Volume 1: Contents

Tables and figures

Chapter One

Introduction to the research

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the topic of the counsellor placement, positions this concept within the counselling field and outlines the thesis statement. The motivation for the research is explained and a rationale for the project is provided.

Counselling is a purposeful activity, within which counsellors provide opportunities for client reflection, leading to understanding and positive change (Bor and Watts, 2017; Westagaard, 2017). Three main organisations oversee the work of counsellors in the UK: The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy [BACP], the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy [UKCP], and the Counselling Psychotherapy Division of the British Psychological Society [BPS] (Bond, 2015a). Each of these professional organisations has a particular membership profile, a specific code of practice, and differing terms and policies, with the BACP, the largest of these bodies, representing counsellors and a wide spectrum of interests (Feltham, 2015a).

The BACP currently represents over 44,000 members, with this number increasing annually (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy [BACP] (BACP, 2016a) and in exploring the role of the counsellor placement in facilitating early practice, this research takes its lead from the BACP's fundamental premise that counsellors should be trained (BACP, 2013a; 2013b) and registered (BACP, 2016b), and follows this organisation's pathway for training, practice, and supervision. As the BACP is underpinned by an ethical framework (BACP, 2010a; 2016c) which informs the practice of each member of the organisation and frames the use of counselling skills, therapeutic services, and corresponding research (BACP, 2014; 2016c), this also provides a context for the research. Furthermore, BACP best practice initiatives support a commitment to enhance and sustain good counselling practices for the thousands of people in the UK who regularly seek help from a BACP professional counsellor to address life issues (BACP, 2016c).

Such life stressors and psychological distress are not new phenomena, as throughout the ages, people from all walks of life have experienced times of difficulty. Consequently, therapeutic interventions have developed significantly over the last 200 years, evolving particularly rapidly during the twentieth century (Aldridge, 2014). This evolution heralded a praxis of transformation as the concept of counselling was founded by Carl Rogers in the 1940's when

he challenged the prevailing medical model by changing emphasis from the 'treatment' to the 'client' (Rogers, 1961; Ballantine-Dykes, et al., 2014).

Since this time, counselling has continued to develop and today the profession of counselling supports people who seek help when difficult life circumstances create uncertainty and vulnerability (Bond, 2015a), leading McLeod to describe counselling as a cultural intervention with a creative simplicity which has improved the quality of life "of millions" (McLeod, 2013b, p.4). Nonetheless, whilst counselling plays a significant role in supporting members of society whose life is hampered by mental, physical, or social handicap (Oldale and Cooke, 2015; BACP 2016d), there is no universal definition of counselling (Feltham, 2006). Resultantly, various definitions are offered, each representing differing aspects of the counselling process (McLeod, 2013b), with counsellors themselves finding it difficult to provide a definition, preferring instead to describe the process of counselling and what they do as therapists within their day-to-day work (Aldridge, 2014).   Against this background, the most appropriate definition identified for the purpose of this research is the current definition of counselling offered by the BACP:

> "A range of talking therapies, delivered by
> trained practitioners who work with people,
> short or long-term, to help bring about effective
> change or enhance wellbeing"
>
> (BACP Website Home Page, 2017)

This definition however, does not acknowledge the confusion which can arise between diverse counselling traditions and contexts, nor does it address current debates concerning similarities and differences within and between psychological disciplines (Reeves, 2015a).

1.2 Counselling and the counselling process

According to Cooper (2015b) and Bor and Watts (2017), counsellors offer a valuable service by walking alongside a person in distress so that their client can discover purpose, find direction, and make meaning of their everyday lives.   To this end, when learning about counselling and the counselling process, trainees are rapidly made aware of the many orientations of counselling, as the profession now encompasses a variety of modalities, each with specific views of human nature and interaction (Oldale and Cooke, 2015) and each

capable, in different ways, of enabling a client to explore areas of their life causing them concern (McLeod, 2013b; Evans, 2015). Nelson-Jones (2015) describes these counselling processes as a relationship, a repertoire of interventions, and a psychological process and McLeod goes so far as to describe counselling as a "social institution" (McLeod, 2003, p.4).

A multitude of counsellors therefore work across a variety of settings and are accessible to the public through a range of services including the NHS, voluntary organisations, employee assistance programmes, and educational establishments, with many counsellors also working in private practice and/or pursuing portfolio careers, which can include a combination of counselling, training, placement co-ordination, and/or supervision. Within these professions, the therapeutic contact and counselling interventions that constitute counselling are constantly evolving, with an ever-increasing and varied client base (Sanderson, 2015). Moreover, the type of problems presented to therapists of today are unspecific and vary from superficial to issues of great breadth and depth.

Accordingly, wherever they work, counsellors are faced each day with a diverse range of people of various ages and backgrounds who are experiencing a wide range of issues. These problems come in many forms, such as: emotional issues; loss and bereavement; financial matters; current/past life events; issues arising from health conditions or chronic pain; anxiety; depression; communication problems and/or relationship issues; work/life balance; employment/unemployment issues; redundancy; frustration or dissatisfaction with life; inter-personal matters; the impact of bullying; issues of difference and diversity; negative thought processes and/or unhelpful patterns of behaviour. Many of these, and other disorders presented to counsellors, do not qualify for inclusion in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders [DSM] (Feltham, 2014) and sometimes clients who present for counselling cannot even clearly articulate what it is that is making them feel anxious and/or depressed (BACP, 2015a). Paradoxically, however, it is not necessary to be in, or approaching, crisis to engage in counselling, as a client can be seeking to improve feelings of wellbeing, or wish to see balance restored within his/her life.

When a person engages with a counsellor, a contract is negotiated and specific periods of time are set aside to explore identified areas of concern to the client (BACP, 2015a). The practitioner will often commit to seeing their client for a specified number of sessions, in order to offer therapeutic support, and this arrangement can be short-term, approximately six sessions, longer-term or even open-ended (Cancer Information and Support Services [CISS],

2015). Counsellors are trained to listen non-judgementally and unlike talking to a relative or friend about issues of concern, a counsellor is in a professional role and is impartial, circumstances which can combine to help a client work towards finding their own solutions (BACP, 2015a). Counsellors are also taught how to acknowledge, accept, and sit with emotions (Reeves, 2015b; BACP, 2015a) and are trained to work with the primary purpose of helping their clients feel less depressed and anxious and/or reach specified goals (Nelson-Jones, 2012). Alongside this training, early forerunners of therapeutic intervention such as Sigmund Freud (Kanzer, 1981) and Carl Rogers (Rogers, 1961) promoted the therapeutic relationship as crucial to positive outcomes within helping encounters (Lambert and Ogles, 2004).

Counselling is therefore not advice giving, advocacy, being told what to do or just a friendly chat; a BACP counsellor, as a trained practitioner, is skilled in forming a therapeutic relationship and using this as a working alliance (BACP, 2016d). A counsellor can also help a client develop an understanding of their sense of self, can assist a client in relating better to others and will be keen to encourage a client to arrive at their own solutions (O'Driscoll, 2013). Moreover, counselling supports individuals through its role as a helping activity which focuses on the needs and aspirations of a client (McLeod, 2003; Trower, Jones and Dryden, 2015), with the aims of counselling differing according to the overarching therapeutic modality. Counselling objectives can therefore be diverse and can include promoting self-awareness, empowerment, restitution, forgiveness, problem-solving, the acquisition of social skills, and/or goal-seeking (McLeod, 2003; Nelson-Jones, 2015).

There are times, nevertheless, when the opportunities and challenges of counselling are not always clear, as counselling takes place in a private environment and the content of each counselling session is confidential. Accordingly, little is published about what actually takes place as part of this activity (Feltham, 2015b), a situation which has led to an element of mystique surrounding the concept of counselling (Lambert, 2007b) and prompted McLeod (2016) to emphasise that the profession needs to better understand how non-practitioners perceive therapy. Notwithstanding this, counselling is now seen as more available, acceptable, and accessible than was previously the case, with a more visible presence within mainstream health care (McLeod, 2013a; 2016). Consequently, the field of counselling is increasingly better understood, is no longer quite the mysterious activity it once was (Hough, 2014), and is becoming more discernible, though many writers also recognise that counselling

is currently under scrutiny, as its core concepts and training criteria are being reassessed as discussions regarding future regulation continue (Bond, 2015a; Reeves, 2015c).

Alongside this, whilst 'talking therapies' have become more commonplace in society and despite the acceptance, popularity, and longevity of counselling as a productive helping intervention (McLeod, 2013b), no definitive statistics exist as to how many counsellors are practising in the UK (Feltham, 2014). Estimates indicate, however, that most of the 100,000 practitioners delivering therapeutic services describe their work as counselling (Aldridge, 2014), with Feltham (2012) and more recently the BACP (2017), suggesting there are in excess of 70,000 practising counsellors who promote understanding and bring insight to clients who are struggling to function.

Counsellors, however, are not medically trained, do not tend to diagnose or attach labels to their clients (McLeod, 2013b) and are not required to hold a degree in psychology (Hough, 2014). Moreover, until recently, counsellors have not been part of a registration process, although this situation is changing, as the British Psychological Society, the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy [UKCP] and the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy [BACP] all now publish registers listing approved practitioners (Bond, 2015a; BPS, 2015). This system is managed through Accredited Voluntary Register arrangements which involve professional bodies seeking approval from a Department of Health scheme, managed by an independent body answerable to Parliament [the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care] (BACP, 2016b; Bond, 2015a; University of Wales, Trinity Saint David [UWTSD], 2015). Whilst this move is viewed by the profession as a step towards greater professionalism, the process is, nevertheless, not without its problems as the BACP, for example, has only recently established a register and as registration is voluntary, with the uptake for inclusion on this register slow (BACP, 2016b), questions have been raised regarding the introduction (Atkinson, 2012; Bowes, 2012) and efficacy (BACP, 2016b) of this process.

Positive changes are occurring, however, as although counselling remains unregulated through Government legislation, it is becoming more transparent since the anticipated statutory regulation of the profession has been placed interminably at the forefront of the advancement of the counselling field (Feltham, 2014). Nonetheless, Aldridge and Pollard highlight confusion which can exist around the identity of counselling in noting that whilst 57% of counsellor training courses use the term 'counsellor' others use titles such as 'psychotherapist', 'analyst',

or 'therapist' (Aldridge and Pollard, 2005), a finding which demonstrates how counselling, as a profession, has difficulty in defining itself and consequently struggles to negotiate relationships with sister professions (Aldridge, 2014).

Resultantly, the discourse around counselling has changed greatly over the last three decades as counselling emerges as a profession fighting to forge a distinct identity separate from, yet related to, other helping professions (Gibson, et al., 2010; Urofsky, 2013). This aim is hampered by indistinct definitions which create a blurred identity of counselling; an ambiguity nurtured through counselling's development as an alternative to the work of psychologists and psychiatrists (Gladding, 2012). Moreover, whilst counselling and psychotherapy are commonly used, even by the BACP, as umbrella terms to cover a range of talking therapies delivered by trained practitioners (BACP, 2016d), there is a distortion of boundaries evidenced between counselling and psychology (Reeves, 2013). This is viewed by McLeod (2003) as understandable, since counselling emerged within the context of contemporary society. Other writers, however, see clear distinctions as necessary since counselling and psychology hold differing views of the world and have different perspectives and understanding of human experience (Reeves, 2013).

Consequently, misunderstandings caused by grouping together psychological interventions can result in confusion if all helping professionals are seen as belonging to the same frame of reference, since they can operate within differing conceptual frameworks and are guided by different learning environments, culture, and ethical codes (Tribe and Morrisey, 2015). Titles given to mental health professionals and definitions of the roles of those who work within helping environments are particularly prone to misinterpretation, as these are often banded together, and/or their titles used interchangeably, although there are distinct differences within their training and roles.

1.3 Counsellor training in the UK

Having addressed counselling processes and practice, it is necessary to consider the training undertaken by counsellors who deliver therapeutic services.

As modern society continues to evolve, so more and more individuals choose to engage in counselling to address distress caused by stressful times in their lives and whilst there are no legal minimum qualifications necessary to practise as a counsellor in the UK (Folkes-Skinner, 2011), this helping activity is mainly carried out by trained professionals (Hough, 2014). This

has given rise to a plethora of training programmes, in many guises, with over 570 counsellor training courses generating and replenishing these practitioners (Aldridge and Pollard, 2005). More specific statistics indicate that 50% of such courses are delivered within university settings (Carver, 2013; BACP, 2015b), although current trends allude to a significant shift of emphasis as the BACP has recently expressed concern over several planned closures of counselling courses within universities (Therapy Today, 2016a; BACP, 2017). Nevertheless, with many courses of various stature, confusion exists over levels of training competence (Bond, 2015a).

The significance of equitable training within the counselling field and the role of training in raising standards is acknowledged by the BACP and translated into a core objective of the organisation which commits to promoting training standards for counsellors, thus improving counselling for the benefit of clients (BACP, 2015c). A key development in the counselling/counsellor training field is recognised as a vital component in achieving this identified BACP aim, as in 2013, the Quality Assurance Agency introduced the first benchmarks for Counselling and Psychotherapy to assist Higher Education providers in designing and delivering counselling programmes. The focus within this document is on courses leading to a Bachelor's Degree [Honours] and a Master's qualification (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education [QAA], 2013; UWTSD, 2014).

Consequently, the BACP outlines professional standards of training for BACP members within their document entitled 'Accreditation of Training Courses' (BACP, 2013a) and some institutions foresee that, in the future, counsellor training could be set at a minimum of an Honours Degree, although training could be at undergraduate level for new entrants to the profession and at Master's level for aspiring counsellors who already hold an undergraduate degree and some experience (UWTSD, 2014).

Despite these initiatives, however, counsellor training today comes in many forms and guises (Bayne and Jinks, 2010). Training to be a counsellor can involve three to four years of study (Nelson-Jones, 2015), or take even longer, depending upon the individual and the specific pathway he/she follows, since as Aldridge (2014) points out, counsellor training can range from basic vocational courses to PhD. This training includes not only cognitive processing, it also encompasses embodied aspects of self and encourages trainees to explore and reflect upon their own experiences whilst relating these to theory. In this way, emerging

practitioners are critically-aware, self-reflective, and capable of improving the well-being of their clients (University of Edinburgh, 2015).

The BACP website currently recommends that trainees pursue a three-stage route for counsellor training, starting with an 'Introduction to Counselling' course which provides a general overview of counsellor training. The next BACP endorsed stage is a 'Certificate in Counselling Skills' where students gain a deeper theoretical understanding of counselling and further develop basic counselling skills (BACP, 2017a). This learning constitutes entry requirements for the next stage of training, which should be at a minimum level of a 'Diploma in Counselling'. Furthermore, whilst the BACP does not yet advocate degree programmes on the training page of their website, Diploma courses accredited by the BACP must facilitate a minimum of 400 contact hours, encourage the development of analytical skills, promote a range of transferable employability skills, and offer a strong practical skills base (BACP, 2015d).

As therapeutic practice is a vital component of the skills acquisition necessary to become a counsellor, counsellor training has to be academically robust and contain a strong experiential element (Oldale and Cooke, 2015) since an important part of developing a practical skills base is the opportunity for therapeutic contact (Nelson-Jones, 2015; UWTSD, 2015). This practical element is particularly important as the award of a diploma in counselling enables a practitioner to practice within areas such as the NHS, education forums, the third sector, and private practice (UWTSD, 2014). Moreover, immediately after qualification, there is pressure to work towards BACP accredited status and to be eligible to apply for this, a practitioner must meet stringent criteria, including further evidence of practice experience. To begin their route to qualification and BACP accreditation, trainees are therefore keen to evidence face-to-face contact with clients from an early stage of training.

To facilitate this early practice element of counsellor training, there is a BACP requirement for supervised client contact as a core element of counselling courses (Nelson-Jones, 2015; BACP, 2015b) and in South West Wales, this is often undertaken within an external agency, known as a counsellor 'placement'.

1.4 Counsellor placements

Placements constitute an integral part of many professional courses in Higher Education, taking on various forms depending upon their discipline (Ryan, Toohey and Hughes, 1996) and the development of the counsellor placement, like many other concepts, is linked to research into its role, function, and relationships with interconnected systems (Oldale and Cooke, 2015).

In counselling, the placement is linked with the systems of training and supervision as these three concepts form the foundation of counsellor development and practice. The current research explores the facilitation of the practice element of training within placements described by Kahr (2006, p.195) as "one of the most crucial components of any training course in mental health", which can "become the vital vertebral spine of the training experience" (Kahr, 2006, p.201). Moreover, as involvement with a placement usually starts at an early stage of training and continues throughout [and often beyond] the qualification process, it is essential that these placements are visible, understood, and adequately supported by training and supervision.

As long ago as 1977, Mearns explained how the counselling concept of a placement derived from the field of social work where it related to trainees who were 'placed' into a practice situation (Mearns, 1977) and today, the axiom 'placement' is widely understood within the counselling profession as a vehicle for early therapeutic opportunities and accepted as integral to counsellor training (Oldale and Cooke, 2015). Nonetheless, despite its common use, the term 'placement', does not appear frequently within counselling research and the thinness of material relating specifically to the counsellor placement made a working definition initially elusive. Mearns did express a preference towards renaming the counsellor placement 'counselling opportunities' (Mearns, 1977), yet this idea never developed, and beyond this, the only pertinent definition found during the initial stages of this research was of a generic work placement: "A temporary job you do as part of a course of study to get practical training and experience" (English Dictionary Definition, 2013). Whilst this is relevant to the counsellor placement, later in the research process the following definition, which is more specific to the counselling field, was offered by Oldale and Cooke:

> "A placement is work-based experience where trainees gain vocational or 'on the job' experience. For counselling and psychotherapy trainees this usually means taking an unpaid role in an organisation offering therapeutic services"

(Oldale and Cooke, 2015 p.xiv)

This definition suggests how the relationship between the counsellor placement and counsellor training is maintained, with placement experience widely acknowledged as an initial step towards gaining the necessary therapeutic practice to become a professional counsellor (BACP, 2015b; Oldale and Cooke, 2015). It is as part of this placement experience that training in theory, therapeutic practice, and the art of reflecting upon self and work consolidate for trainees and many other professions, such as those within the field of education, medical professions, and those engaged in social work, gain experience in much the same way prior to qualification. The difference is, however, that within these professions a trainee can learn from actively witnessing the work of an experienced associate and can be accompanied and supervised by a more senior colleague[s] in their initial contact with service-users. In contrast, as counselling interactions are private and confidential, it is not usual for early therapeutic encounters to be witnessed directly by a third party (Oldale and Cooke, 2015). Counsellor trainees therefore usually experience their first real therapeutic encounter within a placement setting and work directly and unaccompanied with their clients from the outset. As a facilitator of necessary skills practice within the counselling field, the counsellor placement is therefore anecdotally positioned as one of the critical links between learning and practice, with early client-work supported by supervision.

1.5 Counsellor supervision and the placement process

Counselling supervision links counsellor training, practice, and the placement, is a key learning environment within the profession, and is part of a practitioner's professional life throughout their career (Despenser, 2011; Owen-Pugh and Jewson, 2015). Supervision is therefore of relevance to this research as career-long commitment to supervision usually starts within work at a counsellor placement.

As all counsellors, regardless of qualification and/or experience, must engage in supervision, most professional bodies in the UK cite the supervision of client-work as an ethical requirement (BACP, 2016c). The supervision of counsellors is therefore complex, with

numerous supervision models and a plethora of definitions. A definition which encapsulates the concept of supervision for trainees was penned by Inskipp and Proctor:

> "Supervision is a co-operative, facilitating
> process with a twofold aim. The first is to
> enable the student or worker 'being supervised'
> to develop a working process. The second,
> related, aim is to offer a forum in which the
> worker renders an account of herself in order to
> assure herself, and anyone else who may be
> requiring her to be accountable, that she is
> practising responsibly"
>
> Inskipp and Proctor (Personal communication
> cited in Henderson, Holloway and Millar, 2014,
> p.17)

Within the placement context, supervision is invaluable as a normative, formative, restorative, and educative process (Hawkins and Shohet, 2012; Henderson, Holloway and Millar, 2014; Page and Wosket, 2015) and can assist a trainee with the negotiation of professional relationships, demystify early client-work, and unravel theoretical and ethical concepts (Oldale and Cooke, 2015).   In these ways and as evidenced within Inskipp and Proctor's definition, the relationship between supervision, training, and placements is crucial to the training of counsellors and placement processes.

In summary, trainee counsellors have to participate in therapeutic activity which involves specific, supervised therapeutic experience (Bernard and Goodyear, 2014) and resultantly, current relationships between counsellor training, supervision, and placements exist, in part, because of the BACP recommendation that, alongside academic work, trainees complete a minimum of 100 hours supervised practice prior to qualification (BACP, 2013b.B4.1; Nelson-Jones, 2015; BACP, 2015b). Parallel to this, quintessentially, those members of society who would most benefit from counselling, are often those who cannot afford it (Heaney, 2012). Consequently, more counselling placements materialise annually in the voluntary sector and year by year these organisations work with ever-expanding client groups, within widening service settings, and with increasingly complex issues (Armstrong and McLeod, 2003; Oldale and Cooke, 2015). The majority of counselling in such placements is undertaken on an unpaid basis (Satori, 2011; Oldale and Cooke, 2015) and it is to these agencies that trainees traditionally turn for a placement offering practice experience.

1.6 Counselling, counsellor training and placements in Wales

This research focusses on training and placement experiences within Wales and there are significant issues relevant to the Principality, as every geographic area has a particular demographic profile where economic and social mapping influence the nature and context of counselling services (Oldale and Cooke, 2015). Firstly, the current health system in Wales differs from that in England, where, following a comprehensive spending review in 2007 the 'Improving Access to Psychological Therapies' [IAPT] programme was introduced to support the NHS in delivering National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence [NICE] approved interventions to clients suffering from depression and anxiety. IAPT's purpose is to offer early, realistic, and routine therapeutic intervention (Department of Work and Pensions [DWP] 2013; 2017). Whilst these initiatives impact upon psychological services in England however, there is no current legislation to introduce IAPT in Wales.

Secondly, in addition to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education benchmarks for Counselling and Psychotherapy (QAA, 2013), the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Together for Mental Health' is a ten-year plan which raises the profile of mental wellbeing and places strong emphasis on high standard, evidence-based training for those who aspire to deliver psychological therapies (Welsh Assembly Government [WAG], 2012; BACP, 2015c; UWTSD, 2015). This could, eventually, impact upon the development of mental health services and counsellor placements in this area.

To date, however, whilst recently released statistics indicate that for those living in Wales who are in employment, average weekly earnings fall between 84.9% to 91.1% of the UK national average (Gov.Wales, 2015), unemployment is described as chronic (Beatty and Fothergill, 2005; Dicks, 2014) and generational (Shooter, 2008; DWP, 2015), with mental health issues not only regularly presented at GP surgeries in Wales, but also cited as one of the most common reasons for claiming health-related benefits within the Principality (DWP, 2015).

In addition, Welsh Assembly Government statistics identify that during one month alone [December, 2015] the number of people waiting over eight weeks for access to mental health diagnostic services increased from 13,407 to 15,208, whilst during the same period, the number of prospective clients on waiting lists for specific therapeutic services for more than fourteen weeks rose from 2,914 to 3,013 (WAG, 2016). This situation puts pressure on the NHS and means that due to the socio-economics and demographics of Wales there is consistent

demand for free counselling within communities. Moreover, whilst a limited number of counsellor placement opportunities occur within the NHS and Further/Higher Education, placement opportunities primarily exist within the volunteer or not-for-profit sector (Swansea Council for Volunteer Service, [SCVS], 2015). In this way, as noted by Akhurst (2013), psychological help within local communities opens doors for people who might otherwise be unable, reluctant or not eligible for, traditional psychological services.

Alongside this stands the necessity for trainee counsellors to accrue client hours for qualification, creating and maintaining a supply and demand equation which sustains the practice of trainees offering their services free of charge within counsellor placements. Consequently, whilst offering trainees an opportunity to work with clients, these placement organisations also make a valuable contribution to the emotional health and wellbeing of communities (SCVS, 2015), creating a discourse about whether the primary development role of a placement is the delivery of therapeutic services or its role as an educative tool (Serenity, 2013; SCVS, 2015). Oldale and Cook (2015) hold that in placement work, the development of the trainee should be the principal focus, however, pressure to keep waiting lists to a minimum can create a situation contrary to this view. Moreover, long waiting lists, alongside poor employment opportunities for counsellors, can result in trainees continuing to work, unpaid, in placements long after they have qualified; a situation which has further stilted the educative development of the placement within this area.

Accordingly, despite the benefits therapeutic placements bring to the NHS and communities, this existing practice model is not without problems for trainees, course providers, placement providers, and supervisors. Firstly, finding a satisfactory counselling placement has been a long-standing difficulty for counsellor trainees, a situation supported by Fanthome (2004), who confirms that placements can be hard to acquire within most employment spheres. Trainees cannot therefore assume, that because they can offer a specialised service for no cost, within communities where free counselling is desperately needed (Griffiths, 2010), there will be a queue of organisations waiting to offer them a placement. The opposite is actually the case, as there are usually far more prospective volunteers chasing each placement than places on offer (Fanthome, 2004; SCVS, 2015). Nonetheless, whilst these views are prevalent within writing on placements, only scant research was found which supported or challenged these views.

Secondly, there is a perception that as most volunteer organisations are symptom-specific, they cannot offer a generic service, making it difficult for trainees to experience a variety of presenting issues and engage with a diverse range of clients. Resultantly, exposure to different clients and issues, an essential element of balanced learning, can be restricted (Oldale and Cooke, 2015; UWTSD, 2015). Only limited research was found which addressed these observations.

Thirdly, stands the insight offered by Owen-Pugh and Jewson (2015), that, as differing workplace settings proffer different combinations of learning and development, trainees' experiences vary according to the type and setting of their placement environment (Oldale and Cooke, 2015). This situation is compounded because the wide range of placement organisations makes contact with these agencies difficult and neither the trainee, nor their course provider or supervisor, has much control in ensuring that trainees are subjected to equitable, safe, supervised placements, where they can accrue their practice hours and experience a variety of appropriate clients (Izzard, 2003). Again, little research was found which supported or challenged these conceptions for counsellor placements in this area.

As can be seen from foregoing discussion, despite a lack of empirical evidence, problems are perceived to exist in outsourcing the practice element of counsellor training and these mainly centre on difficulties in securing a placement, lack of generic opportunities, and issues of contact, equality, and quality. Consequently, in response to these professed challenges of the dominant model, trials of different ways of offering counsellor placements have taken place in other areas.

One such initiative is a more integrated model, where the practical difficulties in relation to the availability, suitability, and communication channels surrounding counsellor placements have led some universities in other areas to move away from traditional outsourcing of practice elements of training by offering students a placement alongside their course (Nelson-Jones, 2015; UWTSD, 2015). As this training/practice alignment is under-represented within academic literature, it is difficult to assess whether this model addresses the difficulties previously outlined.

Resultantly, whether placements are outsourced or operate alongside a counselling course, in these days of evidence-based practice (Bower, 2010) and practice-based evidence (Fernando and Minton, 2011) it is essential that placement experiences are the subject of personal and

professional reflection, yet little is known about how they facilitate early practice. Moreover, as the counsellor placement sits at the heart of the counselling profession in general and counsellor training and development in particular (BACP, 2013a), most of those connected with present-day counselling practice and/or training are, or have been, involved, in some way, with a counsellor placement and would therefore welcome increased research in this area.

1.7 Context of the thesis – the role of the placement in facilitating early practice

Counselling and counsellor training are at a juncture, where their values and concepts are being challenged and re-appraised (Claringbull, 2010; Reeves, 2015c; Samuels, 2016). Consequently, counsellor training has a commitment to provide those entering the profession with awareness and understanding of a complex body of knowledge, and has a responsibility to ensure that trainees are equipped for proficient and practical skills' application (QAA, 2013).

It is against this background and within the context of the process of counselling, the training and supervision of counsellors and the early experiential practice of trainees that this research developed. The ongoing call for the standardisation of counsellor education within the UK (Bond, 2015a; Reeves, 2015c) also adds weight to this research as to this end, the BACP's 'Accreditation of Training Course' criteria define and classify the specific aspects an accredited counsellor training course needs to fulfil (BACP, 2013a). These guidelines represent a significant move towards more definitive standards of quality and competence for the counselling profession (BACP, 2013a; Bond, 2015b), with several specific areas of particular importance identified. This research is, therefore, underpinned by the rationale that practice placements are one of six key elements named within this document as essential in satisfying counsellor training requirements. In line with this reasoning and as hundreds of trainees undertake counsellor training every year (van Ooijen, 2015), there is an ethical imperative to discover more about the practice element of counsellor training.

Accordingly, this thesis will present research undertaken on the developing role of the counsellor placement in facilitating early counselling practice within South West Wales. This is a particularly important concept, as the early practice experience of counsellor trainees takes place parallel to the formal academic learning of counselling theory, and

alongside the development of relational counselling skills, and therefore necessitates vigorous training, placement, and supervision processes. This has led to an identified need to conduct more research into how training (McLeod, 2015; Sackett and Lawson, 2016) and supervision (Avent, et al., 2015; Wallace and Cooper, 2015; Neuer-Colburn, 2016) support early practice.

Moreover, Hatcher, et al. (2012) note how practicum training has become increasingly salient in professional psychology. This is evidenced within literature, as much of the research undertaken on early practice and placements relates predominately to the skills training/practicum experiences of psychology students, with much of this relating to training outside the UK. Little attention has consequently been given to early practice experiences of counsellors following the BACP route to qualification. Resultantly, whilst recognising differences in the training and practice of psychologists and counsellors, some of this wider literature aligns with the aims of the current research, often drawing attention to deficiencies of research into counsellor training and highlighting how counselling has to look to sister professions for guidance. For example, Pascual-Leone, et al., (2015), note contradictions within research literature, concurring with a review of published research conducted previously by Hill and Knox (2013) which led the researchers to advocate that further research needs to be undertaken so that practitioner training and supervision are better understood.

This assertion is welcomed by the profession in the UK and re-iterated on behalf of counsellor training by the BACP (BACP, 2015b), yet little counselling research is evidenced. Furthermore, as part of this identified need for increased research, Hatcher, Wise and Grus (2015) recognised that the importance of experiential practice to the training of counsellors and psychotherapists is gaining recognition. This, again, is not strongly evidenced within the counselling field in the UK and is particularly concerning because, as attention turns towards enhanced professionalism, so the quality of practice experience and the integration of placement elements within training will be subjected to greater scrutiny. Accordingly, the concept posited by Stahl, et al. (2009), and supported in more recent research by Hill, et al. (2015), again from research with psychologists, that in-depth learning emanates from direct experiences with clients, is also a recognised and integral component of the training, supervision, and development of BACP counsellors (Folkes-Skinner, 2011). This is not a new concept, as over fifteen years ago, Orlinsky, Botermans and Rønnestad (2001) conducted a large-scale study which sought the views of over 4,000 practitioners, recruited from fourteen

different countries, and found that direct experience with clients consistently ranked as one of the top three positive influences on professional development.

As evidenced by Orlinsky, Botermans and Rønnestad (2001), client contact has long been recognised as a vital part of counsellor development and learning. Nonetheless, despite this acknowledgement and a recent surge of interest in fledgling therapeutic encounters of psychologists (Hatcher, Wise and Grus, 2015), the counsellor placement, which usually facilitates early client contact for BACP counsellors and is where training, practice and supervision often integrate for the first time, remains under-represented within scholarly literature. It can therefore be deduced that evidenced research into the early practice of other health professionals is likely to have incurred resultant improvements within these elements of training, yet, paradoxically, a lack of research into the counsellor placement in the UK in general, and Wales in particular, may have hampered development and could indicate that the counsellor placement has not kept pace with progress within associated areas.

In addition to the lack of research evidenced for the early practice of counsellors, three current developments make this research particularly relevant. Firstly, the aim of the research, to explore how the counsellor placement facilitates early practice, aligns with the commitment of the counselling profession to strive for a more professional status through transparency, registration, and regulation (Feltham, 2014; BACP, 2016b). Secondly, as resultant heightened professionalism will lead to increased attentiveness towards all aspects of counselling and counsellor training (Hawkins, 2012a; BACP, 2015c, 2017), it is timely that this research raises awareness of placement processes. Thirdly, students often struggle to complete counselling hours necessary for qualification (Halifax, 2009a) and whilst in this area this work is usually undertaken in a placement external to counselling courses, developments in other areas have seen universities moving away from external practica to offer placements alongside counselling courses, although this training/practice alignment is also seldom explored within literature.

Given the centrality of the placement within counsellor training as identified by the BACP (BACP, 2013a), the lack of research into the counsellor placement could be a significant anomaly. This scarcity of research was evidenced by a thorough examination of relevant publications, journals, research papers, conference presentations, the BACP dissertation data-base, and internet/intranet sources. The identification of this gap in literature is surprising given the research attention focussed on other areas associated with therapeutic

training such as supervision (Smith and Bird, 2013), mandatory personal therapy within training (von Haenisch, 2011; Chaturvedi, 2013), and personal development (Spencer, 2006; Moller and Rance, 2013), as not only do new studies regularly appear within these domains, calls for further research continue to be made. Subsequently, these areas are positioned at the forefront of therapeutic research and practice, whilst the placement aspect of counsellor education is much less in evidence.

In addition to this, the demonstration of core competence practice is a key component of counsellor training (BACP, 2013a), with more critical appraisals of the theory and practice of counselling identified as a priority (Loewenthal, 2015).

1.8 Structure of the thesis

This chapter introduced the topic of the counsellor placement and outlined the thesis statement. The motivation for the research was explained and a rationale for the project was provided. The remainder of the thesis will be presented in the following way.

Chapter Two will present a deeper discourse of the profession of counselling, through critically reviewing academic and non-academic literature from the fields of counselling, counsellor training, counsellor supervision, and counsellor placements, thus providing a foundation and context for the research and confirming the gap in knowledge which formulated a research question. Chapter Three will present methodological considerations wherein the qualitative research design, the constructionist/phenomenological research paradigm and research aims and objectives will be outlined. Ethical safeguards and issues of trustworthiness will also be considered.

Two distinct, yet linked, qualitative studies will then be addressed sequentially within separate chapters as Chapter Four presents Study One, which explores the current position to identify placement characteristics and experiences. Chapter Five is dedicated to Study Two which addresses possibilities for the future by considering the experience of offering a placement alongside a university counselling course. The thesis will conclude with a general discussion and draw conclusions in Chapter Six. As postulated by Faris and van Ooijen (2012), the world of counselling is full of terms often used interchangeably, although their actual meaning may

differ from the proposed interpretation. Key terms and concepts are therefore presented in Appendix 1.

Since the 'being' of the researcher impacts upon participants and the researcher is also influenced by the research and participants, each chapter ends with research reflexivity as the researcher considers and reflects upon the research process and the relationship between the research, the researcher, and participants.

1.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the research topic, positioned counsellor placements within the counselling field, outlined the thesis statement and made the conceptual framework of the research clear. The motivation for the research is explained and a rationale for the project is provided.

Table 1.1 explains the conceptual framework which provided order and structure for the research and summarises the main concepts of the introduction chapter:

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND SUMMARY OF RESEARCH CONCEPTS	
Concept	Theory and practice come together within a counselling placement
Gap in knowledge	Little published research is available regarding this subject
Ontology and epistemology	Research approached from a social construction/phenomenological worldview whenever possible
Thesis	Because client contact is an essential pre-requisite of BACP qualification, the profession needs to better understand how the placement facilities early practise
Rationale	1. Despite on-going debate as to the efficacy of counsellor training, hundreds of trainees engage with counsellor training each year (BACP, 2017). 2. The BACP Accreditation of Courses Criteria (2013a) stipulates that all trainees evidence 100 hours of supervised practice prior to qualification 3. The BACP (2013a) recommends that this training is not undertaken within private practice. This practice is therefore usually undertaken within a counsellor placement 4. Research has consistently confirmed that early client contact is one of the most pivotal of counsellor training (Duryee et al., 1996; Izzard, 2001; Ronnestad and Skovholt, 2003; Orlinsky and Ronnestad, 2005; Howard, et al., 2006; Foulkes-Skinner, 2011; Wardle and Mayorga, 2016) 5. The BACP (2013a) has identified the practice placement as one of six key concepts of counsellor training
Research studies Study One: The current position: Characteristics and experience of the counsellor placement	Study One sought to answer the first subsidiary question: "What are the characteristics and experiences which define the counsellor placement?" Study one consisted of two phases: Study One, Phase One: A qualitative content analysis of questionnaire data Study One, Phase One, was a qualitative content analysis of data derived from questionnaires which provided characteristic and experiential information regarding

	current placements.
Study Two: Future Possibilities – Placements alongside university counselling courses	Study One, Phase Two: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of interview data.
	The second phase in Study One offered an interpretative phenomenological analysis of data generated by semi-structured, face-to-face, interviews which explored lived experiences of placements.
	Study Two sought to answer the second subsidiary question: "How do staff and students describe their experience of a placement parallel to a counsellor course?"
	Study Two, Phase One: Report on a questionnaire for universities in other areas who offered trainees a placement alongside their counselling course
	The first phase of Study Two sought information regarding the experience of university personnel in other areas who offered students a counsellor placement alongside their training course. Despite a robust recruitment strategy, insufficient data were generated. Nevertheless, the context and conduct of this phase of research are reported to aid thematic unity.
	Study Two, Phase Two: A thematic analysis of focus group data
	The second phase of Study Two presented a thematic analysis of data emanating from two focus groups wherein staff and trainees piloting a placement alongside their counsellor training course considered their experience

Table 1.1: Conceptual framework and summary of research concepts

1.10 Researcher's reflections

By way of a personal history, I am a practicing counsellor [Primary Care, Employee Assistance Programmes, and private practice], a counselling supervisor in private practice and for a charity, and a registered, accredited member of the BACP. I am also a counselling lecturer, teaching on counselling programmes which range from Level Four Counselling Skills to a Post Graduate Diploma/MA in therapeutic practice.

Given that this study is about counsellor placements and I am a counsellor who has an involvement with placements at various levels, it is important for me to present my thoughts, feelings and areas of potential bias so that readers can evaluate my research and to not only ensure, but also demonstrate, that findings are embedded within data (Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006). Researcher's reflection sections therefore detail some of my reflexivity around the research process. As these are reflective accounts, the first-person singular is used to reflect upon my researcher role and consider issues which could have influenced the research processes.

The inspiration for this research arose from my formative training and current employment as, through my everyday work, I became aware of the relationship between the facilitation of early practice, where trainees need to gain experience, and prospective clients' need for free/low cost counselling. My work as a Primary Care counsellor meant I was experiencing first-hand, the difficulty of keeping waiting lists at a manageable level, whilst another area of my work involved supervising trainee counsellors for a charity where there was often a waiting list for trainee counsellors to take up placements. Alongside this, teaching on a Diploma/MA in Counselling Practice meant I was aware of the issues trainees face in securing appropriate and generic placements. These roles heightened my awareness of, and interest in, an important concept shared by many trainees entering the profession - early practice and the counsellor placement.

Since I started this research, progress has been evidenced by a comprehensive research trail within weekly entries in a journal recording my research journey. This research journal provided space not only for documentation, but also for reflection on the collection and analysis of data and charted my personal reactions throughout and beyond research processes (Creswell, 2007). Within this research journal the background to, and processing of, emerging developments, interpretations, high, and low points of research, were all evidenced. As a practising counsellor, ongoing reflection on my work is a normal part of my professional life and as Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggest, as well as attending to the experience of others, qualitative researchers also need to attend to their own experiencing. Accordingly, alongside the process and progress of my research I also penned a reflective journal which reflected my personal and professional excitement at starting this research, my experiences, and my curiosity about the concept of the counsellor placement. Entries in my journal led me to contemplate how much I already knew about counsellor placements and consider and acknowledge my own assumptions and perceptions. My reflective journal therefore started with me detailing my own involvement with counsellor placements, so that I was not only aware of, but could begin to address, potential for bias and went on to acknowledge the ontological and epistemological concepts framing my research.

Entries which started my reflective journal show that one of the most exciting parts of research for me is when I sit with a blank piece of paper and consider the journey ahead. This research was no exception to this and when I started to research the counsellor placement in 2010, I was enthusiastic, yet apprehensive, about starting on this process of exploration and enquiry. I

contemplated how, before that blank piece of paper became a relevant and coherent contribution to knowledge, I would personally experience many feelings of doubt, uncertainty, and confusion as well as moments of exhilaration, satisfaction, and learning. As this personal and professional excitement at starting a new project generated reflection, so my inquisitiveness about the counsellor placement, fueled by my own experiences, developed.

This professional and personal reflexivity added rigour to research through documenting my preconceptions, my proactive and reactive responses and my reflexivity, as well as decision-making processes, as far as reasonable and possible.

Chapter Two

Review of literature

2.1 Introduction

This chapter critiques relevant literature on the counsellor placement and the role placements play in the early practice of counsellor trainees. The gap in knowledge which led to the current research and the consequent research question are evidenced.

2.1.1 Structure of chapter

To position this research alongside the work of others, this chapter is organised in the following way. In the first section, literature regarding contemporary counselling, the need for counselling, the aims, processes, and effectiveness of counselling provide a background to the research. This is followed by an exploration of literature in relation to counsellor training. Literature regarding the main concept of this research – the counsellor placement – is then critiqued, before addressing counsellor supervision in relation to early practice. Consideration of integration and interaction between stakeholders of the counsellor placement leads to a rationale for this research.

2.1.2 Timing of the literature review

The timing of a literature review in qualitative research can differ, with some approaches recommending that a researcher delay reviewing the literature. One research approach, which sometimes recommends postponing the literature review to avoid imposing a researcher's preconceptions on data and analysis, is Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

The selection of a qualitative approach for this research is considered in the next chapter [Chapter Three], where the background to the decision not to use several other research approaches, including Grounded Theory, to explore the counsellor placement is explained. This process exposed the researcher to wide-ranging debate about the timing of a literature review, and endorsed her view that, for the current research, an early literature review would develop theoretical sensitivity, rigour, and innovative insight, as advocated by Giles, King and de Lacey (2013). Furthermore, an often-cited rationale for delaying a literature review is to ensure that emergent theory will be grounded in data, rather than forced to fit a pre-conceived theory (Giles, King and de Lacey, 2013), and the current research was not approached with an existing theory to prove, or disprove, but rather to allow concepts to emerge from data.

Consequently, an early literature review was conducted as preparation for a research proposal in 2010 to clarify the researcher's thoughts, and confirm this research as relevant and worthwhile. This contextualised the researcher's original interest in counselling placements, identified key writers in the field, and confirmed the sparsity of empirical research specifically related to this area of counsellor training. From this, the rationale for the research, the context, the research focus, and possible research questions began to formulate (Hutchinson, 1993). The preliminary literature review also enhanced research through a guiding, rather than a constraining, role (Glaser, 1992, Ramalho et al., 2015), which allowed the researcher to be informed by literature, whilst engaging researcher reflexivity [as described in various sections within this thesis]. This enabled her to build on previous knowledge, without assuming that concepts in the early review provided *the* answer (Strubing, 2007). This was achieved as ongoing reflection helped prevent prior knowledge distorting perceptions of the data, so that existing knowledge could be considered, without believing that these concepts represented a final truth (Urquhart, 2007). Leading on from this, rather than avoiding the literature, the researcher used it extensively from the start of the research period to broaden research horizons, and develop questions during data collection. Critical reviews of literature were therefore on-going, as newly published articles introduced fresh information.

Subsequently, there was a continual reading process, which was strengthened because the researcher kept the research focus in mind whilst regularly conducting searches on counselling and research related issues as part of her teaching and supervising roles. As the result of this activity, the literature review became an integrated part of the research, rather than something that ended after an initial reading of the literature (Wellington et al., 2005). Within this process, there were three particular stages of research when reviewing the literature was particularly helpful.

In the first instance, as described above, the initial literature review in 2010 facilitated engagement with ideas and research in relation to counsellor placements, helped position the study, and clarified its potential contribution to knowledge. As this research was conducted on a part-time basis, extending over six years, another literature review was conducted after data collection, in 2014. This process confirmed that the researcher's knowledge was up-to-date, and demonstrated awareness of relevant, current issues published throughout the period of the research.

The literature review was again updated and extended in 2017 in preparation for the final thesis. This further review of the literature had a slightly different focus, since, whilst still checking for recent publications, other factors were now important. There was an emphasis on relating findings to existing literature, and consideration of the implications of these to theory and practice. Significantly, as remaining current was a demanding challenge of this research, there was also confirmation that this research remained relevant within a changing and evolving context.

Notwithstanding this, whilst several researchers defend the use of literature from the beginning, and throughout a research period (Ridley, 2012; Giles, King and de Lacey, 2013), and the benefits of this concept are supported by growing evidence (Giles, King and de Lacey, 2013), there were advantages and disadvantages to this process. A positive advantage of conducting a literature review at several key points throughout the research was that the researcher was knowledgeable enough about the counsellor placement, and the proposed research, to satisfy the university requirement to present a research proposal to the University Ethics Committee at an early stage of the research. This acquisition of knowledge also meant that the researcher was able to participate in theoretical conversations at conferences and training events throughout the research period. Consequently, knowledge continued to grow, as the researcher remained in touch with new innovations within the research area.

A negative to this way of working with the literature was identified, however, in recognising that familiarity with the literature could block creativity. To address this, the researcher acknowledged the influence of prior knowledge during data analysis (Giles, King and de Lacey, 2013), and reflected that few researchers approach research without any knowledge, preconceptions, prejudice or bias regarding the research area (Mills, Bonner and Francis, 2006; Bryant, 2009). It was also important to note that the timing of a literature review can be influenced by the researcher's ontological and epistemological perspective and in line with the paradigmatic position outlined in the following chapter, in constructionist research a researcher is not neutral, as the researcher's voice is heard, and prior assumptions should not only be expected, but welcomed. Within this, it was accepted that knowledge drawn from the field can offer a useful guide, and acknowledged that a researcher is no more likely to adversely influence the research process by prior reading of the literature than from knowledge gained through professional experience, such as the educational/supervision activities identified earlier. The essential requisite for this, however, was that the researcher

maintained an open mind regarding cogency and relevance to the data. This helped ensure, through reflexivity, that rather than obstructing creativeness, familiarity enhanced researcher sensitivity to subtle nuances within the data, and she remained sufficiently theoretically sensitive to be able to formulate and conceptualise themes.

2.1.3 Literature review search strategy

The literature review includes information gathered from searches through the period June 2010 to February, 2017. Searches concentrated on academically authoritative sources such as the UWTSD intranet and digital library, research papers, and library databases including recognised writing sources such as peer-reviewed journals [in particular those dedicated to counselling, for example: Counselling Psychotherapy Research; Journal of Professional Counselling; the International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling], Government publications, research reports, and text books. Whilst much of this research was conducted electronically, selected books and journals were reviewed manually.

Library databases containing a compilation of bibliographic information, abstracts, and full text articles proved particularly helpful, including: The BACP website and dissertation data bases; Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC); Academic Research Premier; ProQuest; Education Journals; JSTOR; PsycARTICLES; PsycINFO; Springer journals; Times Digital Archive and Welsh Journals On Line. Searches started by searching for the subject area, with several search terms varied systematically to ensure that differences in American/British spelling were included. Search terms such as "Counsellor placement", "Counsellor training" and "Counsellor early practice" and other 'phrase searches' identified potential studies of interest. Research then narrowed to abstracts, titles, and/or work by identified authors shown to be influential in the field. Boolean 'positional operators' were used to combine terms and facilitated the use of '*and'* or *'not',* and '*nor'*. For example, it was possible to search for 'counselling' *and 'training'* and 'placements' which could yield publications in which these terms appeared, with the '*or'* operator producing references which contained either or both words. Truncated terms broadened the search to include terms beginning with the letters entered, regardless as to how they ended, using the truncating symbol '?*',* for example, 'Coun?' Background information, provided to contextualise the counsellor placement within counsellor training and development, is subjected to comparative analysis (Ridley, 2008), whilst material of more central importance merited in-depth scrutiny.

This is critiqued to move beyond description and comparative analysis, providing constructively critical exploration, backed by supportive evidence (Wallace and Wray, 2011).

Counselling text books were checked for appropriate content and reference lists in books and/or articles helped acknowledge standard texts. Research was evidenced on placements in general and other health workers' experiences of early practice, some of which is included as relevant for this research and underlines the lack of specific research on the early practice of BACP counsellors. This paucity of research on counsellor placement stakeholders justified research with this population to explore how the counsellor placement facilitates early practice.

2.2 The discipline of contemporary counselling

The counsellor placement is at the heart of the discipline of counselling as it is instrumental in facilitating early practice for the counsellors of tomorrow. To situate the counsellor placement within the counselling field, this section considers: definitions of counselling and related professions; counselling in the UK; professional counselling organisations [BACP], counsellor professionalism/accreditation and registration/regulation.

2.2.1 Definitions of counselling and related professions

To consider the concept and role of the counsellor placement, it is helpful to review definitions of counselling. As long ago as 1982, Timms and Timms noted difficulties in understanding and defining counselling, a notion which has prevailed for over thirty years (Timms and Timms, 1982), despite the counselling discourse changing greatly over this time. There is still no universal definition of counselling (Feltham, 2006) and whilst Bond (2015a) believes that moves towards eventual counsellor regulation have somewhat alleviated the need to agree a definition, the following simplistic description proffered by Feltham offers a starting point for those considering the concept of counselling:

> "Counselling, at its simplest, is about two
> people sitting down, in privacy, one listening
> intently and responding helpfully to the other
> expressing concerns about problems in living"

> (Feltham, 2010a, p.93)

Nevertheless, whilst this description and others (See: Feltham, 2004; 2010a) portray counselling simply as a private, confidential environment where a person can air issues and

another, '[some]one', can help them understand themselves better, is useful in grounding the activity of counselling, the delivery of professional counselling is far more complex. The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy [BACP] offers this definition:

> "Counselling and psychotherapy are umbrella
> terms that cover a range of talking therapies,
> delivered by trained practitioners who work
> with people, short or long term, to help
> bring about effective change or enhance
> wellbeing"
>
> (BACP Website Home Page, 2017)

This current BACP definition introduces the concept of a 'trained practitioner', rather than the imprecision of Feltham's '[some]one', yet avoids mention of counselling as a contracted activity. Whilst aware of this omission, as the training of counsellors is central to BACP principles (BACP, 2015b), this definition is adopted for the purpose of this research.

Taking a wider perspective, defining counselling in a multicultural and internationally relevant way has proved difficult (Stanard, 2013), as counselling is a rapidly changing environment (Reeves, 2015a) and varying definitions of counselling exist, each representing differing aspects of the counselling process (McLeod, 2013b). Consequently, counselling struggles to shape a distinctive identity aligned to, yet different from, other helping professions (Gibson, et al., 2010; Urofsky, 2013).

Nelson-Jones (2016) identifies more than six categories of practitioners who offer help to clients presenting with psychological concerns and counsellors constitute only a small percentage of mental health services (Aldridge, 2014). Counsellors can therefore be confused with other health-care professionals and misconceptions can lead to confusion about the discourse of the helping field. Such misunderstandings are fuelled by the lack of a collective definition of counselling with the terms 'counsellor', 'psychotherapist' and 'psychologist' often used interchangeably by the public, despite the British Psychological Society [BPS] (BPS, 2015) clearly differentiating between these professions.

The following definitions go some way towards clarifying this position.

Counselling Psychologist:

"Counselling Psychologists deal with a wide range of mental health problems concerning life issues including bereavement, domestic violence, sexual abuse, traumas and relationship issues. They understand diagnosis and the medical context to mental health problems and work with the individual's unique subjective psychological experience to empower their recovery and alleviate distress. Counselling psychologists are a relatively new breed of professional applied psychologists concerned with integration of psychological theory and research with therapeutic practice"

(BPS, 2015 [on-line])

Clinical Psychologist:

"A Clinical Psychologist deals with a wide range of mental and physical health problems including addiction, anxiety, depression, learning difficulties, and relationship issues. They may undertake a clinical assessment to investigate a client's situation. There are a variety of methods available including psychometric tests, interviews, and direct observation of behaviour. Assessment may lead to advice, counselling or therapy"

(BPS, 2015 [on-line])

A description from Bond (2015a) is offered to describe a counsellor:

Counsellor:

"A counsellor is someone who develops therapeutic knowledge and skills, provides appropriate conditions for their clients to be able to discuss life issues and is committed to work in the best interest of their clients"

(Bond, 2015a, Kindle:865)

Whilst boundaries between differing classes of therapy are correctly described by Woolfe as "opaque" (Woolfe, 2016, p.6), understanding different ways of assisting someone through a helping process is advantageous for professionals and clients (Bond, 2015a), as whilst the space between these professions could not be described as a chasm, there is a degree of polarisation, with some promoting differences between these positions (Aldridge, 2014; BPS, 2015). Moreover, whilst these groups share many professional aims, there is some tension between them and they tend to diversify through competition, as according to Timmermans (2008), one way in which professions succeed is through rivalry.

On the other hand, others advocate a more conciliatory position, seeking connectedness to close perceived gaps between different conceptual domains (Claringbull, 2010; Reeves, 2015a) or wishing to address intransigence within the delivery of therapeutic interventions (Cooper and Dryden, 2016). Reeves (2015a) sees differences between professional titles as less important and less deserving of attention than securing the future of all psychological therapies and calls on professional bodies to attend to similarities rather than variance (Reeves, 2015a). Nevertheless, identified differences between these professionals are noted in the context of the current research due to varying roles, training, and research activity within helping professions.

In this vein, Bond offers a clear précis of the ongoing debate about distinctions between helping professionals and their roles (Bond, 2010, pp.30-32). Moreover, the BPS noticeably tiers therapeutic work, with counselling defined as:

> "An umbrella term covering a range of talking therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy, psychodynamic therapy, and person-centred therapy. Counselling is a way of exploring the thoughts and feelings that may be causing difficulties in your life. There are a number of recognised but distinct methods of counselling. These have developed from a theoretical base but not necessarily one that incorporates psychology"

> (BPS, 2015 [on-line])

This definition is strengthened when related to the work of Counselling Psychologists who are defined by the BPS as a higher tier of professionals, "…practitioners who have undertaken further training and therefore offer counselling, but also have training in scientific areas of psychology" (BPS, 2015 [on-line]). These definitions reflect general acknowledgement

within the field that the term psychologist reflects significantly more training (Hough, 2014; UWTSD, 2015) as the academic status, content, and length of training of psychologists and counsellors differ considerably (Oldale and Cooke, 2015).

Alongside this and despite these helpful differentiations offered by the BPS, confusion is further compounded, because, in addition to not having a uniform definition for the activity of counselling (Feltham, 2006), there are no legal minimum qualifications necessary to practise as a counsellor in the UK (Folkes-Skinner, 2011). Paradoxically, the professional titles of Practitioner Psychologist, Registered Psychologist, Clinical Psychologist, and Counselling Psychologist, in stark contrast to a 'Counsellor', are restricted by law in that it is an offence to use these titles unless a practitioner is registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (BPS, 2015, HCPC, 2017).

This exploration of definitions of counselling and related professions aligns this research with BACP recommendations for counsellor training and practice and leads to a consideration of the context of counselling in the UK.

2.2.2 Counselling in the UK

An important point to consider is that mental health expenditure costs the UK economy an estimated £105 billion a year (HM Government, 2015) and nationally, mental ill-health is the second most common reason for seeing a GP (Lester and Glasby, 2010; HM Government, 2011). It is against this background that counselling in the UK has developed and continues to expand.

Counselling is described within literature as a discipline of breadth, depth, and complexity which is over 100 years old (Feltham and Palmer, 2015) emanating from, and situated within, the social sciences (Bond, 2015a). Counselling stems from theology, humanities, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and psychology (McLeod, 2007, 2013; Reeves, 2013) and psychoanalysis is widely believed to have been the first form of therapy until the 1930's, when new waves of helping interventions began to appear (McLeod, 2003). Sigmund Freud is therefore considered the grandparent of most schools of therapy practised today (Feltham, 2006). Nonetheless, whilst Freud is widely regarded as the initiator of the 'talking cure' (Faris and van Ooijen, 2012) and his ideas were copied, criticised, modified, and enhanced by many [For example, Jung, Adler, Ferenczi, and Rank], Reeves (2013) runs the argument that as

psychotherapy actually dates back to early holy and communal rituals in existence long before Freud's time, it may be impossible to trace the actual start of counselling as we know it today.

The tradition of counselling in Britain is purported to have emanated from the work of Hans Hoxter who transported American counselling concepts [including counsellor training] to Britain (Ivey, 1989; Feltham, 2006). Whilst Hoxter was instrumental in bringing counselling to this country, however, some inspiring work in the early embedding of counselling into British society was also undertaken by Rollo May, another American, credited with writing the first counselling text in 1920 (May, 1992). When counselling first surfaced in Britain early in the 20th century (Bond, 2015a), it was a concept linked to the voluntary sector and was promoted heavily by Rogers during the 1940's and beyond, a period defined by some as the "emergence of the person" (Reeves, 2013, p.16) as Rogers cultivated his person-centred ideologies. Rogers is widely held as one of the most active promoters of counselling in the USA and many counsellors in Britain also took their lead from his approach, with over 400 differing theoretical approaches now in existence (Feltham and Horton, 2006; Bayne and Jinks, 2010; Nelson-Jones, 2016).

Consequently, today, some of these modalities differ greatly from the approach upheld by Rogers. For example, in Wales, where this research was undertaken, there is an increasing demand, particularly within the NHS, for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy [CBT] which is perceived as time-effective and financially more viable than other approaches (Feltham and Palmer, 2015). Nevertheless, counselling is provided under a variety of different labels and is, in its various forms, widely accepted as a form of helping which can provide useful interactions of therapeutic value for an assortment of client concerns (Feltham and Palmer, 2015; Bor and Watts, 2017). McLeod (2003) uses an analogy from the business world to normalise the array of counselling modalities, explaining that counselling offers a variety of competing products, each offering the consumer, more or less, the same service.

Feltham and Palmer (2015) contend that it is not necessary to understand where counselling emanated from to contextualise this activity within today's society and as this research explores the counsellor placement as an element of contemporary counselling, this literature review concentrates on addressing the current counselling field. The foregoing brief outline of how counselling came to be part of life in Britain today is included, however, as the best way to understand counselling is to contextualise therapeutic interventions within history (Reeves, 2013). Those who therefore wish to consider the rich historical background and development

of counselling further are directed to the following resources which provide excellent material: McLeod (2003); Goldfried, et al. (2005) and, in particular, Feltham and Horton (2006, pp.4-5/6-10) provide excellent chronological tables defining significant events in the history of counselling.

In everyday life, the word 'counselling' suggests advice giving, which most agree counselling, as a profession, avoids (Feltham, 2010a), preferring softer interventions encouraging increased self-awareness and empowerment. Resultantly, in today's world, counselling is an activity where time is set aside by client and counsellor to consider issues that have led to a client engaging with therapy at this point in time. These issues might revolve around past and/or present life events, thoughts, feelings, relationships, patterns of thinking/behaviour, when a client's strategies for addressing issues fail to work, or as a quest for self-improvement and growth (Bohart and Tallman, 1999; Rouse, Armstrong and McLeod, 2015). A counsellor will help his/her client identify a course of action right for them within their circumstances, either moving towards resolving difficulties, finding acceptance, or ways of coping (O'Driscoll, 2015). There are, however, times and situations where counselling is not always the first, or best, option and Marinoff (1999; 2002; 2003) controversially advocates that counselling should be directed only towards clients without psychiatric problems which require medication and who are functioning normally.

Marinoff, a controversial figure, has, quite rightly, been criticised for such comments. Moreover, his repeated assertions that insights from philosophy can be as effective as 'expensive' therapy in helping individuals solve day-to-day problems, have also been widely debated (Levinson, 2001). Whilst some praise for Marinoff's concepts is evidenced within such debates (Howard, 1998; Perring, 1998; Sharkey, 2001), even some of his philosophical colleagues consider him dangerous (Schuster, 2004). It is also noted in literature how Marinoff often demonstrates limited knowledge of how psychotherapists actually approach therapy (Schuster, 1999; 2004), with his unrealistic and broad stereotypical view of psychotherapists described as problematic (Knapp and Tjelveit, 2005).

Within long-standing dialogue regarding Marinoff's perceptions, interesting points made more recently by Popescu (2015) merit attention. Popescu explored moral dilemmas and existential issues encountered in both psychotherapy and philosophical counselling practices, and in arguing that both mental health, and moral dimensions, can be brought together in an integrative model of helping, questioned Marinoff's lack of enthusiasm for, and often scathing

criticism of, the therapeutic process. In setting this naivety alongside more positive, evidence-based research into therapies such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy, Popescu positions Marinoff's negativity within a new, wider perspective. In coming from a more balanced position, and through this broader standpoint, Popescu lends credence to a more commonly held view amongst psychotherapists, including the current researcher, that, regardless of a client's past or presenting issue, focusing on the present [for example, through mindfulness] and the future [for example, through solution focused therapy] can, with very few exceptions, promote enhanced client wellbeing and a calmer state of mind (Popescu, 2015).

Sanders (2006) also addresses the danger of promoting counselling as a panacea for the world's ills, identifying how it can be difficult to differentiate between psychological and non-psychological problems as these can become blurred. The examples used to support this view are situated within areas such as poverty, homelessness, discrimination, and oppression which are social in origin and, he believes, cannot be resolved through counselling processes. He recognises, however, that a person facing these situations could still benefit from the support and relationship offered within the counselling process. It can be seen from the foregoing that therapeutic processes are not without critics and as some of these are unconvinced of the successful impact of therapy (Smail, 2005) dissatisfied clients are now given more opportunity to voice and register concerns (Bates, 2006).

Despite this, Woolfe (2016) describes contemporary therapeutic services as residing within a discipline confident in its core beliefs, values, and approaches, yet questioning, and evolving, whilst McLeod (2003) hails counselling as a brilliant twentieth-century invention. Whilst such optimistic views are promoted by many (Egan, 2014; Nelson-Jones, 2016), Reeves (2015b) cautions that such persuasive ideals of counselling can mask some realities of the therapeutic process and other writers question how much has changed since Feltham proclaimed, in 1995, that even posing a question about what counselling is to practising counsellors, would induce uncertain responses (Feltham, 1995; Aldridge, 2014).

Nonetheless, Bayne and Jinks (2010, p.70) make a robust statement that, "counselling is better established, better accepted, and more widely understood, than at any time in the past", although in contrast to this, James (2002) previously described the counselling field in the UK as disjointed. In criticising counselling, attention is also drawn to clients who terminate counselling before the allocated number of sessions and/or feel disappointed with their

counselling experience, feeling that therapy has been a waste of time or an opportunity lost (von Below and Werbart, 2012; Jackson, 2016). Clients have also experienced counselling as detrimental or even abusive (Bates, 2006) and whilst research has shown that disgruntled clients find it difficult to complain (Bowie, McLeod and McLeod, 2016), a number of dissatisfied clients regularly submit complaints to professional bodies (Symons, et al., 2011; Symons, 2016), leading Bond (2015a), to advocate early positive responses to client preferences and/or concerns about practice. There is also evidence of dissatisfied clients moved to voice their criticisms of counselling through the media (Hodson, 2004), although the media and communication industries have also helped promote counselling processes, broadcasting counselling sessions with real clients on radio and YouTube (Felham and Palmer, 2015).

It can be seen from the foregoing that the activity of counselling has been hailed as a life-changing event (Reeves, 2015b; Therapy Today, 2016c, p.45) yet has also been criticised as unstructured and "something people did, with little or no training" (Dryden, Mearns and Thorne, 2000, p.471). Such discourse exemplifies the dominant argument for professional counselling bodies.

2.2.3 Professional counselling organisations: The BACP

The rationale for the current research included awareness of the general move within the profession towards a more professional image and builds upon the BACP's identification of counsellor placements as an influential area of counsellor training (BACP, 2013a). Moreover, as the main drive for increased professionalism stems from professional bodies, these organisations are central to issues addressed within this research, as professionalism of the discipline depends upon successful training leading to competent therapeutic processes and promoting best practice (Popescu, 2015). Johnston (2016), however, is concerned, that within counselling contexts, the word 'professionalism' can be manipulated to establish status rather than competency.

Nevertheless, counsellor placements are part of the journey to becoming a counsellor and joining an accepted profession (Gorman and Sandefur, 2011) and for many trainees, an important step towards professionalism is membership of a counselling organisation (Wilkins, 2006). Moreover, Reiner, et al. (2013) identify counsellor organisations as one of the most important factors in establishing a single identity for the profession.

Whilst other organisations operate within the UK, the main umbrella organisation for counsellors is the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy [BACP] with over 9,000 of its 44,000 members accredited practitioners who have met training and professional requirements for BACP accreditation (Reeves, 2015c). Accreditation is achieved and maintained through evidence of continuing professional practice and personal development (BACP, 2015a) and is viewed by many as a stand-alone qualification in its own right (Wilkins, 2006). Resultantly, many counsellor employment opportunities ask for proof of accreditation, or at least evidence of working towards accredited status.

Another important point for the current research is that most counsellor trainees have to belong to a professional organisation [usually the BACP] and this infers allegiance to a particular code of ethics and acceptance of a recognised complaints procedure (Wilkins, 2006). As it is mainly the BACP Ethical Framework (2010a;2016c) that guides counselling practice and training, this framework establishes, promotes, and sustains professional standards with Professional Conduct Procedures. This ensures that BACP members are accountable to an approved code of conduct (BACP, 2016c).

Accordingly, the BACP is widely recognised as the main professional body for counselling and a guardian of professional standards of practice (Coldridge and Mickelborough, 2003) and Potter (2012), cited in Therapy Today (December, 2012, p.20) describes stoic work undertaken by the BACP in "developing four cornerstones of best practice: research, accreditation, ethical guidance, and complaints procedures" as an onerous, yet worthwhile task. Not all share Potter's view, however, as some do not see the organisation as fulfilling the role identified by Reiner, et al. (2013) of advocacy for the counselling profession.

Nevertheless, many novice counsellors acquire role socialization through joining such a community of practice (Gibson, et al., 2010; Gibson, et al., 2012; Moss, et al., 2014), which helps their professional development as socialization into most professions involves developing a professional identity (Gordon and Luke, 2015). Prosek and Hurt (2014) quantitatively explored differences in professional identity between relatively new and more seasoned counsellors and found that more advanced practitioners evidenced greater professional development. These researchers do identify several limitations to their research however, as the research sample, although consistent with counselling demographics, was not diverse in race/ethnicity, or gender, and the single programme researched included

consideration of professional orientation, and ethics, making these participants possibly more attuned to professional issues.

BACP student and professional members are provided with specialist material by two key publications, 'Therapy Today', and the research publication, 'Counselling Psychotherapy Research'. Professional organisations, through their ethical frameworks, general, and research publications therefore impact greatly upon trainees as they embark upon early practice, influencing their views on training, placements, supervision, and clients. These organisations are also instrumental in orchestrating the registration and future regulation of counsellors.

2.2.4 Professionalism, registration and regulation

Consideration of professional organisations takes into account how counselling is moving towards more professional status, with quality and accountability becoming centre-stage in line with other professions. As part of this process, the BACP has marshalled practitioners through voluntary registration of practitioners, operated on behalf of, and accountable to, the Government by the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social care [PSAHSC] (SMU, 2012). The BACP Register was the first counsellors' register accredited under this initiative, heralding an important development for counsellors in training, although whilst welcomed in general by the BACP (BACP, 2015b), this initiative caused some angst during its path to fruition, sentiments summed up by Amanda Hawkins, the then chairperson of the BACP who disclosed, "Despite the long and arduous journey to registration, the new voluntary register is a positive step towards fresh opportunities" (Hawkins, 2012a, p.45).

Trainees who successfully complete a BACP accredited course are entitled to join the register. If a trainee's course was not BACP accredited, however, they need to take a further Certificate of Proficiency assessment for eligibility. The register is a public record of counsellors who meet BACP standards for registration, including commitment to the BACP Ethical Framework, training, supervision, and continuing professional development. The register therefore offers, for the first time within the counselling sector, a standardised measurement of minimum therapeutic competence (BACP, 2016b). To this end, the register allows counsellors to demonstrate professional status (BACP, 2013a;2015b), offering reassurance to employers and the public that a counsellor with registered standing is committed to high standards of proficiency and good practice (BACP, 2015a).

Practitioner registers are promoted by the Department of Health as establishing professional competence (PSA, 2015). Such professional competence develops from three key components, education [theory], training, and experience, and is defined as the ability to apply knowledge and skills to produce a required outcome (QAA, 2013). The BACP practitioner register is therefore suggested as the first port of call for prospective clients (BACP, 2016b), as registration, either through completion of a BACP accredited course or undertaking the computer-based, multiple-choice 'Certificate of Proficiency' assessment, is claimed by this professional organisation to offer the public the opportunity to select a competent counsellor.

Some practitioners welcome this as a positive underpinning of their therapeutic work within an unregulated profession, although the impact of registration on that profession is weakened because registration is voluntary, and not a legal requirement. On the other hand, the BACP maintains that it is important for counsellors to gain registration as a precondition to advancement to accredited, then senior accredited membership status (BACP, 2016b).

There is a counter-argument to this however, as although the register creates a minimum standard for BACP practising counsellors, standardisation of professional competence is blurred, since other bodies exist for counsellors and psychotherapists. For example, the National Counselling Society is another professional association for counsellors which also holds an accredited register recognised by the Professional Standards Authority, and sets out standards for practitioners (NCS, 2017). It can be seen therefore that the BACP registration process has anomalies. For instance, an ethical, qualified and experienced counsellor could, by choice, not belong to the BACP, and could, in accordance with the premise that the register is a measure of competence, be viewed as less capable and professional than a practitioner far less qualified and experienced, yet on the BACP register.

Notwithstanding this, since the register recommends minimum standards, it is said to benefit practitioners as a means of demonstrating his/her therapeutic ability to prospective employers. Correspondingly, employers are claimed to value the register as a benchmark in appointing staff of a particular standard, and it is postulated that members of the general public are re-assured by a registered status when seeking a counsellor (BACP, 2016b). More concretely, the register does provide a clear route where complaints against a registered therapist are considered by a grievance panel, and this process provides some accountability and recourse for clients who experience unethical or exploitative practice.

There is also a school of thought, however, that the BACP register is not an accurate measure of professional competence as it falls short of the power afforded by statutory regulation to bar, or limit, the work of practitioners who fall short of minimum standards. Resultantly, a recent report revealed that one out of four counsellors struck off the BACP register continues to practise, promoting a view that the registration process is failing from a safeguarding perspective as it is ineffective in eliminating rogue practitioners from the profession (Dore, 2016). Such claims suggest that the profession is facing real challenges associated with the voluntary registration of therapists and is struggling to underpin this process with an ethical framework which, whilst not enforceable by law, needs to achieve accountable and transparent membership compliance (Jenkins, 2015). There is, nevertheless, an important by-product of the register, in that since registration must be renewed annually, requirements such as professional indemnity insurance, continuing professional development, and supervision of registered practitioners are subject to audit, with a random selection of therapists appraised each month.

Nonetheless, despite this safety measure, confusion can arise because whilst registration currently bears no direct relationship to BACP accredited status, an early version of the voluntary register logo [which every registered BACP member is entitled to use], started with the word 'accredited'. Whilst this related to the fact that the register is accredited by the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care, not the individual practitioner, this proved problematic for both clients and practitioners. Misperception arose since a prospective client, possibly in distress and looking for a counsellor, could have been misled into believing that a registered member of the BACP was also accredited. On the other hand, accredited counsellors saw this as diminishing their hard-earned accreditation. Resultantly, new logos now make a clearer distinction between registered and accredited members. Moreover, since clear information about differing membership categories is now available to clients on the BACP website, those seeking therapeutic services are more aware of the level of experience of potential practitioners.

The new logo also gives more prominence to the Professional Standards Authority [PSA], and interestingly, the word 'voluntary' has been dropped. The PSA relate this change to a response to feedback that, in relation to the register, the word voluntary was confusing (PSA, 2015). Despite this explanation, however, this omission has engendered debate as to whether this is a veiled move towards statutory regulation.

It can be seen from the above that existing registration and possible future regulation will form part of the transition from trainee to counsellor. Nonetheless, whilst moves towards regulation are currently somewhat abated at Government level, it can also be seen that rumors abound, resulting in greater awareness of, and attention to, professional and ethical issues. It is important to remember, however, that, as yet, there is no agreed implementation process or timetable for the regulation of the counselling profession (Bond, 2015a; BACP, 2017).

2.3 The need for counselling in today's society

The training of new counsellors and their early placement experiences provide a stream of new counsellors into a society where statistics consistently reveal that at least one in four members of the UK population will experience a mental health issue within any twelve-month period (Cohen, 2016; New Scientist, 2016), with 246,428 new referrals made into mental health services within the UK during January, 2016 (Health and Social Care Information Centre [HSCIC], 2016a). These statistics add to the debate around a report that described Britain as a "Therapy Nation in the making", tracking a move away from the time-honoured custom of British people displaying the "stiff upper lip". This shift, it was suggested, heralded the dawn of a new "emotionally literate" age in this country (Therapy Today, 2004, p.46).

Several years later, data collected by the Office for National Statistics [ONS, 2012] suggested that the UK is a nation of somewhat happy individuals. Subjective wellbeing scores rated highest, however, in Northern Ireland with Scotland rated next in happiness ratings and England and Wales trailing at the bottom of statistical tables; the current study was therefore conducted in an area low in 'happiness' stakes.

Furthermore, research undertaken on behalf of the BACP found that 88% of people could be happier if they talked to a therapist (Therapy Today, 2004, p.46; 2010b), although by 2012 the Office for National Statistics revealed that two-thirds of UK citizens are content with their work and social life, with four in five also happy with family life (ONS, 2012). Nonetheless, one in five citizens in Britain has sought the help of a counsellor (Therapy Today, 2010b) and half the population knows someone who has engaged in counselling. Respondents in research undertaken by the BACP also overwhelmingly proclaimed that everyone should be able to access free counselling through the NHS (BACP, 2010b; 2015d), although this is often not possible due to long waiting lists for mental health services.

As noted by Ritzer (2004), there is an annual growth of mental health problems, a view reinforced by statistics which evidence an increase in people waiting more than 14 weeks for specified therapy services in Wales from 2,375 in September, 2012, to 2,773 in October, 2013 (Welsh National Statistics, November, 2013). This, coupled with the way the extended family has changed to more nuclear and disparate ways of living, places great demand on psychological services, with a survey by the Royal College of General Practitioners describing the provision of adult psychological services as "patchy" (RCGP in Therapy Today, April, 2010, p.6).

What has not changed, however, is that humans are relational beings and like to talk with someone about problems (Bayne and Jinks, 2010; Faris and van Ooijen, 2012). Furthermore, today's world is increasingly busy and becoming ever more complex and fast-changing, so that humans have many different experiences which can be difficult to address. Very often, it is possible in these circumstances to just get on with life. Sometimes, however, a person's normal coping strategies fail and they are left without sufficient resources to address whatever is bothering them. In these circumstances, it is often easier to talk to someone who is not a friend or close family member, although the increase in clients seeking help from a counsellor has been related to how problems and fragmentation of modern life (McLeod, 2003) make face-to-face contact with significant others increasingly difficult.

People in upsetting circumstances, therefore, do not always have friends or family they can, or want, to turn to and whilst in the past, an available significant other could have been 'aunty' next door, a spiritual leader such as a priest, a shaman, a wise woman (Faris and van Ooijen, 2012), or in this part of the world, possibly the Welsh matriarch, today, this is often a counsellor. De Botton (2013, p.23) consequently sees counsellors as "secular society's new priests". These issues can also be compounded, as even where relatives and friends are close at hand, a person can feel too ashamed or embarrassed to disclose to someone close to them, the real issue they are struggling with. Alternatively, the advice offered by family or friends can seem to lack impartiality or is viewed as insufficient (McLeod, 2003).

Furthermore, problems of living in today's world are changing and increasing. Greater longevity, whilst fortuitous in many aspects, has its downside, as living longer brings attendant problems of an aging population. This presents real difficulties, as Westerners today live approximately twenty years longer than a century ago (Nelson-Jones, 2012). Alongside this, given the on-going pension crisis, the populace has to review working habits and retirement expectations, causing much stress and anxiety (Feltham and Horton, 2006).

In an interview for Therapy Today, Feltham (2004b, p.17) pointed out the valuable service provided by counsellors, in that counselling offers privacy, confidentiality, a situation, and place where people can talk about their worries. Resultantly, it follows that counselling, with its emphasis on psychological/emotional wellness and personal development, is an essential paradigm at the heart of human service and mental health provision (Kaplan and Gladding, 2011; Mellin, et al., 2011; Douglas, 2016).

This section considered the need for counselling, contextualising this within the framework of changing societal needs and mental health services.

2.4 The aims and process of counselling

When considering the role of counsellor placements, it is helpful to garner understanding of the aims and process of counselling. Crucially, the goals of therapy should be those of the client, rather than the counsellor (Knox and Cooper, 2015) and most clients can explain what brings them to counselling at a point in their life and what they want from it (Cooper, 2015a). For counsellors, therefore, the process of counselling involves a genuine objective to understand their clients' worldview and motivation for engaging in therapy (Paré, 2013).

Rogers (1980) and Knox and Cooper (2015) hold that it is this genuine interest in a client and their issues, sincere concern for their wellbeing, and being real that facilitates helpful change and within extant literature there is a view that the quality of the therapeutic relationship consistently predicts therapeutic outcome (Arnd-Caddigan, 2012, p.77). A practitioner's way of being within the therapeutic relationship relates to their view of the world (Gilbert and Leahy, 2007) and their ability to not only experience, but ensure that their client experiences, the core-conditions. In recent years, Mearns and Cooper suggest an addition to Rogers' core-conditions (Rogers, 1980) through a concept of relational depth wherein the meeting of counsellor and client is identified as key to therapeutic processes (Mearns and Cooper, 2005; Nelson-Jones, 2016).

Beyond this, the many therapeutic models of counselling have various aims and processes (Feltham and Horton, 2006; Bayne and Jinks, 2010) and Faris and van Ooijen (2012) identify how prospective counsellors quickly become aware of the rich, yet confusing, and sometimes overwhelming, array of orientations and counselling approaches. Consequently, whilst the current research was approached from an interdisciplinary perspective and mindful of emerging work on theoretical integration and pluralism (McLeod and Cooper, 2011), in considering contemporary counselling, cognisance must be given to the differing, sometimes competing,

approaches and models in existence (Feltham, 2006). Within this maelstrom, many counsellors undergo training within a single orientation and steadfastly adhere to this throughout their practice (Faris and van Ooijen, 2012), others, however, follow a more flexible approach.

