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THE "BEGINNING" OF COUNSELLOR DEVELOPMENT: A HERMENEUTIC STUDY

By

MONA LYNNE MATHESON 

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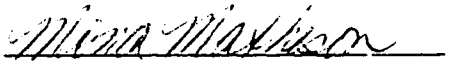

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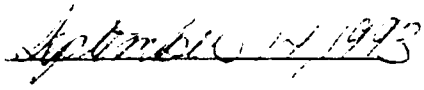
DATED: 

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **THE "BEGINNING" OF COUNSELLOR DEVELOPMENT: A HERMENEUTIC STUDY** submitted by MONA LYNNE MATHESON in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF EDUCATION in COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY.

Dr. Don Sawatzky

Dr. Ronna Jevne

Dr. Gordon McIntosh

In memory of my dad

Abstract

This qualitative study was completed in order to gain a deeper understanding of the counsellor development experience from the student counsellor's perspective. It is hoped that this understanding will lead to the development of effective strategies for enriching and enhancing the Master's program in counselling. The approach to the study was based on hermeneutic phenomenology. The data for this study consisted of critical incidents written by fifteen student counsellors over their first four months in an introductory counselling course (1991). Each participant's collection of critical incidents was combined into a story which attempts to capture the uniqueness of their "lived experience". Common themes which emerged from the researcher's interaction with the participant's stories were then documented. The common themes included Non-acceptance of Self, Incompetency, and Unclear Boundaries under "forms of dissonance"; Change in Attitude, Faith, Self-Affirmation, and Turning to Others for Support under "reactions to dissonance"; and Need to Take Care of Self, Need to be Listened to, Power of Group, and Appreciation of Differences under "experiential learning". These common themes connected the participants' stories to each other. At the end of the study recommendations for counsellor training and future research are discussed.

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call of duty. The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without Brian's love and support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER PAGE

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The development of a counsellor is a complicated and on-going process of change. One of the most obvious features of our waking state is change (Gilgen, 1987). Some may consider that the most important part of counsellor development occurs through the didactic components. Roehlke (1988) argued that the affective aspects are at least as significant as the didactic components. Rogers (1967) emphasizes the holistic nature of learning, including feelings and intellect, as well as the meta-level perspective of learning about learning as "a continuing openness to experience and incorporation into oneself of the process of change" (p. 43). A salient part of the counsellor's developmental experience occurs through interaction with clients, colleagues, supervisors, and many others in their personal lives. The interaction between the nature of an event and the readiness of the individual to accept the challenge to be "educated" results in counsellor development. All of the counsellor's life experience has contributed in some way to this development.

An important part of a counsellor's development is learning how to handle powerful feelings associated with experiences such as exclusion and inclusion in themselves and in others. Van Hesteren and Ivey (1990) stated that counsellors need to learn to embrace problems as well as solve them. The task of counsellors is to realize that problems are a fact of life. They need to invite vulnerability in their clients and accept and enjoy it within themselves.

Effective counsellors undertake the lifelong task of trying to live up to the dictum "know thyself". It is essential that they understand their own assumptions, beliefs, values, standards, skills, strengths, weakness, idiosyncrasies, style of doing things, foibles, and temptations, and the way in

which these permeate their interactions with clients (Egan, 1990). Counsellors must be aware of their own process and consciously challenging themselves and to grow as they challenge their clients to risk and grow as well.

Self-knowledge, especially awareness of one's biases, is an important responsibility counsellors assume in order to provide clients with professional help (Cooper, 1984; Peavy, 1992; Rogers, 1961). As an effective counsellor, it is important to identify and explore issues and biases that may interfere with providing effective therapy (Pipes & Davenport, 1990). A self-reflecting process can be a valuable tool for counsellors to enhance their awareness and growth. The effectiveness of counselling is related to the personal "togetherness" of the counsellor (Carkhuff & Berenson, 1976).

Hopefully, when counsellors begin their formal training they will have, or if not, will develop a personal commitment to self-awareness and continued growth.

> "There is not merely a human species but also peoples, not merely a human soul but also types and characters, not merely a human life but also stages in life; only from the recognition of the dynamic that exerts power within every particular reality and between them, and from the constantly new proof of the one in the many, can it come to see the wholeness of man" (Buber, 1965, p. 14).

This is no less so for a counsellor in training than a client. In order to attain a deeper understanding of the counsellor development experience, the individual counsellor needs to be given a voice. Through the unique experiences of each counsellor there comes a deeper knowing of the whole experience of counsellor development.

"We make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single and developing story" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 150). It is therefore important to maintain the uniqueness of each counsellor's individual story - to allow each one to be heard and acknowledged. They are all individuals, with their own uniqueness and differences. From their individuality is a commonality - a "shared experience" - that draws us together and connects us as human beings - changing, learning, discovering, becoming....

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to deepen the understanding of the student counsellors' experience in the initial four months of the Master's program in counselling, from the student counsellors' perspective.

The study represents an effort to listen to the voices of individual student counsellors in order to understand their "lived experience". A deeper understanding of the whole initial counsellor training experience from the perspective of the students is one of the necessary prerequisites for developing effective strategies for enriching and enhancing the counsellor development experience in the academic programs.

Significance of the Study

There is a scarcity of research concerning the initial development of a counsellor from the perspective of the student counsellors themselves. Much of the literature has focused on the supervisory relationship. Although this is a very salient part of counsellor development, it does not capture the whole

experience. Even though the counselling literature is lacking in its attention to the "lived experiences" in counsellor development, the literature clearly suggests that individuals experience numerous significant events in their personal and professional lives which influence their development as a counsellor (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992; Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988; Roehlke, 1988). No studies were found which look at the whole counsellor development experience from the Master's student counsellor's point of view.

The perspective findings attained from this study have the potential to:

(1) convey the experience of the students to those who instruct in such a way as to more adequately understand the needs of the student counsellors;

(2) influence the counsellor training program; and

(3) convey to students that "they are not alone".

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter the literature which is relevant to the study will be reviewed. Areas of relevant research considered necessary are: the counsellor development experience; understanding the development experience through the hermeneutic encounter; and retelling the development experience through narration, or "story". A second literature review conducted after the discussion of the findings follows in Chapter Five.

The Counsellor Development Experience

Much of the literature about the counsellor development experience has been focused on issues of counsellor training supervision, specifically from the perspective of the supervisor. Research in the area of counsellor development through self reflection, however, is extremely limited. Sawatzky, Jevne, and Clark (1991) argued that there is a need for perspectives to be obtained inductively from the student counsellor, the one most qualified to reflect on counsellor development. The studies discussed are primarily the ones that used a self-reflective process as a research tool that shifted the focus to the student counsellors' perspective.

The unpublished study by Sawatzky et al. (1991) focused on the student counsellors' perspective of their development with the use of a critical incident format. Initially one-hour interviews that consisted of an elaboration of the incidents that were deemed important by the interviewee were conducted. The participants were nine doctoral students in their final stages of internship. The question asked of the research participants was "what experiences in the

doctoral practicum and internship have been significant in contributing to your effectiveness as a counsellor?" (Sawatzky et al., 1991, p. 3). The findings of this study described a process of counsellor development that included: experiencing dissonance, responding to dissonance, relating to supervision, and feeling empowered.

Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) also focused their qualitative study on developmental themes. This research study was carried over five years (1986-1990), using grounded theory methodology as a method of analysis. The study was intended to cover the professional life span, taking into account both the professional and personal sources of influence. The participants were 100 therapists and counsellors ranging from those in their first year of graduate school to those 40 years beyond graduate school. These participants were divided into five groups according to education and experience. The research instrument used for this study was a 23-item questionnaire. Interviews were conducted and subsequently guided by this questionnaire. Through the analysis, a stage model was first identified, followed by twenty themes. It was concluded in this study that the themes suggested a movement from reliance on external authority to reliance on internal authority.

Skovholt and McCarthy (1988) directed a study involving critical incidents as the catalysts for counsellor development. The participants for this study were solicited primarily through several professional newsletters and asked to send in critical incidents. "The authors came from all areas of the United States and from a wide variety of counselling settings" (Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988, p. 70). As these were strictly on a volunteer basis, the data that were gathered, not surprisingly, supported their hypothesis. A total of 159 critical incidents were received, but only 58 of them were used in this study. Each one of these was submitted by a different individual. Skovholt and

McCarthy (1988) only referred to this selection process as "difficult" (p. 70). The method that was used to categorize the critical incidents was not discussed. The categories of critical incidents were: clients as teachers; counsellors as clients; counsellor disillusionment and vulnerability; cross-cultural lessons; finding a counselling niche; lessons from a child's death; letting go of overresponsibility; mentors and models; personal pain as teacher; professional transitions; and theoretical awakenings. This study concluded that writing and reflecting on critical incidents had an impact on participants' development as counsellors.

The two studies (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992; Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988) focused on counsellor development from the perspective of the counsellors themselves, many of whom were professionals. It is important to note that the counsellor development experience from their own perspective was a more wholistic experience that extended over a large time-span and was not limited to the area of supervision. To date much of the literature has focused on the area of supervision and the supervisory issues associated with that relationship (i.e. Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1988; Holloway, 1987; Sansbury, 1982; Heppner & Roehlke, 1984).

Borders (1990) conducted a study that looked at developmental changes specifically during supervisees' first practicum. The participants consisted of 44 students, all enrolled in a one-semester counselling practicum. The instrument used in the research was a Supervisee Levels Questionnaire and was given before and after their first practicum. The results of this study reported developmental changes that were restricted to the three dimensions of self-awareness, dependency/autonomy, and theory/skills. The supervisees perceived themselves as more aware of their own motivations and dynamics, less concerned about performance during a therapy session, and less dependent

on their supervisors for directions and support. Although the analysis reported statistically significant gains on all three of these dimensions, Borders (1990) was left with many unanswered questions that only a qualitative study could answer. It is interesting to note that all the participants indicated a movement towards greater awareness, autonomy, and theory/skills over the three months. This raises a concern that the results may have been influenced by the participants' attempts to live up to the experimenters' expectations - the "Pygmalion Effect" (Borg & Gall, 1989).

McNeill, Stoltenberg, and Pierce (1985) examined counsellor trainees' perceptions of their counselling and supervision behaviors. The sample consisted of 91 trainees from eight geographically diverse training programs classified into three levels (beginning, intermediate, and advanced) in the areas of counselling experience, supervision experience, and education. The instrument used to assess relevant constructs was the 24 self-report item Supervisee Levels Questionnaire (Stoltenberg, 1981). The response format was a 7-point Likert scale. A summary of the findings reported that the trainees moved from initial levels of anxiety and dependence to increased self-awareness and independence, using the three scales of self-awareness, dependency-autonomy, and theory/skills acquisition. These scales were pre-determined and there was difficulty in ascertaining what these meant experientially. The study also stated that all the other items that did not "fit" under these three scales were discarded. The study also noted that this progression will generally occur at different times for various domains of counsellor functioning.

A further study was conducted by Stoltenberg, Pierce, and McNeill (1987) . It was hypothesized that shifts would occur in the student counsellors' development: (a) from greater to lesser need for supervisor imposed structure,

(b) from greater to lesser need for didactic instruction, (c) from greater to lesser need for direct feedback of counselling behavior, (d) from greater to lesser need for supervisory support, (e) toward greater need for trainee self-direction, and (f) from greater to lesser training/supervision needs in general. The participants consisted of 91 students from eight different training programs across the United States. Each student was categorized in three different levels as outlined in McNeill et al. (1985) study. The instrument used was the 30-item Supervisee Needs Questionnaire that was constructed to assess supervisees' needs within supervision along five conceptual categories: (1) structure, (2) instruction, (3) feedback, (4) support/availability, and (5) self-directed. The questionnaire used a Likert scale format. In general, the results supported the notion that there is a progressive shift in supervisees' training/supervision needs as a function of the complex nature of counsellor development. More specifically, as the counsellor development progresses, trainees show a significant decrease in overall needs, especially the need for supervisor-imposed structure and direct feedback.

Ellis (1991) conducted a study to test two models of supervisory issues (i.e., Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth, 1982; Sansbury, 1982) in a clinical supervision context and in the context of training and supervising supervisor trainees. Loganbill et al. (1982) proposed a developmental supervision model that incorporated eight supervisory issues. Sansbury (1982) introduced a staging, or hierarchical, framework for these issues, suggesting that they emerge in the following sequence as the counsellor matures from neophyte to expert: (a) competence, (b) purpose and direction, (c) theoretical/conceptual identity, (d) emotional awareness/confrontation (e) respect for individual differences, (f) autonomy, (g) professional ethics, and (h) personal motivation. The participants in the study consisted of eighteen counselling psychology

doctoral students (nine student counsellors and nine supervisor trainees) from the same university. The instrument used in this study was a critical incidents questionnaire that consisted of the responses to three questions: A total of 142 critical incident questionnaires were completed. The critical incidents were then rated on the basis of the ten previously established categories: relationship, competence, emotional awareness, purpose and direction, autonomy, personal, individual differences, professional ethics, motivation, and identity. The results of the study concluded that critical incidents more often involved relationship, competence, emotional awareness, autonomy, and personal issues.

The counsellor development literature that was discussed primarily involved studies that focused on development from the counsellors' perspective. Because of the nature of these studies, the number of studies was extremely limited and, generally conducted within the last five years. The participants used in these studies varied in levels of academic experience and professional experience. Two of the studies used the Supervisee Levels Questionnaire and one used the Supervisee Needs Questionnaire, resulting in quantitative findings.

Although qualitative findings had been attained, the studies used the experiences of the participants through critical incidents and an interviewing process to organize common themes or a developmental process. The unique experiences of each participant were not captured. An indepth understanding of their "lived experience" was not encountered.

Hermeneutic Encounter

What is Hermeneutics?

Hermeneutics is usually defined as the art and science of interpretation. Hermeneutics is a study of the interpretation of texts (Chessick, 1990; Kvale, 1983) to reach an understanding. To understand a text means to be guided and captured by, and open to that which makes the original work possible. Understanding and interpretation are therefore always active in the counselling relationship, as they are in life itself.

History of Hermeneutics

A condensed version of the history of hermeneutics will be introduced to provide background on how the experience of counsellor development is to be understood in this study. Originally coming from a place in theology, the prominent figures in the development of hermeneutics are: Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and Gadamer.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). Schleiermacher had come to realize that the tools of the linguist succeeded in illuminating only the surface or "grammatical" levels of the text, failing to reveal the author's special insight (Howard, 1982). Of course, the interpreter can only begin with a part, but the whole is what is looked for. The actual practice of hermeneutics becomes a part-whole-part movement, a constant back and forth process - a "hermeneutic circle" (Hoy, 1978, p. 2). So the interpreter is caught in an endless circle wherein the understanding, by definition, is never complete (Palmer, 1979; Hollnagel, 1978).

Schleiermacher's contribution to modern hermeneutics is vital. He unfolded the complex and dynamic world of the text and its primordial connectedness to individual life.

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911). Dilthey took up Schleiermacher's project of general hermeneutics and pursued it in the wider context of human sciences (Davidson, 1990). Dilthey is sometimes called the father of modern hermeneutics. Dilthey saw the powerful connection between language and life. Hence, he believed that human phenomena are not to be explained but to be understood (Howard, 1982; Palmer, 1969).

> Our understanding of life is only a constant approximation; that life reveals quite different sides to us according to the point of view from which we consider its course in time is due to the nature of both understanding and life (Dilthey, 1961, p. 109 cited in Howard, 1982).

Dilthey reduces to affective terms the interpreting process in the human sciences and hence makes empathy an essential ingredient in understanding theory. Dilthey's main point was that there exist two "standpoints" of experience, two ways of experiencing the world: (a) standing back separately and observing a world conceived as composed of natural objects, and (b) living in the world. We cannot ever live and interact with people and things without adopting a stance towards them, inescapable involvement (Chessick, 1990).

From the time of Dilthey, it has been realized more fully that meaning and understanding are subject to time and change. Understanding is an ongoing process with no absolute beginning nor end. Dilthey's view of understanding includes the continuity and reciprocal influence of the life-world and knowledge about it; from what might be termed natural or naive understanding through the "hermeneutical circle" to structural representation (Palmer, 1969).

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-). As a student of Heidegger, Gadamer sought to perceive and develop the positive hermeneutical consequences of phenomenology, and particularly Heidegger's thinking about it. In Gadamer,

Heidegger's basic concepts of thinking, language and history are carried over and developed (Davidson, 1990). Understanding is not merely a subjective human process, but the way of being human. Understanding, and especially understanding through language, is a primary form of being-in-the-world. Human beings not only come to know through the hermeneutic process, but are formed and constituted by it. This process of self-formation and self-understanding can never be final or complete (Woolfolk, Sass, & Messer, 1988)

Gadamer states "All understanding is an interpretation" (Descombes, 1991). Hermeneutic understanding begins at an analogous phenomenon, the I-Thou relationship. In this relation, the "Thou" is experienced truly as a "Thou", with no overlooking of the other person's claim but to listen. To this, openness is necessary. Without this kind of openness to one another, there is no genuine human relationship.

Gadamer refers to the highest type of hermeneutical experience as the "effective historical consciousness", and its realization as the "fusion of horizons" (Howard, 1982; Hekman, 1984). The process of understanding involves the "fusion of horizons", the horizon of the interpreter and the horizon of the text. Gadamer (1975) argued that one does not confront a text in a historical vacuum. Rather, people dwell within a contemporary "horizon of understandings", and these understandings inevitably fashion their interpretation of the texts (Gergen, Hepburn, & Fisher, 1986). Gadamer describes the hermeneutic task as "coming into conversation with the text" (Weinsheimer, 1985).

The definition of prejudice, which is the preunderstandings that are the necessary condition of all human understanding, is the key to Gadamer's understanding of the process of interpretation. For Gadamer, prejudice is a

"positive possibility" of interpretation, not a problem to be solved. Furthermore, Gadamer argues that the awareness of the role of prejudice in the process of interpretation entails self-reflection. This leads to him to the assertion that interpretation always involves self-understanding, that is, understanding oneself through the analysis of the text (Hekman, 1984; Chessick, 1990).

For Gadamer, understanding is always an historical, dialectical, linguistic event. There can be no fore-ordained method for genuine understanding. The highest understanding between people is achieved when the other is not regarded as one who can claim superior understanding, but rather when one sustains relationships dialogically, acknowledging the other's equally valid experience.

The literature review on hermeneutics provided an overview of the approach taken in seeking to understand the counsellor development experiences of these participants. Gadamer's position was focused on as the philosophical basis for this study.

Language

Having briefly outlined the development of the hermeneutic tradition as I understand it, I will now turn to "language" itself, since hermeneutics is described as the art of interpreting language (Howard, 1982).

We are immersed in language which determines our experiences, our thought processes, and our understanding. Thus language is not simply an instrument for communication but has an established role in our very experience itself. In Gadamer, the meaning in a dyadic relationship is generated by language and resides not in the mind of individual speakers or

writers but in the dialogue itself (Chessick, 1990). This suggests that we cannot understand what is in the private and inner realm in the mind of each individual speaker but must concentrate on the social dialogical meaning of the exchange. Each language system has its own particular way of distorting, filtering, and constructing experience. The explanation produced by the variety of language systems stand side by side, each providing its own distinct understanding (Polkinghorne, 1992).

The intermediary function of language in the phenomenological experience is central to the nature of hermeneutics, because it means that "language is the gathering, revealing of possibilities. Language is the self display of `what is'" (Deetz, 1977, p. 62). Language serves as the "window" to experience. The connection between the world, understanding, and unconcealment of whatever "reality" there is through language is the central methodological tenet of contemporary phenomenology (Casmir, 1983).

The written language or text offers a different relationship. The text is like a silent partner that speaks only through the interpreter (Weinsheimer, 1991). Texts are in fact helplessly vulnerable to imposition. The interpreter needs to be open to what the text says in order that a dialogue and not a monologue can exist. When we enter the process of description we invariably rely on conventions of language. We must make use of these conventions or we fail to communicate at all. These conventions simultaneously govern what can be communicated - the ontological presumptions of a culture (Gergen, 1992).

The written word is abstracted from the immediacy of sound and voice, on which oral tradition depends. Written tradition vanishes when it is not interpreted. A written word is absolutely meaningless unless and until it is interpreted to have a certain meaning. Gadamer states "in writing, language

attains its true spirituality" (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 221). As an ideal entity detached and abstracted from physical embodiment, the letter is spirit. By reading, we have direct access to a moment of the past. The past attains the permanence characteristic of spirit, for it is available to every present (here and now) and to anyone who can read.

As language is the essence of hermeneutics, some attention was given to this area to increase the level of understanding.

The Narrative - "Story"

As human beings, we take bits and pieces of "lived experience" and construct relevance and meaning through a narrative context. This context is woven through language, through words (Sanders, 1993). Gadamer states that language is to be understood as the medium of disclosure of our experience of the world and not an objectification of the world (Garden & Cumming, 1975). Narrative understanding is the comprehension of a complex of events by seeing the whole in which the parts have participated. Narrative explanations involve a special kind of understanding "which converts a multitude of events into a series of events, and emphasizes and increases the scope of synoptic judgment in our reflection on experience" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 22). Storying is a way to connect with each other; our experiences; our truths. Narrative is a primary scheme by which hermeneutical meaningfulness is manifested (Polkinghorne, 1988). Narrative is one of the forms of expressiveness through which life events are conjoined into coherent, meaningful, unified themes.

Polkinghorne (1988) describes the connection between self and narrative very succinctly:

> We achieve our personal identities and self concept through the use of the narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story. We are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure how they will end; we are constantly having to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives. Self, then, is not a static thing nor a substance, but a configuring of personal events into a historical unity which includes not only what one has been but also anticipations of what one will be. (p.150)

The story relates to human experience and is the vehicle by which people exchange the value of their experiences (Liske, 1993).

Mair (1988) believes "Stories are habituations. We live in and through stories. They conjure worlds....Stories inform life....We live through stories..."(p. 127). Stories are unique and varied, always in a constant flux of change, of movement.

With regards to research, postmodern thought supports the narrative and hermeneutical approaches. Research then becomes not a mapping of some objective social reality; research involves a co-constitution of the participants investigated, with a negotiation and interaction with the very participants studied. The perspective is heterogeneous; it emphasizes differences and continual changes of perspectives, and it attempts to avoid dichotomized and reified concepts (Kvale, 1992).

Summary

In summary, the literature that was reviewed encompassed the three main areas relevant to this study. This resulted in a deeper understanding of the research in the areas of counsellor development, hermeneutics, and "storying".

The power of story is becoming more widely recognized because it is able to capture more of what "lived experience" is about. The present study represents an effort to understand the "lived" counsellor developmental experience from each participant's perspective and allow his/her individual voice to be heard. Common themes will also be discussed as they become known.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Selecting an Approach

The type of research question that is asked is what determines the research method. Because the question asked in this study, "What has been your experience in your development as a counsellor?" is one that focuses on the in-depth experiences of participants from their own perspective, a qualitative method is more appropriate than a quantitative one. Qualitative research also `fits' areas of study that have had limited research.

The Qualitative Approach

The qualitative approach was based on hermeneutic phenomenology, with the research question focusing on `the understanding of the counselling development experience' and with the researcher being involved in and questioning the text (Kneller, 1984). Hermeneutic phenomenology is the study of interpretive understanding, or meaning, emphasizing the descriptive study of lived experience (Giorgi, 1985). The purpose of hermeneutics is to obtain a valid and common understanding of the meaning of the text (Kvale, 1983).

"Meaning" is essential in the qualitative approach. Questions are continually asked to discover, "what they are experiencing and how they interpret their experiences" (Psathas, 1973). In order to engage in this "process of discovery" with the counsellor development experience, a qualitative design was chosen for this study.

Just as I must interpret the text in the light of my perspective, hermeneutists agree that they are constructing the "reality" on the basis of their interpretations of data provided by the participants (Eichelberger, 1989).

All interpretation points in a direction rather than to some final endpoint, in the sense that it points towards an open realm that can be filled in a variety of ways (Gadamer, 1986). I realized that I had to encounter "their world" - their experience, by surrendering to the process, by pointing in a direction, and "letting go".

Participants

The participants were the students who attended the EDPSY 532/533 class in the fall of 1991 at the University of Alberta. All twenty-one students who attended this class were contacted directly in person or by telephone, told about the proposed research, and given the opportunity to ask questions. Fifteen participants out of a total of 21 students consented and were included in the study. Some of the participants who did not give their consent stated how they did not feel comfortable in allowing their critical incidents to be used in the study.

The sample consisted of 3 males and 12 females. Their backgrounds varied in demographics of professional history, academic history, personal history - single, married, divorced, re-married, single parents - all unique. They were not actively involved in the study after they officially consented to the study and released their critical incidents at the end of the winter session, 1992 (see Appendix A for Consent Form). All of the participants will remain totally anonymous.

As all of the participants in the study were selected from EDPSY 532/533, a brief description of this course is deemed necessary in order to help understand the context of the participants' experiences. The course integrated theory and practice. A variety of instructors presented different theories of counselling and often followed the theory with an experiential exercise. Separate from the classroom format was a practicum component consisting of a field placement or counselling experience within the Education Clinic itself. Each student being paired with another colleague and assigned to a supervisor for weekly supervision. Students also met in small groups of five for weekly two hour seminars facilitated by an instructor and a doctoral student. Within the Education Clinic, videotaping of counselling sessions was strongly encouraged as these were viewed by the supervisor and/or at the weekly seminars as case presentations.

Data Collection

The data collected for this study were accumulated through the documentation of critical incidents in the form of written text. A specific format of the critical incident technique was outlined to the participants (see Appendix B), using a modification of a critical incident format (Flanagan, 1954). The critical incident approach was used to encourage systematic reflection on the evolving development of a counsellor.

What is a Critical Incident?

A critical incident can be defined as a developmental turning point (Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988) and identified through a self-reflective process. Critical incidents are defined as "those events that stand out as significant markers in an individual's professional development" (p. 69) or what

phenomenologists call "lived experiences". A major criterion for determining whether an event constitutes a critical incident is whether it is perceived by individuals as having had a significant impact on them. Thus, the "same" event may be a critical incident for one individual, but not for another. Critical incidents share the common features of challenging an individual's sense of self, competence, and relationships with others; of placing demands on the person to adapt and cope; and of being perceived by the individual as a significant experience (Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988).

Critical incidents can occur at any time. Perhaps it is partly the element of surprise that makes the chance encounter so powerful (Cormier, 1988). For student counsellors, many critical incidents occur during the course of their professional counsellor development program.

Critical incidents are a self-reflective tool. Cormier (1988) discusses how critical incidents have the potential to shape both our present behavior and our future destiny, as well as possibly even reshape our past. Self-reflection can increase awareness and self-knowledge. Particular forms of knowledge derive from retrospection, from an essentially backward look over the terrain of experience. This is an irreducible "peculiarity" of the human being (Freeman, 1984). The critical self-reflection can give us a new freedom (Batson, Fultz, Schoenrade, & Paduano, 1987), as there is a sense of relief in knowing ourselves; more of who we are. There are doubtless individual differences in adults' responses to the "call to know thyself". Some individuals may respond enthusiastically, others may turn away, and others may not even hear the call. Adults can lose themselves if they are too rigid to reflect upon themselves. These individuals lose the ability to see themselves from a different perspective. They either accept that they are the way they appear to

themselves or simply look at themselves repeatedly without seeing anything new (Havens, 1986).

The participants' critical incidents in this study varied in length, type of issue reflected upon, and the language used to describe those issues. Turner (1978) states that private self-consciousness is concerned with the extent to which one reflects on one's thoughts, feelings, and motives. Individual differences in self-consciousness have also been shown to mediate the consistency of self reports. Higher self-report criterion correlations in Turner's study were found for persons who habitually reflected upon themselves. Since high private self-consciousness persons repeatedly attend to their inner thoughts and motives, they should provide not only valid self-reports, but also more detailed ones. Habitual self-reflection should result in an ability to give a more complete or extended self-description.. The non-reflective persons when asked to describe themselves should have fewer descriptive phrases at their command than should the habitually reflective person.

Self-reflection adds to insight the element of putting what is known into the context of the personality, including its values. Gergen (1992) states how critical self-reflection is essential for the postmodern scholar.

In the first week of September, 1991, the students were presented a paper that included the format for writing the critical incidents and a list of submission dates (September 13, September 27, October 11, October 25, November 8, November 22, and December 6, 1991). A minimum of seven critical incidents were to be submitted. Each of the students was to select a code name of his/her own choosing in order to ensure anonymity. An envelope situated on the Edpsy 532/33 teaching assistants' office door was used to collect these documents. They were kept in the office until the end of the term, when each student's set of critical incidents was placed in a sealed brown

envelope and stored in the Chairperson's office of the Department of Education Psychology.

Additional sources of data were my journalling notes or memos. These notes were written continuously throughout the interaction with the data, both at the time of reading the text and whenever a thought, insight, impression, hypotheses, or question concerning the data came up. The ongoing personal notes heightened my self-awareness and the depth to which I engaged the text.

Interpretation

A way of understanding the participants' critical incidents happened through the "context of discovery", rather than the "context of verification". The chosen method of understanding consisted mostly of an interaction with each participant's story; an interaction that deepened with every re-reading of the critical incidents. The following, detailed step-by-step description of the process followed makes it sound somewhat like a logistical exercise, and does not really capture the impact of my own experience as the researcher.

