

UCL Institute of Education

Doctor in Education

**Development of professional identity –
Singapore counsellors in tertiary educational
institutions**

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Thesis declaration and word length

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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Abstract

Though Counselling as a field has been in existence in Singapore for the last 30 years, many individuals (both public and members of other professions) still do not have a clear idea of the roles played by counsellors. Even though attempts have been made towards becoming a fully professionalised practice, counsellors' professional identity is still fairly weak. The purpose of this study was to identify elements of practice which influence the development of professional identity amongst counsellors working in tertiary educational institutions in Singapore. The findings from this study seek to fill a gap in the limited literature on professional development of counsellors in Singapore as well as to potentially be used as the foundation for the construction of a competency framework for future professional development of counsellors.

Adopting a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006), this research sought to identify factors which assisted or hindered the development of professional identity amongst counsellors in Singapore's tertiary educational institutions. Individual interviews and focus groups were conducted with 20 counsellors from across the various tertiary educational institutions in

Singapore. Four categories were identified to be significant influencers for the development of professional identity: 'Adapting to expectations' and 'Building knowledge and skills' within the personal dimension of self and 'Building support networks' and 'Navigating practice within the socio-political environment' within the interpersonal dimension of self.

The results indicated that professional identity development happens in a process when counsellors become intentionally engaged with stakeholders whilst ensuring good service to students and being responsive to management requests. Additionally, counsellors who continually build their knowledge and practice increase their credibility amongst stakeholders as well. It appears that the process of building a professional identity requires a willingness of the counsellor to negotiate the personal and interpersonal dimensions of their professional self, whilst being engaged in the various job demands.

(303 words)

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Personal Statement

Introduction

This personal statement is to demonstrate how my ideas about being a researcher and scholar have developed over the whole EdD programme, especially the impact from the various pieces of work to my professional development as a practising counsellor and researcher. I will also discuss the development of my thinking and attitude about research over the years from the position of a counselling practitioner who was ignorant about the value of scholarly research for the broadening of knowledge to one who has begun the process of appreciating research for the way it powerfully informs many aspects of my professional life. To effectively structure this reflection, I will first discuss the development of my critical thinking prowess by reflecting on examples of learning across the taught modules throughout the EdD programme, followed by a reflection of the development of my academic ideas through course assignments, IFS and eventually the thesis. Finally, I will consider the impact of the EdD programme on the development of my professional counselling practice by structuring the discussion around the concept of the “scholarly practitioner” advocated by Bentz and Shapiro (1998).

Development of critical thinking ability through coursework and IFS

Over the past decade, the counselling profession in Singapore had been working hard in pursuit of professional licensure. As a senior practitioner, I had inevitably followed along without much thought to the possible implications for the practice should the profession achieve what it had always wanted. After attending the first course (foundations of professionalism) my eyes were finally

opened to the discourse surrounding professionalism and how different occupations in the past and present sought to distinguish themselves from each other by implementing entry prerequisites such as educational requirements and codes of practices. The discussions and readings about professionalism were extremely helpful in starting me to be critically thinking about my work as a counsellor vis-à-vis the counselling profession. An awaking occurred. I began questioning the necessity of Singapore's counselling profession's goal of full professionalization in order for it to be on par with the older professions such as medicine, law and accounting. This question formed the basis for my first assignment. The formative and summative feedback I received to the first draft of my assignment helped to identify areas of weaknesses in my writing and formed the foundation for the second module.

Building on the academic idea of challenging Singapore's counselling profession's push towards full professionalization, the second module (Research Methods 1) introduced me to research methodologies and the importance of the role of data in justifying findings leading to the formation of theories or incorporation of findings into practice. Being unschooled in the area of conducting research, (my master programme was completely applied in nature) I found the process of learning how to design a researchable project related to my professional practice by leveraging on an existing problem and turning it into an area for research extremely refreshing. The assignment for this module led me to think beyond the macro issues of professionalization faced by the industry and into the area of professional practice and the conflicts and tensions faced by counsellors in educational institutions. The

subsequent summative comments by the tutor were extremely beneficial in shaping the development of my critical thinking abilities as well as building a good foundation for the generation of ideas leading up to my Institutional Focused Study (IFS).

The third module (International Education) was centred on the exploration of educational issues from a macro and international perspective, namely in transitional states like Timor-Leste and the impact of globalization in the forming of educational policies in such countries. Initially, I felt that the subject matter was irrelevant to my professional practice. However, it was not until the end of the assignment where I began to see the relevance, not in terms of content, but more in the area of learning to synthesize complex amounts of information and objectively discussing my understanding of the subject matter at hand. This was an important development in my growing competency as a “thinking professional” as the ability to inquire and synthesize is part of a “larger process of reasoning, argumentation and critical thinking” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998).

The fourth module (Research Methods 2) was the course which helped me to crystallize the thoughts and ideas regarding my professional practice as well as the IFS. The module introduced me to the various approaches to qualitative research methods applicable for the types of research I was to be embarking on. Apart from the crystallization of my thoughts, this module also helped me to become aware of my personal subjectivities as a fledgling researcher. I had throughout the first three modules, mistakenly assumed that all researchers thrived on being completely objective and neutral. This positivistic assumption was based very much from the training I had received over the years that

focussed on counsellors adopting an objective and value-free position vis-à-vis the clients (Halbur & Halbur, 2006). However, this module challenged me to revisit the notion of researcher bias due to my “personal experiences, beliefs, cultural standpoints and professional dispositions” (Preissle, 2008).

For my IFS, I had studied how the expectations of different stakeholders shaped the perception of the role of counsellors in the University which I was employed. Prior to embarking on the first taught module, I only had a vague idea regarding the eventual research piece with my thoughts centring on possibilities around the field of counsellor leadership and education. The first taught module facilitated my examination and understanding of the political and sociological conflicts arising from the attempts by Singapore’s counselling profession in her search for professional recognition. My growing perception of the field’s lack of professional credibility coupled with an understanding of the less than positive experiences of counsellors in educational institutions led me to focus the second course’s assignment on developing a proposal for developing a typology of counsellor orientations to help educational administrators and teachers change their misplaced perceptions and to understand the developmental process of a counsellor as they grow in an educational institution. The third module trained and equipped me with the ability to examine an issue from both a macro and a micro view and especially the skill to synthesize complex amounts of information yet objectively discussing my understanding of the subject matter at hand. The introduction of qualitative research methods in the fourth course brought about further clarity for the IFS – which was to study the perception of the role of the counsellor in

my educational institution through the eyes of the senior counsellor on my team.

Together with the positive feedback garnered from my IFS tutor and the FPR panel, it was clear that the learning achieved from the taught courses worked powerfully together that enabled me to confidently research and explore the IFS topic in a way that I would not have been able to, prior to embarking on the EdD programme. The findings and ideas generated from the IFS also significantly influenced the research area for the thesis component of the programme. The stream of thoughts and ideas about professional development of counsellors eventually converged into the main thesis topic where I would explore how counsellors in tertiary educational institutions in Singapore develop their professional identity.

Though I had not particularly pursued one line of enquiry throughout the EdD programme, the commonality throughout was my focus in advocating for the professional development of counsellors in Singapore. The elements of learning from each of the taught courses and IFS were likened to be pieces of a puzzle, each fitting compellingly one to another and eventually providing the foundation for the research area for the thesis. The writing and eventual completion of this thesis is the capstone of a seven year journey of learning and growing to be a counselling practitioner who is schooled in the ways of research similarly to the concept of a 'scholarly practitioner' espoused by Bentz and Shapiro (1998).

A scholarly practitioner – Impact of the EdD programme on my professional practice

Prior to embarking on the EdD programme, I had mistakenly viewed research as predominantly a domain for researchers with very little relevance to my professional life. However, as the programme progressed, I found myself slowly changing my mindset towards academic thinking and research. As I looked at the past masters of counselling theories (e.g. Sigmund Freud, Carl Rogers and Albert Ellis), I came to realize that these individuals were the epitome of what I was seeking to become – i.e. a scholarly practitioner (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). These masters were experts in the field of clinical counselling, yet had the capability and capacity to effectively engage in research and writings which have shaped the helping profession for the past 50 years. Bentz and Shapiro (1998) posited that a scholarly practitioner is one who successfully integrates professional practice (in this case, my counselling practice within a higher educational institution) with that of academic research and inquiry in a way which allows for a deeper and fuller exploration of topics emerging at the clinical level. Looking at the work I had done throughout the four taught courses, IFS and thesis over the past seven years, I am satisfied that I had myriad opportunities to reflect on my personal development as a practitioner as well as being in a position to retune some of my professional approaches and practices in order for it to be aligned to the principles of scholarly practitioners. An example of this “re-tuning” was the inclusion of an ability to think about researchable topics and the writing of practitioner influenced academic papers as part of the requirement for counsellor development in the counselling team under my charge. In addition, I have also

found an increasing confidence in my academic thinking ability through discussions on varied topics with academics (not necessarily practising counsellors) at the university as well as modifying the way I speak about 'counselling' in my taught classes with an increased emphasis on the need for students to critically reflect on any theories or practice being taught.

Conclusion

While we are engaged in the process of theorizing Shakespeare in performance, it might be useful to recall that there was once a time, fairly recently, when, unlike now, stage-centred Shakespeare scholars and theatrical practitioners could *actually* talk to one another (Mazer, 2005, p.153; italics added).

As I conclude this reflection, I find it interesting that the ongoing debate regarding relevance of the "useful" work between practitioners and academic scholars continues unabated. Universities are continuing to reward scholars for outstanding research leading to publications in Tier-A journals while organizations are also continuing to reward their practitioners for outstanding contributions leading to cutting edge solutions. Although there has been cross-overs where practitioners are recruited by researching organisations (e.g. academic institutions) to provide practical solutions to problems faced by industries (& vice-versa), the lines drawn between the two groups continue to exist with arguments for and against continually being exchanged.

Now that I am at the cusp of completing the EdD programme, I see myself at the stage of my learning journey where I can put on newly acquired 'lenses' as I navigate new vistas in my professional life. Even as I explore this next stage, I am clearly thankful to have had the opportunity to participate in the Doctor in Education (International Dual Award) programme. The training I had received

had provided a strong grounding and foundation to face the myriad challenges I will encounter in the years to come.

(1908 words)

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Chapter 1 - Introduction and Context

1.1 Introduction

Throughout history, many occupational groups have sought to establish themselves as “professions” in order to be recognised by the public as experts in their field of work (Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1933; Larson, 1998; MacDonald, 1995; Wilensky, 1964). The process of occupations transitioning towards being professionalized has also been the subject of academic discussion for close to a century (Carr-Saunders, 1933; Wilensky, 1964; Larson, 1977; MacDonald, 1995). The idea of ‘Professionalization’ generally brings about a sense of importance and significance to the occupation in discussion as a whole as well as a sense of pride and worth to the practitioner. The sense of significance was evident from the ‘ancient’ professions such as the priesthood, university teaching, law and medicine to industrial-era professions such as engineering and architecture (Lester, 2010). Later occupations such as accounting, teaching, uniformed services such as military and police, to name a few, have also been generally successful in their transition towards being professionalised and in the process have developed professional identities easily recognised by people outside of these professions.

Following the footsteps of the early professions, the Counselling profession have also attempted to professionalise their practice since the mid ‘50s with varying levels of success (Gale & Austin, 2003; Gazzola & Smith, 2007; Myers, 1995). From the early 1900s, counselling emerged in the United States and eventually developed into a field with many different specialties such as

rehabilitation, disability, education and community health in different settings such as mental health, schools, marriage, addictions and careers (Stove & Bradley, 1994). Due to the uncoordinated growth of the various specialties and its related associations within the field of counselling over the years, a coordinated effort emerged amongst the key counselling associations in the '70s and '80s to develop educational programmes, common standards of practice, ethical statements and eventually credentialing and licensing for individual counselling practitioners as part of their effort to achieve legitimacy as a profession (Ponton & Duba, 2009). Although counselling has attained many of the criteria deemed necessary for the formation of a profession, the attainment of professional status has achieved little in the way of creating a strong sense of professional identity or even to help counsellors distinguish themselves from the other helping professions such as psychologists and social workers as seen in literature (Alves & Gazzola, 2013; Gale, 1998; Goodyear, 2000).

Counsellor professional identity is largely a part of what it means to be a counsellor (Gazzola & Smith, 2007). It applies to every counselling practitioner and includes the integration of both intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions surrounding the concept of identity (Gibson, Dollahide & Moss, 2010). A counsellor's professional identity serves as a personal framework for the making of professional decisions as well as assisting the practitioner to make sense of their role, based on the perception of their skills, attitudes and self in the context of the professional counselling community (Brott & Myers, 1999; Friedman & Kaslow, 1986). Amongst the counselling community, professional identity can also be seen as a form of a collective identity, where

all counselling practitioners are seen to be a part of the “collective”. Unlike personal professional identity, which focuses on the characteristics and attributes displayed by individual practitioners, collective professional identity relates to the characteristics manifested by professional groups and how individuals identify with these groups (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine & Broadnax, 1994). Collective professional identity (also known as collective self-esteem) also refers to individuals’ self-perception, evaluations and identification as members of a social or professional group (Katz, Swindell & Farrow, 2004) and is measured by the value of their emotional significance and attachment as a member of that group (Bettencourt & Dorr, 1997).

The issue of counsellors’ professional identity is a topic of substantial debate, as evidenced by the topic being discussed in various counselling journals such as *Journal of Professional Counselling, Practice, Theory and Research, Journal of Counseling and Development* and conferences organised by National Board of Certified Counselors International and International Association for Counselling in recent years (Alvarez & Lee, 2012; Hohenshil, 2010; Hoskins & Thompson, 2009; International Association for Counseling, 2009). Conferences such as the 2011 American Counselling Association’s and the 2013 Australian Counselling Association’s conferences have highlighted the need for practising counsellors to firm up the profession’s identity in the midst of a rapidly changing society as part of the effort to embrace the emerging concept of an international counselling identity (Hoskins & Thompson, 2009). As the counselling profession grows in strength and numbers across the world, the case for the development of a clearer sense of professional identity will only grow with each passing year.

In Singapore, counselling services have been offered by various social service and government organisations over the past 50 years. However, in spite of the reasonably long period of time that counselling services have been available to the public in Singapore, the practice of counselling continues to be viewed as a young occupation trying its best to be perceived as a legitimate profession. Starting out as a service mostly provided by volunteers in the '70s, counselling has gradually shifted towards a service provided by full-time practitioners based in Family Service Centres (social work services partially funded by the government), schools and tertiary educational institutions, religious organisations, health care institutions such as hospitals and privately-run for-profit services (Tan, 1998).

When these counselling services were started, helping practitioners such as psychiatrists, social workers, psychologists, nurses, teachers and even religious leaders were engaged to offer assistance on a voluntary basis. In this context, the words "counselling" and "counsellor" were generic terms used to describe the activity of providing an avenue for people to receive help and it was not until the setting up of the Singapore Association for Counselling (SAC) in 1983 that the term 'counselling' and 'counsellor' presented as an occupation deserving to be viewed as a distinctive helping profession in its own right (Shek, 1999). In the intervening years, the practice of counselling had continued to remain low profile in spite of various pockets of growth found in various sectors such as education and social work in Singapore.

In the early 2000s, counselling was given a 'shot in the arm' with the Ministry of Education proposing a new framework emphasising holistic development for students with a focus on enhancing their socio-emotional learning (SEL)

capabilities. SEL essentially sought to enable students to “acquire skills to recognise and manage emotions, develop care and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships, and handle challenging situations effectively” (Ministry of Education, 2004, para. 1). This approach required schools to employ full-time counsellors by the end of that decade with a target for every school staffed by at least one full-time counsellor, supported by a team of counselling-trained teachers. By the end of 2010, most MOE schools as well as tertiary educational institutions (including private education providers) had established counselling services offered mainly by full time staff for students.

Having an increased number of counselling practitioners can only be good for the occupation as a whole. However, due to the uneven growth of the profession and the lack of a coordinated approach by the various parties involved in provision of counselling services in establishing a framework for the development of counsellors’ professionalism in practice, the public continues to remain ill-informed and confused about the roles played by professional counsellors. The lack of a clear developmental pathway for counselling practitioners has unfortunately led to a weak sense of professional identity amongst practitioners which in turn continues to contribute to the lack of awareness of the roles of counsellors by members of the public.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Professional identity is central to how counsellors perceive themselves as practitioners as well as their relation to the counselling profession as a whole. In spite of the good progress made towards professionalising the work of

counselling in the United Kingdom, Australia and Singapore, the professional identity of individual counsellors in the aforementioned countries continues to remain weak compared to that achieved in the United States (Bondi, 2004; Sim, 1999; Torres-Rivera, 2008). Alongside the achievement of professionalism, the counselling field (especially in the United States) has seen the emergence of many different counselling specialisations accredited by different licensing bodies, each with its own ethical codes and credentialing approaches over the last two decades (Gale & Austin, 2003). Instead of strengthening the professional identity for counselling, the increased diversity within the field, together with the lack of a clear, unified professional development framework, continues to further muddy the perception of the occupational title “professional counsellor” to the point where practitioners are unable to clearly explain what it is that they do, without having to take pains explaining to the enquirer the minute differences between their roles and that of the other mental health professionals.

This muddled perception in turn may work against the development of the profession in the eyes of government and legislative authorities, further weakening its attempts to gain recognition and parity as a mental health discipline with the established professions such as medicine and law. It is no wonder that the ACA (2009) considered the firming up of counsellors’ professional identity as one of the key factors which would work towards unifying and strengthening the profession.

As a young but growing profession in Singapore, there is currently very little information about how individual counsellors’ professional identity is developed. There is no literature or theory to explain if Singapore counsellors’

professional identity will be strengthened with the growing professionalization of Counselling as a field or if counsellors' professional identity development is influenced or hampered by some other factors, such as Singapore's multi-cultural/multi religious-influenced social-political environment. It is therefore important that an understanding of the counsellors' view of their profession and their identity is attained through an exploratory study in order to shed light on these gaps.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this grounded theory study is to generate a theory explaining how the professional identity of counsellors in Singapore's tertiary educational institutions is developed through examining the struggles, experiences and processes encountered by them. An investigation into the lived experiences of these counsellors will provide an insight into the experience of being a counsellor in a tertiary educational institution with a specific focus on what individual practitioners believe are the key features and processes which have contributed to their professional identity development in the midst of the counselling profession's continued push towards full professionalization. The findings from this study have the potential to fill a gap in the literature on professional development of counsellors in Singapore as well as to be used as the foundation for the construction of a framework which supports a clear and structured approach towards the development of practitioners' professional identity both on an individual as well as on a collective level.

The two research questions that guide this study are:

1. What do experienced, tertiary educational institution counsellors understand about the nature of their professional identity?
2. What processes and experiences do such counsellors believe have supported or hindered their professional identity development?

1.4 Significance of the Research

This study is unique in that past research and studies on the topic of counsellors and the work of counselling in Singapore have focused mostly on the effectiveness of psychotherapeutic expertise and approaches with various client groups (Jennings, D'Rozario, Goh, Sovereign, Brogger & Skovholt, 2008; Yeo, 1993); helping-seeking behaviours of clients (Ang & Yeo, 2004; Yip, 2013) and the tracing of developmental history of the profession in Singapore (Sim, 1996; Yeo, Tan & Neihart, 2012). Apart from these, there have been limited studies focussing on the processes behind the way professional identity of counsellors are developed. As the counsellors being studied are practitioners based in the tertiary educational institutions in Singapore, the findings gained from this study should allow for a greater insight into the work of these counsellors and would aid counsellor educators, policy and decision makers in various Singapore institutions employing such counsellors to understand how to proactively engage counselling practitioners in ways that would support their continued developmental needs. As it is at this point of time, most cases encountered by these counsellors in tertiary educational institutions tend to revolve around academic work stresses (time management, study techniques, etc.) with little exposure to serious mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and other diagnosable issues such

as bi-polar disorders and obsessive-compulsive disorders compared to practitioners working in dedicated clinics treating psychological disorders.

Besides benefitting counsellors practising in tertiary educational institutions, counsellors practising in schools and other settings could also use this knowledge as a foundation to understand various successes and struggles that may be typical pathways in the development of counsellors' professional identity as well as to support their younger and less experienced colleagues who may be new to the profession. The knowledge and information obtained from this study could also be used to form the basis of a professional development framework for the counsellors working in these settings, and possibly counsellors working in other settings such as community and families.

Other groups and stakeholders which may benefit from the results and outcome of this study include:

- Applicants deciding a career switch into counselling as a second career
- Counsellor educators overseeing and determining curriculum reviews and designs
- Employers of counsellors in the way they formulate policies for the hiring of staff and support for professional growth of these practitioners
- Professional associations in their approach to the development of policies, membership services and their advocacy work with regulating bodies and possible accreditation standards

- Governmental bodies in the development of licensing criteria and other Work-Skill Qualifications standards for newly professionalised groups in the future.

Finally, the findings of this study would add to the growing literature base regarding professional counselling for Singapore in the 21st Century.

1.5 Investigator's background

As a practising counsellor for the past 18 years and as a counsellor educator for the past nine years, I have had the opportunity to work with a variety of clients, students, practising counsellors from schools to social service agencies as well as those practising across the tertiary educational institutions in Singapore. Additionally, I had the opportunity to interact with numerous decision makers ranging from administrators of counselling education programmes, fellow lecturers and instructors, to school principals and directors of social service agencies and counselling centres within the various institutions employing these counsellors. Over the years of interaction, I was made keenly aware of the numerous challenges faced by the various stakeholders with regard to the roles of counsellors and the perception of this young profession. Besides challenging the misconstrued ideas of what counsellors do within the tertiary educational institution I work for, I also had opportunities to be significantly involved as the chair of a sub-committee within the counselling association in Singapore, advocating for professional development and educational pathways that enhance the standing of counsellors in society. Besides advocacy work within counselling in Singapore, I was also involved in various governmental committees tasked with the

responsibilities of exploring ways to improve socio-emotional literacy as well as to enhance the national identity of young Singaporeans. It was the confluence of these experiences which led to my interest in deciding to explore how professional identities of practising counsellors were developed and to research ways that not only would allow for the voice of the counsellors to emerge, but to enable the findings from the study to be used as a possible foundation for future professional development initiatives of counsellors and other newly professionalised groups within Singapore and if possible, the region.

1.6 Organisation of the chapters

This study explores the concept of professional identity and its importance as a key indicator of the maturity of an occupation working towards professional status. By studying how counsellors working in tertiary educational institutions in Singapore develop their professional identity through their everyday, lived experiences, we gain invaluable insights into the challenges and struggles faced by this young profession.

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter one provides the introduction to the study and delimits the contextual background in which this study takes place. This chapter also introduces the reader to the concept of professional identity and its importance as an identifier for professional groups and individuals working in that field. This chapter also introduces the reader to the counselling profession, its journey towards professionalization and the struggles it has faced with regards to the establishment of its professional identity and the perception of the public towards their roles. Additionally, this

chapter explains the purpose and significance of this study as well as its importance to the counselling profession in Singapore.

Chapter two reviews the literature that defines and discusses the concept of professions and how professional identity is developed with particular reference to the counselling profession. As part of the exploration of counsellors' professional identity, an evaluation of the literature surrounding the personal, interpersonal and collective dimensions is performed. The chapter ends with an assessment of literature on the development of counselling services in Singapore over the past decades.

In chapter three, I start the discussion with an account of the contextualisation of this research in the light of my personal lenses and the reasons behind the choice of grounded theory as the methodology for the approach of this study. I also discuss the role and position of researcher within the context of the study and explore the ethical stance adopted with participants. This chapter also discusses the method of data collection and the analytical method used to examine the data corpus. I then conclude the chapter with a summary of the research process.

Chapter four presents the key findings with a description of the themes and categories emerging from the analysis of the data corpus. The categories that emerged from the data are described and include: 1) Adapting to expectations; 2) Building knowledge and skills; 3) Building support networks; and 4) Navigating practice within the socio-politico environment.

Chapter five draws together the threads and themes of the findings in a discussion of the interpretation of the findings. This chapter discusses the

categories and attributes identified in the process of negotiating and developing their professional identity as counselling practitioners in Singapore's tertiary educational institutions, and how the attributes and categories manifest themselves as part of the professional 'Self' of the practitioner and the implications for the counselling profession. I then conclude the study with a suggestion of a possible framework for the professional development of counsellors, possible areas for future research and a reflection of my journey throughout the EdD programme.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review presents the issues surrounding the development of professional identity of practising counsellors and by extension, the counselling profession. Even though the practice of counselling has been in existence in Singapore since the '70s, with counselling services made available in tertiary educational institutions since the '90s, it was not until the mid 2000s before the profession started seeing a significant growth in the number of practitioners due to the Ministry of Education's target to have a trained counsellor assigned to every school by 2010. Due to this relatively new phenomenon in Singapore, studies specifically focussing on the development of counsellors' professional identity are lacking and as such, this review draws on studies largely conducted outside of Singapore. The ideas surrounding personal and professional development and its influence on professional identity, the way it is developed in various practices, definitions of counselling, the ways counselling practitioners develop their professional identity, the challenges facing counsellors in educational institutions due to the confusion of roles attributed to them, and the frameworks governing counselling in educational institutions both in the United States and Singapore are discussed.

2.2 Personal and professional development

Skovholt and Ronnestad (1996) defined personal development and professional development as the two strands that constitute the broad process of counsellor development. In a follow-up study, Ronnestad and Skovholt (2012) further reiterated that the development of personal self is how

practitioners see themselves as they relate to other people in the nonprofessional context while the professional self is defined as how practitioners see themselves in the professional context, and specifically how they see themselves when relating to clients. Wilkins (1997) offered an alternative definition of the relationship between the two concepts in that professional development is primarily concerned with the acquisition of skills and knowledge while personal development embraces 'everything else which facilitates being a practicing counsellor' (p.9). The 'everything else' in Wilkins' definition includes the process of attending to elements of the personal self which increases our effectiveness as individual therapists. Areas such as personal blind spots, emotional hot-buttons irrational beliefs, defence mechanisms and self-worth are considered (Hsi, 2013).

Other writers such as McLeod (1996) also proposed that counsellor competencies comprises that of technical and generic competencies. The former are described as referring to the counsellor's 'skills applied in specific domains of counselling activity' and the latter as referring to the counsellor's 'personal qualities and attributes' (p. 47). Similarly, Elton-Wilson (1994, p. 71) has suggested that professional development is concerned with 'doing needs', such as techniques and skills, explanations and theory, validation and research, training and qualification, while personal development is concerned with 'being needs', like authenticity, interpersonal engagement, intimacy and self-valuation. However, a further examination of the literature suggests that professional development may also include dimensions of a more 'personal' nature, such as the therapist's own counselling, fitness to practice and self-care (Bayne, Horton, Merry & Noyes, 1994; Elton-Wilson, 1994; Horton, 1996).

Additionally, Donati and Watts (2005) emphasised that the professional developmental needs of a counsellor has to be viewed from a spectrum of needs with one end of the scale being ‘personal growth and development’ and professional development’ at the other end.

Although the concept of personal identity is by itself an interesting aspect to be studied, I am mindful at this point that there is potential to study the intricacies of personal identity within the vast field of psychology but it would be beyond the scope of this study. As such, before I proceed to discuss the concepts of professional identity and how counsellors develop it, it is crucial to note that the position of this study would be that the development of counsellors’ personal identity is intimately tied together with the development of their professional identity. Hence, the concept of professional identity and the way it is developed amongst counsellors will be viewed as the overarching concept behind the basis of this study.

2.3 Professions – a construct

The construct of a “profession” is one of importance as it has a significant impact on an individual’s identity and self-worth, remuneration and responsibilities offered by an organisation employing that individual, and finally the respect and trust bestowed by the society on the individual practising as a professional. For example, societies across time have typically accorded medical doctors (or healers) with a high degree of respect and status (sometimes almost akin to divinity) based very much on their knowledge and seeming power to prolong life or bring relief to individuals afflicted with various physical ailments. As such, it is important that I begin my discussion of this chapter with a definition of the construct of ‘profession’. In its simplest form,

the Cambridge dictionary defines a profession as “any type of work that needs special training or a particular skill, often one that is respected because it involves a high level of education” (Cambridge Dictionaries, 2013).

