# Professional Counsellors' Personal Narratives

# of "Doing Life" while "Doing Work"

by

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## Abstract

What does it mean to be a counsellor?  What challenges do counsellors face?  How do life events influence the personal and professional self of the counsellor?  What insights are provided by time and experience that accompany a lifelong career?  The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to learn from six counsellors, each veteran in their careers, how critical life events influenced who they became as both a person and professional.  Interview conversations presented retrospective narratives and personal stories illuminating whether each came to discover and develop an integrated self.  Descriptive field notes, researcher reflections and comments further substantiated the complex world of counsellors.  The interview data offered through this study exposed the intersection of the person and the professional as well as the valuable and diverse growth experiences that occurred along their career trajectories.  Embedded in the interviews were implications for resiliency and sustainability; these were derived from learning that occurred with extensive time and experience.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

"Always keep life and work separate", this statement is often echoed time and again in an effort to maintain a healthy life-work balance. This adage could be conceived as more pertinent if the "work" one does is personal in nature. Consider a career that involves bearing witness to the stories and at times crises of others and depends on a keen ability to conceptualize therapeutic or life process plans. Furthermore, let us also consider a career that relies on one's ability to individuate in an effort to self-preserve. This is often the reality for a counsellor. While there are countless strategies one can employ to keep the professional and personal world well defined, can they ever really be kept "separate"? "Working" as a helping professional involves "living" as a person, which can at times during one's career prove to be far more complex than anticipated. These two very distinct roles can be difficult to navigate, particularly in light of career stage.

**How Do Counsellors Navigate Personal and Professional Life Experiences over the Career Span?**

Is it feasible that given the realm of personal and professional life events faced throughout a career span coupled with the duties a counsellor encompasses that counsellors can always prevent their personal and professional lives from intersecting? Over the course of a career span every person will face multiple significant challenging life events; some will be planned and deliberate while others are not. When these significant challenging life events present in a real and personal way to counsellors how do they pursue their professional obligations including facilitating others in navigating their own personal and professional challenges? In spite of the extensive theoretical knowledge, formal course work and heightened

inter and intrapersonal awareness and skills many counsellors possess, are they equipped to

manoeuvre with capability both their professional and personal being throughout the entire

career span?  How do their significant life events shape or transform who they are and who they

become as helping professionals?  Were there aspects along this journey that led them to

integrate who they are as a person with who they are as a professional?

**Statement of the Problem**

Academic research concerning the field of counselling within the context of professional

development is wide and varied.  Numerous studies pertain to counsellor training, supervision

and vulnerability; however, these are consistently conceptualized within the framework of the

counsellor as professional.  Much research considers how counsellors' experiences with clients

influence and shape who they become on a personal level. Fewer studies have considered how

counsellors' life experiences or critical events during their life shape and influence who they

become as a professional?  There is existing research focused on how early life experiences

influence individual's choices of entering training programs and becoming counsellors, however

following this initial stage of a counsellor's development, research becomes diminutive.  It is

when one aims to ascertain knowledge regarding the veteran counsellor as a person as well as the

interconnectedness of personal and professional development of counsellors that research is

considerably less accessible.

This study aims to describe the extent to which during the course of the career span,

ongoing natural life events or critical events (be these positive or negative in nature) have shaped

and influenced both the personal and professional self of the counsellors involved in this study.

The study will strive to describe the journeys experienced by six veteran counsellors in their

effort to navigate both the personal and professional contexts in which they live and work.

Finally, from these retrospective accounts and perspectives the study will derive ideas related to

resiliency and sustainability for those that choose counselling as a profession.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to learn from six counsellors through their life stories how

significant professional and personal life events shaped and transformed who they became as a

person and a professional over their career span. In addition, the goal is to have their stories

illuminate the challenges, experiences and processes that led each of them to who they have

become with insight into whether these two aspects (person and professional) intersected over

their career.

The study is of theoretical significance as it explores counsellors' personal and

professional identities over the career span and strives to illuminate the complexities and

vulnerabilities counsellors endure. In so doing, models of counsellor development are analyzed

responding to the need for research on aspects of seasoned counsellors' development that are

lacking in the literature. Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) indicate with respect to the lack of

research on counsellor development; "It is perhaps ironic that like 'the shoemaker who has no

shoes' counselors have neglected research on their own life-long career development" (2).

One could ascertain from the existing literature that counsellor development ends when

the counsellor is a novice. Much of the literature suggests that early in their careers, counsellors

have developed to the extent possible. Many however, recognize counsellor development as

extending beyond this. It is therefore necessary that more research supports the career long

process and development undertaken by veteran counsellors.

Goodyear, Wortheimer et al. (2003) referenced veteran counsellors as not being consumers of current academic research; and indicate that Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) believe that as practitioners get older, "they turn increasingly to other sources of knowledge about human nature (literature, cinema, and so on)" (78). It may also be likely that because veteran counsellors are not reflected in the research, they don't subscribe to it. How engaging and motivating is current academic research when consumers do not feel it is relevant to who they are or where they are in the career journey?  It is time that veteran counsellors see themselves reflected in current literature whereby the accounts of their journey will serve to inform and educate others in the profession.  Ronnestad and Skovholt (2001) reiterate the importance of veteran counsellors and what they have to offer the profession by virtue of their experience; "No matter how talented or hardworking a young practitioner may be, later life offers something that cannot be acquired in earlier years, that is, the precious commodity of life experience" (187).

Finally, veteran counsellors' retrospective accounts of their own developmental journeys coupled with opinions and suggestions for improvements in programming have potential benefits for counsellor training programs.

The study is of practical significance as it aims to bring to the forefront the counsellor as a person; significant studies and research have focused on the counsellor in context of the professional. Lawson, Venart et al. (2007) reiterated this notion; "Counselors are no less vulnerable to the challenges of living in a complicated world, and, in fact, the nature of our work often places us at greater risk" (6).  Counsellors by virtue of their training and role come to epitomize qualities of strength and self-actualization.  While gratifying, this also comes with a cost, whereby there is often an expectation, sometimes by society and sometimes by oneself, to

maintain vigour may not be realistic.  Lawson et al. (2007) indicate; "we as counselors, are not allowed to have our own vulnerabilities or struggles" (6).

The study also aims to share the personal narratives of six veteran counsellors who may have not yet had the opportunity to tell their story or have it documented. It seems critical to promote the person within the professional given the nature of the role and the risks associated with it. In so doing, it may alleviate the pressure some counsellors feel to assist clients while ignoring one's own needs.  Allowing counsellors to acknowledge their own challenges essentially normalize the concept that all are human. With this mindset the counsellor becomes more forgiving of limitations and this assists both them self and the client.

While there has been a recent shift to learning more about the person behind the counsellor, this continues to be an area lacking in clarity.  For too long there has been an assumption that by virtue of their roles, counsellors do not experience or reconcile personal challenges in the same manner others do.  There remains a belief among much of society as well as some in the profession that counsellors are less affected by these challenges than those

in the general population. Lawson and Venart (2005) indicate:

> A common myth in the helping field is as follows: Since counselors
> are well educated about mental and emotional struggles, and because
> we are skilled at helping others address their concerns, we are somehow
> immune or at least less susceptible, to struggles of our own. Compounding
> this myth is the belief that when we do experience some sort of personal
> difficulties that we should be able to overcome them without seeking
> assistance ourselves. This "counselor heal thyself" mentality is a reflection

of the stigma that seems to persist, not only in the general population but

also among the community of helpers. (pp.243-244)

Literature refers to this existing culture of shame preventing counsellors from voluntarily

acknowledging their intrapersonal struggles and seeking assistance which exacerbates the

challenges counsellors face.  Jaffe (1986) explains; "Therapists may be expected to submerge

their personal needs, and their own emotions may not always seem relevant. (as cited inWityk,

2003, p.6)

The hope is that this study is one vehicle that speaks out in an effort to normalize

counsellors as people who experience and feel as others do.  As well, the hope is that the study

acts as one small piece of literature that reduces the diffidence around acknowledging challenges

and seeking help.  In doing so, this study when combined with others like it may reaffirm the

notion that counsellors are not impervious to life's challenges. Research that promotes the

counsellor as a person allows the counsellor to be seen in a new light; a skilled professional who

at times experiences personal and professional challenges and are vulnerable beings too. This

normalizes vulnerability in all beings irrespective of professional role.

The second significance is to confirm how interwoven the personal and professional

worlds of a counsellor are and to illustrate that experiences within a counsellor's personal world

impact who one becomes as a professional.  There is ample literature focused on who one

becomes as a result of early life experiences, the professional training one attains as well as the

work one does within a counselling capacity.  Less effort has been dedicated to who the

counsellor becomes as a professional as a result of developmental life experiences.   The study

aims to learn which aspects within the professional context were influenced during or following

the counsellors' own profound life experiences. Sharing counsellors' stories of their journey in integrating these two areas of life may offer great insight to other counsellors in the profession and assist them in charting their own developmental course.

Finally, the study if combined with others similar in nature may promote professional sustainability by considering wellness efforts that promote resiliency. Efforts towards improved programming, supervision and professional development for counsellors at various points in the career span would be beneficial. This may offer clarity into potential changes in counselling training programs to better equip those who choose counselling as a career. More specifically; greater emphasis could illuminate the process of navigating the personal and professional aspects throughout a career, in essence, how to do "counselling" while doing "life".

**The Research Approach**

For the purpose of this study a qualitative phenomenological approach was taken requesting that counsellors allow me, the researcher, into their world as they reflect and reveal personal and professional concerns via personal narratives. The interviews aim to uncover their lived experiences throughout their career. The study encouraged participants to openly share the experience of whom they were and who they are as a result of personal and professional critical life events. I worked diligently to listen to and deeply understand each of my participants as he or she shared their story. I have made it a priority to share aspects of their story in a manner that is respectful and accurate according to their truth. All interviews held two purposes; the first was to gain participant narratives which in turn offered increased understanding around the counsellor as person and professional. Secondly, the experience aimed to provide each participant an outlet to reflect and openly share in a safe manner they may not have previously

been afforded.  I made every effort to provide the context of a trusting relationship grounded in

respect for the participants whereby a common ethical understanding prevailed.

The study employed the inductive feature of qualitative research, whereby the picture

was created based on the data gathered from the stories of participants.  Whereas deductive

research sets out to prove or disprove a theory and is most easily described as a top down

approach, inductive builds from the ground up based on the research that has been gathered.  To

discern inductive from deductive the analogy of a lake and tributary can be used, deductive

researchers set out to travel from the vast lake (a broad setting) with the goal being to find

themselves in a tributary (a specific setting). The inductive researcher begins at the tributary (a

specific setting) and travels to find themselves in the lake (a broad setting) upon completion.

A phenomenological approach was used for this study.  Bogdan and Biklen (2007)

explain the phenomenological mode as an, "attempt to understand the meaning of events and

interactions to ordinary people in particular situations" (25).  This branch of qualitative research

has been heavily influenced by Edmund Husserl and Alfred Schutz.  Bogdan and Biklen (2007)

emphasize this approach as, "located within the Weberian tradition, which emphasizes verstehen,

the interpretive understanding of human interaction" (25).  It is understood that from this

orientation comes various perspectives and truths, each of which are valued and worthy of

greater understanding towards people's realities.

Granted there are multiple ways of interpreting experiences it is imperative that

researchers using this approach do not make assumptions or confer their own meaning on their

participants.  It is acknowledged that the researcher has embarked on this focus of study with

some understanding and likely personal experience related to the topic, in this way they bring to

the forefront their own point of reference. This integral component of phenomenological

research is referred to as reflexive bracketing or epoch and is used in an ongoing manner

throughout the qualitative process. It implores the researcher to self-disclose their own

experiences and opinions on the topic so as to make the participants and consumers of the

research keenly aware of their position. A more in depth definition and description of relevance

and use of reflexive bracketing is provided in the methodology chapter.

**Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this qualitative study are as follows:

1. What is the experience of being a counsellor? What is it like?

2. What challenges do counsellors face?

3. How do life events influence the personal and professional self?

4. What does time and experience offer a counsellor?

**Limitations**

While qualitative research approaches have gained greater acceptance, there are still

limitations to this research approach. Qualitative research is marked by rich descriptions and

narratives and is contrary to quantitative research approaches as it does not encompass data that

can be showcased through statistics and numbers.

Qualitative research is also considered a very subjective approach as it implores the

researcher to interpret and create deeper meaning from the data collected. In qualitative research

efforts to bracket are intended to ensure the researcher's experiences, values, and opinions are

brought to consciousness. Many would argue that this task is challenging and merely impossible

and that in spite of researcher efforts, data collection and analysis is heavily influenced by the researcher.

The nature of this study invites participants to consider their career in a retrospective manner and asks that veteran counsellor's reflect on their personal and career history. Those participating in the study were confident in their abilities and maintain a sense of competence and satisfaction in the professional work they do. If all participants are grounded in this frame of reference the opportunity for a diverse sample are decreased.

In addition, research points to the stigma attached to counsellors' acknowledging their own vulnerability and need for assistance. In the case of this study, it is likely that one participant selectively chose memories or reflections that they felt proud of and that highlighted their competence whereas sharing challenges may have been too difficult to bear. Two other participants' touched briefly on difficult times in their lives but chose not to go into detail.

Six counsellors shared their experiences over the career span and while there were common themes and elements each participant offered a single perspective and in so doing was a unique entity for the study. However, given the brief time spent with each participant coupled with the complex task of capturing insights that spanned a career, it is acknowledged that this is also a limitation within the study.

Finally, if another researcher were to undertake the study in the same manner, the data collection and analysis may vary; yielding different results than those collected in this study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

For the sake of this study, the term integration refers to putting parts together in an effort to create a whole. The process of integration within a counsellors' world encompass coordinating who the counsellor is as a person and professional, however, integration also requires an understanding of how the two aspects of person and professional are distinct and separate. To focus on integration and consider it an isolated process would be limiting. There are many relevant aspects within the literature that postulate counsellors' efforts at integrating their personal and professional selves. Each of the aspects considered through this literature hold relevance to the concept of self-integration and potentially influence and impact a counsellor's career journey.

In considering which aspects may be relevant to the process of integration it is logical to begin by looking at the complex role of a counsellor. It is also necessary to highlight the more ambiguous aspects of a counsellor's professional role that may be less obvious to some people. In order to consider the integration of the professional with the personal, it is first necessary to glean a clear understanding of what the "professional" and "personal" is each comprised of. Further, the complexities that are inherent in the counselling profession offer insight into why the process of integration is not prescribed or automatic.

Second, I will outline the challenges associated within the professional context of being a counsellor in an effort to illuminate aspects that may potentially impede or stall the process of counsellors' efforts at integration. Counselling has long been described as a "high touch hazard" career; in essence, due to the trauma and sadness shared by many clients in counselling sessions the counsellor is placed at an increased risk of experiencing elevated levels of stress. Cummins et

al. (2007) indicate, "Even with a good support system and adequate supervision, it is well known that counselors are vulnerable to distress because of the nature of the work that they do" (p.36).

Therefore, it becomes relevant to review literature on the challenges that may slow or even circumvent counsellor's efforts at achieving integration.

The literature reflects multiple counsellor development models. Characteristics of various models have been highlighted in an effort to share features of development at various stages in the career journey.  Developmental models may offer some perspective on how and where aspects of integration occur in the career life cycle.

Within the literature lie recommendations around wellness and career sustainability.  It would seem that when these recommendations materialize into conscious efforts, the process of integration becomes more likely and probable. Yager and Tovar-Blank (2007) state; "Counselors will be able to prevent impairment through a strong working knowledge of wellness strategies and approaches. The historical roots of the counseling profession are solidly planted in a wellness prevention framework" (p. 153).  Various resources and tools have been given consideration in this chapter.

I noted several gaps and inconsistencies in the literature and further expand on these in this chapter. Finally, the literature offers implications for future research in the areas of counsellor development, counsellor role and whether counsellors' personal and professional dimensions of being are interconnected.

**The Role of the Counsellor**

The label of "counsellor" is a generic term under which many professional titles fall including but not limited to: therapist, mental health professional, clinical counsellor, psychotherapist, guidance counsellor, and career counsellor. The Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association website indicates, "the counselling profession as being inclusive of more than 70 professional titles." Carl Rogers a psychologist and founder of the person-centered approached recognized early on the complexity of the helping role.

Rogers (1961) defined the term helping relationship:

By this term I mean a relationship in which at least one of the parties has
the intent of promoting the growth, development, maturity, improved
functioning, improved coping with life of the other. The other, in this sense
may be one individual or a group. To put it in another way, a helping
relationship might be defined as one in which one of the participants intends
that there should come about, in one or both parties, more appreciation of,
more expression of, more functional use of the latent inner resources of the
individual. (pp. 39-40)

While there may be some distinctions among the roles subsumed under the term "counsellor" there is also much overlap and similarity within these titles. The titles counsellors' are assigned, settings they work in, the population they serve as well as the theoretical models used may vary from counsellor to counsellor. The counsellors interviewed for this study work in community settings providing counselling services to individuals and family. Four of the counsellors provide services through an employee assistance program available to thousands of

employees from various career backgrounds. Two of the counsellors' work within a hospital

setting providing service within palliative care and cancer care. In spite of these distinctions,

there are some aspects and guiding principles shared by the majority of counsellors within the

profession.  Irrespective of these distinctions a universal responsibility of all counsellors is

placing their client's needs at the forefront.  Yalom (2005) affirms, "the basic posture of the

therapist to a client must be one of concern, acceptance, genuineness, empathy" (p.117).  The

responsibility of care a counsellor is bestowed is significant; Hamilton (2008) in considering

counsellors working with children views their role as one to, "provide children and adolescents a

safe, empathic environment to share their painful stories" (p.10).

**Complexities of the Role.** It is when one looks at the broad and varied nature of the

profession of counselling we recognize the complex nature of the role; one that is often

ambiguous in nature and occupied with paradox.  The professional role is demanding and yet can

be personally fulfilling, requires personal investment, energy and time however by the same

token requires a commitment to personal wellness to remain effective and efficient.  One aspect

of the paradox counsellor's face is illustrated by Figley (2002), "We must put our feelings aside

and objectively evaluate our clients and administer the best treatments according to the best

practice guidelines.  But on the other hand we cannot avoid our compassion and empathy"

(p.1433-1434).

The process of counselling according to Cashwell, Bentley & Bigbee (2007), "Involves

pouring out a bit of ourselves to each client and, in some instances, taking on some of the

"draining" energy of others" (p.69).  Wityk (2003) also reiterates the exhaustive nature of the

role of a counsellor, whereby work with clients taxes the emotional and physical resources of the

therapist.

**Cognitive Complexity of Counsellors**

One aspect of a counsellor's role is providing support to those facing personal struggles or challenges. Cummins et al. (2007) state; "In our daily work, we encounter clients who have tremendous pain. We are their sounding boards and reflectors of feelings" (p. 35).   There is recognition that counsellors possess an emotional competence necessary to perform the role. Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) explain; "Counselors/therapists' ability to regulate and control their emotional engagement is inherent in the conception of professional empathy" (p.11). Additionally, extensive cognitive capacity within the role of counselling is also required. Counselling is a profession that is so entrenched in emotional welfare that the cognitive competency required to be an effective counsellor may be less apparent.

Welfare and Borders (2010) share:

> Effective counselors must be able to identify each client's unique
>
> combination of characteristics (e.g., cognitive, emotional, contextual,
>
> behavioural, and spiritual) that influence the presenting problem in
>
> counseling.  Next, counselors must integrate those characteristics into
>
>  a meaningful framework that informs effective treatment planning
>
>  and implementation. (p.188)

Simon (2012) characterizes effective therapists as those who are, "...passionately present, responsive, creative and flexible, because these are the qualities required to foster and maintain the therapeutic alliance, which is the sine qua non of effective therapy" (p.8).

Counselling is a profession built on the foundation of many theories, some of which include: Family Systems Therapy, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, Gestalt Therapy, Feminist

Therapy, and Reality Therapy. It is acknowledged that this is a brief listing and that hundreds of

different therapy models exist today.  Skilled counsellors have an awareness and understanding

of multiple models as well as the theoretical and practical implications.  In their work with

various clients, counsellors are implored to recognize the differing needs, draw from many

theories and conceptualize a therapeutic plan for use with clients.  When counsellors use an

eclectic or integrated approach in their work they will have a grounded understanding in various

theories but also a confidence, flexibility and intuitive nature to shift between various theoretical

orientations as they assess and reassess client needs. Jones-Smith discusses the benefits of

moving from a single theory focus to that of multiple theories in the integrated approach to

working with clients. "Practitioners increasingly recognized the inadequacy of a single theory

that is responsive to all clients and their varying problems" (p.586).   As in all professional fields,

counselling is similar in its evolving nature. New developments occur within the field and it is

the responsibility of the counsellor to remain current.  Gibson and Mitchell (2003) specify that,

"Professional counselors need to be professionally and personally committed to constantly

updating and upgrading their skills and knowledge to reflect the latest and ongoing progress in

their professional field" (p.26).  Prochaska and Norcross (2007) indicate, "Good clinicians are

flexible, and good theories are widely applicable. Thus, we see theories being adapted for use in

a variety of contexts and clinicians borrowing heavily from divergent theories" (p.5).

**Counsellor Vulnerability**

A vast amount of research has been undertaken addressing the vulnerable nature of

counsellors.  The research consistently and collectively expresses the likelihood of increased

vulnerability of those who work in a counselling profession.  It is believed that by virtue of their

professional roles counsellors are more vulnerable to stress. Figley (2002) expresses, "The very

act of being compassionate and empathic, however, extracts a cost under most circumstances. In our effort to view the world from perspective of the suffering we suffer" (p.1435). Tehrani (2007) further emphasizes the potential costs to caring. "Workers exposed to the stories of distressed and traumatized people often describe personal experiences similar to those of their clients" (p.325).

Cummins, Massey and Jones, (2007) elaborate:

> In our daily work, we encounter clients who have tremendous pain. We are
>
> their sounding boards and reflectors of feelings. The essence of counseling is
>
> to consistently summon the energy to engage with another human's emotions
>
> while at the same time balancing our own personal experiences and challenges
>
> outside of the job. (p. 35)

The stressful nature of a counsellor's role is compounded further by expectations of "fixing" client issues. Jaffe (1986) expressed, "Not only do therapists observe other people's pain, there often is an expectation for them to fix the pain or make it go away" (as cited in Wityk, 2003, p.3).

Oftentimes, the result of interacting with clients who have experienced trauma or are currently in crisis can have harsh effects. During these times, references will be made to counsellor's endured stress as burnout, compassion fatigue or secondary stress. Each of these terms has become synonymous with counsellor impairment. It is important to recognize that these terms reflect a stark reality along the career development continuum. It is believed that every counsellor will to some degree endure negative effects inherent from the work they do over the course of their career. Lawson, Venart, Hazler and Kottler (2007) emphasize, "all counselors find themselves positioned somewhere on the spectrum from "well" to "impaired"

(p.13).  Mathieu (2006) believes that compassion fatigue runs along a continuum and reiterates that all counsellors' experience some degree of compassion fatigue over the course of their career.

Sadly, the grim reality of counsellor impairment becomes compounded when counsellor lack of self-care and shame associated with vulnerability are exposed in multiple literature sources identified in this chapter.