Data consisted of the participants' written critical incidents and my memos (personal journalling). Upon receiving the envelopes containing the participants' critical incidents, I randomly assigned a letter to each one of them. Each participant's set of critical incidents was then typed onto the computer. During this preliminary process, whenever something meaningful or something which "jumped out" was identified, it was highlighted and coded for future reference.

By reading and re-reading each participant's collection of critical incidents, an "I-Thou" relationship between myself and the participant developed and deepened. It is only the knowing of the I-Thou relation that

makes possible the conception of the wholeness of humankind (Buber, 1965). The voice of the participant could be 'heard' through the written words - a story was being told. It became quite important, essential, to let each story be told individually, maintaining its uniqueness and allowing a "sense of the whole" (Giorgi, 1985, p. 10) to be experienced. This holistic approach assumes that the whole is understood as a complex system that is greater than the sum of its parts (Patton, 1990). The participants' "own words" were used in the telling of their stories. In a typical hermeneutic phenomenological approach, Polkinghorne (1981) stated that in order to describe and interpret the essence of an experience, many concrete examples of the experiences are used (cited in Clark, 1993). It was intended that both the "uniqueness" and the "commonness" of each story be written. A full description of a story should include both the elements that are unique to that particular story and those that can be found, at least in essence, in other stories (Polkinghorne, 1988).

A more focused and purposeful look at each critical incident, on a sentence-by-sentence basis, was carried out several times over a period of nine months in order to identify the "meaning units". Since I could not interpret a whole text simultaneously, I broke it down into these manageable "meaning units" of a psychological nature that were perceived from the interaction with the text. Following a suggestion by Giorgi (1985), I noted meaning unit discriminations directly on the critical incident whenever I became aware of a change of meaning for the participant that appeared to be psychologically sensitive. The meaning units were then grouped into categories as they seemed to pertain to the same phenomenon. At times as I moved between the parts and the whole of the text, varying interpretations would present themselves. I was then called to discover the meaning which made sense both for that particular part and for the whole of the text, creating a circular process.

As this process of discovery continued, themes began to emerge - ways of connecting the stories to each other. I then moved back and forth between the text and the identified themes to ensure the meaningfulness and accuracy of these categories (Patton, 1990). The most common themes were identified by the greatest number of occurrences that were tallied from each of the critical incidents.

The relationship between each participant and myself was enhanced by the dialogue that was established. This dialogue was captured in the form of memos and personal journals that were written on an ongoing basis. The memo and journal writing recorded the insights and understandings that contributed to the stories and to the emerging themes. They also recorded the numerous questions that I longed to ask. The most common of these questions was, "can you tell me more about that? At times, I needed to "step back" from the text, particularly when personal memories and reflections were being triggered and needed to be processed separately.

The process resulted in an understanding, a fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 1986).

> To become aware of a man means to perceive his wholeness as person defined by spirit: to perceive the dynamic centre which stamps on all his utterances, actions, and attitudes - the tangible sign of oneness. Such an awareness is possible only when he becomes present for me. (Buber, 1965, p. 27)

Trustworthiness

"Establishing trustworthiness" (Patton, 1990) is achieved through the quality and credibility of the qualitative analysis. It is essential to understand

that the quality of a hermeneutic work derives not from method, but from the power and richness with which it enables the researcher to encounter the lived essence of an experience (van Manen, 1990).

Credibility was established by the overall consistency of the findings. With the re-reading of the text over an extended period of time, the meaning units were primarily consistent throughout. Numerous examples of these meaning units from the participants' actual documented experiences were included. Reliability was ultimately reached through the comprehensiveness of the research document. This included the appropriateness of the interpretation to the research question.

Upon completion of the interpretation, several participants were then contacted to discuss the common themes that emerged from the individual stories. This also ensured the accuracy of the findings.

Even though many of the findings were confirmed, I was left with some unanswered questions and feelings of uncertainty. "Humility can do more than certainty to enhance credibility (Patton, 1990, p. 464). I was constantly reminded that human beings are complex and human researchers are not all-knowing "experts".

The data itself offered its own quality. Because of the structure of the critical incidents themselves, specific headings helped prevent the participants from diverging from the process. The criterion for accuracy of reporting is the quality of the incidents themselves (Woolsey, 1986). No outside interference or biases could be initiated through direct questioning or personal contact by myself that may have influenced the participants' descriptions of their counsellor development. The participants could stay "with themselves" in the self-reflection process.

Although the trustworthiness of the qualitative research needs to be documented, the issue of trustworthiness came more from my own internal struggle. On one side of the struggle was the self-talk of questioning the level of competency, raising self-doubts, and trying to sabotage intuitive "hunches". On the other side was the deeper part of self where faith and acceptance lives. It was also helpful to be reminded that there is no one correct interpretation of the text. Although the "horizon" of the text itself remains the same, the changing horizons of the interpreter will result in different interpretations (Hekman, 1984).

Issue of Bracketing

In qualitative research, the research instrument is the researcher. Bracketing, or awareness of my influence through personal beliefs, experiences and values on the research process, is essential. Qualitative researchers guard against their own biases by recording detailed notes that include reflections on their own subjectivity (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Although an awareness and guardedness can be attained, Merleau-Ponty (1962) argues that to suspend one's own conceptions is not possible. It seems as one brackets one's preconceptions, more of these emerge at the level of reflective awareness. This process of bracketing is one that never ends (Valle, King, & Halling, 1978). Realizing this impossibility, my ongoing recording of memos and journalling notes at least helped me reflect on and become as fully aware of my own bias and preconceptions as possible. Prejudices or kinds of foreknowledge are always present and always required as the organizing and orienting devices without which perception would be blind (Sass, 1988). In Gadamer's (1976) view, prejudices should be understood not only as potentially blinding but also

as potentially liberating and illuminating. "Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. For only with the aid of these biases of one's openness to the world is it possible to bring forth the many meanings that lie within the text" (p. 9).

> According to a narrative theory of human existence, a study needs to focus its attention on existence as it is lived, experienced, and interpreted by the human person.
>
> (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 125)

For Gadamer (1976), the event of understanding is not something which happens between the consciousness of interpreter and author, but an event that happens between interpreter and text where the interpreter's own historicity and bias are not impediments to be obliterated but the precondition and indeed very essence of understanding. My own historicity is very much connected to this research. I am a participant in this study, as I was a student in this particular class. As a result, I already felt a connection with the participants, many of their words resonating within myself. "Through interpretation a text comes to speak. But no text speaks if it does not speak the language that reaches the other" (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 224). I already held particular biases and learnings about the counsellor development experience, having "walked through" that together with the other participants - the same but different. Freeman (1984) argues that the more that is genuinely understood and known about the subject of research - provided this understanding is not filled with inauthenticity and self-deception - the more valid the interpretation will be.

Often I "re-lived" my experiences as I read about the other participants' similar experiences. I remember feeling quite self-absorbed with what I was going through at that time. Through this research process, I developed a deeper

respect and sense of compassion for my fellow colleagues. I could actually "hear" their voices as I read their words.

My commitment and strong belief in the "reflective practitioner" helped me to continually process my "own stuff" throughout. Gadamer argues that the awareness of the role of "prejudice" in the process of interpretation entails self-reflection. This leads him to the assertion that interpretation always involves self-understanding, and that includes understanding oneself through the analysis of the text (Hekman, 1984).

The meaning units do not exist in the text as such, but only in relation to the attitude of the researcher (Giorgi, 1985). What stands out depends very much upon my own perspective. Gergen, Hepburn, and Fisher (1986) argued that text can be expected to convey different meanings within various subcultures and across history. From this perspective, the concept of "true meaning" is problematic. Thus Gadamer (1975) supported that one does not confront a text in a historical vacuum. People live within a contemporary "horizon of understandings". These understandings inevitably help to create their interpretation of texts.

Preunderstandings

In preparation for this study, I had to first understand where I was coming from. Thus, I needed to become aware of my own preconceptions of counsellor development. This process of increasing awareness through reflection and critical analysis is central to the hermeneutic project in its entirety. My preconceptions from the perspective of a student, of a human being, and of a counsellor, certainly influenced this study.

As a participant in this study, I could not just put aside my own learnings and "life experiences". I already held particular beliefs about the Master's program in counselling and the issues that the other participants experienced. I have many "untold stories" and I believe that these tended to emerge through my writing of this study. As a student, I longed for more depth with my colleagues - more opportunities to share the deeper parts of ourselves, like "the first weekend". I came into this study already having some ideas about how I would have liked the program to be different.

As a human being, I consider self-reflection to be an important part of my own personal growth journey and I value that process very much. Prior to my training, I have also experienced situations where sharing in groups at a deeper level and being listened to had been very empowering and growth-producing.

As a developing counsellor, I come from a very strong belief that we can only take our clients as far as we have gone ourselves. The stance of a "reflective practitioner" is very much my stance as a counsellor. I value the telling and acknowledging of clients' stories, and I strongly believe that the counsellor needs to avoid taking the role of expert. These are also positions I take as a researcher in this study.

I had a sense of curiosity upon entering this study. I was very interested in discovering whether my colleagues experienced the same struggles that I did.

Considerations and Delimitations

There are several issues to be considered in this study. Enough data were collected to develop an understanding of the student counsellors'

experiences in their counsellor development. In this particular study, however, all the participants originated from the same class of initial counsellor development. The disadvantage of this selected sample is that it invites the possibility of class-related data biasing the results. The advantage is that I had the opportunity to "see" the impact of some situations through the different perspectives of different participants, each of whom experienced it in their own unique way.

Being able to identify each of the participants may have influenced interaction with the text since my personal knowledge extended beyond what was presented in the critical incidents. While reading the critical incidents, I needed to remind myself to be open to understanding `their' world, and not to analyze or try to "fix" their situation.

The writing of the critical incidents every two weeks was presented to the participants as a course requirement at the beginning of the term. The feeling of "have-to" may have influenced the level of sincerity or "realness" of the results. Upon reading and re-reading the critical incidents, however, this did not appear to be the case.

Critical incidents were self-selected. The participants chose what was a critical incident for them, which critical incidents to write about and submit, how long to make them, and to what depth they would be written.

Due to the construction of the study, total anonymity was ensured. Because of the necessary structure of the data collection, I was not at liberty to interview or re-contact the participants about their individual findings. This resulted in the inability to validate the individual stories with the participants themselves. However, several of the participants were consulted in relation to the common themes that were discovered.

Due to the large number of participants, or what is felt to be a large number of participants for this type of hermeneutic phenomenological research, truly extensive and intensive interpretations and understandings were not carried out. The researcher discovered that to focus in-depth on even one participant's experience would have been enriching and powerful, but very time-demanding. The goal of this study was to capture each individual's story as well as identify the common themes found within those stories.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations for this research study included informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity. A proposal for this study was submitted to and approved by the Ethics Review Committee of the Department of Educational Psychology.

The participants of the study were directly informed of the general purpose of the study and questions were answered to their satisfaction. They were required to sign a written consent form prior to the releasing of their critical incidents. Participants were informed that anonymous quotations from these critical incidents may be included in the final report with names and other identifying information deleted from the documents. They were told that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw their consent and terminate participation at any time without any negative consequences.

Confidentiality and anonymity was maintained throughout the study. Code letters were used on all documents and false names were assigned for the final research document. Information which could identify either the participants or others was omitted from the final report. All original critical

incidents were destroyed at the conclusion of the study as previously contracted between the participants and the researcher.

CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS

This chapter consists of fifteen individual stories and a number of common themes that emerged from my encounter with my research participants' critical incidents. The critical incidents were focused on the question, "What has been your experience in your development as a counsellor?".

Each participant's story is unique and yet parts of each story touches part of another story. I often found myself saying "yes, that's exactly the way I felt too" or "I can certainly identify with that". As human beings who are connected to each other, so are our stories; if not the ones that are told, then at least the ones that are not told. In order to honor the uniqueness of each participant, the stories about their development as a counsellor will be presented individually and then "brought together" as common themes become visible. A story of the critical incident itself will also be told.

Because of the congruence with the Sawatzky, Jevne, and Clark (1991) study and the critical incident format itself, the structure chosen for the writing of the participants' stories consisted of the various sources of dissonance, different ways of responding to that dissonance, experiential learnings and insights/awarenesses that arose from the dissonance and experiential learning: All of these contributed to the participants' development as a counsellor.

Their Stories

Angie's Story

Angie began her story by expressing her need to be listened to and the importance of having close relationships with people she could share her true self with: "I have come to see my desire for a friend. I also need people to talk to, in order to be honest about my hurts, confusion, and expectations."

Angie's feelings about her own needs and the acceptance of them enabled her to recognize these similar needs of her clients:

> As I work with clients I do not have to see them as people with traumatic need or perhaps even pathology. They may be seeking someone to listen to them, or someone with whom they can share a burden. Their sharing may be a means of empowerment instead of simply someone seeking advice or direction.

The awareness of differences between people and the importance of appreciating those differences is a prominent theme in Angie's story.

> While I have seen many people before, each one deserves special attention. Their personality, their reactions, their backgrounds all differ. They need to have time taken with them, and I need to see each one as a person who has a special character.

Angie also faced the questioning and struggling of her own differences as she felt compared to and judged by her peers.

> There are those who wish me to be less happy. Perhaps if I were so it would make them seem happier on their scale of relativity. I am called insensitive for not joining them in misery. I see myself as a fighter and soldier and I will not resign myself to defeat. ... As for difficulties that have been noticed, I have been responded to with the `accusation' that I do not become overwhelmed as any `normal' person would. Even when

> hurting, I am accused of having resources which do not seem real to some people - to those who feel I should not be content.

In one critical incident Angie described the possible impact of her own differences on the therapeutic relationship.

> I too hold certain values, but if I insist on what I see as best, and someone else does not espouse these same values, I can create much tension and alienate the client from a process that could have led to eventual change.... It is important to emphasize the need to respect others' convictions.

Dissonance was experienced when Angie faced questions such as, "Would I unconsciously treat friends like clients as I developed skills and as these became more second nature?" She described the concern of bringing the "counsellor" relationship into friendships and then the discovering of "how to" maintain that boundary between the two roles.

A prominent part of Angie's story in responding to dissonance is the acknowledgement of faith/hope/inner strength that came through on a number of critical incidents. Amongst the feelings of dissonance, this aspect is declared.

> Hope is what has enabled me to keeping fighting, perhaps not the visible battle, but the internal battle and the wounds which are contracted during this time.....I am not always `happy', but I am content because I have an internal joy kept on fire by hope.

Beth's Story

A primary source of dissonance in Beth's story seems to have arisen from her comparing herself to her peers. "I think I am much closer to the beginning of my development as a counsellor than other members of my class.

I don't seem to have the same clear sense of mission that is evident in some of the others."

Dissonance was also created through her awareness of the various roles she had played and wondering how these roles could "fit" or "not fit" into the development of the counsellor role.

> I asked a question of the class member who was then acting as `client', it was a question typical of my self: direct, clear, task-oriented. I am a teacher with eleven years of experience at asking questions. The question I asked sure sounded like it came from a teacher, too! Within my personal style I am aware of times when I proceed gently, with caution, and other times when I use the direct approach.

Another source of dissonance was the gap between understanding a concept intellectually and `experiencing' it.

> Understanding the difference intellectually isn't enough; I need to experience the difference and come to have the ability to consciously go broader or deeper with a client. Putting the two together seems like a great challenge to me right now.

The experience of the "lived experience" is one that powerfully impacted Beth's development as a counsellor.

> I'm still always amazed by the power of living an experience. I haven't really learned anything new on the cognitive level in what I have expressed here. I've read about this, I've reasoned it out, I've talked about it with others. But none of these qualifies as experience on the affective level.

Beth responded to many of her conflicting situations with a realization of the need for flexibility, a willingness to change, and a readiness to learn.

> My style of questioning - while the clear, direct, and task-oriented approach works very well in the classroom setting, it is not necessarily

> appropriate in a counselling setting... I need to become aware of when such a style is likely to be appropriate and effective in counselling.... I also need to develop other aspects of my questioning style which will allow clients the opportunity to become comfortable and open in their communication with me at a pace that is appropriate to their needs.

Beth's awareness that additional techniques and knowledge were needed also demonstrated her willingness to change. "I will need to develop other techniques in order to achieve the same end with counselling clients."

Self-affirmations were another way that Beth responded to dissonance. "When I get worried and insecure about my ability to help a client, I will make myself remember these words: I am learning. I am taking skills I already possess, making them conscious, and refining them."

A belief in something bigger than self also appeared to play a part in Beth's counsellor development. "Is someone or something really looking out for me? .... I believe God delivers the occasional kick in the pants that I need to wake me up and make me think about what I am doing."

Reference to this higher power/faith seemed to help Beth cope with the dissonance that she experienced.

> I simply had to let go and have faith in the process. Doing so allowed me to take another tidbit of cognitive data and internalize it. At the time I let go I could not visualize what the end result would be; I relied on faith and let it be.

Beth described the closeness she developed with peers through sharing themselves with each other. She expressed how the safe environment that was created freed her to share even more with the group, and thereby helped her deal with inner conflicts.

> These four individuals [in the group] were probably the four to whom I feel closest in the whole class, and thus, the ones I felt safest with. That closeness gave me the courage to share .... Sharing the fear gave me

> some insights into what has been going on for me over the past six months or so.

Carol's Story

Carol's story began with the dissonance and inner emotional turmoil she experienced in questioning whether she would be judged by her peers if she shared deeper parts of herself. "As the sharing continued around the circle, I questioned whether I would let my new `colleagues' know information about my background which may lead them to question my competence as a future counsellor."

She went on to question how well she really knew herself and expressed some disillusionment at what she discovered.

> I have always considered myself to be a good listener....I am now reflecting on how much I have `really' attended to other people in conversations. I feel that I may not have shown as much sensitivity in the interactions that I would have at the time.

Carol also experienced dissonance and insecurity because as a result of a perceived lack of support and not feeling safe to make mistakes and grow.

> I was looking forward to the practicum -- I would be given a chance to make mistakes and have someone suggest other ways of dealing with the situation....for the time being I am concerned about not having my needs met.... I want to be able to make mistakes in a safe environment.... I feel needy for support.

Self-criticism, confusion, and self-doubt were other sources of dissonance that affected Carol at times.

> I have never questioned myself as much as I have in the past few weeks. Whenever I was introduced to new material in the past, I found it quite

> easy to adhere to one concept over another. This is not the case for me at this point in time.
> I'm not sure I can trust my instincts - more so, I don't know if I have enough wisdom to trust my gut feeling about a decision concerning a client:...I'm not sure of what to believe or whose suggestions I should follow.

Fortunately, Carol felt supported by a higher power in struggling with her issues and made reference to having trust in the process. "I once again put my faith in my `higher power' and continued my program of growth."

Sharing with other colleagues also helped her to feel supported. It provided a place where she felt connected to others and helped reinforce her belief that `I am not alone'.

> I discovered that the feelings I was having about `fitting in' at grad school were shared by many of the people who attended the workshop...What I find out from sharing with others in the workshop is that the feelings I am experiencing are quite normal for this beginning level of development in grad school.

Carol felt that peer support was a valuable aspect of her development as a counsellor. "The group support that was felt was overwhelming....I sat in the session considering how important this small group of people had become in my life. This reassures me that I can trust the process."

Another way that Carol dealt with feelings of dissonance was by taking constructive action to help alleviate them. She made a commitment to herself to acquire new skills and knowledge; and to seek out the support of colleagues, Ph.D students, and other supervisors; and to create a `change in attitude'.

Her `action' orientation may also have contributed to the impact she felt in "experiencing" versus "intellectualizing".

> Any study in the past seems now to be quite superficial - I did not understand the impact that the concepts or techniques would actually have on myself and my client. I also am beginning to experience the impact of the therapeutic relationship.

Diane's Story

Diane described the impact she felt by putting herself in someone else's shoes and then being able to trust herself, her intuition.

> I feel that I was able to see the world through this woman's eyes. This feels like quite an accomplishment for me because, to be very honest, this is a woman whom I have never really much liked and it is growth for me to be able to empathize with her. Most importantly, I feel a sense of relief to know that it might be O.K. to `trust my instincts or intuitions' even in the face of contradictions.

Seeing the connections - the commonalities- of "lived experience" between counsellor and client was extremely significant to Diane's development as a counsellor. This was brought to light through the sharing of stories by fellow students.

> For whatever reasons, I had entered this part of my training with a concept of the counsellor's world as `our world' and the client's world as `their world'. I had hoped to be able to see into `their' world, leaving `ours' behind me. But as I listened to the troubles of my classmates, I slowly came to a different feeling about it all. I came to realize that all of mankind has its struggles and problems. It isn't `us' and `them'. It's really only us.

Diane often experienced a sense of over-responsibility for others and realized the consequences of "taking on" that role.

> I have done considerable thinking about the whole thing and I have started only to be aware of the mental commitments I make to certain

> special people along the way. These mental commitments stay with me, not the other person. I must be wary of making these commitments which are far beyond my control. I set myself up for guilt and grief.

Diane realized that issues she was having difficulty with were mirrored by her clients when she was affected by something external, she was able to look inside of herself for the truth and was able to face that truth.

> How sensitive I am when confronted with the pain of losing a spouse. When I tried to work through this with myself, I found that I almost could not even allow myself to think of how it must be to lose a spouse.

This self-reflective process is one of looking within self, knowing that the only person we can change is ourself. Diane realized the importance of coming to terms with issues of the self before dealing with these issues with others. Through this process Diane saw herself as a "facilitator" of pain. "Maybe all I have really learned is that being the facilitator of an examination of pain does not make me the perpetrator of pain."

Diane acknowledged how childhood `self talk', such as, "It's not nice to make other people cry", still affects her as an adult and as a counsellor.

Diane also tells how experiencing a situation helped to "really get it". She talks about how her supervisor facilitated this process for her.

> When a supervisor can shed some light for me in a `real live' case in which I am involved, I finally get some Ah Haa! These are the same ideas I have read in theoretical contexts, but true to my style, they don't make a usable connection for me until they are directly applied."

Enid's Story

Part of Enid's story is seeing the connection between her experience and that of a client. She recognized the impact of positive reinforcement on herself and then committed to creating that for her clients.

> How much I actually respond to the positive, need it, seek it out. How good it makes me feel. In my clinical work, I will make a conscious effort to use different forms of positive reinforcement to empower, to join, to make my clients believe in themselves.

But Enid also realized that the `helper' role can take on an over-responsible role as well - "too much of a good thing" - and that it can be an ongoing struggle to try to find a balance between the two.

> Sometimes I operate in a suffocatingly nurturing mode in order to `help' or to make a person feel better, this can stunt a client's potential growth. There are times that I can fuse and empathize too intensely.
> I believe that I could have altered the outcome of this interview by trying to find out more about this person, her life, her interests, her family, etc. instead of trying to `solve the problem'.
> I was so busy being a `nice supportive' person (too afraid to hurt him or to have him not like me) that I may have crippled him even more.

Enid's awareness of her own internal process was one of the ways she coped with dissonance.

> I think that my greatest learning is that my own discomforts need to become signals to me to step emotionally back and to evaluate what is actually happening. Listen with my heart but speak from within my head.

A change in attitude also helped Enid in coping with dissonance. "This experience reinforced for me the need to go slow, the client will lead the way, that doors open when the time is right." [trusting the client, trusting the process]

Enid had high expectations for herself as a counsellor.

> I want to be effective by being real in the here and now. I want to create an environment so that my client can risk enough to be real too. I would like to make a meaningful difference in my client's life.

Fran's Story

Fran began by expressing her awareness of feeling that "people appeared competitive and judgmental to me". Insightfully, she discovered that what she seemed to perceive in her colleagues was actually a reflection of how she felt about herself.

> My initial judgment of my classmates was about my view of self. My need to have the external environment safe for me to just be was about my inability to completely accept me. At this point, I believe that as I learn to love and accept me unconditionally, without judgment, I will gradually lose that nagging critical voice that is so quick to fault, try, judge, and execute.

Fran also expressed her feelings of insecurity in her development as a counsellor. "Am I doing this right? "Shouldn't I be studying under a mentor in order to grasp what to do and how to use techniques in the different theoretical orientations? Shouldn't I practice these interventions before using them on innocent clients?"

She went on to express a broad range of other feelings associated with the process.

> This ambition of being a counsellor is my passion....I realize that along with the jubilation of achieving my goal of entering the masters program in counselling are the sacrifices and losses of going back to school. I'm scared? I'm excited? I feel like crying? Wow!

The need to do things perfectly - `perfect' therapy is a part of Fran's story. This drive towards perfection may be one that has been the motivator for her successes in life. However, Fran's perfectionist tendencies seem to have created dissonance for her.

> Every time that I choose a particular approach to try with my client, I question whether the technique will help. I am not sure if the technique I choose will work. I find myself wanting to be guaranteed that the intervention that I choose will definitely help my clients want to make changes in their life and consequently make them feel better.
> If I was an expert counsellor, I would know how to phrase my sentences and what interventions to use to help him [the client] make a shift.

Fran also seemed to struggle with the dilemma of either `doing' or `being' with a client; being able to `let go' of her own agenda.

> I believe that I need to learn the balance between being there for my client by focusing on his agenda and on the other hand to know what tools to use and when to implement those tools so that I can help my client move out of being stuck.

Her feelings of over-responsibility and wanting to `fix' the client were tied up in this struggle.

> As he [the client] left the counselling room, I worried about him. I wondered how I could help him out of his pain. If only his wife could love him the way he needs to be loved. If only he did not have to work so hard to choose a new career....Sometimes I wish I had a magic wand to make things better instantaneously.

Fran's recognition that counselling is not a step-by-step process with guaranteed results, helped to alleviate some of her feelings of dissonance. "I'm realizing this counselling is not a quick process in which one can implement x, y, or z treatment technique and make clients all better."

Fran's story speaks of moral and ethical dilemmas that she faced, raising many questions.

> They [the clients] have just really begun in the last few weeks to allow me to see a part of themselves that they keep very hidden. How dare I then bring up the subject of termination! Is this ethical? Am I telling them that they are dispensable? Am I saying that any counsellor will do? If so, of what importance is the therapeutic relationship? Wouldn't uprooting a client at this stage be too traumatic? Am I breaking the

> principle of beneficence if my leaving the counselling relationship with a client causes them great emotional harm?

Grace's Story

Grace began her story by expressing a fear of being judged by her peers. Fortunately, she recognized this as a projection of her own judgment of herself. "I realize, however, how much I judge myself and project that on them. It's my own stuff."

Grace realized that her effectiveness `out there' with her clients really depended on how well she resolved her "own stuff".

> When I do make mistakes, I need to forgive myself. As a counsellor, it is important for me to be able to forgive my clients (be gentle on them) when they make mistakes as well. The more I can forgive and accept myself for all of who I am, the more I will be able to do that with my clients and others around me.

"I know that the more I take care of my own needs, the more I will be fully present to others (my clients)".

> I realized how important being liked is to me, not just being liked - but being liked by everyone. As a counsellor, I need to accept that there will be people (client) who will not like me or would prefer to see someone else. My sensitivity to the client's needs and my commitment to the client to do the most good will call me to `let go' of my need to be liked by everyone.

Grace also realized how important it was to keep her "stuff" separate from her client's "stuff". One of the key ways to take care of self is through awareness of boundaries, or lack of boundaries.

> For me to be aware when what is being said by my client is triggering something in me and to maintain my boundaries - to realize what is my

> stuff and what is theirs. This will not take my power away and when it is appropriate I can then deal with my own issue.

Boundaries are not just related to counselling relationships, but within personal relationships as well (parallel process), especially when faced with "counselling" a close friend. Grace struggled with the issue of not being able to end a conversation when its length had well exceeded her comfort zone. "Two hours is a long time. I have rights and needs as well. I need to let go of the `should's around that I should always be there for my clients".

Another boundary issue that seemed to impact both Grace's personal relationships and client relationships was that of being over-responsible.

> Within my own personal life, I have difficulty `letting go' of the need to protect my own children and to trust them more. I do struggle with believing in empowering my clients (and myself), although I also know I have a `rescuer' part in me.

Grace was aware of the influences of past experiences and "unfinished business" on the development as a counsellor, and found several ways that were helpful in dealing with these. "Talking to my peers, other counsellors, are ways to process it and also to journal about it".

Grace experienced a struggle between her head and her heart. "I know in my head that I can not take my clients home with me, but my heart sometimes has a life of its own."

Amongst the inner turmoil, Grace's belief and trust in the self provided inner strength and wisdom. "Personally, I need to nurture the spiritual part of me. I feel more empowered and trust my inner self more fully."

"For me to trust myself and believe in myself is important and plays an important role in the ability to trust and believe in my clients."

Grace also found that the support of colleagues was extremely powerful and necessary in her own growth and development as a counsellor. "Each of

us shared at such a deep level and I was really touched with the sensitivity, love and care within our group....We are not `sole flyers'.

Harold's Story

Harold's story focused on the academic, intellectual part of his life, with his newly attained knowledge and counselling techniques from the counselling program. After reading in one of the counselling text books, Harold observed that the importance of decision making in the counselling process reflected his own beliefs about how change occurs.