Professions such as accounting, medicine and law require individuals seeking to be a part of these respective fields to be equipped with core bodies of specialised knowledge and skills, backed by standards and certifications (Reid, Dahlgren, Petocz & Dahlgren, 2008; Swennen, Volman & Van Essen, 2008; Wilensky, 1964). Throughout history, many people have sought professional work as their life career. In his theory of vocational development, Super (1953) proposed that individuals’ occupational choices reflect an attempt to implement what he calls ‘self-concept’. Self-concept in this case refers to a process whereby an individual chooses a profession that matches the image of their personal self. Individuals will make choices such that the occupational roles of their profession and self-concept will be compatible (Super, 1988). This compatibility and the subsequent sense of congruence about their work can then be referred to as their professional identity.

2.4 Professional identity

There have been various studies focussing on professional identity and it is generally viewed as a complex dynamic concept with multiple realities.

‘Professional identity’ can be seen in terms of a profession’s collective status in the eyes of the public where the nature of its role, history and particular characteristics are observed and understood (Gale & Austin, 2003).

‘Professional Identity’ may also indicate an individual’s identity as a professional and is a reflection of the person’s ability to self-conceptualize in terms of how they define the field and its roles, how decisions are made, and

the steps taken towards developing and acquiring expertise and professionalism (Brott & Myers, 1999). Each professional carries an identity that sets them apart from others outside of their unique field.

Various studies suggest many areas of overlap between an individual's and the collective's professional identity (Alves & Gazzola, 2011; Brott & Myers, 1999; Goldschmitt, Tipton & Wiggins, 1981). Professional identity of the collective is developed when groups of people with common professional interests come together to engage in a process of collective learning.

Individuals in these groups learn by observing others within the community and adopting their ideas, practices and experiences as their own (Wenger, 2000). New entrants to the profession such as newly graduated students will look up to their senior colleagues and supervisors in order to learn and internalise the norms, values, professional attitudes and skills which form the basis for their emerging identities as practitioners (Adams, Hean & Sturgis, 2006). Depending on the profession in question, a professional may have a strong individual professional identity, while the perceived collective identity of the profession may be weak, or vice-versa, according to the context of the practice (Gazzola & Smith, 2007).

2.5 How professional identity is developed

Development of professional identity is seen as a life-long process starting from the point the individual receives training and education in a particular field of preferred interest. The identity of the professional then gradually builds and evolves throughout the professional's life-span (Hiebert, Simpson & Uhleman, 1992). Gibson, Dollarhide and Moss (2010) proposed that professional identity is developed through the way a professional self-labels; how the professional

integrates their learnt skills and attitudes into their practice; and the influence of the professional community. Agreeing with Gibson, Nugent and Jones (2009) confirmed in their study that professional identity consists of an integration of the personal attributes of the individual (such as character and personality) with the professional training situated within the structure of a professional community.

Sugrue (1997) saw professional identity as part of a discourse where the components and essential characteristics surrounding the profession are open to continuous redefinition. Various studies have also suggested that professional identity is never fixed or pre-determined and may comprise a series of competing and sometimes contradictory values, behaviours and attitudes based on the life experiences of the professional 'Self' in formation (Coldron & Smith, 1999; Samuel & Stephens, 2000). The components and characteristics of professional identity are continually being redefined according to the latest discourse present within the profession.

In spite of the various perspectives regarding how professional identity develops, it is generally accepted that the first step in building professional identity starts when an individual enrolls in a course of study related to a particular profession (Reid, Dahlgren, Petocz & Dahlgren, 2008). In their study of novice educators, Ronfeldt and Grossman (2008) found that students develop their self-image as professionals through the personae projected by the senior educators. Through observation, students construct their professional self-identity based on how these senior professionals relate and behave. In Friedman and Kaslow's (1986) study of psychotherapists' professional development, they liken the novice trainee as a newborn, entirely

dependent on its parents (supervisors) for guidance in order to properly grow in the professional field. The authors also suggest that the quality of the novice's professional growth is directly proportionate to the quality of work demonstrated by their supervisors. Supervisors with clearly defined and developed professional identity will likely train supervisees to have similarly developed professional identities as well. In their study, Fagerberg and Ekman (1998) found similar conclusions in that nursing students' perception of their role and their professional identity was greatly shaped by nursing educators; as well as interactions with patients, the health-care team and students' own self-esteem levels, knowledge and skills.

Upon graduation from their courses and training, new professionals transit to a new environment where they are exposed to influences from fellow professionals, clients and other colleagues. These individuals develop their professional identity through the maturing of their sense of understanding of their work by the constant interaction present within the professional community and replicating behaviours that are aligned to that community (Auxier, Hughes & Kline, 2003). The idea of learning about professional identity through interaction was acknowledged by Watson (2006) where he elucidated that professional identity is a relational construct, where individuals perceive the parts of themselves which are similar or different to other senior practitioners and in the process of engagement, creates and strengthens the conception of their own identity. In their study of professional development of counsellors, Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) found that individuals develop "professional individuation" (p. 507) over time and that the factors influencing

their development shifts from an external focus (i.e. reliance on supervisors, theories, etc.) to one which is internal (i.e. reflexive practice).

New professionals also experience struggles in terms of the way they adjust to their own identity formation as a professional. Individually, new professionals experience fears and struggle with uncertainties regarding their abilities to implement their knowledge when working with clients (Gerrity, Earp, DeVellis & Light, 1992). Many new professionals feel unsure about their professional expertise and often think that they are deceiving themselves and their clients (Beagan, 2001). These feelings of inadequacy are part of the challenges new professionals face as they struggle to find congruence between how they feel about themselves and their work with clients. Stoltenberg, McNeil and Delworth (1998) found that new professionals tend to focus exclusively on outward tasks in order to build their "Self and Other Awareness" mental structure but their focus tends to be on "what they have not achieved" (p. 20) compared to professionals who are at higher stages of professional development. Often, in an attempt to cover perceived gaps in their knowledge, new professionals show strong desire to learn and demonstrate openness in learning from different sources of information (Sibley & Parmalee, 2008).

When practitioners become more experienced in their field, their professional identity would have developed to a point where it is manifested in various forms such as the practitioner's reputation amongst fellow professionals as well as with past and present clients, among others. Macintosh (2003) confirmed that an established professional's reputation is often based on their work experiences with fellow practitioners and clients. These practitioners would be noted for their consistent positive professional outcomes which in

turn demonstrate their competence and proficiency. Expert practitioners also demonstrate highly developed skills which enable them to respond effectively to tasks and situations at virtually any time with limited preparation (Ericsson, 2008). Due to their highly developed skillsets and competencies, senior practitioners with well-developed professional identities are likely to be recognised for their expertise and are highly respected in their fields and may be seen as ideal supervisors and mentors for younger practitioners. In their study on the effectiveness of mentoring, Hunt and Michael (1983) found that the process of mentoring was a key factor in the development of psychosocial and self-image development of individuals. The study also concluded that professionals who received mentoring and supervision from a senior practitioner with many years of experience stood a higher chance of career success compared to those who did not. Though not every expert practitioner becomes a supervisor or mentor to junior practitioners, a significant number do take the jump to become one, with reasons ranging from personal development and a desire to pass on learnt skills and techniques to junior practitioners (Spouse, 2001). According to Ungar (2006), the process of professional identity formation does not stop for expert practitioners but continues to grow into the phase of consolidation, which is in line with the last stage of Super's (1983)¹ theory of vocational developmental tasks.

Individuals who have been in a profession for a long time would have amassed a significant amount of recognition from colleagues from within the organisation they work for, clients and others from the professional community

¹ Donald Super's (1980) five stages of vocational development tasks include i) Crystallisation; ii) Specification; iii) Implementation; iv) Stabilisation; v) Consolidation.

while at the same time also encountered negative experiences such as politics (within the organisation as well as national), misunderstanding of roles and lack of developmental support (Assuncao, 2006; Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003). This group of senior professionals would have developed a significant base of professional knowledge of their field and many acknowledged as leaders or have taken up leadership responsibilities within the professional community (Swennen, Volman & Essen, 2008).

Having examined broadly the literature surrounding how professional identity is defined and developed, I will now highlight some definitions of counselling, its qualification as a profession and the role of counsellors, prior to shifting our discussion to counsellors' professional identity.

2.6 Is 'Counselling' a profession?

Historically, the field of counselling had its roots in Sigmund Freud's theories on human personality development and his approach to curing individuals' "body by the mind, aided by the impulse of one mind to another" (Van Eeden, 1887, cited in Ellenburger, 1970, p. 765). Subsequently, other theorist-practitioners such as Carl Jung, B.F. Skinner and Carl Rogers advanced their own theories and approaches in the field of counselling and broadened the public's understanding of psychological disorders and personality issues in the early 20th Century. Since then, counselling and the various related fields of professional helping such as social work, psychology, marriage and family therapy to name a few, have morphed into a field with over 400 different types of approaches, each with its own history and theoretical foundations.

In spite of the varied approaches developed over the past 80 years, 'Counselling' as a field has taken significant strides towards full professionalization. The counselling practice in the United States was the first in the world to have achieved full professionalization through regulating the practice by licensure and government legislation (Sweeney, 1995). Additionally, there is a national professional association (American Counselling Association) dedicated to upholding the standards of counselling practice through its code of ethics and stringent educational qualifications required for all individuals seeking to enter the profession. Based on the model of professional development developed by Wilensky² (1964) to illustrate the movement of occupations towards professionalisation, counselling as a field in the United States has achieved all five stages as described. Unlike the United States, the counselling profession in Singapore and the United Kingdom are one stage short in that they are currently still not regulated through licensure or backed by government approved legislations. Although the counselling profession in the United Kingdom is much closer to achieving full professionalisation compared to Singapore, both counselling associations have made noteworthy strides towards professionalising the practice, which in turn goes a long way to helping practitioners to identify themselves as counselling professionals (Hsi, 2012). With this in mind, the rest of this literature review will be founded on the assumption that counselling as a field

² Wilensky's (1964) concept of professional development includes: i) the occupation became full time; ii) a professional association is formed; iii) training is provided for the occupation; iv) recognition of the profession through legislation; v) a code of ethics is developed.

has achieved the status of being a profession due to most of the stages being achieved according to Wilensky's model.

2.7 What is 'Counselling'

According to Mcleod (2013), counselling is "a purposeful, private conversation arising from the intention of one person, a couple or a family; to reflect on and resolve a problem in living, and the willingness of another person to assist in that endeavour" (p. 7). On the other hand, the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy's (BACP, n.d.) defines counselling as "a range of talking therapies ... delivered by trained practitioners who work with people over a short or long term to help them bring about effective change or enhance their wellbeing". While Mcleod's definition focusses on the individuals receiving assistance, the BACP's focus is on the role of trained practitioners or therapists who provide the services to individuals looking for changes in their lives. An examination of these two definitions leads us to the observation that 'counselling' comprises two parts, namely 'counselling' from the perspective of an individual *receiving* help and 'counselling' from the perspective of the individual *providing* help.

2.7.1 Counselling: Receiving help

One side of the counselling 'coin' is the client who is receiving help to deal with issues which are troubling or causing a dysfunction in their daily living.

Counselling literature found in databases such as ERIC and ProQuest lists numerous counselling journals and articles which study the effectiveness of various therapeutic approaches for clients. In their study of psychotherapeutic treatment effectiveness, Smith, Glass and Miller (1980) found that 80% of

individuals who received counselling treatment received relief for their issues compared to a control group of individuals who were untreated. Another study by Howard, Kopta, Krause and Orlinsky (1986) found that 75% of clients were better able to cope with their psychological issues after 26 sessions or six months of weekly counselling treatment. Even if the number of sessions were reduced to as few as eight sessions, about 50% of clients demonstrated clinical improvements leading to better management of life issues.

Other studies on effectiveness of therapy for clients focused on client variables and intervention types. Clients seeking help from counsellors enter therapy with different needs, disorders, cultural and historical backgrounds. In their study of client responsiveness to therapy, Lambert and Cattani-Thompson (1996) found that different client variables such as severity of disturbance, motivation, capacity to relate, ego strength, psychological mindedness, and ability to identify a focal problem had significant impacts on counselling outcomes. Other important factors impacting on outcomes include the nature of issues faced by clients (i.e. types of psychological disorders, psychosis, etc.) as well as level of openness of clients towards help seeking.

In their study of effectiveness of specific therapeutic approaches on clients, Jones, Cumming and Horowitz (1988) found that apart from non-specific interpersonal relationship factors such as positive human connections (e.g. therapeutic alliance) and clients' projected hope for improvements influencing counselling outcomes, psychotherapeutic approaches (i.e. well-defined, intentional therapist actions) also play a significant role in client recovery from psychological disturbances or difficulties. The body of evidence demonstrated from the many studies of specific approaches such as Cognitive-Behavioural

Therapy (Beck, 1995; Butler, Chapman, Forman & Beck, 2006), Solution-focused therapy (De Shazer & Berg, 1997; Macdonald, 2011) and Humanistic Therapy (Elliott, 2002; Wampold, 2007) confirms the effectiveness of these approaches and their ability to bring about relief or healing for clients facing various difficulties.

Another important approach that is increasingly seen as critical to effectiveness of treatment for clients is the level of multi-cultural/multi-lingual sensitivity displayed by therapists. Sue, Arredondo and McDavis (1992) described this level of sensitivity as a therapist or counsellor's "multicultural counselling competence" (p. 479). In a study investigating client satisfaction with counselling, Fierres and Brobst (2002) reported that clients' ratings of their counsellor's multicultural competence showed a significant difference in levels of client satisfaction between two groups of respondents (one group were mainly white respondents and the other group with a mix of participants from different racial and ethnic backgrounds). Multicultural counselling competence of the therapist accounted for only two percent in terms of overall client satisfaction for the group comprising mainly white respondents, whereas multicultural counselling competence of therapist accounted for at least 16% of the satisfaction level for the other respondent group.

2.7.2 Counselling: Providing help

On the other side of the 'counselling coin' is the provider of counselling. The practitioner (professional counsellor) is an individual who has been trained with various theoretical and therapeutic approaches and provides counselling

service to clients in various settings such as schools, health, community or private practice.

Historically, counsellors in schools provided vocational guidance but their roles have grown to include addressing issues faced by students such as alcohol, drug addictions, teenage suicide and homelessness (Nugent, 1990). School counsellors assist students by equipping them with skills to cope with the various challenges in their lives, and working towards successful completion of their school journey (Agresta, 2004). In healthcare, counsellors work to improve the wellness of patients through outreach programmes, strength-based interventions and psycho-education (Altmaier, 1991; Elliott & Shewchuk, 1996; Hoffman & Driscoll, 2000). For counsellors working within the context of the community, they seek to assist clients deal with socio-economic issues by helping clients develop their personal abilities to modify their environment towards a state of health through advocacy and removal of external barriers to well-being (Toporek & Liu, 2001). Finally, counsellors working in private sectors usually work alongside general medical practitioners through provision of therapy for clients on a whole range of issues from stress/anxiety to bereavement and even psychologically induced behavioural issues (Sibbald, Addington-Hall, Brenneman & Obe, 1996).

2.8 Confusion of counsellor roles and functions

According to Sim (1999), counselling is an activity which is provided by different mental health professionals such as psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, counsellors, teachers, pastors, nurses and other paraprofessional helpers. The sharing of 'counselling' (as an activity) by the

different helping professions has raised dilemmas for 'Counselling' as a profession. Amongst other criteria, most typical definitions of professions require the occupation to possess a unique body of knowledge which is then utilised by individuals specially trained to deliver services based on that knowledge (Wilensky, 1964). However, in this case, the 'specialised' body of counselling knowledge is being utilised by different professions, which in turn diminishes the standing and the right of professional counsellors to the exclusivity of this knowledge and practice. Until this issue is resolved, the public and future clients will continue to misunderstand and confuse the role of professional counsellors and mistake them with practitioners from other helping professions.

Because of this ongoing issue, several studies have been conducted over the past two decades to determine counsellor roles, both within the field and in comparison with other helping professionals (Agresta, 2004; Alves & Gazzola, 2013; Coy, 1999; Dahir, Burnham & Stone, 2009; Gazzola & Smith, 2007; Hoskins & Thomson, 2009; Lieberman, 2004; Stelzer, 2003). A scan across literature show studies ranging from the lack of a unified professional identity amongst counsellors (Brott & Myers, 1999; Gale & Austin, 2004; Hanna & Bemak, 1997; Hill, 2004) to the struggles faced by counsellors in trying to develop their professional identity in an unstructured environment (Antony, 2002) where there may be competing or in some cases, no clear frameworks being offered to guide counsellors (Hansen, 2003; Marsella & Pedersen, 2004). Furthermore, there are diverse ranges of settings where counsellors practise their craft ranging from schools to family and community services and

private practice (Archer Jr & Cooper, 1998; Gale & Austin, 2003; Nugent & Jones, 1994; Sibbald, Addington-Hall, Brenneman & Obe, 1996).

In the early 2000s, the American School Counselling Association (ASCA) in an effort to introduce a framework and standardization of job roles amongst school counsellors, introduced the ASCA National Model (Henderson, n.d.) as the national blueprint for the development and implementation of a comprehensive school counselling programme in the schools across the United States. By 2007, the ASCA National Model was updated to encourage counsellors to shift their focus from delivery of traditional counselling services to include developmental outcomes which demonstrate tangible benefits to students (ASCA, 2008). In spite of positive reports across the school system following the adoption of the 2007 ASCA model, Dahir, Burnham and Stone (2009) reflected that counsellors are still struggling to balance additional non-counselling related responsibilities allocated to them by their school's leadership, which include crises intervention and administrative tasks, with that of their desire to see every student succeed.

This lack of clarity regarding the role and function of counsellors in educational institutions has, to a large extent, been influenced by the history of the development of the counselling field on a wider scale (Murray, 1995). Role confusion, conflict and a general inability of the profession to maintain a clear consistent public perception have been the norm (Coll & Friedman, 1997; Coll & Rice, 1993; Poidevant, 1991). Many different streams of counselling specialties have been introduced as evidenced by the 19 chartered divisions and 56 branches within the American Counselling Association (American Counselling Association, n.d.). Examples of the different streams include

rehabilitation, mental health, school, career, college, marriage and family, community, and gerontological counselling (Altekruise, Harris & Brandt, 2001; American Mental Health Counsellors Association [AMHCA], 2007; Parker & Szymanski, 1998; Spruill & Fong, 1990). To further complicate matters, these different tracks within the profession unfortunately do not have standardized accreditation or licensure requirements (Marini & Stebnicki, 2009). For example, rehabilitation counsellors registered with the American Rehabilitation Counselling Association (ARCA) are certified by the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) which had identified different core knowledge areas compared to that produced by the Council for Accreditation of Counselling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), which certifies training programmes undertaken by American School Counselling Association (ASCA) registered counsellors working in educational institutions. Marini and Stebnicki (2009) also observed that different states adopt different sets of criteria for counsellor registrations such that counsellors in schools and universities in one state may not be able to practise in neighbouring states unless they take separate qualification examinations. In addition, school counsellor certifications are established by each state's department of education (not counselling association) which further obscures the already muddled perceptions of counsellors operating within the educational institutions. While it is good that specialisations emerge to support the diversity of needs (as seen from historical trends observed in the medical profession), it is critical that the different specialisations within the field take steps towards unifying and recognizing one another under one national standard of registration and certification. This step, if managed well, will go a long way to offering clearer

guidelines and evaluation procedures for counsellors within educational institutions.

It has also become evident over the last three decades that the different counselling associations in the United States and the United Kingdom had worked to bring about a common definition of counselling, in an attempt to address the confusion and diversification of counselling roles to the public at large (Smith & Drodge, 2001). Besides unifying the diversity of streams within the field, the successful creation of a common definition for counselling will also bring about an overall improvement to the professional identity of counsellors, which will alleviate and remove the confusion, besides raising the standards of professional counselling practice across the field and improving its stature with the public.

2.9 Professional identity of counsellors

As discussed in the previous section, due to the shared knowledge and mixed heritage for counselling as a profession, it is important that its professional identity is continually explored and established along with attempts to unify the field. The next section of this literature review will focus on various studies conducted to determine how counsellors' professional identity is formed as well as the processes leading to the formation and development of counsellors' professional identity.

2.9.1 Development of counsellors' professional identity

As discussed earlier in this chapter, counsellors' professional identity is seen as a continually growing process which occurs throughout the lifespan of the counselling practitioner (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003; Studer, 2007).

Throughout their lifespan, these counselling practitioners would have encountered several processes which significantly developed their professional identity. Reid, Dahlgren, Petocz and Dahlgren (2008) and Brott and Myers (2009) suggested that the development of the counsellor's professional identity begins with their professional training as a student within a formal training programme. It is in such programmes that students come face to face with the idea of how a practitioner should present themselves to clients when working with them in the future. These training programmes normally include a practicum segment where students undertake internships or placements in various agencies in order for them to be immersed in the practice and to internalise the learnt skills. Adams, Hean, Sturgis and Clark (2006) found that students' construction of their professional identity is greatly influenced by opportunities of exposure to both work or internship experiences which allowed for an enhanced understanding of working with others in teams as well as the development of a well-developed sense of "cognitive flexibility" (p. 58). According to Martin and Rubin (1995) "cognitive flexibility" describes a person's inclination to be flexible in adapting to new situations faced (p. 623). Studies demonstrate that individuals with high levels of cognitive flexibility tend to be more innovative, creative and display stronger adaptive knowledge applications (Isen, 2002; Spiro, Collins, Thota & Feltovich, 2003). Larson (1998) found that counsellors with higher measures of counsellor self-efficacy levels (where social-cognitive flexibility is one contributing factor) tend to be more efficacious as a helping practitioner due to their superior mental flexibility demonstrated by their ability to easily retrieve, connect and assimilate past

knowledge with current information provided by their clients in order to assist them to work towards successful problem solving outcomes.

Once they become full-fledged practitioners, counselling professionals continue to build their professional identity throughout their professional lifespan with memberships in professional counselling organisations, attending conferences and workshops in fulfilment of what is commonly known as Continual Professional Education (CPE) hours. The interaction encountered with fellow counselling professionals in these settings serves to further solidify and strengthen their identities which in turn, build their sense of belonging (Nelson & Jackson, 2003). This process of building their professional identities continues until the point where practitioners retire from active work (Brott & Myers, 1999).

Besides examining counsellors' professional identity development from a lifespan perspective, another approach would be to consider their identity formation from the practitioner's personal and interpersonal dimensions with regard to their relationship to self and others.

2.9.2 Professional identity development – Personal dimension

Gazzola and Smith (2007) proposed that counsellors' professional identity develops when the practitioners' personal and interpersonal (professional) self are integrated in such a way to provide practitioners with a 'label' for themselves. This 'label' is also known as a sense of 'knowing' or 'level of consciousness' which influences individuals' conscious control of thought, emotion and action (Zelazo, 2004). The personal dimension of the practitioners' identity development includes attributes such as the practitioner's

values, theoretical orientation and attitudes which are then combined with the professional training such as techniques and communication skillsets received by the practitioner. Early in their professional lives, counselling practitioners rely more on supervisors and other experts such as professors and senior colleagues to validate their growing competence and less on their own experiences and training (Auxier, Hughes & Kline, 2003; Brott & Myers, 1999). In a related study on counsellors' professional identity growth, it was found that counsellors' locus of control and evaluation of personal competence were largely externally focussed but with time and experience, gradually shift to an internal focus (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003). New practitioners tend to connect their sense of professional self-worth with clients' progress with their issues. The tendency to rely on clients' positive feedback following therapy as an indicator of their own professional self-worth and ability to establish therapeutic effectiveness is a manifestation of the sense of vulnerability experienced by new practitioners or novices within the counselling field (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003). Hesteren and Ivey (1990) observed that new counselling practitioners over-rely on theoretical constructs when working with their clients to the point where practitioners run the risk of engaging in "developmental stage typing temptation" where clients are buttonholed into psycho-developmental theories without considering their life experiences or challenges (p. 526).

Another personal dimension of professional identity development for counselling practitioners is found in the continued growth of knowledge, attitude and skills required as a practitioner. One area of personal growth and development which is increasingly pertinent is the knowledge and competence

to operate within a multi-cultural and trans-cultural environment (Hoskins & Thompson, 2009). The UNESCO World Report on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2009) opined that with increasing globalisation, contacts between different cultures are expanding rapidly leading to increased cultural diversity across many nations and societies. While cultural diversity may pose challenges at an international or intra-national level, it may be more pronounced at an individual level as people in various societies exposed to globalisation learn to cope with differences arising from the confluence of multiple cultures. In view of the unique challenges faced across societies in the 21st Century, Bemak and Hanna (1998) called for contemporary counselling training programmes to include aspects of multiculturalism in order to equip counsellors with the knowledge of sociological, anthropological, political, educational, and historical connections to their clients. This way, practitioners will be guided to develop personal competencies which will empower them to be highly relevant to the needs of the 21st Century counselling client.

Throughout their practice life-span, counselling practitioners learn to critically self-evaluate their own practice (i.e. making decisions based on sound professional judgment) through the building of what Skovholt and Ronnestad (2003) described as their “cognitive road map” (p. 52). This cognitive mental map is made up of past experiences which include successes and failures with clients and lessons learnt from decisions made throughout their practice life-span. These cognitive maps allow practitioners to continually build their professional knowledge and expertise by reflecting each new client experience with previous knowledge. The process where practitioners continually think about what they are doing or “reflecting-in-action” (Schön, 1983, p. 56) forms

the basis whereby practitioners are freed from being dependent on learnt theories and approaches and enables them to create new techniques to deal with client issues. Through continual framing and re-framing of the issue in the form of reflection, counselling practitioners continually strengthen their cognitive road map which heightens their expertise and professional identity as a counselling practitioner over time.

2.9.3 Professional identity development – Interpersonal dimension

The interpersonal dimension of professional identity development refers to practitioners' relationship to others and how the various relationships work in conjunction in order to build the counselling practitioner's professional identity. The 'others' in this instance may refer to individuals such as their clients, supervisors, colleagues, members of the public; or organisations such as the professional counselling community, employer and place of work.

Skovholt and Ronnestad's (1992) study of therapist-counsellor development found that interpersonal encounters and experiences were significant influences in practitioners' professional identity development. Participants in the study reported that interaction with people (including clients, supervisors, colleagues, etc.) were important factors influencing the conception of their professional identity compared to other aspects such as knowledge of theories and approaches. The study also indicated that of all the individuals that therapists interacted with, clients were the group that was the single most important unit influencing new counselling practitioners' professional identity growth. This conclusion was also supported by Nelson and Jackson's (2003) study of Mexican counsellors-in-training. In the study, it was observed that the experiential working relationships with clients were a major factor in the

development of trainees' growing professional identity. Therapists who have significant exposure to a wide range of clients were found to have a higher level of confidence in their skills and knowledge and these therapists tend to produce better results with fewer drop-outs amongst clients (Stein & Lambert, 1995). Therapists with successful practices tend to be more confident about their abilities and competence as a counsellor. Clients who have experienced positive outcomes would share their experiences with others, which then work to further boost the credibility and reputation of the practitioner. This works to further strengthen the professional identity of these practitioners amongst their clients and those whom they are connected with (Kuhn, 2004).