Nonetheless, strong and enduring debate has considered "What treatment, by whom, is most effective for this individual, with that specific problem and under which set of circumstances" (Paul, 1967; Egan, 2002, p.12). Accordingly, Cooper and McLeod (2007) argue that no 'right' aim or process of counselling exists, promoting a pluralistic framework as the way forward. Other writers agree with this concept, following Feltham (2006), who advocates that there is more commonality than difference between various approaches and claims that clients can benefit from practitioners recognising this. Later, Cuijpers, et al. (2011a,b) strengthened these views, as their meta-analysis considering the commonly-presented issue of depression, found little disparity between various therapies.

Moreover, some of the main approaches have begun to almost unperceivably, yet conceptually, move away from a pure approach and closer to each other (Norcross and Goldfried, 2005; O'Leary and Murphy, 2006). Weston, Novotny and Thompson-Brenner (2004) bring evidence-based practice into the conundrum of counsellor orientation, in observing that more togetherness can help circumvent inflexible adherence to specific modalities. Furthermore, two theorists, familiar to many beginners of counsellor training, have their say about theoretical issues of 'pure' or 'integrative' counselling. Carl Rogers (1980, p.60), although obviously a proponent of his Person-centred Therapy, warned that "theories too often become dogma". In similar vein, Gerard Egan, who used Rogers' work as a foundation to build an integrative model, advised helpers to, "beware of the person of one book; all truths about helping cannot be found in one book" (Egan, 2002, p.15).

These, and other problems, are often voiced about steadfast adherence to theories and their counselling aims and processes. For example, Feltham (2010a) argues that theorists provide valuable frameworks, yet counselling models are predominately productions of a middle-class society, developed mostly by middle-aged, white males, which must influence their values. Some writers go further, arguing that the concept of a pure theory is only a myth (Horton, 2006) and undoubtedly, the richness of life-experiences and everyone's uniqueness necessitate flexibility of interpretation and application, with new counsellors developing a personal style of counselling. Furthermore, whilst trainees start their placement with an idea of their counselling

orientation and associated conceptual aims and processes, Fanthome (2004) and Morgan (2012) note how placements afford trainees an opportunity to contemplate which field they wish to work within and in the counselling profession this involves testing modalities, client-group, and specialisms. These considerations then impact upon the aims and processes of counselling.

When on placement, a trainee's concept of their own aims and process of counselling is particularly important when viewed against counselling's lack of distinctiveness and absence of clarity. Many prospective clients construct their image of counselling from the media and there has been a shift in the image of counselling over recent years, bolstered in part by television exposure (Bayne and Jinks, 2010), with programmes such as "In Treatment" and "The Sopranos", portraying transparently, a visible, if not always accurate, view of therapeutic relationships. Chandler (2009, p.25) welcomes how such programmes make counselling more knowable and accessible and research by Hill, et al. (2012) also evidences that media coverage and 'word of mouth' promotes therapy as a valuable process, perhaps also demonstrating that the confidentiality the profession promotes should not be mistaken for secrecy. Nevertheless, even though Williams (2016) maintains that within media and public awareness in general, counselling is now embedded as something anyone can access, the image of counselling still needs attention.

As evidenced above, the aims and process of counselling continue to develop (Armstrong and McLeod, 2003; Nelson-Jones, 2012; Bond, 2015a) and today, counselling is an applied discipline with the application of skills refined through early practice experienced within a counsellor placement. Nevertheless, Feltham (2004a) perceives an element of promoting positive aims and processes of counselling whilst down-playing negatives in relation to therapeutic processes. Resultantly, it is difficult to objectively assess the current aims, and/or the projected future and effectiveness of counselling.

2.5 The effectiveness of counselling

There is much discussion within and outside the profession regarding the effectiveness of counselling. Whilst some insist that research indisputably shows that counselling is effective, the mission to explain how and why this is the case, has proved less straightforward (Leibert and Dunne-Bryant, 2015). Sanders (2006) suggests that a good way of defining counselling is to

consider what it is useful for and researchers have been busy for many years working on what is effective in counselling and why this is the case (Feltham and Palmer, 2015).

Cooper (2008, p.15), answers the blunt question "Does Counselling work?" with a resounding "Yes", whilst paradoxically, Feltham (2004a, p.345) has described counselling as "a hit and miss process that cannot be relied upon".   Furthermore, evidence exists that counselling interventions can harm, as well as help, clients (Lambert, 1989; Rousmaniere and Lambert, 2013; Jackson, 2015), with claims that one in twenty clients reported lasting harmful effects from unhelpful therapy (British Journal of Psychiatry, cited in Therapy Today, 2016b).

Such debate over the effectiveness of counselling has raged since 1952 when Eysenck announced that around two thirds of mental health patients recovered without psychological intervention (Eysenck, 1952).   Moreover, whilst counselling is often described as a 'process', defined by Nelson-Jones (2012, p.37) as movement and progression over time, numerous methodological problems make assessing effectiveness and outcomes of counselling difficult (Kazdin, 1994), with little known about how, or why, counselling works (Bayne and Jinks, 2010), or what counsellors actually do (Folkes-Skinner, Elliott and Weaver, 2010).

Despite this, there is a strong and evolving evidence base which indicates that counselling is effective (Cooper, 2008). For example, a meta-analysis conducted by Cuijpers, et al. (2011a,b) found medication and talking therapies to be of similar value for the treatment of depression, with a combination of medication and counselling more effective than either alone.

Nevertheless, not all clients are totally satisfied and not all professionals agree that therapy is always the best it can be. Feltham (2010a), one of the most questioning of those prominent within the profession and seen as a radical free-thinker, has queried the effectiveness of counselling, suggesting that some practitioners approach therapy with a variety of ill-matched methods, the long-term impact of which, are difficult to quantify or define. Spence contextualised this, describing therapy as "a healing, but inherently risky, business" (Spence, 2007, p.20) and Khele, et al. (2008) analysed complaints to the BACP during the period 1996-2006 and found that most complaints were against males and accredited members, with the majority of grievances raised by people knowledgeable about the process of counselling.

To put these complaints into context, just like their clients, counsellors are human and exist within a defined environment within their particular world (Faris and van Ooijen, 2012). Moreover, as humans, they can, for a variety of reasons, make mistakes. Rogers (1961) wisely reflected that counsellors must live with failures as well as successes, a process which forces

learning. Later, Rogers took this concept further, in stressing that a counsellor cannot reasonably be expected to be 'perfect' (Rogers, interview with Baldwin, 1987), as this is non-human. This view was legitimised and supported many years later, when a study into relational depth by Knox and Cooper (2010) highlighted the 'humanness' of the therapist as important.

An uncomplicated way to evaluate the effectiveness of counselling is to measure client wellbeing before, during, and after therapy. Some writers say, quite simply, that if counselling is successful, client welfare will improve after therapy (Bower, 2010). This straightforward statement is complicated, however, by other reasons why client wellbeing might improve. For example, research has shown that people who believe in positive benefits of therapy are more likely to both seek, and feel that they have benefited from, counselling (Shechtman, Vogel and Maman, 2010; Hill, et al. 2012). There is also the "Dodo effect", a term from Lewis Carroll's 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland' when Rosenzweig (1936) named an article "At last the Dodo said, 'everybody has won and all must have prizes'" (cited in Faris and van Ooijen, 2012, p.6). In other words, all therapies work and share common factors (Luborsky, et al., 2002; Beutler, 2006; Mansel, 2011).

Some, however, use derogatory language to describe negative counselling processes, such as "deceitful" (Morrall, 2008, p.8), and "exploitative" (Mason, 1989, p.24). Jones (2007), however, holds the oppositional view that counsellors should impenitently promote themselves and their work and do more to demonstrate the effectiveness of the profession, a point strengthened by Gerada (2013) who calls upon health professionals in general to value themselves more and sing their own praises about the many things that go well. In stark contradiction to this, McInnes (2013) feels that some counsellors need to show more modesty in claims about their capabilities and Sanders (2016) feels that counselling has, over the last three decades, become omnipresent and is in danger of promoting itself as limitless in its ability to help. Further to this, some researchers have even detected a tendency to over-estimate the effectiveness of counselling to the tune of around 65% (Miller, 2013).

From such discourse, it can be seen that the question posed by Cooper (2008), enquiring whether counselling works, can only be answered through more, specific research (Leibert and Dunne-Bryant, 2015), which accounts for the increasing interest in evidenced-based practice, practice-based evidence, randomised controlled trials and Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT).

2.5.1 Determining effectiveness

As the profession continues to consider regulation, counsellors are increasingly asked to explain what they do and how they define themselves (Spurgeon, 2012). Current and ongoing debate in the field therefore assesses 'evidence-based practice' and 'practice-based evidence' (Barkham and Mellor-Clark, 2000; Goss and Stevens, 2016).

Alongside this discussion, stands a call from the US for counsellors to be proactive and actively educate policy-makers and end-users about the unique benefits counselling offers (Mellin, et al., 2011). Increasingly, however, healthcare policy-makers require all forms of therapy to be supported by robust research evidence (Goss and Rose, 2002; McDonnell, al., 2012) although historically there has been a reluctance for therapists to engage in research activity (McDonnell, et al. 2012). Thus, research into the effectiveness of counselling is now a necessity (Fernando and Minton, 2011), whilst mindful that counselling is more difficult to evaluate than other professions, such as dentistry (McLeod, 2013a), and heeding the warning by McLeod that funding and evidence-based practice are bringing counselling to the brink of disaster (McLeod, 2013). Woolfe follows this line of reasoning in questioning whether the accepted concept of reflective practitioners can survive within the constraints of evidence-based practice (Woolfe, 2016).

Nevertheless, in response to today's need for confirmation of effectiveness, the BACP expects trainees to work with therapeutic outcome measures, or other quality assurance procedures (BACP, 2013a, B5.6). The Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation [CORE] system assesses client subjective wellbeing, symptoms, interpersonal functioning, and risk factors at several stages of therapy (Stiles, et al., 2008; CORE, 2012; Mellor-Clark, et al. 2012; Barkham, et al., 2013), capturing valuable information about the effectiveness of routine practice (McLeod, 2013b). CORE can therefore be used as a pre/post measure of the impact of interventions. Moreover, practitioners are becoming increasingly aware of treatment effectiveness (Bower, 2010), with an upsurge of support for an insightful contention offered nearly twenty years ago by MacDonald (1998) that as counsellors can intervene in another's life, it is vital that each intervention complies with the best available evidence about its likely outcome.

Accordingly, there has been an increase in the need for evidence provided by Randomised Controlled Trials [RCT's]. Such research is at the forefront of developing an evidence-base for counselling, with Cooper and Reeves (2012) confirming that as without evidence provided by these trials, counselling would become marginalised within the NHS, RCT's will continue to be of prime importance within the field. van Ooijen, however, situates RCT's as too entrenched within a modernist paradigm, where everything can be explained (van Ooijen, 2011).

Despite this, RCT's are described as the "Gold Standard" of research by Reeves (2012, p.1), a point substantiated by Davis, et al. (2012). Such "clinical wisdom" (Bayne and Jinks, 2010, p.56) is also heralded as the way forward if the counselling profession is to prove its value and proficiency, as principles of evidence-based and empirically validated treatment are a keystone of government policy-making (Armstrong and McLeod, 2003, p.257). Concomitantly, however, in line with van Ooijen's comments, political and philosophical affiliations within humanism are prevalent within the counselling field and tend to conflict with experimental methodologies such as RCT's (Cooper and Reeves, 2012), with the BACP hailing evidence from systematic reviews, or meta-analyses, as also reliable (BACP, 2016a). Nonetheless, whichever view prevails, what is certain, is that within the current climate, all trainees must be aware of evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence to develop their knowledge-base and strive towards best practice (McLeod, 2015].

Even so, the merits and disadvantages of Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs) provide rich material for ongoing exchanges of views in Therapy Today considering the efficacy of various types of talking therapies and the need for evidence-based practice (See: Cooper, 2011; Rogers, Maidman and House, 2011). These articles evidence a divergence of opinion, with some practitioners and academics opposing RCTs, dismissing these as quantitative methodologies, out of place within a counselling environment and therefore inappropriate as a way of assessing the efficacy of talking therapies (van Ooiijen, 2011). On the other hand, there are those who believe that these strategies must be embraced if the therapy world is to survive (Cooper, 2011). Some writers also stress that as there are other valid approaches for evaluating efficacy within talking therapies, there is no need to conform to standards set by policy-makers and commissioners (Rogers, Maidman and House, 2011).

These debates take place alongside initiatives to improve the effectiveness of therapeutic encounters such as the implementation of the IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological

Therapies) programme in England, which, according to Bond, is one of the most obvious results of the power of evidence-based policy and service implementation (Bond, 2015a). A decision was taken in Wales, however, not to engage with IAPT. Alternatively, the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Together for Mental Health' initiative (WAG, 2012) is a ten-year strategy for mental health/wellbeing. This aims to improve the social and environmental wellbeing of people and communities within the Principality (Jones, 2012), with implementation of this initiative supported by a series of delivery plans outlining steps the Welsh Government and partner organisations need to undertake.

This work is overseen by a National Mental Health Partnership Board (Griffiths, 2015) and to achieve its aims, improvements in mental health services over the last ten years are drawn upon, including legalities of the Mental Health (Wales) Measure 2010 (WAG, 2010), which placed legal requirements on health boards and local authorities to expand support for those suffering with mental ill-health. To put the scale of this into context, over the last three years local primary mental health support services established under this Measure assessed over 100,000 people, with over half of these subsequently referred for treatment (Gething, 2016).

Within recommended initiatives there is also a commitment to promote wellbeing and preventative measures and a pledge to address inequality of access to treatment by delivering well-designed, integrated care (Jones, 2012). These aims represent huge challenges and the impact of these initiatives is slow to materialise, with Gething (2016), in drawing attention to significant progress since the launch of these policies, recognising that more still needs to be done by the Welsh Government and voluntary organisations to make a difference to those impacted by mental ill-health.

In April 2015, the Welsh Assembly Government also introduced a 'Wellbeing of Future Generations Act' (WAG, 2015) which, it claims, will impact upon future priorities through urging public bodies to consider longer-term strategies, improve connections with communities and each other and take a more preventative, cohesive approach. The impact of this is also yet to filter to the grass roots of the helping professions, although 2016-19 delivery priorities include reducing stigma and discrimination towards those with mental health problems and ensuring that public services and the third sector provide integrated approaches to mental health. Progress of these aims is awaited and will be reported through annual reports by the Welsh Government.

2.6 Counsellor training

The intricacies of counsellor training are central to this research as the counsellor placement facilitates early practice for trainees who have to evidence practice hours to qualify (van Ooijen, 2015, BACP, 2016c). Counselling training is both challenging and multi-faceted (Georgiadou, Willis and Canavan, 2015) and whilst the core components of training remain basically the same as the original concepts of theory, self-knowledge, clinical practice, and supervision established by Max Eitingon in the 1920's (Schröter, 2002), developments which impact upon the training experiences of counsellors continue to arise as training evolves.

2.6.1 The Discourse of counsellor training

Trainees engage with a transient and somewhat confusing environment when they begin early practice. In February 2007, the Government of the day published a White Paper entitled, 'Trust, Assurance and Safety: The Regulation of Health Professionals in the 21st Century' (HMSO, 2007) which raised questions regarding the future of the profession and communities serviced by counsellors (SMU, 2013). Since then, counselling has been beset by vigorous activity by various professional bodies, exploring in-depth ethical issues and reviewing accreditation schemes as the profession moves [at different paces, at various times] towards regulation. Paradoxically, alongside this move towards greater professionalism stands the decision by the BACP in July 2012 to reduce supervised practice hours for trainees from 150 to 100, dispense with the 50 hours pre-qualification contextual work and decrease course contact hours to 400 from 450 (BACP, 2012), decisions which seem at odds with the commitment to raise standards within the profession.

Despite this lowering of practice and contact hours for qualification, however, the process of training, accreditation [BACP, 2012], and regulation has a different connotation from comments made in the Sunday Times and quoted in Therapy Today that, "to set up in practice, all you need is one couch, one box of tissues, and African art on the wall" (Marshall-Shore, 2012, p.37), or counselling's image of "tea and sympathy" (Jackson, 2016, p.3), comments which align more with the incongruity that no qualifications are necessary to practise (Feltham, 2010a; Folkes-Skinner, 2011).

Hawkins, then chairperson of the BACP, whilst welcoming the changes afoot, admitted to feeling anxious about opening the counselling profession up to the outside world (Hawkins, 2012a, p.43) a trepidation shared by many within the profession. Hawkins, however,

recognised that, "If you don't change, you become extinct" (Johnson, 1999, p.46) and McIness (2014), urges the profession not to sleepwalk toward extinction like dinosaurs, but to take control of the profession's destiny. It is alongside these transitions that trainees engage with counsellor training.

Within the UK, counsellor training is usually undertaken part-time, although qualifications range from none (Folkes-Skinner, 2011) to NVQ to MA and beyond. Despite this, in research commissioned by the BACP in 2010, 84% of participants indicated they would be more likely to engage in a counselling relationship if their counsellor was fully trained and a registered member of a professional body (BACP, 2010b). Folkes-Skinner (2011) maintains that to begin to determine whether training impacts upon therapists' effectiveness, counsellor training needs to be better understood, on the basis that the role that training plays in the personal and professional development of counsellors is key to understanding how training prepares trainees to become effective counsellors (Folkes-Skinner, Elliott and Weaver, 2010). Nevertheless, whilst some writers maintain that only limited research on the training experience of counsellors is evidenced within literature (Grafanaki, 2010a,b), consideration has been given to counsellor training (Black, Hardy, Turpin and Parry, 2005) which started when counsellor training methods were imported from America to service students at the Universities of Keele and Reading in 1966 (Feltham, 2006). This proved to be the forerunner of counsellor training as we know it today and from this humble beginning, counsellor training is now provided by a variety of institutions, ranging from private counsellor training organisations, to Further Education, and Higher Education at under-graduate and post graduate levels (Bayne and Jinks, 2010; Carver, 2013).

2.6.2 The need for counsellor training

Some research has shown counsellor training to be effective (Smith, 2016) although Folkes-Skinner (2011) observed how the impact of training on practice is relatively under-researched and unknown, even though considerable effort has been put into ascertaining best practice and desired outcomes (Wheeler, 2000). Nevertheless, some query whether training actually makes a difference to client outcome, as questioned by Durlak (1979) who, in finding that paraprofessionals' clinical outcomes equalled, and in some cases proved significantly better, than professionally trained therapists, invoked controversial debate (Armstrong, 2010), this despite the fact that Durlak's findings were not without criticism, including important

limitations such as study design, representativeness of participants, inadequate sample sizes, and poor outcome measures (Faust and Zlotnick, 1995; Armstrong, 2010).

Another early study undertaken by Strupp and Hadley (1979) is also remembered for its suggestion that professional counsellor training is not a necessary prerequisite to effective and worthwhile therapy, as their seminal research found that therapy by unqualified counsellors was of equivalent value to therapy undertaken by trained counsellors. In coming to this conclusion, however, Strupp and Hadley stressed, that for this phenomenon to occur, the right circumstances do have to prevail.

From a review of such studies, it emerges that the meta-analyses carried out by Durlak (1979), where he researched over forty studies that compared the effectiveness of trained and non-trained therapists, evaluating them in terms of outcome and quality, and the well-controlled study by Strupp and Hadley (1979) made, in the same year, strong, yet contentious arguments that training and experience were, in fact, not necessary to be an effective helper. This encouraged others to take up this debate, and led Armstrong and McLeod (2003, p.256) to consider the obvious follow-on question, about how people who have received limited training can achieve therapeutic results equivalent to highly trained professionals. One plausible answer, posited by Armstrong and McLeod, is that as paraprofessionals are likely to see fewer clients each week, they could be less susceptible to burnout, and thus more able to display authenticity, presence, and interest consistently towards each client (Armstrong and McLeod, 2003).

Atkins and Christensen (2001) deepen this line of questioning by asking the next obvious question, whether professional training is worth the effort and cost. In reviewing the research literature, these researchers note that previous research, although methodologically limited, suggests, that whilst evidence supports the efficacy of paraprofessional counsellors, and research has shown that therapist characteristics impact upon client outcome (Zimmerman and Bambling, 2012; Bambling and King, 2013), it is also evident that professional training may lead to improved client outcomes, particularly in relation to briefer therapy and client retention. A counter-narrative to this was advanced by research which found advanced relational skills to be unhelpful, whilst a therapist's questioning of self and self-doubt had a positive impact on counselling (Therapy Today, 2012, p.5). Research undertaken by Eriksen, et al. (2012, p.360), however, found that professionals "giving something of themselves" was recognised as important, whilst research with novice practitioners by De Stefano, et al. (2010) found

interpersonal qualities of the counsellor to be significant, thus affirming that Rogers' 'presence' (Rogers, 1980) remains important decades after his death.

The debate, whether there is a connection between levels of training and successful therapy, is set to continue. Some writers maintain that this has not been proven as research methodologies prohibit definitive findings (Atkins and Christensen, 2001; den Boer, et al., 2005) or advocate that professional training makes no difference to therapeutic outcome (Lambert and Ogle, 2004) although Armstrong (2010) found paraprofessionals to be less effective than professional counterparts and even called for more and sustained training prior and during early client contact. Within this debate, sits the premise held by early practitioners such as Freud (1913a,b) and Rogers (1961), that a positive connection with a client is a fundamental condition for effective treatment.

Despite such conflicting evidence as to whether training is a vital pre-requisite for helping interactions, with some writers supporting the view that counsellor training has a bearing on a counsellor's expertise or therapeutic skill and others stating firmly that this is not the case (Boswell, et al., 2010), trainees continue to acquire many different types of knowledge through training (Kivlighan and Kivlighan, 2009). Particularly important for the current research, is a key aspect of counsellor training identified by Boswell and Castonguay (2007), which suggests a need to engage in experiential training and practice, rather than purely didactic methods. Moreover, there is also a view that to deliver counsellor training, trainers should be, and remain, in practice, as advocated in the USA by Ray, Jayne and Miller (2014) whose participants reported that continuing, therapeutic contact with clients had a significant and constructive influence on their teaching.

The question whether it is moral to continue to train counsellors given limited paid employment opportunities (Eccles, 2008) is also debated in literature and attracts regular dialogue within Therapy Today, as does the feasibility of counsellor courses delivered within universities (News Item, Therapy Today, February, 2016, p.8). These are interesting debates, as whilst there is little evidence to support the assumption that training positively impacts upon clients (Trepka, et al., 2004), counsellor training aims to facilitate competence and develop expertise for many students each year (Palmieri, et al., 2007). Accordingly, for this research, training is accepted as necessary, in line with the current move towards regulation, the BACP Framework (BACP, 2010a;2016c) and the long-standing view of Polkinghorne and Hoshmand (1992) who not only

herald theoretical and clinical knowledge as vital for clinical practice, they also advocate the interactive cycle of enquiry and action which takes place within the counsellor placement.

2.6.3 The impact of counsellor training on trainees

In the context of this research, the impact of training on trainees is crucial, as counsellor trainees are recognised as having greater tensions and pressures upon them than other students, particularly at the time of early client-work (Kumary and Baker, 2008; Folkes-Skinner, Elliott and Weaver, 2010).

2.6.3.1 Stress of Counsellor Training

There is general agreement within literature that practitioner training can be stressful, particularly at the start of practice, as at this juncture, trainees are assimilating a host of new information and beginning to apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills within a counselling setting (Kumary and Baker, 2008; Folkes-Skinner, Elliott and Weaver, 2010). This demands a lot from trainees who must deal with developing concepts of raised awareness and personal change alongside the challenges of engaging in academic learning, whilst also developing professional skills (Duryee, et al., 1996; Rønnestad and Skovholt, 2003; Hill, et al., 2007; Folkes-Skinner, Elliott and Weaver, 2010).

Nonetheless, although counsellor training involves personal, practical, and financial commitments (Coldridge and Mickelborough, 2003; Reeves, 2013) and is intellectually and emotionally demanding (Bayne and Jinks, 2010), the impact of counsellor training on the development of trainees is identified by some as a relatively under-researched area (van Rijn, 2008; Grafanaki, 2010a), although it has been addressed by researchers including, Bischoff, et al. (2002); Orlinksy and Rønnestad (2005); Howard, et al. (2006); Turner, et al. (2008) and Folkes-Skinner, Elliott and Weaver (2010).

Furthermore, commencing counsellor training often originates from the experience of recent stressful life events (Folkes-Skinner, 2007) and this can cause difficulties, as counsellor training provides enhanced insight into relationships (Reeves, 2013) and can impact upon a trainee's perceptions and relationships with family and friends. Folkes-Skinner (2007) coins the phrase 'altruistic reflexivity', to describe the development of increased self-awareness for the sake of future clients defined as essential for transition from trainee to professional.

Alongside these emotional impacts of training, fees continue to rise and many 'hidden' costs including supervision, books, insurance/professional fees, and often loss of earnings (Banning, 2013) can be problematic, especially when, to quote Erskine (2011, p.9), "the journey to qualification, let alone accreditation, takes forever".

Those employed within helping professions are particularly vulnerable to stress, commonly known as burnout (Fothergill, Edwards and Burnard 2004; Kumary and Baker, 2008; Voltmer, et al., 2013; Tabaj, et al., 2015) and whilst many studies concentrate on stress levels experienced by qualified practitioners [for example, high stress levels as the result of work within organisational settings (Carroll, 2003; Greenwood, 2003; Winning, 2010)], trainees are also prone to stress (Halewood and Tribe, 2003; Kumary and Baker, 2008).   It is difficult to compare stress levels within other academic courses, as whilst university counselling services report increased referrals, the extent of incidences of mental health issues within general UK student populations is unknown (Macaskill, 2013), yet is concerning (Allan, McKenna and Dominey, 2014; McKenzie, et al., 2015). Cooper and Quick (2003), however, take a different approach, maintaining that increased stress is part and parcel of success [i.e. becoming a trainee counsellor/counsellor].

Despite this, individuals facing high challenge need high levels of support, and in a qualitative study conducted by Georgiadou, Willis and Canavan (2015), additional support for trainees was explored through focus groups of trainees, staff, and personal tutors providing integrative, phronetic support. This support, whilst related to core training, was separated from it, so that trainees could integrate theory, personal experience, and practice within a safe environment. These researchers explored how trainees used this arrangement and identified helpful and unhelpful aspects of this support system. Data were analysed through a reflective team-based approach (Siltanen, Willis and Scobie, 2008) and findings indicated that the system enhanced personal and professional development. Moreover, trainees valued both the provision of a dedicated space to explore their learning and appreciated that this process involved non-assessing support. Whilst the researchers do not advocate personal tutorials as the only way to provide trainees with integrative, assessment-free, individualised support, their findings add to a dialogue around phronetic support. This recent study presents potential implications for counsellor training in suggesting that non-assessing personnel can be beneficial to trainees who traditionally experience stress during counsellor training, particularly during early client-work.

Stressors for counsellor trainees can also include the personal impact of contact with severely depressed or suicidal clients and "psychic isolation' as the result of becoming too good at putting others first, thus holding back on self-disclosure. This can lead to the trainee becoming withdrawn in personal relationships and, "eventually losing a clear sense of self" (Brady, et al., 1995, p.13).   Furthermore, confidentiality can prevent meaningful conversation about 'the bad day in the office' and as cogently put by Storr (1990), counsellors can become so drained they experience emotional exhaustion, leaving no surplus energy for other aspects of life.

Accordingly, many question whether counsellors and trainees practise what they preach and self-care (Beaumont, et al., 2016), although Carl Rogers maintained that it is only with appropriate conditions that a person can self-actualise [reach full potential] (Rogers, 1980) and counsellor training encourages trainees not only to adopt the core-conditions as a way of being (Rogers, 1980), but to also show the core-conditions to themselves (BACP, 2016d).

Furthermore, as self-care is an ethical principle (BACP, 2010a;2016c; Dansey, 2013), educating trainees about self-care is instrumental in ensuring that they cope with stressors within and beyond training (Myers, et al., 2012) and take care of themselves in the way they encourage clients to attend to their own needs. Bond (2013), speaking about how counselling might meet challenges of the 21st Century, spotlighted the impact of client-work on therapists, cautioning that driving selflessness too far, results in burnout. Hence, the showing of, as Nelson-Jones (2012, p.21) puts it, "agape", or selfless love, parallel to fast developing self-awareness and personal development can take its toll and lead to early burnout (Voltmer, et al., 2013). Consequently, a counsellor's emotional exhaustion can impact not only upon themselves, but can also reflect negatively upon the treatment organisation (Knudsen, Roman and Abraham, 2013).

As the profession promotes self-care as paramount to safe and ethical practice, it is a paradox that literature offers insight into how counsellor training produces high levels of anxiety within trainees, with Carter (2004) revealing that anxiety, induced by the need to pass and the complexity of assessment criteria, resulted in more time and effort spent on course assessment than on important concepts like reading, or reflection, making trainees feel pressurised and deskilled. To balance this, however, Topham and Moller (2011) researched the wellbeing of generic first year students in a UK university and found that almost a quarter of non-specific students also disclosed psychological distress and social anxiety levels ranging from moderate

to severe. Learning, in general, can therefore be stressful, yet evidence suggests that counsellor trainees' stress can be excessively high (Kumary and Baker, 2008). A factor less explored in any detail within literature also merits attention, in that counsellor training usually involves unpaid placement work (Oldale and Cooke, 2015), and volunteers are more likely to tolerate poor working conditions (Haug and Gaskins, 2012), resulting in increased stress.

Interestingly, a qualitative investigation of a trainee counsellor's experience at the start of training, aptly entitled, "A Baptism of Fire" (Folkes-Skinner, Elliott and Weaver, 2010) is one of the top ten articles downloaded from the Therapy Today website and this same expressive phrase was also used by Carroll (1993) to describe early client-work. Against the background of the few studies which have explored change experienced by trainee counsellors, Folkes-Skinner, Elliott and Weaver (2010) sought to identify aspects of training which assist trainees in the process of becoming therapists. Their research is of particular importance to the current study as it explored how a trainee counsellor changes at the start of training in order to identify aspects of training helpful in initiating and supporting change, concepts important to trainees undertaking a counsellor placement. This research is, therefore, considered in some detail.

Goldfield's (2005) assertion that research methods for exploring client experiences could be utilised to investigate change in trainee counsellors underpinned the research process and the researchers captured the experience of one trainee counsellor through three semi-structured interviews conducted at pivotal points of her first term - beginning, middle, and end. Collected data were subjected to systematic qualitative analysis through an adapted version of a qualitative clinical instrument - the Change Interview Schedule (Elliott, Slatick and Urman, 2001) within a single case study design.

Analysis was through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis [IPA] (Smith, 2003) and generic qualitative analysis principles (Elliott and Timulak, 2005). Findings indicated that the trainee experienced significant levels of change during this first term, with contact with real clients the main driver for change. Each interview revealed a different phase of development: The interview conducted at Week 3 [beginning of term, prior to beginning practice], revealed the process of becoming something new and growth in therapeutic confidence. At Week 6 [middle of term, during early practice], the trainee was surviving 'stressful involvement' through supervision, whilst Week 11 [toward the end of the first term], revealed how experiential learning, in particular group supervision, was helpful throughout.

Findings confirm that early positive experiences with clients impact greatly on trainee development. Moreover, as emotional demands, particularly at the start of therapeutic practice, are stressful, trainees need experiential learning, peer support, and supervision to assist development. Relevant information concerning the researchers and the participant helped contextualise the research process and ethical considerations are outlined. Consistency with previous research findings of Bischoff, et al. (2002); Howard, et al. (2006) and De Stefano, et al. (2007) corroborate claims made in that this participant's experience emulates that of trainees in earlier studies. This practice-based research offered understanding of the experiences of trainees when starting client-work that could potentially inform and improve training and practice, although the authors make no claims of generalisability, only enhanced understanding of one trainee's experience. No recommendations for action are made other than the identification of a need for further research to better understand the influence of training on therapist development, in line with Bohart (2000) and Elliott (2002).

Limitations of the study include firstly, dependence on a single case, whilst accepting that this facilitated a detailed account of the participant's experience and secondly, the extent to which other factors influenced change remain unknown. Thirdly, research involved only one organisation and training orientation over a short timescale and the timing of the study may have influenced results, as change induced by training may parallel those of therapeutic clients (Lambert, 2007). It could therefore be anticipated that most dramatic change would likely occur at the start of training. Finally, the specific focus of the interview schedule may have been restrictive, preventing the emergence of other topic areas. Despite these limitations, this study offers insight into pivotal points where trainees may need additional support during early client/placement work.

Moving on from the Folkes-Skinner, Elliott and Weaver study, whilst anxiety is generally accepted as part of any learning process (Topham and Russell, 2012), counsellor training can induce relational issues and impact hugely upon a trainee's self-awareness, self-understanding, and perceptions. Resultantly, relationships with family and friends are explored and can subsequently change. A powerful quotation uses metaphor to capture this, "The changes in me rocked many boats, some perilously near to capsize" (Connor, 1994, p.225).

Paradoxically, however, stands a starkly different perspective advanced by Murray and Kleist (2011) who explored the impact of counsellor training on relationships between trainees and

their partners. In this study, couples participated in three rounds of interviews and resultant data revealed that relationships were positively transformed by new awareness within the trainee which fostered firstly personal, and secondly, relationship, changes.

Whilst tolerating, yet not totally accepting views concerning training anxiety, Elliott, et al. (2007) recognise that training could be improved and emphasise that trainees respond to feeling valued and learn more when they belong to interpersonal support systems where they have a chance to fully develop skills, rather than struggling to learn within a perceived critical environment, and one way that trainees can address the tensions of counsellor training is through personal therapy.

2.6.3.2 The necessity and impact of personal therapy

Alongside academic training and placements, many trainees engage in mandatory personal therapy as part of their course criteria and this is a much-debated element of counsellor training (Chaturvedi, 2013). A significant discourse surrounds mandatory personal therapy for counsellor trainees, with some perceiving this as a key characteristic of training, whilst others see it as unnecessary cost and pressure for trainees. Zerubavel and Wright (2012) point out that counsellors are not immune to ongoing problems or less than perfect past experiences and Moorhead, et al. (2012), suggest that some counsellor trainees decide to become counsellors because focusing on problems and healing processes of others allows them to postpone, or even circumvent, addressing their own issues. These situations highlight the importance of personal therapy within training so that trainees are encouraged not to avoid personal problems and are supported in exploring challenging issues to improve their sense of self and counselling effectiveness.

Moreover, despite the BACP claiming over ten years ago that, "No counsellor can ask a client to explore more than he has explored himself" (Colledge, 2002, p.84), by 2005, after considerable debate around its appropriateness for trainees (Murphy, 2005), the organisation had withdrawn their requirement for counsellors working towards accreditation to engage in personal therapy (von Haenisch, 2011), concentrating instead on broader evidence of increasing self-awareness (Malikiosi-Loizos, 2013).

Nevertheless, Chaturvedi (2013) notes that many training courses still require trainees to undertake therapy of a minimum duration, leading Holland (2011) to relevantly question, "Whose therapy is it? Consequently, whilst personal therapy is acknowledged by several writers as a crucial activity for therapists (Oteiza, 2010; Perry, 2013a), others take an opposite

view. For example, whilst an old, yet comprehensive and still relevant, study conducted research on 4000 counsellors emanating from fourteen different countries and found personal therapy to be one of three most positive influences on professional development (Orlinsky, Botermans and Rønnestad, 2001), others are less enthusiastic about its place within counsellor training (Chaturvedi, 2013).

Such debate has raged for years (Oteiza, 2010) and whilst personal development is a tried and tested foundation stone of counsellor training (Spencer, 2006), in comparison, Murphy (2005) muses that trainees are asked to engage with personal therapy despite a lack of convincing evidence of resultant benefits. A flavour of the strong feeling around this is provided by contrasting views expressed within literature. From a trainee's viewpoint, it is advantageous to experience how a counsellor works, learning from their style and attitude and Perry (2013a, p.8) vividly and touchingly describes mandatory personal therapy for trainees as, "the process of pulling myself apart to help others put themselves back together".

Furthermore, von Haenisch (2011) researched how compulsory personal therapy during counselling training influenced personal and professional development, finding positive impact upon personal growth, better understanding of therapeutic relationships, increased self-awareness, and enhanced professionalism. Another study by Daw and Joseph (2007) used questionnaires to canvass counsellors' views of their own personal therapy and found this to be a positive experience that benefitted practitioners personally and professionally. This finding is moderated, however, by research by Holland (2011) whose participants felt that mandatory therapeutic experiences differed from therapy by choice.

Experiencing the vulnerability of being a client is also invaluable, although the positive aspects of personal therapy in training are robustly refuted by Atkinson (2006), who questions how it can be right that someone commences therapy on the insistence of another, seeing this as a direct contradiction to the BACP concept of autonomy (BACP, 2010a;2016c). A study by King (2011) took a different perspective, exploring the views of therapists who provide personal therapy to trainees. Whilst this study was limited in that participants were all psychodynamic counsellors, findings showed that participants, whilst recognising inherent difficulties, perceived personal therapy as a mandatory requisite of counsellor training.

von Haenisch (2011) brings a more balanced perspective to this debate, in both accepting the unavoidable truisms that personal therapy is emotionally demanding, time-consuming, and expensive, yet believing that even if personal therapy is accessed because it is mandatory, it is a

catalyst for improved self-awareness and increased confidence, qualities that result in proficient counsellors. Whilst it appears from this line of reasoning that personal therapy during training is essential, with research by Daw and Joseph (2007) also supporting the experiential learning gained from client roles during personal therapy, Oteiza (2010) stipulates that, unlike career-long personal development, personal therapy should be time-limited.

McLeod (2009, p.625) defines the requirement for personal therapy as a 'rite de passage', whilst Malikiosi-Loizos (2013) puts a case against mandatory personal therapy, drawing attention, like von Haenisch (2011), to additional time, financial, and emotional burdens, also noting the oppositional stance of some trainees who feel they neither need, nor want, counselling at that juncture of their lives. Given such discourse, Chaturvedi (2013) sensibly argues that whilst personal therapy within training is proclaimed by many as valuable, with limited empirical evidence confirming this assertion, these claims seem to be sustained mainly by historical views, steeped in faith and custom, which beg further research.

2.6.3.3 Professional Identity

Another aspect to consider when exploring the facilitation of early practice is the developing professional identity of trainees. This begins to form during early training (Fragkiadaki, et al, 2013) and goes hand-in-hand with an identity crisis within the profession (Hock, 2008; King and Stretch, 2013), and the move towards regulation where it is hoped that, along with increased professionalism, will come the consolidation of professional identity (Fragkiadaki, et al., 2013). This move towards unified professional identity is seen by some as an agent of change for the profession (Fernando and Minton, 2011) although McLeod (2013a) is concerned that counsellor identity, as a distinct role, is currently threatened.

Consequently, professional identity is a controversial issue within the counselling field (Burkholder, 2012), with much written about this concept within experienced counsellors (Alves and Gazzola, 2011). The development of professional identity within counselling students has also been in vogue (Gibson, et al., 2010) as Daniels (2013) argues that a counsellor's identity determines how they view the world. Moreover, development of inter-professional theory (Ateah, et al., 2011), as experienced in a placement, develops professional identity, roles, and functionality and there are also strong references in literature about how evaluating therapeutic performance in early client-work impacts upon identity and self-efficacy (Skovholt and Rønnestad, 2003; Howard, et al., 2006; Theriault, et al., 2009).

2.6.4 Training and preparation for placement

The bestowing of any award which involves contact with vulnerable adults is a responsible task and it is within the placement that trainees usually experience their first client contact (Oldale and Cooke, 2015).

Consequently, as the award of a counselling diploma grants the right to see clients, Wheeler (2000) welcomed the considerable effort put into ascertaining best practice and desired outcomes for training counsellors of tomorrow (Wheeler, 2000). By 2015, however, Pascual-Leone, et al. (2015) proffer the diametrically opposed view that little attention has been paid to training practitioners. This is disappointing, as learning within a counselling context is a complex process and requires effective and interactive academic and practice learning environments (Folkes-Skinner, 2011). In this vein, a valid point was made long ago by Russell (1912) who in differentiating between 'knowledge by description' and 'knowledge by acquaintance' situated both as equally important within learning processes. These concepts relate to counsellor training where knowledge is gained through 'description and learning' and client-work where knowledge is gained through 'acquaintance and practice'.

A key way trainees prepare for their placement is through triad work and Smith (2016) undertook a qualitative study on the impact of disclosures and resultant intimacy of triad work on relationships with course colleagues. She explored learning from triad work for twelve undergraduate students on a BSc Psychology and Counselling degree, collecting data through semi-structured interviews and thematically analysing transcripts. She found that triad work impacted on relationships and emphasised the need to maintain boundaries and provide trainees with ongoing guidance and support for this aspect of training. Her research could influence future counsellor training as whilst this pedagogical approach was seen as an appropriate facilitator of learning, which adds richness to skills training, there was an identified need to ensure that this learning takes place within a safe environment. Limitations of this study have to be taken into account when considering transferability of findings as participants all emanated from one UK undergraduate course and were below the average age of students of counselling, yet this study provides insight into issues trainees face when preparing for placement.

Trainees must also develop therapeutic qualities and an ability to work at relational depth and in 2016, Baker explored the impact of mindfulness training in relation to trainee experiences of relational depth, their use of self within the therapeutic relationship, and the cultivation of

therapeutic qualities (Baker, 2016).   For this research, fifteen trainees participated in eight-weeks of mindfulness training specifically designed for therapists and eight were interviewed four months later. The interview scripts analysed through IPA found participants to have experienced a range of positive personal and professional outcomes with mindfulness appearing to enhance the ability to work at relational depth. Limitations included difficulties in defining the extent to which mindfulness impacted upon positive changes as these could have occurred as a consequence of other influences and practice. Nevertheless, this study could influence trainee preparation for placement.

A qualitative enquiry undertaken by Rouse, Armstrong and McLeod (2015) also has something to offer trainees' preparedness for placement as they researched how a therapist's personal creativity can inform client-work. In this study, a Grounded Theory methodology sat alongside arts-based research methods. Participants consisted of ten qualified practitioners who took part in semi-structured interviews before and after representing what creativity meant to them through an experiential creative task. Participants also kept reflective journals about their processing and the research revealed that creativity was a significant, relational, and potentially transformative aspect of therapeutic work. There are, however, limitations to this study, as participants were all over fifty and all openly identified themselves as interested in working creatively. Research findings could therefore have been different with younger participants and/or if carried out with practitioners for whom creativity was not part of their personal/professional identity. This study did, however, highlight the value of enhancing confidence in combining personal creativity with counselling theory and experience. These results could therefore inform preparation for early practice.

Armstrong and McLeod (2003) pointed out that few counselling courses prepare trainees for work within the voluntary sector and there is still an apparent failure to address counselling placements in depth within literature (Oldale and Cooke, 2015). When viewed against the observation that placements are crucial to the learning process, are where trainees consolidate theory and practice, contextualise their learning with their worldview and become more reflective and self-aware (McCabe, 2013; Oldale and Cooke, 2015), this is both curious and concerning.

2.7 The counsellor placement

This section is particularly important in respect of the main focus of this research as preceding sections contextualise the placement, setting the scene for a more specific exploration of this phenomenon.

Because early client-work is a prerequisite of qualifying as a professional counsellor (Dryden, et al., 1995), trainees must participate in client contact (Bernard and Goodyear, 2014), experience which traditionally takes place within counsellor placements. To this end, counsellor placements facilitate opportunities for trainees to practise helping skills and have real client experience (Min, 2012) and the transition of theory into real life practice undoubtedly takes place within placement settings (Stupans, March and Owen, 2013). Hatchett (2011), however, perceptively highlights that because many clients attend relatively few sessions, incompatibility exists between therapy as portrayed in textbooks and the process trainees experience within placements. Perhaps more concerning within this, however, is the inequality of placement experiences highlighted in general placements by Tynjälä, (2008) and alluded to within counsellor placements by Oldale and Cooke (2015).

2.7.1 Placements in education and training

Counselling is not the only profession where trainees rely on placements for experiential practice. Placements providing work/life experiences are central to learning within health care (Hunter, 2010) and benefit students through work experience prior to qualification. This is described well by Fanthome (2004, p.5) who aptly and metaphorically portrays such early work experience as "the first rung on the career ladder", especially as accreditation is now available for some volunteering (Holdsworth and Quinn, 2012). Moreover, as it is difficult to secure employment without relevant experience, entering the voluntary sector provides necessary practice (Feltham, 2010a) and Nevile (2004) points out that trainees on work experience benefit from belonging to a network of contacts (Little and Harvey, 2006), enhancing employability. Resultantly, trainees forge valuable connections to the labour market (Nevile, 2004) and through situational, real-world knowledge within placements, can become confident, competent professionals (Murphy, et al., 2012).   Additionally, Kubiak, Rogers and Turner (2010) strengthen the importance of placements, finding that workplace learning is an intrinsic component within health and social care.

Fanthome (2004) further proffers that the biggest learning from a placement comes from seeing how colleagues with years of experience approach various situations. This can, however, be either good, or bad, learning, depending upon the quality of experience and whether best practice is modelled (Harter and Arora, 2009; Harter and Stone, 2012).

Papastavrou, et al. (2010) extolled the value of placements that make trainees welcome, offer a supportive environment and integrate volunteers through teamwork, thus echoing sentiments expressed by Levett-Jones, et al. (2007) that belonging and empowerment stimulate learning. Moreover, during placement, trainees take tentative steps towards joining a community of practice (Cope, et al., 2000) and are therefore viewed as clinically competent (Warne, et al., 2010), and although Fanthome (2004, p.55) emphasises that when in a placement "mistakes are to be expected", many companies and organisations cite problems with previous placement workers as a block to taking future trainees (Morgan, 2012). This concept of the placement as the environment where mistakes can be made, although true to a certain extent, engenders a different perspective within the context of counselling placements, as the BACP Ethical Framework, through its concept of non-malevolence (BACP, 2010a;2016c), disagrees sharply with practice which falls below exacting standards.

This weakens the argument made by Fanthome (2004) that in general placements there is an expectation that a trainee will shadow a more experienced employee and this is where "it is safe to make mistakes" and "take calculated risks" (Fanthome, 2004, p.4). In contrast to this, in counselling placements, the importance of confidentiality and one-to-one connections make it difficult to sit alongside a more experienced counsellor during the counselling process. Moreover, whereas it is readily accepted that time spent at counsellor placements is a learning experience, making mistakes and risk-taking is more problematic when dealing with the human psyche, soul, and emotions (Morgan, 2012).

On the other side of the coin, for clients, counselling placements provide free/low cost counselling and as noted by Folkes-Skinner, Elliott and Weaver (2010) and van Rijn (2008), despite the thousands of clients seen every year in voluntary agencies in the UK, this work is rarely discussed, reflected upon or researched. Thus, an important opportunity for learning is overlooked, leaving a valuable data source untapped. Ivan Lewis, MP, then Minister for Young People, looked at placements from another angle in drawing attention to the benefits of work experience to employers, emphasising that work experience and placements have important roles to play, placing employers in a stronger position to develop and deliver enhanced services

(Lewis, 2003, cited in Fanthome, 2004). This concept, when related to counselling, holds firm today in relation to the benefits placement trainees provide for the NHS and local communities. Accordingly, there is a groundswell within literature that work experience is a good thing and the way forward. This concept is expressed by many, but none more unequivocally than Rhodes, who proclaims, "Work experience is here to stay. There is no doubt about that!" (Rhodes 2003, cited in Fanthome, 2004, p.2).

A research and practice paper by Koskinen and Äijö (2013) is key to the current research, as the researchers' mode of working, and choice of methods, suggest an interest in both understanding and improving practice by exploring a different placement model. Koskinen and Äijö make several links with previous literature and their study was informed by theoretical concepts of integrative pedagogy offered by Tynjälä (2008) and Kallio (2011). In similar circumstances to the second phase of Study Two, Koskinen and Äijö describe how a learning forum emanated from a desire to establish a different practice placement for health-care trainees, whilst also offering accessible health interventions to a local community.

There are several other similarities between this study and the current research, since Koskinen and Äijö describe undergraduate health care students' experiences of placement learning, in an attempt to respond to evolving learning/working environments within health and social care.   Moreover, Koskinen and Äijö's placement related to students' respective course curricula so that students gained theoretical knowledge from lectures, and integrated this within practical, authentic situations with diverse client groups. Students were part of the learning environment, were encouraged to direct their own learning, and as recommended by Griffiths and Guile (2003), student suggestions and critiques were welcomed. Consequently, like Study Two of the current research, Koskinen and Äijö established a different way of facilitating placement practice, which benefitted trainees and the public.

Koskinen and Äijö's study differed from the current research, however, in that the placement and subsequent research were not situated within the UK, and whilst Koskinen and Äijö's placement existed on the university campus, the placement offered an outreach service, involving a variety of health care trainees, rather than exclusively counsellors. Moreover, unlike the current study, trainers and supervisors were not physically present at the placement (Tiilikainen and Laitinen, 2010).

Nevertheless, again in line with the current research, Koskinen and Äijö collected data through focus-group interviews and background questionnaires, and their questions focussed on concepts such as work orientations, professional roles, and scopes of action. Data were analysed using inductive content analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Data collection was satisfactorily reported, although as some focus groups involved ten participants, it could be questioned whether adequate opportunity was provided for all voices to be heard. The 42 participants were profiled, although, as not all invited trainees participated, the experiences of those who did not participate remain unknown. It is also possible that again, in similar vein to the current study, the fact that researchers were employed by the university may have impacted upon focus group processing. Moving on from data collection, the process of analysis was succinctly transparent, with actual quotations used to substantiate findings.

Koskinen and Äijö categorised their findings into personal, collaborative, and organisational learning contexts, and told, through authentic student accounts, of the varying experiences of happy students, and those who were unhappy. There were marked anomalies between the experiences of happy students, who were satisfied with the placement, and unhappy students, who were dissatisfied with the placement. Students' descriptions mainly concentrated on the three categories designated by the researchers, with several of these personal, collaborative, and organisational concepts of interest to the current research and early work undertaken within counsellor placements.

Firstly, personal learning contexts evidenced learning related to the student's self, such as self-regulation, a desire to learn, self-awareness, and readiness to practise. Within this, happy students found it easy to formulate personal learning objectives, were pro-active, responded to responsibility, enjoyed independent working, developed personally and professionally in response to being trusted, and their self-confidence increased through the transition from novice to expert. Paradoxically, unhappy students did not formulate personal learning objectives, and their involvement in the placement was marginal, as they did not immerse themselves in learning experiences requiring responsibility or trust. They described their supervision as too little and/or too late, and they did not gain significant professional expertise from the placement.

Secondly, collaborative learning related to relationships. Client-work was experienced positively by all students, and happy students were not concerned about the number of clients

they were seeing at the placement. Happy students had a client-centred work orientation, and described working both independently, and as part of inter-professional teams. For happy students, this new type of placement provided more inter-professional focus than any earlier placements. Within this, they learnt from each other through modelling, questions/answers, reflecting, critical evaluation, and feedback. Happy students enriched their own work through these concepts of integration, and when they encountered problems, they sought solutions together with peers, a process which encouraged them in their own practice. Unhappy students however, tended to work in a more isolated way. They did not engage with the concept of inter-professional working or client-focused care. They complained that there were not enough suitable clients, and as the meaningfulness of the placement did not seem to have been encompassed by them, they described this placement as a waste of time.

Thirdly, the organisational learning context addressed learning conditions such as teaching roles, corresponding course/curriculum issues, and the scope for action during the placement. Within this theme there was overlap between happy and unhappy students. As this was a new type of placement, students needed an in-depth introduction to the working arrangements, yet both happy and unhappy students found, at first, the induction process to be inadequate. Despite this difficult start, the initial negative opinion of the happy students changed during their time at the placement, as they realised that the placement facilitated a standard of learning of expertise not possible within a traditional placement. They also felt that the course curriculum was well-suited to the placement environment. On the other hand, unhappy students felt that the scope of practice at the placement did not match the aims of the course curriculum, and felt they would have learnt more had they been placed in a traditional placement.

Koskinen and Äijö concluded that student satisfaction varied greatly, and posited that in order to learn expertise, students need to be supported more effectively in theory-practice integration. In describing the continuum of happy and unhappy students, they noted that diversity of experiences could relate to the length of time a student spent at the placement. They also acknowledged that in many ways, the experiences of the unhappy students were the direct opposite of the happy students, and importantly, recognised that identification of circumstances which led to unhappy students could support student learning in the future. Moreover, whilst Koskinen and Äijö identify elements that need further development, their integrative pedagogy model provides key prescriptions for improving practice. Resultantly,

whilst this pedagogy model had not previously been used within health care, it could lead to improvements in the role of trainers, training, and placements within the health and social care field.

From the critique of this paper it can be seen that, although this placement functioned outside the UK, and was a general health care provider [including health counselling], the similarities with the current research are both relevant and interesting. Of particular interest to the current study is firstly, the acknowledgement that gaining theoretical knowledge, and effectively integrating this within genuine encounters with real clients, are vital components in successfully completing placement elements of training. Secondly, inconsistency of participant experiences, where some students are happy with their placement experiences, and others are unhappy, brings into focus the lack of, and need for, similar research in relation to counsellor placements within the UK.

2.7.2 Counsellor placement dynamics

Work experience is an essential course requirement for vocational programmes world-wide (Cronin, 2014) and the counsellor placement is embedded within the context of contemporary counselling.

These placements are, however, complicated environments with many competing priorities.

2.7.2.1 Organisational Factors

Managing a professional organisation, particularly one which harnesses the power of trainees is not an easy task, particularly in times of austerity, funding cuts, and an increasingly litigious climate. Armstrong and McLeod (2003) pick up this point, drawing attention to the array of organisational factors impacting counselling agencies. Moreover, the Chronicle of Philanthropy (2006) critiqued seven stages which, according to the consulting group, Qm^2, constitute a non-profit organisation's life cycle. These organisational stages are categorised as: Infant; Toddler/go-go; Adolescent; Prime; Stable; Aristocracy and Bureaucracy. Interestingly, some of these stages can be related to Erikson's Stages of Man (Erikson, 1959). For instance, organisational 'infant', where there is frantic activity to get the agency off the ground and make the project work. In this stage, management is often in crisis and trust in the viability of the project and its founders must grow and be maintained; trust must be both earned and given. This

can be related to Erikson's stage one of 'Infancy', where there is a culture of 'Trust versus Mistrust', learning to trust in people and the environment.

Likewise, the organisational stage of 'Adolescent', where internal conflicts occur between workers as to the identity of the organisation and 'who does what'. Conflict occurs as some want to expand [external focus] and others want to get organised [internal focus], concepts that relate to Erikson's stage of adolescence, where issues of 'Identity versus Role Confusion' are worked through, as the adolescent becomes aware of how they appear to others [external focus] and the congruence/incongruence of this outer image compared to their sense of self [internal focus].

The process of moving through these organisational stages can also be related to Rogers' Seven Stages of Change as the new organisation struggles to reach 'actualization' or become the best it can be (Rogers, 1963). In human terms this theoretical process is conveyed through metaphor, how an acorn has potential to develop into an oak tree (Joseph and Murphy, 2013). An acorn, if provided with correct nutrients from the earth and favourable atmospheric conditions, will grow to its fullest potential - an oak tree. However, without nurture from the soil and the right balance of sunlight, rain, and shade, its full potential will never be reached. Without the right conditions for growth, the acorn will not become an oak tree, a person will not be fully-functioning and an organisation will not reach its full potential.

2.7.3.2 Organisational culture

According to Clafferty (2008), each organisation needs to be clear about its aims, what it can offer trainees and what it expects from trainees in return since, as Fanthome (2004) emphasises, organisations and their personnel differ; what is acceptable and normal in one organisation is unacceptable and abnormal within another and for counsellors, acceptable ethical behaviour varies between working environments (Gutheil and Brodsky, 2008; Owen-Pugh and Symons, 2012). Additionally, Winning (2010) talks of pressures inherent within organisational dynamics and work culture, as unquestionably, workplace philosophy shifted significantly early in the 21st Century (Pestonjee and Pandey, 2013), with placements not immune to this sea-change (Koskinen and Äijö, 2013). Trainees therefore have to learn, as put intriguingly by Tynjälä (2008), the unwritten rules of the placement.

The significance of this is that as every organisation has a particular ethos and culture, organisational variables play a big part within a trainee counsellor's work, as the context of the

agency is always in the consulting room with counsellor and client (Palmer, 2013). The Chronicle of Philanthropy (2006) describes how volunteer organisations can decline into an overly bureaucratic stage, where resources become depleted, the organisation focusses inward and decorum and civility are replaced with passive resistance. Consequently, more energy is spent on internal wrangling than the charitable cause resulting in staff distancing themselves, trainees feeling dislocated and service-users finding engagement difficult.

Issues can also arise where client/counsellor/organisation relationship boundaries are not well-defined, since, as client/counsellor develop within their roles, uneven relationships occur, with counsellor nearer to client and vice-versa than either is to the organisation/placement. Pictorially, this relates to a triangle with counsellor/client closer at the base of the triangle, with both equidistant from the agency, although this resides at the peak of the triangle:

Figure: 2.1:   Relationship between Agency/Counsellor/Client (Adapted by researcher from Sills, 1997, p.159)

Working life consumes around a quarter of most working adults' wakeful hours (Harter and Stone, 2012) and a working culture of dignity and respect is therefore paramount to employee wellbeing (Unison, 2010). Following this argument, Feltham, when asked what he would change about society, replied that he would like to "humanise the workplace" (Feltham, 2010b, p.15) and in any organisation where people mix, there is a potential for bullying (Unison, 2012)

which can lead to loss of confidence, diminished self-acceptance, and low self-esteem (Pörhölä, 2016).

Unexpectedly, it is also not unheard of for volunteers in the helping profession to experience prejudice from management and peers, with Gebbia, et al. (2012) drawing attention to bullying in volunteer environments and its impact on present and future life. Cultural issues can also arise and Ellis and Cooper (2013) note that cultural differences can be ignored on counsellor training courses where, 'safe spaces' should be created so that cultural diversity can, as Ellis (2013, p.18) puts it, move towards a "rainbow-coloured therapeutic community", concepts which should also transition to placements.

Fanthome (2004) and Feij (2013) also highlight cultural difficulties that can occur within a workforce and Wheeler (2007, p.252) is upfront in claiming that "organisational cultures can be destructive and alienating". Trainees can, therefore, find it difficult to develop a sense of belonging (Bradbury-Jones, et al., 2007) and can also face discrimination despite policies on issues of difference often in place.

Such policies and procedures are a necessary part of the culture of placements, and as evidenced in the BACP Ethical Framework (2016c) and BACP information sheets, are extensive in nature and number, for example, 'Guidance for Trainee Placements' (Coate, 2010), 'Managing Volunteers' (Clafferty, 2008), Professional aspects of setting up a counselling service [P1] (Moore, 2008) and Practical aspects of setting up a counselling service [E1] (Gabriel and Casemore, 2008a). Many of these are currently being re-written by the BACP (BACP, 2017), nevertheless, having policies in place is not enough, as trainees need to be aware of, understand, and implement them, a concept that depends upon the prevailing culture within the organisation. This point is succinctly encompassed in a participant quotation, heading a research article by Brown (2006, p.100), "In my agency it's very clear, but I can't tell you what it is", a perfect exemplification of the uncertainty sometimes experienced when working with such policies.

2.7.3 Counsellor placements and the trainee counsellor

Theoretically, a counsellor placement provides trainees with opportunities to practise skills with real clients under controlled and supervised conditions, learning which, according to Happell, et al. (2015), is essential within mental health training.

Working as a counsellor at a placement can also improve the wellbeing and psychological development of trainees, although Stern, writing in 'The Psychologist' (2013), warns that if a person takes either themselves, or their work, too seriously, their mental health is in danger and trainees often approach their placement earnestly, as successful placement outcomes are essential for qualification. Furthermore, counsellor trainees often "hit the ground running" (Dunkley, 2007, p.41), and Fanthome (2004) and Baird (2010) provide excellent advice on how to survive in work placements in general, with much of their guidance applicable to counsellor placements. Alongside this, Fanthome (2004, p.77) explains how many trainees feel indebted to their placement, whilst others "believe they are doing employers a favour" and undoubtedly, trainees within any workplace boost the existing workforce, incurring little or no extra cost. This is certainly the case in the counselling sector, where trainees provide much of the therapeutic delivery.

Wheeler (2002) recalls how training can be a process of 'un-training', an occurrence which has been explained as a move from unconscious incompetence to unconscious competence (Bayne and Jinks, 2010, p.140); this process occurs within the counsellor placement. Learning can be conscious or unconscious and the Consciously Competent Model, first developed by Noel Burch (DNA), over 30 years ago, defines four levels a person transitions when learning a new skill as: Unconsciously Incompetent [unaware of lack of knowledge/skill]; Consciously Incompetent [recognising, but not as yet addressing, skill deficit]; Consciously Competent [performs the skill independently and reliably, but with concentration and focus] and Unconsciously Competent [performs the skill automatically, without conscious effort].   Where a trainee is within this cycle, can impact hugely upon their confidence and the timing of, and preparation for, placement is therefore important (Murphy, et al., 2012).

Additionally, Turner, et al. (2008) researched the impact of training on counsellors, exploring how trainees learn through client-work and the contexts where such learning arises. Whilst this

study was of limited scope, involving just two trainees for only part of their training, one finding merits particular consideration, as the study found that learning trainees experienced through client-work might disappear from their awareness without reflexivity. Perhaps, most important, however, is that the placement is where trainees realise that counselling is not merely a job, but a way of being (Carter, 2004).

Moreover, Anteby and Wrzesniewski (2013) see the quality of working life as pivotal to sociological agendas and good experiences in training and early practice impact trainees' sense of 'self' and produce 'soft outcomes', such as increased self-esteem and improved communication/interpersonal skills (Nevile, 2004; Fanthome, 2004; Baird, 2010). Placement work can also negate adverse impacts of unemployment on self-worth and wellbeing (Nevile, 2004). Nonetheless, researchers have also found placement trainees to experience a lack of respect (Bradbury-Jones, et al., 2007) and a dearth of information, with Clafferty (2008) stressing the importance of ensuring effective communication with trainees.

Perry (2013b), however, offers a counter-indication, describing placement experiences as professional and supportive. In addition to this, whilst trainees are not paid, Clafferty (2008) suggests how they can be remunerated, for example, simply thanking trainees for work undertaken, recognising their value within the organisation, and/or providing training and supervision, all potentially raise self-esteem. This is important, as during training, trainees often operate through an external locus of evaluation (Rogers1980), boundaried by views and opinions of others, such as peers, tutors/lecturers, placement providers, and supervisors. Through practice application and embedded learning, however, this can eventually give way to a more internal focus as their previously neutralised 'self' and 'presence' re-emerge (Rogers, 1980).

In addition to this, trainees on placement can also experience self-esteem issues through: lack of decision autonomy [little decision making/control of events] (Olfert, 2013); imposter syndrome [I'm not qualified…I shouldn't be here] (Tosey and Gregory, 2002, p.82); role incompatibility [student/volunteer/counsellor?] (Kahn, et al., 2010); ambiguity (Grant and Rothbard, 2013); conflict of knowledge ownership between trainee and organisation (Rechberg and Syed, 2013) and lowered self-belief (Rogers, 1967). Moreover, Fanthome (2004) notes how the attitude of permanent staff to trainees can be varied, with positive experiences producing raised self-esteem/increased confidence and negative experiences resulting in high stress levels and

disappointment within trainees. Such experiences could be what led Brammer (2012) to describe crisply in just four words what is needed to get through training as, practice, resilience, growth, and faith.

Sullivan (2013), however, promotes shared laughter with respected colleagues as a way of coping with stress at work and aiding healthy self-esteem, a concept which contrasts with Folkes-Skinner's (2007, p.40) description of how trainees can find placement experiences difficult as sometimes the "desire to help becomes a struggle for survival", with Fanthome 2004) pointedly reminding that placements need trainees as much as trainees need placements. She puts it this way, "You [trainees] have as much to offer them [placements] as they have to offer you" (Fanthome, 2004, p.7).

Nonetheless, the placement experience, in bringing to life the process of counselling and taking it from classroom to consulting room, examples the importance of 'learning by doing' as proposed by Knowles (1980) and Kolb's (1984) experiential learning paradigms, enhancing understanding of counselling processes by linking education to practice. Accordingly, placement work has long been recognised for its ability to support and compliment academic studies (Fanthome, 2004; Baird, 2010) as best practice does not grow merely out of course design, curricula content, or teaching, but through participation within relevant settings (Kubiak, Rogers and Turner, 2010). This point is brought into question, however, by a study in New Zealand, where only 41% of respondents named their 'placement' and/or counselling practice as key elements of learning (Wright and Gardiner, 2009). Taking a different stance, Halifax (2010a) maintains that working in a counsellor placement leads to greater understanding of counselling relationships and working alliances which results in feeling more comfortable with counselling roles. Issues can, however, arise where trainees need to be reprimanded (Browne, 2006), for example, some are bad time-keepers, do not adhere to organisational policies or break confidentiality (Clafferty, 2008) and as Coate (2010) acknowledges, where such issues remain unaddressed, placements become unsafe for both trainees and clients.

Furthermore, course providers differ in guidance offered to students in finding a counselling placement, a sentiment expressed as common in other disciplines by Fanthome (2004) and echoed by Baird (2010). Some course providers have placement tutors who help students find placements and/or a database of placements for trainees to access. Paradoxically, others place this onus firmly on students, seeing this as part of the process of becoming a professional. In

this way, placements are a learning experience from beginning to end (Fanthome, 2004, Baird, 2010), although it is not always easy to find a placement to start this learning process.

2.7.3.1 Securing a placement

Herrick (2007) draws attention to a culture where increasing numbers of students pursue sparse placements because counselling is a growing commodity (BACP, 2010b), with many placements inundated with trainees seeking voluntary work. Consequently, a supply and demand situation occurs where placements can afford to be discerning in their choice of trainee. This could account for the trainees who feel lucky to have a placement opportunity (Tribe, 2005) and can result in trainees feeling pressurised to accept any placement without checking for appropriateness or considering whether they want/are able to work within a particular environment (Coate, 2010). Furthermore, placements are usually symptom specific (Serenity, 2013) rather than generic and trainees naturally lean towards particular presenting issues and/or specific modalities.

2.7.3.2 Inequality of trainee experiences

Fanthome (2004) advocates careful consideration of what type of placement a trainee wants to work within and a plethora of placements are advertised within every edition of 'Therapy Today'. Notwithstanding this, as noted by Averett, Carawan and Burroughs (2012), when researching social worker placements, little is known about how to match students to 'best fit' placements. Over thirty years ago, Pitts (1992) drew attention to shortcomings of some counsellor placements, a concerning statement, because, as noted by Fanthome (2004), course providers incorporate work placements into curricula to provide productive practice and meet initiatives for widening participation and increasing employability (Fanthome, 2004; Little and Harvey, 2006; HEA, 2011). Shortfalls in some placement resources can therefore make it difficult for trainees to make the most of learning opportunities (Kubiak, Rogers and Turner, 2010), with some placements even falling below acceptable standards (Izzard, 2001).

As also pointedly expressed by Fanthome (2004, p.13) and echoed by Morgan (2012), "The umbrella term 'placement', encompasses a plethora of differing experiences" and for trainees, the counselling placement consolidates learning and practice and as such is pro-active, involving trainees moving out of their comfort zone and into unchartered territory. Moreover, whilst Fanthome (2004) and Baird (2010) astutely differentiate between work experience and work training, the counsellor placement balances curiously between the two, as becoming a counsellor involves a complex mix of training and practice.

Writing about nursing trainees' experiences, Murphy, et al. (2012) reinforce that quality practice placements are key to training competent professionals. Despite this, Fanthome (2004, p.53) reports how, in some work placements, trainees are treated as if they have "no status at all" as they "do not have a real job" and some placement trainees experience limited learning opportunities (Bradbury-Jones, et al., 2007). Furthermore, the attitude of students to general work placements is discussed in literature (Fanthome, 2004; Gilbert, 2014; Brooks and Youngson, 2016) as work placement experience can be worse than, better than, or simply not what was envisaged by a student (Fanthome, 2004), with some trainees' anticipations not met (Murphy, 2012) and mismatches of expectations between trainee and placement common (Little and Harvey, 2006).

As seen from the foregoing, debate about the value of general placements and work experience is significant (Rhodes, 2003, cited in Fanthome, 2004; Smith, 2010; Murphy, 2012). However, this concept is not without criticism, or "shadows" (Palmer and Bor, 2008; Bhargava and Sriram, 2016) with trainees reporting both positive and negative experiences (Murphy, 2012) and poor placement experiences not only affecting trainees, but also impacting negatively upon course providers (Urwin, et al., 2010).

Nevertheless, such organisations offer trainees real counselling experience, external to the learning establishment, although this can be highly challenging for trainees as Perry (2013b) describes trials, tribulations, and benefits of the counselling placement, profiling good and bad experiences. It is surprising, therefore, that few researchers have explored new ways of facilitating work experience for the helping professions.

One key practice and research based paper is, however, of particular relevance to this research as it partly captures concepts involved in considering different ways to address practice elements of training. The paper outlined research undertaken by van Rijn, et al. (2008) who established and evaluated an internship year alongside a second year of training and practice. The researchers' own training and practice were the focus of interest as, similar to Study Two in the current research, their aim was to close the gap between training and practice and facilitate the translation of theory into practice for trainees. There was also a wider focus of integrating findings from 'common factors' research into effectiveness of psychotherapy.

The intellectual project the authors undertook involved knowledge for understanding and reflexive action as manifested in their clear interest in comprehending and improving practice and their choice of action research for reflection on learning. The authors overtly condemned

the lack of research into early practice and covertly criticised the policy of outsourcing practice elements of training. The study was naturalistic, using quantitative and qualitative methodology within an action research framework to evaluate their new approach to practice training and reflect upon its impact on participants, the organisation, and practice. Schon (1987) described reflexivity as the ability to reflect in action, whilst holding multiple views, and this paradigm informed the project.

Data collection was clearly explained and a summary of all data was presented. Analytical processes were detailed, explaining quantitative analysis of the effectiveness of trainees' practice, where clinical data compared the internship to two comparative groups, firstly, trainees at the same stage of training, and secondly, CORE-OM national benchmarks (CORE, 2012). Qualitative analysis of portfolios provided insight into developing clinical and research skills and qualitative analysis of the research process involved analysing project meetings through a loosely structured framework of transcript analysis. Emergent themes were identified which were interpretative, using participants' subjective experience (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Several significant claims encompassed much of the detail of the findings, relating to how the project increased the effectiveness of students' practice, promoted reflexivity, and provided insight into students' experiences, as the quantitative research demonstrated that the project developed student practice and reflexivity skills, whilst qualitative analysis described student experiences and the emotional impact of the research process.

The researchers offered first-hand experience of their own practice knowledge and research, and findings are specific to the context from which the claims were derived, as generalisability is not claimed. Nevertheless, the quantitative and qualitative claims fit together in supporting the overall argument that developing and evaluating a therapeutic training programme demonstrated the complexity and challenges of evaluating therapeutic training. Findings offer insight and generate suggestions for practice, yet at the same time raise questions concerning the future development and training of effective practitioners.

Limitations of this research include recognition that the main researcher was both a tutor and manager of the counselling service where students undertook placements, a dual role that necessitated high levels of integrity and transparency within the research process, with the whole research team involved in analysis and formulation of conclusions. Furthermore, the project involved only two training groups and was restricted to a single organisation and a

particular counselling orientation. Researchers qualify their claims by acknowledging the study's limitations, yet whilst these indicate tentativeness of results, the robustness of the evidence is strengthened by the researchers acknowledging and accepting methodological limitations, including how the process of research was new to tutors and students, and also conceding their own uncertainty during some phases of research.

Nonetheless, through this investigation of an internship year, practice knowledge and research knowledge were enhanced in that a new structure of training and practice was tested which can be adapted and further evaluated within different settings. Awareness has also been raised regarding the need for more research into what made this project successful and the relevance of the experiences and challenges of the project. What is also important for the current research, is that researchers did not offer counter-evidence from other researchers, seemingly because they found no evidence from others' work or research/practice literature that supports or challenges claims made. Thus, the need for further research in this area is evidenced.

2.7.3.3 Client assessment and referrals

Even post-qualification, every counsellor cannot work with every client, with each counsellor at some point encountering a client or issue they find difficult, or tests their ability (Halifax, 2009d). The allocation of client to counsellor is therefore important (Tasker, 2010; QAA, 2013), particularly for referrals to trainees (BACP, 2013a). Orlinsky and Rønnestad (2005) argue that when assessing clients for trainees, every attempt needs to be made to ensure compatibility between the student's skill level and the challenges a prospective client could present. Many placements, however, do not have assessment processes in place (SCVS, 2015) and even where these are in existence, assessment is a difficult process, as clients can present suitable issues, holding back deeper or difficult subjects until therapy is underway (Halifax, 2009a). Trainees have consequently reported inappropriate referrals (Dunkley, 2007).

Additionally, whereas referrals to trainees are usually assessed as low risk, low risk, by definition, means some risk, and no assessment is fool-proof (Dunkley, 2007).   Freeth (2013) sees the assessment process as determining appropriate/inappropriate referrals and Tasker (2010) identifies assessment skills as similar to those within counselling, albeit used differently. The BACP's view is that assessment should only be undertaken by practitioners holding at minimum a diploma in counselling, plus 450 hours supervised practice and undoubtedly, defined and well-implemented assessment processes, graded referrals, controlling the number

of clients a trainee sees during training, and careful counsellor/client matching is of advantage to trainees and their clients (Dunkley, 2007; QAA, 2013). Carroll (1993) however, whilst underlining the importance of careful monitoring and sensible selection of clients, takes a more pragmatic and normalising approach, reminding that trainees have to start therapeutic work at some time, somewhere, with some client.

Nonetheless, whilst Feltham (2010a, p.22) and Reeves (2013, pp.252-253) offer sensible advice on formal client assessment, all counsellors naturally formulate an understanding of new clients and such in-session assessment guides therapeutic processes. Research by Kendjelic and Eells (2007), however, examined the impact of specific training in assessment, where 77% of 43 participants were trainees, with half the sample acting as a control. They found that participants who had two hours of assessment training produced significantly more complex and accurate client assessments than those who had not participated in training.

2.7.3.4 First clients

Orlinsky and Rønnestad (2005) endorsed how direct contact with clients is the most influential factor in counsellor development and Rønnestad and Ladany (2006) put forward the argument that research needs to improve understanding of counsellor training processes and their impact on trainee development. This is a welcome assertion as there are few personal problems which do not find their way into counsellor placements, where, as poignantly voiced by Faris and van Ooijen (2012, p.ix), many clients arrive with "broken hearts" or "worried brows", hoping for a "cure" or solution to their problems. Consequently, trainees today experience increasingly complex cases, since, as voiced by Halifax (2009a, p.7) placement clients are sometimes "in real crisis, often profoundly damaged people". This increase in symptom severity of placement clients could be attributed to concepts advanced by Erskine (2011), who maintains that fewer clients can afford to pay for counselling and alongside this, funding cuts mean that organisations that previously supported paid, qualified staff now rely more on volunteers.

These factors set the scene for early client-work which is consistently described within literature as stressful (Izzard, 2001; Herrick, 2007; Hill, Sullivan, Knox and Schlosser, 2007; Folkes-Skinner, 2011) and the major influence on the professional development of a trainee (Orlinsky and Rønnestad, 2005). Moore (2008) recommends that trainees have at least 100 hours dedicated counselling training [as opposed to training in other caring skills or related academia] before seeing clients and a comprehensive induction process introducing new

trainees to policy/procedures is also of prime importance (Clafferty, 2008). Prior to seeing clients, understanding the power of the therapeutic relationship and respect for the working alliance (John, 2012) are crucial and whilst the BACP expects that before starting client-work, trainees will be assessed individually for readiness to see clients and should not acquire their practice hours through private/independent practice (BACP, 2013a [B4.1(iv)]), literature evidences how counsellors can feel ill-prepared and ineffectual when entering the professional world (Kottler and Blau, 1989; Kottler, 2010; Folkes-Skinner, Elliott and Weaver, 2010).

The essential element of becoming a professional counsellor - the first real client - traditionally occurs within a counselling placement. Placement providers and counsellors have to disclose trainee status to all clients (BACP, 2013a [B4.1(v)]) prior to therapeutic contact and it is in the placement that learning from training comes to life and is grounded and embedded as trainee counsellors apply their craft. Some trainees become frustrated, however, as they wait a long time before their placement refers them a client, whilst paradoxically, other trainees find themselves with their first client having just walked into the placement (Dunkley, 2007).

At this time, even excellent trainees can find themselves struggling (Dunkley, 2007; van Rijn, 2008), as coming into contact with that first client is daunting. Evans (2016) acknowledged that his training had been near to reality yet still described feeling powerless and unprepared when seeing his first client. Machin (2007) eloquently and movingly explains this:

> "Despite all the training, reading, personal therapy, supervision, peer-groups, conferences, continuing professional development…I now realise that nothing could have prepared me for the experience of becoming a therapist"

> Machin (2007, p.44)

In Gestalt terms, this could be defined as moving from familiarity to a 'growing edge', or as alluded to by Tribe (2005) and coined by Denham-Vaughan (2010, p.35), "a place of teetering uncertainty". It is at this point that the difference in understanding, learning, and talking about counselling processes, and the quantum leap to becoming a counsellor (Folkes-Skinner, 2007) occurs, and the placement plays a pivotal part in this transition; a shift which Orlinsky and Rønnestad (2005) pertinently describe as stressful evolution from role ambiguity to confident practice.

The placement, is, nevertheless, steeped with unfulfilled potential. For example, Feltham (1986;2010a) observed that although helpers from Freud onwards publish case studies, few focus strongly on learning from clients. Rogers (1961, p.10), however, is one theorist that Feltham cannot taint with this accusation, as Rogers recognised long ago that his theoretical ideas arose, in part, from learning experienced through client-work. He expressed this touchingly:

> "If I subtracted from my work learnings
> gained from deep relationships with
> clients…I would be nothing"
>
> Rogers (1980, p.62)

Others place doubt on Feltham's indictment (Turner, 2007) as Skovholt (1974, p.58-64), in similar vein to Rogers, poignantly reminisced about "self-insight gained through working with others", whilst Turner, et al. (2008) powerfully confirmed these assertions through their astute observation that trainees can take as much learning from clients as clients gain from therapeutic encounters. Likewise, client-work has been seen to impact positively not only on the client, but also on the counsellor, by several other writers (Rogers, 1961; Yalom, 1991; Miller, 2001; Kottler and Carlson, 2006; Etherington, 2016) and Kottler takes this concept even further, believing that every client changes their therapist in some way (Kottler and Carlson, 2006). Nevertheless, little research was found which addressed the learning trainees derive from early client-work within placements, although a small, yet relevant, study by Folkes-Skinner, Elliott and Weaver (2010), critiqued earlier, identified how encounter with a first client is seminal, yet stressful.