> I think the beginning key to changed behavior is making new decisions. Therefore how one discovers the problem, sets up goals, and explores alternatives can be done in many ways, but at some point decisions must be made by the client.

When Harold experienced anxiety around beginning his practicum placement, further reading in this area and the support by one of his peers helped to dissipate the anxiety.

> Another incident which helped to decrease my anxiety level was when we were practicing counselling and I was the client. I brought up my concern about having a high level of anxiety when counselling my first clients. My fellow student did an excellent job of counselling and I felt better after talking with him.

Attaining new skills seemed to alleviate Harold's anxiety and helped him feel somewhat "in control" of the therapeutic process. Harold then faced an "I don't know" experience when he could not play the "expert" role.

> This experience was critical in that it gave me confidence that I don't have to be an expert or have vast amounts of knowledge to be useful. I

> can resist temptation to be directive and be non-directive. It also demonstrated to me my limitations as a counsellor.

Harold expressed how great it felt for a client to "fit" the text as that experience seemed to validate the theoretical concepts that he was learning.

> This is critical for me because it was probably the first time in five years of academics that I observed book knowledge in real life. Even that which is presented in class as facts are theory to me because I can't say as I have experienced them in real life. It seems like academics and real life are two different worlds. Observing my client behaving in a way consistent with the text may have started the construction of a bridge between the two worlds.

Ian's Story

Ian admitted that the beginning workshop posed some reflective questions which opened up the space for him to examine his own attitudes and values, "perhaps for the first time". "What [italics added] I am doing [in the next five years] will not be as important as the way [italics added] I am doing things. The values, beliefs, and ideals that I hold, I would like to take with me into the future in whatever I choose to do."

The workshop also created an experience of dissonance for Ian as he struggled to support others whose values differed from his own. This led to an important learning in his development as a counsellor.

> Perhaps too, as a counsellor, I need to be able to accept uncritically the values that other people hold even if they are not constant with my own. Being in a group situation with others in the program, during the weekend, as they articulated their views prompted this evaluation of the issues related to values and an understanding of its importance.... Discovering the need to be open to different viewpoints and indeed values was thus an important learning experience and in many ways provided for me a useful starting point to the counselling courses.

Ian initially struggled with the negative feelings that resulted from his unfavorable comparison of himself to his colleagues. "Was there something wrong with me?" He then began to get in touch with ownership. "Ownership enables me comfortably to accept what others are saying without experiencing a need to compare myself in light of their observations." This helped him to appreciate and accept his differences.

Ian was also aware of the opening and closing of space. "Initially for me the exercise closed space - no doubt about that - but only because I tried to view myself in terms of the experiences of others...Reflection ultimately opened space, but only after realizing that different people will have different needs and will have different ways of showing these needs." With this experience and insight, Ian learned how essential openness and acceptance were to the counselling relationship.

Ian maintained a `reflective stance' throughout his story and committed to this stance as an ongoing process. "[Thus] I need to arm myself with a critical attitude (a hermeneutic of suspicions) and critically evaluate my role in the counselling situation, my methods, my intentions, and my motivations and not merely those of the client".

Being placed in the "shoes of a client" in a role-play exercise and experiencing the feeling of being disempowered and not being believed or validated was a powerful experience for Ian. It emphasized the need to value the client's subjective experience and trust the client's own process. "As a counsellor one should be comfortable with ambiguity and open-endedness, particularly in the opening stages of a relationship. Don't try and impose a framework on someone else's problems. Let the unfolding story of the client guide the framework, not vice versa".

Ian still struggled with the difficulty of letting go of his own agenda and coming to terms with his own limitations as a counsellor; trusting the client's own process

> One has to learn to let go of certain clients and one cannot force them to see that they need to change, nor can you or should you dictate what direction the change should take, nor can you help them make change until they themselves are ready.

Even with `knowing' this, Ian pondered and questioned his own competence, "I also wonder what if there was anything I could have done differently to perhaps bring about a different perhaps better, more satisfying result."

Jill's Story

Jill began her story with an insight around a major shift from an "outcome-oriented" to a "process-oriented" view of herself as a person. She saw herself very differently; in a new mode of "being-in-the-world", fully embracing the "learning experience".

Jill was aware of the paradigm shift in this learning environment and was "enjoying the experience of becoming free and autonomous" with the opening of space.

Conversing with others can be helpful to Jill in discovering what is her truth - distinguishing between her needs and those of her clients. "The client's needs should determine the form that the therapeutic relationship will take."

Through a conversation with a professor and through a personal experience in class, Jill became aware of a part of herself which she had not seen before.

> I was having to acknowledge how deeply ingrained, how much a part of me, my concern with pathology is and how severely it can limit my understanding of people - including my future clients....I'm also aware of the need to be aware of where my focus lies, and this increases the likelihood that, eventually I'll be able to effect the desired refocusing.

Jill recognized the blurred boundaries between the self and the

cou[illegible] seemed quite accepting of the fact that the two can not be

sep[illegible]

> [illegible]n't draw a clear distinction between my development as a person and my development as a counsellor. I believe that everything that contributes to the former of necessity contributes to the latter. The most important learnings revolve around ways in which my own attitudes and emotions facilitate or hinder my interaction with people.

Although an encounter with her supervisor turned out to be extremely difficult and conflictual, Jill was still able to identify important "learnings" from this painful experience.

> It should be obvious that what happened between [ ] and myself has prompted extensive reflection and self-examination along previously unexplored lines. This, in itself, cannot help but contribute to my development as a counsellor...I suspect that because [ ] was being so harshly critical of me, she served as an externalization of my overly harsh inner critic.

Jill found herself in a conflictual situation with her supervisor who disagreed on the plan for a client. Jill felt very strongly that what her supervisor was asking her to do was not appropriate. She pursued this with her supervisor and her supervisor supported Jill in her decision.

> I felt that it contributed significantly to my development as a counsellor in that it suggested to me that there was some merit to my view of the case and that sharing my views on how the case should be handled could sometimes influence a more experienced counsellor's view on the

> subject. This boosted my confidence in my judgment and made it more likely that I will engage in a dialogue with a supervisor if I disagree with his or her instruction regarding my cases in future.

Jill not only felt more confident, but also empowered by her supervisor.

The discovery of her limitations as a counsellor however, was painful, and experiencing those limitations was, of course, much more impactful than just reading about them.

> I'd come to understand at an emotional level that what happens in a given session depends as much on the client as it does on the counsellor. Now, I understand emotionally, though I find it difficult to accept in this case, that people other than myself and my client can be involved in, and influence the outcome of, a counselling relationship. (It's fine to study systems theory in the classroom, but seeing how it works in "real life" is far more convincing and disturbing to me).

Karen's Story

Like many others, Karen was quite impacted by the depth of sharing at the initial workshop. She felt that the telling of her story and listening to other colleague's stories in her small group helped facilitate a closeness that was not experienced with other members of the workshop. "We took the time to `listen' to each other". The experience helped put Karen in her client's shoes, and as a counsellor. This moved her to "developing my listening skills. I am encouraging myself to talk less and listen more".

This intensity of the group seemed to heighten the sensitivity to feelings of inclusion and exclusion for Karen. "Instead of the class members growing together over the past two weeks, I felt that group members seemed to be more "within" themselves and I was feeling like I did not belong with the group".

Being able to discuss this with her supervisor, Karen could then understand how "in our development as counsellors being `counselled', we would tend to be more reflective and within ourselves - a similar process that clients go through in their own development. The process is the ebb and flow of growth and development.

The appreciation of differences was also identified. "We should be aware at times when we feel that we need to belong, others may need to feel like they need to be alone. In that we should let our `leather stretch' when it gets wet, not put up barriers".

Through another critical incident, Karen emphasized the acknowledgement of "what fits for me".

> ...as I develop my counselling skills, it was important that I incorporate with my personal style, theoretical frameworks and models that were comfortable for me, not my classmates.

Because of some of her feelings of dissonance, Karen identified the importance of debriefing in being able to process specific issues. In one particular incident, Karen was role-playing a client and had some insights about what clients may be needing in a therapeutic relationship.

> When my counselor therapist and I returned to the classroom, I was aware that I felt `drained' and did not easily `come out' of that role of the depressed patient...Because I need time before facing the world again to `become myself', it made me realize that I had been `wide open', and needed time to close up again. Therefore, it may be important for the client who has opened up to the therapist to have time to close up again before the end of the session, before he faces the world.

Classroom lectures also impacted Karen's development as a counsellor by allowing her to look at her own personal life and situation. This was

brought to her attention by the familiar "pit" feeling in the stomach and reflecting on what that meant to her.

> Well, I think that I was beginning to feel guilty as I attended lectures on family issues and systems, functional patterns of interactions, and what keeps a family "stuck" within the ruts. Somewhere in a little "rut" I saw myself.

In one particularly rewarding experience, Karen was delighted to discover that her learned counselling skills could be used in other parts of her life outside of the therapeutic relationship. This helped her see that her role as counsellor was really not separate from her `self'.

> I intentionally used my developing counselling skills to help them [members of the women's group] focus on a "figure-ground" Gestalt perspective within a systems model of problem solving to help them understand what might influence the leadership style of a good leader. I also found that in order to gain their trust, I utilized empathetic responses, positive affirmation, a self-disclosure, normalizing techniques along with open ended questioning. It was a wonderful experience !!

Larry's Story

Larry shared how he valued the sense of openness and trust that quickly developed as his colleagues shared their "life" stories with each other.

> I was pleasantly surprised with the ease with which the group was willing to open up, share feelings, emotions, and experiences with the rest of the group. This suggested a sense of trust and colleague bonding that is extremely desirable, valuable and obviously of considerable merit in this area of study...It became evident that many of the anxieties I had with regard to beginning studying again were shared by others and that the air of anxiety/ uncertainty was effectively calmed...During the introductory workshop I felt inspired, invited to develop and grow personally and to perfect my own personal styles and theory.

Larry struggled, though, with wanting to do what came naturally and yet wanting to do the 'right' thing, professionally. "I feel very ambivalent about the situation. I recognize that I now have a professional responsibility in not attempting to use my "new" skills yet I would gladly give this young lady support and an "ear" to her problems."

With a friend Larry also struggled with how to "be" in this possible dual relationship when his friend confided in Larry about thoughts of suicide. "Not counselling your friends is one thing but letting a comment such as this [suicide] go by is another...We had another beer and got talking about hunting and all the time I'm thinking, "don't counsel him...you are not allowed".

Larry did, however, find his new counselling skills to be a real benefit in his current working situation. They helped him gain a greater insight into the client's world.

> The critical point for me is that the skills I am learning are permitting me to gain a greater insight into the experience of the clients with which I work....There is no doubt that constructs, particularly the concept of relationship and empathy are greatly enhancing this process.

Through a role-play situation, Larry was affirmed when he followed his "hunches" and saw past the issue that his client initially presented. Things are not always what they seem. "The experience of having a client present with one issue and then to discover the real issue was extremely enlightening and powerful."

Larry also experienced how being non judgmental and allowing himself to be "led in the "dance" with a client, built a trusting therapeutic relationship and permitted the client to let go of his defenses.

The need to choose a specific theory was a source of dissonance for Larry. "Perhaps the greatest struggle for me has been deciding which peg to

hang my hat on in terms of counselling theory". After careful consideration of the various theories, Larry then felt comfortable in developing an eclectic approach.

Maureen's Story

Maureen began her story by getting in touch with the importance of self-care and realizing how much she has neglected taking care of herself. She was aware of the self-talk that often seemed to get in her way. A parallel process was evident when Maureen decided she would encourage her clients to do the same.

> As a counsellor it is important that I nourish my self and honour my self and my needs, both in order to maintain my objectivity and to diminish stress. As well, since I value taking time for me, this will be a skill that I would encourage my clients to develop.

Being placed in a position similar to that of a client allowed Maureen to identify with how a client would feel when told that she was a student clinician. "This experience has helped me to "walk in the client's shoes"; to realize how important it is to treat the client with respect and to treat the client as a person, not a case or a label."

Through another role-play situation in class, Maureen, as the client, experienced the impact of certain types of questioning and the impact of language.

> The impact of the words "invite the client". For me those words are key words. I know I am much more willing to discuss and share of my self if I am asked in a gentle, non-judgmental, non-threatening way. Likely most clients would feel the same.

A discussion in class triggered feelings of stress from having many things to cope with. "How do I achieve balance?" This led Maureen to wonder, "There will be clients who will present the same feelings, so how can I help them if I can't achieve balance in my own life?" To deal with this dissonance, Maureen increased her awareness around this issue by identifying her own coping patterns.

An experiential exercise in class gave Maureen an opportunity to take care of herself. "For once in my life it was O.K. for me to stop, be still, and not move... Today, for a moment, I consciously chose to stop, to be quiet, and watch the others while reflecting on my own needs. I felt near tears - yet the feeling was one of relaxation and letting go".

Again, Maureen related her experience to that which clients may encounter. "I realize the importance for me to be aware that clients may experience this same roller coaster feeling...Through the use of self-reflective questioning, I can invite clients to empower themselves by making conscious choices..."

Maureen also discussed her awareness of how difficult it was for her to maintain boundaries, especially in the area of expectations.

> It will be crucial for me to keep my boundaries clear in the therapeutic setting, so that I do not get hooked in when my client fails to do something he has agreed to do or breaks a contract with me (or someone else)....This will be a tough one for me, because I have felt my worth tied to other people's performance, and have felt that they do not value me when they do not do what they said they would do.

Inner emotional turmoil was also experienced when Maureen asked several questions of herself: "Do I confront people and let them know when I feel let down by something they have done? Or is this strictly my issue - for me to solve on my own? Do I value my self enough to speak up and express

my frustrations? Or, do I put my self second in order to maintain a positive relationship?"

Having personally experienced how good it felt to be really listened to, and how much closer she felt to the person who listened, Maureen wanted to ensure that she provided that experience for her clients. "It is crucial to allow the client the time to tell his story before I jump in with questions. Sometimes the most wonderful thing is to have someone listen to me - clients likely feel the same".

On the other hand, Maureen was also able to identify a non-productive pattern she had been following in her marriage that she did not want to follow with her clients. "I now am able to see beyond the rescuing and to see the impact it has [in the video] on the couple's relationship. Rescuing merely perpetuates the under functioning pattern."

Maureen still struggled with her discomfort at seeing people in pain and her desire to rescue them. "I don't like to see people in pain, and so I comfort them, but is my motive to comfort them, or is it to make my self feel more at ease? Being aware of my rescuing habit, and being aware of the impact rescuing can have on relationships, is a good beginning towards handling the problem. I now have that awareness, not only at a cognitive level, but at a gut level. Now I can act on that awareness."

From observing her supervisor doing therapy, Maureen experienced many learnings, one of which:

> The importance of knowing my "own stuff" in order that I can avoid projecting, and recognize and deal with it when I am projecting. I am there for the client, not to handle my own stuff. If I let my "stuff" get in the way, the client will sense it and his progress will stop, as he will subconsciously realize that I am no longer there for him.

An important realization for Maureen was that, no matter what others told her, she was just not ready to make a decision. This provided insight into the limitations of a counsellor.

> The counsellor can try all sorts of techniques, but until the client can accept the idea, nothing will happen, except possibly increasing frustration levels on the part of both the client and the counsellor. The counsellor must be patient and allow the client to proceed at his own pace.

Maureen spoke of having faith and trust in her clients and also in God and surrendering to that - letting go of the responsibility and control. Her supervisor provided tremendous support and wisdom, including one particular saying that she treasured.

> "God grant me the serenity
> to accept the things I cannot change
> the courage to change the things I can
> and the wisdom to know the difference."

Nancy's Story

Nancy began her story by recognizing that she needed to take better care of herself and to not to 'force' her influence on clients.

> I must take care not to project my energy levels or motivational levels on others thereby influencing them to do what is not right for them. I must also take care not to overextend myself because I could become ineffective in a helping role... It is hard for me to "take time.

Much the same issue came up when Nancy had "everything organized and planned" for her first interview, although the interview did not unfold as she expected. "This was not how the initial interview was supposed to look!"

Nancy struggled with the way the interview "should" be and the way it actually was. Having gone through this experience of dissonance, Nancy realized that she needed to stay flexible and follow the client's lead. "When one is dealing with people as opposed to things anything can and will happen. It is important to 'stay' with the client. It is their agenda much more than it is yours".

Through journalling, Nancy got in touch with how beneficial understanding and dealing with issues from her childhood were in relation to understanding adolescent clients. Nancy could identify with what many of today's adolescents are going through. "I do need to address this area of sensitivity in myself and use my understanding of adolescence in a way that will benefit the children with whom I come in contact. They can benefit from my understanding."

For Nancy, self-reflection was an important process in her development as a counsellor. "I appreciate better the need to reflect on my past history from time to time in order to be more self-aware. I must be self-aware in order to be effective with others."

Through an experience of putting herself in the "client's shoes, Nancy realized " how it is crucial to entertain all possibilities when someone comes for guidance, support, or help in coping. It is most likely a good idea to start with the simple and work to the complex if in fact working to the complex becomes necessary at all".

Working with a client triggered memories of a similar issue that Nancy had struggled with. The work led to growth for both Nancy and her client in this therapeutic process.

> As we [client and herself] rehearsed "I" statements I realized that these are some of the very things I had difficulty with in the past. There has been growth for my client and growth for myself in the process. I

> couldn't ask for more than that. I also remembered that in the past I have experienced difficulty expressing my needs clearly, thinking that I would be more lovable if I went along with another's wishes rather than my own. I remember fearing the loss of love if I created conflict. This helped me understand her fears more clearly.

Nancy reflected back on the past four months and realized that she has learned a great deal; she looked at the world a little differently now.

> My view of myself is changing...My world view has changed significantly in one main way...The past is always with us and provides the learning that facilitates change. The future brings hope that is a necessary condition for growth. The present is the playground whereupon we can act out our lives with intentionality. Intentionality will result when the world view is a whole one which encompasses past, present, and future.

Olive's Story

Olive began her story by expressing her appreciation in reaching this stage of her counsellor training and her faith in the future. "I felt very thankful for God for his guidance and his faithfulness in fulfilling all his promises and I again felt the assurance that he will always take care of me, even in situations that are seemingly impossible."

Olive recognized the importance of emotional support for herself. "It is very important for me (and perhaps others) to have someone that understands me, to be supportive of me and to help me understand and gain insight about myself not only through crisis, but all throughout my life."

Olive also experienced the physical effects of not taking care of herself. "I really ought to know my limitations and physical exhaustion level, but somehow, I've arranged a day that is far too hard to handle for myself. The

stress simply starts from the shoulders, proceeds up the neck and is really hard to bear when it gets to the head."

In a counselling session with her most "challenging" client, Olive discovers her limitations as a counsellor. "It is not my responsibility or my abilities or skills that is going to change her [the client]. It is her willingness to adapt a new way of relating to the world that is crucial in her development. Nothing in the world is going to change her if she is unwilling to change." Thus Olive decided to let go of the "expert" counsellor and opt for the "I don't know" counsellor stance instead.

As a result of a role-play exercise in class, Olive discovered the importance of maintaining boundaries.

> As a counsellor and a person, I should not be swept away or be overly empathetic to people I interact with to the extreme that I agree and identify totally and subjectively with their view thus losing my objectivity and ability to analyze the situation thus rendering me ineffective as a counsellor.

Being able to identify her with a client through another role play exercise, Olive gained some insight and empathy as to what a client may be experiencing in a therapeutic setting.

> Through this exercise, I could really feel the anxiety and nervousness and the ambiguity a client may feel when they walk into a counselling situation for the first time. Thus as a counsellor, I should really give clients some time to relax and learn about the context from which they came. Moreover, when clients are reluctant to talk about their problem or when they are very vague and slow about disclosing their concerns, I should not take it as a sign of failure on my part but be empathetic as to where the clients came from and their nervousness about actually telling someone about their problems, perhaps for the first time.

While studying for a midterm exam it struck Olive that learning to counsel was not simply a matter of getting information from books and trying

to use it. "It [books]seems artificial and inauthentic...After actual counselling sessions, however, reading the text made much more sense and some of the materials actually applies!! I still need to say that it is the assimilation and integration of information and knowledge into one's self that is crucial to the process of becoming an authentic counsellor!!"

Themes

Through my interaction with each story, it became obvious that there were many "common experiences" (or themes) that contributed to the development of a counsellor. The "common themes" that I have chosen to focus on were clearly heard. The way I have chosen to capture these "common themes" reflects my understanding of the stories as I stand outside all of them. The themes seemed to fall into two main categories: dissonance and experiential learning.

Dissonance

Many of the common themes had to do with dissonance, both the forms it took and how participants reacted to it. Some participants shared more of themselves and described their struggle with dissonance in detail. Others seemed to gloss over their inner struggle, perhaps not even wanting to acknowledge it. It is important to acknowledge the untold stories and to wonder ....

Forms of Dissonance

The critical incidents revealed many forms of dissonance that had been encountered by the participants. The most common forms of dissonance that

the participants struggled with were non-acceptance of self, feelings of incompetency, and unclear boundaries. The participants experienced inner turmoil, battling between the "shoulds" and the reality of their experience.

Non-acceptance of Self. Feelings of non-acceptance seemed to come up in several different types of situations. Many times these feelings resulted from high expectations. Some participants described how they had achieved so much to get where they were and felt they "should" be getting this more easily. The questioning of whether "I am good enough" (in comparison to peers) was also an issue for many participants. Iris shared, "Initially for me the exercise closed space - no doubt about that - but only because I tried to view myself in terms of the experiences of others, I wondered whether I should have felt more, whether I was lacking in feeling or not, particularly in terms of the reactions of other group members and what this would mean for me as a counsellor".

Non-acceptance of self was also seen when some participants felt judged by their peers. Interestingly, none of the participants who expressed the feelings of being judged by others, with the exception of one participant, identified this as coming from anyone else but their own colleagues. Carol describes her experience, "As the sharing continued around the circle, I questioned whether I would let my new `colleagues' know information about my background which may lead them to question my competence as a future counsellor." These feelings of being judged and not accepted by others reflected their own feelings of non-acceptance and self- doubts. Fran summarizes this realization. "Of course I realize that my reactions are all about self. My initial judgment of my classmates was about my view of self. My need to have the external environment safe for me to just be was about my inability to completely accept me. The workshop setting has reminded me of where I am in acceptance of self".

Incompetency. This form of dissonance was prevalent in many of the stories; even if not overtly expressed, feelings of incompetence seemed to be at the base of many critical incidents. Ian was forthright in his disclosure. "Moreover it leaves me with somewhat of a crisis of confidence and lots of self-doubts. What could I have done differently? Could I have been more confident with the client? Could I have been more reassuring, more directive?" Most of the participants had come from backgrounds where they felt a level of confidence in either their academic experience or their work experience. To come from that into such a non-traditional learning environment as the counselling Master's program was quite disorienting. As one participant said, "This type of education experience that I am now participating in is very different from anything I have known in the past". Feelings of incompetency of course, also resulted from the "I don't know" experiences common to the development phase of any new skill. Fran wrote, "I do not know what will make him better. For me this is a scary revelation. I really do not know."

Unclear Boundaries. This source of dissonance manifested itself in a variety of ways for the individual participants. For Grace, it was an issue that impacted both her personal and professional life.

> As an extrovert, I have always enjoyed being around people and getting a lot of energy from them. I learned that I need some space for myself. When I was an undergrad, the university was a fairly isolating place for me...I did not have to work to have that space for myself... In this program, I realize that I must consciously create that space for myself. As a counsellor, I need to be able to set boundaries with people.

Maureen recognized the struggle with her boundaries when involved with clients in a counselling relationship.

> Where I will have to be really clear is in not attaching my self to the client's results, or lack of results...Based on how I have operated in the past, keeping my boundaries really clear will be important in order for me to maintain an effective therapeutic stance.

Becoming over-responsible - the "rescuer" - is usually another indication of unclear boundaries, and often creates dissonance. The battle that occurs between the heart and the head on this issue can be a very difficult one and is faced by many counsellor trainees. Enid came to terms with this issue when she explained, "I think that my greatest learning is that my own discomforts need to become signals to me to step emotionally back and to evaluate what is actually happening. Listen with my heart but speak from within my head". This 'helper' characteristic is present in so many counsellors because it so often is the one that calls people into the counselling profession.

Reactions to Dissonance

The participants reacted to dissonance in many different ways. Some participants were more "doers", creating and following a plan of action to lessen the dissonance. Others were more "be'ers", choosing to learn from their dissonance by reflecting on their awarenesses. The most common ways of reacting to dissonance were a change in attitude, having faith, using self-affirmations, and turning to others for support.

Change in Attitude. This form of reacting to dissonance was the most common, probably because most attitude changes came about as a result of self reflection, and self reflection was facilitated through the writing of critical incidents. Other methods of data collection, such as interviews, are less self-directed and therefore may be less conducive to self reflection or attitude change.

Increased acceptance of self was the primary attitude change. Beth described her coming to terms with acceptance of self, "I don't have to be a

perfect counsellor this week; I won't be a perfect counsellor by Christmas, and I will almost certainly always have doubts about my efficacy because of the nature of the counselling interaction.

Increased acceptance of self was sometimes expressed clearly and directly and sometimes it was inferred by "reading between the lines". Enid found an expressive way of describing her acceptance of self. "I am learning to feel comfortable within my own skin".

Faith. Many participants talked about falling back on some form of "faith" to help them in struggling with dissonance. Although other words were used, the reference seemed to be to "something" beyond their normal resources. Angie speaks of "Hope". Beth describes her `faith' as, "Is someone or something really looking out for me? I believe God delivers the occasional kick in the pants that I need to wake me up and make me think about what I am doing". Grace reflects, "As a counsellor, personally, I need to nurture the spiritual part of me. I feel more empowered and trust my inner self more fully. I will call on the goddess within myself, whenever I need to and to know that I have the inner wisdom within myself".

Self-Affirmation. A number of the participants used self affirmations to help in their struggles with dissonance. Some participants explained how saying self-affirmations to themselves would alleviate the dissonant feelings and they would then feel "good about themselves". After Angie, a participant in this study speaks of her emotional dissonance, she lists some affirmations for herself; one being, "I can influence my life and I can choose the perspective with which I am going to observe it". Another participant when dealing with feelings of incompetency around asking the "right" questions of a client, shared, "When I get worried and insecure about my ability to help a

client, I will make myself remember these words: I am learning; I am taking skills I already possess, making them conscious, and refining them".

Turning to Others for Support. Many of the participants also related to dissonance by turning to others - professors, supervisors, and colleagues - for support. Often through this interaction, the dissonance would be alleviated or diminished; a "positive experience". Harold was feeling anxious about beginning his counselling practicum and how effective he would be as a counsellor. As a client in a role play situation he sought the support of a fellow student who role played a counsellor. After discussing his anxiety with "his counsellor", Harold said, "I felt better after talking with him". Diane was struggling with resistance on the part of the client and turned to her supervisor for support. "[My supervisor], as expected, posed me a number of thought provoking questions. I am unable to recall exactly her wording that caused me to see things differently, however, she did accomplish this end."

Many participants seemed to recognize the importance of sharing and interacting with `others'. ""Often I am most strong when I ask for support. Ask friends, colleagues, or turn to God for help". One participant felt unsure and incompetent in dealing with a client for the first time. After she consulted with her seminar peers, she felt more confident. "I have used the counsellor tool of peer consulting".

Experiential Learning

The other main category into which the common themes seemed to fall consisted of those themes that dealt primarily with experiential learning. Since some of the experiential learnings certainly involved dissonance, classification under this category was somewhat arbitrary. The themes in the dissonance

category, however, spoke mainly of struggles that were focused on the participants' own development. Themes in the experiential learning category dealt with insights that were not only useful for personal growth, but also helped the participants identify with what clients would experience.

The connection between 'self' and clients was acknowledged through the many experiences that could be identified as common to both. We are all connected to each other in some way. "It isn't 'us' and 'them'. It's really only 'us'...we the human species. Almost every participant's story included a place where they could put themselves in the client's shoes. Identification with clients was very impactful, both in constructed situations and through own personal experiences. After a role-play situation, one participant said, "I could really feel the anxiety and nervousness and the ambiguity a client may feel when they walk into a counselling situation for the first time".

Most participants found that experiential learning was very influential in their development as a counsellor. "I had learned a tremendous amount from this experience. I found that I much prefer this form of experiential learning rather than the traditional lecturing form of teaching". Almost every participant's story included a place where they could put themselves in the client's shoes. The experiential learning was either intentional or unintentional and included both positive and what at first appeared to be negative experiences. Whatever form the experiential learning took, it was almost always embraced by the participants.

> I'm still always amazed by the power of living an experience. I haven't really learned anything new on the cognitive level in what I have expressed here. I've read about this, I've reasoned it out, I've talked about it with others. But none of these qualifies as experience on the affective level.

The experiential learning experiences most often led to a significant insight. Again, there were not only many insights but a variety of different insights throughout the participants' stories; some expressed more deeply than others. The most common ones were the need to take care of self, the need to be listened to, the power of group, and appreciation of differences.

Need to Take Care of Self.