Research regarding counsellor impairment refers to the counsellor's tendency to place the client needs at the forefront while ignoring the recommendations they are offering and further dismissing or ignoring their own needs. Cummins et al. (2007) describe counsellor's efforts at offering strategies to clients in an effort to be well, however, "counselors are often remiss in taking their own advice about wellness" (p. 35).  Lawson et al. (2007), indicate, "Counselor impairment often occurs when counselors have persistently focused on the plight of clients while ignoring, dismissing, or minimizing their own needs for balance and self-care" (p.5).  Further, the literature indicates that the focus in training emphasizes how to assist clients in managing their stress, however little is taught around management of counsellors' stress. Emerson and Markos indicate that while, "... counselors may receive training to help individuals with severe presenting problems, they receive little or no training in how to deal with their own stress" (as cited in Lambie, 2006, p.33).  Further, it is acknowledged that some counsellors are unable to recognize the importance of their own self-care. However, counsellors are advised to make concerted efforts and invest in their own health and well-being by employing the wellness and self-care activities they recommend to clients. Figley (2007) states; "The same tendencies we have for helping others make us especially vulnerable to overlooking our own needs.  It is as if we have a self-care blind spot as counselors" (p. 3). Witty (2003) also states, "Therapists need to

follow their own advice and engage in the same beneficial self-care activities that they suggest to their clients in order to maintain their personal and professional well-being" (p.3).

Counselling as a profession offers varied experiences, including working with: traumatized populations as a result of violence or abuse, those suffering Post Traumatic Stress Disorders, those living with chronic and terminal illness, and clients suffering unimaginable grief and loss. Given the complexity of a counsellor`s role and all that he or she is potentially exposed to, the priority for self-care becomes increasingly important. Counsellors' disregard for their own self-care become increasingly complex when coupled with an unwillingness or inability to address their own vulnerabilities. Perhaps this is due to an innate nature of caring for others and the characteristics that make them who they are. Perhaps societal perceptions regarding counsellors have contributed to a culture of shame that prevents many from exposing their own weakness and vulnerability. The research indicated that often counsellors are viewed as being composed of superhuman qualities whereby they don`t feel what others feel or experience stress or sadness in the way others do.

 Lawson et al. (2007) share:

> Our interpretation is that we, as counselors, are not allowed to have
>
> our own vulnerabilities or struggles – our own "bad belly". Some
>
> counselors seem to believe that because of our training, skills or natural
>
>  talents, we should be impervious to the stresses of everyday life. (p. 6)

According to Lawson and Venart (2005):

> A common myth in the helping field is as follows: Since counsellors are
>
> well educated about mental and emotional struggles, and because we are
>
> skilled at helping others address their concerns, we are somehow immune,

or at least less susceptible to struggles of our own.  Compounding this myth

is the belief that when we do experience some sort of personal difficulties that

we should be able to overcome them without seeking assistance ourselves.

This "counselor heal thyself" mentality is a reflection of the stigma that seems

to persist, not only in the general population but among the community of helpers. (pp.

243-244)

Kotler and Haler (1996) describe personal experiences with impairment, "There isn't a

day that goes by that I don't feel impaired in some way, hopefully not to the point that I hurt

others, but at least to the point that my levels of competence are diminished" (p.100).

Robber (2010) also addresses this in the literature by stating, "experiencing negative emotions is

an inescapable part of the messy and unpredictable process of therapy and should not be

considered as a sign of being a bad or inexperienced therapist" (p. 234).

It is important to consider how the literature describes the manifestation of this

vulnerability. In describing counsellor impairment, many terms are used interchangeably. While

there are similarities amongst the terms it is important to recognize there are aspects that make

each term distinct.  With some degree of impairment occurring across the career span it is

possible that this impairment influences the process of integration and plays a role in the overall

development of the counsellor.

**Burnout.** Malachi (2003) qualifies burnout as encompassing three dimensions including:

exhaustion (including emotional), cynicism, and decreased sense of efficacy.  Lamble (2006)

refers to burnout as, "a form of impairment that affects all aspects of a counselor's functioning,

not just his or her professional abilities" (p. 32).  Similarly, Skovholt (2001) likens burnout to

that of a candle going out; a depletion which over time leads to wear out.  While professionals'

experiencing fatigue can remain effective in their professional role, burnout affects all aspects of functioning both personally and professionally. According to Schaufeli (1993) while burnout is extremely painful, it is experienced in varying levels or degrees and is also very gradual and complex with no clear beginning or ending points.  Pines and Aronson (1988) describe burnout as, a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion that comes as a result of long term involvement in emotionally demanding situations.  Jenkins and Baird (2002) identify burnout as, "a defensive response to prolonged occupational exposure to demanding interpersonal situations that produce psychological strain and provide inadequate support" (p. 424).

  **Vicarious Trauma.** Another term synonymous with counsellor impairment is vicarious trauma.  Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995) define vicarious trauma, "as the permanent transformation in the inner experience of the therapist that comes about as a result of empathic engagement with clients' "trauma material" (p. 31).  They further define vicarious trauma as the... "cumulative effect of working with survivors of traumatic life events. Anyone who engages empathetically with victims or survivors is vulnerable" (p.31).  One does not have to encounter trauma firsthand to experience vicarious trauma.  It can occur as a result of counselling those who have experienced trauma firsthand. Lawson and Venart (2003) clarify that the concept of vicarious traumatisation "... is applicable even when clients are not disclosing personal histories of trauma; in the process of connecting with clients, we are connecting with their pain and our empathy with that pain has an impact" (p. 5).  Vicarious trauma has a personal impact on the counsellor and can affect personal wellness, view of the world and even interpersonal relationships.

Vicarious trauma can alter a counsellor's cognitive schemas regarding both self and others in five areas. According to Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995), these include, "trust, safety, control, esteem and intimacy" (page unknown).

**Compassion Fatigue.** Another term associated with counsellor impairment is compassion fatigue. A well known researcher in the area of compassion fatigue named Charles Figley (2002) refers to this phenomenon as a result of bearing witness to other's pain. Figley (2002) distinguishes compassion fatigue as being, "associated with a sense of helplessness and confusion; there is a greater sense of isolation from supporters" (p. 1438). Figley (2002) considers compassion fatigue (CF) and secondary traumatic stress (STS) as synonymous terms. He explains that while the symptoms of CF or STS are almost identical to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), there is a distinction between them; STS involves the exposure to knowledge about the traumatic event. Therefore, the experience is vicarious in nature and is experienced by the counsellor second hand through the story of another. PTSD on the other hand is a result of first-hand experience. Francois Mathieu (2006) perceives compassion fatigue as, "a deep erosion of compassion and energy" (Canadian Association on Gerentology Newsletter, para. 3).

**Counsellor Development**

Efforts to examine how the process of integration occurs over the career span cannot be done in isolation. Most counsellors do not enter a graduate program with the skills and experience needed to harmoniously incorporate the two roles of person and professional. It is through time and experience that this development occurs. Yager and Tovar-Blank (2007) state;

"Although some students may fondly hope that "all of that difficult self-awareness stuff" will end with the completion of the graduate degree, a truly competent counselor will be

involved in the process of addressing personal wellness throughout a professional career"

(p.144).

The literature asserts that individuals go through various phases or stages over the course of the

career span.

**Early Life Experiences.** Some counsellor development literature posits that the

counsellor's developmental journey begins in early life and that it is these experiences that

influence the career choice of counsellors. Elliot's research on female psychotherapists when

compared to women in other professions reported "higher rates of physical abuse, sexual

molestation, parental alcoholism, psychiatric hospitalization of a parent, death of a family

member, and greater family dysfunction in their families of origin" (Goodyear, Wortheimer,

Cypers, Rosemond, 2003, p.77). McWilliams observed that, "psychotherapists tend to have a

depressed character structure that stems from relational problems they encountered as children"

(Goodyear et al., 2003, p.76). Radeke and Mahoney (2000), "found that psychologist who were

psychotherapists were more likely than those who were researchers to have experienced

childhood abuse (pp. 76-77). Kottler and Parr (2000) infer that the influence of early life

experiences is a relevant aspect of development, "so much of what we have learned in our own

families while growing up provides the basis for much of what we do as practitioners" (p.143).

In hearing of retrospective accounts of senior therapists, Ronnestad and Skovholt (2001) indicate

that the impacts of early life experiences are relevant on professional life. "The main family

themes were abandonment, demanding achievement orientation in the family of origin, rigid and

restraining child-rearing practices, conditional love from parents, and growing up in a family

with a rule of no emotion" (p.182).

**Helper Phase.** Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) indicate that the first phase of counsellor development is the lay helper phase and the "helping" in this phase of development is the precursor to ongoing development. "In roles such as parents, children, friends and colleagues, people are continually engaged in trying to help others to make decisions, resolve problems and improve relationships" (p.10). King (2007) argues, "One motivation for training might be an identification with a therapist or because it offers a legitimate chance to go into therapy via training" (392). Comparable to King's argument, Mander (2004) also believes "that there is an unconscious reparative drive that underlies the desire to help and to revisit with another an area of pain, of unfinished mourning, or of unresolved conflict that resonates with something familiar in oneself" (n.p.). Chang's (2011) research indicates that individual person variables, environmental factors and learning experiences influence one's career orientation.

**Counsellor Trainee Phase.** Once the career choice has been established, counsellors embark on a new stage or phase of the developmental journey. This is typically a time when counsellors' are students in training; it is a time marked by a shift in perceptions around what a counsellor's role is. Prior to formal training the trainee's perception of a counsellor's role may have been more simplistic in nature, however with increased education, the trainees conceptualization of all a counselling role encompasses becomes increasingly complex. The majority of literature supports that it is partly this realization that invokes feelings of anxiety and self-doubt in counselling trainees.

Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) articulated this effectively:

> To move from the known role of the lay helper to the unknown role of the professional is
> a taxing task often acutely felt when the student is assigned the first client. Issues of
> suitability are normatively raised. Students ask themselves if they have the personal

characteristics needed for this kind of work, the resourcefulness needed to complete the

studies and the ability to bridge the felt chasm between theory and practice. (p. 12)

Hale and Stoltenberg indicate;

Beginning trainees typically experience anxiety early in their work

with clients. We have found this anxiety to be a function of self-focus

in terms of negative perceptions of one's ability to be effective as well

as evaluation apprehension regarding the supervisor's reactions to the

trainee's efforts. (as cited in Stoltenberg, 2005, p.859)

Lichtenberg's research on trainee development states, "the important problem of counselors

"believing when the facts don't fit." The very closely related problem is choosing what to

believe when the facts seem contradictory. This latter seems to occur with respect to novice

anxiety" (Goodyear et al., 2003, p.77). Fouad (2003) describes students in this realm of

development as, "...anxious, tense, and perhaps fearful. Further, many students have relied on

excellent academic skills... only to find those linear, rational, academic skills are not the same

ones needed to do excellent therapy" (p.82). Chang (2011) considers the integrated

developmental model (IDM) and affirms, "Beginning trainees are typically anxious and are

focused on themselves. Anxiety is a function of their lack of confidence and apprehension about

being evaluated" (p. 408).

**Counsellor Intern.** The literature indicates that during the next phase or level of

development trainees have made a shift and are consolidating efforts at conceptualizing the inner

and outer world. Fouad (2003) states, "This phase is characterized by continuing to make

congruent the inner world of self and the outside world" (p. 83). Fouad asserts that the

developmental tasks at this point include, "consolidating one's position, and then advancing or

refining self-concept in new areas" (p. 83).  Chang (2011) in reviewing the IDM model, notes

that Level 2 characteristics find, "trainees can focus more on the client and less on themselves,

they can implement basic skills and demonstrate increased empathy to clients, enhancing their

sense of motivation and autonomy" (p. 408).  Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) identify the next

stage of development as a time still marked by some degree of insecurity, "...interns usually act

in a conservative, cautious and excessively thorough fashion. They are typically not relaxed,

risk-taking or spontaneous. There is little natural playfulness or sense of humour in their work"

(p. 15). Ronnestad and Skovholt recognize that this phase is still marked by a time whereby

modeling is important for trainees. Trainees observe their supervisors and other professional staff

which assists them in maintaining a professional standard and conceptualizing their own cases.

While there is predominantly an external focus there is also simultaneously an increased internal

focus. Stoltenberg (2005) who proposed the IDM model articulates this level of development as

a time when, "...skill level increases and they become more comfortable with the process, their

awareness tends to shift more toward a focus on the client" (p. 859). Stoltenberg asserts that this

level of development results in either the trainee gaining increased motivation and autonomy or

the opposite; confusion, and negative emotion with diminished effectiveness whereby motivation

and autonomy are reduced.

   **Novice Professional Phase.** The next phase or level identified in many models is the last

phase of development and it seemingly represents the trainee's "arrival".  At this point in

development, they have moved to independence and are no longer the anxious beginner; they

have developed a clear awareness of both the client and self. In considering the IDM model,

Chang (2011) describes this final level of development as one whereby, "... the trainee can

exhibit empathy for clients, and engage in metacognition about hypotheses, feelings and counselling behaviour, applying their knowledge "in the moment""(p.408). Stoltenberg (2005) emphasizes that Level 3 in his IDM model is characterized:

> ...by a change in the self-other awareness structure where the
>
> supervisee retains the ability to focus on the client, setting the
>
> stage for understanding and empathy, while also being
>
> increasingly self-aware of his or her own thoughts, emotions,
>
> and behaviour in relation to the client. (p. 859)

Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) refer to this phase of development as the novice professional phase. They believe it is a time that encompasses the first years after graduation whereby the years are engaging and intense but also challenging. It is a time when the new professional seeks to confirm what they have learned followed by times of disillusionment when faced with professional challenges. This is also a time marked by more intense exploration of self and the professional environment. There is also an increasing awareness that the counsellor's personality comes through in the work they do; the awareness can be positive if they feel assured in their capacities or less so if there are feelings of uncertainty.

Ronnestad and Skovholt's model of counsellor development is the only one I have discovered and reviewed whereby development is conceptualized as ongoing to the end of one's career. Goodyear and Wertheimer (2003) state, "Virtually all the other models conceptualize therapist development to occur during graduate school and perhaps shortly after. Ronnestad and Skovholt permit us to understand it as a life-long process" (p. 74). Whereas other models have three or four phases or levels, Ronnestad and Skovholt identify six phases of development. They assert that there is an experienced professional phase whereby the counsellor has been practicing

for numerous years and has varied client and setting experiences. In this phase the professional

works to develop a therapy role that is highly congruent with the self (their own values, interests

and attitudes). This phase is followed by a final phase; the senior professional phase. Typically

the professional in this phase is highly regarded and has practiced for a minimum of twenty

years. Practitioners at this phase have a sense of self-acceptance and accomplishment, however

it can be a phase marked by personal loss and separation accompanied by a belief that the

professional future will not offer new knowledge in the field. Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003)

state; "There is a sense that there is and will not be any significant new knowledge in the field"

(p. 26).

**Efforts towards Wellness.** The literature certainly conceives of the complex nature of the

profession and the challenges it presents. When considering these aspects the prospect of

integration may seem increasingly ominous. It leads one to question how with so much potential

adversity over the career span it is likely for integration to occur. For those that have done this,

what is it that sets them apart? Are there certain tools, strategies and other aspects related to

wellness they have employed?

**Counsellor Wellness Literature.** One may assume that consciously incorporating

strategies to develop and maintain wellness within the self will support the journey towards

integration. Hamilton (2008) states, "A counsellor's professional identity and positive feelings of

competence are important: counsellors who have a strong sense of themselves and their ability to

help will be more resilient" (p.15). Literature on counsellor wellness is a relatively new and

evolving field. Sadly, research in this area has been lacking. Figley (2002) asserts, "there is still

far less attention to those who care for the suffering – be they psychotherapists or loving family

members" (p.1435). Lawson et al. (2007) express, "Counselor wellness is not a new issue in the

profession, but it has not received nearly the attention that we believe is due" (p.6). Yager and Tovar-Blank (2007) conceptualize that the lack of emphasis on counsellor wellness is a lacking aspect from the onset as there is, "there is little to no thought given to the personal wellness of the student" (p. 142).  Further, literature indicates that often there is a reactive approach whereby counsellor's wellbeing is addressed only when the effects of burnout arise. Lambie (2006) declares, "To date, professions such as counseling have been reactive in their approaches to burnout, not proactive or preventative.  This is evident in the limited research and writing related to the prevention of burnout" (p. 37).

  **Open Discussions Regarding Impairment.** The existing literature conceptualizes varied aspects of wellness that when consciously employed by counsellors promote a more holistic personal and professional self. In essence, when counsellors incorporate the necessary self-care actions there is an increased sense of balance both personally and professionally. Cummins et al. (2007) state; "In addition to client care, it is important that counsellors take care of themselves to maintain a good quality of life so that they do not leave the field prematurely" (p.47).

   The literature suggests that by simply discussing impairment issues, they are brought to the forefront and counsellors benefit from this sharing experience. Mathieu and Cameron (2006) state that, "Breaking the silence is a powerful tool.  By openly discussing and recognizing compassion fatigue, helpers can normalise this problem for one another" ("When Helping Hurts," para.6).  Lambie (2006) highlights, "Providing new counselors a forum to discuss the issues of burnout can itself serve as a prevention strategy" (p.42).

  **Counsellor Self-care.** The literature also points to the need for counsellors to direct more of their attention towards their own self-care. Self-care within the literature is considered in a bilateral manner; personal and professional self-care. Within each of these kinds of self-care

could be considered an overarching theme that incorporates various elements. Skovholt et al. believe that efforts towards personal wellness need to address all facets of one's personal life including, the physical, spiritual, emotional and social domains. In the same article, Cummins et al. refer to professional self-care efforts including, "Creating a professional greenhouse at work", a concept first conceptualized by Skovholt (2001). A professional greenhouse at work includes "finding or developing a work environment that encourages growth with leadership and supervision that promote wellness and self-care. Mentorship and having fun at work are seen as key elements of an effective self-care work environment. (Cummins et al., 2007, pg. 43)

Hamilton (2008) indicates that, "Personal self-care begins with the most basic: exercise, nutrition and sufficient sleep. Body work, such as massage and other physical healing therapies, are effective aspects of self-care" (p. 16).  Hamilton discerns professional self-care from personal and believes the markers of effective professional self-care include an awareness and commitment to maintaining healthy balance in work life. She shares that setting limits and boundaries at work ensure that there is space and separation between the counsellor and the client. Another professional area that promotes self-care as indicated by Hamilton (2008) is connection with professional peers. "The research literature points to the need for peer support and clinical supervision as the most critical aspects of professional self-care" (p. 17).  Mathieu indicates that setting clearer boundaries at both home and work contribute to increased personal and professional wellness. Mathieu (2007) states that working part time is an ideal professional self-care preserver, "It has been found that the optimal number of days of doing direct client work is three days per week" ("Transforming Compassion Fatigue," para.5).

**Counsellor Self Awareness.** The literature also emphasizes that efforts at increased self-awareness contribute to improved levels of wellness. Not unlike the concept of self-care, self-

awareness varies from literature source to literature source and is not concisely defined or conceptualized across sources. While multiple literature resources identify increased self-awareness as a strategy for improved wellness, clearly delineating what is meant by self-awareness can be challenging.  Mathieu and Cameron (2006) refer to heightened self-awareness as the ability to assess one's life situation in an effort to evaluate whether the nourishing and depleting aspects of one's life result in balance. As well, Mathieu and Cameron believe self-awareness involves regular exercise, personal interests and opportunities to debrief.  Baker (2002) describes self-awareness as, "the ability to hold both positive and negative experiences in awareness that comes with mindfulness leads to an increased ability to do the personal-growth work required of effective, well-balanced counselors" (n.p.). Hamilton (2008) indicates; "Self-awareness and introspection are important protective personality traits in counsellors because they are critical in maintaining self-protective behaviour and empathy" (p.15).

      **Humour.** Another facet believed to promote wellness is humour. Research indicates that the benefits from humour are not limited to emotions but also extend to the physical domain. Erdman (1991) found humour promotes relaxation within the skeletal system, boosts immunity, increases heart rate and stimulates circulation and oxygenates the blood.  This in turn massages the internal organs ultimately aiding in the process of digestion.  Lawson and Myers (2011) in interviewing five hundred and six professional counsellors found that humour was one of the top five career sustaining behaviour strategies endorsed by the professionals. Carroll (1990) states, "humour has been associated with reduced depression and pain relief" (as cited in Myers, Sweeney and Witmer, 2000, p. 255). Kuiper and Martin (1993) also found infusing humour led to increased self-esteem and decreased levels of stress.

**Spirituality.** Spirituality was also a significant theme in the wellness literature. Sweeney and Myers (1992) in conceptualizing the overarching theme of wellness considered spirituality as an active process undertaken by some to have a more successful existence. They developed a theoretical model called the wheel of wellness which was the first wellness model based in counselling. The model emerged from extensive reviews of cross-disciplinary studies whereby the authors set out to identify the empirical correlates of health, quality of life and longevity. This model was later conceptualized into the final wheel model, the wellness evaluation of lifestyle model (WEL). As in the original wheel of wellness model, the concept of spirituality is the central figure in the model and is considered to be the most important. Myers and Sweeney (2000) described spirituality as, "...an awareness of a being or force that transcends the material aspects of life and gives a deep sense of wholeness or connectedness to the universe" (p. 252). Figley (1995) indicated meditation or spiritual practice as being one of the six ways that growth and wellbeing of counsellors can be enhanced. Hamilton (2008) asserts, "Because connection to spirit or a higher power appears to be a significant protective factor, counsellors should be encouraged to nurture their spiritual development" (p. 15).

**Personal Therapy.** Finally the literature referenced personal therapy as a source of increased wellness, Macran, Stiles and Smith (1999) found, "personal therapy and supervision appear to be good facilitative experience for positive well-being in therapists, and should be encouraged as a regular part of any therapist's clinical work" (as cited in Linley and Joseph, 2007, p. 400). Norcross (2005), when considering the self-report data of therapists in his research found they, "...perceive therapy to be important in improving self-esteem, work functioning, social life, emotional expression, and symptom severity (page unknown).

**Gaps and Inconsistencies**

The multiple sources reviewed examined the four major sections contained within the literature review: The Role of the Counsellor, Counsellor Vulnerability, Counsellor Development and Efforts towards Wellness. While the sources offered increased insight into some aspects related to counsellor integration they did not directly address the concept or process. Articles alluded to the processes involved; however, a definition or description of counsellor integration was not available. Further, the majority of literature regarding integration is presented within the overarching themes of counsellor wellness and counsellor development. While each are valued topics relevant to integration they represent only two aspects of many that contribute to counsellor integration. It was clear that the existing literature regarding counsellors is largely considered within a professional context. One could assume that examining only the professional world of the counsellor may serve as a protective factor for counsellors. Attempts to highlight the real and vulnerable person within the counsellor would require a level of self-disclosure and intimacy that many are uncomfortable with. It is suggested that attempts at gaining insight into the personal worlds of counsellors are difficult. Lawson et al. (2007) in reporting on the 2003 Task Force on Counselor Impairment found, "people were incredibly reluctant to speak openly with members of a task force on counselor impairment – it was as if they feared a mere discussion on the topic could prove stigmatizing or contagious" (p. 14).

**Counsellor's Role.** My efforts at representing the more ambiguous aspects of a counsellor's role proved to be challenging. The role of counsellor can be varied and broad; however this complexity wasn't highlighted often. The complexity within a counsellor's role was indicated briefly in one article that referred to counsellor's having no clear pathway like that of other professions. Another article in the literature denoted the counselling profession as having

very ill defined roles.  With more than fifty articles reviewed for this study, most used the title

"counsellor" in a generic manner without establishing what this role entailed within the context

of the author's research.  Providing increased clarity may be of benefit on two levels. It may

offer the reader a clearer sense into the role of the counsellor which in turn could increase

understanding and appreciation of the complex nature of the role.