Research by Rønnestad and Skovholt's (2003) studied the development of therapists who consistently disclosed how they were influenced by interactions with clients and a more recent study by Hill, et al. (2015) used a mixed-method approach to explore changes over a period of 12 to 42 months within psychology trainees undertaking externship training in a psychodynamic clinic. Hill and colleagues found that during this time, trainees changed in some respects, yet did not in change in others. Areas of change included increased skill in forming therapeutic relationships/working alliances, the ability to use helping skills, an increase in higher-order functioning, and client rated improvements to interpersonal functioning. No change was found, however, in engaging clients [for at least 8 sessions], or client-rated symptoms. Trainees ascribed change to their training, group supervision, research participation, and their engagement with clients (Hill, et al., 2015). This research had many

strengths in that quantitative and qualitative research similarly demonstrated change and extant literature was extended by highlighting the influence of training, supervision, coursework, and clinical experiences/working with clients. Nevertheless, whilst research tracked trainee change over time, collecting data over a six-year period rather than through cross-sectional research, it was limited to one site, with trainees involved in doctoral studies on one training programme, some of whom had previous experience and all of whom were engaged in psychodynamic/interpersonal training. Participants were also in their third year of training and therefore offered reflective, rather than 'real time' perspectives. Furthermore, within the qualitative study, the one interviewer had multiple relationships with some trainees as their researcher, professor, supervisor, and clinical director. This may have inhibited negative responses and the researchers themselves also noted that the study needs to be repeated with more rigorous methods.

In another key paper, results of a qualitative study by Turner, et al. (2008) focussed on learning and change experiences of two trainees over a nine-month period, strongly evidencing learning from client-work. These authors drew on published evidence of others including Miller (2001) and Kottler (Kottler and Carlson, 2005). Heuristic methodology (Moustakas, 1990) was employed with principles of co-operative inquiry methodology (Heron, 1996), where dialogue between researchers combined with periods of individual data collection in a process of 'co-operative self-search inquiry', with learning and change recorded within journals. Findings illuminated how trainees learn through client-work and learning contexts and considered the impact of learning on trainees. Benefits, in terms of their roles as practitioners and engaging in research, included positive change within their client-work and reflective practice. As this was heuristic research, it was conducted by the trainees themselves and they described their findings as illustrative and suggestive, rather than explanatory or evaluative.

Limitations of the study include its focus on only two trainees for a relatively short period and as the researchers themselves point out, it can be difficult to fully represent learning and change experiences. Nevertheless, the authors used robust evidence from previous work to support their claims. For example, findings that trainees become more confident in their abilities through client-work are related to previous writing by Chaplain (1989) who suggests that counsellors develop in confidence throughout their careers. Oscillation between feelings of competence and incompetence, confidence, and doubt were related to findings by Orlinsky,

et al. (1999a) and Theriault and Gazzola (2005) who found that experienced counsellors also battle with similar feelings. Learning about 'self' through client-work was also related to experiences of seasoned practitioners (Norcross and Guy, 1989; Wosket, 1999) and learning about therapy as a consequence of client-work was compared to work undertaken by many theorists including Thorne (1989), Wosket (1999) and Mountford (2005). Recommendations for practice include the need for trainees to be well-prepared for the emotional demands of client-work and reflect upon, and record, subsequent learning.

2.7.3.5 Accruing client hours

The need to accrue client hours is of utmost importance to trainees as they need to evidence 100 hours of supervised practice prior to qualification, yet there is inequality of experience and disparity reported between the number/frequency of clients seen by trainees during placement experience, making it difficult to work at an optimal level. Workload [too much/too little] is recognised as a cause of workplace stress, with consequent impact on self-esteem as too much work results in stress, commonly known in the counselling world as 'burnout', whereas too little can cause 'rust-out' (Morris and Norris, 2010).

Literature describes how quantity under-load through too few clients, a concept also described by Levi (1984) as 'rust-out', can result in lack of stimulation, under-utilisation of skills, decreased self-confidence, lowered self-esteem, and feelings of ineffectiveness or futility. This concept is often seen in trainees struggling to accrue client hours, yet experiencing few or inconsistent referrals and/or DNA's, as such circumstances fuel feelings of not being up to the task (Maclellan, 2008). Paradoxically, trainees can also be over-stretched, having too many clients, where quantity overload can cause 'burnout', leading, according to Levi (1984) and Malinowski (2013), to reduced performance, low self-esteem, loss of humour, and insomnia.

On the other hand, optimum workloads result in creativity and high energy levels (Starmer, Frintner and Freed, 2016) and whilst research into workload in other areas has shown how too much, or too little, work means that overload or lack of stimulation results in a decline in performance and increased error margins (Morris and Norris, 2010), this is less acceptable within counselling environments. Nevertheless, in Halifax's view, accruing counselling hours within a set period results merely in "clients turning into hours clocked" (Halifax, 2009d, p.8-9).

2.7.3.6 Assessment of placement practice

All new experiences offer opportunities to learn and learning at the placement builds on earlier and ongoing learning from training courses. Cottrell (2003, p.54) advances six conditions necessary for learning: New experiences; foundations; rehearsal (practising/repeating); processing (meaning-making); understanding and demonstration, concepts all present within the counselling placement. By demonstrating learning, trainees become assured of their knowledge and qualities (Cottrell, 2008;2013) through putting new skills to the test of real client-work. A necessity missing from Cottrell's list is, however, important for counsellor trainees - the art of reflection (Etherington, 2004; Moller, 2010). By reflecting upon their contribution, what they liked, what they disliked, what they found interesting, or boring, trainees determine individual interests, strengths, and challenges (Fanthome, 2004).

Reflexivity and developmental analysis are essential to the placement experience (Fanthome, 2004) and most trainees already possess an ability to self-reflect and apply learning to wider concepts, they then learn from the process of reflecting upon their placement (Fanthome, 2004). Given the importance the counselling profession places upon self-reflection and continuing personal and professional development (John, 2012), however, it is surprising how little counselling placement students are asked to reflect upon practice elements of training.

Moreover, counsellor placements are used by course providers in trainee assessment processes and so that this practice element of training can be assessed, details of client-work are recorded in professional logs, endorsed by suitably qualified supervisors who report on trainees' progress as they accrue practice hours, then presented to evidence competence (BACP, 2013a [B4.1(vi)]). Graham (2013), however, objects to course providers using supervisors as assessors through such practice logs and reports, maintaining that assessment is a role trainers should fulfil. Placement assessments also draw on lessons from each phase of the placement experience through written/oral assignments including purposeful practice evidenced by learning logs, reflective essays, placement presentations, and reports (Fanthome, 2004).

Arguably, however, the most important learning from placements is that trainees make appropriate links between theory and practice as, as Halifax (2010) judiciously elucidates, counsellors need a sound working knowledge of theories. Several authors uphold the need for adherence to theoretical concepts (Nelson-Jones, 2012; Egan, 2014), yet in an early, yet

robust challenge to theory, Jung followed a dismissive view, declaring, "…learn theories as well as you can, but put them aside when you touch the miracle of the living soul" (Jung, cited in Milne,1999, p.16). It is in the counselling placement that trainees begin to contemplate such complexities of translating theory into practice and contrasting views of theory as dogma (Rogers, 1980), or necessity (Egan, 2014], one reason why supervision is a vital component of counsellor training.

2.8 Supervision and the placement process

It is within placements that trainees usually first engage in a lifelong process of supervision (Grant and Schofield, 2007; Bowie, McLeod. and McLeod 2016). Various aspects of supervision have been subjected to substantial research over many decades (Dawson and Akhurst, 2015) as supervision, where a counsellor meets with a more experienced colleague to explore their caseload, is a central and essential aspect of counsellor training and practice. The BACP describes supervision as follows:

> "Supervision is essential to how
> practitioners sustain good practice
> throughout their working life.
> Supervision provides practitioners
> with regular and ongoing
> opportunities to reflect in depth about
> all aspects of their practice in order to
> work as effectively, safely and
> ethically as possible. Supervision also
> sustains the personal resourcefulness
> required to undertake the work"

> (BACP, 2016c, p.11, Section 50)

Supervision is fundamental to the counselling of every client (Schofield and Pelling, 2002; Bradley, et al., 2010; North, 2012) and is one of the fundamental ways in which counselling is monitored and evaluated. Nonetheless, Feltham (2002), somewhat controversially, has contended that supervision can impact adversely upon the quality of counselling. The BACP (2013a, B4.11) accords with the sentiments of Bradley and colleagues and North, but disagrees with Feltham, defining supervision as: educational; reflective; developmental; supportive and managerial. Undoubtedly, counselling supervision has a long and involved history, dating back to the days of Freud and Jung (McGuire,1974) and whilst within most professions qualifying infers an ability to work unsupervised, this is not the case within the

world of counselling as mandatory career-long supervision is a cornerstone of the counselling profession (BACP, 2007).

Despite this, Bailey (2012) questions whether counsellors actually need supervision and whether, in fact, this lifelong acquiescence to supervision is necessary, or indeed, healthy. Supervision is, nonetheless, part of the identity of the counselling profession, has strong historical and current elements, and is an integral and complex concept common to all practicing counsellors. Furthermore, whilst Wheeler (2007, p.1), a stalwart of counsellor training, made the valid observation that supervision is "notoriously difficult" to research, this has not detracted from copious amounts of supervision research.

Particularly relevant to the current study is a question raised by Halifax, who, in discussing placement dilemmas experienced by trainees asks, "Who is checking up on us?" (Halifax, 2009a, p.7). A question answered to some degree by the 'evaluative' component of supervision which along with restorative, supportive, and educative elements constitute the core of supervision (Hawkins and Shohet, 2007; Hewson, 2008; Reid and Westergaard, 2013). Interestingly, however, evaluative aspects are only alluded to by vague reference to "managerial" in BACP guidelines (BACP, 2013a, B4.11). Notwithstanding this, supervision does supply an answer to Halifax's 'scrutiny' query, in that it also provides accountability, not only for counsellors, but also for the organisations within which they practise (Bradley, et al., 2010).

Bond (2010; 2015a) argues that it is relatively undisputed that supervision is a beneficial and necessary aspect of a counsellor's early career, greatly influencing counsellor development (Wheeler and Richards, 2007; Wallace and Cooper, 2015). Moreover, whilst Falender and Shafranske (2007) are more specific in defining the benefits of supervision as developing supervisee competence whilst ensuring integrity of practice, the negative impact of poor supervision on trainees cannot be underestimated. Considering this, Orlinsky and Rønnestad suggest that when things go wrong for trainees in supervision, this can result in a concept called "double traumatisation" (Orlinsky and Rønnestad, 2005, p.189), where a trainee can become caught up in a negative, self-fulfilling cycle that impacts upon levels of self-worthiness and therapeutic confidence.

Webb (2001) also cautions that we should not dupe ourselves that supervision ensures client safety, or ethical standards, with Bailey (2012, p.30) asking bluntly, "Do we need supervision?" A question often posed by early career and experienced therapists alike. Bailey

concludes, that as supervision brings checks and balances to a process where the service of others is paramount, the answer to her question is, "Yes". Others, however, are not as sure, as the term 'supervision' invokes visions of line-management, power, and evaluation for many (Dansey, 2013), a far cry from restorative aspects of supervision (Hawkins and Shohet, 2012). To enhance the perception of supervision, other names have been suggested over the years, with Dansey (2013) one of the latest to suggest altering the conception of supervision by changing the name to 'consultation' in a move towards more collegial connection. Nevertheless, power differentials can present in supervision (Dansey, 2013). For example, supervisor reports can make the difference between a pass/fail on the practice element of a course (Graham, 2013) and as Rarick and Ladany (2012) found, incompatibility of gender, attitude, supervisory style, and working alliance can impact upon supervisory relationships, with Strasser (2009) revealing that some supervisees leave supervision disempowered and angry, feelings that can be detrimental as Ganske, et al. (2015) found that high self-efficacy can be related to enhanced perceptions of both supervisor and client working alliances. In similar vein, Mehr, et al. (2015), found that within supervisory processes, trainees who experienced a strong alliance suffered less anxiety.

Furthermore, in some placements, supervision is either partly, or wholly paid for by host organisations and whilst this is welcomed from an economic standpoint, it can create tensions, as supervisees can feel obligated to the organisation and therefore reluctant to raise issues referred to by Palmer (2008, p.40) as the "shadow" side of organisations, for example, the "influence of context" or "a culture of secrecy". Palmer (2008) also noted how, during supervision, a credibility gap often becomes noticeable between the public persona of organisations and the actuality described by supervisees. Alongside this sits a point raised by Bailey (2012), namely that trainees and early career therapists often drift into supervision processes unprepared, without questioning its purpose or value.

Another important issue for supervisors, placement providers, and/or voluntary organisations who offer trainees a placement, is clinical responsibility for client-work (BACP, 2013a [B4.5(iii))]. This may be devolved to the supervisor, held jointly between supervisor and organisation, or held elsewhere in the organisation and importantly, where there is a strong supervisory relationship, supervisees are less reluctant to disclose things which do not go well (Dansey, 2013). Moreover, as noted by Dawson and Akhurst (2015) many factors, including fear and feeling judged, block trainees from disclosing in supervision. Research has also found nondisclosure to be a frequent and normative supervision occurrence (Banks and

Ladany, 2006; Farber, 2006; Hess, et al., 2008), with Mehr, et al. (2010) revealing that 84% of trainees withheld information from their supervisor. Furthermore, within a single supervision session, participants reported an average of 2.68 nondisclosures, although, again, these percentages dropped considerably when supervisory relationships facilitated a strong triadic relationship between the supervisor, their supervisee, and the "not-present client" (Trowbridge, 2015, p.31).

Ladany and Inman (2012), however, hail supervision as the principle way of stimulating competence in trainees and Dunkley (2007) spotlights the pivotal role supervisors hold, balanced between the trainee, the course provider, and the placement provider, with an ever-watchful eye on client wellbeing. Furthermore, some writers note a difference between qualities needed when supervising experienced counsellors and trainees, as trainees are in formative stages of practice and may prefer higher levels of structure and direction, while more experienced counsellors may prefer a less-structured and more challenging environment (Heppner and Roehlke, 1984; Wallace and Cooper, 2015). Nevertheless, supervision is key in the "future development of helping professions" (Bradley, et al., 2010, p.10), although whilst O'Donnell and Vallance (2012) see 'supervision-of-supervision' as an essential element within the profession and this is a BACP requirement (BACP, 2002, p.198), paradoxically, Proctor (2002, p.198) queries where responsibility ends and Mander (1997, p.292) foresees problems in developing "an unwieldy proliferation of watchdogs ad infinitum". This idiom is also echoed by Jacobs (2000, p.202) in asking similar questions, albeit from a different perspective, "Who supervises the supervisor…who supervises the supervisor…who supervises the supervisor ....?" A continuum without end.

Discourse continues as to whether mandatory career-long supervision is necessary to safeguard the profession or exists purely as another tier of jobs. Nonetheless, supervision has the potential to hold trainees, training establishments (Walker and Jacobs, 2006), and placements (Bradley, et al., 2010) to count; supervision, therefore, constitutes an important element of counsellor training and is key to the current study. The centrality of supervision to the counselling profession is also evidenced by responses to recent proposed changes to the BACP Ethical Framework with 77% of those who responded indicating that they were receiving regular, ongoing supervision, with a further 4% indicating a willingness to engage with supervision when practicing regularly (Bond, 2015a).

The particular relevance of supervision within the placement experience is further confirmed by research conducted by Owen-Pugh and Jewson (2015) who found supervision to be a key learning environment within counselling, confirming early research by Heppner and Roehlke (1984) which found that whereas experienced practitioners welcome stimulating and unstructured supervision experiences, trainees need support and structure from supervisory relationships (Wallace and Cooper 2015), with Trowbridge (2015) noting that supervision can, by creating a safe space, help grow a counsellor's understanding. Regrettably, however, despite an abundance of research and the identified learning potential of supervision, Hilsenroth, Kivlighan and Slavin-Mulford (2015) note a paucity of research into the impact of supervision on the therapeutic alliance and, importantly for this study, the development of therapeutic skills.

2.9 Relationship and contact between stakeholders

An important aspect to consider when exploring the facilitation of early practice within counsellor placements is the relationship and contact between stakeholders. Traditionally, forging partnerships between theory and practice has proved to be challenging (Corlett, et al., 2003), although a certain amount of contact occurs before placements commence as agreement needs to be reached regarding several important issues (BACP, 2013a).

Despite this, little face-to-face contact can occur at this time and not enough is known about communication between stakeholders whilst students are at placement. The BACP blandly refers to "meetings" (BACP, 2013a [B4.5(iv)]), Fanthome (2004), however, more prescriptively, advocates closer links between education establishments and employers as advantageous, with each becoming more aware of issues faced by the other. She gives the compelling example that long-term collaboration between stakeholders could produce greater understanding within each about the philosophy of, and what is required by, the other, a concept endorsed by findings in research by Tyndall (1993).

2.10 Closing comments and identification of the gap in knowledge

From the foregoing, it can be seen that counselling is in transition (Kanellakis and D'Aubyn, 2010), changing steadily over the last three decades, with much transformation over more recent years (Ballinger, 2013; Reeves, 2015c). Yet, counselling, as a profession, has not fully

established a strong research emphasis (Yates, 2013; Sommers-Flanagan, 2015) and it is surprising that during this period of change, related published research has declined (Lichtenberg, 2011; Murdock, 2011). Some postulate that it is not that less counselling research is undertaken, but a breakdown in dissemination (Hanley and Gordon, 2013) possibly because, according to Farrants (Farrants, J., cited in Hanley and Gordon 2013) many counsellors conduct research merely for practice enhancement.

Despite this, it can also be seen from this literature review that research on counsellor training and supervision is available, although, paradoxically, whilst writing about the counsellor placement is plentiful, much of this is derived from descriptive comments, rather than reported research findings. This indicates a lack of empirical research, as historically, research around counsellor skills training has focused mostly upon effectiveness (Buser, 2008). Furthermore, much of the writing about early practice and training, although some is applicable to the UK and counselling, has been based on research within other countries and/or early practice of other helping professionals such as nurses or psychologists. Thus the early placement experiences of BACP trainees is an under-researched area, leaving the profession to draw upon research findings which overlap with their role. Nevertheless, each of the three subject areas which frame the counsellor placement (i) Counselling/counsellor training; (ii) Early counsellor practice and (iii) Counsellor supervision has been previously explored, using a variety of research approaches. Despite rigorous search strategies, however, only scant information on counsellor placements in South West Wales was evidenced and, nationally, few writers conceptualise the counsellor placement as a functioning part of a larger system, or relate the placement to the supportive structures of training and supervision. No study was found which explores the counsellor placement in this particular context with counsellor stakeholders, identifies the placement's role within early counsellor practice and considers future placement facilitation. A research question was therefore formulated, "How does the counsellor placement facilitate early practice?

2.11 Summary

This literature review presents a corpus of published work, which provides accumulative knowledge of early client-work, and the counsellor placement. It is demonstrated that existing literature is mainly substantive, with limited theoretical or academic writing addressing this area. Resultantly, advice offered by Trafford and Lesham (2008) was followed, as these authors recommend that where non-academic factors have a significant

influence on a subject matter, these should be included within a literature review. They also promote professional journals as a unique, particular genre of scholarship, which, although sometimes not research based, is often more contemporary than research studies (Trafford and Lesham, 2008). The lack of academic sources and peer-reviewed articles specifically related to the counsellor placement was therefore overcome by drawing upon such associated writing, alongside relevant research within adjacent fields of study. In this way, comprehensive coverage demonstrated working knowledge of, and sound familiarity with, the main schools of thought concerning counsellor training, early practice, and placement experiences.

Having strategically organised available writing to contextualise the current research, reveal the paucity of research on counsellor placements, and lead coherently to the research objectives, this section presents a summary of five key empirical research studies. These studies determined the direction of the research, and validated the originality and relevance of the research question, as they synthesised thoughts and ideas framing significant elements within the journey to become a professional counsellor. This summary therefore funnels academic research from broader, well-researched training concepts to the little researched area of the counsellor placement, and demonstrates how these studies came together to construct a framework for the current research.

The first of these studies relates to qualitative research undertaken by Turner, et al. (2008) [Critiqued on Page 85-86]. Whilst several researchers have focussed on early counselling practice, in addressing the learning and change experiences of trainees, this research strongly evidenced the experiential benefits of early client-work. Moreover, through their consideration of the impact of such learning upon trainees, these researchers also emphasised the importance of trainees being well-prepared for the emotional demands of client-work, and highlighted the benefits of new practitioners engaging in real, reflexive practice. These principles fuelled recurring questions the researcher had about the learning experiences of counsellor trainees. The first of these queried how well-equipped trainees actually are for early client-work. The second deliberated how little trainees reflect upon early learning experiences. The third considered the profession's stance towards early client-work, and the final question, which resurfaced most persistently, questioned the lack of empirical research into the role of the counsellor placement within counsellor training and early client-work.

A few years later, an even more significant study, entitled, 'A Baptism of Fire' (Folkes-Skinner, Elliott and Weaver, 2010) [critiqued on Page 59-60], strengthened this developing research interest. This qualitative research influenced the current study as Folkes-Skinner, Elliott and Weaver investigated a trainee counsellor's experience at the start of training. In addressing counsellor training and early practice, these researchers confirmed that, despite the many studies on counsellor training, few studies had researched change experienced by trainees, or sought to identify those training aspects most influential in assisting the process of becoming a therapist. This paper was therefore a contributory factor in defining the parameters of the current research, since whilst there was no direct reference to the counsellor placement in their research, these researchers focussed on trainee change at the start of training, and helpful aspects in initiating and supporting that change. Within this, they identified that most significant change occurs early in the training process, noted difficulties in developing therapeutic confidence, confirmed the need for experiential learning, and promoted early positive experiences with clients as a main driver for change. Each of these benchmarks can clearly be related to counsellor placement experiences and Folkes-Skinner, Elliott and Weaver's research, when considered in conjunction with the previous study by Turner, et al. (2008), re-enforced the lack of, and need for, research into the counsellor placement.

Having refined the research interest to the counsellor placement, another instrumental study in the formulation of the current research was a thematic review of research on generic workplace learning compiled by Tynjälä (2008) [referenced throughout thesis]. Tynjälä's work stood alongside the many studies conducted on general work experience and placements, in offering a stark comparator to the lack of research specifically into counsellor placements. Tynjälä researched perspectives into learning at the workplace and drew attention to a gap between knowledge attained through formal education and the skills needed for work. To address this, Tynjälä suggested that as both education and skills are equally important for the development of professional expertise, classroom-based learning, and work-based learning should come closer together. If this concept is related to the learning and skills acquisition of counsellor trainees, it suggests that as the placement is where theory and practice merge for new therapists, a step towards closer working arrangements would be to research the current positioning of counselling placements, and gain better understanding of placement relationships. This empirical research therefore added to the impact of the studies of Turner et al. (2008) and Folkes-Skinner, Elliott and Weaver (2010), in confirming the need

for research into the coming together of learning and practice within the counsellor placement.

Attention then turned to empirical research into the counsellor placement and from the limited academic interest in this area, research by van Rijn, et al. (2008) [Critiqued on Page 79-81], in aiming to close the gap between clinical practice and formal training [as advocated by Tynjala (2008)], facilitate the translation of theory into practice [as identified as important by Folkes-Skinner, Elliot and Weaver (2010)] and, like Turner, et. al. (2008) recognising the importance of developing trainees' capacity for critical reflection, linked the research previously summarised within this section, and brought the aim of the current research into sharper focus. This arose as van Rijn, et al. (2008) positioned placement practice at the heart of training, and in particular, sought to evaluate a new approach to placement-based practice. Within this, van Rijn addressed the impact of the training on the participants, the training organisation, and practice.   In welcoming van Rijn's research for its originality, its limitations were also noted. For example, the action research was conducted within one organisation, working within a single orientation, with only two training groups, and trainers not fully grounded in the research approach. This suggested (i) that it would be useful to identify all placement stakeholders (ii) a need to explore existing, generic placements through the experiences of placement stakeholders, and (iii) that research was needed into different approaches to placement facilitation.

Importantly, as previously identified, no comparative study could be found within the counselling profession which firstly, generically explored how the counsellor placement facilitates early practice, and secondly, addressed a way to bring training and practice closer together.   Within the wider health and social care field, however, research by Koskinen and Äijö (2013) [Critiqued on Page 68-71] particularly spoke to the spirit and ethos of the developing study. In similar vein to van Rijn, et al. (2008), Koskinen and Äijö (2013) identified the need to explore new ways of facilitating a health care placement. Their research arose from a desire to establish a new type of practice placement for health care students, which led to them developing, and researching, an integrative practice placement model for students in health care.

From their placement initiatives, Koskinen and Äijö (2013) went further than van Rijn's study in that they progressively developed an integrative pedagogy model for placement learning.

Their study described experiences of university undergraduate health care students' placement learning experiences, and whilst this research was conducted at a university in Finland with a variety of health care students, rather than specifically trainee counsellors, it raised interesting anomalies and rich possibilities for counselling research. In particular, the concept of a university providing students with a practice placement by developing student-driven health care services for local people was thought provoking. Consequently, reflection on the concept of facilitating student placements, whilst enhancing the well-being of the community around the host university, identified a gap in counsellor training research and offered an interesting research model.

From this summary of key empirical research, it can be seen how broader concepts funnelled to specific placement studies, evidencing that literature addressing the most significant area for the current research - the counsellor placement - is much less in evidence.   The developing picture, particularly the decrease in research activity evidenced through this funnelling process, led naturally to the research objective of exploring not only traditional placements, but also a more innovative model, through the designated research question identified earlier, "How does the counsellor placement facilitate early practice?"

Within Chapter Two, a literature review critiqued relevant literature on counselling, the counsellor placement, and the early practice of trainees. The need for the current research was demonstrated, as pertinent issues in relation to the counsellor placement are conspicuous by their absence in peer-reviewed journals. The research was located within a narrow geographical location, and a broad therapeutic context. Finally, a summary of academic literature confirmed the need for the research and demonstrated how the research question was formulated.

Chapter Three introduces methodological considerations and research design.

2.12 Researcher's reflections

Good research starts by exploring the present position regarding the phenomenon to be studied and through application of this concept I discovered that, as far as I could tell, little was known or understood about counsellor placements and so this research began to formulate. An early literature review identified how in 2010 the scarcity of relevant literature justified the need for research into the counselling placement and little has changed in this regard as verified in 2015

by Oldale and Cooke who re-affirm the lack of information, literature, and research on counsellor placements (Oldale and Cooke, 2015). My research was therefore conducted against this background and my deepest reflection revolved around the decision not to include the perspective of clients, although following discussion with my supervisors, I came to understand that this would have changed the focus of the research. This decision, is, however, identified as a limitation.

The literature review was difficult to write due to the limited research specifically on the counsellor placement and this led to early attempts drawing substantially on literature regarding the status of trainees who work free of charge at placements within this and related fields. This diluted the central ethos of the research and the argument that my research was strongly grounded in counselling practice. Some references to volunteering remain as this is conceptualised within the counsellor placement (Armstrong and McLeod, 2003) and these are now contextualised within placement experiences. Furthermore, some literature which informs on general placements or is more commonly associated with other helping professions, including psychology, is included. This could have been omitted making this literature review more succinct. This is included, however, as it re-enforces the gap in counselling literature this research seeks to fill as whilst this is relevant to the counselling field, little empirical, discipline-specific research is available on many issues raised by this research. The same applies to less academic literature included in the literature review as again this emphasises the interest, yet lack of research, regarding the placement.

Keeping a research journal ensured that I kept in touch with personal experiences and meant that the way my pre-understanding could influence bias was in the forefront of my mind throughout the research process (Finlay, 2008). My journal entries and working on the literature review led me to contemplate how much I already knew about counsellor placements and consider and acknowledge my own assumptions and perceptions. I understood that whilst pre-knowledge is not usually described as either too little, or too much, what is important is, that, as a researcher, I am honest and transparent about the fore-structure of my knowledge base (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). My own involvement with counsellor placements was therefore reflected in my journal [See: Chapter One], so that I was not only aware of, but could begin to address, the potential for bias. Ontological and epistemological concepts which framed my research and considerations about my worldviews, background, and experience are considered within the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Methodological considerations and ethical principles

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the constructionist/phenomenological conceptual framework which supported this relativist research in addressing the question, "How does the counsellor placement facilitate early practice?" Methodological and general ethical considerations involved in exploring this subject area are considered, and each phase of research is foreshadowed as the research design is outlined. Ethical issues in relation to each study within the research project are outlined within the distinct chapters dedicated to each study [Chapters Four and Five].

According to Creswell (2007), the success of all research depends upon methodological alignment between the philosophies of the researcher, the research background and aims, the research genre, and instruments of research (Creswell, 2007; 2013). Accordingly, when designing the methodological framework, the researcher considered her own worldview alongside research reference points in relation to the philosophy of counselling, the aims of the project, methodology, and data collection.

3.2 The philosophy of the researcher

Methodology includes a "general orientation to life, a view of knowledge and a sense of what it means to be human" (van Manen, 1990, p.27) and these concepts became much clearer and took on deeper meaning when the researcher, like all participants in this research, engaged with counsellor training. This learning began when considering that just as within rigorous and ethical research it is essential for a researcher to own and be transparent about their worldview, it is also important for a therapist to understand the broad perspectives and philosophical underpinnings supporting their therapeutic modality and interactions.

This process consolidated for the researcher when a Post Graduate Diploma in Counselling Practice encouraged individual and group reflection upon concepts such as: the self; identity; how we know what we know; types of knowledge and how we know that knowledge is valid and reliable (Faris and van Ooijen, 2012, p.24;25). It was from these reflections that a growing awareness brought personal beliefs and values into sharper focus and the researcher's philosophies clarified as a postmodern worldview where reality is co-constructed and subjective, and truth is provisional. Over time, this awakening formed a belief that knowledge is socially created, where reality also has multiple perspectives rather than any one

true description and, within a research profile, researcher and participants co-construct findings. This can best be described as moving towards a relativist, social constructionist epistemology where reality is not seen as independent of human action but rather as the product of interactions within historical and cultural contexts; people make their worlds and are in turn made by their worlds (Burr, 1995, Thomas, et al., 2014).

Alongside this, consistently working therapeutically at relational depth (Mearns and Cooper, 2005, p.11) instilled a phenomenological, relational ethic within the researcher, where an interest in lived experience (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) and truly 'being with' another, meant paying attention to one's own and the other's phenomenological experience (Slote, 2007). These experiences raised awareness of the importance and power of inter-subjectivity where, as one enters the world of another, each engages in the other's phenomenological field (Bener and Wrubel, 1989). As the philosophies of the researcher therefore began to also align towards a phenomenological paradigm, her assumptions and beliefs began to form a social constructivist-phenomenological perspective. As a counsellor, or a researcher, it was recognised that it is not possible to completely remove oneself from these worldviews, or remain totally uninfluenced by one's own values, prejudices, and beliefs. It is therefore necessary for researchers to make these assumptions explicit so that there is clarity about what they have actually done, how they have done it, and why (Attride-Stirling, 2001). This knowledge is essential so that there is a deeper understanding of the philosophies and concepts that underpin the research and so that, importantly, research can be properly evaluated. A reflective and transparent stance was therefore adopted towards the researcher's relationship with the counsellor placement and her developing worldview.

Given the above, and as the researcher was a practising counsellor throughout the research period and was exploring experiences of the counsellor placement, it was natural to adopt an approach which acknowledged how interactions between researcher and participants can impact upon research and where research did not set out to present the 'true story', but rather to construct a partial account, situated by the researcher as an analyst, with data collected with these participants, at this time.

3.3 The philosophy of counselling and aims of the research

Alongside the philosophy of the researcher, consideration also had to be given to how this research stemmed from, and is situated within, the field of counselling. Human sciences evolved from the ontology and epistemology of phenomenological philosophy and as the beliefs and values of phenomenology parallel those of the counselling profession they were recognised as congruent with the values of the BACP Ethical Framework (BACP, 2010a;2016c). Furthermore, phenomenology has a broad and deep philosophical heritage and is not merely an approach to research, but is also a philosophy in its own right (Finlay and Ballinger, 2006, Howitt, 2013). Consequently, as implied by Finlay (2011, Kindle:1058) in referring to, "the muddy mire of phenomenological theory", there is more than one facet to phenomenology.

Moreover, both phenomenology and counselling have strong philosophical assumptions and values and both respect and honour an individual's experiencing. Phenomenology and counselling also share a desire to understand people through perception and empathy and in this way, phenomenology encompasses the values and core-beliefs held by the researcher as well as the basic values and core concepts of the counselling profession. In addition to this, counsellor trainees and practitioners of today are expected to be research aware, research informed, and research active, and in their search for a research framework which resonates with them many turn to phenomenology, feeling comfortable within this genre. This can therefore be seen as natural progression for the researcher, as counsellor training is based around the need to respect individuals, to be attentive, to act sensitively, to actively listen, to create rapport within a short period of time and to hold awareness of the connection between oneself with the world, and one's client and his/her world (Hays and Singh, 2011), all valuable skills for phenomenological research.

Accordingly, the similar values, principles, and concepts of phenomenology and counselling led to a natural practice/research alignment, as both counsellors and phenomenologists are aware of, and are interested in, everyday human experiencing and take a holistic approach to life and the living. This close relationship between phenomenology and counselling was evidenced for the researcher when, returning to counselling practice following time spent in phenomenological research, she found her practice greatly enhanced and was then able to appreciate a similar experience recounted by Finlay (2011). From the foregoing, it can be seen that the firmly

established and enduring links between phenomenology and counselling were important to the researcher and the research.

The aim of this research was phenomenological in that it sought to understand participants' subjective experiences, seeking to discover what experiences of the counsellor placement are really like, what meaning participants make of this experience and how this lived world presents itself (Finlay, 2008, Howitt, 2013); an opportunity for insight into the lifeworld of participants (Creswell, 2007; Howitt, 2013). There is also a parallel with some counsellors, including the researcher, who encompass postmodern ideologies and adopt social constructionist epistemologies, as they understand and welcome the co-construction that can occur both within therapeutic alliances and research. Furthermore, constructionist worldviews are often manifested in phenomenological studies where participants describe experiences (Moustakas, 1994). These considerations led to a natural leaning towards a postmodern attitude within both counselling and research, where open-minded approaches are common-place and where there is a possibility of not just one, or the 'correct' therapeutic theory (McLeod and Cooper, 2011) or the 'correct' answer to research questions. This research therefore made use, wherever possible, of elements from constructionism and phenomenology, considering these both as complementary to the values and philosophy of counselling and the researcher.

Through these observations, methodological alignment further materialised as particular patterns began to form:

> *Perspectives:* Understanding that all research is based on a particular paradigm, or worldview, which offers differing perspectives (Kuhn, 1962;1970) led to a consideration of several perspectives and viewpoints. Firstly, the perspectives that underpinned this study - understanding the experience of the counsellor placement from the perspectives of stakeholders - were considered. It was apparent that there was a need to not only collect data that could provide rich and reflective accounts, telling something about participants' involvement in counsellor placements, but to also generate data which could provide insight into participant meaning-making (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Secondly, the perspective of the researcher was significant, not least the necessity to acquire and maintain a reflexive position, given her prior knowledge of counsellor training

and placements. Thirdly, theoretical perspectives of writers who have stated views on counsellor training were considered.

Ontological issues: The consideration of ontological issues included reflection upon relationships between the world and human interpretations and practices (Braun and Clarke, 2013) and the nature of reality, including the researcher's subjective, social, and inter-subjective world. Within this, philosophical assumptions were based upon the researcher's counselling background, historical primary assumptions and core-beliefs, summarising these as postmodern, with an assumption that reality is subjective, and a perspective that as reality and truth can change across time and across context, it reflects how and where knowledge was generated (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Research was therefore based on the belief that what we can know about the counsellor placement is mediated by socially constructed frames of reference (Faris and van Ooijen, 2012). These assumptions formed the relativist ontology (Morrow, 2007) described earlier, where truth is seen to have elements of inter-subjectivity and unlike realism, where there is a leaning towards a pre-social reality independent of ways of knowing (Tebes, 2005), or critical realism, where reality is seen to exist, although can only ever partially be known, reality was seen as dependent upon human interpretation and the ways we come to know it (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

Epistemological issues: Epistemology also informed theoretical perspectives and in keeping with the foregoing discussion on value systems, this meant getting close to participants (Creswell, 2007) and again encompassed a relativist constructionist/phenomenological position where the world is socially constructed through various discourses and meaning systems (Burr, 2003; Faris and van Ooijen, 2012) and where it is impossible not to be influenced by one's particular beliefs and prejudices (Faris and van Ooijen, 2012). Therefore, unlike a realist paradigm where research would seek to find 'the' truth, the current research was grounded within the belief that knowledge can only be perspectival; absolute truth does not exist and knowledge is created, rather than discovered, through the research process (Braun and Clarke, 2013). The researcher also adopted a position of 'research with', rather than 'research on' participants, with the researcher not the 'expert', rather the participants seen as experts due to their

experiential knowledge. Accordingly, the researcher adopted an authorial stance of keen to learn, open to experience and eager to interrelate with participants on a journey of joint discovery.

It was clear from these considerations that a relativist/constructionist, phenomenological position strongly aligned with qualitative research and data collection, particularly as this research sought to explore participants' perceptions and experiences and understand processes rather than determine outcomes (Smith, 1996).   A qualitative approach also connected with the foundation of this research which was about a search for experiential meaning, rather than number-based outcomes, and sought not to provide a single correct answer, but rather to explore how the counsellor placement is experienced and understood by particular participants. Furthermore, as the current research was driven by unanswered questions, it did not call for the testing of a hypotheses.   Instead, an inductive approach could better facilitate exploration, discovery, and pattern formation.

Accordingly, it was recognised that meaningful answers to the research question could be offered (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) through a qualitative [inductive] approach rather than a quantitative, deductive approach (Creswell, 2013) as there was a need for openness to participants' experiencing, where their voices could be heard and where interactions between researcher and participants influenced research (Ponterotto, 2005; Rennie, 2012; Creswell, 2013). In this way, knowledge, constructed by both researcher and participants (Lyons, 1999), would offer understanding of how participants describe their perceptions of the counsellor placement. Furthermore, a qualitative approach could facilitate a commitment to focus on process as much as outcomes in discerning how participants make sense of placement experiences.

Moreover, the relevance of qualitative research for exploration within the counselling field is well recognised, not only because of its commitment to subjectivity and assigning meaning to a phenomenon (Ponterotto, 2005; Berrios and Lucca, 2006), but also because within qualitative research, as in counselling, the researcher has to interact with participants, thus entering into their personal domain (Silverman, 2004;2013) whilst respecting their rights and values (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative approaches have therefore been effective in investigating similar research questions (See: McLeod, 2003; Clarke, Rees and Hardy, 2004; Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

Other qualitative studies which can be related to the current research include research by Smith (2016) who undertook a qualitative study on the impact of triad work on training relationships, Georgiadou, Willis and Canavan (2015) who explored non-assessing support for trainees and Rouse, Armstrong and McLeod (2015) who researched links between a therapist's personal creativity and their client-work.

Moving on from these considerations it was recognised that diverse qualitative approaches can be deployed for research within the field of counselling and to determine a research design specific to the current research a critique of qualitative approaches was undertaken. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) initially presented as an approach which could meet the aims of this research. This decision was later reviewed to include Qualitative Content Analysis and Thematic Analysis within the research design, as evidenced by the consideration of research approaches within the following section.

3.4 The case for interpretive phenomenological analysis

The rationale of choosing a phenomenological approach was justified by the philosophies of the researcher and particularly the philosophies of counselling, since this research was about experiencing the counsellor placement and so aligned with phenomenology and exploring the lifeworld (van Manen, 1990). Creswell (2007;2013) also justified phenomenological research for this research when he explained that the best problems for exploration via phenomenology are those where it is important to understand the experiences of a number of individuals in order to comprehend and develop practice.

IPA is among the phenomenological approaches which cluster under the qualitative umbrella and was singled out from other approaches as it is applicable and useful within a variety of areas akin to the current research (Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006; Petty, Thomson and Stew, 2012) and whilst Husserl's phenomenology seeks to discover the essence of experience, there was an affinity with IPA's more modest goal of aiming to capture particular experiences of specific people, as in this case, placement stakeholders.

Moreover, recognition of IPA as a valid research method was substantiated by Brocki and Wearden (2006) who, in a comprehensive review of published IPA research confirmed IPA as legitimate and resourceful for a wide range of similar topics. This diversity was also seen as important as it stems both from IPA's background and its versatility, as IPA, as a

phenomenological approach, is supported by a rich philosophical heritage that provides a strong theoretical foundation. Phenomenology therefore underpins and is central to IPA as whilst IPA is still a relatively new approach, which continues to develop and be scrutinised as a research methodology, the history of IPA is both short, in that it first emerged in 1996 (See: Smith, 1996), and long, in that it is based upon concepts from, and grounded within, the much older concept of phenomenology. These facets were instrumental in choosing IPA for this research.

Given foregoing discussions, it was also important that IPA is underpinned by contextual constructionist epistemologies where language affects experiences and meaning-making is influenced by social constructionism (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). The decision to use IPA was also further influenced by the approach's key philosophies of knowledge that relate not only to phenomenology, but also to hermeneutics and idiography, thus concurring with the values of counselling, the researcher and the aim of exploring experiences through engaging with a theory of interpretation whilst attending to the individual and the particular.

These concepts were significant in several ways. Firstly, the way the approach draws on phenomenology, where differing emphases of Husserl (1927;1970), Heidegger (1962), Sarte (1943;1956) and Merleau Ponty (1962) collectively contribute to a holistic phenomenology was important in facilitating exploration of what an experience is actually like (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), a concept which often drives the counselling process and was therefore familiar to the researcher. Secondly, there was a resonance with hermeneutics emanating from the work of Smith (1996) as IPA is strongly influenced by hermeneutics and as such is concerned, at different levels, with movement and relationships between the part, the whole, and the hermeneutic circle (Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006; Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Moreover, as the hermeneutic element of IPA facilitated social interaction between researcher and participant, encouraging the researcher to bring her perspectives and interpretations to analysis (Shinebourne, 2011) so that meanings of experiences could be jointly constructed, this process constituted a double hermeneutic (Smith and Osborn, 2003) where two interpretative stances were at play (Ricoeur, 1970). The first of these, the hermeneutics of empathy, focused on understanding the meaning of each text as seen (Langdridge, 2007) and the second, the hermeneutics of suspicion, or, as Smith, Flowers and Larkin aptly define the middle-ground in this, hermeneutics of questioning, engaged with existing theoretical perspectives to unpack hidden meanings of experiences (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Within this, there was a spirit of openness (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) where the interpretative account was iterative, formed from the

relational encounter between researcher and participant, and speaking to the spirit of the current research and the ethos of counselling.

Thirdly, stood the concept of idiography, which formulated a move away from nomethic concepts to a concern with the particular. This involved exploring individual characteristics and paying attention to detail, thus facilitating a view of the counsellor placement as understood by each particular participant, within this particular context (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, p.2009).

IPA was chosen for this research because of an alignment with these concepts and because IPA has a clear focus on how "people engage with the world" (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.21). In addition to this, IPA seeks to understand how particular experiential phenomena, "…an event, a process or a relationship" (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009 p.29) are understood and as involvement with a counsellor placement could be described as an event and/or a process and involves multifaceted relationships, the suitability of IPA for this research seemed clear.

Accordingly, IPA provided the opportunity of exploring participants' views of the counsellor placement, at the same time recognising that whilst a researcher may indeed get close to a participant's perceptions, it is not possible for this understanding to be total, as access is complicated by conceptions of the researcher that come into play through the interpretative process (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). IPA therefore stood out for this acknowledgement of researcher interpretation, its use of bracketing of experience and reflexivity (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.21).

Nevertheless, the majority of IPA research to date has focused on health issues [See: Bramley and Eatough, 2005; Smith and Osborn, 2007; Arroll and Senior, 2008; Borkoles, et al., 2008], although this situation is changing, as increasingly, IPA research encompasses not only direct experiences of individuals with health conditions, but also explores experiences of their significant others [See: Hill, et al, 2009]. Furthermore, IPA has featured in studies to explore significant events in people's lives and has been used to research how individuals view life experiences. Some of these involve major transitions such as diagnosis of life threatening illness or, of particular relevance to this study, starting work (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.3).

Interest is also emerging around the use of IPA for the exploration of health practitioners' experiences of health care processes, where, like the aim of the current research, the approach has helped deepen understanding of the lived experiences of health professionals [See: Hughes and McCann, 2003; Raval and Smith, 2003; Michie, et al., 2004; Whittington and Burns, 2005; Epstein and Ogden, 2005; Nel, 2006; Thompson, Powis and Carradice, 2008].

In addition to this, the relevance of IPA as an accepted methodology for exploring counsellor and counselling experiences is evidenced by several relevant research endeavours such as a recent IPA study by McGown (2015) which explored the impact of mental imagery on the therapeutic process and research by Simonsen and Cooper (2015) on helpful aspects of bereavement counselling. Experiences of trainee counsellors have also previously been the subject of IPA studies. For example, work undertaken by Lee and Prior (2013) where IPA was used to explore perceptions of counsellor trainees as they developed therapeutic listening skills, Wootton (2011), who conducted an IPA study to research trainee counsellors' experiences of group dynamics, Folkes-Skinner, Elliott and Weaver (2010) who used IPA to analyse a pilot study where the early practice of a single counsellor trainee was explored, von Haenisch (2011) who conducted IPA research into how compulsory personal therapy during counsellor training influenced personal and professional development and finally, Baker (2016) who employed IPA to explore the impact of mindfulness training on trainees.

These examples illustrate the versatility of IPA and importantly, demonstrate how IPA has proved successful in previous research with similar aims. Wilding and Whiteford (2005) also strengthen the rational to use IPA in recognising that IPA can usefully explore phenomena such as issues of occupation [work within counsellor placements] and everyday aspects of life [the placement as commonplace within counsellor training].

It can be seen from the foregoing that IPA has much strength as an evolving research methodology. Nonetheless, IPA is not without limitations. For instance, as IPA developed within health psychology and its main prevalence remains within this sphere, it is taking some time for IPA to broaden out and attract interest in other fields (Smith, 2004; Mackay, Carey and Stevens, 2011).

Another censure is that as IPA is still a young approach within the ancient world of research (Larkin, et al., 2006), variations inevitably exist in its application, anomalies which can be confusing for novice counsellor researchers drawn to IPA for early research projects. IPA is also condemned for the commitment and time involved in conducting semi-structured interviews and consequent in-depth analysis of data (Rabionet, 2011). Moreover, an area which causes much debate within phenomenological research is the issue of epoché (Husserl, 1973) or 'bracketing' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009; Howitt, 2013) considered within the next chapter.

In considering these limitations, a number of other methodologies which offer alternatives to IPA were critiqued for their appropriateness for this research. For example, IPA was selected over the

qualitative approach of Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Czarniawska, 2004; Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007; Reissman, 2008) although this approach was initially appealing and could have focussed on the research question, "What story structures do placement stakeholders use to describe placement events?" Narrative Inquiry could also have researched the narrative of one individual involved in the counsellor placement, exploring important events or "epiphanies" (Angrosino,1994; Creswell, 2007) and re-storying an account of placement experiences within a chronology of events (Creswell, 2007). This approach was discounted, however, because of its main focus of reporting the life of a single participant (Creswell, 2007) which did not concur with the ethos of the research. Furthermore, whilst this approach has the potential to go deep into personal meaning-making, has also been used to successfully provide rich, detailed accounts of health and well-being experiences (Riessman, 2007; Braun and Clarke, 2014; Joyce, 2015) and can have a contextual focus [for example, narratives about organisations such as the counsellor placement] (Czarniawska, 2004), the challenges presented by multiple issues within the collection, analysing, and telling of stories, such as confusion over who actually owns and can tell the story (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2006) were also seen as contra-indications.

When considering case study as a viable alternative to IPA, the question, "How do placement experiences change trainees' practice?" was considered. The rationale behind choosing IPA and not a straightforward case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009) relates, however, to the focus of the current research on description and lived experience, as it was felt that a case study, whilst offering different insight, would have reflected on issues not recognised as significant within the current research.

Despite this decision, as part of this contemplation, and whilst also writing policies for the placement established as part of the current research, it was recognised that the way placements deal with incidents described as critical, or 'near-misses', is an important, under-researched area, would lend itself to case study, and could potentially enhance the current research.

Consequently, it was deliberated whether to supplement the current research with a case study exploring this area. Whilst case study research could follow a social constructionist paradigm (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 2009) with an emerging design, a context dependent focus, and inductive data analysis, an additional study on a critical incident depended upon a 'near miss' occurring at the placement. Should this occur, it was recognised that it would be important to understand exactly what happened, explore how policies helped or hindered the process, and

determine how procedures could be strengthened in light of the incident. Detailed consideration was therefore given to how a case study could be developed and its likely value to the overall research objective.

Stake (2005) relates good case study to the skill of defining what is to be studied within a bounded system. In considering how to design a case study, however, a challenge commonly identified with this research approach in identifying case/cases, was experienced. Working through this problem, it was recognised that each case is bounded by time, place, and relational/spatial context, with inter-related parts that form a whole. In considering this concept, Stake (1995) described a case as a system. It was perceived, therefore, that the defining characteristic of the proposed case study would be the demarcation of the subject of study (Merriam, 1998) and the provision of a clear account of the extent and focus of the research.

Rather than researching a multiple bounded system [cases], exploring how various other placements addressed critical instances [a multisite perspective], the case study would be designed to research a bounded system [or case] to consider how this particular placement reacted to a critical incident [within-site study] (Creswell, 2007). The study would address the research question, "How does the Community Counselling Centre [placement] respond to a critical incident?"

As a first step, a data collection matrix was developed which specified the amount and type of information likely to be collected, and in identifying temporal constraints, clear beginning and ending points were identified. It was determined that the proposed case study would begin with a detailed description of the critical incident. Within this, extensive contextual information would be provided about: the remit of the placement; its referral systems; client base; aims/values; policies/procedures; counselling modalities; the catchment area, and the building in which the incident occurred. A chronology, starting with the lead up to the event, the event itself, and working through the two weeks following the incident would be provided via data collected through multiple sources of information (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003; Creswell, 2007). Data collection might take the form of interviews with those present during the incident, members of the placement management team on duty at the time, and trainee counsellors. Observations of how this incident impacted upon the day-to-day running of the placement and policies/procedures could also inform the research, with Lincoln and Guba's

(1985) case study framework aiding detailed consideration of the problem, the process, the context, the issues, temporality, and lessons learned.

In this way, the case identified for the study – this particular placement - was seen as a naturally bounded entity, consisting of participants who had come together for their own common purposes. The placement's response to a critical incident - and the context or setting for the case - would be described, painting a detailed picture by situating the case within its own particularities, and taking its unique features and characteristics into account.   This single case [the placement community], would be bounded by time [two weeks of data collection], by place [situated within a single placement operating within a specific building] and by context [limited to the placement's response to the incident, without expanding to the reactions of others, for example, the university, course providers, supervisors, the BACP, etc.]. Thus, limitations were created around the subject to be studied (Merriam, 1998; 2009), with the case separated out in terms of time, place, context, and physical boundaries.

Case study is defined as in-depth exploration of a bounded system, based on extensive data collection (Creswell, 2013) and within the spirit of the proposed case study, a detailed account of the placement reaction, and response, to a critical incident could be offered. It was hoped that this research might identify issues to be addressed as the result of a 'near-miss', and assist in the planning of a cohesive placement critical incident response for the future. Implications from such a study could provide practical and useful suggestions for personnel in this, and similar, placements.

Nonetheless, whilst using a case as a specific illustrator in this way could be insightful and promote understanding of the placement, as no relevant 'near miss' occurred during the data collection period, the proposed case study design was not implemented. It was also recognised, as research developed, that an additional study could weaken overall findings as more data collection and analysis would increase time pressures within an already tight timescale.

Accordingly, after careful deliberation as to whether to use case study instead of IPA, or include a supplementary case study, this approach, like the narrative inquiry considered earlier, was rejected for the current research.

Grounded Theory's (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin and Strauss, 2008) adaptation from Corbin and Strauss' earlier version (Strauss and Corbin, 1997) to the epistemologically more positivist forms (Glaser, 1992) and the constructivist approaches developed by Charmaz (2006) were also considered through the question, "What factors influence how trainees manage placement practice?" Reflecting upon Grounded Theory, however, it was felt that this was inappropriate as whilst capable of generating valuable data, its features seemed out of step with the aims of the current research, mostly in that Grounded Theory has an intent to generate theory whilst the objective of the current research was explorative (Creswell, 2007). Despite the Grounded Theory offered by Charmaz (2006), in particular, being likened to IPA in that the 'zig-zag' approach (Creswell, 2007) of constant revision and comparison of data is reminiscent of how the 'whole' and the 'detail' gradually develops in IPA (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), through the disagreement between the main Grounded Theory theorists, an indistinctness as to how to actually conduct analyses was detected (Payne, 2007) and seen as a limitation of this approach. Accordingly, Grounded Theory was also deemed unsuitable for this research.

These considerations have provided insight into how IPA was originally confirmed as fit for purpose in the context of this research, as it offered an appropriate approach to explore under-researched topics and reappraise what is known about a specific phenomenon. In hindsight, however, when considering, as outlined in the research design to follow, that data collection included questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups, whilst IPA was established as a sound approach for data collected via semi-structured interviews, it was not suitable for the other data collection methods contained within the research design [focus groups and questionnaires]. Alternative analytical procedures therefore had to be adopted for data collected in these ways.

It was established that whilst focus groups have been successfully evidenced as data collection methods within published IPA studies [See: Flowers, et al., 2000; Flowers, Knussen and Duncun, 2001; Roose and John, 2003; de Visser and Smith 2007; Palmer, et al., 2010] focus groups do not fit as well as interviews within the model of the relationship IPA promotes between researcher and participant (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) and are less suitable for IPA studies as they engender a more complex, interactional environment (Palmer, et al., 2010). Interactional complexity of focus groups can also make it difficult to develop phenomenological aspects of IPA and problems have also been encountered due to the idiographic commitment of IPA and difficulties involved in using experiential analysis within more complex activities (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

Accordingly, whilst IPA was used successfully in the current study to address interview data, another qualitative approach was needed to provide rich understanding (Braun and Clarke, 2006) from focus group data. Thematic Analysis was the method adopted for this task.

3.5 The case for thematic analysis

As for IPA, some background to this method is provided to aid understanding of the analytical process, provide transparency, and strengthen trustworthiness.

Thematic analysis, which dates back to the 1970's and stemmed from early work by Gerald Holton (Merton, 1975), is a theoretically independent qualitative method which has gained recognition and popularity within the health and social sciences since an influential paper written by Braun and Clarke in 2006. Within this paper, Braun and Clarke presented thematic analysis as a qualitative method "in its own right" and offered an established set of procedures to follow when conducting analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.80). In the decade since this paper was first published, thematic analysis has become more accepted and recognised as a method for analysing data (Joffe, 2012; Howitt, 2010, 2013) and whilst several authors offer differing versions of how to conduct thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Joffe and Yardley, 2004), the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) guided analysis.

The variability and fluidity of thematic analysis make it appropriate for a variety of research projects and like the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis [IPA] (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) detailed in the previous section, thematic analysis seeks patterns within data, yet unlike IPA, thematic analysis immediately encompasses an entire data set and is not tied to any particular epistemological position (Braun and Clarke, 2012).

Accordingly, unlike IPA and other approaches that provide methodological frameworks which specify particular ontological and epistemological positions, thematic analysis separates qualitative research from broader philosophical debates, as it is merely an analytical method (Braun and Clarke, 2013). In this way, thematic analysis had a lot to offer the current research, particularly as it enabled the researcher to work within congruent ontological and epistemological frameworks. Notwithstanding this, however, whilst this theoretical independence makes thematic analysis a flexible method, Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise the importance of a researcher acknowledging and making clear their underlying values, philosophical background and

theoretical stance towards qualitative research. To this end, the authors detail key decisions researchers should address to firstly understand, and secondly make clear, their theoretical position towards their research. The researcher therefore reflected upon three points before conducting the thematic analysis. Firstly, assumptions about the research topic were considered and recorded, secondly, a contemplation of her personal values and relevant life experiences were reflected upon and thirdly consideration was given to the impact these concepts may have as data were read and interpreted (Clarke and Braun, 2013a; Braun and Clarke, 2012). These considerations and the ontological and epistemological stance of the researcher and the research were outlined earlier and are reflected upon at the end of this chapter. Accordingly, this thematic analysis was approached, wherever possible, from a social constructionist/phenomenological stance.

Importantly, thematic analysis has been the method of choice in significant research studies within counselling (McLeod, 2009), and has been used to research issues impacting upon counsellor practitioners. For example, Ciclitira, et al. (2012) used thematic analysis to explore the impact of personal therapy on counsellor trainees and Starr, et al. (2013) conducted a thematic analysis of female clinicians' experiences of counselling supervision. Thematic analysis has also been used with focus groups in several studies, such as research on weight and obesity conducted by Braun, Clarke and Hanson for a book on qualitative research (Braun and Clarke, 2013), research by Braun (2008) which explored identity explanations for poor sexual health statistics and work by Braun and Wilkinson (2005) on genitals and gendered identity.

There are, however, problems associated with thematic analysis which had to be considered. For example, there is a lack of consensus about what thematic analysis really is and although Braun and Clarke produced guidelines on how to conduct thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Howitt, 2013) how to actually do it remains vague for some (Tuckett, 2005). There is also a view of the method as unsophisticated (Braun, Clarke and Terry, 2014) and lacking in substance (Braun and Clarke, 2013), with an indictment that thematic analysis is 'atheoretical' (Howitt, 2013; Braun, Clarke and Terry, 2014). Braun and Clarke also express concern that although thematic analysis is frequently used, it is often not clearly "named and claimed" as the method of analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.6; 2013), which means it has not gained its rightful recognition within the qualitative field. Despite these criticisms, thematic analysis was considered appropriate to address the focus group data where analysis was both semantic, as coding was undertaken on the basis of participants' experiences, and latent as interpretation and theoretical constructs were

115

drawn upon in considering concepts that participants did not explicitly articulate (Braun and Clarke, 2012). Braun and Clarke also stress that clarity regarding the process of thematic analysis is essential (Braun and Clarke 2006) and accordingly, the way analysis progressed is detailed within Chapter Five.

3.6 The case for qualitative content analysis

An alternative research approach to IPA also had to be introduced for the analysis of data generated via qualitative questionnaires and Qualitative Content Analysis [QCA] was identified as encompassing appropriate qualities for this task. Within this, it was recognised that QCA is an established, systematic research method, which offers flexibility of research design (Harwood and Garry 2003) and yet, according to Weber (1990), Burnard (1996) and Braun and Clarke (2013), few systematic guidelines are consistently offered for the analysis of data. Schreier (2012), however, does suggest steps for the implementation of the approach and these guided analysis of questionnaire data.

According to Schreier (2012), as QCA developed from quantitative content analysis, there is no sharp distinction between quantitative content analysis and QCA, although QCA is now accepted as a distinct method of qualitative data analysis. For the current research, the qualitative characteristics of attention to context, the capacity for data-driven analysis, flexibility in following steps of analysis and a partial dependence on researcher insight and intuitive action (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004), were embraced. Furthermore, QCA is described as an interpretive method with fundamental assumptions which differ from the positivist tradition (Bradley, 1993) and seen, as postulated by Mayring (2002; 2014), as having links to hermeneutical approaches, concepts in keeping with the general ethos of the current research. Nevertheless, some aspects of QCA gave cause for reflection as considered within the section dedicated to researcher's reflections at the end of this chapter.

Nevertheless, a prerequisite for successful research within this method stipulates that data can be reduced to concepts that describe a research phenomenon (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008) by creating categories, a model, and a conceptual map (Weber, 1990), conditions which had been met during data collection. Advantages of this method for the current research included how a large volume of textual data could be relatively easily addressed (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008) and the primary objective "to systemically describe meaning of material" (Schreier, 2012, p.3). This fitted with

the aim of determining what an identified group [counsellor stakeholders] had to say about a given topic [the counsellor placement] (Schreier, 2012).

In employing QCA cognisance was also given to previous research which had successfully utilised this method in comparable circumstances and in similar vein to this research, Diederich and Schreier (2009) analysed data from participants from several different stakeholder groups, using one set of categories to analyse how all groups described a broad range of criteria in relation to priority-setting within health care. In another study, Bux and Coyne (2009), asked participants to describe the impact of the 2005 London bombings. Like the current research, participants described their experiences in their own words and subsequent questionnaire material was analysed through QCA. Moreover, when Holmlund, Lindgren and Athlin (2010) used QCA to analyse questionnaire data exploring group supervision for nursing students during clinical placements, their findings provided valuable information for encouraging good learning environments. In another study, McDonald, Wearing and Ponting (2009) explored characteristics of wilderness settings conducive to spiritual experiences. Like the current study, data were collected using questionnaires and analysed through QCA.

From the review of the research method, criticisms of QCA were considered. For example, the time-consuming process of analysis (Schilling, 2006), concern that the approach is overly simplistic (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008), that differences in unit definitions can impact upon coding decisions (De Wever, et. al., 2006), and confusion regarding terminology when assessing the quality of QCA (Bradley, 1993; Schreier, 2012). As these were not seen as insurmountable contra-indications, QCA was the method used to analyse questionnaire material.

3.7 Research design

The intention of the current research was to begin to close an identified gap in extant literature regarding the counsellor placement. Within this aim, it was recognised that, as the counsellor placement has many important components, it was impossible to include all aspects within a single study. Consequently, professional aspects of placement structures, function, and delivery, which are the foundation for service provision, were taken as the main areas for exploration.

To better understand the role of counsellor placements a main research question was posed, "How does the counsellor placement facilitate early practice?" Areas of interest relevant to address this question were identified as firstly, determination of the current placement situation, leading to the subsidiary question, "What are the characteristics and experiences which define the counsellor placement?" The second area of interest, consideration of a training model where universities offer a placement alongside counselling courses evoked the subsidiary question, "How do staff and students describe their experience of a placement parallel to a counsellor course?"

To answer these questions, views of counsellor stakeholders identified as: trainees; course providers; placement providers, and supervisors, were sought through two qualitative studies. Each study consisted of two phases with generated data subjected to distinct sets of analysis.

Study One: The current position: Characteristics and experiences of the counsellor placement

Study One sought to answer the first subsidiary question: "What are the characteristics and experiences which define the counsellor placement?"

Study one consisted of two phases:

Study One, Phase One: A qualitative content analysis of questionnaire data

Study One, Phase One, was a qualitative content analysis of data derived from questionnaires which provided characteristic and experiential information regarding current placements.

Study One, Phase Two: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of interview data.

The second phase in Study One offered an interpretative phenomenological analysis of data generated by semi-structured, face-to-face, interviews which explored lived experiences of placements.

Study Two: Future Possibilities: Placements alongside university counselling courses

Study Two sought to answer the second subsidiary question: "How do staff and students describe their experience of a placement parallel to a counsellor course?"

Study Two, Phase One: Report on a questionnaire for universities in other areas who offered trainees a placement alongside their counselling course

The first phase of Study Two sought information regarding the experience of university personnel in other areas who offered students a counsellor placement alongside their training course. Despite a robust recruitment strategy, insufficient data were generated. Nevertheless, the context and conduct of this phase of research are reported to aid thematic unity.

Study Two, Phase Two: A thematic analysis of focus group data

The second phase of Study Two presented a thematic analysis of data emanating from two focus groups wherein staff and trainees piloting a placement alongside their counsellor training course considered their experience.

As the research was not orientation specific, it is relevant to all involved in the field of counselling and counsellor training.

For ease of reference, Table 3.1 links research questions and studies:

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND STUDIES		
MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION: "How does the counsellor placement facilitate early practice?"		
RESEARCH OBJECTIVE	**SUSIDIARY QUESTION**	**STUDY**
To identify the characteristics and experiences which define the counsellor placement	"What are the characteristics and experiences which define the counsellor placement?"	Study 1
To explore how a counsellor placement parallel to a university course is perceived by staff and students	"How do staff and students describe their experience of a placement parallel to a counselling course?"	Study 2
Table 3.1: Research questions and studies		

3.8 General ethical considerations and aspects of trustworthiness

Counselling represents a particularly sensitive area of inquiry (Lee, 1993; Bond, 2015a; McLeod, 2015), and detailed consideration was therefore given to ensuring that research was as ethically sound as possible. A comprehensive document was produced to externalise work to be

undertaken and ensure ethical thoroughness and this focussed discussion with supervisors, aided reflection, and resulted in an ethical plan which formed a foundation for the research.

Consideration of ethical issues and a risk assessment were undertaken prior to the start of the research and the ethical plan was revisited before moving into each active stage of research. Accordingly, ethical considerations played an integral part in the design and conduct of the study and preliminary research did not highlight any studies of similar subject matter where significant ethical issues had occurred. Nevertheless, this research involved human contact and this merits particular rigour and awareness of the many ethical and theoretical issues that can arise (O'Reilly and Kiyimba, 2015). Therefore, in considering how to ensure thoroughness and trustworthiness, it was recognised that ethical principles within research are similar to values held as essential for counselling practice (McLeod, Elliott and Weaver, 2010), for example, the concepts of beneficence, non-maleficence, respect, anonymity, and data storage (BACP, 2010a). Resultantly, every effort was made to ensure that participants finished the research project in no worse a situation than when they entered it and hopefully exited the study in a better position through the reflective process.

As the researcher practiced as a counsellor and counsellor supervisor and taught on graduate and post graduate research modules throughout the research period, ethical principles were embedded within daily life. Consequently, understanding and a working knowledge of the BACP Ethical Framework (2010a;2016c) underpinned all aspects of research, translating into heightened awareness of potentially sensitive issues and a commitment to ensure that decisions and actions embodied the moral principles of the BACP. Consultative counselling supervision undertaken throughout the research period also underlined ethical working practices and a detailed paper outlining all aspects of the research was presented to the School of Psychology and Counselling Research Ethics Committee of UWTSD [then Swansea Metropolitan University] for ethical approval prior to each stage of data collection. Through this process, research design and documentation [including information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires, data collection documentation, and debriefing information], were endorsed.

Ethical processes also continued throughout the research period as the research was live in that it developed alongside unfolding events. This fluidity meant that reflexivity and flexibility were, within the boundaries of the endorsed ethical plan, essential components of the research process.

Notwithstanding this, as noted by McLeod, Elliott and Weaver (2010, p.39), "It is impossible to design ethically neutral research".   For this reason, where a choice had to be made between conflicting ethical principles the overall concept of "Above all, do no harm" (Bond, 2004, p.67; 2015a; Danchev and Ross, 2014, p.3) was adopted alongside the BACP Ethical Guidelines for Research (2004), and the importance given to the concept of non-maleficence is considered further within the researcher's reflections at the end of this chapter. Research ethics contained within this document were the guiding principles against which decisions were considered whenever a dilemma arose and/or a judgment had to be made about acceptable practice.

Furthermore, although the risk assessment confirmed that the research was unlikely to harm or offend anyone and the research had received an ethical endorsement by the university, a watching brief was maintained by the researcher and research supervisors throughout the research period to address any new or unforeseen issues that arose as research unfolded.   There was also recognition of the ethical responsibility for researchers to encompass the values at the heart of research paradigms and ensure philosophical consistency within research traditions (Duffy and Chenail, 2008). Accordingly, there was a transparent approach to the research including evidence of the researcher's reflexive processes.

Finally, in order to ensure trustworthiness, guidelines for qualitative research recommended by Yardley (2000; 2008) were considered alongside the research process, in particular taking advice from Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) and Langdridge (2007), in adopting Yardley's four principles of: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence and impact and importance (Yardley, 2000; Smith Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.180-183). In particular, Yardley's fourth principle of 'impact and importance', although questioned by Langdridge (2007), was particularly important as the current research could potentially impact upon how the profession sees the counsellor placement. Transparency through clear explanation of what was done and how it was done also enhanced trustworthiness (Marshall and Rossman, 2016). Nonetheless, despite these steps to ensure ethical thoroughness, potential ethical issues became apparent after data collection. These are addressed within ethical issues and/or researcher's reflections specific to each relevant phase of research.

3.9 Summary

This chapter considered ontological and epistemological positions and methodology, offering the constructionist/phenomenological paradigms that guided the research and led to qualitative research approaches, data collection, and analysis (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, [1971] 2017). The research design and general ethical considerations were addressed. The following chapter [Chapter Four] is dedicated to Study One which explored current characteristics and experiences of the counsellor placement.

3.10 Researcher's reflections

The ethics of counselling and research demand that counsellors and researchers carefully contemplate, and understand, ethical principles. In the process of my research, I therefore spent much time reflecting within my journal on the core principles of the BACP: Being trustworthy; autonomy; beneficence; non-maleficence; justice and self-respect (BACP, 2016c, p.2). As a mainstay of these activities is the aim to keep clients/participants safe, and not damage them in any way, a natural place to start these considerations was the aphorism 'Above all, do no harm' (Bond, 2004, p.67; 2015a; Danchev and Ross, 2014, p.3). This maxim was therefore the main ethical principle which guided my counselling, teaching, and research.

In counselling terms, 'do no harm' has transitioned into the BACP fundamental principle of non-maleficence, which is a primary precept within health and social care, and a worldwide fundamental principle. For me, this translates into respect for a client, and his/her situation, together with a sensitive, professional assessment, and an appropriate response to presenting issues. I adopt this concept through the core conditions, and an active approach, rather than passive acceptance, as I make a conscious effort to not only ensure non-maleficence, but to also aim for beneficence, thus engaging in safe, effective, and ethical therapy.

Non-maleficence also holds that a therapist's actions should always develop from the needs, wants, and values of their client, with respect for a client's autonomy and right to be self-governing. The concept of autonomy is therefore also a strong ethical principle, and a central component of therapeutic relationships. Moreover, respect and support for a client's autonomy can encourage a client to be aware that they have choices, and recognise that they can make decisions based on a menu of options, without influence or pressure to change in a particular direction. This experience can be empowering, and promotes self-efficacy.

Nevertheless, the ethical principles of beneficence and respect for autonomy can conflict within therapy, and in such circumstances, every corresponding decision must be based on a duty of care, individual circumstances, and the unique therapist/client relationship.

Furthermore, when training those embarking upon a counselling career, I believe that raising the profile of ethical practice is an effective way of protecting clients, encouraging autonomy, and maintaining professional values. I emphasise that ensuring that clients are not harmed in any way by the therapeutic process requires the maintenance of professional standards, and an active responsibility to reflect upon personal, moral, and ethical perspectives on a wide range of topics. I also promote the premise that non-maleficence starts by a trainee engaging with personal development/personal therapy throughout training to raise awareness of unresolved issues and I encourage continual monitoring of fitness to practise by considering the possible impact a counsellor's physical health, emotional stability, and mental capacity can have on the ability to help clients.

Whilst my teaching also underscores the importance of familiarity with the BACP Ethical Framework (2016c), and the need for each trainee to fully understand his/her placement policies/procedures, my experience of supervising trainees has shown how new counsellors, whilst well aware of ethical principles, can relate to these in an abstract way, often struggling to integrate these concepts into day-to-day therapeutic activities. Resultantly, I advocate the ethical principle of non-maleficence as paramount, raising awareness that 'do no harm' must be an active aim when starting placement work. This helps ensure, for example, that trainees recognise, and work within, their competence level/stage of training, and take all aspects of early client-work to supervision. Experiential group work, role play and reflection on non-maleficence and beneficence, help consolidate these principles into placement work, and assimilate 'do no harm', not simply as a negative duty, but as a conscious endeavour, firmly embedded into counselling processes. Within this, although trainees are encouraged to think before they act, consider possible consequences of their therapeutic interventions, and reflect upon their actions, it is recognised that each therapist will interpret and understand non-maleficence on their own terms.

This concept will therefore become meaningful within their own frame of reference. Alongside this, autonomous learning encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning, both independently, and in collaboration with others. In tandem with this self-learning, students are encouraged to relate this experience to another important ethical

principle considered earlier – autonomy and self-empowerment, thus underpinning the importance of one's sense of control over who we are, and what we do.

Within this, whilst recognising that counselling can be a chancy business (Renn, 2009), it is important to maintain a healthy relationship with ethical principles, and keep a sense of equilibrium, as whilst counselling cannot always be perfectly executed, this may be uncomfortable or non-productive, but not necessarily harmful.   It is therefore important to encourage a trainee not to develop an overtly defensive stance, yet recognise that as every close relationship has a risk element, a therapeutic relationship is never problem free (De Zulueta, 2007; Feltham, 2007). Thus, the importance of offering each client the core conditions, and the requirement to engage in regular supervision, are re-enforced.

I carried my commitment to non-maleficence into the design and execution of the current research, incorporating recommendations from ethicists such as Proctor (2014), Bond (2015a), Amis (2017), and Jenkins (2015; 2017).   Autonomy is also an important concept advocated by these authors as crucial to ethical research, and is evidenced in the commitment to ensure that research participants are: free to choose whether or not to participate; agree informed consent; have freedom of choice; freedom of action; are treated with respect, and are free to determine the content and extent of information shared with a researcher (Kitchener, 1984).

Since the professional judgments of researchers, and therapeutic interventions made by counsellors, have the potential to impact upon the welfare of others however, the spirit of non-maleficence is replete with responsibility, and a fundamental ethical principle which all counsellors and researchers should consistently aspire to achieve.

Consequently, I hold non-maleficence as the foundation upon which all ethical principles in counselling and research develop. This concept is supported by Page (2012), who quantitatively measured the core ethical principles in relation to health care settings and found, without question, the most important principle to be non-maleficence, with the weighting of this principle twice that allocated to any other. Moreover, although each ethical principle can stand alone, the most effective ethical reasoning occurs when all the ethical principles are used in conjunction (Gillon, 2003). Accordingly, another important aspect of non-maleficence is that by adopting the principle of 'do no harm', we encourage the other principles to flourish, making it easier to achieve this aim of ethical harmony.

My research journal also considers how working as a lecturer/counsellor/supervisor brings me into contact with various counsellor placements on a regular basis, yet questions, what do I really know about placements and stakeholders? How much do I think about what actually goes on within these placements? What are my own placement experiences?

My own counselling training gave me direct experience of working in counsellor placements and as I reflected upon the impact this had on me as a person, as a counsellor, and on my work now, I realised that although I have no strong feelings about this part of my training, counsellor placements gave me the opportunity for the early practice so necessary to develop my skills and these placements were, for me, enjoyable and rewarding experiences. For the first time, when writing my journal I appreciated that I continue to volunteer at one placement partly because I feel a sense of loyalty to the organisation for the opportunities and support provided during my training.

I also reflected upon other involvement with placements, as some years ago I established and administered an Employee Assistance Programme and noted that through this I gained working knowledge of how placements operate on a day-to-day basis. My current involvement as a supervisor with an agency which offers free counselling by utilising the services of trainee counsellors also had to be considered as this involves most therapeutic, administrative, organisational, and support aspects of providing a counselling service.   In recent years my work within a University Community Counselling Centre has also given me a wide range of placement experiences.

Teaching on counselling practice programmes, my awareness and understanding of the transition from trainee to professional counsellor provided yet more insight and different perspectives into a journey I had been part of as trainee, a volunteer, a supervisor and now as a lecturer. As I approached this subject from yet another angle, as a researcher, I was very aware of this range of experience and knowledge and questioned how this would impact upon my research. I reflected that this had potential for bias and also meant that as I approached this research I had 'insider' knowledge (Conrad, 1987) of the trainee's role, the course provider's role, the placement provider's role and the supervisor's role. I reflected deeply and for a long time about my own experiencing, particularly questioning which of these roles I felt more affinity with, which I felt were more, and less, problematic and identifying those roles which invoked defensive, or protective, feelings within me, and realised how my feelings were inconsistent.

From this reflection, I acknowledged that these experiences may have actually given me a sense of balance, although I also recognised that whilst this helped me resonate with participants in that I could identify with all of them, believing that through understanding my own experiences, I could better understand theirs, was a different matter.   Considering these concepts, I became acutely aware that I needed to address how my preconceptions may influence the research, realising that my understanding was coming from my perspective, through my experiential lens and was a version of placement experiences, rather than the version. Furthermore, although my own placement experiences were good, I was under no illusion that all trainees have a good experience on placement as my students and supervisees regularly disclose concerns about not being supported, describe experiences with unsuitable clients, and bemoan difficulties they experience when working therapeutically to accrue client hours.

My ongoing reflections describe how I reflected upon, and came to understand, and address, my influence [Reflexivity] (Thompson and Thompson, 2008). Braun and Clarke (2013, p.37) helpfully draw attention to different types of reflexivity useful in research contexts as differentiated by Wilkinson (1988) and in the current research, critical reflection on the way as a researcher I could influence research and research methods [functional reflexivity] proved invaluable to the research process, whilst my journal and reflexivity bring me truly into the research and make my presence visible [personal reflexivity]. From this, I recognise that whilst there is no doubt that findings stem from data, they are also impacted by my influence and by every decision made throughout the research process.   For example, like all counsellors I brought my own beliefs and values into counsellor training and the therapeutic process and these made up my personal ontology and epistemologies that impacted upon how I approached firstly therapy and then research. Whilst these paradigms are addressed in the main chapter to underpin the research process, a more personal insight is now evidenced through reflections within my journal.

Previous life experience and counsellor training had engendered a curious and questioning approach, a reflective attitude, and an interest in meaning-making processes. As briefly recounted earlier, however, my biggest learning came with my Post Graduate Diploma in Counselling Practice where I immediately felt great affinity with the values and assumptions of the Relational Integrative Model [RIM] (Faris and van Ooijen, 2010;2012). The fundamental principles that underpin this model and the wider reading and reflection these engendered clarified and consolidated my previously strong, yet naïve, and relatively unstructured values, and beliefs. I now had a framework that defined my approach to life and made sense of my 'way

of being' (Rogers, 1980). Through working with this counselling model, I also came to more fully understand that truth is an elusive concept (Faris and van Ooijen, 2012), as the RIM offered a framework, the opportunity, and the confidence to be curious or even sceptical about some things that others may see as 'definite' (Faris and van Ooijen, 2012) and I had previously taken for granted.