Firman (2009), in her study of new counsellors, observed that their professional elders such as supervisors and mature colleagues and peers also act as a 'mirror' in reflecting back to practitioners the areas of their practice which are both good as well as areas which require improvement. Dyadic supervisory relationships between counselling therapists and counselling supervisors are seen as critical in the development of the practitioners' growing sense of self (Ekstein & Wallerstein, 1972). Loganbill, Hardy and Delworth (1982) defines counselling supervision as "an intensive, interpersonally focused relationship in which one person is designated to facilitate the development of therapeutic competence in the other person" (p. 4). Through the process of identification with their supervisors, young or new counselling practitioners learn skills, attitudes, values and problem solving strategies which enable them to be effective therapists. Various authors have found that the learning of these skills and behaviours takes place over a period of time with each stage (or phase, depending on theoretical approaches)

describing characteristics, skills and behaviours learnt and demonstrated by the practitioner (Friedman & Kaslow, 1986; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013; Stoltenberg, McNeil & Delworth, 1998). Supervision serves to protect both clients and the practitioner. Supervisors serve as an external check in order to monitor client care, set professional standards and act as gatekeepers for the profession (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004). A good, ongoing supervisory relationship serves to enhance professional functioning and the development of the therapist's professional identity over time (Haynes, Corey & Moulton, 2003).

Besides the influence of individuals, counsellors' professional identity is also impacted by the influence of the professional community such as the counselling associations or certification bodies which counsellors may be members of (Gazzola & Smith, 2007). Counsellors both learn and contribute to the culture of the profession through their participation and advocacy of various issues critical to the identity of the practice. Individual counsellors benchmark and align their own emerging counsellor identities with that which has been established by the professional associations and community (Robinson, 2012). This process is akin to "communities of practice" or 'CoP' (Wenger, 2000) where it is seen as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (p. 1). Communities of practice develop and share their knowledge and skills through activities which is the base for the formation of a "living curriculum" (p. 3) where practitioners both young and experienced learn from each other within a dynamic environment where social learning takes place through sustained interactions amongst the practitioners. As discussed earlier

in this chapter, in spite of the emerging professional identity of counsellors due to the advocacy of these professional groups and community, the lack of understanding and confusion about the role of counsellors in comparison within the other practices within the field of professional helping (such as psychiatry, social work, psychology and nursing) is still present. It was thus seen as critical that counsellors' professional identity is continually built up to increase their credibility and improve the public's overall understanding of their roles. In a conference hosted by the American Counselling Association in 2006, delegates from over 30 counselling related organisations came together and proposed the "20/20 Vision for the future of counselling" statement with a key focus on seeking to solidify and unify the identity of the counselling profession. This emphasis was the cornerstone in the counselling profession's attempt to address the continued confusion by the public of counsellors' role with the other helping professions. Currently, only the US has approved governmental legislation in support of regulation of professional counselling amongst the 50 States. This same issue of a lack of clear definition and standardisation of counsellors' roles has been the key obstacle to counselling being regulated in the United Kingdom and Australia (Australian Counselling Association, 2015; McGivern, Fischer, Ferlie, & Exworthy, 2009). When comparing the perceived professional identity of counsellors between the United States, United Kingdom and Australia, it is obvious that there is a direct connection between counsellors having clearly defined and well developed professional identities which are related to the industry being professionalised and regulated through government legislation (Gazzola & Smith, 2007).

2.10 Development of counselling in Singapore

Development of counselling services in educational institutions in Singapore is still at an early stage. Although counselling services in Singapore has been provided by various social services since the 1970s, not much has been written about it even as the industry is slowly building its way towards full professionalism. In Singapore, the words 'counselling' and 'counsellor' are terms used by many helping practitioners such as psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists, nurses, teachers and even religious leaders (Shek, 1999). The loose use of this term has unfortunately contributed to a diverse perception of what counselling is about and who provides these services. This has also diluted the understanding of the public towards counselling as a specialized activity practised by professional counsellors. This weak understanding by the public contributes significantly to the lack of counsellors' professional identity in Singapore. This final section of the literature review seeks to illustrate the development of counselling services (with special attention to those trained as 'professional counsellors', which is very different to counselling services provided by social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists, even though they use generic counselling skills as part of their work) in Singapore with special focus on schools and tertiary educational institutions.

Counselling services in Singapore started in the 1970s mainly with voluntary help from doctors, pastors and missionaries. In the 1980s, more counselling services were offered by various establishments which eventually led to the formation of organisations such as Counselling and Care Centre (CCC), Samaritans of Singapore (SOS), Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association

(SANA), Singapore Anglican Welfare Services (SAWC), Singapore Association for Mental Health (SAMH), and Students' Care Services (SCS) to support the needs of the community. The majority of the practitioners were volunteers with very basic levels of training. Clients seeking help from these organisations were usually not charged a fee as these clients were likely to be individuals with mental health issues and struggling to make a living during the immediate period after Singapore's independence (Sim, 1999). In the '90s, the Singapore government acknowledged the need to further support various sections of Singapore's society through the setting up of social service agencies such as Family Services Centres to meet the socio-economic needs of individuals and families living within various communities across Singapore. Additionally, counselling services were also established in organisations with large populations such as the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF Counselling Centre), the Ministry of Education (School Social Work unit) and the Guidance Clinic within the National Institute of Education (Chong & Ow, 2003). The setting up of these organisations in the '90s initiated the need for better trained practitioners in order to provide these social services. Although there were some professional counsellors employed within these organisations, most of the counselling services were provided by psychiatrists, social workers and psychologists in addition to their respective professional functions (treating patients with psychiatric issues – psychiatrist; alleviating living conditions of individuals and families within the community – social work and; psychological assessments and research – psychologist), due to the lack of professionally trained counsellors in Singapore.

The big change in the professional counselling scene in Singapore occurred in 2000 when the Ministry of Education implemented a new student framework emphasising holistic student development where the focus was on developing students' 'Social-Emotional Learning' (SEL) capacities. The target of SEL programmes was aimed to assist students to “acquire skills to recognise and manage emotions, develop care and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships, and handle challenging situations effectively” (Ministry of Education, n.d.). This move required all Singapore schools to have at least one full time counsellor providing counselling and student development services by the end of that decade. With over 300 schools within the Singapore school system (Ministry of Education, n.d.), the government encouraged various educational institutes to offer programmes to train professional counsellors to fill the employment gap. The initial batch of practising counsellors comprised retired teachers who were trained with a six month diploma in counselling from the National Institute of Education, followed by the development of the Master of Arts in Applied Psychology programme (Torres-Rivera, Nash, Wah, & Ibrahim, 2008). This was closely followed by Temasek Polytechnic's Specialist Diploma in Counselling and Guidance programme. From 2003, various private education providers also started offering specialized Masters level counselling programmes to supplement the existing training programmes available then. By the end of 2010, the Ministry of Education had successfully achieved the goal of having a practising counsellor in every school in Singapore.

Prior to the year 2000, tertiary educational institutions (including universities, polytechnics and vocational institutions) in Singapore did not invest many

resources into providing counselling services for their students. In their study on youths with emotional and behavioural disorders in Singapore, Chen and Soon (2006) estimated that about 1 in 10 individuals in Singapore suffer from some form of mental health issue and that 8.6% of young adults between the ages of 18 to 34 stand a high probability of experiencing a major depressive disorder. A newspaper report in 2001 also indicated that two out of three Singapore students suffer from “study stress” (Phua, 2001). It was the impact of these reports as well as the strategic shift by the Ministry of Education to equip every school with a counsellor which eventually tipped tertiary educational institutions to increase their investments in providing professional counselling services for their students. Counsellors practising in educational institutions currently possess formal academic qualifications ranging from diploma in counselling (mainly for those practising in primary and secondary schools) to postgraduate degrees such masters and doctorates in counselling (for those practising in tertiary educational institutions).

Today, though a majority of the cases handled by counsellors in tertiary educational institutions still revolve around academic stresses, counsellors are starting to see students presenting with fairly serious mental health issues such as depression and clinical anxieties. In the cases of serious mental health issues, some strategies adopted by counsellors in tertiary educational institutions include referring these students out to dedicated mental health organisations or equipping themselves with knowledge and skills to effectively help these students (Torres-Rivera, Nash, Wah, & Ibrahim, 2008).

Currently, the Singapore Association for Counselling is the key association dedicated to supporting the professional development of counsellors working

in the different helping professions. Over the past decade, the Association has made much progress in pushing for registration of professional counsellors. In order to be on the register, only registered members of the Association who have completed 400 clinical hours of practice accompanied by 50 hours of clinical supervision every two years are admitted. In addition to self-regulation of current practitioners, the Association works to recognise the role of clinical supervisors, which is a critical part of the process in providing supervision for all registered counsellors. Besides self-regulation, the Association also credentials training curricula and counselling programmes offered by various educational institutions in Singapore. This process ensures that providers of counsellor education and training programmes are aligned to a strict evaluation criterion that effectively trains counsellors to meet the standards required of the Register (Singapore Association for Counselling, n.d).

Counselling is currently not regulated in Singapore and the Association has no legal power or authority to impose practice standards on members or even to prevent individuals with minimal training to label themselves as a 'professional counsellor'. At this time, the government has no plans or requirements to regulate counselling and to hold counsellors accountable to an established code of professional practice. However, even without regulation, the Singapore Association for Counselling has acknowledged that the onus is on the counselling community to demonstrate their capability to self-regulate and to maintain a high level of professional expertise for those registered with the Association (Chong & Ow, 2003). The establishment of a code of ethical practice and the voluntary submission to the code by all registered counsellors works to further establish the sense of professionalism amongst practitioners.

This sense of professionalism will go a long way in building counsellors' professional identity in Singapore.

2.10.1 Counselling in Singapore – Socio-cultural influences

Much has been written about the multi-cultural context of counselling, especially that of multi-cultural competencies and influences impacting on the efficacy of counsellors' provision of services for minority clients in countries such as United States, Canada, United Kingdom and other western-oriented cultures (Arthur & Januszkowski, 2001; Arthur & McMahon, 2005; Gu, Schweisfurth, & Day, 2010; Margolis, 1986). The development of these areas of counselling practice were a response to the emergence of global changes leading to changes in the cultural complexion of western societies such as the United States, United Kingdom and various European countries such as Germany (Sue, Arredondo, McDavis, 1992). However, in spite of the importance of multi-cultural counselling as an important "fourth force" in the field of counselling (Pederson, 1990, p. 19), this concept did not seem to have found traction in counselling practice and training course syllabi in Singapore. The lack of traction of multi-cultural counselling approaches could be due to the fact that multiculturalism has always been seen as a cornerstone in the building of this country and that the enactment of various laws to protect racial and religious harmony had over the years, socially engineered Singaporeans to be accepting of social and cultural differences (Chan, 2013). In the early years of Singapore's independence, it was critical that a system of law was adopted in order for all the different races and ethnic practices to be tied together such that the diverse groups of people could live together in peace and tranquillity.

As it is, the majority of counselling theories and orientations currently taught in counselling graduate schools in Singapore are western in origin. A scan through the curriculum of three graduate counselling programmes in Singapore clearly demonstrates this observation. Classical counselling theories established by Western theorists such as Sigmund Freud (psychoanalytic therapy), Carl Rogers (person-centred therapy), B.F. Skinner (behavioural therapy), Aaron Beck (cognitive-behavioural therapy) and Fritz Perls (gestalt therapy), to name a few, were listed as foundational theories which students of counselling are exposed to and trained in. Although there have been attempts by counselling practitioners in Singapore to integrate folk therapies and Chinese indigenous psychotherapeutic practices, the majority of these approaches and theoretical paradigms have not been integrated as part of mainstream approaches by counselling practitioners in Singapore (Lee, 2002).

Looking at counselling practices within educational institutions, Tan (2002) found that counselling in Singapore schools between the years 1980 to 2000 was premised on western conceptions of the individual having the motivation and desire for personal autonomy in making life decisions for themselves. By the time the mid '90s came around, the Ministry of Education realised that the notion of receiving personal guidance and counselling as understood in the US context was not working well within the Singaporean context. The Asian context of collectivism and the subsequent sense of respect ascribed to seniors and elders (the reason behind why students tended to look to teachers and counsellors for directions rather than making life decisions for themselves). By virtue of their position within Singapore's socio-cultural

hierarchy, teachers and counsellors will naturally be viewed as experts who impart knowledge and skills to students, which in turn compels most Singaporean students to naturally defer to the teacher or any adult educator within the school system with regard to their life and or career decision (Torres-Rivera, Nash, Sew & Ibrahim, 2008).

In a comparative study of student perceptions of counselling effectiveness between United States and Singaporean college students, D'Rozario and Romano (2000) found that students in the United States perceived counsellors who adopted directive approaches as being more experienced whilst students in Singapore perceived non-directive counsellors as having more expertise compared to the former. The results of this study were surprising because previous studies indicated that Asian clients tend to perceive directive counselling styles as more effective than nondirective counselling approaches (Atkinson & Lowe, 1995; Atkinson & Matsushita, 1991; Leong, 1986).

Interestingly, several studies on Singapore culture have indicated this country has a confluence of both Asian and Western influences which makes Singapore unique amongst most Asian states (Ban, 1982; Check-Teck, 1992; Tan & Farley, 1982). Although Singaporeans may display behaviours such as 'obedience', 'harmony' and 'trust of family' which are reminiscent of Confucian influences, at the same time, they also display western oriented behaviours such as individualistic orientations with regard to work achievements, egalitarian approaches towards rank and status and a focus on autonomy in the pursuit of personal goals (Ee & Seng, 2008; Lee, 1996; Schwartz, 1992).

2.11 Concluding thoughts for this chapter

This chapter reviewed literature with regard to the professional identity and the way professional identity is developed amongst counsellors, which are seen as a newly established group of professionals within the helping profession. The literature review first explored the construct and definitions of professions and reviewed the idea of professional identity being the self-concept of a profession. Due to professional identity being a dynamic concept with multiple realities, this part of the review focussed on the various ways and approaches different practitioners take to developing their self-concept as a professional. The second part of the literature review focussed on the idea of 'Counselling' as a profession and how individuals develop their professional identity as a counselling practitioner. The literature suggests that professional identity of counsellors is developed along an individual's personal and interpersonal dimensions of the 'Self' (Gazzola & Smith, 2007) and the attributes and competencies along the two dimensions continue to be developed and are manifested as knowledge, attitude and skills required throughout the lifespan of their profession (Super, 1953).

The third section of this chapter reviewed the development of 'Counselling' as a profession in Singapore since the '70s. The development of counselling as a service was evidenced through the growth and establishment of various organisations (both governmental and non-governmental) and associations providing assistance to individuals with various levels of need across the past four decades. The final section of this chapter discussed the impact of Singapore's cultural influences in the way counselling is developed and perceived by individuals in this country.

The limitation of this literature review, however, is that there are limited studies related specifically to the professional identity of counsellors practising within the tertiary educational institutions in Singapore. This study contributes to the existing literature base by exploring how counsellors in the tertiary educational institutions develop their professional identity throughout their career lifespan. The literature is further integrated in chapters four and five of this study. In the next chapter, I will address the methodology of this study and describe from a constructivist perspective, the approach of grounded theory as the foundation for examining the context, method, process of data collection and the analysis of the data corpus.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In the field of counselling, we have knowledge about the various practices of counsellors and the various demands made on the work of counsellors. However, our understanding of how counsellors develop and grow their professional identity remains fuzzy. This is especially so for counsellors working within the context of tertiary educational institutions. The literature reviewed suggests that more studies are needed to understand how counsellors develop their professional identity, especially in the context of tertiary educational institutions. To date most studies investigating the processes surrounding the development of professional identity amongst counselling professionals have focused either on newly graduated counselling professionals or those practising their craft in school environments (usually in a secondary school setting). By virtue of the higher number of practising school counsellors in Singapore, it is only natural for any focus of research to be made on the group with the highest number of individuals. However, my contention is that as all school counsellors receive their training from institutions of higher education, it is imperative that counsellors in tertiary educational institutions lead as ideal role models in order for the practice to continue to grow. Hence, in order to provide the base for role modelling, it is important that research studies, such as this, should focus on counselling practitioners in higher educational institutions. This way, the experiences, knowledge and skills obtained over the years could then be imparted to the current generation of school counsellors who in turn, are able to lead the profession to the next stage of development.

As such, the first purpose of this study is to describe and explain the idea and nature of professional identity experienced by tertiary educational institution counsellors. The second purpose is to examine the processes and experiences that have supported or hindered the growth of their professional identity.

To achieve the goals of this study, I present the logic and theoretical underpinnings for my research design and methods adopted in this study. This is a qualitative study that adopts principles from grounded theory. As such, in what follows, I discuss an overview of the background of grounded theory, the reasons behind the adoption of the research design, role of researcher, context of the study, ethics, participants, data collection, and data analysis will be further addressed in detail.

3.2 What is ‘Grounded Theory’?

Glaser and Strauss (1967) were the pioneers of grounded theory. It was developed as a methodology to inductively generate theory through a systematic analysis of data collected from research (Evans, 2013; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The elements which define grounded theory include simultaneous data collection, analysis and coding of said data into categories and themes which form the basis for theory construction. One of the cornerstones of the approach is that the researcher approaches the area of interest from a position of not having an a-priori hypothesis which may influence the way the data is coded, analysed and interpreted. Additionally, the “constant comparative method” (Glaser, 2012) for coding of data at each stage of the analytical process allows for interaction between emerging codes with

subsequent sets of data in order to further advance conceptual understanding, leading to the development of a theory which is grounded in the data.

Grounded theory developed initially as an alternative methodological approach to thinking about and conceptualising data in the period of research history when quantitative research was regarded as the dominant methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This alternative approach (usually termed 'qualitative approaches') asserts that individuals actively create their realities and are constantly modifying meanings of their worlds by their own actions and interactions with others. In grounded theory, data is collected using various sources such as interviews, official documents or records, field observations, activity logs and letters (Glaser, 2005). The acceptance of the myriad ways in the collection of data provided researchers with the ability to thoroughly investigate the phenomenon in question in order to yield rich meanings behind the interactions experienced by participants of any study. Each new set of data subsequently collected will be constantly compared to what the researcher had already considered, with questions about the analysis continually being refined and refocused, while repeatedly seeking for emerging patterns and concepts which illuminate important processes surrounding the phenomenon (Haig, 1995).

The goal of the researcher using this method is to build a theory or model seeking to explain the process and interaction of ideas surrounding the phenomenon being studied. The role of theory is to predict and explain behaviours of individuals and groups through the function of plausible relationships among concepts and sets of concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Theories form the basis for logical action for research and practice and provide

researchers with a guide or lens through which social issues and problems are examined. Historically, most definitions of theories derive from positivism where theory is treated as a statement of relationships between abstract concepts based on empirical observations. In this case, theories are created to deduce, explain and predict for causality and generality (Charmaz, 2006). However, alternative philosophical definitions of theories would focus on the abstract and interpretive aspects of a studied phenomenon. Qualitative approaches of theory generation emphasise understanding rather than explanations. Qualitatively induced theories allow for uncertainties rather than causality, with priority given to determining meanings, patterns and processes (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004).

Meanings and patterns are created when individuals actively live and modify their own actions and interactions with others (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Meaning is constantly created and modified through individuals' social actions and reactions to circumstances and situations. A big part of the creation of shared meaning by people involves the use of symbols, which is seen as a basic human trait that enables communication (Schreiber & Stern, 2001). These symbolic communications allow the researcher an opportunity to observe beyond the relationships expressed through individuals' behaviours, to the underlying meanings that motivate the individual (Schwandt, 1994). Symbolic interaction between people is grounded in the assumption that interaction is central to knowledge development and is built upon the unique experiences of individuals (Blumer, 1969). The grounded theory researcher in this case, seeks to construct a model to explain a phenomenon of interest generated by everyday interaction and exchange of symbolic

communication or symbols between individuals. The tradition of symbolic interactionism hence serves as the theoretical basis behind this method (Charmaz, 2006).

Upon reflection, the use of grounded theory as the method for this study is most appropriate due to the approach being highly congruent with my current worldview. In order to fully understand the experiences of counsellors working in tertiary educational institutions in Singapore, it would be necessary to examine a) counsellors' personal stories of their experiences with stakeholders (including student clients, staff and faculty and parents) and the way they interpret and attach meaning to these various interactions; b) the value counsellors place on their interactions with stakeholders; and c) to possibly unearth a deeper insight into the complex processes behind their layers of communication and interaction. Based on the three reasons described above, it is logical and feasible that Grounded Theory is used as the methodology for this research. It is envisioned by this researcher that the examination of these complex processes would lead to the uncovering of important concepts fundamental to the development of a theory about how counselling professionals in tertiary educational institutions build and grow their professional identities.

3.2.1 Coding

In grounded theory, the coding of data is seen as the fundamental link between data and the development of the emerging theory. Coding describes what the data is 'speaking' about. Saldaña (2012) describe codes as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-

capturing and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language based data” (p. 3). Charmaz (2006) further describes coding of data as generating the “bones” of the researcher’s analysis and the subsequent “theoretical integration” as being likened to the reassembling of the bones into a “working skeleton” (p. 45). In grounded theory, it is highly recommended that the researcher be intimately involved with the coding of the data as their constant exposure to the data enables them to be sensitive and perceptive to the nuances embedded within the data. This in turn stimulates conceptual ideas which will lead to emerging theory.

The researcher begins the process with initial or “open coding” (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) where the data is mined for a broad range of conceptual and theoretical ideas. The data are analysed using “line by line coding” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 50-52). Line by line coding is usually considered the first step in grounded theory coding of data and consists of naming each line of the communication in order to make sense of possible processes embedded within the data. These processes would be coded as potential categories to be used for subsequent development of questions and lines of inquiry as part of the direction for further data gathering. When second or subsequent interviews are coded, the researcher has to constantly compare this new set of data with the earlier sets of coded data in order to confirm emerging categories.

The second phase of coding (“Focused Coding”) occurs when the researcher begins to develop categories arising from the initial coding and synthesising these codes into larger segments of data (Sheperis, Young & Daniels, 2010; Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). At this stage of coding, usually one

to two core conceptual categories begin to emerge that will serve to explain the main phenomenon being examined. These core conceptual categories also drive the direction for further data collection which is known as theoretical sampling. In short theoretical sampling happens when new research cases are chosen to be compared with data which have already been studied earlier (Strauss, 1987). More details on theoretical sampling will be discussed in the following section.

3.2.2 Theoretical sampling

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), theoretical sampling is a sampling process adopted to develop the properties of emerging theoretical ideas and categories which are then used for generating theory. Theoretical sampling does not depend on only one point of inquiry but relies on continued data collection, choosing of new research sites or cases to compare ideas with ones that have already been studied. The researcher goes through a process of collecting data, coding the data, analyses and constructs tentative ideas about the collected data and then checking these ideas against what has been inquired into and analysed, in order to decide what further sources of data to collect. The iterative process is not based on any preconceived theoretical framework but inductively based on the analysis of the data being examined.

The philosophical foundation for theoretical sampling strategies is very different from typical quantitative sampling approaches. The aim of quantitative approaches is to answer “what” questions and to test pre-determined hypotheses and produce results which are generalizable across broad ranges of populations whereas qualitative research aims to provide explanation and

understanding of complex psychosocial issues with a focus on answering “why” and “how” questions (Marshall, 1996). Hence, the decision on sampling approaches is normally determined by the research questions behind the study but in the case of a grounded theory approach, theoretical sampling is determined by the iterative process of data collection and analysis; leading to the development of categories and themes until the point of data saturation.

In grounded theory, researchers do not select a group to be studied based on pre-selected ideas and variables, but rather the initial phase of sampling is determined *before* the study to examine the phenomenon where it is found to exist. Comparison groups are subsequently selected by the researcher according to their theoretical relevance in the development of the emerging categories based on the coding of the initial collection of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In the first phase, the researcher begins by using “convenience sampling” (Richards & Morse, 2007) to determine individuals who are available and are seen to be the ‘experts’ on the particular phenomenon being studied. Glaser (1978) also acknowledged that researchers in the initial stage of data collection would also approach groups which provide maximum potential for obtaining data which will lead to further data collection downstream. These groups of individuals are usually most knowledgeable in their field of experience and will also point researchers to other individuals or groups to further collect data which is relevant to the study. Once the initial sampling is completed, the next phase in the sampling procedure starts. In this phase, “purposeful sampling” is used where participants who are currently experiencing the phenomenon are recruited for data collection. The codes

which are being developed from the analysis of the data from the convenience sample are compared to the newly collected codes from the data collected from the “purposeful samples”. Once the data and codes from the purposeful samples are analysed and completed, the sampling process moves towards theoretical sampling.

The main idea behind theoretical sampling is that the researcher allows the emerging concepts, as well as their own understanding of the developing theory, to direct the final phase of sampling (Draucker, Martsof, Ross, & Rusk, 2007). Researchers deliberately seek participants who have had specific or significant responses to key experiences, which were determined by the researchers’ analyses of data collected from the earlier sampling phases. These particular participants (some may have been interviewed in the earlier phases) are then interviewed (or re-interviewed) with targeted questions for their narratives which add to the existing data corpus about a particular concept or category. The data is then used to verify or confirm the emerging theory (Morse, 2007).

3.2.3 Constant comparison

One of the key cornerstones of grounded theory is the concept of “constant comparison” of data as part of the process to generate theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Data gathered from initial selective sampling would be coded for categories but these categories have to emerge from the data. A category represents a unit of information composed of events, occurrences, and instances (Coyne, 1997). The process of considering information from collected data and then comparing it to the emerging categories and back

again to subsequent collected data is the constant comparative method of data analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Glaser and Strauss proposed that similarities and differences within the data would be clearly observed through this method of analysis. Throughout the research process, the researcher is advised to continually evaluate the number of groups to be sampled until theoretical saturation has occurred. Saturation occurs when no additional data are found and the properties of the category can be developed (Glaser, 1978).

3.2.4 Theoretical saturation

In grounded theory, theoretical saturation is obtained when simultaneous collection and analysis of the data corpus no longer produces any other new features and concepts (Glaser, 1978). At this point, the emerged concepts are theoretically saturated. According to Glaser (2005), this stage produces the “conceptual density” in order to merge the developing theoretical categories into conceptual theory. Once saturation is reached for these categories, there is no longer a need to continue the process to “theoretically sample” further data for comparisons. In this case, theoretical completeness is achieved with saturated categories derived from constant comparisons of data.

3.3 Rationale for approach

Grounded Theory was selected as the approach for this study because it enables a shift from a general description of what is happening in the field of counselling to an understanding of what is actually happening in terms of the growth of the professional identity of counsellors practising in tertiary educational institutions in Singapore (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory was used for this research study mainly because it was seen as the

best approach to address the research questions as well as the ability to utilise multiple sources of data. This particular study utilised memo-writing during coding and analysis as well as interviews with the participants. Particularly, grounded theory was selected due to the approach's philosophical congruence with my experiences as a counsellor in a tertiary educational institution in Singapore for the past 12 years. The interactions with the various stakeholders such as students, staff and parents within the place of employment as well as with counterparts all across the various tertiary educational institutions have greatly influenced the way I perceive the way knowledge is constructed as well as allowing for an increased sense of theoretical sensitivity regarding the joys and struggles of counsellors working in a tertiary education setting.

Due to my work with counselling clients over the past decade and a half, I have gradually shifted from a positivistic clinical paradigm received during my graduate counselling training to one where I *journey* with clients in order to fully appreciate their stories and challenges and relying less on established 'clinical knowledge' because no one-page description of an issue is able to fully expound on the client's experiences behind the issues faced. The shift away from an objectivist stance regarding clinical knowledge to one where I look at a client's issues beyond the "once-and-for-all descriptions of people" and into the constantly evolving and changing "social, political and economic realms" inhabited by them (Gergen, 2009, p. 100) was palpable. This constructivist approach places priority on the phenomenon under investigation (i.e. how professional identity is built and grown amongst counsellors in tertiary education institutions in Singapore), and views the analysis of data as being co-created from the varied shared experiences with participants. Berger and Luckmann

(1966) assert that knowledge in social constructivism is not an objective representation of nature but, rather, a linguistic creation that arises in the domain of social interchange.

As a novice researcher, it is important that any research paradigm used is congruent with my beliefs and views about what reality is. Grounded theory, as discussed earlier in this chapter, is a methodology that aligns itself very well with my philosophical and epistemological views about reality. The approach blends a positivistic slant for the need of a procedure (albeit a flexible one) with a post-positivistic perspective that knowledge is created through the researcher's construction of concepts arising from data collected from the lived experiences of individuals who are undergoing (or have undergone) the phenomenon being examined.