Many participants entered this program and felt quite overwhelmed by the emotional and academic demands that they faced. Through this experience, they realized the importance of taking care of themselves and then were able to understand at a deeper level just how important it is for clients to learn how to take care of themselves as well. Through an experiential exercise in class, a participant realized how she had not been taking care of herself, emotionally and how she needed to listen to her inner voice as to what was the best for her. "The modeling of that behavior [taking care of own needs] to my clients will also help to facilitate the growth in their development of healthy relationships". Other participants were also able to recognize their past lack of commitment to making time for and taking care of themselves. As a result, many chose to seriously commit to that in the future. One participant recognized how easy it was for her to put others first and to not honour her own needs. In this particular situation, she chose to look after herself first. "Since I value taking time for me, this will be a skill that I would encourage my clients to develop".

Need to be Listened to.

A lot of participants also personally experienced the importance of their need to be listened to. From the weekend "retreat", a participant experienced the importance of being heard in a small group situation and wanting to continue that process during the two-hour supper break. "It might appear that each one of us needed more time to have our peers listen to our stories...we

took the time to listen to each other". Another participant expressed how she valued her close relationship with a room mate. "I also need people to talk to...They [clients] may be seeking someone to listen to them, or someone with whom they can share a burden". Again, through reflecting on their own experience, the participants were able to fully appreciate how large a part of the counselling experience "just being listened to" really is.

The Power of Group

The interactions within a group were the most talked about in the critical incidents. The sharing within a group setting was also a meaningful experience for many of the participants.

> The patient, supportive silence of my group certainly contributed to my decision to share; not sharing would have been more scary. At one point in my sharing, one of my group members reached out and touched my knee. It was like being thrown a lifeline.

Another participant with her own internal struggle declared, "The sharing of real issues in small groups was the specific catalyst for my 'revelation". Carol also shared how a small group experience had impacted; how she had experienced closeness after each member shared deeper parts of themselves. "This experience has left me with an appreciation of my colleagues....Our group members were deeply emotionally connected and it was very special to be invited to each other's worlds".

Appreciation of Differences.

Through a variety of personal experiences, participants became aware of the importance of both recognizing and valuing the uniqueness of others (clients). After being challenged about her beliefs and values, a participant was able to reaffirm herself and to know that she could accept others who did not share her beliefs. "It is important to emphasize the need to respect other's

convictions". After an experiential exercise in class, one participant compared his response to the responses of others. Initially he felt that there was "something wrong with him" and then reflected, "Different individuals will get different things from various activities and to differing degrees". This was an important insight into dealing with clients.

The Critical Incident Story

The critical incidents themselves have told a story of their own.

The most common sources of critical incidents - what participants identified as a significant experience in their development of a counsellor - were the in-class experiential learning sessions and counselling sessions with clients. The experiential learning sessions consisted of role-plays, small group exercises, and large group exercises (specifically the 'step' exercise), and the initial weekend workshop.

The critical incidents varied in length from a third of a typed page (single spaced) to five pages. However, on the average, the length of a critical incident was one and a half pages long. Some critical incidents followed the specifically outlined format and some did not. As a result, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish between what preceded the critical incident, the critical incident itself and the incident's influence on counsellor development.

It was striking that in most of the critical incidents, the participants put themselves in the client's shoes, either intentionally or unintentionally and had numerous awarenesses and insights. The critical incidents however, mostly reflected what the participants felt was important to do "in the future". Not many talked about what they had actually done to put these insights into action.

Some participants' collection of critical incidents followed a dominant theme while others covered a variety of themes.

In the process of writing these critical incidents, some participants reflected on the process itself. "Hopefully, by finding a place to unload, whether it be writing my critical incidents or talking with my supervisor and colleagues, I will be better prepared to be present for my clients...I feel that at times these critical incident assignments are opportunities to create a therapeutic outlet for me".

"By journalling I can pinpoint areas of growth that I need to address and I can identify and explore issues that interfere with my ability to provide a good therapeutic atmosphere for my clients. It frightens me to think that there are things about me that are outside of my awareness. Journalling is a device to help me keep this unawareness in check."

"Reflection will continue to be one of the most important [illegible]s in my life".

The critical incidents were supposed to be focused on how they impacted the participants' development as counsellors. Many participants, however, also spoke of their personal growth from reflecting on the incidents. Connections were made and experiences paralleled between personal lives and professional lives. "I don't draw a clear distinction between my development as a person and my development as a counsellor...the most important learnings revolve around ways in which my own attitudes and emotions facilitate or hinder my interactions with people". This speaks to the complexity of our humanness and our experiences. There is no black or white, only grey. Our life experiences just 'are'. My encounter with these stories is my own reality -

not that of the participants. My hope is that by attempting to enter `their worlds' I was able to understand a piece of their truth.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND SECONDARY REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A discussion of the findings in relation to existing literature was a difficult task. As previously mentioned, studies that focus on counsellor development from the perspective of the counsellors themselves, are extremely limited. To my knowledge, the present study is the first of its kind to attempt to understand the "lived experience" of the beginning of counsellor development from the perspective of the student counsellor, using a hermeneutic approach. Integrating theory with the participants' "lived experience" seemed to be the most beneficial way to discuss the findings. As a whole, each participants' experience did not "fit" into any particular model or a theory. However common components of individual experiences could be further understood by relating them to existing theory. For example, why do people react to dissonance the way they do? Theory can perhaps help us to understand why the participants in this study reacted the way they did to situations which created dissonance for them. A caution is necessary, however. My attempts to provide linkages between theory and experience should not be perceived as "the" definitive explanation of the participants' experiences, only as a broadening of possible understandings.

In this chapter both the themes and some of the individual experiences of the participants are discussed in relation to the existing theories. Two important paths that lead to change are dissonance (both the experiencing of and the responding to dissonance), and experiential learning. First, different theories are used to help provide a deeper understanding in the areas of dissonance and attitude change. The many sources of dissonance and the ways

of coping with that dissonance were a major component of the participants' experiences. Their experiencing of and response to dissonance resulted in change, which took the form of self-discoveries, awareness, and growth, as well as an integration of beliefs, emotions, and behaviors. Experiential learning is discussed next. Every participant shared to some degree the importance of 'lived experience'. Literature is discussed which attempts to explain experiential learning and the impact and importance of experiential learning in counsellor development. Specifically, the types of 'lived experience' and other related themes are discussed. Also included in the secondary literature review is a section on supervision. This area is included not because the participants in the present study identified this as a common theme, but because of its "known" importance through previous research.

Dissonance

During the "experience" of counsellor development, attitudes were altered when dissonance was aroused. Dissonance increases a person's motivation to change (Axsom, 1989). Dissonance was experienced by the participants in interactions with supervisors, clients, colleagues, and self.

Sawatzky et al. (1991) suggest that the overall experience of dissonance might be like the experience of adolescence, a period of relative anxiety, turmoil, excitement and exploration, the ideal outcome of which is newfound confidence and identity. In this current study, the participants' stories reflect the various experiences and emotions associated with the dissonance that adolescents can face.

Many of the participants experienced the fear, frustration, anxiety, and confusion that frequently results from the recognition of skill, knowledge or experience deficiencies. This emotional turmoil and anxiety is associated with inexperience and presumed to have to rely on oneself more than expected. To help to alleviate this dissonance, Pates and Knasel (1989) suggest that a 'de-mystification' process needs to be encouraged. They believe that student counsellors should be encouraged to see interpersonal skills as essentially natural ones which can be usefully refined and developed by themselves and not just skills that are the exclusive prerogative of 'experts'.

The following theories will attempt to explain how the different sources of dissonance were experienced and responded to by the participants in this study.

Theories

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Festinger (1957) stated that cognitive dissonance is an unpleasant state of tension generated when a person has two or more bits of information that are inconsistent or do not "fit together".

Aronson (1969) argues that cognitive dissonance does not occur with just any two cognitions. They must be cognitions about behavior and self-concept that are at variance, for example, "I am an honest person" and "I have misled someone". A participant described an experience of believing that she was a good listener and yet, she realized that her behavior did not support that belief. After this experience of dissonance, she was able to decide to change her feelings of incompetency and be more congruent. However, if people do not think that they are honest and they lie, no dissonance will occur and no

change will result. Attitude-behavior consistency is greatest for certain personality types (Worchel, Cooper, & Goethals, 1988):

Low Self Monitors, people who are particularly apt to show attitude-behavior consistency, tend to rely on their inner states and disposition when making behavior decisions. They select situations where they can fully express their attitudes. High Self Monitors, however, tend to be sensitive to situational cues and base their decisions on what the outside world seems to demand (Worchel et al., 1988). On this basis, participants in this study consisted both of low self-monitors and high self-monitors.

"Doers" show attitude-behavior consistency, by taking a more active role. A dominant theme in one participant's story was how frequently she put her words into action. An example was when she became aware of her need to take better care of herself: to exercise and spend time alone. She exhibited consistency between this attitude and action by following through with spending some time by herself writing and then by riding her bike. After experiencing a great deal of emotional turmoil around feeling that she was "not getting enough" from her supervisor, another participant made a commitment to act. "I have come to the decision that I will seek out my colleagues, Ph.D. students, and possibly other supervisors as to supplement what supervision I am receiving".

People with high levels of self-consciousness and moral reasoning also exhibit consistency between behavior and attitude. They tend to be more sensitive when something just does not "feel right" and are bothered by it. Many participants' stories consisted of dissonance and a heightened sensitivity to what was "right". A participant questioned her level of competency and whether she "should" be counselling clients at this stage of her development. "Shouldn't I practice these interventions before using them on innocent clients?

Is it ethical to use the interventions that I have read about without being thoroughly trained in them?"

"An attitude is a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related" (Allport, 1935). In order for a change of attitude to occur, congruency needs to be achieved through a shift of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels. Attitudes formed through direct experience are more likely to be consistent with behaviors.

Some of the dissonance leading to change in the development of a counsellor can be understood in relation to two different paradigms - "induced compliance" and "effort justification".

The paradigm of induced compliance. This paradigm is characterized by individuals who are persuaded to behave in ways that are inconsistent with their private attitudes (Worchel et al., 1988). Some of the participants in this study expressed an internal struggle when they were faced with situations that went against their own beliefs. Critical factors necessary if induced compliance is to lead to dissonance-produced attitude change are: (1) choice; (2) commitment, (3) aversive consequences, and (4) personal responsibility (Worchel et al., 1988). A participant in this study stated how she wrestled with the issue of termination of clients. She felt guilt because she was "abandoning" her clients. This theme of unclear boundaries that presented in the form of over-responsibility was a dominant theme in her story. This dilemma of whether this was the correct thing to do raised many questions for her, "Am I telling them they are dispensable? Am I saying any counsellor will do?" She then acknowledge that termination can be a learning experience as it is a necessary part of life.

A situation that some of the participants in this study faced that went against their own beliefs was the learning environment itself. Varying levels of frustration were expressed in a number of critical incidents by participants who wrestled with the conflict between their belief of how they "should" be taught and how it actually was. One participant commented, "This experience is much different than any other training I have completed". Some participants expressed how this counselling Master's learning environment was much more anxiety producing than others they had been in (i.e. undergraduate degree program). Heppner and Roehlke (1984) suggest that student counsellors want techniques and directions to do counselling the "right way" from their supervisors. It may have "seemed easier", but the result would not have been an attitude change.

The effort justification paradigm. Axsom (1989) argues that the decision to suffer for something results in the tension state of cognitive dissonance. People can change their attitudes and behaviors if they are induced to suffer in order to achieve their goal. Participants often "voiced" the amount of frustration they were experiencing and then in the next "breath" how they felt more committed to their goal than ever. This goal is then highly valued. The awareness of pressures that lay ahead of her seemed to increase one participant's passion in becoming a counsellor. "I am enthused that I have chosen to face the pain of hard work and deferred gratification in order to achieve my goal of being a psychologist". Counsellors-in-training choose to enter a dissonance producing environment. As student counsellors, they are constantly putting themselves or being placed in situations in which they can learn from their interactions with clients, peers, supervisors, and others. These trainees are hampered by anxiety, lack of knowledge of technique, insufficient practical knowledge of counselling, insufficient belief in the creativity of their

clients, and inadequate familiarity with clients' psychological and social environments (Williams, 1987). They were seeking to advance their training, realizing that they did not "know enough" or "have all the skills" they believed desirable. Some of the participants questioned whether they would ever know enough to feel competent. The initial period of counsellor development was one of challenge, of facing up to weaknesses, and of discovering strengths through experimentation, self-questioning, and self-discovery (Sawatzky et al., 1991). Participants shared how they struggled with "balance" in their lives and feelings of being overwhelmed "by it all".

Axsom (1989) argued that subjects who exuded a high effort improved only when they were not provided with an opportunity to misattribute dissonance arousal. Student counsellors who exhibit a great deal of effort, will not change significantly if they can misattribute dissonance arousal (divert it somewhere else; discount it, or deny it). They need to go through that experience of feeling dissonance and recognize its source and its value. As part of the counsellor developmental experience, the student counsellor has freely chosen to undertake something high in effort in order to become a psychologist.

As these theories do not fully explain all of the findings from the participants' experiences, some alternatives to dissonance in explaining attitude change will now be discussed.

Impression Management Theory

People are motivated to "appear" consistent because they have been positively rewarded when it has looked as though they have acted consistently and negatively sanctioned when it has seemed that they acted inconsistently (Worchel et al., 1988). Conclusively, a change of attitude happens, not out of

some internal need for consistency, but to "appear" consistent. If it is true that these cognitive changes come about as a means of reducing the unpleasant tension state, then it may also be true that any means of reducing the tension may satisfactorily reduce the dissonance (Worchel et al., 1988). In this study, attitude change that occurred from appearing consistent was difficult to ascertain from the participants' critical incidents. It certainly was not specifically mentioned. Participants in this study may have "appeared" confident as beginning counsellors, when in fact they felt a lack of confidence. This appearance of confidence could then facilitate an attitude change of confidence.

Self-Perception Theory

Given that beliefs about self may be causal factors in how we feel about ourselves, how we behave, and the goals that we set, it is important to consider the origins of the self-concept and pathways for change and development (Littrell & Magel, 1991). Unlike dissonance theory, Self-Perception Theory views attitude change as the result of a nonmotivational, inferential process -- change that is information driven (Axsom, 1989). According to Bem (1972), persons rely upon two major sources of information when formulating beliefs about themselves. These sources are: (1) reaction of others and (2) self-observations. People who rely on "reaction of others" are people who use external sources of opinion such as supervisors or fellow classmates to draw conclusions about what they feel and the traits they possess. Many participants expressed emotional turmoil in this area, "Do I measure up , compared to my peers and in the eyes of my supervisors?" This can work both negatively and positively. When a client did not respond in the way a participant had "planned", the participant questioned her own competency and she found it very easy to blame herself for the client's reaction. Student counsellors seem to

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By

MONA LYNNE MATHESON 

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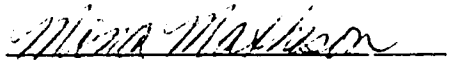

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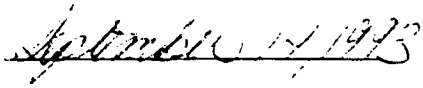
DATED: 

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **THE "BEGINNING" OF COUNSELLOR DEVELOPMENT: A HERMENEUTIC STUDY** submitted by MONA LYNNE MATHESON in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF EDUCATION in COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY.

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In memory of my dad

Abstract

This qualitative study was completed in order to gain a deeper understanding of the counsellor development experience from the student counsellor's perspective. It is hoped that this understanding will lead to the development of effective strategies for enriching and enhancing the Master's program in counselling. The approach to the study was based on hermeneutic phenomenology. The data for this study consisted of critical incidents written by fifteen student counsellors over their first four months in an introductory counselling course (1991). Each participant's collection of critical incidents was combined into a story which attempts to capture the uniqueness of their "lived experience". Common themes which emerged from the researcher's interaction with the participant's stories were then documented. The common themes included Non-acceptance of Self, Incompetency, and Unclear Boundaries under "forms of dissonance"; Change in Attitude, Faith, Self-Affirmation, and Turning to Others for Support under "reactions to dissonance"; and Need to Take Care of Self, Need to be Listened to, Power of Group, and Appreciation of Differences under "experiential learning". These common themes connected the participants' stories to each other. At the end of the study recommendations for counsellor training and future research are discussed.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The development of a counsellor is a complicated and on-going process of change. One of the most obvious features of our waking state is change (Gilgen, 1987). Some may consider that the most important part of counsellor development occurs through the didactic components. Roehlke (1988) argued that the affective aspects are at least as significant as the didactic components. Rogers (1967) emphasizes the holistic nature of learning, including feelings and intellect, as well as the meta-level perspective of learning about learning as "a continuing openness to experience and incorporation into oneself of the process of change" (p. 43). A salient part of the counsellor's developmental experience occurs through interaction with clients, colleagues, supervisors, and many others in their personal lives. The interaction between the nature of an event and the readiness of the individual to accept the challenge to be "educated" results in counsellor development. All of the counsellor's life experience has contributed in some way to this development.

An important part of a counsellor's development is learning how to handle powerful feelings associated with experiences such as exclusion and inclusion in themselves and in others. Van Hesteren and Ivey (1990) stated that counsellors need to learn to embrace problems as well as solve them. The task of counsellors is to realize that problems are a fact of life. They need to invite vulnerability in their clients and accept and enjoy it within themselves.

Effective counsellors undertake the lifelong task of trying to live up to the dictum "know thyself". It is essential that they understand their own assumptions, beliefs, values, standards, skills, strengths, weakness, idiosyncrasies, style of doing things, foibles, and temptations, and the way in

which these permeate their interactions with clients (Egan, 1990). Counsellors must be aware of their own process and consciously challenging themselves and to grow as they challenge their clients to risk and grow as well.

Self-knowledge, especially awareness of one's biases, is an important responsibility counsellors assume in order to provide clients with professional help (Cooper, 1984; Peavy, 1992; Rogers, 1961). As an effective counsellor, it is important to identify and explore issues and biases that may interfere with providing effective therapy (Pipes & Davenport, 1990). A self-reflecting process can be a valuable tool for counsellors to enhance their awareness and growth. The effectiveness of counselling is related to the personal "togetherness" of the counsellor (Carkhuff & Berenson, 1976).

Hopefully, when counsellors begin their formal training they will have, or if not, will develop a personal commitment to self-awareness and continued growth.

> "There is not merely a human species but also peoples, not merely a human soul but also types and characters, not merely a human life but also stages in life; only from the recognition of the dynamic that exerts power within every particular reality and between them, and from the constantly new proof of the one in the many, can it come to see the wholeness of man" (Buber, 1965, p. 14).

This is no less so for a counsellor in training than a client. In order to attain a deeper understanding of the counsellor development experience, the individual counsellor needs to be given a voice. Through the unique experiences of each counsellor there comes a deeper knowing of the whole experience of counsellor development.

"We make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single and developing story" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 150). It is therefore important to maintain the uniqueness of each counsellor's individual story - to allow each one to be heard and acknowledged. They are all individuals, with their own uniqueness and differences. From their individuality is a commonality - a "shared experience" - that draws us together and connects us as human beings - changing, learning, discovering, becoming....

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to deepen the understanding of the student counsellors' experience in the initial four months of the Master's program in counselling, from the student counsellors' perspective.

The study represents an effort to listen to the voices of individual student counsellors in order to understand their "lived experience". A deeper understanding of the whole initial counsellor training experience from the perspective of the students is one of the necessary prerequisites for developing effective strategies for enriching and enhancing the counsellor development experience in the academic programs.

Significance of the Study

There is a scarcity of research concerning the initial development of a counsellor from the perspective of the student counsellors themselves. Much of the literature has focused on the supervisory relationship. Although this is a very salient part of counsellor development, it does not capture the whole

experience. Even though the counselling literature is lacking in its attention to the "lived experiences" in counsellor development, the literature clearly suggests that individuals experience numerous significant events in their personal and professional lives which influence their development as a counsellor (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992; Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988; Roehlke, 1988). No studies were found which look at the whole counsellor development experience from the Master's student counsellor's point of view.

The perspective findings attained from this study have the potential to:

(1) convey the experience of the students to those who instruct in such a way as to more adequately understand the needs of the student counsellors;

(2) influence the counsellor training program; and

(3) convey to students that "they are not alone".

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter the literature which is relevant to the study will be reviewed. Areas of relevant research considered necessary are: the counsellor development experience; understanding the development experience through the hermeneutic encounter; and retelling the development experience through narration, or "story". A second literature review conducted after the discussion of the findings follows in Chapter Five.

The Counsellor Development Experience

Much of the literature about the counsellor development experience has been focused on issues of counsellor training supervision, specifically from the perspective of the supervisor. Research in the area of counsellor development through self reflection, however, is extremely limited. Sawatzky, Jevne, and Clark (1991) argued that there is a need for perspectives to be obtained inductively from the student counsellor, the one most qualified to reflect on counsellor development. The studies discussed are primarily the ones that used a self-reflective process as a research tool that shifted the focus to the student counsellors' perspective.

The unpublished study by Sawatzky et al. (1991) focused on the student counsellors' perspective of their development with the use of a critical incident format. Initially one-hour interviews that consisted of an elaboration of the incidents that were deemed important by the interviewee were conducted. The participants were nine doctoral students in their final stages of internship. The question asked of the research participants was "what experiences in the

doctoral practicum and internship have been significant in contributing to your effectiveness as a counsellor?" (Sawatzky et al., 1991, p. 3). The findings of this study described a process of counsellor development that included: experiencing dissonance, responding to dissonance, relating to supervision, and feeling empowered.

Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) also focused their qualitative study on developmental themes. This research study was carried over five years (1986-1990), using grounded theory methodology as a method of analysis. The study was intended to cover the professional life span, taking into account both the professional and personal sources of influence. The participants were 100 therapists and counsellors ranging from those in their first year of graduate school to those 40 years beyond graduate school. These participants were divided into five groups according to education and experience. The research instrument used for this study was a 23-item questionnaire. Interviews were conducted and subsequently guided by this questionnaire. Through the analysis, a stage model was first identified, followed by twenty themes. It was concluded in this study that the themes suggested a movement from reliance on external authority to reliance on internal authority.

Skovholt and McCarthy (1988) directed a study involving critical incidents as the catalysts for counsellor development. The participants for this study were solicited primarily through several professional newsletters and asked to send in critical incidents. "The authors came from all areas of the United States and from a wide variety of counselling settings" (Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988, p. 70). As these were strictly on a volunteer basis, the data that were gathered, not surprisingly, supported their hypothesis. A total of 159 critical incidents were received, but only 58 of them were used in this study. Each one of these was submitted by a different individual. Skovholt and

McCarthy (1988) only referred to this selection process as "difficult" (p. 70). The method that was used to categorize the critical incidents was not discussed. The categories of critical incidents were: clients as teachers; counsellors as clients; counsellor disillusionment and vulnerability; cross-cultural lessons; finding a counselling niche; lessons from a child's death; letting go of overresponsibility; mentors and models; personal pain as teacher; professional transitions; and theoretical awakenings. This study concluded that writing and reflecting on critical incidents had an impact on participants' development as counsellors.

The two studies (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992; Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988) focused on counsellor development from the perspective of the counsellors themselves, many of whom were professionals. It is important to note that the counsellor development experience from their own perspective was a more wholistic experience that extended over a large time-span and was not limited to the area of supervision. To date much of the literature has focused on the area of supervision and the supervisory issues associated with that relationship (i.e. Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1988; Holloway, 1987; Sansbury, 1982; Heppner & Roehlke, 1984).

Borders (1990) conducted a study that looked at developmental changes specifically during supervisees' first practicum. The participants consisted of 44 students, all enrolled in a one-semester counselling practicum. The instrument used in the research was a Supervisee Levels Questionnaire and was given before and after their first practicum. The results of this study reported developmental changes that were restricted to the three dimensions of self-awareness, dependency/autonomy, and theory/skills. The supervisees perceived themselves as more aware of their own motivations and dynamics, less concerned about performance during a therapy session, and less dependent

on their supervisors for directions and support. Although the analysis reported statistically significant gains on all three of these dimensions, Borders (1990) was left with many unanswered questions that only a qualitative study could answer. It is interesting to note that all the participants indicated a movement towards greater awareness, autonomy, and theory/skills over the three months. This raises a concern that the results may have been influenced by the participants' attempts to live up to the experimenters' expectations - the "Pygmalion Effect" (Borg & Gall, 1989).

McNeill, Stoltenberg, and Pierce (1985) examined counsellor trainees' perceptions of their counselling and supervision behaviors. The sample consisted of 91 trainees from eight geographically diverse training programs classified into three levels (beginning, intermediate, and advanced) in the areas of counselling experience, supervision experience, and education. The instrument used to assess relevant constructs was the 24 self-report item Supervisee Levels Questionnaire (Stoltenberg, 1981). The response format was a 7-point Likert scale. A summary of the findings reported that the trainees moved from initial levels of anxiety and dependence to increased self-awareness and independence, using the three scales of self-awareness, dependency-autonomy, and theory/skills acquisition. These scales were pre-determined and there was difficulty in ascertaining what these meant experientially. The study also stated that all the other items that did not "fit" under these three scales were discarded. The study also noted that this progression will generally occur at different times for various domains of counsellor functioning.

A further study was conducted by Stoltenberg, Pierce, and McNeill (1987) . It was hypothesized that shifts would occur in the student counsellors' development: (a) from greater to lesser need for supervisor imposed structure,

(b) from greater to lesser need for didactic instruction, (c) from greater to lesser need for direct feedback of counselling behavior, (d) from greater to lesser need for supervisory support, (e) toward greater need for trainee self-direction, and (f) from greater to lesser training/supervision needs in general. The participants consisted of 91 students from eight different training programs across the United States. Each student was categorized in three different levels as outlined in McNeill et al. (1985) study. The instrument used was the 30-item Supervisee Needs Questionnaire that was constructed to assess supervisees' needs within supervision along five conceptual categories: (1) structure, (2) instruction, (3) feedback, (4) support/availability, and (5) self-directed. The questionnaire used a Likert scale format. In general, the results supported the notion that there is a progressive shift in supervisees' training/supervision needs as a function of the complex nature of counsellor development. More specifically, as the counsellor development progresses, trainees show a significant decrease in overall needs, especially the need for supervisor-imposed structure and direct feedback.

Ellis (1991) conducted a study to test two models of supervisory issues (i.e., Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth, 1982; Sansbury, 1982) in a clinical supervision context and in the context of training and supervising supervisor trainees. Loganbill et al. (1982) proposed a developmental supervision model that incorporated eight supervisory issues. Sansbury (1982) introduced a staging, or hierarchical, framework for these issues, suggesting that they emerge in the following sequence as the counsellor matures from neophyte to expert: (a) competence, (b) purpose and direction, (c) theoretical/conceptual identity, (d) emotional awareness/confrontation (e) respect for individual differences, (f) autonomy, (g) professional ethics, and (h) personal motivation. The participants in the study consisted of eighteen counselling psychology

doctoral students (nine student counsellors and nine supervisor trainees) from the same university. The instrument used in this study was a critical incidents questionnaire that consisted of the responses to three questions: A total of 142 critical incident questionnaires were completed. The critical incidents were then rated on the basis of the ten previously established categories: relationship, competence, emotional awareness, purpose and direction, autonomy, personal, individual differences, professional ethics, motivation, and identity. The results of the study concluded that critical incidents more often involved relationship, competence, emotional awareness, autonomy, and personal issues.

The counsellor development literature that was discussed primarily involved studies that focused on development from the counsellors' perspective. Because of the nature of these studies, the number of studies was extremely limited and, generally conducted within the last five years. The participants used in these studies varied in levels of academic experience and professional experience. Two of the studies used the Supervisee Levels Questionnaire and one used the Supervisee Needs Questionnaire, resulting in quantitative findings.

Although qualitative findings had been attained, the studies used the experiences of the participants through critical incidents and an interviewing process to organize common themes or a developmental process. The unique experiences of each participant were not captured. An indepth understanding of their "lived experience" was not encountered.

Hermeneutic Encounter

What is Hermeneutics?

Hermeneutics is usually defined as the art and science of interpretation. Hermeneutics is a study of the interpretation of texts (Chessick, 1990; Kvale, 1983) to reach an understanding. To understand a text means to be guided and captured by, and open to that which makes the original work possible. Understanding and interpretation are therefore always active in the counselling relationship, as they are in life itself.

History of Hermeneutics

A condensed version of the history of hermeneutics will be introduced to provide background on how the experience of counsellor development is to be understood in this study. Originally coming from a place in theology, the prominent figures in the development of hermeneutics are: Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and Gadamer.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). Schleiermacher had come to realize that the tools of the linguist succeeded in illuminating only the surface or "grammatical" levels of the text, failing to reveal the author's special insight (Howard, 1982). Of course, the interpreter can only begin with a part, but the whole is what is looked for. The actual practice of hermeneutics becomes a part-whole-part movement, a constant back and forth process - a "hermeneutic circle" (Hoy, 1978, p. 2). So the interpreter is caught in an endless circle wherein the understanding, by definition, is never complete (Palmer, 1979; Hollnagel, 1978).

Schleiermacher's contribution to modern hermeneutics is vital. He unfolded the complex and dynamic world of the text and its primordial connectedness to individual life.