The way I work within the RIM is relational and sits within a framework based upon a postmodern philosophy and adopting a social constructionist epistemology, concurring with my belief in multiple perspectives and inclusivity (Faris and van Ooijen, 2012). Within this, I embrace constructionist epistemologies that argue that the world and what we know of it, is constructed through various discourses and systems of meaning and as these change, so truth changes; there is no one truth. Correspondingly, I am also attracted to the growing movement towards integrating different aspects of theoretical models within counselling (Faris and van Ooijen, 2012) and I encompass the developing tendency towards pluralism (Cooper and McLeod, 2007; Tilley, McLeod and McLeod, 2015). As the RIM's framework is integrative, this concurs with my ontological and epistemological stance (Faris and van Ooijen, 2012).

The RIM is based on the core principle that concepts within the three main therapeutic schools [Humanistic, Psychodynamic and CBT], when synthesised into an integrative model with a wide theoretical framework, have much to offer a client in distress. Within this, as I began to make this model my own and develop my personal counselling style, my preferences, prejudices, and beliefs influenced my work and the balance of each theory within my non-pathologising/non-blaming stance. This engendered in me a way of working, where I bring to the therapeutic encounter the possibility of new meanings, particularly through recognising and exploring context as I believe that there can be no real meaning-making without taking this into consideration. Many counsellors encompass postmodern ideologies and adopt social constructionist epistemologies (Loewenthal and Samuels, 2014) and working with the RIM, I particularly warmed to the co-construction that occurs within therapeutic alliances and the more open-minded approach of the possibility of there being not just one 'correct' therapeutic theory, but a stance of curiosity and integration.

Working with this approach I engaged with inter-subjectivity and what it means to be human, seeing the therapeutic relationship as essential for therapeutic change (Woolfe, Dryden and Strawbridge, 2003). I also experienced how individuals have within them inner resources for

growth (Rogers, 1957) and came to better understand the relational core of human existence in appreciating that humans have a basic need for relationships, and are social beings living within relationship networks, or systems. This led to an acknowledgement that to be human is to be interconnected and interrelated and as a counsellor and researcher I am interested in processes of mutual influencing and feedback, attentive to patterns of behaviour, and intrigued by how the here and now, the past, the present, and the future, link within a client or a participant's story (Fairs and van Ooijen, 2012). Accordingly, I see the world as having to be understood from social, cultural, moral, ideological, and political sources and my view of the person relates to how each operates within a subjective and interpreted world, responding to both external and internal influences. I therefore also work therapeutically with the concept that the relationship between person and context is fluid and reciprocal with influence in both directions (Faris and van Ooijen, 2012).

This process made me re-consider my understanding of one of the cornerstones of counselling and humanistic therapies, the meaning of being human (van Deurzen-Smith, 2002), what it means to be human and live within these systems. These concepts are also important within phenomenological research (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) and led me to an exploration of issues such as identity, change, personality, and the 'self', finding myself particularly drawn to concepts considered by Lapworth, Sills and Fish (2001) that concentrated my attention on concepts of the here and now, the past, and the future, understanding that both reality and the 'self' have temporal elements. What is real and true differs across time and context and within a 'triangle of insight' as described within the 'time model' (Menninger, 1958). For me, this resonates with Heidigger's concept of Dasein (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) where the past is connected with the present and there is a concept of tumbling into a presence of temporality, thrownness, and fallenness, with attendant frustrations.

Finding support and a framework for my previously nebulous beliefs, I came to understand that knowledge is socially constructed through communication, interaction, and relationships. Alongside this, my alignment with the assumptions of this model not only coloured my thinking about social identities such as gender, class, ethnicity, values, and assumptions it also led me to reconsider my relationship with my work, as for the first time I was able to define my approach to life, counselling, and research. From this awakening, I developed a different approach to therapy as through considering interpersonal patterns that inform my approach to therapy [and life] I become more relational and interpretative. This can also be related to qualitative research

processes, as unpacking patterns within data to understand the meaning beneath the surface is similar to how, as a relational integrative counsellor, I help unpack client disclosures and within this process have learnt how to hold many concepts as conceptually, in that moment of space and time, true (Faris and van Ooijen, 2012).

I also came to understand how whenever people interact, meanings coalesce to form a shared meaning, a joint narrative within the space between them as both conscious and unconscious connections constitute a form of mutual influencing. This concept of inter-subjectivity challenges the idea of a contained self and has had an important influence within my therapeutic work as this awareness of mutual influencing and merging of subjectivities, i.e., what is happening in the here and now between myself and my client, has not only developed my self-awareness, but has also meant that I am more attuned to processes within my client, myself as the counsellor, and the consulting room. I am therefore able to use this co-transference therapeutically (Orange, 2009), becoming curious about what lies beyond the presenting issue of a client and glimpsing the complexity and richness of his/her life wherein sits a multitude of resources and opportunities (Faris, 2007).

Through these postmodern and social constructionist lenses I had questioned the idea of a single, fixed reality, and objectivity and confirmed that for me, what is known is mediated by perception, cognition, and social construction. I had also come to view the relationship between person and context as important as interaction with a subjective world, with humans both constructed, and constructors of, reality (Braun and Clarke, 2012, Faris and van Ooiijen, 2012).

As can be deduced from the foregoing, bringing my subjectivity and reflective processes into the research process involved looking through a lens constructionist in orientation, influenced by phenomenology and where there is not only one, correct, version of reality. A world where knowledges exist, rather than knowledge (Braun and Clarke, 2012) and these are derived from, and make sense within, the context from which they originated. Accordingly, my approach within both therapeutic relationships and research relates to my view of the world (Gilbert and Leahy, 2007) which challenges ontological and epistemological theories of positivism and objectivism, working instead within both therapy and research around how a human is situated within the world and operates within a relational matrix.

This section used my reflexive processes within my journal to explain my personal connection to the counsellor placement, my interest in meaning-making and my understanding that being a particular person, existing within a particular setting, impacts upon how I experience and interpret the world, how I see the counsellor placement and my impact upon the research. It can be seen how I came to delineate my own position on ontology and epistemology that account for this view of the world, and hence how I engaged with counsellor placements and this research.

I am aware that my own cultural, social, and economic background influenced research focus, design and analysis, as I have experience of the placement from a therapeutic involvement right through to a supervisory and a managerial involvement. I am also aware that a combination of these and the factors described above could have impacted upon the questions asked of participants, determined what was seen as important within participant responses and could have resulted in a tendency to prioritise some themes over others. This awareness made me careful in my efforts to ensure that research processes, themes, and interpretations were both grounded in, and supported by, data.

Chapter Four

Study one: A qualitative content analysis and an interpretative phenomenological analysis of the existing position: The characteristics and experiences of the counsellor placement

4.1 Introduction

The aim of Study One was to describe the characteristics and experiences that currently define the counsellor placement. To this end, this study is presented through two phases that sought information from stakeholders involved in early counselling practice.

Phase One presents a Qualitative Content Analysis (Schreier, 2012) of characteristics and experiences of the counsellor placement.   Phase Two is an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) of stakeholders' lived experiences of the counsellor placement.

4.2 Background and contextualisation to study one

As discussed in previous chapters, many students in the UK training for a profession undertake part of their learning through placement (Cameron-Jones and O'Hara, 1990) and whilst working at their placements, trainees are the joint concern of their course providers within the training environment and associated professionals out in the field (Cameron-Jones and O'Hara, 1990). Within the counselling profession the associated professionals involved with early practice take the form of placement providers and supervisors, and relationships between these professionals, the learner and course provider are multifaceted (Cronin, 2014).

Moreover, many researchers recognise that early practice is an intrinsic part of training for health professionals, yet this element of training is also acknowledged as a stressful time (Folkes-Skinner, 2010; Delaney, et al., 2015). Early practice within training for health professionals can therefore be a concern both for trainees and those who support them, as anxiety and resultant decreased coping strategies can interfere with effective learning and practice performance (Delaney, et al., 2015). To begin to determine how any aspect of training impacts upon counsellors and their effectiveness, there is therefore a need to firstly learn more about underlying elements of counsellor training. Accordingly, Rønnestad and Ladany (2006) argue that research needs to provide better understanding of the training process, the factors relevant and meaningful to trainees and their impact on a trainee's overall development.

To date, however, research has primarily concentrated on course concepts (Georgiadou, Willis, and Canavan, 2015), the acquiring and development of counselling skills (Smith, 2016), personal development (Moller and Rance, 2013), supervision (Dawson and Akhurst, 2015) and client outcomes (Yasky, King, and O'Brien, 2015), often at the exclusion of personal perspectives. The counsellor placement is also notably absent within research and resultantly, much of our understanding about how placements work is anecdotal and generalised from non-academic writing [for example, articles/correspondence within the BACP's 'Therapy Today'] and/or relevant research related to other allied professions within the health and social care field, as evidenced within the literature review. This scarcity of research into the counsellor placement is concerning both from an academic standpoint and a counselling perspective, especially as the success or failure of early practice for trainee counsellors is directly linked to contact with clients (Orlinsky and Rønnestad, 2005; Folkes-Skinner, 2016). This study therefore starts a process towards understanding how placements currently facilitate practice elements of counsellor training, by addressing the research question, "What are the characteristics and experiences which define the counsellor placement?"

Phase One: A qualitative content analysis of questionnaire data

4.3 Study aim and research question

The objective for this phase of research was to explore the existing placement position, and so learn more about underlying placement structures and day-to-day experiences. Phase One therefore asked stakeholders, "What are the characteristics and experiences which define the counsellor placement?"

4.4 Research design

Research design and methodology are outlined in Chapter Three and in accordance with this, the first phase within Study One presents a Qualitative Content Analysis [QCA] (Schreier, 2012) of data generated by qualitative questionnaires completed by counsellor placement stakeholders.

4.5 Target population

As this research aimed to explore the perspectives of those involved with early therapeutic practice, information garnered through the literature review identified stakeholders who could provide valuable information regarding the characteristics and experiences of the counsellor placement. This target population consisted of (i) Established professionals currently associated with the therapeutic work of counsellor placements, identified as, course providers, placement providers, and supervisors and (ii) Trainee counsellors in, or having recently completed, counsellor training with associated placement practice.

4.6 Recruitment process

Invitations to participate in the research were forwarded to individuals within purposively selected groups within the target population known, through professional networks, to be in a position to provide insight into the characteristics and experiences of counsellor placements (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Professionals who met the research criteria were identified through existing contacts, with prospective respondents [37] contacted via email to introduce the study.

For the recruitment of trainees, gatekeepers in the form of Programme Directors/Managers of appropriate courses [9], were asked to forward research information to relevant trainees and those who had recently qualified, either in person or via administrative email lists. Placement providers [21] were asked to circulate this information to trainee counsellors.

4.7 Development of material

The researcher developed a research pack for distribution to prospective respondents who expressed interest in the research. This consisted of: a covering letter [Appendix 2] and an information sheet [Appendix 3]. As no appropriate questionnaire was available, the researcher designed questionnaires to meet the needs of the study and according to substantive placement roles [Trainees, Appendix 4; Course Providers, Appendix 5; Placement Providers, Appendix 6 and Supervisors, Appendix 7]. A consent form [Appendix 8] was also included.

The research pack explained the research, making all conditions and implications of the research clear [evidenced within Appendices 2-8] and research documentation was considered as part of a pilot study prior to wider circulation.

4.8 Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted to test documentation and procedures so that anomalies or issues likely to cause confusion or misunderstanding could be rectified. Questionnaires were administered to a pilot group consisting of counselling stakeholders selected for their similarity to the target population. Questionnaires were applied to a selected cohort [four, one from each respondent group] to test their suitability and consider the supporting documentation/research pack. The questionnaires were circulated by email as planned for the main study and respondents were asked to consider all information and provide feedback on ambiguities, difficult, or awkward questions, logging the time taken to complete the questionnaire and identifying potentially problematic areas.

Three responses were received and several implications arose from these, some of which confirmed the questionnaire design and content, whilst others elicited changes. Arising from the pilot study, the sequence and appropriateness of questions were revisited as feedback on phraseology led to a review of questionnaire design and content. Firstly, two respondents felt that the font used was too small and one identified 'Ariel 12' as the clearest font for questionnaires. This suggestion was implemented. Secondly, question sequences were revisited so that there was more of a natural flow to questionnaires, simpler language was adopted and some combination questions were split into single entities. Thirdly, there was a suggestion that a final question should ask whether anything important had been omitted from the questionnaire and this recommendation was adopted. Appendices 2-8 example final documentation.

An analytical process [IPA] was also tested as part of the Pilot Study and was found at the time to be satisfactory. Nonetheless, as can be seen from previous and following sections, data were subsequently re-analysed using Qualitative Content Analysis to systemise findings (Schreier, 2012). No data collected as the result of the pilot study were included in the final analysis and upon conclusion of the pilot study, documentation was circulated to the wider target population.

4.9 Data collection: Questionnaires

Data collection commenced following the pilot study when the research pack was circulated to prospective respondents who had expressed interest in the study. Steps were taken to ensure that respondents who wished to take part, yet did not have internet access or felt uneasy about

returning a questionnaire via email, could participate; it was important that no-one felt excluded from the research process. Alternative arrangements were therefore made available and postal communication and hand delivery were used by many respondents.

Where questionnaires were returned electronically these were printed and emails deleted. All questionnaires were anonymised, allocated an identification code and kept separately from consent forms in accordance with the regulations of the university, the BACP (2010a;2015a) and the Data Protection Act (1998).

4.10 Respondents

Forty-nine respondents returned signed consent forms and completed questionnaires either via email, personally, or through the postal service.

In line with the target population, respondents were:

1. *Professionals* associated with counselling placements:

    (i)   *Course providers*: Counselling course providers within Further Education, Higher Education, and private providers. Three course providers returned questionnaires.

    (ii)   *Placement providers*: The 'responsible person' for trainees in organisations identified in Point 2 below. Seven placement providers returned questionnaires.

    (iii)   *Supervisors*: Supervisors experienced in placement work and currently working as independent supervisors for trainees on placement. Three supervisors returned questionnaires.

2. *Trainee Counsellors* in, or having recently completed, counsellor training with associated placement practice within agencies working with bereavement, cancer, general/specific health issues, gender specific issues, the homeless, and young people. Thirty-six trainees returned questionnaires. The greater number of trainees compared to course/placement professionals represents the ratio of trainees to other stakeholders

Respondents were therefore trainees, course providers, placement providers, and supervisors.

4.11 Debriefing procedure

Debriefing of respondents involved acknowledging receipt of questionnaires, thanking respondents for their contribution and ensuring that they understood and were happy with all aspects of the research.   All participants were also offered sight of the research findings.

4.12 Ethical considerations of the QCA study

All research documentation was endorsed by the Ethics Committee of the UWTSD [then Swansea Metropolitan University] and data collection materials were revisited and approved by the Ethics Committee prior to this stage of data collection. Informed consent was obtained from each respondent and care was taken to protect anonymity. Advice provided by Madge (2006) who advocates that a respondent's agreement to participate can be indicated with a check box [e.g., I consent to ☐ or via an email returned to the researcher] (Cabiria, 2012) was adopted and before consenting to return their questionnaires via email, respondents were urged to consider whether they felt comfortable and safe communicating personal reflections and feelings electronically [Appendix 8].

A potential ethical issue was identified after data collection, however, as no specific warning was provided regarding problems that could have arisen in transmitting raw data via email. At the time it was felt that risk was mitigated as (i) All respondents were, by nature of their training/profession, familiar with electronic communication and the storage/retrieval of electronic data, (ii) Email is considered a private online environment where only researcher and participant can access communication (Salmons, 2010), and (iii) Responses were returned to an academic email address and could only be accessed via the researcher's personal log-on details and individual password. This issue is considered further within the researcher's reflections at the end of this chapter.

4.13 Data analysis : QCA

A Qualitative Content Analysis [QCA] was carried out of textual comments on questionnaires (Bux and Coyne, 2009; McDonald, Wearing and Ponting, 2009) which, in describing common characteristics and experiences, defined current placement concepts for this cohort.

Steinke (2004) suggests that, in the spirit of transparency, researchers show explicitly how they arrive at conclusions. Accordingly, the three main stages of QCA are described as

preparing, organizing, and reporting (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008). Analysis was adapted from steps described by Schreier (2012, p.6), summarised in Table 4.1:

QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS
1. Selecting material
2. Building a Coding Frame
3. Dividing Material into Units of Coding
4. Trying Out the Coding Frame
5. Evaluating and Modifying the Coding Frame
6. Main Analysis
7. Interpreting and Presenting Findings
Table 4.1: Analytical steps adapted from Schreier, 2012, p.6

4.13.1 Selecting material

The material analysed took the form of elements of completed questionnaires that described characteristics and experiences of the counsellor placement. To firstly distinguish between information relevant, or irrelevant, to the research question initial coding determined pertinent material. Within this process, care was taken to make 'relevant' coding more inclusive than the 'irrelevant' category, thus ensuring that all important concepts within data were captured (Schreier, 2012).

As the questionnaires generated a significant amount of material, rather than building a large coding frame in one attempt, data were broken down into smaller portions of material as advocated by Schreier (2012). Resultantly, data were originally addressed according to the different sources of information, e.g., groups of stakeholders [trainees, course providers, placement providers, and supervisors], initially developing a coding frame which covered data from one source only.   The first source to be addressed was the supervisor group which, as one of the smallest cohorts [three respondents], was likely to constitute a manageable coding

frame and whilst presenting as the easiest to work with, could facilitate a basic framework to build upon. The supervisor coding frame is therefore used to example the process of analysis, since, as analysis progressed, this partial coding frame gradually encompassed other sources with categories continually added until a complete coding frame was formed.

4.13.2 Building a coding frame

Once relevant material had been selected, work started on building a coding frame that suited the questionnaire data (Boyatzis, 1998).

4.13.2.1 Structure and generating

A structure for the supervisor coding frame was formed by determining dimensions to describe data, then generating sub-categories for each dimension. As is often the case in QCA, the coding frame consisted of a mixture of concept-driven and data-driven strategies (Fruh, 2007; Shreier, 2012).

As the purpose of this study was to describe respondents' impressions of current characteristics and experiences of counsellor placements, the research question pointed the way towards dimensions as relevant questionnaire topics offered a deductive framework, forming concept-driven dimensions of the coding frame. These dimensions were logically identified as addressing issues (i) Before placement commenced: preparation and support aspects, (ii) Experiences during placement: organisational, professional, practice and change aspects and (iii) Aspects experienced as the result of the placement: impact and reflection. Appendix 9 illustrates the formation of these dimensions and the developing coding frame.

Whilst the questionnaire topics had specified dimensions, addressing comments offered by respondents called for a data-driven strategy. Sub-categories were therefore generated inductively from data through successive summarising (Shannon, 1954; Shreier, 2012).

Summarising involved firstly creating a master list of data relating to each relevant dimension. Data were then summarised and paraphrased (Mayring, 2000;2010), firstly focusing on those things that paraphrases had in common, then deleting issues redundant in relation to the research question. Similar paraphrases were then compared and, where appropriate, summarised into one final paraphrase that generated a category description and name, thus reducing data to a more manageable level (Shreier, 2012). Appendix 10 provides an illustrative example of the summarising process.

4.13.2.2 Defining and naming

The next step, once a set of dimensions and sub-categories had been established, involved assigning names and definitions to categories. Each category definition was explicit, consisting of three parts (Rustemeyer, 1992): (i) a description; (ii) a name and (iii) an example. As each definition acted as a rule for assigning data to a category, care was taken to make the meaning of each category clear, so that coding would be consistent and reliable. A category name was allocated to provide a label that offered a concise portrayal of each category's main concept, so that it was possible to code without constantly referring to category definitions. This was followed by an actual example from data illustrating the most characteristic aspects of the category and supporting the category definition. Definitions for dimensions were limited to a description of category features, whereas definitions for sub-categories were more specific to aid analysis.

Appendix 11provides an illustrative example of the definition, name and example arising from the progressive summarising exampled in Appendix 10, whilst Appendix 12 is an example of how information began to accumulate to develop the supervisors' coding frame.

To ensure that it was possible to revisit material later during analysis and check for missed material or unintentional bias in selection of material, each category was numbered and a residual category was included at each hierarchical level. Residual categories contained information which, whilst of some relevance to the research question, did not immediately fit any existing category.

4.13.3 Revising and expanding

With a list of dimensions and sub-categories which had been allocated descriptions, names, and supplemented with examples from within data, the developing coding frame was re-visited. Revising the coding frame involved taking a step back and returning to the coding frame after one month to review its structural framework and re-consider dimensions and sub-categories to ensure that no categories had been missed and all were exclusive (Mayring, 2010). Within this process, overlaps between categories were identified and where two categories were similar, these were collapsed into one category. This is demonstrated within Appendix 13.

As the result of these revisions, no decision rules were necessary as sub-categories did not overlap. Appendix 14 presents the final Supervisors' coding frame.

Schreier (2012) also recommends devising a visual map of the coding frame to aid future analysis and the following diagram proved helpful in building upon this coding frame to encompass remaining material:

MAP OF SUPERVISORS' DEVELOPING CODING FRAME

[See Appendix 14 for final Supervisors' Coding frame]

D1 Pre placement Aspects	D2 Organisational Aspects	D3 Professional Aspects	D4 Practice Aspects	D5 Change Aspects	D6 Impact ascepts	D7 Reflexive Asoects
1.1 Better preparation needed	2.1 All BACP members	3.1 Group supervision provided by placements	4.1 Contracted counselling with variety of skills needed	5.1 Concern over drop in training hours	6.1 Supervision reports monitor learning	7.1 Questionnaire provided a rare reflexive experience
1.2 Better support needed	2.2 BACP policies & procedures need to be unpheld	3.2 Supervisors have professional indemnity insurance	4.2 Inequality of safety and ethics of practice	5.2 Placement alongside course possible, but needs hard work, support, commitment and sensitivity	6.2 Permanent employment within placement unlikely	7.2 Reflexivity key for placement learning
	2.3 More contact needed	3.3 BACP Ethical Framework guides work	4.3 Confusion over duty of care			
			4.4 Most common presenting issues = Anxiety, depression & interpersonal issues			
			4.5 Supervisors first point of contact for help/emergency			
			4.6 Robust assessement not always provided but needed			
			4.7 Robust supervision necessary			
			4.8 Early supervision needed			
			4.9 Training Supervisor needed			
			4.10 Mentor needed			

Figure 4.1: Map of Developing Supervisors' Coding Frame

Starting with this smaller section of material confirmed it was possible to analyse the questionnaire material in this way and provide an answer to the research question. As this process started by selecting only a part of the material, however, once the supervisor coding frame had been finalised the next source was added and the coding frame was expanded to fit

additional material. In order to use the same set of categories in analysing responses of all four stakeholder groups, the coding frame was developed, one stakeholder group after another, until each source [trainees; course providers; placement providers, and supervisors] had been addressed and a complete, yet draft, coding frame began to develop as illustrated in Appendix 15.

4.13.4 Dividing material into units of coding

Before trying out the coding frame, selected material had to be divided into smaller units. This segmentation began by adopting a formal criterion to determine where each unit of coding ended and another began, as use was made of the questionnaire structure already inherent within the material (Schreier, 2012). This meant that it was possible to simultaneously mark, segment, and code each passage, so that each unit of coding could fit into a category of the coding frame. Nevertheless, for clarity, every data item was examined and the beginning and end of each coding unit was identified '//' and numbered consecutively to ensure that relevant material was considered. Each category had already been numbered and now as units of coding were numbered and related to the unit of analysis, they could be easily traced and identified for comparison at a later date. Appendix 16 examples this process.

4.13.5 Trying out the coding frame

Through the development of the complete coding frame, dimensions, sub-categories, definitions, and examples were established encompassing all relevant questionnaire material. Trying out the coding frame involved a pilot phase encompassing three stages: (i) Trial coding; (ii) Consistency check; (iii) Adjustment of coding frame.

Before the trial coding, however, a final check was carried out on the coding frame as there seemed to be too many residual categories, implying, according to Schreier (2012), that the coding frame had low face validity and required further development. This involved checking all aspects of the coding frame as further modification was necessary.   Resultantly, adjustments were made to the coding frame and coding procedure as all categories were checked, residual categories were addressed, overlapping categories were merged, and new categories were added [Appendix 17].

The coding frame was subsequently deemed appropriate for application to collected material, as follows:

The trial coding: Once developed and revised, the final coding frame was tested on a subset of the material in a pilot phase. As the aim of the study was to describe the perceptions of counsellor placement stakeholders, the coding frame was tested on part of the actual material to be used for the main coding (Schreier, 2012). To ensure that no part of the coding frame remained untested all dimensions and sub-categories were examined during the pilot phase as the trial coding applied the final coding frame to data from one unit of analysis [questionnaire] from each data source. This aided variability and ensured that the pilot phase related to all stakeholder groups and material (Neuendorf, 2002). Coding procedures were therefore undertaken exactly as planned for the main analysis, although only in relation to part of the material (Fruh, 2007).

Categories were applied consecutively, one at a time, to segmented material (Macqueen, et al., 2009).   Within this coding, as the aim of the study was to describe features of the counsellor placement and the structure of the original questionnaire made it unlikely that a particular aspect would be mentioned repeatedly by a respondent, repetitions were deemed not to add any particular information (Schreier, 2012).

Consistency check: Double-coding involved a comparison of coding at different points in time, with two rounds of coding [15th June 2016 and 16th July 2016] compared for consistency. A comparison coding sheet was created for every dimension of the coding frame, where each line corresponded to one unit of coding and columns related to two stages of coding. Appendix 18 demonstrates the process of double-coding segmented material, to enhance coding.

Adjustment of the coding frame: Due to extensive amendments to the coding frame immediately prior to the trial coding, only minor amendment was necessary as the result of this stage of analysis.

4.13.6 Evaluating, modifying and confirming the coding frame

The quality of the coding frame had, in part, been confirmed by the comparisons of coding. Nonetheless, a more formal quality assessment was carried out by considering the concepts of uni-dimentiality, mutual exclusiveness, exhaustiveness, saturation, and reliability (Schreier, 2012):

***Uni-dimentiality*:** A check was carried out to ensure that each dimension captured only one aspect of the counsellor placement and sub-categories were variables of the main categories [values], with no repetition of category names.

***Mutual exclusiveness*:** This was apparent as sub-categories within each dimension were mutually exclusive of each other in that each segment of material could only be allocated to one sub-category within that dimension.

***Exhaustiveness*:** Exhaustiveness was achieved once each unit of coding was allocated to a sub-category and each sub-category was used at least once, with no sub-category left empty; all material of relevance was captured within the coding frame.

***Saturation*:** For the part of the coding frame created in a concept-driven way, saturation was not applicable and for data-driven categories, saturation was met by definition as if a concept had not been present in material, the category would not have been created.   According to Schreier's criteria, however, saturation was achieved as each sub-category was used at least once during analysis (Schreier, 2012).

***Reliability*:** Whilst there is no confirmed agreement regarding procedures or terminology when assessing the quality of QCA (Bradley, 1993; Schreier, 2012), this QCA, had fundamental assumptions that differed from the positivist tradition thus making it difficult for conventional criteria for validating research results to be fully employed (Bradley, 1993). Nevertheless, in line with the recommendations of Schreier (2012), the criterion of reliability could be said to have been met through the consistency of coding at different points in time by the researcher. Furthermore, avoiding common areas of inadequacy associated with this approach, such as incomplete analysing processes or including too many different concepts within a single sub-category (Dey, 1993; Hickey and Kipping, 1996), strengthened the research, with actual citations from respondents also increasing trustworthiness (Sandelowski 1993;1995; Patton 2002).

Furthermore, analysis was deemed to be successful, as through this coding frame, data were simplified, analysed, and formed dimensions and sub-categories that reliably reflected the characteristics and experiences of the counsellor placement

(Kyngäs and Vanhanen 1999), covering all relevant data (Graneheim and Lundman 2004).

Validity: Whilst validity is always a matter of degree and qualitative researchers prefer to consider trustworthiness, according to Schreier (2012) the coding frame is valid to a certain extent as its categories adequately represent the ethos of the research question and data-driven elements of the coding frame capture the meaning of the material. Validity was also enhanced by early recognition that residual categories should have been used more sparingly and this insight led to the coding frame being continually modified until these categories were empty.

4.14 Main analysis

The main analysis replicated the trial phase, except the final coding frame was now applied to all relevant data, with those parts of the material used for the trial coding now re-coded, checking for units of coding that needed to be re-assigned. Coding was addressed dimension by dimension, coding all material for Dimension One before moving to Dimension Two. Appendix 18 demonstrates this process.

Following the main coding, a comparison coding sheet was again created for every dimension of the coding frame and a further comparison took place to determine the meaning of material where codes differed when subjected to double-coding.   Where a unit was coded differently at the two points in time, the recommendation made by Schreier (2012) that a colleague who had knowledge of the research topic and the research was consulted and agreement was reached via discussion.   Through these steps, many words of text were classified into smaller content categories to offer a condensed, yet broad, description of the counsellor placement.

Table 4.2 depicts the final coding frame:

QUESTIONNAIRE COMPLETE CODING FRAME [FINAL VERSION]							

LEVEL ONE DIMENSIONS

PRE-PLACEMENT ASPECTS	ASPECTS DURING PLACEMENT					ASPECTS AFTER PLACEMENT	

LEVEL TWO DIMENSIONS

D1 ASPECTS BEFORE PLACEMENT BEGINS	D2 ORG ASPECTS	D3 PROF ASPECTS	D4 PRACTICE ASPECTS	D5 FINANCIAL ASPECTS	D6 CHANGE ASPECTS	D7 IMPACT ASPECTS	D8 REFLEXIVE ASPECTS

LEVEL THREE DIMENSIONS AND SUBCATEGORIES

D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8
D1.1 Trainee recruitment: Trainees recruited through courses	D2.1 Placement aims & values: Aim to provide free/low cost counselling	D3.1 Type of supervision: Group supervision usually provided	D4.1 Referral processes: Client referrals to trainees vary greatly	D5.1 Placement Funding: Placements funded through combination of WAG funding, charity shops & donations	D6.1 BACP revision of training hours: Concern over BACP drop in training hours	D7.1 Monitoring of Progress: Supervision and placement reports assess placement learning	D8.1 Reflective processes: Reflexivity key for placement learning
D1.2 Placement Preparation: Better preparation needed for placement element	D2.2 Working relationships: Working relationships vary greatly	D3.2 Insurance: Most placements & stakeholders have professional indemnity	D4.2 Range of Skills utilised: Most placements offer contracted one-to-one counselling but no variety of clients	D5.2 Cost of placement work: Trainees pay to work through supervision & insurance	D6.2 Feasibility of placement alongside course: Placement alongside course possible, but needs support, commitment & sensitivity	D7.2 Placement outcomes: Huge pressure on doing well to pass course	D8.1 Reflexive Value of research Process: Questionnaires a reflective experience
D1.3 Placement Support: More support needed for placement element	D2.3 Policies/Procedures: BACP Policies/procedures need to be not only in place, but understood and acted upon	D3.3 Organisational Membership: All participants BACP members	D4.3 Most common presenting issues: Anxiety, depression & interpersonal issues	D5.3 Expenses: Most placements pay travelling expenses		D7.3 Hope & Expectations: Trainees with positive hopes/expectations report better placement experience	D8.3 Personal therapy alongside course: Mandatory personal therapy essential
D1.4 Securing placement: Personal contact best way to secure placement	D2.4 Documentation: Most placements & courses have robust documentation	D3.4 Ethical framework: BACP Ethical framework guides work	D4.4 Emergency procedures: Supervisors first contact for help/ Emergency			D7.4 Good Placement experiences: Good placements greatly aid Personal/professional development	
D1.5 Time to secure placement: From immediately to eighteen months	D2.5 Contact: More contact needed between Stakeholders		D4.5 Duty of Care: Confusion over clinical responsibility			D7.5 Bad placement experiences: Bad placements can damage self esteem	
D1.6 Induction procedures:	D2.6		D4.6 Assessment			D7.6 Employability:	

146

Induction procedures vary from none to full day	Placement Stressors: Time pressures		Processes: Robust client assessment vital, yet some placements have none			Permanent employment within placement unlikely and counsellors often have to have other jobs to survive	
D1.7 Making most of placement: Trainees need to fully engage to make most of placement			D4.7 Reaction to learning from first client: First client pivotal point of training and stressful				
D1.8 Readiness to practice: Readiness to practise is awarded by course prior to placement			D4.8 Feelings just before first client: Time just before first client particularly stressful				
			D4.9 Reaction during first session: First session huge learning curve & stressful				
			D4.10 Reaction after first session: Huge relief after first client				
			D4.11 Supervision processes: Need for robust supervision				
			D4.12 Supervisor characteristics: Training supervisor needed				
			D4.13 Timing of supervision: Supervision prior to first client helpful				
			D4.14 Additional support: Mentor needed for early client-work				
			4.15 Safe. Ethical Practice: Inequality of experience, safety and ethics of practice				
Table 4.2: Final Coding Frame							

According to Neimeyer and Gemignani (2003), the process of Qualitative Content Analysis cannot be contained into definite models but instead, has a more complex and idiosyncratic nature. Researchers therefore decide on variations fitting for their study (Weber, 1990, Elo and Kyngäs, 2008). The process described had led to inductive sub-categories which described the underlying characteristics and experiences of the counsellor placement and the finalised coding frame provided the meaning of each unit of coding. The needs of this study were therefore deemed to have been met and no further stages of analysis were undertaken in line with the process of QCA followed by previous writers (Koskinen and Äijö, 2013).

4.15 Findings

Participants described the characteristics and general experiences of counsellor placements as forming eight dimensions: (i) Pre-placement aspects; (ii) Organisational aspects; (iii) Professional aspects; (iv) Practice aspects; (v) Financial aspects; (vi) Change aspects; (vii) Impact aspects and (viii) Reflexive aspects which defined three phases of the counsellor placement: Pre-placement, during placement, and impact of placement.

The coding frame [Table 4.2] is the main finding as the categories describe the material (Tambling and Johnson, 2010). Before presenting findings in qualitative style, Table 4.3 presents a summary of findings with supportive illustrations depicting how each category was expressed within material:

TEXT MATRIX ILLUSTRATING DATA	
DIMENSIONS	**EXTRACTS FROM QUESTIONNAIRES**
DIMENSION 1: PRE-PLACEMENT ASPECTS	
D1.1 Trainees recruited through courses	We're in regular contact with local courses who recommend us [placement] to their students
D1.2 Better preparation needed for placement element	No preparation to really speak of…
D1.3 Better support needed for placement element	There could have been more support for the placement element of training
D1.4 Personal contact best way to secure placement	In the end, I visited placements personally. That's how I got a placement
D1.5 From immediately to eighteen months to secure a placement	(i) Immediate, I was already working there (ii) Took over eighteen months
D1.6 Induction procedures vary from none to full day	(i) No induction (ii) A full day which included introductions to staff
D1.7 Trainees need to commit to fully engage to make most of placement	Those students who really engage with the organisation, not just see it as a placement, get on best
D1.8 Readiness to practise is awarded by counsellor courses prior to commencement of the placement	The course has already checked a trainee's readiness to practice prior to starting placement

DIMENSION 2: ORGANISATIONAL ASPECTS	
D2.1 Aim to provide free/low cost counselling	Our main aims and values are to provide free counselling to local communities
D2.2 Working relationships vary greatly	I have two placements. In one working relationships are excellent and I feel supported, but things are different in the other
D2.3 BACP Policies/procedures need to be not only in place, but understood and acted upon	Work has to be done in accordance with BACP policies and procedures, sometimes these are just paid lip service…
D2.4 Most placements and courses have robust documentation	All documentation [policies and procedures] are based on BACP recommendations
D2.5 More contact needed between stakeholders	Things can get missed…
D2.6 Time pressures	You don't realise how much time it all takes, additional training, admin, supervision

DIMENSION 3: PROFESSIONAL ASPECTS	
D3.1 Group supervision usually provided	Group supervision provided
D3.2 Most placements & stakeholders have professional indemnity	Placements, trainees and supervisors have personal professional indemnity
D3.3 All BACP members	BACP member
D3.4 BACP Ethical framework guides work	Work in accordance with BACP Framework

DIMENSION 4: PRACTICE ASPECTS	
D4.1 Client referrals vary greatly	(i) I had contact numbers for 6/7 prospective clients and just begun to ring around them (ii) There is a stepped approach to referrals to ensure that we get 'easier' clients when starting off
D4.2 Most placements offer contracted one-to-one counselling but no variety of clients	Contracted for proper counselling, but only if there are clients…
D4.3 Most common presenting issues: anxiety, depression and interpersonal issues	Usually relational, seeking meaning, anxiety and/or depression and relational issues
D4.4 Supervisors first contact for help/emergency	There is an emergency contact list, supervisors are at the top of that list
D4.5 Confusion over clinical responsibility	No-one has that overall vision, this [Clinical responsibility] is a bit vague
D4.6 Robust client assessment is vital, yet some placements have none	The most important of this is proper client assessment, although this is often missing
D4.7 First client pivotal point of training and stressful	Felt this was the pinnacle of all my training and my hopes to be a counsellor all rested on it
D4.8 Time just before first client particularly stressful	Felt terrified, stressed out
D4.9 First session huge learning curve & stressful	During my first session I began to relax a bit and assimilate learning from the experience, but it was still stressful
D4.10 Huge relief after first client	All I could think of after my first session was thank goodness I'd done it and both of us [client/trainee] came out of it unscathed
D4.11 Need for robust supervision	It's essential that supervision is professional and robust
D4.12 A training supervisor needed	Different type of supervisor needed for trainees, more sensitive, with more of an emphasis on educative functions
D4.13 Supervision prior to first client necessary	Having supervision before seeing my first client calmed my nerves as I had a chance to talk things through
D4.14 Mentor needed for early client-work	More support, possibly a non-assessing helper
D4.14 Inequality of experience, safety and ethics of practice	I have two placements, one does its best to do everything right, the other seems to do its best to get things wrong

DIMENSION 5: FINANCIAL ASPECTS	
D5.1 Placements funded through combination of WAG funding, charity shops & donations	Our funding comes mainly through the Welsh Assembly funding arrangements, our charity shops/donations.
D5.2 Trainees pay to work through supervision/insurance	It costs money as well as time to work at my placement as I pay for my own supervision and insurance
D5.3 Most placements pay travelling expenses	35p per mile travelling

DIMENSION 6: CHANGE ASPECTS	
D6.1 Concern over BACP drop in training hours	I have concerns that some weaker trainees won't reach acceptable standards
D6.2 Placement alongside course possible, but needs hard work support, commitment and sensitivity	Would be fabulous, but there would be a lot of effort and hard work needed, to say nothing of support and commitment

DIMENSION 7: IMPACT ASPECTS	
D7.1 Supervision and placement reports assess placement learning	Supervisors and placements provide reports at particular stages of placement
D7.2 Huge pressure on doing well to pass course	Seemed everything hinged on doing well at placement
D7.3 Trainees with positive hopes/expectations report better placement experience and vice-versa	(i) I knew it was going to be awful, it was (ii) It was every bit as good as I'd expected
D7.4 Good placements greatly aid personal and professional development	It was in the placement that my counsellor personality began to develop
D7.5 Bad placements can damage self esteem	If you have bad experiences during early practice it can damage your confidence and self-concept
D7.6 Permanent employment within placement unlikely and counsellors often have other jobs to survive	No. Not as far as I'm aware, most counsellors have several jobs across the sector
DIMENSION 8: REFLEXIVE ISSUES	
D8.1 Reflexivity key for placement learning	If I had just done it, not reflected on what things actually meant, how things worked, or didn't work, learning wouldn't have been so immense
D8.2 Questionnaires a reflective experience	A good reflective exercise
D8.3 Mandatory personal therapy essential	It's important that a counsellor knows what it is like to be a client

Table 4.3: Dimensions and substantiating comments

4.16 Discussion and conclusions from QCA study

In this phase of research, a qualitative content analysis was undertaken on material collected by questionnaires designed by the researcher. Several writers warn of inherent problems when a researcher compiles qualitative questionnaires (Roth, 2008), however, whilst mindful of these misgivings, the lack of previous research on the counsellor placement meant that no existing questionnaires suited the needs of the current project, seemingly no-one had previously attempted to answer the research question. Respondents were asked to describe characteristics and experiences of the placement in their own words and as no response options were offered, they could respond in any way they wished. The pilot study confirmed questions as suitable and appropriate, however, modifications could have enhanced the quality of resultant data. The implications of this are considered within the sections on limitations of this research and researcher's reflections.

Categories are described as they appear on the coding frame and the relationship of these findings to extant literature is evidenced where possible.

4.16.1 Pre-Placement Aspects

4.16.1.1 Aspects encountered prior to starting placement

The core of this first category related to aspects prior to starting a placement. The main recruitment source for placements is through contacts with local counselling courses and personal contact was also found to be effective in securing a trainee placement. Readiness to practise is awarded by counsellor courses prior to the commencement of the placement, in accordance with BACP recommendations (BACP, 2013a) and the time taken to obtain a placement varied from immediately to eighteen months. There was also disparity in induction procedures which varied from none to a full day and this cohort also intimated that trainees need to fully engage to make the most of placement practice. Alongside this, was a feeling that better preparation and more support is necessary prior to practice/placement elements of counsellor training.

Having considered the trials and tribulations encountered prior to starting a placement, respondents went on to consider placement processes.

4.16.2 Aspects during placement

4.16.2.1 Organisational aspects

The ethos of this category captured organisational aspects of placements through day-to-day operational issues. Placement aims were identified, first and foremost, as a need to provide free/low cost counselling, with the placement element secondary to this guiding principle. Within placements, working relationships were seen to vary greatly and trainees therefore have to learn, as phrased intriguingly by Tynjälä (2008), the unwritten rules of the placement. Nonetheless, most placements and feeder courses have robust documentation and trainees were made aware of these prior to commencing practice. Respondents also advocated that BACP policies/procedures should be, and usually are, in place within placements where trainees practise and for this cohort, there was emphasis on policies/procedures needing to not only be in place, but understood and acted upon.

Respondents indicated that more contact is needed between placement stakeholders echoing another finding by Tynjälä (2008) whose meta-analysis of workplace learning found instances of the beneficial 'coming closer together' of education (theory) and work (practice). All participants felt that better communication is needed between stakeholders as found previously within research by Brown (2007), who found relationships between and across stakeholders to be of concern. This implies, that if course providers, placement providers, and

151

supervisors improved communication, there would be a more unified approach to training and inequality of practice may be minimised.

The main organisational stressor was identified as time pressures experienced as the result of working within a placement alongside academic learning and life-events.

4.16.1.2 Professional aspects

The main thrust of this category addressed professional aspects of placement work. Group supervision was the form usually provided by placements and most placements and respective stakeholders were perceived as having professional indemnity insurance and organisational/individual membership of the BACP. This was an important finding, as it confirms the BACP Ethical Framework (2010a; 2016c) as the charter that guided placement activities. Placement work was, therefore, conducted, in theory, under the auspices of this framework.

4.16.1.3 Practice aspects

The central core of this largest category described practice elements of placements.

Referral processes were seen to be difficult, with client referrals to trainees varying greatly in both number and complexity. Most placements offer contracted one-to-one counselling but can fail to provide consistent client-work, a variety of clients, and wide-ranging presenting issues. Nevertheless, the most common presenting issues were identified as anxiety, depression, and interpersonal issues, which strengthens research undertaken by Moore (2006), which found similar common presenting issues within a local volunteer counselling service and research by Gibbard and Hanley (2008), where these presenting issues were also identified as common. This implies that despite varying presenting issues, there is consistency of core therapeutic activity.

Supervisors were named as the first contact for help in general circumstances or any emergency, confirming, that as suggested by Kahr (2011), relevant and adequate support is vital for trainees inexperienced in client-work. Nevertheless, duty of care/clinical responsibility was unclear for these respondents and interestingly, although it relates to one of the most important aspects of clinical practice (BACP, 2013a), confusion over who has clinical responsibility for client-work was noted in literature over fifteen years ago, arising from research by Izzard (2001;2003), and is again raised within the current research. Robust

client assessments were recognised as pivotal to early practice, in line with BACP recommendations (BACP, 2016c) and this cohort found it regrettable that some placements have no assessment processes in place.

Respondents described early client experience as impactful, yet stressful, which supports research undertaken by Folkes-Skinner, Elliott and Weaver (2010), who, in researching early practice, described this as a nerve-wracking experience. There is also alignment with previous work by Izzard (2001;2003); Skovholt and Ronnestad (2003); Orlinsky and Rønnestad (2005) and Herrick (2007), as the current research builds upon previous work in that respondents related to stress reactions and learning from their first client and went on to consider their feelings before, during, and after their first session. Respondents' reaction to learning from their first client situated this interaction as a pivotal point of training and extremely stressful. The time just before first client contact was construed as particularly stressful, reaction within first sessions was described as a huge learning curve and again, stressful, whereas the time immediately after the first session was dominated by relief.

Supervision processes were confirmed as important for the development of counsellors and robust supervision for trainees was viewed as an essential requisite for early practice, concurring with sentiments expressed by Dryden, et al. (1995). A strong case was also advocated for a specialist training supervisor and supervision prior to seeing a first client. Moreover, there was a call for additional support to be provided by a mentor during early client-work, a finding in concord with research by Georgiadou, Willis and Canavan (2015), who found that trainees welcomed an opportunity to discuss their practice and therapeutic experiences with someone not assessing them or their work, although Georgiadou, Willis and Canavan's research identified this person as a personal tutor. This finding is also in line with a suggestion by Truell (2001), that a non-assessing person, familiar with counsellor training, can relieve the stress of early practice.

Respondents voiced concern that ethical practice was difficult to definitively ascertain or monitor due to the mix of good/bad placement experience, inadequate communication and inequality of practice. This gave rise to questions regarding fairness, safety, and ethical robustness.

4.16.1.4 Financial aspects

Within this category, respondents expressed views on financial aspects of placements. Placements were described as funded through a combination of Welsh Assembly Government funding, income from charity shops/events and general donations. Costs of working at a placement meant that some trainees were not merely offering their services free of charge, they were paying to work through supervision/insurance fees and day-to-day expenses.

It was acknowledged, however, that most placements pay travelling expenses, although these vary in amount and substance.

4.16.1.5 Change aspects

This category revolved around the changing environment of placements. Firstly, following the BACP revision of qualification criteria and subsequent drop in training and practice hours, respondents registered concern about these initiatives (BACP, 2010a; 2013a). Secondly, respondents also considered the feasibility of a placement alongside a counselling course and determined that this could be advantageous, but would need high levels of support, adequate resources, commitment, and sensitivity.

Having considered issues at the forefront of day-to-day placement experiences, respondents concluded their description of counsellor placements by considering the aftermath of this aspect of training.

4.16.3 Aspects after placement

4.16.3.1 Impact aspects

This category expressed how placement learning is mainly assessed by supervision and placement reports, with placement outcomes inducing anxiety because qualification depends upon evidencing successful client contact. The level and context of trainees' hopes and expectations were seen to impact upon their placement experience, with those trainees with positive hopes and expectations reporting better placement experiences and vice-versa. Good placement experiences were construed as an aid to personal and professional development and bad placement experiences were described as potentially damaging to self-esteem and future practice. Additionally, the chance of permanent employment within a placement was classed as unlikely, with counselling described as a portfolio career, as it is common for counsellors to hold several jobs concurrently.

4.16.3.2 Reflexive issues

The reflexive value of the research process was valued by respondents, with completion of the questionnaire appreciated as welcome reflective space. Placement reflective processes were identified as important, with reflexivity identified as a key element of placement learning. This finding echoes research by Turner, et al. (2008) and Tynjälä (2008), who found that trainees who gained most from learning had well-developed reflexive and self-awareness skills.

Mandatory personal therapy was seen as an advantage for trainees, to provide them with an opportunity to reflect upon training and practice. The view was expressed that counsellors need to have experienced their own therapeutic process, in line with research undertaken by von Haenisch (2011), who confirmed compulsory personal therapy as a positive aspect of training and a study by Daw and Joseph (2007), who used questionnaires to canvass counsellors' views of their own personal therapy and found this to benefit therapists personally and professionally. The current study found no evidence, however, to support research by Holland (2011) who suggested that mandatory therapeutic experiences differed from therapy by choice.

4.16.4 Limitations of the research

This study achieved the objective of describing underlying characteristics and experiences of the counsellor placement for this cohort and has added value to existing knowledge by providing new information. Nonetheless, several limitations need to be taken into consideration. Firstly, due to the sampling strategy, it was impossible to be definitive about response rates and because of the wide circulation of the questionnaire and the omission of a demographic section, it was also not possible to compare or contrast the demographic characteristics of respondents. As perspectives were sought from respondents with varying experiences, qualifications, and therapeutic modalities, useful information could have been elicited such as: age; sex; ethnicity; socio-economic status, and counselling orientation.

Limitations were also identified in relation to the data collection method since, as data were gathered by qualitative, open-ended, questionnaires, it has to be considered, that respondents may be a particular type of placement stakeholder as they invested considerable time and effort in completing the questionnaire. Furthermore, according to McLeod (2013a), those with strong views on areas of research are more likely to complete a qualitative questionnaire

than those less interested in the subject matter. Paradoxically, however, it was apparent that some respondents had completed questionnaires rather quickly as some answers were written in a hurried, condensed style that made understanding difficult.

In hindsight, the value, composition, style, and sequence of questions could also have been improved, as they were overwhelming in number and context and overly prescriptive. The main limitation in relation to the questions, however, was that all participants were not asked the same questions, in the same sequence. This could have been addressed by using one questionnaire for all participants.

It also has to be recognised that, as is usually the case where QCA is used to analyse questionnaire data, the study is limited to summarising and conceptualising key themes within responses (Schreier, 2012). Furthermore, by classifying, reducing, and summarising specific data according to a coding frame, some specifics, and potential multiplicity of meanings may have been lost. Moreover, whilst the overall approach to this research was interpretative, this phase of research provided information on characteristics and experiences of the counsellor placement by describing respondents' views, rather than drawing conclusions that go beyond analysed material. Finally, whilst validation through relating research findings to previous research has been evidenced as far as possible, this was difficult due to the paucity of similar studies.

4.16.5 Suggestions for further research

At this point an overview of the counsellor placement has been presented as the aim of this study was not to make comparisons between stakeholders, but to describe general characteristics. Schreier (2012) suggests, however, that if further, more detailed research is required on how sources within a QCA study differ and relate to each other, this should be undertaken after the initial analysis has been concluded. It is therefore suggested that a comparison of stakeholder responses could be undertaken.

Phase One of this study explored current characteristics and experiences of the counsellor placement. Phase Two continues to enhance understanding by exploring lived experiences of counsellor placements.

Phase Two: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of interview data

4.17 Study aim and research question

The qualitative content analysis in Phase One provided valuable background data about current placements. Following on from this, the objective of Phase Two was to explore how stakeholders experience and make meaning of their personal involvement with counsellor placements. This was achieved by enabling a smaller number of participants to explore their experiences freely, in an interview, without constraints imposed by a questionnaire as in Phase One. This phase of research asked, "How do stakeholders describe their lived experiences of the counsellor placement?"

In line with the phenomenological and interpretative foundations of IPA, this study was exploratory, rather than explanatory, in order to illicit what data had to say about the lived experience of the counsellor placement (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). These authors describe experience as "A person's relatedness to a given phenomenon" (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.135) and this is in keeping with the aim of this phase of research to offer rich, descriptive, and interpretative accounts of placement processes and experiences.

4.18 Research design

The research design is outlined in Chapter Three. Accordingly, this phase of research addressed data generated by interviews with placement stakeholders and analysed through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

4.19 Target population

In line with Phase One, as this research aimed to explore the perspectives of those involved with early therapeutic practice, the literature review identified stakeholders who could provide information regarding lived experiences of the counsellor placement. This target population consisted of (i) Established professionals currently associated with the therapeutic work of counsellor placements, identified as, course providers, placement providers, and supervisors (ii) Trainee counsellors, in, or having recently concluded, counsellor training with associated placement practice.

4.20 Recruitment process

Following the same recruitment procedure adopted for Phase One, details of the research were forwarded to purposively selected groups of stakeholders known, through professional networks, to be in a position to provide insight into the lived experience of counsellor placements (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009):

1. *Placement professionals***:**

   Course providers: Counselling course providers within Higher Education, Further Education, and private providers. Invitations to participate were sent to nine counsellor course providers

   Placement providers: The 'responsible person' for trainees in organisations identified in Point 2 below. Invitations to participate were sent to twenty-one placement providers

   Supervisors: Supervisors experienced in placement work and working as independent supervisors for trainees on placement. Invitations to participate were sent to seven supervisors

2. *Trainee Counsellors* in, or having recently concluded, counsellor training with associated placement practice within agencies working with bereavement, cancer, general/specific health issues, gender specific issues, the homeless, and young people. Contact was made with twenty-one placement organisations and nine counselling courses who circulated research information.

   Contact was then made via email, the postal service and personal contact according to accessibility, and those who expressed interest were sent a research pack informing them of the research details.

4.21 Development of material

The research pack consisted of: A covering letter/preliminary information [Appendix 19], an information/protocol sheet [Appendix 20], an interview schedule according to each placement role [trainees, Appendix 21; course providers, Appendix 22;

placement providers, Appendix 23; supervisors, Appendix 24] and a consent form [Appendix 25].

This information introduced the research and made all conditions and implications of the research clear, as evidenced within Appendices 19-25. Documentation and procedures were considered within a pilot study.

4.22 Pilot study

Two pilot interviews were conducted with stakeholders from local placements to test documentation and procedures. Pilot participants were chosen for their variety of placement experiences akin to those identified for participants within the study and as they were also conducting research into counselling concepts, they were familiar with qualitative research. The development of the recruitment material and its relevance and clarity were considered before pilot study interviews were conducted, in the same surroundings designated for the research interviews [consulting room on the university campus]. Similar interview conditions were applied as those intended for actual interviews and the content and context of interview schedules were tested alongside pre-briefing and debriefing processes.

The pilot study also facilitated the opportunity to practise interview technique, determined timescales for holding and transcribing interviews and enabled topic areas and data collection to be assessed and refined (Yin, 2009). Through these processes, some minor amendments were made, with two additional questions added to the interview schedule for course providers, one regarding the contextualisation of the counselling placement within the wider community and the other in relation to the development of course content and delivery [See: Appendix 22]. With these minor amendments, the pilot studies confirmed the research material, interview protocol, process, and structure as capable of generating appropriate data.

To complete the pilot study, the analytical protocol [as described in the analysis section to follow] was also tested and found to be satisfactory. No data emanating from the pilot study were included within the final analysis.

4.23 Participants

Whilst twenty-five participants returned signed consent forms and all were interviewed, Smith, Flowers and Larkin recommend between four and ten participants for IPA research (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), and their warning that it can be problematic to attempt to meet IPA's commitments with a larger sample, proved to be the case.

Sampling was theoretically consistent with a qualitative paradigm and IPA's orientation, nevertheless, some interviews generated only thin data. Furthermore, whilst Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) are specific about the importance of a homogenous sample, the original categorisation of participants by placement role resulted in a heterogeneous sample.

Moreover, through reflection, it was recognised that as counselling is a portfolio career, with people holding various positions simultaneously or consecutively within a variety of settings, it was impossible to confine interviews to a participant's specific role. It became apparent that many participants had experienced the counsellor placement through various lenses and many had experience of each other's current position, as evidenced within these quotations, *"I've experience of placements firstly as a trainee and latterly as a course provider, a placement provider and a supervisor....and in more recent roles I've seen...um...lots of trainees go through this process..."* [Lucy/14-18] and *"It's a strange position to be in as I've been a placement provider for three years...but now I'm going through different counsellor training and find myself in a different placement...a trainee again"* [Marian/4-8].

Resultantly, although individual interviews were intended to explore perceptions of the placement from a particular angle, participants consistently talked about the whole range of their experiences. Thus, to do justice to personal accounts, data from six interviews were selected for re-analysis through IPA. These participants were chosen because they had experienced the full range of counsellor placement activities as a trainee, course provider, placement provider, and supervisor and provided strong accounts with rich data suitable for IPA analysis. This was more congruent with IPA, achieving quality, rather than quantity (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), facilitating analysis of thick data provided by a small group who could offer meaningful perspectives (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Larkin, 2015) and complying with IPA's recommendations for a small, homogenous, sample (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Homogeneity within participants of an IPA study can differ (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) and for this re-analysis, participant similarity was achieved as the research question was meaningful to all six participants who facilitated access to wide-reaching accounts of the counsellor placement (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

The six participants ranged in age from mid-thirties to mid-sixties and were all female. Five were white and British, one was of Iranian descent. All were currently practising and actively involved with placements within South West Wales. Their theoretical orientation and levels of experience varied, although all had experience of more than one therapeutic modality, identifying their primary approach as humanistic or integrative underpinned by humanistic principles. All participants confirmed they were members of the BACP and committed to the BACP Ethical Framework (BACP, 2010a; 2016c). Beyond this, no in-depth demographic information is available for participants.

Not having such in-depth demographical details was a disadvantage because demographics could have provided particular characteristics of participants. This could have included information regarding age, social class, race, ethnicity, gender, working status, profession, employment, and socio-economic status, as well as topic-specific characteristics, and geographic location.

Demographic information would also have contributed to comparisons between studies, and replication of this research (Hammer, 2011), and would have strengthened the transferability of research findings (Polit and Beck, 2012; Connelly, 2013). Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintain, however, that in qualitative research, transferability is ultimately determined by the reader, who makes his/her own judgement as to whether research findings can be related to their own circumstances. Moreover, whilst the lack of demographical information is appropriately recorded as a limitation, it is also recognised that whilst this limits research claims and quality criteria, limited biographical information can protect participants from identification within a close-knit profession and counselling community.

Table 4.4 details participant pseudonyms and identification:

TABLE OF PARTICIPANTS [Pseudonyms]
Eve
Judith
Lucy
Lynda
Marian
Sara
Example of Identification:
Marian/82 =
Participant/Transcript line number

Marking on Transcripts:	
...	Identifies pause
[-]	Superfluous/identifiable words redacted
Table 4.4: Participant pseudonyms and identification	

4.24 Data collection: face-to-face, semi–structured interviews

<u>4.24.1 Interview Structure and Protocol</u>

Interview structure and processes followed the principles outlined within the research pack circulated prior to interviews. All interviews took place either within therapy rooms at the university campus or at the participant's current place of work, with both environments affording privacy. Similar boundaries to a counselling relationship were established and pre-briefing (Collins, Onwuegbuzie and Sutton, 2006) and pre-interviewing processes ensured that both researcher and participants were prepared for the interview.

Firstly, as research explored lived experiences of the counsellor placement, to be phenomenological, the researcher stood back from her experiences of the placement and 'bracketed' or put aside her preconceived ideas (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Early consideration was given to this process of 'bracketing' [Epoché, (Husserl, [1907]1999, p.63-65)], by reflecting upon, and describing, her own experiences within a reflective journal throughout research processes. This ensured that she was becoming aware of her preconceptions before attempting to bracket these views (Creswell, 2007;2013) so that during each interview the participant was the focus of analysis (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

Secondly, the researcher was careful to change her interviewing style from that attuned to therapeutic processes to a more hermeneutic and interpretive position within the context of the interview and the needs of interviewees (Nelson, et al., 2013). Thirdly, time was set aside for re-visiting information contained within the research pack, inviting participants to ask questions about anything that concerned them or they did not understand (McNamara, 2009). Only when it was clear that a participant had understood the information provided, and had confirmed informed consent in writing and orally at the start of the interview recording, did the interview begin.

Semi-structured interviews were fluid, with interview schedules based on issues identified by the literature review. Whilst these schedules provided some structure, however, concepts were used only as 'topic guides' to stimulate dialogue and as participants had prior knowledge of these and had time to consider their responses, conversation naturally flowed from general to specific. Questions were not therefore asked in stringent order, as interviews went where participants led, following the natural flow of conversation, with the researcher occasionally sensitively probing for further information. Participants often freely raised relevant topics before there was opportunity to refer to the interview schedule and the researcher respected these as issues the participant wished to consider in greater detail.

Interviews were recorded in separate folders on a dedicated recording device, with interviewees allocated a pseudonym so that only the researcher could link recordings and transcripts to consent forms and participants. Discussion continued until no new data emerged and/or individual participants were ready to end the interview, with interviews lasting between 55-95 minutes.

Saturation did not drive data collection as this implies a more experimental, positivist stance, with the aim of providing one 'true' answer.

4.24.2 Debriefing procedure

Upon conclusion of each interview, a debriefing procedure provided a 'cool down' period (Salmons, 2010) which assisted transition from taking part in the interview to returning to everyday life. When it seemed that the end of the interview was approaching, the researcher invited participants to discuss any issues that had arisen during the interview. A final question asked about the reflective element of taking part to allow the participant to review the interview and a debriefing form [Appendix 26] ensured that participants had relevant information should any problem arise and emphasised that should the interview have caused distress, they were free to discuss associated issues with their counselling supervisor. Participants were again reminded that should they require signposting for therapeutic support as the result of the research process, they would need to make contact within seven days of the interview.

4.25 Ethical considerations for the IPA study

This section addresses ethical issues in relation to planning and conducting IPA and collecting data via interviews.

All research documentation was endorsed by the Ethics Committee of UWTSD [then Swansea Metropolitan University] and data collection materials were re-presented to the Ethics Committee prior to this phase of data collection. Moreover, within this research phase, guidance provided by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) regarding the interview process within IPA was followed and advice offered by Kvale (2007) highlighted specific principles, including the possibility of an interviewee becoming distressed. This was mitigated by circulation of the detailed information sheet and interview schedule prior to interview, giving participants the opportunity to ask questions before and after the interview, reminding participants that participation was voluntary, and emphasising that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time during data collection without giving a reason. As a practising counsellor, the researcher also ensured that the core-conditions advocated by Carl Rogers were not only present, but were experienced by participants (Rogers, 1957).

Furthermore, whilst the risk of harm to participants was considered to be minimal as they were familiar with the concept of reflecting upon and discussing their working practices, there was sensitivity that as this was a subject of some importance to them, there could be something unexpected that could cause distress. In anticipation of this, the researcher familiarised herself with Draucker, Martsolf and Poole's (2009) advice on management of distress in the context of research interviews.

Finally, whilst several guidelines (Elliott, Fischer and Rennie, 1999; Yardley, 2000;2008) address trustworthiness within qualitative research, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) recommend guidelines by Yardley (2000;2008) and explain how these apply to IPA (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.180). As these principles were relevant to the current research process, appropriate to counselling, and in keeping with the BACP Ethical Framework (2010a; 2016c), they provided a background to ethical considerations.

4.26 Data analysis: Interpretative phenomenological analysis

Within Phase One, Qualitative Content Analysis [QCA] reduced and described data (Schreier, 2012), whereas in this phase, the aim was one of discovery. Accordingly,

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis [IPA] was used to analyse how participants experience, understand, and make sense of their personal experiences of the counsellor placement. The following steps originally formulated by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p.79-175) and enhanced with suggestions by Larkin (2015), guided analysis:

Step One: A case-by-case analysis involved active engagement with the data, with the researcher now re-engaged with her fore-understanding. Each recording was listened to several times and transcribed including all spoken words and notable features such as hesitations, pauses, recurring phrases, and pacing.

Step Two: Each script was then read carefully, maintaining an open mind, becoming more familiar with content and getting a 'feel' for data.

Step Three: Each entire transcript was read several times to attain general understanding of exactly what was expressed within each line and what this meant in the context of the whole interview. At the end of this stage transcripts were read more carefully and reflectively, this time whilst listening to the soundtrack, to merge the spoken dialogue with the written word. This process drew attention to how, through translation, some simple, short quotations lost the powerful impression engendered during the interview and allowed these to be captured. This facilitated a sense of immediacy and being in the moment that aided analysis as exampled in Appendix 27.

Such initial noting included observations and mainly descriptive accounts of meaning to the participant, e.g., perceiving how they seemed to make sense of their placement experiences. These were noted alongside text in the right-hand column. As the start of a colour-coding process, these were highlighted in yellow [Appendix 27].

Step Four: Extracts from an interview with one participant [Eve] are reproduced in appendices to illustrate selected steps of analysis and Appendix 28 shows how, one line at a time, important comments, at this early stage mostly descriptive, were noted [yellow] and key areas were highlighted in red. This process meant that gradually, as greater familiarity formed with the text, more interpretative notes were recorded alongside a move from description to interpretation. This shift occurred, as, whereas

165

initial comments described the content of the participant's contribution, linguistic comments began to form, focussing on the participant's use of language. This involved noticing the use of tenses, metaphor, and simile. Instances of repetition, changes in tone, pause for thought, articulacy, individual/joint laughter and recall of participant gestures were also recorded. Descriptive comments remained close to the words of participants, whilst interpretative comments were increasingly more speculative and included the researcher's thoughts and reactions.

Within this process, conceptual comments also began to introduce a more theoretical level, highlighted in lilac. This conceptual noticing continued as themes also started to form, as evidenced in Appendix 29.

It can be seen from these examples that from the verbatim transcript, the script grew, as descriptive comments and more interpretative noticing were drawn together. It was the larger form that became the focus for the development of emergent themes, although the transcript retained centrality in terms of data. Connections were made across Eve's transcript, now beginning to reduce the volume of data as evidenced in Appendix 30.

Step Five: Formulated meanings started to cluster into emerging themes through identifying patterns. Searching for connections and developing themes involved further work within the hermeneutic circle, interpreting part of the data "in relation to the whole" and "the whole in relation to the part" (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.92). Appendix 31 illustrates the sub-ordinate and super-ordinate themes evidenced within Eve's interview.

*Step Six***:** Within this process, a check was undertaken to ensure that themes remained true to actual words and meaning of the participant through a combination of staying close to the participant's experiencing, alongside developing interpretation and analysis. Each theme was supported by quotations from raw data, as Appendix 32 examples.

Step Seven: As part of the above process, the original transcript was re-read to trace themes back to original quotations as confirmation of emergent meaning. Wherever

material seemed out of alignment with emerging themes or the overall picture, the original transcript was revisited to ensure that important information had not been missed or misconstrued.

Step Eight: As more than one IPA transcript was analysed, the researcher could have used super-ordinate themes from the first case to identify further examples within subsequent cases [whilst checking for new themes] or could have started the whole process again, with each subsequent case producing lists of themes. These would then fuse into a list of master themes (Biggerstaff and Thompson, 2008). The researcher adopted the recommendation of Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p.100) to use the latter approach, ensuring that analysis of each transcript was complete before moving on, treating each interview as a separate case-by-case analysis and justifying each participant's individuality by bracketing concepts from prior case analysis. Accordingly, analysis remained committed to IPA's dedication to ideography, as analysis moved systematically from the particular to the shared. Appendix 33 illustrates how connections began to form across the data set and were mapped together as independently, a theme which arose within Eve's interview in relation to the stress of early client-work [Appendix 30], occurred again within Lynda's interview. In this way, master themes started to form. This process of clustering master themes across cases is illustrated further within Appendix 34.

Once these stages were complete, themes within, across, and between contributions were checked again for connections, convergence, and divergence (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) with firm master themes now emerging.

Step Nine: Master themes were ordered into a comprehensive description so that they created a coherent narrative of the counsellor placement, with theory and prior knowledge now an acknowledged interpretative tool.

In summary of this process, Table 4.5 condenses the framework of data collection and analytical processes:

FRAMEWORK OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYTICAL PROCESS
➢ **Bracketing:** Researcher's assumptions acknowledged, stated, and 'bracketed'
➢ **Data generation**: Data collected by semi-structured, one-to-one, interviews
➢ **Re-engagement:** Researcher reconnected with experiential/theoretical prior knowledge
➢ **Initial interaction with data**: Recorded interviews listened to several times, then transcribed verbatim
➢ **Initial noting**: Transcriptions read, re-read, notations made in margins
➢ **Developing emergent themes**: Significant statements and sentences noted, meanings formulated
➢ **Connecting themes:** Clusters of statements and structures formed by noting patterns, meanings, and related themes
➢ **Confirmation seeking:** Original protocols re-read to trace themes back to original quotations.
➢ **Moving to next interview**: Above steps repeated for each subsequent case, ideas which emerged from first and subsequent participants bracketed, with each case treated on its own terms
➢ **Identifying patterns across interviews:** Themes across and between participants checked for connections
Table 4.5: Process of Analysis, adapted by researcher from Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009,p.79-175)

A supervisor, knowledgeable of this research, and experienced in IPA independently audited the chain of evidence from transcripts through to findings to ensure that the final report was credible.

4.27 Findings

4.27.1 Summary of Findings

Findings are firstly shown in tabular format to provide an overview before each theme is considered and supported by quotations from data.

The results section centres upon four master themes, present across individual cases, as detailed in Table 4.6:

TABLE OF MASTER SUPER-ORDINATE AND SUB-ORDINATE THEMES	
SUPER-ORDINATE THEME 1 A COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT	1.1 A valuable environment of service-delivery and placement facilitation, if done properly
	1.2 A conflicting environment where dual roles can cause conflict of interest
	1.3 A variable and unequal environment, fuelled by inconsistent policies and procedures
SUPER-ORDINATE THEME 2 EARLY CLIENT-WORK IS IMPACTFUL AND STRESSFULL	2.1 Robust client assessment and stepped referrals vital for trainees
	2.2 Accruing client hours evokes anxiety resulting in emphasis on quantity rather than quality
	2.3 First clients are the most crucial and stressful point of counsellor training
	2.4 Mentor needed at time of early client-work
	2.5 Economic and value-laden road to employability and beyond
SUPER-ORDINATE THEME 3 THE SUPERVISION LYNCHPIN	3.1 Role of supervision pivotal to training and placements
	3.2 Confusion over clinical responsibility
	3.3 Need for a training supervisor and stepped approach to supervision
SUPER-ORDINATE THEME 4 PLACEMENT EXPERIENCES IDENTIFY GROWTH AREAS FOR THE PROFESSION	4.1 Personal development key for personal and professional growth
	4.2 Organisational and professional development needed
	4.3 Registration and regulation key issues for the profession
	4.4 Improved information, contact, and communication needed
Table: 4.6: Master Super-ordinate and Sub-ordinate Themes	

Participants identified their experience of the counsellor placement as falling into four main areas. Firstly, the placement environment was seen as complex, with good placements constructed as valuable to both service-users and trainees. Dual roles of the placement as counselling provider and facilitator of early practice could potentially cause difficulties, whilst discrepancies in the quality of placements make it difficult to ensure equal opportunities for trainees to practise and develop, with policies and procedures adding to the conundrum of experience. Within this inequality of practice, good placements were seen to enhance development, whilst bad placements were constructed as detrimental to training and future practice.

Secondly, early client-work was seen as a crucial, yet stressful, point of counsellor training; beginning to see clients is a time full of anxiety for trainees. Robust client assessment and stepped referrals were identified as vital for trainees and the accruing of client hours was also seen as evoking anxiety, a situation which could result in an emphasis on the quantity of hours

rather than the quality.   It was suggested that a mentor would be beneficial at the time of early client-work and recognised that the road to employability and beyond is economically and value laden.

Thirdly, supervision was seen as pivotal to placement processes, with the role of supervision identified as fundamental in binding training and placements. Confusion was seen to exist over clinical responsibility and participants recommended specific training supervisors and a stepped approach to supervision.

Finally, through placement processes, areas of potential growth were identified, where personal development, such as self-care and personal therapy, were recognised as key for personal and professional growth, with changes in identity occurring alongside training and practice. Suggestions for organisational and professional development were made and registration and regulation were identified as key issues for the profession, which, whilst welcome in the long-term, were causing some uncertainty and discontent in the short-term, a situation that could have been avoided through clearer implementation strategies. The main areas identified for development were improved information, contact, and communication and a placement offered alongside counsellor training was viewed as an innovative development, yet difficult to deliver and maintain.

Detailed findings from the IPA analysis of interview data are presented in Appendix 35.

4.27.2 Theme-by-theme overview

This section provides a theme-by-theme outline of the findings of this IPA. To support this and evidence the initial case-by-case analysis carried out in keeping with IPA's commitment to ideography, Appendix 36 précises key aspects from each participant's contribution, capturing their lived experience of the counsellor placement. Through this participant-by-participant and theme-by-theme presentation, readers can not only construe the generic narrative of shared themes, but can also better understand the objects of concern, experiential claims, and life-world embedded within each personal contribution, and contextualise movement from each participant account to master themes (Smith, 2004).

Accordingly, Master Super-ordinate Themes are now considered in greater detail.

4.27.2.1: Super-ordinate Theme One: A complex environment

This first super-ordinate theme addressed the placement environment, considering its worth as a placement and service-provider. Issues stemming from these sometimes conflicting and inconsistent roles were identified and elements which participants felt constituted good, or bad, placements were identified.

Sub-Ordinate Theme 1.1: A valuable environment of service-delivery and placement facilitation, if done properly

Overall there was certainty about the value of good placements as both a service-provider and a facilitator of early practice. Firstly, the role as a counselling agency was confirmed by Eve, "*there's a huge need for such a service…counsellors on placement [-] offer a fantastic service, when {name redacted} haven't been able to offer the service, for whatever reason, they've {service-users} really missed it. The service has been greatly missed at those times*" [Eve/275-277].

Eve's reiteration where '*missed*', became a more expressively emphatic '*greatly missed*' demonstrated her strong belief that placements are of value to clients.

Secondly, Sara described how the placement is an educative experience, "*…this {placement} is such a huge part of training, I would even go as far as to say....from my experience, where I was at that moment…you know.....just about to qualify…the placement was make or break within that process*" [Sara/531-535]. Here, the idiom '*make or break*' raises images of a kaleidoscope where changing scenes revolve through spectrums of a successful future vocation to a career ruined, graphically illustrating the importance of the placement to trainees.

Thirdly, the placement was constructed as a vital opportunity to put course learning into practice:

> *Well, we can teach them, theoretically, anything we want, we can even give them practical work for triads, so that they can use counselling skills, practise counselling skills, but it's not until they go on placement, they're out there doing it, that I feel the whole lot is integrated and their education in counselling…it really… really...begins* [Judith/1-8]

Judith's point was well made within this extract, in that she articulated how despite trainees having opportunities for theoretical and practical learning during training, it is on placement that real learning to be a counsellor occurs. Dependence upon the placement for the practice element of training is also evidenced.

171

There was, however, a caveat present in all interviews emphasising that, for a placement to be successful as a facilitator of practice and/or a service-provider, it has to be a good placement. This sentiment was captured succinctly in this comment by Lynda, *"Such valuable experience for all involved…IF DONE PROPERLY [that's in capitals]!!!"* [Lynda/559-561]. The clear inference here is that this is not always the case.

This sub-ordinate theme confirmed the value of good placements to both service-users and trainees, as a provider of counselling, a facilitator of practice, and an educative experience.

Sub-Ordinate Theme 1.2: A conflicting environment where dual roles can cause conflict of interest

Within descriptions of good placements as valuable, complex, and evolving, data acknowledged, yet questioned, the placement's dual role as a training establishment and a counselling agency. These roles were identified as of equal importance, although were seen to have mutually dependant, yet in some ways undefined, or conflicting, primary aims which could sometimes cause problems, as defined clearly within this extract from Sara, *"What's this really all about, is this {the placement} an organisation for the provision of free counselling…or…is it a training establishment? This is where it gets…oh…so……..so, confused…and…worrying!"* [Sara/186-192]. Someone so closely involved with a placement, questioning its main purpose, underlies the lack of clarity around placement processes and the uncomfortable position of uncertainty was evidenced by Sara's expressive end to this statement where she emphasised her exclamation and the marked slowing down in her verbal pace as she lingered pointedly in repeating the word *'so'*. Lynda explained in more detail how dual roles can be difficult, *"The placement just wants people to be seen and the student just wants their hours…needs hours…for their training...and neither are then really coming from a wholly self-aware and ethical place where they're thinking…is this really appropriate? This is a……………violation"* [Lynda/84-89]. Lynda's statement clearly centres on her explicit view, that mirrors the inherent concern in Sara's interview, that as both placement and trainee need to evidence counselling hours, albeit for differing reasons, and the supervisor and training establishment are somewhat removed from this process, no-one is able to be truly objective about the quality of service provision or the ability and learning experience of the trainee, as all have a vested interest in the process. Careful selection of the word "*violation*" lingered as an uncomfortable presence and implied a threat to self, lack of respect and/or abuse, concepts in contradiction to the ethos of a therapeutic environment.

172

This sub-ordinate theme defined how the placement has a dual role as counselling provider and training establishment, which sometimes causes difficulties.

Sub-Ordinate Theme: 1.3 A variable and unequal environment, fuelled by inconsistent policies and procedures

Participants all expressed strong interest in the concept of the counsellor placement, a feeling articulated by Lynda, who started her interview with an emphatic statement, *"Well...the counsellor placement is something I feel very strongly about…actually…I feel passionate about it"* [Lynda/1-3], yet, as defined by Lucy and Marian, all also welcomed the chance to discuss this subject as they felt that not enough attention is given to this aspect of counsellor training, *"The counsellor placement is a very important part of counsellor training it's...a bit unknown…and...a bit…kind of...just accepted…as...something that happens"* [Lucy/2-5] and *"it's a bit of an enigma really"* [Marian/928].   Marian's choice of the word '*enigma*' raised a sense of confusion and mystery.

Data demonstrated individually expressed, yet common, agreement that it is not possible to determine a single philosophical or practical underpinning of the placement, as each agency/organisation has its own modus operandi, working ethos, and more particularly, standards. Participants felt this created an unequal playing field as they established differentials between good and bad placements, as evidenced in the concern voiced here by Lynda in her interview, "*The counsellor placement has a huge impact on the trainee and that impact…good...or…bad, much depends upon what that placement's like*" [Lynda/458-451]. It is suggested from this statement, that inequality of placements is not only recognised, but also accepted.

Subsequently, variance in the quality of placements makes it difficult to ensure that trainees have equal opportunities to develop, as good placements can enhance training and future practice, whilst bad placements can be detrimental to training and future practice. Initially, therefore, when conducting the case-by-case analysis, this sub-ordinate theme started off as two themes, one describing good, and one defining bad, placement experiences. As analysis progressed, however, it became apparent that all participants reported experiences of both good and bad experiences; no participant was convinced that the placement was, overall, either a good or bad experience, as all had experienced both positive and negative elements, often within the same placement. Moreover, all were quick to counter-balance a bad

173

experience with a good one. Hence, the title of this theme encapsulated the mixed perceptions of participants.