**Counsellor Wellness.** Inconsistencies became apparent after reading numerous articles

focused on wellness.  The concept of self-care while addressed to varying degrees in nearly all of

the articles did not have a consistent definition. The term "self-care" encompassed varying

aspects dependent on which piece of literature I was reviewing. In some cases, self-care

encompassed physical health, leisure activities and limits and boundaries whereas other articles

considered these themes a separate designation.

The articles offered numerous strategies to counsellors in an effort to develop or maintain

wellness. Multiple articles considered effective supervision, manageable caseloads and working

three days per week as key to wellness. Other articles supported the notion of collective esteem

based on peer support in the workplace as likely to contribute to wellness.  Depending on the role

of the counsellor (which was usually not delineated) the strategies offered to be of greatest value

may be the least likely to apply.  For this reason, many strategies located in the literature lacked

practical application for some counsellors.

The literature on counsellor wellness was based out of a primary concern for the client.

The studies within the literature were often undertaken in an effort to research counsellor

effectiveness and client welfare.  While this focus is important and necessary, it also forced me

to recognize that very few studies are undertaken focused on counsellor wellness for the sake of

the person that exists within the professional. Shifting this focus could bring to light counsellors'

as people and highlight that they are more than a professional implement towards client wellness.

More studies undertaken highlighting the counsellor as person may contribute in a small way to

reducing stigma and changing "counselor heal thyself" attitudes. Rogers (1961) addressed this in

a most eloquent manner, "what is most personal and most unique in each one of us is probably

the very element which would, if it were shared or expressed, speak most deeply to others" (p.

26).

**Counsellor Development.** The literature regarding counsellor development proved to be

more complex than I anticipated. There are multiple models of development, some very

simplistic (two or three levels or phases) while others are more complex (six or seven levels or

phases). While commonalities were found among some of the models, no collective levels or

language exists pertaining to counsellor development. Further, most of the models are general in

title but more specific in focus and this was rarely defined at the outset. Some models addressed

an overall development while others focused on one specific area (i.e. self-efficacy development)

and a portion of time had to be invested in reading about a specific developmental model before

it became obvious what area of development was being discussed. This made the task of

reviewing the literature on counsellor development both time consuming and perplexing.

The various development models briefly highlighted personal development and presented

it as a by-product of professional development. Personal development was not a primary focus or

theme within the counsellor development literature. It is my belief that personal development of

counsellors is a topic in its own right and is deserving of greater attention. Williams and Irving

(1996) find that "despite its widely acknowledged clinical importance, it has been suggested that

personal development remains a "'poorly specified' area of training that suffers from a surprising

scarcity of literature" (n.p). When personal development is addressed within the development literature it will illuminate how interrelated the personal and professional aspects of development are. Johns (1996) referred to, the inevitable interplay that exists between the realms of personal and professional development. "Although 'they may be separated for semantic or training purposes ... each, inextricably, contains the other'" (p.10).

The most glaring concern I found with the counsellor development literature is that it predominantly addresses the training and novice counsellor. Ronnestad and Skovholt were the exceptions that recognize the importance of counsellor development across the career span. Other developmental models emphasize development occurring during training and very shortly thereafter; this could translate into counsellors reaching their developmental capacity at the beginning of their careers. Some literature does point to the vulnerability that exists in experienced counsellors and how supervision throughout the career span could be beneficial. Goodyear et al. (2003) also state, "One implication of a life-long developmental approach is that post licensure supervision should receive greater attention" (p. 78).

 While some research has focused on veteran counsellors, it remains an area that is sparse. Granello (2011) emphasized, "very little is known about the professional development of counselors over the course of their careers" (p. 93). It would seem that much interest and insight can be gleaned from the experiences and accounts of veteran counsellors. Surprisingly, mid-career counsellor literature is even more difficult to discover. Chang (2011) indicates, "Research that describes counsellors in the early-career post licensure stage and the mid-career stage of their professional lives could directly benefit the profession and society at large" (p. 422).

Despite the extensive literature focused on training and novice counsellor development, issues of programming and curriculum for counselling students remain underrepresented. These areas include but are not limited to increased supervision, wellness and self-reflection. It would seem that with the emphasis that has been placed of assessing student and novice counsellor development these areas with deficiency would have been addressed some time ago.

Finally, several articles were dedicated solely or addressed the concept of master or expert therapist. While the concept of expert therapist is seemingly innocuous I also found several articles that disputed the existence of an expert or master therapist.

**Methodology.** In considering the literature reviewed, I found the majority of sources were qualitative in nature which initially had me anticipating very rich narratives in each of the areas of focus. While each piece of literature offered new learning I found the few that were inductive in nature and included in-depth interviews and focus groups were the most detailed, intriguing and beneficial for the focus of this study.

Much of the research within the literature was a result of inventories, questionnaires, surveys and rating scales. While each of these methods provided insight, it was not the deep and rich insight I had hoped for. In using these tools the limitations became increasingly obvious. The methods used lacked the advantages that face to face discussions and interviews can offer including voice intonation, facial expressions and body language. Each of these has the potential at offering increased aspects to the stories, or reflective, accounts of counsellors and therefore becomes a more detailed data source. Further, it is likely that the response rate was indicative of those counsellors that were high functioning and currently in a well state which may not be representative of counsellors on the whole. The limitation to surveys, rating scales and tools of

this nature is the legitimacy they afford. It is likely that counsellors are hesitant to self-disclose for various reasons and choose not to respond in an accurate manner.

Finally, some of the articles did not clearly define the methodology used which made conceptualizing the study challenging. Some of the literature I reviewed relied heavily on secondary sources and in these instances, the method undertaken in the secondary source was not disclosed. As a consumer of the literature this left me questioning the soundness of the research.

**Summary**

The intent of this literature review was to gain an increased understanding of the concept and process of counsellor integration. The aim was to discover recent literature related to the ways in which professional counsellors navigate both the personal and professional dimensions of their being to ultimately arrive at a place where this interconnected self was in balance. Efforts at finding research dedicated solely to the process of integration were futile. This led me to consider the manner in which counsellor integration is addressed (albeit indirectly in some cases) and conceptualized in the literature.

In an effort to do this the counsellor as person and professional were given consideration and the ambiguous nature of the professional role of counsellor was given further description. The counsellor's professional role is often broad and varied and much of what a counsellor's role incorporates is unbeknown to the general population. Revealing some of the more ambiguous and complex aspects of the role could potentially illuminate for others why efforts at integration may also become complex.

A second component of the literature review involved an examination of the potential challenges counsellors face within the professional context that may lead them to a place of vulnerability. Counsellor vulnerability is a highly probable occurrence within one's professional career. In so being, it seemed necessary to highlight what the current literature indicates about counsellor vulnerability as this can directly impact counsellor efforts and attempts at finding a holistic sense of self.

Next, the literature review considered how counsellor development was conceptualized. Well known counsellor development models were highlighted and emphasis was placed on examining the characteristics associated with varying developmental levels or themes. While the process of integration was not directly addressed in the development literature some qualities associated with integration were discussed.

Finally, counsellor wellness was reviewed; emphasis was on precise tools and strategies that have proven to promote an increased sense of wellness and balance. In considering counsellor integration, it becomes apparent that wellness is likely one of the most interrelated concepts associated with developing a holistic self. In the introductory section of On Becoming a Person, Kramer (1995) declares, "The self-awareness and human presence of the therapist is more important than the therapist's technical training. And the boundary between psychotherapy and ordinary life is necessarily thin" (On Becoming a Person, 1961, p. xii).

**Chapter 3**

**Methodology**

This methodology chapter intends to consider the phenomenological approach taken within this study as well as the value of this approach in relation to the focus. For the purpose of this study it is important to clarify the terms method and methodology. "Madison (1998) supported the notion that method focuses the researcher on exact knowledge and procedure whereas methodology uses good judgment and responsible principles rather than rules to guide the research process" (as cited in Laverty, 2003, p.16). Next the chapter highlights the source of data used, the study environment, as well as the participant selection process. The chapter defines the ethical processes undertaken within the study to ensure confidentiality of participants and outlines the reimbursement offered to participants. The chapter also emphasizes my position through an epoch process. This process offers insight into my personal and professional experiences and illuminates the opinions and the biases I hold. The value of this process encouraged a more conscious effort to suspend my own biases while undertaking the research. In concluding the methodology section, an explication of the data outlining interpretation and analysis is offered.

**Pure Phenomenology**

As mentioned in chapter one a phenomenological approach was undertaken in this study. In order to elucidate how the phenomenological perspective best lends itself to a study of this nature it is necessary to briefly consider the history and evolution of phenomenology.

Historically, many areas of academic research depended on methods of quantitative research to ascertain data. With time came recognition of the limitations of empirical methods for some areas of study. Since Husserl, many others have expanded and built on his foundational

concepts and beliefs about phenomenology. Some of the key contributors to this method include

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) who conceptualized, "'Dasein' or 'Being there' and the dialogue

between a person and her world" (Groenewald, 2004, p.4). Phenomenology was also advanced

through the work of Alfred Schulz (1899-1956) who recognized that the world is comprised of

various meanings. The world of phenomenology lost influence following this initial thrust and

took some time to become established as a viable alternative to empirical methods of research.

Osborne (1994) identifies the early 1980's,

"as a time when, greater disenchantment with the limits of

logical-empirical research methodologies began. Increasing

questions emerged about the focus of inquiry, as well as

exploration of methodologies that emphasized discovery,

description and meaning rather than prediction, control and

measurement. (as cited in Laverty, 2003, p.2)

Westcott (1994) describes the last 25 years as a time of growing concern and crisis for

positivistic psychology as philosophies and methodologies are being rethought. This has

propelled many to recognize that traditional forms of empirical research don't always provide a

methodological "fit" dependent on the research being undertaken. Polkinghorne (1983) described

this essence as "a growing recognition of the limitations addressing many significant questions in

the human realm within the requirements of empirical methods and its quest for the indubitable

truth" (as cited in Laverty, 2003, p.2).

Within the framework of phenomenology exist both pure phenomenology and

hermeneutic phenomenology; while these terms are used interchangeably it is important to

recognize there are distinctions between the two.

Vandenberg regards Edmund Husserl as "the fountainhead of phenomenology in the twentieth century" (Groenwald, 2004, p.3). Fouche (1993) explain how Husserl, "rejected the belief that objects in the external world exist independently and that the information about objects is reliable. He argued that people can be certain about how things appear in, or present themselves to, their consciousness" (as cited in Groenewald, 2004, p. 4). From this is an understanding that individual's realities are the only absolute data, all else should be discounted. Husserl coined his philosophical method "phenomenology", "the science of pure phenomena". Husserl established his phenomenology beliefs from Franz Brenatano who taught him and thus provided the basis for his learning in phenomenology. Phenomenology has come to be known as the study of the lived experience or as van Manen (1997) refers to it, the "life world". Phenomenologists believe that the world or reality is not something separate from the person but rather the emphasis is on the world as lived by the person.

The premise behind phenomenology is that we take experiences for granted and treat many aspects within life through a common sense approach. Phenomenology implores individuals to return to lived experience through recollection and reflection allowing one to reframe experience whereby new findings and meanings that were initially missed or taken for granted may be reborn.

**Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was a proficient student of Husserl, one whom Husserl assumed would be his successor. Husserl worked intensely with Heidegger to train him in the processes of phenomenology. However, over time, Heidegger defined himself independent of Husserl and broadened his perspective from the traditional concept of phenomenology. Like pure phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology is also concerned with the human experience as it

is lived, however the difference exists in the illumination of that lived experience. In pure phenomenology, Husserl's focus was on understanding beings, in hermeneutic phenomenology Heidegger's focus was on the mode of being human. Annells (1996) and Jones (1975) exemplify the varied nature of phenomenology,

> "Husserl was interested in acts of attending, perceiving, recalling
>
> and thinking about the world and human beings were understood
>
> primarily as knowers. Heidegger, in contrast, viewed humans as
>
> being primarily concerned creatures with an emphasis on their fate
>
> in an alien world" (as cited in Laverty, 2003, p.7).

Heidegger asserts that our histories and backgrounds are something we cannot step outside of, it is this history that provides us with a pre-understanding of the world and of situations that are predetermined within us. Koch (1995) describes this as an "indissoluble unity" between a person and their world. Hermeneutic phenomenology asserts that every interpretation of our lived experience is also influenced by our history which cannot be eliminated from the process. Pure phenomenology implores the researcher to bracket their feelings through acknowledging their position on the focus of study and then aiming to set it aside in efforts to avoid bias. A hermeneutical approach implores the researcher to reflect on their position and continue to do so throughout the process whereby the researcher's position and experience is embedded in the data collection process. It is further asserted that this interpretive process is necessary in this method whereby one moves from the parts of experience to the whole of experience and back and forth to increase the engagement and understanding until one reaches a place that feels free of contradiction.

**Source of Data**

The following section of this methodology chapter outlines the criteria that were used in selecting participants for this study. Secondly, criteria regarding participant access are addressed and finally the sample size that was used for the study is defined.

**Criteria for Participant Selection**

In considering participants for this study, the guiding notions of selection were considered through a phenomenological framework. Van Manen (1997) reiterates the aim of participant selection as being one that finds those, "who have lived experiences that is the focus of the study, who are willing to talk about their experience, and who are diverse enough from one another to enhance possibilities of rich and unique stories of the particular experience" (as cited in Laverty, 2003, p.18).

The study employed purposive sampling whereby participants were chosen ensuring each person had experienced the phenomenon of counselling and "doing life while doing work" at the core of this study. Participant selection for this study was comprised of six adults that currently work in the community as professional counsellors.

Participants selected met the following criteria:

1.     Completed at minimum a post-secondary degree in their area of specialty.

2.     At the time of the study participants' currently worked as a counsellor performing counselling duties.

3.      Be established in their professional field having a minimum of 20 years of experience.

4.     Be willing to openly share the phenomenon at the heart of the study.

**Criteria for Participant Access**

Participants were recruited through an initial contact via letter and poster. The letter and poster were sent to an Employee Assistance Program as well as the Department of Social Work at St. Boniface Hospital. The letter provided my home, work and cellular phone numbers as well as home and work e-mail addresses as initial contact options. Following participant responses an invitation was extended to meet in person whereby the informed consent process was provided and explained. Following this, the semi-structured, interview proceeded. Purposeful sampling was used whereby participants offered recommendations for other participants to join the study.

**Sample Size**

Data was collected based on the life stories of six participants. Laverty, (2003) outlines; "researchers as continuing with interview processes until they believe they have reached a point of saturation, in which a clearer understanding of the experience will not be found through further discussions with participants" (p.18).

**Instrumentation and Data Collection**

Within the constructs of phenomenological research the aim is to understand the lived experience of the participant. During the process of data collection some key concepts guided my process. First and foremost was the understanding that my data collection efforts occurred through providing the context of a trusting relationship. Marcel (1971) exemplifies this critical relationship in a most eloquent manner.

When I say that a being is granted to me as a presence…. This means that I

am unable to treat him as if he were merely placed in front of me; between him

and me there arises a relationship which surpasses my awareness of him; he

is not only before me, he is also with me. (as cited in Laverty, 2003, p.19)

Another guiding principle while conducting my research was a keen awareness that I the researcher became a student of the participant who was my teacher. I received the trusted life story of each participant and in exchange my intent was to honor each of them by offering an outlet to share; whereby they felt heard, respected and deeply understood.

Another critical element guiding my data collection was the understanding that if a participant felt unsure or misguided by a question this was my responsibility to consider ways to clarify it for them.

The main source of data collection was open ended, in-depth semi-structured interviews, whereby I heard the life stories of each participant through the reflective accounts they offered. The interview questions served as a flexible guide; with my main intent being for the interview to flow in a comfortable and flexible way. Koch (1996) explains the nature of interview questions as, "very open in nature, with follow up discussion being led not so much by the researcher but by the participant. Openness is critical and the exchange may be entirely open, with few direct questions asked" (as cited in Laverty, 2003, p.19). Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed by myself. Participants were invited to review their transcript following the process and had the choice of receiving these through postal mail or e-mail. Upon receiving the transcript, participants' were encouraged to make any changes (additions or deletions) necessary to arrive at the essence of what they wished to communicate about their experiences.

**Research Objectives**

The research objectives of this qualitative phenomenological study included:

1.    Creating a safe holding environment allowing each participant time to reflect and share their life story as it related to the phenomenon.

2.      Gaining a better understanding of both the person and the professional that exists within

each participant.

3.      Learning about the reciprocal nature of the personal and professional life of each

participant.

4.      Gaining an increased understanding of how life experiences shape the personal and

professional self.

5.      Understanding what time and experience in both personal and professional life provide.

**Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

1.      What does it mean to be a counsellor?

2.      How does a counsellor do life and work?

3.      To what extent do life events influence a counsellor?

4.      How do counselling experiences influence the person of the counsellor?

5.      How does life and work as a counsellor change with time?

**Probes**

During the interview process, probes were used to ascertain increased clarification and

elaboration from participants when needed. Examples of probes included:

"Can you tell me more about...?"

"Do you think...?"

"How did you feel about...?"

"So, kind of...?"

"So, it sounds like...?"

"Can you elaborate on...?"

"So, are there…?"

"And what is…?"

"Okay, in your opinion….?"

"Are there things…?"

Probes adapted from Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest and Namey (2005) *Qualitative*

*Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide*

**Debrief**

In planning for the in-depth interviews I recognized that some of the content covered in

the interview may be challenging for participants. I anticipated that participants may willingly

recount challenging personal or professional life events during their career and others may find

themselves revisiting aspects of their life they did not anticipate at the onset of the interview. I

recognized that the emotional content and residual effects for some participants could be

challenging, and if this were the case and participants wished, debriefing could occur following

the interview. A debrief would consist of an oral review of the interview by the researcher

allowing participants to revisit both the questions and their responses. Participants would also be

encouraged to describe the experience of being interviewed and speak to how it felt before,

during and following the interview.  They would also be invited to share their observations and

feelings at the present time and consider what effect the interview process had on them and may

continue to have. While I felt each participant revisited aspects that were challenging to differing

degrees, none of the participants requested debriefing following the interviews.

**Field Notes**

A second source of data used in the study was field notes. Brief field notes were taken

and served three purposes; the notes assisted in facilitating the researcher's memory, offered the

researcher a sense of self-reflection on the interview process and supported some of the emerging themes.

**Field Notes** adapted from Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein, 1997

Date: _____          Time: _____

Setting:_____

_____

_____

Sensory Responses:

_____

_____

_____

My Personal Responses to Interviewing:

_____

_____

_____

Key words, phrases used:

_____

_____

Other Observations:

**Research Setting**

The interview date, time and location were determined during initial contacts via phone or e-mail. Meeting locations were determined by the participant in an effort to offer a setting that felt comfortable and safe to openly share.

**Ethical Considerations**

Each participant provided verbal and written consent prior to participating in the study. The researcher explained the purpose of the study and highlighted some of the potential risks associated with participating. The risks included participant emotional responses as a result of reviewing or recollecting professional and personal life events. Participants had the opportunity to debrief following the interview.

Prior to the interview process participants' were made aware that they were invited to share those aspects of their story that they felt comfortable sharing and that they may retrieve any portion of their story at any time. Participants' were also made aware that they could request the recording device be turned off at any time during the course of the interview and that this request would be immediately obliged.

Participants' were sent a copy of the transcript and had the opportunity to add any further details, offer clarification or retrieve pieces of the interview they no longer felt comfortable sharing.

**Confidentiality Processes**

For the purpose of this study, I am the only person to know the subjects by name. All participants in the research study were assigned and referred to using pseudonyms in all written notes and transcription data. Their real names only appeared on the consent form. All data was kept in a secured locked file cabinet in my home when I was not at home. All data will be

destroyed following the completion of the master's degree; recorded data have been erased and all print data will be shredded.

**Reimbursement**

At the end of the interview each participant was provided a Starbucks gift card in the amount of $20.00 for volunteering their time for the study.

**Researcher's Epoch Process**

Part of the preparation for a researcher undertaking phenomenological research involves doing purposeful reflection on their chosen focus. This reflection involves asking oneself why the research is important to them, how their own experiences are relevant to the research to be undertaken and what their position on the topic is. Laverty (2003) asserts that the purpose of this reflection, "… is to become aware of one's own biases and assumptions in order to bracket them, or set them aside, in order to engage the experience without preconceived notions about what will be found in the investigation" (p.17). The process of the researcher disclosing their personal disposition towards the research was referred to by Husserl as Epoche. While the process of positioning oneself in relation to the research is necessary, this needs to be balanced with an acknowledgement that we cannot completely separate ourselves from our experiences. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) acknowledge, "… that no matter how much you try, you cannot divorce your research and writing from your past experiences, who you are, what you believe, and what you value" (38).The goal is rather to acknowledge who you are in relation to the research with the intent to enhance the process.

And so, in order to conduct this research I am implored to consider what led me to pursue this direction. In so doing, I acknowledge that I am not separate from it and that it was my experiences that propelled me to delve further into this world of counsellor integration. It is

within the philosophy of phenomenology that I am committed to not only acknowledge my

personal connection to this area of focus but invest time through reflection to also disclose and

describe my position.

As I embark upon my eighth year as a school counsellor I reflect on my career; what led me to

this role and the experiences I have had over time influenced who I have become as a

counsellor? Perhaps it is with age I am forced to see the intersection of my personal life with my

career. Until now the two have been quite separate, it was with ease that I could

compartmentalize my personal life from my professional life. At the start of my career as an

educator I worked diligently at leaving work at work. This wasn't always easy as I taught in high

needs settings where the struggles and challenges of the children I faced were evident. In that

time, working with many underprivileged children I also came to learn that school counselling

by virtue of its role does not contain itself within those school walls. It is here and with these

children and their families that I learned firsthand about family systems. Theoretical

underpinnings aside, I saw how the family functions as a system and the ripple effect that occurs

as a result of experiences within a family.

Working as a school counsellor prompted me to consider how I found my way here, for I

believed it wasn't by chance that I became a counsellor. As I traced back my history both

personal and professional, I recognized that the consistent theme emerging was that of helping.

In university I was drawn to jobs that involved helping others; a respite worker to special needs

children, a shelter worker to children awaiting foster placements, a family support worker to

families experiencing crisis of many variations and as a resident services facilitator to residents

at St. Amant. From here, I moved on to become a teacher and then pursued a Post Baccalaureate

in Special Education. Through the experience of my Post Baccalaureate in Special Education I

found myself drawn to counselling courses each time I made elective choices. Upon attaining

Special Education certification I was highly motivated to undertake a second Post Baccalaureate

focused on counselling and during this time I accepted a position as an elementary school

counsellor. It was at this point in my academic and professional career when I felt aligned and

decisive in my chosen path as a counsellor. Each of these roles had a common theme and it

wasn't until I was firmly rooted as a counsellor that I could discern the qualities that drew me to

each new experience and ultimately laid a foundation for where my professional life would take

me.

As a beginning school counsellor I aspired to create a comprehensive guidance program in a

school where one had not previously existed. I conceptualized this program as serving needs of

the whole school population and had idealized notions of how balanced and fulfilling this

experience would be. It was indeed fulfilling and I was highly motivated but it did not take me

long to recognize I was out of my element. I felt that a Post Baccalaureate provided me a basis

for performing my role as a counsellor but did not necessarily get at the heart of what children

and their families truly needed from me. In my role I recall three very profound moments that

established this for me, one was a grade eight boy who had been in more than 10 foster

placements in his lifetime. He and I were working together to do an activity taken out of a

counselling guide book that focused on circles of support and I asked him to share with me who

the people were in his life that loved him. He looked at me with a smirk and sarcastically said,

"Are you fucking kidding me Mrs. M, no one has ever loved me! I wouldn't be in this many

foster homes if anyone ever really loved me." In another incident a parent came to meet with me

and during our meeting regarding her daughter's school performance and behaviour concerns,

she confided a recent loss of her partner and broke down inconsolably sharing a history that

dated back to her own mother's suicide. Finally, a third experience that illuminated how unprepared I was involved a 12 year old girl in foster care asking if she could show me something. I replied yes and she proceeded to stand up, turn around and lift her shirt to show me the most horrific burn scars I would ever see. These very profound moments, clarified that I was a person that these people clearly trusted, however, also a person that was not equipped to assist in moving them to work through these experiences or manage my own feelings and emotions when these scenarios were exposed to me. These experiences provided me much humility and desire to begin a Master's degree. With each course I took and with the opportunities to connect with other students I felt I became increasingly confident. However it was within the practicum component of the Master's program that I developed in a most practical manner. Living and working in a setting outside of the school system and learning about therapy with families in the community setting encouraged me to extend and broaden my theoretical understanding, personal philosophy of ways to be with clients and understanding of family systems and narrative therapy approaches. The experience of working with the Mobile Crisis Unit as well as five very dedicated and competent therapists at MacDonald Youth Services was invaluable. With these experiences and time I let go of some of my idyllic notions around the counsellor I would be. I recall one of the therapists reiterating to me the importance of theoretical underpinnings but was explicit when he said, "Rhonda, you need that as a foundation and then you also need to know when it is time to throw the roadmap in the backseat and just drive". This for me was another poignant moment when I realized that if I was to remain caught up in the theory I would miss the here and now with clients.

Meanwhile in my daytime job as a school counsellor I worked hard most days and have come to recognize that the odd day where I didn't it wasn't laziness or apathy but rather my body and

mind taking a break from the intense nature of the job and environment in which I worked. I

believe that during this time in my career I always tried to do the right thing the right way for

children and their families. I ran many groups, some as lone facilitator and others co-facilitating

with divisional Social Workers and Psychologists. I continued to provide a lot of individual

counselling as the high needs environment I worked in necessitated this. With time and

experience I arrived at a place where I was able to leave work realizing that the nurturing and

support I offered within the parameters of my working day were the best I could do for these kids

and for myself. With this learning came an even greater understanding that I had put my family

as a second priority on my list. I recall many moments of meta-cognitive experiences where I

could rationalize that family comes first and create a plan or contract with myself to put forth a

greater effort to do so, but my best intentions would fall. I would find myself time and again

immersed in my work to the extent that my family had fallen to number two yet again.

 This recognition of imbalance coupled with the high needs environment became tiring, so after

six years in this high needs setting I really evaluated my career and my future. While evaluating

I recognized that I had become a go to person in the school, there was only a principal and I felt

that much of the Vice Principal duties fell on me. With the arrival of yet another new

administrator, I found staff approaching me more and more with questions and concerns and I

found myself redirecting people to administration. I was becoming cynical and also felt I was

becoming stagnant doing the same things with kids in the same ways. I felt a move would be

beneficial for kids as it would offer new blood in the role; hopefully someone fresh and

motivated and at the same time I hoped for a setting that could reinvigorate me. I requested a

transfer to a new school and after two requests was granted a transfer the second year. I would

now find myself as guidance counsellor to a new population; a larger school situated in a middle-upper class neighborhood.

Up to this point, I felt as though I had truly developed as a professional, however upon reflecting I realize this was done with little influence from my personal life. To this point my personal life went according to planned and there were really no unexpected stressful life events that implored me to stretch myself to maintain a life work balance in the face of adversity. Perhaps it is with time and age that these experiences present, or perhaps it is luck that found me in my mid-thirties living a life according to my predetermined plans. However, the past two years my own life presented the life challenges I had lacked. It is within this time that I have had the opportunity to learn more about who I am firstly as a person and then also as a professional.

On November 3, 2010 we were faced with a very tumultuous time whereby my son had a pathological fracture of the femur. We awaited pathology results for nearly a month to finally learn the lesion was benign. The care he required necessitated me to take 7 weeks away from my job. During this time he was on his back and required feeding and toileting and it was here that I learned more about who he was as a person, who I was and who we were as a family. I struggled with missing work; suddenly one of the markers for how I identified myself was missing. Each day I experienced the conflict of knowing I needed to be there for my son and there was the greatest piece of me that knew I couldn't be away from him, the flipside of this was knowing someone else was in my office, doing what I loved and valued. Following several weeks, Luka returned to school and me to my job but there was much adjusting to be done. For six months Luka remained in a wheelchair and we as a family did the best we could to do "life as normal". My work days were shortened as I had to drop off and pick up Luka at the beginning and end of each school day, so while I was back to my role, it was in a different way and I certainly felt a

sense of disconnect from the role I had known and from the staff. I struggled with how much to disclose to the children that wanted to know where I had been and also felt like much time was spent repairing relationships with those that depended on me. For some children, I am sure it seemed I was there one day and gone the next, taking with me their reliance and trust. All the while reflecting on where I was in life this was miniscule compared to the thoughts of Luka that consumed me. I recall wondering how his days at school were, was he able to make it to the washroom with independence, how did he spend his time during Physical Education, and how did he manage recesses when his peers were out playing and he was indoors alone? While I am now removed from this and recognize it as a moment in time, it was a stressful moment. I don't know that I was all that effective as a professional, I think that likely during that time my efforts shifted and my energy was expended at home and with my family. I was likely "getting by" at work, a mediocre counsellor at best.

It seemed we were just over that hurdle and another was presented. This time we learned my mother had Stage 4 breast cancer, this resulted in her living with us for several months, having a long and risky surgery and facing several treatments. In the past 15 months the cancer has progressed to both her liver and her brain. I have come to know that this cancer may live in her but belongs to all of us. This is a daily concern, each day I awaken to this reality that someday she won't be here. I am also forced to acknowledge that in all of this, life carries on though; I still need to be a mom, a wife, a daughter and a professional. I feel that in spite of her prognosis and the sad reality, I am able to carry out my professional duties in a more thoughtful and focused manner than I did during my experience with my son. Perhaps it was because Luka's experience was the first big personal challenge for me or perhaps the experience put things in perspective and in some way prepared me and strengthened me for what was to come.

Within these past 2 years I have been forced to revaluate where I am in life and search for answers that seem pertinent to my professional and personal success.

Work as a counsellor takes energy and conscious effort and action to ensure professional practice is maintained at a high standard. Encompassed in this high standard is ensuring client needs are at the forefront, professional development is active and current, and a healthy life-work balance is nurtured. When aspects in our lives beyond our control present themselves and we are suddenly faced with an imbalance, how is it that we as counsellors do our job maintaining the standard while also managing the personal areas of our life? How can we be assured we are maintaining a professional capacity that ensures effectiveness with clients? A counsellor's work can be isolating, oftentimes we are an anomaly in the workplace. During these times who is it that offers us the professional insight and support into how we perform? How do we ensure we are maintaining a standard for our clients to move forward in their process? How have others faced life's challenges while maintaining a capacity for wellness and professionalism? What are the things and who were the people that supported them in doing this? Did they feel they were prepared to face the challenges that intersect their personal and professional worlds? What if anything could have made these transitions less complex?

And so from experience I am left to realize that it is not a matter of whether during the course of your career you will experience turbulent times whereby establishing the life work balance is more challenging. The question remains when will one be faced with this? Further it is my belief that by the very nature of a counsellor's work we become more vulnerable during these times. We often remain an anomaly in a workplace; there is only one of us and we don't meet the criteria to fit with others in our workplace. We are also faced with society's view that if we are an expert at helping others, how is that we cannot help ourselves? Thus far, my

experience has been while these aspects of a counsellor's development are integral in the direction their career may move, it is yet to be an area worthy of discussion/focus within a graduate study level. There are no courses that focus on the developmental journey of a counsellor, proactive strategies in maintaining a life work balance, teaching one how to reflect in purposeful ways in efforts to self-sustain. Further, there are no courses or professional system to assist in navigating the levels of support available to counsellors. And so I have found within a personal context a need for common stories about the ebbs and tides within a counsellor's personal and professional life. It is my belief that an increased focus on how counsellor's maintain wellness and a capacity for professionalism during challenging times and how they have reflected on the impact these personal life events have had on their careers will offer valuable insight. This insight may provide support and direction for others in the helping profession. It may also offer insight into how counsellor training and supervision can shift to promote a capacity for professionalism, integrity and life work balance.

**Data Analysis**

Data collection was undertaken for this research in three manners. The primary source of data was gathered through interviews with helping professionals. The conversations arose out of open ended interviews which served as a flexible guide in getting at the heart of each participant's story. Each conversation was audio recorded using an iPhone and was transcribed by the researcher shortly following the conversation. Upon completion of transcribing participant interviews the audio recording from each participant was erased. The transcribed conversations were analyzed by the researcher and themes that emerged were categorized using a broad coding system. The codes allowed the researcher to organize the data into manageable groups of information that could be further analyzed and compared with other participant conversations.

As information was organized and analyzed the need for secondary or sub codes were

established to further break down the themes. Following each participant interview the data was

transcribed and upon completion of all data the transcriptions were assigned coding categories.

According to Bogdan and Bilked (2005) numerous families of coding categories exist. Upon

reviewing various categories in their work, I have considered seven initial codes that may be

used within this study. "Situation codes" depict participant's world view and how it relates to the

research topic. Situation Codes often focus on how participants define what they do as well as

aspects that are important to them.  "Perspectives Held by Participants" codes are another

potential category of use whereby ways of thinking and orientations towards certain aspects of

the setting are held within a common framework. Often these common perspectives are captured

in words or phrases that participants use. A third coding system "Participant's Ways of

Thinking" is another family coding category that highlights participants' understanding of each

other, of outsiders and of the aspects that make up their world. "Process Codes" are words or

phrases indicative of sequences of events, changes over time or passages from one type of status

to another. This coding system is seemingly relevant in considering participants reflective

accounts over a career span. A fifth coding category "Strategy Codes" refers to the tactics, plans,

methods and other conscious manners by which participants accomplish aspects. "Relationship

and Social Structure" codes may be used in considering roles and positions. Finally another code

that may be utilized to analyze the data is "Narrative Codes". This coding system is structured

around the talk itself that occurs and is common when participants offer accounts or stories of

their life. Where their story begins and concludes as well as the structure participants' use may

indicate beliefs and attitudes.

Codes developed were not shaped solely on data but rather data coupled with the researcher's perspective and theoretical frame of reference. Within the broader coding categories as data unfolded, sub codes became necessary to further categorize and analyze the data.

Experienced researchers' analysis and interpretation often occur synonymous with data collection. Often the experienced researcher interprets and analyzes the majority of data prior to leaving the field. For novice researchers' it is more common to collect all data first while remaining mindful of how much is enough propelling one forward to then analyze and interpret findings. In this study, efforts were made to interpret the data while in the field; however the focus on analysis and interpretation occurred more fully following the completion of each interview.

A second source of data collection was gathered through field notes used during the conversation with participants. The field note taking process involved basic key words during the conversation and served as reminders following the conversation allowing the researcher to add detail. The field notes identified descriptors regarding the physical environment in which the researcher and participant met in, any noticeable aspects that appealed to the researcher's senses (sights, sounds, and smells), any personal feelings or responses that were evoked in the researcher through the conversation process and finally any key words or phrases used by the participant during the conversation. Following each interview time was spent adding increased detail to the brief field notes taken. The field notes were analyzed in regards to establishing the components that influenced the conversation process (setting, sights, sounds, smells). In addition, the field notes served as a secondary source of data both in substantiating initial themes identified in the conversations with participants and in highlighting the researcher's experience during the interview process.

A final source of data used was the researcher's personal reflection through journaling after each participant conversation. The reflection encompassed the researcher's personal responses towards the conversation process and a review of the experience highlighting any emotional responses that arose. The reflective researcher's accounts offered ongoing insight into the researcher's position in relation to the theme and the data as it was being collected and analyzed. The reflection also served as an outlet by which to further analyze participant perspectives and infer deeper meaning. A considerable amount of time was dedicated to reflecting and journaling, the following questions will assist in guiding this process:

- What are my initial opinions and feelings following the interview experience?

- How did the process of the interview feel?

- Were the questions I posed to participants legitimate? Did I receive detailed narrative responses as a result?

- What is it that I am learning from participants? What is emerging from the data?

- What is it I still need to know?

The reflection process combined with review of the detailed field notes provided direction as to the adjustments and modifications for future interviews. Conscious efforts were taken to bridge what I am learning from my participants with the literature. I made efforts to note if what they were teaching me about their experiences was also reflected in the literature.

A copy of all data was kept serving as a master copy that remained unmarked. Copies of data were used to sort and organize through margin notes, colour coded categories and prescribed values (numbers, letters or symbols) to further categorize. The manner in which the data was organized and coded was reformulated as the process of data analysis unfolded to accommodate both my comfort with and approach to managing the research.

**Chapter Four: Data Presentation and Analysis**

**Introduction**

Chapter Four provides an evocative descriptive of the personal narratives from six

participants providing the foundation for this chapter. The chapter also offers themes which are

identified through the data collection efforts from the participants, each an experienced

counsellor (having more than 20 years of professional experience). Finally, the chapter

accentuates the essence extracted during the data analysis process.

**Description of Participants**

The six participants in this study were comprised of two males and four females, ranging

in age from approximately 55 – 65 years of age. All participants were currently working as

counsellors, five of the participants hold a Master's degree while one has a Ph. D. Four of the

participants were working within an EAP setting while the other two were working within a

community setting.

Each participant initially reached me via phone or email. Following that, our initial meeting was

set up via phone at which time every participant chose to have the informed consent and

interview occur concurrently. With the exception of one participant, all others requested to

forego a second meeting and chose to provide feedback to their interview transcript via email.

One participant did request another meeting to review the transcript.

"DOING LIFE" WHILE "DOING WORK"

**Table 4.1 Participant Descriptor:**

| Participant Name | Age (Approximate as age was not a direct question asked of participants) | Gender | Practice | Number of years in Field | Number of Interviews | Length of Interview in Minutes and Seconds |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Danny | 55 | M | EAP | 20 + | 1 | 52:56 |
| Ivan | 64 | M | EAP & Private Practice | 30 + | 1 | 39:14 |
| Patricia | 62 | F | EAP | 30 + | 1 | 60:02 |
| Lana | 62 | F | Community | 42 | 2 (Follow up interview was also approximately 60 minutes in length.) | 60:00 |
| Deb | 54 | F | EAP | 34 | 1 | 25:10 |
| Edie | 57 | F | Community | 35 | 1 | 60:12 |

**Essences and Meanings of "Fortitude"**

Strength, endurance and vigour are all words that encapsulate the essence of fortitude; each participant shared compelling personal and professional narratives that exemplified the spirit of fortitude. While strength is one of the defining characteristics of fortitude, it is critically important to note that participants in this study did not report a sense of strength at all times, in fact they shared times in their lives that were despairing. It is when one experiences vulnerability and weakness and then later reflects and shares the experience of that despairing time; how it felt and what they learned, that a true and clear reflection of fortitude emerges. In spite of bearing witness to the grief and suffering of many clients and experiencing their own personal loss and

distress over the course of time, these six people shared openly and were a testimony to determination, inner strength and continued existence. Edie, participant six, shared, "I survived it and I managed to not kill anybody or myself during that period and at the age of 31 I had my first really fundamentally powerful, painful, despairing time and it was the first time I had a clue what that was about. So, it was the first time I had a clue what the experience of the people whose experience I feared the most looked like" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013).

There were four core research questions guiding this study and these included:

- What is the experience of being a counsellor? What is it like?

- What challenges do counsellors face?

- How do life events influence the personal and professional self?

- What does time and experience offer a counsellor?

In essence, the research questions aimed to share each participant's experience of working in a counselling capacity over the career span while living one's own life. As well it aimed to identify how life and work has influenced each participant and gather participant opinions of what time and experience in a counselling context can offer?

**Example of Data Analysis**

The chart exemplifies the data analysis process undertaken in my research process. As themes emerged through the data an overall essence was illuminated. The overall essence of "Fortitude" (column 1) was informed from the effort of the themes (column 2) that were composed during the analysis phase. Column 3 identifies the specific experiences identified by participants as they relate to each theme (boundaries, evolution, integration, and challenges). Column 4 is a collection of participant statements from the transcripts that illuminate both the theme and essence. The final column indicating "Number of References" indicates the number of

times the participant offers a statement during the course of the interview that links his or her

experience to each theme. The column may offer implications as it may show the importance of

specific themes based on the number of references participants' have made throughout the

transcript in comparison to others.

**Table 4.2 Essence: "Fortitude"**

| Essence | Theme | Components of Experience | In Vivo Statements | Number of Statements or Concepts |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Fortitude** | Boundaries | 1. Awareness of Need for Balance | 1. Danny shared that, "Sometimes I think you just have to call it quits on certain things, either you could maybe do it at one time but you can't anymore because maybe it's just too emotionally raw for you or you can't do it for a period of time or whatever". <br><br> 1. Lana in reflecting on her previous experiences in her nursing career prior to becoming a SW shared working with young children in oncology, "So it was a huge privilege..... But it also leaves a deep scar. So in order to be able to go on, I think I had to learn not to do that. For a while the way I did that self- | Danny – 27 <br> Ivan – 8 <br> Patricia – 21 <br> Lana – 27 <br> Deb – 13 <br> Edie – 15 |

| | | | protection was not to work with kids, so once I had kids of my own then it wasn't so easy to walk away". | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 2. Not Responsible for Clients or The Outcome | 2. Patricia explained, "I think I'm contributing to someone's life when I work with them but I'm not responsible for their life in that total sense. I'm one person on the path for a period of time, that kind of thing". | |
| **Fortitude** | Evolution | 1. Significant changes that occurred through career & life | 1. Deb shared how the birth of her second child changed and shaped her career perspective and that of the clients she worked with. "So she really was my humble pie, but it taught me a lot and has made me so much more compassionate for parents who are having difficulty with a child. Like I think that is a huge piece of what has made me so good at this job in terms of helping parents and children". | Danny – 21 Ivan – 8 Patricia – 14 Lana – 14 Deb – 7 Edie – 22 |
| | | 2. Development of one's own | 2. Lana shared a critical time in her own development, | |

| | | identity | "I've had to learn who I am over time because for a long time I didn't know. I was somebody's daughter, somebody's sister, somebody's nurse, somebody's girlfriend, somebody's wife, somebody's mother. **Researcher-Yeah** Lana – "And it wasn't until I was actually on my own with four kids to raise that I realized that I'm not such... you know.... there's something to like here". | |
| **Fortitude** | Integration | 1. How I do work and life has changed over time. | 1. Ivan – "And I think as experience grows and you develop as a person your experiences in life then come into these experiences".<br><br>1. Patricia shared that whether she is offering seminars and professional development or in session with clients she finds she is often taking learning away. "...the ideas you get from people are so wonderful | Danny – 17<br>Ivan – 10<br>Patricia – 19<br>Lana – 13<br>Deb – 8<br>Edie – 16 |

| | | | and then you just weave it into what you are doing and so it goes both ways". | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 2. What I know now that I didn't know then. | 2. Danny shared his learning over time, "I thought I could change anything and knowing that some things are not going to change. You can get people to a certain point but not everybody is going to be able to play Mozart on a violin, some people will never play the violin, some people will play beautifully. If you can accept that in therapy that not everyone is going to get to the same point. That doesn't mean they aren't going to get something that is useful to them but not everybody is going to change dramatically". | |
| **Fortitude** | Challenges | 1. Within context of workplace | 1. Patricia – "But there was one very senior person there who was a major bully and it became like a survivor's club and I wasn't one of the main victims in the thing. But just being in the | Danny – 16 Ivan – 8 Patricia – 8 Lana – 25 Deb – 8 Edie – 18 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | environment, we were having health breakdowns, left, right and it was just bizarre." | |
| | | 2. Personal Hardships | 2. Edie shared the death of her father and the unwished for end to her marriage all occurring within the span of a year. "I survived it and I managed not to kill anybody or myself during that period and at the age of 31 I had my first fundamentally powerful, painful, despairing time and it was the first time I had a clue what that was about. So it was the first time I had a clue what the experiences of the people whose experiences I feared the most looked like". | |

## Individual Participant Structural Descriptions of their Experiences

**Danny.** Danny holds a Masters in Social Work; he has been practicing in therapy for

more than twenty years and is currently working in an EAP program. Danny verbally offered a

candid personal and professional reflection through the course of his interview, framing it within

the context of his career span. Danny shared that while he sees his role as therapist as important

to who he is and also recognizes that it provides some sense of accomplishment, he admits it is

only his job and not how it defines his being. In fact, he shared that when we begin to wrap our professional identity into our personal one there is a danger because you risk too much if you load yourself up in job identity.

Danny shared his predisposition to be an introvert as it is a familial trait and how he has spent much of his adult life working to set himself apart from his siblings so that he has increased comfort in social situations. He acknowledged that this continues to be an ongoing goal and one he will work on always. Early in his career Danny felt he worked much harder than his clients did and felt that he worked all day as a therapist and then when he left his office he would either go to volunteer in various therapy settings. He shared that if he was not volunteering, his time would be spent reading at home in the evenings as he felt he needed to teach himself all that he didn't know for fear of being "found out"!

Danny spoke unequivocally about the populations he would not work with and these included clients presenting with deeply rooted psychiatric issues, sex therapy issues and depending on the severity some addiction issues he would also refer to other counsellors. Danny shared that he himself had become aversive to some issues over time as he has learned about himself and has had personal experiences but said, "I won't go into that issue because it's just too close to home" (Danny, interview, July 22, 2013). He also shared that he is conscious of how he balances his caseload and if things are feeling heavier at home he will lighten the caseload at work and plan it "low energy" (Danny, interview, July 22, 2013).

Danny shared the boundaries he has that extend outside of the workplace into his personal life including the manner by which he surrounds himself with people who do completely different types of work than him. He shared that the friendships he keeps are with people who do all different types of careers but none of which are therapists. Danny also shared

that he is conscious of how he balances his time outside of work and tries to fill it with

housekeeping tasks, good music, movies, food and time spent visiting with neighbors. He also

makes an effort to be physically active doing sports that are extreme and test the limits of his

body. He shared that he enjoys doing extreme sport such as three to four hour cycling rides,

mountain climbing and white water rafting.

Danny spoke of how his practice with clients has evolved over time and how the world of

being a counsellor is one of "chronic unpredictability" (Danny, interview, July 22, 2013). He

shared how in this profession he has little control of what he hears from his clients and how at

times it is difficult to balance that with his own life. He shared the example of coming back to

work following his mother's passing and how on his first day back, still feeling a little fragile his

first client opened up about his own mother passing away while Danny had been away. He

shared how this was particularly difficult but how counsellors' also need to set "our own stuff"

aside, even if momentarily to do the work.  This segued to a discussion about spill over, and it

really illuminated the point of yours and theirs (clients). Danny shared the importance of while in

session being conscious that if you have similar experiences to clients to be aware of the danger

line and know that there can be spill over between 'yours' and 'theirs'. Danny shared that he has

become better at catching himself in therapy and asking if there is something there for him that

he needs to work on, see another therapist about or consider if his work-life balance is off. With

time, Danny has learned to go with the flow, he expressed that his boat doesn't get rocked as

easily and that this is something that has come with time, experience and increased confidence. It

isn't something that can be taught, it just has to take shape over time with experiences.  He also

shared that even with his best work and best efforts there have still been clients who have killed

themselves, he has learned that he cannot carry that burden. His greatest learning's have been to

not get preoccupied about having a good outcome with clients. He also believes experience is teaching and informing and that it is important to acknowledge it and figure out what you are being taught. Danny also shared that he finds that as he gets older things in life are less black and white and greyer.

### Researcher's field note entry and reflection on the meaning of "fortitude" for Danny.

Danny was restful and open in our communication and I as researcher immediately had a sense that he was genuine and transparent as he chose to host the interview in his home. I found that Danny was very engaging and humorous over the course of the interview. He was very humble about his skills and abilities as an experienced therapist and offered reflections from his entire career trajectory.

Throughout the course of the interview I first recognized Danny's courage early on as he spoke of referring out specific populations. He then moved on to indicate that there are certain areas he can and cannot work with, simply because he becomes too activated and because it is too close to home. I understood this was his way of indicating we needed to move on, and we did. It was clear to me that there was an underlying strength within Danny that evolved from the challenges he had faced.

Danny also spoke of his struggle to find balance early on in his career; he would consume himself with the world of counselling. He was a counsellor by day and then he would leave that day job and go to a voluntary setting in the evenings and on the odd evening he wasn't doing that he would go home and read about how to become a better counsellor. He did this all for fear that someone would find out that he really didn't know what he was doing. He shared that he felt like he was a fraud and that he didn't want to be found out. At some point in his career he recognized he just couldn't continue this pace.

At another point in the interview Danny spoke of his family of origin and shared that his family were all fairly anxious people and that he too was geared this way. He spoke of his determination at making a conscious effort to be social in spite of the difficulty for him.

Danny shared that he had come to some big learning's as a therapist in his career and these included not having the ability to change people and not feeling a sense of failure because of it.  He also shared that sometimes when you do all of your best work you will still have people who kill themselves, it is not your fault, and you can either move on from it or let it consume you.

**Ivan.** Ivan holds a Ph. D. in Clinical Psychology and has been practicing for more than 20 years. He sees his role of therapist as one of a position of honour and trust whereby he recognizes he is invited into a client's world. Ivan spoke of his career experiences and how he feels that he has an extremely diverse career profile, his career has shifted over time to less of a direct therapy role. He continues to do some therapy within private practice; however the majority of his role is serving as an Executive Director for a program that directs treatment of therapy providers.

Ivan spontaneously spoke of his childhood background and how he felt this was fundamental to his career decision. As a child he shared that his home was rich in literature and there was a tradition of delayed gratification which he believes set the tone for him to pursue education. He believed this inspired him to want to read, question and study. He also felt that a teacher in high school spurred him to pursue Psychology as a field of study.

Ivan also spoke of boundaries and shared the importance of having professional boundaries and being very aware as a therapist what your preferences and comfort are in terms of what you have the affinity and desire to work with in terms of counselling. He also spoke to

having the wherewithal to know oneself within the context of counselling and know what it is that activates you or strikes a chord for you when in the presence of clients. He made a point to say that it isn't necessary to bring that to light for others but it is essential that you have a keen awareness of it within you. Ivan also spoke of diversifying the caseload, ensuring that counsellors' are not consistently seeing the same "type" of clientele. While all people and their stories are unique they can wear you down over time if they are presenting in a similar fashion. Ivan shared the need for diversity and novelty to the kind of client one takes on or it can start to become exhausting if therapists are always seeing the same kind of clients.

Ivan spoke of personal boundaries; the push and pull that the job of counselling entails and the need for counsellors' to be cautious. Without awareness, he cautioned that counsellors' may become absent or distant and may not have a lot to give to the people who matter the most. He shared prior experiences of dealing with the loss of his parents and his in-laws who were both elderly and had since passed away. At the time these were difficult and stressful times but he felt it was a time that had passed in his life. Ivan also spoke of his grown children who faced their own issues and spoke of the uncontrollable nature of home life and how when coupled with the uncontrollable nature of the work counsellors' do can lead to extreme stress.

Ivan shared that by virtue of his role he has been touched, knowing that people have let him into their worlds and this has increased his belief in humanity. While one can never know how others feel or truly understand what it is exactly they are going through, he said he can't help but feel honoured that clients' have let him in and he is forever changed by the experience. Over time, he has come to find a deeper understanding of other's life experiences and has realized that he as a counsellor is really not that smart. It is rather the time, and the interactions he has had with people that allow him to recognize situations and then draw on that experience.

He shared that as life experience grows there's a deepening of understanding and a self-confidence and self-assurance that grounds one and promotes within a counsellor a knowing of who you are.

Ivan shared that over time he has matured professionally and has become less concerned with the outcome with clients. Early in his career he was more likely to feel like a failure whereas later in his career he didn't encounter those feelings to the same degree. With time, Ivan would rethink approaches if one didn't work or accept that people drop because not all people connect. He has come to learn that tinges of insecurity are okay and normal, that all people have them. He has also recognized that there are a number of ways to get to a solution, there are many roads to take to get to the same place and you can be happy there. Finally, Ivan reiterated that counsellors' must know who they are and what they bring to the experience with clients, if not for anyone else at least for themselves.

### Researcher's field note entry and reflection on the meaning of "fortitude" for Ivan.

Throughout the course of the interview Ivan appeared exhausted; he was yawning excessively and rubbing his eyes. He seemed to be struggling to maintain a sense of alertness. He shared that he may receive a call during the course of our interview which would momentarily take him from our interview and then explained that he had contractors in his home as they were undergoing home renovations. In spite of Ivan's fatigue, it did not seem to impact his ability to offer insightful reflections over the course of the interview.

Ivan was confident and self-assured in our interview; he spoke of his past career experience. He also shared how he had navigated balancing career while caring for aging parents and in-laws who had since all passed. He also spoke of having adult children who live their lives and go through their own challenges. He shared his perception of the work of therapists being a

challenge at the best of times and that when personal lives are going relatively well it can all feel

quite taxing but that when one area feels in disequilibrium then it can be especially exhausting.

Ivan was not as open about his personal life and offered more reflective accounts about his

professional life than personal. While he alluded to some challenges in his personal world he did

not delve into these further.

Ivan did speak of his experience with clients in pain management and children in poverty

stricken northern communities and the challenges in measuring or evidencing success with these

populations. He shared how when one works with these populations it is often difficult because

success is not always evident and this can lead to a feeling of defeat and exhaustion.

**Patricia**. Patricia holds a Master's in Clinical Psychology; she has been practicing in

therapy for more than thirty years and is currently working in an EAP program. The interview

was equally balanced with retrospective narratives of Patricia's professional and personal life.

Patricia was very energized and upbeat over the course of the interview and her investment and

genuineness was evident. She shared her love for the job she does and verbalized this in multiple

ways including, "It means, for me it's really connected in with purpose in life" (Patricia,

interview, July 27, 2013). "...who I am is what I do" (Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013). "I get

so much back in terms of doing the work" (Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013).

Over the course of the interview Patricia maintained her positive demeanor and shared

how some of her early career experiences involved working in a volatile setting whereby

workplace bullying occurred. As she reflected on this experience and how difficult it was she felt

that it in some way shaped who she was and contributed to her life in a positive manner. She

indicated that the experience offered her a skill set that had made her stronger at what she did

today. This theme continued to emerge for Patricia over the course of the interview where as she

reflected on past challenging life experiences she found the goodness and wealth they had

afforded her today. Patricia also talked of the awareness she had around certain needs of clients

and how she wasn't particularly good at counselling specific populations because of a lack of

training, interest or fit with a client.

Patricia shared her perspective on the boundaries she has established including an on/off

switch that is very ingrained in her as opposed to a deliberate effort she has to make. "…when I

am working I am really into my work and I'm enjoying it and when I walk out the door it's like

I've got lots of other interest and things and I don't tend to carry my thoughts about the people

with me when I'm not there" (Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013). Patricia also shared her

awareness of not being responsible for her client's life in a total sense and recognizing the small

role she plays in their life.

She spoke to some of the wellness practices she had in place that have evolved over her

career including seasonal retreats that allow her a reflective period, walking, and writing. She

emphasized writing as a very important practise and likened it to the peeling back of an onion for

her. As we talked about wellness practices and aspects outside of her work she spoke of doing

things that are separate from what you do in your day to day life. "I think a lot of things like that

and just having other things I like doing that have nothing to do with my work" (Patricia,

interview, July 27, 2013),

Patricia spoke openly of times in her life when personal challenges have made balancing

work and life challenging. She talked of becoming depleted and weary and how at times we

don't know that this is occurring until it is too late. She also talked about the rebuilding phase

and how this doesn't occur quickly. She used the analogy of filling a gas tank and the process

involved in filling your tank and how this affects you professionally. Patricia also shared how as

she has passed through each decade and various life stages she has noted that she has an interest

in the life stages of her clients as well. She seems more drawn and interested to clients in parallel

life phases to her own.

We ended our interview with her sharing learning's from her career thus far which

included knowing that life doesn't always go as one had planned it to go. She also spoke of other

things within the context of a therapy room becoming bigger influences than the theories one

learns about in their training and how crucial it is to move away from theories and be deeply

present with one's client. And finally, "…there's something deeper than that and it's sort of like

the mystery of what happens if you can enter into that time with a person in another way"

(Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013).

### *Researcher's field note entry and reflection on the meaning of "fortitude" for Patricia.*

Over the course of the interview Patricia exuded a positive energy and she verbalized that

she genuinely appreciated this experience and opportunity to reflect on her career. Even while

sharing the challenges she had endured in her personal and professional life she consistently

reframed these into a context of how these experiences had helped her to become a better person

and counsellor. I quickly inferred that no part of Patricia's past had made her cynical or jaded to

her work or life outside of work.

Patricia shared an experience early in her career that involved working in a very toxic

environment within the civil service setting whereby someone in upper management was a bully.

This created a toxic environment that was highly abusive and led to many, many health

breakdowns. Patricia was not one of the victims but directly witnessed many co-workers who

were and felt directly affected and suffered the stress of that. She said that they referred to their

group as the survivor's club, she endured this for a period of 4 years at which time she moved on

to a new career. At the time this was the worst career period of her life, however she shared that she has used this experience in ways she never anticipated. As a counsellor, she often works with clients who encounter workplace bullies and she utilizes these past experiences of her own to assist clients. Ironically, a painful time in her past has been a tool in her toolbox.

Patricia also spoke of the elder care for her father that lasted several months and occurred in and out of the hospital. She was primarily his caregiver and she continued to work during this time and leave from work to care for him. As his health deteriorated the care increased and eventually he passed away, it was only then that Patricia recognized how weary and depleted she had become. She shared that sometimes we as therapists don't even see it until it is too late and the rebuilding process is not automatic, this process is slow and took her a long time.

As our interview came to a close Patricia was sharing some of her greatest learning with me and one of these gave me a sense that it may have been a missed opportunity of regret of sorts. She quietly with a smile shared that one thing she has learned is that life is complex, and that one might plan a life for oneself but that it just doesn't go that way after all. At this point in the interview I recall feeling a sense of sombreness, perhaps sensing some regret in her voice. From here we moved on. The interview concluded with Patricia sharing that prior to our interview she anticipated that she might enjoy this experience and that she really did.

**Lana.** Lana holds a Master's in Social Work; she has been working for 42 years and is currently working in a hospital setting. She is working in a community setting and is also a liaison between the social work department and all other departments at her workplace.

Much of the interview with Lana highlighted her personal self and that of her family, and she shared openly and in confidence how a life lived had impacted her both as a person and

professional. The portion of Lana's discourse that did focus on the professional context was reflective and took her back a number of years often to her previous career in nursing.

Lana spoke of her strengths being her ability to compartmentalize both personally and professionally and to direct people to find resources that are meaningful and helpful for them. She shared that her ability to compartmentalize has likely come about from the many moves she made as a child and that something that was very challenging and difficult has become an asset later in life. "The longest we... before I was 10, the longest we ever lived in one place was almost 3 years" (Lana, interview, July 29, 2013). Lana also shared some of the very tangible practices she has that act as boundaries for her. This includes sorting or filing paper when the world outside of her office gets too busy, overwhelming or big for her and she just needs time and space. She also listens to a specific radio station which seems to reset her on the way home from work each day, she talked of turning the music up and listening to oldies, singing at her top of her lungs. Once at home, she changes out of her work clothes and this practice offers a distinct signal of leaving work or shedding work in a tangible way. Lana indicated changing as the first thing she does upon arriving home and that initially it was a habit as it is something she did as a nurse but has now become a ritual.

Lana shared how over time she has come to recognize she cannot hold herself responsible for the lives of the people she works with in a broad sense. She has come to know she plays a small role and is a small, albeit important influence in the overall picture.

Over the course of the interview Lana spoke of the process of evolution and while portions of this focused on her work with clients, more of it was directed intrapersonal. Lana talked about her own self-discovery and how over time she had come to realize there was a

person within her and not only a mother, sister, wife, and friend. With time she learned who she was and that there was someone worth liking under all those labels.

She also discussed her journey from passiveness to assertiveness and self-advocacy and finding her voice at a critical point in her life out of necessity. This came at a time when she was between careers, dependent on employment insurance and felt trapped by that system as she awaited financial support with four children to feed. She had taken the kind and polite approach thus far and was feeling frustrated as it clearly wasn't working in her favour. Finally one day she became assertive out of necessity and recognized people respected and listened to her.

Lana shared that over time she came to a realization that she was not going to make the changes she initially thought for this world but that she is now okay with it. "You do the very best you can and recognize that it really does not matter what other people think, it matters what you think" (Lana, interview, July 29, 2013)!  Lana also shared, "I think you come to the realization that fifteen minutes after you're gone, nobody's really gonna remember much" (Lana, interview, July 29, 2013).

Lana referred to nursing as a very task oriented career and social work as a very process oriented career, however she felt that the two could really complement one another. While it wasn't easy to always make them work simultaneously, it was possible; she used the analogy of weaving. "I sort of talk about it in terms of netting or weaving, so you weave the different strands together and you end up with whole cloth." (Lana, interview, July 29, 2013).

Lana talked of maintaining her nursing license for many years and as she now looks back on that she thinks it was more a piece of the transition for her out of one career and into the other. "And for awhile, for many years I kept my licence and I worked at St. A on weekends. And that for me

was a transition; because it was still tasks but I could do the Monday to Friday airy fairy stuff"

(Lana, interview, July 29, 2013).

Much of the interview was devoted to the personal hardships that Lana had endured over

the course of her lifetime and career. There were many and they were varied, including having

no childhood home base or attachment until after the age of 10. As Lana grew up she had a

strained relationship with her father and in our interview she referred to him as a "hard ass".

When Lana's nursing career ended due to injury she shared how this impacted her life, "What

was my life and what for a large piece identified who I was became non-existent" (Lana,

interview, July 29, 2013). Shortly after Lana's injury and loss of career, her marriage ended and

she found herself home with four children perplexed with the loss of her professional and marital

identity and now questioning the future.

Lana also shared her daughter's illness as a child and then once again her daughter

encountered another unrelated illness as an adult which both times were terrifying and required

intense care. Lana herself suffers from some chronic health issues which posed challenges on

many days that affect her personally and spill over into her professional world. She explained

that a reorganization in the workplace somewhat recently has caused much stress for her and an

increased workload whereby she now has a new role that is making her job much broader and

fuller than 1.0. "They call it decentralization; I call it destruction" (Lana, interview, July 29,

2013).

### *Researcher's field note entry and reflection on the meaning of "fortitude" for Lana.*

Lana began by sharing an early awareness of her own attachment patterns as a child. Due

to the nature of her father's job, her family moved often. Lana recalled that as a child she was

usually the new child starting school in September and the kid moving in June. Until the age of 10, her family did not live in one place longer than 3 years.

Lana also expressed that she and her father had a strained relationship much of her life; she perceived him as not supporting her interests and decisions. One of these decisions included her interest in pursuing social work following high school. Her father wouldn't hear of it as during the interview Lana laughed recalling her father referring to Social Workers as "the devil's spawn". Her father's wishes and direction ultimately led to her initially pursuing nursing but as Lana shared the manner in which her career trajectory unfolded it was quite uncanny.

Lana became a nurse and did love the job but admits that there were some very difficult and stressful times in this job. She reflected on her memory some 42 years ago working as a young nurse on the oncology ward with children who had a prognosis of nine months to three years and riding the bus home from work crying all the way home. She shared that to this day she can still without closing her eyes see some of their faces and it has been 42 years. In one case she recalls a mother pulling her to the side in the ward and asking her whether she needed to purchase her son a new snowsuit for the upcoming winter; after all would he survive that long? Lana said that while this job was a huge privilege it has left a very deep scar. She said that for a while after the way she protected herself was to not work with children but that once she had her own this became impossible.

One evening while on shift in the emergency room a workplace injury with a fire door caused an injury to Lana's shoulder that ended her career as a nurse because as she so eloquently put it during the interview, "one armed nurses aren't much of a commodity". This was a very difficult time for Lana because so much of her identity was tied into being a nurse, she never imagined she could do anything else and a part of her world felt lost.

It wasn't long after this happened that her marriage came apart, she found herself at home, without a job, on employment insurance, with four small children to provide for. Lana shared that for so long she only knew herself as a mother, sister, friend and wife, but it was really at this point in time that she realized she was missing a piece of her identity. She endured a difficult process with employment insurance, and recognized that she needed to find some assertiveness because no one was going to take care of her. It was here that she began a rebuilding phase and started to learn who she was and that she was worth something.

During this time her father was ill and was living in another province and she was traveling to and from Manitoba to see him, over time his health worsened and he eventually passed away. Following this time she recognized that she needed a plan as she had four small children to provide for so she began to take a Bachelor of Social Work. As we spoke during the interview, she reflected on her father and said that while she started the degree while he was still alive he never did know about it and isn't sure how he would have felt.

Lana spoke of one of her daughter's having seizures as a small child and consequently having a stroke as a result of her seizures. She spoke of this traumatic experience and recalled feeling very alone with her children. While it was over twenty years ago Lana's recollection and emotion of the account felt much more recent and I sensed how terrifying this experience was for her. She spoke of the unknown cause of the stroke, awaiting test results and her own feelings of fear and uncertainty but maintained strength at all costs for her daughter. Even after learning the cause and knowing she would make a recovery, the recovery time and process were long and intense.

Some years later, Lana shared that this same daughter experienced another traumatic time in her life by way of illness. Lana, family members and friends created a circle of support

providing 24 hour care to her daughter for several months. Lana shared how stressful and exhausting this was. She continued to work and often at work she would be thinking about leaving work going home to change and go to her daughter's home. She shared how very often her mind at work was preoccupied with thoughts of her daughter.

The interview ended with Lana sharing that she believes people who go through life with little challenges are narrow people and those who have endured challenges and hardships are better for it. She has learned she can walk on two sides of the street and now knows that if she was given the choice today between nursing or social work she would be hard pressed to choose. We closed the interview and I felt a sense of gratitude in her saying that our interview felt comfortable and more like a conversation.

**Deb.** Deb holds a Master's in Social Work; she has been working for 34 years and is currently working in an EAP program. Over the course of the interview Deb shared narratives within the context of her professional experiences and entered into her personal world in a more guarded manner.

Deb spoke of how she has come to learn that setting priorities is part of establishing boundaries and a big piece of that has been an ability to work part time. She also recognized that as she was attaining her Master's she couldn't have worked full time, studied and been the mother she wanted to be to her children. Deb shared that with time she has become more effective at setting limits and boundaries with clients because as a social worker it seems part of who they are; it is difficult to say no to clients. "That is just sort of setting limits with people it's not only good for them in terms of knowing that you have limits and boundaries but good for me, like it feels good" (Deb, interview, August 23, 2013). Deb also shared the importance of remaining cognizant of knowing your place with clients even as an experienced counsellor.

"Sometimes as people age in their careers they get worse at listening and better at talking. And to me that is key, if I ever get to a point that I am doing more of the talking in the session I don't think you're doing your job anymore" (Deb, interview, August 23, 2013).

In speaking of her own evolution, Deb recognizes that with the arrival of her own children she had a new found appreciation for the difficult job of parenting. Her second child was her "humble pie" and she really felt it was her second child that helped her understand the trials of some of the parents she had worked with.

And then my second child was a horrible child, in terms

of temperament, I could barely manage her. I was embarrassed

to tell people my profession because it like really, honestly

and only because she was my second did I not feel really

badly about myself. (Deb, interview, August 23, 2013)

She also feels she has evolved as a counsellor as she can now set clear limits with clients and help them to see something differently in terms of strategies, without having them feel criticized.

Throughout the interview the theme of balance surfaced multiple times and Deb talked of her efforts to integrate aspects of her life so that there was equilibrium. One example she spoke of involved attaining her Master's and coming to the understanding that to be a good mom she knew she needed to work part time, to ensure she could fit everything in. She also talked of her decision to retire from one job that she had known for so long while also working part time in an employee assistance program and this transition was difficult for her.

Last September, I cried every day, I thought I had made a terrible

mistake, you pushed me into this L. I hate you. But anyway, I am

so much better balanced in my life; it was such a good thing. It's not

that I don't miss the schools a little bit.

(Deb, interview, August 23, 2013)

The topic of personal hardships was touched on briefly over the course of the interview but the majority of the interview focused on more of a professional context.

### *Researcher's field note entry and reflection on the meaning of "fortitude" for Deb.*

Deb was very calm and relaxed over the course of the interview; the focus was mainly the professional self and as the interview progressed this didn't change to a great extent. In moments where conversation led to the personal arena I sensed some trepidation in Deb, as she used phrases such as, "anyway" or "big long story" perhaps as a means of departure back to the professional context.

While Deb didn't go into great detail she did offer briefly some of the times it has been difficult to do life and work throughout her career. The first included returning to work after having her children; she recalled it feeling unnatural to be working and away from her children at what felt like a critical point in their development. Her return to work was unlike the time parents are allowed today and at that time her children were five months old when she returned to work, and she shared that it "killed" her to return so early. A second time that was very difficult in her personal life involved a terrible crisis with her husband's parents whereby she couldn't stop crying and needed to take some time away from work. She didn't elaborate or offer details and seemed ambiguous about the nature of the crisis. The most recent issue was her retirement from a long and loved career. Her husband had been retired for three years and had been "pressuring" her to retire for some time, Deb conceded and decided to retire from her full time job and continue with the part time employee assistance work she had been doing. When she finally

made this decision, she cried every day for a month believing she had made a terrible mistake which she blamed her husband for. However, after some time, the transition eased and while difficult, it had all been a very positive change and had offered her much needed balance in her life.

**Edie.** Edie has a Master's of Social Work and has been working for 35 years. The interview with Edie moved between narratives of her personal and professional world as she shared how one interacted or impacted the other at varying stages in her life. "And well certainly it's been something that's been an evolution and it's been a work in progress so it's very different depending on what's happening in my life outside of my job" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013).

As we discussed the topic of boundaries Edie shared how often there is a misperception held by those she is close to that she is anguished 24/7 by the work she does when in fact this is not the case. While much of her work involves working with terminally ill people she often does not take it home with her. "I feel no sense that I am responsible for any of the lives that I work with" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013). Edie also shared her perspective on crossing over from her initial career in nursing to her second career as a social worker and making that initial shift. "So now I'm a medical Social Worker and now I'm doing medical social work and I start out very much with a medical model and I'm thinking totally like a nurse which was very convenient right because I'm a nurse so that worked out pretty good" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013). Edie also shared how she practices from a feminist perspective and the importance of reflective practice in providing feedback to her clients balanced with always maintaining the focus on her clients.

Although there are times that I reflect my responses to my client for

whatever reason, like holy mackerel, that makes my stomach jump

when you say that or whatever. I'm not gonna be, you know, I definitely

practice with a feminist perspective so I'm not gonna be a blank slate

over here that doesn't show any reaction. But my job is to really be

focusing on them right?

(Edie, interview, August 23, 2013)

As we discussed how a counsellor does life and work the topic of evolution surfaced and continued to arise over the course of the interview. Edie shared that her ability to shut out her personal life when at work or shut out her professional life when outside of work has been an evolution in her career. She shared that how she does life and work have changed over time but that her experiences are not that distinct or different from anyone else's. "The type of counselling work I'm doing has evolved, my attitude towards it, as well as my life, so it's very much a matrix in lots of different ways" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013). Edie shared that much evolution has occurred within a professional framework and it is ongoing and occurs in spite of anything purposeful she is doing. "I really got it that it wasn't all about knowledge base and I really got it that I, eventually, I got it, not at that time, not... during those first couple of years, but I eventually got it that I was totally, I was so naive" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013). Edie also shared how the process of evolution has played a significant role in her own self-care and wellness efforts. She spoke of not living in her body twenty years ago, but that today she has a greater awareness of what is happening in her body and because of this she senses energy and senses how her clients are feeling. She feels this very much affects her life and her experiences with her clients when she is in session with them. "And that's got to do with some practises in

my life that have evolved over the last fifteen to twenty years so, mindfulness, using meditation, stuff like that" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013).

Edie spoke of her work being an opportunity to do the things that she hopes she is doing in her life. She referred to a counsellor as doing life and work because they are really one in the same to her. "I guess I see it as more integrated. One has to do life and work because work is life. Um and I maybe feel that a little bit more than if I were doing another kind of work" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013). Edie spoke to the experience of cancer as a nurse and caregiver and then experiencing it on a personal level with her father. Although it felt familiar because of her nursing experiences it also became a distinctly different experience.

My father gets pancreatic cancer and I, so I've already seen death up

close many, many time and uh, cared for dying people, provided

support at the bedside to families, all that was familiar to me. My

father gets pancreatic cancer and you know he dies within five....

four months of his diagnosis, so that brings me to a new level of a

different experience of death.

(Edie, interview, August 23, 2013)

Edie also shared an understanding that has come about for her with time, she now knows that she cannot create something that is not happening, if it has not yet happened, it likely will not. With that knowledge has come a deepening and broadening of the understanding that she doesn't have to have the right answers and that she can't be the expert. "But, I now know I don't just know intellectually or from a pro humility standpoint that, not only do I not need to be, I can't be and any... it's... You know? That's totally not what this is about" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013).

As our discussion moved to personal hardships Edie shared that at about the age of 16 her parents had some marital discord which was brief and was akin to a storm that was ridden out. As an adult, her first real experience with hardship was her father's cancer diagnosis and death which happened very quickly and was a new experience of death for her in spite of her experience as a nurse. Within a year of her father's death, another traumatic life event occurred for her and perhaps one that was felt in an even more traumatic way. Her marriage ended, it was unwished for and involved a betrayal. At the time, she had a young child and her husband's and her professional contexts overlapped, so efforts at providing distance in the professional context were futile. "I was not functioning and I was shattered, I was shattered and it probably took me about a year until I started to feel a little bit more like myself" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013).

### *Researcher's field note entry and reflection on the meaning of "fortitude" for Edie.*

Some aspects about Edie as well as some of the descriptions she shared over the course of the interview have been withheld in an effort to assure her anonymity. I met Edie at her workplace; the interview was conducted at 2:00 and she was very welcoming but apologized prior to the interview as she had not yet had lunch and hoped I wouldn't mind if she had her tea and yogurt. She offered me the same. In spite of her busy schedule she spent a considerable amount of time with me; her responses were detailed and elaborate. I at times found myself intimidated by Edie as she was very articulate, sometimes reframing my questions or clarifying for her purpose. However, I never got the sense that she was narcissistic, I felt the environment was genuine and open from the moment I arrived.

When Edie shared the details of her marriage ending I was amazed by her strength to overcome something so challenging and difficult. She spoke of it, providing details of that time

in her life and while she did not become emotional I could see and hear sadness as she spoke.

Overriding that though was her strength to tell the story, speak of overcoming it and move

further to share how the experience propelled her to expose a greater humanity to the

relationship with her ex-husband and his new wife for her child's sake. She began to consider

what would happen if she ever died while her child was young and recognized they all needed an

amicable relationship. In her opinion she and her husband already had this but she felt she

needed to establish it with his wife as well. Edie also pursued a Master's that focused on

bereavement knowing that she needed for her child to have ways of identifying with her if she

passed away while her child was still young.

## Themes: Composite Textural Descriptions

**Boundaries.** A key theme that emerged with each participant with frequency over the

course of each interview was boundaries. The concept of boundaries for participants included the

limits or confines formed by themselves or others both in the professional setting as well as the

personal one.  The one consistent aspect the data represented for all six participants was how

over the course of their career they have come to an understanding of which populations they are

more skilled at working with and which they are not. Four of the participants could tell me with

certainty which client cases they would accept and which they would refer out. This privilege of

being selective with their cases is something that has been established as a result of time,

experience in the role and the structure of their workplaces. In the case of these four participants,

they work within a structure that employs a large number of counsellors whereby they have the

resources to refer clients to others.. In discussing boundaries and limits with participants the

focus was not exclusively on counselling and work with clients but it also extended to their lives

outside of work.

Danny, Ivan and Patricia were very clear in representing what their areas of specialty and strengths were. As Danny shared, "I think that area has really moved on, you know from the time I was doing it until now it's really advanced quite a bit and I don't think it would be appropriate for me to do it anymore" (Danny, interview, July 22, 2013). He also shared that he has "limitations" in that he will not work with "clear indications of personality disorders, schizophrenia, manic depression or dysthymia" (Danny, interview, July 22, 2013). Patricia spoke of exploring your skills over the course of a career and how you learn not only what your strengths are but also the flipside to this;

> I don't think I'm particularly good with certain needs, certain groups
>
> and I'm not all that well trained in that. So it's like being able to shape
>
> what I do too, so it's not counselling in the broadest sense but being
>
> able to find ways to sort of develop more of a specialty or a knowledge
>
> around certain things and then really be able to hone that over time.
>
> (Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013)

Ivan also talked about boundaries and limitations in respect to counsellors' taking the onus to balance their caseloads. He used the example of counsellors working in pain management clinics and the need to develop limits and boundaries for their own wellbeing. "And, so yeah, you can separate but if all you got is that type of file I think that's why I sometime see people who work in pain management clinics... they just keep turning around because it's just, that's just all you see, it's unrelenting and sometimes it's sad because nothing changes" (Ivan, interview, July 23, 2013). Danny also touched on this and talked about the fine line counsellors walk day to day between their world and their client's world and how that can "spill over". Deb shared that at times while doing this work "you do get stuck" which leads to

"checking your boundaries". Deb also shared the use of colleagues as a form of clinical support and how this was an avenue she used on occasion but chose to use it wisely and rarely because she felt that there can be a danger in over using it.

Deb, Patricia and Lana all discussed the concept of boundaries and limits in regards to their personal wellbeing in relation to work. Deb spoke to the awareness one needs to have for the extra you take on. She experienced this having worked in a school system and shared that the more competent you appear the more you will be asked to do, the more committees you will be asked to be a part of. "I got better at saying no to people. Like just realizing I can't do everything" (Deb, interview, August 23, 2013). Patricia discussed the concept of being rested and well in order to be effective at her job. "I haven't always been in touch with how much energy it takes to do it. You know the old deal, we're not out there digging ditches but yet, to really be present in your work you need to have rest" (Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013). Even with her professional experience, Lana shared her keen awareness of the boundary but an inability to see it through;

> Basically I come home from work done which is not good. I leave
>
> it all on the ward or in the office or whatever. And there's not much
>
> left over, which is not healthy and I'm always saying to people you
>
> can't be doing that, but I'm always better at telling than doing." Lana
>
> goes on to share, "knowing there are boundaries but the operationalizing
>
> of those is what's important and that's the piece I'm not really good at.
>
> (Lana, interview, July 29, 2013)

Several participants spoke of boundaries in regard to clients and specifically in separating

the influence they saw themselves having on their clients and the work they did with them. Deb

described this;

you want to do a good job, you want to be helpful. But at the same time

you can't take that personally, you can't let it devastate you.... you have

to have a strong enough sense of self that you obviously feel good about

things but you can't let that turn into some kind of expectation.

(Deb, interview, August 23, 2013)

Danny spoke of doing your very best of work as a counsellor and in spite of that still

having clients kill themselves but also making every effort not to become cold and distant and to

keep in mind that you as a counsellor are not their whole life. Edie, Lana and Patricia echoed the

thought that counsellors not carry a sense of responsibility for a client's current state of being.

Lana shared;

I'm not responsible for anybody else's life, I'm not responsible for

the choices people make, I'm not responsible for the mistakes they

might have made. I'm not responsible for the fact that they have an

illness that I really can't do anything about.

(Lana, interview, July 29, 2013)

Likewise Patricia shared that she was keenly aware of all the other influences and choices

clients had and she was not prepared to take on a sense of responsibility for that. Edie shared;

I feel no sense that I am responsible for any of the lives that I

....you know, I am not responsible for any of the people I work

with.... What I do in here is a, it's just a, it is a, such a infinitesimally

small nanosecond of what goes on in a people's lives.

(Edie, interview, August 23, 2013)

**Evolution.** In each interview the theme of change and growth was illuminated in both a

personal and professional context, participants expressed how this change took shape over the

course of time.

While the interview questions did not ask participants to reflect on childhood experiences

or early influences, throughout the course of the interview five of the six participants did so. It

became part of their chronological narrative and evolution for who they had become either

personally or professionally. Danny shared how he had evolved over time at making conscious

efforts to place himself in social situations due to predispositions in his family of origin.

Most of my family is fairly anxious and they don't do social

relationships real well and I still have problems and faults and I

catch myself being like them....I will never be perfect but me

think I am better than if I had not tried.

(Danny, interview, July 22, 2013)

Ivan shared that it was a psychology teacher following his grade 11 year in Quebec that inspired

him to pursue the field of Psychology. Ivan also felt this was a critical point in his career

trajectory, at the conclusion of our interview he ended with "Don't know your past, don't know

your future" (Ivan, interview, July 23, 2013). Patricia also shared that she knew in her teen years

she had an interest in Psychology and that it would lead her to a pursue a career that involved

Psychology. Patricia did not identify herself as someone who was overly caring and was not the

person that her friends came to for advice. Lana shared that she and her father often were at odds

and she perceived her father as a "black and white" thinker. She expressed an interest in pursuing

social work and her dad saw Social Worker's as "the devil's spawn", this led her to pursue

nursing which she did for many years until a workplace injury ended her career. At that time,

ironically, she retrained and became a Social Worker, she later furthered her studies completing

an MSW. At the time of her father's passing he was not aware of her career change. In speaking

with Lana about a preference for SW or Nursing she couldn't choose one over the other, and in

summarizing her career to this point Lana shared, "Who knows, maybe I was meant to have that

fight with that door that ended my nursing career?" (Lana, interview, July 29, 2013).

Edie shared her perception of her childhood place in the family; "I'd been a spoiled,

youngest daughter in a family of two other boys, the sun shot out of my ass. I'd never had

anything where somebody who loved me.... it didn't turn out to be a really good thing" (Edie,

interview, August 23, 2013).

The premise of evolving nature carried through in the interviews as participant's reflected

on the work they did with clients and how this changed and developed as their careers extended.

Participants shared what time and experience had provided to them, in essence what they knew

now that they didn't know then. There was a resounding consistent message from participants

that there is this unpredictable nature both in this chosen path of being a counsellor and in life

that makes the journey challenging at times but also rewarding. During the interview with Lana

she likened it to a "windy road";

> you really can't see the end of it and you don't know what the
>
> next things that's going to make you feel like, "wooh, I've got
>
> to chase this is!", nor do you know the next thing that's gonna
>
> make you feel like, "oh God, why did I bother getting up?
>
> (Lana, interview, July 29, 2013)

Edie shared that the type of counselling work she does has shifted as well as her attitude towards it;

I've evolved from feeling like I have to find the right answers to

I have almost none of the answers but I have some sense of the

process and it is helping with the process that I think I am supposed

to be about. (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013)

Danny, Ivan, Patricia, Deb and Edie all verbalized how being at this point in their careers and in life offers a certain reference point as a counsellor. They all echoed the sentiment that with life experience you have more to bring to a room with your clients. Patricia expressed;

there's kind of an evolving something that goes on with all of that

in your life. And maybe it's that evolving intersection of that you live your

own life and go through things and then sort of the path takes you here and

there and everything like that just sort of changes.

(Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013)

Danny, Patricia and Lana each addressed how they shifted some of their conceptualizations over the course of their careers either with how they provided direct service to their clients or with the expectations they had for themselves. Danny shared this sentiment in his interview, "And I think that was being young, inexperienced, not having a lot of experience as a therapist, not having life experience, I wasn't confident in myself" (Danny, interview, July 22, 2013).

Patricia touched on the aspects that are not learned but rather felt skills and these include the soft skills of the job; the "bigger "influences that play a role but may not be so apparent in a young therapist's repertoire. She spoke of how these develop over time and with experience and referred to them as the "mystery".

I'm not discounting any of that (theories and methods), but

you know some of the, some of the other things, you use them

here and there and selectively as you go along but it's.... there's

something deeper than that and it's sort of like the mystery of

what happens if you can enter into that time with a person in

another way. (Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013)

Participants shared how they came to develop a greater understanding of who they were both personally and professionally over the course of time. Lana spoke of her marriage dissolving and how she had for so long identified herself attached to other people and how this was now a time out of necessity where she learned who she was. Deb also spoke of twice feeling conflicted at having to make a career decision. The first was finding a balance between working and being a good mom to her children which saw her ultimately work part time so that she could be home with her children part of the time. She felt that this was necessary to be the mother she needed to be for her children. She shared that she was faced again with a difficult decision two years ago when she retired from working in the school system as a social worker, a job dear to her heart. Her husband had retired a year previous and their family had experienced a very tragic event with his parents so she felt he had been very patiently awaiting her retirement. When she finally did retire, she shared that the transition was extremely difficult and she found that she cried every day for several weeks; she felt pushed into this by her husband and didn't realize how much of her identity belonged to that job. With time she found it was the right choice whereby her life became more balanced.

Patricia shared how this career was a chosen path and truly was her calling, "It's really connected in with purpose in life, for me it really is... because it's felt like a good path for me. So

part of the meaning for me is that I'm doing something that.... who I am is what I do" (Patricia,

interview, July 27, 2013). Danny shared that while he gets some fulfillment from his job he

doesn't define himself by it and that he sees it as a function more than anything.

>I get some value and worth out of it a little bit, but it's not...
>
>I don't define myself by it, whereas some people are really kind
>
>of caught up in their careers and don't .... I mean, I've
>
>encountered people like this in my profession where I wonder who
>
>they think they are when they're not doing this line of work.
>
>(Danny, interview, July 22, 2013)

Another common theme of wellness and mindfulness emerged throughout the interviews.

While it took time to discover the practices that worked, in each case, Patricia, Edie, Danny and

Deb felt these efforts were essential to who they were. These included investing in other areas of

their life, making a deliberate effort to spend time with people in a different line of work than

themselves and making time for friends and investing in their intimate relationships. In addition,

participants spoke of being physically fit and Danny spoke of the extreme sports he chose to do

like mountain climbing, white water rafting and intense cycling for several hours. Other efforts

included meditation, mind body awareness practices, retreats, and journaling. Edie shared how

mindfulness practices have helped to shape and develop her work and practice with clients. "I

focus on myself to take care of myself, but I don't focus on myself to stuff it. I focus on myself

to tell me what that's telling me about what's happening right here, right now" (Edie, interview,

August 23, 2013).

 In all cases participants attributed these practices as keys to maintaining a sense of balance and

as a contributing ability to do their jobs well.

**Integration.** The third theme to emerge in the data was integration, throughout the interviews participants reflected and shared how they had changing and altering practices within the professional and personal context over time impacted their career, family and lifestyle.

Danny, Patricia, Lana and Edie all spoke of how life and the work of a counsellor are interconnected. Danny, Patricia and Edie all spoke throughout their interviews of how the role of counselling is unique in nature as opposed to other jobs that are not as overlapping. Examples of working on an assembly line or cutting grass were offered whereby you are less connected with people's intimate life events. Edie shared, "I guess I see it as more integrated, one has to do life and work because work is life" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013). Danny, Patricia and Lana all spoke of the unique nature of the job of counsellors and so much of what we do in counselling is pervasive though our relationships. Danny explained that each day we run into clients and things that either connects to us personally or professionally and while it is not always a negative thing it brings us back to our own being.

Patricia shared how moving into her career was really an extension of who she was because it was her calling in life. "It means for me it's really connected in with purpose in life, for me it really is... because it's felt like a good path for me" (Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013).

Patricia and Lana shared that while many professionals are focused on what they give to clients they have always maintained some focus on what they get from clients. Both recognize that they are provided valuable learning experiences from the clients they interact with and they shared how they often take pieces from their interactions and use these for future sessions and build it into their repertoire of skills. "The ideas you get from people are so wonderful and then you just weave it into what you are doing and it goes both ways" (Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013). Patricia and Lana used various analogies of weaving and netting over the course of their

interviews to illuminate the aspect of integration. Lana used the analogy of weaving different colored strings together to signify nursing and social work. She felt that the two colors when weaved together are complimentary and create a beautiful cloth.

Every participant spoke to what time and experience had offered them and how they had integrated these learning's over time. "And I think as experience grows and you develop as a person your experiences in life then come into these experiences" (Ivan, interview, July 23, 2013).

Danny, Ivan, Patricia and Edie all spoke of an acceptance that comes with time and experience of not needing to have the answers or the fix for every situation.

I thought I could change anything and knowing that some things

are not going to change. You can get people to a certain point but

not everybody is going to be able to play Mozart on a violin, some

people will never play the violin, some people will play beautifully.

(Danny, interview, July 22, 2013)

**Challenges.** The final theme to emerge in the data was challenges. Participants' shared how over their careers challenges occurred both personally and professionally and how they managed these times in their lives.

Danny, Lana and Edie all reflected at the beginning of their interviews sharing a memory about their adolescence and young adulthood. Danny shared the anxious nature within his family of origin. For him, this translated in needing to make a conscious effort at being more outgoing and he explained that even today he has a difficult time with this and forces himself to be more extroverted than is natural. Lana shared that she and her father never saw eye to eye and that he didn't support her initial decision to enroll in social work and hence her decision to become a

nurse. Edie also shared that as a teenager she recalls her parents' marital breakdown albeit one that was resolved.

Patricia and Lana both spoke of stressful work environments, Lana's was a current situation due to a restructuring approach and involved an increased workload which was creating a great deal of stress and extra work. Patricia's was a reflective account from early on in her career that was abusive whereby she was witness to many that suffered health breakdowns and endured workplace bullying.

Lana and Edie each shared how their marriages ended, while Lana spoke only briefly of her experience, Edie spoke more in depth of how the experience had impacted her. In both cases, each had young children, Lana had four young children and Edie had a three year old child. Edie described the ending of her marriage as a betrayal; sharing that it was unexpected and unwished for. The pain of her marriage ending was compounded by the fact that her husband's and her work contexts overlapped. Edie shared that in the months following that she wasn't really herself and that she was really just going through the motions doing what she needed to do to provide for her child, it took her more than a year to start feeling like herself again;

I survived it and I managed to not kill anybody or myself during

that period and at the age of 31 I had my first fundamentally

powerful, painful, despairing time and it was the first time I had

a clue what that was about. So, it was the first time I had a clue

what the experiences of the people whose experiences I feared the

most looked like. (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013)

All of the participants interviewed shared their experiences of caring for aging or dying parents and the stress that involves. Patricia spoke to the effort involved as care for her father

increased she found herself consumed with both her job as well as caring for him and she now recognizes she lost sight of her own self-care. She spoke of not always knowing how run down you can get until it's too late. "Sometimes I think it sneaks up on you, like how weary you're really getting so I think that thing of at different times we almost have to go through a rebuilding thing again and sometimes it doesn't happen quickly" (Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013).

Lana also spoke of her daughter facing two serious illnesses during her lifetime; the first occurred as a child when she suffered seizures and a result of the seizures at approximately 10 years old endured a stroke. They went through a period of time believing she may have a brain tumour and after learning she didn't she still endured a period of time in recovery and therapy. Years later after having a child of her own she suffered postpartum psychosis requiring 24 hour care and months of recovery. Since that time, this daughter has also endured a divorce. Lana shared these as very sad and stressful times in the life of not only her daughter but affecting the larger family system.

**Differences**

There was one distinct difference that emerged through the data. The difference involved two brief interviews in comparison to the interview lengths of the other four participants. The interview with Deb lasted twenty five minutes and contained less content around personal or professional challenges. Deb appeared less comfortable and did not share to the degree that other's had and therefore did not appear as open to the process. When questions were posed she was often very thoughtful and guarded in the answers she provided. At the end of the interview she shared that she felt she did not provide enough information and as I thanked her for her participation and made efforts to reassure her she made a statement like, "Are you sure this will be good enough?" The data she provided was valuable and very relevant; however given the

length of interview in relation to other participants I found that I drew on other participant responses throughout the data more often as Deb's data equated to half of other participant data.

Ivan's interview was also brief, lasting just over thirty nine minutes, at times he appeared preoccupied and tired, yawning often. I did however find upon further analyzing his data that some areas of the interview offered data relevant to the phenomenon under consideration.

**Summary**

Within this chapter the data was delineated into four themes which included: boundaries, evolution, integration and challenges. From the themes, an overall essence of Fortitude was obtained. Fortitude encompasses characteristics of strength, stamina, staying power and grit. Each participant having lived through their own challenging life experiences while maintaining a dedicated counselling career personifies fortitude. Fortitude was defined and described in relation to each theme.

Finally, the one distinct difference involved the brief length of two of the participants' interview times in relation to the other four participants.

**Chapter 5: Discussion and Summary of Results**

**Introduction**

This final chapter will begin by reviewing the research questions at the heart of this study. Following this, each of the four themes extrapolated from participant data; boundaries, evolution, integration and challenges will be examined in relation to the reviewed literature. Next the chapter will consider the association between the themes and essence of fortitude and the research objectives and purpose of the study. The chapter will then consider both the strengths and weaknesses of the study which will offer an enhanced understanding of the overall meaning and implications. Finally, the chapter will offer recommendation for further study.

The research questions guiding this qualitative study include:

1. What is the experience of being a counsellor? What is it like?

2. What challenges do counsellors face?

3. How do life events influence the personal and professional self?

4. What does time and experience offer a counsellor?

**Themes Examined in Relation to Literature**

Each participant in the study shared reflective accounts; many of which included the participant placing themselves in a vulnerable position, both by allowing themselves to revisit difficult memories and also by openly sharing them with me. Upon hearing the stories of the six participants, the strength of character within each of them became apparent and ultimately a foundation from which the themes emerged. The essence that was extrapolated from the four themes was 'fortitude'. Each of the six participants on a distinctive level embodied the spirit of

fortitude; demonstrating strength, endurance and vigour over time. Fortitude became the concept at the core of the study offering clarity regarding what it meant to do "work" and "life" in a career that is both personally fulfilling and at times very taxing.

**Boundaries.** While the concept of boundaries may appear broad and varied, throughout the data, participant's concepts and ideas were often situated within the context of counselling. Over the course of the interviews, participants' statements regarding boundaries within the professional context were reiterated.

Several participants spoke of their comfort, interest or skill set with specific client populations or presenting issues. In addition, participants spoke of having achieved a level of comfort when the synergy or dynamic between them and the client is not readily apparent. Each acknowledged a professional responsibility in accepting those clients they have something to offer, feel motivated to work with and believe they have the skills to serve. When this is not the case, each participant acknowledged their obligation to refer on to someone more qualified in that particular area. "I don't think I'm particularly good with certain needs, certain groups and I'm not all that well trained in that" (Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013). Ivan spoke of the importance in recognizing that if a client-counsellor connection does not exist it does not mean the counsellor has failed.

> They don't necessarily connect with you and things like that,
>
> so when they don't connect with you it's, it doesn't mean
>
> you're bad or that it doesn't work it just means I don't
>
> know… there wasn't that relationship that they felt they could
>
>  do this work with. (Ivan, interview, July 23, 2013)

Lana also spoke to the obligation she feels she has in "being able to, direct people to find resources that might be more meaningful or more helpful to them" (Lana, interview, July 29, 2013). Edie shared how she had come to an understanding at this point in her career that she was not the expert on her clients but rather they were. "I am not the holder of the grail, I don't know the right way, the expert in the room isn't me because by far the complex issue going on is their lives" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013). Danny shared how early in his career he lived and breathed the counselling world and that his evenings were often consumed with reading in an effort to strengthen his counselling skills. At that time he felt he lacked the confidence to perform the role he held and that his efforts at self-study would grow his skill set. The counsellor development literature supports this notion of feeling insecure early on in one's career and then over the course of one's career moving to a place of greater self-assurance and confidence. In reviewing where he was early in his career in contrast to where he is now illustrates the accuracy of the counsellor development literature in regards to Danny's experience. Like Danny, other participants spoke of experiencing a lacking skill set required to meet the needs of some presenting issues clients may arrive with. As each spoke, I gained a clearer understanding of their sense of comfort and acceptance with not having the ability to meet some client needs that developed over the course of their careers. Participants comfort and acceptance of their limitations exemplified Ronnestad and Skovholt's counsellor development findings, whereby experienced counsellors develop a therapy role highly congruent with ones values, interests and attitudes.

Each participant spoke of the importance to invest themselves in interests outside of their workplace, in some cases participants noted that those pastimes are very unlike the roles they perform in their day jobs. Cummings et al. (2007) note, "Personal self-care, according to

Skovholt et al. (2001), should address all areas of a counselor's personal life, including the

physical, spiritual, emotional, and social" (p. 43).

> When I am working I am really into my work and I'm enjoying
>
> it and when I walk out the door it's like I've got lots of other
>
> interests and things I don't tend to carry my thoughts about the
>
> people with me when I'm not there.
>
> (Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013)

"I always did something physical, I always had a component in there, I know for me that's a real

good stress reliever" (Deb, interview, August 23, 2013). "And I started trying to figure out about

future volunteer experiences and things I could get involved in that were completely different,

so, if you're being a therapist by the day, you're teaching figure skating by night, you know"

(Danny, interview, July 22, 2013).

Over the course of the interviews the aspect of work ethic and the counsellor's inability

to say no was a recurring premise, participant's spoke to how this often becomes a danger point

in counsellor's careers. Hamilton (2008) states, "Setting limits is an important aspect of

professional self-care, because many helpers typically do not know how to say no, and as a result

become overloaded with depleting activities" (p.17). Lawson and Myers (2011) noted that, "…

counselors as a whole tend to neglect their own self-care in favor of the services they provide to

their clients" (n.p.). Lana shared how saying no is very difficult for her and while she can offer

advice on drawing boundaries and leaving work at 4:30 to her colleagues she doesn't always live

by her own advice. "If you're gonna talk the talk, walk the walk, I'm not so great at that and I

probably will be retired before I ever get it" (Lana, interview, July 29, 2013). Cummings et al.

(2007) state,

Like doctors, however, counselors are often remiss in taking their own

advice about wellness. Often, we counselors believe we can handle it

and that we do not need to be concerned with our own wellness because

it does not affect our professional practice. (p. 35)

Danny shared how as he reflects on his earlier years as a counsellor he recalls working harder than some of his clients. "You've got to let people do their work; you can't do their work for them you can't be working harder than they are working" (Danny, interview, July 22, 2013). Deb shared that it was out of necessity and considering family needs that she rebalanced the time and energy she was expending at work and at home. "Your work ethic is so strong and you're so passionate and you want to give over and above as much as possible but also as you have children you realize you have to set priorities" (Deb, interview, August 23, 2013). For Deb, a shift occurred again later in her life when she working full time as a social worker as well as part time evenings and weekends as a counsellor. "It was really obvious to me I couldn't keep doing everything so again it felt, it was a scary decision for me but I retired from the school division" (Deb, interview, August 23, 2013). I felt that Danny and Deb most clearly indicated their development in understanding and altering their boundaries over the course of their careers. I believe this development came as a result of personal experiences imploring them to adjust their boundaries in an effort to preserve. In Deb's case she explicitly stated that her children were the initial impetus for this change whereby her priorities changed once she became a mother. She recognized a limit to the amount she could give professionally as her personal life now required more of her time and attention. Danny did not openly share the impetus that led him to alter his boundaries; however he did allude to things that had occurred over the course of his lifetime that necessitated changes but were not aspects he wanted to revisit in the interview.    Pat shared how

as her career has evolved she has become increasingly aware of the need to be a "better steward of your energy". "How you're setting up your day and nutritionally, how you're looking after yourself and sleep wise and it's all, it's either, or participating in toxic relationships and how it's energy draining" (Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013). Lawson et al. (2007) state, "Counselors are no less vulnerable to the challenges of living in a complicated world, and, in fact, the nature of our work often places us at greater risk" (p. 6).

Danny, Ivan and Lana all spoke specifically to times when case management can become overwhelming, necessitating a heightened awareness and proactive action. Hamilton (2008) shares, "What most counsellors do not know is how this process of empathic engagement with clients may be affecting them personally" (p.10). Danny spoke to counsellors being consistently vigilant of the danger of the work they do as lines can become blurred and aspects of home and work often do reflect one another. As the interview progressed I felt a sense that Danny has arrived at a place where he is clear on his boundaries and is assured with the fact that it is natural to make mistakes, not always feel engaged in sessions and admit that he cannot do it all. "I think it's important to be able to throw in the towel once in awhile and say I don't do these cases" (Danny, interview, July 22, 2013). Kottler and Parr (2000) indicate,

> There is simply no way that we could spend such intimate, intense, dramatic
>
> moments with people in excruciating pain and not be significantly affected by
>
> these experiences. It is virtually impossible to avoid being profoundly moved
>
> by some of the changes that we become part of. (p. 145)

Ivan spoke more specifically to balancing cases so that counsellors are not overwhelmed and find a reprieve from the same types of cases. "There's a pragmatic time that you sometimes say, no I can't accept more files like that, I got two grief cases on my caseload and so I think

that's enough" (Ivan, interview, July 23, 2013). "Knowing when I need to say this is more than I can do, so knowing not only my professional boundaries but also my personal boundaries" (Lana, interview, July 29, 2013). I noted that over the course of the interview Lana vacillated between a sense of joy and satisfaction and exhaustion and depletion she experiences from her professional role. This was also the case in regards to professional boundaries; Lana could articulate she had a sense of knowing what she could manage, however over the course of the interview she shared experiences that indicated otherwise. She spoke of days at work being emotionally charged and exhausting and how she uses that time to take a break. "There are times when I am, I feel overloaded; challenging families, staff issues, whatever. And I have the luxury of being able to go to my office and shut the door" (Lana, interview, July 29, 2013). There seemed some disparity between Lana's sense of assertiveness or control in regards to her personal vs. professional life. Lana's accounts of her personal life and the journey of being a single mother on employment insurance gave me a sense that she was keenly aware of the boundaries or sense of control she needed during those difficult experiences. It seemed that over time she gained a sense of assertiveness and took the steps needed to advocate for a better life for her and her children.

Another common aspect that came up in the data was the skill of compartmentalizing. Participants spoke to how important it was that counsellors have the ability to discern their own feelings and experiences and separate these from their clients during a session. Edie shared that much of the success in session has to do with the awareness the counsellor brings into the counselling experience. "It's not about blocking who you are and what your feelings are out when you're in relationship, it's about having awareness of them but not attending to the needs that arise around them" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013). Danny spoke to the clear distinction

he keeps between his own feelings and thoughts and how at times he deals with those at a later time. "So long as I can keep the separation between this is theirs' and this is mine, sometimes it can be helpful in that way" (Danny, interview, July 22, 2013). Ivan spoke to the concept of knowing oneself well and the critical importance of that as a counsellor. He also clarified that while it isn't necessary to share all details with the outer world it is important for the counsellor as a person to be in touch with who they are before they can help others. "You have to have an understanding of both what's going on for you in your life, you have to have an understanding that there are things you cannot control. And then you have to also be with someone and be connected with them and understand what is going on but be able to compartmentalize such that you are knowing how it tinges or touches you when they speak so that you're not taken off" (Ivan, interview, July 23, 2013).

A final concept that was shared multiple times in the data by some participants is that they do not feel a total sense of responsibility for their clients. Danny, Pat, Lana and Edie all discussed how they are a small part of their client's overall world and to feel a total sense of responsibility would create an overinflated view of how much influence or importance they have in their client's world. Danny shared that sometimes in spite of all the best work done there are still clients who will end their lives and to carry this burden would be too much to bear. "You've done all the best work and somebody still kills themselves… that can eat you or you can say, okay you know what, science is not perfect, I don't have control over everything. I'm the therapist; I'm not their whole lives" (Danny, interview, July 22, 2013). "I'm not responsible for their life in that total sense. I'm one person on the path for a period of time" (Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013). Lana spoke to the fact that recognizing you don't carry that responsibility can be freeing and allow you to do your work. "The knowledge that I'm not responsible for anybody

else's life, I'm not responsible for the choices people make; I'm not responsible for the mistakes they might have made" (Lana, interview, July 29, 2013). "I feel no sense that I am responsible for any of the lives that…. I, you know, I am not responsible for any of the people I work with" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013). The consistency of participants' in not feeling responsible for clients in a total sense was an aspect of the data that was surprising to me. I immediately wondered what the perspective would be of counselling students or those novices to the profession. As I considered this common held belief I recognized it was likely one that developed over time and came about with their personal and professional development. I also recognized that to carry a responsibility for your clients' wellbeing and success is a burden too immense to carry. This is likely an aspect that fits into the counsellor development literature whereby experienced counsellors develop beliefs that are self-protective.  This poignant moment had me consider whether essential common held beliefs such as this one are defining factors in whether counsellors maintain wellness in the profession.

**Evolution.** As participants were interviewed one familiar topic repeatedly evoked through the data was inadequacy or insecurity. As reflective accounts of early career experiences were shared each participant in some way expressed having feelings of inadequacy and insecurity as a new counsellor. Jennings, Gob, et al. (2003) state, "The complex ambiguity of the helping professions can sometimes appear to be so daunting as to make the process of acquiring competence an impossible task" (p. 68). "I was trying to figure it out quickly before somebody caught on that I didn't know what I was doing" (Danny, interview, July 22, 2013). "Um, and, you know there were times that I thought, God, if they only knew what a fraud I was" (Lana, interview, July 29, 2013). "In retrospect, it horrifies me but at the same time, like, you know who knows, like, did you do harm? I don't think so, so, anyway, but I learned a lot" (Deb, interview,

August23, 2013). Gazzola and Therriault (2007) state, "Research has shown that even experienced therapists can have profound feelings of incompetence and self-doubt" (p. 240). It is likely that feeling incompetent may be experienced irrespective of age and life experience. Edie spoke of having that imposter syndrome once again in her second career as a Social Worker. Although she had lived through very traumatic experiences and had grown as a result, it did not ease the insecurity of beginning in a new profession. "So that imposter syndrome that I had so handily created for myself when I was a young nurse I now had an imposter syndrome…. I experienced the imposter syndrome as a social worker" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013).

Just as participants reflected on this sentiment early on in their career trajectory they also shared how they had now arrived at a point in their careers where they felt a sense of adequacy and self-worth. Participants shared that through career, life experiences and time the ways in which they lived and worked had shifted and looked different than at the starting points in their careers. As participants shared their stories a sense that they had moved beyond feelings of self-doubt and incompetence were ever-present but were balanced with a genuineness and humility. It seemed there was a greater awareness of all that they didn't know and an acceptance of it. There was a greater acknowledgment by participants that they did not have all of the answers, never would and were okay with that. Ronnestad and Skovholt (2001) indicate,

> This sense of security seems to come from a complex cluster of differentiation
>  of responsibility, clarity of work role, and sense of therapeutic competence.
> These highly experienced therapists were telling us that, during their last
> years of working, they were working in a way and using a style that suited
>  them. (p.183)

It was apparent that over time this had been their journey; not so much in finding the

answers but more so in finding the acceptance around understanding they didn't have the

answers and never would. "So, I think that's the maturity piece, when I was young I thought I

was going to make all of these changes right? Not so much" (Lana, interview, July 29, 2013).

"So I've evolved from feeling like I have to find the right answers to I have almost none of the

answers" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013).

Another common topic that contributed to the theme of evolution was the participants'

shared perspective in regards to counselling as a unique and distinctive career. Participants saw

the counselling role as distinctive both in regards to the ambiguous nature but also in regards to

the ever-changing and evolving nature of the job. Participant's collectively agreed that while the

counsellor's role requires flexibility, in spite of that so much of what happens within sessions

cannot be controlled for.  Danny shared how after returning from his own mother's funeral he

decided to take a short break from seeing clients who had just dealt with recent deaths. On his

first day back, he met with a client and while he had been away, the client's mother had also

died.

> And so you can go from 0 to 60 in like you know any second.
>
> So I think that's the thing that's kind of hard about it is that
>
> there is that chronic unpredictability with life, we never know
>
> 20 seconds from now what's going to happen exactly.
>
>  (Danny, interview, July 22, 2013)

Patricia spoke to the transitory nature of counselling;  "Everything is transitory, so going through

anything is that sense that absorbing a lot of energy at this time, or very distressing at this time

but it's transitory, even if you feel you're stuck with something, it's moving" (Patricia, interview,

July 27, 2013). Patricia's articulation around the transitory nature of life had me consider the

benefit this mindset could be to others. I reflected on each of these participants early in their careers; the challenges they had experienced, the insecurity they felt and contemplated whether knowing that no matter how good or bad a situation is it is ever changing could have offered some comfort in those times.

Another familiar element contributing to the theme of evolution was participants' own family and how the stages of their family members directly influenced their professional context. Yager and Tovas-Blank (2007) indicate,

As humans, we will inevitably find that we do not achieve the ideal balance

between the personal, social, physical, spiritual, and occupational domains

of our lives. What we can address successfully is moment to moment

adjustments approximating a wellness-focused balance. (p. 146)

Participants shared that as their children grew, their domestic demands changed which in turn changed how they positioned themselves as a professional.

You have all the other things that are occurring for you in your own life

and then you have your children who are adult children but they still face

their own issues. So, there's that real push and pull for people that makes

it very difficult and challenging. (Ivan, interview, July 23, 2013)

Most participants spoke to the topic of passion for their work and openly shared how the motivation or passion they have had for their work over their career span ebbed and flowed. The reasons for this varied, in most cases it was due to issues personal in nature that withdrew their energy and focus from their career, although in nearly every case participants continued to work. Only one of the participants, Deb, shared that she had taken time away from work when dealing with a traumatic crisis involving her mother and father in law. Patricia, Lana and Edie all spoke

openly of going to work when their personal lives were in a despairing state. They echoed the

sentiment the literature had offered whereby counsellors are at some point in their career too

impaired to work although many still continue to. Lana was the only participant that addressed

the fact that during that difficult time she worked out of necessity as she had four children to rise.

This had me consider the counsellor impairment literature reflecting counsellors' inability to

admit weakness or appear vulnerable, was this a factor for these participants? This seemed a

missed opportunity whereby I wished I had gone deeper with participants in asking their

motivation to keep working at such a despairing time in their personal lives. In other instances,

volatile workplace and mismanagement were contributing factors for diminishing career

enthusiasm. "There are times that I've been much more passionate about my job than others and

um, and much more passionate about individual instances than others" (Lana, interview, July 29,

2013). Lana indicated a sense of disillusionment with the restructuring that had recently taken

place. It was clear that she didn't feel as valued as she once was; she spoke of the increasing

workload and feeling the restructuring had added more responsibility to her. When I met with

Lana a second time to debrief, she shared that she had come to a decision to retire in the

upcoming summer. She seemed very happy with her decision but the sense of frustration

lingered as she shared that at her retirement celebration she thought it appropriate for the guests

to hold hula hoops and have her jump through them to signify her professional experience of

"jumping through hoops just to get by". While presented as a humorous analogy; an underlying

truth existed. While Patricia also experienced a challenging time in the workplace, her

experience occurred at the beginning of her career whereby she was a witness to repeated

workplace bullying. She explained that while difficult, she had used the experiences from that

time over and over to her advantage as a counsellor. She explained that when she had clients present with issues of workplace bullying she could apply and utilize her own lived experience.

**Integration.** In spite of long and varied careers that had at times been stressful, participants maintained a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction for their careers. The manner in which participants shared this varied, but in all accounts there was a positive regard for the profession. "It's really connected in with purpose in life, for it really is, because it's felt like a good path for me. So part of the meaning for me is that I'm doing something that, who I am is what I do" (Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013). Patricia spoke of how her job gives her a great amount of purpose in life and feels like it is truly her calling. Edie's perspective on her job and how it fits into her life were aligned with Patricia's sentiment. "I'm very lucky because I absolutely fucking love my job! So, I'm very lucky. My job provides me with so much. Like, it's a very rich part of my life" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013).

By contrast, the separation Danny maintains between his personal and professional life were very apparent. He shared that his job is simply a role and function of what he does but not who he is. He further shared that he is in awe of those who live and breathe their work as he does not know how they identify when outside of their jobs.

Each participant spoke to the unique nature of the role they performed and how the role of counselling is unique in nature and set apart from other professions. Donati and Watts (2006) state, "…the field of counselling has increasingly come to realize the intertwining of the personal and professional aspects of functioning of the therapist/counselor" (p. 477). In particular the participants identified the role as distinctive because of the overlap with facets of their own life and how at times there isn't much separation in work and life. "The overlap with your own life and what happens at work, to not have some realizations, I don't know…" (Danny, interview,

July 22, 2013). "One has to do life and work because work is life. And I maybe feel that a little bit more than if I were doing another kind of work" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013). Patricia spoke to how interconnected life and work are and to the degree that at times we don't even know where one entity begins and another ends.

> Sometimes, we don't even know where we get all our stuff from,
>
> you know like, does it come from work or does it come from other
>
> things in life? Because you learn so much from life as well that it
>
> all sort of comes together at some point in that way.
>
> (Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013)

Kottler and Parr (2000) indicate;

> There are so many ways that our personal and professional lives
>
> merge together; it is at times difficult to determine where one ends
>
> and the other begins. Yet, we are also able to enhance our family
>
> relationships as a result of what we learn as therapists. (p.146)

Another familiar idea that resurfaced throughout the data and became a contributing component for the theme of integration was the concept of reciprocity within the counsellor client context. Kottler and Parr (2000) state;

> This process of reciprocal influence that takes place in family therapy is
>
> multidimensional. Our lived family experiences join with those of the
>
> families we see in therapy to form unique, continuously changing
>
> templates about family life. Though we typically think of the therapist
>
> as the change agent, the reverse occurs, too, as therapy is a co-constructed
>
> experience. (pp.144-145)

Participants spoke to how within their experience they have come to acknowledge that the client-counsellor relationship is rich and offers reciprocity. Patricia was the one participant who spoke at length of the learning she consistently takes from her clients. She shared that often what she learns from clients she utilizes with other clients. She also shared that in training she recalls being asked what it was she had to offer the profession and that equally important for her was what she would get back from it. It is not a one way giving or taking relationship but in fact they as the counsellor gain so much back from the relationship beyond the feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction;

Part of that journey they're on at least you can partner with them for

a little while in that. The amount that I've learned out of that experience

or gained and all the rest is just so huge so I don't see it as just a giving

thing, I see is as a getting back thing.

(Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013)

Deb, spoke to a new level of realization of her client's experiences only once she became a parent herself. It was only then that she was able to integrate this new learning and apply it to how she now did her job as a counsellor. "So she really was my humble pie, but it taught me a lot and has made me so much more compassionate for parents who are having difficulty with a child" (Deb, interview, August 23, 2013). As she shared this experience it supported the benefits life experience provides; it was only when she became a parent that she was able to conceptualize her clients' experiences on another level.

Participants shared that the practices they employ today are deliberate efforts they have developed over time and were not measures they took early on in their careers. Four participants spoke of specific self-care practises they utilize, and while the practices did not encompass all

domains (physical, spiritual, emotional and social) of their personal life, those they did indicate were both meaningful and critical to their professional success. Each also recognized it took time to understand what they needed by way of self-care and that it wasn't automatic but rather practises that evolved over time. Meyer and Ponton (2006) indicate "resiliency in counselors is not an accident. Rather it is the cumulative effect of counselor's healthy decision making" (as cited in Lawson and Myers, 2011, p.200).The four participants who shared their self-care regimes did not have a consistent self-care practice; each had a very distinct idea of what assisted them; ranging from intense physical activity, mindfulness and meditation practises, time out with friends and journaling and reading.  Edie shared how her mindfulness and meditation practice evolved over the past 15 years as a result of her husband's spiritual beliefs and influence as well as professional development she had attended. "20 years ago I didn't really live in my body, I lived somewhere over here. So, I now have a much greater awareness of what's happening in my body and how I mean mind, body connection" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013).  Pat shared her quiet and reflective periods are integral to her success as a counsellor and that she relies on these four times a year to maintain a state of equilibrium. She shared that when she is in need of a reflective time or a retreat experience she knows she needs that experience before she feels to far afield. "It will be a retreat experience like going to St. Benedict's and taking something and having extra time for walking and writing, sometimes it will just be on my own" (Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013). Contrary to Pat's approach, Danny shared how oftentimes, extreme sport such as heart pounding cycling or mountain climbing have been his avenue for wellness and self-care;

> I just find physical exercise for me, if I've been to something you
>
>  know, because I do critical incident debriefings and sometimes people

  paint pictures for you that are pretty graphic. But if I go out on a

  Saturday morning and it's a pounding hard ride, four and a half hours,

  pedal to the metal kind of thing, I'm not thinking about that.

  (Danny, interview, July 22, 2013)

Ivan and Lana did not identify with any degree of certainty aspects of self-care they employed and Lana was very clear in indicating her inability to care for herself to the degree she should. She was also the participant who indicated that at times she feels a great deal of stress from her job and often "leaves it all on the ward" having nothing left for herself when she gets home. Lana had a clear awareness that this was not healthy and while she could rationalize what she needed to change, it was the action of making the change that she had extreme difficulty with.

  Participants' also spoke of their own personal and professional growth and development and the interrelatedness of these but the overall relevance to who they have become as counsellors.  This includes having an increased awareness of who they were in all ways, knowledge that they don't have all the answers, it is okay to not always be at their best and that tomorrow is a day to try again. "And I think as experience grows and you develop as a person your experiences in life then come into these experiences" (Ivan, interview, July 23, 2013). Edie spoke to coming to a place of acceptance over time at not having the answers. "I don't just know intellectually or from a pro humility standpoint that, not only do I not need to be, I can't be" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013). Danny shared how his attitude had changed with time and how he was now more forgiving towards himself than he had been early on in his career;

  Every performance is not going to be perfect, so cut myself a little

  bit of rope, I'll go back at it, have a second chance at it. There is

  going to be some missed opportunities but maybe next time I won't

miss the opportunity.

(Danny, interview, July 22, 2013)

**Challenges.** Within the data recurring themes of personal and professional challenges arose. The degree to which information was disclosed varied however each participant shared challenges faced over the course of his or her career. Each participant spoke to the information counsellors connect with and the stories they hear and in so doing, by virtue of that they are immediately placed in a vulnerable position whereby a deeper sense of awareness is required. Cummings et. al. (2007) indicates, "The essence of counselling is to consistently summon the energy to engage with another human's emotion while at the same time balancing our own personal experiences and challenges outside of the job" (p. 35). Ivan reflected on the honorable and yet challenging role a counselor has;

Being able to put that away and understand that this is the time

for the individual that you need to focus on and that you'll be

most effective when you are able to not get emotionally caught

up in the sadness, the terror they are describing.

(Ivan, interview, July 23, 2013)

Patricia also spoke to how the profession and all it encompasses can lead one to wear down. "You can get depleted and you know, I'm used to myself operating at a certain level and doing things and I like my work and that's really good but so getting really, really weary and sometimes I think it sneaks up on you" (Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013). Cummings et. al. (2007) share, "When a counselor shifts emotional resources to attend to a personal crisis, this creates a deficit in the counseling relationship and ultimately one's ability to remain well" (p. 39)

All six participants shared with differing levels of detail the challenge they experienced of aging and dying parents and the toll this took on them. In several scenarios as participants' parents aged they became primary caregivers to their parent and this became a great source of stress. In each participant's cases their elderly parents have since passed away, some many, many years ago. In spite of this it was still a very relevant aspect to share with me during the interview even though it was not a direct question. The fact that it was such a clear aspect within the data as well as hearing their recollections demonstrated both how painful that time was for each of them and how difficult this was while "doing work". Lawson et al. (2007) state, "We cannot stop the natural flow of life that comes and goes, gives and takes, nourishes and decays, and pleases and disappoints" (p. 7). This quote eloquently captured the stories shared by the participants of this study illuminating that life presents both opportunities and challenges that cannot be stopped. It also placed into context Patricia's sentiment of life being transitory; nothing stands still, it is always changing and therefore individuals are changed by experience. Deb spoke of that time during her career being a critical one requiring her to step away from work for a brief time. "We were having all these aging problems with my husband's parents and there was one point during that very critical time I was such a mess I knew I couldn't do it" (Deb, interview, August 23, 2013). Edie also shared her experience more than 30 years ago while in the profession of nursing caring for her aging parents. "I had the experience of caring or both of my parents as they died and providing their primary care". Further in the interview Edie shares details of her father's untimely illness and passing. "My father gets pancreatic cancer and you know he dies within five…four months of his diagnosis, so that brings me to a new level of a different experience of death" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013).

Most participants also reflected on earlier family experiences, and while separate from death and dying were equally challenging and distressing experiences at points in their life. In each case the reflections shared were within a personal context however participants linked the impact of those experiences to both their personal and professional context. In sharing their story they did not separate how it impacted one world or the other but talked fluidly of the impact it had on them as a person and as a professional. Lana shared extensively beginning with her memories as a child and moving frequently due to her father's job. She felt that this inability to establish roots while painful at times as a child served her well later as she believed it contributed immensely in her ability to compartmentalize. Lana also shared later in her daughter's life the terrifying experience of postpartum psychosis and how at times the thoughts of this would creep in while she was at work. "I couldn't be doing that when the other half of my brain was thinking, okay so now I have to sleep for four hours so I can go over and keep her alive" (Lana, interview, July 29, 2013). Cummins et al. (2007) state, "These constant emotional interactions with clients who are traumatized are a challenge. It requires the counselor to renew, restore and come to the client with the resources and energy to be a catalyst for change. What happens when the counsellor finds himself or herself in a personal crisis" (p. 38)? Deb reflected on returning to work when her son was five months old prior to maternity leave being extended and she reflected on this being one of the most difficult times for her. "It felt so unnatural to be away from that baby at first…that killed me" (Deb, interview, August 23, 2013). Danny spoke to areas of counselling he works with and areas he doesn't, either because he is good with it or isn't, or has preferences for it or doesn't. He also shared that in some cases his own past painful experiences play a role. "As things have happened in my own life I have become a bit aversive to

some issues either temporarily or permanently. I won't go into that issue because it's just too close to home" (Danny, interview, July 22, 2013).

The topic of challenges within the context of the workplace was initiated by some of the participants. They reflected on difficult times throughout their careers that felt challenging and these experiences varied from aspects such as personnel issues, restructuring in the workplace and workload. Patricia shared an earlier career experience whereby she witnessed several of her colleagues being bullied which led to many health breakdowns. She shared how the some of the staff who worked there were referred to as the "survivor's club". Lana shared her experiences with a restructuring at her workplace which in her opinion added an incredulous amount to her job description as she now became a liaison between all social workers and departments. "They call it decentralization, I call it destruction" (Lana, interview, July 29, 2013)!  Deb spoke of her more recent retirement decision from her long standing career as a social worker and how this was a very difficult decision. When she finally did make it, she felt for a long time she had made the wrong decision. "Last September I cried every day, I thought I had made a terrible mistake" (Deb, interview, August 23, 2013). Ivan spoke to the imperative need for balance of client caseload. "If all you got is that type of file I think that's why I sometimes see people who work in pain management clinics, they just keep turning around because it's just, that's all you see, it's unrelenting and sometimes it's sad because nothing changes" (Ivan, interview, July 23, 2013).

When participants were asked what they knew now that they didn't know then, Patricia responded by saying, "How complex life is sort of in terms of, I mean I think that at an earlier stage you have no idea how you might plan a life for yourself or think of how it might go and it just doesn't go that way" (Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013). Patricia's quote places eloquently in context the experiences of two participants whose lives in many ways were parallel. Edie and

Lana both began their careers as nurses; because of life's circumstances they both changed

careers and became social workers, each later completing an MSW. Lana and Edie each spoke of

their marriages ending and in spite of it being many years ago the impact this had on their life

and career were immense. I sensed that Lana felt the fiscal responsibility of this separation in a

much bigger way as she had four children to care for.  "When I had to get a job because my

marriage came apart and I had four kids who actually wanted to eat" (Lana, interview, July 29,

2013). Unlike Lana, Edie shared the circumstances surrounding the ending to her marriage and it

seemed a more despairing time for her, "I had a marriage that ended about 30 years ago that was

very traumatic and I was a parent at the time and it was unwished for and unexpected so that was

very traumatic" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013). Edie likened this experience to something

worse than the terminal illness and death of her father. While Lana did not share specifics of her

husband and the ending to her marriage, she did share that her husband was involved in her kid's

lives. Edie on the other hand shared that her husband moved across the world with his new wife.

Perhaps the situations surrounding each of their experiences differed greatly, however, on both

accounts it brought to the forefront Patricia's statement that life does not always go according to

plan.

**Themes and Overall Essence in Association to Research Questions**

This section intends to consider the themes and overall essence of fortitude and provide

context with how these relate to the research objectives and purpose of the study.

The first objective of this study was *to create a safe holding environment, allowing each*

*participant time to reflect and share their life story as it relates to the phenomenon.* In an effort

to promote this sense of comfort and safety, participants were invited to choose the time and

place of their interview. In the case of all six participants, interviews were held at either their

workplace or their homes. Danny, Lana and Patricia each shared their appreciation of having the

opportunity to have a discussion focused on themselves and their experiences. At the end of the

interview as Patricia reflected on the process she shared, "I thought I would really enjoy it and I

really did enjoy it" (Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013). Lana shared that the experience of having

the initial interview didn't feel like an interview but rather a "very comfortable conversation". At

the conclusion of the interview with Danny he said, "I don't very often get to talk about myself,

kind of in this way and to think about these things" (Danny, interview, July 22, 2013). For most

participants I feel the objective of a comfortable and safe environment was established whereby

allowing them to reflect and openly share. From this sharing, much of the content that

contributed to the theme of challenges emerged. It is a safe holding environment that allows for

risk taking and disclosure and one has to assume those aspects were in place for some if not all

of the participants in this study. It is only under these conditions, some of the participants were

willing to revisit some very painful times from their past and share those experiences openly

with me. For two participants the experience of reflecting on a painful time in their life was a

very emotional experience. While all four themes contributed to forming the overall essence, it

was the theme of challenges and the participant stories within the theme that was the greatest

impetus for the essence of fortitude.

The second research objective of this study was *to know both the person and the*

*professional that exists within each participant.* The themes of boundaries, integration and

challenges all incorporated both personal and professional reflective accounts by the participants.

In all cases; there was a sense of fluidity as participants shared their stories moving between the

work and home context. Although the research questions for the study were very open ended and

general, participants provided very personal and specific information. While each participant's

extent of openness varied, there was a definite sense of knowing each participant on a deeper

level at the conclusion of each interview. This sense of knowing included who they were as

counsellors, as people and as a member of their current family unit. Deb shared the experience of

becoming a mom for a second time to a child who was challenging. "My second child was a

horrible child, in terms of temperament, I could barely manage her. I was embarrassed to tell

people my profession" (Deb, interview, August 23, 2013).  Five of the six participants also

provided descriptions into their family of origin, some offering perspective around their

childhood. "I came from a liberal home where debate and discussion were part in parcel of my

growing up" (Ivan, interview, July 23, 2013).

The third research objective of this study was *to learn about the reciprocal nature of the*

*personal and professional life of each participant.* Within the theme of integration, participants

shared who they are inside and outside of the counselling context and how they bring who they

are in as well as separate or take who they are out when they need to. Patricia spoke to bringing

the personal experience of caring for her dying father into the counselling context in so much as

it is helpful to a client experiencing a similar life event. "I have a lot to offer from having lived

through that experience and knowing how exhausting it can be. If I'm working with someone

who is also going through something with some similar elements in it, I'm also learning"

(Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013).

The fourth research objective was *to understand how life experiences shape the personal*

*and professional self.* Participants shared how their own life experiences or the experiences of

those close to them have influenced them over time. Each participant reiterated that with time

and increased life experience they have become more skilled at their job. Ivan spoke to the fact

that it is not that a seasoned counsellor is necessarily any more cerebral than a novice counsellor; they do however have more life and professional experience and can apply that. "You just have a sense that worked with so and so  and it might work here.....again, you're not that smart, it's the experience and you're interacting and you know you have these things" (Ivan, interview, July 23, 2013). Deb spoke to how she is often grateful for the life she has and recognizes how fortunate she is that she has not had to endure the trauma firsthand in the manner by which many of her clients have. She also shared how to some degree, people in her personal life assist her in the therapy context. "Things I learn from other people, like maybe a blended family situation and it helps me understand from people I know, you know, maybe it makes me a bit more understanding of those" (Deb, interview, August 23, 2013).

The fifth and final research objective was *to understand what time and experience in both personal and professional life provide.* The themes of boundaries and evolution offered the greatest participant data around their growth and development over time. Participants shared that over the course of their careers they had become more self-aware, gained increased confidence and assurance. With this came an increased acceptance of the fact they did not have all the answers. "I've evolved from feeling like I have to find the right answers to I have almost none of the answers" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013). Participants had also become more forgiving of their short comings and could accept that they weren't at their best every day but that tomorrow was a new day. "Every performance is not going to be perfect, so cut myself a little bit of rope, I'll go back at it, have a second chance at it" (Danny, interview, July 22, 2013). Most participants shared that these learnings came with time and experience and much of what they had learned was not something that could be taught earlier on in their careers.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of the Study**

  **Strengths.** The strengths of qualitative research are numerous and contributed to this study in various ways. One on one interviews, flexibility, bridging gaps in the research and offering direction for future study were the strengths of this study.

  The interviews offered descriptive narratives that could only be gathered by having one on one focused discussions. The interview format also allowed time and space for clarification and elaboration when it was needed. It was in this face to face setting that I as researcher could gain a sense of the participant's body language, tone of voice, facial expression, and raw emotion. It was also within the context of the interview that I noted my own responses and emotions during the process and reflected on these later in the field notes. I believe the multi layered experiences gained over the course of the interviews could only be possible within the parameters of qualitative research.

    Qualitative research allows for a greater sense of flexibility in several regards. Participants decided when and where interviews occurred and on several occasions interruptions occurred during the interviews including phone calls as well one participant's teenage son and husband entering the room at different times. Each incident contributed to a sense of comfort for the participant as that was their world and I as researcher was entering into it so it implored me to become more flexible. The interruptions were also authentic representations of their day to day world. As researcher, I had to be flexible as I waited scheduling of interview times and then responses to the initial transcripts. In addition, qualitative research allows flexibility around the open ended interview format. There were times participants asked for clarification or requested a question be repeated, this offered feedback around clarity and had me consider whether one question in particular could have been worded in a more concise manner.

Finally, findings in this study bridge gaps in the existing literature and offer some contributions to literature around counsellors at the ends of their careers, what their current needs are and what they have to contribute. The study also offers direction for future areas of research including counsellor training, wellness and counsellors over the career span.

**Weaknesses.**  In using a qualitative research method there was some potential for inherent weaknesses in this study, one of which includes a smaller sample size of six participants. As well, reflective accounts of participants and researcher's motivation for the topic of study contribute to the possibility of subjectivity.

The six people that responded to participate were likely interested in and highly motivated by the phenomena at the heart of the study and therefore it is probable that participants who contributed to the data were a sample of only those that were enthused and stimulated by the research topic.

The study involved a small sample including only six participants and as such it is acknowledged that the results of the study are not reflect the experiences of the greater population of experienced or veteran counsellors at the ends of their careers. In addition, the participants from this study were representative of three separate workplaces. Four of the participants worked for one organization and provided employee assistance counselling services. Given this common factor, there is the likelihood that they have shared in professional development opportunities and hold similar common professional beliefs and experiences that may have influenced some of their responses throughout the interviews.

It is further acknowledged that my time with each participant was brief and involved a single meeting for five of the six participants. There were moments in the interviews that I sensed certain participants' reticence regarding sharing detailed accounts of challenges or

struggles they had encountered. It is likely that multiple meetings with the participants could have increased their trust and comfort in sharing more deeply.

Research also indicates that counsellors as a group are more apt to conceal their feelings of vulnerability or weakness within the professional context. The research indicates that by virtue of being a counsellor and having the skills and tools to help others, counsellors are often seen as being immune to having their own emotional weakness. This culture of shame continues to exist today among some counsellors and in knowing this research, it has to be acknowledged that there is the possibility that participants may have held back information they did not feel comfortable sharing around their own vulnerabilities or weaknesses.

Finally, as researcher, I identify as a counsellor and in spite of my best efforts to bracket and remain impartial there is the possibility that my own biases and subjectivity have contributed to this study. There is the chance that this has occurred in the interpretations I have made about participants' data.

## Implications

The purpose of this study was to learn from counsellors through their life stories how significant personal and professional life events shaped and transformed who they became as a person and a professional over their career span. The themes that emerged from the data included: boundaries, evolution, integration and challenges. At the core of these themes was the essence of fortitude. Each participant reflected on decades encompassing personal and professional triumphs and tragedies and continued to uphold careers that provide fulfillment and satisfaction but also "leaves a deep scar" (Lana, interview, July 29, 2013). It was this determination, positive attitude and staying power within each participant that exemplified the spirit of fortitude.

One implication that has come out of the study is that counsellors are people first who experience joys and challenges much like the clients they treat. The challenges they encounter over the lifespan are not unlike those of their clients, however counsellors are often viewed by society as impervious to misfortune and suffering. Lawson and Venart (2003) share: "Often counselors are told they need to work longer, see more clients, produce results in shorter time periods with more multiply stressed clients, and put aside their own needs in the service of others (p. 4). The information gained from participants indicates that they did experience stress and suffering at points in their career and that they were at times more vulnerable to suffering because of what their career entailed. The six participants in this study revealed that they are people first and experience very human thoughts and emotions over the course of a day:

So sometimes the days are long, you've talked to people all day long,

you've tried to be present and empathetic and understanding and focused-

And then you come home and your wife has had a long day at work, your

adolescent son is being obnoxious and you're just feeling like, I don't' want

to do this. Like please give me a cold beer and put me someplace else.

(Danny, interview, July 22, 2013)

Lana spoke about passion in her career and how that has vacillated over time;

And maybe it's that curiosity, right? You just keep showing up.

Or, maybe it's sheer stupidity; you don't know enough to not

show up. (Lana, interview, July 29, 2013)

Edie also spoke about times when she isn't always at her best. "I have times when I'm sitting here and can't wait till the hours over. I have times when I'm you know, I'm very distracted by

what's going on with me. I have times when I miss things, I miss things every day" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013).

Another insight gained through this study concerned counsellor development. In much of the literature counsellor development is posited to be established early in one's career at which point development ends. Ronnestadt and Skovholt (2003) are an exception who views counsellor development as a lifelong journey. In this study several participants offered their perspective on development, and also viewed themselves as lifelong learners who continue to develop. Two participants verbalized that ongoing development is open to those willing to accept it.

As long as you stay current and continue your professional development

... sometimes as people age in their careers they get worse at listening

and better at talking. And to me that is a key, if I ever get to a point that

I am doing more of the talking in the session I don't think you're doing

your job anymore. (Deb, interview, August 23, 2013)

Patricia shared writers and theorists who have been influential in her career.

Sometimes you meet people on your path who are big influences,

just how they do life but sometimes reading for me and workshops,

it's not putting anybody much on pedestals but just like, you just read.

You know, I mentioned this author and it's just, she does something

for me, so never stopping doing that because it's sort of like it keeps

bringing you things in to clarify what do I believe and what don't I

believe kind of think, you know? (Patricia, interview, July 27, 2013)

Danny also shared his perspective on lifelong learning and development;

I think from now until the time I am no longer doing this, and then I

when I quit doing this I will be learning about something else. Like,

every experience is teaching you and informing you, you cannot not

be learning. (Danny, interview, July 22, 2013)

Edie spoke to a significant professional understanding in that she as a counsellor cannot create

something that isn't there and that people are just more of who they are under stress. She shared

that this learning while very freeing for her only came recently when she considers the length of

her career. "I'm 57 years old and I think I only really have been aware that it's, I've only really

found that rest in the last ten years, maybe less than that" (Edie, interview, August 23, 2013).

The participants in this study have been and some currently hold supervision roles to

counsellors in training. As one may assume, over time as a career matures supervision decreases,

however, the need for support may remain and be even more necessary at certain points in one's

career. Deb spoke to being watchful in the amount she relies on colleagues for fear of her issues

being minimized if she overuses clinical support. "There's some people who if they ask too

much, it doesn't seem as important a request so it kinda seemed to me I kinda created the idea

that if I was asking I really needed it" (Deb, interview, August 23, 2013).

**Recommendations for Further Study**

The gaps within the existing literature coupled with the interview data provided direction

towards areas of future study.

One area deserving of greater attention is that of the counsellor as a person. Throughout

the literature, counsellors are often portrayed as unyielding or impermeable to stress and personal

challenges. There is a belief held by some that given their training and skill set, counsellors do

not encounter stress or sadness to the magnitude others do as they have learned the skills to cope

more effectively.  The majority of literature has focused on the professional development of the

counsellor but very little has considered who the counsellor is as a person and how or if counsellor's personal development aligns or integrates with their professional development. While this study has considered aspects of the personal and professional self within the counsellor it is a topic worthy of further study.

The research outlined in chapter 2 indicates that most counsellor development models, such as the Integrated Developmental Model (1981), do not consider counsellors continuing developing long past their post-licensing. Participants throughout this study collectively stated that their development was ongoing in spite of being at the end of their careers. All participants felt that they were consistently learning and growing in their jobs and gaining new knowledge and understandings on a regular basis from experiences they had with clients. It would be beneficial for counsellor development models to consider development as ongoing and lifelong. In looking for research on counsellors at the end of their careers, I found this area to be lacking in general. Increased attention to counsellors in the latter part of their careers is a worthy area of study as it provides perspectives and insights on their vast knowledge and experiences and may offer direction for counsellor training.

Throughout the interviews, participants discussed their feelings of insecurity as novice counsellors; however, this was not concurrent with age. In the case of two participants, they became counsellor's later in life after successful nursing careers and still had those feelings of insecurity. One of the participants described her novice experiences as a therapist and shared that during this time she experienced the "imposter syndrome". She elaborated by sharing that she did not have a clear sense of what it was she was supposed to be doing in that professional context. In an effort to compensate for her lack of knowledge and experience she acted as though she knew exactly what she was doing in that professional role, in essence, she faked it. Two

other participants referred to themselves as "frauds" and another stated how he didn't want "to get caught". While some level of insecurity and anxiety as a new counsellor is to be anticipated, this may offer direction for  programming counsellors-in-training. What amount of self-reflection and personal development are included in training programs for students becoming counsellors? Could an increased self-reflection encourage knowing oneself on a deeper level which, in turn, increase confidence? This is likely a worthy consideration for training institutions to evaluate and consider.

The participants within this study shared efforts they make towards wellness and self-care. There was no definitive key component of self-care shared by the majority of participants but rather each had established their own strategies, or practices, that worked best for them. There has been ample research on counsellor vulnerability, stress and burnout, however, less attention has been paid to wellness and self-care efforts. The understanding that self-care is not a one-size-fits-all model can offer direction to employers about professional development and self-care opportunities. It is critical that employers recognize that providing diverse and varied opportunities for self-care will allow people to tailor those to their own interests and self-care needs.  Further research on counsellors' wellness plans, suggesting a broader and more holistic self-care options, would be beneficial for those wishing to choose their own particular wellness activities. Wellness and self-care efforts coupled with narratives of how counsellors' found the efforts to be successful and how and when they are most useful could offer direction to other counsellors seeking career sustaining behaviours.

**Summary**

The aim of this chapter was to discuss and analyze the findings of the study and place it into appropriate context within the existing research.  The chapter analyzed the themes of

boundaries, integration, evolution and challenges in relation to the reviewed literature placing into context the relevance and importance of the overall study. The themes and overall essence of fortitude was considered in relation to the research objectives and literature. The strengths, weaknesses and implications arising from this study were highlighted. Finally, areas of future study were considered.

**Conclusion**

Do counsellors during the last stage of their careers arrive at a place where they feel they have reached a reasonable balance of "doing work" and "doing life"? In response to that question, based on the reflective accounts of the six participants in this study, the resounding response shared in a multitude of ways would indicate yes. Participant data referred to the overlap, the transitory nature of life and work as well as the lack of separation in work and life. It would seem integration of these two worlds becomes automatic; it was reiterated time and again throughout each personal narrative that counsellors' really can't "do work" without "doing life" and vice versa. While at the onset the question was about integration of the personal and the professional, the participants' narratives showed that at times the separation of the two worlds is what takes the more concerted effort. Participants shared how oftentimes, so much of their own life was mirrored in the work they do with clients, that it is the process of compartmentalizing and bracketing that takes a conscious effort on their part..

It is likely that each participant is situated at differing positions on an integration continuum; however, they have all in some manner integrated aspects of their personal and professional self. The experience of integration for each participant is likely fluid and is felt more so or less so at various times and stages depending on the demands and challenges they are

experiencing, either at work, or at home. Perhaps the experience of integration is also transitory and changes in relation to our professional and personal experiences.

Wellness efforts and self-care practices employed by participants have contributed in a valuable way to holistic wellness. It is important to reiterate that these practices were individualized to fit each participant and is something that has evolved over time.

Participants shared that two main factors; time in practicing their profession coupled with life experiences (both personal and professional), are the main factors situating them where they are as counsellors today.

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