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911). Dilthey took up Schleiermacher's project of general hermeneutics and pursued it in the wider context of human sciences (Davidson, 1990). Dilthey is sometimes called the father of modern hermeneutics. Dilthey saw the powerful connection between language and life. Hence, he believed that human phenomena are not to be explained but to be understood (Howard, 1982; Palmer, 1969).

> Our understanding of life is only a constant approximation; that life reveals quite different sides to us according to the point of view from which we consider its course in time is due to the nature of both understanding and life (Dilthey, 1961, p. 109 cited in Howard, 1982).

Dilthey reduces to affective terms the interpreting process in the human sciences and hence makes empathy an essential ingredient in understanding theory. Dilthey's main point was that there exist two "standpoints" of experience, two ways of experiencing the world: (a) standing back separately and observing a world conceived as composed of natural objects, and (b) living in the world. We cannot ever live and interact with people and things without adopting a stance towards them, inescapable involvement (Chessick, 1990).

From the time of Dilthey, it has been realized more fully that meaning and understanding are subject to time and change. Understanding is an ongoing process with no absolute beginning nor end. Dilthey's view of understanding includes the continuity and reciprocal influence of the life-world and knowledge about it; from what might be termed natural or naive understanding through the "hermeneutical circle" to structural representation (Palmer, 1969).

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-). As a student of Heidegger, Gadamer sought to perceive and develop the positive hermeneutical consequences of phenomenology, and particularly Heidegger's thinking about it. In Gadamer,

Heidegger's basic concepts of thinking, language and history are carried over and developed (Davidson, 1990). Understanding is not merely a subjective human process, but the way of being human. Understanding, and especially understanding through language, is a primary form of being-in-the-world. Human beings not only come to know through the hermeneutic process, but are formed and constituted by it. This process of self-formation and self-understanding can never be final or complete (Woolfolk, Sass, & Messer, 1988)

Gadamer states "All understanding is an interpretation" (Descombes, 1991). Hermeneutic understanding begins at an analogous phenomenon, the I-Thou relationship. In this relation, the "Thou" is experienced truly as a "Thou", with no overlooking of the other person's claim but to listen. To this, openness is necessary. Without this kind of openness to one another, there is no genuine human relationship.

Gadamer refers to the highest type of hermeneutical experience as the "effective historical consciousness", and its realization as the "fusion of horizons" (Howard, 1982; Hekman, 1984). The process of understanding involves the "fusion of horizons", the horizon of the interpreter and the horizon of the text. Gadamer (1975) argued that one does not confront a text in a historical vacuum. Rather, people dwell within a contemporary "horizon of understandings", and these understandings inevitably fashion their interpretation of the texts (Gergen, Hepburn, & Fisher, 1986). Gadamer describes the hermeneutic task as "coming into conversation with the text" (Weinsheimer, 1985).

The definition of prejudice, which is the preunderstandings that are the necessary condition of all human understanding, is the key to Gadamer's understanding of the process of interpretation. For Gadamer, prejudice is a

"positive possibility" of interpretation, not a problem to be solved. Furthermore, Gadamer argues that the awareness of the role of prejudice in the process of interpretation entails self-reflection. This leads to him to the assertion that interpretation always involves self-understanding, that is, understanding oneself through the analysis of the text (Hekman, 1984; Chessick, 1990).

For Gadamer, understanding is always an historical, dialectical, linguistic event. There can be no fore-ordained method for genuine understanding. The highest understanding between people is achieved when the other is not regarded as one who can claim superior understanding, but rather when one sustains relationships dialogically, acknowledging the other's equally valid experience.

The literature review on hermeneutics provided an overview of the approach taken in seeking to understand the counsellor development experiences of these participants. Gadamer's position was focused on as the philosophical basis for this study.

Language

Having briefly outlined the development of the hermeneutic tradition as I understand it, I will now turn to "language" itself, since hermeneutics is described as the art of interpreting language (Howard, 1982).

We are immersed in language which determines our experiences, our thought processes, and our understanding. Thus language is not simply an instrument for communication but has an established role in our very experience itself. In Gadamer, the meaning in a dyadic relationship is generated by language and resides not in the mind of individual speakers or

writers but in the dialogue itself (Chessick, 1990). This suggests that we cannot understand what is in the private and inner realm in the mind of each individual speaker but must concentrate on the social dialogical meaning of the exchange. Each language system has its own particular way of distorting, filtering, and constructing experience. The explanation produced by the variety of language systems stand side by side, each providing its own distinct understanding (Polkinghorne, 1992).

The intermediary function of language in the phenomenological experience is central to the nature of hermeneutics, because it means that "language is the gathering, revealing of possibilities. Language is the self display of `what is'" (Deetz, 1977, p. 62). Language serves as the "window" to experience. The connection between the world, understanding, and unconcealment of whatever "reality" there is through language is the central methodological tenet of contemporary phenomenology (Casmir, 1983).

The written language or text offers a different relationship. The text is like a silent partner that speaks only through the interpreter (Weinsheimer, 1991). Texts are in fact helplessly vulnerable to imposition. The interpreter needs to be open to what the text says in order that a dialogue and not a monologue can exist. When we enter the process of description we invariably rely on conventions of language. We must make use of these conventions or we fail to communicate at all. These conventions simultaneously govern what can be communicated - the ontological presumptions of a culture (Gergen, 1992).

The written word is abstracted from the immediacy of sound and voice, on which oral tradition depends. Written tradition vanishes when it is not interpreted. A written word is absolutely meaningless unless and until it is interpreted to have a certain meaning. Gadamer states "in writing, language

attains its true spirituality" (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 221). As an ideal entity detached and abstracted from physical embodiment, the letter is spirit. By reading, we have direct access to a moment of the past. The past attains the permanence characteristic of spirit, for it is available to every present (here and now) and to anyone who can read.

As language is the essence of hermeneutics, some attention was given to this area to increase the level of understanding.

The Narrative - "Story"

As human beings, we take bits and pieces of "lived experience" and construct relevance and meaning through a narrative context. This context is woven through language, through words (Sanders, 1993). Gadamer states that language is to be understood as the medium of disclosure of our experience of the world and not an objectification of the world (Garden & Cumming, 1975). Narrative understanding is the comprehension of a complex of events by seeing the whole in which the parts have participated. Narrative explanations involve a special kind of understanding "which converts a multitude of events into a series of events, and emphasizes and increases the scope of synoptic judgment in our reflection on experience" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 22). Storying is a way to connect with each other; our experiences; our truths. Narrative is a primary scheme by which hermeneutical meaningfulness is manifested (Polkinghorne, 1988). Narrative is one of the forms of expressiveness through which life events are conjoined into coherent, meaningful, unified themes.

Polkinghorne (1988) describes the connection between self and narrative very succinctly:

> We achieve our personal identities and self concept through the use of the narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story. We are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure how they will end; we are constantly having to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives. Self, then, is not a static thing nor a substance, but a configuring of personal events into a historical unity which includes not only what one has been but also anticipations of what one will be. (p.150)

The story relates to human experience and is the vehicle by which people exchange the value of their experiences (Liske, 1993).

Mair (1988) believes "Stories are habituations. We live in and through stories. They conjure worlds....Stories inform life....We live through stories..."(p. 127). Stories are unique and varied, always in a constant flux of change, of movement.

With regards to research, postmodern thought supports the narrative and hermeneutical approaches. Research then becomes not a mapping of some objective social reality; research involves a co-constitution of the participants investigated, with a negotiation and interaction with the very participants studied. The perspective is heterogeneous; it emphasizes differences and continual changes of perspectives, and it attempts to avoid dichotomized and reified concepts (Kvale, 1992).

Summary

In summary, the literature that was reviewed encompassed the three main areas relevant to this study. This resulted in a deeper understanding of the research in the areas of counsellor development, hermeneutics, and "storying".

The power of story is becoming more widely recognized because it is able to capture more of what "lived experience" is about. The present study represents an effort to understand the "lived" counsellor developmental experience from each participant's perspective and allow his/her individual voice to be heard. Common themes will also be discussed as they become known.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Selecting an Approach

The type of research question that is asked is what determines the research method. Because the question asked in this study, "What has been your experience in your development as a counsellor?" is one that focuses on the in-depth experiences of participants from their own perspective, a qualitative method is more appropriate than a quantitative one. Qualitative research also `fits' areas of study that have had limited research.

The Qualitative Approach

The qualitative approach was based on hermeneutic phenomenology, with the research question focusing on `the understanding of the counselling development experience' and with the researcher being involved in and questioning the text (Kneller, 1984). Hermeneutic phenomenology is the study of interpretive understanding, or meaning, emphasizing the descriptive study of lived experience (Giorgi, 1985). The purpose of hermeneutics is to obtain a valid and common understanding of the meaning of the text (Kvale, 1983).

"Meaning" is essential in the qualitative approach. Questions are continually asked to discover, "what they are experiencing and how they interpret their experiences" (Psathas, 1973). In order to engage in this "process of discovery" with the counsellor development experience, a qualitative design was chosen for this study.

Just as I must interpret the text in the light of my perspective, hermeneutists agree that they are constructing the "reality" on the basis of their interpretations of data provided by the participants (Eichelberger, 1989).

All interpretation points in a direction rather than to some final endpoint, in the sense that it points towards an open realm that can be filled in a variety of ways (Gadamer, 1986). I realized that I had to encounter "their world" - their experience, by surrendering to the process, by pointing in a direction, and "letting go".

Participants

The participants were the students who attended the EDPSY 532/533 class in the fall of 1991 at the University of Alberta. All twenty-one students who attended this class were contacted directly in person or by telephone, told about the proposed research, and given the opportunity to ask questions. Fifteen participants out of a total of 21 students consented and were included in the study. Some of the participants who did not give their consent stated how they did not feel comfortable in allowing their critical incidents to be used in the study.

The sample consisted of 3 males and 12 females. Their backgrounds varied in demographics of professional history, academic history, personal history - single, married, divorced, re-married, single parents - all unique. They were not actively involved in the study after they officially consented to the study and released their critical incidents at the end of the winter session, 1992 (see Appendix A for Consent Form). All of the participants will remain totally anonymous.

As all of the participants in the study were selected from EDPSY 532/533, a brief description of this course is deemed necessary in order to help understand the context of the participants' experiences. The course integrated theory and practice. A variety of instructors presented different theories of counselling and often followed the theory with an experiential exercise. Separate from the classroom format was a practicum component consisting of a field placement or counselling experience within the Education Clinic itself. Each student being paired with another colleague and assigned to a supervisor for weekly supervision. Students also met in small groups of five for weekly two hour seminars facilitated by an instructor and a doctoral student. Within the Education Clinic, videotaping of counselling sessions was strongly encouraged as these were viewed by the supervisor and/or at the weekly seminars as case presentations.

Data Collection

The data collected for this study were accumulated through the documentation of critical incidents in the form of written text. A specific format of the critical incident technique was outlined to the participants (see Appendix B), using a modification of a critical incident format (Flanagan, 1954). The critical incident approach was used to encourage systematic reflection on the evolving development of a counsellor.

What is a Critical Incident?

A critical incident can be defined as a developmental turning point (Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988) and identified through a self-reflective process. Critical incidents are defined as "those events that stand out as significant markers in an individual's professional development" (p. 69) or what

phenomenologists call "lived experiences". A major criterion for determining whether an event constitutes a critical incident is whether it is perceived by individuals as having had a significant impact on them. Thus, the "same" event may be a critical incident for one individual, but not for another. Critical incidents share the common features of challenging an individual's sense of self, competence, and relationships with others; of placing demands on the person to adapt and cope; and of being perceived by the individual as a significant experience (Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988).

Critical incidents can occur at any time. Perhaps it is partly the element of surprise that makes the chance encounter so powerful (Cormier, 1988). For student counsellors, many critical incidents occur during the course of their professional counsellor development program.

Critical incidents are a self-reflective tool. Cormier (1988) discusses how critical incidents have the potential to shape both our present behavior and our future destiny, as well as possibly even reshape our past. Self-reflection can increase awareness and self-knowledge. Particular forms of knowledge derive from retrospection, from an essentially backward look over the terrain of experience. This is an irreducible "peculiarity" of the human being (Freeman, 1984). The critical self-reflection can give us a new freedom (Batson, Fultz, Schoenrade, & Paduano, 1987), as there is a sense of relief in knowing ourselves; more of who we are. There are doubtless individual differences in adults' responses to the "call to know thyself". Some individuals may respond enthusiastically, others may turn away, and others may not even hear the call. Adults can lose themselves if they are too rigid to reflect upon themselves. These individuals lose the ability to see themselves from a different perspective. They either accept that they are the way they appear to

themselves or simply look at themselves repeatedly without seeing anything new (Havens, 1986).

The participants' critical incidents in this study varied in length, type of issue reflected upon, and the language used to describe those issues. Turner (1978) states that private self-consciousness is concerned with the extent to which one reflects on one's thoughts, feelings, and motives. Individual differences in self-consciousness have also been shown to mediate the consistency of self reports. Higher self-report criterion correlations in Turner's study were found for persons who habitually reflected upon themselves. Since high private self-consciousness persons repeatedly attend to their inner thoughts and motives, they should provide not only valid self-reports, but also more detailed ones. Habitual self-reflection should result in an ability to give a more complete or extended self-description.. The non-reflective persons when asked to describe themselves should have fewer descriptive phrases at their command than should the habitually reflective person.

Self-reflection adds to insight the element of putting what is known into the context of the personality, including its values. Gergen (1992) states how critical self-reflection is essential for the postmodern scholar.

In the first week of September, 1991, the students were presented a paper that included the format for writing the critical incidents and a list of submission dates (September 13, September 27, October 11, October 25, November 8, November 22, and December 6, 1991). A minimum of seven critical incidents were to be submitted. Each of the students was to select a code name of his/her own choosing in order to ensure anonymity. An envelope situated on the Edpsy 532/33 teaching assistants' office door was used to collect these documents. They were kept in the office until the end of the term, when each student's set of critical incidents was placed in a sealed brown

envelope and stored in the Chairperson's office of the Department of Education Psychology.

Additional sources of data were my journalling notes or memos. These notes were written continuously throughout the interaction with the data, both at the time of reading the text and whenever a thought, insight, impression, hypotheses, or question concerning the data came up. The ongoing personal notes heightened my self-awareness and the depth to which I engaged the text.

Interpretation

A way of understanding the participants' critical incidents happened through the "context of discovery", rather than the "context of verification". The chosen method of understanding consisted mostly of an interaction with each participant's story; an interaction that deepened with every re-reading of the critical incidents. The following, detailed step-by-step description of the process followed makes it sound somewhat like a logistical exercise, and does not really capture the impact of my own experience as the researcher.

Data consisted of the participants' written critical incidents and my memos (personal journalling). Upon receiving the envelopes containing the participants' critical incidents, I randomly assigned a letter to each one of them. Each participant's set of critical incidents was then typed onto the computer. During this preliminary process, whenever something meaningful or something which "jumped out" was identified, it was highlighted and coded for future reference.

By reading and re-reading each participant's collection of critical incidents, an "I-Thou" relationship between myself and the participant developed and deepened. It is only the knowing of the I-Thou relation that

makes possible the conception of the wholeness of humankind (Buber, 1965). The voice of the participant could be 'heard' through the written words - a story was being told. It became quite important, essential, to let each story be told individually, maintaining its uniqueness and allowing a "sense of the whole" (Giorgi, 1985, p. 10) to be experienced. This holistic approach assumes that the whole is understood as a complex system that is greater than the sum of its parts (Patton, 1990). The participants' "own words" were used in the telling of their stories. In a typical hermeneutic phenomenological approach, Polkinghorne (1981) stated that in order to describe and interpret the essence of an experience, many concrete examples of the experiences are used (cited in Clark, 1993). It was intended that both the "uniqueness" and the "commonness" of each story be written. A full description of a story should include both the elements that are unique to that particular story and those that can be found, at least in essence, in other stories (Polkinghorne, 1988).

A more focused and purposeful look at each critical incident, on a sentence-by-sentence basis, was carried out several times over a period of nine months in order to identify the "meaning units". Since I could not interpret a whole text simultaneously, I broke it down into these manageable "meaning units" of a psychological nature that were perceived from the interaction with the text. Following a suggestion by Giorgi (1985), I noted meaning unit discriminations directly on the critical incident whenever I became aware of a change of meaning for the participant that appeared to be psychologically sensitive. The meaning units were then grouped into categories as they seemed to pertain to the same phenomenon. At times as I moved between the parts and the whole of the text, varying interpretations would present themselves. I was then called to discover the meaning which made sense both for that particular part and for the whole of the text, creating a circular process.

As this process of discovery continued, themes began to emerge - ways of connecting the stories to each other. I then moved back and forth between the text and the identified themes to ensure the meaningfulness and accuracy of these categories (Patton, 1990). The most common themes were identified by the greatest number of occurrences that were tallied from each of the critical incidents.

The relationship between each participant and myself was enhanced by the dialogue that was established. This dialogue was captured in the form of memos and personal journals that were written on an ongoing basis. The memo and journal writing recorded the insights and understandings that contributed to the stories and to the emerging themes. They also recorded the numerous questions that I longed to ask. The most common of these questions was, "can you tell me more about that? At times, I needed to "step back" from the text, particularly when personal memories and reflections were being triggered and needed to be processed separately.

The process resulted in an understanding, a fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 1986).

> To become aware of a man means to perceive his wholeness as person defined by spirit: to perceive the dynamic centre which stamps on all his utterances, actions, and attitudes - the tangible sign of oneness. Such an awareness is possible only when he becomes present for me. (Buber, 1965, p. 27)

Trustworthiness

"Establishing trustworthiness" (Patton, 1990) is achieved through the quality and credibility of the qualitative analysis. It is essential to understand

that the quality of a hermeneutic work derives not from method, but from the power and richness with which it enables the researcher to encounter the lived essence of an experience (van Manen, 1990).

Credibility was established by the overall consistency of the findings. With the re-reading of the text over an extended period of time, the meaning units were primarily consistent throughout. Numerous examples of these meaning units from the participants' actual documented experiences were included. Reliability was ultimately reached through the comprehensiveness of the research document. This included the appropriateness of the interpretation to the research question.

Upon completion of the interpretation, several participants were then contacted to discuss the common themes that emerged from the individual stories. This also ensured the accuracy of the findings.

Even though many of the findings were confirmed, I was left with some unanswered questions and feelings of uncertainty. "Humility can do more than certainty to enhance credibility (Patton, 1990, p. 464). I was constantly reminded that human beings are complex and human researchers are not all-knowing "experts".

The data itself offered its own quality. Because of the structure of the critical incidents themselves, specific headings helped prevent the participants from diverging from the process. The criterion for accuracy of reporting is the quality of the incidents themselves (Woolsey, 1986). No outside interference or biases could be initiated through direct questioning or personal contact by myself that may have influenced the participants' descriptions of their counsellor development. The participants could stay "with themselves" in the self-reflection process.

Although the trustworthiness of the qualitative research needs to be documented, the issue of trustworthiness came more from my own internal struggle. On one side of the struggle was the self-talk of questioning the level of competency, raising self-doubts, and trying to sabotage intuitive "hunches". On the other side was the deeper part of self where faith and acceptance lives. It was also helpful to be reminded that there is no one correct interpretation of the text. Although the "horizon" of the text itself remains the same, the changing horizons of the interpreter will result in different interpretations (Hekman, 1984).

Issue of Bracketing

In qualitative research, the research instrument is the researcher. Bracketing, or awareness of my influence through personal beliefs, experiences and values on the research process, is essential. Qualitative researchers guard against their own biases by recording detailed notes that include reflections on their own subjectivity (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Although an awareness and guardedness can be attained, Merleau-Ponty (1962) argues that to suspend one's own conceptions is not possible. It seems as one brackets one's preconceptions, more of these emerge at the level of reflective awareness. This process of bracketing is one that never ends (Valle, King, & Halling, 1978). Realizing this impossibility, my ongoing recording of memos and journalling notes at least helped me reflect on and become as fully aware of my own bias and preconceptions as possible. Prejudices or kinds of foreknowledge are always present and always required as the organizing and orienting devices without which perception would be blind (Sass, 1988). In Gadamer's (1976) view, prejudices should be understood not only as potentially blinding but also

as potentially liberating and illuminating. "Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. For only with the aid of these biases of one's openness to the world is it possible to bring forth the many meanings that lie within the text" (p. 9).

> According to a narrative theory of human existence, a study needs to focus its attention on existence as it is lived, experienced, and interpreted by the human person.
>
> (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 125)

For Gadamer (1976), the event of understanding is not something which happens between the consciousness of interpreter and author, but an event that happens between interpreter and text where the interpreter's own historicity and bias are not impediments to be obliterated but the precondition and indeed very essence of understanding. My own historicity is very much connected to this research. I am a participant in this study, as I was a student in this particular class. As a result, I already felt a connection with the participants, many of their words resonating within myself. "Through interpretation a text comes to speak. But no text speaks if it does not speak the language that reaches the other" (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 224). I already held particular biases and learnings about the counsellor development experience, having "walked through" that together with the other participants - the same but different. Freeman (1984) argues that the more that is genuinely understood and known about the subject of research - provided this understanding is not filled with inauthenticity and self-deception - the more valid the interpretation will be.

Often I "re-lived" my experiences as I read about the other participants' similar experiences. I remember feeling quite self-absorbed with what I was going through at that time. Through this research process, I developed a deeper

respect and sense of compassion for my fellow colleagues. I could actually "hear" their voices as I read their words.

My commitment and strong belief in the "reflective practitioner" helped me to continually process my "own stuff" throughout. Gadamer argues that the awareness of the role of "prejudice" in the process of interpretation entails self-reflection. This leads him to the assertion that interpretation always involves self-understanding, and that includes understanding oneself through the analysis of the text (Hekman, 1984).

The meaning units do not exist in the text as such, but only in relation to the attitude of the researcher (Giorgi, 1985). What stands out depends very much upon my own perspective. Gergen, Hepburn, and Fisher (1986) argued that text can be expected to convey different meanings within various subcultures and across history. From this perspective, the concept of "true meaning" is problematic. Thus Gadamer (1975) supported that one does not confront a text in a historical vacuum. People live within a contemporary "horizon of understandings". These understandings inevitably help to create their interpretation of texts.

Preunderstandings

In preparation for this study, I had to first understand where I was coming from. Thus, I needed to become aware of my own preconceptions of counsellor development. This process of increasing awareness through reflection and critical analysis is central to the hermeneutic project in its entirety. My preconceptions from the perspective of a student, of a human being, and of a counsellor, certainly influenced this study.

As a participant in this study, I could not just put aside my own learnings and "life experiences". I already held particular beliefs about the Master's program in counselling and the issues that the other participants experienced. I have many "untold stories" and I believe that these tended to emerge through my writing of this study. As a student, I longed for more depth with my colleagues - more opportunities to share the deeper parts of ourselves, like "the first weekend". I came into this study already having some ideas about how I would have liked the program to be different.

As a human being, I consider self-reflection to be an important part of my own personal growth journey and I value that process very much. Prior to my training, I have also experienced situations where sharing in groups at a deeper level and being listened to had been very empowering and growth-producing.

As a developing counsellor, I come from a very strong belief that we can only take our clients as far as we have gone ourselves. The stance of a "reflective practitioner" is very much my stance as a counsellor. I value the telling and acknowledging of clients' stories, and I strongly believe that the counsellor needs to avoid taking the role of expert. These are also positions I take as a researcher in this study.

I had a sense of curiosity upon entering this study. I was very interested in discovering whether my colleagues experienced the same struggles that I did.

Considerations and Delimitations

There are several issues to be considered in this study. Enough data were collected to develop an understanding of the student counsellors'

experiences in their counsellor development. In this particular study, however, all the participants originated from the same class of initial counsellor development. The disadvantage of this selected sample is that it invites the possibility of class-related data biasing the results. The advantage is that I had the opportunity to "see" the impact of some situations through the different perspectives of different participants, each of whom experienced it in their own unique way.

Being able to identify each of the participants may have influenced interaction with the text since my personal knowledge extended beyond what was presented in the critical incidents. While reading the critical incidents, I needed to remind myself to be open to understanding `their' world, and not to analyze or try to "fix" their situation.

The writing of the critical incidents every two weeks was presented to the participants as a course requirement at the beginning of the term. The feeling of "have-to" may have influenced the level of sincerity or "realness" of the results. Upon reading and re-reading the critical incidents, however, this did not appear to be the case.

Critical incidents were self-selected. The participants chose what was a critical incident for them, which critical incidents to write about and submit, how long to make them, and to what depth they would be written.

Due to the construction of the study, total anonymity was ensured. Because of the necessary structure of the data collection, I was not at liberty to interview or re-contact the participants about their individual findings. This resulted in the inability to validate the individual stories with the participants themselves. However, several of the participants were consulted in relation to the common themes that were discovered.

Due to the large number of participants, or what is felt to be a large number of participants for this type of hermeneutic phenomenological research, truly extensive and intensive interpretations and understandings were not carried out. The researcher discovered that to focus in-depth on even one participant's experience would have been enriching and powerful, but very time-demanding. The goal of this study was to capture each individual's story as well as identify the common themes found within those stories.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations for this research study included informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity. A proposal for this study was submitted to and approved by the Ethics Review Committee of the Department of Educational Psychology.

The participants of the study were directly informed of the general purpose of the study and questions were answered to their satisfaction. They were required to sign a written consent form prior to the releasing of their critical incidents. Participants were informed that anonymous quotations from these critical incidents may be included in the final report with names and other identifying information deleted from the documents. They were told that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw their consent and terminate participation at any time without any negative consequences.

Confidentiality and anonymity was maintained throughout the study. Code letters were used on all documents and false names were assigned for the final research document. Information which could identify either the participants or others was omitted from the final report. All original critical

incidents were destroyed at the conclusion of the study as previously contracted between the participants and the researcher.

CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS

This chapter consists of fifteen individual stories and a number of common themes that emerged from my encounter with my research participants' critical incidents. The critical incidents were focused on the question, "What has been your experience in your development as a counsellor?".

Each participant's story is unique and yet parts of each story touches part of another story. I often found myself saying "yes, that's exactly the way I felt too" or "I can certainly identify with that". As human beings who are connected to each other, so are our stories; if not the ones that are told, then at least the ones that are not told. In order to honor the uniqueness of each participant, the stories about their development as a counsellor will be presented individually and then "brought together" as common themes become visible. A story of the critical incident itself will also be told.

Because of the congruence with the Sawatzky, Jevne, and Clark (1991) study and the critical incident format itself, the structure chosen for the writing of the participants' stories consisted of the various sources of dissonance, different ways of responding to that dissonance, experiential learnings and insights/awarenesses that arose from the dissonance and experiential learning: All of these contributed to the participants' development as a counsellor.

Their Stories

Angie's Story

Angie began her story by expressing her need to be listened to and the importance of having close relationships with people she could share her true self with: "I have come to see my desire for a friend. I also need people to talk to, in order to be honest about my hurts, confusion, and expectations."

Angie's feelings about her own needs and the acceptance of them enabled her to recognize these similar needs of her clients:

> As I work with clients I do not have to see them as people with traumatic need or perhaps even pathology. They may be seeking someone to listen to them, or someone with whom they can share a burden. Their sharing may be a means of empowerment instead of simply someone seeking advice or direction.

The awareness of differences between people and the importance of appreciating those differences is a prominent theme in Angie's story.

> While I have seen many people before, each one deserves special attention. Their personality, their reactions, their backgrounds all differ. They need to have time taken with them, and I need to see each one as a person who has a special character.

Angie also faced the questioning and struggling of her own differences as she felt compared to and judged by her peers.

> There are those who wish me to be less happy. Perhaps if I were so it would make them seem happier on their scale of relativity. I am called insensitive for not joining them in misery. I see myself as a fighter and soldier and I will not resign myself to defeat. ... As for difficulties that have been noticed, I have been responded to with the `accusation' that I do not become overwhelmed as any `normal' person would. Even when

> hurting, I am accused of having resources which do not seem real to some people - to those who feel I should not be content.

In one critical incident Angie described the possible impact of her own differences on the therapeutic relationship.

> I too hold certain values, but if I insist on what I see as best, and someone else does not espouse these same values, I can create much tension and alienate the client from a process that could have led to eventual change.... It is important to emphasize the need to respect others' convictions.

Dissonance was experienced when Angie faced questions such as, "Would I unconsciously treat friends like clients as I developed skills and as these became more second nature?" She described the concern of bringing the "counsellor" relationship into friendships and then the discovering of "how to" maintain that boundary between the two roles.

A prominent part of Angie's story in responding to dissonance is the acknowledgement of faith/hope/inner strength that came through on a number of critical incidents. Amongst the feelings of dissonance, this aspect is declared.

> Hope is what has enabled me to keeping fighting, perhaps not the visible battle, but the internal battle and the wounds which are contracted during this time.....I am not always `happy', but I am content because I have an internal joy kept on fire by hope.

Beth's Story

A primary source of dissonance in Beth's story seems to have arisen from her comparing herself to her peers. "I think I am much closer to the beginning of my development as a counsellor than other members of my class.

I don't seem to have the same clear sense of mission that is evident in some of the others."