Placements that enhance training and future practice were conceptualised as those which follow BACP guidelines, have good induction procedures, robust client assessment, and good communication channels, with training and supervision provided free and expenses paid. The payment of supervision fees and the provision of expenses was recognised as particularly important, as frankly expressed by Judith, "*Really...it's very important because it could, it does often, make the difference between whether a student can carry on...progress or not...depending upon whether they've had to...and...will have to...pay for their own supervision...and...have expenses. This hasn't been standardised...yet*" [Judith/58-62]. By finishing this sentence with '*yet*', Judith inferred that she hoped, and there was a chance that, there may be standardisation in the future

Good placements were classed as an excellent training and client resource and one participant, went further than this, identifying a consistently good cohort of placement providers:

> *I'd have to say...and I know this sounds like the most dreadful cliché, but you know...I'm sorry...but it's true, the best placements are...with those which tend to be voluntary organisations, where............cheesy...I know, but people actually care, they really care about what they do and make time to have that continued contact* [Lynda/231-241]

Lynda chastised herself for being '*cheesy*', and apologised for using platitudes, yet her delivery, particularly her pause in the middle of this quotation, where she broke off from her statement for reflection before continuing, added weight to her conviction that voluntary organisations have an ethos of care and therefore offer good placements. This was underlined by how, despite applying a sensitive challenge to herself because she was aware of making a huge generalisation, she continued with her argument that volunteer organisations have a positive, effective bond with counsellor training.

The profound impact the placement can have on a trainee was identified by Eve within this intense statement, *"Quite simply, it {placement experience} changed my life"* [Eve/10]. Eve went on to relate this powerful statement to positive change, however, when viewed alongside the fact that overall, participants described placements as "*a mixed bag*" [Lucy/1005] or a "*bit of a hit or miss affair*"[Judith/555], a deeper meaning can be attributed to this statement, as, when re-visiting Eve's experiences in light of this and looking at the 'part' in relation to the 'whole', her placement could have been life-changing in less positive ways, as she also

described being in poor placement environments. Consequently, as summed up by Marian, *"When it's {placement} good, this is a very worthwhile service for both trainees and clients"* [Marian/999]. Here, Marian clearly indicated that there are good placements, yet also hinted, by her emphasis on '*When*', that some placements are not quite so good. From these interviews, there is an indication that being in a good or bad placement can have corresponding consequences.

There was a noticeable change in style and mood as each participant turned their attention to not so good placement experiences, as, whereas when considering their good lived experiences, they were content to just touch upon these and needed prompting to expand upon comments, when considering bad experiences, they freely went into considerably more depth, yet quickly followed bad with positive placement experiences.   This is illustrated within the following extracts, starting with this worrying statement by Lynda, "*There's nothing in place {describing a bad placement}, it's not well run, I could go on…and…on…and…on…but it's frankly…dangerous…it's dangerous. I know that's a big word to use, but I do think that it's…dangerous"* [Lynda/76-80]. Whilst Lynda did not clarify whether there was a perceived danger for trainees or clients, the implication in not doing so was that there was inherent danger to both. Furthermore, the extent of her concern is evidenced by her use of the emotive word '*dangerous'* three times within such a short extract and her almost shocked recognition of the enormity of this word, as she realised the implications of something going wrong and her concern about possible consequences. Paradoxically, just minutes later, Lynda noted the opportunities presented by placements in facilitating client-work as, *"A brilliant practice experience"* [Lynda/92].   It is clear from interpretation of such extracts that many covert shades of grey exist between the overt black or white constructions offered of placements.

The main issues identified as present within a bad placement were almost a direct opposite of those associated with good placements, drawing attention to a lack of adherence to BACP guidelines, inadequate or no induction procedures, no or inappropriate client assessment, non-existent or poor communication and a lack of training and supervision. Additionally, concern was voiced regarding varying counselling styles of trainees and inadequate consulting rooms. Marian's interview contained a good example of incompatibility between the counselling style of a trainee and a client's needs:

> *Often…trainees who start client-work early want to fix… and…or sympathise {Client group redacted} don't need that. New, very…inexperienced…counsellors saying, 'Oh…you poor thing'. That's…just not helpful…that isn't want they need*

from a counsellor. In fact, interestingly…some clients actually said they don't want counselling...because they're fed up with the counsellor repeating things back to them. They {clients} get so cross...It doesn't actually harm them…but it doesn't help either [Marian/1002-1006]

In this excerpt, Marian also illustrated what can happen if a trainee starts to see clients before they are ready. She not only verbalised a common criticism of Person Centred Counselling (Rogers, 1980) where reflection has been parodied as 'parroting' she also highlighted a tendency within early practice to want to 'fix' problems and make everything alright. She did, however, differentiate between interactions which are unhelpful and those which could be potentially harmful and also identified how important it is that placements are timed to coincide with readiness to practise, a tenet also voiced by Sara, *"It's so important that trainees' practice…and…theory come together…<u>at the right time</u>"* [Sara/456-457].

Interestingly, a critique of the skill of reflection, although no question directly referred to skills, was also offered by Eve, who described her learning curve regarding this skill:

 Take...reflection...{counselling skill}…I accepted this as a fundamental skill of therapy…for use in all circumstances…I've found though…that clients sometimes need space to think through and 'own' feelings identified…I've also seen excessive reflection result in clients languishing in problems...rather than progressing. This made me reconsider...with each client...the type/amount of reflection I use…I no longer <u>just take</u> theory at its basic value...I judge it against my practice experience and I first got that...experience...on placement [Eve/934-939]

In a slightly different context to Marian, this participant explained how, when reflecting with early clients, words from textbooks acquired somewhat different meaning, resulting in revision of her practice. Eve demonstrated that the placement had facilitated her practice-based evidence and given her confidence to re-appraise the work of the founder of person-centred therapy. From this, theory and practice were becoming inter-connected for Eve, with developments within one area of study helping other aspects as she described how, in her early client-work, she identified ways of improving her interventions and applied this learning.

Both Lucy and Judith gave revealing examples of their experience of inadequate consulting rooms. Lucy's example is striking in its description:

 I used to go into this room, where I was supposed to be counselling…and…in that room...during that week, they'd been storing loads of equipment, things that they just didn't know what to do with, really…so…every time I went in, this room where

I was supposed to walk in and just start counselling, had been used as a storeroom and was full of equipment, hoists. So I'd say to them, where shall I put the hoists and things...and...they'd just look at me...blank...you know, they just didn't want to deal with that, you know, so before I could start counselling I had to wheel all these hoists... and...whatever else was in there out into the corridor...just get in there...er...and try to make a space in the middle for the client and me to sit, we would sit in these awful worn out armchairs so we could have a counselling hour and there it is...that's the kind've thing some trainees have to deal with on placement [Lucy/274-294]

Implicit within Lucy's statement is the unquestioned effort she was happy to expend to facilitate a '*counselling hour*' which also demonstrated faith in the counselling process as helpful to her client.

Judith approached the inadequacy of consulting rooms from another, even more perturbing angle, *"I was appalled that people...outside the room...could hear everything we were saying. I was concerned"* [Judith/90]. Judith related this unease to a breach of confidentiality, which she found inexcusable. She also inferred by her emphasis on 'I' at the start of both sentences, that she needed others to understand why this was unacceptable and found it hard to understand how this behaviour could be condoned. In a separate interview, Sara gave another example of this, as, when reflecting upon her early placement work, she also described a breach of confidentiality:

Things came to a head when...I could no longer tolerate the lack of discretion...the receptionist had no idea about confidentiality...I spoke to the manager...but I don't think he understood the importance of it either...I felt compromised...I left [Sara/656-662]

This description encompassed meaning-making by expressing not only what Sara experienced, *"Receptionist had no idea about confidentiality"* [textual], but also how she experienced it, *"felt compromised"* and dealt with it, *"...I left"* [structural]. The contemplative way this statement was delivered, with multiple pauses, left a lasting impression of the enormity and depth of the problem for Sara at that time. A closer reading of this text also demonstrated how this appeared to have happened at the end of a line of other instances, '*Things came to a head'.*

Sara was not alone in expressing concern regarding non-counselling staff being unaware of confidentiality. This extract is interesting, however, in that she not only acted on her concerns, but linked what happened to intention [to try to sort it out], *"Spoke to the manager",* to emotion *"Felt compromised"* [what was felt] to action *"I left".* Sara went on to describe how at the time, such experiences led her to feel dissatisfied with work and

177

self, lowering her commitment to the organisation, so that she felt compelled to leave. This lived experience would undoubtedly have impacted upon her training and practice.

This experience also mirrored other contributions which confirmed that selecting/training is equally as important for support staff as therapists. It was inherent within data that participants felt, that, whilst it is accepted that counsellors must possess specialist skills, it is often not recognised that non-therapeutic staff also need careful selection and training, particularly receptionists, who are usually the initial contact for clients. Participants went on to express how first impressions count, reminding that clients may be nervous, needing sensitive handling, and pointed out that anonymity covers client attendance, as well as session contact. Participants also felt that, as managers play a big part in setting the culture of organisations, they could also benefit from basic counselling training. Leaders are important in determining workplace culture and frustration can arise where placement managers do not have a counselling background and/or come from commercial practice, as evidenced by Judith in describing her discomfort in witnessing how a manager pontificated about supervision when addressing paid members of staff:

> *{The Manager said}…You mean you just sit and talk {gesticulated the quotation thing ["”] in the air…around the word "talk"} to a client for an hour…then you spend another hour "talking" {gesticulation repeated} to someone else about the hour you spent "talking" {gesticulation repeated} to her? Two hours just sitting "talking" {gesticulation repeated}?"… I tried to find my happy face…but failed!* [Judith/299-303]

The paralinguistic features of Judith's statement, along with her enthusiastic gesticulation made this an interesting contribution that truly captured her astonishment through targeted, strong emphasis. She was explicit in depicting how these sentiments were expressed by her agency manager. The "*quotation thing in the air*", was graphically demonstrated with hand movements, drawing quotation marks repeatedly to demonstrate how the manager degraded the whole concept of '*talking'* as therapeutic. She was also explicit in signifying how hard it was for her whilst "*trying to find a happy face*" {also drawn in the air}, indicating her reluctance to show her real feelings. In this statement, Judith brought to life, almost photographically, participants' feelings about the importance of managers having an awareness and empathy for the helping process, strengthening earlier comments by Sara, who, as an aside in describing a breach of confidentiality, also felt that some managers do not have enough understanding of counselling processes. In so doing, these participants evidenced how managers, accustomed to commercial enterprise, can become frustrated by the often non-

directive counselling environment. For Judith, this experience strained her sense of being as evidenced by her talk of a divided, or false, self, as she tried to hide her real feelings.

Another aspect of concern identified issues in relation to the implementation of policies and procedures. All participants described variations in policies and procedures, with some placements inundated with policies and others with none. There was also a feeling, as voiced particularly strongly by Lynda, that the writing of policies and procedures is not a standalone exercise, but an ongoing, live endeavour. On a descriptive note, she explained how this works, *"Until something happens you don't know you need a policy, policies and procedures get built up bit…by…bit, they don't just come out, da-de-da-de-da-de-da, done, finished…it isn't like that…it's live…it's fluid* [Lynda/191-193]. On a more conceptual level, her sing-a-long interlude in the middle of this statement surreptitiously relayed her contempt of how others approach policies and procedures.

Data also strongly emphasised that it is important for policies and procedures to be really understood and implemented, rather than just in place, a point well made by Eve, who described how the people who need to understand and work with policies should be consulted and involved in their implementation, "*…involve trainees in policy-making…keep asking yourself…and…them…is this working for you?* [Eve/75]. Eve's statement is one of many that called, in different ways, for inclusivity. Furthermore, policies need to be seen as relevant, since, as Lucy pointed out, too many policies, not clearly explained, make them seem irrelevant:

> *We have policies for absolutely everything…if you wanted a cup of tea…we'd have a policy that says you must put the milk in first…but nothing about taking care with boiling* water [Lucy/118-120]

Within this statement, Lucy epitomises how although policies are in place, they are not always seen as relevant, or do not fully address issues, often leaving the most difficult area unaddressed. Making tea a particular way may make it taste better, but it is handling boiling water that is potentially harmful, yet this procedure is ignored. In another interview, Judith emphasised the importance of not only the existence, but also the visibility of policies, *"This {policies and procedures} has to be transparent…everything has to be on the table all the time and has to be revisited all the time"* [Judith/345-346]. Whilst this statement does not overtly criticise, there is a covert reading where the tone and emphasis of words infers this does not always happen.

Lynda and Marian also underlined the importance of this aspect of placement work. Lynda stated clearly, *"You really have to have your policies and procedures in place, you have to do the ground work. I don't think that it's…um…possible to have too many policies and procedures <u>and these need to be communicated</u>"* [Lynda/148-151], whilst Marian made a similar point through metaphor, vividly describing how without proper policies and procedures, nothing stands up, *"The saying in our agency is that an organisation without policies is like a scarecrow without stuffing {{shared laughter}}"* [Marian/1012-1014]. Marian communicated a need for an upright, upstanding organisation, supported by policies as opposed to a heap of systems [clothes], unrecognisable as a placement [scarecrow].

In discussing placement processes there was also a feeling that in those placements described as less than satisfactory, there was a tendency not to make trainees feel integrated and part of the organisation. In her interview, Sara clearly sensed this and made a direct comparison between a good and bad experience within a placement. She firstly reflected upon what was, for her, an unpleasant placement experience when she felt far from part of the organisation:

> *<u>Staff</u> wore smart, designer suits, etc. Hmmm…one day they suggested that <u>volunteers HAD</u> to wear the organisation's sweatshirts {with organisation's logo}! I was incensed…furious…but my supervisor suggested that maybe it was not quite the way it seemed…more an attempt to hmmm cut down on volunteers' expenditure so that…hmmm…they didn't have to…hmmm…buy work clothes….It still rankles me though* [Sara:12-16]

It is difficult to determine from this statement whether Sara was describing a power imbalance or, as her supervisor mitigated, this was an attempt to help volunteers which backfired. It could also be contemplated whether the suggestion of wearing a logo could be construed as an act of inclusion, rather than exclusion, although what is inferred by Sara, is that it was the casual element of sweatshirts contrasted with smart suits which caused her frustration and introduced a construct of 'them' [qualified, paid staff] and 'us' [unqualified, unpaid volunteers]. Instances of *'Hmmm'* in this account indicated the participant's uncertainty in disclosing this experience, what was certain, however, was the impact this had on Sara and her strong feelings that trainees need to be made to feel part of an organisation, since, as can be seen from the identification/line code, this statement was delivered unprompted, and angrily, within the first few seconds of her interview. The fact that she went on, however, to describe a situation, in the same placement, where trainees were made to feel part of the organisation, *"We're are invited to training days[-], invited into all activities and that's*

important, inviting trainees in, making us feel part of an organisation is so important and that happens here"[Sara/265-267], summed up how, for these participants, there was no clear-cut element of 'good' or 'bad' placement experiences, rather a mixture of both.

Worryingly, however, there were also concerns expressed over bullying and racism. Taking the racist issues first, this participant described what she felt was a racist experience:

> *I've experience of students being in a bad placement……..actually…….. there's a certain placement where………..{longer pause}….yes, I think the placement providers could possibly have been racially prejudiced and two of our trainees, one {nationality redacted} and one of {nationality redacted} origin…um…went there...and…I…think…they were treated with suspicion and…I think…they weren't understood, particularly the young {nationality redacted} lady because her facial expressions didn't match with what was expected and I just feel that [-] it's just not what one would expect from a counselling placement!!! So...a bit of a shock really!* [Judith/77-91]

The pauses near the beginning of this extract are where Judith was both momentarily overwhelmed by what she was about to say and stopped to consider whether it was appropriate to mention such a thing. She goes on in a quieter, yet determined, way to clearly express what seemed, for her, to be speaking the unspeakable, expressing both her disappointment and astonishment in encountering racism within this environment and having actually voiced what she later described as "…*unthinkable to even say"* [Judith/108], she described the incident further:

> *It was a real shock to find this sort of attitude in that sort of establishment, awful…dreadful…because it was presented to us that little old Welsh ladies were complaining about our students and well….they weren't difficult clients because they <u>were</u> little old Welsh ladies...it was a {client group redacted} service and well…yes…little old Welsh ladies may not be so cosmopolitan as some other types of clients and be not so used to having people of different race around or as their counsellors...but that doesn't justify racist behaviour on the part of placement providers….Not surprisingly, the placement didn't survive...*[Judith/94-105]

As evidenced by this extract, Judith again expressed her amazement, this time adding some stronger language, with her first sentence describing her experience as shocking, *'awful'* and *'dreadful',* adjectives which underlined her feelings of disillusionment and frustration that trainees had been subjected to unfair criticism on the grounds of race.

In another interview, there was an unrelated description of a racist experience in a geographical area far removed from the encounter described by Judith, as Eve disclosed how she experienced racist behaviour as a trainee:

Good and bad experiences…This could've been due for being the only trainee of colour and perhaps from other culture…Someone said, "We British send our sons and daughters to your country to civilise your nations"….Racism does exist...even in counselling communities…Some {placements} have great difficulty with cultural differences…I was discounted…{Organization redacted} damaged my self-esteem [Eve/53-57]

This comment showed how Eve experienced the uncomfortable position of difference when she found that even within the counselling field, prejudice can disrupt the learning process and lead to a trainee not achieving full potential. Eve does indicate, however, that she had *"good and bad experiences"*, so this intolerance was specific rather than generic, and as can be seen from her other contributions, evidence of isolation, '*I was discounted'*, perceived tokenism, '*the only trainee of colour'* and damage to her self-esteem did not deter Eve from continuing her training and becoming a successful practitioner, especially when one relates this to her earlier comment where she recounted how the placement experience changed her life for the better [Eve/10]. This evidenced, once again, the mixture of good and bad experiences prevalent throughout interviews. Nevertheless, what was also interesting was that it can also be seen from other extracts that Eve spoke throughout most of her interview as a confident professional, yet when relating this episode, reverted to a far more hesitant and colloquial manner of speech, speaking faster, with a stronger accent, and struggling to articulate the depth of her meaning, suggesting that these experiences were still painful years later.

Turning to experiences of bullying, instances of unfair treatment were inherent within several interviews, such as within this offering from Marian, *"I eventually………found…… the right balance……… of……being seen as willing and able to help…yet ensured I……was no longer put on…….I really feel hurt by this"* [Marian/33-35]. Her hesitant and uneasy delivery revealed Marian's struggle with her desire/need to help, juxtaposed with her need for self-care. Inherent within this quotation is a perceived tendency to, as Marian explained through metaphor later in her interview, *'flog a willing horse'* [Marian/41]*,* so much so, that she had to change her approach to ensure fair treatment and not feel pressurised. There was also a temporal referent here, demonstrating that this still worries Marian, as at the end of the statement having used the past tense to describe these experiences she switched to the present tense to disclose not how she felt, but how she feels.

Lynda also described an uncomfortable experience:

I hadn't expected…hadn't expected…to encounter {{shared silence}} open hostility and {{shared silence}}…bullying…bullying…in such an environment…My face just didn't fit…didn't fit…So stressful, there was simply…nothing…I could do [Lynda/102-106]

This quotation is peppered with pauses and repeated words, revealing both the distress Lynda felt as she reflected on her experience and her surprise that bullying was present in a counselling environment. Repetition and accentuation of '*hadn't expected*' also suggested a preconception that actions constructed as improper for therapeutic concepts would not be tolerated within helping organisations. Even more poignant was the residual uncomfortable feeling that Lynda had no choice other than to continue working there to accrue hours.

Another example of questionable treatment was evidenced by Sara:

It's like, you know, you just do it…you know? You feel good doing it…you're helping, you're accruing hours…..but…you work one more hour, then there's another needy client…and…they ask you…and there's another hour…and you do it, but eventually I began to wonder…just why am I working more and more, you know? It really got to me………{long pause………..}…….I felt intimidated………………{long pause…………} …………………….this was against the Framework, the Ethical Framework [Sara/952-957]

This statement captured the impact of volunteering as part of a qualification as it can be seen that Sara's willingness to work more hours stemmed, at first, from her feeling valuable and valued and also needing to accrue hours. At the beginning of this statement, Sara distanced herself from the personal meaning of this statement through her choice of language, as although talking about herself, she used the general "*you*" and looked for confirmation twice during this short extract by posing two questions seeking affirmation from the researcher. As her contribution progressed, however, as evidenced by her switch to the use of *"I"* Sara began to own her feelings, *"I felt intimidated",* changing to words that described her feelings in a personal way *"it really got to me",* before her language, after a considerable pause, again became more distant and theoretical, referring to perceived protection, yet externality, offered by the Ethical Framework.

The following extract from Sara covered key aspects of this sub-ordinate theme of inequality, "*Students are a valuable asset to agencies [-] and in the main…agencies help students get hours. I don't think that it's acceptable…though…that some {placements} don't meet the mark….but…we need to know that. Don't we……..?"* [Sara/1002-1005]. The rhetorical question at the end of this quotation, delivered contemplatively, earmarked a change in position from Sara's earlier stance, as at the beginning of her interview, her opening

comments showed her, and possibly the profession's, taken-for-granted attitude towards the placement, *"Well, we just have this thing in the middle of counsellor training, don't we, called the counsellor placement, and there it just is"* [Sara/2-4]. This demonstrated how having reflected on the taken-for-granted stance she initially presented, Sara recognised a need to learn more about the workings and efficacy of placements. This awakening to the current unconditional acceptance of the placement as just being 'there' and the need for further exploration of the placement concept was present, in varying degrees, in all interviews.

Despite identifying that there were good and bad placements and the difficulties ensuing from this, participants were in agreement that there had to be engagement with real clients during training, Judith explained why:

> *Doing role play…there's…no real experience of a real client…or…even using a fellow student for triad work…because you see…fellow students can be one of two things…can do…one of two things, they can either be the client from hell…or can be so accommodating that it just isn't true…and…it really isn't true...so…if you don't have placements...if there were no placements as part of training, then what will happen is the...student will get to the end of the course and fail…..because their skills are just not good enough* [Judith/11-20]

Judith provided understanding of the need for the placement. Interestingly, however, although Judith and others emphasised the real need for the counselling placement, yet found some unsatisfactory, they did not spontaneously offer an alternative way of facilitating pre-qualification client-work. Consideration of the feasibility of a placement parallel to a training course was offered briefly and only as the result of a direct question as addressed within Theme 4.2.

Within this sub-ordinate theme, reflection upon placement settings and processes, contemplation of the main characteristics which constitute a good placement and identification of placement challenges revealed that overall, a placement provides the client contact essential for learning, yet placement experiences are complex, variable, and impact upon participants' thoughts, feelings, behaviour, and future practice. The sum of this sub-ordinate theme was expressed meaningfully by a single sentence from Lucy, *"Those in good placements have a good start to practice…those in bad placements can have a terrible start"* [Lucy/951-953], a position strengthened by Lynda, *"To coin the phrase…When it's good, it's very, very, good, when it's bad…it's horrid!!!"* [Lynda/1111-1112], whilst the profundity of the counselling placement and the importance of getting this part of training right was

captured by Eve, *"they're [client group], so vulnerable, but also…in many ways…so are trainees"* [Eve/149-150].

4.27.2.2: Super-Ordinate Theme Two: Early client-work is impactful and stressful

Super-ordinate Theme Two addressed five areas of early client-work. Firstly, the importance of robust client assessment and stepped referrals to trainees, secondly, the experience and impact of accruing client hours, thirdly, the stress of early client-work, particularly first clients, fourthly, a suggestion that trainees should have a mentor at this time and lastly, the economic and value-laden road to employability and beyond.

Sub-Ordinate Theme: 2.1 Robust client assessment and stepped referrals are vital for trainees

Eve set the tone for the importance of this theme, as she identified that, *"Referral processes are one of the most problematic areas"* [Eve/65], as all participants, like Eve, felt strongly about the need for robust client assessment when referring clients to trainees.

Judith explained how this might be managed:

> *Clients should have a prior, first assessment with someone else…someone senior…and…more experienced beforehand. The client would be told about this…would expect it….it would just be an assessment, you know the sort of thing…you'll just be chatting to someone today… and...then they'll arrange for you to see a counsellor…now, where that does happen…things tend to be a lot easier…and…a lot safer* [Judith/290-298]

Whilst Lynda explained, in her interview, just why this is so important, *"There are more and more complex cases coming through...trainees are seeing clients who are probably unsuitable for counselling at all, never mind with somebody inexperienced"* [Lynda/222-225]. The matter-of-fact delivery of these words undermined their importance, situating this as not new or surprising realisation for Lynda.

Eve gave an example where assessment of clients does not take place:

> *The counsellor does that {client assessment} themselves [-] the waiting list is created and the counsellors then work through this, they then do an*
>
> *initial assessment themselves. They {service-users} get to the top of the list…and…are called in* [Eve/225-257]

It was clear within this extract that, within this placement, there is no assessment of clients before referral to trainees and, furthermore, the trainee does an initial assessment themselves,

even though this could be the first time they have sat in front of a client and are unlikely to have had assessment training. Sara gave another example of how, during early practice, she was left to cope with a huge client load with no assessment process or direction, *"I was given 17 referrals…just started ringing them…I'd no support…no…idea if any were urgent"* [Sara/545-547]. Sara described here how she was given the task of both prioritising and assessing her clients, with no information about presenting issues, no information as to who to see first or indication of the anticipated duration of work. A stressful and onerous early practice experience which made her feel let down and rejected.

In another interview, Lynda explained how this, in her words, '*dumping*' [Lynda/85] clients onto trainees can happen:

> *They {placements} just think, oh thank god, just bring in the counsellor to deal…they can deal with this person, the trainee is thinking….of course I can deal with this, because they're at that stage of learning where they're ignorant about how ignorant they are, that not knowing…um…so they're taking on more than they can handle, not realising all the layers and the depth and the stuff…all the stuff…that is…um…can be…um…involved and how these can all then just...tip over…and cause problems for the client, the organisation, the counsellor…it could all go…'pop'…quite easily...* [Lynda/89-100]

Lynda's concern that there could be a point where everything goes '*pop*' implied an element of unsafety and a risk of something dangerous about to happen. She voiced strong concerns about the consequences of some elements of the counsellor placement coming together, in that placement providers need to reduce waiting lists, trainees need to accrue hours and have not, as yet, fully understood the complexity of the role they are undertaking. Moreover, there is no time, capacity or ability to offer proper assessment and no understanding of the need for, or importance of, assessment processes. The analogy Lynda portrayed was that these toxic ingredients could, when combined, create an explosion with collateral damage. Lynda also inferred that referral to a counsellor, or trainee, is often the result of not knowing what else to do with a client.

Participants acknowledged, however, that whilst there should be client assessment, this cannot always be an accurate judgement of client suitability. Lucy explained:

> *Not that you can always tell {client suitability}, you can't always tell, we know that…but at least an effort to assess is made by someone senior, yes, things can go wrong with assessment…but…every potential client for a trainee needs to be assessed by an experienced practitioner* [Lucy/656-660]

Lucy went on to explain how, in her view, the placement situation has developed and questioned whether this whole concept is the best way to accrue client hours:

> *There's this ruling by the...um...BACP that trainees shouldn't see private clients, they say you must work with...um...agencies and placements, but do you know...I think that sometimes, private client-work is a bit easier, because you don't...um...tend to get some of the high-end stuff you tend to get in agencies...where you tend to see people with high-end, gigantic issues, issues which they have often had all...or...most...of, their lives...and they're...um...coming along... and...they're seeing a trainee, possibly a trainee who has never, ever counselled anybody, never sat opposite a client before and I think, aaaaagggggghhhhh, let's try not to do that, you know?* [Lucy/715-727]

Lucy explained well in this quotation the dilemma of early placement work, suggesting that private practice can be less complex. She ended this explanation with a heartfelt plea, strengthened by an elongated exclamation, for robust assessment processes for trainees. This request was supported within Marian's interview, as she, like other participants, called for "*a stepped approach*" [Marian/728-729] to assessment and subsequent referrals to trainees.

This sub-ordinate theme recognised referral processes as vital, yet stressful, and noted the lack of assessment in some placements, the importance of robust assessment processes in early client-work, the difficulties, even when adequate assessment is carried out, of referring clients to trainees and called for assessment to be carried out by appropriately qualified, experienced practitioners with a stepped approach to referrals. The dichotomy of trainee hours versus waiting lists was seen to impact upon assessment processes and an alternative to placements where trainees start early practice working in private practice, was suggested.

Considering assessment processes of early client-work leads to the next sub-ordinate theme as trainees counsel placement clients to accrue practice hours.

Sub-Ordinate Theme: 2.2 Accruing client hours evokes anxiety resulting in emphasis on quantity rather than quality

Within this sub-ordinate theme, it was clear that different placements require trainees to play diverse roles and can produce conflicting demands and resultant anxiety, since, at different times, there will be insufficient numbers of trainees, or a shortfall of clients, making it difficult to match supply and demand.

Lynda reflected upon her early practice and her heavy client list, *"I was just given a huge list of clients and just told to get on with it…soooo…stressful"* [Lynda/101-102]. Placements aim to enhance accessibility of service provision, however, such a waiting list, could, for a trainee keen to demonstrate practice hours, result in tremendous pressure to get through the list and result in them feeling anxious, over-stretched, and concerned about the unknown urgency of those clients at the end of the list. Marian's experience of early client-work was different but equally frustrating, as she described the exact opposite of Lynda's overload, where quantity under-load through few referrals, when under pressure to accrue hours, created stress, *"…after six months I'd only been referred one client"* [Marian/528-531]. Eve, in her interview, described a miss-match witnessed within a placement, *"…Some trainees had three clients and there were some with ten…no…really…*ten*, with no obvious reason for this anomaly"* [Eve/313-315].

Eve expanded on this:

> *One of the difficulties is that sometimes a trainee will, this happens often, actually, will…have…a placement…but then….they don't have any clients and time goes on and they* still *don't have any clients…the thing is that sometimes there* are *no clients...that makes for a very difficult kind of placement situation, or you...um...have the direct opposite where…there're just too many clients…so* too few*, or* too many*, actually…it's rare for the balance to be just right* [Eve/325 328]

This discourse was important because the pressure to accrue hours was construed as sometimes overtaking the value of early counselling experience, as Marian explained, *"… some students just see it, though, as merely gaining hours, they don't see what they're doing as part of the organisation as a whole and what we do at varying stages is to say, please don't see this placement as just gaining hours...think about quality of hours, not quantity of hours"* [Marian/119-123]. Other participants were more pragmatic in recognising that as there is little consideration of, or check, on the content of sessions, with qualification hinging on the number of hours logged, it is understandable that there is more emphasis from trainees on the number of sessions as this is what counts towards qualification. Sara summed this up, *"You know, only rarely I've heard discussion about the content of client hours amongst trainees, they're* always *going on, though, about how their number of sessions are or, more usually aren't, going well…because this* is *the bottom line for them… pass...at this time…*or not*"* [Sara/1067-1068]. As can be seen from this statement, the discourse was described

somewhat differently for Sara as she focused on trainees' end goal of qualification, empathising with a trainee's position. In noting that there is little discussion concerning client-work, only client-hours, it is noticeable that there is no recognition here that discussion on client-work should be restricted to supervision.

From consideration of the experience and impact of accruing client hours this sub-ordinate theme constructed a need for greater importance to be placed on the quality rather than quantity of hours. There was also a common thread of concern regarding the stress created by the pressure on trainees to accrue hours, yet very differing experiences as, whereas some participants felt anxious because they were over-stretched due to too many clients, others talked about feeling frustrated at not having client-work.

Sub-Ordinate Theme: 2.3 First clients are the most crucial and stressful point of counsellor training

This theme encapsulated how participants conceptualised the process of beginning to see clients, starting with difficulties in assessing a trainee's readiness to practise. Lynda pondered this, *"How do I know this student is suitable, or ready?"* [Lynda/48-49], asking this rhetorical question in a way that implied there are no accurate guidelines, no answers; this is a subjective judgement. Judith, in contextualising how difficult this assessment can be, also indicated eloquently, that it is impossible to gauge when a trainee is ready for a first client:

> *It's difficult…[-]…actually to really know…when a trainee's ready for all this, the trainee themselves often don't know whether they're ready. You see, we can do as many readiness to practise assessments as we want…but until the client is actually in with the trainee, then we don't really know, we don't really know until that client is in with that trainee, what's going to happen* [Judith/283-287]

Judith captured the uncertainty involved in judging whether a trainee is ready to see their first client and the unknown element of the inter-subjectivity between every counsellor and client. This unknown territory is encapsulated succinctly within her last sentence, "*we don't really know until that client is in with that trainee, what's going to happen",* again inferring a huge leap of faith in assessing a trainee as ready for practise. This was taken to a higher level by Marian, who, along with other participants, was also of the mind that there can be no certainty about readiness to practise, moving this into another sphere, by relating the level of client presenting issues to the possible unpreparedness of trainees, *"This…{name redacted}…is high-end...a specialism...a hard area to work in…and…you…can't…prepare anyone for that,*

it's only when we're doing it… that…we get into what that really means, just…going for it, I suppose" [Marian/625-629]. Again, there is an uncomfortable feeling of impreciseness and chance entrenched within Marian's words, which demonstrated the onerous burden of assessing readiness to practise. This responsibility was also picked up by Eve:

> *The {client group redacted} deal with very, very vulnerable people, with God knows what coming through the door for that first session. We can't sit in on the sessions…you know what I mean…so we have to have the right people who're not only suitably qualified…but also have the ability to deal with our clients in an appropriate way…from that <u>very first session</u>* [Eve/145-148]

In this statement, Eve draws together the problems of complex clients and matching clients with trainees. She highlights the importance of not only readiness to practise, but integrates the qualities of trainees with the problem of being unable to witness client-work, the vulnerability of clients, the often-unknown nature of their presenting issue and the requirement for trainees to work at a high level from the start of placement work, or as Judith vividly expressed, *"Straight in with flags flying…into the deep stuff straight away"* [Judith/363-366].

Several participants offered examples of what can happen if readiness to practise is misjudged and Lynda presented a stark warning of the adverse impact of getting this wrong:

> *There's nothing worse than putting someone in when they're not ready…because you're setting them up to fail, not only are you setting them up to fail, you're possibly causing damage within the placement, the reputation of the training course, you could also be harming the client and counsellor. That trainee may, after, say a bad experience with a first client…if they're not ready…just never have the bottle to do that again…may <u>never</u> just want to do that again…we're all ready at different times* [Lynda/457-465]

Within this extract, Lynda painted a vivid picture of wide-ranging damage that could result from misjudging the point when a trainee is ready to sit in front of their first client, emphasising the importance of the timing and context of first clients. These issues are critical in understanding how stressed and vulnerable trainees feel at this time, as evidenced by Sara:

> *The worst time, of course, is when…a counsellor sees their first client, hugely stressful. I feel that we're just so…unprepared…really, we're nervous, our nerves are tangible…jangling…we just have to do it….go for it….afterwards we're just so relieved that we've gone <u>in there</u> and <u>done it</u>! First clients are <u>very</u> difficult, counsellors in early practice are uneasy…scared…when they face that <u>first</u> client for the <u>first</u> time…<u>I</u> was just terrified* [Sara/536-545]

This is a telling excerpt, as when looking closely at Sara's contribution, she uses seven adjectives to emphasise just how stressful an experience this is, "*unprepared*", "*nervous*", "*difficult*", "*scared*", "*uneasy*", "*jangling*", and *"terrified"*. She also strengthened themes from other interviews in describing that, for their first client, trainees just "*have to go for it*" [Lucy/711]. This, again, points to unscientific and vague criteria for readiness to practise.

Sara also went on to clearly articulate feelings of unpreparedness and lack of confidence accompanying her early client-work, *"the first time I was on my own {with a client}...I thought...I shouldn't be doing this...I'm not experienced enough...didn't have that important piece of paper...{diploma/qualification}...felt panicky"* [Sara/990-992]

Within this excerpt from Sara's interview, an important concept, raised within several interviews was highlighted, as, in describing her anxiety, she clearly related this to her trainee status and the crossover that occurs once qualification is confirmed, inferring that '*that important piece of paper'* would have made her feel more confident. There is also a sense of real fear of being unprepared, feeling unworthy and almost fraudulent, as her panic seemed to relate to concerns that if her client were to understand the consequence of 'the truth': '*I shouldn't be doing this'*, she would be revealed as an imposter. Professional identity has not yet formed.

Marian's interview also contained evidence of first client apprehension, echoing Sara's anxiety. She described feelings of self-doubt which accompanied her first client experience, *"'Oh God...can I really do this'...was probably my first thought!"* [Marian/996]. This short, simple quotation loses, in transcription, the powerful impression engendered during the interview as the exclamation at the start of this quotation was uttered in such a meaningful and haunting way, it made this statement very powerful and truly indicative of a feeling almost close to terror. This first client experience evoked massive insecurity and still, many clients later, induced anxiety. These words invoked an indelible sense of panic raised through fundamental feelings of being unprepared and unable to cope.

Lucy had an even more worrying example, as her early client experiences were described as creating more and more tension:

> *The relief was marvellous at the end of each session, but then straight away...tension started to grow again as...I started to worry...and...prepare for the next session...or the next client, the stress getting worse...every time* [Lucy/688-670]

The inference here is that literally as soon as one session was over, Lucy found herself preparing for the next, describing mounting cycles of anxiety.

Several participants linked first client experiences to identity and like Marian, experienced a questioning of self and competence, as this extract from Judith demonstrated:

> *I felt very strange…who was I? Who was this person in front of me {client}? I was confronted by an unknown person…experiencing problems as yet unknown…It could've been anything…So many unknowns...who I was...who they were...but most unfortunately…at that point…I felt the level of my ability was the greatest unknown…everything I'd learnt about skills flashed before my eyes...but I couldn't make sense of any of it…* [Judith/912-917]

Judith described here how she tussled with uncertainty, trying to negotiate the fluid boundaries of professional/personal, whilst questioning her capability and professional ability as she saw her first client. Interestingly, she also questioned her preparedness for the task before her, echoing feelings inferred earlier by Sara that some trainees are not ready for the watershed of seeing their first client. Reading between the lines of these interviews invoked a strong sense that it was mainly a concept of 'unexpectedness' that contributed to first client anxiety.

Nevertheless, despite these issues, good first client experiences were seen as important in developing professionals, as Eve explained:

> *I still remember the phone call saying…'I have a client for you'…at that moment...this was real…no longer abstract, I was actually starting work…as a counsellor! I was now being treated like a professional...not like just a student. I was part of the helping fraternity* [Eve/69-72]

For Eve, the allocation of her first client was a pivotal point of her training, where she felt that the transition from trainee to professional occurred, as even before sitting in front of her first client, she felt integrated into the helping community, no longer, "*just"* a student.

Eve and Lucy both went on to recall encouraging experiences of early client-work. Eve described a feeling of euphoria, after seeing her first client, *"{Felt} Elated…on a sort of therapeutic high…felt it went really well"* [Eve/501], whilst Lucy demonstrated relief and an emerging therapeutic confidence:

> *I was surprised at how positive the process was for both of us…Having worried about my reflections and responses…the client began...with little input from me...and…just let go of all the pain that had built up…I realised that the hard work being done was his…not mine* [Lucy/145-148]

Here, Lucy reflected on her realisation that she could trust the therapeutic process and this allowed her to relax and facilitate her client's processing. She described a parallel process where, as the client let go of his pain, she let go of her mounting anxiety and allowed the therapeutic process to develop.

Several participants made suggestions as to how the defining moment of early client-work could be improved. This proposal was offered by Lucy who explained the wisdom in starting off with several clients:

> *It can be a bad thing to start off with just one client [-], because if you've only one client, and if....no, when something goes wrong, you then, you definitely, definitely then think it's <u>you</u>, that it's <u>you</u> that did it, you think that's your...em...fault, but if you have two clients and one is going ok, but one...is not doing well [-], then you know that it's not you....It's them, or a mixture of you and them, or it's the relationship, or it's something else...you can then kinda work things out...so it's great really, to start off with two or three clients...so...that...um...it's understanding...that...um...it's going to be different with everybody and...every client...and...every session is different...because...otherwise...it's...just...too...intense...you...know...[-] because...if someone...um...walks into the room...and...that's your one and only client and they don't really like you and they...er...don't ever come back and they're your only client...they could not come back...because...they just don't like counselling, or...their life has turned miraculously around...but you never know the reason...and...if that's your only client...you're wondering...but you may never know...the reason...then you tend to blame yourself and that's not a good start [*Lucy/437-455]

In offering a way that the stress of early clients can be relieved, Lucy also provided a conceptual insight into just how difficult early client-work can be in that she identified how every client and every session is different and that therapy can often end suddenly without the trainee ever knowing why, leaving the trainee holding the content and unfinished business of therapy and blaming themselves for the breakdown in the therapeutic relationship. This touches on another issue recognised by many participants who identified self-blame as often present in early client-work, *"{During early client-work} Trainees blame themselves for everything...we <u>love</u> to self-blame"* [Marian/457-458].

Lynda shared meaningful words of wisdom from her supervisor, which helped her deal with the trauma of her first client:

> *I was nervous... indeed...terrified, seeing my first client and...what my supervisor said that made me feel so much better...was...because I was thinking I can't do this, feeling not good enough...we all go through it...what on earth am I going to say...etc....but she {supervisor} said, this client will never be so well cared for as she will be by you...because she is your first*

one…and…I thought….well do you know, that really took the pressure off me, do you know that really made me feel so much better... and…what a lovely way of putting it…and so true, as well. This was my first…first…client and of course, she {supervisor} was right... because...I…was going to make sure I got it right…[-]…I had supervision on supervision…I had individual supervision…I had group supervision…I had peer supervision, I wrote about it ad-infinitum…..yes, it's a gift {to the client} [Lynda/508-526]

From Lynda's words and her delivery of this disclosure it was deduced that her supervisor's intervention greatly helped her at a time she described as a period of great uncertainty. Again, it also provided insight into feelings experienced around early client-work as Lynda recalled feeling '*terrified*' and engaging in a process of self-questioning as to whether she was good enough. This was followed by a process of normalisation as Lynda then became almost glib in acknowledging that every novice counsellor has feelings of self-doubt. The concept that Lynda was offering her client a present in the form of therapeutic contact relayed the value Lynda placed upon the power of the therapeutic relationship, her developing confidence in the process of counselling and her ability to help her client. This extract is one of many illustrating these concepts.

Also inherent within Lynda's statement is that she had supervision prior to seeing her first client, which helped her enormously in her attitude towards early client-work, and resulted in a more confident approach. Sara also highlighted this as good practice:

A huge benefit to me was going to supervision...group supervision...before I saw my first client...that was so supportive...and…insightful for me…helped me though what can be a…very…very…difficult experience, helped calm my nerves and keep myself together through that first <u>sixty</u> minutes, the acid test [-] that's the point where you make it, or fake it and those who fake it at that point…fake it thereafter...never really make it...never really make the grade [Sara/666-678]

This is an interesting statement as Sara re-iterated the point made in Lynda's statement, that supervision prior to starting client-work is helpful and again depicted how seeing that first client is portrayed as a nerve-wracking, challenging experience. Sara went on to make a point, hinted at by others, that a bad early client experience can impact upon future therapeutic activity. She, however, is more graphic than other participants in constructing her first client experience as '*the acid test'*. Relating and emphasising her first therapeutic hour in terms of minutes underlined her level of stress, as did going on to say that those who fail this test carry on throughout the rest of their practice in a disingenuous and incongruent way, behaviour which undermined the fundamental ethos of the core-conditions.

Lucy introduced another way that early client-work could be less stressful in highlighting how trainees need to learn how to approach placements, particularly as many face the complexity of CORE at this time, a stressor which could easily be avoided by promoting this within training:

> *Trainees need to know how to use CORE <u>before</u> they start their placement….Some courses don't cover this at all...They {trainees} need to be able to use CORE before they get there...[-]...sometimes, trainees get there and...they {placement} say well, here...are your CORE forms for you to complete, but they've...the poor student....has never seen these before…that can be confusing, daunting…not a good start at all, so placement training should be...um…in place...and…be…part of the readiness to see your first client* [Lucy/685-699]

Lucy recognised here that whilst the therapeutic aspect of early client-work is nerve-wracking and often unknown, there is another aspect that can also add to a trainee's anxiety. The difference is that, unlike therapeutic encounters, this learning is predictable, logical, and concrete and can be addressed before placement, so that it is not an additional burden at an already stressful time.

Another way that pre-emptive action can ease first client experiences was defined by Eve, who explained the feeling of participants, that if trainees are comfortable dealing with real issues within triad work and understand what being on placement really involves, they have an easier transition:

> *For first clients…the first thing that's important is [-] that on our course, we get used to working with real issues. Also...that we understand what it's like to work in a placement, have 'placement training'* [Eve/984-986]

A final quotation ends this theme by encompassing the stress of early client-work, the pressure on students to 'get it right' for assessment and the intense feelings this work engenders within trainees:

> *So…there we were…my second ever client…our last of six sessions. I was recording the session for an assignment. We'd explored this and that...no real depth and then she just, literally…literally, dropped it. There it was, the gigantic issue, the tremendous…tremendous, colossal, immense…immense, awful…really…awful…awful…issue [-] I just didn't know what to say, I realised immediately...how we'd been skirting around this. I was aware that I'd missed it, aware that it was our last session, aware of the bloody, bloody recording and the approaching deadline and so <u>unaware</u> of what to do…or say…to help her…it wasn't my finest hour….oh…I'm just going on and on now, none of this is really important* [Lucy/586-592].

This participant described a powerful early interaction with a client and when language is explored more closely it can be discerned that these words, with strong, all-encompassing, swiftly repeated, adjectives, displayed Lucy's frustration, as her words spilled out almost involuntarily as she recalled her feelings of helplessness and anxiety. The change of direction at the end of this contribution could indicate deflection, as she recognised, yet did not want to sit with, or confront, the intensity behind her words.

This sub-ordinate theme considered some stressors involved with early client-work. Marian illustrated the precept of this theme, within this quotation, "*First clients are a big issue, probably the turning point. A good…or…bad experience at that point can make all the difference to the rest of the placement…training…and…future practice*" [Marian/159-161]. Ways to alleviate stress included working with real issues in triad work, starting client-work at the optimum time and with more than one client, early supervision and placement/CORE training (CORE, 2012; Mellor-Clark, et al., 2012; Barkham, 2013).

Sub-Ordinate Theme: 2.4 Mentor needed at the time of early client-work

Within this sub-ordinate theme, it was suggested that to make the best of placement experiences and practice safely and professionally during early client-work, trainees need additional support. Judith had been giving this considerable thought:

> *….Having mentors readily available…I've…been giving this a lot of thought lately, giving some thought to this mentoring side really…there's really a time and place now for this to come into its own in counselling….I know some people groan about that...others see it as another layer of possible work...but do you know…I've thought about this a lot recently and I'm wondering….you see when a student starts out in placement [-] it's all strange to them…very strange and unfamiliar…and...this adds to their nerves… but…if they could have a mentor, now…I don't mean a supervisor now…not a supervisor now…someone different, someone separate from that, non-assessing, a mentor who they could refer to <u>immediately</u> the session finished…..*[Judith/446-450]

Judith brought together several issues within this statement. She suggested there is a place for a mentor to support trainees during their early practice to facilitate the quantum leap from triad work to placement. She recognised that many trainees find themselves in an unfamiliar environment at a time when they most need support and identified the key point at which they need an opportunity to debrief as after early sessions. Interestingly, she also introduced another concept, the prospect that a new

role of 'counselling mentor' would add to much needed employment opportunities as considered in the next sub-ordinate theme.

Eve, in her interview, also referred to the need to have someone to talk to after early client-work. She put it this way, *"At times it felt like I was swimming in the deep-end without a life-jacket…with the life-guard {supervisor} unavailable for a month"* [Eve/234-236]. The meaning inferred here, is that supervision is all very well, but as a new counsellor, Eve felt she was drowning in the need to offload after some early client sessions and needed reassurance in-between supervision. It can also be deduced from this that there should be differentials between mentor [life-jacket] and supervisor [life-guard], as a mentor should not in any way replace, or under-mine, a supervisor, as Lucy explained, *"A*s *well as supervision…alongside it. As well as, not instead of…someone not assessing…or…advising…just…listening…understanding"* [Lucy/698].

Marian, in her interview, further clarified the difference between a supervisor and a mentor, explaining how this worked in practice:

> *When students start their first few sessions, we ensure there's always someone there with them…they're never there on their own. Either their mentor is there [-] or they speak with her on the phone immediately afterwards. So, after their first…and...possibly second client...they can come out and there's someone there…to say, oh...do you know what…have a bit of a debrief, not break confidentiality, but a <u>release</u> of what that experience was like for <u>them</u>. It's a massive experience and we live through that…I'm remembering the feeling myself as I'm saying it…you see your first client…and this is momentous…a huge experience, but you can't go home and talk about it. And you want to talk…and…talk…about it. That's why we have mentors. That idea came from a student* [Marian/510-520]

In this quotation, Marian underscored how trainees need additional support at this time. Two other key points stand out within Marian's quotation. Firstly, she addressed the important point that in speaking to someone after client-work, care would have to be taken not to break confidentiality and secondly, she revealed that the idea of having a mentor was originally suggested by a trainee and then implemented. Evidence of training integration.

Lucy also exampled how she had experienced the allocation of mentors to trainees, *"…definitely for their first few sessions, their mentor will be there, so that they can say, how'd it go? And...this will be someone who has been through this experience…who's non-assessing…but <u>knows</u> what it's like"* [Lucy/523-527].

Sara summed up the need for a mentor identified earlier by Judith, Eve and Lucy, *"A mentor would ease [-] anxiety of early client-work"* [Sara/99-100] and later in her interview, Judith took the suggestion of support during early practice to a higher conceptual level:

> *I was <u>even</u> thinking...that maybe [-] if you have a student who panics, really panics in session....If they have a suicidal client...and...they just don't know...they just don't know what on earth to do, I was just wondering...just wondering...whether...it might, it just might be possible...feasible...for them to actually consult during session, to have someone around just in case...have a facility whereby someone experienced, but not assessing, can listen in to the session...[-]...That's the sort of thing I was thinking of...so that the student doesn't take all this....especially after a first session...home with them. I remember...just how bad...that was* [Judith/1263-1279]

This sub-ordinate theme suggested that a non-assessing person, a mentor, should be allocated to trainees at the point of early client-work. This person would be suitably qualified in that they have experience of early client-work and would work in tandem with, yet separate from, the trainee's supervisor. A suggestion was also made for another way to support trainees during this time, by a more hands-on approach, with access to actual counselling sessions.

Sub-Ordinate Theme: 2.5 Economic and value-laden road to employability and beyond

Sub-ordinate Theme 2.5, in considering the economic and value-laden road to employability and beyond, considered the link between the placement and difficulties newly-qualified counsellors experience in finding paid employment. Sara put this into a context of placements as instrumental in creating counsellor unemployment:

> *A huge issue for counselling is that there is a huge number of students qualifying...or...about to qualify...but...no work and this is undermining the profession. In many ways, it's immoral to carry on training counsellors where there are just no jobs available...and...we must look to the many counsellors who are working for nothing as holding some responsibility for making less and...less...jobs available. So...the...placement...I...suppose...creates unemployment for counsellors and degrades the profession. The more people who work for free, the less jobs become available...supply...and...demand"* [Sara/978-983]

Sara made some important and controversial points here. She started by questioning the morality of training counsellors when their chance of paid employment is slim and goes on to cite the placement and volunteer counsellors as partially responsible for the lack of paid employment. Inherent within this, was the inference that counselling is devalued by the wider

system because so much therapy is delivered free of charge. Judith also pondered the employment position:

> *So, the thing is...whether there are no jobs because too many people are working for nothing, or whether people are working for nothing because there are no jobs. The thing is, which of these came first...the chicken, or the egg? Anyway, sadly it remains the elephant in the room, always there...yet hardly...ever...spoken...about...really...*[Judith/789-796]

Judith's extract, in reflecting on employability, incorporated two metaphors as meaning-making vehicles. The first was a philosophical metaphor often used in debates about the origin of the universe as '*the chicken or the egg*' implied there was no answer as to whether the lack of paid jobs in the profession led to volunteers, or whether there are not enough jobs because there are so many volunteers. The second metaphor, '*The elephant in the room*' is often used within therapeutic dialogues to draw attention to truths unseen or thoughts unspoken. Often, these issues are ignored, because, if voiced, they would raise anxieties, although there is an implication here that these concepts need to be addressed, because not doing so creates tension within the profession.

Lynda, however, disputed that all counsellors find it difficult to secure paid employment, she described her particular experience from a far more positive stance, and in a contrary view to Sara, saw the placement as potentially creating counsellor employment opportunities:

> *In my experience...those students who've gone out there and looked for work, have been willing to do the leg-work, and do the voluntary stuff...maybe above and beyond what their course requires...will...succeed. It's not always...particularly in this profession...about seeing a job advertised...you have to get out there...in the world...put yourself about...and...I'm not saying that the placement will...and...does lead to employment...but it can* [Lynda/546-555]

Apart from the obvious divergence between Sara and Lynda's contributions, there are some other important observations to be drawn from Lynda's statement. She sees volunteering as possibly leading to employment and also suggests that jobs are available for those who are proactive in seeking employment. There is also a suggestion that personal contact helps secure employment.

Another participant, Marian, demonstrated how, for some trainees, placement work does lead to paid employment, *"We've just offered a trainee a permanent post"* [Marian/210], although

Lucy took this in a different direction, describing an unpleasant experience during her early training:

> *I think that maybe….you know, I wonder whether………maybe….they used me? Now, it's only me thinking this, mind, only my opinion, but [-] I worked hard...hours of admin…more hours of counselling than needed for my course….Then…I started to apply for jobs…I needed references…they assured me there'd be a permanent position there for me…once qualified….Three weeks before I was finishing they said there was no funding…no job….They'd used funding as an excuse…I felt used…I think….maybe…they'd deliberately dangled the carrot of a job to get extra hours out of me…I felt resentful. I think that this placement was…maybe…offering employment like dangling a carrot. Actually, you know, I'm right on this, I know I'm right. They did…use me. But…do you know…I'm not really bothered about it anymore, I'm not really bothered"* [Lucy/723-730]

It was apparent within data that it is not a normal occurrence for a trainee to secure a permanent post within a placement. This quotation was chosen, however, because it goes further, as, whilst hindered by weakening words such as '*maybe*' which almost, although not quite, conceal meaning, it inferred that the lure of a permanent position was used to manipulate extra hours. Here, Lucy not only made a claim, "*They…assured me there'd be a permanent position*" but also warranted this with perceived justification for letting her down, "*…They'd used funding as an excuse*", and described how she felt "*…used…and…resentful*".

In addition to this, the way Lucy first posed, reflected, and then answered her own question portrayed a growing confidence in her stated position, as whilst she started off using non-committal and self-diminishing language, "*It's only me thinking this, mind, only my opinion*" she ended saying "*Actually, you know…I'm right on this, I know…I'm right*". Her weakening words now replaced by positivity. On the other hand, her repetition of the phrase, "*I'm not really bothered*" indicates uncertainty, rather than lack of interest, or could infer that even with the passage of time, this experience still hurt.

Other issues considered within this theme show more convergence between participants, particularly around 'placement blocking', a concern to many participants and explained well by Lucy:

> *Students would just stay, they wouldn't move on...everyone would just stay there, there are then a whole new bunch of trainees and not one vacancy in that placement [-] what happens is that these counsellors who stay working there, they get stuck in…a …um...sort of…an apprentice role and just don't move on, so it's not good for those who stay working there…and…not good for students who don't have the opportunity to work in what is a good placement* [Lucy/360-375]

Lucy later offered a possible solution to placement blocking "…*if there was a bit more of a career pathway...a career structure, a path through…you see...that's actually very important*" [Lucy/954-956].

However, other participants offered another reason as to why placement blocking occurs. Eve explained:

> *Those on benefits can't really take [-] paid jobs, unless it's for more than so much money…because if they do, then...um...everything in their system, where all their money is organised, all goes up in the air, so they either have to have a job...you know...more than 20 hours a week...or something…or....they volunteer, they can't afford that middle ground, because they couldn't afford to...um...survive on the money they'd earn, so it's a difficult balance; so many of them prefer to have their benefits and work voluntarily [-]. Placements then provide…a lot of things…They {trainees} can be getting quite a lot of things that don't impact upon their financial benefits…but do improve their lifestyle [-] and they've got a purpose, they feel they're providing a service to the community, they can get training, expenses, the placement gives a sense of purpose, they're learning, they get training, supervision...so they're happy with that…and…just want to stay* [Eve/376-390]

This statement frames a different depiction of why trainees can tend to stay on in placements, thus contributing to placement blocking. Here, the placement is construed not as a block to employment, but as providing a sense of worth, structure, and purpose to trainees stuck in an employment impasse.

Despite there being no direct question relating to value, there were many references within respective interviews to the perceived worth of counselling and the impact of working for free/paying to work. As Lucy explained, *"Whilst volunteering really makes me feel worthy, I suppose, really worthy, raises my self-esteem far more than paid employment…that's why I still do it, I wish financial...and...time elements were more appreciated"* [Lucy/480-482].

This statement encompassed several important elements, as whilst Lucy confirmed, as did all participants, that she still offered her services free of charge alongside paid employment, she clearly resented the lack of respect for this position. Her statement also hinted, that for this participant, there is a need to feel that she is freely giving of herself to support clients, as this helps her truly value herself.

This feeling of being undervalued was expressed more strongly by Eve, who explicitly described what other participants implied:

There's this under-belly of socio-economic tension going right through counselling, counsellor volunteers save this country mountains of money, imagine if all volunteer counsellors stopped tomorrow for some reason? There'd be chaos. Service delivery would collapse in the sector…a huge gap would appear. I used to think I was <u>lucky</u> to be <u>allowed</u> to counsel, because it made me feel good…and…so…therefore…accepted this was unpaid and doing this cost me so much time and money. <u>Now,</u> I feel angry that the service I…and…others give...isn't valued [Eve/1000-1006]

Here, Eve introduced a different dimension, as she both asked and answered her question about the value of free counselling, the way that this supports the NHS and how this is often not recognised either within the profession or more widely. Talking about her views on this in the past tense and then changing to the present tense indicated that Eve's view has developed over time, and her strong emphasis on *'now'* suggested that she became more confident about her views as time passed.

This sub-ordinate theme depicted how placements can create both employment and unemployment, and those trainees who successfully find paid employment usually do so through personal contact. The lack of a clear career trajectory can lead to placement blocking, as can trainees who stay in placements due to the impact on their benefits should they find paid work. In these instances, data revealed how working at placements engendered a sense of worth for these trainees as they enjoyed benefits-in-kind. The morality of continuing to train new counsellors when there are so few employment opportunities was questioned and the tension created by the juxtaposition between volunteer/paid employment was emphasised. Many qualified and experienced counsellors continue to offer their services free of charge alongside paid employment and whilst placement work raises self-esteem and self-worth, the lack of respect for volunteer counsellors was defined as causing frustration and provoking feelings of being undervalued, as did the unrecognised support that placement counselling provides to the NHS and communities.

4.27.2.3: Super-Ordinate Theme Three: The supervision lynchpin

This theme positioned supervision as central to the training and placement process, acknowledged confusion over clinical responsibility and identified a need for a training supervisor, with stepped supervision.

Sub-Ordinate Theme: 3.1 The role of supervision is pivotal to training and placement

This sub-ordinate theme identified supervision and supervisors as anchors that stabilise placement processes. Sara summarised these views well, *"It's the supervisor's role in all of*

this…isn't it?   I mean supervisors often really…hold the whole thing together. However…I don't think...this is really recognised" [Sara/194-199]. In claiming that supervision is pivotal to the counsellor placement, Sara encompassed a view expressed in varying degrees by all participants, who also regretted that this role is not fully acknowledged.

A different, yet in some ways similar, concern was that the role of the supervisor was neither appreciated, nor accepted as important in the formative training assessment of trainees. As Eve enlightened, *"Supervisors give…in a way…formative assessment along the way...but this is often not recognised, nor used by the placement… or...the course as valuable information...and...it should be"* [Eve/212-215]. Frustration was evidenced within this observation from Eve and a loophole was identified, where a failing trainee could simply change supervisor if they felt their supervisor might give them an adverse report, as Marian noted, *"If a supervisor were to say to them...look I don't actually think you're doing a good job here…they…can…in theory….just go find another supervisor, who is willing to take their money and tell them how fantastic they are"* [Marian/242-246]. The inference here, is that the new supervisor then provides a more positive report. Another participant, Lucy, in identifying the same issue, suggested a way of addressing this ambiguity, *"There should be proof of continuity of supervisor…if there's a change…the outgoing supervisor should be asked to complete a form…just a few lines…giving reasons for termination of supervision"* [Lucy/350-352].

There was also disquiet that the role of supervision is not schooled as it should be, as identified here by Sara, *"Checks on supervision [-] are, well…non-existent…really"* [Sara:187-199]. Nevertheless, the most important role of supervision was identified as detecting when things go awry, as wryly claimed by Lynda, *"It's the supervisor who's most likely to notice {if anything goes wrong}"* [Lynda/548-550].

Another important role of supervision was identified as providing support to new counsellors. Judith reflected how group supervision made her feel not only safe and more confident, but also put her at ease with disclosing if, during early client-work, things had not gone well:

> *Supervision [-] made me feel more self-confident…at ease with academic issues and…um….there was a major breakthrough…when…in group supervision…I realised that qualified counsellors met clients and situations which fazed them…Not only that...but this made me feel safe...as they were able to bring this up in supervision without blinking an eyelid and their*

disclosures were met without any sign of reproach or blame...this was a container for stuff [Judith/369-378]

Judith described here, an appreciation of supervision as a supportive environment and the choice of phrase, "*container for stuff*", is interesting, as whilst there is a literal association with a container as a vessel, there is also an inference of this being more of a receptacle, transcending this container to represent a safe space - holding and containment, a representation of protection.

Coming from a different perspective, Eve gave her reasoning as to why trainees can struggle with supervision:

The name supervisor makes people nervous...apprehensive ...and...supervision, the way...we...do it, isn't...something we've ever done before...and...by the time trainees qualify...they're supposed to know all about it, understand it and use it throughout their career, so it should be given more attention early in that career [Eve/323-327]

Here, the concept of supervision as a career-long process is introduced and Eve illustrates a recommendation considered by other participants, that as an important part of the professional life of a counsellor, supervision should be addressed earlier and more fully within training.

Data also confirmed that it is the supervisor who is turned to in times of emergency *"It's the supervisor who always gets the panic call first"* [Lucy/956-957], aligning with comments made by Lynda, that it is usually the supervisor who is the first to know if something goes wrong either at the placement or within training. Lucy's simple sentence, with the emphasis on '*always',* alongside her glib delivery, also inferred irritation that this is neither recognised nor appreciated.

From these selected contributions from this sub-ordinate theme, the supervisor emerges as the 'de-facto' lynchpin, the person with the best view of what is actually happening and although not 20/20 vision, or always recognised, it was conceptualised as a much-needed overview. This sub-ordinate theme of 'The role of supervision is pivotal to training and placement' is therefore summed up by this quotation from Eve, which succinctly encompassed the concept individually expressed by all participants, *"It {Supervision} is the process that brings all that together...the supervisee...the placement...the course...the client...and...the issues* [Eve/14-18]. Supervision was therefore constructed as the glue that bonds training and practice.

Sub-Ordinate Theme: 3.2 Confusion over clinical responsibility

Sub-ordinate Theme 3.2 considered clinical responsibility. There was discussion about responsibility for client-work within each interview, with an element of confusion as to where responsibility actually sat at any given point in time. Sara's contribution give a flavour of comments presented, *"This is the great debate…nobody seems to be accepting responsibility"* [Sara/551-552]. This quotation underscored both the topicality of this issue and a perceived reluctance to accept responsibility for client-work. Considering the concept of who has clinical responsibility for client-work being *'debated'* and listening to the music behind Sara's words brings to mind an image of musical chairs, with everyone keen to avoid being the one left without the safe-haven of a seat, having to stand up, and be accountable.

Interestingly, whilst no participant gave an example of clinical responsibility being tested, there was an undertone which, through interpretation, was seen to consist of conjecture, even fear, about what would happen should this occur. Some participants offered their suggestion of how to ensure clarity about responsibility for client-work. Lynda suggested how there may be more surety about responsibility, *"Three-cornered contracts…joint responsibility between course, placement, and supervisor…until the trainee gathers autonomy and responsibility"* [Lynda/152-154]. This seemed, on the face of it, a good way of clarifying responsibility, until this statement was considered more closely. Firstly, Lynda appeared to infer there is a stage early in a trainee's practice, where they have no responsibility, a sentiment voiced more specifically by Marian in her interview, *"In the beginning, a trainee can't have responsibility…they don't have enough knowledge or…experience"* [Marian/189-199]. This was an issue also picked up by Sara and one where there was divergence between participants, as she held a different view, expressing hotly, *"Trainees must have a responsibility…they just have to…they're the counsellor, they're delivering the therapy, they're in the counselling room, they have that responsibility"* [Sara/115-119].

Another participant suggested a theme of shared responsibility, *"{Placement} has responsibility for work carried out on behalf of the Organisation…Clinical responsibility is shared between supervisor and trainee…with the trainee becoming increasingly accountable…and…responsible for their practice"* [Lucy/524-526]. Again, this model is similar to Lynda's, based on joint responsibility and phasing-in trainee accountability. This sounds feasible, although, like Lynda and Marian's suggestion and in contrast to Sara's

205

contribution, implies a period where the trainee has no responsibility. In addition to this Lynda and Marian's propositions suggest there could be confusion should there be a need to identify precise clinical responsibility at any given time. Data suggested that it would be difficult to determine a trainee's accountability and responsibility at the point of any incident. This was, however, seen as better than the situation that exists in some placements where, according to Lynda, there is no accountability, *"There's misunderstanding about what needs to be in place…who's accountable…who's responsible…quite shocking…often nothing, not even contracts…in place…"* [Lynda/24-26]. Lynda's description of this situation was resonated by other participants, who also recounted instances where there was lack of clarity over clinical responsibility, or no contracts, circumstances they defined as worrying.

The sum of this sub-ordinate theme of 'Confusion over clinical responsibility' was encapsulated by Eve in noting a difference between the process and the actuality, or the ideal and the realistic. This was evidenced by the changing of a sentence into a question, *"So…therefore we're, in many ways, <u>certain</u> that the buck stops <u>here</u>, yet…in…some…ways we're still…unsure, actually <u>really</u> asking, the buck stops...<u>where</u>?"* [Eve/834-835].

This is a good example of the uncertainty of the notional shared concept of clinical responsibility as Eve started off explaining how the buck stops here, yet ended her contribution by changing the statement to a question, exchanging '*here*' for '*where*?' Deeper interpretation also raised a tacit, yet tangible, inability to answer the question, "Who has clinical responsibility?" In looking more closely at data to attempt to answer this question, moving between the part and the whole, the particular and the shared responsibility, an initial interpretation of 'uncertainty' shifted, giving rise to the unspoken, yet implicit, answer, "I don't know, but not me". This reluctance to take responsibility was an implicit blind spot within several interviews. This theme showed inferred, superficial ideals about where clinical responsibility lies. When considering this in more depth, however, should a question about clinical responsibility occur, for example during a crisis, it would be difficult to ascertain who held responsibility at that exact point of praxis. There was also a reluctance to claim personal responsibility.

Sub-Ordinate Theme: 3.3 A need for a training supervisor and a stepped approach to supervision

Sub-ordinate Theme 3.3 evidenced a strongly-held view that there was a difference between supervision for trainees and supervision for experienced counsellors. Analysis identified a

feeling that there should be more credence given to this difference, with the allocation of specific 'training supervisors' and a stepped approach to supervision.

The concurrence of experience of participants within this theme was well supported within data through the shared feeling, independently offered, that not enough attention is paid to trainee supervision. This was evidenced by Sara, who in referring to how ill-prepared trainees are for supervisory processes, demonstrated how the absence of preparation for supervision resulted in a lack of conceptual understanding, "*I don't think some {trainees} understand what supervision is at all...they just don't realise what supervision is about…or what it's for. This needs to be addressed…at course level…more training on supervision…and…possibly specific supervisors for trainees*" [Sara/657-659]. Marian also called for more training on supervision and a different type of supervision for trainees, describing the need for this in greater detail than Sara and showing both her own commitment to the process and her frustration at students wasting a valuable resource:

> *We've even had students say that once they've started placements...they don't need supervision and [-] this is the time that they <u>do</u> need supervision, to get them into that sense of...how will I present my clients in supervision? How will I present myself in supervision, is there something that touches me [-] students are ill-prepared. They find supervision...a struggle...and…um…that needs to be addressed in training…and….their supervisors should be more understanding…ready to help more with the process...a different breed {of supervisor}* [Marian/196-206]

Lucy also identified the lack of attention to this area within supervision training, *"I don't remember, in my training [-] anything…er…specific about supervising trainees...and that would be useful, it would be good to actually consider and learn about what trainees really need"* [Lucy/514-519]. This anomaly could account for the situation that Eve recounted, where she felt that trainees were not getting the support they needed from supervisors:

> *There are a few supervisors out there, who are, some of them are very {sharp intake of breath}...judgemental…you know…really…so…so…judgemental they're...very…it's got to be like this…this is the way to do it, you have to do it like this, you're not doing it right, a lot of that...you know…it's very undermining for students…it's very difficult for students…they need, at early stages of training, particularly when seeing first clients, to be encouraged and also, to feel…er…safe, and supported they need to <u>feel</u> safe and <u>be</u> safe. So the supervisor…in their role…with trainees, should ensure…their first priority is to ensure that trainee…and…client…are safe, and...um…some supervisors are too involved with criticising...actually seem to <u>enjoy</u> it sometimes…and…that doesn't help the trainee with early practice. It would*

be good to have specific training for supervisors of trainees, be useful for what trainees need...they might need...maybe...a...different...type...of...training supervisor [Eve/765-777]

In this quotation, Eve started out describing a situation she was uncomfortable with, as evidenced by her intake of breath towards the beginning of this extract, and went on to analyse the defined situation and come to a conclusion that could resolve the issue bothering her, "*they might need to have [-] a different type of...a....training...supervisor*" and revealed her case for sensitive challenge within supervision, rather than overt criticism. There was also an inference of the importance of trust within the supervisory relationship. Her contribution raised other issues, in that she also described how supervisors can be prescriptive, critical, lacking in unconditional positive regard and undermining. This invoked the question whether these supervisors are fit to be working even with qualified counsellors, as whilst Eve made a strong point for trainees to have encouragement and feel safe and it is understandable that qualified counsellors need more challenge and less holding, it is to be hoped that all supervisors would comply with the central tenet of do no harm. Eve did mitigate her view of these supervisors, however, when later in her contribution she toned down her criticism by reminding, "*...bear in mind...that we're hearing things, hearing...all these things...mostly from trainees [-] so, we don't always...really...know exactly what's been said by that supervisor... or...that placement provider...or...in what context...we just hear that trainee's narrative*" [Eve/822-824].

A justifiable reason for a training supervisor was also provided by Marian:

> *I would say that students on placement should bring <u>all</u> their clients to supervision <u>every</u> month [-] and there's quite a big difference, I think, between supervising trainees and supervising counsellors who are qualified...who can pick and choose...can decide...what they want to bring to supervision because...if you think about it...at that stage...at that early stage...during training...how do they {trainees} know how/who/what to present? They don't...do they? They can't. They don't know enough to know what's important...and...the supervisor has to have the skill to help in this process. A training supervisor...may...encourage disclosure* [Marian/434-440]

Another concept was also intrinsic within Marian's quotation, as behind her words, analysis detected the vulnerability of trainees who find themselves practising whilst "*not knowing enough*" yet unable to properly elicit help they need to practise. There was also a sense that the supervisory relationship with trainees needs to be more encouraging, "*Trainees need a different type of relationship with their supervisor. They need a different type of supervision, a lot of holding...a lot of support, constant reassurance...they need to be able to...tell it as it*

is. There are particular skills to supervising trainees" [Marian/259-262]. The direct opposite of Marian's '*being able to tell it as it is*' was relayed in another interview by Lucy:

> *What amazed me was how many trainees said, when asked [-] to answer honestly, that…if they'd done something wrong they wouldn't tell their supervisor...they would be* <u>*afraid*</u> *to tell their supervisor [-] if people are too scared to bring mistakes to supervision...then it denies the whole object of supervision [-] I really have to reach out to imagine and encompass and understand that…because…I...would always tell my own supervisor anything, always have, even in the very beginning, you know,* <u>*I*</u> *did, but…that doesn't mean that* <u>*everyone*</u> *does* [Lucy/559-563/588-592]

Lucy relayed her understanding that no counsellor is infallible and displays the therapeutic skill of empathy, formed by her own experiences of being a trainee, as she struggled to understand non-disclosure in supervision. She offered a concept of power imbalance within supervision and her uncomfortable representation of trainees "*scared*" and "*afraid*" gave rise, during analysis, to a questioning of the emotional impact of this for students in dealing with an imperfect self, prone to making mistakes, yet closed off to the inevitability of this, acceptance, and disclosure of humanness. Judith took this further in identifying that the thing a trainee thinks they could not possibly take to supervision is the very thing they should, in fact, disclose. As she said, "*If something's gone wrong [-], that's the very thing to take to supervision... trainees...should be helped to feel safe enough {to do this} by supervisors understanding their needs*" [Judith/333-341]. This again implied the need for a particularly sensitive supervisor and when Marian described a working concept within a placement, she summed up the stepped approach to supervision advocated within data:

> *Buckets full of support to start...supervisees are childlike in the beginning, it's then right…that...in Year Two, they have somebody who is more….somebody who will say, right then, you've now done this for a year, let's reflect on this…let's move on and hopefully…this will encourage them to reflect more and be more open to challenge…so supervision will then grow and develop…*[Marian/294-302]

Marian also alluded here to the possibility of dependency within early supervision as a relationship where one partner is innocent and unsophisticated, "*childlike*" implies a lack of autonomy, disempowerment, and reliance, concepts which could make it difficult to then be "*open to challenge*" in subsequent supervision, although progression to 'Year Two' would hopefully engender a more equal relationship.

This sub-ordinate theme addressed how participants identified a difference between supervision for trainees and for qualified counsellors, noting that some trainees feel unsupported and find it

difficult to disclose to supervisors. Arising, there was a recommendation that trainees should have specific, 'training supervisors' and a stepped approach to supervision.

4.27.2.4: Super-Ordinate Theme Four: Placement experiences identify growth areas for the profession

The fourth super-ordinate theme identified growth areas concerning personal development, professional/organisational development, registration/regulation, and improved contact/communication.

Sub-Ordinate Theme: 4.1 Personal development is key for personal and professional growth

When considering personal development, there was commonality between transcripts that personal therapy should be mandatory within counsellor training to strengthen the person of the counsellor and the profession of counselling.   Lynda epitomised this feeling, when she said simply, yet poignantly, *"We just have to know what it's like to sit in that chair"* [Lynda/400-401]. In this extract, on a descriptive level, Lynda used a short statement to infer that counsellors need to experience therapy. On a more conceptual level, however, this simple statement captures complex concepts as, with these few words, she stimulated understanding of the nervousness, vulnerability, and power imbalance that clients can experience during therapy. She also strongly advocated that personal therapy needs to be an integral part of counsellor training and explained how personal therapy during training can help grow the counselling profession and influence a trainee's future counselling:

> *Well…[-]…I really think that if we want the profession to be valid, to be valued, to be valuable, to be professional, to be recognised, to be accountable…then…we…want…we need to be…deep-sea divers, not snorkelers….We need deep-sea divers, we just don't want snorkelers [-] then…for that to happen…people just have to sit in that {therapeutic} chair* [Lynda/395-401]

Here, from a rhetorical stance, it can be seen how Lynda used the analogy of deep-sea divers and snorkelers to differentiate between therapists who work with superficial issues and those willing and able to delve into more complex areas of therapeutic work. She strongly advocated that the profession needs depth and that counsellors need to have experienced personal therapy to be able to work at deeper levels.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Lucy:

> *I'm very much for personal therapy, trainees need to know what it's like to be
> in the situation of being a client, they should know what it's like to be in that
> place…and…know what they'd want…and….what they <u>wouldn't</u> want in that
> situation* [Lucy/944-948]

This extract reveals not only that counsellors should experience personal therapy, but also, that some aspects of counselling can be less than perfect and are best avoided as both counsellor and client.

Many other reasons for the importance of mandatory personal therapy during training were offered, for example, Sara saw personal therapy as a way to begin to access the self and accentuate personal awareness:

> *What we're doing in a therapeutic relationship…is working with ourselves
> and…if there are areas of ourselves hidden…that we don't know
> about...then [-] we just don't recognise what's going on* [Sara/484-488]

Whilst Sara concentrated on self-awareness as an important aspect of being a counsellor and a reason for mandatory personal therapy, Eve approached this from another angle in advocating personal therapy to address the possible power imbalance between therapist and client:

> *It {personal therapy} takes away some of that…[-]…it makes it more real and
> it….stops that split between 'me' and 'them'…you know…because…I…think
> that 'splitting' of counsellor as 'well' or 'healthy'…and separating off the
> client as the 'patient' or the 'ill one'…just isn't good…*[Eve/397-402]

This extract also has rhetorical aspects that accentuated the importance of an equal therapeutic relationship in emphasising, through three discrete references, *'split'*, *'splitting'*, and *'separating'*, the danger of counsellor and client reverting to stereotypical practitioner/patient roles.

On the other hand, Judith, recalled personal therapy during training with a candid admission, *"Didn't want to do it...I....<u>really</u> didn't want to do it but I'm so glad I did, I thought I'd not really engage, but, boy, did I...it was more than learning…cathartic experiencing"* [Judith/1012-1013]. This extract neatly conveys the negative connotation some therapists place on mandatory personal therapy, feeling fearful and unready to engage, yet examples how negative perceptions can change as trainees warm to the process.

Marian's offering, however, showed another side of mandatory personal therapy, that of counsellors who engage with these trainees:

> *Some colleagues…who see counsellors, who have to have therapy for their
> course…well, their hearts drop at the prospect. Some {trainees} really engage*

in therapy…but others just go through the motions. I can't imagine how anyone can possibly do this job without having had their own…proper…therapy [Marian/444-446]

Marian demonstrated here, how, unlike Judith, who reflected upon her eventual engagement with personal therapy, some trainees are experienced by their counsellors as just going through the motions, expecting a 'once-over-lightly' approach, which makes mandatory personal therapy less successful in increasing self-awareness and improving personal development.

There was also an individually expressed, yet common, call for mandatory personal therapy at the start of counsellor training, because as Lynda explained:

Well, I would make personal therapy mandatory for counsellors in training and…I'd have that at the beginning of a course…because to have it at the end, doing it at the end, is, well…you're then just ticking boxes…really…because, really…if it's at the beginning…if you're doing it at the beginning of the course… then...you have the chance to learn about yourself and use that information…use that learning throughout the course [Lynda/426-435]

This extract revealed the importance of timing counsellor training so that theory, practice, supervision, and therapy inform one another.

