Becoming and being a counsellor: An exploration of the tension between graduate learning regimes and professional identity in a counsellor training programme in Singapore.

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Doctorate of Education

June 2024

Keele University

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to Keele University for giving me this opportunity to push beyond my limits, especially the supervisors that have helped me along this long journey. In particular, I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to especially Dr John Howlett and Dr Sam Weston for their invaluable support in guiding me and cheering for me, especially through the final stretch.

I also wish to acknowledge the generous and kind assistance of the participants who believed in the importance of this work for the sector and willingly contributed their insights.

To my friends and family, my very own cheerleading squad, thank you for your constant encouragement and belief, and for being a source of strength, COVID was not an easy time. Thank you for being a part of this adventure.

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Abstract

In this thesis, the author investigates and explores the experience of the 'becoming' and 'being' of Singaporean counselling graduates as they navigate their professional identity in a specific counselling training programme in Singapore. 'Becoming' a counsellor involves acquiring the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to provide effective counselling services, while 'being' a counsellor involves embodying the qualities and characteristics that are essential to the counselling profession.

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, there was a growing interest in how counsellors were trained among national and government agencies in Singapore. This was accompanied by policy changes, tighter regulations, and technological innovations that impacted the environment that counsellors worked and trained in. This thesis was promoted to understand the tensions between the graduate learning regimes and counsellor professional identity; drawing upon observations from the first completely local counsellor training programme in Singapore, established in partnership with a local tertiary educational institute and the Singapore Association for Counselling (SAC). This was done by analysing the data gathered from qualitative face-to-face interviews.

The findings underscore the importance of factors which contribute to professional identity development, especially the prominence of professional growth and recognition during the "becoming" phase of shaping a professional counsellor. Additionally, intrinsic motivations, belief systems and prior personal experiences during the "being" phase are seen as making significant contributions to professional identity. This study identified challenges such as participants' perceived need for licensing. The thesis finishes by advocating for curriculum discussions that will assist counsellor-in-training to navigate through their development, to enhance their training experience, and promote an articulation of a coherent, professional counsellor identity in Singapore and other parts of East Asia.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

At the turn of the century, between 1990-2000, there appeared increased interest and attention among Singapore's national and government agencies towards how counsellors were professionally trained. The growing interest in mental health demonstrates its significance in Singapore. Tighter regulations, policy changes and technological innovations in this period was pivotal to how counsellors worked and impacted the environment in which they trained.

Such changes were linked to Singapore's educational policies in professional counselling training being more aligned with the capital-intensive and technology-driven environment that occurred since the 2000s. This process of formalising counselling training fit nicely into the broader educational framework in Singapore in meeting its manpower needs. However, it also increased the tension and created a 'unnatural' dichotomy between those seen as 'professionally trained' and those highly experienced and well-respected practitioners in the field of counselling who may not have obtained any formal educational qualification. This contrast represents the need for discussion on the nexus of formal education for counsellor training while balancing with practical experience, as Singapore struggles with the boundaries of ethical practice due to the lack of licensure for the counselling profession.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for a more robust mental health system to adapt to the changes in society. The need to fine-tune the policy changes, and to utilise the technological advancements is to meet the needs of individuals. Moving into 2023, changes continue to evolve in the provision of mental health services. This demonstrates the necessity to ensure professional rigour advances with the ever-changing needs of the individuals who require counselling services.

1.1 Singapore's Counselling Landscape

The history of counselling in Singapore began with the Churches' Counselling Centre in 1964, when a group of medical professionals and local missionaries came together, officially recognising the need to assist those with emotional distress (Sim, 1999). At that point, there was limited formalised infrastructure for mental health care with counselling not being well-recognised as a profession. During the 1970s, Singapore also experienced rapid development, as modernization occurred across multiple sectors, including health and social care. The Counselling and Care Centre (CCC) was established in 1978, which initiated the island nation's first formal counsellor training programme in 1981. It was also in the late 1970s, that the Singapore government recognised the psychiatric services provided under the auspices of the then Woodbridge Hospital (now known as the Institute of Mental Health). These services were seen as having played an important role in shaping the mental health landscape in Singapore. The Singapore Association for Counselling (SAC) was then founded in 1982 by the late Mr. Anthony Yeo, who was then the Director of the Counselling and Care Center. Using the constitution of the Association of Psychological and Educational Counsellors of Asia-Pacific (APECA) as a basis, Anthony Yeo and his staff therapists formulated the first constitution to formally establish the SAC. Today, the SAC is the dominant professional body with which trained counsellors in Singapore affiliate themselves with, signalling their distinct professional identity as counsellors. The SAC has progressively gained recognition by government agencies to be the professional body that represents and regulates the counselling profession in Singapore.

At the time of its inception, the SAC was the first such organisation in Singapore to acknowledge the existence of a professional relationship between counsellors and clients. This led to SAC's foundation of having an inclusive membership policy, where anyone who was involved in some kind of counselling work, including social workers, pastors and educators, could be accepted as members, and lack of formal qualifications in counselling was not a barrier to membership entry (SAC website, 2013). This meant that the definition of 'counselling' loosely encompassed anyone who was involved in a relationship that had

some element of helping. In the context of Singapore, the definition has been strongly influenced by the government of Singapore's understanding of the 'many helping hands' approach, a strategy applied to facilitate a sense of cohesiveness in the nation-state (Ow, 1999). This approach of incorporating diverse players, refers to the Singapore's government's encouragement of both citizen and voluntary community services participation within this field regardless of formal counselling training. This is similar to the understanding posited by McLeod (2013), who defined counsellors as individuals who were in contract with another person in order simply to 'resolve a problem in living' (p.7). However, alternative definitions of counselling have differed in their focus; for example, the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) places the therapist at the forefront of the process of the counselling relationship, rather than the interaction between the counsellor and the client itself (BACP, 2021). The lack of consistency highlights the range of how counselling is perceived across various contexts.

The heart of effective counselling is the emphasis on the collaborative nature of the therapeutic relationship between the professional counsellor and the client. Essential in this process is the building of rapport and trust with clients, as this enables open communication and facilitates the journey of exploration and discovery undertaken by counsellors when they tailor and utilise the various therapeutic techniques and approaches. The process of counselling also encompasses the professional counsellor's continuous self-reflection and professional development. As the counsellors engage with their clients, counsellors gain important insights in their own therapeutic styles and professional competencies while navigating to address the evolving needs of the clients. By critically examining their interactions with clients, counsellors enhance and deepen their skills, and abilities to effectively address the complex needs of clients.

The historical foundation of counselling in Singapore is rooted in Christian missionary services, which has significantly influenced its evolution into a professional service. The development of counselling has expanded into the non-secular realm, encompassing counselling services to be provided by both religious and secular organisations. In present-day Singapore, counselling services cater to a diverse

range of clients, with various therapeutic approaches that take into account the multicultural needs of the population in Singapore. These diverse organisations include private practices, hospitals, clinics, social service agencies (known as Voluntary Welfare Organisations, supported by the government) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO). Most private practices and smaller NGOs while having a limited number of counsellors offer more specialised and personalized services. Larger and public institutions like hospitals and VWOs have a larger pool of counsellors to cater to patients and clients. However, it is worth noting, that partly due to the historical definition of counselling as being a helping profession, even in the present day, healthcare and allied healthcare service providers, such as social workers, psychologists, nurses, may provide counselling in their professional capacity, even if they do not possess formal training as professional counsellors. These professionals integrate counselling into their work to address the psychosocial needs of the clients. While this multidisciplinary approach addresses the holistic health of a person, it can dilute the specialisation and depth of counselling expertise, and individuals may not receive the same level of specialised support that professionally trained counsellors offer and thus impede the professional growth and recognition of the counselling profession.

In addition, the loosely defined parameters of counselling in Singapore have, to date, also hindered the development of counselling as a profession (Shek, 1999). This in turn opened up questions regarding the process of professionalisation and the impact that professionalisation has on both the professional and personal identity of the trained counsellor, beyond simply the experience of the professional relationship between counsellors and clients. The lack of clarity in this regard, and Singapore's adoption of counselling as a "shared term" (Shek, 1999, p. 105) among professionals, has diluted the professional identity of counsellors, and arguably stunted the development of the counselling profession in the nation state (Shek, 1999). In Singapore today, as individuals from various professions, such as social workers, psychologists, counsellors, family therapists, those in the education sector, medical professionals, clergy, and others, have the ability to provide counselling, even if they have not undergone formal training in the discipline of the counselling profession. Consequently, the term "counselling services" in Singapore

does not appear to be exclusively associated with specialized training or activities conducted by professional counsellors. Engaging with these challenges, and owing to this loose definition of counselling, the current thesis attempts to explore the extent of the tensions acted out upon counselling trainees' professional and personal identity in the process of professionalising the counselling profession via formalised training.

'Professional practice' as a counsellor refers to the utilisation of the skills and competencies acquired during the counselling training to provide counselling services as a trained professional counsellor. Hence, 'professional practice' reassures the public that practitioners have completed the minimally-required educational programmes and are equipped to perform certain professional services adequately (Corey et al., 1998). In the context of this research, 'professional practice' refers to a demonstration or practising of professional skills within the context linked to the regulatory and professional body aspects of the counselling work. 'Professional practice' does not just provide a demonstration of both personal and professional skills; it also takes into account the regulatory aspect, that is to say, the embodiment of the requirements for the professional identity of the counsellor under the purview of the professional body. The professional identity of the counsellor takes into account the professional knowledge, skills and attitudes relevant for the provision of counselling services as a trained professional counsellor, within the context in which the counsellor is practising (CEDEFOP, 2009; Alves & Gazzola, 2011; Hsi, 2017; Bentz & Shapiro, 1998).

In light of the loosely held definition of counselling in Singapore, the lack of clarity on what the professional counsellors do is a difficulty when trying to professionalise the counselling profession. The current thesis considers how a specific training programme embarked on by potential counsellors in Singapore shapes the discourses and discursive practices of its trainees, in the necessary process of shaping of their professional identity while also navigating the continuum of being trained through a formal counselling programme. Finally, this study also seeks to explore how the participants' prior experiences in the field interacts with the formal training. It is hoped that this research will, in turn, lend

itself to providing "empirical evidence to convince the state, welfare agencies and the public that the counselling profession is indeed a profession" (Chong & Ow, 2003, p. 43), where the professional growth and professional recognition for counsellors are necessary for greater clarity in understanding the professional boundaries and definition of both the 'becoming' and 'being' of a counsellor.

1.1.1 Legitimacy concerns about counselling in Singapore

It is important to have an understanding of the different ways in which professional counselling services has developed in the Asia-Pacific region, as compared to Singapore. Many countries, for example, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and Korea have a registration or certification system for counsellors that is approved by professional organisations, rather than state regulated licensure programmes (ARCAP, 2022; Lam & Yeung, 2017; NZAC, 2022; Pelling & Sullivan, 2006; Wang et al., 2011). However, countries like Malaysia, still require all counsellors to be licensed for practice under the Counsellors Act 1998 (http://www.commonlii.org/my/legis/consol_act/ca1998163/), whilst Taiwan in 2001 passed the Psychologists Act that regulates counsellors and psychologists (Chang & Bhat, 2013). Licensure is considered to be a formal recognition and the most stringent form of credential, granted by a government body backed by law that regulates the practice (Chang & Bhat, 2013). While there are differences in qualifications and experiences required for formal recognition of counselling practices, the various countries within the Asia-Pacific region are committed to increasing quality of services to better mental well-being within their respective countries (Harris, 2014).

As such, there also exists varying definitions of counselling. The Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA) defines counselling as follows: 'professional counselling is a safe and confidential collaboration between qualified counsellors and clients to promote mental health and wellbeing, enhance self-understanding, and resolve identified concerns' (PACFA, 2023). In this context, clients are seen as active participants in the counselling process, working together with the professional counsellors to better their well-being. The European Association of Counselling (EAC) expands on

PACFA's view to include counselling as 'an interactive client beneficial relationship set up to approach a client's issues… the counsellor can help a client resolve relationship issues… to work with the client's feelings, thoughts and perceptions and be aware of both internal and external conflicts' (EAC, 2019). This indicates that counselling has developmental aspects that would be more than the current loosely defined state of counselling in Singapore as a helping profession. The SAC acknowledges that in Singapore, the word 'counselling' has been used generically to include "processes of interviewing, assessment, testing, guiding and helping individuals to cope, manage or solve problems and plan" (SAC, 2015); and 'counsellors' has become an "umbrella term … from those who give intensive psychotherapy to others who offer gentle advice" (SAC, 2015). Thus, the difficulty in clarifying the definition of the professional counsellor and what counselling entails in Singapore, would seem to make it hard for counsellors to be seen as providing a professional service.

As of 2022, the number of counsellors registered with SAC was reported at 1,240 (MOH, 2023). This is due to the increase of mental health issues that became more prominent during the COVID-19 pandemic. The greater attention on the significance of counselling services, led to the formation of a new Interagency Task Force on Mental Health and Wellness in 2021 to oversee and coordinate mental health and well-being efforts in Singapore (REACH, 2021). Hence, counselling is increasingly seen as an essential service that is significant in supporting mental health, the counselling profession in Singapore, faces some legitimacy concerns. Namely, the counselling profession in Singapore is still not currently regulated by law. In 1999, a proposal was submitted to the then Ministry of Community Development, that aimed at setting standards for the Recognition and Licensing of Professional Counsellors in Singapore. However, the paper was rejected, as the counsellor fraternity was then considered too small and likely too fragmented. This absence of regulation raises concerns about the quality and standards of counselling practices in Singapore.

There exists also a wide range of training programmes and qualifications available for counsellors in Singapore. While SAC has introduced a counselling training programme accreditation process to

address the inconsistences in training standards and ensure consistency in competence and expertise of practitioners, it is not mandatory for all training providers to seek SAC's accreditation of their respective counsellor training programmes. Similarly, while SAC has established ethical guidelines for counsellors, the adherence to these guidelines is voluntary.

To address the concerns and improve the legitimacy of counselling services in Singapore, there have been ongoing discussions on the need for professional regulation and licensing of counsellors, to establish a regulatory framework that ensures minimum standards of training qualifications, as well as to uphold ethical practices within the profession. Moving towards a regulated counselling profession, can possibly increase professional recognition of counsellors by the public as well as other allied healthcare professions. The counselling community in Singapore can continue to look at best practices around the world to establish a professional community to address the mental health needs.

1.1.2 Variable nature of Counselling

In Singapore, the various definitions of counselling are part of the lack of clarity in the framing of this profession. As Chong and Ow (2003) have noted, the welfare system for the Chinese has been built upon the familial and thus "act[s] of kindness" and "benevolence" bestowed upon the individuals who seek counselling services (Chong & Ow, 2003, p.38-39). Such a definition of counselling has arguably incurred some less-than-ideal effects, contributing to the lack of professional prestige and recognition of the counselling profession. The example of Singapore sheds some light on the reason for this. The view of counselling services as "compassionate help" remain common to this day in Singapore as the nation's counselling service is heavily funded by the government, and clients pay a nominal fee or none at all with the funded social service agencies (Chong & Ow, 2003). This lends to the view that people do not recognise the professionalism of the counselling services rendered vis-à-vis the other allied health care services like Psychology and Social Work. Counselling, whilst in theory seen as a beneficial, helping

relationship, is notably different from case where clients are active agents who decide from whom and what type of therapy to engage with, and what to discuss. Clients when seen as active agents in the counselling or helping relationship are recognised as involved and committed participants and collaborators in the process, with their own unique perspectives, experiences and are encouraged to use their strengths to make choices and decisions to contribute to their own growth and healing. Being active agents also mean that the autonomy and involvement of the clients go beyond the counselling session. Clients are encouraged to apply the insights gained into their daily lives to advocate and build their self-efficacy.

However, in Singapore, as counselling is a free or nominal fee-based 'service'. Clients' perception of 'free' counselling services in Singapore may therefore, in turn, affect and lower their expectations about counselling, the counselling process and the counsellors themselves, thereby impeding the development of counselling as a recognised profession. Clients could be passive recipients of interventions and less open to complaining about any less-than-ideal counselling services provided by their counsellors, potentially leading to an eventual disengagement from the counselling service (Chong & Ow, 2003). This could be due to power imbalances between counsellors and the clients in the counselling relationship where counsellors are seen to assume a dominant role, and clients who receive services rely on the counsellors to provide solutions to 'fix' their problems. Clients who are disengaged ultimately perceive their contributions to the counselling process as not important and would then be less likely to explore their concerns, or share their thoughts with the counsellors. Ultimately, it can be argued that the difficulty in regulating the counselling services as a professional service has reduced respect for counselling as a professional service, leading to less importance being ascribed to the counselling profession amongst the public at large.

Professionalising counselling would be one of the essential steps in increasing the prestige and recognition of the counselling service. Counselling, when professionalised, would involve establishing ethical guidelines, implementing standards of practice that are generally accepted as a guide by most

practitioners, and using evidence-based approaches. Examples of professionalisation would include informed consent, clarity in boundaries and expectations, client-centered approach, and a committment by counsellors to acquiring necessary skills and competencies to effectively support clients.

In addition to the issues of reduced respect due to a lack of professional recognition and loose definitions of counselling in Singapore, the lack of formalised counselling training, together with a lack of proper professional licensure, has led to the term "counselling" being loosely shared among those involved in the provision of counselling within the broad remit of social services in Singapore, where counselling is as an auxilliary service that is common among social workers, psychologists, teachers, and volunteers. The National Council of Social Services (NCSS) in Singapore is a statutory board under the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF), that serves as the coordinating body for social service agencies in Singapore and aims to enhance the capabilities and capacity of the social service sector. NCSS has a webpage that describes the role of a counsellor and the various job responsibilities and salary range. However, in the salary guidelines for the social service sector, the job title of 'counsellor' is not in the list (https://www.ncss.gov.sg/docs/default-source/ssc/fy2023salaryguidelinesforthesocialservicesector.pdf).   This seems to point to a lack of professional prestige for counselling as a profession and would seem to suggest it is possible to be subsumed under the other job roles like social work, psychology and therapy. A trained counsellor would likely fall under the category of Senior Social Work Associate as this category includes "relevant disciplines like social work, psychology and other relevant fields in social science" (NCSS, 2023), with a media salary of SGD$4130.00 per month.

The Allied Health Professions Act (AHPC, 2011) was enacted in 2011, in which counsellors were not included, and with mounting pressure from trained and practising counsellors, the SAC has been trying to create a collective professional identity since its inception in 1982. Those who have received formal training in counselling in a recognised higher learning institute, and who have completed the prerequisite practicum hours, are eligible to become registered the SAC counsellors if they so wish. However, to date, there has been no legal requirement for licensure or certification in order to practice

as a counsellor or psychologist in Singapore; neither is there a legal mandate enforcing adherence to any particular ethical framework (Yeo et al., 2012).

Overall, the trajectory of the development of the counselling field in Singapore has been such that counselling has been primarily perceived as a helping relationship that could include volunteers who were not trained as counsellors. An attempt seemed to have been made to justify the need for counsellors in Singapore by the newly formed Strengthening Families Programme@Family Service Centre (FAM@FSC) launched in 2021 to support and strengthen families and marriages with free counselling services[1]. However, this, in turn, meant that counselling became increasingly seen as a 'free' service. This perception, combined with the exclusion of counsellors from the Allied Health Professions Council (AHPC) in 2011, might serve to cripple the development of a professional counselling service in Singapore. It is against this background that the current research will attempt to understand how the definition of counselling and the historical roots of counselling in Singapore, informs the development of the professional identity of counsellors in Singapore, and the need to reposition the counselling service as a *professional* service in Singapore, necessary for her evolving and fast-paced economy.

1.1.3 The importance of research on the Becoming and Being of Singapore Counsellors'

The growing demand for counselling services from 2020, in Singapore has put a strain on current resources. This demand was further compounded by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Acknowledging this need, the government has tasked social service organisations to further upgrade the counselling skills of the current social service practitioners, and have more trained counsellors, in order to expand their services, to ensure equitable access to services across different populations. While

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[1] FAM@FSC is part of the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) network of Family Service Centres (FSCs), as part of the social service agencies, that are based in the communities that offer services to assist families and individuals facing various social issues. FAM@FSC aims to provide a holistic approach to supporting families in their multiple needs and strengthening family well-being. (https://www.msf.gov.sg/what-we-do/famatfsc/home)

training programmes have been set-up, with the help of the government, the number of training opportunities is not sufficient to meet the needs of these organisations. Anecdotally, evidence indicates that there is a six- to nine-month wait for a current social worker to be placed on a counsellor training programme, and the training is for minimally six months before graduation as a professional counsellor. Factoring both the waiting time and the required training period, it would take at least twelve months to complete this process.

It is therefore important to have local research that contributes to the understanding of professional development and growth of counsellors in Singapore. The identification of effective training methods, professional competencies and learning needs will help inform the 'becoming' of a professional counsellor-in-training. Best practices and empirical studies will determine necessary core competencies, that ensures quality training in the development of counsellors. Such research can also possibly provide the basis in establishing a regulatory framework for licensing in the counselling field in Singapore.

The process of 'becoming' a counsellor can be enhanced in the exploration of the evidence-based outcomes linked to different counselling approaches and techniques, to enable counsellors to make well-informed decisions on interventions tailored to the specific needs of the clients. Emphasis on understanding the 'being' of a counsellor is essential in implementing culturally and environmentally relevant interventions. This is much needed in Singapore's diverse socio-cultural landscape to navigate the counselling work with clients. Evaluating client satisfaction will contribute to understanding the impact of counselling services in Singapore on clients' well-being, as well as inform counsellors on how they can shape their 'being' as they build on the counsellor-client relationship. Such insights can allow counsellors to hone the development of their professional identity and the quality of their work with clients.

Jennings et al (2008) is one of the rare few studies that quantifies the 'being' of expert psychotherapists in Singapore, taking into account their personal characteristics, developmental influences and the

approaches to therapy. Understanding the 'being' of a counsellor will enable training programmes to grow counsellors-in-training into the role of a professional counsellor.

As such, the demand or professional counselling services is even more prevalent today in Singapore. It is then important to contribute to local research that looks at the development and growth of the 'becoming' and the 'being' of the counsellor. Identifying effective training methods, core competencies and client-centered approaches, will allow better preparation of counsellors-in-training for their profession. Evaluating the impact of the work on the 'being' of counsellors, can grow a more competent counselling community, that will ultimately benefit the work with clients.

1.2 Counselling And Neoliberal Elements In Mainstream Education In Singapore

The nature of mainstream tertiary education in Singapore has been influenced by neoliberal ideas which emphasise the market-driven principles of competition, individualism, and economic efficiency. Neoliberal educational models see education as a commodity and students as consumers where student outcomes are based on performance metrics to ensure the best opportunities to resolve social issues (Ball, 2012; Giroux, 2005). The application of neoliberal policies and practices within educational systems are found particularly in public schools and higher education institutions in the training of skills and competencies that are linked with student preferences, contributing to a market-like education environment.

The trajectory and evolution of professional training in counselling is also impacted by the bigger geopolitical situation, which is vital to the understanding of the counselling professional training in Singapore. Singapore's emphasis on education was a means to drive economic development and enhance her global competitiveness. Given her limited natural resources, Singapore has always relied on developing its *human* resources in order to establish her presence in the world. Great attention has been paid to education and to its appropriate development in order to ensure that Singapore's workforce

meets the demands of the global market the country's economic needs. Hence, the nation's educational institutes, such as the one attended by the author, may be seen as part of what Selznick (1957, p. 5) termed as "technical instruments" that mobilize human efforts towards specific aims. Selznick (1957) goes on to argue that these organisations are rational entities. However, given that organisations are run by humans with their own opinions, rationality can, therefore be subjective.

Such subjective rationality was arguably the driver that shaped the state of education in Singapore. The latter has shifted from catering for a labour-intensive economy to a capital and technology intensive one, clearly indicating that educational institutes were displaying an "efficiency, output driven system [to] meet the needs of a knowledge economy" (Gopinathan, 2011, p. 21). The changes to being capital- and technology-intensive are Singapore's key educational reforms that started in 1987. Nietzche's (1886) view of "aris[ing] from the opposite" (Allen, 2012, p. 2) is an apt descriptor of the shift in Singapore's education landscape, whereby the production of knowledge is not necessarily corrupted by power. Nietzche (1886) further implied that such a movement towards a knowledge economy could lead to new freedoms, in turn generating new schemas in education within a specific social and political framework (Allen, 2012). Bensimon (1995) echoed this in explaining how large organisations have been working with educational institutes to develop their "capacity to educate workers according to specifications" (Bensimon, 1995:595) so as to suit the needs of the economy. Examples of such neoliberal elements can be found in the significant use of standardised testing and assessments that influence students' educational trajectories and future opportunities, focusing on measurable outcomes. In line with both of these visions, Singapore's education has, indeed, been impacted by the state's developing socio- political needs, and as part of its policy of state capitalism implemented to ensure competitiveness and survive in the world economic order (Gopinathan, 2011).

Singapore's shifting educational focus towards meeting the needs of a capital and technology-intensive economy is mirrored in the effects of the knowledge-intensive economy of the 2000s, described as follows:

Moving forward into the 2000s, Singapore saw the need to increasingly develop into a globalized entrepreneurial and diversified economy. The response in the educational sphere is to position Singapore as an Education Hub… Local institutions will continue to seek quality and excellence in developing a first-class education at all levels. (Birger et al., 2008, p. 121)

The strong emphasis is seen in developing skills that are aligned with both industry needs and workforce demands, both of which contribute to the economic utility of education to address Singapore's human resource allocation needs. However, in order to move towards such a definition, first-class education would be characterized as requiring 'production of proof… in which goal is no longer truth but performativity… [with the] best possible input/output equation' (Lyotard, 1979, quoted in Duncan, 2007, p. 2). The proposition of production of proof with regard to counsellor education, may be problematic as the best possible training resources input may not always result in the best possible trained counsellor. Often, in this field, formal training only provides an inroad to doing the work of a professional counsellor, with a counsellor's actual skills performance constantly needing to be honed and sharpened through consistent, daily practice. Hence, the production of proof goes beyond the formal training or education process. The implication of Neoliberal ideas on counselling training, means emphasising the need for efficiency and quantifiable outcomes, which may of course not be easily seen as counselling takes place in societal contexts that involve the social, cultural and systemic factors evolving in clients' lives. The difficulty in quantifying measurable outcomes of counselling can undermine the recognition of the counselling profession. The output of a trained counsellor goes beyond attaining the academic qualifications, as a professional counsellor also needs to prioritise the well-being of the client, and be an advocate for social justice and systemic changes in society. The relational nature of counselling is part of

its uniqueness. However, a parallel need to commodify the counselling services as a product can lead to the lack of prestige for the counselling profession.

Singapore's history of counselling has been linked with mainstream education, with career counselling as the main focus for services specifically provided to students at secondary school level as meticulously documented in a paper written by Yeo, Tan and Neihart (2012). As such, school counselling in Singapore started with careers guidance and vocational counselling in preparing students to explore career options, employability skills, and be better informed on making decisions about their educational and career pathways. As they highlighted, the nation state's counsellor training has been overseen by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and carried out through the National Institute of Education (NIE), the official institute that conducts pre-employment and in-service training for teachers. Counselling embedded within the education system plays the role of developing and investing in human capital, aimed at producing a productive and skilled workforce. In 1986, a national report entitled "Towards Excellence in Schools" brought forth the need for counselling services and career guidance to be provided as essential services, and to become a "regular feature of Singapore's education by the mid-1990s" (Yeo et al., 2012, p. 245). The publication of this report also resulted in greater demand for teachers to be equipped with enhanced counselling skills, in order to be able to play the role of counsellor to the students with whom they work. In 1987, the MOE took a significant step by establishing the Pastoral Care and Career Guidance (PCCG) branch within the education ministry. This move aimed to introduce guidance programmes in schools and lay the foundation for the structured implementation of counselling services for youth in Singapore. Training teachers in counseling skills became integrated into the pastoral care and career guidance programs, particularly within the secondary school levels. As a result, counselling services are were seen as a means to enhance educational outcomes, while also attending to students' social and emotional needs.

The publication of the report "Toward Excellence in Schools" (1986) solidified the connection between counselling and career guidance, led to a growing demand for teachers to undergo training as career

counsellors. This alignment with career guidance links neoliberal ideas of education to preparing individuals for the workforce and economic productivity. In response to the demand and need for equipping more teachers with counselling training skills, the NIE introduced an eight-week, in-service training programme in pastoral care and career guidance in 1988, to support teachers in their expanded work scope. (NIE being 'Singapore's national teacher education institute and … an integral part of the nation's education service [with] a key role in the preparation of teachers and in the provision of teacher professional and school leadership development programmes' (https://nie.edu.sg/about-us/corporate-information)). However, the introduction of the eight-week counselling course, is an example of a response to the neoliberal education demands, and one that is insufficient as a formal, comprehensive training course for school counsellors to deal with the myriad of complex youth-related counselling issues that arise in the secondary schools. Beyond enhancing educational achievements, students need support to address broader goals of promoting well-being and supporting their mental health needs. The lack of formal counselling training for school counsellors exacerbated the issue of the lack of professional qualifications and did not lend itself to the development of the professional counselling services, hence leading to the lack of recognition of counselling as a professional service in Singapore. This obvious gap then led to the call for the development of a professional counselling services in Singapore ultimately resulted in the development of a formal course in 1997, the Master of Arts in Applied Psychology (MAAP), which I attended among the inaugural batch of graduates (Yeo et al. 2012:245).

MAAP was a milestone in the development of counselling as a profession in Singapore as it was the first recognised qualification within which counselling was not linked with school counselling but, rather, gained its own standing. This Master of Arts programme was also the first completely local programme that recognised counselling as being on par with psychology, as the training interwove both counselling and psychology. With this development, counselling was no longer just an 'illegitimate child', so to speak, in the practice of mental health. By virtue of MAAP's positioning, counselling in Singapore was given legitimate status equivalent to the practice standing of traditional psychology.

Following the launch of the MAAP in 1997, a six-month intensive Diploma in School Counselling was developed in 2005, in response to the MOE's push to 'equip every school with a counsellor by 2008' (Yeo et al., 2012, p. 245). The Diploma in School Counselling included modules in counselling theories and practice with a 15-week practicuum in the schools. In 2008, the NIE launched a Master of Arts in Counselling and Guidance (MACG) to further enhance counselling training for teachers and those who wanted to work with students in schools. By 2010, there were about 280 counsellors trained and deployed to schools, working as school counsellors. Hence, the development of counselling in Singapore over the last three decades has been closely linked with career guidance and with the MOE.

Counselling as a form of professional training does not fit neatly with Neoliberal ideas, as counselling is focussed primarily on ensuring the well-being of individuals, families and communities. The intrinsic nature of counselling goes beyond the economic considerations and market efficiency priorities of Neoliberalism. Hence, counselling could be undervalued as a profession as it is not able to generate more tangible economic value as other professions. Counselling is different from the other professions, as the building of the relationship between the client and the counsellor is the core of the work of a counsellor. Counsellors look at developing greater social support in the process of the therapy, and this relational aspect of counselling is different from the priority placed on the individual, or the one-size-fits-all approach of Neoliberalism. In trying to ensure the well-being of the different communities within the society, counsellors have to advocate for greater social justice and changes in systemic issues, which lead to the lack of prestige and recognition for counselling as a profession.

1.3 My Personal Journey with Counselling as a Profession

My involvement in school counseling began during my time as a church worker, where I provided support to schools through pastoral care initiatives. This experience sparked a passion for helping students navigate their personal and academic challenges effectively. However, I realised that working with it was also important to work with the other systems that the students were in, for example, their family

systems. However, I had no expertise in this area. Recognizing the importance of professional development in the field of counseling that enabled me to work systemically with clients, I decided to pursue the Master's in Applied Psychology (MAAP) when it was launched the course in 1997. This served as a gateway to further enhance my skills and competencies in my journey as a professional counsellor.

However, after successfully completing the MAAP program, I encountered a surprising realization: despite my efforts to establish myself as a professional counsellor, the public did not perceive me in the same light as I saw myself. The divergence in perceptions and expectations became increasingly apparent as I delved into the field and engaged in counselling practice. To complicate matters further, I found myself grappling with the ambiguity between social work, psychology and counselling, which blurred the lines of my professional identity.

The challenges surrounding my professional identity and role were multifaceted. While I had dedicated myself to the specialized training and education of a counsellor through the MAAP program, I had developed a robust understanding of counselling theories and ethics, and honed my therapeutic skills. My intent was to be recognized as a competent and reputable professional counsellor, equipped to provide effective counselling services to those in need. However, the public's perception did not necessarily align with my professional training. Many people still perceived me as a well-meaning helper or social worker rather than acknowledging me as a qualified counsellor. This disconnect between my self-perception and external perception created an internal struggle, leading me to question my professional identity and sense of belonging within the counselling field. Additionally, the confusion between social work, psychology and counseling further complicated matters. While the three professions (psychology, social work and counselling) share the common goal of supporting individuals and communities, their approaches, training, and methodologies differ significantly. I grappled with understanding where my expertise and contributions were most appropriately placed.

Thus, the journey of becoming and being a professional counsellor became a process of introspection and self-discovery. I grasped to understand the essence of 'becoming' a professional counsellor, beyond academic qualifications and knowledge, to that of professional recognition and validation. I also wanted to discern how does one shape oneself in the 'being' of a counsellor, and to seek greater clarity regarding my professional identity.

The current thesis explores the tension between the "becoming"- on issues of professional growth and recognition; and the "being" of a professional counsellor – on what contributes to the shaping of a professional counsellor. In this context, it explores how Singapore's counsellor training environment encourages the development of a professional counsellor identity beyond the act of the counsellor practising in the educational sector alone. This thesis also aims to (1) uncover the barriers potentially preventing these counsellors from fully practising and developing their professional identity, for example, the development of professional identity within the structure of the curriculum and allowing a counsellor-in-training to navigate and reflect on their personal and professional identity; (2) to begin the articulation of a coherent, professional counsellor identity in Singapore and contribute to a better learning experience for counsellors-in-training.

1.4 Professional Body for Counselling in Singapore

Currently, the Singapore Association for Counselling (SAC) is the dominant professional body with over 1000 members in Singapore. As a professional body, the SAC aims to enhance professional competence and standards of counselling practitioners in Singapore. The SAC also aims to increase professional recognition for counsellors in Singapore. Changes to the SAC's constitution in 2013 included additional membership tiers and a governance process accompanying the SAC's establishment of ethical guidelines and standards of practice for counselling professionals to guide professional conduct within the field. The SAC as a professional body facilitates and fosters trust and accountability on licensure, and

accreditation processes for counsellors in Singapore. This mirrors the broader context of counselling in Singapore, which is moving towards counsellors having increasingly professional standing in terms of educational qualifications and with the SAC exercising gate-keeping functions.

However, the SAC's movement towards greater professionalisation has also heralded a tension between counsellors with formal educational qualifications and those who have had many years of experience but may not possess such qualifications. For example, the increased attention paid to the required number of practicum hours as part of the professionalisation of the field, as acknowledged by Neimeyer and Diamond (2001), has exerted greater pressures on the formal training programmes as part of the assurance of academic rigour. One of the benchmarks of professionalisation, as posited by Bentz and Shapiro (1998), is that of a practitioner who is able to successfully integrate professional practice with academic research. In this sense, professional practice is viewed as: 'part of a larger enterprise of knowledge generation and critical reflection' (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998, p. 66), with the accompanying academic and pedagogical aspects intended to serve a deeper and fuller exploration in developing competencies, and to enable the practitioner to better understand the topical issues of the day. However, the creation of formal counsellor educational qualifications, possibly along the lines of licensure, may inadvertently restrict access to knowledge and limit the diversity of discourses, with licensure becoming a self-serving measure for counsellors with formal qualifications (Davis,1981). For example, licensure often comes with a defined scope of training and some counselling practitioners may face challenges in fulfilling the specific educational criteria that the SAC may set out for a licensure process. This is especially so for practitioners who are recognised as master practitioners in the field for their skills, but who may not be able to fulfil the continuing education requirements needed to maintain their licenses, as they are likely to be the master trainers for the continuing education courses. Therefore, the gate-keeping system of the licensure process of the SAC may create barriers for counsellors who have valuable knowledge and skills gained through their experiences. However, as

these counsellors lack the specific academic credentials, licensure may seem to be inaccessible or not aligned with the specific circumstances of the counsellors, creating disparities and inequities in professional recognition.

The specification of counsellor educational qualifications may, in turn, serve to divide rather than unite the counselling profession, ultimately exerting the paradoxical effect of preventing the formation of a stronger or more united professional identity among counsellors (Davis, 1981). For example, the rules and regulations of the SAC may be criticised for the lack of flexibility of accepting training approaches and philosophies that are seen as non-traditional. The influence of the dominant paradigms of the day can create a bias towards other emerging forms of practices. Hence, it may be important to consider if the specification of counsellor educational qualifications do lead to a more cohesive professional identity among counsellors and to consider being open to consistently balance licensure processes with the promotion of knowledge accessibility and expansion for clients' well-being. A possible result in specifying counsellor educational qualifications could be seen in counsellors being licensed to practice. Licensure is an important consideration, as it is seen as the most powerful form of national, governmental regulatory control that protects the public from counsellors who practice beyond their expertise and contravene the code of ethics, with penalties for those who violate or engage in conflict of interests (Spurgeon, 2012).

Gazzola and Smith (2007) have shown that membership of, and certification from, a national association or body do reinforce the professional identity of counsellors. The SAC has, in the last 10 years, tried to establish its position as a professional and national association and hence advocate for the development of the professional identity of the counsellor and to adequately keep up with the developments, as well as recognizing that the counselling field is dynamic and constantly evolving with newer evidence-based approaches. Recent changes in the last ten years have seen the SAC as trying to control the composition of the membership as a way to make clear the professional identity of counsellors. With the passage of time, the SAC began to take greater note of how it wanted to be

portrayed to the public, in an effort similar to that discussed by Selznick (1957) with regard to groups that 'exercise distinctively governmental functions, on their own account and apart from any connection with public government,' (Selznick, 1957, p. 260) in order to increase their accountability to the public. As such, in 2014, the SAC decided that membership and registration were established as separate processes, with more stringent membership selection in place. Today, the SAC is also paying greater attention to higher educational qualifications as part of its aims to self-regulate the counselling profession, in order to increase clarity on the professional identity of counsellors.

Another aspect that reinforces the professional identity of counsellors was the endorsement of counselling courses via the SAC's criteria. The SAC is the only national body that has a membership and registration for trained counsellors. Courses that were accredited or endorsed by the SAC aided graduates in their SAC membership requirements. From 2016 onwards, the course accreditation process under the SAC further required course providers to delve into and provide greater details on those who were to teach their respective programmes. In addition, the organisation is seemingly moving in the direction of having only members or those registered with the professional body to teach the courses that it accredits. The implementation of the SAC's more stringent requirements for teaching accredited courses has potentially put teaching professionals in a challenging position. For example, the professional standing of the teaching professional could be enhanced if they endorsed the new course accreditation process. However, it may create difficulties in running their respective courses, and interfer with the personnel recruitment process. There is a need for teaching professionals, who is also a trained counsellor, to navigate the impact of these changes on the roles and their professional development.

The interference of bodies like the SAC in the recruitment process of teaching staff for counselling programmes that seek to be accredited under the SAC became a complex issue. While the SAC's criteria may be designed to ensure high standards of education and training in the counselling field, it created challenges for course managers like myself, who were responsible for consolidating a competent

teaching team. I found myself in a dilemma, as I grappled with the conflicting requirements between those set by the SAC and the needs of the tertiary education institute that I was employed with. For example, other factors, such as prior teaching qualifications in the tertiary education sector beyond the basic tertiary qualifications, are some of the employment criteria necessary for tertiary institutes. This resulted in difficult situations, where potential instructors who possessed the necessary teaching qualifications, did not meet the requirements that the SAC put forth for registration. Such potential trainers, were usually well-respected trainers with real-life experiences in the field of counselling, but are ineligible for registration with SAC, as they do not have the educational qualifications sought by the SAC. Some of these experienced trainers might even view that registration with the SAC as not necessary, as registration is not mandated for professional counselling practice. Other potential instructors who met the SAC's criteria, may not have the necessary teaching qualifications of field experiences that is required to deliver a post-graduate course. The SAC then plays an important role to have dialogues with educational institutions, so that all stakeholders can collaborate in promoting the growth and advancement of the professionalisation of the counselling community.

This need to exercise the regulatory function – for those recruited to teach in the counselling programme to meet the professional body's new educational criteria – may be seen as highly self-serving of the professional body and, moreover, does not keep said body open to differences or enable it to consider how these differences could actually enhance the development of the counselling field. Ultimately, it can be argued that such a narrowing of criteria directly goes against the grain of working with clients to break down stereotypes, assist them in self-actualising, and in affirming them as unique and different individuals (Egan, 2013), as all teaching personnel recruited are from a similar mould that does not allow for deviation of thought. For example, when the first completely local programme to train counsellors was initiated, there were many counsellors in the field who, despite having amassed significant experience in the field, were unable to contribute to the programme to benefit the students, as they did not meet the professional body's new educational criteria.

1.5 Rationale for the Thesis Research

At its broadest level, this thesis aims to examine the effect of formal counsellor education on strengthening the professional identity of counsellors in Singapore, more specifically by exploring the being and becoming of a counsellor with formal educational qualification. The idea for this research arose in response to an exploration of how the novice counsellors who underwent a particular counsellor training programme in Singapore experienced the tension between the necessary graduate learning regime and development of their professional identity in a counsellor training programme in Singapore.

The objective of this thesis, therefore, drawing on the intent of counsellor educational qualifications to serve in the development of the professional identity of counsellors, is thus to examine the degree to which the counsellor training programme has impacted the formation and development of counselling graduates' personal and professional identities on their individual paths to becoming professional counsellors (Pillen et al., 2012). In so doing, it engages with a range of higher education discourses as well as counselling-specific ones, such as transformative learning, job-relatedness, filling workforce needs, and the interactions of all of these dimensions with one's professional and personal identity (Golden, 2012). At the same time, the teaching and learning processes of higher education are required to develop certain characteristics in graduates, such as critical thinking that allows for reflection of the given content and the process of learning towards participation in change processes could (Howlett et al., 2016) lend to the tension between the graduate learning regimes and professional identity of the counsellor training programme.

This thesis explores the impact of a counsellor training programme in Singapore in terms of its contribution to: (1) the graduates' definition of their person – the 'being' of a professional counsellor; and (2) the construction of their professional identity as a counsellor practicing in Singapore – the

'becoming' of the professional counsellor. The thesis attempts to expose some of the key impacts of these two processes on the development of the professional identity of counsellors in Singapore by taking into account how top-down regulations and professional bodies have attempted to rally a scattered profession, and how individual, trained counsellors feel about such attempts to shape their professional identity. Data were gathered using qualitative, face-to-face interviews with graduates who obtained a post-graduate diploma in counselling.

On a personal level, having volunteered on the SAC's Executive Committee for more than a decade, and given that my own professional accreditation is linked with the SAC, changes in the latter body have affected me in terms of both my professionalism and my professional identity, as I have undergone one of the formal counselling courses in Singapore myself. My own professional identity as a Counselling Psychologist (CP), which I see as a composite of my self-identity, is derived from discourses and experiences that are similarly subject to changes and not entirely in my control, as my interaction with the environment plays a part in these changes. Another key driver of environmental changes in this context is the SAC, especially given its development of membership tiers where each tier signals that the 'master' practitioner has more specialist knowledge than an 'ordinary' member. Moreover, such a title or label is implicitly very attractive as it may, for instance, translate into better pay and social standing. Indeed, part of my own professional identity developed from learning from masters of the trade, in particular one whom I consider to be my mentor. I even recall saying to myself in situations where I was uncertain, 'what would my mentor do, ask, say, behave?' in my attempt to become a 'professional''. As such, I hope that this research will help to promote understanding and insight into the discourses and discursive practices that these counselling course graduates engage with.

1.6 Research Questions And Study Scope

My overarching research question is: How and to what extent does the counsellor educational qualifications serve in the development of a professional identity of counsellors? The secondary research questions are as follows (Annex A):

1. How has the selected counsellor training programme helped students to learn about their identity as professional counsellors?

2. What are the factors that have influenced students' developmental trajectories towards professionalism as counsellors?

3. How significant have these factors been on students' understandings and approaches to professionalism and the professional identity of a counsellor?

1.6.1 Study Scope

As Singapore's counselling training landscape has evolved through the years, in the process of my writing this thesis certain boundaries in terms of scope were set in order to manage the feasibility of this study, as outlined in the empirical focus and issues of access.

1.6.1.1 Empirical Focus

As Singapore's counselling profession continues to evolve, and many private as well as government-subsidised programmes on counsellor training emerge, the empirical focus of this research is on one specific training programme, which I was heavily involved in from inception to execution stage. The author had developed the curriculum and was also the programme coordinator from onset to completion for every batch of students. The curriculum involved modules of academic study as well as 100 hours of internship hours to be logged with clients. Therefore, while the thesis presents a snapshot of the counsellor training scene in Singapore and may lend some weight to the issues surrounding the influences

and challenges in the development of a professional identity of a trained counsellor, it is unable to take into account all of the permutations of counsellor training programmes available in Singapore.

1.6.1.2 Issues of Access

While I was involved in the specific counsellor training programme in Singapore, I was able to randomly sample only nineteen graduates, who responded to my research recruitment appeal. Most of them were graduates from the 2008-2010 programme cohort. There were also five graduates who had initially agreed to be contacted, but they decided to drop out before the interviews could be conducted due to scheduling and time constraints. Another graduate cancelled after initially agreeing to an interview, citing difficulties in their work schedule.

1.7 Thesis Structure

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter Two presents the literature review, considering, first, the notion of professional Identities in relation to the various contexts and definitions drawn from diverse sectors. This is followed by an examination of the particular remit of the professional counsellor identity, in relation to the developments of the counselling sector and discourses around the professional counsellor identity of graduates. The key concepts of professional identity, and the struggles involving both the professional and personal identity within a graduate studies regime in this context are seen as important, and are also explored here.

Chapter Three sets out the methodological approach taken, methods and tools applied; sampling strategy; participants' background, and analytical approach.

Chapters Four, Five and Six presents the key research data detailing the major themes and categories that emerged from the data on the 'becoming' and 'being' of a counsellor, as well as the enablers and disablers to the 'becoming' and 'being' of a counsellor.

Chapter Seven provides a detailed discussion and interpretation of the findings, relating these back to the research questions. Concluding thoughts consider the contribution of the study and recommendations for how professional identity can be placed more at the forefront of the academic curriculum of formal training programmes for counsellors in Singapore.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Counselling as a profession is relatively young compared to other mental health professions such as social work, psychiatry, and clinical psychology (Hershenson & Power, 1987). This applies not only to the United States, but also to other parts of the world, like Singapore. The field of counselling in Singapore has made significant strides in recent years, but it continues to face challenges in trying to differentiate itself from other allied health care professions (Neimeyer & Diamond, 2001). This is partly due to counselling seen historically as a profession that is integrated in educational and vocational settings as discussed earlier in Chapter One (Neimeyer & Diamond, 2001; Gazzola & Smith, 2007), and since counsellors continue to practice in various settings, beyond just the educational, the lack of homogeneity makes it more difficult to develop a collective professional identity as counsellors. Counselling as a profession in Singapore is still trying to seek broader recognition and support, in advocating for greater professional recognition, professional development opportunities, and professional standing to ensure adequate remuneration and job satisfaction for counsellors.

'Education', 'career guidance', 'career development', 'socio-emotional care' are among the other terms that have been associated with counselling, and that have gained much attention worldwide, including among international agencies like the World Bank and the OECD (OECD, 2004; World Bank, 2003), where career guidance forms part of the training of counsellors, who were needed to look at career counselling for educational and vocational needs. School counselling, or the involvement of counsellors in educational and career guidance needs, has been a common starting point for counsellors in many countries, such as China, Nigeria, and Venezuela (Alvarez & Lee, 2012). However, the continued diversification of counsellors' functions, as indicated by the interweaving of counselling through diverse fields, such as social work, psychology, teachers and volunteers, can be a double-edged sword. On the

one hand, such diversification increases the elasticity of the profession. This is especially useful for a diverse society like Singapore, with a range of cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds. When counsellors are equipped with the multicultural competencies, there will be increased accessibility to counselling services and services to the public beyond the traditional mental health settings to include that of workplaces and community organisations. The integration of counselling services into various fields recognises the interconnectedness of the mental, emotional, social, physical health of the individual, enabling the professional counsellor to address the multiple dimensions so as to provide comprehensive support to the individual. Diversification has also fostered collaboration between counsellors and professionals from other disciplines, that addresses complex care issues, in a timelier manner.

On the other hand, diversification diminishes the integrity of efforts to consolidate the core identity of counselling (Neimeyer & Diamond, 2001). As counsellors take on diverse roles in different fields, there can be dilution of their core counselling functions and counsellors may be expected to fulfil a wider range of responsibilities beyond their core expertise, which can pose to be a challenge in terms of training, and professional development for counsellors. The need for multidimensional care among professionals from various settings could lend to a lack of coordination and expose counsellors to potential ethical dilemmas, as different professions have different codes and standards. To maintain the integrity of the counselling services, it is then important to ensure that there is ongoing professional development and training to ensure professional growth and recognition of counselling as a profession.

With regards to the training and professional development, growing attention has been paid to the counselling profession as paramount in playing the role of "supporting lifelong learning, career management and achievement of personal goals" (CEDEFOP, 2009, p. 1). Here, the development of a professional counselling identity is construed as fundamental to the needs of society, not just in the realm of pastoral support in a schooling context, but throughout the lifetime of citizens who may need to engage with such services. The vocational experience itself forms the professional training for career

guidance counsellors, whereby 'competencies, qualifications and continuous professional development of guidance professionals' (CEDEFOP, 2009, p. 1) are needed in order to mediate the "paradox between individual need and collective complexities of labour markets and social policy" (Douglas, 2005, p. 38). However, the achievement of one's personal goals is not simply the individual's professional training; rather, the neoliberal ideas of how the demands of the economy are often embedded within the needs of the labour market and policies become seen as key, in turn influencing individuals' choices to meet the complex needs of the labour market. However, while establishing a professional identity for counsellors is thus seen as vital, there is no existing mandate for licensure, qualification nor membership in order to practice as a professional counsellor in Singapore, in line with Neoliberal ideas of counselling services as a marketable service, as well as personal responsibility of counsellors for their own professional development. Hence, self-regulation mainly by the professional bodies to ensure quality, as a result of a lack of government regulation, is the result. This lack of attention paid to the professional practice of counselling has, it would appear, watered down the image of counselling in the eyes of the public. The emphasis on outcome measures, focussing on standardised assessments, and evidence-based practices that have proven outcomes, results in having the counselling practice be absorbed within different workplace settings and functions, and it thus does not stand alone as a profession in itself, especially when not all counselling practices can be quantifiable. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory - widely applied across various disciplines and contexts - offers us an opportunity to use it as a lens by which to examine changes and interactions across multiple levels of the socio-ecological system within the counselling environment and to see how they may influence the identity formation of counsellors in, in this instance, Singapore.

Within the context of professional counsellor education in Singapore, microsystems encompass the immediate environments where counsellors or counsellors-in-training practice. These microsystems include the specific organisations offering counselling services and professional supervision. These interactions within the various microsystems are crucial in shaping the processional identity of

counsellors to enable them to navigate the practical aspects of their training and practice.

Mesosystems (interactions between different microsystems) provide insights into the connections between counselling organisations, educational institutions that offer counselling training courses, and national association bodies like Singapore Association for Counselling (SAC) which oversees counselling practices in Singapore. Such mesosystems contribute to the integration of theoretical knowledge and ethics to be found within the practice contexts.

In Singapore, the macrosystems reflect governmental influences on mental health and education. Whilst explicit policies on mental health have yet to be firmly established, initiatives such as the establishment of the National Mental Health and Well-being Strategy (MOH, 2023) provide a glimpse into government priorities and cultural attitudes toward mental health, which would impact societal perceptions of counselling services and counselling professionals within Singapore. Additionally, neoliberal elements of individualism, competition and economic efficiency play a part in influencing both societal perceptions of counselling services, as well as exerting an influence on the professional identity formation of counsellors.

The Chronosystem underscores the impact of time on the evolving changes of the counselling profession in Singapore. Historical shifts, albeit subtle in nature, have shaped the counselling landscape. Such shifts include economic and educational policies, both of which manifest neoliberal elements that emphasise the commodification of education. The COVID-19 pandemic has, furthermore, been a significant catalyst, bringing mental well-being to the forefront of health services and it continues to shape attitudes towards the ongoing evolution of societal attitudes towards counselling training in the mental health sector in Singapore.

This chapter further engages with the dilemma of the dilution of counselling practices across diverse fields, and the public's perception of counselling as a professional service in Singapore. It does this, first, by exploring how the concept of the professional identity is viewed in various sectors, specifically that of the counselling field; and, second, how these views are linked with counsellor training and the development of professionalism in the latter field.

2.1 Understanding Professional Identity

2.1.1 Definition and concepts of professional identity

The question of counsellors' professional identity has long been the subject of debate and is still evolving. In order to de-construct this, it is helpful to take a broader view of the concept of 'identity' within 'professional identity'. Watson (2007) identifies two aspects of identity, public and private, which mutually inform one other. The notion of public identity here refers to how other people are engaged in our definition of our social selves. This public identity is the subject of the current thesis; namely, how a socially constructed and defined identity in turn defines the professional identity of graduates who have undergone counselling training (Dent and Whitehead 2002).

Butler (1993) has expounded on identity as recursive and reflexive, established by way of explicitly 're-enacting [of] previous performances' (Hodgson 2005, p. 55). Thus, the professional becomes a 'professional' due to the norms and meanings generated by the repetition of performances that 'identifies' the professional. Therefore, the 'citational repetition of terminology and of actions is central to the embodiment of a specific professional identity' (Hodgson 2005:58). The identity of the professional could thus be constructed 'in and through conduct rather than pre-existing conduct' (Hodgson, 2005, p. 54). To paraphrase Parker (Dent and Whitehead 2002: 154), 'professionalism', and 'professional identity' are 'words that human beings attach to the worlds they live in [and such worlds] are not timeless or foundational.' Hence, as the researcher of this landscape in a specific context, I foresaw the need to be prepared to constantly navigate my understanding and operation of these concepts in the current study. It also became evident that understanding how the concepts are used by the graduates in their lives and worlds would be key, monitoring whether the participants had been able to find a 'personal definition of counselling, internalizing responsibility for professional growth' (p. 21) – a factor that has been highlighted (Gibson, Dollarhide & Moss, 2010, quoted in Shuler & Keller-Dupree, 2015) as necessary for the development of a professional identity.

It has been recognised that professional identity does not just pertain to that of an individual, but can reflect a 'collective achievement,' where the 'culture of practice' demonstrates professional identity using 'artefacts, of behaviours, of ethics and symbol' (Dent and Whitehead, 2002, p. 178). Professional identities are thus demonstrated, as Lave and Wenger (1991) mention, through:

> Who is involved, what they do, what everyday life is like, how masters talk, walk, work, and generally conduct their lives, how people who are not part of the community of practice interact with it, what other learners are doing and what learners need to learn to become full practitioners. (Dent and Whitehead, 2002, p. 178).

The process of developing a professional identity is, then, a complex process in which one needs to navigate in the becoming of a counsellor, impacted upon by the learning environment (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Ashwin, 2009). Within this context, one's professional identity can be 'analysed as the product, unstable and only partly under the individual's control' (Dent & Whitehead, 2002, p. 174). The research conducted by Jennings et al (2008) further contributed to insights on the ongoing process of the development of the professional identity. By examining the benefits of teaching and training others, as well as the challenges to professional development, this research presents an insightful understanding of the growth of the professional identity for psychotherapists in Singapore. This extends our understanding of professional development of counsellors in Singapore underscoring Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of the role of environment in developing the professional, as well as Ashwin's (2009) perspective of the relationship between formal and informal learning experiences in influencing the development of a professional identity.

However, the establishment of a professional identity can face challenges with the influence of neoliberalism, particularly with the growing emphasis on marketisation of mental health care. Neoliberal principles promote the push for individuals to seek counselling as a purchased service, rather than recognising it as an essential aspect of overall well-being. This shift in perceptive can undermine the

intrinsic value and significance of counselling as a holistic support system for individuals. A study by Hughes et al (2021) highlighted on how neoliberal restructuring of the economy has affected counselling profession. With an emphasis on market-drive approaches, counselling becomes more focussed on specific areas, for example, career development, and potentially neglecting the psychological and social consequences of work on individuals. This narrowing of focus can detract efforts to address broader mental health issues and systemic inequalities.

Dent and Whitehead (2002) further recognise that while the term 'professional' has been subjected to various redefinitions, the term, 'professional' still represents a status that is highly sought after. The latter term now comes with expectations of specific knowledge gained through, for example, rigorous educational attainment. Moreover, this particular identity can be seen as a social process that engages with a discourse involving knowledge and power in trying to shape and construct such an identity. These discourses are not neutral as they exhibit 'disciplinary properties and power production possibilities,' which legitimise the being and the becoming of the professional identity (Dent and Whitehead, 2002, p. 9-10).

Elsewhere, the concept of identity has been distilled into: (1) social identity, (2) personal identity, and (3) role and type identity (Fearon, 1999). For Fearon, professional identity is an integral part of social identity, as it implies the belonging to a social category. He explains that a social category involves: (1) implicit or explicit rules of membership, and (2) the existence of sets of characteristics comprising physical attributes, and moral and other expected behaviours involved in the role (Fearon 1999:13-14).

The various concepts of identity are intricate and complex, and professional identity involves more than the 'profession' especially in counselling, but also the personal aspects, social aspects governed by for example, membership to the fraternity of counsellors. The need to navigate the intricacies in the development of one's professional identity as a counsellor, while managing the academic learning, forms the tension of the being and becoming as one tries to function as a counsellor in Singapore.

Gazzola and Smith (2007) similarly propose that counsellors' professional identity integrates their personal identities; the latter encompassing personal attributes such as values and attitudes. Fearon (1999) further explains that some social categories involve role and type identities. Role identities are identities that come with formal membership rules via education, examinations, or ceremonies while type identity is characterised by less formal membership, although it still adheres very much to social convention. What is significant to the current research is that both types of identity may be seen to influence the development of a counsellor's professional identity. Counsellors may be said to have a role identity as there is a push for formal educational qualifications that they need to obtain in order to become a counsellor. At the same time, there exists certain societal expectations of counsellors, that is, that they hold certain 'beliefs, attitudes, values, preferences, moral virtues' that are widely perceived as characteristic of people performing the role of counsellor (Fearon, 1999, p. 17-18). The social expectations of counsellors correlate with what Prichard (1999) understands about identity, notably that it consists of roles and scripts. Specifically, he uses Mead's (1913) idea of the self being 'created and sustained though social activities' (Prichard, 1999, p. 8). This self-consciousness then becomes a 'monitoring, evaluating, scrutinising component which is constantly judging and realigning' the 'I' via the discourses and practices (Prichard, 1999, p. 8). This definition of self-consciousness by Prichard (1999) would appear to parallel Ball's idea of the 'new management panopticism' (Ball, 2013, p. 219), except that this panopticism is precisely about self-monitoring and management, how we measure our own worth, and where we place our professional and personal values.

These self-monitoring practices can be brought about by the social norms of a professional group to enhance professional standing within a community. Alvesson and Willmot (2002) write that identity can be regulated and changed via the provision of specific motives, such as the social motives of a particular group where community is emphasised and instrumental motives downplayed, as indicated by a lack of hierarchy. Morals and values then become much more important as a way of self-regulation within the group. An example of morals and values can be seen in how Asians are more likely to identify their counsellors as "experts" and defer to them as 'authority figures' (Chong & Ow, 2003, p. 39), in turn implying the importance of these practitioners in living up to such expectations with clients. Knowledge and skills also regulate identity, since 'education and professional affiliation are powerful media of identity construction' (Alvesson and Willmot, 2002, p. 630). This leads to the creation of group categorisations, 'dividing up of the social world into 'us' and… 'them'… [such that] feelings of belonging and membership, a sense of community… can be developed' (Alvesson and Willmot, 2002, p. 630). This process allows the development of feelings towards membership and affiliation in the construction of identity. SAC is an example of having adopted such a practice by the inception of 'networking sessions' to encourage members to get together to form a sense of collective identity through the formation of a community. The enticement to participate is reinforced by the presence of renowned and distinguished guest speakers. By attending such exclusive 'members only' sessions, one can develop a sense of solidarity and belonging to the group, as well as the means to accumulate continuous education hours, thus contributing to the maintenance of knowledge and skills. This ultimately facilitates the continuous evolution and construction of one's professional identity.

2.1.2 Construction and Development of Professional Identity

In constructing one's professional identity, Prichard suggested that identity is 'historically and politically constituted and not an ontological given' (Prichard, 1999, p. 14). This subjective identity formation is mediated by our habitus, as discussed by Bourdieu (1990), particularly influencing our given ways of

thinking and behaving through a social environment that incorporates a certain way of conduct and appearance (Bourdieu, 2005; Sweetman, 2003; Srinivas, 2013). The influence of habitus on our subjective identity formation can result in the creation of a reality in the form of a 'professional status' which can develop so as to 'displace or marginalize aristocratic status polarities in favour of greater equality of opportunity and other forms of meritocratic inequality' (Knights and Willmott, 1999, p. 103). The need thus arises to protect this new equality via the panopticism discussed by Foucault (1977). This, in turn, results in the 'law of contradiction', as produced by performativity (Ball, 2013, p.221). The law of contradiction posits that, when the first order activity increases, this generates greater direct engagement with students, research, and curriculum development. However, the costs of this are then seen in the reduction of the second order activity, resulting in less time for performance monitoring and management (Ball, 2013). The assumption is that when professional counsellors cum trainers spend more time directly engaging with trainee counsellors, there will be less time to ensure the competence of the trainee counsellors. However, this assumes that the first and second order activities are mutually exclusive, and that neither influence each other nor the wider performativity. In reality, the first order activity informs the second order activity, especially in terms of how professional counsellors manage the trainee counsellors in a classroom and their own paperwork. Ultimately, this 'new management panopticism' (Ball, 2013, p. 219), results in counsellors becoming their own system of surveillance and control in measuring their worth as professionals.

Being 'professional' has been seen to encompass the elements of:

> The possession of an established body of systematic knowledge; a commitment to altruistic service to the client; the existence of an occupational association, membership of which is the license to practice; a high level of educational achievement among practitioners and considerable autonomy at work. (Moore, 1970, p. 8)

Given the latter description by Moore (1970), the environment in which professional identity can be inculcated and established lies, firstly, within the individual professional identity that encompasses one's

personal work values, skills and knowledge, and growth as a person, as well as one's success and improvement at work, and imagination and innovation (Gazzola & Smith, 2007). Secondly, there is the aspect of a collective professional identity relating to the status of a given profession; that is, relating to a shared identity and history amongst members, the culture of the profession, and the influence of the formal professional community, such as professional bodies (Gale & Austin, 2003; Gazzola & Smith, 2007).

Gazzola et al (2010) noted that counsellors who reported having a clearer sense of professional identity were more satisfied with their careers, and had greater exposure to professional identity issues during their respective counsellor training programmes. Such issues notably relate to the training and experiences that shape the personal identity, professional titles and roles of counsellors in the field of allied health professionals.

The significance of studies on professional identity development in counsellors (Bruss & Kopala, 1993; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992) indicate that the development of a professional identity is not only crucial to the person of the professional counsellor, but also impacts the professional services provided to the school and the community (Brott & Myers, 1999). Professional identity is, moreover, informed by the personal identity of the counsellor, which is carried into the professional self (Alves & Gazzola, 2011), whereby such personal characteristics such as caring and compassion are displayed in one's practice as a professional counsellor, both reinforcing and defining the counsellor's professional identity.

In their research, Pillen et al (2012) undertook an in-depth exploration of person-hood in the context of beginner teacher professional identity, and concluded that the development of professional identity is a process of integrating one's personal knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, norms and values, with the broadly accepted societal values and standards pertaining to teaching and other professional demands (Pillen et al., 2012). Taken in the context of the current research, Pillen et al.'s (2012) findings would parallel the challenges arising for a novitiate counsellor; that is, finding the balance between the personal subjectivities and professional requirements of the given professional organisation would be paramount

for the integration and functioning of the newly minted professional counsellor.

As Kerfoot (Dent and Whitehead, 2002, p. 82) also argues, discourses on professionalism and professional identity point to the latter being a 'mode of regulation of the self.' Even though Kerfoot was considering the professional male, her idea of professionalism being an 'articulation of specific… behavioural displays commonly associated' (Dent and Whitehead, 200 p.82) may arguably be seen as relevant across other dimensions of social identity. Professionalism as recognized by The Council for the Accreditation of Counselling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) includes 'knowledge and understanding of professional organizations, legal and ethical standards, the role of counselors, professional competencies, and personal and professional growth' (Shuler & Keller-Dupree, 2015, p. 152). This focus on, and integration of, personal and professional growth has been referred to as the counsellor professional identity (Shuler & Keller-Dupree, 2015).

Shuler and Keller-Dupree (2015) showed how curriculum of counsellor training programmes can enhance professional counsellor's identity, using self-reflective and experiential activities that allow opportunities to integrate the counsellor's lifestyle, personal well-being, and interpersonal ability to relate to others and self-evaluation. Nugent and Jones (2009) also viewed the becoming of a professional counsellor as an integration of professional training with personal attributes, operating within the framework of a professional community. Reisetter et al (2004) went beyond this, adding the further dimension of the counsellor seeing him/herself within the context of the community they operate in. Similarly, Auxier et al. (2003) posited that, in order for professional counsellor identity to develop, the counsellor would need to understand themselves and behave according to the mores of the professional community within which they function, allowing the professional counsellors to better understand how the socially constructed identity of a professional counsellor is presented to the graduates who have undergone counselling training.

Some writers have approached the issue of professional identity from the perspective of functioning within a given 'professional' community. For instance, Gibson et al (2010) defined professional identities

as being built on three tenets: self-labelling as a professional, integration of skills and attitudes, and the perception of self within the context of the professional community. In terms of the display of professional identity, and explicitly with regard to counsellors in the present research context, the counsellor would need to recognise oneself as a professional with the relevant competency skills that are congruent with certain frames of references related to counselling roles, decision-making, attitudes and ethical responsibilities, all in line with the professional community. As others have highlighted the counsellor must demonstrate that their counselling practice is uniquely identifiable and different from that of other mental health practitioners such as psychologists, with an emphasis on education, human development and multicultural competencies (Ritchie, 1994; Hanna & Bemak, 1997). However, other studies, such as the once conducted by Corsini (1989), highlight the existence of multiple failed attempts in separating psychotherapies. However, this being said, the sense of counsellors' professional identity remains unclear to the public, especially when historically counselling is seen as a free service provided by volunteers (Ow, 1999); allied mental health professionals, and counsellors themselves.

The process of professional identity development has taken the route of theory, research, training and accreditation by Western counterparts (Martin, 1988; Van Hesterson & Ivey, 1990, Hanna & Bemak, 1997; Shek 1999; Gazzola & Smith, 2007; Alves & Gazzola, 2011). The need for a similar process seems needed for counsellors in Singapore to gain professional identity status. With accreditation, one of the important issues that defines the professional prestige is gaining licensure for counsellors to have their own professional identity. The presence of licensure in establishing counselling as a 'profession' cannot be underestimated. For example, for counsellors in Canada, licensure has not only provided important access to jobs, but has also served as a public declaration of counselling as a profession with its own standing (Goodyear, 2000). Alberding et al (1993) outlined how the process of licensure protects the public and increases the trust and utilisation of the professional service in question; specifically, in the case of counsellors, licensure protects their professional status while enhancing professional power and prestige. However, in the same study, Alberding et al (1993) also noted that licensure does not always

protect the public and may even discriminate against competent practitioners who do not fulfil the required certification. Licensure could also lead to increased costs of services and professional stagnation, as licensure makes it harder for counsellors to laterally move to other allied professions.

2.1.3 Regulatory process of professional identity

Licensure is seen as a way of gaining professional prestige as a validation mechanism. Licensure is also a way to ensure professionalism and uphold the quality of counselling services (Chang & Bhat, 2013). However, Alberding et al (1993) noted that licensure can also become a self-serving way for counsellors to legitimise the profession. Chong and Ow (2003) calls for more information on the impact of licensure, or lack thereof, on the professional identity of counsellors. The lack of formal licensure can lead to issues of quality and accountability of counselling services, as well as ethical concerns within the profession (Chong & Ow, 2003). Licensing is, therefore, important in regulating practice requirements, continued competence, and regulatory functions in line with state and government laws. While there are benefits as well as undesirable consequences in the quest for licensure, Alberding (1993) also notes that it is important to ensure that the process of licensure remains relevant to the profession and does not end up shutting out indiscriminately those who do not fit the practice requirements. A point of interest in the current research was to explore whether this was a similar concern among the participants involved.

While the issue of licensure is pertinent in regulating practice requirements, Watson (Dent and Whitehead, 2002, p. 105) states that at the core of professionalism lies the 'notion of an occupation whose members deal in some kind of specialist knowledge.' Clearly, one needs to be accountable in using this knowledge, especially in a service-oriented field like counselling. However, as Parker (Dent and Whitehead, 2002, p. 141) mentions, professional accountability 'closes them [the professional] off and demands hierarchical separation.' This seems to be in direct contradiction to providing the service, as providing a professional

counselling service would require the professional counsellor to involve other systems and share the specialist knowledge without division of rank. According to Butler, power lies in the practice of discourses which, in this context, both regulate and constrain the professional (Hodgson, 2005, p. 55). The 'forced reiteration of norms' (Hodgson, 2005, p. 55), will acquire meaning and momentum through repetition and over time become identified as the 'professional'. Part of this discourse on becoming a 'professional' occurs via attaining educational and vocation specific qualifications, encompassing the processes of accreditation and certification, as mentioned by Kerfoot (Dent and Whitehead 2002:85), which result in licensure and specialist knowledge – the latter is, arguably, attractive not in itself but, rather, holds appeal due to what it can offer. Watson (2002) mentions that rewards come from the high prestige and material benefits of the application of specialist knowledge, and also from this being endorsed by wider society once this knowledge is applied in service to others. As such, membership of a professional body gives the one holding this professional knowledge a certain positioning in society that can, hopefully, increase its professional legitimacy, while reducing some "occupational insecurity" (Dent and Whitehead, 2002, p. 105). This follows Giddens' (1991) idea of how one's self-identity is found in actual performance and discursive practices. As noted in Torres (1988), exclusionary effects can be traced to professionalism, where professional autonomy can affect the structuring of the field and the profession itself via establishing set standards of structural practices in an attempt to control membership.

Professional identity is a multifaceted concept encompassing various definitions and constructs. The development of professional identity appears to follow a seemingly varied processes, leading to the consideration of regulatory measures such as licensure as a validation mechanism to elevate professional prestige. The following sections will explore what it may mean to be a professional counsellor, to have a professional identity similar to that of other recognised professionals like doctors, lawyers, and accountants, as well as to ascertain the point of intersection between training and education, and membership with a professional body in informing the professional identity. These will be explored on both a theoretical level and more explicitly with regard to the case of counselling professionals in

Singapore in the development of their professional identities.

2.2 Counsellor Identity and Training

The implicit need built into professionalisation to control knowledge clearly engenders a shift towards what has been described as the knowledge economy (Duncan 2007); namely, the need for knowledge to be part of economic value as one of its outputs demonstrating professionalisation. In the context of the current study, Singapore's focus on education as being knowledge-intensive inherently arose from:

> The need [for Singapore] to increasingly develop into a globalized entrepreneurial and diversified economy. The response in the educational sphere is to position Singapore as an Education Hub… [so that] local institutions will continue to seek quality and excellence in developing as a first-class education at all levels (Birger et al., 2008, p. 121).

The kind of educational courses offered can thus be seen as critical to Singapore's economy, such as those in engineering, business management and healthcare, to name a few. In such a knowledge-driven economy, the need to measure or control performance also becomes imperative. For example, in one educational institute in Singapore (the one I currently work in), part of the performance measures includes considering the performativity or output of the academic staff via graduates' grades, following the idea that high quality students are such because they were taught by high quality teachers.

In relation to higher education, the accountability that comes with professionalism has also meant a certain professional autonomy and academic freedom, especially with regard to the tenure system. Making the clear distinction between who owns knowledge and how this discourse of knowledge is enacted has resulted in a distinction being made between the faculty and students. This distinction is, therefore, intricately linked with power, and ultimately, means that those who own the knowledge are more likely to be 'admitted' into the hallowed hallways of academia. However, as with professionalism,

such knowledge as observed by Alpert (1980) needs to be perceived and disseminated via the established channels, such as being a published author. This is one way the academic profession recognizes how one has mastered knowledge in a particular field and thereby demonstrated the necessary training undergone to receive a certification from a recognised institution or association (Alpert, 1980).

This sense of professionalism – that is, the 'owning' and appropriate conveying of knowledge – would parallel Becker's (1970) 'processual enactment of professionalism,' (Hodgson, 2005, p. 53) whereby to be 'accepted one must have learnt to play the part' (quoted in Hodgson, 2005, p. 53). A very obvious manner in which one is rewarded for having learned this is being awarded accolades that endorse and reinforce this process; another way is the rewarding of those who have understood and performed their parts well. Such public acknowledgement thus allows the new professionalism to gain legitimacy.

It would thus seem that having greater clarity and transparency as to how knowledge can be demonstrated demystifies the process, thus possibly allowing greater access to the process of acquiring and demonstrating such knowledge. Professional growth via training could be part of the transparency in acquiring the knowledge which further opens up greater access to anyone aspiring to become a 'professional'. Yet, within the context of this transparency, the shortcomings and limitations inherent in the process of acquiring knowledge as one becomes a 'professional' are also made clear, as a lack of mandate for the need to professionalise counselling services, lends to greater market forces to drive efficiency and quality as indicated by neoliberalism. In an attempt to protect vulnerable stakeholders and prevent abuse, the remit of discipline and power can be seen in, for example, the ethical measures put in place to safeguard the 'profession' from people who may call themselves 'professionals', even though the latter may not be seen by the gatekeepers of the profession as possessing exclusive knowledge.

Counselling training has been a factor in influencing the development of the counsellor professional identity, which Bruss and Kopala (1993) argue begins in the process of training itself. This notion, in turn, suggests that the training environment is important in generating discussions on the formation of

counsellors' professional identity and how this identity is maintained over the course of practice, and in reassuring the counsellors-in-training of their personal and professional capabilities (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). In the field of counselling, such professional practice constitutes continuous education hours, formal education such as Masters programmes, and post-graduate training.

In Singapore, such training takes place in institutes that have increasingly come to respond to economy-driven outputs, as education in the nation state shifted from a labour-intensive to a capital and technology intensive economy (Gopinathan, 2011). This shift clearly indicates how educational institutes were mobilised as technical instruments that directed human efforts towards specific aims displaying 'efficiency, [and] output driven system[s] [to] meet the needs of a knowledge economy' (Gopinathan, 2011, p. 21). Professional training for counselling too falls into such an environment - described by Sleznick (1957) as comprising, 'a technical instrument that mobilizing human energies and directing them toward set aims,' (Sleznick, 1957, p. 5) - where increasing efforts were made to identify and improve the notion of 'efficiency' and educational institutes strived to deliver courses that provided 'value for money'. The strength of a counsellor's training and development of a professional identity can be positively influenced by the relevant institutions in seeking out high quality and excellence (Alves & Gazzola, 2011). This could, in turn, potentially lead to a better differentiation between counsellors and allied professionals and, accordingly, appropriate assistance and services being provided to clients (Gazzola & Smith, 2007).

Counsellors' professional training in Singapore may be seen as a 'natural product of social needs and pressures – a responsive, adaptive organism' (Selznick, 1957, p. 5) to the needs of the society. As further noted by Selznick, 'the more precise an organisation's goals, and the more specialised and technical its operations, the less opportunity will there be for social forces to affect its development' (Ibid., p. 16). Hence, the evolution of counselling training and the counsellor professional identity in Singapore can be seen as very strongly rooted in the economic survival of Singapore.

However, other studies have shown that counsellors' professional identity is not merely dependent on

their education, but also related to, for example, the 'ownership' of specialized knowledge (Goldfried, Greenberg, & Marmar 1990; Hanna & Ottens, 1995; Hanna & Bemak, 1997; Whiston & Sexton, 1993). The focus on specialised knowledge and expertise in a neoliberal framework becomes a factor in shaping counsellors' professional identity. The pressure then to acquire specific credentials is to remain competitive in the market. While specialisation leads to creation of expertise, it also can potentially narrow the scope of counsellors' work. However, even in today's counselling framework in Singapore, the type of formal training that counsellors attain does not guarantee a definite scope of work. In reality, there exists an overlap between the work of counsellors, social workers, and clinical and counselling psychologists (Goodyear, 2000), regardless of training, leading to tensions in the personal and professional discourses of the trained counsellor.

Hence, counsellors' struggles with their sense of professional identity can arise owing to multiple factors. As summarised in research undertaken by Gazzola and Smith (2007), these factors include: (a) differences in training and specialisation, with a range of theories and practice for varied client groups (Gale & Austin, 2003; Gazzola & Smith, 2007); (b) the fact that counselling is a relatively newer profession compared to other allied mental health professions (Hershenson & Power, 1987); (c) counsellors having shared purposes, roles and settings with other allied mental health professionals, possibly leading to misconceptions about counselling (see Pelling, 2004; Nelson & Jackson, 2003; Swickert, 1997); and (d) counsellors having dual identities and, subsequently, dual memberships in associations that have different foci in the field, causing mixed loyalties (Domke, 1982). While it is possible that counsellors have solid individual professional identities, studies have shown that they simultaneously identify the collective identity of the profession as weak (Gazzola & Smith, 2007; Gazzola, Smith, King-Andrews, & Kearney, 2010). Such struggles with identity are not unique to counsellors, as Findlow (2012) reported in her study on the tensions that nurses experience between their academic-professional identities and their clinical nursing identities, heightened by their low status recognition among medical professionals.

In other research, these academic-professional identities have been referred to as hybrid identities (Bathmaker, 2015) and, on a wider level, exist also within the counselling profession. Similarly, the participants in my study all have a prior undergraduate degree that may or may not be related to the helping profession. Yet, different aspect of prior learning, can be utilised to blend with their counselling training (McGhie, 2017), potentially giving rise to different nuances of professional identities among counsellors with differing rules and practices.

The exclusion of some training or trainers also creates what Bledstein (1975) recognises as a 'culture of professionalism,' requiring 'tenure to 'trust' in the integrity of trained persons, to respect the[ir] moral authority' (quoted in Alpert, 1980, p. 499). This also leads to greater control over specific professional arenas as the profession becomes more developed. Alpert (1980) noted that the process of professionalisation has engendered changes in the values of occupations such as law, medicine and education. Setting up new parameters to enter into these professions via educational and/or work experience routes, and the governance of members' conduct via a code of ethics or conduct, are some of the ways in which a regulatory body recognises a person as being a professional, and thus allowed to practice in their professional capacity. While the code of ethics are important guidelines that 'adjudicate professional behaviors and responsibilities in the interest of the clients and society' (Chong & Ow, 2003, p. 34), it is precisely this professional self-regulation that Jary (1999) explains is the new form of management and quality control in an audit society (Dent and Whitehead, 2012, p. 47). In the context of Singapore, it would seem that the Singapore Association for Counselling (SAC) is moving towards this form of professional self-regulation in its rigorous attention to education. The counselling graduates consulted for the current research are the product of this very same audit society, the impacts of which will now be discussed.

2.3 Counselling Training and Professional Associations

The diversity of titles assigned to counsellors across the world, due to their specialised areas of work, has contributed to ongoing confusion within discourses on the profession's identity. Gaining professional status is not the same as increasing trained counsellors' collective identity as a group, or differentiating this from other mental health professionals (Gale & Austin, 2003). Being linked with a professional association such as the SAC may, then, provide a path for professionalism to be developed amongst its members, and could also act as a signal to the public that its members can be trusted as professional practitioners, as the SAC then serves to audit the counselling training and the standards in which counsellors may need to be held accountable to in the counselling practice. This section examines these aspects, with a focus on the purpose of professional associations to audit and the role of audit in counselling training both on a global scale and in the context of Singapore.

Membership and certification by a national association can reinforce the professional identity of association members, as a study conducted by Gazzola and Smith (2007) in Canada revealed, specially with regard to the professional identity of counsellor. (The SAC is Singapore's closest approximation to a national association for counselling.) Given the notion that professional counselling associations could bridge the tension in the professional and personal identity discourse via public education campaigns on counsellors contributing to the improvement of positive communities (Gazzola & Smith, 2007; Alves & Gazzola, 2011), it is important to address the impact of membership and certification from the professional counselling associations for the development of counsellors' professional identities, both as individual practitioners and collectively as a professional group, in adaptation to the professional standards of the counselling profession, and opportunities for ongoing dialogues on the group characteristics of professionals in this field (Gazzola & Smith, 2007; Alves & Gazzola, 2011). The SAC, then, could be seen to play a key function in linking members together to counterbalance the identity confusion arising from the varied work of counsellors and in ensuring that professional standards are presented to allow counsellors to bridge the gap of what is required as a professional counsellor.

However, the SAC's more stringent requirements pertaining to who teaches its accredited courses, while simultaneously attempting to increase the professional standing and identity of its members, could actually result in counselling practitioners feeling alienated. As part of its auditing process, the SAC tries to build public confidence and trust in the counselling profession by trying to exert changes to control the composition of its membership. Membership and registration are now separate processes, with membership being more stringent in terms of selection. Higher educational qualifications are also given greater attention, echoing the 'claim to ownership of knowledge' put forward by Parker (Dent and Whitehead, 2002, p. 138). In addition, the SAC is implementing new parameters for entry into the counselling profession. Education qualifications are now carefully dictated in terms of the 'acceptable' types of training courses and hours required, a rigour that resulted in the counselling training programme that I was personally involved with, as a trainer and course content developer. Such an audit process when made known to the public can help instill a sense of assurance that counsellors are receiving services from qualified professionals who meet certain standards, therefore building the professionalism of the profession.

The SAC has also spearheaded the establishment of a governance process to complement its existing code of ethics. This initiative outlines a grievance process that provides clients with a recourse to address any issues against their counsellors. Legal expertise was engaged in this process, with the aim to increase counsellors' professionalism and accountability for their actions and adherence to the same ethical standards and code of conduct as a collective body of professionals. This parallels what Fournier (1999) conveyed in Dent and Whitehead (2002, p. 3) where professionalism functions as the new disciplinary technique. In the context of the SAC, this process was further substantiated when the members passed a resolution for the formalisation of the grievance process at the organisation's Annual General Meeting in 2015. This act signalled their belief that this was both a vital and necessary accountability tool and an improved way of enhancing their professional conduct, in the absence of government intervention.

Beyond membership affiliation with a professional association that has strong ethical foundations and

trust-building procedures in place, another key factor that can lead to professionalism is the adoption and replication of key traits of the profession already established elsewhere (Hodgson, 2005, p. 56). This type of mimesis is considered by Selznick (1996) as 'a response to uncertainty' (Selznick, 1996, p. 273) during organisational adaptation. In a similar vein, Kerfoot articulates that part of the attraction of professionalism, or being a professional, is to be free from this 'uncertainty and insecurity,' as 'professionalism offers the possibility of certainty, of one's own knowledge and sense of self, in an otherwise highly uncertain locale' (Dent & Whitehead, 2002, p. 86). This is similarly acknowledged by Parker (Dent and Whitehead, 2002, p. 139); namely, that this shift towards higher education, audits on outputs and administrative processes, and the ways in which training leads to alignment with market-oriented objectives, has changed the fundamental nature of professional academic labour. Auditing provides valuable data and insights about the state of the profession, and can be used to identify trends, gaps and areas of improvement within the field. However, such a focus on performance indicators limits higher education to a service or product, where inputs, outputs, time-lines, costs and quality are measured and subjected to surveillance and scrutiny, perhaps under the guise of professionalism.

The SAC's attempt to increase professionalism can be argued to have occurred through its leadership in spearheading a governance framework that included the formalising of training pathways and more stringent membership prerequisites. This approach was a way of mitigating and addressing the prevailing uncertainty among Singapore's counselling stakeholders regarding the status of the profession itself. This uncertainty is augmented by the fact that no counselling professional body – the SAC included – holds the legal licensure mandate to compel individuals who call themselves 'counsellors' to be registered with the association. It is, therefore, essential to consult with counselling graduates themselves, such as those who participated in this current study. The insights of the participants in this study would contribute to perceptions regarding the uncertainty and ambiguity of the standing of the profession; the absence of legal licensure; and the lack of standardised benchmarks locally recognised across the industry in evaluating the level of professionalism necessary for professional recognition of a counsellor.

The process of being a professional continues to evolve, especially in light of today's 'audit society', a notion identified by Jary (Dent and Whitehead, 2002, p. 38). As previously noted, a vital factor of the SAC's audit initiative involved the restructuring of its membership and registration process. While the latter is still very much tied to educational qualifications that are required for entry, the membership tiers have further delineated to distinguish between practitioners with more years of experience from those with less experience. As a professional body, the SAC has not been able to 'embrace the symbol of professionalism in a very explicit and formal way, by seeking state recognition in the shape of a… charter' (Dent and Whitehead, 2002, p. 102). However, the SAC tries to gain legitimacy by creating a new discourse, via the adoption of resolutions (Dent and Whitehead, 2002, p. 5). There also appears to be a tangible, underlying sense of urgency among counselling professionals in Singapore to be secure due recognition as a professional community perhaps precisely stemming from the occupational insecurity mentioned earlier. This occupational insecurity may be what the graduates have to grapple with; that is to say, whether this new discourse of seeking state recognition in the form of licensure would enhance or impede their professionalism.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the professional identity of the counsellor has not yet developed in Singapore. One answer may relate to the nation state's socio-political situation, one that (perversely) established an accreditation system for social workers, but not so for counsellors. While counsellors are recognised as supporting social work, counselling is not seen as a profession in itself, especially since there is no licensure requirement for the practice. Its development in Singapore's history is very closely linked with supporting education via career and guidance counselling. This, then, makes it more difficult for counselling to achieve a comparable standing to that of social work, and in turn this disparity affects the professional identity of counsellors, as this identity is not recognised by the same group of professional

counsellors that measures output. By examining this problematic issue through the lenses of performativity, professionalism and professional identity, this literature review has provided the critical context in which the current research is situated.

The counsellor, by engaging with the professional counsellor identity, are invited by the promise of a higher social status and increased rewards, due to the perception of providing a socially commendable service, as the professional counsellor is seen as providing expert knowledge that only they possess (Dent and Whitehead, 2002, p. 114). This study will throw light to how professional counsellors in Singapore perceive their professional status to have been acknowledged publicly and also to have received recognition as such. Professionalism, as mentioned by Srinivas (2013), can be seen as a larger calling that mediates between the dilemma of a person's inner core and their outer shell (Srinivas, 2013, p. 1664). One's outer shell can be seen as the set of performative standards that one has to meet in terms of output, and the inner core as the person and the experiences which may or may not be recognised as appropriate output measures. Hence, the call to professionalism and forming a professional identity may be how graduates of a counselling course can circumvent this dilemma, and is what this thesis will explore and address.

As this literature review has also highlighted, professionalism is a process that continues to redefine one's professional identity. In this light, the SAC may be seen as an organisation – or habitus, as indicated by Bourdieu – in which its stakeholders, that is, counsellors, are influenced via formal and informal channels in terms of how to think, act or move while in the social environment of the organisation's physical or hierarchical premises.

As a professional counsellor in practice, I have learnt that avoiding premature cognitive conclusions is a necessary aspect of the development of a professional counsellor, as one encounters diverse situations with clients and the self almost on a daily basis, resulting in new or transformed schemas and perspectives. As an academic, I realised that neoliberal ideas can be found in the measurement of professional standing or worth as indicated by the standards that the SAC sets out in their criteria for renewal of professional

membership (even though there is no legal licensure), which sees the panopticism at work via declarations

of training and practice hours accumulated.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The professional counsellor identity has been studied in many forms, particularly by means of quantitative methods such as questionnaires for practitioners, pre- & post-training questionnaires, and even the Delphi method, to understand the future of this professional identity (e.g., Gazzola et al., 2010; Neimeyer & Diamond, 2001; Norcross, Hedges, & Prochaska, 2002; Prochaska & Norcross, 1982). However, as the purpose of the current thesis is to explore the tension between graduate learning regimes and professional identity in a counsellor training programme, hearing the narratives and discourses from the participants themselves is important. The approach that I thus adopted is drawn from an interpretive and subjectivist standpoint, using a Grounded Theory approach and thematic analysis techniques to analyse the data.

Grounded Theory (GT) as an interpretive, subjectivist approach which allowed me to make sense of the data while taking into account contextual factors such as the experiences of the participants. In line with the interpretive, subjectivist approach, I decided that the qualitative interview method would best assist in the development and construction of knowledge on how the formal counsellor training programme has actively impacted the formation and development both of the person of the counsellor, and the development of their professional identity, within the framework of their experiences beyond the transmission of passive information via textbooks (Howlett et al., 2016).

This chapter begins therefore with a justification for selecting GT as a methodological approach, followed by a description of the interviewing approach. It then continues with the analytical approach using Thematic Analysis as the data analysis method employed, explaining how the themes were extrapolated and explored. Following this, the process of coding of the responses from participants and the ethical considerations of this study are dealt with.

3.1 Research Questions

As a recap, my research questions focus on the influences and processes involved in a counsellor's development in their professional and personal identity, from the period spanning their post-graduate training to the start of their practice. The literature on professional identity in an ever-changing and rapidly marketising higher education sector has given rise to my overarching research aim which is to understand the influences and processes acting on a counsellor's identity. The specific research questions are as follows:

1. How has the selected counsellor training programme helped students to learn about their identity as professional counsellors?

2. What are the factors that have influenced students' developmental trajectories towards professionalism as counsellors?

3. How significant have these factors been on students'/graduates' understandings and approaches to professionalism and the professional identity of a counsellor?

3.2 Methodological Approach

The methodological approach I adopted draws on Grounded Theory (GT), most specifically Constructivist GT in relation to the ways that I conceptualized this under-researched field of counsellor education and training in Singapore and the link to professional identities and professionalism. GT enabled me to look at the co-construction of knowledge where data presents as a form of evidence of the inductive experience of the development of the professional identity of counsellors. Constructivist GT also acknowledges the importance of my subjectivity as a researcher who is involved in the analysis of the data (Charmaz, 2006).

For data collection, I relied mainly on interviewing as this tool allowed me to identify emerging themes and issues, through the process of social interaction with the participants. For the subsequent analysis, I used Thematic Analysis, where participants' emphases, tones of voice, facial expressions or gestures give an added dimension in the interpretation of specific statements. Data was categorized and coded into themes following the practice of Thematic Analysis which, 'also considers the relationship among categories… [such that] data that have been decontextualized through coding [can] retain their connection to their sources' (Ayres, 2008, p. 868).

3.2.1 Grounded Theory

The nature of the knowledge sought by the current study required the research to go beyond the surface meanings elicited. I decided to use Grounded Theory (GT) for this, because GT in its inherent capacity allowed me to delve deeper to study the fundamental social processes, social structures and social interactions (Annells, 1997) relevant to counsellors in the development of their professional identity in order to identify the connections between the given values, views and facts. GT in its inherent capacity would be most appropriate as the research goals of the study required me to describe and interpret the patterns, while also exploring the depth and significance of social phenomena within the data (Morgan, 1993). GT further enabled the co-construction of the data with the participants, as GT takes into consideration that as a researcher, I am not a bystander, but that my interaction with the participants during the interviews allows expansion and clarification of the participants' views.

Grounded Theory, introduced as a methodological approach by Glaser and Strauss (1967), was deemed revolutionary as it offered a systematic inductive guideline to collect and analyse qualitative research data in order to then inform and refine a further theoretical analysis (Charmaz, 2000). GT as an inductive research methodology involved systematically gathering and analyzing data to construct theories

"grounded" in the data itself, rather than being guided by pre-existing theories (Charmaz 2000). Grounded Theory is also characterised by data that are rich, empirical, original and trustworthy, serving to reflect the depth of the psychosocial process being explored in the current research (Charmaz cited in Morse, Stern, Corbin, Bowers, Charmaz & Clarke, 2009, p. 244). Without losing coding and categorising which is a core element of Grounded Theory, constructivism further expanded the scope of Grounded Theory to emphasise the co-construction of knowledge with participants, enhancing the meaning of participants' experiences allowing for a better understanding and analysis of the data without compromising the categories that lie at the forefront of the discussion (Charmaz, 2000).

The classical view of 'discovering' theory within the data, as advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967), evolved to include Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2000), whereby one goes beyond the collection and analyses of the data to emphasise the co-construction of knowledge with the participants, recognising the subjectivity that the researcher-participant interaction. This aligns with my present research for in-depth exploration and interpretation of patterns within the data. In order to 'ground' Grounded Theory in its fundamentals, Charmaz (2000) posited Constructivist Grounded Theory include: 'first-hand knowledge of empirical worlds... mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward interpretive understanding of subjects' meanings' (Charmaz, 2000, p. 510). The tenets of Constructivist Grounded Theory were also applied for the purposes of this study as it allowed a relationship to emerge during the interviews with participants, drawing out the descriptions sought by the researcher while also allowing them to express their thoughts and feelings. The shift from the classical view of GT (Glaser and Strass, 1967), to the Constructivist Grounded Theory approach, aligns with this current research in the development of a theory or conceptual framework on the process of professional identity formation among counsellors. The use of a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach recognises the active role of the researcher in being part of the interactions during the interview but also acknowledges their subjectivity in the research-participant interactions, thus allowing themes and concepts to emerge from the data, guiding the research to be deeply rooted in the experiences of the

participants. Harnessing the synergy between the interaction of the researcher and participants allows for deeper meaning to be ascertained thereby better understanding the participants' experiences of their journey in the being and becoming of a professional counsellor.

The dynamism in the researcher-participant relationship, while using Constructivist Grounded Theory resonates with the tenets of Grounded Theory posited by Glaser and Strauss (1965). Constructivist Grounded Theory approach involves the search for concepts, structures and key elements while allowing space for reflexivity in the questioning of the actions and roles of the researcher, within the research process (Dunne & Üstűndağ, 2020; Flick, 2018). Such co-construction of data with the participants enabled the current researcher to gain new understanding of the knowledge sought while, at the same time, acknowledging that, as a researcher, I am part of the influence in the process in my interactions with the participants' own multiplicity of views (Howlett et al., 2016; Curtin & Fossey, 2007). This method made possible the unveiling of subtle insights of the interplay between the participants' views and the interactions with me as the researcher. Even with prior experience in the field, such an approach allows for a fresh exploration of the topic under investigation by setting aside preconceived notions and theories and focusing solely on the data itself. This iterative process encourages a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives. Grounded theory, in this case, served as a systematic and rigorous method in generating a theory grounded (literally) in the lived experiences of the counselors, enriching the existing knowledge in the field.