3.4 Role of Researcher

Constructivists study the 'how' and 'why' in a research study and interact closely with participants to co-construct meanings and actions. The resulting study is dependent on how the researcher interprets and theorizes the data collected (Bryant, 2002). The grounded theory that is developed cannot stand outside of the researcher's view of the data. Hence, the view of researcher 'contamination' of data is not something that needs to be avoided but is to be seen as a natural consequence of interaction between researcher and participants. Peshkin (1988) uses the term "subjectivities" when addressing the influences of researchers' personal attributes on the interpretation of data. Subjectivities in this case include aspects of identity that "have the capacity to filter, skew, shape,

block, transform, construe and misconstrue what transpires from the onset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement” (p. 17).

In this study, of particular importance are the subjectivities that arise from my being a senior counselling practitioner within the field in Singapore, especially amongst the tertiary educational institutions, where I am noted to be a forerunner of counselling and other student wellness services and approaches. Due to the hierarchical nature of educational institutions and its influence in shaping the mindset of individuals working within it (Marginson, 2006), an important subjectivity to note is that my seniority within the counselling field may influence and colour the responses of participants during the interviews. Briggs (2002) investigated the complexity faced by researchers operating from a position of relative privilege or seniority and trying to separate herself or himself from their status of being inherently more ‘knowledgeable’ as the researcher compared to the interviewee. In order to address the issue of interviewees deliberately aligning their answers to be in agreement with the interviewer’s perception of the subject matter, I strove to be engaged with interviewees in an active way and constantly reminded them of my role as a researcher and for them to respond to me as a researcher, and not as a senior practitioner in the field. For example, within each of the interviews, I started by having a small discussion with the participants about my role as a researcher and that my previous interactions with them as fellow professionals should be kept in the background and that their views were most important for the study. I was also mindful to constantly steer the interviews such that the interviewees kept close to the list of questions in order for them to fully elucidate their thoughts about the subject matter being discussed. This way, I was able to avoid imposing my

views on the discussions even though I may have had intimate familiarity with the issues.

3.5 Participants and setting

3.5.1 Description of setting

The setting for this study was the various tertiary educational institutions in Singapore. There are currently five polytechnics, five universities and numerous privately-run institutes offering university programmes. There is currently an estimated total number of 40 to 50 counselling practitioners working in the tertiary educational institutions in Singapore. Each institution's counselling centre is headed by a senior practitioner with at least 10 years of counselling experience and who is also a member of either the counselling association or psychological association of Singapore. Due to my familiarity with all the heads of centres across the institutions, telephone conversations were initiated with twelve heads to explain the context behind the research study and to gain agreement for either themselves or their staff to be invited to participate in the study. Emails were subsequently sent to confirm the content and context of the telephone conversations. The heads of centres took between two days to three weeks to come back with their agreements. Out of the twelve, two declined the invitation to participate. Once permission was obtained, I requested basic demographic information on their team members such as i) number of years of counselling experience; ii) number of years working for the current educational institution; iii) highest educational qualification. Due to the leadership role within my own centre, I had chosen not to approach members of my own staff team as participants for this study.

Data was collected from January 2014 to July 2014. The initial approach was to have only individual interviews but five of the 'younger' practitioners from different tertiary educational institutions communicated with each other after the invitation was sent and responded with a request to be interviewed through a focus group discussion. The reasons for their request was that being 'young' practitioners, they may not fully understand the concepts and ideas surrounding professional identity and that their participation as a group would allow each other to comment and support the others' point of view. Kitzinger (1995) reflected that focus groups, besides helping individuals to explore and clarify views that would be less accessible in a one on one interview, encourages participation from individuals who may be reluctant to be interviewed on their own (intimidated by the formality and isolation of a one-to-one interview). Hence, instead of catering just to these five individuals, I opened up the opportunity for all participants to either be interviewed individually or in focus groups.

A total of two focus groups (with six and five participants each) and nine individual interviews were conducted during this period of time. The interviews (both individual and focus groups) were conducted within the group counselling room in the counselling centre within my educational institution. Each individual interview lasted for about an hour and the focus groups for an hour and a half.

3.5.2 Participant characteristics

The participants interviewed were practising counsellors working with the various tertiary educational institutions in Singapore. Most, if not all of the participants were members of the Singapore Association for Counselling or

Singapore Psychological Society and had been in practice between three years to over 23 years.

I started the research process by inviting five senior staff members with at least 10 years of counselling experience who had worked for at least eight years in their current position within the tertiary educational institution to be the first wave of participants. Three of them were current heads of their centres. This was in line with the selective convenience sampling strategy where participants involved in the initial stage of data collection would normally be those who are most knowledgeable in their field and are able to offer potential for obtaining data which will lead to further data collection (Glaser, 1978). The data from this initial group of participants were subsequently coded and categorised for emerging concepts. Based on these initial ideas and emerging theoretical categories, the next wave of participants was invited. The second wave of invitations was made to 26 practitioners who had at least five years of work experience as counsellors at their current workplace. 11 of these responded to be involved in focus groups and four chose to be interviewed individually. The other 11 declined to be involved. The enquiry with the second wave of participants was slightly more focused with questions pertaining to the categories which emerged from the first wave of interviews. Constant comparisons between the two sets of data were made in between interviews and focus groups. The order in which the participants were involved in the study can be found in Annex A.

3.6 Data Collection

Upon clearance from the doctoral school to proceed with the thesis stage, I started the research process and contacted twelve heads of counselling

centres located with the following tertiary educational institutions - five polytechnics, four universities, three private educational institutions. As discussed earlier, I contacted each of these heads with an initial telephone call to gauge their interest and possible agreement before emails with further details were sent to confirm my intentions and request for access to their counselling practitioners. With their agreements, interviews and focus group discussions were scheduled with the various staff members of the respective teams as discussed in the section above.

The initial wave (selective sampling) of participants was recruited through an email with the information regarding this study. Three of the participants (who were also heads of their centres) responded immediately to the invitation while the other two only responded positively after a personal telephone call was made to each of them. In their research, Sproull and Kiesler (1986) found that individuals tend to be more self-absorbed and may not respond to email communication especially if it is not from superiors. In this case, the telephone call bridged the “digital gap” and was more effective in getting a positive response to my request compared to email alone. Interviews were scheduled with mutual meeting time and locations determined. Informed consent was obtained prior to conducting the interviews (Appendix B). The interviews were audio recorded using a digital recorder and an initial semi-structured question guide was used.

The initial interviews comprised open-ended questions exploring these senior counsellors’ experience of working as counselling practitioners in the tertiary educational institutions and expanded on areas that they felt were challenging. An example of an open-ended interview question asked was “how would

counsellors, members of the public and stakeholders within the educational institution view and define counselling?” All interviews explored the various approaches the counsellors used in order to adapt to the academic environment and the resources they used or procured in order to ensure success not only with students but also their work relationships with various other stakeholders such as their immediate supervisors, other staff such as faculty or administrators and parents. The full list of open-ended semi structured questions used for the initial interview are found in Annex C.

Constant comparison was utilised throughout the interviews to identify possible themes and common experiences among the various interviews. The themes were also further compared in subsequent interviews with the second wave of participants.

At the conclusion of this initial phase of interviews, I proceeded to code and analyse the data. Using constant comparison, I was able to determine eight main categories and themes which served as the foundation for the collection of data with other participants in preparation for the second phase of coding (focused coding). These categories drove the direction of the questions used for the focus group and subsequent individual interviews. An example of a question derived from the emerging categories was “how does adapting to expectations of stakeholders affect the way you perceive yourself?”

Based on the eight categories which emerged from the initial interviews, I rephrased them into a semi-structured guide of interview questions (Appendix D) for use in this next phase of focus groups and individual interview sessions. An example of an interview question used at this phase was “what are your views about the need for counsellors needing to network to build connections

with stakeholders?” The focus groups were the first to be organised and the meetings focused in on the perceived areas of practice which built counsellors’ professional identity and their experiences with stakeholders within tertiary educational institutions. Questions asked at this stage included “what experiences have you encountered which contributed most to your professional identity development” and “what role have others played in the development of your professional identity”. Also discussed were perceived barriers to building professional identity and how counsellors handled the challenges of expectations (both reasonable and unreasonable ones) from stakeholders. They also provided insight into what they saw as solutions and future changes that needed to occur in the field of counselling in order for counsellors’ professional identity to be developed significantly. Following the focus group discussions, additional questions were added to the semi-structured question guide for the individual interviews to further identify gaps in the current data. An example of a question in this guide included “Share your opinion about how the building of knowledge and skills contributes to formation of your professional counsellor identity”. The interviews with the four individual counsellors further solidified the core categories until the data were deemed to be saturated. Theoretical saturation takes place when no further data or relevant category emerges and the relationships between the categories are fairly established (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

3.7 Data Analysis

The systematic approach of constant comparison of data and analysis was used as the method of data analysis. This method of data analysis does not progress in a linear form in that there needs to be a constant movement

between the collected data and analysis of that data, and then back to the data for further confirmation of an emerging category. These emergent themes and categories were then further compared to previous data on an ongoing basis.

Data analysis began with the first collection of data and was immediately focused on the generation of concepts, themes and ideas surrounding the process of how counsellors build up their professional identity amongst other more established professionals within the academic environment which they work out from. The constant comparative method was utilised to develop categories and sub categories of data and eventually to generate a theory that maps to what was observed on the ground (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The subsequent coding of the collected data was conducted based on the recommendations of Charmaz (2006) which included initial coding, focused coding and memo writing.

3.7.1 Initial coding

Each interview was manually transcribed and reviewed simultaneously. Each line of transcribed text was examined 'line-by-line' for important processes which participants experience. These were all captured through their utterances as specific behaviours and words used when encountering those processes (Charmaz, 2006). Analysis started the moment the first data was collected. This way, each new set of interview data could be constantly reviewed and compared to the previous data set in order to identify possible patterns and codes which would be used as the basis for the creation of categories relevant to the study. The initial stage of analysis was where a whole list of themes and general categories were identified from the interviews

with the senior practitioners. I also used memo writing as the transcripts were reviewed to record my reactions to the questions I posed and to the answers generated by the participants. I then developed new questions and directions from this initial phase of the analysis process. Memo writing (Appendix E) encourages one to analyse data and code early in the research process (Charmaz, 2006) and allows for a method or system to keep track of the categories and emerging theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

3.7.2 Focused coding

Focused coding was used to blend and explain the huge amounts of data that was collected from all the interviews. Subsequent categorising and subcategorising of data was done by focusing on the most significant and frequently occurring codes from the data (Appendix F). As these codes and categories were concepts based on my own interpretation of data, it was important that these codes reflect the actual experiences of the participants. As such, draft copies of the codes and categories were sent to the initial wave of five participants with a request for them to read through the codes and to determine if the categories correctly reflected their experiences. Out of the five, four responded with generally positive comments regarding the codes.

One participant wrote:

the categories you have suggested are actually quite close to my experience of being a counsellor and I feel that very often people who are not counsellors tend to misunderstand what we do and prescribe their own assumptions to our profession. Main thing now is that more people will get to know what it is that we do and not go about imagining that we are some magicians using some 'quack' technique without any base in sound helping theories.

Using the constant comparison approach with the data and reviewing it against the memos I wrote throughout the analysis period, I was able to determine the emerging categories and to continue to collect data to further saturate it.

Following this phase of analysis, I proceeded to collect more data from the other participants in order to refine and saturate the emerging theoretical ideas. As discussed earlier, these individuals were approached due to their being recommended by their senior colleagues who felt that they were able to contribute to the refining of ideas which subsequently would inform the emerging theoretical insights. As these participants were being interviewed, I consciously focused on questions which related to the theoretical ideas and continual analysis revealed that there were emerging commonalities in the data. These commonalities unified the earlier categories and subcategories into a core theoretical code. Charmaz (2006) suggests that theoretical codes propose the possible relationships between the categories which were developed from the focused coding process. According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), core categories are generally seen as the “central phenomenon” of any study.

3.8 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, according to Curtin and Fossey (2007), is the level at which research findings are seen as an “authentic reflection of the personal or lived experiences of the phenomenon under investigation” (p. 88). Birks and Mills (2011) emphasized that the methodology used for research has to fit well with the researcher’s personal philosophies. Morrow (2005) suggests that the idea

of trustworthiness in constructivist research very much like this study, should address meanings which are co-created between researchers and participants while considering the context, culture and existing rapport levels. Curtin and Fossey (2007) further suggested that in order to determine if a piece of qualitative research has been performed in a trustworthy manner, three key areas needs to be considered. These areas include various strategies for triangulation, member-checking (including collaboration between the researcher and the participants) and researcher reflexivity.

Table 3.1 – Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness Strategy	Approach used
Triangulation (multiple data sources)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature review • Memo writing • Different data collection methods (Focus groups and individual interviews)
Member-checking and Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applied after the first round coding and categorising of data
Researcher Reflexivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memo writing • Recognising and providing information regarding researcher background and interests in topic being studied.

As seen in the table above, the strategies adopted throughout the research study indicate my attempt to ensure that the findings of the study reflect as closely as possible, the lived experiences of counsellors in tertiary educational institutions. The first strategy ‘Triangulation’ is a method whereby the combination of multiple data sources and strategies are used to overcome

fundamental biases as a result of single method, single observer and single theory studies (Denzin, 1970). The use of literature review, memo-writing while analysing data, and the approach of collecting data from focus groups and individual interviews were used as sources for data triangulation. Morrow (2005) confirms that the use of multiple sources of data further enhances the 'interpretive status of the evidence' (p.256) which allows for a good foundation to the building of theory.

Member-checking and collaboration entails involving participants as part of the data analysis process where they are given the opportunity to find congruence with the initial research findings. By allowing participants to be involved, the initial coding and categories can be confirmed for accuracy, fairness and validity of data analysis (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). In this case, I provided the initial five participants the opportunity to review my codes and categories, which in turn created a sense of trust amongst the participants that the findings are indeed representative of their experiences (Creswell, 2003).

An important aspect of trustworthiness of the research study is the need for researcher reflexivity. Researcher reflexivity refers to an intentional and systematic acknowledgement of the researcher's self through a process of the examination of biases and assumptions which may influence research analysis and outcomes (Finlay, 2003). Carpenter and Hammell (2000) state that, "Reflexivity entails articulation of the deep-seated (but often poorly recognized) views and judgments that affect the research topic, including a full assessment of the influence of the researcher's background, perceptions and interests on the research process" (p. 113). Through self-examination, I became aware of my position within this study about how my biases and assumptions would

shape its direction. Additionally, the nature of qualitative research is such that it involves the interpretation of data by the researcher and as such, reflexivity represents a level of honesty and openness to the research (Berg, 2004). In this study, researcher reflexivity is addressed through the use of memo-writing and providing an upfront discussion of my professional background and interest in this topic being studied (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Memo-writing is the intermediary step in grounded theory between data collection and analysis to help the researcher develop the codes into categories in the research process (Charmaz, 2006).

3.9 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained with the Institute of Education. All participants of this study were provided with an informed consent form which was the document used to protect their confidentiality, self-determination and autonomy (form A). All identifiable tags have been replaced with anonymised data.

3.9.1 Risks

Participants involved in the study were not expected to be exposed to any significant risks. Some participants were concerned that any information they shared regarding their work environment may be picked up by colleagues and any negative or unfavourable information shared may make its way back to senior management and in turn jeopardise their jobs at the institution. The assurance given to these participants was that only the investigator would have access to the interview data and that their names in the transcribed data

would be anonymised. Furthermore, the findings would be written up in such a way that participants would not be linked back to any particular institution.

3.9.2 Benefits and compensation

Participants of the study received no outward benefits or monetary compensation for being involved in the study. However, the knowledge and understanding of how the professional identity of counsellors is grown and developed in tertiary educational institution may be of value for the future development of practitioners in these same environments.

3.9.3 Confidentiality

For the confidentiality of participants, all recognisable elements of their identity and the names of the various tertiary educational institutions had been anonymised in the transcriptions and replaced with pseudonyms, with the real identities of the participants known only to myself. Additionally, the digital audio recording was secured with an encrypted password and only accessible by myself.

3.9.4 Data storage

The encrypted digital audio, the transcribed data were stored in a password-protected computer with additional copies of backup transferred to external hard drives. All hard copy written memos and various analytical documents were kept under lock and key in the office accessible only to myself.

3.9.5 Informed consent

All participants were provided with copies of the informed consent documents for acknowledgement. The informed consent form included the following statements: a) that confidentiality of participants and research data would be

ensured; b) identity of the participants would be anonymized; c) participants are free to withdraw from the study at any point at any time; d) participants are fully briefed on the purposes of the study and that their responses would be used to form the basis of this study.

3.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter covered a description of grounded theory with a discussion of the background, the philosophical foundations surrounding the adoption of this research approach, its congruence with my personal epistemological view of knowledge and the relevance of the method for the research questions raised. Furthermore, a description of the participants and their background was discussed. Emergent themes and categories were obtained mainly through the process of systematic constant comparative method which essentially compares newly developed categories to previous data on a continual basis in order to arrive with an in depth analysis of the emerging data. The trustworthiness of this study was maintained through the use of the three strategies - triangulation, member-checking and researcher reflexivity. In the next chapter, I will discuss the results arising from this grounded theory study.

Chapter 4 – Research Findings

4.1 Introduction

In spite of the increasing number of counsellors working in various fields such as education, social services and governmental departments such as prisons and police, members of the public continue to remain hazy with regard to the roles and range of work that counsellors engage in. This research study seeks to identify the various components which are necessary to the building and continual development of the professional identity of counsellors. In this chapter, I will discuss the results and findings from the analysis of the data collected from the interviews and focus groups. Key categories emerging from the analysis of the data were 'Adapting to expectations' and 'Building knowledge and skills' within the personal dimension of Self and 'Building support networks' and 'Navigating practice within the socio-political environment' as part of the interpersonal dimension of Self.

4.2 Growing and developing a counsellor's professional identity

Context plays an important role in how individuals respond in a specific situation and hence an understanding of the context will also enable a researcher to make better analysis and interpretations of participants' responses. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), framing the context of a study allows researchers to be able to identify the set of conditions which individuals will respond to favourably. The responses would be seen as a flow of interaction or action which based on Strauss and Corbin's definition, is expressed as 'a process'. A process can be identified by noting the changes in conditions which influences the action/interaction, the responses to that

change and the subsequent adjustments in activities, interactions, and emotional responses impacting on the next action/interaction. This repeated flow of action and interaction leads to the establishment of a 'phenomenon'.

Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 101) further state that a phenomenon "stands for the topic, the event, the happening, the goal or the major idea contained in the set of data". The phenomenon being studied in this research was identified as "growing and developing counsellors' professional identity". The participants in this research agreed that being able to establish and solidify their professional identity and standing within the tertiary educational institutions that they are operating in would work positively towards enhancing the reputation and identity of the counselling profession within Singapore.

4.3 Context and background

The context for the process of growing professional identity amongst counsellors was based in the practices located within the various tertiary educational institutions in Singapore. As discussed in the previous chapter, each of the counselling centres in the various educational institutions was headed by a senior practitioner with at least 10 years of practice experience and staffed by counsellors with experiences ranging from three to eight years. Foremost on the minds of practitioners when they started work at their respective practice was not so much about their professional identity but more of pragmatic issues such as job stability, job satisfaction and being able to practise their skills in an environment which would allow them to develop and grow into highly experienced professionals. The issue of their professional identity, credibility and standing amongst the various professions found within the institution as well as outside only became a significant point of discussion

when they have been at the practice for some time, having developed a strong sense of engagement with and to the objectives laid out by the directors of their Centres.

The results of the coding procedures as shown in figure 4.1 below, express the emergence of categories which explain how participants continually processed the phenomenon (i.e. ideas about the processes which develop their professional identity) through the lenses of the 'Professional Self' which comprises two dimensions namely; *Personal* and *Interpersonal* dimensions of perception and experience of being a counsellor. Through constant comparative coding and procedural analysis of the grounded data, four inter-related categories emerged (two in each dimension). The categories leading to development of professional identity which emerged under personal dimension were (a) Adapting to expectations; and (b) Building knowledge and skills. The categories under interpersonal dimension were (c) Building support networks; and (d) Navigating practice within the socio-political environment.

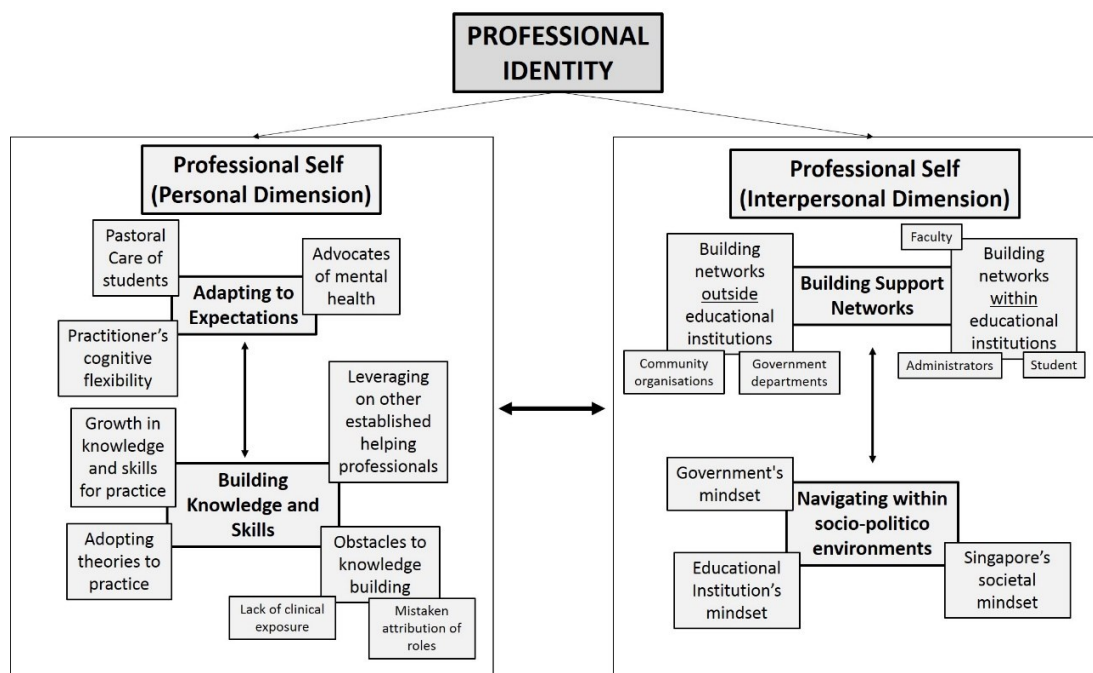


Figure 4.1 Professional identity formation

4.4 Personal dimension of professional identity

Consistent with the literature review in chapter two, counselling practitioners continually processed ideas about their professional identity through their *personal* and *interpersonal* dimensions of perception and experience of being a counsellor. In this first instance, the analysis of the data showed instances whereby participants continually make references to themselves as individuals or to their abilities in general as a practising counsellor. These instances include participants making reference to aspects of their work which were reliant on their *personal* abilities to build a therapeutic connection with their clients and that this element played a significant part in the way they form their professional identity. According to Brott and Myers (1999), professional identity is the way a counsellor perceives her/himself in the context of the work of counselling practice and is viewed as an integral part of their personal identity. Professional identity development is a process where the external and internal attributes of what it means to be a professional are balanced and worked out (Hermansen, 1987). Two responses of participants' view of how professional identity is influenced by their personal dimensions are reflected below:

...it has to do with *your training, your background and your experiences...*(emphasis mine) the areas that I found has helped strengthen my identity is when I actually get to work with students. I come with a clear perception of who I am and what I am supposed to do. (Janson N.)

Even now that I'm so old, I am still learning. There are *new approaches, new theories, new things...*(emphasis mine) there is a process, you never stop learning... different counsellors come from different background and will view clients' problems differently. I think it goes very much according to the *development of the counsellor as a person* (emphasis mine) first. Without the element of *personal*

(emphasis mine) growth, you cannot go very far in this work.
(Anni L.)

Participants also indicated that their personal worldview orientation and personal career needs played a major part in their decisions to be involved in the work of counselling. All participants expressed a strong need that their choice of being a counsellor was greatly influenced by their understanding and sense of self in relation to their personal life experiences. The significance of this perspective was illustrated by one participant who specified that “my background, my personal life experiences with people, my family, my growing up years in school and early career had guided me in this direction and over time, changing the way I perceive myself” (Jenny C). Twelve participants also reflected that their choice of being in the counselling profession was based on pragmatic reasons such as employment opportunities and the quality of the work in counselling which brought about a strong personal sense of satisfaction knowing that lives have been impacted by their work. This observation was clearly supported by Emmett H. when he established that:

the opportunity to join as a counsellor at this institution was opened at that time and being stuck in a administrative job for quite some time, I felt that this was the perfect place for me to make the change as well as to live my dream of helping people, which was started when I decided to pursue my master’s studies in counselling on my own time. (Emmett H.)

Nugent and Jones (2009) assert that professional identity includes an integration of professional training with the personal attributes of the counsellor and is linked to what Auxier, Hughes and Kline (2003) calls the “therapeutic self” where the counsellor’s professional and personal self is blended and reflected as the counsellors’ “values”, “theoretical stance”, “emotional

awareness” and “sense of autonomy”. Out of the list above, the participants in this study identified three similar personal competencies, mainly values, emotional awareness (understanding feelings) and sense of autonomy (freedom to make decisions) which they perceived were present in their own practice and mindset. Here are some observations from three respondents:

I think how we see ourselves in terms of our roles and responsibilities is (sic) important. The way I practice is completely reliant on *my personal values, my value system, my belief system* (emphasis mine). Taking pride in what we do and believing in what we do as counsellors is very important. (David G.)

I think that goes very much on the development of the person, not just as a counsellor, but on an individual level. A student or client may say something, but if you as a person are not sensitive to the feelings of clients, you will miss the cues and take it as a casual remark. *We need to understand and recognise feelings – ours as well as clients* (emphasis mine). Not everyone has that ability. (Bryan D.)

For me, it is a set of beliefs that as we grow, we develop ourselves and have the ability to make decisions for our own benefit. This same ability allows me to behave in certain ways ... it is like wearing a hat. *I can choose to wear any hat because I have the freedom to decide. So it is this same belief that gives me the freedom to make a decision how to practise* (emphasis mine), how to improve my professional abilities as a counsellor. (Jenny C.)

Besides the three competencies which were aligned to Auxier, Hughes and Kline’s study, there was also an element of prior life experiences which played a significant role in influencing the individuals’ choice of work to be in the field of counselling. This element seemed to be a significant common factor behind the decisions of individuals who sought to be involved in the work of

counselling. In his study of the personal identity of professional practitioners, Roberts (2000) suggests that the personal identity of individuals already exists before a practitioner makes a decision to enter a profession. Parts of the individual's identity such as their age, gender, ethnicity and life experiences play a massive role in shaping their self-perception in the light of their eventual work as a helping professional:

Every counsellor has some level of *personal* (emphasis mine) experiences which have inevitably influenced the way they view the world. Very often it is a negative situation which has happened and somehow they received help from someone which changed them so much that they would like to return that help to others ... something like 'paying it forward' kind of an idea. (Anni L.)

I am thinking Asian values, we tend to ascribe wisdom to those who are older, have age on their side. When the person is seen as older, the person is perceived to be wiser, we give them more respect. To be frank, that was one of the thoughts I had when I decided to shift out from banking into counselling. (Winsett M.)