Like several participants, Sara linked personal therapy during training to personal development, self-care, and finding a sense of identity:

It's really nice to have personal therapy as well. I know it's time and money, but…you know how it is...sometimes it's about the carer caring for themselves, finding their sense of…identity…developing…personally [Sara/468-471]

Concepts of self-care and identity were often mentioned as part of personal development and personal therapy, opening up the question of how identity changes over time during training, with a challenge to identity precipitating the embedding of a trainee's personal and professional identity.

Two participants, Eve and Lucy, in reflecting upon their placement experiences, offered strikingly similar descriptions of the impact of the placement on their sense of identity. Firstly, in her interview, Eve shared her confusion as she began to embed her personal/professional self:

Felt chaotic…confused…student/trainee/supervisee all at once…Everyone expecting different things of me…Which one was I? Where was the person I was before training? I'd glimpsed the Therapist I hoped to become…but…as I

gained professional identity...I just...seemed to lose my sense of <u>self</u> for a while [Eve/766-769]

Eve recalled a sense of identity transition and role ambiguity experienced during her early placement work, illustrating how trainees can struggle to identify with a distinct role due to incompatible pressures of belonging to multiple groups. She described feeling neither one thing nor another, acting out all three identities within constantly changing contexts as priorities of one 'system' conflicted with another, each with specific expectations. For Eve, values of self and systems eventually started to converge into a professional identity, but were initially overwhelming to this participant's '*self*'. There was also an inference that a longed-for 'perfect' self would not be experiencing such discord.

Whilst some trainees thrive on multiple identities, oscillating between student/therapist/supervisee/personal roles, the struggle to integrate personal and professional values can trigger feeling undervalued, with adverse impact upon self-esteem. Lucy also recalled an identity crisis at the beginning of her placement experience:

I was working well...but...partner/mother/daughter/student/ volunteer/supervisee, s-o-m-e-w-h-e-r-e, squeezed...between......them all...s-o-m-e-w-h-e-r-e...was...me!
[Lucy/62].

For Lucy, role clarity became unclear through incompatibility of tasks required as partner/mother/student, etc., resulting, as also evidenced by Eve in the previous quotation, in loss of her real self within her conflicting priorities. What is particularly interesting about this quotation is how Lucy's voice became quieter and her pace slowed as she contemplated the meaning of her words. The repeated, drawn-out, word *"somewhere",* is also worthy of note, as Lucy uttered this as a kind of plea as she searched to find and ground herself amongst role conflict and confusion. The description of feeling *"squeezed"* was also graphic and representative of similar comments by other participants when describing the impact of training on identity. In this interview, however, Lucy also went on to give a good example of how trainees can gain in confidence, as many participants indicated a strengthening of personal identity as they began to trust in themselves and encompass their personal/professional identity. This is how Lucy evidenced this, citing a shift from an external to an internal locus of evaluation, *"Through personal therapy and personal development I'd become more comfortable with self-evaluation...rather than depending upon others' opinions"* [Lucy/219].

This sub-ordinate theme addressed personal development where links were made with mandatory personal therapy, self-care, the coming together of the personal/professional self during training and the formation of a professional identity.

Sub-Ordinate Theme: 4.2 Organisational and professional development needed

Within this sub-ordinate theme, attention turned to how organisational and professional development could better support counsellor training and placements.

Looking firstly at training, all participants acknowledged that counsellor training is different from most educational courses, "*Counselling isn't a course like any other… like…you take maths, and then you're like…sitting a maths 'A' level, you mechanically pass…and…off you go, it's very different*" [Lynda/340-344]. In relating counselling to maths, Lynda made a strong point that counsellor training is deeper and more complex than traditional subjects due to its processes and idiosyncrasies. Training can result in a trainee going through periods of deep self-reflection, which can invoke times of uncertainty, at the same time as they are dealing with the pressures associated with placement work. Lynda also intimated that there is more responsibility in becoming a counsellor than becoming a mathematician. In Lynda's words, when starting to work, as she called it, as a '*number-cruncher*' [Lynda/346], "*off you go*" [Lynda/343], inferring there is no looking back, no reflection, and little personal responsibility whereas counselling is very different as it involves contact with the human soul. As Eve put it, when reflecting upon a moment within her early client-work, "*I felt as though I was holding the client's heart in my hands*" [Eve/212-213], a poignant insight of an intimate experience far removed from 'number-crunching' and a stark reminder of the responsibility of offering therapy.

Participants also talked about how they sensed a change in counsellor training, not always for the better. Lynda, in particular, was detailed in her view:

> *It's becoming increasingly difficult to train counsellors…there's no coherent way of training counsellors, courses change all the time, milestones change…and…it's becoming, it's becoming…in my view…it's becoming more academic… and…I know it has to be academic… but...I think it's becoming more academic at the expense of common sense…a lot of the time…and there's something between having guidelines...how to run a course…and…having freedom to run that course creatively, being creative within that…and…there's no freedom or opportunity for that creativity. So…I think...it's becoming more restricted…more accountable* [Lynda/274-287]

There is an interesting shift here, as earlier in her interview, Lynda proclaimed she was "*all for accountability* [266-267], yet now constructed accountability as overly restrictive. Lynda also described a constantly changing academic maelstrom, becoming more academic at the cost of flexibility and creativity. This view was also expressed within other interviews. Take Lucy's offering:

> *Counsellor training is, at the* moment*, too academic…because there're people who would be good counsellors, would be good practitioners, but aren't particularly good at academic essays… and…these people just can't get...um...through any more. There used to be ways that they might just get through…but…they can't get through anymore* [Lucy/841-849]

Lucy inferred here a tightening of the academic process where resultantly counsellors must meet all standard criteria to qualify. She disagreed with this perceived change, feeling it debars good counsellors from qualifying. She went on to raise a question, *"Trainees need to understand theory [-] but do they really need to understand academia?"* [Lucy/886-888]. She also implied that, previously, prospective counsellors, who were good therapists, yet not strong academically, could have qualified. Conversely, Sara, made an appositional observation, "*There's no longer enough freedom to let people go…when they're clearly not cut-out, not suitable...to be counsellors"* [Sara/308-309]. This presented a dichotomy of some counsellors able, until recently, to qualify although not considered academically suitable and others who, although deemed unsuitable, progress through training because it is difficult to fail them. These issues raised questions about the responsibility and accountability of counsellor training.

Lynda took this theme to greater depth in registering a concern about the very spirit of counsellor training, *"I think it's very easy to lose the, the* essence *of what it is…the heart and soul of it {counsellor training}…..you know what I mean? Without sounding...like an aging hippy, it's that…it's that felt-sense, isn't it….of the work [-] and things that you can't always put into language"* [Lynda/289-292]. In her delivery of these words and her relating of felt-sense to halcyon days gone by, there was nostalgia in Lynda's contribution, which spoke of a sense of loss as the ethos of the therapy she understood and valued was changing.

One suggestion as to how these circumstances could be improved was advocated by Marian:

> *I'd very much like to see some kind of coherent, core, course structure, set out, or agreed...this really is fantasy-land now...a core structure, set out by the BACP and/or the major accrediting bodies* and enforced*, that recognises the complexity of the work…so…some kind of standard, if you like*, for...all *courses and...placements* [Marian/646-649]

215

Apart from the main concept of this quotation which, in contrast to Lynda's need for greater flexibility and felt-sense, called for more structured and standardised counsellor training and placements across the board, there is also an indication of how this participant felt this was unlikely. In fact, Marian saw this as so improbable, she related it to make-believe.

Lucy made another, more detailed, suggestion, calling for a different counsellor training route:

> *I'd like to see a situation where there could be more of a kinda apprenticeship route…eh…opening up [-] where you did a lot more placement work...a lot more involvement with a voluntary agency in a placement capacity, not necessarily client-work in the beginning, a…kinda….foundation for a kinda less academic route to qualification…I do...um…understand why degree level is required, why everyone has to come out with a degree…because it gives parity with things like nursing, etc., increased professionalism, moving away from vocational qualifications...making it more academic and professional than vocational…but I still think...that if there was a kinda, apprenticeship route…not a soft option now, I don't mean that, but a <u>different</u> option, not a soft option, it could actually be very challenging, quite a challenging option…but just not necessarily so theoretically weighted* [Lucy/851-869]

There are some important points within this statement, as firstly, Lucy called for an increase in placement work undertaken by trainees, including non-therapeutic activities, which is in direct contrast to current thinking within the profession demonstrated by changes to BACP guidelines. Secondly, in likening counselling to other professions and understanding the need for qualifications, like other participants, Lucy also leant towards less academia in counsellor training, inferring that her suggestion would, in fact be harder, yet more beneficial in many ways and could improve the quality of counsellors.

Moving on to consider the image of counselling, similar issues in relation to the perception of counselling and future innovations were raised by most participants in varying degrees. The fundamental nature of these comments was best presented by Eve and Judith:

Eve drew attention to the image of counselling, identifying this as a challenge for the profession, *"One of the biggest issues <u>still</u> is people's perception of…their attitude to counselling [-] well…there is…<u>still</u>…stigma towards counselling...and…this needs to be addressed, if that…{stigma}…was removed…it would open up…a whole new gambit"* [Eve/734-736]. Eve's repeated emphasis on the word *'still'* constructs this as a long-standing problem that needs to be addressed. She also inferred this is holding the profession back, deterring future development.

In her interview, Judith also related to, and expanded upon, this perceived negative image of counselling:

I'd like counselling to be seen…er…not just for those with problems…but more as a supportive structure, more of a wellbeing thing, than a sad, morose…stigmatised…activity There's also hope…What about hope? [Judith/417-419]

Judith expressed here a feeling inherent within other transcripts, that there should be more emphasis on wellbeing within counselling, a portrayal of counselling as a supportive, hopeful process, rather than an activity steeped in doom and gloom, only applicable for clients who are extremely distressed, or in crisis. Judith covertly implied a need to get a message across that clients do not need an excuse for counselling and Sara also touched on counselling's image as a supportive structure, although her emphasis was on her perception that there needs to be more of a value system within the profession:

In a nutshell, counselling is about support, so let's support the profession. Treat students fairly, value the volunteer, value the profession, value the people who teach the profession, value ourselves…and…each other. Counselling is about self-worth and self-value…but many in our profession just don't adopt this…as a profession we need to value <u>ourselves</u> and <u>what we do</u> [Sara/888-889]

Sara's implied sentiments speak of a need to ensure that the core-conditions are not just for clients, but should also apply to counsellor professionals, a concept raised in different ways and in varying degrees by most participants. Her choice of words and emphasis, including repeated inferences to value, convey depth of feeling. Sadness can also be heard here, as Sara's reflections hint at counselling as a valueless profession.

When turning to a consideration of how organisational changes could benefit placements in the future, Eve made an interesting proposition for standardising and monitoring placements:

I'd like to see a register, I think that…um…all placements should be registered with a central body, we <u>were</u> trying to do that, I was on a forum in {area/name redacted} where...we tried to do that, where all…er…placements, all the charities, agencies, etc., offering free counselling would all be on this set register…would all work to a certain set standard, would all work ethically…and...all work in a particular way with student counsellors and would also offer…expenses…supervision...and training…<u>and</u> would be monitored [Eve/1024-1028]

Whilst this suggestion was hinted at by other participants, although not so directly phrased, there was negativity about the likelihood of this ever coming to fruition, as, whereas Eve

indicated how an attempt had been made to establish a register, she mentioned this very much as an afterthought, also inferring that this initiative had failed, yet not explaining what went wrong. There was also implied negativity towards the possibility of revisiting this again. Likewise, other participants were negative about change, as evidenced by Sara, "*It {placement} may not be perfect…but it's all we've got…right? So… we...have to put up with the imperfections*" [Sara/876-877]. Sara's comment paraphrased sentiments often heard within interviews, that the placement "*… is what it is*" [Judith/1000], a surprising construct within a profession where reflection and positive change are encouraged.

Lucy, however, made an interesting suggestion for change:

> *We must think of the placement in different ways…maybe we have to think of the placement more as an extension of training and think about…this just as if it was a <u>proper</u> training module and had to meet all criteria any other training activity would have to meet, don't you…don't you think?* [Lucy/566-567]

Lucy called here, for integrating placement work and practice experience more into course structures, where there would be greater emphasis on learning objectives, learning outcomes and learning criteria than she presently perceived to be the case. What was also interesting about this quotation is how Lucy started off with a strong statement, "*We have to*", yet ends on a somewhat hesitant note, by not only seeking confirmation on her statement, but also seeming less confident and hesitant as she asked the question, the answer to which she clearly hoped would confirm her way of thinking, "*don't you…don't you think?* Her emphasis on the word "*proper*" also inferred her perceived distance between structured learning and placement practice.

Other participants considered how the placement could be better integrated into training, voicing mixed opinions about the option of course providers offering trainees a placement alongside their counselling course. Lucy identified that this transfer from out-sourcing to in-sourcing could have pedagogical advantages, "*A good teaching instrument, you could bring this in, integrate it into teaching…that would make for...rich…really…rich learning*" [Lucy/932-934], yet also added a warning, "*there could also be some fuzzing of the boundaries there, though, that…would be my concern*" [Lucy/1001].

Judith and Marian concisely demonstrated how participants considered the advantages and disadvantages of course providers providing placements, Judith succinctly declared, "*A fantastic…fantastic…concept, but very difficult to implement…maintain*" [Judith/991-992], which captured the overall feeling that, in theory, this seemed like a good idea, yet in practice,

there was concern about the amount of work this would create, as Marian put it, *"Great…but who has time for that, sounds like another…'Come-on, let's do this…blah…blah…blah….and this…blah…blah…blah…oh...and…this...blah…blah…blah…but…where are the staff?"*[Marian/777]. Here, Marian's cynical lapse into '*blah…blah…blah*' clearly indicated her frustration of mounting pressures and a lack of resources which made providing a university placement, although accepted as a good initiative, an unattractive option.

When considering the concept of courses offering trainees a placement, concerns were also voiced by participants about the concept of offering free counselling, Judith represented these sentiments in identifying that it is not the monetary value of paying for the service that is important, but the commitment this engenders, *"I'm not so sure…about…generally, now, about value…giving counselling for free, even if you charge just £1, because…my experience is…it just won't be valued. I'm not sure that it would be valued. If counselling is free…it often isn't valued"* [Judith/178-183]. Again here, when the language of this participant is looked at closely, over-use of the word '*value*' reflects an undercurrent of concern present within all interviews, which clearly relates to concerns voiced earlier by Sara [888-889].

Marian echoed Lucy's concern about boundary issues being a possible area of unease, *"Boundaries would need to be so tight"* [Marian/230] and Sara also had a concern, *"A drawback is that people can get too inward…too introspective…could be too introverted"* [Sara/667-668], although it was Judith who summed up participants' ethos of this theme as a good idea, yet somewhat idealistic. She did so strikingly, with these words, *"It's a <u>wonderful</u> idea, <u>wonderful</u>, but maybe…yes, I think it's a bit utopic"* [Judith/206-207].

This sub-ordinate theme explored scope for organisational and professional development and captured participants' views on changes to improve the image of counselling, counsellor training, and counsellor placements.

Sub-Ordinate Theme: 4.3 Registration and regulation are key issues

Sub-ordinate Theme 4.3 considered how participants construed registration and regulation as mechanisms for the recognition and growth of counselling as a profession. Marian explained a need to have a seal of approval, or endorsement, for work undertaken by counsellors:

> *The move toward registration is good…making it, if you like, rubber-stamped, before this, there's always…been…well…the sense of being a counsellor…was…um…well…you know…'you can just…call…yourself a*

counsellor'………..people…don't…………recognise…or……understand the…training involved……..and…that kinda………..feeling…around the profession...isn't……....good…It's…bad…actually…{laughter}
[Marian/604-610]

Marian's apparent struggle to find the right words here presented as a desire to say something stronger about her perception how counselling is viewed and her laughter was indicative of the discomfort hidden beneath her words. Nevertheless, her comment that the profession is not fully acknowledged did overtly reveal her frustration at a situation she sees as undermining her role as "*you can just call yourself a counsellor'* and this underlined, in her view, the need for registration and regulation.

Despite this, there was consensus, that whilst registration was welcomed and viewed as a positive move forward, its implementation left much to be desired, *"I really like the idea. I don't think the way they've {BACP} done it is particularly good…or…easy, but I think it's basically…a good move…a step in the right direction"* [Eve/614-617]. Eve's concept of registration as somewhat inadequate is reinforced by more specific doubts cast on the process by Lynda:

To be honest………..I'm not sure how I feel about all this….I'm all for accountability, but I'm not sure how I feel about registration, because…um…people still slip through the net…and…I'm still aware of people out there, who aren't working well, but they've not been held to account. I experience a roller-coaster of emotions about this…I'm not sure it's working, but I want it to…I suppose….[Lynda/266-274]

Whilst indicating that she welcomed the accountability attendant within registration and regulation, Lynda used metaphor to express her fluctuation of feelings. This use of metaphor helped Lynda give meaning to her feelings by comparing these metaphorically to something else. Whilst a *'roller-coaster of emotions'* does not actually exist, this expression relayed well Lynda's experience of feeling upbeat and positive about registration and regulation at times, whilst at other times she felt down, as she perceived that these initiatives might prove inadequate due to shortfalls within systems. She went on to indicate that despite her questioning of these developments, she wants these to work, although she weakened this statement, as again her uncertainty surfaced, by ending the sentence with "*I suppose*".

Judith had a slightly different approach, as although she felt that, long-term, registration and regulation will ultimately be positive for the profession, her concerns were in the collateral damage she envisaged as the profession moves towards more professional status:

In many ways...registration and regulation will go a long way to address some issues we've discussed, but you know...these are going to be...long, d-r-a-w-n-o-u-t processes which, in the short term, have the possibility of tearing the profession apart before...becoming the cohesive, professionalising answer we're...so...desperately seeking [Judith/350-357]

This statement brings into awareness a graphic image of demolition *"tearing the profession apart"* and rebuilding *"becoming cohesive, professionalising"*. Participants all expressed the view, as voiced earlier by Judith and here by Sara, that whilst welcoming the future prospect of regulation, this is one of the main issues currently confronting the profession, as due to consequent debates *"...there are big challenges at the moment that are going to get raked over big time as we move towards regulation"* [Sara/134-136]. Sara does not make it clear here, whether she feels that this discourse is a good, or a bad, thing although the concept of something being '*raked over*', rather than debated or deliberated does imply a rather unpleasant, unwelcome experience. Within this, however, all participants were clear that both registration and regulation, although not perfect, are positive steps which will encourage growth. Marian described this feeling aptly, *"...this is a professional thing, a responsible thing we're doing. It's...not just any old thing...so...the move towards registration and regulation is brilliant"* [Marian/611-614]. Here, Marian both welcomed registration and regulation and summed up the uncomfortable feeling expressed by participants that counselling can be viewed, by some, as an unprofessional activity.

This sub-ordinate theme situated registration and regulation as a welcome way to professionalise and ratify counselling, whilst problematising both as difficult in the making and engendering much debate.

Sub-Ordinate Theme: 4.4: Improved information, contact, and communication needed

Each participant spent a significant amount of time during their interview talking about information for the public, information sharing, and contact/communication between stakeholders. These issues cohere within this theme.

There was an overall feeling that counselling in general, and more specifically, the counsellor placement, suffers from the absence of a core identity and there is a common lack of understanding within the general public as to what therapeutic work actually entails. Lucy articulated this, *"Some {clients} don't even know what counselling is...{Tut}"* [Lucy/31]. The expressive end to this sentence demonstrated Lucy's frustration.   Eve captured the feeling

that there is a failure to clearly identify and market the profession of counselling, *"We're just not getting "right" information to "right" people"* [Eve/777-778].

Whilst participants touched on information sharing, contact, and communication between the profession and society, it was mainly the enactment of these concepts within and between placement stakeholders that received most attention. Data explored at length the independent 'parts' associated with counsellor placements and how they inter-related to form a 'whole' assemblage. Sara described how each component works independently and separately, *"We all go our own way….."* yet each depends upon the other, *"….each needs the other to survive"* [Sara/321-323]. Whilst Sara identified independence, yet reliance, Eve described how, in her view, there is confusion, *"No-one really knows…exactly…what the other is doing"* [Eve/500].

This confusion related particularly to the entwined relationship between the placement, training, and supervision, with a concern that each corner of the placement, i.e. the placement itself, the trainee, the training programme, and the supervision process, could all be working well, yet something important could get missed between them, creating a feeling of insecurity. Lynda explained, *"There's just this…feeling…that <u>something</u> could slip through the net…or fall through gaps...but you see...all the time…we're being squeezed through hoops…this one…oh no…that one…so…it all gets very confusing"* [Lynda/909-913]. This participant expressed how she felt through idioms, using three within this short extract, *"slip through the net"*, *"fall through gaps"*, *"squeezed through hoops"*. Lynda's choice of words spoke of literal associations of sliding, being pressed and tumbling, creating an impression of uncertainty and feeling out of control.

Another participant, Lucy, also defined a feeling of regularly working with only partial knowledge, *"I...I...often…feel…there's something…just…beyond my awareness…I should…know about…that…………..worries me..."* [Lucy/265-267]. Lucy seemed weighed down by this concern and her uneasiness was emphasised by momentary hesitations between her first few words that became heavier and more pronounced later in her statement. The vacillation before her final comment, that she finds this concerning, also emphasised her disquiet.

Marian offered a more concrete example of the breakdown of communication alluded to by Lynda and Lucy, *"They thought I was doing it…I thought they were...nobody did it"* [Marian/143]. Marian's statement shows how Lynda and Lucy's concerns of something

important being missed were more than a concern as, for her, this had been a reality; an example of pluralistic ignorance where everyone leaves something to someone else. Marian did not share information about what was left undone, leaving an uneasiness that it could have been something important. Eve, also had an interesting perspective on this, suggesting a reason for the lack of communication, asking, *"When does interest…become interference?"* [Eve/387]. Eve seemed to imply a reluctance to interfere in the work of another placement cohort, as there is no clear distinction between close contact and intrusion. She went on, however, later in her interview, to indicate how placement work is an integrated process:

> *We all care what happens in the other corner…part of the same family…but like families…not always singing from the same hymn-sheet…want the same things, work in tandem…inter-relate…[-]…yet…this doesn't always translate into communication…that's what's needed* [Eve/482-500]

Here, concentric relationships between stakeholders were evidenced as Eve described placements as interconnected activities forming a cyclical process, with each component feeding into the other. Other participants, in their interviews, like Eve, described a helpful community of professionals, defining, as Eve powerfully depicted, a familial experience, where, like all families, interference has positive and negative connotations and where whilst relationships are not always perfect, there is an underlying bond, with evidence of inclusivity, shared goals, and values, yet elements of asymmetry and lack of action.

Judith gave an example of what can go wrong when communication breakdown results in lack of cohesion, *"Trainees are meant to be held by two parents {college/placement} but sometimes one says one thing…one says another"* [Judith/88]. Here, Judith described how a trainee should be receiving consistent support and interestingly again, like Eve, Judith used a family analogy to communicate the strongly supportive environment that should exist, yet exampled how a trainee was left unsupported and uncomfortable, not knowing which 'parent' to 'please'.   In an unrelated incident, Lucy explained how she dealt with a similar situation as that described by Judith: "*Each said different things…placement said do one thing…course another…I went with neither…did what I felt was right…I…was the one in the room with the client*" [Lucy/129]. In this extract, it can be seen how placement experiences and actually working with clients can encourage a growing capacity for independence of action and judgement alongside development of practice. Also evidenced, was how the way a counsellor behaves, what they say or do, or what happens in practice, might not always reflect theoretical learning, or follow placement protocol. Here, a spill-over of values occurred, where, instead of creating cross-fertilisation of ideas, ways of working strained against each other, creating

trainee/organisation/course incompatibility, where Judith worked differently from the expected orientation [intra-sender] and/or there was incompatibility between trainee and placement [inter-sender]. It is also interesting that this participant did not mention supervision as an option at a time of uncertainty within her practice.

It can be seen that the placement is not a stand-alone entity, and again, in considering contact and communication participants considered the sub-systems [parts] that make up training practice [whole] and were keen to see more synergy between trainees, course providers, placement providers, and supervisors. They felt that the total value of the system created from cohesion of the parts was greater than the worth of each individual component. Data evidenced, however, that, *"It's difficult to have a bird's eye view"* [Marian/298] and all expressed concern about the lack of contact and communication using strong language such as *"...Shambolic"* [Lynda/582], *"...Disorganised"* [Eve/151], communicating feelings of confusion as summed up neatly by Sara *"Well...it's a bit of a muddle really, isn't it?* [Sara/1] leading each participant to call for more cohesion and communication.

Within this sub-ordinate theme, participants described a lack of contact, as evidenced by Sara, *"Communication is something of a struggle"* [Sara/54] within connected activities that form a recurrent process, with each component feeding into the other, creating autonomy, yet reliance, as illustrated again through metaphor by Lucy, *"No-one really knows what the other is doing...but when something goes wrong...if one engine stalls...we realise how the other's work impacts us"* [Lucy/20-21], whilst another possible reason for lack of contact is provided by Eve, *"We're too busy fire-fighting in our corner...to take time to <u>really</u> understand what's happening in others"* [Eve/23].

Whilst participants were clear that better communication, with more "*joined-up thinking*" [Lynda/112] and action is needed between stakeholders, there were two discordant views, where some participants, having expressed their concerns about communication, provided insight into initiatives introduced to address these issues. For example, Judith mitigated *"We keep contact...phone/visit placement provider/supervisor regularly"* [Judith/808] and Lucy *"We hold regular meetings"* [Lucy/1010], although the underlying message within this sub-ordinate theme was that participants strongly felt that contact and communication needed to be addressed. Eve summed this up philosophically, *"Someone needs to take a 'stand back' position...take a good look at all this"* [Eve/555-528]*, and later added, "<u>I think</u> this is one of*

the biggest issues [-] I really feel that we just have to get contact/communication right" [Eve/631-632].

There is an interesting change of emphasis in this second statement as Eve switched from a cognitive to a more felt-sense disclosure, evidenced by her cognitive offering when starting this contribution with the strong assertion, "*I think*". This underlined that at this point, she was operating at an intellectual level. Towards the end of this quotation, however, she seemed to get more in touch with her felt-experience, evidenced by adopting a softer tone, yet emphasising the emotion word that now replaced the cognition response of earlier, articulating her words more slowly, and adding 'really', "*I really feel*".

Appendix 37 offers an overview of superordinate themes and the next section discusses some main concepts of this phase of research.

4.28 Discussion and conclusions from IPA study

The aim of this phase of research was to explore the lived experience of placement stakeholders involved with a range of placement activities. Arising from six semi-structured interviews, four master superordinate themes emerged: (i) A complex environment; (ii) Early client-work is impactful and stressful; (iii) Supervision as lynch-pin; (iv) Growth areas for the profession.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) hold semi-structured interviews as the most common and useful method of collecting data within IPA and interviews elicited rich descriptions of the counsellor placement. In line with the ethos of IPA, each participant's account offered meaningful all-round perspectives and an interpretative account of data grounded in participants' descriptive experiences (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). As analysis progressed, concepts of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography, integral to IPA, fused within detailed and vigorous analytical procedures where phenomenology was both interpretative and meaning-making (Finlay, 2011), leading to a bracketing of the researcher's experience and a commitment to exploring perceptions and lived experience. Emerging themes were substantiated by participant quotations.

Working with the hermeneutic circle involved "negotiation of part-whole relationships" (Tomkins and Eatough, 2010, p.244), an activity described well by Robinson and Smith (2010, p.18) who explain this as "looking at the whole through the eyes of the part, and the part through the eyes of the whole". Smith and Osborn (2008, p.53) explain the double

hermeneutic in a way that captured the approach to this research, "[While]...participants are trying to make sense of their world, the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world". This concept was familiar to the researcher as researchers/counsellors access participants/clients' experiences through participant/clients' contributions, which are seen through the researcher/counsellor's own lens, i.e. participant/client meaning-making is 'first order', researcher/counsellor meaning-making is 'second order' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). The idiographic aspect of IPA led to attention to detail and thorough case-by-case analysis.

Findings detailed lived experiences of early counsellor practice and the counsellor placement, and some of the emergent concepts present within literature are now considered in relation to the research question and existing theory, with each master super-ordinate theme addressed in turn.

The first super-ordinate theme addressed the complexity of the placement environment and participants noted how the dual role of the placement as a counselling provider and training establishment can cause difficulties. Dual, or even multiple, relationships are common within counselling and, as recognised by Gabriel (2005) and confirmed by the current research, can be both controversial and complex. Gabriel (2005) also concedes, however, as inferred in the current research, that dual relationships are not always detrimental.

The value of the counsellor placement to both service-users and trainees was confirmed alongside the ability of the placement to offer trainees opportunities to practise developing skills, with real clients, as also reported by Min (2012). For these participants, however, this commendation came with the caveat that the value of the placement is dependent upon good, rather than the sometimes bad, placement experiences evidenced. Furthermore, as Herrick (2007) and Coate (2010) also noted, trainees pursuing sparse placements with an imposed objective of gaining client hours led to trainees foregoing checks on placement standards and appropriateness for their practice and circumstances. This can be problematic given the inequality of practice evidenced where, whereas good placement experiences enhanced training and future practice, bad placements were constructed as detrimental to self-esteem, practice, and career.

Good placements were identified as following BACP guidelines (2010a;2016c), facilitating applied learning, supporting trainees through supervision, training, and expenses, and ensuring that trainees are fully integrated into the organisation. Within this, voluntary

organisations were identified as placements which tend to consistently offer good experiences. Paradoxically, bad placements were described as the direct opposite of good placements and evoked far more comment in that some were depicted as unsafe, with inappropriate consulting rooms, confidentiality breaches, and incompatibility of counselling style/trainee orientation.

There was also concern that some placements mistimed trainees' readiness to practise, a concept explored by Dryden, et al. (1995) who maintain that trainees are not ready to commence placement work until they have a working knowledge of their core theoretical model and understand how this underpins their practice. Interestingly, however whilst participants recognised that misjudging the right time for first client contact can have negative connotations for all involved, they appeared to relate this responsibility to bad placements, although readiness to practise is clearly designated by the BACP as the responsibility of course providers (BACP, 2013a, B6.4, p.2).

As can be seen from this example, this construct of the good or bad placement was not as straightforward as it first seemed, particularly as no participant was convinced that the placement was, overall, either a good or bad experience, with all participants describing events and experiences which were, at the time, constructed as a mixture of experiences, some beneficial and some detrimental to them and/or their practice. Nevertheless, in describing how placements can have a positive or negative impact upon trainees and their professional future, participants defined the importance to training and future practice of having a good placement at the time of early client-work, a finding that concurs with research by Tynjälä (2008) who undertook a thematic review of research on workplace learning and like the current study, found that workplaces differed greatly in their structure and support. Variations within and between placement experiences demonstrated how trainees on placement can experience inequality of standards and practice, with discrepancies in the quality of placements making it difficult to ensure ethical practice and equality of practice opportunities. Cautions expressed over inequality of trainee experience and shortcomings inherent within some placements can be related to findings by Dryden, et al. (1995) whose research led these researchers to emphasise that well-managed, supportive placements are pivotal to trainee development.

It was therefore clear, that trainees who engage within different placement environments can develop in diverse ways depending upon whether placement experiences are good or bad. Other researchers, for example, Grafanaki (2010a,b) have explored how positive and negative aspects of early practice impact upon trainees and this was also an important aspect within research by Tynjälä and Virtanan (2005), where it was evidenced that alongside beneficial learning, trainees can also experience negative learning through witnessing and even engaging in unscrupulous practices.

Non-counselling staff within placements were identified as the first point of client contact. It was therefore suggested, that these personnel need as careful selection as therapeutic staff and should have basic training in counselling skills. Participants also felt that placement managers would benefit from more awareness of counselling processes and intimated that policies/procedures need to be in accord with BACP recommendations (BACP, 2016d), made relevant, visible, live, and not only understood, but applied. One way of achieving this was identified as staff involvement in drafting policies. The inference here is that, as Farson (1966) suggested, "The population that has the problem, possesses the best resources for dealing with it" (cited in Rogers, 1980, p.247).

Good placements integrate trainees into the organisation and treat them with the respect and dignity that should be afforded to all employees (Unison, 2012). Paradoxically, however, two findings were surprising. Firstly, issues of bullying were identified. Although this was somewhat unexpected, reference to bullying within this sector is present within extant literature, with Gebbia, et al. (2012) drawing attention to bullying in volunteer environments and Kierski and Johns-Green (2014) writing about bullying experienced whilst on placement, where the alleged bully was a fellow therapist.

The second unanticipated finding related to issues of racism disclosed by participants. Whilst racism can potentially occur in any situation where human beings come together, counselling values and the ethos of tolerance of difference at the heart of the profession should make this rare within counselling environments. Nonetheless, again evidence of this was found within existing literature, where several writers draw attention to racism including Black and Keys (2014) and Mckenzie-Mavinga (2014), findings that stand in stark contrast to the BACP Ethical Framework, which pledges to strive for higher standards than legal minimums for equality, diversity, and inclusion (BACP, 2016c, Point 23) and strengthen calls from

Lawrence (2016) who maintains that to achieve best practice, training providers should embed anti-discriminatory practice into training programmes.

The second super-ordinate theme addressed the impact and stress of early client-work. The claim by Hill, et al. (2007), that early practice experience appears to lay the foundation for learning and practice for psychotherapists, was confirmed in the current study, as participants all referred to the impact of their early client-work on subsequent practice. Stepped referral processes and robust client assessment were identified as vitally important for trainees, a concept also highlighted as important by Tasker (2010) and concurring with BACP recommendations (BACP, 2016c). These areas were classified as the most problematic of early practice with concern expressed over an uncomfortable dichotomy, where clients are presenting with more complex issues, whilst some placements do not assess client referrals to trainees. Alongside this, the mix of trainees needing practice hours and placements wanting to reduce waiting lists can adversely impact assessment processes.

Several writers provide guidelines for client assessment (Feltham, 2010a; Bager-Charleson and Van Rijn, 2011; Reeves, 2013), however, for these participants, there was a suggestion that assessment of clients for referral to trainees should be conducted by senior, experienced practitioners, a precept which again conforms to BACP guidelines (BACP, 2016c). The current research also recommended stepped referrals to trainees, as whilst recognising that no assessment can be perfect, something was seen to be better than nothing. Data also suggested that, ideally, there should be defined and well-implemented assessment processes, graded referrals, control of the number of clients a trainee sees and careful counsellor/client matching. Literature supports these initiatives, evidencing how these strategies advantage trainees and their clients (Dunkley, 2007; QAA, 2013).

Participants also described how placements can impose differing demands on trainees, as suggested by Oldale and Cooke (2015), evidencing how this can lead to stress and vulnerability. For example, accruing client hours evokes anxiety which is compounded by the way placements vary in their allocation of client hours, so that trainees can experience either client overload or client deficit (Tabaj, et al., 2015), leading participants to suggest that a change of emphasis is needed, from quantity of hours to quality of hours, supporting sentiments expressed by Halifax (2009a).

Starting to see real clients was constructed as a pivotal and stressful part of counsellor training, capturing views expressed by Lent, et al. (2009) who, in similar vein to the current

research, evidenced excessive rumination about session processes, worrying, and nervousness within practitioners.

High stress levels are consistently evidenced within early practice of counsellors (Folkes-Skinner, Elliott and Weaver, 2010) and first client experiences led trainees to question their preparedness for client-work.   It was evidenced that trainees sometimes felt like 'imposters', which can be related to imposter syndrome as recognised by Tosey and Gregory (2002, p.82), since it takes a while for trainees to gain faith in therapeutic processes and develop confidence in themselves within this. This concept also correlates with research undertaken by Turner, et al. (2008, p.176), where a participant raised an earnest question often raised by participants within the current research, "Was I qualified to handle this case?"

This finding is contrary to the train of thought offered by some researchers that counselling skills are easy to learn (Truax, 1971; Nelson-Jones and Toner, 1978; Brewster, 1979; Urbani, et al., 2002; Hill and Lent, 2006; Hilsenroth, et al., 2006; Kivlighan, 2010), yet parallels findings of Turner, et al. (2008), where health trainees were seen to move through cycles of feeling competent, then incompetent, confident, and then doubting.   Subjective evaluation of therapeutic performance as evidenced within the current research was found by Theriault, et al. (2009) to sap confidence, with this practice not restricted to trainees. This also aligned with previous research demonstrating how seasoned practitioners also experience periods of doubt (Orlinsky, et al., 1999a; Wosket, 1999; Theriault and Gazzola, 2005).   Such feelings are constructed as central to developing professional identity and part of the learning process by Theriault, et al. (2009a), as was the case within the current research as many contributions had identity issues threaded through them. Participants often linked issues to their developing professional identity and a shift from an external to an internal locus of evaluation (Rogers, 1980), personal and professional movement were also evidenced by Gibson, et al. (2010). Early client experiences for this cohort also invoked a questioning of personal and professional identity, where learning about self and others raised more questions than answers in the short-term. This strengthens research by Turner, et al. (2008) who found that health trainees' experiences included learning about 'self' with attendant crises of confidence through experiencing the challenges of becoming a therapist. Participants also evidenced how it took time to attain a comfortable joint identity, echoing research by Moss, et al. (2014), who suggest that integration of personal/professional self usually occurs within later career stages.

Participants also identified the importance of a strong identity for the profession. The subject of counsellor professional identity has attracted much attention within literature (Fernando and Minton, 2011; McLeod, 2013a; Fragkiadaki, et al., 2013) and this finding parallels work by many researchers who identify the importance of actively developing a strong counsellor identity (Ponton and Duba, 2009; Kaplan and Gladding, 2011; Reiner, et al., 2013).

Trainee status also added to stress since, as Skovholt and Ronnestad (2003) also identified, uncertainty of early practice leads to anxiety, although the onset of client-work also marked entry to the profession and the start of becoming a competent practitioner. Orlinsky and Rønnestad (2005) therefore recommend that trainees begin work with clients as early as possible in their training. Participants in the current study stressed the importance, yet vagary, of readiness to practise and went further in advocating that it can also be beneficial to start with more than one client, so that there is a control situation should something go wrong. It was also evidenced that counsellor training should include placement and CORE training (CORE, 2012) before placement commences. Furthermore, triad work should address real issues rather than role play, although Smith (2016) found the use of personal material in triads to be impactful.

Several models map the transitional process of trainee growth across developmental stages as evidenced by Stoltenberg and Delworth (1987) and Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003). In the current study, correlations were also made with family constellations, some suggesting alignment with Winnicott's concept of the 'good enough mother' (Winnicott, 1965). In such circumstances, the training provider/placement provider may be experienced as 'good enough' (Winnicott, 1965), or paradoxically, if this role is perceived as parental, mixed messages can emanate from each 'parent' and this can be experienced as loss of attachment (Bruss and Kopala, 1993). A trainee's transition can also be viewed as parallel to some developmental objectives identified for the first year of life (Winnicott, 1965, Erikson, 1959).

Like the current study, many writers draw attention to learning and change as the result of client-work (Rogers, 1961; Yalom, 1991; Miller, 2001; Etherington, 2004; Kottler and Carlson, 2005) and an early study by Norcross and Guy (1989) found that qualified counsellors also gained self-knowledge through working with clients. Findings of the current study also furthered work of researchers who evidence professional development, self-development and enhanced therapeutic presence as the result of training (Pascual-Leone, Wolfe and O'Connor, 2012; Pascual-Leone, Rodriguez-Rubio and Metler, 2013),

strengthened research by Turner, et al. (2008), which found that trainees learn about themselves through client-work, and confirmed findings by Stahl, et al. (2009) where psychologists' learning emanated from direct experience with clients. Also in line with the current study involving counsellors, research by Hill, et al. (2015) found that psychology trainees attributed improvement within therapeutic work to engagement with clients.

The level of support trainees receive was recognised as important and ideas for supporting trainees included access to actual counselling sessions and dedicated placement training. In similar vein to Duryee, et al. (1996), participants in the current research also recognised that trainees can feel inadequate and incompetent if faced with situations where they are unsure how to respond and supervision was identified as particularly helpful when uncertainty led to anxiety. The beneficial impact of trainees having supervision prior to seeing first clients was also emphasised and participants felt that to make the best of placement experiences, practise professionally and keep safe, trainees need additional support in the form of a non-assessing mentor at the time of early client-work. A mentor should be someone who has been through the experience of early practice and knows what early client encounters entail. Similar sentiments can be found within writing by Georgiadou, Willis and Canavan (2015) and Truell (2001), who advocated that the availability of someone familiar with counsellor training, yet non-assessing, can relieve the stress of early practice. In the current research, participants advocated firm differentials between a mentor and a supervisor and considered how a new role of mentor could not only provide additional support, it could also potentially offer another tier of jobs within a profession where employment opportunities are a concern (Halifax, 2009c; Browne, 2012).

The morality of continuing to train new counsellors when there are limited employment opportunities was questioned, in line with the view of Eccles (2008), although it was also evidenced that there are trainees who successfully find paid employment, as noted by Sherborn-Hoare (2015) and Slaney (2015) and usually do so, through professionalism and personal contact. The tension between volunteer/paid work continues to create tension within the profession (Rosenhammer, 2013) and participants constructed the road to employability as economically value-laden, with many qualified and experienced counsellors continuing to offer their services free of charge, because they either cannot secure paid employment or continue to volunteer alongside paid employment (Sudbury, 2014).

For these participants, placements were seen as creating both employment through their infrastructure and unemployment because counselling hours, provided free of charge, impact upon job opportunities. The lack of a clear career pathway can also lead to placement blocking, where some trainees can experience little development, seemingly trapped within an apprentice role. These findings echo similar themes identified by Tynjälä (2008) when researching learning perspectives within the workplace.

Furthermore, it was evidenced that some trainees who stay in their placement do so because they cannot obtain paid employment, whilst others are trapped in an impasse because of the impact on their benefits should they secure paid work.   In these ways, whilst contributing to placement blocking, the placement was described as providing training, increasing self-esteem, and developing a sense of worth. Whilst volunteering can raise self-esteem and self-worth, however, the lack of respect for volunteer counsellors causes frustration and feeling undervalued. Taking this to a more general level, there was a feeling that counselling itself is devalued by the wider system because so much therapy is delivered free of charge as part of the fundamental values of counselling described by Bondi, Fewell and Kirkwood (2003). Furthermore, for this cohort, it was regrettable that the support that free counselling provides to the NHS and communities, is not recognised.

The third super-ordinate theme considered the role of supervision and its identification as a lynch-pin within the training experience, as supervision and supervisors were situated as pivotal to training and central to placement processes, as previously suggested by Wheeler and Richards (2007) and Kivlighan (2010). Consequently, participants felt that counsellor courses should include training on supervision at an early juncture. There was also a feeling that some trainees are not getting enough support from supervisors and a difference between supervisors/supervision for trainees and for experienced counsellors was highlighted, suggesting, that as providing support to new counsellors is an important role of supervision, there should be a stepped approach and designated 'training supervisors'. Findings also support the argument that trainees are often ill-prepared for supervisory processes and can be reticent to disclose in supervision, as expressed by Mehr, et al. (2010;2015).

One of the most important roles of supervision is detecting when things go awry, as the supervisor is usually the first to be aware of a problem because they are usually contacted in times of emergency. Moreover, supervision and supervisors are anchors that stabilise the placement process and play an important role in the formative training assessment of trainees,

although this is also not always recognised. To prevent the loophole of trainees changing supervisors for a better report, a change of supervisor should entail the outgoing supervisor providing reasons for the termination of supervision. As supervision is such an important aspect of placement work and a career-long process, participants felt that supervision should be better regulated and some evidence was found which supported the view of Ladany (2007) and Mehr, et al. (2010) who found that supervisory relationships can be unhelpful and negative.

There was an element of confusion as to where clinical responsibility actually sat at any point in time and in some placements, there appeared to be no accountability. This led participants to suggest a need for greater clarity about who has responsibility for client-work, possibly through shared, multi-faceted contracts, a concept that follows on from work by Dryden, et al. (1995), who advocated that successful placements depend upon the quality of three-way contracts between course, trainee, and placement, also advocated by the BACP (BACP, 2013a). All participants, in different ways, identified with perceived confusion over clinical responsibility and highlighted temporal issues where such joint responsibility inferred that, should clinical responsibility be tested during a crisis, it would be difficult to prove responsibility. This neatly parallels the contention of vagueness regarding this important issue put forward by Izzard (2003), who used metaphor to capture this confusion, asking "Who is holding the baby?"

The final super-ordinate theme considered growth areas for the profession generated by placement experiences. Firstly, enhanced awareness and personal development were recognised as key for personal and professional growth. As part of this, participants showed a clear preference for views also expressed in research by Grimmer and Tribe (2001), Murphy (2005), and von Haenisch (2011), that personal therapy is a positive experience for trainees and enhances the learning process. Participants in the current study also felt that personal therapy should be undertaken early within counsellor training for greatest impact. Furthermore, for this cohort, it was clear that the profession needs to work at relational depth and counsellors therefore need to have experienced personal therapy. The current research does, however, contradict the views of others, less enthusiastic about personal therapy's place within counsellor training, like Chaturvedi (2013), who constructs a different view of personal therapy during training. Furthermore, whilst there was some evidence within current data, as also found in research by Holland (2011), that mandatory therapy differs from therapy by

choice, it was evidenced, that whilst some trainees are reluctant to engage with therapy and this makes counselling these trainees difficult, those who do engage, despite finding it difficult at first, can benefit from the process.

Suggestions were made for organisational and professional development, with counsellor training constructed as different from other educational courses. Participants explained how training counsellors is becoming more difficult, more academic, with constant changes impacting trainee progression. Two ways of improving counsellor training were offered. Firstly, a more uniform core structure and secondly, a different, less academic, yet not easier, training route.

Counselling was seen to have a negative image, which holds the profession back and needs to change, sentiments which concur with a call for counselling to be seen, heard, and respected (Jackson, 2016). Counselling in general, and specifically the counsellor placement, suffer from weak core identities and there is a lack of understanding as to what therapy entails. Suggestions to address the image of counselling included greater emphasis on wellbeing and the promotion of a stronger value system within the profession. An element that does not appear to have been addressed by previous researchers, however, is the proposal that placements should be standardised and monitored through a placement registration process, with placement work and practice experience more integrated into course structures. Whilst the placement is not without its problems, it is almost taken-for-granted in fulfilling practice needs, although consideration of a different way to facilitate practice through a placement offered alongside a counselling course was seen, theoretically, as a good idea, yet difficult to implement. A connection is made here with findings by Tynjälä (2008), who also researched different models of workplace learning and offered similar views regarding the creation of partnerships between education and work experience.

Registration and regulation are construed as positive mechanisms for the recognition and growth of counselling as a profession. These participants felt, however, that the implementation of registration has left much to be desired and although future regulation is welcomed by the profession, challenges are surfacing in the interim period as issues are debated. Improved information, contact, and communication were also identified as potent growth areas as participants evidenced a mix of separatism, yet dependency, within placement stakeholders, which sometimes led to confusion, insecurity, and issues overlooked. These findings confirm complicated communication systems identified by Baird (2004) possibly due

to Eve's comment about the *"fine line between interest and interference"* [Eve/387]. Many participants also advocated that placements should have full information on counselling courses to avoid stakeholders feeling "*wobbly*" (Lucy/153), a finding which strengthens work by Izzard (2003).

4.28.1 Limitations of the study

Although perspectives were sought from participants from a range of areas and experiences, it was not possible to determine how many trainees were approached or the response rate, as research information was circulated by gatekeepers through existing databases of local counsellor courses and placements. Furthermore, if participants had been invited to complete a demographic section, important information regarding participant demographics would have been available. Not providing specific and substantive information about participants is more in line with nomothetic concepts than IPA's ideographic principles (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) and more rigorous homogeneity in selecting participants for the re-analysis could have been achieved, had this information been available. Furthermore, as this was an exclusively female sample, it was also impossible to identify gender differences in placement experiences. Additionally, choosing interviews for re-analysis could potentially have been subject to selection bias as there could have been an element of researcher's predisposition in their selection.

Participants all indicated that they were very involved and interested with the concept of the counselling placement. A different cohort of participants, who were less interested/involved could therefore offer different or conflicting views. Furthermore, for these participants to have experienced this variety of placement experiences, their time as a trainee was obviously not experience near and although this was mitigated in some ways by the fact that all were currently closely involved with trainee journeys through the placement, this could indicate that trainees were under-represented within this study.

As is the case in all research, the composition and content of interview questions impacted upon data collection and for these participants, contributions may have been limited as the prescriptive interview schedule may have unintentionally impeded the emergence of some spontaneous and/or important matters.

Another area where reflection revealed how the interview process could have been improved relates to participant disclosures of bullying and racism.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) maintain that for IPA to be exemplary, detailed and sustained attention needs to be paid to phenomenology and lived experience from the very start. Moreover, such attention needs to be unfailingly maintained throughout the research process. It became clear, however, from reviewing data that phenomenology and lived experience were not always at the forefront of the interview process. For instance, reflection revealed how, in disclosing bullying and racist activity, participants were clearly relating to how experience became *an* experience, or as Husserl describes, "the thing itself" (Husserl, 1982, p.76). Reflexivity exposed how, whilst participants were given time to take these statements further, a simple reflection, or question, such as "How did you feel when that happened", or, "Can you tell me more about that?" would have facilitated thicker data and allowed these experiences to have been explored in greater depth. IPA's theoretical underpinnings include symbolic-interactionism (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), where the meanings participants attribute to events are obtained through a process of interpretation and social interactions. Despite this, since these comments were left to stand on their own, participants' meaning-making processes, and the implications they ascribed to these incidents, remain not fully understood. Consequently, discriminatory behaviours are merely noted as events of concern, as experience can only be truly accessible through an interpretative process (Biggerstaff and Thompson, 2008), which, unfortunately, was not fully engaged during parts of these interviews.

A further example where "going deeper" (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.68) could have produced interesting and more in-depth data can be identified by considering participants' offerings regarding identity. Identity issues are often a strong theme within IPA research and had the researcher made a conscious effort to further address issues of 'self', rather than just accepting statements which, at face value seemed easily understandable, less apparent meanings might have been exposed. This could have led to greater interpretation of thoughts/feelings, and facilitated recognition of the strange within the familiar, as interviewees talked of counsellor placement experiences (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

The final limitation relates to a form of member-checking originally considered to be a way to add to the trustworthiness of the research. Member-checking, however, is inconsistent with IPA due to several contraindications. Firstly, IPA owns the analyst's perspective which cuts across member-checking processes. Secondly, a participant could expect to see their own story strongly reported and reflected upon, whereas themes present an overview. A participant may also feel uncomfortable in contradicting or questioning a researcher's interpretations. Thirdly,

temporal differences can be problematic as the researcher had remained focussed on that point in time, and that text, whereas the participant's life would have moved on beyond the time and context of the interview. Moreover, a participant may not fully understand interpretations made by the researcher or could possibly even have changed their mind about an issue during the intervening period between interview and member-checking (Angen, 2000). Lastly, and most importantly, member-checking tends to rely on the positivist hypothesis that there is just one fixed truth, rather than a particular interpretation being just one of many possibilities, a concept contrary to IPA's ontological and epistemological principles (Angen, 2000; Larkin, 2015).

4.28.2 Recommendations for future research

This was a complex research project which offers breadth of coverage along with depth of engagement, as it was important for early research to take into account the whole placement practice environment. More specific and narrow research is now necessary, however, as whilst this review of all stakeholders has been a valuable study from which to contextualise the placement, in line with Wolcott's "Unit of One", Wollcott (1999, p.68), future research could concentrate on one trainee, one course provider, etc., providing an in-depth view of each perspective.

4.29 Summary

This chapter presented Study One, which identified the characteristics and experiences of counsellor stakeholders. Chapter Five addresses Study Two, which explored how staff and trainees described the experience of offering a placement alongside a counselling course.

4.30 Researcher's reflections

My reflections on this study started with consideration of the qualitative content analysis.

Questionnaire circulation covered a wide geographical area, drawing upon differing philosophies and diverse counsellor training and placement circumstances, and this variety of locations and backgrounds generated a broad spectrum of experience, diversity, and a mass of data. Initially overwhelmed by the amount of data and the challenge of an unfamiliar research method, my view of content analysis as a simple and easy method was initially tested, as at

first, as Glaser (1978) warned, unforeseen difficulties arose during the analytic process, as the quantity of data was overpowering, and confusing. Nevertheless, questionnaires had previously been subjected to IPA and working through the QCA quickly confirmed the inappropriateness of IPA in these circumstances, as the high degree of structure within the questionnaires was not conducive to exploring lived experience. I then appreciated the systematic procedures of QCA, particularly liking the common-sense approach of using a mixed strategy in creating the coding frame where questions asked about the placement formed concept-driven dimensions, and questionnaire answers were summarised to create data-driven subcategories.

Furthermore, whilst alert to the fact that qualitative researchers are increasingly employing computer software to support their analysis, and aware that programs are available to make content analysis more manageable and ordered (Gerbic and Stacey, 2005), I decided to conduct the analysis manually, and whilst this proved to be time-consuming, with the accuracy and transparency of this analysis achieved at the expense of much time and effort, it was also a satisfying and rewarding experience. Nonetheless, electronic analysis of data would certainly have been less time-consuming and may have facilitated higher levels of analysis. I wanted to stay in touch with data, however, and understood that whilst computer programmes could help, they could not do the analysis for me.

Beyond this, my personal experience in relation to the QCA is relevant in contextualising this study within this research, and in relation to me as the researcher. My first association with QCA was in 2014, when I was asked to analysis the questionnaire data within this study via QCA. In considering a framework to guide this QCA analysis, it became clear, as confirmed later by Drisko and Maschi (2016), and Graneheim et al. (2017), that there are methodical challenges involved in QCA, with clear contradictions within the literature over what QCA actually is, and how it should be conducted. Despite this, I found comfort in the fact that several writers relate QCA to constructionism, for example, Mayring (2014), and in particular, Schreier (Schreier, 2012; Drisko and Maschi, 2016). This phase of research was therefore approached in accordance with Schreier's version of QCA (Schreier, 2012), whilst mindful, and somewhat disconcerted, that like many writers who address this research approach, this author does not address ethical aspects of QCA.

Through my reflexive processes at the end of this research, I now appreciate that, had I been more confident in myself as a researcher, I would have realised that this approach was

incongruent with my approach to research, and, in some ways, not "best fit" (Egan, 2015) with the general research aim.

Reflexivity helped me understand why learning about this research approach was a time of confusion and reflection. For instance, I was aware of how my knowledge and experience of the placement would, as a coder, have a significant impact on research findings, and conscious that objectivity and reliability play a more prominent role in QCA than within other qualitative approaches. Therefore, whilst noting various opinions about seeking agreement between coders (Graneheim and Lundman 2004), and recognising, that as each researcher will interpret data according to their subjective perspective, any two researchers could arrive at alternative interpretations (Sandelowski 1995), the analysis on various sections of the material undertaken by one of my supervisors and another researcher was nonetheless important in checking selected data samples (Conger, 1998). I felt that this endorsed coding procedures, confirmed that findings could be linked back to raw data, and indicated that my interpretation was shared with others knowledgeable in the field; findings were not just my understanding. This re-assuring confirmation of data procedures also impacted me in another way, however, as it gave rise to reflection on the existence of knowledge[s], and my paradigmatic worldview. I recognised how uncomfortable I felt with some of the more pragmatic stages of this phase of research, and realised that, had I been less defensive about my analytical ability at this point in my research, I would have had more confidence in truly approaching this phase in a more interpretative way.

It was therefore clear that this aspect of research, and more importantly, the feelings this engendered, needed in-depth reflection, and I used a reflective cycle (Gibbs, 1988) to start this process. Reflexivity revealed how attempting to map my qualitative paradigm to Schreier's QCA (Schreier, 2012) presented methodological and personal questioning. I reflected upon my struggle to align issues such as double-coding, and the positivist language of face validity, variables/values, saturation, and validity, designated as part of QCA by Schreier (2012), with my relativist paradigm. There was a clash between these concepts, and my tendency to expect, and welcome, that researchers make sense of data through their own prism of culture and experience, and can therefore differ in their interpretation.

I initially addressed this by interpreting concepts of validity and reliability, which conflicted with my less definitive concepts of credibility and trustworthiness, as a need to provide a

transparent trail throughout the research, enabling the reader to discern a cohesive thread throughout the entire work (Graneheim, et al., 2017).

Nonetheless, alongside my discomfort with such positive terms, I could not ignore the incongruence of my feelings of resistance, yet strong need for confirmation of my analysis. I reflected how this led to a blinkered mission to evaluate this phase of research, since, to confirm this study and my findings, I incorporated two evaluation procedures. Initially, I adopted one of the first evaluative criteria for qualitative research offered by Lincoln and Guba (1985), as this framework was identified by Elo (2014) as the most common way to evaluate QCA. Through this process, I checked for authenticity, credibility, conformability, dependency, and transferability, yet still found myself in need of more confirmation. I therefore went further and checked this research against a checklist compiled by Elo et al., (2014) for the use of researchers in attempting to improve the trustworthiness of a content analysis. I now understand that I was experiencing 'stuckness'; I was working hard, yet getting nowhere. The point where I regained my qualitative sensibility (Braun and Clarke, 2013), and was again able to acknowledge, and hold, uncertainty, came whilst on holiday and taking a break from my research. During this time, I experienced a similar experience to one described by Turner et al., (2008), where, as also described by Moustakas (1990), when my research was not consciously in focus, unconscious processing [incubation] took place, and spontaneous insight occurred, where new and old knowledge joined to cement understanding. Through removing the pressure of research, I began to understand how my persistent need to confirm this analysis stemmed from my defensive stance in relation to this research at the time [2014]. I recognised and understood how this evoked a yearning within me to retreat to my comfort zone (Riley and Solic, 2017). Carnall (1995) supports this theory by establishing a correlation between how one feels about oneself, their self-esteem, and their ability. Carnall, like Yerkes (1907) and Yerkes and Dodson (1908), established that ability and decision-making processes increase with stress up to a certain point [optimal performance zone]. After this, as stress continues to increase, so ability, and levels of functioning, start to fall to ultimately reach a level that causes deterioration [danger zone] and 'stuckness'.

Through my counsellor training, I had come out of my comfort zone and was in the learning zone, as reflected upon in previous chapters. Although sometimes a little uncomfortable with this newly experienced uncertainty, yet excited by it, I was open to new learning and experience. Through this PhD research process, however, I had ventured further out of my comfort zone, spent a period of time in the learning zone, but had, at this time, moved into the

danger zone. My defence mechanisms were therefore coaxing me back to my comfort zone by the unconscious lure of the certainty I had experienced during a particular axis of my life. I therefore longed for a time where I was in control, languishing in my comfort zone, confident in myself and my work, as neither were threatened.   I reflected that prior to my counsellor training, I was working in a financial role, and I realised why I now found myself longing for certainty. Figures are right or wrong, and in this previous life, I was confident that my trial balances, audits, accounts, and projections were correct, and importantly, I could prove their soundness. As Atherton and Kyle (2015) suggest, retreating into my comfort zone was what I needed at that time, and was what I was unconsciously striving to re-create.   This led to my over-emphasis on the need for other coders to agree with my coding and fed the constant need to validate this phase of research – as opposed to my normal stance of seeing differing views as healthy, and engendering constructive debate. Whilst there has been much criticism of the theory of comfort zones and the Yerkes-Dodson law (Brown, 1965; Landers, 1980; Banich, Stokes and Elledge, 1987; Neiss, 1988; Stokes and Kite, 1994), this helped me make meaning of my discomfort with this phase of the current research.

I recognise now that researchers' struggles with the process and trustworthiness of QCA have been noted consistently in literature (de Casterlé, et al., 2012; Elo, et al, 2014; Drisko and Maschi, 2016; Graneheim, et al., 2017) and for me, this experience will be remembered as productive discomfort which led to enhanced understanding of my responsiveness, how I react to perceived threats to self, and eventual confirmation of my ontological and epistemological stance. This led to personal and professional development, which manifested in confidence in myself as an independent researcher, and my more interpretative approach to the following phases of research. This process also enhanced my therapeutic and teaching work through greater awareness of the complexity of transitions when students, clients, and research participants venture out of their comfort zones.

From this more confident position, I acknowledge that whilst it is little wonder that this is the least interpretative phase of my research, it resulted in three important outcomes. Firstly, valuable information about the counsellor placement has been presented. Secondly, the importance of researcher reflexivity has been demonstrated. Thirdly, the need for more focused discussion about the conduct, quality, and ethical issues in relation to QCA, as also noted by Elo, et al. (2014) and Drisko and Maschi (2016), is re-enforced.

Upon reflection, it was also recognised that whilst no ethical issues arose at the time, there was an oversight within the research process in that participants were not specifically advised of issues that could arise as the result of transmitting raw data via email. This occurred as participants gave their consent for data to be collected and stored electronically and it was considered, at the time, that data security arrangements were proportionate to the nature of data, the participant profile, and the risks involved. In hindsight, however, there should have been a clause added to information/consent forms detailing issues that can arise when using email for research purposes, with more attention given to alerting respondents to the possible risks and greater emphasis placed on how the Internet provides a context in which people are often more inclined to be freer in their presentation of self.

More information should also have been provided about how personal information would be stored and protected. There would then have been more certainty that respondents understood that data sent by email is less transient than other contexts, as data becomes semi-permanent, or permanent, when stored via email on host servers. Had the advice provided by academics (Bruckman, 2002; IRB, Advisor, 2010a,b; Hedrick, 2014) been followed, arrangements could also have been made for the consent form to be signed and returned separately via the postal system. Furthermore, limitations of guaranteeing anonymity/confidentiality within online transmissions should have been more fully covered in that anonymity/confidentiality can only be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used; no guarantee could be given regarding the interception of data by any third party, as information was transmitted via the Internet. These steps would have ensured that respondents, who gave their consent, were more fully informed.

Turning to the IPA, many aspects of this study induced in-depth reflection. Not least of these were aspects of data collection. Firstly, I could have thought more pragmatically in terms of homogeneity prior to recruiting participants. Furthermore, in reflecting upon interview topics, I can identify, that in pursuit of answering my research question, my interview topics were too explicit. During interviews, however, these became less directive, as the interview schedules had been useful not only in informing participants of areas of interest, they also helped them reflect upon these topics and formulate their contributions.

Resultantly, participants brought their perceptions into discussions and the interview technique had to be flexible to allow them to expand upon these. One area where the explicitness of the interview topics is manifested throughout analysis, however, is how all

participants talked of both good and bad placement experiences and were unable to articulate whether overall, placements were either good, or bad. I relate this to the fact that the interview topics included two questions around this topic: "Tell me about a good placement experience" and "Tell me about a bad placement experience", which immediately set the tone before participants arrived for interview that the placement consists of good and bad entities.

Furthermore, as the interviewing strategy encouraged interviewees to speak about the counsellor placement with as little prompting from me as possible, and as these participants were all involved on a day-to-day basis with placement activities, and had reflected upon these prior to interview, very little encouragement was needed after inviting each participant to tell me about their experiences. Nonetheless, it is clear within analysis, that this did not overcome the impact that the directedness this part of the interview schedule had on deliberations.

My flexibility around interview schedules is also evidenced within participant quotations. This strategy led, however, to the collection of extensive data and upon reflection I wonder whether my questions were too broad and also whether IPA was indeed the best approach for this study, as whilst the number of interviews was reduced considerably for re-analysis, I now better understand the trend for IPA studies to be conducted with a small number of participants, as my experience evidenced how a commitment to a detailed interpretative account of each interview can only realistically be achieved with a very small sample. Consequently, I am left feeling that even working with only six interviews, in some parts of the analysis, greater depth was sacrificed for breadth as, when working on particularly rich interview transcripts, I sometimes struggled to give each case due justice, as I had so much data to represent. Accordingly, I feel that the number of interviews could have been reduced even further and question whether Thematic Analysis would have been more appropriate to analyse this type and volume of data.

Furthermore, if had I picked up on the generic, rather than role specific, context inherent within interviews earlier, remaining interviews could have been framed differently and may have generated richer data. This is particularly evidenced, as, whilst personal and detailed accounts were presented, participants sometimes lapsed into an impersonal and generic style. This was difficult to analysis phenomenologically and a sensitive reminder when this occurred during interviews might have kept participants focused on their lived experiences. This again raised the question whether Thematic Analysis would have been a better choice for

the analysis of this data, although, despite this, I feel I got as close to my participants' lived experience as data allowed.

Reflection also addressed the debriefing of participants, since, as a researcher within the counselling field I warmed to this process, as it mirrors the care and reflective stance of my therapeutic background. This resulted in a keenness to ensure that the debriefing process was sensitive and allowed ample time for each participant to ask questions.

Whilst Smith and Osborn maintain that "there is no single way to do IPA" (Smith and Osborn, 2008, p.54), I followed steps suggested by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009). There was a requirement for me to bracket my experience, however, how to bracket my preconceptions and whether this was even possible (van Manen, 1990), was debated at length within my reflective journal (Finlay, 2008; Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). As part of these reflections, tensions between description and interpretation and determining where epoché sat within these, were prime considerations (Finlay, 2008). From these deliberations, an approach to bracketing evolved where I viewed this concept as not contradictory, nor in direct conflict with the notion of interpretation (Biggerstaff and Thompson, 2008), identifying this instead, as a cyclical process (Smith Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

This process of bracketing was not an unusual experience for me as I linked this to counselling concepts of listening at relational depth (Cooper, 2010) and approached this process as an extension of self-awareness (Lee and Prior, 2013). Connecting the concept of bracketing to reflective practice in this way (Finlay and Gough, 2003), normalised this process as akin to my therapeutic work where, in trying to meet clients without bias and aspiring to understand them on their own terms, I regularly need to bracket my personal experiences as much as possible to be truly 'with' my client and become more creative. I therefore knew how such suspension of my understanding often promoted curiosity (LeVasseur, 2003). These experiences had led me to understand that the more I 'attended' to another [client/participant], the more my own perceptions faded into the background and the views of the other took centre stage.

Accordingly, for me, bracketing was as an ongoing process, where a temporary suspension of presuppositions and assumptive judgements allowed me to initially focus on what each participant was presenting. This translated into a transcendental process, where I felt as if I was almost seeing the concept of the placement as if for the first time (Creswell, 2007) as I

245

tried to make sense of a participant's point of view and meaning-making. In noticing a participant's experience, I was also able to bring in my own inquisitive reflection. Within this process, I was conscious of the need to remain aware of what was the participant's contribution, whilst making constructive use of what belonged to me. The impact of these issues on the research process and on me meant that like Rogers' core-conditions (Rogers 1980) bracketing was always aspired to, although it was recognised that this could only ever be partially achieved.

I started this process of bracketing by noticing, recording, and reflecting upon my assumptions and pre-conceptions, then attempting to bracket these before engagement with participants. Following each interview, I then re-connected with my own assumptions, experience, and knowledge, in adopting an interpretative stance to analysis. I was therefore involved in a process of constant self-monitoring and reflection, asking myself, for example, (i) "Why does this particular part demand so much attention, yet other parts seem insignificant?" (ii) "What does it mean to experience this? (iii) "How does this participant make sense of this experience?" In this way, as client/counsellor, or participant/researcher, meaning is co-constructed.

My approach to this research came together for me firstly in recalling how Finlay supports my view that there is an element of phenomenological research in all counselling interactions. She coined the phrase "reflective enquiry" (Finlay, 2011, Kindle Location:6:254) for a process I have experienced often, whereby as a client tells their story, I listen, noting not only what is being said, but searching for underlying meaning, phenomenologically noting things not being said and checking both my client's and my own understanding of the client's experiencing, a process mirrored within research processes.

Secondly, I found parity with words from Smith (2007, p.6) who summed up well my processing as I embarked upon this phase of research, with my journal recording how I was starting the pre-research period confident in my knowledge and expertise, or, as Smith eloquently describes:

> "....I start where I am at one point on the circle, caught up in my
> concerns, influenced by my pre-conceptions, shaped by my experience
> and expertise...."

As I started my reflective journal, entries show how I was acknowledging, understanding, and both questioning and positioning my predispositions, as:

> "....In moving from this position, I attempt to either break, or at least acknowledge my preconceptions, before I go round to an encounter with a research participant at the other side of the circle...."

As the active part of research began:

> "....Whatever my previous concerns or position, I [will] have moved from a point where *I* am the focus to one where the *participant* is the focus as I attend closely to the participant's story....."

Following the active part of research, another segment of the circle was completed as:

> "....Having concluded the conversation I [will] continue the journey round the circle, back to where I started....I .....[will] analyse collected material from the perspective I started from, influenced by my prior conceptions and experience"

I will re-engage with my perceptions and knowledge to analyse the data. I will, however, be:

> ".....irretrievably changed because of the encounter with the new, my participant and her/his account".

Smith's observations resonated particularly strongly with me during the interview stage of this research as I started my journey around the hermeneutic circle and began to interview stakeholders about their perceptions of the counsellor placement, as I was alert to how these aspects came together and aware of the need to heed the warning that research totally removed from my personal experience could become "dry and lacking in motivation and sparkle" (McLeod, 2003, p.25). Throughout this research, I therefore engaged in a Gadamerian dialogue (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) between my own preconceptions and my fresh understandings of my participants' lifeworld.

Chapter Five

Study Two: Future possibilities:

A thematic analysis of participants' experiences of a placement offered

alongside a university counselling course

5.1 Introduction, background and contextualisation of study

This chapter presents Study Two which considered a developing training and practice alignment, where universities offer counsellor trainees a placement alongside their course.

The main literature review acknowledged problems associated with the outsourcing of the practice element of counsellor training, identifying how anecdotal evidence suggests that placements can (i) be difficult to secure, (ii) offer unequal practice experience, (iii) facilitate mainly specific, rather than generic, presenting issues, and (iv) experience communication difficulties. Perry (2013b) drew attention to how difficult it is to secure a counsellor placement, recounting counsellor placement interviews charged with challenge, criticism, and fierce competition for places and Reeves (2013) confirmed this as a long-standing issue, when he described problems he faced securing a counsellor placement in the mid 1980's. Halifax confirmed that little had changed by 2009, equating finding a placement to feelings of "blind panic" (Halifax, 2009a, p.9) and whilst similar situations are experienced within various sectors of health care professions (Kubiak, Rogers and Turner, 2010), difficulties in relation to counsellor placements are regularly voiced within Therapy Today (Halifax, 2009b; Hunter, 2010; Vermes, 2014).

The inequality of counsellor placements is highlighted by Oldale and Cooke (2015) when they point out that placements are diverse entities, with many conflicting factors which can influence their operation, observations which confirm research undertaken by Izzard (2003), who found some placements to be inappropriate. The disparity among placements is also inherent in the writing of Bayne and Jinks (2010) who provide trainees with a checklist to consider before engaging with a placement and suggest that trainees ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place before any firm commitment is made.

Izzard (2003) also identified the need to ensure the suitability of clients and appropriateness of trainees' caseloads and drew attention to a situation also evidenced within South West Wales, where most organisations are symptom-specific and are therefore assumed not to offer generic placement experience (SCVS, 2015), thus making it difficult for trainees to experience the variety of presenting issues and diverse clients essential for balanced learning (Izzard, 2003).

The importance of good communication between training course and placement is also emphasised by Izzard (2003) and Baird (2004) who contend that with the best intentions, contact and communication between educational/placement systems can be inconsistent and

complicated. Fanthome (2004) also offers compelling illustrations of how long-term collaboration between placements and education establishments could produce greater understanding within each about the philosophy of, and what is required by, the other.

5.2 Rationale

In response to the foregoing and other procedural issues, research has taken place into the provision of work experience and practice experience for various learners within the field of health and social care, including a seminal study by Koskinen and Äijö (2013).

When looking specifically at literature on counsellor placements, however, little research addresses different ways of providing early practice, even though some universities offer trainees a counselling placement alongside their counselling course. Whilst such initiatives may have the potential to address difficulties in outsourcing placements, a lack of defined constructs to describe and conceptualize this activity was evidenced within literature.

This omission is important since, as recognized by Orlinsky and Ronnestad (2005) and the BACP (2013a), direct contact with clients is an important factor in therapist development. Consequently, organisationally robust placements are vital for appropriate trainee experiences and the provision of a level of support appropriate for the complexity of placement client-work (Dryden, et al., 1995).

Accordingly, a question was posed, "How do staff and students describe their experience of a placement parallel to a counsellor course?

Phase One: Report on a qualitative questionnaire for course providers offering a counsellor placement

5.3 Introduction

Phase One considered a learning/practice alignment in other areas, where a counsellor placement is offered alongside a university course.

5.4 Report on recruitment and responses

The criteria for taking part in this phase of research stipulated that respondents be university staff, instrumental in organising and delivering a counsellor placement linked to a university counsellor training course. Five universities, who had publicly launched their counselling

placements, were identified and relevant staff who met these criteria were contacted via email. The email explained that due to the wide geographical area covered, participation would involve completing a qualitative questionnaire and an option to engage in subsequent email interactions.

The researcher designed a questionnaire to elicit information regarding in-house counsellor placements [Appendix 38] and this, plus documentation in line with that described for Study One, Phase One [Appendix 2/3/8], made up the research pack circulated to the five potential respondents.

Despite this active research strategy, however, no completed questionnaires were returned. A shorter questionnaire [Appendix 39] was circulated and resultantly one university indicated that their placement facility had closed. Only one other response was received and as this generated only thin data (Braun and Clarke, 2013), this phase of research could not be progressed. It is reported here to provide thematic unity before moving on to Phase Two of this study.

Phase Two: A thematic analysis of focus group data

5.5 Study aim and research question

Phase Two explored the perceptions of staff and trainees of a placement offered alongside a local university counselling course.

Accordingly, a practice placement was established to assist Post Graduate MA/Diploma counselling trainees in accruing 150 hours of counselling practice [since reduced to 100] (BACP, 2013a; Oldale and Cooke, 2015), whilst providing free therapy within the area surrounding the university campus. The university was situated within one of the most socially and economically deprived areas within the UK (Griffiths, 2010; UWTSD, 2015) and through this creation of a University Community Counselling Centre [Placement] the needs of counsellor trainees who required an opportunity to practise and members of a needy community, who sought access to free counselling, were integrated and addressed.

The aim of this phase of research was, therefore, to explore the experiences of trainees and staff within this university counsellor placement by addressing the question for Study

Two, "How do staff and students describe their experience of a placement parallel to a counsellor course?"

5.6 Research design

The research design is described within Chapter Three. In accordance with this outline, this phase of research was a Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013) of focus group data.

5.7 Target population

Eligible participants were identified as the eleven staff/trainees involved with organisation and service-delivery at the placement. There were two parts to this study, with two distinct groups targeted. The first focus group sought information from trainees volunteering within the placement and the second focus group consisted of university academic staff also working and volunteering at the placement.

5.8 Recruitment processes and development of materials

All staff and trainees working at the Community Counselling Centre were sent a research pack providing information regarding the research, consisting of: A covering letter [Appendix 40]; an information sheet [Appendix 41]; A consent form [Appendix 42]; A focus group schedule with discussion topics [Appendix 43] and a debriefing form [Appendix 44].

The research pack introduced the research and made all conditions and implications of the research clear, as evidenced within Appendices 40-44.

5.9 Ethical considerations

Focus groups give rise to particular ethical issues, yet in line with advice from Boateng (2012), were appropriate for this research, as the topics under discussion had few personal implications for participants. Nevertheless, in understanding the rich potential of focus groups, cognisance was also given to tensions that can arise within this type of research and necessitate careful consideration of ethical issues (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2014).

To ensure procedures and study content met ethical standards, a detailed proposal was reviewed and approved by the then Swansea Metropolitan University [now UWTSD] School of Psychology and Counselling Ethics Committee.

Two specific ethical issues arose during this phase of research in relation to the constitution of the focus groups. The first arose, as the original intention was to hold just one focus group. At the time of submission for ethical approval, however, the trainee counsellors were enrolled as students, although the teaching component of their course had concluded. Resultantly, following recommendations by the Ethics Committee, two focus groups were held to avoid ethical issues identified in staff/trainees participating in shared focus group discussions.

The second ethical issue arose as the Focus Group Moderator/Researcher was a member of staff within the university [although had no teaching/supervisory responsibilities with the trainees]. There was, therefore, an ethical responsibility to recognise and manage dual relationships which made moderation of the focus groups potentially more complex than if the focus groups consisted of strangers (Clarke, Kitzinger and Potter, 2004). This awareness served as a background to focus group discussions.

5.10 Pilot study

Documentation and focus groups were piloted by a trial group, which consisted of staff [1] and ex-students [3] involved with the placement, so familiar with the topics to be discussed, yet not directly involved with the research. This trial consolidated discussion points, clarified the structure, format, and timing of the focus group schedule and confirmed the allocated room and apparatus as fit for purpose. Recording equipment was tested to ensure it was capable of recording a variety of voices within the acoustics of the room, so that a seating plan could be devised to facilitate good sound quality and aid transcription.

The pilot study led to one minor change to the discussion topics [Appendix 43], as Question Two was originally "Where to from here?" and as pilot participants felt this was vague, this was changed to a more specific question, "What are our future challenges?" The experience of the pilot focus group also made the researcher more aware of the interaction and inter-subjectivity between focus group members through the concept of 'positionality' (De Monticelli, 2007) and the role played by the moderator in any researcher-led group discussion also became more apparent. No data emanating from the pilot study were used for analysis.

5.11   Participants

In accordance with the recommendation of the Ethics Committee, the seven responses from the target population were divided into trainee counsellors [Focus Group One] and staff [Focus Group Two], with homogeneity obtained through a shared experience of counsellor training and working together in the placement, as follows:

1. ***Focus Group One***: Participants in Focus Group One were four trainee counsellors, known to each other, as they had worked as volunteer counsellors at the placement for over two years. They had recently accrued the practice hours [100] necessary for a Post Graduate Diploma in Counselling Practice [Level Seven] and were therefore just about to qualify. Participants, three females and one male, ranged in age from 30–50. Their counselling theoretical orientations varied, although their recently completed Diploma was humanistic in nature. All participants were student members of the BACP and committed to the Ethical Framework of the organisation (BACP, 2010a;2016c).

2. ***Focus Group Two:*** Focus Group Two consisted of three University lecturers in counselling studies/practice. They were involved with the development, management, and day-to-day running of the placement and offered their services during working hours and beyond as volunteer counsellors. Participants ranged in age from 40-56, were all female, and their counselling theoretical orientation and training modalities varied. All were known to each other and all were experienced, practicing, counsellors and counselling tutors. One participant was a BACP accredited counsellor whilst the other two participants were working towards accreditation status.

5.12   Data collection

The Focus Groups took place on the university campus. The trainee Focus Group was held in a consulting room and the Staff Focus Group took place in a meeting room.

The focus groups were moderated by the researcher and the research pack was revisited verbally at the beginning of recorded groups. No objections to recording were raised and the

researcher re-emphasised informed consent, reminding participants of the consent forms they had signed and steps taken to ensure anonymity.