Dissonance was also created through her awareness of the various roles she had played and wondering how these roles could "fit" or "not fit" into the development of the counsellor role.

> I asked a question of the class member who was then acting as `client', it was a question typical of my self: direct, clear, task-oriented. I am a teacher with eleven years of experience at asking questions. The question I asked sure sounded like it came from a teacher, too! Within my personal style I am aware of times when I proceed gently, with caution, and other times when I use the direct approach.

Another source of dissonance was the gap between understanding a concept intellectually and `experiencing' it.

> Understanding the difference intellectually isn't enough; I need to experience the difference and come to have the ability to consciously go broader or deeper with a client. Putting the two together seems like a great challenge to me right now.

The experience of the "lived experience" is one that powerfully impacted Beth's development as a counsellor.

> I'm still always amazed by the power of living an experience. I haven't really learned anything new on the cognitive level in what I have expressed here. I've read about this, I've reasoned it out, I've talked about it with others. But none of these qualifies as experience on the affective level.

Beth responded to many of her conflicting situations with a realization of the need for flexibility, a willingness to change, and a readiness to learn.

> My style of questioning - while the clear, direct, and task-oriented approach works very well in the classroom setting, it is not necessarily

> appropriate in a counselling setting... I need to become aware of when such a style is likely to be appropriate and effective in counselling.... I also need to develop other aspects of my questioning style which will allow clients the opportunity to become comfortable and open in their communication with me at a pace that is appropriate to their needs.

Beth's awareness that additional techniques and knowledge were needed also demonstrated her willingness to change. "I will need to develop other techniques in order to achieve the same end with counselling clients."

Self-affirmations were another way that Beth responded to dissonance. "When I get worried and insecure about my ability to help a client, I will make myself remember these words: I am learning. I am taking skills I already possess, making them conscious, and refining them."

A belief in something bigger than self also appeared to play a part in Beth's counsellor development. "Is someone or something really looking out for me? .... I believe God delivers the occasional kick in the pants that I need to wake me up and make me think about what I am doing."

Reference to this higher power/faith seemed to help Beth cope with the dissonance that she experienced.

> I simply had to let go and have faith in the process. Doing so allowed me to take another tidbit of cognitive data and internalize it. At the time I let go I could not visualize what the end result would be; I relied on faith and let it be.

Beth described the closeness she developed with peers through sharing themselves with each other. She expressed how the safe environment that was created freed her to share even more with the group, and thereby helped her deal with inner conflicts.

> These four individuals [in the group] were probably the four to whom I feel closest in the whole class, and thus, the ones I felt safest with. That closeness gave me the courage to share .... Sharing the fear gave me

> some insights into what has been going on for me over the past six months or so.

Carol's Story

Carol's story began with the dissonance and inner emotional turmoil she experienced in questioning whether she would be judged by her peers if she shared deeper parts of herself. "As the sharing continued around the circle, I questioned whether I would let my new `colleagues' know information about my background which may lead them to question my competence as a future counsellor."

She went on to question how well she really knew herself and expressed some disillusionment at what she discovered.

> I have always considered myself to be a good listener....I am now reflecting on how much I have `really' attended to other people in conversations. I feel that I may not have shown as much sensitivity in the interactions that I would have at the time.

Carol also experienced dissonance and insecurity because as a result of a perceived lack of support and not feeling safe to make mistakes and grow.

> I was looking forward to the practicum -- I would be given a chance to make mistakes and have someone suggest other ways of dealing with the situation....for the time being I am concerned about not having my needs met.... I want to be able to make mistakes in a safe environment.... I feel needy for support.

Self-criticism, confusion, and self-doubt were other sources of dissonance that affected Carol at times.

> I have never questioned myself as much as I have in the past few weeks. Whenever I was introduced to new material in the past, I found it quite

> easy to adhere to one concept over another. This is not the case for me at this point in time.
> I'm not sure I can trust my instincts - more so, I don't know if I have enough wisdom to trust my gut feeling about a decision concerning a client:...I'm not sure of what to believe or whose suggestions I should follow.

Fortunately, Carol felt supported by a higher power in struggling with her issues and made reference to having trust in the process. "I once again put my faith in my `higher power' and continued my program of growth."

Sharing with other colleagues also helped her to feel supported. It provided a place where she felt connected to others and helped reinforce her belief that `I am not alone'.

> I discovered that the feelings I was having about `fitting in' at grad school were shared by many of the people who attended the workshop...What I find out from sharing with others in the workshop is that the feelings I am experiencing are quite normal for this beginning level of development in grad school.

Carol felt that peer support was a valuable aspect of her development as a counsellor. "The group support that was felt was overwhelming....I sat in the session considering how important this small group of people had become in my life. This reassures me that I can trust the process."

Another way that Carol dealt with feelings of dissonance was by taking constructive action to help alleviate them. She made a commitment to herself to acquire new skills and knowledge; and to seek out the support of colleagues, Ph.D students. and other supervisors; and to create a `change in attitude'.

Her `action' orientation may also have contributed to the impact she felt in "experiencing" versus "intellectualizing".

> Any study in the past seems now to be quite superficial - I did not understand the impact that the concepts or techniques would actually have on myself and my client. I also am beginning to experience the impact of the therapeutic relationship.

Diane's Story

Diane described the impact she felt by putting herself in someone else's shoes and then being able to trust herself, her intuition.

> I feel that I was able to see the world through this woman's eyes. This feels like quite an accomplishment for me because, to be very honest, this is a woman whom I have never really much liked and it is growth for me to be able to empathize with her. Most importantly, I feel a sense of relief to know that it might be O.K. to `trust my instincts or intuitions' even in the face of contradictions.

Seeing the connections - the commonalities- of "lived experience" between counsellor and client was extremely significant to Diane's development as a counsellor. This was brought to light through the sharing of stories by fellow students.

> For whatever reasons, I had entered this part of my training with a concept of the counsellor's world as `our world' and the client's world as `their world'. I had hoped to be able to see into `their' world, leaving `ours' behind me. But as I listened to the troubles of my classmates, I slowly came to a different feeling about it all. I came to realize that all of mankind has its struggles and problems. It isn't `us' and `them'. it's really only us.

Diane often experienced a sense of over-responsibility for others and realized the consequences of "taking on" that role.

> I have done considerable thinking about the whole thing and I have started only to be aware of the mental commitments I make to certain

> special people along the way. These mental commitments stay with me, not the other person. I must be wary of making these commitments which are far beyond my control. I set myself up for guilt and grief.

Diane realized that issues she was having difficulty with were mirrored by her clients when she was affected by something external, she was able to look inside of herself for the truth and was able to face that truth.

> How sensitive I am when confronted with the pain of losing a spouse. When I tried to work through this with myself, I found that I almost could not even allow myself to think of how it must be to lose a spouse.

This self-reflective process is one of looking within self, knowing that the only person we can change is ourself. Diane realized the importance of coming to terms with issues of the self before dealing with these issues with others. Through this process Diane saw herself as a "facilitator" of pain. "Maybe all I have really learned is that being the facilitator of an examination of pain does not make me the perpetrator of pain."

Diane acknowledged how childhood `self talk', such as, "It's not nice to make other people cry", still affects her as an adult and as a counsellor.

Diane also tells how experiencing a situation helped to "really get it". She talks about how her supervisor facilitated this process for her.

> When a supervisor can shed some light for me in a `real live' case in which I am involved, I finally get some Ah Haa! These are the same ideas I have read in theoretical contexts, but true to my style, they don't make a usable connection for me until they are directly applied."

Enid's Story

Part of Enid's story is seeing the connection between her experience and that of a client. She recognized the impact of positive reinforcement on herself and then committed to creating that for her clients.

> How much I actually respond to the positive, need it, seek it out. How good it makes me feel. In my clinical work, I will make a conscious effort to use different forms of positive reinforcement to empower, to join, to make my clients believe in themselves.

But Enid also realized that the `helper' role can take on an over-responsible role as well - "too much of a good thing" - and that it can be an ongoing struggle to try to find a balance between the two.

> Sometimes I operate in a suffocatingly nurturing mode in order to `help' or to make a person feel better, this can stunt a client's potential growth. There are times that I can fuse and empathize too intensely.
> I believe that I could have altered the outcome of this interview by trying to find out more about this person, her life, her interests, her family, etc. instead of trying to `solve the problem'.
> I was so busy being a `nice supportive' person (too afraid to hurt him or to have him not like me) that I may have crippled him even more.

Enid's awareness of her own internal process was one of the ways she coped with dissonance.

> I think that my greatest learning is that my own discomforts need to become signals to me to step emotionally back and to evaluate what is actually happening. Listen with my heart but speak from within my head.

A change in attitude also helped Enid in coping with dissonance. "This experience reinforced for me the need to go slow, the client will lead the way, that doors open when the time is right." [trusting the client, trusting the process]

Enid had high expectations for herself as a counsellor.

> I want to be effective by being real in the here and now. I want to create an environment so that my client can risk enough to be real too. I would like to make a meaningful difference in my client's life.

Fran's Story

Fran began by expressing her awareness of feeling that "people appeared competitive and judgmental to me". Insightfully, she discovered that what she seemed to perceive in her colleagues was actually a reflection of how she felt about herself.

> My initial judgment of my classmates was about my view of self. My need to have the external environment safe for me to just be was about my inability to completely accept me. At this point, I believe that as I learn to love and accept me unconditionally, without judgment, I will gradually lose that nagging critical voice that is so quick to fault, try, judge, and execute.

Fran also expressed her feelings of insecurity in her development as a counsellor. "Am I doing this right? "Shouldn't I be studying under a mentor in order to grasp what to do and how to use techniques in the different theoretical orientations? Shouldn't I practice these interventions before using them on innocent clients?"

She went on to express a broad range of other feelings associated with the process.

> This ambition of being a counsellor is my passion....I realize that along with the jubilation of achieving my goal of entering the masters program in counselling are the sacrifices and losses of going back to school. I'm scared? I'm excited? I feel like crying? Wow!

The need to do things perfectly - `perfect' therapy is a part of Fran's story. This drive towards perfection may be one that has been the motivator for her successes in life. However, Fran's perfectionist tendencies seem to have created dissonance for her.

> Every time that I choose a particular approach to try with my client, I question whether the technique will help. I am not sure if the technique I choose will work. I find myself wanting to be guaranteed that the intervention that I choose will definitely help my clients want to make changes in their life and consequently make them feel better.
> If I was an expert counsellor, I would know how to phrase my sentences and what interventions to use to help him [the client] make a shift.

Fran also seemed to struggle with the dilemma of either `doing' or `being' with a client; being able to `let go' of her own agenda.

> I believe that I need to learn the balance between being there for my client by focusing on his agenda and on the other hand to know what tools to use and when to implement those tools so that I can help my client move out of being stuck.

Her feelings of over-responsibility and wanting to `fix' the client were tied up in this struggle.

> As he [the client] left the counselling room, I worried about him. I wondered how I could help him out of his pain. If only his wife could love him the way he needs to be loved. If only he did not have to work so hard to choose a new career....Sometimes I wish I had a magic wand to make things better instantaneously.

Fran's recognition that counselling is not a step-by-step process with guaranteed results, helped to alleviate some of her feelings of dissonance. "I'm realizing this counselling is not a quick process in which one can implement x, y, or z treatment technique and make clients all better."

Fran's story speaks of moral and ethical dilemmas that she faced, raising many questions.

> They [the clients] have just really begun in the last few weeks to allow me to see a part of themselves that they keep very hidden. How dare I then bring up the subject of termination! Is this ethical? Am I telling them that they are dispensable? Am I saying that any counsellor will do? If so, of what importance is the therapeutic relationship? Wouldn't uprooting a client at this stage be too traumatic? Am I breaking the

> principle of beneficence if my leaving the counselling relationship with a client causes them great emotional harm?

Grace's Story

Grace began her story by expressing a fear of being judged by her peers. Fortunately, she recognized this as a projection of her own judgment of herself. "I realize, however, how much I judge myself and project that on them. It's my own stuff."

Grace realized that her effectiveness `out there' with her clients really depended on how well she resolved her "own stuff".

> When I do make mistakes, I need to forgive myself. As a counsellor, it is important for me to be able to forgive my clients (be gentle on them) when they make mistakes as well. The more I can forgive and accept myself for all of who I am, the more I will be able to do that with my clients and others around me.

"I know that the more I take care of my own needs, the more I will be fully present to others (my clients)".

> I realized how important being liked is to me, not just being liked - but being liked by everyone. As a counsellor, I need to accept that there will be people (client) who will not like me or would prefer to see someone else. My sensitivity to the client's needs and my commitment to the client to do the most good will call me to `let go' of my need to be liked by everyone.

Grace also realized how important it was to keep her "stuff" separate from her client's "stuff". One of the key ways to take care of self is through awareness of boundaries, or lack of boundaries.

> For me to be aware when what is being said by my client is triggering something in me and to maintain my boundaries - to realize what is my

> stuff and what is theirs. This will not take my power away and when it is appropriate I can then deal with my own issue.

Boundaries are not just related to counselling relationships, but within personal relationships as well (parallel process), especially when faced with "counselling" a close friend. Grace struggled with the issue of not being able to end a conversation when its length had well exceeded her comfort zone. "Two hours is a long time. I have rights and needs as well. I need to let go of the `should's around that I should always be there for my clients".

Another boundary issue that seemed to impact both Grace's personal relationships and client relationships was that of being over-responsible.

> Within my own personal life, I have difficulty `letting go' of the need to protect my own children and to trust them more. I do struggle with believing in empowering my clients (and myself), although I also know I have a `rescuer' part in me.

Grace was aware of the influences of past experiences and "unfinished business" on the development as a counsellor, and found several ways that were helpful in dealing with these. "Talking to my peers, other counsellors, are ways to process it and also to journal about it".

Grace experienced a struggle between her head and her heart. "I know in my head that I can not take my clients home with me, but my heart sometimes has a life of its own."

Amongst the inner turmoil, Grace's belief and trust in the self provided inner strength and wisdom. "Personally, I need to nurture the spiritual part of me. I feel more empowered and trust my inner self more fully."

"For me to trust myself and believe in myself is important and plays an important role in the ability to trust and believe in my clients."

Grace also found that the support of colleagues was extremely powerful and necessary in her own growth and development as a counsellor. "Each of

us shared at such a deep level and I was really touched with the sensitivity, love and care within our group....We are not 'sole flyers'.

Harold's Story

Harold's story focused on the academic, intellectual part of his life, with his newly attained knowledge and counselling techniques from the counselling program. After reading in one of the counselling text books, Harold observed that the importance of decision making in the counselling process reflected his own beliefs about how change occurs.

> I think the beginning key to changed behavior is making new decisions. Therefore how one discovers the problem, sets up goals, and explores alternatives can be done in many ways, but at some point decisions must be made by the client.

When Harold experienced anxiety around beginning his practicum placement, further reading in this area and the support by one of his peers helped to dissipate the anxiety.

> Another incident which helped to decrease my anxiety level was when we were practicing counselling and I was the client. I brought up my concern about having a high level of anxiety when counselling my first clients. My fellow student did an excellent job of counselling and I felt better after talking with him.

Attaining new skills seemed to alleviate Harold's anxiety and helped him feel somewhat "in control" of the therapeutic process. Harold then faced an "I don't know" experience when he could not play the "expert" role.

> This experience was critical in that it gave me confidence that I don't have to be an expert or have vast amounts of knowledge to be useful. I

> can resist temptation to be directive and be non-directive. It also demonstrated to me my limitations as a counsellor.

Harold expressed how great it felt for a client to "fit" the text as that experience seemed to validate the theoretical concepts that he was learning.

> This is critical for me because it was probably the first time in five years of academics that I observed book knowledge in real life. Even that which is presented in class as facts are theory to me because I can't say as I have experienced them in real life. It seems like academics and real life are two different worlds. Observing my client behaving in a way consistent with the text may have started the construction of a bridge between the two worlds.

Ian's Story

Ian admitted that the beginning workshop posed some reflective questions which opened up the space for him to examine his own attitudes and values, "perhaps for the first time". "What [italics added] I am doing [in the next five years] will not be as important as the way [italics added] I am doing things. The values, beliefs, and ideals that I hold, I would like to take with me into the future in whatever I choose to do."

The workshop also created an experience of dissonance for Ian as he struggled to support others whose values differed from his own. This led to an important learning in his development as a counsellor.

> Perhaps too, as a counsellor, I need to be able to accept uncritically the values that other people hold even if they are not constant with my own. Being in a group situation with others in the program, during the weekend, as they articulated their views prompted this evaluation of the issues related to values and an understanding of its importance.... Discovering the need to be open to different viewpoints and indeed values was thus an important learning experience and in many ways provided for me a useful starting point to the counselling courses.

Ian initially struggled with the negative feelings that resulted from his unfavorable comparison of himself to his colleagues. "Was there something wrong with me?" He then began to get in touch with ownership. "Ownership enables me comfortably to accept what others are saying without experiencing a need to compare myself in light of their observations." This helped him to appreciate and accept his differences.

Ian was also aware of the opening and closing of space. "Initially for me the exercise closed space - no doubt about that - but only because I tried to view myself in terms of the experiences of others...Reflection ultimately opened space, but only after realizing that different people will have different needs and will have different ways of showing these needs." With this experience and insight, Ian learned how essential openness and acceptance were to the counselling relationship.

Ian maintained a `reflective stance' throughout his story and committed to this stance as an ongoing process. "[Thus] I need to arm myself with a critical attitude (a hermeneutic of suspicions) and critically evaluate my role in the counselling situation, my methods, my intentions, and my motivations and not merely those of the client".

Being placed in the "shoes of a client" in a role-play exercise and experiencing the feeling of being disempowered and not being believed or validated was a powerful experience for Ian. It emphasized the need to value the client's subjective experience and trust the client's own process. "As a counsellor one should be comfortable with ambiguity and open-endedness, particularly in the opening stages of a relationship. Don't try and impose a framework on someone else's problems. Let the unfolding story of the client guide the framework, not vice versa".

Ian still struggled with the difficulty of letting go of his own agenda and coming to terms with his own limitations as a counsellor; trusting the client's own process

> One has to learn to let go of certain clients and one cannot force them to see that they need to change, nor can you or should you dictate what direction the change should take, nor can you help them make change until they themselves are ready.

Even with `knowing' this, Ian pondered and questioned his own competence, "I also wonder what if there was anything I could have done differently to perhaps bring about a different perhaps better, more satisfying result."

Jill's Story

Jill began her story with an insight around a major shift from an "outcome-oriented" to a "process-oriented" view of herself as a person. She saw herself very differently; in a new mode of "being-in-the-world", fully embracing the "learning experience".

Jill was aware of the paradigm shift in this learning environment and was "e joying the experience of becoming free and autonomous" with the openi.g of space.

Conversing with others can be helpful to Jill in discovering what is her truth - distinguishing between her needs and those of her clients. "The client's needs should determine the form that the therapeutic relationship will take."

Through a conversation with a professor and through a personal experience in class, Jill became aware of a part of herself which she had not seen before.

> I was having to acknowledge how deeply ingrained, how much a part of me, my concern with pathology is and how severely it can limit my understanding of people - including my future clients....I'm also aware of the need to be aware of where my focus lies, and this increases the likelihood that, eventually I'll be able to effect the desired refocusing.

Jill recognized the blurred boundaries between the self and the counsellor and seemed quite accepting of the fact that the two can not be separated.

> I don't draw a clear distinction between my development as a person and my development as a counsellor. I believe that everything that contributes to the former of [illegible] contributes to the latter. The most important learnings revolve [illegible]s in which my own attitudes and emotions facilitate or hinder [illegible] on with people.

Although an encounter with [illegible] visor turned out to be extremely difficult and conflictual, Jill was still able to identify important "learnings" from this painful experience.

> It should be obvious that what happened between [ ] and myself has prompted extensive reflection and self-examination along previously unexplored lines. This, in itself, cannot help but contribute to my development as a counsellor...I suspect that because [ ] was being so harshly critical of me, she served as an externalization of my overly harsh inner critic.

Jill found herself in a conflictual situation with her supervisor who disagreed on the plan for a client. Jill felt very strongly that what her supervisor was asking her to do was not appropriate. She pursued this with her supervisor and her supervisor supported Jill in her decision.

> I felt that it contributed significantly to my development as a counsellor in that it suggested to me that there was some merit to my view of the case and that sharing my views on how the case should be handled could sometimes influence a more experienced counsellor's view on the

> subject. This boosted my confidence in my judgment and made it more likely that I will engage in a dialogue with a supervisor if I disagree with his or her instruction regarding my cases in future.

Jill not only felt more confident, but also empowered by her supervisor.

The discovery of her limitations as a counsellor however, was painful, and experiencing those limitations was, of course, much more impactful than just reading about them.

> I'd come to understand at an emotional level that what happens in a given session depends as much on the client as it does on the counsellor. Now, I understand emotionally, though I find it difficult to accept in this case, that people other than myself and my client can be involved in, and influence the outcome of, a counselling relationship. (It's fine to study systems theory in the classroom, but seeing how it works in "real life" is far more convincing and disturbing to me).

Karen's Story

Like many others, Karen was quite impacted by the depth of sharing at the initial workshop. She felt that the telling of her story and listening to other colleague's stories in her small group helped facilitate a closeness that was not experienced with other members of the workshop. "We took the time to `listen' to each other". The experience helped put Karen in her client's shoes, and as a counsellor. This moved her to "developing my listening skills. I am encouraging myself to talk less and listen more".

This intensity of the group seemed to heighten the sensitivity to feelings of inclusion and exclusion for Karen. "Instead of the class members growing together over the past two weeks, I felt that group members seemed to be more "within" themselves and I was feeling like I did not belong with the group".

Being able to discuss this with her supervisor, Karen could then understand how "in our development as counsellors being `counselled', we would tend to be more reflective and within ourselves - a similar process that clients go through in their own development. The process is the ebb and flow of growth and development.

The appreciation of differences was also identified. "We should be aware at times when we feel that we need to belong, others may need to feel like they need to be alone. In that we should let our `leather stretch' when it gets wet, not put up barriers".

Through another critical incident, Karen emphasized the acknowledgement of "what fits for me".

> ...as I develop my counselling skills, it was important that I incorporate with my personal style, theoretical frameworks and models that were comfortable for me, not my classmates.

Because of some of her feelings of dissonance, Karen identified the importance of debriefing in being able to process specific issues. In one particular incident, Karen was role-playing a client and had some insights about what clients may be needing in a therapeutic relationship.

> When my counselor therapist and I returned to the classroom, I was aware that I felt `drained' and did not easily `come out' of that role of the depressed patient...Because I need time before facing the world again to `become myself', it made me realize that I had been `wide open', and needed time to close up again. Therefore, it may be important for the client who has opened up to the therapist to have time to close up again before the end of the session, before he faces the world.

Classroom lectures also impacted Karen's development as a counsellor by allowing her to look at her own personal life and situation. This was

brought to her attention by the familiar "pit" feeling in the stomach and reflecting on what that meant to her.

> Well, I think that I was beginning to feel guilty as I attended lectures on family issues and systems, functional patterns of interactions, and what keeps a family "stuck" within the ruts. Somewhere in a little "rut" I saw myself.

In one particularly rewarding experience, Karen was delighted to discover that her learned counselling skills could be used in other parts of her life outside of the therapeutic relationship. This helped her see that her role as counsellor was really not separate from her `self'.

> I intentionally used my developing counselling skills to help them [members of the women's group] focus on a "figure-ground" Gestalt perspective within a systems model of problem solving to help them understand what might influence the leadership style of a good leader. I also found that in order to gain their trust, I utilized empathetic responses, positive affirmation, a self-disclosure, normalizing techniques along with open ended questioning. It was a wonderful experience !!

Larry's Story

Larry shared how he valued the sense of openness and trust that quickly developed as his colleagues shared their "life" stories with each other.

> I was pleasantly surprised with the ease with which the group was willing to open up, share feelings, emotions, and experiences with the rest of the group. This suggested a sense of trust and colleague bonding that is extremely desirable, valuable and obviously of considerable merit in this area of study....It became evident that many of the anxieties I had with regard to beginning studying again were shared by others and that the air of anxiety/ uncertainty was effectively calmed...During the introductory workshop I felt inspired, invited to develop and grow personally and to perfect my own personal styles and theory.

Larry struggled, though, with wanting to do what came naturally and yet wanting to do the 'right' thing, professionally. "I feel very ambivalent about the situation. I recognize that I now have a professional responsibility in not attempting to use my "new" skills yet I would gladly give this young lady support and an "ear" to her problems."

With a friend, Larry also struggled with how to "be" in this possible dual relationship when his friend confided in Larry about thoughts of suicide. "Not counselling your friends is one thing but letting a comment such as this [suicide] go by is another...We had another beer and got talking about hunting and all the time I'm thinking, "don't counsel him...you are not allowed".

Larry did, however, find his new counselling skills to be a real benefit in his current working situation. They helped him gain a greater insight into the client's world.

> The critical point for me is that the skills I am learning are permitting me to gain a greater insight into the experience of the clients with which I work....There is no doubt that constructs, particularly the concept of relationship and empathy are greatly enhancing this process.

Through a role-play situation, Larry was affirmed when he followed his "hunches" and saw past the issue that his client initially presented. Things are not always what they seem. "The experience of having a client present with one issue and then to discover the real issue was extremely enlightening and powerful."

Larry also experienced how being non judgmental and allowing himself to be "led in the "dance" with a client, built a trusting therapeutic relationship and permitted the client to let go of his defenses.

The need to choose a specific theory was a source of dissonance for Larry. "Perhaps the greatest struggle for me has been deciding which peg to

hang my hat on in terms of counselling theory". After careful consideration of the various theories, I am then felt comfortable in developing an eclectic approach.

Maureen's Story

Maureen began her story by getting in touch with the importance of self-care and realizing how much she has neglected taking care of herself. She was aware of the self-talk that often seemed to get in her way. A parallel process was evident when Maureen decided she would encourage her clients to do the same.

> As a counsellor it is important that I nourish my self and honour my self and my needs, both in order to maintain my objectivity and to diminish stress. As well, since I value taking time for me, this will be a skill that I would encourage my clients to develop.

Being placed in a position similar to that of a client allowed Maureen to identify with how a client would feel when told that she was a student clinician. "This experience has helped me to "walk in the client's shoes"; to realize how important it is to treat the client with respect and to treat the client as a person, not a case or a label."

Through another role-play situation in class, Maureen, as the client, experienced the impact of certain types of questioning and the impact of language.

> The impact of the words "invite the client". For me those words are key words. I know I am much more willing to discuss and share of my self if I am asked in a gentle, non-judgmental, non-threatening way. Likely most clients would feel the same.

A discussion in class triggered feelings of stress from having many things to cope with. "How do I achieve balance?" This led Maureen to wonder, "There will be clients who will present the same feelings, so how can I help them if I can't achieve balance in my own life?" To deal with this dissonance, Maureen increased her awareness around this issue by identifying her own coping patterns.

An experiential exercise in class gave Maureen an opportunity to take care of herself "For once in my life it was O.K. for me to stop, be still, and not move... Today, for a moment, I consciously chose to stop, to be quiet, and watch the others while reflecting on my own needs. I felt near tears - yet the feeling was one of relaxation and letting go".

Again, Maureen related her experience to that which clients may encounter. "I realize the importance for me to be aware that clients may experience this same roller coaster feeling...Through the use of self-reflective questioning, I can invite clients to empower themselves by making conscious choices..."

Maureen also discussed her awareness of how difficult it was for her to maintain boundaries, especially in the area of expectations.

> It will be crucial for me to keep my boundaries clear in the therapeutic setting, so that I do not get hooked in when my client fails to do something he has agreed to do or breaks a contract with me (or someone else)....This will be a tough one for me, because I have felt my worth tied to other people's performance, and have felt that they do not value me when they do not do what they said they would do.

Inner emotional turmoil was also experienced when Maureen asked several questions of herself: "Do I confront people and let them know when I feel let down by something they have done? Or is this strictly my issue - for me to solve on my own? Do I value my self enough to speak up and express

my frustrations? Or, do I put my self second in order to maintain a positive relationship?"

Having personally experienced how good it felt to be really listened to, and how much closer she felt to the person who listened, Maureen wanted to ensure that she provided that experience for her clients. "It is crucial to allow the client the time to tell his story before I jump in with questions. Sometimes the most wonderful thing is to have someone listen to me - clients likely feel the same".

On the other hand, Maureen was also able to identify a non-productive pattern she had been following in her marriage that she did not want to follow with her clients. "I now am able to see beyond the rescuing and to see the impact it has [in the video] on the couple's relationship. Rescuing merely perpetuates the under functioning pattern."

Maureen still struggled with her discomfort at seeing people in pain and her desire to rescue them. "I don't like to see people in pain, and so I comfort them, but is my motive to comfort them, or is it to make my self feel more at ease? Being aware of my rescuing habit, and being aware of the impact rescuing can have on relationships, is a good beginning towards handling the problem. I now have that awareness, not only at a cognitive level, but at a gut level. Now I can act on that awareness."

From observing her supervisor doing therapy, Maureen experienced many learnings, one of which:

> The importance of knowing my "own stuff" in order that I can avoid projecting, and recognize and deal with it when I am projecting. I am there for the client, not to handle my own stuff. If I let my "stuff" get in the way, the client will sense it and his progress will stop, as he will subconsciously realize that I am no longer there for him.