Finally, counsellors also experienced a process of individuation (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013) where practitioners evolve in their practices with a movement towards their own unique and personalised way of relating with their clients. New therapists and counsellors rely heavily on external modes of validation (i.e. theories, other senior practitioners and clinical supervisors) in order to clarify and strengthen the perceptions of their own roles (Bruss & Kopala, 1993). However, with time and experience and through the process of individuation, counsellors and therapists develop a "solid non-threatened belief in [their] own autonomy, yet are equally non threatened by [their] own occasional yet appropriate dependency" (Loganbill, Hardy & Delworth, 1982,

p. 22). This was demonstrated and underscored by counsellors experiencing an increasing empathic engagement with their clients, underlined by an increasing confidence in their own abilities as a professional yet displaying a sense of humility and grounding regarding their own skills and abilities:

Sometimes people ask me “you are a counsellor, why are you running around the polytechnic, chasing after the students?” Is this part of my job? Not really, but I see this as a part of my whole *personal* (emphasis mine) development. Doing this doesn’t hamper my growth, it’s more than just viewing job scopes, it’s about my personal way of exercising my rights to do this job. (Jenny C.)

If one’s sense of satisfaction comes from individuals being helped, then that is what makes the journey worth it. Years ago, I would constantly refer to my textbooks, manuals and theories to determine if I have fully followed the procedures for treating my clients ... but with time, I realised that the greatest satisfaction is not in doing things right, but in doing the right things, seeing students open up, and braving their challenges. (Andrew F.)

4.4.1 Adapting to expectations

Throughout the process of growing their professional identity, participants felt that there were periods where they had to build their practice mainly on the expectations of what their respective tertiary educational institution’s stakeholders wanted them to work on. Apfelbaum (1958) defined expectations as the “anticipation of an event with the implication that this anticipation is held with some degree of certainty” (p. 103). In analysing the data, it is apparent that the growth of counsellors’ professional identity is either influenced or impacted on by stakeholders’ expectations with regard to their role in the tertiary educational institution. The interviews showed that stakeholders

expected counsellors to be involved in the continual provision of a whole range of services surrounding student matters, besides guidance and counselling care. This perspective was best summed up by Peeter S. when he commented that:

I would see counselling as pastoral care. Pastoral care of students –which include guidance, career coaching, providing emotional support during crises, stress, anxiety. Not long term therapeutic work – more short term. More developmental. Help students to be more aware, help them build resilience. (Peeter S.)

The first expectation for counsellors, apart from providing counselling services is that they should provide pastoral care to students as well. According to Best (1999, p. 57):

Pastoral care is concerned with promoting pupils' personal and social development and fostering positive attitudes: through the quality of teaching and learning; through the nature of relationships amongst pupils, teachers and adults other than teachers; through arrangements for monitoring pupils' overall progress, academic, personal and social; through specific pastoral and support systems; It ... offers support for the learning, behaviour and welfare of all pupils, and addresses the particular difficulties some individual pupil may be experiencing.

The idea of pastoral care came from medieval universities in Europe where teachers have full responsibilities over the students, acting as their moral guide and religious mentor within an academic setting. This model has continued to influence education today where we view the teacher (or another educator) providing support for students' personal and social development. Teachers and parents in the Singapore education system would be familiar with this concept as it was introduced into the Singapore education system

sometime in the '80s as part of the guidance programme for students (Ministry of Education, Pastoral Care, n.d.). Due to this historical exposure to the concept of pastoral care, it is hence not unexpected that the same mindset is carried into tertiary education but counsellors are now expected to fulfil the role of providing pastoral care to students.

As part of the expectation to provide pastoral care, many practitioners felt that they had little influence in the way the counselling practice should develop within their organisations even though they were the ones offering the counselling service to the student community. Oscar R. stated “when I was the only counsellor then, I didn't really have a choice as to how to build the service. It was essentially to provide the counselling service according to how the Dean wanted it to be. Funny thing was that he had little understanding of the role of counsellors”. Participants agreed that learning to adapt their service offerings according to what stakeholders perceive as pastoral care was not necessarily negative, but the challenge was in learning to deal with the uncertainties of starting a new service offering which their graduate counselling training never prepared them for. The following participants stated:

I've always known that as counsellors we are at the bottom of the food chain within the organisation. So I have learnt to accept that whatever senior management wants me to offer, I will try my best to develop the service and to make sure our students benefit. (Anni L.)

In this school, administrators expect counsellors to 'know-all' and most importantly, the counsellor is a 'fix-it-all' person. Anything happens to a student in school, go see the counsellor-she can fix it. Cannot pay money – see counsellor who will process financial aid We are to fix whatever is broken ... it's actually not a bad thing, if you look at it holistically from the polytechnic's point of view. (Kelly O.)

These new services – disability, financial aid, discipline – all were never addressed in my master programme. We were taught counselling theories, counselling skills, using assessment tools, atypical behaviours, but there were no courses focusing on disability or disbursing money to students and worst still – to administer discipline! (Sandy U.)

Participants reported that although they had anticipated working as a counsellor would entail changes in the way they ought to function, they were not fully prepared for the wide range of expectations by stakeholders. One participant was particularly unhappy about stakeholders within the university where they continued to associate student conduct and discipline with the counselling service:

After five years of trying to educate the community, my non-counselling colleagues from different offices and schools, there are still some individuals who continue to send emails and call me to help them deal with students who did not turn up for classes, display defiance towards the lecturer, caught for smoking on campus and even sleeping on the bench just outside the lecture theatre! (David G.)

Another participant likened the struggle in educating stakeholders to counsellors' roles as trying to extract a decayed tooth from an unwilling patient. Linni E. explained, "trying to explain our roles and having these staff members to open their minds and understand was almost like trying to pull out a tooth from a person who refuse to open his mouth for the dentist".

4.4.1.1 Practitioners' cognitive flexibility

Another subcategory under 'adapting to expectations' which participants felt was an important factor influencing the growth of counsellors' professional identity is the ability to maintain behavioural and cognitive flexibility regarding

the expectations of stakeholders towards the provision of pastoral care and any associated services. According to Martin and Rubin (1995), individuals with cognitive flexibility have high levels of mental awareness in any given situation and are able to consider various options and alternatives while displaying a willingness to be flexible and adaptable. Individuals “who can acknowledge possible adjustments based on situational factors are more cognitively flexible than those who see only one proper or correct behavioural response” (p. 623).

To really be successful as a counsellor in tertiary education, you really should have mental flexibility. The ability to be flexible in dealing with the unexpected. These unexpected things come from crises situations – students suicidal (sic), threatening others; some unexpected things come from bosses and senior management, parents even. (Linni E.)

Participants recognised that having an ability to be flexible in their responses to the demands of stakeholders is an important trait which positively influences how their professional identity is established in the eyes of stakeholders. When a student crisis erupts, administrators and staff within the institution tend to automatically look towards the counsellor for leadership to manage these student crises. If the situation is well managed, stakeholders’ perception of the counsellor’s ability and professional standing would increase in a positive way:

So far the crisis situations which we have faced in our poly³ have actually helped my bosses and senior management to be more appreciative of what we do as counsellors. (Bryan D.)

Over the years, people in this Poly have slowly recognised that counsellors are actually very professional in the way we do things. We have a good store of knowledge and skill which not

³ Poly – short form for Polytechnic

every Tom, Dick and Harry can claim to have. Even Dr Prasad, has made it compulsory that every new lecturer must attend a course conducted by us on how to work with students when they are in distress. (Fantasee I.)

Instead of rigidly sticking to what they perceive should be limits in terms of what the counselling practice should offer, being able to flexibly consider the various expectations of stakeholders and creating new service offerings based on their expectations allows stakeholders to acquire the perception that counsellors are extremely responsive to feedback and are highly professional in terms of their work. This perception works towards the building of a positive professional identity for the counsellor in the minds of stakeholders which in turn influences and encourages counsellors to maintain their cognitive and behavioural flexibility with regards to their practice within the tertiary education institution. Linni E. said:

Early in my first few months on the job, my boss sat me down and told me that I needed to come up with ideas to work with parents so that they are able to contribute back to the polytechnic. I was asking myself – what does this have to do with my role as a counsellor? In the end, I did what was necessary – not to say I was entirely happy about it. I did voice out that this really wasn't something I was trained to do.

Instead of being angry or upset that financial assistance became my baby, I chose to view this new load as an opportunity to grow, to learn to expand my role or at the very least, increase my understanding of students' issues beyond just psychological and emotional. Learning to behave and respond in many other ways in new situations that I am thrown into. (Linni E.)

The positive experiences encountered by stakeholders of counsellors' services, especially those who were flexible, have a positive attitude and were able to continually work towards solving problems in a professional way

tended to encourage both counsellors to continue providing the good services as well as etching in the minds of stakeholders a growing appreciation of the work of counsellors within the institution, hence positively influencing their perception of the counsellor's professional identity. These competencies were also identified by Gronroos (1998) in his study on the measurement of customer service quality. He offered six criteria as measurements for good, perceived service quality which were 'professionalism and skills', 'attitudes and behaviour', 'accessibility and flexibility', 'reliability and trustworthiness', 'recovery' and 'reputation and credibility'. It is not surprising that at least three competencies listed (professionalism, flexibility and attitude) have also been identified by practitioners as important measurements or competencies which count towards building the professional identity of counsellors in the minds of stakeholders.

4.4.1.2 Counsellors as advocates of mental health

The third theme under 'adapting to expectations' is that counsellors should work as advocates for mental health within the tertiary educational community (including all stakeholders such as students, faculty, staff and parents).

According to the World Health Organisation, mental health advocacy includes a "variety of actions aimed at changing the major structural and attitudinal barriers to achieving mental health outcomes in populations. Mental health advocacy actions may include raising of awareness; dissemination of information; education, training, mediating; defending and counseling" (WHO, 2003). Janson N. stated:

That's our role now. Anything to do with mental health in the College- that's what we do. Programmes, outreach,

counselling. It's all part of our work load now after the massive reorganisation that took place last year. (Janson N.)

According to Lee (1998), the work of advocacy requires practitioners to work on behalf of their clients or a social cause and “assist clients to challenge institutional and social barriers that impede academic, career, or personal-social development” (p. 8-9). The participants of this study would have come into contact with various individuals (students, staff or faculty) who have faced barriers within the institution which limited their access to services. Some of these barriers could be in the form of policies or procedures not favourable to individuals with mental health or other related situations. Seeing that counsellors work to improve the well-being of students, it is probable that stakeholders placed this expectation on counselling practitioners to advocate and work closely with different stakeholder groups within the educational institution in order to increase stakeholder understanding of mental health issues faced by students within the community. This expectation was shared by the following respondents:

...making a difference in the lives of the young people as well as their family...and to enhance the knowledge of the staff and students. We use a proactive approach to reach out to staff so that students have access to mental health services by our service. Some staff have no idea what mental health is about. When they see a student behaving weirdly in class, some think these students are naughty or playing the fool, not knowing that these students may have a mental health issue that needs to be properly addressed. (Hilda K.)

My client expects me to work with the school administrator, the lecturers who are aware of students needing help. Because I am the counsellor, I am seen as the 'expert' in the School. That is why I am expected to come up with ways and

programmes which will address mental issues and help my clients. (Matilda P.)

4.4.2 Building helping skills and knowledge

The second category which 80% of participants (or 16 participants) in this study reported having a significant impact in the development of their professional identity would be the opportunity to build up their helping skills and knowledge. Many spoke about the effect that the build-up of knowledge and skills had on their sense of their professional self-identity, especially when their clients report improvements with presenting issues that were directly resolved due to the application of the attained knowledge and skills by the practitioners. This observation by participants was supported by Stoltenberg's (1981) study where emerging counsellors' identity is found to be built upon the integration of theoretical knowledge and skills within a developmental framework

Participants also reported on the effectiveness of having a growing knowledge of existing and new evidence-based theories and practice, and the advantages of calling on established helping professionals to improve their own knowledge and practice. Some obstacles discussed include the lack of research and practice knowledge focused on Asia, mistaken attribution of roles to counsellors in tertiary educational institutions as well as the general lack of guidance and exposure to clinical practice.

4.4.2.1 Growth in knowledge and skills for practice

One of the areas that participants reported as having a significant influence in the growth of their professional identity is the opportunity to build up their knowledge and skills in the helping field. Participants frequently described that

the ability to increase their knowledge and associated helping skills through attending continual development workshops and courses and being able to share and practise the newly acquired knowledge and skills in helping their clients better cope with the issues faced by them.

(Name of institution⁴ removed) has strong support for student wellness and counselling. Not only for counsellors but lecturers as well. Everyone is geared towards learning, acquiring skills, acquiring knowledge, attending clinical supervision, to focus on bringing up the best in our students. Being able to attend courses, workshops to increase my knowledge and in turn being able to help students gives me the sense that students recognised that I am getting more professional, more knowledgeable, more experienced. This improves my professional identity in (name of institution). Everybody slowly knows what it is that we do and appreciates us for it. (Janson N.)

Firstly, if you say you are a professional, it means that you have enough knowledge. Application in the education setting, I would assume that you have experiences and skills to know how to help clients. If not, then I will go and learn, increase my knowledge. With increased knowledge will mean increased professionalism and then people will see and know. (Linni E)

For Regina T, having the opportunity to increase her clinical helping knowledge also enabled her to have greater confidence communicating clinical observations to her clients and other stakeholders within the tertiary educational institution. This strengthened confidence in turn seemed to increase her overall credibility with stakeholders because she was able to use clinical terminologies to support her observations and assessments.

To a certain extent, I have to know how to convince my student clients as well as bosses and other non-counsellor colleagues.

⁴ Uttered institution name substituted with "Name of institution" to protect the identity of the participant.

Previously, I remember struggling so much when trying to communicate to clients about their issues. I only knew basic terminologies like 'depression', 'anxiety' but anything deeper like 'bipolar disorder, dissociative disorders' were terms which I knew very little about. Now that I have studied my masters, I find myself more credible when I communicate my assessment observations to my clients. Even colleagues and bosses are more open because of the terminologies I use when communicating about these students. Maybe I sound more sophisticated? (Regina T.)

4.4.2.2 Adopting theories to practice

Participants in this study report a strong sense of identity being built when they adopt counselling theories and practices which are recognised as established approaches currently adopted by practitioners in countries where counselling has moved significantly towards being a professional practice (e.g. United States, United Kingdom and Australia).

You give yourself a better chance of success when you adopt an existing approach that counsellors from established countries use. Like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Solution Focused Therapy and approaches like Mindfulness based therapy. (Jane A.)

Although we do not have major schools of counselling teaching specific approaches here in Singapore, but by learning how to apply these specific techniques and theoretical approaches with my clients – it helps me to feel confident knowing that these approaches are effectively used in the US and UK. In a way, I feel like I am aligned to what is happening out there – I have bragging rights and can say that I am becoming more professional in my work. (Linni E.)

Participants also report that by keeping updated with their knowledge and skills through attendance at conferences and learning about new approaches to counselling and psychotherapy enabled them to have the ability to provide sound and competent counselling care to their clients. In his study on

effectiveness of counsellors working in the field of career development, Brown (2002) showed that licensed practitioners were very likely to regard attendance at conferences as an important factor in their ongoing counselling effectiveness.

Now that I have been practising for over four years in this place, I can see that I have actually grown in terms of my knowledge base, in terms of my confidence, in terms of how my non-counselling colleagues view me. Each time I go for a counselling conference, I learn new approaches and I make it a point to adopt parts of what I learn into my practice and with my clients. When clients feel that I have helped them resolve their issues much faster, I know my professional practice has improved. (Jon B.)

There was also a sense of increased credibility each time they were able to improve their counselling skills and knowledge and applying it successfully to helping their clients overcome their challenges and difficulty.

When my clients have been helped, the funny thing is they actually go around telling people that they have seen a counsellor about their issues and they have successfully been helped by me! Strange isn't it, seeing that this is not really something Asians do... anyway, because of this unintended testimonial, word gets back and my boss, his boss and even my non-counselling colleagues get impressed! This surely increases my credibility as a counsellor in this polytechnic! (Andrew F.)

Besides adopting counselling theories and practices used by practitioners outside of Singapore, participants indicated that what was more significant was the fact that their counselling practice was guided by approaches founded on established counselling theories. This area was an important consideration influencing how participants viewed themselves as professionals whose practices were guided not by anecdotal knowledge but by properly researched theories. One participant stressed that being able to share about her practice

using established counselling theories with her non-counsellor supervisor and colleagues enabled her to feel more professional and credible because she was able to back her arguments with data and research.

When I was in (name of institution removed), my deputy director, he doesn't know anything about counselling...he thinks that counsellors just engage in talk and (expletive removed)... fortunately I was able to build good working relationship with the Director, Dr (name removed). He was open and gave me the opportunity to share with him about the counselling practice, that it was founded on strong and established theories with research and data to support claims. (Winsett M.)

Another participant also reported that being able to share and educate her fellow colleagues about the counselling practice using theories also helped others to understand her role and her work.

It's called education. Reaching out. When I share about what we do and educate my colleagues from other departments and offices, they appreciate what we do and understand what our roles are. Some will still be confused and think that we do discipline, but increasingly these cases are getting less over the years. This shows that people begin to recognise what we do. (Anni L.)

In his study, Brown (2002) found that over 64% of respondents were more likely to agree that their work was greatly "informed by theory and that the theory and research data should inform practice" (p. 120). The research also demonstrated that practitioners who were registered counsellors tended to consider theory and research as important components in therapeutic work compared to practitioners who were not registered professional counsellors. In a related study of occupational therapists, Elliot, Velde, and Wittman (2002) used a qualitative approach to explore the use of theory and found that

participants valued the use of theory and recognised that it helped significantly in distinguishing them from other professions.

Kelly O. was a proponent that knowledge and skills learnt should be supported by evidence of effectiveness when applied to helping clients. She indicated that because she was able to demonstrate this through using evaluative techniques such as using surveys and client satisfaction forms, this knowledge actually improved her standing amongst her older and more experienced colleagues within the Counselling Centre in her institution. Being the only person in her team utilising such an approach seemed to imbue her with a sense of pride, leading to an increased sense of identity as a practitioner.

I am the youngest in the counselling team. When I look at them, they are so much more experienced and have more years of practice compared to me. But one thing which I think sets me apart from them is that I choose to use evidence to support my work. I use 'before' and 'after' feedback forms with clients. This simple procedure allows me to know the areas I am doing well and where I need to improve. Being the only one doing this, there is a sense that the rest of the team see me as the expert and they actually value what I bring to our team discussions. It's actually a nice acknowledgement by the senior members which makes you feel proud that though I may be the youngest in the team, I can contribute an important piece to our practice.
(Kelly O.)

This approach reflects the concept of practice-based evidence – which is increasingly being used in various approaches to psychotherapy (Barkham & Mellor-Clark, 2010). Practice-based evidence is the “conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current evidence drawn from practice settings in making decisions about the care of individual patients” (Barkham & Marginson, 2007, p. 446). Practice-based evidence is proof of effectiveness based on *practitioners' expertise* which differs slightly from the more well-known

terminology “evidence-based practice” where the use of *external evidence* (comprising clinical substantiations based on a systematic hierarchy of research evidence) is adopted to determine clinical efficacy (Payne, n.d.). Currently, the idea of practice-based evidence has not taken root within the counselling field in Singapore, although there is growing evidence suggesting its importance in the professionalising of the counselling field moving forward (Green & Latchford, 2012).

4.4.2.3 Calling on other established helping professionals

Another area which participants indicated helped them in the growth of their professional identity was the opportunity to leverage on the knowledge and skills of other established helping professions such as psychiatrists and clinical psychologists, especially senior practitioners who have been in the industry for significant amounts of time (e.g. 20 years or more). As the helping industry is small in Singapore, senior practitioners are fairly well known with many of them either practising privately or engaged by bigger organisations such as privately run hospitals or counselling centres. Hence, the ability to engage the services of these practitioners either as consultants to the counselling services within the tertiary educational institutions or as trainers for continuing education of the counsellors would in turn lead the tertiary educational institution to be perceived as having the commitment towards investing in the growth of the counselling services and by association, its professional identity amongst the stakeholders.

In (Name of institution removed), we pride ourselves on being student centred. So when we find that our counselling team was lacking in certain knowledge and skills, we brought in Dr (name removed) and Dr (name removed) to be our consultant

and counselling supervisors. Both of them are well established in private practice – one is a psychiatrist and the other is a clinical psychologist ... they have made a name for themselves by establishing that they are professional therapists, run courses, there is integrity, they have put in years of hard work to reach their current stage. Their fields of knowledge is wide ... so we borrow their knowledge and use their name to increase the credibility of our practice. (Kelly O.)

4.4.3 Obstacles to Knowledge and Skills Building

Although participants reported opportunities to grow their knowledge and skills, there were also limitations and obstacles which worked against them. The first subcategory which emerged from the interview data around this category pointed to limited research knowledge on local counselling practices as well as studies about counselling practices in tertiary education institutions in Asia. This limitation affected practitioners' knowledge growth as they found it difficult to apply existing counselling theories based on western worldviews to local clients' issues. Oftentimes practitioners ended up either lapsing into traditional modes of guidance (directive advice giving) (Soong, 1997; Yeo, 1993) or constraining clients to work through their issues framed by existing counselling approaches. This observation was shared by Jennings, D'Rozario, Goh, Sovereign, Brogger and Skovholt (2008) in their study of psychotherapy expertise in Singapore. One key component of their study was the finding that Singaporean psychotherapists were aware of the need to balance western values implied in counselling outcomes (e.g. assertiveness, autonomy, etc.) on local clients but had few Asian counselling theories to fall back on. Sandhu (2004) also found the same struggle in the provision of counselling services to South Asians where a high percentage of clients terminate counselling after their first interview due to the mismatch between counsellor and client's

worldview as well as the fact that most therapists have been trained using counselling theories founded on western cultural worldviews.

Most of our counselling training was based on theories which are non-Asian based, you know? Freud, Skinner, Beck – all these masters all came from a western mindset. So we are using western theories and applying it on our Singaporean students. Whilst it generally works, but I think there is still a cultural gap. (Oscar R.)

The traditional counselling theories suggests that clients make decisions for themselves. They come from a worldview where individual autonomy is important. It is individualistic, it's about their personal growth... Our culture here – students cannot just 'suka suka' (colloquial for 'simply just') make their own decisions on whether they want to continue studying or not. They have to consult with their parents, teachers, seniors and then collectively make a decision. So if I apply what I have been taught, I will tell him – make the decision yourself because it is about you, but culturally, it would not work because my client still has to consider others' perspective. (Anni L.)

4.4.3.1 Mistaken attribution of work roles to counsellors.

Another aspect of this category of obstacles would be the issue where other stakeholders within the educational institution mistakenly attribute certain roles or types of work to counsellors. Participants report instances where individuals (faculty, staff, students and even parents) within their institution would assume that counsellors were the best persons to deal with *all manner of* student issues such as conduct or disciplinary issues, the person or department to disburse financial and bursary support as well as emergency responses to any student activity (including accidents), in addition to their key roles supporting students in terms of their mental health. Such expectations on counsellors are not unusual. These observations were largely in line with the various studies

regarding the conflict between stakeholder perception and expectations on school counsellors' roles in educational institutions over the past two decades (Foster, Young & Hermann, 2005; Herr, 2002; Kendrick, Chandler & Hatcher, 1994; Muro & Kottman, 1995; Murray, 1995; Oyaziwo & Imonike, 2002). Coll and Rice (1993) in their study of community college counsellors, found that college counsellors experienced role conflicts largely arising from rigid administrative policies as well as counsellors receiving different messages from different stakeholder groups within the campus due to varying expectations.

In the eyes of certain administrators, counsellors seem to be very difficult to work with...they would say "why have counselling for students when we cannot openly talk to them about the issues?".... if we break these boundaries, the student will suffer in the long run...because we cannot build the relationships with the student. They will not trust you. They will ask "how do I know that everything I tell you, you will not tell the school? So the question for us is – who do we serve? The students? The school? Or the management? (David G.)

Due to this struggle (of role conflict), there is a lot of internal conflict which directly creates problems for us internally. I have gone through these struggles which makes me don't feel very good...and it affects my professional identity! (Hilda K.)

Why be a counsellor when I might as well be a disciplinary master? I can still work with the student right? Easier to force students to see me right? There is no need to wrap the student in cotton wool as a discipline master isn't it? You see, this is the difference between a professional helper and one that is not. The perspective of who we are helping! (Regina T.)

4.4.3.2 Lack of exposure in clinical practice

The final subcategory of obstacles to the building of knowledge and skills for counselling practitioners would be the perception held by the participants that there is a general lack of exposure to clinical practice in terms of their work within the educational institutions. It is curious that participants used the word 'Clinical practice' as part of their counselling work. A search of the word 'clinical' using various databases such as 'Web of Science' and 'JSTOR' generally shows the term used mostly in research by the medical community but increasingly found in the field of psychology and psychotherapy. At a basic level, the Merriam Webster dictionary termed 'clinical' as "work done with patients based on or characterised by observable and diagnosable symptoms". The increasing use of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V) as an established standard in classification of mental disorders by professional helping practitioners (including counsellors) may have been a major influence in the terminology being employed outside of the medical field. As most cases encountered by counsellors within tertiary education institutions revolve around academic work stresses (time management, study techniques, etc), the opportunity for these counsellors to deal with clients facing serious mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and other diagnosable issues such as bi-polar disorders and obsessive-compulsive disorders will be low compared to practitioners working in dedicated clinics treating psychological disorders.

The counselling work here in Singapore compared to the previous institution which I worked in Australia is very different. The role in Australia is very clear. It is very high on clinical work. Your clinical skills get pushed very far. Your learning curve is steep on how to develop and improve your clinical

skills. You learn from school, then you apply at work – you keep building it and the system with all the supervisors and all, supports you and your career is developed. Here the role comprises everything to do with students. Besides the usual issues like stress, relationship issues, I also have to see them about financial issues, academic issues, all mixed. In this case, my clinical knowledge doesn't grow that much since my exposure here is way lesser. (Linni E.)

Over in this Poly, most of us do not have the expertise to deal with clinical issues like severe depression, OCD, psychosis and all that. That is why we have clinical support from external vendors like (name removed, name removed and name removed). When we have a crisis, we can tap on these external therapists with experience dealing with these issues. Of course the problem is that we do not have the time to go for courses to gain the required expertise to treat students' issues like this. That is why we are only a 'counsellor' here and not a 'therapist' like our external vendors. (Jane A.)

4.5 Interpersonal dimension of professional identity

Besides the personal dimension, the analysis of the data also showed how interpersonal skills and abilities act as a facilitator to competent practice and professional identity growth for counsellors in the tertiary educational institutions. Elements of the interpersonal dimension influencing the growth of professional identity include skills for relating effectively with others (students, parents, teachers and other professional counterparts), development of professional approaches and persona, and internalising of professional standards which include components such as knowledge, skills, norms, values and culture of the profession through the process of socialisation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). According to Du Toit (1995, p. 168), professional socialisation is:

the complex process by which a person acquires the knowledge, skills and sense of occupational identity that are characteristic of a member of that profession. It involves the internalisation of the values and norms of the group into the person's own behaviour and self-conception.

Though observed as a process, socialisation of individuals into a professional group's practices and identity is usually not seen as a linear process but that it happens in 'fits' and 'starts' throughout the individual's life-long process of human development and professional growth (Howkins & Ewens, 1999; Ohlen & Segesten, 1998).

Participants recognised that having a good ability to relate with others was seen as a key skill which facilitates the process of building their professional identity as counsellors. In their study on measurement of social intelligence, Boyatzis, Goleman and Rhee (2000) found that individuals who have demonstrated a good ability to understand themselves and others (i.e. have higher levels of social intelligence) tend to fare better in terms of interpersonal relations with people around them. Other aspects of interpersonal functioning which participants talked about include characteristics such as empathy, positive regard and genuineness – which were the key foundational competencies enabling counsellors to be effectiveness helpers (Rogers, 1957). Two participants observed that:

Counsellors like us, we often deal with emotional management of our students. They get stressed, they get emotional, they seek us out. There were times even when lecturers will call us to seek for help for their own issues...of course officially we are not supposed to counsel the lecturers but in the end, they chat with us over coffee and we hear them talk about their issues! (Hilda K.)