<u>5.12.1 Conduct of focus groups</u>

Discussion followed the semi-structured topic guide [Appendix 43], based upon the literature review and identified gaps in literature. This facilitated fluid, yet guided discussion and audio recordings were saved in separate folders, allocated as 'Focus Group One' and 'Focus Group Two'. Brief notes were taken by the researcher as an aide-de-memoire to mitigate technological failure and discussion continued until no new data emerged and/or participants were ready to end the focus group. The possibility of potential distress was mitigated by the circulation of the information sheet and focus group schedule a week prior to the focus groups and by giving participants the opportunity to ask questions before the focus group and at the end of proceedings. In addition to this, participants were reminded that participation was voluntary and they were free to withdraw from discussion at any time without giving a reason. It was also reiterated that should participation raise any questions or concerns, participants could discuss these with their counselling supervisor, or contact the researcher or a research supervisor for signposting to relevant support.

<u>5.12.2 Debriefing procedure</u>

At the end of each focus group a debriefing process took place in similar format to the debriefing protocol for the interviews undertaken in Study One, Phase Two [Appendix 44], although as this debriefing involved group processes, there was a group debrief, followed by the offer of an individual debriefing. Care was taken to again stress anonymity issues surrounding focus groups, particularly as participants were work colleagues and part of a professional network (Liamputtong, 2011).

5.13   Data analysis [Thematic analysis]

As this study sought to explore participants' perceptions and experiences and understand processes rather than determine outcomes (Smith, 1996), a qualitative approach provided rich understanding through a thematic analysis of focus group data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Like the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis outlined in the previous chapter, detailed guidance is available for conducting a Thematic Analysis. For Thematic Analysis, this clarity emerged through the writing of Braun and Clarke and consequently the six-phase process of analysis advocated by these researchers provided a foundational structure for engagement with data, guiding analysis, whilst allowing opportunities for creativity and interpretation (Braun, Clarke and Terry, 2015).

Braun and Clarke's suggested steps are reproduced in Table 5.1 for ease of reference and clarity:

STEPS FOR CONDUCTING THEMATIC ANALYSIS

1. Familiarisation with data

2. Generating initial codes

3. Searching for themes

4. Reviewing themes

5. Defining and naming themes

6. Producing the report

Table 5.1: Steps for Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.87)

5.13.1 Familiarisation

The analytical process started by listening several times to audio recordings of the focus groups whilst being aware of "noticings" (Braun and Clarke, 2012, p.204) and then moved on to transcription. Data were prepared for analysis through transcription of the focus group discussions and producing an orthographic transcript, not only offered a verbatim account including all verbal and nonverbal communication, it also encouraged early, deep engagement with data. This process produced a thorough representation of the proceedings in transcript form to facilitate analysis and remain true to participants' intended meaning.

As little research exists on the counsellor placement in general and in particular, on the concept of a placement alongside a course, views on this topic are relatively unknown. Analysis, therefore, encompassed the entire data set [Two Focus Groups consisting of (i) trainees, (ii) staff], to achieve a rich overall description, rather than providing a more detailed account of one particular theme.   The seven participants were allocated pseudonyms for anonymity and to facilitate the allocation of extracts from focus groups. The whole data set was read three times in an active and analytic way, whilst searching for meaning and before moving on to the next stage, transcripts were checked against original recordings to ensure consistency. During each process, early thoughts about interesting sections of the data were recorded, including how personal experiences of the researcher were useful as an analytical resource and were shaping analysis, yet could also be limiting engagement with data (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Appendix 45 demonstrates the start of this process for Focus Group Two.

5.13.2 Coding

This stage involved the organisation of data into meaningful groups and identifying those aspects that related specifically to the research question. To address the broad research question, data were subjected to "complete coding" (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.206), where all data of relevance to the research question from across the entire data set were considered. As this process of coding progressed and as analytic interest deepened, codes began to form building blocks of analysis, each distinct in some way (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Codes were semantic as surface meanings were considered for their obvious and objective meaning, yet became latent in some instances in a more subjective approach, where analysis went beyond explicit content (Braun and Clarke, 2013).   Coding was started manually, working systematically across the entire data set and part of this process is reproduced as Appendix 46 to example early coding, now using a section of transcript from Focus Group One.

After initial coding, the whole data set was revisited to ensure that codes were distinct, as concise as possible, capable of standing alone from data extracts and could support candidate themes. Once codes were identified and clearly linked to corresponding data extracts, a computer package [Microsoft Word] was used to collate each code and related data extracts. Within this process, codes were clearly titled, with all text where a particular code was evidenced, attributed to that code with details of the originating participant [Appendix 47].

5.13.3 Searching for themes

With data initially coded and collated, this phase involved identifying patterns across the data set and arranging codes into candidate themes. The purpose was not only to combine codes into themes, but to also capture patterns meaningful in developing answers to the research question. Whereas codes embodied one idea, themes represented several ideas, with each code linking to a theme's central organising concept (Braun and Clarke, 2013). In this way, themes developed alongside growing conceptual and analytic clarity.

All codes and associated data were checked again to search for similarity and connection. Provisional themes were then deliberated individually, as independent patterns, before relationships between themes were considered.

5.13.4 Reviewing themes

This phase reviewed and refined the list of candidate themes, checking that each captured the meaning of the data, with clear and identifiable distinctions between themes. In ensuring that data within each theme cohered meaningfully, were built around a central organising concept, and related to the research question (Patton, 1990), several realignments were made.

Collated extracts for each theme were considered, to assess whether they formed a logical pattern and checked, to determine whether themes accurately reflected meanings evident in participants' accounts of experience. Transcripts were again re-read as part of the reiterative coding process to ensure that no crucial data had been overlooked.

As attention was now turning to the relationship between the codes themselves and between initial themes, all codes and data extracts within identified themes were produced in table form [Appendix 47]. Once reconsiderations no longer led to substantial modification this stage of analysis was concluded.

5.13.5 Defining and naming themes

Within this step, themes were firstly defined, refined, and organised into a coherent account that began to form the story of the theme. Secondly, each theme was viewed in relation to others to ensure there was no overlap between them and to determine how each theme related to the overall developing narrative in response to the research question. Thirdly, themes were given an analytical name to anchor them within the story of the data. Once this process had

been completed, further analysis involved looking at the data once again to identify similarities and differences apparent within the two focus groups.   Creating thematic maps [Figure 5.1] served as an interpretative tool that helped identify an overall structure and recognise relationships between the themes. This led to some further refinement as overarching themes were added or removed, expanded or contracted as analysis developed:

EARLY THEMATIC MAP OF DEVELOPING OVER-ARCHING CANDIDATE THEMES:

Figure 5.1: Thematic map of developing overarching themes

5.13.6 Producing the report

Analysis continued, as attention turned to the overall narrative of the data, determining how best to relay the story the data had to tell from both within and across themes.

5.14   Findings

This section provides an overview of overarching and substantive themes crafted from the data set (Braun, Clarke and Terry, 2014). Evidence is presented in the form of quotations from original transcripts that support themes and strengthen the transparency of the analytical process.   Data extracts are used as illustrative examples in some instances and analytical comments are included where appropriate, so that the "inter-

weave of descriptive and summative analysis" aspired to by Braun and Clarke is achieved (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.254).

As the thematic mapping evidenced in Figure 5.1 developed, a chart was produced to provide further visual representation of the structure and content of developing themes (Frith and Gleeson, 2004a). Figure 5.2 represents the whole data set and served as an analytical tool that helped identify relationships between themes. Themes are colour-coded to show whether they were represented within the whole data set, or relate specifically to one of the focus groups:

DIAGRAM OF OVER-ARCHING AND NESTED THEMES

Mainly Good points idendified	Not all plain sailing	Mind the gap	Learning by doing	Risky Responsibilities	Thought provoking processes	Into the future
Benefits all	Deep sighs of relief and reluctance	A grey zone of different versus better	Transforming transitions	A risk iceberg	Who is helping who?	Organisations like this are needed in communities
Links to the course appreciated in the short term	Some difficult experiences	A transient zone of permanent versus temporary	First client experience: A scary leap in the dark	A weighty responsibility	A question of values: Self and counselling	Time to move on
Links to the course more problematic in the longer term	A questionable investment of time, effort, and money	A blury zone of indistinct procedures and accountability	Practice makes perfect		Caring and giving professions	Huge potential for growth
A mixed myriad of practice experiences	Frustrations of client flow	A confused zone of mixed messages	Counsellor educators need to be in current practice		Changing conundrums	Frustration of hopes, practicalities and possibilities
Positive comparisons to other placements	Feeling out on a limb		The significant role of supervision		Do what we say, not what we do	
			The importance of robust assessment			

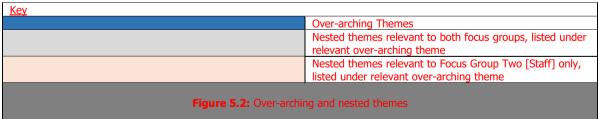| Key	
(blue)	Over-arching Themes
(grey)	Nested themes relevant to both focus groups, listed under relevant over-arching theme
(peach)	Nested themes relevant to Focus Group Two [Staff] only, listed under relevant over-arching theme
Figure 5.2: Over-arching and nested themes	

Findings are addressed in accordance with the themes diagrammatically evidenced in Figure 5.2. As evidenced within this diagram, the thematic analysis crafted seven over-arching themes: (i) Mainly good points identified; (ii) Not all plain sailing; (iii) Mind the gap; (iv) Learning by doing; (v) Risky responsibilities; (vi) Thought provoking processes and (vii) Into

the future. Each overarching theme has a central organising concept, which identifies a clear core principle, owns a definition that explains the theme and contains nested themes. Nested themes share the central organising concept, whilst addressing a particular aspect of data (Braun, Clarke and Terry, 2015).

To support findings and as contextualisation can be lost by not considering the interactive nature of focus group data (Hollander, 2004; Braun and Clarke, 2013), where a flow of conversation was particularly enlightening, this dialogue is included.

Table 5.5 details the constitution of both focus groups, participant pseudonyms/identification codes and transcript marking:

FOCUS GROUP ONE: FG1 STUDENTS [PSEUDONYMS]	FOCUS GROUP TWO: FG2 STAFF [PSEUDONYMS]
Charlotte: A trainee counsellor, just about to qualify and a volunteer on placement at the university. Charlotte was also volunteering in other placements	Ann: A counselling lecturer, working and volunteering at the University placement, also volunteering in other placements
Dave: A trainee counsellor, just about to qualify and a volunteer on placement at the university. Dave was also volunteering in other placements	June: A counselling lecturer, working and volunteering at the University placement
Jan: A trainee counsellor, just about to qualify and a volunteer on placement at the university. Jan was also volunteering in other placements	Kate: A counselling lecturer, working and volunteering at the University placement, also volunteering in other placements
Lyn: A trainee counsellor, just about to qualify and a volunteer on placement at the university. Lyn was also volunteering in other placements	
Example of Identification: Charlotte/FG1/82 = Participant/ Student Focus Group/Transcript line number	
Marking on Transcripts: ... Identifies pause [-] Superfluous/identifiable words redacted	

Table 5.2: Constitution of Focus Groups, Pseudonyms and transcript marking

<u>5.14.1: Overarching Theme One: Mainly good points identified</u>
Central organising concept: *Elements of experience participants constructed as significant.*

Sub-theme 1.1: Benefits all, positive impact for all involved

Within this theme, participants felt that the placement was generally beneficial and had a positive impact on those involved, a concept captured well by Kate, *"...this is a very valuable commodity… for...the NHS, university, staff, community, trainees…and…their clients"* [Kate/FG2/521-522].

Participants from both focus groups clearly articulated a benefit to trainees as demonstrated by these quotations from Jan, *"....tremendous counselling experience"* [Jan/FG1/197] and Ann, *"An opportunity to practise [-] that...in itself...is amazing"* [Ann/FG2/109-110].   The way the project also benefitted the university and staff, and helped achieve many of their prime objectives was articulated by June, "*We tick the box of community engagement, which is a crucial piece to the university…"* [June/FG2/90-92] and by Kate, who was in no doubt about the benefits for lecturers, explaining how the placement fulfilled both a need and a requirement for therapeutic contact, *"...certainly for lecturers working here…to have that practice as part of their role, although we volunteer as well, is…really…essential...really essential"* [Kate/FG2/147-149]. The importance that Kate placed on this was demonstrated by her repetition at the end of her statement and June went on to describe graphically, just how clients, the community and the NHS benefitted from the placement:

> *…given the nature of the community…the people looking for counselling are often people who GP's [-] just don't know what to do with, some Community Mental Health Teams and support officers…are…as well, in some ways…at a loss…they know this person needs help, and yet until now…until this {placement}, It's been very difficult to get that help* [June/FG2/409-418]

Within this theme, participants recounted benefits for all stakeholders emanating from the placement. Staff concentrated on benefits to trainees, clients, university, community, the NHS and then themselves, whilst students concentrated on the benefit to them in accruing hours, touching on benefits to clients and community.

Sub-theme 1.2: Links to the course appreciated in the short-term

This theme related to the proximity of course and placement which was construed as a bonus, with both focus groups relating how general familiarity, familiarity of location, and familiarity of people, were seen as helpful in the short-term. Participants within the staff focus group

were glad to have the placement on campus, *"that we've got something on site it…it's amazing"* [Kate/FG2/819] and felt that trainees benefitted from the convenience of having the consulting room on campus, especially as having trusted people around added to their placement experience. Trainees benefitted from having practised their counselling skills in the consulting room where they eventually went on to see early clients, *"to have that real feel…of what it's like to be in a real counselling room"* [Kate/FG2/145-146]. The trainee focus group also confirmed the short-term value of familiarity of the consulting room, *"I was familiar with the room, that made it so much easier when it came to seeing actual clients…less intimidating"* [Jan/FG1/19-21] and felt it was important that help from people they were familiar with was always at hand, *"….all the staff knew us…and…we knew them…that was really good for me"* [Lyn/FG1/268-270].

Familiarity was presented here as a good thing, lessening anxiety within trainees in the short term and underpinning the service for the staff group.

Within this theme, participants saw pre-knowledge as empowering during early stages of client-work and constructed resultant familiarity in the short-term, as a helpful experience, which facilitated them in their transition from trainee to counsellor, and lecturer to placement provider.

Sub-theme 1.3: Links to the course more problematic in the longer-term

Whilst Theme 1.2 related how the proximity of course and placement was initially seen as a bonus, when considering data latently and looking at longer-term consequences, the familiarity participants constructed as a good thing in the short-term, could, in the longer-term, become problematic as they described a comfort zone where this placement was the safe/easy option, as opposed to necessarily the best option, a situation which could give rise to negative connotations in the future. Several quotations illustrated this point.

The first extract considered was from one of the trainee counsellors, Lyn:

> *….one of the main things for me is that it's been easy…yes…that's it, the whole thing's been easy. For outside placements, they interview you several times, get to know you before referring clients…etc. Strange people, new environment….Here, everyone knew us from the start and we knew…and…trusted them…all the staff knew us and we knew them…that was really good for me…* [Lyn/FG1/262-270]

Lyn clearly articulated here, how not having to go through an interview process, not needing to get to know new people, not having to work and survive within a new environment and not

having to face the anxieties involved with both earning and giving trust were constructed as a short-term bonus to working at this placement. It could be said, however, that the negatives of having a placement elsewhere described by Lyn are actually part of the placement process and a learning experience denied her due to working in a placement alongside her course. It is therefore questionable, whether familiarity could be good in the short-term, yet detrimental to her career in the longer-term. Another trainee, Jan, added to this questioning of the almost invisible divide between 'good' and 'easy':

> *A great deal of my confidence came from working here on campus and in this {consulting} room…we had practised triads here, I was familiar with the room, that made it so much easier when it came to seeing actual clients…less intimidating. Knowing what it was going to be like…the familiarity…certainly reduced stress levels greatly…far less anxiety for me…because of its location…* [Jan/FG1/16-24]

Again, there was a feeling, here, that Jan was, and remained, very much in her comfort zone. She talked about gaining confidence from being in familiar surroundings and feeling less intimidated due to having undertaken triad work in the consulting room with resultant lower levels of anxiety. As placements are intended to emanate real work experience, however, there is again a question mark as to whether this was achieved. Working in a placement outside the university would have involved being in an unfamiliar place and experiencing the anxiety of new situations, as real life experiences involve uncertainty and stress.

As defined in the previous theme, staff were also not immune to the comfort of familiarity in the short-term, yet in describing how keeping practice close made it more manageable, "*We have a support system on site. It's not like they're out there {gestures with arms} they're here, the trainees are under our wing, we can monitor it {placement practice}…we can see what's happening*" [Kate/FG2/546-548/541-542], it can be seen that staff also identified that this placement experience had not been as independent and self-regulating for trainees as if they had been out in the community instead of kept close, a situation defined expressively by this participant's use of metaphor, '*under our wing*', which offers a protective, nurturing analogy.

Through contextualising these accounts, insight is provided into how familiarity, initially posited as good in the immediacy of early practice, may also have negative connotations in the future, a concept which raised questions for participants, *"Could that {high levels of familiarity} be a bad thing…or a good thing…though?"* [Dave/FG1/276-277], in that whilst familiarity has short-term advantages, it can foster long-term disadvantages, as stretching out of one's comfort zone, although uncomfortable, can offer more real experience than staying within it.

This theme described how, in contrast to the previous theme, where participants saw pre-knowledge as empowering during early stages of client-work and constructed this familiarity in the short-term as mainly helpful and positive, when considering this in relation to longer-term processes, a different construct began to formulate.   This situated familiarity as possibly obstructive to longer-term development, circumstances which would be especially difficult for trainees who undertook all their client hours prior to qualification within a placement alongside a counselling course, as whilst familiarity was welcomed by staff and students in the introductory stages of practice, to progress, new experiences and challenges need to be encompassed.

Sub-theme 1.4: A mixed myriad of practice experiences

This theme contextualised the mixed myriad of practice experiences described by participants, as summed up for the trainees by Dave, *"Very valuable experience"* [Dave/FG1/608] and expanded by Jan, *"The experience has been…for me…it's been a pleasurable experience…a safe experience…it's been exciting, it's been…you know...I've been involved with many different aspects of this from the beginning and…um…it's been a good experience…*an *empowering experience…"* [Jan/FG1/561-566]. Trainees went on to describe feeling held and secure whilst experiencing a wide range of administrative, organisational, and therapeutic experiences, including robust client assessment processes, and these experiences deepened their placement experience. Staff also described constructive experiences relating to practice issues and pronounced a feeling of satisfaction through creating something from nothing and learning more about the intricacies of counsellor placements which, as confirmed by Ann, would inform future teaching, *"…the whole thing's a tremendous teaching tool that can be developed"* [Ann/FG2/110-112]. The importance of community engagement was also defined by staff as a constructive experience, *"it's about drawing in more people from the community…and… showing them…what's available"* [Kate/FG2/68-70].

Another constructive practice experience for staff was described as establishing, maintaining, and sustaining a client-base, particularly as clients and their presenting issues were many and varied. This was significant, as a wide variety of clients was important for the growth and development of trainees and the service. Comments offered by all participants revealed how securing a placement was difficult and multiple placements were common in order to accrue the hours necessary for qualification within identified time-scales, *"You…have to really {have another placement}…don't you?"* [Lyn/FG1/226]. Within this discussion, counselling was

contextualised as isolating, so, as well as necessary for the practice element of training, having more than one placement increased contact with other professionals. The best placements were identified as those offering regular training, supervision, and/or social events.

Both staff and trainees also found the experience of drafting policies and procedures invaluable, *"The experience…of…drafting all the policies was a lot of work…but a hugely worthwhile experience"* [June/FG2/1029-1030]. Despite these joint experiences, however, there were areas of distinct differences of opinion between the focus groups. For example, the trainees were unanimous in designating the placement as not only a constructive, but also a safe experience, "*A safe space to work [-] it's a safe container"* [Jan/FG1/169-171] whilst staff highlighted times when they felt unsafe, although they recognised that feelings of safety were increasing as time went on, "*I think that now I feel more safe…but there were times when I didn't feel very safe at all"* [June/FG2/847-848]. Another difference surfaced when, in describing constructive practice experiences, staff concentrated more on providing a valuable service to trainees and a needy community, whereas trainees had a different emphasis, focussing instead on a construct of the placement as a good experience because it had given them an opportunity to practise.

Likewise, trainees were united in their construct of this placement experience as supportive, *"I really couldn't have had better support systems"* [Lyn/FG1/573-574] whilst staff were considerably less confident about the support they received in delivering the placement. *"I guess what I don't know, is………..Do we have the backing of this institution if anything goes wrong? {Nervous Laughter}"* [June/FG2/667-668]. The faltering silence, as June hesitated before voicing the question concerning her, viewed alongside the uneasy laughter at the end of this statement and her earlier comment about the complexity of client-work [June/413-415], presented a rueful acknowledgement of the enormity of undertaking such a venture whilst uncertain of the level of support available.

There was also a distinction between the focus groups when it came to a feeling of ownership of the placement. Trainees felt a strong sense of ownership, *"{I} feel ownership of the project…[-]…and…that's been fantastic experience"* [Jan/FG1/500-502], although this sense of belonging Jan described contrasted sharply with the detachment experienced by staff, who, whilst feeling ownership of the therapeutic process, *"{Therapy is} part of what we do…it's part of what we do"* [Ann/FG2/114] were concerned that the placement was not really held by the university system, *"Does the university…recognise…endorse…support…this work… us?!"*

266

[Ann/FG2/80-82]. This uncertainty of tenure is worthy of note when viewed against the strong desire staff felt to do their best for the university, evidenced by profound self-questioning *"Did I put the university in danger?"* [June/FG2/860] and the sense of commitment inherent within this quotation by Kate: *"An experience we had to do well…because…at the end of the day…we're part of this university*" [Kate/FG2/1030-1032].

Despite these differences, staff and trainee narratives extolled the benefit of active participation in a joint project. The sense of engagement experienced by trainees was evidenced by their talk of wide involvement in the work of the placement, describing how they were active, as opposed to passive, agents within the process, *"….we've been involved in the development of the placement, we all had input into this...that would be unlikely to happen elsewhere…"* [Jan/FG1/497-499]. This feeling of joint enterprise was also demonstrated by staff who tellingly spoke of trainees working beside them in a collegial relationship, *"for trainees to have that opportunity…to…you know…to work here, to have that opportunity to work alongside us…"* [Ann/FG2/71-73].

This subordinate theme cohered a continuum of practice experiences involved in working at the placement, with staff and trainees in agreement over the construct of many, but with different perceptions of some experiences.

Sub theme 1.5: Positive comparisons to other placements

The theme focussed on positive comparisons which both focus groups made of this placement compared to others. These were many and varied and noted how other placements were less supportive to trainees, condoned lone-working and offered a narrow client base with restricted presenting issues. Jan explained *"If there was a problem here…there's access to various people...this is a huge advantage over working in a huge organisation"* [Jan/FG1/25-27], which contrasted with an experience of working at another placement related by Kate, *"…{for my other placement} I've been working out in the community, in a room…in the dark…in the night, where there's no-one around…you know…it's not safe…whereas here I do…I feel safe, I feel there's structure…there's structure in place…I feel held here"* [Kate/FG2/842 -846].

This theme was strengthened further, when Kate went on to clearly contrast a grim view of another placement, *"In other placements, I've been out there totally on my own and if something happens there…in that moment…then I feel that…oh god…it's up to me…."* [Kate/FG2/919-921], with an almost idealistic view of working in this placement*, "…I don't*

feel like that here….I feel safe here, like, I've got people around me…a…wealth of experience all around me really, there's always someone about…" [Kate/FG2/921-924].

From participants' comparisons of this placement to others, it could also be seen that the consulting room itself had an impact upon therapeutic encounters; the placement concept and environment influenced therapeutic work. This was evidenced when Kate encompassed the positive views of participants concerning their consulting room on campus, *"It's a lovely room, so that's good…makes a difference…there's a nice feel to the room, a nice sort of relaxed energy"* [Kate/FG2/786-787] and Dave compared the campus consulting room to his other placement, clearly indicating how the counselling environment impacted upon his therapeutic endeavours:

> *My other placement now...that's quite different to this…I counsel in {name redacted} in, literally, a storage room, a room where they store boxes of stationary, loads and loads of stuff, but this is the only room they've got, so I ended up…also seeing some of those clients here…because it was impossible, the room was tiny, no window and not confidential, this is what it's like in other placements….We both {Counsellor/Client} had to climb over boxes to get in and out…crazy…not a good start to a counselling session... and...when those clients eventually came here because it was so bad there, I saw a huge difference in them, partly because I was different…I felt more professional…more relaxed…and.....safer* [Dave/FG1/103-117]

Dave clearly evidenced, here, how he felt more, or less, capable and professional depending upon the condition and ambience of his surroundings. This impacted upon his therapeutic capacity.

In addition to this, trainees felt that assessment was far more robust within the university placement, with some other placements not having any assessment processes, *"Assessment is sound here…no assessment at all…in my other placement"* [Charlotte/FG1/172-173], with more consistency here than in other placements. Trainees also described several elements of lone-working experienced elsewhere, where they had found themselves not only lone-working but, also felt that at times, they may not have been actually alone, yet felt lonely and isolated, as Jan observed*, "Obviously, she {placement co-ordinator} is there, but I think sometimes, they're just not really…"* [Jan/FG1/28-29]. For Jan, the placement provider was 'present', yet had no 'presence', making her physical proximity irrelevant.

The construction of this placement as better than others emphasised huge variations within and across placements. This concept underpinned discussions within both focus groups and was conceptualised as providing an alternative to inequality of practice experiences.

5.14.2: Overarching Theme Two: Not all plain sailing
Central organising concept: The "but" that followed on from the first overarching theme of "Mainly good points identified"

Sub-theme 2.1: Deep sighs of relief and reluctance

June set the scene for this theme by her proclamation, "*Yes, this has been good…but there've been…real…challenges*" [June/FG2/400]. Participants depicted how they felt some sense of accomplishment, although this was tempered by feeling relieved at having reached this point, "*A huge achievement…and…I think, a sense of relief*" [Kate/FG2/968].   On several occasions this feeling of relief was expressed by deep sighs, accompanied by the expression of almost wonderment, as indicated by the "*wow*" accompanied by the exhale of breath in the middle of this offering from June, *"Well…yes…I mean, I………well……..wow {long exhale of breath}, yes…here we are…..we've come a long way*" [June/FG2/1-2]. Within this short quotation, it can be seen how June recognised the achievement in getting to this point, yet felt grateful to have got here without major incident. Her choice of words also indicated that this had been an eventful journey, with some difficulties along the way. Ann strengthened this point, "*Well…we've got here…there were times when I really didn't think we'd make it…but we have, we've got here*!" [Ann/FG2/965-967]. From this statement, it can be seen that there were times when Ann doubted whether the placement would succeed, or even survive, and Jan also exampled her acknowledgement of the hard work and her relief through repeating an expressive utterance at the end of this quotation, "*We've done the hard part…phew…phew…*" [Jan/FG1/153-154]. Jan's reference to the *'hard part'* in itself, also evidenced that all was not plain sailing. For these participants, deep sighs therefore indicated a construction of this experience as one of value, yet obligation, accountability, and hard work. This placed additional strain on trainees and staff.

The sense of relief in having got to this point was also accompanied by a reluctance to criticise, particularly evidenced by the trainee focus group, as exampled here by Lyn, who tempered this negative comment with no less than three justifications, "*Yes, the usual…the diary….but this is…work in progress, isn't it? It works OK…because we're all here regularly…it's worked fine actually, but…could be better*" [Lyn/FG1/362-365]. This extract indicated that although diary arrangements had been a long-standing issue and one that had been raised often, '*the usual*', in this short extract this participant offered three excuses as to why this was not too problematic (i)'*This is work in progress*'; (ii)'*It works OK'* and (iii)'*It's worked fine actually*". Whilst this tendency was not so prevalent within staff offerings, this propensity was nonetheless present,

as can be seen by June's offering, where, whilst revealing a feeling of uncertainty, she was careful not to allocate blame, "*…not against anyone…but sometimes...I felt…unsure*" [June/FG2/850-851].

Analysis of data explained feelings behind participants' actual and inferred deep sighs as they recalled taxing experiences, whilst seemingly disinclined to be overly critical, even though all was not plain sailing.

Sub-theme 2.2: Some difficult experiences

Working together closely in any environment can cause friction and trainee participants described how some difficult experiences had arisen at the placement. Space was an issue "*there was some conflict as we only had…one…room…then*" [Dave/FG1/123-124] and many of the original protocols needed refinement, as demonstrated by this illustrative comment by Charlotte, "*There could be more work on our outward referral list, there's a lot of information on it…but there's a lot more that could go on*" [Charlotte/FG1/390-392]. Again, the reluctance to criticise captured in the last theme is evidenced, although less obviously, as Charlotte, whilst identifying something that needed correcting, offered the moderating statement that the referral list does contain a lot of information. Nevertheless, as can be seen by these example extracts, the trainees in Focus Group One offered difficult experiences of a practical nature that could easily be addressed, whilst in Focus Group Two, there was a different emphasis, as staff constructed more conceptual difficulties linked to clinical practice. June raised one such issue:

> *It's also very hard, it's not easy…because…you know, I guess, it's that sense that counselling also requires that sense of consistency…and stability…and…you know…for the client…and…it depends on your lecturing sometimes, that you don't get that, it's not an easy balance, let's put it that way…I think we can get that balance, but it's not always easy* [June/FG2/182-188]

Here, June described her construction of counselling as a necessarily consistent and unfailing environment and revealed how she felt uncomfortable as she occasionally found herself finding time for clients within a lecturing timetable and sometimes felt that this balancing act was not always creating the best environment for counsellor presence and client experience. She went on to ask a rhetorical question which profoundly underlined the sentiments expressed above, "*If you're having a heavy day of teaching... and...then you're seeing a client in the middle…or…at the end of that…are you offering your best to that client?*" [June/FG2/217-219]. The discomfort caused by the balancing of these roles was evident within these quotations, as was the unspoken, yet inferred, impact on teaching and student experience.

Another issue related to the clash of roles was highlighted by Ann:

> *Where it blurs is if {name redacted} is teaching, say, on the Diploma, and could be doing a {client} assessment {in placement}…so that {name redacted} could possibly engender a dual relationship with that trainee {volunteer counsellor}…because she has lots of information about the client that trainee is seeing, she also has lots of information about the trainee* [Ann/FG2/201-206]

From these two quotations, difficulties which can arise through boundary issues and dual relationships were clearly visible as the pressures of holding dual roles and the boundaries of 'placement' and 'course' were questioned.

These extracts provided insight into some difficulties experienced at the placement. Nonetheless, both the staff focus group, "*Yes, it has put pressure on us as staff…but I'm glad we did it*" [Ann/FG2/985] and the trainee focus group, "*I've enjoyed doing it…[-]…a very valuable experience*" [Dave/FG1/608] indicated that difficult experiences had not outweighed good experiences.

Sub-theme 2.3: A questionable investment of time, effort, and money

This theme addressed the personal investment participants put into the placement, with trainees and staff considering the impact of most of the work being undertaken on a voluntary basis. June identified how the effort put into volunteering can be taken for granted at times, describing the feelings of staff in this regard, *"There's a difference between 'for free' and 'for no effort' this has taken a lot of effort for a small team…"* [June/FG2/573-575] and the impact upon trainees, "*Trainees have worked here…for nothing…and…it's cost them much time…and…expense to do this*" [June/FG2/970-971].

Whilst June related difficulties of volunteering for both staff and trainees, Dave gave a detailed example which demonstrated how, for trainees, volunteering can interfere with paid employment:

> *I had a client who rang me in work, actually in a meeting {explained work setting}. My phone was on because I was waiting for a work related call to do with the {information redacted} so I answered it, not knowing...and it was a client who wanted to speak to me urgently and I…just couldn't speak to her….she was fine about it…but it wrong-footed me for the whole meeting because I felt I just really cut her off, nicely, of course, but I just couldn't give her the time at that point…it could've been a big problem for me if some of my bigger bosses or {information redacted} had been around. To be honest...all I wanted to do then was wrap the meeting up as quickly as possible…get out of there and ring her and don't*

forget…this {work setting} is my job I shouldn't have rushed that to get out
[Dave/FG1/407-414]

This is a significant excerpt, as Dave's verbal emphasis, when saying that he could not talk to this client showed his frustration and his concern that he was letting his client down. He was clearly struggling with this juxtaposition between volunteering and paid employment and later in the extract, there was also a sense that he felt he was letting his employer down, *"this is my job I shouldn't have rushed that to get out"*. There is also an element of guilt as he felt he was letting himself down as he straggled his two professional roles and, in that moment, felt he was failing both. It can also be seen that client and counsellor felt differently about the experience, as Dave confirmed that his client readily accepted the situation, whilst he was thrown off balance.

Paradoxically, the staff focus group had a different take on the paid work/volunteer balance as they had benefitted because their paid employment was helping them keep up their BACP practice requirements and fulfil their need to offer free counselling to vulnerable clients, as Kate and June dialogued:

> *…if you're working full time, it's difficult to sort of maintain those practice hours…and…to be able to continue with that, this makes it possible…and…it's just a really good opportunity...as you say more…rounded* [Kate/FG2/152-155]

> *…I echo what Kate is saying [-] then {when volunteering in the community} you're also part of that spirit…part of the volunteering and…the community life-force* [June/FG2/160-165]

In this statement, June demonstrated just how, for staff, whilst the placement engendered a lot of additional hard work, the time and effort put into the placement kept them in touch with their community spirit.

Within this theme, volunteering at the placement was seen as a questionable investment of time, effort, and money, with the relationship between volunteering and paid employment not always appreciated and holding differing connotations for trainees and staff.

Sub-theme 2.4: Frustration of client flow

One of the most often mentioned difficulties within both focus groups was anxiety caused by an erratic client flow, starting with frustration with clients who failed to attend for allocated appointments, *"Well…top of the list of the most challenging things are DNA's. I know this*

happens everywhere…but…with this client group…it's… particularly hard" [Jan/FG1/292-294] and working through a scale to there never being an optimum case load. This point was made metaphorically by Dave, *"burn-out... or…rust-out with clients*" [Dave/FG1/359]. Again, differences were evidenced within the focus groups regarding the construction of the experience of DNA's, with staff finding this easier to accept because they were already on site and had not made a special journey, "*If you've a free hour between teaching…if you do have a free hour…you can see a client…that's much easier than going to another organisation where people still may not turn up…but you've made the journey. It's worrying for trainees though…they* __need__ *hours*" [Kate/FG2/371-375] and trainees experiencing the exact opposite, "*…they {DNA's} just don't seem to care that we make a special journey…we make the effort, it's an effort to travel all the way here…when we're not meant to be here for studies, {we come} just to see them*" [Jan/FG1/295-297]. The erratic flow of clients was also more sustainable for staff as, unlike trainees, staff were not involved in the panic to accrue client hours for qualification. Resultantly, trainees were frustrated when at times there were more clients than they could safely see given their level of experience, or at other times, not enough clients. As Charlotte complained, this was a continuum which slowed down their practice hours, "*It's hard to get the {client} balance right*" [Charlotte/FG1/354].

Client flow can therefore be seen to cause frustration within both groups, although trainees were more concerned because of their need to accrue hours and were frustrated by clients not turning up, whilst staff were troubled by unpredictable referrals which led to inconsistent client hours for trainees.

Sub-theme Theme 2.5: Feeling out on a limb

One of the negative sides of the placement experienced by staff, but not trainees, related to a sense of belonging, with trainees feeling very much part of the placement, whilst staff felt detached and out on a limb. This difference in attachment is illustrated well by the following comments. In the trainee focus group, Lyn clearly articulated the sense of attachment experienced by trainees, "*Having a placement integral to a course…is…excellent*" [Lyn/FG1/67-68]. In this extract, Lyn not only referred to her experience as good, but also used the word '*integral*' to situate the placement experience as firmly embedded within her counsellor training. On the other hand, this exchange between Kate and Ann within the staff focus group demonstrated far less security and attachment:

I wonder…what advantage this is to the university? [Kate/FG2/77]

I don't know! You might say that yes...this…is an advantage, but, do you know what...[-]…Do they {University} have an awareness even…that this is going on? Possibly they don't…I don't know…[Ann/FG2/78-82]

This interaction was not only steeped in uncertainty and detachment from the main thrust of the university structure, it actually questioned whether broader university bodies were aware that this placement existed, a situation which led to feelings of insecurity.

The point was furthered within another interchange, this time between Kate and June:

We're not fully integrated and that's....not comfortable, it's like a bit of…an…'add on' [Kate/FG2/670-671]

…it's {placement} just not fully embedded and embraced [June/FG2/672]

These quotations demonstrated clear feelings of staff detachment and a need to be a part of the main thrust of the university, whereas the trainee focus group expressed feelings of belonging, *"It's so good to feel ownership…so much....a real part of this project"* [Jan/FG1/617].

This theme draws attention to different constructions of the relationship between the placement, the workers, and the university, offered by the two focus groups, which ranged from the separatism experienced by staff to the inter-connectedness experienced by trainees, highlighting the importance of feeling part of an organisation.

5.14.3: Overarching Theme Three: Mind the gap
Central organising concept: Issues with elements of both positivity and negativity, straddling the gap between 'Mostly good experiences' and 'Not all plain sailing'

Sub-theme 3.1: A grey zone of different versus better

The scope of this theme centred on a construct of the placement as 'different', however, 'different' can be good, or bad. Dave identified how different this experience was, expressing succinctly, the view articulated by all trainees, *"Things are different here…a whole different training…and…atmosphere…from start to finish really"* [Dave/FG1/84-85] and for the staff group, June also emphatically drew attention to differences between this placement and others, *"That {being part of the university}…has made this a very different placement experience for both us as staff and the trainees"* [June/FG2/1030-1032].

Thus, a grey zone was created, which raised an interesting uncertainty regarding the gap between this placement and others, because, if this placement was so different, it could be that it was not real practice experience.

Sub-theme 3.2: A transient zone of temporary versus permanent

The focus of this theme considered how the status of this placement as a pilot project impacted upon participants' construction of the experience of working there, with June, within the staff focus group, reticent to fully accept achievement because of the lack of permanence surrounding the placement, *"...maybe the word isn't achievement, because we're still....this is a pilot project really"* [June/FG2/3-5] and Lyn, within the trainee focus group, through her use of the word '*only'* in the following quotation indicating a construction that work undertaken as part of a pilot project, is less important than more permanent endeavours, "*Yes...it was only a pilot project...but we've done good"* [Lyn/FG1/613-614]. This theme continued through other contributions, for example, in staff discussions, Ann, like June, sensed achievement, yet in responding to Kate's positive comments in this dialogue, situated achievement as muted and felt reluctant to advertise the project's success, sounding a note of caution due to the temporary status of the placement:

> *Sometimes it's difficult to really understand that there was nothing here, now there's a good placement...we don't give us enough credit...and...bang the drum about what we've done....*[Kate/FG2/1006-1009]
>
> *Even though, you know...it's...only a pilot project* [Ann/FG2/1010]

Variance within the data set due to the transient journey through this counselling placement for trainees and the more permanent status of staff could have been anticipated, particularly as staff were actively working towards the next cohort of trainees, whilst these trainees were moving on. This proved not to be the case, however, as transience was more evident within the staff focus group than the trainee cohort, as trainees identified a clear future for the placement and a role for themselves with a new intake, *"...new trainees coming in...we could be their placement buddies...supporters"* [Jan/FG1/375-376]. Participants did, however, talk about experiences in real time, with both groups considering the future pathway of the placement as evidenced within later themes [7.2/7.3/7.4].

The transient zone was the gap between temporary and permanent, where participants identified that their construct of the permanence of the project impacted their attitude towards it.

Sub-theme 3.3: A blurry zone of indistinct procedures and accountability

This nested theme developed the central organising concept of the over-arching theme in revealing that whilst both staff and trainees acknowledged they were working within defined parameters and structures, which superficially suggested a professional experience, *"I think it's really good {placement handbook/policies}…systems work well, all the documentation, the handbook…"* [Lyn/FG1/386-387], despite being aware of documentation, they were uncertain how systems translated into practice. This suggested an undefined way of working and responsibility. An example of this was contained within a staff focus group dialogue regarding the important issue of clinical responsibility:

> *…let's say there's a problem with something like……confidentiality…or…clinical responsibility…who is that person you turn to…who has responsibility? {Addressed moderator for clarification}* [Ann/FG2/632-635]
>
> Moderator; *"The supervisor"* [Moderator/FG2/636-637]
>
> *So…if there was…an issue that arose…in session……that would go…to the supervisor?* [Kate/FG2/638-639]
>
> Moderator; *"Well…yes"* [Moderator/FG2/640]

This exchange demonstrated uncertainty and a blurriness around confidentiality and responsibility for client-work. A comment from the trainees also showed, in suggesting that there is total confidentiality within counselling interactions, a lack of understanding of policies, *"Confidentiality is <u>absolute</u>, right?* [Dave/FG1/200]. As can be seen from these statements, there was a gap between drafting/defining procedures and understanding/implementing these.

Sub-theme 3.4: A confused zone of mixed messages

Within this theme, it can be seen how both information deficit and information overload impacted work at the placement.

An information deficit was identified by both focus groups, where the public and prospective clients did not have enough information regarding counselling concepts and/or what happens in counselling sessions. Jan explained:

> *Yes…well…they don't really know what to expect [-] my last client more or less wanted me to tell her where she'd gone wrong in her life…wanted me to tell her how to put it right….huh….so basically our first session was...sorry...you've got it wrong here, you've got the wrong person if that's what you want, that's…not what we're going to do here* [Jan/FG1/512-517]

Within this extract, Jan situated the activity of counselling as one of facilitation, in contrast to her construction of her client's view of the counselling process as a 'fix', a concept also encountered and described well by Dave, "*Yes, some people come wanting advice, some come and say…in so many words…so…here it is…now sort my life out! They think…we have a magic wand!*" [Dave/FG1/522-524]. Ann described another experience where lack of information and understanding about counselling had caused difficulties:

> *A challenge I've faced is lack of understanding from clients about what counselling is about….what counselling is for, I mean…..I've…had clients arriving with their families and babies, and trying to manage a baby in a counselling room...how can you manage a baby in a counselling room? But…this…has happened so we need to give that basic knowledge to clients…because [-] clients get referred…but don't always know…or…understand what's going to happen...when they're here* [Ann/FG2/232-242]

This quotation from Ann demonstrated how the public need better information regarding what counselling is about, with Lyn offering a possible solution to this problem, *"Yes…psycho-education is needed…and…certainly...information about what counselling is…would help enormously"* [Lyn/FG1/528-530]. It was further identified that prospective clients need information prior to their first session and talking about what this information might be and when and how it should be made available, Charlotte summarised the feeling of participants, that not only the content, but also the timing of providing such information to new clients is important, *"Maybe…though…we could give client information sheets out earlier…even before assessment?"* [Charlotte/FG1/505-507].

There were strong representations that the profile of counselling needs to be clearer. When looking more closely at these passages, however, alongside the semantic elements of this theme, more latent meanings became evident, as there was also an indication of how scary a process counselling can be for new clients when, as Ann related, they neither know, nor understand, what is going to happen. This situation creates an immediate power imbalance between client and counsellor, especially when contrasted with the trainee counsellor's familiarity with the location, the context of counselling, and the process of therapy.

In contrast to this information deficit, trainees felt subjected to information overload, where improved communication between stakeholders would avoid confusion, as evidenced by this dialogue:

> *It's confusing…and…overwhelming when people say different things* [Charlotte/FG1/536]

My two supervisors tell me conflicting things [Dave/FG1/538]

My placements do too {supervisors/placements differing advice} [Lyn/FG1/539]

I've also had that [Jan/FG1/540]

This theme identified how confusion caused by a deficit of information/information overload caused communication issues, impacting adversely on placement processes.

5.14.4: Overarching Theme Four: Learning by doing
Central Organising Concept: Greatest knowledge arose from actual experience;
working at the placement facilitated learning

   Sub-theme 4.1: Transforming transitions

This nested theme explored how the placement was constructed as a developmental transition from trainee to counsellor and from course provider to placement provider. For this first transition, trainees needed an assortment of clients, with varying presenting issues, as June noted, "*they've {trainees} had good experience…of…a range of clients…and…challenging issues, that's been so important for their training transition…and…the trainee perspective, having that*" [June/FG2/24-27]. Charlotte also demonstrated how trainees identified with the placement as a transition, *"Transitioning from triad-work to client-work and trainees to counsellors"* [Charlotte/FG1/36-37]. For the staff focus group, there was recognition of the learning involved in experiencing the placement from the other side of the fence, as placement provider as well as course provider, especially as these roles were operating concurrently.

The placement was instrumental in facilitating transitions from trainee to counsellor and course provider to placement provider, although for staff, transitioning into a new demanding role as placement provider, whilst still committed to the challenging role of course provider, caused some angst.

   Sub-theme 4.2: First client experiences – A scary leap in the dark

The trainee focus group constructed early client contact as the most crucial and stressful point of training, and a time when trainees need high levels of support.

Jan encapsulated the trainee perspective that starting placement work is a huge step, not always identified as such, *"….from just doing that {triad work} to suddenly working with real clients was huge…much bigger than anyone can anticipate…scary, in fact"* [Jan/FG1/8-10]. Within this statement, Jan implied that not enough credence is given to the enormity of starting work with real clients. Charlotte also described how early client experiences impact a new counsellor, disclosing, that even in retrospect, with over 100 contact hours, she still felt

nauseated when reflecting upon this part of her training, *"It's that whole 'first client' thing…as well…isn't it…I feel sick just thinking about that"* [Charlotte/FG1/87-88].

The staff focus group recognised the anxiety invoked at this time, yet seemed less mindful of just how stressful this can be, despite being aware of how the BACP reduction in lecturer/trainee contact hours could result in trainees being less prepared for client-work, *"…Trainees just finishing their programme…you know, I think they wanted more trauma therapy…that...sense of understanding [-] trauma better… and…we don't have this [-] to the extent that they're suggesting, because we don't…have…time to fit it in now…never mind with decreased hours"* [June/FG2/737-742]. Here is a situation where trainees expressed discomfort and anxiety around early client-work, whilst staff articulated their struggle to include everything within present curricula and were concerned that this could result in trainees being even less prepared for client-work in the future as contact hours decline. This dichotomy inferred that trainees might not be getting enough preparation for their early client experiences, a situation that could deteriorate in the future.

There was limited recognition from staff about the stress of early client work and agreement within both groups that trainees would benefit from a 'mentor' as well as a supervisor around the time of early practice. As Lyn explained, *"It may be a good idea [-], to have a mentor…not a supervisor…but someone around because this kinda happens here…but not in other placements I work in. This makes a huge difference…someone you can talk to about…sharing the experience…of early clients, but not judging"* [Lyn/FG1/42-49]. Charlotte furthered the argument, that a mentor at this time would be invaluable, clearly demarcating how this had been mentioned several times and identifying this as a different role from that of supervisor:

> *I was supported here before and after the experience {first client}, comes back to that 'mentor' idea again…doesn't it? I can't imagine what it would've been like to have just walked out of here…closed the door…and…gone home, I was so hyped…I needed to come down and you can't talk to anyone at home about it…you see…..can you? But for me…I could talk to someone about how I felt…not about the actual session, that was for my supervisor, but talk about how <u>I</u> felt, how the session went in general. <u>We</u> could now provide this for new trainees!* [Charlotte/FG1/89-99]

Staff endorsed this concept, noting that having qualified, experienced, counsellors in the placement was a help to trainees, *"We provide a support system here [-], we have qualified counsellors…always here to offer support. We have a support system on site"* [Kate/FG2/543-546].

Within this theme, it can be seen that the time where new counsellors start to see clients is a critical, stressful point of training. They therefore need robust preparation leading up to this, and additional support, possibly in the form of a mentor. Staff were concerned that the reduction in training hours could result in future trainees being less prepared for early client-work.

Sub-theme 4.3: Practice makes perfect

The purpose of this theme was to highlight the feeling amongst participants that the more they worked within this environment, either in developing/managing the service or practising skills, the better they became at organisational and administrative tasks and/or within therapeutic processes. The concept of therapeutic skill improving with practice was captured succinctly by Jan, *"The more clients you see…the more issues you encounter…the more you grow in confidence…the more I do it, the better I become, I suppose* [Jan/FG1/240-243], with Lyn relating this concept more to placement organisation than practice issues, "*It's becoming more professional as we go along*" [Lyn/FG1/555-556].

There was agreement that the experience had been *"A huge learning curve"* [Ann/FG2/1023], where each participant indicated that their knowledge of counselling processes and their clinical practice had improved through the experience of working at the placement. Additionally, the counselling concept of career-long personal and professional development was introduced, as seen in this graphic statement where June described a conversation with graduating trainees: "*…you might be qualified, but alright…even though you've got your hours…and…you can go out into the world and practise, but…you're by no means done…your learning will be constant*" [June/FG2/746-749].

Sub-theme 4.4: Counselling practice enhances teaching

This theme communicated how the focus groups determined that it is vital that counsellor trainers and placement providers are, and remain, in practice. This was inherently implied within Focus Group One, where trainees voiced appreciation that their lecturers were practising counsellors and used their therapeutic experience to support them in the placement. The following quotation captures this sentiment, *"…that was very reassuring to know…that here there are trusted people…that's good, especially when you're starting out. Not only was someone here…but experienced practitioners we knew and trusted…were around…all the time"* [Jan/FG1/29-33]. As can be seen from the following interchange, staff expressed this view more directly:

This placement [-] brings together teaching…and…practice [Ann/FG2/382]

….if you're teaching counselling…it's imperative that you're counselling…practising as a counsellor [-]…[Kate/FG2/383-384]

I'd agree…Anyone teaching counselling…or managing a placement…just must maintain practice…to…to…keep in touch [June/FG2/388-389]

Within this theme, staff and trainees determined that teachers of counselling and placement providers should be, and remain, practising counsellors.

Sub-theme 4.5: The significant role of supervision

This theme constructed supervision as a lifeline for all participants, with both focus groups expressing this view, although through slightly different lenses. The trainee focus group identified supervision [Group] as important in maintaining contact, helping them feel less isolated, *"I only see everyone in supervision now"* [Jan/FG1/148-149] and Lyn précised well, views offered by trainees, capturing how they valued regular, good quality supervision, which aided their client-work. She also welcomed free supervision, *"Supervision…I…think…has been excellent and in most other placements…counsellors are paying…paying a lot…for supervision…and…here…um…it's been regular, spot on…and free…yeah"* [Lyn/FG1/174-178]. In particular, trainees were keen to point out that their supervision had been suitable for trainees, as all had experienced supervision elsewhere as too challenging and insensitive. Charlotte explained, *"Supervision here has been a holding, supportive, experience…and although we've been challenged, of course, this has been sensitive…a friendly critic…rather than put-downs"* [Charlotte/FG1/1011-1012].

The staff focus group also extoled benefits of supervision, *"The key role is really supervision…and…trusting that supervision…of…trainees…that's crucial"* [Kate/FG2/894-995]. In addition to this, however, as evidenced here by Kate, staff also introduced a different concept, in that not only did they value the supervision that supported them, they also had to

learn to trust the supervision of trainees, as, whilst this was somewhat out of their control, it impacted greatly upon the work and safety of the placement. Another aspect of supervision was highlighted by staff who identified that placement issues are often overlooked within supervision, although it is essential that these are covered, *"those who offer placement services…need supervision on these processes"* [Ann/FG2/450-451].

The ethos of this theme was summed up perfectly by June, "*Supervision makes it all possible…it's the cornerstone to success*" [June/FG2/1022]. The reasoning that informs such comments is evidenced within previous statements, when Kate talked of the importance of trusting the supervision process and June's contribution, where revealing language described supervision as a fulcrum of placement processes. Supervision was identified as one of the main links between training, practice, trainee, and placement and interestingly, trainees made a clear distinction between supervision suitable for trained counsellors and that appropriate for trainees. The need to take placement matters, as well as practice issues, to supervision was also noted.

Sub-theme 4.6: The importance of robust assessment

This theme related to the importance of robust client assessment, particularly for trainees seeing early clients *"This {client assessment} is important…much more so with trainees……"* [Jan/FG1/167-168] and it is here, that the greatest differences between staff and trainee focus groups surfaced.

Trainees found the assessment process to be excellent and welcomed that there was any assessment process at all, since, as noted within comparisons to other placements [Theme 1.5] this does not always happen elsewhere, *"Assessment is good here…no assessment in my other placement"* [Charlotte/FG1/172-173]. Charlotte articulated this view, expressed by all participants within the trainee focus group, that assessment processes worked well and were an unusual luxury. What was not considered at all by trainees, however, was the pressure this induced in staff, as evidenced here by Ann, *"The assessment nightmare, we <u>have to get it right</u> and that's difficult"* [Ann/FG2/666], nor the risk element identified by staff and the huge responsibility this process placed upon them, as considered within the next theme.

5.14.5: Overarching Theme Five: Risky responsibilities
Central organising concept: Providing a counselling service involves risk and responsibility

Sub-theme 5.1: A risk iceberg

This theme addressed the staff's perception that risk factors involved in this venture were high, yet only partially visible, with much of the risk concealed below the surface. Staff were very aware of hidden risks, whilst trainees only considered those risks at the tip of the iceberg and visible above the water line. A good illustration of this was offered by Kate in considering risks associated with client referrals, "*somebody could be presenting with issues which seem*

straightforward…and…then…once counselling starts, there you go…it all unravels…it just starts to…unravel…in front of your…very…eyes. That makes it chancy" [Kate/FG2/435-438]. These hidden 'iceberg' issues made referrals to trainees difficult, as June explained, *"It's one thing to refer to a qualified counsellor… but…it's another to give that client to a trainee…that…that…has been an identified risk…and…challenging"* [June/FG2/406-409]. Kate concurred with June's concern, *"{Client referral} is a risky…business…for…trainees, with…perhaps…many issues out of their remit…but that's difficult to…sort of…recognise in early stages"* [Kate/FG2/430-433]. Later during this discussion, June disclosed:

> *I had to deal with a situation which was difficult…it did make me question myself, question my capability, question a decision I'd made regarding a referral. Did I get that right? Did I endanger the client? Did I endanger the trainee? It's not that nothing worked, everything worked well….In the process…everything worked well, the process worked, everything was done correctly…that's perhaps part of a pilot project…*[June/FG2/857-864]

In this extract, June identified the intention of a pilot project as a trial period, where systems and processes are tested, yet also drew attention to the narrow margin for error within counselling settings. This participant's questioning of self and her client referral processes provided rich insight into the hazardous element of client referrals to trainees and highlighted difficulties experienced in offering a therapeutic service where trainees conduct counselling. Great personal accountability and stress were engendered when considering whether a client was suitable for a trainee. To refer, or not to refer, was a big question.

Referral of clients was clearly identified as risky by June and this extract echoed a dominant construct throughout the staff focus group, where work undertaken at the placement, although rewarding, had been unpredictable, onerous, emotionally draining, and demanding, feelings possibly heightened by concerns voiced in Theme 2.5, where staff felt removed from the main structure of the university, in conjunction with the increase in complexity of clients identified in the following theme.

This theme covered participants' concerns regarding the risk involved in providing this placement, identifying hazards that became more apparent to staff through the operation of the service and caused concern, particularly around referrals to clients. On the other hand, trainees were far less influenced by general risk factors, oblivious to the pressures of client referral processes and hardly mentioned any risk factor connected to therapy. They saw it simply as, *"Referral processes are solid here…It's safe here"* [Dave/FG1/1066].

With risk, comes responsibility, and the huge level of responsibility felt by staff is discussed within the next theme.

Sub-theme 5.2: A weighty responsibility

This theme developed the central organising concept in that staff felt a massive weight of responsibility, although trainees felt less burdened. This was evidenced by trainees describing a manageable sense of responsibility for their clients, yet staff disclosing the great weight of responsibility they felt to themselves as professionals, the university, trainees, clients, community, and counselling as a profession. A poignant extract of June's transcript emphasised how these responsibilities conflicted at times, "*there were…oh dear…it still worries me, but there were…a few clients that…we…had to reject…because their mental health issues meant that…it just wasn't appropriate*" [June/FG2/877-879].

This extract evokes a picture of someone carrying an onerous burden due to a conflict of interest between her responsibilities to the trainee counsellor and the university that meant she could not carry through her inherent responsibility to offer support to a needy client, an experience that left her feeling uncomfortable. This amounted to an arduous responsibility, particularly when viewed against the perception that counselling at this placement was represented as the end of the road for some clients, *"Sometimes, we're seen as a last-ditch attempt with this client…"* [Ann/FG2/270-272]. This raised further issues in that this, and other quotations, *"…people who're looking for counselling {within this community} are often people GP's are kind've…at their wits-end {with}…"* [June/FG2/413-415], imply that the wellbeing, and possibly the lives, of these clients are in the hands of the assessor and volunteer trainees, a responsibility wholly taken on board by staff, yet not fully considered by trainees. What is also interesting, is that it was only towards the latter part of the project, that there was recognition that supervision could help in sharing the weight of referral responsibilities:

> *…something I didn't realise is that I needed supervision on holding the responsibility of referrals and assessments…and…that's something I'm now working on…and…that has made it much better…that's really helpful because…I've been holding it {the responsibility} too much…and…then I thought…well…why am I holding all this like this…I can take this to supervision…you know…because supervision….well…I thought about practice issues…..but hadn't thought about taking this stuff and having some place to talk…that helped my feeling of safety* [Kate/FG2/901-910]

Whilst there was an implicit responsibility to their clients, trainees did not share the magnitude of responsibility evidenced within the staff group, who were very aware of the burdens of responsibility they were carrying, *"We're often left…holding a lot of stuff"* [Ann/FG2/451].

As this division was related to many onerous aspects of the service, responsibility was far more prevalent within the staff focus group.

The logic that might be applied to this, is that accountability for client-work was firmly taken by staff, for example, through responsibility for a vigorous and stepped approach to client referrals, enabling trainees to feel, and be, safe and comfortable within early client experiences.

5.14.6: Overarching Theme Six: Thought Provoking Processes
Central organising concept: Work at the placement gave rise to profound thoughts and deep reflection

   Sub-theme 6.1: Who is helping who?

This question arose from comments made within both focus groups, which revealed oscillation between helping and being helped. Starting with the trainee focus group, participants frequently described how the placement helped them, seeming to hardly consider help in the form of the service they were providing to the community. Dave voiced this perception, "*Yes, interesting…that…we don't put that {good therapeutic service} higher up our list*" [Dave/FG1/381-382] and this view was also evident in this quotation from Charlotte, who clearly articulated that she, as a trainee, was the one being helped, as she felt fortunate to be involved in the placement, "*I was lucky {to have this experience}*" [Charlotte/FG1/89]. In contrast, for staff, the focus was on the service provided by the placement, with greater recognition on how the service benefitted others. An example of this was when Ann described how the placement had helped clients and supported the NHS, *"They send them to us…because they just…don't know…what else to do with them"* [Ann/FG2/271]. There was also representation within the staff focus group of how the placement had, albeit to a lesser extent than within the trainee focus group, benefitted them, "*Yeah, I definitely think that…to have the opportunity to, to do this…to be able to practise as well as teach…is essential*" [Kate/FG2/99-101].

This theme exampled how the help provided by the placement was constructed in different ways by staff and trainees, with trainees accentuating benefits to themselves, whilst acknowledging benefits to others, and staff recognising advantages to themselves, yet emphasising the value of the placement to trainees, clients, university, community, and profession.

Sub-theme 6.2: Values: self and counselling

Following on from the previous theme, the valuing and prizing of counselling as a service and valuing themselves within that service was paramount for all participants, *"Yes, value, it all comes down to value really"* [Ann/FG2/496]. As noted by Lyn, *"There's much discussion now...about whether counselling itself is valued"* [Lyn/FG1/303-304] and in this vein, the experience of working at the placement created a process of questioning the value of the service and considering the value of 'self' within that service.

Questions as to how counselling is valued as a profession arose within the trainee focus group from discussion regarding costs incurred by trainees working at the placement. For example, trainees often incurred travelling costs for a session only to find their client did not attend, a situation which made them question whether that client valued the profession, the trainee counsellor and/or the service. This led Charlotte to succinctly précis how, whilst trainees did not mind working for nothing, as they were not paid expenses and all their supervision costs were not met, they were left financially in negative balance, "*Working for nothing is one thing...paying to work is another*" [Charlotte/FG1/420-421]. This also resulted in trainees questioning their perception of their 'self' in this process and their self-worth "*Do we value ourselves...if we work for nothing?*" [Charlotte/FG1/305].

The questioning of value arose in a similar way for staff, through discussion regarding the high number of clients who did not attend sessions. Here, Kate clearly related missed sessions to the free status of counselling offered within the placement, *"....my frustration is that...when it's volunteering...and....when it's free...people just don't turn up*" [Kate/FG2/357-358]. She continued with a stark contrast to this statement, "*but...when you're paying...when you know you're going to be charged for that time...people make more effort to keep appointments...or...cancel them* [Kate/FG2/360-363].   The questioning of self within this process also arose for staff from discussion regarding how the university seemingly did not value the counselling activity taking place, nor that the placement involved work above and beyond paid employment, *".....does the university even value what's happening?*" [Ann/FG2/79-80]. Inherent within this extract is a questioning of whether efforts were valued and hesitation about the self-wisdom of putting oneself in a perceived unsupported position, offering a service involving high risk and responsibility, whilst questioning whether either the service or the individual was valued by clients or institution.

Within these perceptions of value, there was also a hint of questioning social constructions and power balances by both focus groups. For the staff focus group, questions were raised about the construct of power and systems within the university, *"It's like, who is the university? You know…that's the big question"* [June/FG2/97-98]. For trainees, this was portrayed by questioning the power of clients as pivotal to contact hours and therefore qualification*, "I…turn up…they don't…no hours evidenced…dah!"* [Jan/FG1/668-670]; a statement which inferred, that as time and effort had been expended for no subsequent increase in client hours, Jan felt powerless, in that clients controlled her practice hours within a tight time-scale. The expletive at the end of her statement, emphatically delivered, underlined her frustration.

Overall, there was an inherent sense that this service was undervalued because it was free, as Jan précised succinctly, *"I think that…because we're volunteers…our service isn't valued"* [Jan/FG1/301-302] and the view was also expressed that undervalue was not confined to this placement, *"Well…yeah…counselling is a profession where a lot of work undertaken is free…no payment…no value"* [Ann/FG2/1019-1020]. This theme was summed up in the overall sentiment expressed by Jan, *"We need to value our service and ourselves more…we offer a professional and worthwhile service"* [Jan/FG1/383-384].

The construct of value here is supported by financial and social overtones that differ from the more altruistic and moral role of caregiver considered within the next theme. Nevertheless, this theme raised broader issues regarding the profession, as these comments construct counselling as unappreciated when the service is free. Insight is also provided into value questions that can arise when providing a free counselling service, with trainee counsellors, within a university structure.

Sub-theme 6.3: Helping and caring roles

In the previous theme value was construed as having a financial, rather than a moral dimension. A different kind of world was revealed within this theme, however, where the placement was experienced as fulfilling a need to help others, *"…{The placement is} an important thing…in that we care for the community…An ethos of care"* [June/FG2/18-19]. Both groups identified with a helping and caring role, although this was stronger within the staff focus group, where a need to put helping and caring before financial gain was evidenced, *"We've met our need to work for no payment, to feel…to show…we…care"* [Kate/FG2/1017-1018]. Within this extract, staff situated counselling as a caring and giving profession, where a desire to help is given higher priority than fianancial gain. Nonetheless, another meaning

could also be crafted from these differing views expressed by staff and trainees, as for the staff group, financial gain was less important, as they were already in well-paid employment, whilst the trainees were not all employed. What was also particularly interesting within the staff focus group was, that whilst in other themes the roles of lecturer and placement provider were seen as conflicting, within this concept of care, they were seen as conceptually joined, with both strongly represented as caring professions, *"We made sure we did the best…the very best…we could, in caring…for our trainees…and…clients…in both of our roles…we are carers"* [Ann/FG2/1026-1028]. An integration of caring roles.

Although less focussed on the caring role, the trainee focus group also demonstrated their caring approach, as illustrated by this exchange between Charlotte and Lyn:

It's also good to think we've really helped this community…a community who need help [Charlotte/FG1/611-612]

Yes…[-]…we've done good…helped people who needed it most [Lyn/FG1/613-616]

This conversation evidenced that, whilst there was no financial gain, there was an intrinsic worth and a feeling of satisfaction in having undertaken this work, a concept reinforced meaningfully by June:

…it's…always heartening…when you see…hear someone…telling…sharing…their story…and…really wanting to engage in counselling, you know…heartfelt…and just…providing them with…an opportunity where they're able to do that, whereas they would not otherwise be able to access this…is so good [June/FG2/792-798]

This theme offered a construction of lecturers, placement providers, and trainees as caring and giving individuals, situating caring as an intrinsic part of their professional life, as June continued, *"…This is us…this is what we do…and…it's genuine...and wholehearted"* [June/FG2/1034-1035].

Theme 6.4: Changing conundrums

There was much discussion within both focus groups concerning changes within the profession and counsellor training. This mainly centred upon the reduction of practice hours for qualification [150-100] and a drop in staff/student contact hours [450-400]. Clear differences of opinion regarding these changes were evidenced, starting with the trainee focus group, where the relief in undertaking only 100 client hours for qualification could hardly be contained. The following dialogue demonstrated this:

So…have you got your hours now…? [Lyn/FG1/210]

288

Yes…I got my final number on Tuesday!!! [Dave/FG1/211]

General *"Well done!"* [FG1/212]

Imagine…Dave…if those changes hadn't happened…you'd have another 50 or something to go… [Charlotte/FG1/213-215]

Imagine…!!! [Dave/FG1/216]

Alongside relief regarding the cut in client hours necessary for qualification, trainees also voiced how this placement had helped them accrue hours, agreeing that qualification might not have been possible without this placement, "*I think we all probably…to greater or lesser degrees, owe the fact we've got our hours to working here….and lots of real…real…experience alongside it*" [Jan/FG1 578-580] {general agreement 582}. This activity of mounting hours was typically framed as stress inducing and a race against the clock, "*I have to say it again…I finished my hours!*" [Dave/FG1/609-610] {{Joint laughter}}. The shared laughter ending this exchange showed the individual, yet commonly experienced effort students put into accruing practice hours for qualification. In contrast, this urgency for hours was defined by staff as, worryingly, more like a chore and a competition than an educative experience, "*It's like a rush to the winning post…isn't it?* [Kate/FG2/721]. Leading on from this, the staff focus group also voiced a directly oppositional view to the trainees as they found the reduction in practice hours perturbing, as evidenced here by Ann, "*I find it scary actually…100 hours…then you're qualified?!*" [Ann/FG2/710-712].

Staff also had concerns regarding cuts in contact hours for counselling courses and corresponding impact on counsellors of tomorrow. June summed up these sentiments:

> *It's not matching up to QAA benchmarks…either…I don't think they match the QAA Benchmarks…it's like…they also dropped hours of teaching from 450-400, but there's still QAA benchmarks about what has to be in those hours [-] this is why we have a hard time…it's telling us to do this and this…but how do you do all this in 400 hours? It's almost impossible to teach all that…in 400 hours…then the feedback from some trainees…[-]…who're just finishing their programme…you know…well…I still think they wanted more…that sense of understanding crisis better, and we don't have this, we do, but not quite to the extent they're suggesting…[-]…because…we…don't have time to fit it all in……it's…not…matching…up* [June/FG2/726-743]

Furthermore, whilst trainees welcomed the cut in contact hours and practice, "*It's great that academic and practice requirements have been shortened*" [Dave/FG1/1000], they still felt there could have been greater attention to specialisms:

"*I would've liked more on alcohol intervention*" [Lyn/FG1/1099]

"Um….yeah" [Charlotte/FG1/1100]

This theme identified changing conundrums of client contact hours and teaching contact, detailing how the placement helped trainees accrue hours and how, although stressful, this was viewed as rather an abstract activity.   Within this, there also lies another level of noticing, as both the training levels and practice hours of counsellors have recently changed, changes which were broadly welcomed by trainees, yet caused concern for the staff. Disquiet was also expressed about how a reduction of training is happening parallel to a change in the interface of counselling, where more complicated presenting issues are now evidenced. June expressed this concern eloquently in fronting up this issue directly, *"No longer can a counsellor hide, all counsellors now have to have a real sense of mental health"* [June/FG2/754-755].

Paradoxes were also evidenced with trainees welcoming less contact and practice hours, yet wanting more specific training. Alongside this, stood an indication from staff that recent moves by the BACP devalued the profession, introducing dichotomies where trainees want more specific training, whilst the BACP drop in contact hours could result in less training in specialisms, even though wider and more complex issues are more frequently presented within therapy.

Sub-theme 6.5: Do what we say, not what we do

This theme related to a tendency to expect others to work to high standards, alongside a propensity not to be so particular within one's own sphere of influence.

In Theme 3.3, participants evidenced a lack of in-depth understanding of the framework that was, hypothetically, there to support them within the difficult tasks they were undertaking. This theme takes this to another dimension in that there was, seemingly, no recognition that whilst criticising others, this placement was not perfect. A kind of 'half-knowledge' was evidenced, where participants had been part of the policy-making process, yet there was a breakdown of process as policies were acknowledged, yet not fully understood. It was therefore questionable to what extent these policies were enacted and on what basis other placements were criticised. This was visible within the trainee focus group, where Jan questioned client contracts, the foundation for therapeutic work, *"Other placements don't even cover the use of phones in their contract…………..It's in our contract about phones…isn't it?"* [Jan/FG1/398-399]. There was also confusion within staff understanding and implementation of policies, seen here where Ann was unsure about something as important as insurance cover,

"Some placements don't even check insurance cover….Do our trainees have their own indemnity cover?" [Ann/FG2/699-700].

This was interesting from two perspectives. Firstly, as covered by Theme 3.3, all participants were aware of the placement handbook, yet were unclear about the systems in place. Here, this lack of understanding of their own systems was coupled with criticism of others for such shortfalls. Consequently, whilst all participants, albeit in different ways and degrees, criticised others for not having, or adhering to, good policies and procedures, they did not appear to heed their own advice, as policies were acknowledged, yet perhaps not fully integrated. There was a sense that policies and procedures were seen as important, yet abstract. What is more, there was no acknowledgment of the disjuncture between what was actually happening, as opposed to what should have been happening, alongside the high expectations espoused for other placements, admonished for shortcomings. This position is captured within the title of this theme, 'Do what we say, not what we do', a stance which strains against the modelling aspect of teaching, counselling, and good practice.

5.14.7: Overarching Theme Seven: Into the future
Central organising concept: Having brought the placement this far, participants had to consider what the future held

Sub-theme 7.1: Organisations like this placement are needed in communities

This theme highlighted the need for this placement and others like it, within local communities. The work of the placement was evidenced as hugely beneficial to the local community, *"We've given a service to a community…who…really…really needed that service"* [Charlotte/FG1/623-625].

There was, for example, a feeling that the placement had engendered wider knowledge of, and participation in, counselling *"People have access to counselling…who wouldn't normally…whereas when…you're charging for therapy…then…you're closing the door to many"* [Kate/FG2/804-807]. A new way of dealing with the many problems within this community had also been offered, *"It hasn't even been on their radar before...They'd no idea this was even out there…and it's…life-changing in terms of…wow…I didn't know this existed"* [Kate/FG2/800-802]. There was therefore agreement that the placement had filled a care gap within the society it served.

Participants provided many examples of how this placement helped the community, underpinning a need for this service and others like it. This concept was described eloquently

by June, *"There's a need for this and many more organisations doing community counselling…and…having a presence…in…the…community"* [June/FG2/8-9].

Sub-theme 7.2: Time to move on

The ethos of this theme was fully and pithily expressed by June, "*We're outgrowing the pilot project*" [June/FG2/656]. Participants recognised it was time to move on and that much of the problematic work was behind them, "*Most of the difficult…the…really difficult bits…are behind us….*" [Kate/FG2/1036-1037] and started to consider the future, *"We've done the hard part…we're…really…motoring…forward now…………"* [Charlotte/FG1/558]. Charlotte's analogy of motoring forward spoke of progression, yet she failed to finish this sentence, leaving the '…but where to?' question unspoken, hanging in the air.

The main thrust of this theme was the recognition that it was time to move on, yet there was an inherent uncertainty what, having brought the placement to this point, the future held for the project, or what to do with it now.

Sub-theme 7.3: Huge potential for further growth

The boundaries of this theme were defined well by Ann, *"The potential for this is huge"* [Ann/FG2/56]. Participants agreed that the placement had enormous potential and made suggestions for the growth of the project, as exampled by June, *"…we could bring in outside organisations to rent rooms [-] they could potentially use our trainees, as well…yeah….this would be growth, a way to grow…yeah"* [June/FG2/394-399]. Although, as evidenced within the next theme, participants also recognised, that whilst they made many varied suggestions for development, sustainability, and growth depended upon factors beyond their control [funding/staffing], which had to be addressed before any definitive growth plan could be designed and implemented.

Sub-theme 7.4: Frustration of hope, practicalities, and possibilities

Despite the feeling expressed in the previous theme, that the future of the placement was largely out of the control of these participants, there was much hope for the future of the placement within both focus groups, although this was tinged with frustration. Lyn evidenced this, "*I really hope we can take forward what we've started*" [Lyn/FG1/614-616]. Her emphasis on '*really*' revealed her concern that the future of the placement might be thwarted in some way, with June acknowledging that the placement had fulfilled a need in the community that would be unmet should the placement close, *"What I do think has been achieved is to fill a*

need…there's a need in this community…and…we've fulfilled it…fulfilled it well" [June/FG2/5-7]. Here, June uses the past tense to describe something that is presently continuing, claiming '*We have fulfilled it*', rather than '*We are fulfilling it*'. Inherent within these statements from Lyn and June was hope that this gap could continue to be filled, yet doubts that this project would prove sustainable. Staff were, however, realistic in accepting that this had been a lot of work for a small team and was now getting too big for them to handle, as Ann bluntly stated, *"We've developed this small organisation that, at the moment, is just about manageable…but we're right on the margin…if it goes just a little bit bigger, it's just going to implode…we'd…be…in a precarious position"* [Ann/FG2/595-599]. Ann's statement clearly demonstrated her concerns about developing the placement and she went on to specify what needed to be done for sustainability and growth. The meaning from this and other supporting contributions was clear, in that without backing from the university and increased staffing/funding, the placement could not survive, *"We….need staff…and…probably specialist staff"* [Ann/FG2/482].

As can be seen from these extracts, there was hope for the future of the placement, however hope was tempered by the feasibility of moving forward.

Both focus groups highlighted practical issues that needed addressing. Organisational and administrative issues needed to be strengthened, including an early assessment of client-work and the need to introduce a system such as CORE, *"We're ready for CORE now"* [Ann/FG2/467]. All participants also indicated, that for sustainability and growth, there had to be tighter administrative procedures and consistency and as evidenced earlier, the staff focus group also felt that changes to staffing levels were needed.

A huge practicality needed to sustain or grow the placement was funding, which was becoming more and more of an issue and identified by staff as blocking growth and the main challenge for the future. On the one hand, there was a sense of pride in creating the placement without funding, "*It's…I suppose…a triumph against adversity in many ways…although…it's hard to put it in these terms*" [Ann/FG2 1003-1005], whilst on the other hand there was recognition that not only could the placement not grow without funding, its sustainability was also questionable without an influx of funds *"…we definitely need funding"* [June/FG2/497].

In presenting the issue of funding as a massive block to the future of the placement and recognising that income was clearly needed, participants also identified several sources of potential income. Here are just two ideas for finance generation. The first was a proposal

from the trainee focus group, where Jan offered a possible funding source, *"Some banks…[-]…are offering funding to charities for 'good work in the community'…perhaps we could look at that?"* [Jan/FG1/345-349]. A second idea to raise funding came from the staff focus group, as Kate proposed, *"…what would stop us making a small charge…maybe…only £5.00…per session…or…something. So…we'd be getting revenue, but we'd still be providing a service for all…not only people who can afford to pay the full amount"* [Kate/FG2/490-494]. As there were various other suggestions to generate income, more latent interpretation questioned why, if funding was such a great motivator for moving forward, these and other suggestions like them had not been taken forward. This also posed a question whether the real problem related to the time involved in implementing and organising these activities. This would mean that the placement needed more staff to generate funding, and needed funding to generate staff, *"…for…the people involved…I don't think it's our job to look for funding…that's…specialist activity"* [June/FG2/498-500]. There is also another possibility that issues of funding and staffing were masking another concern in that it is possible from staff's offerings that it was the feeling of being out on a limb and perceived lack of support from the university [Theme 2.5] that could be the real underlying block to sustainability and growth, as voiced by all staff and clearly articulated here by June, *"….for staff it's sustainable as long as there's support. We have to have support from the institution…and…faculty because that…has to be there...and I'm not sure it is….* [June/FG2/550-553].

Discussion regarding the future raised another practical issue in the form of staffing levels, as there was acknowledgement that current workloads could not be sustained indefinitely, without jeopardising the service, as voiced by Ann, *"…we're getting onto rocky ground, a bit, we're…a…very…small team"* [Ann/FG2/596-597]. Above and beyond this, was the recognition that from here, sustainability and growth would need additional, specialist staff, as identified when, in discussing her frustration with the problem of how to move the project forward, June noted that progress would entail different skills than those currently available within the team, as endorsed by Kate, *"We need…like…a practice manager now"* [Kate/FG2/626].

Whilst considering hopes and practicalities for the future, many possibilities were considered. All centred around the main aim to provide trainees with a placement and develop the placement as a training tool, whilst continuing the work of taking counselling into the community, thus cutting waiting lists. Within this, there was also a sense that participants were, in a way, suffering because of their own achievements, as it seemed that the placement

had grown so much, it was becoming too big for a small team to handle. Ann described how the placement was changing and participants felt hoisted on their own petard:

> *To grow it…we have to look at sustainability...it almost seems that it needs a new hierarchy now, doesn't it…you know...when organisations start…they achieve…then they get bigger…and…things start to shift…and…there needs to be a new hierarchy, or more time is needed for us to do it properly [-] we've got it to a stage where it's now too big for us to handle...we're victims of our success…I suppose…that's what is happening...that's making us stressed….we need something to make us ready and have space…time…to take it to the next step* [Ann/FG2/645-654]

This theme captured how participants took stock of their situation, considering what had been done to date, with the main thrust of this expressively communicated by June, *"What we've done…in a sense…what we've done is to put our name out there in…that arena…for that kinda of work in this community"* [June/FG2/15-17], knowing what needed to be done, *"From here…it's…maintaining the service…growing the service"* [Charlotte/FG1/350-351], yet uncertain as to how, or even whether, this was possible.

5.14.8 Summary of Thematic Analysis

This phase of research provided a thematic analysis, grounded in data, which answered the research question, "How do staff and students describe their experience of a placement parallel to a counsellor course?" The answer to this question can be summarised as a construction of the placement as a viable practice model, yet one which needed more support from the hosting institution, required some refinement of operating systems and had resource and funding implications. Many issues identified in outsourcing placements were addressed, although other problems took their place. In answering this question, participants described their involvement with the placement as a valuable experience overall and a good initiative in bringing together training and practice elements of counsellor training. They acknowledged there had been some problems along the way and recognised that for sustainability and progression, there needed to be integration, modification, and improvements.

A synopsis of over-arching themes is presented as Appendix 48 and a detailed table of findings on a theme-by-theme basis is attached as Appendix 49. Appendix 50 summarises findings, grouped into general, practical, and organisational/administrative concepts.

There are many ways of making meaning from data sets qualitatively, all of which are partial and subjective to some extent, as they cannot offer the only truth (Braun and Clarke, 2013) and these participants, at this time, answered this question by describing their experience as mostly

good, although admitting that all was not plain sailing. Gaps in knowledge and practice were identified through the process of learning by doing and the risks and responsibilities involved with the work of the placement led to thought-provoking processes. In reflecting upon their experiences, participants considered how the placement might move forward into the future. The final words of this thematic analysis of the two focus group discussions are left to June who summarised, in one statement, how participants contextualised this placement experience, *"Overall, a very worthwhile project…but one that needs to be valued, supported, and financed for sustainability and growth"* [June/FG2/968-969].

5.15 Discussion of thematic analysis

Focus groups were chosen to generate data as they are used extensively within the social sciences to explore diverse topics (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015), gather information about little-researched issues and provide access to everyday ways of talking about topics (Braun and Clarke, 2013). The capacity of focus groups to facilitate discussion around the meaning of recent experiences and encourage collective sense-making and meaning-making (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015) was also important due to the cooperative nature of the placement.

Each focus group met once for between 60–90 minutes, with the moderator adopting a semi-structured style, making only minimal interventions when there was a break in the flow of conversation (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Topics were drafted to invite reflection and information-gathering, rather than service-evaluation and as participants talked naturally to each other, rather than directly to the researcher, this encouraged dialogue like normal conversation (Wellings, Branigan and Mitchell, 2000), where participants used everyday vocabulary and descriptive phraseology (Wilkinson, 1998).

Analytical procedures and findings, defined earlier, generated rich data regarding the experience of offering a placement alongside a counselling course. Within this process, staff perspectives were positioned, not merely from an educator's third party perspective, but from a more real foundation, as they had experienced the transition of placement experiences as a trainee, a course provider, and now as a service-provider. The trainees were, and viewed themselves as, actively engaged in the placement in meaningful roles that offered discerning perspectives into placement processes. Thus, participants provided insight into the experiences of those responsible for, and closely involved in, the provision of a counselling placement within a university setting and emphasised the value of exploring this practice model. Participants agreed that offering a placement alongside a counselling course can be

beneficial to all involved, a finding which relates to suppositions by Holdsworth and Quinn (2012), that all benefit from such arrangements; trainees attain new skills and enhance employability, trainers forge relationships with local communities and clients access services. Furthermore, the bringing together of training and practice in this way, could, with support and fine-tuning, work well for staff and trainees. This concurs with Tynjälä (2008) whose meta-analysis found instances of beneficial 'coming together' of education [theory] and work [practice]. Nevertheless, forging partnerships between theory and practice has also been found to be challenging (Corlett, et al., 2003; Tynjälä, 2008) and this proved to be the case in this instance.

Many problems participants described in this in-house placement were similar to those experienced in other placements. As explained by Oldale and Cooke (2015) and evidenced within previous phases of this research, however, a variety of levels of outsourced practice experiences were evidenced. This finding is concerning when viewed against research undertaken by Skovholt, Jennings and Mullenbach (2004), which positioned client-work and reflecting upon client experiences as essential for growth and development. It could therefore be argued, that if trainees have poor placement experiences in early practice they may be denied the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Participants described their experiences broadly in terms of general concepts, practice concepts, and organisational/administrative concepts. Taking descriptions of general concepts of the placement first, there were many points of harmony between the focus groups, with numerous findings common to both groups and a few differing views expressed. Participants agreed that, as identified by Reeves (2013), securing a placement can be difficult and took this principle further, noting that within the counselling field multiple placements are necessary not only to accrue practice hours and benefit from balanced placement experiences, but also as counselling was contextualised as an isolating profession. Having more than one placement was therefore seen as increasing contact with other professionals, a finding which sits alongside comments made locally, that recommend that trainees have more than one placement (Coleg Sir Gar, 2009; Serenity, 2013; CISS, 2015).

Additionally, variations participants described in placements support earlier work on training, practice, and work experience undertaken by Tynjälä (2008), who found workplaces to differ greatly in how they support trainees and facilitate learning and, as highlighted by Armstrong and McLeod (2003), issues of sustainability and progression raised are common within the

counselling volunteer sector, the environment where counsellor placements are situated. A finding also related to both in-house and outsourced placements is the stress of early client-work as evidenced in research by Skovholt and Rønnestad (2003) and later by Moss, et al. (2014) which identified that both new and advanced counsellor trainees can struggle with what can be unrealistic expectations of what it is to be a counsellor.

Another element with implications for general placement practice was the strong case put by participants for counsellor educators and placement providers to be, and remain, in current practice. Only scant information is available about the relationship between counselling practice and counsellor educators, although this finding confirms previous research which has, over the years, encouraged counsellor educators to integrate teaching and practice roles to provide greater depth to the training experience by offering trainees practical knowledge alongside academic learning (Grossman, et al., 2009; Overholser, et al., 2010). A more recent study also suggests that being a practising counsellor enhances teaching models and improves trainee learning, and the current research confirms such views expressed within the large-scale, mixed method, research project undertaken by Ray, Jayne and Miller (2014).

A further strand, evidenced within the current research, was that career-long personal and professional development is integral to the profession, a position that reflects views within the counselling field, positioning ongoing personal and professional development as important for practising counsellors (Spencer, 2006, John, 2012; BACP, 2015b; Vetre and Stratton, 2016).

Other issues participants raised were more specific to the context of a placement operating alongside a university course and were more difficult to conceptualise within literature due to the lack of research into this practice model. Participants frequently described the university practice model as better than other placements, supporting these perceptions with vivid examples. In making comparisons to other placements, participants suggested that the university placement mitigated some identified shortfalls when outsourcing placements and provided greater equality of early practice. For example, this placement offered a generic counselling experience, equitable opportunity, close involvement, and communication. Nevertheless, whilst many identified shortfalls in outsourcing counsellor placements were not evidenced within this in-house placement, they were replaced with other problematic issues such as high levels of risk/responsibility, additional work for staff, multiple/dual relationships, and potential boundary issues. Most issues discussed by both focus groups were labelled as good points, promoting the placement as beneficial to all involved. The prevalence of this

polarisation of external placements as bad, and this internal placement as good could, however, be viewed against the possibility that this construct may reflect how participants were entrenched in their work at the time of the focus groups and therefore felt precious about their accomplishment and protective of their contributions over a period of over two years.

Participants also described how, within the placement, important transitions took place as students felt they transitioned from trainee to counsellor and reported feelings of support, belonging, and ownership within the process. The support trainees described at this time is important to professional development when considered alongside the view of Tweed, et al. (2010), who, in researching the progression of medical professionals, described the transition from undergraduate to the first year of training as the most challenging of professional transitions. Staff were also aware of role transition as they took on the position of placement provider alongside lecturing and volunteer counsellor roles. This can be related to concepts identified by Fouad and Bynner (2008), who explored transitions within work and workers. Participants also described developmental placement processes akin to professional actualisation and striving for personal actualisation ascribed by Rogers (1963), with the placement also perceived as an important teaching tool which could be further developed, concurring with research undertaken by Koskinen and Äijö (2013).

Participants acknowledged that the placement had widened participation and helped the community and emphasised the need for this placement and others like it within local communities. This strengthens sentiments expressed by Shooter (2008, p.19) which emphasised the need for counselling to become "accessible in time, place, and culture" by providing counselling services in whatever format is required by people struggling in deprived communities. An important question was also raised by participants as to how best to provide counselling services in disadvantaged communities, paralleling a query posed by Shooter who asked whether therapists have a role to play on the streets of our poorest areas, where unemployment is into its third generation and life is uniquely miserable (Shooter, 2008, p.19). Similarly, participants in the current research identified a need for an extension of research by Mistral, Brandling and Taylor (2006), who explored savings to the nation as the result of counselling services.

Both focus groups articulated that for this placement, it was time to move on and staff, particularly, related this to outgrowing the pilot project. Here, participants' descriptions of journeying through various organisational stages relates to how voluntary agencies constantly

move through cycles of 'stability and crisis' (Hasenfeld and Schmid, 1989; McLeod, 1994; Armstrong and McLeod, 2003, p.257), which impact upon staff morale, strategic planning, and service delivery (Armstrong and McLeod, 2003; Chronicle of Philanthropy, 2006), as these participants had clearly reached the stage where change was necessary. Consideration was therefore given to the future pathway of the placement, stock-taking, reflecting, and recognising potential for growth.

This placement was seen as very much a joint enterprise between staff and students and a community enterprise, as it brought university and community into greater contact and had made a difference within a designated area of need (WIMD, 2014). All participants described a sense of accomplishment. For trainees, accomplishment related mostly to accruing hours for qualification which, according to Halifax (2009a), can be stressful. For staff, achievement related more to conceptual issues and was tempered by relief of having got to this point. The status of the placement as a pilot project, as opposed to a permanent placement, also impacted upon staff, dampening enthusiasm to claim too much success, even though pilot studies are recognised as contributing to organisational learning (Turner, 2005). Interestingly, whilst trainees felt a sense of permanence, staff were more aware of the transience of a pilot project, underpinning the view of Turner (2005), that whilst the role of a pilot project is to reduce uncertainty, by their very nature, they are transient and often redundant once initial stages of work are completed. This seemed to relate to role insecurity since, as described by Callea, et al. (2016), employees need to feel secure to perform a role effectively.

Work at the placement was described as largely unpaid activity and volunteering was constructed as an intrinsic part of counselling in line with links between counselling and volunteering discussed by Armstrong and McLeod (2003) and Reeves (2013), with counselling, lecturing, and volunteering identified as caring roles by both focus groups. Trainees identified with their individual therapeutic helping and caring role, whilst staff identified more strongly with a wider helping remit and a caring therapeutic, organisational, and community role. Furthermore, whilst recognising that in this placement, roles of lecturer/placement provider/counsellor sometimes conflicted, these were generally viewed as conceptually joined caring professions.

There were no topics within the focus group schedule relating to the value of counselling, or the placement. Nevertheless, this developed into a strong representation as participants questioned the investment of time, effort, and money put into the placement, alongside the

wisdom of providing a free counselling service when there were doubts about the observed value of the service offered, the perceived value of counselling and a questioning of the value of one's self within that process. It was also evidenced, that whilst trainees need to accrue hours to qualify (Halifax, 2009b), counsellors often work for free once qualified [and very experienced], so volunteering is crucial to qualification, yet does not end there (Armstrong, 2010). Staff felt that placement experiences would inform future teaching and, in an oppositional view to that expressed by trainees, who talked of volunteering impinging on paid employment, staff had a positive take on paid work/volunteer balance as they benefitted, because their paid employment allowed them to partially maintain BACP practice requirements (BACP, 2015b) and fulfilled their desire to offer free counselling, helping clients, and community (Bueno, 2009).

Participants in research conducted by Burkholder and Hall (2014) noted similarities between the values of the counselling profession and a counsellor's personal values. In the current research there were, however, clear examples of personal and professional values conflicting, as evidenced by June's dilemma [June/FG2/877-879], where her professional values had to override her personal desire to help a client and, as explained by Ametrano (2014), such conflict between a counsellor's personal and professional values can make ethical decision-making difficult.

Questioning the value of counselling invoked consideration of a counsellor's personal values and beliefs alongside those of the counselling profession (Francis and Dugger, 2014) and evoked questioning of the self of the counsellor within the counselling process, the value of free counselling, and the ethos of volunteer/unpaid work within the profession (Bondi, Fewell and Kirkwood, 2003; Armstrong, 2010). This again, can be related to writings of Armstrong and McLeod (2003), as participants took this concept further in considering the value and worth of free counselling within a profession with strong links with the voluntary sector and a reputation for offering free services. This turn of emphasis arose from discussion about operating the placement for over two years largely on a voluntary basis, with no funding. Whilst considering the possibility of charging for counselling, a wider altruistic/economic element surfaced, revealing a feeling that if price elasticity of public good has enough importance, there is a boost in perceived value to price (Yang, 2012;2013), increased worthiness of the service and the worth of the counsellor increases. In summary, if something is paid for, it is more valued. This dependence on price elasticity, i.e. whether it can be

increased [or in some cases instigated] with little impact on consumer demand, was seen to be a concept yet to be tested for this placement in particular, and counselling in general.

How to take the concept of an in-house placement forward was also identified as an issue of some importance as participants described having reached a cusp; there was a need to move on, yet uncertainty and a lack of control over the future. Accordingly, focus groups provided some answers, but also raised another issue in that, for this cohort, at this time, the question seemed to be whether the work of the placement was valued enough to attract financial, practical, and moral support from the university to grow, or whether this price elasticity had to be tested in other ways.

Arising from this, an interesting parallel process emerged as a question asked by Ann in relation to clients accessing free counselling […*"because they're not paying for it…do they value it?"* {Ann/FG2/555}] seemed, at the end of the staff focus group to also be relevant to the placement in a more general sense, *"but it goes back to…values…again…now...is the institution here seeing, valuing...this project…really…valuing…recognising its potential?"* [June/FG2/1010-1011] and in a broader sense to the profession in general, *"How is counselling valued?"* [Kate/FG2/999]. These concepts are currently in focus, are discussed in Therapy Today as one of the biggest problems facing contemporary counselling (Hawkins, 2014b; Rogers, 2014), and are also raised by Sin and Fitzpatrick (2012).

Interestingly, throughout both focus groups, a reluctance to criticise was evidenced, although this was more prevalent within the trainee group. This could be attributed to the sense of ownership participants felt for the placement, or, for trainees, a perceived power balance between trainees and the researcher as addressed by Quinney, Dwyer and Chapman (2016).

Turning next to practice concepts, participants agreed that close links to the counselling course were appreciated in the short-term, yet the value of familiarity in the longer-term was less certain, as whilst familiarity was seen within the immediacy of experience as helpful, questions were raised as to whether, in the longer-term, this could be limiting, could restrict the full range of placement experiences and be disadvantageous. This relayed how remaining in a comfort zone for early practice might delay moving from familiarity to what has been described as a "growing edge" (Denham-Vaughan, 2010, p.35) of learning. There were also echoes here from attachment theory, which can be drawn upon to explain how familiarity is desirable to some workers, and elucidate the influence of attachment orientations to career progression and stability (Nelson and Quick, 1991; van Ecke, 2007; Renfro-Michel, et al.,

2009) and successful work adjustments (Burlew, 2006). Also relevant is the relationship between attachment styles and how workers deal with stress and burnout (Cherniss, 2016), and/or feelings about coming out of their comfort zone (Yerkes and Dodson, 1907).

It is also noteworthy, that during discussions regarding familiarity, there was no indication within either focus group that familiarity of the 'process' [counselling qualities/skills] was either present, or helpful, a concept contrary to views of Nelson-Jones (2015) and Egan (2014) and interesting when considered alongside ongoing curiosity around the relevance of training to practice (Hill, et al., 2015).

Multiple/dual roles were identified as a source of possible problems by staff, a subject prevalent within counselling literature (Gabriel, 2005), as many counselling professionals engage in portfolio careers, leading to unavoidable dual relationships which, as acknowledged by Herlihy and Corey (2015), are controversial issues within counselling.

There was also a thread throughout both focus groups, albeit in somewhat diverse ways, regarding how 'different' this placement was compared to others and in constructing this placement as very different, it was questionable whether this was real practice experience. Again, the lack of research into this practice model makes it difficult to contextualise this finding, although it has previously been evidenced that trainees who engage with placement experiences outside their learning environment, gain exposure to other professionals and ways of working and may therefore experience greater professional development and a truer image of the working life of a counsellor (Prosek and Hurt, 2014). Additionally, a wide range of practice experiences were valued differently by the focus groups. For example, trainees focussed on a construct of the placement as a good experience because it had provided practice opportunities, whilst staff concentrated more on providing a valuable service to trainees and a needy community. Likewise, trainees offered difficult experiences of a practical nature that could easily be addressed, while staff constructed more conceptual difficulties linked to clinical practice. Both focus groups described challenges and rewards of being a therapist, strengthening findings by Turner, et al. (2008), that parallel the current research.

All participants acknowledged how the placement had facilitated a wide range of administrative, organisational, and therapeutic experiences as advocated by Oldale and Cooke (2015) and the experience of drafting and implementing policies and procedures was described as invaluable in accord with the stated position of the BACP (BACP, 2015b). The importance of policies and procedures has been discussed widely within the counselling field (Reeves,

2015a; Bond, 2015a), nevertheless, the implementation of these has received less attention. Within the current research there was an identified shortfall between drafting and understanding policies and procedures and their enactment, serving to underline how the activation of policies, as well as their existence, needs further attention; both focus groups were aware of policies/procedures, yet seemingly uncertain about applying these to procedural issues. The implementation of procedures is identified as vital for good practice by Bond (2015a), and this finding also concurs with research by Brown (2006), who stipulates that having policies in place is not enough, counsellors not only have to be aware of these and understand them, they must take responsibility for implementing them. There was no recognition of the dichotomy that whilst placing high expectations on other placements to comply with BACP standards (BACP, 2013a) some aspects of this placement were less than perfect.

One area where there were noticeable differing experiences between focus groups was around the reduction in teaching and practice requirements for qualification introduced by the BACP (BACP, 2013a). Trainees described these variations to practice hours as a huge relief, although, whilst welcoming less practice hours, there was also an indication that more training and preparation for client-work might have made them more prepared for early practice. Paradoxically, staff found the BACP changes perturbing, revealing concern that reductions in training and practice are occurring parallel to a shifting interface of counselling where more complicated presenting issues are evidenced. Staff constructed this contradiction as a devaluing of the profession, explaining that although students often indicate that they need more training, this is increasingly difficult due to reduced teaching contact hours.

Further divergence between focus groups was also visible around the acquisition of client hours, in that trainees were concerned about a concept described by Levi (1984) as 'rust-out' where they had too few clients, or 'burn out' (Levi, 1984; Malinowski, 2013) due to too many clients. They constructed this as stressful and a race against the clock, whereas staff were concerned that this was becoming more like a chore and a competition than an educative, experiential experience. There is a close connection between this finding and writing by Halifax (2009a, p.8-9), which referred to early therapeutic sessions as merely clocking-up hours, positioning this as a mechanical logging exercise rather than therapeutic learning. Linked to this were difficulties experienced with the flow of clients, with trainees concerned because of their need to accrue hours and staff frustrated by client DNA's and the unpredictable number and suitability of client referrals for trainees.

Undoubtedly, issues around vigorous client assessment and referral processes created the biggest variance between focus groups. Robust assessment and identifying clients at risk was acknowledged as significant by both groups in keeping with research undertaken by Bewick, et al. (2006) which identified risk assessment as a top priority for counselling services, whilst recognising that counsellors often have little or no training within this area (Milner and O'Byrne, 2003). Assessment processes were also identified as especially important when assessing clients for referral to trainees (Tasker, 2010; QAA, 2013). In this placement, trainees described assessment processes as excellent and robust, in accord with BACP recommendations (BACP, 2013a). Furthermore, having trusted people around added greatly to trainees' placement experience, ensuring that they felt 'held' and secure within their client-work. These assessment and supportive strategies added to a feeling of security that may have led to the finding that students saw the placement as having more longevity than did staff, who felt restrained by the pilot status of the placement. Furthermore, trainees welcomed client assessment processes, as assessments did not take place in other placements. The trainee focus group's experiences were, however, far more unproblematised than those described by staff, as trainees remained unaware of risk elements identified by staff and did not relate to the huge sense of responsibility this process placed on staff, there was little awareness of the unseen volume of the iceberg. On the other hand, staff were very aware of risk elements within this process and struggled with the burden this process placed upon them.

This divergence is thought-provoking, as whilst staff accepted that client assessment processes were robust, they identified this process as onerous and stressful as, unlike the trainees, staff were acutely aware of the risk and the huge responsibility involved with delivering a counselling service, especially when therapy is delivered via trainees, where there is a particularly vulnerable client-base, and the placement is within a university setting. This anxiety appeared greater, in part, because the counselling offered at this placement was sometimes constructed as the last chance for some clients. This resulted in stress, as staff questioned their ability, as also evidenced by Hellman, Morrison and Abramowitz (1987), who identified professional doubt as a factor which invokes stress. Furthermore, such perceived responsibility for another's life and/or safety is a recognised major source of stress, a concept demonstrated in early research by Crump, et al. (1981) in researching air traffic controllers.

Trainees emphasised high stress levels and anxiety when engaging in early client-work and identified this as a landmark point of training when they needed high levels of support,

particularly at the time of first client contact. This finding extends a small, yet relevant, study by Folkes-Skinner, Elliott and Weaver (2010), who identified how encounter with a first client is stressful, yet a seminal moment in training. Further to this, in the current study, both trainees and staff identified that students would benefit from a mentor as well as a supervisor around the time of early practice, confirming early research undertaken by Truell (2001), Izzard (2003), and more recently, Georgiadou, Willis and Canavan (2015).

Alongside this, evidence also emerged that starting therapy can be a stressful time for clients and therefore the content and timing of information given to prospective clients was identified as important. This raised several associated issues, for example, the impact of clients presenting for counselling with little knowledge of the process was constructed mainly as an irritant which delayed the start of the counselling process, yet alluded to issues of power imbalance as the counsellor has control and information, whilst the client has neither, a possibly discomforting experience for the client and not a good start to the therapeutic relationship. Whilst Bond (2015a) draws attention to power imbalances within counselling relationships, little specific research into how stressful an experience this can be for clients, was found.

Social constructions and power balances within placement processes were also considered, although in differing ways, by both focus groups, with trainees describing a power imbalance as clients influenced their qualification as by not turning up for sessions, clients can block practice hours. Trainees, as also reported by Tribe (2005), also felt lucky to be working at the placement whilst, paradoxically, staff were more philosophical in contemplating power balances within the social and organisational construct of the university and society.

Supervision was hailed as a cornerstone of placement processes and described as a lifeline by all participants. The importance of supervision to practise, evidenced by the current research, is generally accepted within literature as a vital component of counsellor training and practice (Grant and Schofield, 2007; Wheeler and Richards, 2007; Starr, et al. 2013; Bond, 2015a) and in this placement, trainees valued regular, free, good quality supervision. Trainees within this study also felt, however, that early practice necessitates a particular type of supervisor, someone in tune with the stresses of starting client-work.

Staff went further in their identification of the importance of supervision, as although supervision was seen as vital to the process by staff and students alike, for the staff group, there were two extra layers identified. Firstly, the importance and value of taking the huge

responsibility held by staff in relation to assessment, referral, and placement issues to supervision only surfaced well into the life of the placement, a change which lightened the load and highlighted the value of supervision within client assessment/referral processes and when providing a counselling service. Secondly, alongside their own use of supervision, staff also had to learn to respect and trust the process of trainee supervision and the impact of this upon client-work.

There were three other marked and important differences between the focus groups. Firstly, whereas the placement was described as a supportive experience for trainees, staff did not feel supported. Secondly, whilst it is common for trainees to find it difficult to develop a sense of belonging (Bradbury-Jones, et al., 2007), in the current study it was the trainees who felt a sense of ownership, whilst staff expressed a strong sense of ownership of therapeutic processes, yet constructed the placement as disconnected from the main system of the university, a situation that strains against the benefits and support of belonging to a network of contacts (Little and Harvey, 2006). Thirdly, when considering the burden of responsibility, for trainees there was an implicit responsibility to their clients, yet they were unaware of any burden of responsibility above and beyond their own client-work, whilst staff felt that the placement was a huge additional responsibility. In some instances, the placement was described in two distinct ways by the focus groups. For example, the trainee focus group talked about feelings of safety and support, whilst on the other hand, in a very different construct, the staff focus group reported feeling unsafe and unsupported. They felt detached from the main thrust of the university structure and, as such, did not feel a sense of ownership of the placement. Seemingly, staff were holding the trainees, but felt that they could have been more held by the university within this process, as they spoke about their need for recognition and greater understanding of the responsibility of utilising trainees to offer a generic counselling service. Resultantly, staff felt that the support of the university was needed for the placement to continue. Feeling undervalued and resultant stress are common traits within health workers and can eventually cause a decrease in personal health, resulting in taking time off work, as suggested by helping professionals in research by Tabaj and colleagues, who, like participants in the current research, also felt frustrated as the result of a sense of feeling undervalued (Tabaj, et al., 2015). The way the staff focus group defined feeling stressed, described lack of control over their future, and voiced concern about values, also lends authority to recent work undertaken by Lamb and Cogan (2016).

Furthermore, the placement as a resource was constructed in different ways by trainees and staff. Trainees accentuated benefits to themselves, whilst acknowledging benefits to others, whilst staff recognised advantages to themselves, yet emphasised benefits of the placement to trainees, clients, university, community, and profession, describing altruistic tendencies in wanting to give something back to a community and provide the depth and breadth missing in some of their own placement experiences. These concepts have been linked within research by Swank, Robinson and Ohrt (2012), who drew attention to a link between altruism and counsellor success.

Moving on to organisational and administrative concepts, participants agreed that counselling in general and placements in particular, suffer from an information deficit, where the public and prospective clients need better information regarding counselling concepts and/or what happens in counselling sessions, although trainees suffered from information overload, where conflicting advice from course providers, placement providers, and supervisors caused confusion.

There was general acknowledgement that administrative and organisational protocols needed to be refined to take the project into the future, a future, where early evaluation of the service was needed to progress. In this regard, the need to demonstrate the efficacy of the service through gathering a bank of statistical evidence, possibly via CORE (CORE, 2012), was suggested by both groups. Alongside this, the huge potential for growth was recognized, although funding and staffing were needed for sustainability and development.

Other themes common to both groups, included an acknowledgement of the placement as constituting learning by doing, supporting theories espoused by Knowles (1980) and Kolb (1984). Two participant comments encapsulated the meaning of this theme, *"The more I do it, the better I become"* [Jan/ FG1/240-243], and "*We're, quite simply…learning it…by doing it*" [Dave/FG1/557]. This concept can be related to an observation made by a qualitative research student who commented, "You have to do it to learn it…You can't just sit there, read a book and think, 'Oh, that's how I do it" (Shaw, Dyson and Peel, 2008). Furthermore, Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, praised for its validity (Scaife, 2010), explains these participants' learning since as they worked through placement experiences, they were grounded by reflexive observation, so that alongside active experimentation, real learning occurred through a cyclical process of practice, learning, and reflection.

A thematic analysis of collected data answered the research question by describing participants' involvement with the placement as a valuable experience overall and a good initiative in bringing together training and practice elements of counsellor training. In so doing, participants acknowledged there had been problems of some magnitude that would need to be addressed for sustainability and growth.

5.15.1 Limitations of research

Whilst the overall aim of the study was met, it needs to be borne in mind that the current research had limitations.

Firstly, this study was restricted to trainees and staff within a single university within South West Wales. These findings were therefore conceptualised in an explicit context by particular participants, located within a specific setting. Furthermore, the lack of response within Phase One meant that perspectives on similar projects proved inaccessible. Consequently, as there was no information available as to how others had approached similar projects, experiences of participants in the current research could not be compared to similar placements. The absence of this voice of experience diminished the completeness of the overall data corpus.

Secondly, the focus group schedules could have been improved and collecting data via focus groups did not allow in-depth following through on more inherent views. Moreover, the moderator could have taken steps to expand or deepen the conversation at identified junctures.

Thirdly, the seven focus group participants self-selected to participate and the experiences of those who chose not to participate may have been different. It is also possible that there was a measure of social desirability bias, where participants felt a sense of loyalty to the project and the focus group moderator/researcher, who was a member of staff within the university and the placement.

Finally, due to the lack of corresponding studies to support these findings, it proved difficult to contextualise these with previous research and as findings relate to this cohort, at this time, transferability of findings cannot be certain, until similar studies are conducted in other areas.

5.15.2 Recommendations for future research

No research is an end in and of itself and further steps needed to progress the ongoing process of enquiry were identified.

Firstly, there is a need to further explore the role of familiarity within the context of course providers providing placements and the 'different' concept of this practice model, particularly whether this model can provide real placement practice experience. Secondly, as this research confirmed the value of early client experiences to counsellor training, further studies could explore the effectiveness of counsellor training where there is a move away from placements and sole reliance on theory. It would also be advantageous to research alternative models of practice for the facilitation of early skills practice.

Thirdly, this research drew attention to a power imbalance which can occur within counselling relationships, creating stressful experiences for clients. Further research into this area would therefore be beneficial. Fourthly, what remains unknown at the end of this study are the experiences of a university placement's clients [this is considered further in the researcher's reflections at the end of this chapter] and whilst some research has been carried out on the experience of clients working with trainee counsellors (Sackett, Lawson and Burge, 2012; Sackett and Lawson, 2016), there is a need for more research into service-users' perceptions regarding the efficacy of this in-house service delivery. Finally, little is also known about the impact of organisations like the Community Counselling Centre on host communities. Research into the impact of such a placement on the community would therefore be a natural study to emanate from the current research.

5.16. Summary

This chapter addressed Study Two which explored a training and practice alignment where university counselling courses offer trainees a placement alongside their course.

Chapter Six brings the thesis to a close with a general discussion and conclusions.

5.17 Researcher's reflections

Working on this thematic analysis was an interesting experience for me. I enjoyed thematically analysing the focus group data and this process made me again question the decision to choose IPA for the analysis of the interview data [Chapter Four] due to its volume and content.

I also reflected upon my dual role as researcher/lecturer, and resultant awareness ensured that I made every effort to emphasise my status as a researcher, stressing that this overrode my other

roles, and ensuring that these dual activities were open and transparent. Nevertheless, whilst this research tells a particular story, not the story, it was important, given these dual roles, that my supervisor considered the data set and analysis and agreed that themes were faithful to the data.

My biggest point of reflection, however, related to the decision not to include the client voice in my research in general, and in particular for this study. I therefore now share my reflections on this decision.

To start at the beginning, my original research proposal included counselling clients as the main stakeholders within the counsellor placement process, and my research design had a strong therapeutic foundation. This proposal was initially considered by the Community Counselling Centre [placement] management team prior to my submission to the University for ethical approval for the research.   It was at this juncture, that concerns were raised by my colleagues on the management team regarding my intention to include clients in research at this early stage of the placement project.

Whilst I was disappointed by this at the time, following reflection, I can contextualise these concerns, recognising that the consideration of this research proposal took place in the early stages of establishing and managing the Community Counselling Centre. I reflect upon this as a time fraught with the complexity of addressing the multitude of ethical issues involved with offering a counselling service, with therapy conducted by trainees, within a needy catchment area. As a management team, we were holding the new responsibility of offering students a counsellor placement in these circumstances, and were meticulously working our way through the drafting of a plethora of policies, ranging from initial client assessment procedures to safeguarding issues. Whilst a longer-term aim of the Community Counselling Centre was to use client-work for post-graduate research, it had been agreed that this would have to wait until a later phase of implementation.

Involving clients in research prematurely at this point was therefore seen as an added burden, and another complicating factor. In discussion with my then supervisors, I also became aware of their discomfort in involving clients within such a new venture, and resultantly re-considered this aspect of my proposal. The determining factor in not involving clients came, however, when, whilst considering my academic colleagues' comments, I found that Ladany, et al. (2008) had conducted research which detailed insights from trainees, supervisors, and clients. This research had a strong therapeutic emphasis, and findings from the study had

311

subsequently been developed into a book for students aiming to become mental health practitioners. The research conducted by Ladany, et al. (2008), in following four trainee therapists, their clients, and their supervisors over a two-year period, was very similar to my own original proposal in researching early client-work undertaken at the Community Counselling Centre.

Whilst I could have built upon this earlier research, this cut across the originality of my proposal, and a combination of my colleagues' reluctance to involve clients, together with the discovery of this [then fairly recent] research, made me step back and reflect further on the context of my research. Through this process I re-wrote my proposal with a new focus – The role of the counsellor placement in facilitating early practice. This was more acceptable to the Community Counselling Centre management team, and my supervisors, and was also more original in context. As my research progressed, however, as discussed elsewhere in this thesis, I did regret that I had not involved clients in my research as this would have made the research more complete, and would also have gone some way towards mitigating an often-experienced feeling that my research was taking me away from my therapeutic roots.

Chapter Six

General discussion and conclusions

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of research findings. The extent to which identified research aims have been successfully met are critically discussed. The main findings of the thesis are presented and considered in relation to relevant literature/theory and within the context of current counsellor placements in this area. Overall limitations of the research and areas for future research are identified. This chapter draws the research to a close with suggestions for practice. A final reflective section considers the researcher's research journey.

6.2 Overview of findings

A gap in extant literature suggested that whilst attempts have been made to explore areas such as practitioner training (Folkes-Skinner, 2016) and supervision (Dawson and Akhurst, 2015; Ellis, Hutman and Chapin, 2015; Neuer-Colburn, et al., 2016), research has neglected the counsellor placement and the experiences of BACP stakeholders involved with this practice element of training. Whilst anecdotal musings abound, empirical understanding of the concept of counsellor placements is limited, with few studies specifically exploring this experience; a situation which led Oldale and Cooke (2015) to identify a need for more research which allows placement stakeholders to define issues they construe as important.

Stakeholders, defined as trainees, course providers, placement providers, and supervisors, were therefore given the opportunity to consider their experiences of counsellor placements. Findings from the qualitative content analysis of data collected through questionnaires described characteristics and experiences of the counsellor placement and found that the placement currently facilitates early practice through underlying structures and features which vary greatly and fall into three phases. The first of these addressed the lead up to the placement, the second phase detailed the active stage of working at the placement, including organisational, professional, practice, financial, and change aspects. Thirdly, a phase was identified which occurs after the placement and encompasses impact and reflexive aspects.

Findings from the interpretative phenomenological analysis deepened understanding of the lived experiences of placement stakeholders, constructing the placement as a multifaceted and

variable environment which facilitates early client-work, albeit with inherent inconsistencies. Such early client-work within placements was experienced as both impactful and stressful. Supervision was identified as a lynchpin of placement processes and from the consideration of placement experiences, significant growth areas for the profession were identified.

Having discovered more about the current placement situation within South West Wales, attention turned to new possibilities for the facilitation of early practice. Qualitative questionnaires attempted to elicit information from universities in other areas, where counsellor placements are offered alongside counsellor training courses. Whilst insufficient data were collected within this phase, the research process was reported to aid thematic unity.

Finally, thematic analysis of focus group data detailed the experiences of staff and trainees as they piloted a counsellor placement alongside a university course, changing from the usual outsourcing of placement activity to a placement parallel to their counsellor training course. Findings situated this as a mainly good experience, yet not all plain sailing. Participants identified how this placement consolidated early practice experiences by avoiding inconsistency between, and some shortfalls of, other placements, yet in so doing other problems were created. Participants identified organisational/administrative issues and procedural anomalies, within an environment where there was a 'learning by doing' culture, which led to awareness of the risk and responsibility of offering a counselling service where practice is undertaken by trainees, particularly within a university structure, and servicing a needy community. Thought provoking processes invoked a reflexive stance and a consideration of the future determined that whilst this is a workable model, for this to be sustainable, and/or grow, identified areas of concern would have to be addressed, with funding, staffing, and support provided.

A review of all research findings [detailed in Appendix 51] evidenced eight practice concepts common to, and emphasised, within all studies:

1. Variation and differentials in placement experiences result in inequality of experience
2. Confusion exists over clinical responsibility
3. Policies and procedures are in place, but not always understood and applied
4. Robust client assessment and stepped referrals are essential when referring clients to trainees
5. The impact and stress of early client-work are not fully recognised or addressed

6. A mentor would be helpful at the time of early client-work

7. The important role that supervision plays in early practice/placement work is neither acknowledged, nor used to best advantage

8. There is a lack of contact/communication between stakeholders

Moreover, an overview of the counselling placement from stakeholders' perspectives was offered so that the role of the placement in facilitating early practice is now better understood. Within this, the research objectives were met, in that the characteristics and experiences that define the counsellor placement are now more visible and insight has been provided into how a counsellor placement, parallel to a university course, is perceived by staff and students. From this new understanding, three key findings are presented in answer to the main research question, "How does the counsellor placement facilitate early therapeutic practice?"

Firstly, as the counsellor placement is the main facilitator of early practice for trainees in this area, it is an educative tool of significance to the training and qualification of counsellors and is the public face of counselling within communities. Nonetheless, it is seldom recognised as fulfilling these roles. Secondly, research confirmed that placements offer inequality of experience and there is no enforceable mechanism by which placements are centrally monitored or evaluated. Thirdly, an alternative model of offering a placement alongside a counselling course is a valuable, viable model, although in addressing identified problems in outsourcing placements, different problems were created.

6.3 Critical discussion

Each key finding will now be discussed in relation to relevant literature, implications for practice, and suggestions for future research.

6.3.1 Finding One: The facilitation of early practice and service-delivery

The first key finding demonstrates that whilst the counsellor placement is an educative tool, is the principal facilitator of early practice and pivotal to the training and qualification of BACP counsellors, its significance in generating new counsellors and providing a counselling service within communities, is rarely recognised or acknowledged. This finding has implications for practice, as it positions the placement firmly as part of counsellor training and development, yet highlights a taken-for-granted, under-researched status. These concepts are significant, because despite continuing debate as to whether training is either necessary or effective in

generating competent practitioners (Hill, et al., 2015), hundreds of prospective counsellors engage with counsellor training, and thus placements, every year, situating the placement as equal in importance to other training concepts, such as triad work (Smith, 2016), and mandatory personal therapy (Chaturvedi, 2013), both of which, unlike the placement, are subjected to ongoing exploration and scrutiny. Within a profession struggling to promote and professionalise its image (Reeves, 2015c), this finding also locates the placement as a major interface between counselling and the public, as every trainee on placement will undertake over 100 hours of client-work, usually within community settings. The placement is therefore positioned in a wider context as not only a facilitator of practice and an educative tool, but also as a construct created and maintained by the requirement for trainees to accrue hours and a need within the populace for free/low cost counselling. The counsellor placement is therefore generated by society, maintained by supply and demand and manifests as one of the most visible examples of how counselling addresses therapeutic need. These points are under-represented in extant literature.

From these concepts, areas for further research were identified. As a starting point, consideration needs to be given to how the placement can become more embedded into counsellor training and better utilised as an educative and training tool. An exploration of how the placement could be used to better effect in show-casing the value of therapeutic work undertaken by the profession is also necessary. Furthermore, to carry this research forward, there is a need for specific research that further explores trainees' perspectives of the placement to ensure that this practice element of training becomes rooted within a robust rationale. An exploration of a single individual's training journey through a longitudinal study would provide valuable information, in that the placement could be explored over time through one trainee's experiences throughout training and early practice, thus exploring experience as it unfolded rather than recollection from different points of practice.

In addition to this, trainees in the current research consistently described feeling grateful for the opportunity to practise their skills, often minimising the service they were providing, yet questioning value paradigms within the profession. This indicates a need for more of a value-base for the profession, a concept which should start within the grass roots of training and suggests a need for the inclusion of more value-based mindfulness, financial planning, and business/economic awareness within counsellor training. Future research could therefore address how starting a career working unpaid impacts upon professional identity, self-worth, and long-term employability, including negative/positive impacts of training in this regard.

This finding also identified a need for mixed-method research, quantitatively examining financial savings generated within the NHS by placement work undertaken by counsellors and qualitatively considering both preventative and restorative benefits of therapy undertaken by trainees.

6.3.2 Finding Two: Inequality of experience

The second key finding confirmed that the placement's facilitation of early practice is significantly influenced by, and significantly influences, a range of variables. Placements are therefore complex environments as roles, functions, and standards vary greatly, resulting in inequality of experience for trainees. For participants in this research, these variations created wide-ranging experiences, with all participants citing both desirable, and undesirable, placement experiences, concluding that good placement experiences can impact positively on early practice and the professional life of a counsellor, yet bad placement experiences can have a detrimental impact upon early practice and future therapeutic endeavours. Moreover, good placements provide a structure and create processes and transitional spaces that nurture trainees through their training practice, and can, as such, shape entire careers. The concept that symptom-specific placements limited experience, was, however, moderated by evidence that depression, anxiety, and interpersonal problems were the three most commonly presenting issues across placement work.

In considering these matters, this research has made visible the fact, that, whilst, according to the BACP, trainees cannot become accomplished practitioners without appropriate opportunity for practice, preferably within a placement (BACP, 2013a), there is currently no centrally agreed, consistently applied mechanism or criteria by which placements are monitored and evaluated. Furthermore, whilst this research did not evidence any current malpractice, many situations described fell short of BACP recommendations (BACP, 2016c). This finding has implications for practice, as previously unknown information regarding placement characteristics and experiences has been presented. From this, it can be seen that placements suffer from an absence of standardisation which, when viewed against the impact that placements can have on a practitioner's self-esteem and future practice, is of significance to the profession. As all participants were BACP members, there is an obvious comparison to make between the inconsistences evidenced, the BACP Ethical Framework (2016c) and particularly, BACP Guidelines for the Accreditation of Courses (BACP, 2013a). This document, known as the gold standard for practice, stipulates that courses must approve

placement providers as appropriate (BACP, 2013a, B4.4), and obtain details of a placement's procedures for the initial assessment of clients/referral to trainees (BACP, 2013a, B4.5 [v]). Neither of these control mechanisms were evidenced within the current research. Considering other criteria for practice, many counsellor courses are delivered within university settings and anomalies also exist between these findings and four recommendations contained within the QAA Benchmarks for Counselling and Psychotherapy (QAA, 2013). The QAA benchmarks are accepted as providing general guidelines for counsellor practice courses within and outside university settings and stipulate firstly, that every student should have an equal opportunity to achieve intended learning outcomes (QAA, 2012). This clearly was not the case for participants in this research. Secondly, incongruence was evidenced with the recommendation of the QAA to engage placement providers in internal course quality processes to assure that learning outcomes are relevant and achievable (QAA, 2012, B3. p.12), as little or no quality assurance measures were evidenced within the current research. Thirdly, the lack of standardisation evidenced is incompatible with the QAA aim to ensure that each programme's learning outcomes are evaluated against agreed expectations about standards (QAA, 2013, p.2). Finally, a QAA concept that explicitly suggests that course providers "…should have a role in monitoring and auditing placements" (QAA, 2013, Point 5.10 p.9) does not appear to have transitioned from intention to action. These anomalies suggest discord between theory, practice/policies, and reality, which needs to be addressed, and endorse the call for further research into the impact of counsellor training on therapeutic processes.

Furthermore, in highlighting that practice anomalies exist within and between placements, it is interesting to note that whilst unhelpful or inadequate therapy is featured within research literature (Bowie, McLeod and McLeod, 2015), there is little research about adequate, or inadequate, counsellor placements and how these might impact upon trainees and clients. Resultantly, when considering another view extolled by the QAA (2013, p.13), that dynamics within organisations can impact upon therapy, a question is raised as to whether disparity of trainee experiences/standards within placements leads to inequality of experience, not only for trainees, but also for clients. This needs to be addressed through further research.

A seam of future enquiry was also identified around how the placement infrastructure can be standardised, developed, and maintained. It is therefore suggested that practice comparisons between specified agencies, and/or each stakeholder cohort conducting their own research

into policies and practice, could inform a move towards standardisation. As the current research was conducted from an interdisciplinary approach, future research might also explore how counsellor stakeholders from differing orientations/modalities experience practice within counsellor placements.

6.3.3 Finding Three: An alternative placement model

The third key finding arose from consideration of different ways to expedite early practice and evidenced how an alternative placement model, where early practice is facilitated by a placement alongside a university counselling course, was constructed as workable, yet needing careful monitoring, and modification; this model addressed many issues associated with outsourcing placements, yet created new problems in the process. A need for funding, staffing, and support was also identified as crucial for sustainability and growth.

This finding comes with implications for practice as literature evidences the lack of attention paid to alternative ways of facilitating early counselling practice (Oldale and Cooke, 2015). The BACP stipulates that practice hours should not be accrued in private practice (BACP, 2013a) and one of the few alternatives to private practice within this area has traditionally been an outsourced placement which, as demonstrated by the previous key finding, was seen to provide inconsistency of practice alongside other inherent difficulties. In demonstrating that a university placement negates many issues of inequality, this finding offers one way to standardise practice.

As this university placement was found, overall, to be of benefit to all involved, this might also encourage others to engage in similar projects, whilst now mindful of some of the triumphs and pitfalls that arose, as many trials, tribulations, setbacks, and achievements of providing a placement alongside a university course have been documented. Those already offering such a service in other areas can now compare their experiences with these participants and identify commonality and divergence. Moreover, as an alternative to the traditional facilitation of early practice has been piloted and researched, this might encourage future research into this training/practice model and/or other ways of facilitating early practice.

This finding gave rise to three other fruitful seams of research in that firstly, research now needs to be undertaken to ascertain whether, in the longer-term, difficulties experienced within this pilot study could be overcome, so that the benefits of a university placement could outweigh the negatives of out-sourcing placements. Secondly, this research could be widened

to other geographical areas. Thirdly, comparative research within other health and social care cohorts who experience placements as part of training would also constitute natural research progression.

The next section considers the general limitations of the study and presents the main area identified for future research.

6.4 General limitations and main area for further research

In critically considering the research process, it can be seen that the identified research objectives have been met. Limitations common to the three research studies, do, however, need to be acknowledged. Firstly, given the scarcity of previous research exploring the counsellor placement, whilst the current research provided data with potential to inform the counselling field, the transferability of these findings to other circumstances and situations remains questionable, as the research was conducted within a narrowly defined geographic region, and findings are specific to that area. Secondly, the exploratory nature of this research could also be viewed as a limitation for transferability. Thirdly, elapsed time since data collection could mean that, whilst research conclusions are still relevant, the passage of time could have decreased the significance of, and interest in, findings. Findings and suggestions for practice are therefore presented with these accepted delimitations.

Nevertheless, for the counselling profession to thrive and develop, it is essential that research is an ongoing process, with existing concepts explored and challenged, so that new ideas are introduced and developed. The more data collected in relation to counsellor placements, therefore, the better able placements will be, to structure themselves in line with modern-day training and practice. In encouraging this process and building upon these concepts, areas for future research are addressed within previous sections of this chapter and foregoing chapters, in relation to relevant findings.

At the end of this research, however, a particular area for future research and development was identified as inherent within all phases of research, and crucial in furthering the current research. This surfaced as the wider implications of not including counselling clients as stakeholders in the placement process were considered, since, whilst the current research illuminated the elements and experiences of facilitating a placement, what remains unknown, at the end of this research, is the value of counselling placements to clients and client experiences of placements. There is therefore a need to research service-users' perceptions,

so that the efficacy of placement service-delivery is tested and to respond to calls from the BACP membership for more attention to be paid to the missing voice of the client (Foskett, 2016; Ashton, 2016). This could lead to an evidence-base for therapeutic placement work undertaken by trainees.

6.5 Suggestions for practice

Resulting from this qualitative research, suggestions for practice are tentatively offered.

For universities offering their students placements, it is suggested that:

1. A placement alongside a university counselling course needs to be fully staffed, funded, supported, and embedded into university systems

2. To alleviate the possible long-term drawbacks of familiarity, a placement alongside a counselling course should not be the only placement opportunity undertaken by a trainee

3. There needs to be continuing awareness of, and ongoing reflection upon, the impact of dual roles

Alongside these proposals, from the issues identified as common to all studies and the three key findings, further suggestions for practise are presented as important in starting to standardise and improve the facilitation of early practice within placements in general. In the short-term, it is suggested that:

4. Greater recognition and attention needs to be paid to the impact and stress of early client-work. Within this:
    (i) More contact is needed between stakeholders
    (ii) The important role that supervision plays in early practice/placement work needs to be acknowledged and used to greater advantage
    (iii) A mentor would be an asset at the time of early client-work
5. Clarification and consistency is needed regarding clinical responsibility and policies/procedures need to not only be in place, but consistently understood and applied
6. Robust assessment of clients and stepped referrals should be in place for all trainees

Longer-term suggestions for general placement practice are also identified:

7. Nationally, a committee be established to work towards the standardisation of the practice element of counsellor training. The role and function of the proposed committee would be to engender a collective voice, offer informed advice, agree standardised, regulated placement benchmarks, and promote best practice and accountability. A BACP network with a steering committee could be established to begin this process.

8. Locally, a placement forum/consortium be established with clear organisational procedures and policies as the driving force to standardise early practice in the area. Within this:

   (i) A placement model and mechanisms, whereby placements are monitored and evaluated, be established with guidelines produced on best practice and consistent standards.

   (ii) A centralised register of approved placements be established and maintained.

   (iii) A comprehensive and accessible guide to the counselling placement for trainees be produced to better inform trainees and encourage placement consistency through raised awareness.

In proposing these suggestions for practice, it is recognised that not all are directly within the control of stakeholders and/or within the gift of the profession at the present time. Nevertheless, although, as Rogers suggests of his core-conditions, these ideals may be difficult to achieve in totality, in the same way that aspiring to the core-conditions is an essential ingredient for the deliverance of successful therapy (Rogers, 1980), the commitment of stakeholders working towards better placement systems is important for the training of counsellors and the future of the profession.

6.6 Implementation of suggestions for practice

This qualitative research into the counsellor placement moved from the presentation of descriptive facts in the literature to factual conclusions, which built up, study by study, related findings to theory, and created new knowledge. Conceptual understanding led to suggestions for practice, and consideration is now given to the implementation of these, and the establishment of a framework for a new generation of placements.

6.6.1 Implementation action plan

Dissemination of these research findings will go a long way towards implementing these suggestions through raised awareness, and Table 6.1 provides some further insight as to how an action plan might be devised to move these suggestions forward:

ACTION PLAN FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SUGGESTIONS FOR PRACTICE	
Universities offering student placements	
Suggestion	**Action plan for implementation**
A placement alongside a university counselling course needs to be fully staffed, funded, supported, and embedded into university systems	A pre-project consultation process considers and agrees staffing and resources A formal funding structure, constitution, and terms of reference be established and agreed at the highest level in the university prior to the start of the placement, and revisited regularly as the project develops A university senior management team be convened to oversee the project A placement management team reports on progress and development to the university senior management team at regular intervals A working group from the university senior management team/placement management team applies for grants/funding for the continuance of the placement and research opportunities
To alleviate the possible long-term drawbacks of familiarity, a placement alongside a counselling course should not be the only placement opportunity undertaken by a trainee	The constitution and terms of reference clearly state that this should not be the only placement undertaken by each student
There needs to be continuing awareness of, and ongoing reflection upon, the impact of dual roles	The constitution and terms of reference stipulate that dual roles are avoided as far as possible, and where dual roles are unavoidable there is a clear procedure which ensures agreement between those involved in dual roles, transparency, reflection, and a regular review of relationships
Placements in general: Standardisation and improvements in the facilitation of early practice: Short-term suggestions	
Suggestion	**Action plan for implementation**
Greater recognition and attention needs to be paid to the impact and stress of early client-work	Course, placement, and supervisor recognise that students need a great deal of support when starting to see clients [particularly their first 20 sessions] and respond accordingly with higher levels of care at this time Course providers, placements, and supervisors accept, and actively respond to the change process, questioning of self, and values which occur during early client-work More attention be paid to personal development within training as this is key to personal and professional growth Personal therapy is mandatory and is timed to coincide with the stressful peaks of training – e.g. first clients

	Stakeholders consider the type of supervisor most suitable for trainees and promote a role of 'training supervisor'
	All stakeholders work to ensure that policies and procedures are not only taught by courses, upheld by supervisors, and in place within placements, but are also understood and integrated into practice
	BACP recommendations be stringently applied:
	• Each course demonstrates that it has clear procedures in place for practice placements which are available to students and placements (BACP, 2013a[B4.3])
	• Courses clearly demonstrate how they enable students to apply relevant theory/theories they have been taught to practice, with a focus on their development as ethical and competent practitioners [BACP, 2013a]
More contact is needed between stakeholders	The BACP's reference to 'meetings' between stakeholders (BACP, 2013 [B4.5(iv)]) needs to be strengthened, with contact taken more seriously by stakeholders
The important role that supervision plays in early client-work/placements needs to be acknowledged and used to greater advantage	The three-way contract between the training course, the placement and the trainee be expanded to a four-way contract which includes the supervisor
	Open communication be maintained between the course, the placement, and the supervisor
	More experiential, practical training on supervision, which includes how a trainee can use supervision to benefit the therapist, the client, and the host organisation
	Contracts include a clause where a supervisor needs to provide a brief explanation of why supervision has concluded should supervision end prematurely whilst a supervisee is in training
A mentor would be an asset at the time of early client-work	A new role of 'counselling mentor' supplements the role of supervision, and helps with the anxiety of client work
Clarification and consistency is needed regarding clinical responsibility and policies/procedures need to not only be in place, but consistently understood and applied	The expression clinical responsibility can have many different meanings. A definitive meaning therefore be agreed between placement stakeholders
	The four-way contract between the course, the placement, the supervisor, and the trainee clearly determines where responsibility lies at any given point in time and a placement should not commence before this contract is signed by all parties
	BACP recommendations be *strengthened* and stringently applied:
	• A written contract should be agreed by the trainee, the placement provider, *the supervisor*, and the course (BACP, 2013a [B4.5]) including, significantly, details of accountability (BACP, 2013a [B4.5(iii)])
	• A further contract is also needed between course and placement provider, detailing

	their responsibilities (BACP, 2013a [B4.5(iv)])
	Policies and procedures are interwoven into practice through placement training and supervision
Robust assessment of clients and stepped referrals should be in place for all trainees	Trainees discuss all new clients with their supervisor and it is ultimately the supervisor's decision as to whether it is safe for the student to begin or continue working with any client BACP recommendations be stringently applied: • Courses demonstrate how placement providers are approved as appropriate for the particular trainee/course (BACP, 2013a [B4.4] • Course providers obtain exact details of how clients are assessed for suitability to work with students, prior to a student attending a placement [B4.5(iv)] and check that this is actually happening • Each course delivers adequate training in assessment procedures consistent with the rationale and philosophy of the course, including a risk assessment strategy informed by evidence-based practice and relevant research. BACP, 2013a[B47.1]) • Courses ensure that students are aware of, and placements adhere to, the BACP guideline that assessment should be undertaken by an experienced practitioner with a stepped approach to referrals. In particular, the BACP's view that assessment should only be undertaken by practitioners holding at minimum a diploma in counselling, plus 450 hours supervised practice, be implemented (BACP,2013a)

Placements in general: Standardisation and improvements in the facilitation of early practice: Longer-term suggestions

Nationally:

Suggestion	Action plan for implementation
A committee be established to work towards the standardisation of the practice element of counsellor training	Approaches be made to policy makers and the BACP, calling for a committee to work towards the standardisation of the practice element of counsellor training and explaining the need for/function of such a committee Alongside this direct approach, letters be published in counselling journals raising awareness of this concept, and calling on the BACP to set up a 'New Ideas for Placements' discussion forum or consultative process
The role and function of the proposed committee would be to engender a collective voice, offer informed advice, agree standardised, regulated placement benchmarks, and promote best practice and accountability	The composition of the proposed committee be carefully considered so that it is representative of all placement stakeholders
A BACP network with a steering committee could be established to begin this process	To begin the process of standardisation, a steering committee/network be established to consider the composition, terms of reference, and viability of such a committee

Locally:

Suggestion	Action plan for implementation
A placement forum/consortium be established with clear organisational procedures and policies as the driving force to standardise early practice in the area	Local counselling professionals, courses and placements be contacted to explain the background and function of a consortium, and asking for expressions of interest in working towards the standardisation of early client-work within this area

A placement model and mechanisms, whereby placements are monitored and evaluated, be established with guidelines produced on best practice and consistent standards.	By pooling the above local information and expertise, consideration can be given to setting guidelines, monitoring, evaluating, and agreeing a code of practice for placements where early client-work is undertaken
A centralised register of approved placements be established and maintained	From the above work, a local, voluntary centralised register of approved placements be established and maintained
A comprehensive and accessible guide to the counselling placement for trainees be produced to better inform trainees and encourage placement consistency through raised awareness	A book be published, providing a comprehensive and accessible guide to the counselling placement. This publication would aim to better inform trainees and encourage placement consistency through raised awareness

Figure 6.1: Action plan for the implementation of suggestions for practise

It can be seen from the foregoing that the most impactful action would be to ensure that BACP guidelines are actually translated into practice, as this research has shown that this is currently not the case. It is also clear that it is possible to move towards a new generation of placements.

6.6.2 An insight into a new generation of placements

Widdowson (2012) encourages researchers to relate findings to practice in an easily assimilated way, and from these research findings and suggestions for practice, it is possible to envisage a better future. Accordingly, as research findings suggest pen pictures of professionals and systems, each striving for best practice within a new generation of placements, this section profiles major players and systems within counselling placements as they might appear in an improved system.

6.6.2.1 The progressive professional organisation

The progressive professional organisation acknowledges the pivotal role that the placement plays within counsellor training, and responds to the implementation action plan [Table 6.1]. It embraces the changing face of therapy, and recognises and acts upon the identified gap between the theoretical status of ethical frameworks/accreditation criteria, and the reality at the grass roots of early practice. There is a review of how ethical principles/policies are translated and embedded into client-work, and a concerted effort to be closer to the membership. The progressive professional organisation holds regular consultations with its membership to keep its finger on the pulse, and engenders a more 'bottom up' approach. Research is carried out into the impact of changes within the qualification criteria, such as the reduction in training contact hours and the decrease in practice hours for qualification.

As registration and regulation are held as key issues for the profession, a watching brief is maintained on developments in these areas. The progressive professional organisation recognises that the more unified counselling becomes, the better placed the profession will be to determine and uphold acceptable standards of training and practice. There would then be more confidence that minimum requirements for ensuring safe standards apply across the board, and clear assurance that the qualification a practitioner holds is meaningful. Most importantly, the progressive professional organisation establishes a committee to work towards the standardisation of the practice element of counsellor training.

6.6.2.2 The studious student

The studious student understands that it can take some time to secure a placement and finds a placement through early personal contact. He/she prepares well for their placement, giving early thought to the type of placement/client base he/she would like to engage with, also considering their hopes, expectations, and what they can give to a placement, as well as what a placement can give them. They recognise the link between their expectations, level of preparation, and placement experience and understand that the more they engage with the placement experience, the more they will get out of it. The studious student identifies the mutually beneficial concept of placement work, and placement preparation includes time management by putting strategies in place for the time and effort the placement demands. The studious student is familiar with ethical frameworks and placement policies, and adopts an active approach to consolidating these within their therapeutic work. He/she approaches the placement as a job, is professional, diligent, experiential, hard-working, and importantly, reflective, whilst working through the process of amalgamating theoretical aspects into their counselling, and developing their personal therapeutic style.

In an improved placement environment, the placement consistently presents the student with positively career-changing opportunities. Placement experiences enhance the student's understanding through the opportunity to apply knowledge gained through their counselling course to practical client-work. This results in meaningful experiences, resourcefulness, and creative practice. The studious student accepts the frustrations involved with accumulating therapeutic hours, and reflects upon the quality, rather than the quantity, of counselling hours accrued. As there is a more consistent calibre of placement, students experience similar working conditions and levels of engagement.

Becoming and being a counsellor comes to fruition within the counsellor placement, as a fusion of training/client-work, and trainee/placement occurs. Students therefore grow professionally and personally from placement experiences, gaining wider knowledge, and appreciation of theory. He/she is aware of, and responds to, how working within helping spheres brings an expectation of personal self-exploration, enhanced self-awareness, and growth. Within this, the studious student recognises that forging a professional identity is a formative process, and their therapist self can be fragile at this time. Through this, self-awareness, personal development, personal therapy, and the permissibility of self-care as preventative measures come to the fore, and help to address the anxiety commonly experienced at this time. The studious student takes all clients to supervision, understands how to use supervision and is aware of the role, function, and benefits of the supervisory process.

6.6.2.3 The considerate course provider

The considerate course provider is mindful of the impact of trainee transitions taking place within counsellor placements, particularly issues of personal/professional identity. Considerate course providers are also thoughtful regarding how, and when, they introduce trainees to early client-work; considerate course providers understand pressures related to practice elements of training, and prepare their students well.

Within this, considerate course providers meet their responsibility to produce counsellors who are ready and able to work professionally and ethically from the start of their contact with clients. They recognise that good training requires efficient, reflective, and responsive trainers who continue to practice, alongside applicable, and well thought out curricula, delivered in tandem with relevant work experience. To facilitate this, considerate course providers continue to turn to placements to provide this practice element of training. Although considerate course providers are still busy with programme content/course delivery, and also have the added responsibility of preparing trainees for their placement experience, their role is made somewhat easier since there is increased communication, contact, and placement accountability.

Considerate course providers check that trainees are placed within a registered, appropriate organisation where they benefit fully from their placement experience. They also ensure that trainees are an asset to their host organization. Within this, they are charged, along with the supervisor, and the placement co-ordinator, with supporting the trainee throughout the

placement. In this new generation of placements, however, synchronization of functions makes this a joint responsibility.

As each component involved in the counsellor placement shares ideas and insights gleaned from the other, this facilitates more effective course planning, and ensures that placements are not under-taught. The considerate course provider appreciates that there is a quantum leap between pedagogical understanding of counselling skills, and their application within a counselling service. Educators and placement providers therefore jointly consider how closely programme content relates to the requirements of working in a placement, with better integration of theory and practice. Placement experiences, and supervision preparation, are more central to curricula. Greater attention is paid to the impact and stress of early client-work and as trainees who feel better prepared report better learning experiences, considerate course providers ensure that trainees are thoroughly prepared for their placement. Placement training, and readiness to practise, are timed to ensure preparedness for client-work, and the inter-relatedness of placement work. Within this, there is training on general client assessment and the purpose, function, and engagement with, supervision.

The considerate course provider not only has clear procedures for practice placements in line with BACP recommendations (BACP, 2013 [B4.3]) but also actively visits placements and approves placement providers as appropriate, with compatible philosophies and aims as those of the course. Better communication ensures that trainers keep abreast of the changing needs of students and the profession. Considerate course providers are better placed to review and update how they prepare/equip students for their placement, and offer students more relevant support around identified early practice 'hot spots'.

6.6.2.4 The perfect placement

A better future for the next generation of placements starts with a concerted effort to replace those areas identified as less than perfect by participants within this research with more acceptable alternatives. In this way, whilst recognising that most placements sit somewhere in the middle of this good/bad continuum, identified problems could be flipped to create solutions and opportunities, moving towards the perfect placement.

There is recognition that, as well as their obligation to provide a counselling services, there is also a responsibility to provide trainees with a good placement. Numerous roles,

undertaken by varying personnel, with various working practices, exist in every placement, and accordingly many differing perspectives are held, depending upon placement ethos, role or the personal/professional attitudes of staff. In the perfect placement, there is greater understanding of differing trainee personalities, cultures/work ethics, and needs. Care is therefore taken to match client requirements with trainee resources. Whilst placement providers are still under pressure to adapt to changing legislation, greater recognition of a placement's role, function, and social/economic worth result in better understanding of how placements have to react to issues such as working within reduced overheads, whilst maintaining a service as funding shrinks alongside demands for increased, more complex, and effective service delivery.

Whilst the management of a placement is never going to be an easy task, in a perfect placement, the integration of trainees into the organisation is handled sensitively, thus enhancing placement performance, productivity, and client outcomes. The perfect placement welcomes trainees into their midst, with those who see trainees on placement merely as unpaid staff who can get/keep waiting lists down, diminished through standardisation and accountability. Placements are more consistent, with internal placement procedures congruent with their external image. The perfect placement has a strong mission statement, with clear aims/values, and ensures that trainees get off to a good start by providing detailed induction, where trainees are introduced to procedural, cultural, operational, and ethical practice.

Sound induction processes include assessment training in relation to the specific client base. In a perfect placement, client assessment concurs with BACP guidelines, and there is an open assessment process, with a qualified, experienced practitioner, before referral to trainees. Full discussion takes place regarding a client's predisposed mental health issues, and the placement takes responsibility for clarifying whether, and in what way, the organisation can be of help. This involves ascertaining what the client wants, needs, and brings as a presenting issue, as well as other concerns. As far as possible, a stepped approach is then adopted, with only suitable clients referred to trainees, and the complexity of client-work increasing alongside training and experience. Trainees benefit from a satisfactory number, and variety, of clients.

Induction is more a process than an event, and contact with other staff is encouraged, and facilitated through regular meetings, training events, and group supervision. Supervision is

331

an important, ongoing, aspect of induction, cementing organisational 'belonging', and as part of the induction process, trainees experience supervision to get to know 'who/what' before seeing clients and having to present them in supervision. There is a leaning towards supervisors who are able and prepared to work as training supervisors and mentors also support the trainees and supplement supervision. A proportion of supervision is paid for by the organisation, with a mixture of internal/external, group/individual delivery encouraged. Moreover, as some trainees feel that they are presently paying to volunteer, this discontent is slightly mitigated since the perfect placement also offers travelling expenses and training in return for therapeutic services.

A positive ethos, and caring culture, support trainees. Perfect placements therefore provide a working environment that facilitates and encourages trainees to feel sufficiently supported, and safe enough to reach their full potential.   Regular checks are carried out to ensure that all involved with the placement are members of a recognised professional organisation, and hold current professional indemnity insurance.

It is recognised that the placement can be a source of professional and social interaction for some trainees, whilst for others, it can be a lonely, isolating experience. As estrangement can be a negative predictor of achievement, in the perfect placement, trainees experience active involvement, mentoring, a feeling of belonging, and space to grow. Accordingly, they thrive through engagement and emotional wellbeing. In the perfect placement there is greater recognition and attention paid to the impact, and stress, of early client-work, with additional support [supervision prior to seeing first client and mentoring] in place when trainees start to see real clients, as this is the main turning point of training, yet an anxious time.   The huge pressure on students to pass the placement element of their course is acknowledged and understood.

This new generation placement is therefore more effective, has appropriate boundaries and scope, works in accordance with the core conditions (Rogers, 1980), and ensures that robust placement policies and procedures are part of the day-to-day life of the organisation.

The perfect placement is monitored, is included on a register of placements, and concurs with guidelines on how to organise, develop, and manage placement organisations. Best practice is supported through positive communication strategies, and strengthened stakeholder partnerships.   The training offered is relevant, and every effort is made to provide trainees with a variety of therapeutic opportunities in line with their stage of

training. In addition to this, the placement works towards strengthening a trainee's self-esteem, and provides appropriate personal/professional development opportunities.

The perfect placement allows space for reflective practice, as it offers an experience instigated by a need to consolidate learning and practice. As such, it is, by nature, pro-active, involving the student moving into unchartered territory. Placement opportunities are therefore a prime time for reflection, and this process is encouraged and facilitated through supervision.

6.6.2.5 The unified university placement

In addition to the attributes of the perfect placement described above, the unified university placement is fully incorporated into the university structure, and benefits from the coming together of theory and practice.

It is recognised at an early stage of implementation that this type of placement involves high challenge, and therefore needs high levels of support, commitment, and sensitivity. Before the placement began, a pre-project consultation process considered, and agreed, staffing and resources. The placement is therefore fully staffed, funded, supported, and embedded into university systems. A formal funding structure, constitution, and terms of reference have been agreed at the highest level in the university, and are revisited regularly as the project develops. A university senior management team oversees the project, with a placement management team reporting regularly on progress and development to the university senior management team. A working group comprised of members of the university senior management team and the placement management team is charged with applying for grants/funding for the continuance of the placement and research opportunities. The unified university placement is a welcome, integral part of the university infrastructure.

Students are part of the process of writing/implementing policies and the running of the placement, as well as benefitting from safe, generic therapeutic experience. The amount of time and effort invested in the placement is recognised and the short-term benefits of familiarity add to the success of the placement, as students feel supported by practising counsellors they know and trust. To alleviate the possible long-term drawbacks of familiarity [such as not experiencing the gaining and giving of trust within a new situation], the placement constitution/terms of reference clearly state that this cannot be the only placement undertaken by a student. The constitution and terms of reference also stipulate that dual roles

are avoided as far as possible, and there is continuing awareness of, and ongoing reflection upon, the impact of dual roles. Where dual roles are unavoidable there is a clear procedure which ensures agreement between those involved, transparency, reflection, and a regular review of relationships.

The unified university placement benefits the students, the university, the community, and the clients, and there is a climate of learning by doing, where lecturers model good counselling practice.

6.6.2.6 The mindful mentor

Mindful mentors are a particularly important asset at the time of early client-work and support, rather than replace or usurp, supervisors and supervision. Effective placements therefore have a mentoring system for trainees operating alongside supervision.

6.6.2.7 The synthesising and supportive supervisor

The synthesising and supportive supervisor deploys a uniquely central position to fuse training and practice through a range of individual/group and external/internal supervision. As one-to-one supervision is seen as the least constructive in a placement setting, but is also deemed to be the least intimidating, both individual and group supervision are facilitated, with group supervision offered as a modelling and learning experience. This new generation of placement supervisor ensures that trainees benefit from working alongside professional counsellors, particularly within supervision groups, and understands that whilst group supervision provided by a placement ensures parity of values between trainee and placement, external supervision enables trainees to raise organisational issues without fear of recrimination.

The synthesising and supportive supervisor is the person who comes closest to seeing the bigger training/placement picture as he/she has the most contact, is usually the first port of call in an emergency, hears trainees' personal experiences, and is involved with course and placement. This stakeholder is therefore placed firmly at the centre of the placement/education experience

In this way, the synthesising and supportive supervisor plays a more central and uniting role in facilitating the stakeholder integration identified as crucial to the success of

counsellor placements. Moreover, the existing lack of recognition of the centrality of the supervisor role is rectified through inclusion within four-way contracts between the trainee, the course provider, the placement, and the supervisor. This contract contains a clear, unambiguous statement of who has clinical responsibility for client work.

Most importantly, the synthesising and supportive supervisor recognises that the supervision of trainees involves more holding and supportive elements than the supervision of experienced supervisees. He/she therefore either adapts to the role of a 'training supervisor', who recognises and pays attention to the impact, and stress of early client-work, or leaves this to a supervisor more suited to this role. Where a supervision contract ends prematurely, the synthesizing and supportive supervisor advises the course provider, providing a brief reason for the termination of the supervisory relationship

6.6.2.8 The continual communication loop

The new generation placement has contact and communication at its heart.

Ongoing collaboration between stakeholders ensures that each stakeholder becomes more aware of the philosophy, aims and objectives, what is required by, and issues faced by, the other. Placement components cluster together to benefit from shared strength through collectivism, as opposed to previous weaknesses resulting from separatism.

Better communication results in more synergy, and the cause and effect cycle between stakeholders is recognised and put to positive, rather than negative, use. Within this, each stakeholder is, in its own way, accepted as an agent of change, with cyclical changes in one impacting upon the other. Greater interaction results in a more powerful impact for each faction, as each achieves more by combining information and resources. Resultantly, there is greater contextual awareness, and a more holistic approach between stakeholders. This harvests cross-fertilization of ideas between stakeholders with all factions working well independently, through conceptual understanding of each other's role.

Alongside this, there is a change from mono-professional to inter-professional working, with more sharing of knowledge so that overlapping elements of 'knowing'

are not separated from each other as education [theory] and work [practice] are now closer together.

As the result of this continual communication loop, trainees, course providers, placement providers, and supervisors benefit from shared experience, as the combined effort of stakeholders is directed towards jointly identified problems, particularly at the beginning of early training, and contact with a first client. More cohesive working results in greater student support offered by course, placement, and supervisor, leading to more uniformity of learning. Such improved communication coheres educative and practice elements of counsellor training, changing irregularity to symmetry through shared goals and values. This also ensures that expertise in one area is understood by, and transferred to, another, with an agreed placement model providing working charters and contracts that are more people, than paper, exercises, and policies/procedures that are evidenced, communicated, and vitally, understood and implemented.

6.7 Concluding comments

To form an initial picture of the counsellor placement, it was important to firstly explore and document stakeholders' perceptions of this practice environment so that future research can move on to other aspects, such as an evaluation of the placement as a facilitator of early practice and an educative tool. An overview of placement processes was particularly important as continuing debate about the effectiveness of counsellor training has had little impact on the emphasis placed on the wide-ranging training necessary for BACP accreditation (Folkes-Skinner, Elliott and Weaver, 2010). Alongside this, the profession's current challenges include an aspiration to become, and be seen as, more professional (BACP, 2016c). Accordingly, studies that promote better understanding of this phenomenon align with BACP objectives and are necessary to make this aspect of training more visible. The current research is therefore not only key to the enhancement of the training of counsellors but is also of benefit to the counselling profession in general, conforming with sentiments expressed by Grafanaki (2010a,b) and reiterated by Georgiadou (2014), that increased knowledge about what happens in counsellor training and resultant challenges can only be beneficial.

Moreover, despite a developing interest in counsellor training (Folkes-Skinner, 2016), little research could be located regarding the multidimensional work and relationships that exist between placement stakeholders or the placement's role in early practice. This research has, therefore, started a process of opening up the world of early practice, and in taking the profession to a position where more is known about the counsellor placement, has begun to close an identified gap in research.

This contribution to knowledge was reached through original evidence, provided by participants who were all involved in counsellor placements, each bringing awareness, knowledge, and experience of placement roles, functions, and value to the research through their perceptions and real experiences. As evidenced, studies exploring the counsellor placement are few and there is currently no consensus within literature, either conceptually or empirically, about what constitutes a workable placement construct. This makes the findings of this research difficult to compare and contextualise. The current study, however, significantly enhances previous research, as, although various studies address certain aspects that make up the placement phenomenon, no research was found which addressed the holistic experience of all stakeholders and explored the experience of offering a placement alongside a counselling course. A rounded view of the counsellor placement has therefore been presented and, seemingly, no other research has conceptualised the placement in quite this way; no study was found which supported this research in its entirety.

Consequently, findings could increase awareness of, and interest in, placements as a learning tool, raise the question of the re-conceptualisation of placements within training frameworks, inform curricula, and enhance the practicum element of counsellor training. Findings are also valuable for trainees striving for a good learning environment within placements, as well as for course providers, placement providers, and supervisors interested in enhancing their supportive roles.

In conclusion, the role of the placement in facilitating early practice can be understood as variable, idiosyncratic, and multifaceted, with profound implications for counsellor training and practice, yet the placement is on the periphery of the profession's awareness and offers inconsistent practice. This understanding is offered on the premise that participants constructed their own truth, at this particular time, rather than searching for a specific truth, and many participants indicated how they welcomed the opportunity to reflect upon

placement experiences. The research process therefore helped participants notice and better understand the role of the placement within counsellor training and early practice.

The current BACP website specifies a need to understand how placements work in practice (BACP, 2016c), and this research has provided information towards achieving this objective. To continue this process, it is hoped that counselling professionals will not only consider these research findings, generated from experiences of practitioners in the field, but will also further reflect on their own experiences of the role of the placement in facilitating early practice.

6.8 Final reflections on the research

My journal makes interesting reading now that my research is complete, as it tells the story of my research journey. This reflection, and regular discussions with my research supervisors, offered the opportunity for reflexivity throughout the research period, providing support and guidance.

As I review the research and my learning from a research experience spanning seven years, I contemplate how the research question, the steps taken to answer it, and the format of this thesis have all changed significantly over the years as I have been exposed to new ideas about the counsellor placement, counsellor training, research, my participants, and myself. In concluding my reflections, I therefore have to acknowledge the extent of my greatest learning which occurred at the end of the active research process.

The context and central theme for this research were formed when starting to write this thesis, although as the work was neither cohesive, nor well-focussed at that point, an evolution of writing and rewriting occurred long after I thought the thesis was finished. It was only after completing my research and following valuable and valued advice from more experienced colleagues that I appreciated how much the two studies addressed within this thesis better represent my research into the role of the counsellor placement within the central theme of counsellor training, and through a qualitative lens. The personal understanding gained through this process has been immense and has resulted in a better overview of the counsellor placement. This experience was a huge learning curve for me, and a test of self as much as anything else, invoking much personal and professional reflection, which resulted in a review of myself as a counselling professional, an educator, a researcher, and a person.

I brought my subjectivity and reflective processes into the research process and made my framework for making sense of experiences, my perceptions, and assumptions, clear to add strength to the research process. Making these known to myself enabled reflexivity and in my journal, I could continue to work on the balance between owning and recognising my rules of engagement, whilst still allowing my knowledge and understanding to be of value to the counselling process and research. This reflexivity continues, as I now realise that I was not able, at the start of this research, to access or fully understand all my preconceptions and although this was a useful starting point, this process is still work in progress, as I continue to reflect on my learning from this research and my shifting paradigms as the result of my experiences.

In conclusion, I started this research, like all researchers, with personal knowledge and assumptions and an overriding stance of inquisitiveness. I end the research period with a sense of accomplishment that more is now known about the role of the counsellor placement in facilitating early practice, and some anecdotal conceptions evidenced have been clarified. Despite this, however, I feel frustrated, as I wish I could start this research again, now incorporating all my learning from the research process. Furthermore, whilst my curiosity has been somewhat sated, I am left with a sense of disappointment that a profession that prides itself on reflexivity and reflective processes has seemingly tended, until now, to ignore this training vehicle at its heart; I find the placement's invisibility exasperating. It was not surprising that participant feedback revealed good and not so good placement experiences, yet as the extent of the inequality of practise was exposed and benefits of good placements and drawbacks of bad placements clarified, it was the taken-for-granted attitude towards the placement, *"Well, we just have this thing in the middle of counsellor training, don't we, called the counsellor placement, and there it just is"* [Sara/2-4] that was most surprising and concerning. This research has started the process of making the counselling placement more visible and understood.

My research achieved this for me, as my personal perception of this aspect of counsellor training has changed, as I now see more clearly that the counsellor placement does not exist in a vacuum, but is entrenched within constantly changing systems-within-systems, entwined social, economic, and political landscapes, within an increasingly competitive and litigious environment. Within this, there are two significant areas of awakening for me, wherein I recognise overlooked opportunities for the profession, firstly, in not harnessing the counselling delivered in placements to promote the ethos and value of counselling, and

secondly, the failure to capitalise on the placement learning experience by developing practice-based and evidence-based practice for placement therapy through research.   I hope these missed opportunities will be recognised and carried forward to offer a voice of experience.