An important realization for Maureen was that, no matter what others told her, she was just not ready to make a decision. This provided insight into the limitations of a counsellor.

> The counsellor can try all sorts of techniques, but until the client can accept the idea, nothing will happen, except possibly increasing frustration levels on the part of both the client and the counsellor. The counsellor must be patient and allow the client to proceed at his own pace.

Maureen spoke of having faith and trust in her clients and also in God and surrendering to that - letting go of the responsibility and control. Her supervisor provided tremendous support and wisdom, including one particular saying that she treasured.

> "God grant me the serenity
> to accept the things I cannot change
> the courage to change the things I can
> and the wisdom to know the difference."

Nancy's Story

Nancy began her story by recognizing that she needed to take better care of herself and to not to 'force' her influence on clients.

> I must take care not to project my energy levels or motivational levels on others thereby influencing them to do what is not right for them. I must also take care not to overextend myself because I could become ineffective in a helping role... It is hard for me to "take time.

Much the same issue came up when Nancy had "everything organized and planned" for her first interview, although the interview did not unfold as she expected. "This was not how the initial interview was supposed to look!"

Nancy struggled with the way the interview "should" be and the way it actually was. Having gone through this experience of dissonance, Nancy realized that she needed to stay flexible and follow the client's lead. "When one is dealing with people as opposed to things anything can and will happen. It is important to `stay' with the client. It is their agenda much more than it is yours".

Through journalling, Nancy got in touch with how beneficial understanding and dealing with issues from her childhood were in relation to understanding adolescent clients. Nancy could identify with what many of today's adolescents are going through. "I do need to address this area of sensitivity in myself and use my understanding of adolescence in a way that will benefit the children with whom I come in contact. They can benefit from my understanding."

For Nancy, self-reflection was an important process in her development as a counsellor. "I appreciate better the need to reflect on my past history from time to time in order to be more self-aware. I must be self-aware in order to be effective with others."

Through an experience of putting herself in the "client's shoes, Nancy realized " how it is crucial to entertain all possibilities when someone comes for guidance, support, or help in coping. It is most likely a good idea to start with the simple and work to the complex if in fact working to the complex becomes necessary at all".

Working with a client triggered memories of a similar issue that Nancy had struggled with. The work led to growth for both Nancy and her client in this therapeutic process.

> As we [client and herself] rehearsed "I" statements I realized that these are some of the very things I had difficulty with in the past. There has been growth for my client and growth for myself in the process. I

> couldn't ask for more than that. I also remembered that in the past I have experienced difficulty expressing my needs clearly, thinking that I would be more lovable if I went along with another's wishes rather than my own. I remember fearing the loss of love if I created conflict. This helped me understand her fears more clearly.

Nancy reflected back on the past four months and realized that she has learned a great deal; she looked at the world a little differently now.

> My view of myself is changing...My world view has changed significantly in one main way...The past is always with us and provides the learning that facilitates change. The future brings hope that is a necessary condition for growth. The present is the playground whereupon we can act out our lives with intentionality. Intentionality will result when the world view is a whole one which encompasses past, present, and future.

Olive's Story

Olive began her story by expressing her appreciation in reaching this stage of her counsellor training and her faith in the future. "I felt very thankful for God for his guidance and his faithfulness in fulfilling all his promises and I again felt the assurance that he will always take care of me, even in situations that are seemingly impossible."

Olive recognized the importance of emotional support for herself. "It is very important for me (and perhaps others) to have someone that understands me, to be supportive of me and to help me understand and gain insight about myself not only through crisis, but all throughout my life."

Olive also experienced the physical effects of not taking care of herself. "I really ought to know my limitations and physical exhaustion level, but somehow, I've arranged a day that is far too hard to handle for myself. The

stress simply starts from the shoulders, proceeds up the neck and is really hard to bear when it gets to the head."

In a counselling session with her most "challenging" client, Olive discovers her limitations as a counsellor. "It is not my responsibility or my abilities or skills that is going to change her [the client]. It is her willingness to adapt a new way of relating to the world that is crucial in her development. Nothing in the world is going to change her if she is unwilling to change." Thus Olive decided to let go of the "expert" counsellor and opt for the "I don't know" counsellor stance instead.

As a result of a role-play exercise in class, Olive discovered the importance of maintaining boundaries.

> As a counsellor and a person, I should not be swept away or be overly empathetic to people I interact with to the extreme that I agree and identify totally and subjectively with their view thus losing my objectivity and ability to analyze the situation thus rendering me ineffective as a counsellor.

Being able to identify her with a client through another role play exercise, Olive gained some insight and empathy as to what a client may be experiencing in a therapeutic setting.

> Through this exercise, I could really feel the anxiety and nervousness and the ambiguity a client may feel when they walk into a counselling situation for the first time. Thus as a counsellor, I should really give clients some time to relax and learn about the context from which they came. Moreover, when clients are reluctant to talk about their problem or when they are very vague and slow about disclosing their concerns, I should not take it as a sign of failure on my part but be empathetic as to where the clients came from and their nervousness about actually telling someone about their problems, perhaps for the first time.

While studying for a midterm exam it struck Olive that learning to counsel was not simply a matter of getting information from books and trying

to use it. "It [books]seems artificial and inauthentic...After actual counselling sessions, however, reading the text made much more sense and some of the materials actually applies!! I still need to say that it is the assimilation and integration of information and knowledge into one's self that is crucial to the process of becoming an authentic counsellor!!"

Themes

Through my interaction with each story, it became obvious that there were many "common experiences" (or themes) that contributed to the development of a counsellor. The "common themes" that I have chosen to focus on were clearly heard. The way I have chosen to capture these "common themes" reflects my understanding of the stories as I stand outside all of them. The themes seemed to fall into two main categories: dissonance and experiential learning.

Dissonance

Many of the common themes had to do with dissonance, both the forms it took and how participants reacted to it. Some participants shared more of themselves and described their struggle with dissonance in detail. Others seemed to gloss over their inner struggle, perhaps not even wanting to acknowledge it. It is important to acknowledge the untold stories and to wonder ....

Forms of Dissonance

The critical incidents revealed many forms of dissonance that had been encountered by the participants. The most common forms of dissonance that

the participants struggled with were non-acceptance of self, feelings of incompetency, and unclear boundaries. The participants experienced inner turmoil, battling between the "shoulds" and the reality of their experience.

Non-acceptance of Self. Feelings of non-acceptance seemed to come up in several different types of situations. Many times these feelings resulted from high expectations. Some participants described how they had achieved so much to get where they were and felt they "should" be getting this more easily. The questioning of whether "I am good enough" (in comparison to peers) was also an issue for many participants. Iris shared, "Initially for me the exercise closed space - no doubt about that - but only because I tried to view myself in terms of the experiences of others, I wondered whether I should have felt more, whether I was lacking in feeling or not, particularly in terms of the reactions of other group members and what this would mean for me as a counsellor".

Non-acceptance of self was also seen when some participants felt judged by their peers. Interestingly, none of the participants who expressed the feelings of being judged by others, with the exception of one participant, identified this as coming from anyone else but their own colleagues. Carol describes her experience, "As the sharing continued around the circle, I questioned whether I would let my new `colleagues' know information about my background which may lead them to question my competence as a future counsellor." These feelings of being judged and not accepted by others reflected their own feelings of non-acceptance and self- doubts. Fran summarizes this realization. "Of course I realize that my reactions are all about self. My initial judgment of my classmates was about my view of self. My need to have the external environment safe for me to just be was about my inability to completely accept me. The workshop setting has reminded me of where I am in acceptance of self".

Incompetency. This form of dissonance was prevalent in many of the stories; even if not overtly expressed, feelings of incompetence seemed to be at the base of many critical incidents. Ian was forthright in his disclosure. "Moreover it leaves me with somewhat of a crisis of confidence and lots of self-doubts. What could I have done differently? Could I have been more confident with the client? Could I have been more reassuring, more directive?" Most of the participants had come from backgrounds where they felt a level of confidence in either their academic experience or their work experience. To come from that into such a non-traditional learning environment as the counselling Master's program was quite disorienting. As one participant said, "This type of education experience that I am now participating in is very different from anything I have known in the past". Feelings of incompetency of course, also resulted from the "I don't know" experiences common to the development phase of any new skill. Fran wrote, "I do not know what will make him better. For me this is a scary revelation. I really do not know."

Unclear Boundaries. This source of dissonance manifested itself in a variety of ways for the individual participants. For Grace, it was an issue that impacted both her personal and professional life.

> As an extrovert, I have always enjoyed being around people and getting a lot of energy from them. I learned that I need some space for myself. When I was an undergrad, the university was a fairly isolating place for me...I did not have to work to have that space for myself... In this program, I realize that I must consciously create that space for myself. As a counsellor, I need to be able to set boundaries with people.

Maureen recognized the struggle with her boundaries when involved with clients in a counselling relationship.

> Where I will have to be really clear is in not attaching my self to the client's results, or lack of results...Based on how I have operated in the past, keeping my boundaries really clear will be important in order for me to maintain an effective therapeutic stance.

Becoming over-responsible - the "rescuer" - is usually another indication of unclear boundaries, and often creates dissonance. The battle that occurs between the heart and the head on this issue can be a very difficult one and is faced by many counsellor trainees. Enid came to terms with this issue when she explained, "I think that my greatest learning is that my own discomforts need to become signals to me to step emotionally back and to evaluate what is actually happening. Listen with my heart but speak from within my head". This 'helper' characteristic is present in so many counsellors because it so often is the one that calls people into the counselling profession.

Reactions to Dissonance

The participants reacted to dissonance in many different ways. Some participants were more "doers", creating and following a plan of action to lessen the dissonance. Others were more "be'ers", choosing to learn from their dissonance by reflecting on their awarenesses. The most common ways of reacting to dissonance were a change in attitude, having faith, using self-affirmations, and turning to others for support.

Change in Attitude. This form of reacting to dissonance was the most common, probably because most attitude changes came about as a result of self reflection, and self reflection was facilitated through the writing of critical incidents. Other methods of data collection, such as interviews, are less self-directed and therefore may be less conducive to self reflection or attitude change.

Increased acceptance of self was the primary attitude change. Beth described her coming to terms with acceptance of self, "I don't have to be a

perfect counsellor this week; I won't be a perfect counsellor by Christmas, and I will almost certainly always have doubts about my efficacy because of the nature of the counselling interaction.

Increased acceptance of self was sometimes expressed clearly and directly and sometimes it was inferred by "reading between the lines". Enid found an expressive way of describing her acceptance of self. "I am learning to feel comfortable within my own skin".

Faith. Many participants talked about falling back on some form of "faith" to help them in struggling with dissonance. Although other words were used, the reference seemed to be to "something" beyond their normal resources. Angie speaks of "Hope". Beth describes her `faith' as, "Is someone or something really looking out for me? I believe God delivers the occasional kick in the pants that I need to wake me up and make me think about what I am doing". Grace reflects, "As a counsellor, personally, I need to nurture the spiritual part of me. I feel more empowered and trust my inner self more fully. I will call on the goddess within myself, whenever I need to and to know that I have the inner wisdom within myself".

Self-Affirmation. A number of the participants used self affirmations to help in their struggles with dissonance. Some participants explained how saying self-affirmations to themselves would alleviate the dissonant feelings and they would then feel "good about themselves". After Angie, a participant in this study speaks of her emotional dissonance, she lists some affirmations for herself; one being, "I can influence my life and I can choose the perspective with which I am going to observe it". Another participant when dealing with feelings of incompetency around asking the "right" questions of a client, shared, "When I get worried and insecure about my ability to help a

client, I will make myself remember these words: I am learning; I am taking skills I already possess, making them conscious, and refining them".

Turning to Others for Support. Many of the participants also related to dissonance by turning to others - professors, supervisors, and colleagues - for support. Often through this interaction, the dissonance would be alleviated or diminished; a "positive experience". Harold was feeling anxious about beginning his counselling practicum and how effective he would be as a counsellor. As a client in a role play situation he sought the support of a fellow student who role played a counsellor. After discussing his anxiety with "his counsellor", Harold said, "I felt better after talking with him". Diane was struggling with resistance on the part of the client and turned to her supervisor for support. "[My supervisor], as expected, posed me a number of thought provoking questions. I am unable to recall exactly her wording that caused me to see things differently, however, she did accomplish this end."

Many participants seemed to recognize the importance of sharing and interacting with `others'. ""Often I am most strong when I ask for support. Ask friends, colleagues, or turn to God for help". One participant felt unsure and incompetent in dealing with a client for the first time. After she consulted with her seminar peers, she felt more confident. "I have used the counsellor tool of peer consulting".

Experiential Learning

The other main category into which the common themes seemed to fall consisted of those themes that dealt primarily with experiential learning. Since some of the experiential learnings certainly involved dissonance, classification under this category was somewhat arbitrary. The themes in the dissonance

category, however, spoke mainly of struggles that were focused on the participants' own development. Themes in the experiential learning category dealt with insights that were not only useful for personal growth, but also helped the participants identify with what clients would experience.

The connection between 'self' and clients was acknowledged through the many experiences that could be identified as common to both. We are all connected to each other in some way. "It isn't 'us' and 'them'. It's really only 'us'...we the human species. Almost every participant's story included a place where they could put themselves in the client's shoes. Identification with clients was very impactful, both in constructed situations and through own personal experiences. After a role-play situation, one participant said, "I could really feel the anxiety and nervousness and the ambiguity a client may feel when they walk into a counselling situation for the first time".

Most participants found that experiential learning was very influential in their development as a counsellor. "I had learned a tremendous amount from this experience. I found that I much prefer this form of experiential learning rather than the traditional lecturing form of teaching". Almost every participant's story included a place where they could put themselves in the client's shoes. The experiential learning was either intentional or unintentional and included both positive and what at first appeared to be negative experiences. Whatever form the experiential learning took, it was almost always embraced by the participants.

> I'm still always amazed by the power of living an experience. I haven't really learned anything new on the cognitive level in what I have expressed here. I've read about this, I've reasoned it out, I've talked about it with others. But none of these qualifies as experience on the affective level.

The experiential learning experiences most often led to a significant insight. Again, there were not only many insights but a variety of different insights throughout the participants' stories; some expressed more deeply than others. The most common ones were the need to take care of self, the need to be listened to, the power of group, and appreciation of differences.

Need to Take Care of Self.

Many participants entered this program and felt quite overwhelmed by the emotional and academic demands that they faced. Through this experience, they realized the importance of taking care of themselves and then were able to understand at a deeper level just how important it is for clients to learn how to take care of themselves as well. Through an experiential exercise in class, a participant realized how she had not been taking care of herself, emotionally and how she needed to listen to her inner voice as to what was the best for her. "The modeling of that behavior [taking care of own needs] to my clients will also help to facilitate the growth in their development of healthy relationships". Other participants were also able to recognize their past lack of commitment to making time for and taking care of themselves. As a result, many chose to seriously commit to that in the future. One participant recognized how easy it was for her to put others first and to not honour her own needs. In this particular situation, she chose to look after herself first. "Since I value taking time for me, this will be a skill that I would encourage my clients to develop".

Need to be Listened to.

A lot of participants also personally experienced the importance of the need to be listened to. From the weekend "retreat", a participant experienced the importance of being heard in a small group situation and wanting to continue that process during the two-hour supper break. "It might appear that each one of us needed more time to have our peers listen to our stories...we

took th[illegible]ne to listen to each other". Another participant expressed how she valued her close relationship with a room mate. "I also need people to talk to...They [clients] may be seeking someone to listen to them, or someone with whom they can share a burden". Again, through reflecting on their own experience, the participants were able to fully appreciate how large a part of the counselling experience "just being listened to" really is.

The Power of Group

The interactions within a group were the most talked about in the critical incidents. The sharing within a group setting was also a meaningful experience for many of the participants.

> The patient, supportive silence of my group certainly contributed to my decision to share; not sharing would have been more scary. At one point in my sharing, one of my group members reached out and touched my knee. It was like being thrown a lifeline.

Another participant with her own internal struggle declared, "The sharing of real issues in small groups was the specific catalyst for my 'revelation". Carol also shared how a small group experience had impacted; how she had experienced closeness after each member shared deeper parts of themselves. "This experience has left me with an appreciation of my colleagues....Our group members were deeply emotionally connected and it was very special to be invited to each other's worlds".

Appreciation of Differences.

Through a variety of personal experiences, participants became aware of the importance of both recognizing and valuing the uniqueness of others (clients). After being challenged about her beliefs and values, a participant was able to reaffirm herself and to know that she could accept others who did not share her beliefs. "It is important to emphasize the need to respect other's

convictions". After an experiential exercise in class, one participant compared his response to the responses of others. Initially he felt that there was "something wrong with him" and then reflected, "Different individuals will get different things from various activities and to differing degrees". This was an important insight into dealing with clients.

The Critical Incident Story

The critical incidents themselves have told a story of their own.

The most common sources of critical incidents - what participants identified as a significant experience in their development of a counsellor - were the in-class experiential learning sessions and counselling sessions with clients. The experiential learning sessions consisted of role-plays, small group exercises, and large group exercises (specifically the `step' exercise), and the initial weekend workshop.

The critical incidents varied in length from a third of a typed page (single spaced) to five pages. However, on the average, the length of a critical incident was one and a half pages long. Some critical incidents followed the specifically outlined format and some did not. As a result, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish between what preceded the critical incident, the critical incident itself and the incident's influence on counsellor development.

It was striking that in most of the critical incidents, the participants put themselves in the client's shoes, either intentionally or unintentionally and had numerous awarenesses and insights. The critical incidents however, mostly reflected what the participants felt was important to do "in the future". Not many talked about what they had actually done to put these insights into action.

Some participants' collection of critical incidents followed a dominant theme while others covered a variety of themes.

In the process of writing these critical incidents, some participants reflected on the process itself. "Hopefully, by finding a place to unload, whether it be writing my critical incidents or talking with my supervisor and colleagues, I will be better prepared to be present for my clients...I feel that at times these critical incident assignments are opportunities to create a therapeutic outlet for me".

"By journalling I can pinpoint areas of growth that I need to address and I can identify and explore issues that interfere with my ability to provide a good therapeutic atmosphere for my clients. It frightens me to think that there are things about me that are outside of my awareness. Journalling is a device to help me keep this unawareness in check."

"Reflection will continue to be one of the most important issues in my life".

The critical incidents were supposed to be focused on how they impacted the participants' development as counsellors. Many participants, however, also spoke of their personal growth from reflecting on the incidents. Connections were made and experiences paralleled between personal lives and professional lives. "I don't draw a clear distinction between my development as a person and my development as a counselior...the most important learnings revolve around ways in which my own attitudes and emotions facilitate or hinder my interactions with people". This speaks to the complexity of our humanness and our experiences. There is no black or white, only grey. Our life experiences just `are'. My encounter with these stories is my own reality -

not that of the participants. My hope is that by attempting to enter 'their worlds' I was able to understand a piece of their truth.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND SECONDARY REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A discussion of the findings in relation to existing literature was a difficult task. As previously mentioned, studies that focus on counsellor development from the perspective of the counsellors themselves, are extremely limited. To my knowledge, the present study is the first of its kind to attempt to understand the "lived experience" of the beginning of counsellor development from the perspective of the student counsellor, using a hermeneutic approach. Integrating theory with the participants' "lived experience" seemed to be the most beneficial way to discuss the findings. As a whole, each participants' experience did not "fit" into any particular model or a theory. However common components of individual experiences could be further understood by relating them to existing theory. For example, why do people respond to dissonance the way they do? Theory can perhaps help us to understand why the participants in this study reacted the way they did to situations which created dissonance for them. A caution is necessary, however. My attempts to provide linkages between theory and experience should not be perceived as "the" definitive explanation of the participants' experiences, only as a broadening of possible understandings.

In this chapter both the themes and some of the individual experiences of the participants are discussed in relation to the existing theories. Two important paths that lead to change are dissonance (both the experiencing of and the responding to dissonance), and experiential learning. First, different theories are used to help provide a deeper understanding in the areas of dissonance and attitude change. The many sources of dissonance and the ways

of coping with that dissonance were a major component of the participants' experiences. Their experiencing of and response to dissonance resulted in change, which took the form of self-discoveries, awareness, and growth, as well as an integration of beliefs, emotions, and behaviors. Experiential learning is discussed next. Every participant shared to some degree the importance of 'lived experience'. Literature is discussed which attempts to explain experiential learning and the impact and importance of experiential learning in counsellor development. Specifically, the types of 'lived experience' and other related themes are discussed. Also included in the secondary literature review is a section on supervision. This area is included not because the participants in the present study identified this as a common theme, but because of its "known" importance through previous research.

Dissonance

During the "experience" of counsellor development, attitudes were altered when dissonance was aroused. Dissonance increases a person's motivation to change (Axsom, 1989). Dissonance was experienced by the participants in interactions with supervisors, clients, colleagues, and self.

Sawatzky et al. (1991) suggest that the overall experience of dissonance might be like the experience of adolescence, a period of relative anxiety, turmoil, excitement and exploration, the ideal outcome of which is newfound confidence and identity. In this current study, the participants' stories reflect the various experiences and emotions associated with the dissonance that adolescents can face.

Many of the participants experienced the fear, frustration, anxiety, and confusion that frequently results from the recognition of skill, knowledge or experience deficiencies. This emotional turmoil and anxiety is associated with inexperience and presumed to have to rely on oneself more than expected. To help to alleviate this dissonance, Pates and Knasel (1989) suggest that a 'de-mystification' process needs to be encouraged. They believe that student counsellors should be encouraged to see interpersonal skills as essentially natural ones which can be usefully refined and developed by themselves and not just skills that are the exclusive prerogative of 'experts'.

The following theories will attempt to explain how the different sources of dissonance were experienced and responded to by the participants in this study.

Theories

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Festinger (1957) stated that cognitive dissonance is an unpleasant state of tension generated when a person has two or more bits of information that are inconsistent or do not "fit together".

Aronson (1969) argues that cognitive dissonance does not occur with just any two cognitions. They must be cognitions about behavior and self-concept that are at variance, for example, "I am an honest person" and "I have misled someone". A participant described an experience of believing that she was a good listener and yet, she realized that her behavior did not support that belief. After this experience of dissonance, she was able to decide to change her feelings of incompetency and be more congruent. However, if people do not think that they are honest and they lie, no dissonance will occur and no

change will result. Attitude-behavior consistency is greatest for certain personality types (Worchel, Cooper, & Goethals, 1988):

Low Self Monitors, people who are particularly apt to show attitude-behavior consistency, tend to rely on their inner states and disposition when making behavior decisions. They select situations where they can fully express their attitudes. High Self Monitors, however, tend to be sensitive to situational cues and base their decisions on what the outside world seems to demand (Worchel et al., 1988). On this basis, participants in this study consisted both of low self-monitors and high self-monitors.

"Doers" show attitude-behavior consistency, by taking a more active role. A dominant theme in one participant's story was how frequently she put her words into action. An example was when she became aware of her need to take better care of herself: to exercise and spend time alone. She exhibited consistency between this attitude and action by following through with spending some time by herself writing and then by riding her bike. After experiencing a great deal of emotional turmoil around feeling that she was "not getting enough" from her supervisor, another participant made a commitment to act. "I have come to the decision that I will seek out my colleagues, Ph.D. students, and possibly other supervisors as to supplement what supervision I am receiving".

People with high levels of self-consciousness and moral reasoning also exhibit consistency between behavior and attitude. They tend to be more sensitive when something just does not "feel right" and are bothered by it. Many participants' stories consisted of dissonance and a heightened sensitivity to what was "right". A participant questioned her level of competency and whether she "should" be counselling clients at this stage of her development. "Shouldn't I practice these interventions before using them on innocent clients?

Is it ethical to use the interventions that I have read about without being thoroughly trained in them?"

"An attitude is a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related" (Allport, 1935). In order for a change of attitude to occur, congruency needs to be achieved through a shift of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels. Attitudes formed through direct experience are more likely to be consistent with behaviors.

Some of the dissonance leading to change in the development of a counsellor can be understood in relation to two different paradigms - "induced compliance" and "effort justification".

The paradigm of induced compliance. This paradigm is characterized by individuals who are persuaded to behave in ways that are inconsistent with their private attitudes (Worchel et al., 1988). Some of the participants in this study expressed an internal struggle when they were faced with situations that went against their own beliefs. Critical factors necessary if induced compliance is to lead to dissonance-produced attitude change are: (1) choice; (2) commitment, (3) aversive consequences, and (4) personal responsibility (Worchel et al., 1988). A participant in this study stated how she wrestled with the issue of termination of clients. She felt guilt because she was "abandoning" her clients. This theme of unclear boundaries that presented in the form of over-responsibility was a dominant theme in her story. This dilemma of whether this was the correct thing to do raised many questions for her, "Am I telling them they are dispensable? Am I saying any counsellor will do?" She then acknowledge that termination can be a learning experience as it is a necessary part of life.

A situation that some of the participants in this study faced that went against their own beliefs was the learning environment itself. Varying levels of frustration were expressed in a number of critical incidents by participants who wrestled with the conflict between their belief of how they "should" be taught and how it actually was. One participant commented, "This experience is much different than any other training I have completed". Some participants expressed how this counselling Master's learning environment was much more anxiety producing than others they had been in (i.e. undergraduate degree program). Heppner and Roehlke (1984) suggest that student counsellors want techniques and directions to do counselling the "right way" from their supervisors. It may have "seemed easier", but the result would not have been an attitude change.

The effort justification paradigm. Axsom (1989) argues that the decision to suffer for something results in the tension state of cognitive dissonance. People can change their attitudes and behaviors if they are induced to suffer in order to achieve their goal. Participants often "voiced" the amount of frustration they were experiencing and then in the next "breath" how they felt more committed to their goal than ever. This goal is then highly valued. The awareness of pressures that lay ahead of her seemed to increase one participant's passion in becoming a counsellor. "I am enthused that I have chosen to face the pain of hard work and deferred gratification in order to achieve my goal of being a psychologist". Counsellors-in-training choose to enter a dissonance producing environment. As student counsellors, they are constantly putting themselves or being placed in situations in which they can learn from their interactions with clients, peers, supervisors, and others. These trainees are hampered by anxiety, lack of knowledge of technique, insufficient practical knowledge of counselling, insufficient belief in the creativity of their

clients, and inadequate familiarity with clients' psychological and social environments (Williams, 1987). They were seeking to advance their training, realizing that they did not "know enough" or "have all the skills" they believed desirable. Some of the participants questioned whether they would ever know enough to feel competent. The initial period of counsellor development was one of challenge, of facing up to weaknesses, and of discovering strengths through experimentation, self-questioning, and self-discovery (Sawatzky et al., 1991). Participants shared how they struggled with "balance" in their lives and feelings of being overwhelmed "by it all".

Axsom (1989) argued that subjects who exuded a high effort improved only when they were not provided with an opportunity to misattribute dissonance arousal. Student counsellors who exhibit a great deal of effort, will not change significantly if they can misattribute dissonance arousal (divert it somewhere else; discount it, or deny it). They need to go through that experience of feeling dissonance and recognize its source and its value. As part of the counsellor developmental experience, the student counsellor has freely chosen to undertake something high in effort in order to become a psychologist.

As these theories do not fully explain all of the findings from the participants' experiences, some alternatives to dissonance in explaining attitude change will now be discussed.

Impression Management Theory

People are motivated to "appear" consistent because they have been positively rewarded when it has looked as though they have acted consistently and negatively sanctioned when it has seemed that they acted inconsistently (Worchel et al., 1988). Conclusively, a change of attitude happens, not out of

some internal need for consistency, but to "appear" consistent. If it is true that these cognitive changes come about as a means of reducing the unpleasant tension state, then it may also be true that any means of reducing the tension may satisfactorily reduce the dissonance (Worchel et al., 1988). In this study, attitude change that occurred from appearing consistent was difficult to ascertain from the participants' critical incidents. It certainly was not specifically mentioned. Participants in this study may have "appeared" confident as beginning counsellors, when in fact they felt a lack of confidence. This appearance of confidence could then facilitate an attitude change of confidence.

Self-Perception Theory

Given that beliefs about self may be causal factors in how we feel about ourselves, how we behave, and the goals that we set, it is important to consider the origins of the self-concept and pathways for change and development (Littrell & Magel, 1991). Unlike dissonance theory, Self-Perception Theory views attitude change as the result of a nonmotivational, inferential process -- change that is information driven (Axsom, 1989). According to Bem (1972), persons rely upon two major sources of information when formulating beliefs about themselves. These sources are: (1) reaction of others and (2) self-observations. People who rely on "reaction of others" are people who use external sources of opinion such as supervisors or fellow classmates to draw conclusions about what they feel and the traits they possess. Many participants expressed emotional turmoil in this area, "Do I measure up , compared to my peers and in the eyes of my supervisors?" This can work both negatively and positively. When a client did not respond in the way a participant had "planned", the participant questioned her own competency and she found it very easy to blame herself for the client's reaction. Student counsellors seem to

be extremely vulnerable to the reaction of others, possibly because of the "newness" of the whole experience of counsellor development.