A survey was done by the polytechnic regarding service levels of lecturers and other providers and a small section talked about the counselling service. The words which students used to describe us were “warm”, “supportive”, “understanding”, “genuine”, “positive” and “caring”. That was a real encouragement to my team when we saw the result. (Kelly O.)

Participants indicated that their self-image was appreciably strengthened when they observe how their clients acknowledge their therapeutic effectiveness when dealing with their issues. Together with acknowledgement of these counsellors’ expertise by fellow professionals within and outside the organisation, participants acknowledged that their strengthened self-image significantly enhances the positive perception of their own professional identity. These positive acknowledgements demonstrate participants’ effective use of their interpersonal ability in connecting with their clients and other professionals. One participant reflected that:

Across (name of institution), people are very clear about what counsellors do. Students who see us know that they are approaching people who are well trained in helping them work with their problems. All across this school, lecturers, senior management know that we do our job well and they acknowledge and respect us for what we have done. This makes me feel that I am accepted and appreciated as a professional. (Sandy U.)

Another aspect of the interpersonal dimension which participants report having a significant impact in the way they view their professional identity growth was their readiness and ability to work with their clients. Clients will choose to visit counsellors anytime throughout the week or day and participants felt that they have to be ready at any point to stop whatever work they may be doing at that moment and to shift their mind and focus to the student who had just walked through the door of the counselling office, seeking help for a matter which is causing distress to the student. This ability to readily shift mental states is what

Martin and Rubin (1995) refer to as 'cognitive flexibility'. Cognitive flexibility describes a person's inclination to be flexible in adapting to new situations (Martin & Rubin, 1995, p. 623). One participant sees himself as:

A person who needs to be really flexible and ready to step up to any situation that is presented to me. I can be busy writing reports but when a student turns up at the office, I have to drop everything and attend to them. There is no such as thing as 'come back later when I am not so busy'. (Oscar R.)

In a counselling session, when something goes wrong, when my client starts to cry, or become violent, I must be ready to respond. When they cry, I switch my mode to ensure that they feel empathy, they feel that I am there for them through my words, my actions, my presence. If they get violent, I have to be ready to leave the room if I feel that I am in danger and to call for help from the security! (Janson N.)

Besides being flexible in dealing with clients and students within a counselling situation, participants also indicated that they were often required to effectively manage relationships with their colleagues and supervisors within their organisations. Often times, they find themselves in situations where they have to make conscious decisions to play the game of "power-trading" (Burnheim, 2007) where they find themselves having to negotiate or 'position themselves' with various stakeholders within the educational institutions in order to gain access to additional resources for the benefit of their clients or students.

Paulhuds and Martin (1988) refers to this as "functional flexibility". Functional flexibility refers to a state where individuals "possess a great many interpersonal capabilities... (with) a large repertoire of social behaviours and can deploy these behaviours in the situations they deem appropriate" (p. 99).

Two participants' responses summed this up fairly clearly:

It is not exactly straightforward. Occasionally I have to deliberately go out to build relationships with other staff members, especially those who are senior in their departments so that when I need to push for something for my clients, I go to these people for help and because of the friendship and trust which I have already built beforehand, they will agree to help me. (Winsett M.)

I struggle a lot. Not in the counselling. But in the power play. Every once in a while, I have to advocate for my clients with some other student departments like registrar or student life and I may find resistance because these staff members will say “cannot this”, “cannot that” “our policy does not allow” and all that (expletive). Sometimes they resist because of laziness, other times because they feel the need to be in power. E (head of department’s name removed) on the other hand, has the talent to network so easily with the other bosses within this institution. Actually her networking has helped our department a lot. When I can’t push for my student, I’ll ask her for help and she will then speak to that department’s boss and usually after some negotiation, it goes our way. (Fantasee I.)

Another aspect of cognitive flexibility observed by participants to be present within counsellors is the ability to perceive issues being discussed with another individual (whether students, staff or faculty) from both a macro as well as a micro view. According to Welch-Cline (2003), micro level behaviours and communication patterns refer to fundamentals such as verbal and non-verbal behaviours, client personalities and communication skills and macro level perspectives include elements such as organisational perspectives, media and corporate communications environment and even social frameworks. This ability was particularly observed amongst senior practitioners within the institutions which suggested that such perspectives become developed with highly mature practitioners who have spent significant amounts of time honing their skills as counselling practitioners.

Counselling is a trusting relationship between the client and counsellor. The counsellor is able to use her skills to build rapport with them, enter their 'secret room' to see their world view, to help them, to clarify....One other thing – the public view also comes into play. As counsellors, we must also be able to see where our clients stand within the social structure, the educational framework, the system within this polytechnic. We must know how to navigate, communicate and sometime negotiate with different parts of this system in order to make things happen. You don't get there overnight. Need to spend at least 10, 15 years to build up that kind of knowledge and influence. (Andrew F.)

4.5.1 Building support networks

Whether formal or informal, individuals offer some level of social support when they relate with one another. According to Shumaker and Brownell (1984, p. 11), social support is defined as “an exchange of resources between two individuals perceived by the provider or the recipient to be intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient”. Social support can be categorised into various dimensions including function (e.g. providing emotional support), source (e.g. support from colleagues, partners, etc.) and structure (networks or groups) (Fawzi, 2011). In the context of this study, the social support in the form of structure through networks and groups will be used as the foundation for the analysis of the emerging category 'building support network'.

4.5.1.1 Building networks within tertiary educational institution

Having observed the senior practitioners in their respective centres, most participants felt that in order for one to be a successful counselling practitioner within Singapore's tertiary educational institutions, there is a strong need for them to be able to build and make use of the social networks within the

institutions. Emmett H. described the importance of utilising support networks whilst building up the counselling service within the institution

It's so important to build the connections with the various stakeholders in this organisation. Majority of the people here don't really know what counsellors do. So we have to go and educate them and show them the things we do. Fortunately, because we are a private educational institution and subject to CPE⁵ - the requirement that students need to be taken care of, hence counselling is an important component. This is where I use this requirement to build up understanding of what we do here across all the levels... There were occasions when they (senior management) see me like a doctor – my boss will say things like “you're the expert, the professional, I trust your opinion as you know better than me”. (Emmett H.)

Three subcategories emerged from the analysis that described the support networks that counsellors and practitioners in tertiary educational institutions relied on whilst building up their professional identity. The three categories were faculty, student and staff support.

All three subcategories identified had the capability to influence the practitioner in both positive and negative ways. A significant number of participants (64%) cited the lack of understanding of their roles by various faculty, staff or students as a contributing factor in the suppression of the growth of their professional identity within the institution. On the other hand, each positive interaction which led to an increased awareness and appreciation of counsellor roles with the abovementioned groups was a positive influence to the growth of their professional identity. While all the practitioners report having significant interactions with the three groups of stakeholders, not all

⁵ CPE (Council for Private Education) - a government body which regulates and accredits private educational institutions in Singapore.

were fully aware of the impact of the interactions on the growth of their professional identity as counsellors in their respective educational institutions.

4.5.1.1.1 Faculty support

Different institutions would have different expectations with regards to faculty being involved in the mental health management of students within their classes. Some faculty members were expected to be at the forefront of their institution's mental health network when it comes to identifying and providing first-line support for students in distress. Other institutions expected faculty members to work closely with the counsellors by ensuring that regular discussion about students' health and well-being were discussed in class.

In school we are hierarchical. It depends very much on how top management view the role of counselling. A lecturer not only has a role to play as a lecturer, they have to be involved all through, including taking care of our students. When new staff (lecturers) join, we run through (mental health issues), it has become a compulsory subject that all staff must take. They must learn how to listen, how to care because they are all CARE (counselling and response) officers. (Peeter S.)

We conduct seminars and workshops for our faculty members here. Our goal is to ensure that as many as possible are equipped with the right knowledge to be able to identify students who are in distress. Every semester, we work with the Centre for Teaching Excellence to advertise the workshops. The topics we train faculty generally revolve around stress identification, depressive states, and referral procedures. (Regina T.)

When faculty members are made aware of the roles of counsellors and especially if they have been involved in the referral process (i.e. faculty encounter a student in distress, provide first-line aid and provide subsequent

referrals to counsellors), they begin to show an appreciation of the work done amongst the student community, which in turn helps to improve their perception of the professional identity of the counsellors because these faculty members would become advocates for counsellors within their own faculty senate or with administration staff when dealing with a student's situation involving their mental health (e.g. applying for leave of absence from courses, etc).

There was a time when I was having lunch with a faculty member and he was so happy about what we had done for his student and especially for him. At that time, he was meeting with this student who came to consult with him about his class. He did notice that the student was a little...off but at first he wasn't too bothered but as the time passed, the student became more and more agitated and became slightly aggressive towards him. Fortunately, he was able to say "let me see what I can do to help you" and left his office and went to the general office for help. The staff called me and I quickly went over to the school to see how I could assist. After I went there, I spoke gently but firmly with the student and found that he wanted to withdraw from school. This boy kept saying "I want to go home already", "I want to withdraw". You know, he had the kind of look, you know that something is wrong with this person. In the end, with the office staff, we managed to help the boy to process his application and off he went...the faculty member actually came to me and said "your expertise was truly needed...and now I really appreciate what you do and can see why every school needs counsellors!" (Hilda K.)

Participants shared that some faculty were not entirely supportive of what counsellors do. Linni E. shared that "there was an Associate Dean who took it upon herself to question almost every mental health recommendation for students from her school. The irony is that members of her staff were the ones who usually send students to us for assessment prior to their application for leave of absence". Participants also shared their frustration with faculty

members who were not understanding towards students' issues especially those who displayed judgmental attitudes towards students with various situations (learning or physical disability, mental health considerations, etc.) and who deliberately created obstacles for these students and counsellors when the counsellors tried to work with them to improve access or have specific individual arrangements. Geranium J. explained it well when she said:

I understand if the lecturer has reasons not to offer special arrangements for his students... but to question the student's physical condition and then denying the student access to a computer to type her answers when she clearly has difficulty writing, is to me not only idiotic but discriminatory and prejudiced! What's worse is when he thinks my recommendation as a counsellor is not worth anything just because he is a lawyer and is seen as more "professional" than what I do?! (Geranium J.)

4.5.1.1.2 Student support

As a key stakeholder in tertiary educational institutions, students play both a direct and indirect role in influencing the services provided by counsellors as well as the development of their professional identity. Direct influences include the needs of students impacting on the development of new counselling services. In Anni L's case, she experienced this first hand and shared that:

we had to scramble to modify our counselling service because that year the university admitted its first student with disability. The registrar was asking us what the university should provide in terms of special academic arrangements. Because we didn't have prior experience, we had to quickly contact the SPD (Society for People with Disabilities) and asked for their expertise to share with us how best to assist this particular student with physical disability. (Anni L.)

Students' indirect influence over the counselling services would include decisions made by senior management of institutions in order to benefit the

student community. An example of an indirect influence would be the need for tertiary educational institutions to continue to have counselling services for students as part of the requirements needed for the institution to qualify for accreditation with various regulatory bodies within and outside of Singapore.

Matilda P. said:

In fact, CPE also recognises the role of counselling. They would want to ask what were the processes as well as procedures for certification. I think that as part of PEI⁶ requirement students need to be taken care of, hence counselling is seen as a crucial and important component. It is not seen as a “nice-to-have”. (Matilda P.)

There are two groups of students who have interaction with counsellors namely, students who visit counsellors to explore and deal with issues and problems and students who interact with counsellors as partners advocating for the improvement of student mental health programmes. A majority of the participants shared that they felt that their work with students was extremely fulfilling as it allowed them to engage in the ‘real’ work of changing lives especially those students who were in bad or untenable personal or academic situations. David G. stated, “for me, that is the greatest satisfaction, in seeing students open up, and facing their challenges. Helping students to overcome issues, to spur them on.” Geranium J. agreed “I feel that my being there to help my clients to see a new perspective to their problem and having their eyes suddenly open up! That is what gets me going!” Fantasee I. felt that working with students from the peer support group to raise awareness of mental health issues in her institution was fulfilling in that it allowed her to impart some of her ideas and perspectives about mental health to students

⁶ PEI- Private Educational Institution

who would readily accept and propagate the same messages to the entire community.

Ever since we started our peer support programme, it has been an inspiring journey for me as a counsellor... to know that these students have the same passions and concerns as I have, to see that there is a visible outcome to their enthusiasm about mental health, to create the awareness programmes, to interact with their fellow students, convincing them to adopt certain lifestyle habits and witnessing how groups of students and even some of the staff, adopt the message of mental wellness and talking about these things during everyday conversations. This gives me the satisfaction knowing that my small contribution as a counsellor in this institution is able to go far and impact many, many people here. (Fantasee I.)

Although not all students fully understand what counselling is about or what it does for them, this gap in understanding and awareness was seen as a great opportunity for the research participants to bridge as the eventual acceptance by stakeholders to mental health issues would mean that the messengers (i.e. counsellors) would be positively associated, leading to positive shifts in perception of their professional identities. Peeter S. opined that:

The day when stakeholders and maybe people across Singapore's society, fully understand and accept that mental health is as critical as medical health; is the day you will see counsellors and psychotherapists' professional identity elevated to a point as high as psychologists or psychiatrists. (Peeter S.)

4.5.1.1.3 Administrative support

The role of administrative staff in tertiary educational institutions in Singapore is clearly defined from that of faculty in that these staff members provide administrative support to faculty and students in the various schools and are

expected to deal with most non-teaching matters especially student related ones. In areas regarding student mental health, these administrative staff, being at the forefront of the schools (apart from faculty) would generally be the ones encountering and dealing with student issues as they arise and would generally work closely with counsellors. Most of the participants reported that their working relationships with the various school administrators have been good due to the constant collaboration over the years leading to trust and support both ways.

The feedback I received from administrators has been very positive. They told me that they were really very appreciative that we have been proactively helping them, helping the students. Whenever they refer, <counsellor name removed> and I would be able to help manage the situation very well. We keep talking and updating each other. I think our being proactive and responsive, these really help the school. And communication helps as well. They view us as a key stakeholder working hand in hand with the school. The feeling is very good. The credit goes to <counsellor name removed> for heading the team very well. (Winsett M.)

Even in the local environment, there are two schools of thought. There are people that believe that if they are very student-centric, working hand in hand with the counsellors, they will see that counsellors play a very important role, they are major stakeholders as well. Another school of thought, they see counsellors are just counsellors, really on the fringe. But here in this institution, it is fortunate that the administrators see us as major stakeholders and respect us for the work that we do. (Jenny C.)

4.5.1.2 Building Networks outside the Tertiary Educational Institution

Besides building strong networks within their educational institutions, participants also noted that working relationships built with external

professional organisations increased the credibility of the counselling services. The increasing recognition of the counselling services (and by association, the counsellors) could have been attributed to the connection with these organisations which in turn provides legitimacy for the counselling practice. According to Brinkerhoff (2005), this method of establishing legitimacy for an organisation is known as 'normative legitimacy', whereby an organisation deliberately adopts and reflects a socially acceptable norm, standard or value in the way they operate. In this case, the association of the counselling services with various professional helping organisations, governmental organisations dealing with social issues and well-known private professional helping practitioners becomes a visible declaration to stakeholders that the educational institutions' counselling services have reached a degree of professionalism and legitimacy in order to be associated with these external agencies.

4.5.1.2.1 Community organisations

Research participants generally indicated that membership of the Singapore Association for Counselling (SAC) is seen as a valid representation of a counsellor's professional identity. Although the commitments and participation levels within the association varies from counsellor to counsellor, a few of the participants described themselves as having significant leadership roles within the Association while most were generally satisfied with their membership with the Association though one participant did question the effectiveness of the activities organised by the Association.

Being a member of SAC for over 15 years gives me some form of credibility when I do my work but beyond that, this Association hasn't done much. Even the professional

development activities haven't really attracted a lot of people.
(Bryan D.)

In Singapore, there is currently no legislation requiring counselling practitioners and psychotherapists to be registered with a Counselling Association before they are allowed to practise. In spite of the lack of legislation, the Association has taken upon itself to self-regulate, in the interest of the hundreds of practitioners who are registered as members and qualified with the title 'Registered SAC Counsellor' as well as the thousands of clients served by these counsellors .

Some reasons surrounding participants' involvement with community organisations such as the Singapore Association for Counselling include: a) being in the SAC enabled participants to have a sense of belonging to a professional community of helping practitioners which reinforces the sense of professional identity for the participants, b) enabled the counselling service in the educational institutions to be based on a 'recognised' ethical code of practice; and c) enabled participants to demonstrate to institutional stakeholders that their knowledge and skills are certified by an organised, regulated body that follows a set of rigorously established guidelines for practice. Two participants explained how they thought the work of the Association would establish the professionalism of the work of counselling in Singapore:

I have only recently volunteered my time with the SAC (Singapore Association for Counselling). I'm really surprised that the executive committee and the various sub-committees are doing so much work on the side, trying to improve counselling as a professional practice in Singapore. I feel really fortunate to be given the opportunity to volunteer my time and to make a contribution towards improving the

standing of counsellors in Singapore, especially in the institutions that we work out of. (Jon B.)

Being a registered counsellor gives you the sense that you are 'recognised', you know? It is like a stamp of approval that what I do is accepted and validated. If clients, parents or even lecturers are unsure, they can go to the SAC website and check my name and they will see it there. This would help them to feel confident that I am a legitimate practitioner with proficiency and not some fly-by-night therapist. (Bryan D.)

Besides the counselling association, participants also report close collaborations with other community organisations focusing on people with disabilities (both physical and mental) and general family services. By working closely with these organisations, counsellors are able to tap into the expertise from these organisations and apply the knowledge back to their counselling practice in the educational institutions. In addition, the counsellors would also contribute to the improvement of institutional procedures by weaving the new knowledge into existing policies. The contribution by counsellors would be perceived as an important value added service to the educational institution and in turn, increases their professional credibility with the senior management. Andrew F. shared that:

...because of my close association with SAMH (Singapore Association for Mental Health), I am kept in the loop regarding current trends in Singapore which I could feed into our student policies. My director was actually very impressed with what I knew and the best part was that knowledge has now been implemented into official policy procedures when working with students displaying mental health problems... there was even a comment that he would consult me in the future regarding these issues because he now sees me as the expert! (Andrew F.)

4.5.1.2.2 Government departments and organisations

Apart from community organisations, participants also shared that the counselling services at their respective tertiary educational institutions have significant connection and collaboration with various government departments such as the Ministry of Education (MOE), Ministry of Social and Family (MSF) and the Health Promotion Board (HPB). Besides tapping into the resources available from governmental bodies, being perceived to be in network with these governmental agencies is perceived as an endorsement by these governmental agencies which further improve the credibility of the counselling services of these institutions. Although critics of government agencies may view the approach of aligning and 'borrowing' good will from these organisations as a questionable practice due to the general erosion of trust in government agencies worldwide (Carnevale & Wechsler, 1992; Thomas, 1998), the study on stewardship and managerial behaviours in non-profit organisations (Davis, Schoorman and Donaldson, 1997) suggests that such alignments are based on pragmatism arising from pro-organisational behaviour of individuals seeking to prolong their tenure at these organisations as well as to increase their influence and reputation with various stakeholders both internally and externally.

Not bad right? We can tap into the various funding offered by these government bodies to further improve our work amongst the students. At the same time, we can also brag to our bosses and other departments that because of our good work, these ministries and bodies recognise that we have a good standard of service. This is a good message that we are sending out to everyone...we are good, that is why government supports us. (Fantasee I.)

...it is like a kind of 'borrowing'. We borrow the good will from these organisations ... and have it applied to us. People see [these organisations] support our programmes, our counselling service, provides funding for us... they will also attribute the positive vibes to us. It's not that we don't have the standing, there's no harm in my using someone else's standing to further boost ours right? (Matilda P.)

As the practice of counselling is currently self-regulated with no government legislation for compulsory registration, compared to Psychiatrists with Singapore Medical Council; Social Workers with Singapore Association of Social Workers, which is administered by the Ministry of Social and Family Development; and Psychologists with Singapore Psychological Association which is on track to becoming a recognised Allied Health Profession in Singapore, it makes sense for counsellors to be aligned with HPB as a surrogate for credibility and professional recognition.

You know that the helping profession in Singapore has 4 tiers right? Right at the top are psychiatrists. They are registered with the SMC⁷ since they are medical doctors. Then you have the psychologists who are registered with the Psychological Association, then the social workers with the Social Work association, and then us counsellors with the SAC. But the situation is that right now, only psychiatrist and social workers are official recognised by government to practice...that means they must be registered before they are allowed to practice. I heard psychologists are moving closer to being recognised by the allied health regulatory body, including speech therapist, physiotherapist – these are being professionalised and regulated. That essentially leaves us with no mother! We are like ugly stepsisters where nobody wants to invite to the dance! Maybe HPB can be our fairy godmother! I know quite a number of the counselling services are working closely with them regarding mental health issue. Perhaps this is the way forward. (Kelly O.)

⁷ SMC – Singapore Medical Council

4.5.2 Navigating practice within the current socio-political context

The final category influencing the growth of counsellors' professional identity is found in the way counsellors manage and advocate for their practice within the current socio-political context in Singapore. As the word suggests, 'socio-political' involves both social and political factors in considering any context being discussed. In this case, participants' perspective of Singapore's socio-political context includes factors such as norms and values of the dominant culture in Singapore, norms and values of the various communities that the counsellor works within (e.g. student community, professional community, community within the tertiary educational institution, etc.) and its interaction with current governmental policies and structure (education policies, economic policies and party politics). Fantasee I. sums up her practice succinctly with this statement:

Counselling (as a profession) in Singapore can only grow depending on three things: how well Singaporeans accept that counselling is a viable avenue to dealing with mental health issues, how our educational systems include counselling as a mainstream service important for student development; and the amount of recognition the government wants to give to us. (Fantasee I.)

4.5.2.1 Societal mindset

According to Chong (2007), the public's acceptance of mental health and illness in Singapore has slowly grown over the past decade and significant strides have been made by social services and mental health clinicians and practitioners in terms of service levels and treatment capabilities. Stigma of individuals who had suffered from various mental illnesses has also gradually shifted to such an extent that these individuals have found that mental health

issues are becoming less of a barrier in terms of employment opportunities (Tan, 2013). The rise in suicide rates in Singapore over the decade, coupled with changes in help-seeking behaviours amongst students had opened the way for the Ministry of Education to implement a “one counsellor in every school” policy with the aim for counsellors to support the holistic development of students as well as to address the issue of suicides amongst students (Ministry of Education, 2004; Torres-Rivera, Nash, Wah, & Ibrahim, 2008). The increase in awareness of these issues has worked to increase the public’s exposure to counsellors’ roles and in turn increased the awareness of their roles and professional identities in the minds of stakeholders. Fantasee I. said:

These past 10 years, I have witnessed students’ attitude about mental health shift from one filled with fear and stigma to one where it is being accepted that it is an illness that can be managed. (Fantasee I.)

Actually the big change in understanding of counselling occurred when MOE started its ‘One Counsellor for Every School by 2008’ programme...this programme kick-started a whole new industry which overnight created demand for counselling schools which in turn increased people’s awareness of what counsellors do. (Fantasee I.)

However, in spite of the growth in numbers of practising counsellors in schools, there is still a lack of understanding of counsellors’ roles by members of the public and they continue to have expectations which may be inappropriate. In the eyes of the public, ‘counselling’ is often mistaken as psychiatry in that practitioners either prescribe medication or use certain techniques that will immediately heal the individual suffering from the mental health issue. This ‘immediate fix’ mentality could have been influenced by the acceptance of the medical model (Stolzer, 2008) where an illness or disorder

would be treated with a series of medication or procedures via a diagnostic-prescriptive approach. To the layman, it simply means a quick way to resolving a medical problem (e.g. paracetamol to treat fever).

Parents come to us and say 'we want you to fix our son'. More critically, they want us to fix their children according to their view. There was a parent who said to me 'My daughter is having some problems in school. Can you fix this? Give her some pill or do some of your 'talk' thing so that she can wake up and get back to studying hard. (Peeter S.)

Anything happens to my son in school, go see the counsellor. Counsellor can fix it. Cannot pay money, go see the counsellor. Cannot study, go see the counsellor... to me there is still a need for public education about advice giving, about what counselling is all about. (Linni E.)

Participants also shared about the public perception that as counselling is a free service offered by the educational institution, it could be considered a low-value service compared to seeing a medical practitioner. Emmett H. said:

when you tell people that you need to pay for professional counselling outside the institution, people will think you are joking. They expect it to be free... since people do not see the immediate tangible take-away. When I see a doctor, I get medication, a prescription... but for counselling, talk only. So they think that 'if I need to talk, I can talk to anyone – no need to talk to a so-called professional'. (Emmett H.)

4.5.2.2 Institutional mindset

In this subcategory, participants shared that the management practices and mindset within tertiary educational institutions in Singapore play a significant function in the development of the role of counsellors and the development of their professional identity. Traditionally, authority structures in higher education were mainly "discipline-rooted" (Clark, 1986) where professorial chairs work

alongside a body of peers and collegial control forms the key mechanism for coordination amongst faculty and university levels of organisation. However, since the late 90s the concept of 'new managerialism' or 'performativity' has taken place across many higher educational institutions across the world where usage of funds has to be justified in order to demonstrate 'value-for-money' expenditure (Deem, 1998). This observation was encapsulated by this participant's observation that:

ultimately, our roles as counsellors are greatly influenced by senior management and the overarching goals that this polytechnic is seeking to achieve. Whatever the focus, whether on student development or being prudent in managing resources, we will end up having to develop more programmes and services – the underlying question is how much of these services are actually appropriate services for counsellors to provide. (Kelly O.)

Hilda K. reflected that in her educational institution, 'counselling' is almost synonymous with 'discipline'. In the eyes of her non-counsellor supervisor and directors, discipline and counselling are seen as different sides of a coin, in that both use almost the same techniques in dealing with student behaviours (including mental health issues like depression or conduct issues like defiance).

In this educational institute – to see a counsellor means it is a penalty for something they did. Counselling equals to discipline. Quite a few of my non-counsellor colleagues think that there is no difference. They see a student having issues in class. To them, once that happens, they automatically will want to refer the student to me. It makes no difference whether that student is misbehaving due to mental health issue or discipline issue. It is the same to them. (Hilda K.)

Some participants described feeling powerless within the educational system in which they worked and experiencing a lot of internal conflict due to the mismatched role expectations from the educational institution.

This is the struggle I face. I am asked to break the boundary of confidentiality. If I break those boundaries, the student will suffer and we cannot build the helping relationship...so the question is – who are we actually? ... because of this struggle, I end up having a lot of internal conflict. Do I help the student, or do I help the organisation? Going through this cycle make me feel not very good...I think it affects my professional identity. (Winsett M.)

4.5.2.3 Government culture

The final subcategory which participants reflected having a significant impact on the development of their professional identity revolves around the relationship between professional and non-professional groups in society with the government in Singapore. Andrew F. opined that:

The lack of professional identity amongst counsellors – actually not just counsellors but a lot of professionals like lawyers, doctors, accountants – they lack confidence in their own professional standing because in Singapore these groups are not allowed to speak up. Not allowed to say anything that may be seen as critical of the government or the way Singapore is being governed. (Andrew F.)

According to Tocqueville (2009), these professional and non-professional groups collectively are known as ‘civil society’ which includes “associations of a thousand other kinds, religious, moral, serious, futile, general or restricted, enormous or diminutive” (p. 979). These groups act as a buffer between the State and the Citizen which Gellner (2013, p. 52) describes as “diverse non-governmental institutions strong enough to counterbalance the state, and... prevent the state from dominating and atomizing the rest of society.” In other

words, civil society should act as a bridge between the people and the government.

However, civil society groups in Singapore have historically been viewed with suspicion by a government dominated by the People's Action Party (PAP). The seeds of this distrust were sown in the early years of the PAP government in the late 50s. This was a period where Singapore's history was marked by riots and unrest largely organised by civil society groups such as trade unions and student organisations actively opposing the authority of the newly elected government (Lee, 2002). Through the years, the ruling government had progressively placed restrictions on political activities by enacting laws that require compulsory registration by all civil society groups (e.g. Societies Act, 1996, 2004). Civil society groups are bound by the Act to be non-political and any political activities would necessitate for these groups to be re-registered as political organisations with vastly curtailed rights. Additionally, any advocacy work deemed to be "prejudicial to public peace" (Societies Act, 2004, section 4-2) would also be seen as unlawful and would render the group liable to be dissolved by order of the Minister. Other mechanisms restricting political activities include the Internal Security Act, and the regulation and structural control of all local media and press content. The outcome of these regulatory measures has been the emergence of a culture of self-censorship (Gomez, 2000; Tremewan, 1994) amongst the populace which in turn have greatly influenced how they engage with the government. Oscar R. surmised:

The Counselling Association tries to engage the government, with MOE but in the end, nothing comes out of it! The government doesn't want to be engaged! MOE is the biggest employer of counsellors but their interests are not

represented. In fact, I was personally told by a school counsellor that there is an unspoken expectation that they should not join the SAC... and even if they are a current member, to not ever discuss any professional issues that may be linked back to MOE.

To Oscar R, the reluctance by government bodies to engage with professional groups beyond those which have been enshrined as Acts of Parliament (i.e. Legal, Medical and Allied Health Professions) has been:

detrimental to groups seeking to be professionalised in Singapore. Without government support and acknowledgement, these groups can never hope to grow their identities and be seen as legitimate contributors to Singapore's social space. (Oscar R.)

Having a government body or ministry accrediting a profession would be viewed as the main factor in facilitating a particular profession's growth in terms of its identity and contribution. Hilda K. shared that:

Look at social work as an industry. Just 10 years ago, not many wanted to study social work due to the perception that it was a tough job and does not pay well. Look at what has happened since. MSF now have accredited social work, pumped in investments, improved career prospects for professionals, protected the industry by legislating that only individuals who are members of the Social Work Association are allowed to be employed with the title "Social Worker".

4.6 Summary

In summary, chapter four highlighted the four major categories along with sub-categories that emerged from the data corpus. This chapter features the processes which counsellors practising in tertiary educational institutions in Singapore experience as they interact with individuals and stakeholders through the personal and interpersonal lenses of their Professional Self. The

categories and sub-categories were derived from the analysis of the interviews and focus groups with the counselling practitioners from the various tertiary educational institutions. The analysis of the data guided the development of themes which explained how the professional identity of counsellors practising in tertiary educational institutions in Singapore was developed through the examination of the struggles, experiences and processes encountered by them. In the next chapter, I will discuss the themes emerging from the analysed data and offer suggestions for the development of a framework which may guide the future development of counselling practitioners.

Chapter 5 – Interpretation of the Findings and Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore the relationship between the concepts of personal and interpersonal dimensions influencing the analysis of the findings, followed by a discussion of the results of the findings and propose some recommendations for the establishment of a competency framework which may be used as a guide for the future development of counsellors in Singapore. I will then conclude the study with some reflections and suggestions for further research in order to extend the knowledge base of counsellors' professional identity development in Singapore.

5.2 Professional identity – A relationship between the personal and interpersonal dimensions of a counselling practitioner's self-identity

One of the biggest issues evident from the research conducted on counsellors practising in tertiary educational institutions today was that a counsellor's professional identity is not something that is visibly seen (hence not easily measured). It is largely a 'type' of identity which is formed from constructs such as an individual's perception of their professional role, which is largely determined by a group of their professional peers (Wenger, 2000), the way that individual defines the role for themselves and the way professional decisions are made (Brott & Myers, 1999), as well as how members of the public perceive the profession in terms of their role, history and professional characteristics as a collective (Gale & Austin, 2003).

As a concept, Professional Identity is continuously developed and evolves throughout the lifespan of the professional and not viewed as something static

or unchanging. This observation is also supported by Hiebert, Simpson and Uhleman's (1992) study that the evolution and development of the counselling profession's identity is a critical aspect of its continual advance to be a profession in its own right.

From the study, it was also determined that counsellors' professional identity is the outward manifestation of the 'Professional Self', which comprises both the *Personal* and *Interpersonal* dimensions of perception and experiences of being a practitioner. The link between how individual practitioners perceive themselves and the way they relate with others was found to be a central component in how counsellors develop their professional identity. The two dimensions are not seen as distinct separate parts of the practitioner but as two interacting parts of a whole. In other words, the personal dimension influences the interpersonal dimension of the professional 'Self' and vice versa.

In his landmark study of human intelligences, Gardner (1983) proposed that people possess not just one single intelligence (i.e. general intelligence) but rather a set of multiple autonomous intelligences. According to Gardner (1991), people understand the world through language, logical-mathematical analysis, spatial representation, musical thinking, the use of the body to solve problems or to make things, an *understanding of ourselves* (intrapersonal or 'personal'⁸, in the terminology of our discussion above), and an *understanding of other individuals* (interpersonal). The latter two intelligences (intrapersonal & interpersonal) are also known as *personal intelligences*. Personal intelligence

⁸ I will use 'intrapersonal' and 'personal' interchangeably throughout this section of discussion.

is the aspect where individuals use their feelings and emotions to guide their behaviours in everyday circumstances. This same concept was the subject of further research by Bar-On (1997) with the emergence of the idea of emotional literacy and emotional intelligence. Bar-On describes emotional intelligence as “an array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one’s ability to succeed in coping with environmental demand and pressures” (Bar-On, 1997, p. 15). Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (1997, p. 3) further expanded emotional intelligence to include the idea that it is “the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth”.

Based on Gardner’s theory, the intrapersonal dimension of personal intelligence is related to the way an individual reaches within oneself to make sense of the information collected from the environment and how that information is expressed in the individual’s outward appearances. Bar-On (1997) states that intrapersonal intelligence is the capability of being able to probe one’s own feelings, to recognize and distinguish among the different feelings, and being able to represent or express the different feelings normally. An individual with a good grasp of this ability is then able to better achieve an understanding of the self. The knowledge of intrapersonal intelligence also aids in realizing one’s strengths and weaknesses which when properly managed, could lead to a more successful, fulfilled individual with higher levels of self-respect, self-enhancement, and strength of character that can be used to solve internal problems (Bar-On, 2001; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000). On the contrary, a person with weak intrapersonal intelligence, as is the case

of children with autism spectrum, would prevent even recognition of the self as a separate entity from the surrounding environment.

The other aspect of personal intelligence would be the interpersonal dimension of the individual. The exhibition of communication skills such as speaking and listening displayed by an individual during social conversations demonstrate the various types of interpersonal skills encased within the personality of that individual. Interpersonal intelligence is concerned with the capacity to understand the intentions, motivations and desires of other people in order for that individual to know how to work effectively with others. Various research studies have shown that individuals in professions such as counsellors, teachers, religious leaders and other occupations such as salespeople and political leaders all require a well-developed interpersonal intelligence (Gardner, 2011; Hunt & Baruch, 2003; Moyers, Miller, & Hendrickson, 2005; Novack, Volk, Drossman, & Lipkin, 1993; Wodarski, Pippin, & Daniels, 1988). In an interview with the Edge, an online portal for the gathering of world intellectuals, June Gruber, a developmental psychologist at the University of Colorado proposed the idea that when individuals are asked to provide an example of a time they remember experiencing some memorable emotion (a function of intrapersonal awareness), they would always “talk about it in a social context (a function of interpersonal connection). Usually, it's about people, but often it's with people... our emotions are inherently personal and interdependent (interpersonal), and that the function of our emotions is not to keep us as individuals, navigating the world, but it's to connect us to other people, and to interrelate to them” (Gruber, 2013). Hence, though personal and interpersonal dimensions of the Professional's Self are vastly different in

terms of their function, the two aspects continually interact within the individual and influence each other, making it a dialectical, two-way relationship between the two concepts. To Bar-On and Parker (2000), the interaction of the two concepts suggests a general effectiveness in dealing with daily demands faced by individuals and that these concepts “comprises abilities related to understanding oneself (personal) and others (interpersonal), relating to people (interpersonal), adapting to changing environmental demands (adaptability), and managing emotions [e.g., being angry, losing temper, being upset] (stress management)” (p. 1). As a whole, personal skills include emotional awareness and regulation, assertiveness, self-actualization, and independence abilities. Interpersonal skills include empathy, social responsibility, and interpersonal relationship abilities. The interaction of the two dimensions then produces for the individual an ability to be able to adapt to the changing environmental demands. Adaptability skills include reality testing, flexibility, and problem-solving abilities.

As seen in the discussion above, the dimensions of a professional’s ‘Self’ (i.e. personal and interpersonal dimensions) do not stand-alone by themselves but constantly interact with each other to produce a public persona (i.e. professional identity) for the individual practitioner. However, in spite of this seemingly simple idea, it may not be as straightforward as suggested because the relationship between personal and interpersonal dimensions of the individual with regards to the development of counsellors’ professional identity is something that is fluid and fairly amorphous even though the analysis of the data corpus suggests hints of that relationship. Extracted below is a segment of an interview with a participant where we see how he quickly moved from

perceiving his work from a personal perspective to an interpersonal perspective:

[Personal] I think that goes very much on the development of the person, not just as a counsellor, but on an *individual* (emphasis mine) level. A student or client may say something, but if you as a person are not sensitive to the feelings of clients, you will miss the cues and take it as a casual remark.
[Interpersonal] We need to *understand and recognise feelings – ours as well as clients* (emphasis mine). Not everyone has that ability. (Bryan D.)

Similar to a coin having two sides, individuals perceive their professional identity through the 'personal' and 'interpersonal' dimensions of their 'Professional Self'. This finding supports the notion put forward by Auxier, Hughes and Kline (2003) that professional identity is an integration or blend of internal and external attributes of what it means to be a professional practitioner. In this case, practitioners who have developed a clear understanding of their personal and interpersonal notions of 'Professional Self' tend to reflect and display a higher level of awareness of their professional identities. The model presented in chapter four proposed that a counselling practitioner's professional identity is cultivated when the two components of their 'Professional Self' are developed. From the data analysis, it was suggested that the development of counselling practitioners' professional identity is dependent on their personal abilities to adapt to expectations; build knowledge and skills; build support networks and navigating within their socio-politico environments and that these abilities are influenced through practitioners' interaction with self and others and how they negotiate the tensions within the development processes occurring within their Professional Selves. This supports current literature on identity development where

practitioners' ability to adapt to expectations, build knowledge and skills; build support networks and navigating within their socio-politico environments was found to be essential conditions encouraging professional identity development (Boyatzis, Goleman & Rhee, 2000; Elliot, Velde, & Wittman, 2002; Fawzi, 2011; Martin & Rubin, 1995; Stoltenberg, 1981).

5.3 Personal Dimension: Adapting to Expectations and Building Knowledge and Skills

The two sub-categories 'adapting to expectations' and 'building knowledge and skills' under the personal dimension of the professional in the study were generally in alignment with existing literature on professional identity development. For some counsellors, to adapt to the expectations placed on them (especially if the expectations are not within their training or supposed scope of practice) was easy while for others, it was a difficult task. It is noteworthy that the majority of the practitioners who responded that adapting was not an issue were found to be those who had been in the counselling field for more than a decade. On the other hand, those who struggled to adapt tended to be either those who were 'young' in practice (not more than five years of counselling experience) or those who displayed some form of rigidity in terms of their personality and behavioural disposition.

It may be observed that equating tenure at an organisation to adaptability of expectations and changes is too simplistic an argument. In their study on career mobility and employment outcomes, King, Burke and Pemberton (2005) found that individuals who stayed within a particular career for a longer period of time tended to accumulate more firm-specific skills and have a better match

between their capabilities and their job needs. However, it was also found that individuals staying in the same roles for long periods tend to become less flexible (Morrison & Hall, 2001). Goodman (1994) points to research on midcareer transitions and the possibility that transitions across roles enhance adaptability. In this light, it is not just a simple function of the length of tenure within an organization that determines the level of adaptability to expectations (i.e., the longer a counsellor is at an organization, the more adaptable they are), but transitional experiences (i.e., taking up different roles and responsibilities) throughout the tenure of the job that makes the difference. Hall (1986) points out that “with each new level of routine established comes a heightened level of adaptability, as the person experiences confidence in his or her ability to learn new career roles” (p. 145). Hence, it is not the length of time worked at an organization that enhances the ability of a counselling practitioner to adapt to expectations and changes but, as counter-intuitive as it is, the number of role changes accepted and experienced over that period of time that causes a practitioner to be highly adept. Conversely, the lack of diversity in work experiences may negatively affect personal adaptability. Specifically, long-term employment at one work site with unchanged roles may limit developmental experiences for these individuals compared to those who have had greater exposure through varying work situations.

Here, it is instructive to consider the concept of rigidity and mental flexibility of the practitioner to their ability to adapt to changing expectations of stakeholders within the tertiary educational institutions. In previous research, rigidity has been found to be related strongly to a ‘personal need for structure’ where it is characterised by an individual’s desire for cognitive simplicity with

the aim of restructuring their environment into a more manageable form (Neuberg & Newsom, 1993). Rigid individuals tend to prefer structures and environments where there are established routines and are fairly resistant to changes in their environments. Furthermore, such individuals demonstrate an intolerance for ambiguity and are less open to new experiences (Steinmetz & Loarer, 2011). Hence, it is not surprising that practitioners who display rigid personalities (whether it is a trait or an affective area of an individual's life) would tend to have more difficulty dealing with different expectations from stakeholders especially if these tasks are not seen to be within the scope or training received. One interesting point for us to consider at this point would be this: If counsellors should be less rigid and have cognitive flexibility in order to be "successful" in terms of being able to thrive in their organisation and be effective in developing their professional identity, how do we 'ring-fence' the profession and only admit those with the 'right' attributes into the practice? Perhaps this question could be examined at the point where a practitioner was applying to be trained as a counsellor in graduate counselling school. An analysis of the application process of various graduate counselling programmes across different educational institutions in Singapore showed that apart from relevant academic qualifications and resume of current employment (to assess for recognition for prior learning or work experience), there were no further assessments to determine if an applicant displayed the requisite behavioural traits that may predict a successful transition to be a counselling practitioner. This would be an interesting area for further research best left for a later study.

The next personal dimension influencing the development of professional identity in practitioners was the ability and opportunity for them to build knowledge and skills. Counselling practitioners who demonstrated a constant growth in knowledge and skills not only deepen their competency base (hence become noted for their increasing expertise within and outside of the tertiary educational institution), they also increase the reputation of the educational institution which they were working in. This is very similar to how universities compete to recruit top researchers in order to boost their academic ranking (Goodall, 2013). In Hong Kong, it is noted that each of the counselling centres within the five universities were noted for their expertise in different counselling approaches (e.g. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for City University of Hong Kong and Career Counselling for Chinese University of Hong Kong). This was due to a deliberate move early in their history to build up expertise in knowledge and skills as part of the attempt to differentiate one from the other (A. Chung, personal communication, June 8, 2015).

In the field of human resources, knowledge and skills are seen as intrinsic values of human capital. Forret (2006) describes human capital as work experience, education, knowledge, skills, abilities, and training. Human capital represents much of an organization's knowledge and is thus seen as an important resource in enabling the organisation to achieve a competitive advantage over others (Hitt, Ireland, Camp, & Sexton, 2002). Employees who possess or continually develop greater amounts of human capital such as knowledge and skills during their employment are likely to be more valued compared to other peers who have less human capital. Regardless of the profession or line of work, it is increasingly expected in today's career

environment that workers have to continually develop their knowledge and abilities in order to be seen as engaged and value-adding to the organisation that they are employed with. Employers are increasingly looking for ways to increase their productivity levels and that includes having employees who can increase the ability of the organisation to be productive (Haltiwanger, Lane, & Spletzer, 1999). In this context, counselling practitioners who continually build up their store of counselling knowledge and skills in their practice unknowingly have taken steps towards building their professional identity especially in the eyes of their student clients whom they serve as well as their supervisors who would be the recipient of positive feedback from stakeholders who have utilised counselling services.

5.4 Interpersonal Dimension: Support networks and navigating the practice within socio-politico environments

The two categories under interpersonal dimension of the professional self and its various sub-themes (i.e. building networks outside and inside of the institution, navigating the practice within Singapore's politico-social environment) are mostly found to be in line with existing literature on the impact of interpersonal relationships influencing the development of counsellors' professional identities. This finding is not surprising seeing that counselling practitioners spend a majority of their professional time interacting with people (stakeholders such as students, teaching & non-teaching staff, parents, members of the public, counterparts from other educational institutions and social services, etc.). The findings suggest that the quality of their interpersonal connections with stakeholders will have an impact on the development of professional identity of counsellors over time. Looking at the

two sub-categories under “building support networks”, it is interesting to note that the successful building of professional identities by counsellors (especially those who have been deliberate in creating social connections) can be encapsulated by the concept of “social capital”, which is found in sociological and business management literature. Walker (2006, p. 2) defines social capital as “social assets that enable one to attract respect, generate confidence, evoke affection, and draw on loyalty in a specific setting”. She further explained that social capital “flows” through individuals’ various personal connections tying together shared expectations and goals in social networks which may be informal groups or amongst formal institutions. As a phenomenon, social capital has been observed to be present in various social networks such as relations inside and outside the family (Coleman, 1988), relations within and beyond the firm (Burt, 1992), the organization-market interface (Baker, 1990), and public life in contemporary societies (Putnam, 1993, 1995). In this case, it can be observed that whether the building of support networks within the tertiary educational institution or with organisations and individuals outside of the tertiary educational institution, the key consideration lies in the ability of the counselling practitioner to productively exploit their various social capital connections.

Winsett M’s comments showed the way that these interpersonal professional relationships function:

I have to deliberately go out to build relationships with other staff members, especially those who are senior in their departments so that when I need to push for something for my clients, I go to these people for help and because of the friendship and trust which I have already built beforehand, they will agree to help me.

Fantasee I's statements continued with the function of interpersonal relationships:

E (head of department's name removed) on the other hand, has the talent to network so easily with the other bosses within this institution. Actually her networking has helped our department a lot. When I can't push for my student, I'll ask her for help and she will then speak to that department's boss and usually after some negotiation, it goes our way.

However, not every individual who becomes a trained counselling practitioner will have all the requisite connections in order to successfully utilise the various social networks available. Even though social capital is distributed unevenly across any population (Putnam, 1993), individuals can build up their social capital through perseverance and hard work to constantly connect with 'gatekeepers' of various networks (Walker, 2006). In this case, the key is to deliberately socialise the role of the counsellor into the collective consciousness of the educational institution during her/his time there. When the counsellor understands this process of building and productively exploiting social networks and the way it works, they are more likely to have a successful outcome. Rogers (1957) suggested that personal characteristics of empathy, genuineness and positive regard were the key competencies that enable counsellors to help others. The question arises, then as to the competencies that enable therapists to help *each other*. While it is comforting from a human standpoint to be described as "warm", "supportive", "understanding", "genuine", "positive" and "caring" (Kelly O.), these are not the qualities that are the most important when one professional is trying to build a relationship with another.

Instead, what would be helpful in working to be accepted and appreciated as a professional with the requisite social capital, and as discussed in the previous section, having the cognitive flexibility, seem to be the critical aspects to the development of professional identity for the counselling practitioner. Being flexible and able to position oneself to gain access to resources is a positive characteristic. Building relationships through cooperative partnerships with stakeholders inside and outside of the tertiary educational institution positively impacts on the way counsellors are perceived, which in turn leads to growth in their professional identity.

The second category under interpersonal dimension would be the counsellors' ability to navigate their practice within Singapore's politico-social and cultural environment. The national environment in Singapore has unique attributes which some Singapore literature label as the "Singapore Culture" (Neo & Chen, 2007; Retna & Jones, 2011; Yeo, 2003, 2007). Singapore is typically characterised in the literature as the embodiment of a country with many rules where the people are highly disciplined and live in an orderly, self-controlled way. Its economic progress and achievements are perceived by many to be impressive and extraordinary (Yao, 2007). Curiously, many Singaporeans take pride in the way the country is ruled, through a highly hierarchical and patriarchal approach by its strong one-party political leadership that has been in power since independence in 1965 (Quah, 1996). The "soft authoritarianism" of the national Singapore culture had birthed unique characteristics and attributes in her people such as being controlled, disciplined, compliant, competitive and capitalistic, which were incidentally considered by many to be the formula for Singapore's success (Yao, 2007).

Some commentators believe that although Singapore's high economic growth had been the envy of many, it was achieved at a high social cost through repression and inequality amongst different social and economic strata of the population (Chua & Tan, 1995; Verweij & Pelizzo, 2009). Studies in organisational behaviour also depict people in Singapore unquestioningly accepting the unequal balance of power within hierarchies with an overarching emphasis on the need to maintain group interests, a concern for status and establishment of order (Cecil & Entekin, 2001; Hofstede, 1984, 2001). Apart from seeing Singapore's national culture through constructs that can be objectively measured as suggested in Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions (2001), national culture can also be perceived as patterns of ideas, beliefs and practices that are embodied by various institutions such as schools, government departments, public and private institutions in particular local and historical settings (Gould & Grein, 2008). Individuals' membership in such a 'culture' is not surrounded by neat boundaries and as pointed out by Gould and Grein (2008), "a person may be a member of one particular culture (e.g. school culture), while being influenced by another national culture (the way a country is governed) in which he or she is not a member" (p. 238).

Various writers have attributed much of the development of this unique Singapore culture to the way Singapore was governed (Barr, 2000; Lee, 2002, 2010). The government in Singapore practises what some scholars term as "illiberal democracy" where the government operates within a "dominant one-party system but tilts more towards the 'soft authoritarian' form of governance" (Brown, 1994; Rodan, 1993; Zakaria, 1994). In other words, the manner and style of the ruling party's (People's Action Party or PAP) approach would be

that as a nation, Singapore can only advance economically, socially and politically through relentlessly adhering to the government's values and ways of managing the state, with limited contribution from opposition or dissenting voices within the country (Mutalib, 2000).

Given the complexity and intertwining of the different influences (with special reference to the style of governance) behind the politico-sociocultural milieu in Singapore, it is no wonder that in order for counselling practice to flourish and be established like the other recognised professions such as law and medicine, practitioners (especially the senior practitioners) have to be mindful of the 'culture' inherent within the groups (e.g. the various culture within the tertiary educational institution, within Singapore society, within the counselling association, within government departments such as the ministry of education, and within public institutions such as the Health Promotion Board, etc.) that the counselling service are 'members' of. Practitioners also need to be sensitive to the 'politics and games' (Goldstein & Read, 2009) inherent in each of the group cultures and make a decision to either 'play by the rules' of the games through recognising and knowing how to build the right alliances with the power-brokers or to challenge the existing game rules by charting their own path through the establishing of new knowledge or skills and be perceived as a leader in that particular sub-area. Of course there is a third option of not being involved in the politics but that may also mean that the practitioner would miss the opportunity to build the profession's professional identity through the latter sub-category of the interpersonal dimension of the professional's Self.

Tied to the previous observation of sensitivity to the various groups' culture and politics is that practitioners who were able to successfully navigate the

politico-sociocultural environments also demonstrate an ability or competency to relate effectively with the decision makers or senior management of the various politico-sociocultural groups that the counselling service has contact with. *Relating effectively* has to be seen in the context of Singapore's culture vis-à-vis the historical influence of the teachings of Confucius especially since almost 75% of Singapore's population are individuals of Chinese descent (Monthly Digest of Statistics, November 2015). Confucius, a highly ranked civil servant who lived in China at around 500 BC was known for his wisdom and teachings on ethical living which have influenced Chinese cultural values. Of particular import to our discussion is the following key principle of ethical living where "the stability of society is based on the unequal relationship between people" (Hofstede & Bond, 1988, p. 504). To Confucius, this principle forms the basis for effective relationships in society where complementary and mutual obligations are observed between people, especially between relationship pairs where one is perceived to be senior in social standing, family status or business collaborator over the other (e.g. ruler/subject, father/son, older friend/younger friend, etc.). As discussed in the previous section, Singapore's predominantly hierarchical and patriarchal culture necessitates the counselling practitioner to display a good level of emotional intelligence in order to successfully relate as a 'junior' partner' in the relationship with their "senior partners' (senior management within the tertiary educational institution, executive council members of the counselling association, contact persons and decision-makers of government departments) while gently (& perhaps respectfully) pushing the professional needs of the counselling practice and her clients.

5.5 A suggested framework for developing counsellors in educational institutions

Having explored and discussed the themes surrounding the concepts of personal and interpersonal dimensions influencing the development of counsellors' professional identity, the next essential step in this study is to propose a possible framework which may be used as a guide for the future development of counsellors in Singapore. The following proposal comprises three sections, each with its own suggestions to increase the professional identity of counsellors. The recommendations are based largely on the findings suggested by the counselling practitioners and should be seen as a preliminary list with potential for further research and confirmation.

5.5.1 Admission criteria for students of counselling

A look at the admissions criteria of more established professions such as law and medicine would show that applicants have to fulfil a series of criteria before that applicant could be considered for admission to the school.

Applicants to law school would have to ensure that they have good scores for their academics, Law National Admissions Test (LNAT, for United Kingdom) or Law School Admissions Test (LSAT, for the United States) and strong letters of recommendation before the applicant would be considered for an interview.

Applicants for medical school would have to demonstrate good scores for their academics, Biomedical Admissions Test (BMAT, for United Kingdom) or Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT, for United States) before the candidate could be considered for an admissions interview. It is obvious by examining just the school application processes of these two professions that not every individual has the suitability to be a potential lawyer or medical

doctor. As discussed in the previous section, applicants for graduate counselling school in Singapore do not have to undergo such stringent selection criteria. All applicants have to do is to submit their application forms that show they are in possession of a general basic degree and some relevant experiences. No interviews or admission tests are required. If counsellors are to be working with other individuals to assist them with their life issues and struggles, it should be expected that these individuals have the right set of qualities which make them ideal for the role.

Although not officially regulated, the various graduate counselling programmes in Singapore do take pains to ensure that their programmes are 'recognized' by the counselling association. One possible step forward would be for the counselling association to gradually implement a standardized admissions process which lays out the selection criteria for all students as part of the effort to improve the standing of the profession and admit only candidates who are wholly suited for the practice.

5.5.2 Education and the counselling curriculum

5.5.2.1 Research skills

An examination of the counselling curriculum found in various graduate counselling schools in Singapore showed that the majority of the core subject courses within the programmes focused mainly on western-oriented counselling theories and practical counselling skills. As discussed in chapter two, though there have been some attempts by Singapore counselling practitioners in integrating folk therapies and Chinese indigenous psychotherapeutic approaches with their practices; the majority of these

approaches and theoretical paradigms have not been integrated as part of mainstream approaches by counselling practitioners in Singapore (Lee, 2002). As such, the next phase in the development of the counselling profession should be focussed on equipping counselling students with research skills in order to enable them with the capacity and ability to generate counselling theories which are culturally appropriate. Having a generation of counselling practitioners with research skills with the capability to impact on the profession both on the practice and research front would substantially improve its professional identity when their research becomes noted and recognised internationally.

5.5.2.2 Training emotional intelligence

Counselling curriculum should include courses on emotional intelligence in order to assist students to develop their level of self-awareness and self-knowledge. The inclusion of this course would address situations where students with less than appropriate personalities or traits to be counsellors, but who have excellent academic grades were admitted to the graduate counselling programme. Various studies have confirmed that the inclusion of classes focussing on raising emotional intelligence in primary and secondary school curricula has been effective in reducing emotional and behavioural problems amongst students (Caplan, Weissberg, Grober, Sivo, Grady, & Jacoby, 1992; Cohen, 1999). At the university level, it has also been found that the incorporation of such classes into the curriculum resulted in higher scores on standardized achievement tests (Hawkins, Von Cleave, & Catalano, 1991). Improved social competence amongst counselling practitioners would enhance

the probability of career success, especially in fields such as counselling and other people-helping professions (Vandervoort, 2006).

In chapter four, the findings showed that counselling practitioners spend significant amounts of time adapting to expectations of different stakeholder groups. Some counsellors were able to better adapt to changes while others faced difficulties. I had discussed earlier in this chapter that practitioners who displayed rigid personalities would have more difficulties dealing with changes, especially if the tasks are not within the scope of work or training received. As such, counselling curricula should include courses which introduce students to the idea of change and to equip them with the skills and knowledge to manage changes of the practice within the organisational/institutional environment. The introduction of such courses to future counselling curricula will enable students to not only increase their level of emotional intelligence, it will also equip students to be better prepared to handle the various expectations which they will encounter when working within tertiary educational institutions.

5.5.3 Continual professional development

5.5.3.1 Collaboration

One of the best ways to develop the professional identity of counsellors is regular exposure to various stakeholders both within and outside the tertiary educational institution. Intentional collaboration between the various stakeholders (for example, counsellors and school administrators or even faculty members) within the tertiary educational institutions on projects or campaigns about student mental health issues should be conducted as part of the educational efforts to assist students to achieve satisfactory academic

achievements. Such collaboration allows stakeholders to be familiar with the reasoning and philosophy undergirding the counselling practice so the stakeholders are given the opportunity to experience for themselves some of the conflicts counsellors would face should they implement some of the expectations placed upon them. Regular collaboration with government agencies (for example, the Ministry of Social and Family Development) and public institutions (for example, Health Promotion Board) on various projects and campaigns with the purpose of raising the public's awareness to mental health issues would work by exposing the public to what counsellors do and increasing their understanding of counsellors' roles.

5.5.3.2 Competency framework

Over the past year, the Workforce Development Agency (a government agency) in Singapore had been working to implement a competency framework to be used as a guide for the training and evaluating of career coaches working across the different agencies. Career coaches or guidance professionals are trained to assist individuals to work with their clients regarding career choice, adaptations to changes in the workplace, career dilemmas and issues related to work-life integration (Zunker, 2011). Like counsellors, career coaches also do not require any form of official registration before they are allowed to practise their craft. However, with the support of the Workforce Development Agency, steps are currently being taken to formalise and regulate the practice of career coaching as a profession. Similar to career coaching, counsellors should continue to advocate for their profession to develop a competency framework which could then be used as a benchmark to determine the development and training of individuals desiring to enter, and

progress, in the profession. This framework could be established through collaboration across the counsellors from the different tertiary educational institutions and perhaps proposed to the education ministry for future support. However, should the Singapore Association for Counselling or any government organisation decides to implement a competency framework for counsellors in the future, advantages and disadvantages for such frameworks should be taken into consideration. The advantages include:

- Ability to assess performance against a well-defined set of behaviours, skills and knowledge
- Clear direction for learning new skills related to counselling
- Ensuring that individual professional development and training milestones are recorded and acknowledged by the organisation

On the flip side, an over reliance on competency frameworks may stifle the development of new counselling knowledge as part of the natural response to the rapidly changing environment counsellors work in. Additionally, competency frameworks tend to be objectivist and prescriptive in its approach to managing counsellor growth and may ignore the possible contributions arising from social learning.

5.5.3.3 Community of practice

Arising from the idea of cross institutional collaboration, counsellors could work together with their counterparts to not only build support networks, but a community of practice. According to Wenger (2002), 'Communities of Practice' are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. In spite of the existence

of a counselling association, there are no community of practice groups amongst counsellors in Singapore meeting on a regular basis. The sharing of knowledge within the community of practice will lead to an emergence of best practices, which in turn leads to better performance of counsellors across the counselling community within the tertiary educational institutions. These types of activities contribute to the overall knowledge base relating to counselling in Singapore and will act to inform the subsequent teaching of counselling knowledge within the various graduate counselling schools as well as stakeholders within the tertiary educational institutions in Singapore. As pointed out by Shulman (1987), knowledge and teaching are interlocked. Communities of practice groups serve not only to provide the counsellor a way to socialize with likeminded practitioners, but most importantly to establish professional standards, develop mentoring programmes and to serve as a visible symbol to the public that the individual has met a high level of professional achievement above and beyond the mere holding of the title *counsellor* (Vacc & Loesch, 2013).

5.6 Limitations of this study

The results of this study are limited by the fact that this study focussed only on the professional identity of counsellors practising within the tertiary educational institutions in Singapore. Although this may offer interesting insights, the findings from this study may not necessarily have full relevance to counsellors working in other settings, i.e. community services or even counsellors working in the secondary school or pre-university environment. In addition, the findings of how counsellors develop their professional identity in this study may not be exactly replicable due to the differences between the academic culture of

tertiary educational institutions compared to secondary school or pre-university institutions, as well as the age range of students and the type of issues faced in the different academic settings.

Additionally, the data was collected only from interviews and focus groups conducted with counsellors. None were collected from the other stakeholders such as students, administrators, faculty or even parents. Having the perspectives of the other stakeholders and their impressions with regard to how the professional identity of counsellors was developed would have added another layer of richness to the emergence of the analytical categories.

Another limitation of this study is the fact that due to the smallness and 'youth' of the counselling field in Singapore, any perspectives or thoughts of the participants would be limited mainly to the amount of exposure the counsellors have been subjected to. Their experiences of the counselling practitioners within the tertiary educational institutions' system would also be significantly influenced by Singapore's unique political-social-cultural context which may not be easily replicated in another country with a different political-social cultural background.

5.7 Future Research

In the course of this study, several areas were identified that have potential to be further studied for answers regarding the development of counsellors and its impact on the counselling industry. Each of these areas warrant further collection of data from counsellors as well as other stakeholders who may have interests aligned to counselling. These areas which I will outline arise

from the interviews and focus groups but were not explored further as doing so might have led to the study deviating from its original aims.

5.7.1 Mental flexibility versus rigidity

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the struggles that counsellors with rigid personalities faced when dealing with stakeholder expectations compared to those who displayed greater mental and cognitive flexibility. The area of research arising from this finding would be about the possibility of training individuals with rigid personalities to become more mentally flexible in order to improve their abilities to deal with changes and expectations of stakeholders to do work in areas which they were not comfortable about.

5.7.2 Academic environment and non-counselling roles

New approaches should be found from further research on the academic environment (both in tertiary education and secondary education) and how non-counselling roles (via the expectations of stakeholders) relate to the actual duties of the counsellor and its impact on the psychological and mental health of the counselling practitioner. An evaluation of the extent to which non-counselling roles affect the perceived efficacy of counsellors should also be undertaken. In particular, more evidence of how contextual factors constrain counselling practice within the academic environment would be of value.

5.7.3 Counsellor job satisfaction

Future research on the job satisfaction derived by counsellors working in academic environments compared to counsellors working in other environments (for example, community service organisations or even private practice) should be conducted. The results from new research on level of

satisfaction vis-à-vis counsellors' working environment may then accurately show or even predict factors causing psychological tensions in the role due to the environment. Anecdotal evidence from informal discussions with various practitioners suggests that not all counsellors are entirely satisfied with their roles within educational institutions due to different expectations placed on them by school principals and leaders. As an example, in addition to providing counselling services, some counsellors have been asked to fulfil other duties such as canteen and chaperone duties during class outings. Further examination of future research results could then be used as the base to modify or adjust the work environments to support counsellors and to prevent attrition within the field.

5.8 Conclusion

Professional identity formation and development are individual maturation processes that begin during one's training for the profession, evolve during entry into the profession, and continue to develop as the practitioner identifies with the profession. These processes can be viewed as the experiences that help the practitioner wed theory with reality in the direction of greater flexibility and openness (Brott & Kajs, 2001, p.7)

One of the biggest issues facing counsellors practising in tertiary educational institutions today is that many of the stakeholders in these institutions do not seem to fully understand the roles played by professional counsellors within their institutions. Oftentimes, stakeholders mistakenly attribute certain roles such as discipline or financial assistance to counsellors when it was never part of their training or stated job scopes. The lack of understanding by

stakeholders of the roles and responsibilities of counsellors has been attributed to the weak professional identity of counsellors and the counselling community in general. This finding is mostly in line with existing literature on stakeholder expectations of counsellors' roles (Ponton & Duba, 2009). In spite of the progress made by the counselling community towards the professionalising of the service (as evidenced by the full professionalisation of the field in the United States and the significant steps taken in the United Kingdom, Australia and to a lesser extent, Singapore), counsellors continue to 'suffer' from a lack of a coherent identity compared to other professional groups such as lawyers, doctors and accountants (Alves & Gazzola, 2013; Gale, 1998; Goodyear, 2000). In Singapore, despite the increased numbers of counsellors being employed by schools and other social service agencies, the profession continues to suffer from a lack of identity arising from factors such as the lack of a coordinated approach to training by the various stakeholders such as graduate schools offering counselling programmes to training agencies, and to the absence of a national competency framework for continuing counsellor development.

It is in the light of this gap that this thesis was written. The purpose was to explore and shed light on how counsellors in tertiary educational institutions develop their professional identity and to advocate that these findings be used as the foundation for transforming the profession through the construction of a competency framework as well as to add to the limited literature about counselling in Singapore. Related to the first research question about experienced, tertiary educational institution counsellors' understanding regarding the nature of their professional identity, the data suggests that

counsellors perceive their professional identity as the outward manifestation of their 'Professional Self' consisting of the personal and interpersonal dimensions of perception and experiences of being a practitioner. The personal dimension consists of two sub-categories – 'adapting to expectations' and 'building knowledge and skills' – and the interpersonal dimension consists of two sub-categories – 'building support networks' and 'navigating the practice within socio-politico environments'. The link between how individual practitioners perceive themselves and the way they relate with others was found to be a central component in how counsellors develop their professional identity. Understanding of this theory is beneficial for future counselling practitioners and researchers as they will be able to utilise this information to determine a framework as the base for the development of the profession in the years ahead.

Related to the second research question on the processes and experiences which counsellors feel have either supported or hindered their professional identity development, the analysis showed counsellors who display higher levels of mental flexibility tend to fare better in terms of their ability to manage and build their professional identities compared to individuals who displayed higher levels of mental rigidity. Mental flexibility/rigidity regulates the ability of counsellors to respond either positively or negatively to challenges and changes to established roles within the educational institution. Additionally, counsellors who spend time and effort to build social capital through developing relationships and partnerships with 'gatekeepers' of various networks positively impacts on how they are perceived and in turn, leads to an improved perception of the professional identity of counsellors as a whole.

Future research should focus on testing this substantive theory in different settings. Understanding this process may provide the foundation for the development of workable strategies that will prepare students in counselling programmes to become competent counsellors in settings other than tertiary educational institutions. Additionally, besides preparing students for the transition, counsellors would also be adequately supported in terms of their developmental growth throughout their professional journey.

5.9 Concluding Reflection

As I approach the end of this part of my educational journey, I pause and reflect on what I have learned from this process. Prior to embarking on the EdD programme, I had always assumed that research had little or no relevance to my professional life. However, as I progressed through the various stages from the coursework, through to the IFS and finally the thesis, I arrived at the realisation that I am closer than before to becoming what I had set out to be – i.e. a scholarly practitioner (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). A scholarly practitioner is one who successfully integrates professional practice (in this case, my counselling practice within a tertiary educational institution) with that of academic research and inquiry in a way which allows for a deeper and fuller exploration of topics emerging at the clinical level. Though I possibly won't reach the levels achieved by the past masters of counselling theories (e.g. Sigmund Freud, Carl Rogers, Albert Ellis), I know that my contribution to the profession in Singapore (and perhaps the region) has the potential to not be an insignificant one, seeing that the profession is still young and developing. As I conclude, I draw my thoughts back to a passage that I wrote in my 2009

“Foundations of Professionalism” course that captured my thinking about the counselling profession as a whole. I wrote:

being a late comer to this ‘dance of professionalization’, the counselling industry is seemingly ending up being all ‘dressed up’ with the trappings of professionalization (certification, educational qualification, ethical code of practice, etc) but finding that most of the available ‘partners’ (hegemonic benefits) have been taken, leaving them to twiddle their thumbs at the corner of the dance floor hoping to either catch the attention of a potential partner (state or social lobby groups) currently engaged on the dance floor or another late comer in an attempt to paint a façade of themselves enjoying the party.

In revisiting this passage, I am aware of how much I have matured in terms of my thinking and perspective about the counselling profession but at the same time I am excited that I may be able to now bring a new perspective to the profession. My potential contribution may be small but I could offer myself to be a ‘make-up artist’ in order to further enhance the professional identity of the counselling profession and hence increase its credibility and ‘attraction’ to potential government bodies, instead of the profession perennially ‘waiting for a potential dance partner’ with the same ‘dress’ worn over the past decade.

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Appendix A: Participant demographics in order of interview/focus group stage

Stage	Age	Gender	Years working in education	Highest qualification	Institution
Stage 1	53	Female	23	Master in Applied Psychology	Polytechnic
	49	Female	15	Master of Arts (Counselling)	Polytechnic
	50	Male	12	Master in Counselling	Polytechnic
	56	Female	10	Master in Social Science (Counselling)	University
	58	Female	9	Master in Counselling	University
Stage 2 (focus group 1)	43	Female	5	Master of Professional Psychology	Private tertiary education
	40	Male	6	Advanced Diploma in Counselling	University
	46	Female	4	Bachelor of Social Science	Polytechnic
	35	Female	4	Post-graduate Diploma in Counselling	Polytechnic
	33	Female	3	Master in Guidance and Counselling	University
	38	Male	8	Master of Clinical Psychology	Polytechnic
(Focus Group 2)	45	Female	7	Bachelor of Arts (Psychology and Counselling)	University
	41	Male	7	Bachelor of Arts	Private tertiary education

	29	Female	3	Bachelor of Social Science	Polytechnic
	38	Male	4	Bachelor of Science	University
	32	Female	6	Master of Psychology (Clinical)	Polytechnic
Individual interview	34	Female	3	Advanced Diploma in Counselling	Polytechnic
	34	Male	4	Master in Counselling (Psychology)	University
	39	Female	6	Advanced Diploma in Counselling	Private tertiary education
	44	Male	5	Master of Psychology (Counselling)	Polytechnic

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

1. Study Information

Research Topic:

Development of professional identity- Singapore counsellors in tertiary educational institutions

Principal Investigator & Contact Details:

Timothy Hsi

Doctor in Education Candidate

Institute of Education, University of London &

National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University

Tel: +65 9660-7844 (mobile)

Email: timothyhsi@smu.edu.sg

Study Sponsor:

NIL

2. Purpose of the Research Study

The purpose of this study is to generate a theory explaining how the professional identity of tertiary counsellors in Singapore is developed by examining the struggles, experiences and processes encountered by them. An investigation into the lived experiences of these counsellors will provide an insight into the experience of being a counsellor in a tertiary educational institution with a specific focus on what individual practitioners believe are the key features and processes which have contributed to their professional identity development in the midst of the counselling industry's continued push towards professionalization. The findings from this study have the potential to fill a gap in the literature on professional development of counsellors in Singapore as well as to be used as the foundation for the construction of a framework which supports a clear and structured approach towards the development of practitioners' professional identity both on an individual as well as on a collective level.

As a counselling professional in a higher education institution, your views are important as it will contribute to further my understanding of this topic. As such, you are invited to participate in this research study.

It is important to me that you first take time to read through and understand the information provided in this sheet. Before you take part in this research study, this study will be explained to you and you will be given the chance to ask questions. After you are properly satisfied that you understand the purpose of this study, and is willing to take part in the study, you must sign this informed consent form. You will be given a copy of this consent form to take home with you.

This study will seek to recruit 30 participants who are currently practicing as professional counsellors in one of the counselling services amongst the tertiary educational institutions in Singapore. The duration of the information collection is from 15 February 2014 to 30 June 2014. All participants recruited will be involved in this study.

3. What procedures will be followed in this study

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview conducted by the principal investigator or a research assistant.

Your participation in the study will last from between 30 minutes to 90 minutes, depending on the context of the interview. As the study utilizes Grounded Theory as the main methodology, you may be requested to be interviewed again by the principal investigator.

The research will involve up to 30 individuals currently employed as professional counsellors within the tertiary educational institutions in Singapore.

Interviews will be recorded and the recordings will subsequently be transcribed into a softcopy in the form of an audio file. The participants will be informed of this and may choose to withdraw their contribution for this or any other reason prior to publication.

The recordings and transcriptions will be securely stored and password protected.

At the research interview I intend to use hand written notes and an audio recording device to capture the primary information.

Confidentiality of all research participants and collected data will be protected. Research participants can choose to remain anonymous and/or to use pseudonyms. Personal information will be de-identified/coded as far and as early as possible, and will be stored and transferred as de-identified/coded information. The participants' names will be kept

confidential and their identity will not be used in the reporting of the research data nor in any intended publication of any sort, be it electronic or print media. All records containing personal information will remain confidential and no information which could lead to identification of any individual will be released.

All research data compiled during the study and completed consent forms signed by the participants will be stored in separate secure sites for a period of 3 years from the completion of the research. After that time all data will be destroyed. The data will be protected against loss or theft and unauthorized access, disclosure, copying, use, and modification. Security measures taken will involve restricted access (under lock and key for hard copy documentation) and password protection (for electronic data).

Original data stored on computer/laptop will be deleted after they have been transferred to more robust form of storage, e.g., DVD or CD and stored securely as described above. Notes derived from the data will also be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

4. Possible Risks and Side Effects

None. Participation in the interview will not lead to any risk or side effects.

5. Possible Benefits from Participating in the Study

If you participate in this study you will be helping the principal investigator to gain a better understanding of the how practicing counsellors in Singapore's tertiary educational institutions grow their professional identity. The results of the study will go on to aid the principal investigator in increasing the awareness of counsellor roles in higher educational institutions as well as providing a "voice" for higher educational counsellors in the rapidly growing field of counselling in Singapore.

6. Alternatives to Participation

You are free to decide not to participate in the interview.

7. Costs & Payments if Participating in the Study

There is no payment for participation in this study.

8. Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may stop participating in this study at any time. Your decision not to take part in this study or to stop your participation will

not affect any benefits (if any) to which you are entitled. If you decide to stop taking part in this study, you should inform the Principal Investigator.

The Investigator may stop your participation in the study at any time if it is in your best interests or if you do not follow instructions required to complete the study adequately.

In the event of any new information becoming available that may be relevant to your willingness to continue in this study, you (or your legally acceptable representative, if relevant) will be informed in a timely manner by the Principal Investigator or his/her representative.

9. Compensation for Injury

Not applicable.

10. Confidentiality of Study

Information collected for this study will be kept confidential. Your records, to the extent of the applicable laws and regulations, will not be made publicly available.

In the event of any publication regarding this study, your identity will remain confidential.

11. Who To Contact if You Have Questions

If you have questions about this research study, you may contact the Principal Investigator as reflected in point 1 of this participant information sheet. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant, you may contact:

IOE Ethics Board

Dr Victoria Showunmi

Email: Victoria.showunmi@ioe.ac.uk

The study has been reviewed and approved by the following Institutional Review Boards:

- 1) Ethics Board of the Institute of Education, University of London,
- 2) The Research & Ethics Committee of the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Research Title:

Development of professional identity- Singapore counsellors in tertiary educational institutions

Principal Investigator & Contact Details:

Timothy Hsi

Doctor in Education Candidate

Institute of Education, University of London &

National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University

Tel: +65 9660-7844 (mobile)

Email: khsi@ioe.ac.uk

I understand that participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty. I understand that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of accrued benefits (Benefits are accrued in proportion to the amount of study completed or as otherwise stated by the researcher) to which I am otherwise entitled. I declare that I am at least 18 years of age.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Investigator Statement

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedures in which the subject (or legal representative has given consent) has consented to participate.

Timothy Hsi

Name of Investigator

Signature

Date

Appendix C: Stage 1 – Interview Protocol and questions for Thesis

- 1) Welcome participant and put them at ease.
 - Review information and informed consent document
 - Have participant to sign and explain confidentiality and method of recording
- 2) Questions for participants:
 - i. How long have you been practising as a counsellor in tertiary educational institutions?
 - ii. From your perspective, how would the following
 - a. Counsellors (as a whole in Singapore)
 - b. Public
 - c. Stakeholders within the educational institution view and define “counselling”?
 - iii. Define counselling in your own words
 - iv. What does it mean to be a counsellor? (your perspective and from others’ view)
 - v. What do you think professional identity is?
 - a. *Tell me about how you came to this view.*
 - b. *What has contributed to this view?*
 - c. *What, if anything, do you feel distinguishes you from other related professionals? (Clinical Psychologists, Psychotherapists, Psychiatrists, etc.)*
 - d. *What do you think of when you think about the philosophy of Counselling?*
 - vi. (If participant worked in another job previously) – did you think you had a professional identity in your previous job?
 - vii. Describe your professional identity now.
 - a. *How would you describe the process of developing your professional identity as counsellor?*
 - b. *What, have you found important in your role so far?*
 - c. *How has this ... (e.g. experience, value, attribute, etc.) made you feel about yourself as a Counsellor? (physically, mentally, emotionally)*
 - d. *How has this made you think about yourself as a Counsellor*

Appendix D: Stage 2 – Focus Group Protocol and questions

- 1) Welcome participants and put them at ease.
 - Review information and informed consent document
 - Have participants to sign and explain confidentiality and method of recording
 - Share ground rules for Focus Group discussion
- 2) Questions for participants:
 - a) How long have you been practising as a counsellor in tertiary educational institutions?
 - b) From your perspective, how would the following
 - i. Counsellors (as a whole in Singapore)
 - ii. Public
 - iii. Stakeholders within the educational institution view and define “counselling”?
 - c) Define counselling in your own words
 - d) What does it mean to be a counsellor? (your perspective and from others’ view)
 - e) What do you think professional identity is?
 - i. *Tell me about how you came to this view.*
 - ii. *What has contributed to this view?*
 - iii. *What, if anything, do you feel distinguishes you from other related professionals? (Clinical Psychologists, Psychotherapists, Psychiatrists, etc.)*
 - iv. *What do you think of when you think about the philosophy of Counselling?*
 - v. *How would you conceptualise your theoretical orientation?*
 - vi. *How have you arrived at this orientation?*
 - vii. *What role has your supervisor's theoretical orientation played in the development of your own theoretical orientation?*
 - viii. *What role have placements played in the development of your theoretical orientation?*
 - f) Describe your professional identity now.
 - i. *How would you describe the process of developing your professional identity as counsellor?*
 - ii. *What, have you found important in your role so far?*

- iii. *How has this ... (e.g. experience, value, attribute, etc.) made*
 - iv. *you feel about yourself as a Counsellor? (physically, mentally, emotionally)*
 - v. *How has this made you think about yourself as a Counsellor*
 - vi. *In your opinion, what impact, if any, has this had on your behaviour?*
- g) What do you think is required to develop counsellors' professional identity?
- h) What role has the university/polytechnic/private tertiary institute had in the development of your professional identity?
- i. *Who has been influential?*
 - ii. *What, if anything, has the university contributed to the development of your professional identity?*
 - iii. *How do you understand this process?*
- i) What experiences have you encountered which contributed most to your professional identity development? On the contrary, what experiences hindered the development of your Professional Identity Development?
- i. *Who has been influential?*
 - ii. *What role have others played in the development of your professional identity? (e.g. supervisors, personal therapist, peers, clients, friends, family, etc.)*
 - iii. *How do you understand this process?*
- j) If there is a process that counsellors should undergo to develop Professional Identity Development, what would it be?
- k) What do you think you personally need to do to progress to the next level?
- l) What experiences have resonated most with you as a professional counsellor, and why?

Appendix E: Example of Memo Writing

Professional Identity development

- Counsellors develop their professional identity (PI) when they are engaged in doing their work at the institution.
- There seems to be no fixed or set processes for developing PI.
- PI seems to be built through a few processes (but not fixed)
 - Studying/being engaged in further study of counselling theory
 - Attending trainings – continual development, attending courses, etc.
 - Supervision – discussions about cases with supervisors and with peers during peer supervision
 - Educating the institution’s community through campaigns, programmes (formal and informal).
 - Dialogue with senior managements
 - Actual work of counselling, good results from clients.
 - Being involved in teaching counselling either within the same institution or outside the institution.
- PI is not a clear concept. Not many practitioners know it even exists as a terminology.
- Doing a bit of this and a bit of that seems to be fundamental to the counsellor’s professional identity because it provides the practitioner with an opportunity of testing out their professional identity in several related areas in front of reflection and exploration of alternative views. Counsellors use senior colleagues as models when developing a professional identity – counsellors identify positive and negative aspects of others behaviour and integrate what they like with their own professional identity.
- The participants spoke about a process where they negotiated between Self (Internal) vs Self (others). This process was not always easy or to the participants liking, resulting in them questioning and speaking about a desire to control and distinguish between their concept of parts of themselves especially if it is not something positive? The participants are faced with a process of give and take between internal-self and other-Self. Over time and through a process of trial and error the participants engage in a process where they adopt the behaviour, values and practice of others within the institution in order to fit with their own professional conduct. This process is interlinked with the participants’ sense of personal and professional branding vis-à-vis their role within the educational institution.

Areas for my reflection:

The participants identified supervision, support from peers, counterparts, government bodies and even senior management and clear communication with non-professionals (administrators within the institution) as important to their development of a professional identity.

- Do the other participants experience the same process?
- Does the process of absorbing information from others differ between institution/ number of years working there/overall experience?
- How do participants understand this process?
- How could participants be facilitated in negotiating the tension between what to take in and what to reject from others and self?
- Who or how will they be facilitated in this process?

Appendix F: Sample Transcript with coding

Line	Transcript	Initial Coding	Focused Coding
78	TC: I think as a counsellor,		
79	we will see that this		
80	particular person is fixated	Counsellor expertise	What counsellors do
81	or stuck at a certain		
82	point, We help them to open	Counsellors' processes	What counsellors do
83	doors and clarify. Is there a		
84	need to change? If you are	Clients' Expectation	Perception of counsellors
85	not happy with this current		
86	situation, what is your	Stakeholder misconstrued perception	Perception of counsellors
87	desired aim. Do you want to		
88	move from here to here.		
89	They are like in the		
90	fishbowl, they don't see it.		
91	We are outside the	Counselling process	What counsellors do
92	fishbowl, We help to		
93	prompt		
94	questions...probably they	Client blindspot	
95	have the solution, but they		
96	don't see it. It's all up here		
97	(pointing to her head). If	Counselling Skill	Process of counselling
98	someone prompts you the		
99	questions - why did I not	Counselling process	
100	see this, didn't think about		
101	this. They are the one who	Helping Process and procedure/ theoretical approach	
102	will do it. They have		
103	resources, some counselling		
104	very effective, some not so		
105	effective, some disastrous.		
106	Same like medical doctor.		
107	My student went to see	Helping Outcomes	
108	psychiatric doctor. The		
109	mother ask her son not to		
110	take so much medication.		
111	Take as and when you want.		
112	Of course haywire! Tell the		
113	doctor, no use! My response	Stakeholder perception of helping/ treatment	Perception of counsellors
114	- you didn't comply with		
115	the medical treatment. My		
116	mom says no need. So, the		
117	counselling to outsider, you		
118	have problem, you go and	Stakeholder misconstrued	
119	see for one session, the		
120			
121			

<p>122 123 124 125 126 127 128 129 130 131 132 133 134 135 136 137 138 139 140 141 142 143 144</p>	<p>counsellor fix, go away, you are happy, go on your way. No need to see again. To me, this kind of “counselling” for one session, how much can it work. Even though you want to work on it, outside people don’t see it, that’s number 1. Number 2, outside professional counselling is paid, you tell people you need to pay for professional counselling, people will think you are “Crazy”. People expect it to be free. Especially in the church. I know the catholic churches , St Ignacius and mary of angels they charge a minimal amount. Family life society also charge. But people are unwilling to pay. People think, when I come to church, it should be free.</p>	<p>understanding of counselling</p> <p>Inappropriate perception</p> <p>Professional identity (PI) of counselling</p> <p>Low PI, hence not worth paying, expectation of free service</p> <p>Associate counselling with religious offerings = free</p>	<p>Professional Standing/ identity of counsellors</p>
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