In addition, realities are socially developed, and rooted in the participants' experiences. The Constructivist Grounded Theory approach therefore acknowledges the subjective and interactive link between researcher and participants, and further recognises that meaning can be created and evolve through the researcher-participant interaction. Such an iterative process allows themes and concepts to emerge organically (Annells, 1997; Charmaz, 2000). This approach is particularly valuable, as it promotes the setting aside of preconceived notions and theories, that I, as a researcher may hold. A Constructivist

Grounded Theory Approach therefore provided a sensible and wholly appropriate set of undergirding principles for the current research and allow it to be carried out in a systematic manner so as to ensure not only rigour in the study but also elaborate possible tension between the learning regimes and the professional identity development among counsellors in Singapore.

3.2.2 Sampling Rationale

A key step in the research design was determining how many interviews could be considered as yielding sufficient data for subsequent analysis purposes, while taking into consideration the established guidelines for qualitative research paradigms. The research was undertaken using thematic analysis, will shortly be detailed. Fugard and Potts (2015) and Braun and Clarke (2013) outlined acceptable numbers for studies that employ thematic analysis, with 6-10 participants recommended for interviews in small projects, 2–4 for focus groups, 10–50 for participant-generated text, and 10–100 for secondary sources. For the current research, there were 19 participants in the main sample, excluding the pilot study to ensure that as themes arose from the data, there were enough participants to enable similarities and differences to emerge while still allowing the individualized and personal meanings derived to remain intact. For example, religious beliefs emerged as a theme, yet participants had differing perceptions as to how their religious beliefs played a role in their values that informed their professional counsellor identity.

Another aspect to consider within a qualitative research paradigm is the point of data saturation (Charmaz 2006; Glaser, 1965). The point of data saturation has been recorded with as few as six interviews (e.g., Isman, Ekéus, & Berggren, 2013; Isman, Mahmoud Warsame, Johansson, Fried, & Berggren, 2013), and, likewise, with as many as 63 interviews (Wright, Maloney, & Feblowitz, 2011). Sandelowski (1995) argued against 'computations or power analyses that can be done in qualitative research to determine a priori the minimum number […] of sampling units required' (Sandelowski, p. 179). My research design thereby followed what Sandelowski (1995) suggested, which is to ensure that the sample size is small enough to manage the data and yet sufficiently large so as to offer 'a new and richly textured understanding of

experience' (Ibid, p. 183). Ability to manage the data will enable me subsequently to explore issues with the participants, understand the contexts in which their experiences were framed, and hence better 'detail the contours and dynamics of people, places, actions and interactions' (Tewksbury, 200, p. 50). The sufficiency of material within the data set was based on my subjective judgement, guided by prior work in the pilot study to reach the goals of the research. As such, this research falls within the suggested guidelines for sufficient interviews in qualitative based studies.

Prior to the main data collection taking place, a pilot study was carried out, and provided valuable insights to understanding the counselling training landscape and identifying gaps. The outcomes from the pilot study informed the direction to take for this current research, with guiding topics and themes for exploration. It highlighted the lack of national legislation that regulated requirements for counselling practice, as interviewees from the pilot study acknowledged that the SAC served the capacity of a professional registration body for counsellors in Singapore, but nonetheless lacked the bite in enforcing professional standards as there was no legislation or licensure for counselling practice in Singapore. This resonated with the participants' acknowledgment of the SAC as a professional registration body with no legal mandate to back its position in enforcing counselling practice standards. The results of the pilot also informed the topic guides for the current study with regard to how I could approach the tension between formal counselling training as part of graduate training, and the development of the professional identity of the counsellor. The pilot study highlighted the following key thematic aspects to be pursued. This included eliciting participants' stories of how they were socialised into the values of the counselling profession through their training experiences and their personal reflections. Additionally, the pilot study opened up new areas to be examined like how perceptions of professionalism could be linked to factors such as the counsellor-client relationship, the counsellor's knowledge base, and training accreditation. These interconnected elements could be explored to understand their contribution to more proficient counselling practices and perhaps lead to the development of personal schemas. Such schemas would

demonstrate how they perceived and judged the world as formally trained counsellors.

The inclusion criteria for the demographic characteristics of participants were defined as follows: (1) that participants were graduates from a particular formal post-graduate degree in counselling training in Singapore; (2) that they were willing to share their experiences about their formal counsellor training course in relation to their professional and personal identity. Cresswell and Plano-Clark (2007) proposed several ways of deciding on a selection criterion for participants, including choosing people who hold different perspectives on the basis of gender or race, or choosing extreme cases such as troubled situations. In the sample for my current research, I was seeking a mixture of participants whose prior training could be from related fields in the helping professions to non-related fields like human resource, legal and business areas. The sample's diversity allowed me to find if there were any commonalities among the participants when they chose to embark on the post-graduate studies in counsellor-training. My research as an applied social science topic was not focussed on studying on the behaviours or differences related to gender or race. The participants were likewise at different stages of their careers, which allowed me to investigate the possible themes across the sample, contributing to a comprehensive exploration of the similarities and differences among the participants.

There were four (21%) male participants and 15 (79%) female participants. Four participants (21%) had prior qualifications in social work as their bachelor's degree whilst three participants (15 %) had a bachelor's degree in psychology. All of the latter seven participants were either in the medical or community social service fields. The other 12 (64%) participants were trained in fields linked with education, medicine/nursing, the military, law, human resources, logistics, business administration, and marketing and real estate. Five out of the 19 participants (after the post-graduate counsellor-training) had gone on to undertake further study related to counselling, social work or psychology, while one out of the 19 participants obtained a subsequent second degree in nursing:

Prior first degrees (bachelor's)	Number of participants
Social Work	4
Psychology	3
Education	1
Biomedicine/ Science /Nursing	4
Human resource/mass communication/general arts/ law	4
Logistics/ building science/ real estate	3

The representation of participants from social, health, and medical health settings were consistent with other studies (Gazzola & Smith, 2007). The participants sampled for the current research were employed in a variety of settings and worked in different sectors, holding diversified roles both in their initial professional training and after completing the counsellor training programme in question. Of the four (21%) participants who had obtained a bachelor's degree in social work, one was working in medical setting, while the other three were working in the social services sector. Three (15%) of the participants who had a bachelor's degree in psychology and two who were registered nurses prior to taking the formal training in counselling worked as a para-psychologist, programme head, and registered nurses in health and social care fields respectively. After obtaining the formal training in counselling, the participants were working in psychology-related fields dealing with children with special needs, in research, therapy, or general psychological assessment work:

Prior Qualifications	Previous work role before undergoing formal counselling training	Current work role after obtaining formal counselling qualifications
Bachelor in Psychology	1) Para psychologist; 2) Programme head of voluntary welfare organisation; 3) Psychologist with social services	1) Military Psychologist; 2) Psychologist in voluntary welfare organisation; 3) Psychologist with social services
Bachelor in Nursing	1) Registered nurses in general ward care	1) Counsellor for mental health patients; 2) Social Health Research

Of all of the participants who had their prior training in fields outside psychology, social work or nursing, four had switched to occupations within the social service sector, after completing their post-graduate counsellor-training. Of these four, two of held the occupational title of counsellors, while one had become the head of a social service agency that worked with the youth population. The other was known as a community-based social service worker. One of these latter four had also embarked on further training, completing her master's degree in counselling and was currently on her way to a doctoral programme in psychotherapy.

Of the seven (36%) participants who had prior training in social work, psychology or nursing, all agreed during the interviews that they were better able to use counselling skills after undergoing the counselling course. However, this did not correlate to having their workplace management endorse their counselling training and reflected within the scope of their job roles. Interestingly, those who had their counselling training formally recognised by their organisation were also those who had moved into upper management work in their respective organisations; as such, they found less opportunity to utilise counselling skills with their target clientèle.

The average age of the participants was 34.7 years of age. All of the participants were Singaporean Chinese, with the exception of one participant who was from another part of Asia.

3.2.3 Interviewing Rationale

My interviewing approach was also guided by Grounded Theory (GT) principles, aligning with the co-construction of the data and to understand the underlying processes and interactions behind the responses of the participants. I elected to use Individual, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews as the primary data collection method. This is because the individual, in-depth interview was aimed at allowing me to have an understanding of the participants' perspectives, as well as enabling the key topics outlined in the research questions to be explored and expressed by participants in a natural and flexible manner

(Carter et.al., 2014). This approach would thus be suited to ascertain the extent to which the training programme has or has not contributed to students' professionalism, as well as the aspects in which the training has been particularly impactful on their professional development.

Qualitative research used in conjunction with GT, underscore the focus on delving into the patterns and similarities across data sets from the different participants, which thereby gives further insights and meaning to the issues at hand. While qualitative data may not be generalisable like quantitative studies, the knowledge gained through qualitative studies has been recognised as being "more informative, richer and offers enhanced understandings compared to that which can be obtained via quantitative research" (Tewksbury, 2009 p.38), with a primary focus on intricate details and dynamics of the social aspects of how we make sense of our experiences within our social environment. This aligns with the goals of the current study in looking at the complexity of the connection between the participants' experiences and their professional identities.

The aim of using qualitative semi-structured interviews is to map out potentially different patterns observed in a data-set rather than looking at magnitudes, which is the purview of quantitative studies (Fugard & Potts, 2015). The richness of the data from qualitative semi-structure interviews acknowledges the diverse ways in which participants clarify the 'what, how, when, where and by and among whom behaviours and processes operate while describing in explicit details the contours and dynamics' (Tewksbury, 2009, p. 50), which was precisely the type of data needed for the current study, in discovering alongside the participants their multifaceted perspectives on professional identity. Qualitative interviewing also enabled participants to relate their own stories, allowing me as the researcher to interpret and make sense of their experiences within a natural setting in relation to the meanings that the participants brought with them (Jones, 1995). In particular, the rich descriptions that were elicited from participants using qualitative semi-structured interviews acknowledged the range of different ways in which they make sense of the world, thus allowing me to discover, together with the participants, how the meanings of professional identity, professional practice as counsellors, and professionalism could be

understood within their world-view (Jones, 1995). The emphasis on the participants' narratives within

qualitative research provides an overall view of participants' lived experiences, aligning with the context

of the complex nature of professional identity development among counsellors.

In essence, semi-structured interviews rooted in the Grounded Theory principles allowed a

comprehensive exploration of participants' perspectives and allowed the uncovering of patterns and

meanings to the development of the professional identity for the counselling profession.

3.3 Analytical Approach
3.3.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was chosen as the analytical tool, as it supported the development of the research

design spanning sampling, data collection, and analysis phases of the current study. The selection of

thematic analysis as the data analysis method is in line with the principles of open coding in Grounded

Theory, facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the data, specifically employing line-by-line coding of

the text, to surface patterns and insights from the participants' narratives. This section elaborates, first,

the detailed rationale for choosing thematic analysis, followed by a description of the coding

methodology, and outlines the phases of the coding culminating in significant research findings. The

process of open coding involved labelling pieces of data which may be descriptive as well as inferential.

Such a coding process allowed me to generate either conceptual labels, categories or themes to be used

in the analysis (Punch, 2009).

At its core, thematic analysis is to identify recurring patterns or themes within qualitative data. In

particular, within thematic analysis, 'a theme is an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a

recurrent experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or

basis of the experience into a meaningful whole' (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000, p. 362). The process of

thematic analysis thus involves recognising that the multiple meanings and experiences of the participants

can be abstracted into cohesive themes. Thematic analysis in qualitative data thus enables the uncovering

of a collection of themes at 'some level of patterned response or meaning' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82) within a data set. In this process of identifying and categorising emerging themes, the research sought to make sense of participants' experiences and narratives in a systematic manner (Bamberg, 2007; Imel et al., 2002), which allowed a repetition of the process of data sets from each participant to be generated for analysis. Using Constructivist Grounded Theory throughout the process, expressions and themes essentially act as values that are placed on discrete happenings, events, and other occurrences. The values were then grouped together based around distinct events and occurrence, to form categories and themes, as posited by grounded theorists Strauss and Corbin (1990). In line with this understanding, themes were drawn from the current data via an inductive approach, while considering pre-existing and prior theoretical understanding of the research topic, that is, applying an *a priori* approach (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). Prior themes came from the following sources: previous research, agreed upon professional definitions found in literature reviews, the constructs found within the counselling community, guided the exploration while allowing fresh themes to surface from the data, in interaction with my own values, theoretical orientations, and personal experiences (Bulmer, 1979; Strauss, 1987; Maxwell, 1996).

Application of Thematic analysis was also instrumental in enabling the commonalities across different participants to surface, thus allowing for a holistic overview of the data analysed. In order to carry out this type of analysis, it is necessary to be familiar with the data and make sense of the data by systematic coding, as well as also through the building and refining of the development and revision of the themes(Clarke & Braun, 2017). By using thematic analysis, the interview narratives were then better understood and more manageable to be categorised by drawing out themes in this manner. Common narratives were then synthesised to deepen the knowledge to enhance the understanding of the research questions.

Thematic analysis served as a powerful tool to critically decipher the discourses that emerged in order to understand, de-construct and draw out themes arising from the qualitative data. Using thematic analysis as a tool was, ultimately, seen as key in enabling me to fulfil the objectives of the current study by

extrapolating the narratives encountered and better understanding the various experiences articulated by the individual participants. As such, thematic analysis, in alignment with Constructivist Grounded Theory principles, ensured the concepts proposed via the research questions can, indeed, be identified from taking a deep dive into the participants' interviews and narrative texts, thus facilitating, in the current research, greater knowledge of how the changes in social processes affect participants' understanding and development of professional identity.

The capacity of thematic analysis was seen as particularly apt for the current research is that it enables an exploration of patterns involving 'identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas' (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012, p. 10), so as to guide the description, interpretation and explanation of the data. The positioning of patterns in the phenomena and outcome of the discourses against the conceptual validity of concepts is highly relevant to the current thesis focus on a particular set of discourses and discursive practices relative to the development of professional identity. This mode of analysis allowed key patterns to emerge and offered insights into the impact of these patterns on the being and becoming of the project's participants in the process of undergoing the counsellor training programme. Eliciting these patterns also enabled the de-construction of and to make meaning by analysing participants' narrative texts (Grant et al., 2004, p. 214), in such a way that pointed to emerging ramifications and implications for other counsellor training programmes in Singapore.

Furthermore, thematic analysis that can be seen as relevant to the current research as this approach fosters the interaction between the participants and the research to include the 'researcher's 'voice', the background theoretical resources, the substantive research topic, one's orientation towards the research subjects, and relationship to one's audience' (Grant et al., 2004, p. 218), while also co-constructing the meaning of the data with the participants. Specifically, the interaction between the participants' stories and my own assumptions underscores the researcher's reflexive process, facilitating a contextual examination of my motivations in pioneering the postgraduate counselling training course and how differently the various participants experienced it. Furthermore, linking this reflexivity with Brown's

(1998) form of narrative, with 'people's cognitive sense-making' as individuals and collectively as a group in understanding changes' (Grant et al., 2004, p. 220), further allowed me to take into account the wider sociological factors that may impact one's identity development as a professional counsellor. It was worth investigating in the participants' narratives, any 'official knowledges and truth regimes' (Grant et al., 2004, p. 222). Such information potentially included social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations inherent in the training programme, that may have impacted on the development of their professional identity.

Inclined towards a post-modern constructivist approach, thematic analysis supports the study of the accountability of the moral consequences of actions. In the current study, this was relevant both to the person of the professional counsellor and to the process of the development of their professional identity. This approach facilitated the examination on the accountability of the curriculum and social practices of the learning institutes as providers of the counsellor training programmes, as well as the moral effects it may have had on the students who signed up for the counsellor training programmes. The constructivist approach thus allowed me to fit 'new understandings and knowledge into and with, extending and supplanting,' previous understanding and knowledge (Fry et al., 2009, p. 10), while actively engaging in the learning process during the interview with the participants (Armstrong, 2011).

Overall, employing thematic analysis to engage with the data from the current study enabled the: (1) evaluation of the learning from the post-graduate counsellor-training programme on the development of the professional and personal identity of the participants; and (2) contribute to the accumulation of knowledge and implications for other counsellor training programmes in Singapore.

3.3.2 Engaging Participants – Recruitment Strategies

The snowball method was adopted to recruit participants, as this allowed for purposive sampling, particularly relevant for qualitative studies. Snowballing is also one of the typical non-probability sampling

methods used for qualitative studies with hard-to-reach research participants. In this instance, the snowball method was an ideal strategy for this particular research because of the limited access I had to potential participants, which was primarily through the email addresses that such participants provided when they enrolled as students during the formal counselling training course in Singapore. An initial mass email was sent to all graduates of the counselling programme selected for the purposes of this study, outlining information and details on the study, the expectations and commitment required of them, and ethical considerations. This approach efficiently conveyed the essence of the study and utilised the strengths of the snowball method, as Naderifar et al. (2017) have noted, the snowball method takes less time and allows opportunities for better communication with the sample population. In this instance, I benefited from graduates' connections with each other, as the graduates who directly responded to my initial mass outreach email had forwarded the email to their fellow graduates who met the study's criteria. The snowball method, therefore expanded the targeted sample population, as I had no way of verifying beforehand if the list of emails I had were still in use. Hence, the snowball method was deemed to be cost and time effective, and suitable for me to reach out and 'grow' the targeted sample population, while upholding data privacy and confidentiality, preserving the integrity of the research process.

Using the snowball sampling method for the current qualitative study also helped me to better define and understand the perceptions and development of the participants in their professional counselling identity, as it gave me greater access to the group specific to the needs of my research. This meant that some of those who affirmed they would participate or were part of the final sample were aware of those who had passed their details on to me. However, the referring parties were unaware of whether or not the interviews with the latter participants subsequently took place, unless they discussed this independently among themselves. As such, the confidentiality and privacy of the data were maintained, with the exception of participants DS18 and DS19, as they requested to be interviewed together. In part, the on-going shared social context of DS18 and DS19 was a clear example of how agency does not occur in isolation but, rather, always within a social context (Charmaz, 2005). In this particular instance, the shared

social context for DS18 & DS19 started when they met while taking the course, and then continued to develop as they navigated the environment around them after completing the counsellor training.

I also sent a follow-up email after two weeks in order to recruit more participants for the study. For participants who expressed their interest in participating, I shared the informed consent form (Annex C & D), and offered them the choice to either sign it before meeting me or on the spot during the meeting. At the same time, for participants who agreed to take part, a request was made to provide their phone contact via email consent, so that we could facilitate a more immediate communication mode to coordinate a time and venue for the face-to-face interview using messaging, which would be faster than email.

The final sample included 19 respondents, demonstrated to the efficacy of the snowball method in accessing a targeted group to fit the research criteria including the necessary information on the context of their counsellor training and the development of their professional identity. The details of the participants can be found in Annex B. This recruitment approach tapped into the participants' network and was successful in forming a diverse and relevant group for the current study.

3.3.3 Conducting in-depth interviews

A semi-structured interview schedule allowed for the collection of basic data pertaining to participants' current experiences after graduating from the formal counselling course. The interview questions were developed in relation to the study framework in order to guide and elicit comprehensive data in the discussion on values, participants' interest in the field, and their purpose and goals in becoming a formally trained counsellor. In order to situate the experiences of the participants and the thematic development, the semi-structured interview structure was designed using guidance on posing open-ended, unbiased questions. Semi-structured interview questions guided by my research objectives, also allowed for a

dynamic dialogue with possible follow-up questions and responses to emerge organically depending on the direction the interview takes (Punch, 2009). The questions were formed in such a way as to build a picture of individual participants' background, in order to support a better understanding of their experiences and current context, alongside the drawing out of themes from the participants' narratives shared and later extracting the relevant themes produced from the transcripts (as detailed in the data analysis section). Each interview lasted between 45-60 mins.

The participants were asked to discuss and reflect on their experiences across a range of topics in the following areas:

• Their pre-existing values they held and how these values evolved during and after their formal counsellor training course.

• The circumstances that influenced, reinforced or changed these values, for example, their interactions with their clients, dynamics within the family, and self-reflections on the counselling processes, and the impact of these on their counselling approaches.

• Experiences and factors perceived as instrumental in developing their professional identity as counsellors, as well as shaping their personal identity.

Most of the interviews took place in a counselling room with complete privacy in my counselling center, which was my place of practice as a professional counsellor, while some were held in the participants' office settings. The various settings for the interviews allowed a conducive environment for open conversations, and ensured that participants were at ease, thus contributing to a richer discussion in the interviews. The interviews were recorded to capture the nuances of the language used and subsequently transcribed for analysis. After each interview, I sent all participants a follow-up email within 1-3 days after their respective interviews, providing them an opportunity to add on thoughts and reflective comments on their experience of taking part in the interview, while also thanking them for their participation. The post-interview correspondence allowed an avenue for continued participant engagement, to share

insights that may have surfaced after the interview itself. None of the participants raised any issues or made further points. The participants' responses were overwhelmingly positive, as many enjoyed the time and space that the interviews allowed for self-reflection. The opportunity to discuss on their personal and professional journey during their development as trained counsellors proved to be insightful.

In summary, the semi-structured interviews used in this current research served to uncover participants' experiences, providing a deeper awareness of their evolving values, professional identity development, and broader reflections on their counselling journey. The interviews also encouraged a sense of engagement and contribution to the research process for the participants.

3.3.4 Thematic Analysis In Practice: Coding Procedure

The application of Opler's (1945) three principles, as outlined in Ryan and Bernard (2003); formed the base of the thematic analysis used in this study. This approach allowed for themes to be visibly expressed through data, regardless whether such expressions of data may be either obvious or subtle, and to recognise that cultural systems can be found to be within these themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003), establishing the relationship between the narratives of the participants and that of the broader social contexts. In my current research, the themes were made visible through expressions verbalised in the data. These expressions were systematically grouped into interconnected sets. Some themes were then openly recognised as part of how society views counsellors and professional training, while other themes like licensure were more covert. The themes revealed interrelated meanings with reference to culture and society, either symbolically, directly, or even via idiosyncratic expressions (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

The importance of each theme was classified according to: (1) how often certain articulations occurred that fit into the theme; (2) how widespread the ideas were in the given theme across participants' various practice settings; (3) participants' reactions when certain ideas were infringed upon; and (4) the perceived degree of control of organisational and structural systems, as expressed by the participants (Ryan &

Bernard, 2003).

In working with Constructivist Grounded Theory, I needed to be well-acquainted with the data in order to generate the subsequent analysis. This involved comprehending the subtle nuances and sensitivities inherent within the data (Charmaz, 2006), thus enabling me to link emerging ideas from the research data to the existing body of literature. Once all the data were collected, the interviews were transcribed. These transcribed texts contained the discussions co-produced by the participant and interviewer (me), within which additional layers of discourses were found. Discourses occurred on the linguistic level of the experiences shared by the participants, and their reflections on the discourses also delved into the broader 'systems of thought', illustrating how one 'construct[s] reality through the use of language by attributing meaning' (Alexiadou, 2001, p. 54).

The coding process entailed a deliberate exploration of sifting and understanding the data, constructing a picture that recognised the shifts between the participants, their circumstances and their lives, and clarifying the participants' views of reality within the paradigm of Constructivist Grounded Theory. Initial general themes and concepts were surfaced, while making sense of the data and seeing the possibility of links between different data sets from the various interviews. This was done first by using 'open coding' (Vaismoradi, 2013, p. 402), followed by more intensive and granular 'line by line' coding (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 50-52). The latter process (Charmaz, 1996) required me to be aware of the similarities and differences between the data among participants Using 'focused coding' (Charmaz, 1996, p. 40), I developed broader categories of themes that could enhance the analysis. Throughout the process of coding, I used memo-writing (Charmaz, 1996; Glasser, 1978) to supplement this process by taking note of my thoughts and ideas, and the relationships between the codes that formed part of my reflections. For example, I became increasingly aware of how some of my use of language could have led the participants towards a certain way of answering, in turn making me more aware of certain biases or preconceived knowledge that I already held, and of verbalising these in my conversations with the participants. The memo-writing process also directed my thoughts to distinguish between the major from minor themes. Further detail

on the precise coding stages applied are provided in the section 'Coding Phases'.

When trying to understand the data, there arose what Glaser and Strauss (1967) advocated as the 'constant comparison method' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, pp. 101–16), involving systematic comparisons and asking: 'what is this sentence about?' and 'how is it similar to or different from the preceding or following statements?' Such a process kept me focused on the data itself rather than on 'theoretical flights of fancy' (Glaser, 1978, pp. 56–72; Charmaz, 1990, 2000; Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp. 84–95). Part of my reflective and reflexive process included asking questions on how similar or different the data were to my own experiences. Furthermore, Spradley's (1979) framework guided the search for 'evidence of social conflict, cultural contradictions, informal methods of social control, things that people do in managing impersonal social relationships, methods by which people acquire and maintain achieved and ascribed status, and information about how people solve problems' (pp. 199-201). This approach allowed me to remain attuned and sensitive to participants' actions and interactions, and the consequences of these dynamics on participants' development of their professional and personal identity (Strauss and Corbin,1990, pp. 158–75). Moving sensitively with the data in this way allowed a process that 'fosters developing conceptual power, depth, and comprehensiveness' (Charmaz, 1996, p. 1163).

The overall approach in coding the data encompassed the use of Constructivist Grounded Theory to engage with the data, while remaining sensitive to the participants' narratives to allow the themes to surface. This process ensured insights into the participants' experiences, while at the same time, showing the interplay between these experiences and the broader societal context.

3.3.4.1 Coding Phases

The process of using Grounded Theory in the semi-structured interviews allowed the data to emerge via thematic analysis, and via the co-construction of data in the conversations held between the participants and researcher. A methodical approach to analysis and to examining the data needed to be replicable for each transcript, to ensure a transparent and organised set of data. The discourses that arose during each interview were teased out from the actual discussion and dialogues generated between the participant and researcher. The meaning of the discourse was made more explicit in the research by written notes or memos while transcribing, as part of documenting and reflecting on the process (Flick, 2018).

The data analysis was broken down into different phases, as outlined below:

Phase one: In the first step of the analysis, I listened to the digital recordings of the interviews and studied the transcripts, which were referenced by minutes and seconds (Table 1). This precision proved useful in the process of note making and cross referencing during the multiple times I went through the transcripts (Table 1). I transcribed and typed the texts directly into word documents. Each word document was saved under a specific code for the respective participant.

Table 1: Example of a Transcript and Notes

Timing	Interview Transcript	Notes
TT3:16/03:39	Ok, that's interesting because to me, then the questions that is part of this study is also then what is it that motivated you to go into counselling in the first place, as a professional training?	
DS-X: 16/03:54	Oh... ok. So err. I guess it is the fact that I can really help a person. So I was doing it in law, and I enjoyed it except that I can only help those who can pay me. And I also should help those who help me, because of time and obviously very high overheads and things like that.	personal value: help people - both law and counselling. BUT counselling able to help people even if they cannot pay. able to exercise value of helping others beyond the consideration of payment of bills
TT3:17/04:16	Em.Em.	

DS-X: 17/04:17	So I…Because of that, I mean I was helping people as well, but because of the fact I have to choose those who can have deeper pockets right, then I have to turn away those who can't.	
TT3:18/04:30	Yes.	
DS-X :18/04:31	So at the end of the day, it's actually, my motivations come not from really helping but more from the income I can gather. So you know, for my belief, as a Christian, it is like: something is not very right.	religion - Christianity: clarification of motivation. altruistic helping vs helping cos of income to be generated
TT3:19/04:45	Em. Em.	
DS-X :19/04:46	So I thought what I should explore, the ways to help because I also serve in church, so to me, I do need skills to grow and to help. Yah... so I took the course … and I felt, alright, after four years, I really need to upgrade because I know that it is not enough. Ya.	desire to focus more on altruistic helping
TT3:20/05:08	Em. Em. You can sense that already lah after the practice forum right?	
DS-X :20/05:11	Correct. Because I can handle all the paperwork and all that, really fine. That's not a… It means the social work part is fine, the case report is fine, all these are like no issues but when it comes to people, it's a different story. Ya…..so..	
TT3:21/05:26	Ok, so then because you wanted to help, so legally, yes, you could do something to help, but there's a..	
DS-X :21/05:33	But I guess I was helping because I was more like helping myself lah. Because I help you,if I get, because legally…	
TT3:22/05:38	Ya. Ya. Ya	
DS-X :22/05:39	Because you have to be really practical	
TT3:23/05:41	Ya..Realistic mah.	
DS-X :23/05:42	Ya, and there is a very high billing target to reach so, of course, you know, in all things, you have to,	pragmatism- legal practice assistance need to reach billing target
TT3:24/05:49	Yes, yes.	
DS-X :24/05:49	And this is the culture unfortunately. Right.	
TT3:25/05:53	Yes.	
DS-X :25/05:53	So you know, so, now actually, at the moment, I'm also like, catch up with some of my friends from the legal circle and trying to see like how I can, how I can use that to help, but not just looking at the bottom line, you know?	bottom line of needing to pay bills vs being able to help people/clients
TT3:26/06:07	Em.	

DS-X :26/06:07	Ya, it's not so much my struggle, it's more of their struggle because they, you know, can't imagine not, you know, like you help a client but ….then, you know,	internal struggle = motivation to help vs able to get sufficient payment for wk. helping not consistent with payment amount.
TT3:27/06:18	without getting a payment?	
DS-X :27/06:18	Ya, without getting a certain amount of payment. You know.	
TT3:28/06:22	Certain level. Yes	
DS-X :28/06:22	Ya so it is difficult, and it is something because of my background and my training, that I'm ….tsk… I, still trying to see…how it goes, ya,… so it is like …slowly lah, let's see lah.	
TT3:29/06:34	Ya, ya, so the main motivation is still to help lah?	
DS-X :29/06:37	Ya, ya, ya, definitely.	
TT3:30/06:37	So why counselling and not any other profession? For example, social work?	
DS-X :30/06:42	Because ah oh..ok, I did, ya, thought about that but actually I've find social work, I'm sure that it has its values but probably because I'm trained legally right, so erm, I thought I would have something to complement it more than….I … I'm sure there's something else in social work but I find that counselling will be a better fit	counselling versus social work
TT3:31/07:03	Which part of it, would seem to you to be a better fit with your legal training?	
DS-X :31/07:07	The part about understanding human behaviours and all that? Ya, because legal training is very task and very focused, it is very issue and all that. So I get social work is a bit of that as well, because the issues and all that, so, I have quite a lot of training in spotting issues and handling issues, and problem solving and all that kind of stuff, I felt that probably I should take counselling instead.	social work = task focussed parallels legal training counselling = understanding human behaviours complement legal training
TT3:32/07:35	So, which means that counselling, offers, seems to offer you a better sort of focus on the human person and the understanding of the human person part..	
DS-X :32/07:44	Yes.	
TT3:33/07:45	…than, for example, social work.	
DS-X :33/07:47	Ya. Not that social work is not good	

Phase two: The second stage involved selecting the first two transcripts as a test for identifying themes and creating categories of the data within the contexts of the participants' definitions of their situations. The text was lifted verbatim by copying from the original transcripts and pasting into a new soft copy document for each participant, linking to the themes. Themes like 'motivation' were, for example, further expanded to 'pragmatism', 'to help people or clients', and 'skills upgrade' (Table 2) This process of expansion was based on emergent themes within these areas; such sub-themes were helpful in making the data more manageable in the later stages of analysis. This process continued, with amendments being made and subsequent transcripts put through a similar process. This process developed a framework, allowing opportunities for reflection and consideration of the emergent themes. Sometimes, a response could fit into more than one theme. In this case, having a table proved helpful, as the same response could be placed in two different categories, and could be easily moved to another category when revisited throughout the analytical process. The process of analysis using themes established 'meaning' in the form of a word or a phrase, and could either be a direct quote from the participant or my interpretation of what was said (Alexiadou, 2001).

Table 2: Example of creating and expanding of themes

Category	Theme	Sub-themes
Motivation	To help people / clients	
	Skills upgrade / growth / competencies	usually linked to other themes - like to help people better, for career development, etc.
	Faith-based	
	Push factor from past career (career development?)	Complimentary skills from past career; Skills from past career is not enough to achieve desired impact; Past career pique curiosity about counselling; Gap in skils and clients' needs; Counselling as a better tool to address client's needs; to specialise
	Pragmatism	Better than being Social Worker when older; demand at workplace;
	Experience / interaction with counsellors	Working with counsellors in past career; Family member; personally attended

Phase three: The process of coding and clustering the themes that emerged from the interview data occurred in Phase 3, when sub-themes were identified under a cluster-theme. This involved further data analysis, and moving back and forth from the verbatim responses within the original transcripts when needed. The results of the coding, clustering and further analysis of the data were captured using an excel spreadsheet.

Phase four: Once the data were distilled, the process of presenting the results commenced, using themes identified under the various questions in the semi-structured interviews. The participants' background and their current occupation (if known) were added as an extra column to the transcripts, for easy accessibility of referencing in the results presentation. Throughout this process, the focus remained on the individual and their experiences of having undergone the formal counsellor training course in question.

Throughout each phase of the coding process, I engaged in thorough discussions with my supervisory team to ensure the methodical integrity of using Constructivist Grounded Theory approach in the development of themes. This ensured that the data was coded rigorously and reflected the participants' perspectives and remained consistent. Based on the principle of auditability (Shek et al., 2005), this approach fostered a mutual co-creative process of sense-making between the researcher and the participants, enhancing the study's credibility and auditability (Shek, 2005).

The writing of the analysis chapter was a continuation of the analysis itself. The process of going 'to and fro' between themes and individuals' stories allowed for piecing together a narrative based on the participants' perceptions of their professional and personal identities. It is during this stage that Constructivist Grounded Theory requires the back and forth movement between the original transcript and themes highlighted, seeking to ensure an accurate representation of participants' stories. A thorough re-reading of the data at this stage needed to be recursive, in order to shape and structure the themes

and analysis (Braun et al., 2014). The refining of the themes also occurred at this stage, when it became increasingly apparent that unintended themes had emerged; for example, the licensing of the trained counsellors' practice, which was seen by participants as important to the development of their professional identity, as well as for the counselling profession itself.

The data analysis focused on the interviews, so that the voices of the participants could be heard in situ (Smith et al. 2009). This enabled the maintenance of as much of the original meaning as possible. Excerpts from the interview transcripts were embedded within speech marks, "—", differentiating it from direct quotes from the supporting literature, which is provided in single quotation marks '--'.

3.4 Reflection On Ethics

My reflections on ethical issues had three main foci: (1) my role as an insider-outsider; (2) risks, benefits and compensation; (3) informed consent. In each of these three interlinked areas, my dual role as a Counsellor and researcher pointed in the same direction – towards ensuring that I presented what the participants meant during the interviews while remaining aware of possible personal biases that may have occurred.

3.4.1 My Role As A Researcher

My position as both researcher/interpreter of the text and as a trained counsellor and trained counsellor clinical supervisor is also worthy of mention in the context of the data analysis. My personal experience in the sector, as described in Chapter 1, meant that I had certain preconceived ideas and notions with my biases and ideological preoccupations. Throughout the research process, in particular the pilot study, I became more aware of the underlying assumptions that I carried, and tried to be similarly aware so as to 'reduce' the level of these assumptions in the main study, especially since I hold an informed position

of knowledge of the workings of the SAC, and also of the workings behind the Singapore counselling scene on a macro and systems level. I constantly sought to clarify the meanings of the words or phrases used, in order to ensure that I did not automatically assume their meaning. Yet, even while attempting to be unbiased, Alexiadou (2001) argues that researchers cannot be objective, as they inevitably construct an understanding based on their own "interests, assumptions and values" (2001, p. 55).

My positionality in this study was made especially complex given the various roles I had to play: as a teacher of the programme, an executive committee member of the professional body in question, and a doctoral studies researcher. This meant, firstly, that participants had all interacted with me in the course of their training. As such, there arose some initial concerns about this research related to the course from which they had graduated. I made a conscientious effort to recruit only graduates from the programme, and not students still currently registered, to ensure that there was no conflict of interest, as the former would already have completed the counselling course. During some interviews, participants provided feedback on the course and course administration matters. I had to remain focused on the research questions and my role as a researcher, while continuing to take note of the feedback the participants had given on the course that they had taken while counsellors-in-training. As interaction is at the heart of qualitative research, I had to ensure that my participation in the interviews and my observations were contained within the confines of the study, to ensure productivity and limit contamination of the research findings (Tewksbury, 2009). Another ethical consideration was the fact that I was also on the executive committee of the professional body, the SAC, since 2014 to date and was called upon during this time to comment on information about the association and its processes when certain insights or queries were raised during the semi-structured interviews.

Ultimately, it was important that I successfully navigated these varying roles throughout the course of the research. While I was in a position of authority while the participants were training as counsellors, in the context of the interviews the power dynamics were reversed. I had to wait for the participants to agree

or disagree to the interview schedules, and had to fit into their timetables. I also had to ensure that the emails sent to the graduates were neutral and inviting in tone, ensuring that potential participants did not feel coerced in any way to participate, while at the same time staying within the time frame of the data gathering stage so as not to compromise the data.

3.4.2 Risks, Benefits And Compensation

The participants involved in the study were not expected to experience any significant risk or discomfort, as the semi-structured interviews mostly concerned their opinions and views. Participants were given the option to withdraw from the study at any point. One participant raised the concern that information shared may be picked up by someone within the same organisation, and that any negative comments made may have detrimental effects on their jobs. This concern was addressed by reassuring the participants that data would be stripped of identifiable elements, and anonymised and aggregated such that the source of data cannot be reasonably identified.

From a professional perspective, it was not possible to guarantee participants that we would not meet again in another context in the future, and I assured respondents verbally at the start of the interviews that no matter what they shared with me, this would not be raised or referred to again by me in the future, should we encounter each other in the counselling or social service arena. There remains the possibility that the participants themselves could refer to events within the study in the future. To protect their identities, all of the participants were given pseudonyms and none were aware of their own or others' pseudonyms, or of the identity of the other colleges where participants worked. The interviews were recorded using a tablet protected by encryption and passwords. The names of colleges, colleagues, locations and any other material that might lead to the identification of any individual were omitted from text samples and quotes in order to protect identities.

The study participants received no monetary benefits or compensation for their involvement. However,

their input may have contributed to the continued development of a distinctive professional identity in a field relevant to them – counselling – and to possibly positively influence Singapore's policies pertaining to professional counsellors in Singapore.

Researcher personal protection was also considered, and a university email address and letterheads were used in order to protect my personal privacy and safety. The usage of a university email address also allowed a more obvious separation between my dual roles as a researcher and a practising professional counsellor. The university letterheads also provided legitimacy to this research study. The interviews were conducted in private spaces within public locations (e.g., a counselling room within a social service facility) during 2016 and 2017.

3.4.3 Informed Consent

A letter inviting participants to take part, an information sheet, and consent forms (Annex D) were all approved prior to use by the ethics committee of the home institution. Participants were given an information sheet outlining the purposes of the study, my personal background, assurances of anonymity and confidentiality, and the contact details of my supervisor at the home institution, should their reflections create any unexpected emotional responses. They were told about the questionnaire, interview length, possible follow-up for clarification, and the procedures around transcription and data storage.

Participants were provided with an e-copy of the information sheet for their perusal prior to the face-to-face interview via an email confirmation of interview details. Participants were encouraged to clarify if they had questions regarding the study before the interview, either by emailing with any queries or raising these on the day of the interview. On the latter, all participants were provided with informed consent documents to sign as proof of acknowledgement, as well as a copy for their safe-keeping. The informed consent form included statements on (1) voluntary participation in the study with the freedom to

withdraw at any time; (2) agreement to take part in the study; (3) that data collected during this study would be anonymised before submission for publication; (4) that data set would be used for possible future research projects and that the participants agreed to be contacted for further possible participation; and (5) participants' agreement to be audio recorded and for their direct quotes to be used.

Assurance was given to the participants that I would be the only one who would have access to the data, and that the data would be stored securely in password protected encrypted files. In addition, I ensured them that, to the best of my knowledge and ability, all of the data transcribed and written up would be anonymised, and neither would be linked back to any identifiable information concerning participants nor their specific organisations when reporting the results in the study. Each individual's audio recording would only be identifiable by a code assigned by me for administrative purposes only, for example, 'DS-1' (for 'Doctoral Study # 1'). These numbers were intended merely to help me keep track of the number of interviews done at specific stages. All hard copy written memos were kept under lock and key, accessible only to me. I also reassured participants that data disposal would be undertaken using the most up-to-date and reliable software data eraser programme available at the time of disposal, with the hard copy memos shredded.

With regard to the thesis itself, I emphasised that none of the reported information would mention any names or specific identifiable information. The level of participants' identifiability of the interviews would be limited to 'current practitioner' or 'professionally-trained counsellors in the field'. Participants were also informed that I would work within the confines of current legislation over such matters as privacy and confidentiality, data protection and human rights, whereby promises of confidentiality may sometimes be overridden by law. This could occur, for example, in circumstances where I may have to report concerns over any actual or potential harm to participants or others during the course of the interviews to the relevant authorities.

Ethical consideration of all elements of the data gathering and analysis processes were approved by Keele University. Permissions were sought on two levels: that of the home institution (Keele University)

supervising the study and the individuals taking part, and the institutions to which the latter belonged (Cresswell and Plano-Clark, 2007). Gaining ethical approval ensured that appropriate procedures regarding the necessary permissions were adhered to. Interviews aimed to elicit the individual's experiences and were not linked to any particular training institutions, programmes, or the institution or organisation itself. As such, approval was not needed from the other institutions or organisations in which the participants were either formally trained or working.

The semi-structured interviews were developed with open-endedness, confidentiality, and the aim of ensuring minimum risk or harm as guiding principles. This was done in line with recommendations put forth by Gazzola et al. (2010) and Bitar et al. (2007). The questions were also checked by the Ethics Board, as part of the ethical approval process.

3.5 Study Limitations

While thematic analysis was a flexible method that proved apt at meeting the analysis needs of this study, I have since wondered if there were inconsistencies in how I generated the themes, and if there was coherence when developing themes derived from the research (Holloway & Todres, 2003). While the construction of meaning using Grounded Theory was intentional, I did not have a way to check back with the participants if the meanings constructed and the categorisation of the themes resonated with their stories. Opler (1945) observed that themes are visible and subject to discovery if they are first explicitly expressed in the data; hence, I wondered if I had given enough space for the participants to express themselves, especially since the interviews were semi-structured.

The outcomes of the interviews were, ultimately, asynchronous snapshots representing the various participants at a particular point on their life journey; hence, this study captured a period insulated in time. Whilst the use of thematic analysis with grounded theory provided structure and supported the process of data collection and analysis, the changes in participants' micro or macro worlds could create

possibilities where the same interview questions could be answered differently. However, all previous studies are in this position, due to the movement of time and changes in resources. So, what is put forward in this study would likely change due to socio-political change in the environment affecting the field of counselling. Despite the study-as-snapshot being a limitation, it nonetheless provides a contribution to the given evidence at that particular point in time. The study does not offer generalisations based on its results. Rather, it offers some in-depth analysis that contributes to knowledge, so as to build and inform discourses on the development of the professional identity of formally trained counsellors.

Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the methodology and methods used to design and implement the data collection and analysis for the current research. The description of the adoption of Constructivist Grounded Theory, and the congruence of using Thematic Analysis would be used alongside each other in the discussion of the results, in relation to the research questions. Themes and categories were systematically arrived at and constantly cross-referenced with the data from different participants to check for accuracy in reflection and analysis. A description of the participants and their backgrounds were also discussed. I will discuss the results from the interviews in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH DATA AND ANALYSIS - BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLOR

Introduction

The process of becoming and, also, being a counsellor involves developing both personal and professional identities. This may involve integrating personal knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, norms, and values with the societal values and standards associated with the counselling profession. The present study has explored the complexities of this process, focusing on how graduate learning programs can either support or impede the development of a professional identity as a counsellor, with a specific focus on a counselling training program in Singapore.

By examining the experiences of graduates from a specific post-graduate counsellor training program, the study highlights the ways in which the program contributed to their professional development and personal growth as counsellors. Key themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews are categorized into the (1) 'Becoming' of a professional counsellor, which encompasses the growth and development of skills, knowledge, and competencies through interactions with course materials, and the corresponding impact of the counselling course on work in relation to the professional recognition; the (2) 'Being' of a professional counsellor which involves the intrinsic motivations, personal experiences as well as personal attitudes, beliefs, norms, and values that participants reflected as important for professional development as counsellors. In addition, the thesis also identifies (3) Enabling and disabling factors that influence the professional development of a counsellor; these include licensure and accreditation issues, as well as professional prestige issues found in the bigger environment of the allied health care scene. These various factors are important in influencing the professional development of a counsellor as being part of a community beyond the individual.

4.1 Becoming a Professional Counsellor

4.1.1 Professional Growth

The becoming of a professional counsellor refers to the process of developing and growing as a professional counsellor. It involves the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies through formal education, training, supervision mentorship, and experience (Garforth, 1971; Kovel, 1978; Strawbridge, 2006). This process would be ongoing and continuous as counsellors are seemingly constantly learning and adapting to new situations, clients, and contexts. The process of acquiring new knowledge and skills, constitutes part of the development of their professional identity.

Professional growth through education and training are essential to becoming a professional counsellor (Garforth, 1971; Kovel, 1978, Strawbridge, 2006). The application of the skills gained during training to one's own life is one of the most important factors in influencing the participants' sense of competence and professional growth. Participants reported that the training they received during the postgraduate programme contributed to their self-development and better self-understanding, and they cited career development, upgrading of their skills and competencies, and their own personal journey as strong reasons for embarking on the counselling course. For example, DS11 enrolled in the counselling training for professional growth and found that the knowledge gained also helped them personally. DS9 expressed similar sentiment about the counselling programme on personal growth:

> I think doing the [course] was also about personal growth. I thought that Counselling is a good
>
> [choice], at that time, when I have not made the decision to become counsellor, it was more of
>
> like "Hey, I find the whole training is so helpful." That even if I don't become a Counsellor, it's just
>
> going to help me as a person. (DS9)

Some participants took up the course as they saw that their organisations acknowledged the need for counselling skills in the work roles. However, others, like DS12 were inclined to take the course due to

needs like enhancing their research and counselling skills within their organisations. This suggests that the counselling course was seen as a bonus in helping them with their work, contributing to their professional growth.

For DS10, the post-graduate diploma in counselling programme propelled them to develop further in the field of counselling by taking a Masters programme:

> I think another reason for me is in wanting to prolong the career, then definitely getting higher qualifications and knowing that I think I can do it, then that's what prompted me to continue further. (DS10)

DS4 likewise found it fulfilling to engage in peer, clinical or personal supervision, for their professional growth and development as a counsellor, especially when it involved being engaged in professional exchange conversations with peers or colleagues in the same field:

> I guess having colleagues who are passionate as me actually helps… and also interest in counselling, to talking to colleagues about counselling. So we learn from one another. (DS4)

For DS11, the training received during the course provided clarity to what was previously seen as straightforward experience or instinct. The course emphasised the necessity of formal training, and to not solely rely on prior experiences. Competencies in the becoming of a professional counsellor can then be developed when undergoing training which can provide more logical reasoning as to why the counselling practice is conducted in a specific manner. Indeed, DS11 acknowledged that instinct or experience may be insufficient and training allows for proven, reliable and tested ways of practice of counselling skills and growth as a professional:

> Actually "Staff Training and Development" really helps…gives clarity to whatever I'm doing, because sometimes I could be just doing either out of experience or some instinct, but if it is through training, it could be more standardized to what has already been tried and tested, and

aligns me to what is… more practical way of doing things. It helps me see where are my blind

spots also. Yah. Because we do have like group supervision. Different people will have different

aspects that they will see my case differently, so that's when I do see my assessment may not be

as robust as I think it is. (DS11)

Enrolling in a post-graduate programme in counselling was seen as a practical step towards professional

development, and a preferable option compared to other options like a Master's programme. Participants

like DS10, who already held a bachelor's degree in social work, chose to further their career by pursuing

courses in counselling as they deemed the latter to be a better alternative to a Master's in social work,

while still enabling them to remain in the helping profession:

I suppose for me it was a form of career development because there was a necessity for me to

continue to work. My children are still in school. So, to try to prolong my career… Counselling is

essentially some form of talk therapy, whether you deal with individuals, couples, groups or

families. So, I thought this is an area that I would... I could turn to. This field gives a lot of

satisfaction knowing that you helped people… [to] make the difference in people's lives. (DS10)

All participants found the postgraduate programme to have contributed to their professional growth and

management. Professional growth through education was the primary reason for embarking on the

training, a point stressed by the majority of participants. They sought to upgrade their skills and

competencies, with the majority of the participants viewing career development as a significant factor in

signing up for the course. Participants voiced that having further training in counselling skills was

evaluated as a better complement for participants working in various fields than any comparable social

work accreditation. Participants felt that they were able to, for example, delve deeper into the intra-

psychic of the clients with counselling skills, and better understand the effects of environmental issues on

the clients. Counselling skills being seen as of having greater utility value than social work was another

reason why some of the participants signed up for the counselling course. Others referred to their previous positive interactions with counsellors as a motivation for enrollment on to the professional counsellors training programme.

The applicability and relevance of counselling skills to one's personal life formed the initial push to embark on the post-graduate counselling training programme. In addition, participants articulated that taking up the counselling training would help them to gain competency to make a positive impact to someone else's life, hence providing a sense of growth in their professional counsellor identity. As DS3 expressed: "I guess when you can see that what you learn is actually, so applicable in daily life and all around … so whatever you learn is like… direct application" (DS3). Additionally, DS8 further reflected on the importance of introspection, which they developed as a result of embarking on the formal academic programme. Other participants similarly expressed a sense of fulfilment from their studies, as evidenced by DS4: "I feel enriched when I'm studying" (DS4). DS6 similarly echoed that their choice to enrol was linked to their growth as a professional through education and training:

> I think it is very much wanting to learn as much as I can in that 15 months of training… what the curriculum is about… you choose to think that you would enjoy… And eventually, as I understand the different theories and how the lecturers actually taught us, I think that it really is very interesting. It just makes you wonder how all these theories can be applicable… for your daily work. (DS6)

This finding echoes research from Canada, where counsellors reported that their valuing of independent, ongoing and lifelong learning increased one's professional identity as a counsellor (Alves & Gazzola, 2011). It is also in this process of acquiring professional counselling skills that there emerges a reliance on external experts, such as faculty members and clinical supervisors, in practitioners' conceptual and experiential learning, as well as in skills evaluation (Auxier et al., 2003; Gibson et. al., 2012).

Similarly, DS10, who expressed wanting to do meaningful work, reported that the counselling skills training had given them the insights they needed to deal with the "individual mindset, thinking, and emotions". This illustrates how education and training can be a source of professional fulfilment by providing individuals with a skill-set that then enabled them to pursue their values and aspirations to undertake more meaningful work:

> With counselling, then it's the intra, then it's dealing more with... like helping them to resolve some way they think… or the... one of the lecturers said it very nicely: 'reframing is our bread and butter.' Changing of mindset. You know, so changing people's mindset, giving them an avenue knowing that they are safe, they can share their problems, that... they feel accepted, they feel that they are not judged by you. So that also makes a lot of difference for them. (DS10)

Some participants - like DS16 who had prior skills to assist them in relating to the clientele group that they work with - found that post-graduate academic training to be professional counsellors can enhance and develop these skills to better relate to their aforementioned groups:

> So, when I was working with the children, one of the things that I needed to do was… meet the parents, and a lot of these parents come from low-income families or they could be from families that had some issues and concerns, so I felt that my training back then... I didn't have sufficient training to kind of equip me with the skills to communicate well with this... population. And I thought that by getting this counselling work it would really be helpful… The other thing is that I was hoping to kind of equip myself with more knowledge on how else could I provide counselling services for parents, for children, for people in the Family Service Centre. (DS16)

The development of the counselling skill-set would, for DS10, allow a "changing of mindsets" as a way of re-framing clients' perspectives while also ensuring the emotional safety of clients. Correspondingly, DS9

also felt the training helped them to recognise and reflect on the changes in the clients:

> I think when I see my clients making growth, getting out from their situation. I think that, is something that gives me a lot of satisfaction… From someone who is feeling so low… and you journey with this person through…[to] gain back the confidence, and after that, this person managed to find so many job interviews… that really makes me want to do more. (DS9)

Professional growth is also then seen as the ability to differentiate oneself from the population one serves by demonstrating self-reflection skills and being able to self-reflect is therefore a sign of their professionalism as a counsellor. This differentiation is based on the standards of practice that they had acquired through their training.

Another distinctive characteristic that emerged across participants was their strong desire for professional growth – a deeply held value that had also motivated them to increase the quality of their counselling practice. For example, DS6 and DS8 had set out on their counselling training with a view to enabling change for clients in terms of knowing how to get their clients to shift in understanding their life issues. However, the training ultimately enabled DS6 and DS8 to shift in their own positioning and focus, to being more oriented towards being present with clients, listening to the clients' issues, and focussed on the clients instead of wanting clients to make changes. DS8 commented that: "change depends on whether the person has the… desire to change... respecting the client's choice to change or not to change," thus focusing on what the "client needs at the moment instead of [focussing] on intervention." DS11 further elaborated on the importance of a cognitive shift for them – that of "respect[ing] each individual… their experiences… choices," - a shift that enabled them to anchor themselves in their core being with another person, and thus be genuine with both the self and the other. DS15 acknowledged the need for clients to be responsible and 'own' the changes clients wanted to make. Such learning via observation, supervision, and practice was the immersion process necessary in order for counsellors-in-training to develop 'appropriate attitudes, values, modes of thinking and strategies for problem solving' (Gibson et. al., 2012).

4.1.2 Professional Recognition

Besides professional growth, *professional recognition* from the participants' perspective was important in them becoming as a professional counsellor. Professional recognition from others in the allied health care professions were deemed as important for the becoming as a professional counsellor. Professional recognition in the field of counselling was seen to be achieved in variety of ways including learning from fellow counsellors and keeping up with the latest skills and techniques developed to broaden their repertoire of skills and techniques they can use with their clients. Additionally, meeting professional conduct and standards also allowed participants to gain professional recognition from others in the allied health care field. Hence, adherence to professional standards and ethics would be an important marker of competency for counsellors' professional identity. Ultimately, the ability to build trust and provide high-quality and ethical services via a professional relationship with clients can determine the longevity of being a professional counsellor. This was experienced by DS5:

> Let's say you're trained, that means, we are able to do the job, then … How long? That means how well we can do our job… How to do a good job? I would say is… from your heart… empathy is very important. And never give up.. and also show your sincerity [to the client]. (DS5)

Such standards of practice address issues - like confidentiality, informed consent and use of appropriate counselling techniques - are important as they serve as a safeguard for the clients and counsellors, due to personal issues that are revealed in sessions. The knowledge of the degree of confidentiality and hence informed consent will allow clients and counsellors to make informed decisions on how they would like to collaborate on the issues discussed during the therapy sessions.

While professional recognition can come in the form of professional *conduct*, adhering to established professional standards and ethics does not necessarily lead to employment. As DS3 noted from

conversations with their counterparts, trained counsellors looking for purely counselling jobs are unable

to find such posts. This is especially so in Singapore, where counselling training tends to appeal to older

persons who have retired from previous primary careers in fields like engineering, HR and others:

> But I guess for my fellow graduates, especially those who are almost retired… it's challenging for
> them to actually work…because they are like nearing like sixties, so they haven't been actually
> working in this sector, which is kind of challenging [for them] to enter. (DS3)

From DS3's comment, perhaps professional recognition in the field of counselling may be hindered by

ageism, as suggested by the difficulties experienced by those trained counsellorsover 60 to obtain

professional recognition and employment as qualified counsellors. DS7 shared this concern as, "other

classmates did say that it has been difficult for them to switch [to counselling work]" (DS7), particularly

with government agencies. It would seem therefore important to highlight that the value of counselling

as a profession may need to have greater recognition from within the organisations as well as in society

at large.

Besides adhering to professional standards and ethics, as well as collaboration within the allied health

care professionals, professional recognition of the unique expertise of counsellors underscores the

importance of counsellors being able to establish themselves as respected professionals in allied health

fields. The need for collaboration and cooperation among the various allied heath fields would seem to

be crucial to keep clients' needs at the centre of the work being done and to promote the overall

professional recognition of the counselling professionals. As DS4 observed:

> newer psychologists… they don't feel as equipped as me and my colleague who are trained in
> counselling, so they also benefit from our sharing, and their feedback to us also helps to empower
> us a fair bit and... having the identity as a counsellor. (DS4)

Professional recognition through feedback from both clients and fellow professionals were seen as cornerstones of participants' sense of professional identity as counsellors, especially if they saw that they added value to the work of fellow professionals, or were recognised as being valuable amongst those peers. Throughout the interviews, feedback from both clients and other professional allied and medical practitioners emerged as a key reason in influencing participants' understanding of their professional identity. Such feedback was often implied to have propelled the participants on to their own self-development path by encouraging them to engage in post-graduate higher education to improve not only their skill-sets, but also their understanding of the connection between the personal and professional characteristics within the identity as a counsellor. However, some participants expressed concerns about the lack of recognition by the public for their contributions in their specialised roles as counsellors. This issue will be further discussed in the next segment under Professional Prestige (refer to 4.3).

Professional recognition as a counsellor is seen when clients give direct feedback on the participants' work as counsellors. Participants such as DS4 & DS6 saw this as a valuable benchmark to measure their counselling skills, and cited feedback from clients, affirmation from others that they were doing well, and comments that they were in the right profession, as experiences that contributed to building their professional identity and being recognised professionally as counsellors:

> I get energised from feedback from others. Ya, there are times when I feel a bit not too confident. "Am I doing things right?" So when I hear feedback from others, then I will feel that, ok, feel affirmed by them… it comes to not being stagnant, ya, I like learning new things. (DS4)

Another participant (DS3) found that particular groups of clients – children and youth, who were often very direct in their feedback – ultimately helped them to find the work more empowering, especially when the clients recognised them as professional counsellors:

Working with kids and youth right is very good in the sense because… kids and youth… would be able to know whether you are genuine or not… And they are very direct. So if they know that you are not, they will just not talk to you… that is very valuable to me, because it really helps me to grow… because they don't need to mince their words or don't need to put up a show for you. Right. So I find that is very empowering because it really helps me to see, eh, where... who I am, where I am. (DS3)

Throughout these interviews, participants emphasised the importance of direct feedback from clients as key in evaluating their competencies and lending to their growth and recognition as professionals. They acknowledged that both the positive and negative feedback from clients shaped their professional identities as counsellors. Being recognised by fellow professionals in related fields such as social work, psychology and psychiatry, were cited as important conditions in contributing to the building of participants' professional identity as counsellors. Such external reinforcements from other professionals were seen as significant in increasing their status and value as professional counsellors. Some participants also found ways to contribute to systemic shifts from within their organisations. For example, DS7 did so by expanding the medical model to include other psychosocial factors to better understand clients' world-view. DS7 stated that such 'external reinforcement' by other professionals increased their value, and gave them greater recognition as counsellors:

I was supposed to have multidisciplinary team meeting… I told the psychiatrist that... I couldn't attend because I have a conference. That psychiatrist told me that, 'Oh! But, no, because you are the medical social worker, you need to be around because we will be discussing about psychosocial issues of the client... and the support of the client. We will shift the meeting because we need you to be around.' So I guess with other professionals knowing the value of your work, recognising the value of the work that's very important… Because the psychiatrist do know that I took a counselling grad-dip [graduate diploma] as well. (DS7)

The ability of DS7 and other participants to positively influence the thinking and add value to other health care professionals may be seen as a hopeful sign that counsellors can, indeed, be seen to be contributing members of the health and social care community and on a par with other medical and allied professionals, especially when participants also aspire to be clinical supervisors, by gaining seniority as a senior counsellor or experienced practitioners in the field. Participants emphasised the importance of such targets for them to gain professional recognition within the field of allied health community.

In a similar vein, DS8 explicitly stated that: "validation from psychiatrists [helped to show] that [helping] professions are complementary to one another… we can do this [work] together." This sentiment was further echoed by DS4, who said that their sense of professional identity was bolstered and strengthened from the "recognition and adding [of] value to other colleagues who are not counsellors" (DS4). This was especially the case when they worked together as a multidisciplinary team on various client cases. The ability to add value would make a difference in boosting the professional identity of counsellors more broadly. Yet, others, like DS13, found that they identified more with their prior training, such as that of a social worker, as they had formed a stronger alliance during their undergraduate years in the latter field, and which was seen as more impactful on their professional identity than the counselling training:

> If you are talking about a counsellor's professional identity, I wouldn't identify myself as a counsellor. I'm still very much social work oriented. (DS13)

Across these examples, the applicability of counselling skills to one's life, and gaining competency to make a difference in impacting someone else's life exemplifies as part of the participants' personal investment in their counselling training. This would imply that the investment in counselling training provided participants with the professional growth and fulfilment through education and training, and provided the means for them to better providef assistance to their clients. As a result, further strengthening the development of their professional identity. Professional growth and professional recognition almost seem

to be interwoven in a symbiotic relationship, as participants also identified that recognition from other allied health practitioners is important, as this indicated to them the impact of the counselling course on their work and how the feedback from clients and other allied health colleagues would boost their professional growth as counsellors. Counsellor's commitment to ongoing acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies will increase their professional growth. By staying updated in the latest research, and evidence-based practices, counsellors can gain professional recognition, from other professionals within the broader allied health care community. The next section will now move to discuss the being of the counsellor and how it builds on the professional identity of the counsellor.

CHAPTER 5 RESEARCH DATA AND ANALYSIS - BEING A PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLOR

Introduction

This chapter looks at the 'Being' of a professional counsellor, that involves the intrinsic motivations, personal experiences as well as personal attitudes, beliefs, norms, and values that participants saw as important for professional development as counsellors. The 'Being' of a counsellor emphasises the counsellor's presence, that is, authenticity through their interpersonal qualities that facilitates a therapeutic process in the relationship with clients.

5.1 Shaping of a Professional Counsellor

The shaping of a professional counsellor goes beyond however the professional growth and recognition described earlier. The shaping of a professional counsellor is also about the being of the counsellor, which can be seen as the subjective experience of change for the participants. It can then be said that counsellors' professional identities are linked closely with their personhood, which includes their personal values, beliefs and experiences. Research has similarly posited that counsellors' professional identities are closely integrated with their personal values, lifestyle, own well-being, and self-evaluation, with both the professional and personal identity operating within the framework of the professional community (Gazzola & Smith, 2007; Shuler & Keller-Dupree, 2015; Nugent and Jones, 2009).

The being of the professional counsellor refers to the counsellor's sense of self, which is integral in their effectiveness when helping clients. The counsellor's beliefs, values, attitudes, and personal characteristics like personality and life experiences, underpins their understanding of the client's situation and determines their approach to counselling, hence developing their identity as counsellors. For example, if a counsellor believes that every individual has potential to be better as they embark on personal growth,

they are likely to adopt humanistic approaches to empower clients, assist clients to identify their strengths, and encourage clients to work towards their goals.

The being of a counsellor also includes their sense of responsibility to clients, personal commitment to ongoing professional development, and self-care. Counsellors engaging in these activities are protecting the well-being of their clients, as well as maintaining their own well-being, so they can continue to be helpful to the clients. Being a counsellor is more than just a job or a role; it encompasses the counsellor's sense of self, purpose, and values to help clients effectively.

The shaping of the being of the counsellor will now be discussed specifically in relation to the meaning placed by participants on three key factors: their intrinsic motivations, prior personal experiences with the helping services, and their belief systems. These are seen as contributing to the shaping of their professional identities as counsellors.

5.1.1 Intrinsic Motivation

Firstly, *intrinsic motivation* can be seen as an important foundational factor in shaping the being of the professional counsellor. This motivation can come from the clientèle group that one works with as expressed by DS3 in discussing their working with vulnerable population such as, in this case, children:

> When I work with kids, I can see the needs and all that, like I guess… I don't know, it just makes me more passionate to reach out and help... because... maybe because children... you know... they don't really have a lot of choices, yet they can make choices… especially the kids in the homes and all that. (DS3)

When further prompted on how such thinking created value in their professional identity as a counsellor DS3 revealed that:

> Right, I could see the work that I do really have impact, really makes a… I mean, don't know, who knows, but it does make some difference. Right, and I also can see, you know, the wrong kind of work, or the wrong values can create a totally different person… So it's important to actually have … people who are, being passionate or… walk the talk, to model for these kids. (DS3)

DS3 articulated that the recognition of the impact of the work by others, be it colleagues or clients, can be a powerful motivation for the participants. This too served as a source of validation for them in sustaining and shaping them as counsellors. This passion was also seen as boosting participants' sense of commitment to shaping their professional identity. For example, for DS6, the genuine desire to want to help others further fuelled their desire to learn more in order to be better positioned to offer this help:

> I think purely it's because I love to interact with people… I just love understanding what's happening to them, and using my skills and what have gone through, to actually, in a way help them… so, the joy that you get is when they… from very, very, very, very teary to very miserable to eventually to be able to smile, to joke and get back to their selves, I think that in itself is a joy that is beyond description… [that was why] I think it is very much wanting to learn as much as I can in that 15 months of training. (DS6)

There seemed then to be a distinction between the 'them' who need to be given help and the 'us' who will be the helpers who provide the impetus for change. Yet, the 'us' receives the reward for change, here verbalised as "joy that is beyond description" (DS6). Making life more "meaningful" (DS10) for clients and having developed an awareness of the bigger ripple effects such 'meaning' has on clients' families were

other values that participants held dear from undergoing training to become counsellors. As DS10 expressed, this reward and satisfaction in seeing clients change is clearly part of the intrinsic motivation that drives and shapes participants as professional counsellors in their being:

> I think this field gives a lot of satisfaction knowing that you helped people. They can make the difference in people's lives… That something I do is meaningful. So, let's say for example if I had been in some other career, I can make a lot of money, that may not be to me so meaningful. But helping someone even in some small ways or big ways, it's always very meaningful. (DS10)

Hence, DS10 found that the meaning of intrinsic motivation for them can be gained from the satisfaction in the knowledge that one has helped others. DS10 also expressed that financial gain is not what motivates them to want to become professional counsellors. DS3 further expounded that counselling work, as opposed to their prior career in the law, enables them to provide a service to people even if they cannot pay, as they talked about the passion for working with young persons and their families, and seeing the impact on their lives:

> I guess it is the fact that I can really help a person. So I was doing it in law, and I enjoyed it except that I can only help those who can pay me. (DS3)

Interestingly, while both law and counselling stems from helping others in need, it would seem from DS3 that helping others as a lawyer stopped short of the ability of the clients to pay! Priority as a professional counsellor could be derived from the satisfaction from making a positive impact on the lives of others, and such meaning leads consequently to greater internal motivation in being a professional counsellor, especially when financial gains is not a source of motivation to the shaping and being of the role This is because in Singapore counselling is not as highly compensated as other professions within the allied

health care sector. As experienced by the participants, society at large also seem to place different values on different kinds of work, with counselling possibly seen as less 'valuable'. This highlights a challenge that many counsellors seem to face – they desire and are motivated to provide professional helping services, yet they need to ensure they can make a living out of it.

The next important aspect of motivation is the value placed on human relationships, such as the "genuineness and realness of people," which was highlighted by DS12 as building intimacy and helping people to recognise how others as well as themselves were of value and importance. The importance as highlighted by DS12 connected with how the being of the counsellor plays a role in influencing the process in working with the client:

> As a counsellor, I would not only [need] the genuineness, but I also hope to lead them or guide them, to be with them, for this change in the cognitive shift... to remove as much knots in them, or… if let's say I have not this cognitive shift, I would see things as only this way. So, after when I have this cognitive shift right, then I realized that if it were my past self, I would have [to] think it this way, so for now, I know that I was then not so open-minded. Now I think otherwise: maybe this, maybe that. Maybe some other perspective, like a different person would see it differently based on their experiences, based on their background upbringing. (DS12)

DS16 similarly reiterated that the need for human connection was a motivating factor to be a professional counsellor and this value for human-to-human interaction, which was reinforced during their training, was seen as one of the basic tenets of the helping profession, and served to increase the internal motivation to develop as a professional counsellor. They also felt that the importance of genuinely connecting with another human being had been supported during the training:

So I guess it's that kind of value of like - If somebody's in need of help, if you can and you are present, then maybe you should do something about it. But if really cannot, then well, that's it. So I think in terms of value, it should be this. Which always help if we can, but we can't, let's not do harm to the person. That's one thing. (DS16)

While DS16 acknowledged that there were situations which may limit their ability to assist others, despite their desires to want to. Nonetheless, they still found a strong motivation in becoming a professional counsellor, principally so as to provide a continued service to others and as a way "to give back to community," (DS16). The course offered the chance to forge continuous connections with other humans. In doing so, as a trained counsellor, this then also helped to shape and forge being as part of their professional identity as counsellors. Having better connections with, and better understanding of, their clients was a significant impact that some participants felt from the counselling course. The course equipped them with the skills they needed to better connect with their clients. This was also a source of motivation for participants who enrolled on the post-graduate diploma in counselling as part of their skills upgrade, to both increase their competencies and their professional growth. Some participants also wanted to move away from theoretical concepts and focus on a human-to-human level. And, as DS6 expressed:

I think over the years, I realised that, ok, I cannot be like that, I should really head towards listening to them, seeing what they want. So now, over the years, I think theories still comes in, but it's not the top priority... I think the top priority is really the basic understanding, giving them the empathy... more of reflection... clarification, paraphrasing, the simple, the basic aspects of counselling. (DS6)

It was also interesting to note that DS6 was here suggesting that the course helped them to become more 'like this' than the current 'like that', where the 'like this' would seem to refer to the counselling course helping them to move towards their desired professional identity, as opposed to their current position. DS5 further expounded that the course helped them recognise that the paying attention to the process of listening to the client was what takes precedence, rather than dictating solutions. This suggested that the course has allowed learning to be construed as a bi-lateral process:

> How to respect people, how to… not to bring your own value on other people, learn how to listen more, rather than telling people what to do… there are other skills and tools that we've learnt from the course that we can actually use it rather than just empathy, learn how to read non-verbals, you know what are the underlying issues. Sometimes, the client may say this, but he has other issues not what has been spoken. So, I listened to them with their non-verbal language, we might be able to explore more… underlying issues. That is useful to work with them…We are actually learning because in fact, counsellors [are] not the teacher. We are actually learning from each other. There are some things that we learn from clients. (DS5)

One of the threads running through the current research was to examine the influence of the training inputs provided for the students, and how the training influenced changes in their values. For example, DS3, who was passionate about working with people, reported that they became more passionate still as they saw the impact of the counselling work they undertook with their clients over the course of practising what they had learned from the counselling course. DS3 went on to comment that certain important personal values, like 'walking the talk', were reinforced for them during the training, especially when working with children and young people. When asked on how the counselling course created value for DS3 in terms of professional counsellor identity, DS3 replied:

I could see the work that I do really have impact… it does make some difference. I also can see… the wrong kind of values can create a totally different person… out of the kids. So it's important to actually have... people who are, being passionate or being… really mean [to]… walk the talk, to model for these kids. (DS3)

In addition, DS4, who valued hands-on learning, found the internship component of the post-graduate diploma in counselling as a new and enriching experience of "the doing alongside with the learning". The duality of the academic learning and doing enabled the reflection on their actions, and also led to the development of new ideas for working with clients. As they further observed:

I guess having colleagues who are passionate as me actually helps... and also interest in counselling to talking to colleagues about counselling. (DS4)

The satisfaction of helping, even though there is little by way of financial gain, is the value of genuine human connection that points to the importance of selflessness and service to others, and seems to underscore the being of a professional counsellor. Understanding what were the participants' motivations, and what values were buttressed and stoked during the training, emerged in this research in discerning their reasons for embarking upon, and developing, their personal and thus professional identity during the post-graduate diploma in counselling.

Motivation could also be seen in the desire in 'helping people', and moving beyond the human connection was listed by some of the participants as the main source of personal motivation. For example, being a guide and support to others was what motivated DS3, DS5 and DS8 to undertake further training in counselling. Participants used terms such as "guide", "support" and "help" almost interchangeably in how they saw their work with clients. DS6 expressed this motivation as emerging from being able to "effect a

change in clients" as part of the process of guiding. Interestingly, the "multiplier effect" of helping others was also alluded to by DS10, highlighting that the impact of helping the client can have a ripple effect on the broader community:

> But helping someone, even in some small ways of big ways, it's always very meaningful… not only do I impact that individual, it also impact the individual's family… so that is something very meaningful. (DS10)

The perception that if they could be trained as helpers, who would "increase happiness, joy" (DS6) and offer a "sense of meaning in life" (DS7), that ultimately led to increasing the "dignity and self-worth of others" (DS7) which anchored 'helping others' as a value and motivating factor for the participants. DS6 mentioned a desire to effect positive change in their clients' lives. Such values even seemed to extend beyond the immediate client to the clients' extended family and friends. DS5 expanded further upon their motivation to help others, as they wanted to help the clients "see light in their lives." DS3 explicitly stated that their motivations come from their belief as a Christian. Such values resonate with the early Christian influences that have played a significant role in shaping the development of counselling in Singapore. Even up to today, some of the social service agencies in Singapore, hold firm to their Christian roots in their counselling services to the community. The historical roots of counselling with the Christian missionary services have its imprints on the 'being' of the development of today's professional counsellor. The participants also indicated that they themselves benefited from becoming a 'better' counsellor through the training, as this meant they had tools and insights given during the training to guide them to develop a deeper understanding of their clients, and they felt this meant that they connected better with them on a socio-emotional level. These insights into participants' motivations and the importance of specific values of wanting to support could possibly provide educators better understanding in conceptualising the support that counsellor trainees would need while attending the counsellor training programme. This is

especially so, when altruistic values like 'giving of self' to support others can sometimes clash with the prevailing neoliberalist ideas of a knowledge-driven economy, and the market-driven approach. Christian values of compassion, a focus on the well-being of others by placing the needs of the clients in the forefront, have contributed to the perception of counselling as a service-oriented profession. The essence of 'being' of a counsellor, can be seen for many of the participants, to be rooted in the selfless desire to make the world 'better', part of which is for the professional counsellors to be 'better' via their competencies and skills. However, the neoliberal ideas of market-driven approaches, may challenge counsellors in reconciling Christian values with the demand for measurable outcomes and market-oriented practices that favour individual success and efficiency. The tension and conflict between the Christian ideology and the neoliberalist ideas can thus impact the development of the 'being' of the professional counsellor. Educators may need to create possible support that could provide counsellor trainees with ways to bolster their motivations, and also strengthen their values, an aspect which will be further discussed in the Chapter seven.

The motivation to help others raised other important values like passion for the work with vulnerable populations, and this was voiced by DS3:

> when I work with kids, I can see the needs and all that, it just makes me more passionate to reach out and help...maybe because children ... don't really have a lot of choices, especially the kids in the [Children's] Homes and all that. (DS3)

For DS5, hope as a motivator was the driving force for their work as a professional counsellor and was seen as being motivated by the hope that they would "see more people happier and see light in their life." Furthermore, their passion - demonstrated via their actions of being as much a guide and support for clients - was seen to be a key part of being a professional counsellor.

Maybe in the sense, like a mentor, because they [the clients] don't actually have a lot of parental guidance. Right, and they [the clients] don't really have a lot of emotional support actually. (DS5)

Sometimes, the ability to help is being able to support clients with changes within themselves such as counselling and this was also indicated as a form of motivation for participants:

… with counselling, then it's the intra, then it's like helping them to resolve some way they think ...or changing of mindset, giving them an avenue knowing that they are safe, they can share their problems. They feel accepted, they feel that they are not judged by you. So that also makes a lot of difference for them. (DS10)

Understanding the sources of internal or intrinsic motivation and values from gaining intangible rewards and satisfaction from helping clients that underpin one's decision to become a counsellor can possibly inform how counsellor training programs can better support trainees in their professional development. Hence, it may be important to provide opportunities for trainees to reflect on their personal motivations and values and how these relate to their role as a counsellor. This may be able to help them further develop and sustain their commitment to the profession.

5.1.2 Prior Personal Experiences with the Helping Services

Next, beyond intrinsic motivation that shapes the being of the professional identity of a counsellor, some participants found inspiration from prior *personal experiences* or interactions with other trained counsellors or allied health practitioners at different points in their lives. For example, having "experienced… therapy through a marriage workshop at church" (DS8), DS8 felt the benefits first hand and was prompted to be trained in order to be able to provide a similar positive experience for other couples, seemingly in the vein of moving beyond self:

One of the first workshops I've attended in the church was a… marriage workshop… that's when I started to [be] self-aware of my own issues, and how my own issues, and my husband's issues actually influence our marriage a lot. So a lot of questions have been answered although I have been married for about eight years that time. So that's when that introspection, my own healing actually started. And of course, I use the principles there in my own small groups. (DS8)

DS16 further alluded that their personal experience of being a helper was inculcated from a young age:

I mean my interest in being in the helping profession came quite early… when I was in Secondary School… I kind of like enjoyed interacting with people. I was like doing those kind of work whereby you know, those... [community service activities] … so it's more like teachers organised these kind of activities and then … we have to go and do community work. (DS16)

Similarly, DS7 had had prior experiences as a volunteer and had seen the work that other allied health professions provide and how such experiences were the impetus for shaping their being as a professional counsellor:

I started volunteering since a young age. Then I got to know… I remembered I got to know a social worker... So that was my first… conversation with a professional. So she was telling me that… the difference between volunteering and being a professional helper… And when I ventured in, it also gave me a meaning in my life... I guess that's the reason why I continued to persist on. (DS7)

The second type of personal experience that shaped participants in their being was encountering mental health issues with reference to personal or loved ones' struggles. DS16 had a family member with mental health issues and faced a lot of social stigma. In the words of DS16: "The other reason is really because… one of my family members, he is having some mental issues… that prompted me and I was thinking like,

"hey, what's wrong with my family member?"... and then "why is he being treated this way?"" (DS16) For DS16, the personal experiences of how their family member was seen in society motivated them to go into the field, to perhaps find ways to affect a change in society's thinking: "I think back then when I was very young and he was there, there was a lot of social stigma then. Maybe part of the thing is that I wanted to go and find out more and see how else could I shift that" (DS16). This inspired them therefore to want to learn how they could shift society's thinking by embarking on the counselling course, which helped them to understand how their personal experiences could shape their being in the development of a professional counsellor.

Similarly, DS11 and DS12 both separately mentioned that their own personal journeys of working through their emotional issues successfully with a friend trained in psychology had propelled them to recognise the usefulness and importance of having counselling skills as part of their work. Interestingly, both DS11 and DS12 had explored the different branches of the helping professions, including psychology, social work, counselling and psychotherapy, before deciding to embark on the post-graduate diploma in counselling. The complexity of the being of a counsellor does not begin and end when one completes the training. Rather, it can also include the environmental experiences that they encounter in their lives. As DS12 commented:

> I had experience with... an art therapist cum counselling, so there was a point I feel very down, and she said: "come, let's come in, let me do a therapy session, a short one, with you." So, I did maybe two times, three times. Even when I left that [organisation], I went back to visit. And then somehow she said, "ok, I have time, why not we do one session." So, I find that was quite therapeutic. (DS12)

DS9 found that previous working experiences with school counsellors as part of their professional community piqued their interest in the area of counselling. This personal experience was crucial for DS9

in shaping their being as a counsellor, having worked alongside other professional counsellors. Such positive encounters with other professionals in the mental health community were similarly echoed by DS11, who went further by modelling the encounter that helped them with other people around them:

> I have a psychologist friend... in my youth, I have a lot of emotional issues, so she was the one who walked me through and... when I have already worked through most of my emotional issues. Then I do talk to my friends on a one-to-one basis, and there were these two incidents whereby they said that they felt enlightened... their burden was lightened, and they felt more clear in their own journey through difficult moments. So that was when I felt, eh, perhaps it's something I really want to go into. It was also at that point in time in my previous work whereby my ex-boss told me to think about whether I want to go for further studies. (DS11)

As mentioned, participants were inspired by their own struggles, the struggles of their loved ones, or else previous positive encounters with other allied health professionals. Such experiences were linked with the sense of meaning and purpose in their life. Using their prior personal experiences, to provide positive experiences while working with their clients, helped to deepen the participants' understanding of their being. Such personal experiences, of having lived through their own stories, were important for these counsellors as they increased their levels of empathy, ultimately also increasing their professionalism as they were then better able to relate to the clients they worked with.

During the interviews, the concept of personal self was often closely linked to the professional self, where the interplay was seen between the counsellor 'as a person' and the counsellor as 'a professional'. This underscores the importance of the symbiotic interaction of one's personal identity towards the development of a professional identity as a counsellor.

5.1.3 Belief Systems

The third factor in the shaping of the being of a professional counsellor is the impact of the *belief system* on the personal development of the participants. The belief system was seen as a source of strength for counsellors in the development of well-being of the clients the counsellors work with. The other two factors discussed earlier- the intrinsic motivation and prior personal experiences of the counsellors - links to beliefs of self-efficacy of clients. During the semi-structured interviews, some of the conversations centred on the belief systems that the participants held during the counselling training, which they felt helped them to develop their identity and their being as professional counsellors. Some of the conversations delved into the level and degree of the significance of these beliefs towards the professional identity of a counsellor, where participants identified both formal and informal situations and structures within their work settings. These may have contributed or hindered their professional identity development in relation to their belief systems.

Almost a third of participants viewed faith-based beliefs as part of their belief systems and as an important and intrinsic factor in human relationships. The participants saw it as being able to embody the value of the love of God and love for God's people. In the specific context of their counselling work, these values translated into being accountable and having integrity, as mentioned by DS15: "Seeing this work as a form of Ministry in a faith-based context, so, that, that is also another area that I identified with very much" (DS15). The human-to-human relationship in counselling work requires genuineness and suggests that the connecting with another person goes beyond skills and techniques, to include personal belief systems which can be significant in contributing to the professional identity of a counsellor. As DS3 discussed:

> Somehow, kids and youth are very sensitive, they would be able to know whether you are genuine or not. And they are very direct. So if they know that you are not, they will just not talk to you. So I thought that is very valuable to me, because it really helps me to grow. (DS3)

Faith-based beliefs emerged as one of the key anchors in terms of how participants chose to invest time and money in the development of their professional identity through a counselling course. One participant articulated this as follows: "involvement in church… Leading a parents' group… Lot of church leaders are counselling-trained… Sense of fulfilment when helping someone" (DS8). Another replied simply that it was "a calling" (DS15), which led them to signing up for the counselling course. Having been called to engage in counselling work, they felt they had the responsibility to "upgrade skills to work better with target clients…[therefore it is a] natural progression [to go for the counselling course]" (DS15). Hence, being comfortable in addressing the spirituality and ability to comprehend the multicultural context in the work with clients is primary to some of the participants.

Another aspect of the participants' belief system was having the trust and confidence in the self-efficacy of clients, that is, that clients are inherently capable of resolution were reinforced during the training. This suggests a view that to be helpful is defined as when counsellors can keep balanced the sense of empathy towards the clients, whilst also maintaining an emotional distance between themselves and the emotions of the clients. This was an important belief for DS5, as this would allow them to keep an objective view and maintain perspective on the client's issues. Whilst it would seem that the ability to distance themselves from the emotions of the clients ran contrary to the practice of the counselling profession, participants saw this as an opportunity for personal growth. Hence, professional counsellors have to be able to connect and understand what the clients are going through; at the same time professional counsellors also need to ensure that they are not caught up in the emotions of the clients, so as to be able to assist clients to better manage the discords in their lives. The ability to balance between offering support to clients while gently challenging clients to change is one of the characteristics that were highlighted as being an 'expert' practitioner (Jennings et al, 2008). This ability to self-evaluate and integrate their experiences posed to be a challenge for consolidating their personal being with that of their professional identities as counsellors.

As a counsellor, DS15 reiterated that their role was to enable clients to hold on to the beliefs of integrity and accountability for their own lives. DS15 also held that the belief of sustainable change, albeit of a slower sort, was likely to be of greater benefit to clients than momentary changes driven by, for example, the counsellor. The need for the client to take responsibility for their own lives was amplified by DS16, who realised that: "what we [counsellors] perceive as help may not be helpful to the other person"; furthermore, they acknowledged that "not every [client] who comes in is suited to [undergo]... counselling." The use of language as verbalised by the participants was, in itself, part of the context in which counsellors were socialised during their training, learning about the expectations and belief systems of themselves and their clients.

The integration of the intrinsic motivations, personal experiences and belief systems are important in one's becoming and being of a professional counsellor. The integration of the skills and competencies and personhood is an on-going process as one continues to practice and develop the identity of a professional counsellor. However, the individual's becoming and being are not the only components that define the professional counsellor; as the next section shows there are bigger systemic factors affecting the counselling sector, that could be the impetus for growth for the individual counsellor.

Conclusion

The 'Being' of a counsellor here has been shaped by factors identified by participants as the intrinsic motivation; their prior personal experiences as well as the belief system that the participants bring with them in their encounters with their clients. The 'Being' of a counsellor is recognised to be an on-going process that evolves throughout the career of a professional counsellor, that contributes to the counsellor's success and effectiveness in the therapeutic work with their clients. The 'being' of a counsellor can also be seen in how therapists demonstrate their flexibility and the approaches used in therapy in the therapeutic stance while working with their clients. We have considered the professional growth and recognition in the 'Becoming' of a counsellor and the impact of the factors that shape the 'Being' of a

counsellor. In the next segment, we will examine the other systemic and environmental factors that both enable and disable the 'becoming' and 'being' a counsellor.

CHAPTER 6 RESEARCH DATA AND ANALYSIS - ENABLERS AND DISABLERS OF 'BECOMING' AND 'BEING' A PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLOR

Introduction

The professional development of a counsellor is influenced by systemic factors that reside within the larger context of the environment. This segment will highlight the significance of the factors and how they may become the impetus for growth, opportunities, and challenges for counsellors.

6.1 Professional Prestige

From the earlier segments, the 'Becoming' of a professional counsellor focussed on the formal mechanisms involved in the professional growth of the individual counsellor through the training courses, as well as the impact of the training on their work. While the 'Being' of the individual professional counsellor centred on the less formal mechanisms, which could be shaped via their intrinsic motivations, personal experiences and belief systems, beyond the individual, the professional counsellor's development is also linked to issues within a bigger system of both the employing organisation(s) and society. Such issues which can be seen as enablers or disablers to the 'Becoming' or 'Being' **-** organisational demands, opportunities and rewards; relevance of profession; dual professional identities; professional network and communities and especially issues related to licensure and accreditation of the counselling profession, - will be discussed in the following segments.

6.1.1 Organisational demands, opportunities and rewards

While the competency of a professional counsellor is judged by the development and maintenance of clinical skills, more often than not, a professional counsellor would also be required to navigate

organisational demands that may prevent counsellors from utilizing their clinical skills effectively. An example of organisational demand can be in seen in counsellors being asked to perform more managerial work, which may be synonymous with promotion and leadership opportunities. This may lead to a reduction in focus on maintaining clinical skills. For example, DS4 seemed to demarcate how colleagues who became more focussed on organisational work would potentially become less inclined to maintaining their clinical skills in dealing with clients, perhaps due to having less capacity and time to deal with clinical work, as one would likely be more involved with administrative tasks. It would also seem from participants that the organisational demands came with rewards and opportunities, as those who were more involved in managerial work were often in leadership positions and responsible for departmental functions like undertaking the role of reporting officers:

> … because I do have [other]colleagues who get sucked into organisational work, so they don't spend much time talking about clinical [work and] supervision. So supervision became second place… [like] my boss is not very into clinical [work]. (DS4)

The participants strived to balance organisational demands and clinical responsibilities, as they deemed these roles as crucial for the field. In the government sector, some participants cited those forms of organisational demands, included pursuing counselling training programme as a necessary form of upward mobility, required them to keep one step ahead for promotions prospects and job security. This access to promotions involved acquiring numerous credentials and certifications seen as necessary for advancing to higher positions within the organisation:

> … go online, find out what are some of the vacancies in the governmental portal and I chanced upon … this position needs someone with psychology background, so I just tried. Then unfortunately I couldn't get into the position … in a government organisation, when it comes to taking up a position that's a psychologist… paper qualifications matters quite a bit. (DS4)

Meanwhile, DS4 also noted that there were some psychologists in their organisation who had a Master's degree. However, they may not have the actual practice skills while dealing with clients. Despite this, organisations hiring practices seemed to rely still on paper qualifications and educational credentials and tended to equate these as sole indicators of practice skills.

Similar sentiments were echoed by DS6, in their case in terms of how taking a course was motivated by conveying the perception of having undergone 'relevant or necessary' training by management:

> Similarly in the organisation last time, the kind of training we go for is also related to job scope. So certain times when I wanted to do a little bit more… it was not seen as relevant or necessary, for the organization, based on the job-description that I was in… which means whatever I had was good enough. (DS6)

DS4 astutely saw the disconnect between actual practice skills and competency versus educational/paper qualifications. For example, there is a group of current practitioners, who are highly skilled and competent, however, they may not have the educational/paper qualifications. In the same vein, there are allied health professionals who have the educational/paper qualifications, but may not be competent in their practice skills:

> Our organisation has newer psychologists… if they don't go for a Masters, or a post-graduate, their training is just theoretical framework from uni [university], so in a way, they don't feel as equipped. (DS4)

It would also seem that the organisational demands are also pegged to the roles and responsibilities of the participants, as professional counsellors. For example, DS10 & DS11 articulated that their organisations saw social workers as dealing with interpersonal client counselling, while counsellors were

limited to working only on cases involving intra-personal issues (DS10; DS11). However, participants realised that the public was unable to distinguish the difference. The contradictions between the roles and responsibilities as demanded by the organisations, and public recognition, would seem to have negatively impacted the professional identity formation of the counsellors. This lack of clarity on the 'what-is-a-counsellor' sentiment was echoed by DS6, who questioned the level of recognition that counselling professionals receive as opposed to medical doctors:

Why is it that doctors, for example, [have] professional training and professional upgrading, without too much of a hassle, but not counsellors? You know that kind of thing? If we were to say that both professionals are professional, then why not? Then it, therefore led me to another question, "So does it mean that we are not professional enough?" You see, so: "In whose idea, in whose mind is it not professional enough?" (DS6)

Over the course of the various interviews, participants both alluded to and also directly brought up the struggle that they find themselves caught in. The perceived professional prestige (or lack of) points to the struggles between counselling, psychology and social work, and of which training domain is superior and more relevant. Turf demarcation in areas of expertise due to differing organisational demands, opportunities and rewards has also been seen to possibly contribute to this struggle. This tussle relates to the lack of prestige amongst counsellors in comparison with other allied health professions like psychology and social work. As one participant commented, there is higher priority placed on the work of psychologists and psychiatrists, especially when objective results can be seen via instruments like test inventories (DS8):

In the hierarchy of... in the profession… Psychiatrists and Psychologists will always be… higher in the hierarchy of things… Not that as a Counsellor, I might… because I know when I went in, this

I'm taking Counselling profession, I am not a Psychologist. But when you [are] in that circle, you feel ... a little less. (DS8)

There are organisations, as experienced by participants, that often distinguish between psychiatry, psychology, social work and counselling via job titles, which in turn conveys the scope of the work to be performed. Participants experienced in their work environments a sense of that hierarchy by being assigned to the various helping professions. For instance, DS4 observed that the highest priority work was typically seen as psychiatry, as this was a branch of the medical profession:

In a government organisation, when it comes to taking up a position that's a psychologist, its qualifications... paper qualifications that matters quite a bit… in order to be a psychologist, you need a Masters [or]… the requirement is a Second Upper Honours which I don't have. Yah, so I was thinking maybe I can get one. (DS4)

DS4 also shared that within the non-medical or allied field, the work of the psychologists is given greater priority, and psychologists could even dictate what was necessary work for counsellors, even if the purpose was not clear. For example, having to do test inventories for all clients (DS4). The needs of organisations were also seen as environmental experiences that were hindering the development of the professional counsellor identity, as related by DS4, who had to negotiate with their organisation to enrol them on the post-graduate diploma in counselling instead of special needs training, which the organisation saw as more imperative to organisational needs. Similarly, DS9 wanted to be further trained as a counsellor as an extension of the work with children. However, the organisation sent them for a course on special needs instead:

> Because… they had enough of counsellors, so they say no. So, I was sent for special needs instead… so I thought, "no this is still not what I want. It's still counselling that I want." (DS9)

At the time of interview, DS4 was pursuing a Master's in counselling psychology. They undertook a Master's programme related to psychology as the organisation prioritised the work and contributions of psychologists, as "counselling is not the priority. It just is a support function." (DS4). The perception of counselling as a support or remedial action only when cases are out of control may result in reduced success or efficacy rates for counselling. Measures of success are often easier to be quantified with developmental rather than remedial issues. Hence, success in counselling is often more difficult to quantify as counsellors deal more with remedial issues than developmental issues.

The implication here is that, while meeting organisational demands are critical to the functioning of the organisation, the organisation may also need to recognise and reward counsellors by aligning the work that counsellors see as adhering to their professional development. DS7, for instance, expressed how her work as a counsellor in a school setting was a perfect fit for her personal interest in working with young people. Similarly, DS15 noted that being able to help clients achieve their goals was a source of personal and professional fulfilment and satisfaction, which in turn motivated them to continue in their professional development as a counsellor. Organisational functions, while based on the organisational demands, opportunities and rewards, may also need to take into account how the practitioners saw their professional identities playing out within the organisation structure, to ensure sustainability of the organisation.

6.1.2 Relevance of counselling profession

The *relevance of the counselling* profession was also highlighted by DS3 and DS7, who both expressed that the practice of counselling skills was not seen as an essential component of their work, which indicated

the external pressures that professional counsellors encounter in their quest for recognition and acceptance within the health care system. In fact, DS7 stated frankly that their organisation saw social work as a baseline, with counselling as merely complementary and as a secondary add-on that could expand the scope of work with clients:

> And the social workers who have a Diploma in Counselling… they will be selected to do counselling with certain cases… So, I was one of the identified ones. So I thought that kind of complemented well, so I don't need to change [from social worker to counsellor]… Because in my area of work, it allows me to function and... The boundaries is really demarcated in such a way that [as] social worker, you navigate with the patients regarding the resources available, you know psychoeducation… if you take on the role as a counsellor, for me… so it becomes... you know that the two hats that you are holding on... that's why, no need to change, because it is already in the department. (DS7)

As articulated by DS7, the organisation perceived social work as a core component that forms the primary identity and foundation, with counselling further perceived as a supplementary skill that could enhance client work. However, this would suggest that social work remains the dominant identity for professional work, while counselling remains a skill-set that does not seem to have a distinct identity of its own:

> there is a lot of support, and the current organization in Social Workers going for professional Counselling courses as well. Actually, in our department right, after two years of Social Work practice, they will send us [for courses] in Counselling. (DS7)

Some participants struggled to see the professional relevance of a counsellor in connection with the work they had to do at the workplace. They highlighted the differences between what the course taught them and what was experienced at the workplace. An example of this was the difference experienced between the type of work that psychologists, counsellors and social workers are involved in in relation to

standardised testing. Some participants even felt that the purpose of having standardised testing was unclear, even though it was protocol to conduct such tests for every client they saw (DS7; DS12). Hence the lack of clarity for participants regarding the development of their professional counsellor identity:

> I think standardised testing is something... I believe... any professions can do... it may not be a counsellor per se, or it may not be a social worker per se... even the general public who go for the training to know how to use this form can actually do it. So, I'm not sure that what does this serve as a purpose? Unless, unless probably how you make sense of the results, then yes, that's another thing. (DS7)

DS8 seemed to have recognised the nuances of hierarchy and how the standing and recognition of professional counsellors would not be the same with other health professionals. This was also shared by other participants, who noted that certain elements of the course structure, like the ability to conduct test inventories, government policies, and overall environment in Singapore, may not fully recognise counsellors as professionals in their own right. On an international level, it is also clearly stipulated that only those with specific educational qualifications and standards, for example, minimally a Master's degree, can conduct the tests and inventories. The seemingly greater organisational demand for psychological work, for example psychological testing, seems more prevalent, even if it did not make sense to the participants in growing their professional identity as counsellors.

DS4 similarly reflected on how the professional relevance of having to learn to 'do' research seemed incompatible with counselling, which they saw as being more 'practice-based': "see counsellors as people who... provide intervention, interact with clients, then I don't see how research come[s] into place, unless I am trying to find whether the approach that I am using, whether... is it effective?" (DS4)

DS7 and other participants found that their understanding of professional relevance as a counsellor was expanded to include that of research and assessment, which was traditionally seen as the work of a psychologist. While their training included research and assessment, DS7 raised questions as to the need and purpose for standardized testing for all clients in the daily practice as a counsellor in their organisation:

> .. purpose of the use… is it going to help us in our intervention, or assessment. And that's where the questions come from. (DS7)

However, DS8 saw professional relevance in using test inventories or standardized testing in their initial assessment and interview of clients as counsellors, even if not required as a protocol. Such tests allowed DS8 to better assess the levels of intensity of counselling work required with clients:

> …inventories that we use, I think it's really very helpful for me now. Because in that respect, I can really gauge whether this client is going to be an intense case, especially .. for people with personality disorders. So, if I sense that this is going to be a intense client, I have to gauge whether I have the time, and the emotional capacity to manage. (DS8)

Although many participants echoed the need for direct applicability of the skills learned through daily client practice, some acknowledged the importance of research, as DS6 disclosed, helped identify the effectiveness of their counselling approaches:

> I was doing a clinical research trial, and I can see the importance and the hard work put in when we are dealing with research. So, I must say that, anybody who comes up to me and said that need my help for research, I would not reject it. (DS6)

Reflecting on this finding, it may seem that participants' experience with research helped them to understand the applicability of the concepts and theoretical knowledge, rather than deriving the latter

solely from published academic research. Participants then saw how this could be professionally relevant to themselves as developing their identity as professional counsellors.

The relevance of the counselling profession may also need to complement the various roles within an organisation. While pragmatism and organisational needs meant that social workers, counsellors, psychologists and other allied health services necessarily undergo different training to fulfil differing roles, it would be paramount that these roles complement one another so that clients' needs remain at the core of the work, and would be seen as an organisation's primary concern. In turn, this could likely help counsellors to develop their professional identity as their role would then be seen as of equal value to other allied health professionals working with clients.

However, the nature of counselling work is more conversational-centred as opposed to solution-based work and, when compared to social work and psychology, it gives rise to a perceived lack of quantifiability of counselling work that involved cognitive shifts, hence would often be "invisible" to the human eye and takes time for changes to become apparent. In contrast, social work and psychology are more quantifiable in nature, such as when providing housing and financial assistance, or through tests to ascertain the levels of disorders. The implication therefore seems to indicate that the lack of visibility and understanding of counselling work means it could be considered to be lower down in importance when compared to social work and psychology.

The findings here indicate that the organisational demands on the professional counsellors and their work environment could impact the relevance of the counselling profession and hence the development of professional identity. The visible and tangible results of social work interventions allow organisations to claim that concrete work has been done. However, counselling work often remains invisible as the changes would take more time to manifest in tangible and visible ways for the clients.

6.1.3 Dual Professional Identities

Many participants felt that their organisations valued the practice of psychiatry and psychology more than counsellors in terms of employment and ranking. However, many of the participants also noted that on a day-to-day level, counsellors were sought out by psychiatrists for advice, particularly in areas of career counselling or crisis intervention. *Dual-professionalism* (Lave & Wenger, 1991) refers to professionals who hold multiple professional identities, both the professional identity of prior training before undertaking a counselling course, as well as the current professional identity of a counsellor. However, sometimes, the two professions may experience some tension when they do not align well with each other. For example, DS15 identified strongly with their prior role as a professional social worker, as much as with their current role of a professional counsellor. The notion of dual-professionalism may or may not sit comfortably in all situations, as the participants verbalised that sometimes they felt the need to choose one profession over the other in the workplace.

To manage this tension, DS15 sought a common ground between these two roles through the basic need for human-to-human interaction. Being able to consult with other professionals when such tensions in dual-professionalism occur was also helpful. Such interaction was an important experience for DS15, which helped to navigate and manage the tension experienced within their professional identity to find common ground in their multiple professional identities:

> I think, of course, first of all, foremost is the human interaction... Just the comfort… when I'm speaking to my supervisor and colleagues… where anytime I can feel that I can just go to my supervisor when I need. (DS15)

Many of the participants while practising as trained counsellors in the field often hold first degrees in social work, psychology or other cognate disciplines within the health care field, with counselling serving as complementary to their primary identity of being a social worker, psychologist or nurse. This demarcation of tasks between these professions was found by some participants to be a challenge, as

counsellors are increasingly taking on responsibilities such as family therapy and case management that traditionally is a portfolio of social workers (DS7). This points to the challenges of the dual identities that professional counsellors face when understanding the boundaries of their professional identity as counsellors and as other allied health practitioners, for example, a social worker. For DS7, even though the boundaries between the role of a social worker and counsellor were very clear in their organisation, they found it necessary to try to practice holistically in their personal capacities to help the clients, using both their social work and counselling knowledge and skills. DS12 tried to focus on the complementary nature of social work and counselling work:

> Counselling [is] the cognitive shift. Ya, so Social Work is more of the task and activity to do for the
> client. (DS12)

DS12 reflected that in their organisation there seems to be a symbiotic relationship between social work - which was related to tasks to be done for clients - and counselling, which involved a cognitive shift when working with clients. This seemed helpful for DS12 in navigating the dual identities of a professional counsellor and professional social worker. Dual professional identities may seem to pose some challenges for the participants in the development of their professional identity as counsellors, however, it would also seem that there is an interconnectedness within the knowledge of the various professional identities that can be interchangeably utilised for the clients when needed.

6.1.4 Professional networks and communities

In trying to chart a clearer path in the development of their professional identity, participants also recognised that involvement in *professional networks and communities* are an important part of the counsellor's professional identity. As part of their training, participants were expected to undergo personal counselling and receive clinical supervision. It was deemed as important that a counsellor who

is aware of their personal issues will take steps to ensure that there was no negative transference of personal issues to clients' issues nor interference with the work of a counsellor with clients. DS7 expressed how, having gone through clinical supervision which started as part of the counselling curriculum, it had guided and challenged their growth and development as professional counsellors:

> Another part of it is the professional growth, and this growth does not come about just through the provision of service but rather, when you have Clinical Supervision who has more experience or practice, who guides you, who challenges you, you know with regards to your current work and how you can do better. (DS7)

Developing a strong professional identity was further established when one had the support of a clinical supervisor, who 'provides direct feedback to address supervisee behaviours that can be changed, offering alternatives or being directive to ensure clients' needs are met' (SAC, 2023). This support can reduce the possibility of self-obsession, by increasing scrutiny and challenge of self (Egan, 2012). Such support is often a way in for trainee counsellors into the network and community of professional counsellors.

Some participants were also eventually in the role of a Clinical Supervisor as a recognition of their counselling skills within their organisation. Being elevated to this role indicated that one has built up a "certain level of competence in your professional work… booster in terms of professional identity" (DS7), where the recognition of skills or competency could point to the importance of the role as an indicator of status and standing within both the counselling community and amongst the general public.

Participants also reported that they wished more information were given on the need for professional networking during the training. Such networks, the participants realised after graduation, provide opportunities to learn, to collaborate and for support among allied health colleagues, which serves to reinforce the counsellor's sense of professional identity.

Part of being involved in professional networks means encouraging participation in professional activities like training, workshops and conferences in the on-going construction of the counsellor's professional identity. Participating in these activities would help counsellors gain recognition and acknowledgement from other healthcare practitioners, thereby promoting their professional standing. Without completing such courses, individuals may not be recognized as professional helpers. This is especially important, as participants reported that even after graduating from a post-graduate counselling course, they reported feeling inferior and not on a par with other allied practitioners, including psychiatrists. This was explicitly verbalised by the participants, highlighting the ongoing struggle for professional counsellors to establish their professional identity as members of the broader health care community.

However, as DS6 experienced, there is a lack of personal agency in professional development, as the organisation determines what is necessary and relevant in the kind of training staff need to meet organisational goals:

> The kind of training we go for is also related to job scope. So certain times when I wanted to do a little bit more… it was not seen as relevant or necessary, for the organization, based on the job-description that I was in… which means whatever I had was good enough. (DS6)

Being in an organisation or environment which supported the participants in their lives, beliefs, and work also motivated them to continue in the field. Participants cited "organisational support", "support from other counsellors", "[being] allowed to hold diverse portfolios [by organisation]", and "alignment with organisation's values and missions" as reasons for staying. There also emerged a parallel sense of fulfilment for counsellors when they felt that they were able to connect, support and impact positively with the clients. It was also crucial for counsellors to receive personal support, and be in an organisation that could positively impact them on a personal level; having the latter, in turn, motivated them to stay on in the field of counselling work. DS16 share their own experience on how they were encouraged by their organisation to embark on counselling training even though they had a bachelor's degree in

psychology, which served as an example of how such external support could inspire and motivate counsellors in their professional identity development:

> There was this need and demand [for counselling skills] at my workplace back then. My boss was pretty supportive and he felt that… I should really go and do it. So I thought, "OK! I should go and try out and go and see whether this was suitable for me." And then that's, that's how I started. (DS16)

The factors that influence the notion of agency in professional development include various forms of organisational support, such as formal job titles, expansion of job roles or through collegial support and case discussions. These could be seen to allow counsellors to deepen and develop their professional identities within the nurturing process provided by their organisational environment.

Participants in the study also noted that other issues, notably the policies implemented by relevant governmental ministries who also acted as gatekeepers and funders, were perceived as a major challenge. Such demands from an external source, as noted by DS13, made it difficult to conduct the counselling work. For example, DS13 remarked that policies were restrictive, as: "being told what to do...That's a lack of trust in ability that we have" (DS13). A few of the participants also highlighted the possible presence of a power play, as counsellors tended to be at the bottom of most of the organisational food chains. As such, professional networks and communities would seem to be an important source of role clarification, a voice of legislative and regulatory issues, as well as being able to increase the accountability purpose for professional development, all the while enhancing the continual improvement and learning for counsellors in their identity development. Hence the issue of licensure would help to draw out its role in the professional prestige of counsellors that influence the professional development of a counsellor.

6.2 Licensure and Accreditation issues relating to the counselling profession

During the study, participants raised several issues pertaining to accreditation, licensure (or the lack of), and the need and importance to be registered with the SAC, which is the closest thing to a national body for counsellors in Singapore. DS4, for example, pointed out the lack of consistent and unifying standards as well as the absence of mandatory licensure requirements in order to practice as a counsellor. They further indicated that thus there would be a lack of incentive for counsellors to push for legislation:

> There are no standards as to what's the golden guideline, what are the different components that must go into the programmes. And as for the status of Counsellors, it's mostly referring to the accreditation because now, I guess, it's not compulsory, for everyone to be the SAC or psychology registered… it's a bit not as advanced as overseas, for example, Australia. (DS4)

Others, like DS7, said that there was no requirement from their workplace to show accreditation to practice, or carry the title of 'counsellor': "HR (Human Resource) policies, they don't require you to write that you are accredited" (DS7).

While participants like DS4 were not convinced about the need for registration with the counselling body, their responses also indicated an overwhelming lack of knowledge of the role of the SAC and how the SAC accredits counselling programmes, as well as the process of registration as a counsellor:

> Hmmm. In terms of registration to the SAC, I guess, Yes. But when I talked about golden guidelines, mainly more about the training programme, not so much about the certification. (DS4)

As stated on the SAC's website, the SAC does have extensive guidelines on hours and curriculum of training programmes seeking accreditation with the SAC. Such lack of knowledge and familiarity might be detrimental to professional identity development, as it could indicate a lack of willingness to be involved

in professional activities that promote one's professional identity. This ultimately does not bode well for the profession as a whole.

Similarly, DS11, did not feel they had sufficient information or knowledge to decide whether there was a need to become a member of the SAC:

> I was actually thinking whether it would…you can talk about the process of getting accreditation, or whether… the process of gaining recognition as a counsellor. I do know of people who are, who have gone for counselling training but because they are already accredited as social workers, they just carry on without being accredited as counsellors. (DS11)

While seeking to be recognised as professional counsellors, DS11 found that many of her counterparts, who already had accreditation as social workers, did not find the need to be further accredited as professional counsellors. Others, like DS7, while being aware of the SAC and the processes involved, found either applying for membership or registration too tedious to embark upon:

> I do know the presence of professional bodies around… and the code of ethics that we have to adhere to. Just that it takes time to have to read all the regulations and all the ways to obtain the professional licence or the certifications, so I really didn't bother too much. The first thing… is that you have to complete how many number of hours and then you have to create a log, you have to have your supervisors to certify and things like that, which may also include your ex-employers. So it becomes a bit tedious… to speak. (DS7)

Registration and licensing were seen as important by many participants. However, they also recognised that it can be a double-edged sword, as with the privilege of licensing comes the responsibility of ensuring that one maintains the standards expected with the license to practice:

It's that standard and I guess that the whole society understands that it's very important standard to keep, yup. So, but I know that at this point here, counsellors don't enjoy or maybe... in a way, it's a double-edged sword, it's like you don't enjoy that kind of privilege or that kind of standing or that kind of responsibility but you also don't have to keep it. Yes, so...it's in a very weird position to say. So counsellors are like, you know, where are we heading to? So I'm sure that there are thoughts about registered counsellors, which there is, but it's not like, I mean it's recognised in some ways but it is not officially, you know, binding everybody. (DS3)

This, then, highlights how the SAC may need to set up a robust system that looks at registration and licensing of the profession. While SAC has a crucial role in creating a pathway for registration and licensing of counsellors, the individual will still need to be responsible for their own professional development, and to keep up with continuous education training in informing themselves of their professional development. As DS3 went on to comment:

Actually, as a lot of self-responsibility in that sense because if you don't join any agency, or you don't go for, you know, even if you don't join, you don't maintain that person-development, updates and all that, I mean… Nobody knows!! Your clients won't know. Basically, nobody knows where are you right now. (DS3)

It would thus seem that without formal licensure, the accountability and ethical issues faced by counsellors could present a stumbling block to counselling services in Singapore. Yet this did not stop DS8 from going through the membership and registration process with the SAC, and being a member for at least a year at the time of interview: "I've just joined the SAC (Singapore Association for Counselling)

recently… no, no, no, one year already… Yes. I have been admitted, although I heard that there were some in my batch who had not, interestingly" (DS8).

However, when asked how joining the SAC can improve the professional identity of the counsellor, DS8 responded that recognition by the government for counselling as a profession in its own right - one apart from social work - was the more pressing issue:

> But I think it's the sector's issues. That, they are not us. But the government is not us... does not look at counselling as a profession. Yes, we need counsellors… In the school setting, yes. In terms of the other aspects like couple counselling, individual counselling, I still feel that government does not see that… Yes, we need counsellors… it's still a long way to go, in terms of changing the mindset of the government which drives the sector. (DS8)

Similarly, DS18 likened professional to registration for nurses and doctors, as they had seen it as an issue critical for practice-based professions:

> Like the nurses, like doctors, that they have like license… it's like even for nurses, you want to practise as nurses, you have to be registered first, doctors as well, so it gives them a certain recognition, that they have a certain level of capability, competency, in that sense. I think if like social workers and counsellors in Singapore have that kind of body as well, it would definitely elevate that kind of position. People would definitely recognise it as a professional body more. I think that's my thoughts. (DS18)

The overall perception of counsellors in Singapore, as elicited by the current research, seem to parallel that of a study by Gazzola et al (2010), in which counsellors were found to lack clarity in articulating the professional identity, with a similar perception that the public at large was seemingly unable to

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acknowledge or identify their skills. Advocacy by counsellors in their professional capacity needs to happen in a bigger and more coordinated manner, in order to better educate other health professionals and the general public, and thus better understand what it means to be a counsellor (Spurgeon, 2012).

Conclusion

The research findings discussed in Chapters Four to Six, highlighted key aspects of the development of participants' professional counsellor identities, and the symbiotic relation between the construction of one's personal and professional identities as counsellor. The 'Becoming' of a counsellor via the training programme participants undertook, looked at how professional growth and development in skills, knowledge and competencies were acquired. Participants experienced professional growth, as the skills gained enabled them to be more competent as professional counsellors. This competence, when highlighted by other allied health professionals and the public, gave the participants a sense of recognition as professionals that furthered their development of their professional identities. DS15 found staff training and development to be a key motivator for them in developing their personal and also their professional identity: "Emphasis on training and development of the staff… I think that is something that would be very key, not just about results alone or outcomes alone, but emphasis on staff development, both professional as well as personal" (DS15). Participants' experiences show that a counsellor's professional identity is not just based on direct service to others, but also from their professional growth through the course.

The 'Being' of a counsellor was discussed as being shaped via the participants' motivations, personal experiences prior to the training course, and their belief systems. First, participants who were intrinsically motivated, found it rewarding and satisfying in doing counselling work, despite the lack of financial gains. Participants in the study described activities that were helpful in constructing a counsellor's personal identity and these fell into the categories of either direct service for self, or provision of service for others.

Participants continued to develop their ideas of their selves, their being and their professional identity as counsellors through learning experiences that occurred during their counselling training to after graduation.

Second, some participants experienced the positive value of genuine human connection from prior experiences with other trained counsellors or allied health care professionals. Other participants found that their personal experiences with mental health issues had shaped the development of their being in the development of their professional identity. Third, the impact of participants' beliefs on the self-efficacy of the clients helped shape the being of the identity of the development of their professional identity.

Together with the individual's becoming and being, larger systemic issues were also seen to impact the development of the professional identity of counsellors. Issues surrounding professional prestige including organisational demands, opportunities and rewards showed how participants would like to see greater clarity on their roles and responsibilities in relation to other allied health practitioners within their organisations. The relevance and visibility of the counselling profession together with other allied health professions were highlighted by participants and seen as systemic issues that impact their development of professional identity. The management of dual professional identities, especially that of being a professional social worker and a professional counsellor, saw participants needing to find the intersection of the two professional identities in their work with clients.

Professional prestige was also impacted by participants' interaction within the professional network and the professional counselling communities. Such interactions were seen to have aided the on-going construction of the professional identity. Through their involvement with professional counselling communities, participants also developed a greater appreciation of the impact of regulatory policies on the development of their professional identity. Issues of licensure were also highlighted as being an

important way forward in the professionalisation of the counselling profession in Singapore. Without formal licensure, participants queried how counsellors can maintain similar values of accountability and ethical behaviour as a professional community. Hence, participants felt that while individuals have their personal responsibility to act in the best interest of clients, licensure would be a key cornerstone in the development of professional identity for counsellors.

CHAPTER 7 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the issues explored in Chapters Four to Six on how the identity of the professional counsellor encompasses the 'becoming' and the 'being', of which there are various enabling and disabling factors that impact the journey. As reviewed, the becoming of a professional counsellor may be better understood via professional growth through the counselling training course and professional recognition indicated how the training course impacted others' perception about the work of the counsellors. In addition, it will also explore how the being of a counsellor was shaped by participants' intrinsic motivations, prior personal experiences with other helping professionals, and their belief systems. The enabling and disabling factors that influenced professional prestige - organisational demands, opportunities, and rewards; relevance of profession, dual professional identities, professional network and communities, and issues of licensure - were discussed in Chapter Four when considering how these factors impact the development of the professional identity of counsellors.

This chapter will therefore discuss the findings as they relate to existing literature, with suggestions on how to encourage greater attention on the professional identity of counsellors among educators, practitioners, and trainees. This will be discussed in relation to the research questions on the importance of counselling programmes in developing professional identity; how the course has helped students in the development of their professional identity as counsellors; and finally, how we can understand what are the factors and the significance of these factors that have influenced participants' developmental trajectories towards their professionalism as counsellors. Having a clearer professional identity could possibly increase alliance between practitioners with different experiences and a sense of belonging within the counselling profession amongst current and future practitioners, which would, in turn, impact

on Singapore's overall drive to improve the delivery of mental and social health services with more trained personnel.

7.1 How important are counselling programmes in developing professional identity?

Since its inception, the counselling profession in Singapore has experienced tension and crisis in terms of its professional identity, given its roots in both education and psychology. In such a landscape, the professional identity of counsellors is diffused and indistinguishable from that of an educator, a psychologist, a social worker, or a community service practitioner, echoing the situation of other countries around the world, such as Canada (Hiebert et al., 1992), and with various stakeholders whose interests need to be addressed. The need for clearer sense of professional counsellor identity to be able to stand on its own surfaced when participants saw the training course as a form of professional growth that hopefully could lead to professional recognition of their skills as professional counsellors. And, as emphasised in the literature, the development of 'the professional counsellor identity' is thus central to local counsellor training programmes (Hiebert et al., 1992).

The first local Masters in Applied Psychology Programme with a specialisation track in Counselling Psychology in Singapore was established by the National Institute of Education (NIE). This directly contributed to the identity confusion experienced by counsellors, given that the Masters in Applied Psychology (MAAP) is housed within education and teacher education, while many counsellors continue to practise within the community, in hospitals, and areas where psychology and mental health is the backbone of their practice. Moreover, MAAP has two specialisation tracks, one of which is in Counselling Psychology. The existence of this track signals a systemic and inherent confusion between counselling and psychology that was also revealed by some participants as discussed in Chapter Four. Other study participants, like DS8, recognised that while counselling is well-known and established in schools in

Singapore, there remains a key gap – that is to say, the perceived need for counselling as a standalone profession:

> In terms of the other aspects like couple counselling, individual counselling, I still feel that government does not see that… we need counsellors. (DS8)

As established earlier, the link between the becoming and being of the professional counsellor could be seen as the process of integrating one's personal knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, norms and values, and, as well, counsellors' need to embrace the broadly accepted values and standards about counselling (Pillen et al., 2013). Individual professional identity not only included a person's values, skills and knowledge, but also their professional identity in the practice of being a professional counsellor (Alves & Gazzola, 2011). For example, some participants felt that while their counselling skills were useful, they still tended to identify with their prior training as representing their dominant professional identity, for example, that of professional social workers. The key implication of this finding is that counsellor training programmes need to map out and communicate the vision to potential trainees of the kind of professionals they are going to be trained to become in order to counterbalance the high percentage of counsellors who identify more with psychiatry or clinical psychology, a finding also suggested in a study by Watkins et al in 1986 (Hiebert et al., 1992). This is especially important in developing the counsellor's sense of professional identity through continuing education programmes that will hopefully help clarify specialised domains of service to clients that differ from those of social workers or psychologists (Hiebert et al., 1992).

The lack of professional prestige can be seen from the interviews with the participants. The public perception of counsellors was also found to have an impact on counsellors' career choices; specifically, some participants felt that they were not seen by the public to be as skilled or knowledgeable as other professionals (Gazzola et al., 2010). Such sentiments were comparable to counsellors in Canada (Gazzola & Smith, 2007), who responded that while they felt they had a unique role to play in society, they did not feel respected by the public for their contributions; this perception, in turn, impacted the formation

of their professional identity. In a similar vein, Auxier et al (2003) found external evaluation to be a key aspect of counsellors' identity formation. Counsellors in Singapore felt that their expertise was at least 'moderately' respected by other allied health practitioners, but not by psychiatrists, even though there was less than 'moderate' agreement on being respected by the public for their knowledge and skills. The curriculum studied by counsellors-in-training, then, seems to be an important starting point from which to build on the necessary skills and knowledge for counsellors to practice and to influence public perception, ultimately leading to a better trajectory for a professional counsellor identity. The ground work is already present in Singapore, with the SAC accrediting counsellor training programmes ensuring that skills and knowledge are aligned among graduates who themselves undergo counselling courses provided by either private or public educational institutes. Such a move by the SAC is important, as it has addressed the concerns that participants have on the importance of improving the professional practice of counselling in Singapore. Notwithstanding this, more may need to be done, as there also emerged a clear indication of the lack of knowledge of the accreditation process among participants. This lack of knowledge, prior to course enrolment, was similarly reflected in a study on students' awareness on accredited programmes under CACREP (Honderich & Lloyd-Hazlett, 2015). As demonstrated by the participants in my study however, this lack might be detrimental to professional identity development, as it could signal a lack of commitment and willingness to participate in the activities and opportunities specially designed for counsellors in their professional capacity (Spurgeon, 2012). It is also important to note that this discussion has gone beyond the 'why' counselling training programmes are important to 'how' such counselling training programmes have demonstrated their importance in the development of the professional identity of the counsellor.

7.2 How has the counselling training programme helped participants to learn about their identity as professional counsellors?

The course helped develop the identity of the counsellors by shaping the being of the counsellors. The training course brought forth the dormant and inherent factors like participants' intrinsic motivations, personal experiences and belief systems. The finding echoes previous views that the nexus of professional development embraces the 'becoming' of a professional counsellor, as seen through the attainment of skills and knowledge and the 'being' of a professional counsellor, which is concerned with 'the doing' in order to meet clients' needs (Shuler & Keller-Dupree, 2015).

Motivations were seen through participants' articulations of their being by using phrases like ''passion for others'' and ''helping people''. Other participants cited faith-based beliefs as a driver for counsellors to continue to dedicate themselves to their personal growth, as well as providing fuel for the continued development of their professional identity, which is similarly reported by counsellors in Canada (Gazzola & Smith, 2007).

The course provided a platform for counsellors to channel their innate motivations to serve others in society via their counselling skills as a form of work. The findings from the interviews with participants in this study pointed to a synergy in terms of how clients can provide the initial motivation to enter formal training in the field, as participants frequently indicated their desire to develop better skill-sets in order to work with clients. At the same time, feedback from clients' experiences with counselling therefore leads to the participants' desire and motivation for further professional growth so that they can continue to work in the counselling field. This noting of the changes by the participants in the process, making adjustments in interactions and responses of the participants is linked to the occurrence of 'the topic, the event, the happening … contained in a set of data' (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 101). Such an 'occurrence' was identified in this research as 'the developmental trajectories' towards professionalism in counsellors. The participants agreed that being given the feedback that they were positively influencing the lives of their clients had, indeed, helped them to become more certain of their

professional identity as counsellors. The applicability of counselling skills and the ability to make a difference in impacting someone else's life, as part of their personal investment, was a motivation for participants to undergo counselling training. This is similar to the findings reported by Alves & Gazzola (2011), where previous personal life and work experiences were seen to lend themselves to the development of the being of the professional counsellor.

Intrinsic motivation has also been linked with autonomy (McGhie, 2017), especially if such motivation is brought about in an environment that informs, supports, and allows people to make choices aligned with their motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985) – in this instance, continuing to be professional counsellors. A clear statement from DS5 on their initial success in using empathy with the clients had propelled their internal motivation to further develop their professional counsellor identity thereby indicating how the environment motivated them to remain autonomous in their decision to embark on the counselling programme. The citing of personal experiences such as that by DS5 as well as other participants, demonstrates the successful integration of the personal into professional practice, in turn allowing an exploration and understanding of issues of the day. The development of the ability to have greater understanding of the issues of the day would then be a yard stick for a successful practitioner (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998).

Secondly, the course (re)socializes counsellors into the evolving dialogue on the work of counsellors in today's fast-paced economy, for example, on the counselling theories and techniques, and the application of the knowledge through the clinical practicuum with clients. Formal education, or education-related activity, has been reported as one of the three most important requirements in the formation of counsellor identity, as well as counsellors' awareness of issues involving the regulation of counselling professionals (Alberding et al., 1993). This was clearly reflected among the participants in this research, with over 90% of them raising the issue of the lack of licensure in the practice of professional counselling, occasionally comparing this with the strict requirements for the medical and legal professions. Both professional and personal developments are mutually dependent in the

construction of a counsellor's professional identity. However, in the course structure of the aforementioned counselling programme, participants did not seem to have grasped the mutuality of the connection between their personal and professional identities. The alignment of the training curriculum that the SAC pushed for on a national level seems here to align with the suggestions put forth by previous research – that professional identity should be discussed at a national, perhaps even at policy level (Gazzola et al., 2010). As trainee counsellors have been found to be influenced by their professors' positions and direct counselling experiences, it would thus be of benefit for the issue of professional identity to be explicit within the curriculum of the counselling programme (Gazzola et al., 2010), ensuring that the socialisation process of professional growth as a counsellor can begin this formation (Öhlén & Segesten, 1998). Such socialisation is an important process, as personal characteristics like attitudes and values are important indicators of counsellor effectiveness (Henna and Bemak, 1997).

The course aligns the participants' personal experiences and also extends the professional network and community support that provide the role modelling for the participants. The community of professional counsellors and their practices helped the participants in the development of their professional identity, as discussed in Chapter Four.

In addition, together with curriculum changes, Gazzola et al (2010) argue that counsellors-in-training also need to have professors who, themselves, possess strong counsellor identities, as the participants in my study were very much influenced by prior encounters and experiences with trained counsellors and others in the helping profession in one's self-development of the counsellors' professional identity. Participants like DS11 & DS12 both mentioned how they had previous positive experiences with the mental health fraternity practitioners, and their personal experiences were used as models for their current practices as professional counsellors. As noted in chapter four, participants reported that their practicuum helped them to gain inroads into the network of practising professional counsellors and gave them the sense of being part of the greater counselling community. Alves & Gazzola (2011) similarly

found from their study that such critical incidents which characterised a positive emotional experience made a difference in their perception of a counsellor's professional identity.

7.3 What are the factors and their significance in influencing students' developmental trajectories towards professionalism and the professional identity as counsellors?

The results of the interviews showed the symbiotic relationship between the construction of one's personal and professional identities as a counsellor. Participants continued to process the occurrence of developing their professional identity via interactions with the course materials and a curriculum which led to self-development in both the personal and professional self. The continued contact between the course materials and the counsellors assisted the participants in learning more about what encompassed their professional identity, while also enabling them to better understand their personal identity linked to their values, such as passion for others, spiritual beliefs, and helping people during the period of training. These findings are aligned with those of Alves & Gazzola (2011) who found a 'strong interplay' (Alves & Gazzola, 2011, p. 195) between counsellors' professional and personal identities.

Moreover, their interaction with the curriculum, classmates, and teaching staff also incurred changes to their values while participants were still undergoing the counselling course. Ultimately, participants saw the training course as an opportunity to 'walk-the-talk' and to grow in self-awareness, in terms of how their person impacts their professional self. The following statement by DS1 indicates how there was a mutual influence between the professional and personal identities, as the high in affection in the personality, and which was also part of DS1's identity as a professional counsellor:

> I think I did a psychometric test and the tests show that I am high in affection… Affection has a…
> focus on people… and I found my score was 90%.. People naturally come to me for counselling,
> I am really good in this (DS1)

Professional identity includes how the counsellor sees him/herself in the context of doing the counselling work - who they are as persons is central to their professional identity. Hermansen (1987) stated that professional identity embodies both the external and internal attributes of a professional identity (Öhlén & Segesten, 1998). This was also borne out in the current research, where some respondents indicated the influence of their personal self on their professional identity:

> People think I am approachable … enough for them to come forward to talk to me … that's why in my daily work, I go around, talk to people … and also building rapport, which I think is very very important …(DS5)

The personal qualities and the heart of the 'being' of the participants extended to the impact of their life experiences on their professional identity, which included their developmental influences found in their growing up, background, and personal struggles with their own emotions. Many of the participants related examples of how their personal experiences were instrumental to their embarking on the counselling course.

Professional identity as a process includes integrating professional training with the personal characteristics and experiences of the counsellor (Nugent & Jones, 2009). This mélange of professional training with personal characteristics in turn becomes a blend that can be manifested via the counsellor's practice, forming part of their values, their awareness and beliefs (Auxier, Hughes & Kline, 2003). In the current research, the participants described changes in their values while undergoing the counselling course, as they saw the training as an opportunity to walk the talk, and also as part of the overall growth of the counsellor, both professionally and personally. Another way of reflecting on this finding would be to consider that participants needed the conceptual learning in order to develop a better understanding of their experiences, rather than gaining the latter through the pursuit of further theoretical education (Auxier et al., 2003). Similarly, Jennings et al (2008) showed that the personal characteristics and developmental influences of practitioners continue to shape the professional identity of the counsellors.

Factors such as the counsellors' lived experiences, self-awareness, humility and even self-doubt continue post-training in the evolution of the professional identity of the counsellors (Jennings et al, 2008). Training of counsellors could address the possible tensions that arise between personal and professionally accepted values as a result of shaping the professional identity of a novice counsellor, where roles and expected professional responsibilities – including research – may have differed from personal values (Pillen et al., 2013).

The concept of identity continues to be difficult to define due to ever-changing interpretations and uses of the term (Lawler, 2014) in relation to our understanding of our experiences, our person-hood, and our environment. Yet, the effectiveness of counsellors in multiple studies, cited in Hanna and Bemak (1997), has been seen to be less dependent on the type of training or theoretical orientation, than on the personal characteristics of the counsellor.

Participants highlighted the importance of exchanges with colleagues from other allied health practices, mainly from social workers and psychologists, which were reflected by participants as part of the process in constructing their professional identity as counsellors. This could be seen in clinical supervision sessions, and even continued training and development courses post-graduation, to update their skills. For other participants, the construction of counsellors' professional identity, does not occur in isolation but, rather, alongside the development of one's prior identity of social worker and/or psychologist. For example, D19 constructs and derives meaning on the counsellors' identity through their interactions with social workers in the field:

> Cause I always thought that… the identity of counsellors are not very strong and not very differentiated from like Social Workers… people tend to get a bit confused. Yah, we don't have that very strong differentiation and skills-set and stuff like that. I always thought that the role of a counsellor is a bit weaker in Singapore. (DS19)

Here, it is noteworthy that DS19 takes into account the actions of social workers with relation to registration, and in terms of defining their own actions as a counsellor:

> But I always felt that professionally, there's a professional pressure for social workers to get their registered social workers status. For Counsellors, it's like…'Ok lah. Registered, not registered, it's also ok, my life goes on.' As a social worker, when you graduate, "I want to be registered", counsellors are a bit different. And I don't know why. Always felt that something I observed. (DS19)

This greater focus on social work may be seen as part of 'normative legitimacy', as highlighted by Brinkerhoff (2005, p.3). The importance paid to social work tasks and activities is socially accepted and valued as fitting the ways in which Singapore's many social service organisations operate. It would seem that, perhaps, a joint conversation might be useful in order for social workers, counsellors, social workers with counselling training, and counsellors with social work training to have: 'equal opportunities to control the social identities presented… and together develop a joint definition of the situation,' as stated by Howard (2003, p. 10). A further implication and recommendation here would be a joint action achieved for all parties, especially as the lines of distinction between what social workers and counsellors do are growing increasingly blurred. The establishment of relationships with other allied health professionals has been articulated as one of the main issues in the articulation of the development of the counsellor's professional identity (Spurgeon, 2012). Such relationships with other professionals might also help develop greater 'communities of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that take into account dual-professionals who come with prior experiences, and which would add value to the professional counsellor identity. The differences in perceptions between the various allied professionals suggest that the scientist-practitioner model, an integral part of counselling programmes, may not be as evident or as influential in actual practice (Hiebert et al., 1992; Alves & Gazzola, 2011) in the development of their professional identity. Hence, there may be a need to develop a bigger framework in order to encompass the variations found in actual practice.

The visibility and tangibility of social work or psychological outcomes is very much valued in society, as they mean that organisations can claim that concrete work has been done; for example, in direct advocacy work for housing and financial assistance via social work interventions and psychological assessment tests which lead to changes in individuals. However, counselling, as an unquantifiable cognitive shift, lends itself to being invisible and may not have any tangible outcome in creating changes in the individuals. Such external evaluation, could lead to a process of reflection, awareness and verification that then comes to form part of the evolution of that professional identity of counsellors (Auxier et al., 2003).

External support structures, like licensure, are deemed as public acknowledgement and requirements for legal practice and many other different professions. To date, there has been no legal requirement for licensure or certification in order to practice as a counsellor or psychologist in Singapore; neither is there a legal mandate enforcing adherence to any particular ethical framework (Yeo et. al. 2012). Many participants raised the issue of licensure and certification to practice; yet, some were not aware that the SAC had been championing this cause from the early 2000s, a consequence of which was the existence of the very counselling training course that the participants had undergone. Indeed, this was the first course that was fully facilitated by local practitioners in an attempt to increase the professional standing of counsellors in Singapore.

The SAC needs to be at the forefront of being relevant as a national body to represent the counselling profession in Singapore. Currently, the SAC is the professional organisation that is most organised in terms of the activities and opportunities offered to professional counsellors. Such an undertaking may even have the secondary effect of counsellors deepening their valuing of self and increased positive self-esteem, in a parallel effect whereby, in caring also for their clients, the counsellors choose and create better patterns of self-care (Öhlén & Segesten, 1998). This could potentially evolve into a standardised process in which such self-care can be part of the Continuing Professional Education hours. As Hsi (2017) found in his research, involvement with the SAC has engendered a sense of 'belonging' to a professional body that

supports the professional identity of practitioners. This underscores the SAC's certification efforts in trying to create a collective identity based on recognising formal counselling training in higher learning institutes. The completion of the prerequisite practicum hours as eligibility criteria will enable a trained counsellor to become registered SAC counsellors, in turn allowing counsellors to show validation of their skills and knowledge. The number of hours, and the focus on the ethical and legal dimensions of professional training, have been reported in multiple studies in the USA as part and parcel of the wave towards professionalisation of the counselling field (Neimeyer & Diamond, 2001). Other skills in the curriculum can also be enhanced, such as research skills, as further suggested by Hsi (2017), in particular by harnessing more local data and encouraging counsellors in training as well as counselling practitioners to generate ideas and thoughts on the profession, hence furthering the professional identity of counsellors in Singapore.

Another study by Gazzola et al (2010) reported that counsellors who feel a sense of career satisfaction and undergo greater exposure to professional identity issues in their training have clearer professional identities as counsellors. However, as some participants in the current study revealed, there was a lack of knowledge of accredited SAC programmes, which could be unfavourable for potential students who would like to sign up for counselling programmes, impacting their ensuing decisions related to becoming a professional counsellor. Fortunately, for the participants in this study, the programme from which they graduated is accredited with the SAC. The feedback from participants echoes that of the study by Honderich & Lloyd-Hazlett (2015), who suggested that accreditation information may need to be communicated more widely prior to formal entry into the field of counselling (Honderich & Lloyd-Hazlett (2015).

This lends credibility to the SAC's attempts at increasing professionalism by spearheading not just the accreditation process, but also a governance process, formalising training pathways, and tightening membership criteria. All of these strategies are seen as ways to manage the uncertainty in expectations

of its diverse 'stakeholders', who range from employers of counsellors in Singapore, to the governing bodies of social services provided in the nation state. In the current research, this uncertainty was clearly reflected in the overwhelming number of participants who raised the issue of the lack of legal licensure as impacting the professionalism of the counsellor identity. Chong & Ow (2003) reviewed that licensure may be a way of improving the quality of counselling practice and therefore improving the professional identity of counsellors in Singapore. While licensure may take time to be debated between the governing bodies, accountability within the practice has to be addressed. Chong and Ow (2003) also noted that a code of ethics may need to be actively pursued as a tool and guide to ensure accountability for professional identity.

While the counselling profession has made some progress in attempting to create a professional identity, the field in Singapore faces similar issues to those highlighted by Spurgeon (2012), notably continued challenges to training for future potential counsellors, and establishing relationships with other health professionals, especially given that Singapore has seen a tremendous increase in the need for mental health services due to the impact of COVID-19 (Staglin, 2021). Therefore, and as the current research suggests, training for future counsellors could consider introducing relevant diagnostic assessments in order to better understand the role of multidisciplinary approaches in the development of professional identity (Spurgeon, 2012) as well as incorporating multicultural competence to better support the increasing diversity of clients while maintaining a professional practice. We could take a lesson from the counsellor education and training book in Venezuela, which aims to integrate theories and practices from the international community to meet the needs in the local community, and so build a culturally-relevant professional counsellor identity (Alvarez & Lee, 2012). Being thus culturally informed, counsellors in Singapore could, through their training and development, inform national guidelines for counsellors and other practitioners, such as those working in the fields of social work and psychology. There has been, and will continue to be, struggles amongst professionals doing similar work. It may thus be seen as beneficial for counsellors in the process of developing their professional identity to find a way to

collaborate and align with other health professionals, especially when complex issues arise with certain clients that require multidisciplinary approaches. The hope here is for counsellors to be the catalysing force that can alter the internal system by educating the medical and allied professionals that they work with through the exchange of professional ideas (Gazzola et al., 2010), and, perhaps, even to change the remedial and pathological-oriented medical model (Gazzola & Smith, 2007) to a more humanistic and developmental model in the professional identity of a counsellor.

As has been also clearly drawn out in the research interviews, communication skills need to continue to be built upon, so that counsellors-in-training can better undertake the necessary conversations in their workplaces and with other health professionals, both in public in terms of advocacy of the counsellor's professional identity, but also by enabling others to increase their understanding of what a being a professional counsellor might entail. Such growth in these counsellors' self-awareness, in terms of demonstrating the ability to understand themselves as well as understanding others, is a key component of enhanced interpersonal functioning with clients. The latter includes the key Rogerian (1957) competencies of effective helpers (Boyatzis, Goleman and Rhee, 2000), which, in turn, directly impact counsellors' professional identity and practice.

7.4 Recommendations, study limitations and future research possibilities

The results of this study point to the recommendation that courses in Singapore which offer counselling training would need to continue their relationship with the SAC, in order to strengthen and deepen their professional identity as counsellors. The insights provided here into participants' motivations for wanting support are important for educators and training providers to better understand and conceptualise the support that counsellor trainees need while attending such a programme, while also reflecting on their own professional development as educators and providers of counsellor education (Pillen, et al., 2012). For example, the use of language as verbalised by the participants was, in itself, part of the context in

which counsellors were socialised during training, learning about the expectations of themselves and clients. This learning, via observation, supervision and practice, encompasses the immersion process whereby counsellors-in-training can develop the 'appropriate attitudes, values, modes of thinking and strategies for problem solving' (Gibson et. al., 2012). Counsellors already practising in the field would need to have a space to interact with other allied health practitioners on equal professional standing and develop their professional identity as counsellors. This would need to occur at the same time as developing their personal identity, given that their 'primary form of identity one develops, while professional identity is naturally developed later on when one enters a profession' (Alves & Gazzola, 2011, p. 195). Achieving this involves continued engagement with clients and management of the person- environment relationships, while self-evaluating and integrating their experiences to strengthen their professional identities as counsellors (PIllen et al., 2013; Gibson et al., 2012). For example, and in accordance with the study by Auxier et al (2003), the activities found in the current research that were stated as helpful to constructing a counsellor's professional identity fell into the categories of either direct service for self, or provision of service for others. Participants progressively clarified their ideas of themselves as counsellors through their learning experiences that occurred during their counselling training and right up to after graduation. The SAC, too, as the representative body would likely need to continue to pursue licensing or practice licenses for the counselling community, as licensure is the highest form and regulation of professional practice conferring the national recognition of competence as a counsellor, both within the professional community and the public eye (Spurgeon, 2012). Licensure, as a regulatory process, will primarily ensure safety and protection of the individuals seeking counselling services from the professionals. It is also important to caution that the licensure process do not deviate from its intended purpose, to become the new management panopticism (Ball, 2003), exerting excessive scrutiny over the professional counsellors.

The journeys of those 'becoming' and 'being' a counsellor are beset with similar challenges in an East Asian context. The ambiguity surrounding the roles of counsellors and those of allied health professionals signals

a need for greater efforts in developing a clearer and more defined professional counsellor identity. The establishment of counselling training programmes represents an important step towards addressing this identity confusion. Given that East Asia is mainly still a collectivist culture, the integration of counselling skills is as important as having programmes that provide a platform for counsellors-in-training to identify and integrate their intrinsic motivations and belief systems into their professional practice, encompassing both the 'becoming' and the 'being' aspects of their professional identity. Moreover, the alignment of counselling training programmes with national accreditation standards will serve to improve societal perception of counsellors' expertise, thus increasing the professional prestige of counselling as a profession. Additionally, the professional prestige must be enhanced such that counselling programmes can serve as hotbeds for networking opportunities and establishment of Communities of Practice as well as being facilitators of professional and personal reflections on the interplay of cultural dynamics. Counselling programmes in East Asia could for instance incorporate opportunities for continued learning, clinical supervision and participation in professional organisations to stay current with best practices and maintain a strong professional identity.

Such a movement can act as the catalyst for a greater sense of belonging and professional identity development, not just among counsellors, but also within the allied health professions more broadly. Ultimately, fostering a collaborative mindset during counsellor training, can promote a multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach to addressing the clients' diverse needs.

This study, however, is limited to only one specific counselling training course in Singapore. As such, the findings may not necessarily be representative or applicable to other private or public institutions that offer counselling training courses. The data were collected with graduates of the specific training programme and did not take into account those who had dropped out of the programme, nor were the reasons examined as to why they had exited the programme before completion. Data were also not collected from any employment agencies who had employed counsellors from the aforementioned counselling training course or any other counselling programmes. The 'youthfulness' of the counselling scene in Singapore could also constitute a limitation to this study, together with the unique composition

of Singapore's context in relation to the development of the nation state's helping field, that makes it hard to find a comparison with any other country. Further research conducted in a longitudinal manner would enable other researchers to chart the development of the professional counsellor identity, while monitoring socio-political and economic factors that impact the process.

Neither the age nor the gender of the counsellors-in-training were taken into account, as this was a post-graduate diploma. However, men accounted for more than a quarter of all participants, which parallels data from the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) showing that only about 20 per cent of Singapore's 600 social workers were male in 2014 (Straits Times, 2014). Males are still recognised as the traditional breadwinners in Asian families; given the disparity in pay between the social service sector and other sectors, this could be a factor possibly deterring men from entering or continuing to develop their professional skills in the social services. It would thus be interesting to identify the reasons for the retention of males in the social service sector, and how they view their professional identity as counsellors.

As the said counselling training course was at post-graduate level, it would also be beneficial to examine whether there are any differences between those who enter into the post-graduate diploma counsellor training course immediately after their first degree, and those who have had some work experience in the social service field before embarking on the counsellor training course, and how the different entry points may impact the trajectory of the development of their professional identity.

7.5 Revisiting my role as a course developer and my professional journey

The Masters in Applied Psychology (MAAP) programme provided me with invaluable skills and knowledge. However, I found it necessary to bridge the gap between how I perceived myself as a counsellor and how others perceived me. Graduating as a Counselling Psychologist in Singapore, made it confusing, as I was in the dilemma of not fitting neatly into either the category of a counsellor or psychologist. Being trained as a Counselling Psychologist literally landed me in no-man's land, as I did not fit neatly into either category. In the job market, I noticed that it was easier to find opportunities as a counsellor, as the job descriptions and requirements seemed less stringent as compared to becoming a psychologist. This ambiguity in professional identity led me, as a course developer to explore and be aware of the significance of counselling programmes impacting the sense of self for aspiring counsellors.

The MAAP programme provided comprehensive training, experiential learning, and theoretical knowledge, equipping aspiring counsellors, like myself with the necessary skills needed to excel in my role as a counsellor. Linking this experience to the importance of counselling programs in developing professional identity, I was highly aware as a course developer of the importance of counselling programmes playing a critical role in integrating the essence of 'becoming' a professional counsellor with their academic qualifications and knowledge. The facilitated opportunities in the programme to engage with real clients, and navigate the complexities of the counselling process, fostered a deeper understanding of the counsellor's professional growth.

However, I realised that there was limited professional recognition of my post-graduate training in the job market. Nonetheless, the MAAP programme allowed me to go into the social service sector, to work alongside social workers, and psychologists. My experience in the workplace, complemented the academic knowledge gained in the MAAP programme. I realised that support and guidance offered in such programmes would contribute to fostering a strong and confident professional identity to enable

counsellors to navigate the challenges and become more confident to embrace their roles, advocate for their expertise, and deliver high-quality counselling services to their clients.

In this context, the factors that influence students' developmental trajectories towards professionalism and professional identity as counsellors play a significant role. The educational and cultural background of counsellors-in-training may also influence their perceptions of counselling and the counselling profession. I realised as a course developer, that counsellors-in-training who come from fields related to social work or psychology found it easier to integrate their prior knowledge and experiences into their professional identity as counsellors, even if they were navigating their dual professional identities. However, other systemic issues affected professional prestige which included organisational demands that blurred the lines of whether I was a social worker or I was a counsellor, or I was a psychologist. The lack of licensure for social workers, psychologists or counsellors further complicated the development of a clear professional identity for counsellors.

All said and done, my journey of 'becoming' and 'being' a professional counsellor was a transformative process of introspection and self-discovery. The MAAP programme played a vital role in this process, offering valuable insights and opportunities for self-reflection. The essence of 'becoming' a counsellor beyond academic qualifications, students can establish a strong sense of professional recognition and validation. And the 'being' of a counsellor, is constantly being moulded starting from the point of the start of the programme for the counsellor in training. Through this program, I learned to metamorphosise in my professional identity as a counsellor, anchored in ethical practice and a genuine commitment to supporting and working with my clients.

Concluding thoughts

In discussing the findings of the current study in relation to existing literature and previous studies, the key implication emerges that greater attention should be paid to the professional identity of counsellors among educators, practitioners, and trainees in Singapore. The professional identity includes the 'Becoming' which can be seen via the professional growth and recognition of the profession as well as the 'Being' that can be shaped by intrinsic motivations, personal experiences and belief systems of the person of the counsellor. The professional identity of the counsellor also takes into account the bigger systemic factors that enable and disable the impetus for growth of the said identity. It would seem important for students to develop the ability and be given the space to talk about the professional growth and also the impact of their personal experiences, motivations and beliefs that shape their being as a professional counsellor. It may also be important to develop behaviours in counsellors in training which acknowledge organisational perspectives and the social climate of helping in Singapore (Hsi, 2017). Perhaps one of the key implications that arose from this study was the need to begin to work with faculty members who are teaching counselling courses, focusing on how they can make a greater impact on the development of their students' professional counsellor identity. Another key focus could be on how to hold this conversation between trainees and trainers at different stages of the counselling training, ensuring that this process is integral to the development of the professional counsellor identity (Auxier et al., 2003). This may then allow trainee counsellors to develop self-consciousness about their professional and personal values, as they critically examine their actions, decisions and ethical considerations within the professional context (Prichard, 1999). Neoliberal ideas are still very much at play, with the need to navigate between quantifying and measuring of outcomes versus the intangible measure of the intrinsic value of counselling that looks at an individual's subjective well-being. The importance of advocacy in counselling, looking into changes in systemic factors to better the well-bring of the individuals also does not align with the neoliberal focus on individual responsibility, resulting in possibly a lack of recognition and prestige of the counselling profession.

It would also be important to note that in the context of Singapore, the influence of Asian cultural and religious beliefs are integral aspects of the socio-cultural, religious and spiritual factors that need to be weaved into the therapeutic approaches in counselling. These factors shape the lives of individual and community practices that impact clients' perspectives, values and ways of navigating life challenges. Professional counsellors must be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate these factors effectively. Understanding the intricacies of the various belief systems would help counsellors to create a safer and more respectful environment for the therapeutic relationship between the counsellor and client, for clients to express their thoughts and feelings. The ability to integrate these beliefs into therapeutic counselling approaches validates the experiences of the clients and promotes deeper trust and rapport in the counselling relationship. Hopefully, this also fosters the development of greater inclusivity and cultural sensitivity for society.

Being able to clarify the definition and be clearer about what counselling entails in Singapore would enable counsellors to achieve greater precision in the development of their professional role and identity. The significance of a comprehensive and understandable definition on what the counsellor does would lend a greater clarity to the framing of the professional identity of the counsellor. Introducing these elements, highlighted as important in the current study, might represent a new way forward for the development of the professional identity of the counsellor in Singapore. Clearer professional identity could possibly increase alliance and a sense of belonging within the counselling profession amongst current and future practitioners, which would, in turn, impact on Singapore's overall drive to enhance the delivery of mental and social health services with more trained personnel.

<u>Annex A - Research Questions and corresponding interview questions</u>

How has the counsellor training programme helped students to learn about their identity as professional counsellors?

Corresponding interview questions:

- *What values and ideas did you hold during the training?*
- *What values and ideas do you now hold that are different or similar to before?*

What are the factors that have influenced students' developmental trajectories towards professionalism as counsellors?

Corresponding interview questions:

- *What motivated you to go into counselling as a form of professional training?*
- *If you are still in the field, what motivates you to keep at it?*

What is the level and degree of significance of the factors that have influenced or informed participants as to their understanding and approach towards professionalism and the professional identity of a counsellor?

Corresponding interview questions:

- What experiences and conditions do you perceive as contributing to your professional identity?
- What experiences and conditions do you perceive as hindering your professional identity?
- What creates value in your work that develops your professional identity?

Participant Demographics	Prior training	Continued educational training after formal counselling course	Previous work role before undergoing formal counselling training	Current work role after graduating from formal counselling training
DS1 – male Age: 50	Human resources degree		Human resource consultant	Business consultant for headhunting firm
DS2- female Age: 28	Bachelor's degree in logistics and supply chain		Human Resource Officer	Social Work Assistant In health care
DS3 – female Age: 32	Law degree		Lawyer	Head of social service organisation
DS4 – female. Age:30	Psychology degree	Master in Counselling Psychology	Military para-psychologist	Military psychologist
DS5 – male Age: 38	Bachelor of arts and social sciences		Military Provost Discipline unit	Military Provost Discipline unit
DS6 – female Age; 28	Bachelor of Nursing		Registered nurse in hospital general wards	Counsellor for patients with mental health issues
DS7 – female Age: 27	Bachelor's degree in Social Work		Medical social worker	Medical social worker
DS8 – female Age: 32	Bachelor's degree in Mass Communication		Marketing Executive	Counsellor in church
DS9 – female Age:29	Bachelor's degree in Building Science		Educator in Primary School	Social service agency worker
DS10 – female Age: 56	Bachelor's degree in Social Work	Masters in Counselling	Social worker	Social worker (Special needs)
DS11 – female Age: 30	Bachelor's degree in Science		Administration Executive	Community-based social service worker

DS12 – female Age:30	Bachelor's degree in Nursing		Registered nurse	Social work research
DS13 – female Age:45	Bachelor's degree in Social Work/Master's degree in social work		Social worker in community social service	Senior social worker in community social service
DS14 – female Age:41	Bachelor's degree in Real Estate	Master's degree in Counselling/ Doctoral Programme in psychotherapy	Volunteer counsellor in church	Volunteer counsellor in church
DS15 – male Age:36	Bachelor's degree in social work and history(honours)	Certificate in Substance Abuse Counselling	Social worker in Voluntary Welfare Organisation	Senior/middle management in Voluntary Welfare Organisation
DS16 – female Age: 29	Bachelor's degree in Psychology	Master's degree in Applied Psychology	Programme Head in Voluntary Welfare Organisation	Psychologist in Voluntary Welfare Organisation
DS17 – female Age: 32	Bachelor's degree in Education		Educator in secondary school	Youth Counsellor
DS18 – female Age: 35	Bachelor's degree in Biomedicine	Bachelor's degree in Nursing	Private home tutor (science)	Nurse
DS19 – male Age:32	Bachelor's degree in Psychology		Psychologist with social services	Psychologist with social services

Annex C: ERP Approval letter

Trina Tan approval
letter 04-08-16.pdf

Ref: ERP1286

13 June 2016

~~Trina Tan Yer~~
Research Institute for Social Sciences

Dear Trina

The being and becoming of a professional counsellor in Singapore – Reflection of graduates' learning.

Thank you for submitting your revised application for review.

I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved by the Ethics Review Panel. The following documents have been reviewed and approved by the panel as follows:

Document(s)	Version Number	Date
Invitation Email	DS1.1	July 2016
Information Sheet	DS1.2	July 2016
Consent Form and Consent for the use of quotes	DS1.2	July 2016

If the fieldwork goes beyond the date stated in your application, **30ᵗʰ September 2017**, or there are any other amendments to your study you must submit an 'application to amend study' form to the ERP administrator at research.erps@keele.ac.uk stating **ERP1** in the subject line of the e-mail. This form is available via http://www.keele.ac.uk/researchsupport/researchethics/

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me via the ERP administrator on research.erps@keele.ac.uk stating **ERP1** in the subject line of the e-mail.

Regards

Yours sincerely

C H Bonneman

Dr Jackie Waterfield
Chair – Ethical Review Panel

CC   RI Manager
        Supervisor

Annex D: Information Sheet and Consent Form

Keele University

Information Sheet

Study Title: The being and becoming of a professional counsellor in Singapore- Reflection of graduates' learning.

Aims of the Research
1. *Evaluate the degree to which counsellor training impacts the formation and development of graduates'*
   (a) 'being' of the professional counsellor (b) 'becoming' of the professional counsellor
2. *Examine the professional dilemmas impacted by changes to professionalism and professional identity.*

Invitation
You are being invited to consider taking part in the research study *The being and becoming of a professional counsellor in Singapore- Reflection of graduates' learning.*

This project is being undertaken by *Trina Tan.*

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with friends and relatives if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.

Why have I been invited?
You have been invited to take part in this interview, as
1. You are an expert in the field
2. You are a professionally trained counsellor
3. You qualify to be registered as a counsellor with Singapore Association for Counselling (SAC)

Do I have to take part?
You are free to decide whether you wish to take part or not. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign two consent forms, one is for you to keep and the other is for our records. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time and without giving reasons.

What will happen if I take part?
1. The researcher will communicate with you on selecting a suitable date and time for a semi-structured interview. The interview would last for about an hour.
2. The venue for the interview will be mutually agreed upon by between yourself and the researcher.
3. Questions on your opinion, relating to the aims of this study will be asked.

What are the benefits (if any) of taking part?
You would be contributing to the development of a distinctive professional identity of professional counsellors in Singapore. This will help in a better understanding of the ground situation and may help to impact policies more positively in the future.

What are the risks (if any) of taking part?
No discomfort or risk experienced by you is expected, as the participation in the semi-structured interview is mostly about your opinions and views. In the unlikely event, that you are not comfortable to continue or take part in the interview, you are free to withdraw from this study at any time and without giving reasons, within three(3) months of the interview.
In the unlikely event that you would like to speak with someone through any issues that may have come up after the interview, information on counselling services with Counselling and Care Centre and/or other counselling centres can be made available for your subsequent contact.

How will information about me be used?
Interviews will be audio-taped and collected for the use of the study. The information may also be used in other publications resulting from the main study. The audio-taped data will be coded without name. The code will not be linked to you with any identifiable information. The data from the interviews will only be used for analysis.

Who will have access to information about me?
Your anonymity will be ensured and safeguarded in the entire process. The audio recording will be kept in encrypted files that can only be accessed by the researcher. Each individual's audio recording will only be identifiable by a code assigned by the researcher for administrative purposes only. All reported information will only use pseudonyms when specific identifiable information are mentioned.

However, I, the researcher do however have to work within the confines of current legislation over such matters as privacy and confidentiality, data protection and human rights and so offers of confidentiality may sometimes be overridden by law. For example in circumstances whereby I (the researcher) am concerned over any actual or potential harm to yourself or others I (the researcher) must pass this information to the relevant authorities.

Measures to be taken to ensure protection of your data:-
- Data will be stored securely in password protected computers and files that have encryption keys.
- The level of identifiability of your interview will only be reported as 'current practitioner' or 'professionally-trained counsellors in the field'.
- The individual audio files stored in the computer will be coded as, for example, 'DS-1' (for 'Doctoral Study # 1'). The numbers are merely to help the researcher keep track of the number of interviews done at the specific stages.
- Data will be retained by the principal investigator for at least five years, and will be destroyed after the completion of the study.
- Beyond the expected 5 years, the longer-term arrangements are for disposing the data via using the most up to date and reliable software data eraser programme available at the time of disposal.

Who is funding and organising the research?
This research is self-funded and is organised by the Research Institute for Social Sciences, Keele University for the purposes of obtaining candidature into the Professional Doctorate in Education (International) programme.

What if there is a problem?
If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you may wish to speak to the researcher(s) who will do their best to answer your questions. You should contact
Trina Tan on +65 96518139 (mobile) or t.l.l.tan@keele.ac.uk .

Alternatively, if you do not wish to contact the researcher(s) you may contact
Dr Sally Findlow, Email: s.findlow@keele.ac.uk

If you remain unhappy about the research and/or wish to raise a complaint about any aspect of the way that you have been approached or treated during the course of the study please write to Nicola Leighton who is the University's contact for complaints regarding research at the following address:-

Nicola Leighton
Research Governance Officer
Research & Enterprise Services
Dorothy Hodgkin Building
Keele University
ST5 5BG
E-mail: n.leighton@uso.keele.ac.uk
Tel: 01782 733306

Keele University

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: *The being and becoming of a professional counsellor in Singapore- Reflection of graduates' learning.*

Name and contact details of Principal Investigator: *Trina Tan +65 96518139 (mobile) or t.l.l.tan@keele.ac.uk .*

Please tick box if you agree with the statement

1.	I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated July 2016 (version no DS1) for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions	☐
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time	☐
3.	I agree to take part in this study.	☐
4.	I understand that data collected about me during this study will* be anonymised before it is submitted for publication.	☐
5.	I understand that although data will be anonymised because of my role it may be possible that I could be identified in reports and publications*	☐
6.	I agree to the interview being audio/video recorded*	☐
7.	I agree to allow the dataset collected to be used for future research projects*	☐
8.	I agree to be contacted about possible participation in future research project*	☐

_____   _____   _____
Name of participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____
Researcher   Date   Signature

Keele University

CONSENT FORM
(for use of quotes)

Title of Project: *The being and becoming of a professional counsellor in Singapore- Reflection of graduates' learning.*
Name and contact details of Principal Investigator: *Trina Tan +65 96518139 (mobile) or t.l.l.tan@keele.ac.uk*

Please tick box if you agree with the statement

1.	I agree for my quotes to be used	☐
2.	I do **NOT** agree for my quotes to be used	☐
3.	I understand that although data will be anonymised because of my role it may be possible that I could be identified in reports and publications*	☐

_____   _____   _____
Name of participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____
Researcher   Date   Signature

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