People who rely on "self-observation" are people who use their own behavior as a source of information in inferring their beliefs, attitudes, emotions, and dispositions. Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) discovered that senior practitioners rely much more on their accumulated wisdom, whereas beginning practitioners rely on external sources. Littrell and Magel (1991) argue that persons will not change their self-concept if external explanations are available for a given behavior (such as a behavior that is expected by a professor or supervisor) or behavior is motivated by an external reward, such as grade marks.

Changes in self-concept can mediate changes in overt behavior. The descriptors that people view as applicable to themselves will provide the basis for their self-esteem or lack of it. Many participants in this study wrestled with non-acceptance of self at varying levels. In writing her critical incidents, one participant questioned the validity of her own feelings, "I am not sure if these thoughts and feelings are appropriate", which resulted in her censoring her internal dialogues. Self-efficacy is a better predictor of future performance (change) than past performance (Bandura, Adams, & Beyer, 1977). Participants described how important it was to be supported by others and how they would facilitate that "safe" environment for their clients. Bem and McConnell (1970) discovered that, interestingly, subjects who have their self-perceptions changed through cognitive dissonance processes are not usually aware of the change.

Attribution Theory

There are two sets of pressures that account for why anybody does anything. Behavior is grounded by either internal or external factors (Rajecki,

1990). Internal factors could be feelings, desires, dispositions, or any type of attitudes. External factors could be environmental demands, laws, societal norms, or expectations or any type of coercions. It is very often important to determine whether a particular act is under the control of internal or external factors. Most participants reflected on internal factors of feelings and desires when faced with numerous situations in their development as a counsellor.

People make causal attributions about their own and other people's behavior more or less automatically (Steele & Liu, 1983). The tendency to make such attributions increased substantially when subjects had just experienced an unrelated loss of control over their environment. This increase in attribution is a subject's attempt to restore a threatened sense of control, to regain a sense of being able to cope effectively. Most of the participants' stories reflected a "loss of control" at some point or points in their development as a counsellor. However, not many expressed it directly. A participant in the study described her feelings as "Wow! I'm scared? I'm excited? I feel like crying? What a job!" Because the disturbing thing about dissonant behavior is its ego threat, any self-affirming activity may reduce dissonance even when it does not resolve or dismiss the particular provoking inconsistency. Some people thus attribute the dissonance resolution to the self-affirming activity. Therein may lie the comforting power of activities such as prayer, conversation with supportive friends, and so on, that frequently do not resolve or dismiss the specific causes of our stresses but nonetheless diminish their effects.

In essence, the ego imposes a theme on the way we perceive, think about and remember ourselves: We are powerful, good and stable. Information that threatens that theme presumably causes anxiety and can bring up feelings of nonacceptance of self by the participants. This causes us to re-interpret the information to make it fit. Steele and Liu (1983) states that

salient, self-affirming thoughts might be an effective means of eliminating thought-distorting defense mechanisms such as denial and rationalization. Our ability to think objectively about particular self-threatening information may depend, at least partially, on what other thoughts about the self are salient at the time the information is processed. Certainly, what else is "going on" with the participants in this study will influence the significance of a critical incident or whether it is a critical incident at all. Some of the participants focused many of their critical incidents on personal issues that they were facing in conjunction with professional issues. There are so many stories by these participants that are not told in the study.

These theories have attempted to deepen the understanding of the participants' experience of dissonance in their development as a counsellor. Definitive answers are not to be found, only the discovery and acknowledgement of human complexity.

Forms of Dissonance

This chapter now turns to focus specifically on some of the themes of dissonance that emerged from the stories. Two of the three forms of dissonance that were most talked about by the participants in this study were incompetency and unclear boundaries.

Experiencing incompetency is one of the central forms of dissonance. Ellis's (1991) study discovered that competence issues were one of the most prevalent amongst his participants' experiences. Similarly, many participants in this present study expressed feelings of incompetency, especially when interacting with clients. The experience of "not knowing" was also felt by

some participants. As this was "new territory" for many of the participants, this form of dissonance was almost expected.

Unclear boundaries is another form of dissonance that was experienced by many of the participants. Many of the unclear boundary issues in this study were 'acted out' by the participants being over-responsible. How can it be wrong to want to help so much, to be so responsive to the needs of others? A participant dealing with over-responsibility shared, "I found myself feeling guilty as I listened to [the client's] sadness about ending counselling with me". At the beginning of counsellor development, the student counsellor typically assumes total responsibility for client improvement (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). "Intellectually, I know that I am not totally responsible, but emotionally I feel it is up to me to make the client's life better" (p. 513). Skovholt and McCarthy (1988) also discovered in their study that the participants found it difficult to let go of overresponsibility. The development of clear boundaries is a critical skill and allows the counsellor to be involved but not depleted by the multiple accounts of human suffering that are heard. If this skill is not developed, "burn-out" can result.

The participants of this study experienced sources of dissonance that were common to a number of others, as well as sources of dissonance that were unique to themselves. Literature describing the student counsellors' experiences as a whole seems to be extremely rare.

Reactions to Dissonance

One of the main reactions to dissonance previously discussed throughout the section on dissonance theories was attitude change. Another reaction to dissonance is to attempt to reduce it through self-affirmation.

Salient, self-affirming cognitions may help objectify one's own reactions to self-threatening information (Steele & Liu, 1983). Ego-based needs for a positive and efficacious self-image may cause this change.

If dissonance stems from the threat to the self(ego) inherent in a given inconsistency, then after dissonance has been aroused, thoughts and actions that affirm an important aspect of the self-concept should reduce dissonance by casting the self in a "positive light".

Steele and Liu (1983) stated that when subjects who had committed a dissonant act were allowed to affirm a value that was important to them, they were able to tolerate the inconsistency of the act, but did not change their attitudes to fit their behavior. A participant in this study talked about how she did not use her voice when she felt offended in a class lecture. She acknowledged to herself how she has started to speak up more in the past five years and how she would have in this particular situation if the circumstances had been different. Self-affirmation somehow reduces the sting-to-the-self that results from dissonant behavior.

Experiential Learning

> The experienced human being is someone who has "learned" not any particular thing but rather the uncertainty of all plans and predictions, the frustration of all attempts to control or close off the future and the disappointment of all aspirations to comprehend a single concept, however inclusive (Warnke, 1987, p.204)

Experiential learning means to learn by doing (Galagan, 1988). The participants in this study described how powerful it was to "go through an experience" themselves, and how much more impact the experiential learning

was than reading about the same issue or hearing about it in a class lecture. The insights that these participants derived from their experiences greatly influenced their personal growth as well as their professional growth as a counsellor. Boot and Boxer (1980) argued that the major aspect of learning is not change in overt behavior but the process of discovering new meanings in experiences. According to Kolb, the most effective learning is that which emanates from personal experience (Sugarman, 1985). Learning is derived from the outcomes of situations experienced, rather than from inputs per se (Pates & Knasel, 1989). Experiential learning is, in fact, the only way we really learn.

Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Model outlines the learning experience as a constantly revisited four-step cycle. Experience is the cornerstone of this model, and learning is viewed as a process. The model's four steps begin with concrete experience, followed by reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Initiated by an individual's concrete experience, the process moves through a period of reflection on that experience. That reflection stimulates the learner to organize observations about the experience and create concepts around that organization to better understand their world. Through that new understanding, individuals find the confidence to experiment actively and thereby enhance their learning. That experimentation leads the individual to revisit the four steps of the cycle beginning with new sets of concrete experiences (Stewart, 1990). In the present study, the process of having a "lived experience" and then reflecting on it in the writing of the critical incident certainly correlated with the first two steps in Kolb's model. The differences in how participants' reflect on their experiences, however, needs to be looked at. Is this part of everyone's style of learning?

There is a problem with experiential learning. No one else can tell you how it really feels to undergo conscious change. You must experience it for yourself (Galagan, 1988). It is important to recognize how complex human experience is. Humanistic psychology emphasizes the wholeness of our experience (Osborne, 1991) and the understanding of the person's inner world. Learning involves the whole person in cognitive, affective, and physical ways. Many of the participants in this study shared how they finally "got it" when they could experience "it" for themselves.

In recording their experiential learnings, the participants' critical incidents reflected "their truth". "Learners believe that what they have learned to be true" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 124). Learning is human change (Short, 1981). Nothing - no one stays the same. Learning is circular. By reading the participants' stories, one can get a sense that the "learning" did not occur in a linear fashion. Learning does not necessarily go in a step-by-step- fashion. As T.S. Eliot (1952) said: "We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time" (p. 145). In the participants' stories, the same issue was brought forward at different times under different circumstances and may continue to be brought forward.

The message expressed by the each participant in this study was one of the uniqueness of their experience. The only world we know is the world that we personally experience (Osborne, 1991).

A prominent theme that seemed to come up often in the experiential learnings was how participants in this study frequently identified with issues from the perspective of the clients. Intentionally placed in the role of the client through a role-playing exercise, participants could experience what a client would be experiencing. Unintentionally, participants would personally have an

experience and then "connect" that to how a client might feel in a similar situation. Through this connection, empathy was experienced. Empathy depends on the apprehension of another's state. One cannot be empathic if one does not possess relevant knowledge and experiential frameworks that permit perception and comprehension of what is being communicated by another (Martin, 1990). In Skovholt and McCarthy's (1988) study, findings supported the description of participants' experiences as clients. One counsellor captured this experience by sharing how he learned about being a counsellor by being a client. Skovholt and McCarthy (1988) concluded that personal therapy should be looked at as an element of counsellor training.

This theme of self as client can be further understood through the Identification Theory. Identification is a factor of crucial importance to attitude change (Williams & Williams, 1987). Usually, the greater the degree of identification, the greater the attitude change. Many of the participants in this study described the impact on their own counsellor development when they could strongly identify with the client. A participant in this study articulated this so well by saying, "Actually doing counselling gets me where I live, it involves depths of me that are seldom tapped so directly ..." Identification Theory refers to a specific psychological set that when established, promotes attitude change in people. Participants discovered that playing the part of a client (role-playing) can also promote attitude change. "I really could identify with that person - walk in their shoes".

Synchronicity can be another example of identification. The concept of synchronicity is defined as two simultaneous events that occur coincidentally; that is they are not causally related but result in a meaningful connection (Jung, 1973). With the interaction between student counsellor and client, there is often a significant relationship between the client's problem and the student's

own struggles. For the student counsellors to grasp the potential meaning and to seize the opportunity for growth that is thus presented to them, there must also be an element of timeliness (Roehlke, 1988). Perceiving critical incidents as synchronistic events helps to clarify their relationship to stages of counsellor development because synchronistic events "almost invariably accompany the crucial phases of the process of individuation" (von Frantz, 1964, p. 211). A participant described an experience whereby her client was struggling with the pain of losing a spouse and she was not able to truly embrace that pain. The participant could then identify her personal issue involving the difficulty in confronting her own pain in losing a spouse. She recognized how she needed to deal with her "stuff" first, before being able to be there and support the client through his pain.

Insights from Experiential Learning

The Power of Group

One of the common insights reported from the experiential learnings in this study was the power of the group. The participants in this study expressed how important it was to be able to turn to others (colleagues, supervisors, etc.) for support and to satisfy their need to be listened to. Interestingly, the findings revealed that participants felt both judged and unaccepted by their peers and supported and listened to by their peers. Although these appear to be conflicting themes, it is concluded that interactions with others can both increase and reduce dissonance.

People learn in relationship (Short, 1981). The choice to enter a relationship usually indicates an intention to learn. This category of human experience can produce a change in world-view. Experiencing the reciprocity

of loving ourselves and loving others can also lead to a change in world-view. The participants in this study disclosed the importance of accepting themselves first to feel accepted by others.

Predominantly the participants' stories consisted of interactions with others. In the study by Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992), the participants talked mostly about the impact of people and least about the impact of theories and research. Intense interpersonal experiences strongly influenced counsellor development, often resulted in feelings of support and safety.

Many of the participants described a critical incident that focused on the "first weekend" of the master's counselling program. Their experiences expressed the closeness they had felt in their small groups as they shared different parts of themselves. Self-disclosure is one of the key factors in the development of closeness and safety. Self-disclosure is the means by which people willingly make themselves known to others (Anderson & Bauer, 1985). Expression of concern in the form of acknowledgement or empathy also enhances feelings of closeness and support.

In the study by Wetchler and Fisher (1991), the results claimed that many student counsellors felt that being allowed to voice their questions and concerns with others sharing similar issues helped in reducing their anxiety and developed support and comraderie from their peers.

In an article about his concern for a more human science of the person, Rogers (1985) discussed the findings of Shaw's study (cited in Rogers, 1985) that resulted in a group program having a major impact on its participants. Out of the 60% of the participants who reported positive interpersonal changes, the greatest change occurred in family relationships, followed by closer relations of faculty to students and students to faculty. Peer relationships were also improved.

Dobson and Campbell's (1986) study reported findings that the participants (master's-level counselling students) who participated in a 7-week or 10-week group increased their level of self-awareness and personal mastery. The results suggested the inclusion of a group experience along with a didactic or lecture phase in the counselling program.

Need to Take Care of Self

The need to take care of self was another common insight that emerged from the critical incidents in this study. Participants shared numerous situations where because of the intensity of the "learning experience", they recognized the importance of taking care of self in order to truly "be there" for clients. Kinnetz (1988) described an experience in a critical incident, realizing through self reflection that without taking care of herself emotionally, she could not help clients learn to take care of themselves. This self-monitoring can be considered an extension of caring for clients.

Need to be Listened To

In this study, many of the participants shared the importance of being listened to in their interactions with others. From these experiences, they realized the value of creating an open, supportive environment. Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) stated how important it is to have an environment supportive of one's search, an environment where the person is connected to other professional "searchers". Such an environment values diversity and has an "opening up" stance as opposed to a simplification of the complex world. In Stoltenberg and Delworth's (1988) study, the results suggested that the environment in which learning occurs is critical for promoting counsellor development.

Sources of Experiential Learning

Many of the participants referred to role-plays as one of the prominent ways to have a "lived experience". Interestingly, the role that was most often discussed was that of the client's role. In the research by Wetchler and Fisher (1991), the findings concluded that the student counsellors found the role play activities to be very helpful and typically responded that they "wished they could do more" (p. 177).

Another major source of "lived experience" described in these critical incidents is in the interaction with clients. Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) found that clients have a powerful impact on a student counsellor's professional functioning. Through the close interpersonal contact between the clients and student counsellors, the latter is continually receiving feedback on themselves as a person.

Supervision

The interactions with supervisors can be a primary source of dissonance (Cormier, 1988; Heppner & Roehlke, 1984; Sawatzky et al., 1991; Williams, 1987). Interestingly, the participants in this study did not focus on the supervisory relationship as a major source of dissonance. Possibly some direct questioning in this area may have elicited more disclosure. The participants may not have felt comfortable in sharing this aspect of their development because of feelings of being judged. Another hypothesis for not expressing more in this area, may be because of the many other critical incidents occurring at the same time and only choosing one to write in the two-week period.

are similar to, yet separate from, the changes effected in counselling (Williams, 1987). Ultimately, supervision is designed to cause a change in skill, an alteration in the professional self. Changes are both wished for and feared. While seeking help, trainees will also defend with all their might the ways in which they have already learned to function. The world makes sense to them this way. They want to change without change. As one participant questioned, "Why does this process have to be so painful? I do want to learn....but it's so difficult". As much as we want to learn, learning implies change, and however much desired, change is simultaneously feared.

On the other hand, supervisors may not facilitate change. One supervisor's role, identified as "Lolly Bag", in which the supervisor hands out the answers to the trainees, requires no change at all on the part of the student counsellor. The "Whydoncha" role as a supervisor, characterized by "Whydoncha do this? Whydoncha do that?" - both bypass one of the chief functions of supervision, which is the learning of counselling. Responding to trainees' demands of "gimme, gimme", runs the risk of simply repeating the trainees' own early family dynamics without providing opportunities for learning that will actually move the trainees forward in their professional development (Williams, 1987).

In summary, the participants in this study shared a variety of sources that influenced their counsellor development, experienced in both common and unique ways and focused on emotional awareness throughout. Some of the sources were supervisors, clients, peers, theories, one's own personal life, social and cultural environment. The sources of influence are common because they affect every individual. Yet, timing, intensity, and pace dimensions as well as many unique features produce an incredible uniqueness for the sources

they affect every individual. Yet, timing, intensity, and pace dimensions as well as many unique features produce an incredible uniqueness for the sources of influence (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). Heppner and Roehlke (1984) in their study of supervisees' differences expressed how the most frequent critical issues reported by the trainees at the beginning of their practicum reflected issues of self-awareness as well.

Gadamer states, "We learn from negative experience and recognize thereby our limitations in the face of history; we also learn through and because of positive experience in regard to our personal lives" (Wallius, 1990, p. 28).

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the first four months of the counsellor development experience from the student counsellors' perspective. The experiences of the participants were both unique and common. My hope is that their uniqueness is captured in their stories. The commonality is what has emerged as themes. An attempt was made to achieve a balance between the uniqueness of each participants' experience through the retelling of their stories and the connectedness of their experiences through documenting the common themes.

The findings of this study do not "fit" any model. I struggled with and eventually challenged the assumption that a model (one which is universal, hierarchical in nature and invariant - the "expert's" answer) must exist to explain the findings. Finally I reclaimed the essence of what this study was about - to acknowledge and accept the experiences of the student counsellors and embrace that experience by giving it a voice. It is difficult to attempt a conclusion from these stories since each one continues to unfold.

Contributions of the Study

There is very little research in the area of counsellor development that listens to the stories of the student counsellors in order to understand their experience. This study was conducted to increase the knowledge of counsellor development from the student counsellor's perspective. The knowledge gained

from this research can enhance program development. Recommendations for counselling training based on this study follow in the next section.

Some of the themes that emerged from this study have been previously encountered and discussed in other studies, from other perspectives. Some of the themes however, were not supported by previous research. These will be now be discussed as contributions of the study.

Non-acceptance of Self

One of the sources of dissonance for the participants of this study was nonacceptance of self. These prominent feelings of non-acceptance may have stemmed from not feeling competent in this new area of learning. Very few of the participants in this study had experienced any previous counsellor training per se or had been a part of this type of learning environment. These feelings of nonacceptance were experienced primarily when interacting with peers, either on a one-to-one basis or in a group setting, and with clients. The feelings of non-acceptance of self were also projected outwards. Feeling judged by peers was the main way that non-acceptance was experienced externally. Non-acceptance may have been a feeling that originated in other past experiences in their lives. However, the fact that these critical incidents were written in the initial four months of the counselling program lends additional credence to the theory that feelings of incompetence were generally precursors of feelings of non-acceptance.

The type of learning in the Master's program in counselling calls for a "paradigm shift". The typical learning environment involves being told the answers by professors and needing to memorize material and regurgitate it back to them. In the counselling Master's program the students are expected to rely on and trust themselves more and take responsibility for seeking the help that is necessary in their learning process. Student counsellors need to understand the

difficulties of unlearning and reorganization. These graduates are entering a field that deals with people in transition. Short (1981) asks the question that if they themselves do not participant in intense explorations of their own development, what kind of appreciation are they likely to have of their future clients' difficulties?

Many of the participants may also have come from a background of competency where they had achieved a great deal and had felt successful in their previous situation, either at school or at work. These past "lived experiences" and backgrounds of the participants may have played an important part in how they reacted to the dissonance. Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) discuss how a counsellor's personal life influences professional functioning, particularly in the areas involving family of origin and definition of self.

Being able to acknowledge feelings of non-acceptance and to share them with others may help to alleviate the dissonance that occurs in trying to adapt to a new and strange environment.

Faith

Relying on faith was one of the most common reactions to dissonance. This was expressed in many different ways, using different language, such as hope, God, inner self, goddess, and others. By claiming this faith, participants showed a willingness to acknowledge an inner strength or a source of strength bigger than themselves. A sense of "surrendering" was felt, as they called upon this higher power. It is interesting that one of the main forms of dissonance was non-acceptance of self experienced as living up to one's high expectations. Participants may have come to the realization that they could not "do it all" and needed to know that they were taken care of. Faith possibly had more of an

opportunity to be expressed through the self-reflective process than it would have through an interview.

A question remains as to whether turning to faith when experiencing dissonance would prevent participants from reaching out to others.

The "Reflective Practitioner"

Through the findings of this study, the importance of self-reflection is witnessed. Self-reflection was a major ingredient of attitude changes and insights. The ability to be a reflective practitioner is essential for this profession.

The need to prepare reflective counsellors has become critical to a real-world professional practice dominated by practical problems that are complex, unique, troubling, uncertain, and value laden. To address this concern, more attention should be give to development of critical reflectiveness about valued ends when making professional judgments (Strom & Tennyson, 1989).

Self-reflection enables participants to become more "intentional" in their own growth process. Intentionality needs to be present for any growth to occur. Specifically, participants need to recognize dissonance as one of the pathways for growth. A meaningful connection between the critical incident that serves as the catalyst and the student counsellor's willingness to learn from the events is necessary. Critical analysis of meanings, actions, existing conditions, and claims to truth and value in dialogue helps student counsellors to expand awarenesses of their beliefs and values, to clarify contradictions, and to weigh and reconcile positions (Strom & Tennyson, 1989).

Paramount in counsellor development is a reflective stance whereby the individual consciously spends time and energy to process significant experiences alone and with others. An active, exploratory, searching, and open attitude is of extreme importance, asking for and receiving feedback is crucial

(Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). We as counsellors can only take our clients as far as we have gone ourselves.

An important question to ask ourselves as counsellors, "how can we ask clients to share the deepest part of themselves when we have not experienced or are willing to do the same in our own lives?"

Having been through the counselling Master's program myself, I began this study with the idea of enhancing and enriching counsellor development. The present study has added to the research in the area of counsellor development experiences from the student counsellors' perspective.

Recommendations for Counsellor Training

The following recommendations are ways that initial counsellor training programs could perhaps enhance the learning of future student counsellors

Expand experiential learning exercises, such as role-plays, to facilitate both conceptual learnings and personal development.

In the role-play exercises, student counsellors can be encouraged to stand back from the experience and to share what they have observed or felt during the experience. Empathy can be created as each person comes to understand the feelings and observations of the others. Exploring how different people may feel in such situations gives student counsellors the opportunity to hear the perceptions of others, both from a counsellor perspective and a client's perspective. This also can facilitate the appreciation of differences.

Encourage the writing of critical incidents as an intrinsic part of the master's counselling program and integrate it fully into group sessions.

This may be a new experience to many of the participants and so a clear explanation of the purpose of critical incidents is recommended. Handing out some articles on the importance of critical incidents may be helpful. It may also be useful to connect the concept of critical incidents to the concept of journalling and the importance of reflection as a way to further clarify what critical incidents are.

The "ability to walk in a clients' shoes" was a learning that emerged from many critical incidents. The connection with clients seemed to be made almost "naturally". To place ourselves in the clients' shoes is necessary for empathy to develop. Possibly this "natural connection" was facilitated by self-reflection in the writing of critical incidents.

Set up and encourage participation in structured weekly support groups.

Within each of the participants' stories there was much knowledge and wisdom - knowledge and wisdom that was never shared. Rogers (1985) stated that graduate students have very little opportunity to educate one another. Dialogues can become significant, stimulating learning, and lead to the building of close personal bonds. Some of the themes such as the need to be listened to, unclear boundaries, and self acceptance that emerged may be addressed through group interactions. The focus of the group may be the sharing of the critical incidents. Group participants can come to realize that they are not alone. In groups, participants can try out new behaviors and ways of interacting (such as being more congruent, working with boundaries, etc.) The group would need to be a safe place to dialogue, to experiment with change, and to receive feedback. These support groups could be facilitated by a doctoral student.

Begin all counsellor training with a weekend "retreat".

As noted throughout the stories, the participants viewed this as a powerful and positive experience. Because of this intense experience, closeness and a sense of connectedness was created amongst participants. This type of beginning would also "set the stage" for the weekly support groups.

An important question to ask ourselves as counsellors, "how can we ask clients to share the deepest part of themselves when we are not willing to do the same in our own lives?"

I thought that the recommended writing of critical incidents and participating in support groups would provide enriching experiences that may influence them to continue incorporating these recommendations in their ongoing development. In addition, student counsellors could utilize the findings in this study to assure themselves that "they are not alone".

Future Research

There is a rich potential for additional research in the area, not only on the beginning of counsellor development but on counsellor development as a whole. Looking at the whole experience is crucial in understanding the development of counsellors. Some suggestions for future research projects follow.

1. More research is necessary to determine the influence of past experiences, personality, and learning styles and what they "bring" to the counselling program on their counsellor training. It became apparent in interacting with the critical incidents that other influences on the participants play a role in their development as a counsellor.

2. It is suggested that additional research be done using critical incidents, but in conjunction with an interviewing process after the completion of the counselling program. This dialogue with the critical incident authors will help to "fill in" the spaces; making more connections, expanding, and enriching their stories. It would be useful to accumulate more knowledge and understanding of the initial development of counsellors and perhaps apply that to program development. "Listening to" the voices of the student counsellors will help clarify what is most beneficial and what is not beneficial in the counselling program.

3. A longitudinal study is recommended to follow the student counsellors through their program and into their professional years to see how much issues change or how much the same ones keep "coming up".

4. More qualitative research in this area is recommended since so little of this research has been documented. Specifically, it is valuable to learn about the unique experiences of each counsellor and be able to see a part of ourselves in their story as well.

5. Both qualitative and quantitative research in the area of support groups for student counsellors is encouraged. As previously stated, I believe these groups would have a very positive influence on counsellor development. If this was demonstrated through research, the groups would more likely be implemented.

The Researcher's Experience

My experience throughout this study has been filled with dissonance and experiential learning. I found myself reacting to the dissonance by accessing my faith and seeking support from others.

In the process of reading each of the critical incidents, I longed to be able to ask questions such as, "can you tell me more about what that was like for you?" or to be able to respond by saying , "I felt like that as well; I feel so much closer to you now - thanks for sharing".

A lot of dissonance was experienced in trying to "fit" the findings of this study into existing models and to find other results that supported my findings. It was difficult to let go of the deductive method. I needed to be reminded continually that this was an inductive process. I found myself getting "caught up" in trying to fit people into theories and categories. I struggled to honor and accept the participants' experiences the way they were presented to me. Similar to counselling, where the therapist is called to hear the clients' stories, I was called to hear the participants' stories.

Since, as the researcher, I had no interaction with the participants and was not able to influence their responses, I needed to trust and accept their own process - what was important to them. On the positive side, at least my own agenda and biases could not get in the way.

I recognize that the stories I have captured are but one of the many stories each of the participants could tell. A part of me wants to tell it all; know it all - yet I realize that words are just not enough. As one participant articulated so well:

> I now realize that when a client comes to me and I ask him or her to put words to an experience, I may be asking what seems impossible. I must remember that the words put to the experience cannot possibly be all that went through my client's mind and affected him/her emotionally. The most detailed story will be incomplete....How I wished I could recreate and share this; impossible - for to put it in words would limit and reduce the experience....I have part of the story, but there will always be an overwhelming large part of the client's life that neither I nor anyone else will ever know.

It was also sometimes hard for me to learn to accept and acknowledge the differences in the participant's stories (where they were different from me). Each participant had their own beliefs and values; each responded to different things in different ways; and each differed in what they were ready to hear. Similar to clients, each was at a slightly different place on their journey. But none were better or worse, just different.

I experienced my colleagues more deeply and felt like I was having a conversation with each of them - with each critical incident. How I wish I could have had that conversation in person. I feel that they have shared a part of themselves and I have connected to them in a way that I did not experience during the time of the counselling course. I feel a sense of sadness in missing that opportunity.

I feel honored to have been given permission to enter into the worlds of these participants, my colleagues. Their stories have touched me deeply. My hope is that all of them have felt heard and understood.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

University of Alberta
Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Psychology

Consent Form

PROJECT TITLE: Development of a Counsellor
RESEARCHER: Mona Matheson Phone: 459-2898 (H)
492-5245 (W)

The purpose of this research project is to understand the process of counsellor development in the first four (4) months of the Master's counselling program.

Should you consent, you will be asked to release the critical incidents you wrote from September to December, 1991. These critical incidents will not be shared with anyone except those directly involved in this research. Anonymous quotations from these critical incidents may be included in the final report. Names and other identifying information will be deleted from the documents.

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT I _____ HEREBY
print name
agree to participate in the above named project.

I understand that there will be no risks to me resulting from my participation in the research.

I hereby give permission to release my critical incidents.

I understand that at the completion of the research, all of the original critical incidents will be destroyed.

I understand that I am under no obligation to participate in this study. I also understand tha I can withdraw my consent and terminate participation at any time without any negative consequences. I have been given the opportunity to ask whatever questions I desire, and all such questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE _____

RESEARCHER SIGNATURE _____DATE _____

APPENDIX B: CRITICAL INCIDENT FORMAT

CRITICAL INCIDENT FORMAT

CODE NAME: DUE DATE:

DATE OF CRITICAL INCIDENT:

SETTING:

PERSONS INVOLVED:

BEHAVIOR AND/OR CONVERSATION THAT PRECEDED THE CRITICAL INCIDENT:

CRITICAL INCIDENT:

INFLUENCE ON MY DEVELOPMENT AS A COUNSELLOR: