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Counselling as Emotional Labour

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is a study of counsellors and the significance that their work has in their lives. It approaches counselling work as a particular form of emotional labour and refers to it as 'pure' emotional labour. The fieldwork undertaken for the thesis involved collecting material through a range of qualitative methods including semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation. These data were analysed with a view to examining various aspects of how informants' counselling work related to their wider lives. Particular attention was paid to the routes into counselling work and their counselling careers, social and personal characteristics, the nature of the counselling relationship, the costs and rewards to them and the notion of a shared counselling culture expressed both formally and informally. The thesis also considers the significance of the growth of counselling in contemporary society, arguing that earlier interpretations of this growth as an expression of secularisation offer only a partial explanation.

   The main findings of the research were that counsellors (many of whom work in a voluntary capacity) derive great personal benefit from their counselling work in addition to the satisfaction gained from helping others. Theories of emotional labour were found to be of great value in making sense of many of the counsellors' negative experiences, but it is argued that such theories need to take into account neglected aspects of emotion work that are positive. Furthermore the argument is developed that while sociology has much to offer the study of counselling (for example through the analysis of professionalisation), the study of counselling also has much to teach sociologists. In particular it is suggested that emotions are not easily accessible to social scientists who employ conventional interviewing methods, and that theorising emotions sociologically is fraught with difficulties as well as having great potential.

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Chapter 1

Counselling as Emotional Labour

Introduction

During the course of this study it has emerged that most people have an opinion about counselling, often a negative opinion. Some people consider counselling to be a form of self indulgence, an 'American idea' that has crossed the Atlantic and is popular with the sort of people who 'like to examine their own navels', others have expressed the view that counselling is the sort of service that rather sad or lonely people may require. I have been told that counselling is a new artificially created 'need' or a new 'want', and that counselling is an indulgence that encourages narcissism.

However, not all the reactions to the focus of my study have been so negative. Some people have suggested that the growing popularity of counselling is a necessary result of changes that have occurred in modern society. A more complicated, specialised society has resulted in greater dissatisfaction or uncertainty in the lives of individuals. Many people have told me that they have consulted a counsellor at some time in their lives or known someone else who has benefited from the service. Obviously such people appeared to be more knowledgeable about counselling, what it entailed and what could be expected from it. In the midst of these popular opinions what was of particular interest in the early stages of this project was that, when asked, very few people said that they would like to be a counsellor. Many people appear to think that listening to people's problems hour after hour, day after day would be an extremely depressing way to earn one's living.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the type of work in which counsellors are involved. In particular it is intended to investigate the costs and rewards of counselling work and to ascertain how such work impinges on the private lives of practitioners. In short, who counsels, why, and with what consequences for them?

1.1 Locating the Study

In order to achieve this it is first necessary to explore some of the accepted ideas about counselling and to recognise that defining counselling presents problems. There is also a further complication in that not everybody who has undertaken counselling training or is involved in counselling work is a counsellor. The argument throughout this thesis will be that a greater understanding of counselling can be achieved through a consideration of counselling as a form of emotional labour. In fact, I shall go further and suggest that counselling can be best described as 'pure emotional labour'. Of course, before these ideas can be outlined more fully it is important to ascertain the extent and the function of counselling in contemporary Western societies.

Recent years have seen an increasing demand for and provision of counselling services in ever widening spheres. The British Association for Counselling reports that it now has over 13,000 members compared to the 1,667 members listed in 1982, an increase of over 700% in a decade and a half. It is not surprising that the number of counsellors offering services has grown in line with the range of counselling that is available. The expansion of counselling has been sufficiently dramatic for Rowe to comment that

> 'we have student counsellors, marriage guidance counsellors, Samaritan counsellors, bereavement counsellors, alcohol counsellors, drug counsellors, tranquilliser counsellors, clergy counsellors, policewomen counsellors, counsellors at day centres and drop-in centres, counsellors on radio and

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television....Indeed, there are so many counsellors and psychotherapists that I sometimes wonder if we are going to run out of people to be counselled' (Rowe, 1992, p.8)

Perhaps the increasing popularity of counselling is best summed up by Ian Craib who declares 'In Britain, therapy and counselling seem to be experiencing an unprecedented popularity: we have reached the stage where they figure in soap operas' (1994, p.1). Counselling has become, in some ways, part of everyday life. Most GP practices now employ a counsellor, private counsellors advertise in local newspapers, and every disaster or tragedy reported by the media appears to include the information that teams of counsellors are on hand to talk to victims. Counsellors appear and take calls from viewers during day-time television shows, they offer phone-ins on the radio and virtually all popular magazines and many tabloid newspapers feature a 'problem page' with an 'agony aunt or uncle'. In addition it is now quite usual for television documentaries on sensitive issues to display 'help line' telephone numbers at the end of the programme.

It would also appear that despite the therapy movement being big already it is still expanding. Introductory counselling courses are being offered by more educational institutions than ever before and courses are so numerous that the British Association of Counselling (BAC) has given up trying to count or keep tabs on them. Clearly such rapid growth in an occupation that is, as yet, unregulated brings its own problems in terms of the quality of the training being offered and the suitability of the people being trained. It is significant that there is no umbrella organisation to register and regulate the activities and training of counsellors. The BAC does keep a register and has developed a code of ethics but membership of such an organisation is, as yet, completely voluntary. Similarly there is also no official registration and training for psychotherapists. This produces the

alarming situation where literally anyone is able to set up practice as a psychotherapist or counsellor without any qualifications or training.

It is important to emphasise here that although, in some ways, counselling has become quite commonplace there is often confusion about what exactly counselling is, who can do it and the nature of a counselling relationship. All discussions about counselling encounter what Mearns and Dryden (1990, p.ix) describe as the 'perennial problem' of defining the activity. Due to the growing popularity of 'talking cures' terms like 'counselling', 'psychotherapy', 'psychoanalysis', 'psychological counselling' or just plain 'therapy' are in common usage. The activities that they describe are often confused with each other although, in fact, they are all different and stem from differing theoretical bases. Paradoxically, though, they can have many characteristics in common and attempts to differentiate between them are not always successful. For example, some practitioners have claimed that the duration of the relationship indicates whether 'counselling' or 'therapy' is taking place. Work that goes on for a lengthy period, perhaps a year or more, is often thought of as 'therapy' rather than 'counselling' which usually lasts, on average, between 6-8 sessions. Some workers believe their work is best described as 'therapy' when the issues their clients are struggling with are of a deep seated nature, reaching back into childhood, for example. In contrast 'counselling' is often thought to be most effective for dealing with more transient problems or coming to terms with major life changes. Such distinctions are not always helpful, as the time element of the relationship does not necessarily indicate that there are qualitative differences in the processes at work. Dealing with profound change or life crises often involves the client becoming aware of deep-seated expectations or patterns of relating to others that have been set in earlier life. The problems of definition in this field become even more acute if cultural differences are examined. Much that is described as counselling in Britain would be termed therapy in the United States where 'counseling' is associated with advice work. The confusion is acknowledged by most writers in this field and some

claim that it is often a matter of what the practitioners themselves feel comfortable with, as Dorothy Rowe explains: 'Psychiatrists do psychotherapy, so do psychologists, nurses, social workers and occupational therapists. If people feel that "psychotherapy" is too pretentious a word to apply to what they do, they describe what they do as counselling' (1993, p.8).

Confusion arises also because counselling has to some extent become an abused term. Hairdressers and other 'personal service' workers often claim that because their clients confide in them they see their work as involving a 'sort of counselling, really'. Teachers who are concerned with student welfare are sent on counselling courses and then described as student counsellors. Often the 'counsellors' who, it is reported, are sent to the scene of every national disaster are, in fact, social workers with some counselling training. It seems clear that many people who are described as counsellors are not counsellors *per se* but people who have added counselling skills to those involved in their main occupation.

This leads us to the problem of differentiating between counsellors and people who use counselling skills in the course of their work. This distinction is of particular importance for this study. Both groups will probably have had counselling training, and in some instances they may well have had the same counselling training but is important to stress that not all those who use counselling skills are, in fact, regarded as counsellors. It is significant that it is not only those who are outside the profession who encounter problems differentiating between counsellors and those who use counselling skills. The BAC admits that the distinction is not always clear. For the BAC what distinguishes the use of counselling skills from counselling are, 'the intentions of the user, which is to enhance the performance of their functional role, as line manager, nurse, tutor, social worker, personnel officer, voluntary worker, etc.' (BAC, 1989)

Most importantly, it is also necessary that the person receiving counselling perceives the situation as such: 'Only when both the user and the recipient explicitly contract to enter into a counselling relationship does it cease to be "using counselling skills" and become "counselling"' (BAC, 1990)

It is not proposed to try to resolve the definitional debate surrounding counselling and therapy in this thesis but it is important for the purposes of this study to make clear the distinction between those who use counselling skills during the course of their work and those who describe themselves purely as counsellors. This study is mainly concerned with the latter group. The majority of the participants in this study are engaged, whether paid or unpaid, specifically as counsellors. Many of them are regular counsellors in G.P. practices, some are counsellors with Relate and others are involved in private practice. Most of the respondents do report that, for them, a 'typical' client/counsellor relationship lasts for 6-8 sessions but, more importantly, their clients see them in the role of a counsellor. The clients have sought a counselling relationship and that is all that the majority of counsellors in this study can and/or will offer them. Some of my respondents, however, are not involved only with counselling. Workers who use counselling skills in the course of their work, either to supplement or enhance their main role were included in the early stages of empirical work in order that comparisons could be made. The characteristics of the sample are detailed in Chapter 2 but for the moment, in order to make the distinction between workers clearer, I shall refer to those who use counselling skills to enhance their main role as 'combiners' and describe those for whom counselling is their main role as 'pure' counsellors.

The confusion surrounding definitions of counselling, therapy, counselling skills and so on does not obscure the fact that there has been rising demand for counselling in many spheres of social life. Various theories have been put forward to account for this escalating need of counselling. Most famously, Halmos's book <u>The Faith of the Counsellors</u> (1965) suggests that the emergence and growth of counselling cannot be explained without

reference to 'contemporary man's banishment from the fold of an ancient faith, from the bond of companionship, counsel, and inspiration, that faith has meant to man throughout the centuries' (p.31). He presented evidence detailing the decline in formal religion in both the USA and in Britain in order to show that there was a breach just waiting to be filled by contemporary, secular counselling. Halmos stressed that his observations were not made in order to illustrate 'the loss of faith in our times but rather to point to a possibility of its strange recrudescence' (p.33).

Halmos also linked the growth of counselling to changing ideas about welfare. He claimed political solutions to society's problems have lost much of their dignity and trustworthiness and stated that the collective actions of the past gave way to the rise of individualism. Collective welfare provision designed to create a solidaristic society inevitably achieves less than is aimed for and collective political action can still leave people as individuals feeling lonely, unloved, alienated or confused. Writing during the 1960's, described by many as a period of great upheaval and change, Halmos believed that there was a growing apathy about political matters and the large-scale prescriptions that had accomplished real material improvements in society during the preceding decades began to engender irritation and suspicion. Even when large-scale social reforms are successful in removing the worst forms of social problems people still cling to a sort of 'restless idealism' and do not want to accept that despite material security and guaranteed welfare they remain mortal and vulnerable; stark misery can be replaced by 'drabness'. Happiness and fulfilment do not necessarily follow the alleviation of physical deprivation.

Halmos also talked about 'the lonely individual' in contemporary society. Individuals can suffer from anonymity and anomie during times of rapid social change. Modern life has brought greater social mobility, the demise of the extended family, the break up of formerly settled communities and so on.

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'When wars and economic slump do not threaten too fiercely, the individual citizen's main social worry is how to adjust to his suburb, his housing estate, or his peer-group; his main anxiety is about his acceptability in his work group or neighbourhood or reference group, and about the parental, marital, or filial mismanagements of his emotional needs'. (p.24)

In The Secular Priests, Maurice North (1972) put forward very similar arguments to account for the growth of counselling in contemporary society. He also claims that the growth of 'the psychotherapeutic ideology' is linked to the character of modern, industrialised society, in particular to changes that have occurred in the family. Like Halmos, North sees the secularisation of society as instrumental in the growth of counselling:

'With the decline in the influence of organized religion and the moral codes associated with them, there is now a scarcity of firm, social controls, of imperatives, in the private sphere and this has created psychological difficulties for the individual. He, seeking his supposedly "real self" in his non-public life, must make do with the assistance of only weak and limited identity-confirming processes. Agencies for identity-maintenance exist in the private sphere but the most important of them, the family, has been greatly weakened by the complex series of interacting influences that we describe variously as industrialization or modernization. Social life seems in the urbanized culture of the West to be inhospitable towards the family and it has been transformed from a stable institution into one that is, in individual instances of great number, a fragile and transient thing. Other institutions have had to come into existence to fill the gap or undergo a metamorphosis to meet new demands' (North, 1972, p.21).

Developments in medical science have also been cited as a reason for the growth of counselling. Advances in medical technology and knowledge now

mean that most people can expect to live longer and be healthier. Some writers suggest that this has resulted in changed ideas about what actually constitutes health. The traditional idea that health was the absence of illness has given way to more positive notions centred around feeling good, feeling fit, being able to make the most of your life, looking good and so on (Halmos, 1965; Lake and Acheson, 1988). This change in attitude towards health is reflected in the world around us by popular ideas about healthy eating and preventative medicine as well as the growth in numbers of health food shops and fitness clubs. Interest in and expectations of 'emotional health' have grown alongside concerns about physical health in a quest for what is commonly viewed as an 'holistic' approach to health. The objective of the therapy movement is to enable people to get the most they can from their lives, to be happier, to feel more fulfilled and to gain greater understanding of themselves and their behaviour by becoming 'psychologically or emotionally fitter' (Lake and Acheson, 1988, p.9).

More recent explanations have also centred on the changing nature of contemporary society. Anthony Giddens (1991) who describes 'our present day world' as 'high' or 'late' modernity argues that although we are now generally protected from the hazards of pre-modern times, new risks and dangers have been created. So, although Giddens believes there is a certain amount of validity to the arguments put forward by writers like Halmos (1965), North (1972) and Rieff (1966) who link the growth in counselling to the secularisation of society in a broadly functionalist fashion, he claims that this cannot be a full and adequate explanation. Therapy is not only a means of adjusting individuals to a flawed social environment, nor is it simply a narrow substitute for deep involvements that were part of pre-modern or more traditional times. Indeed, Giddens argues, therapy cannot replicate the 'authority' of former times because there is no authoritative version of therapy. Individuals who decide to seek therapy are confronted with the enormous choice offered via different schools, philosophies and practices. He states: 'Therapy, therefore, is a more specific expression of

dilemmas and practices relevant to high modernity than it is a phenomenon substituting for more traditional social and moral forms' (1991, p.180)

Giddens describes late modernity in colourful terms, he states 'the modern world is a "runaway world"' (p.16) and claims that to live in it has the feeling of 'riding a juggernaut' (p.28). Other writers too describe the risks inherent in modern living and the problems resulting from a loss of traditional culture. Beck focuses on what he sees as a 'new perplexity' (1992, p.10) and Bauman claims that 'order and chaos are modern twins' (1991, p.4).

According to Giddens it is no surprise that therapy has emerged from this background of risk and uncertainty. More than simply an adjustment device, therapy constitutes one of the 'expert systems' which are products of late modernity and also help in its construction. Giddens points out that personal relationships, trials and problems can tell us a great deal about social life. He states: 'The doctor, counsellor and therapist are as central to the expert systems of modernity as the scientist, technician or engineer' (1991, p.18)

Such experts are required by individuals faced with fewer certainties but more opportunities, choices and freedoms than ever before. While there is not room here to expound on the theories relating to changing modernity perhaps it is enough to say that these later explanations take a less negative view of the growth of counselling than earlier theories. While writers like Halmos perceived counsellors taking the place of something that was now lacking in society, Giddens and others who conceive of society as a reflexive process, regard the rise of therapy as an integral and important part of that process.

As well as theories to explain the growth of counselling a great deal of attention has also been given to the theories of counselling, the effectiveness of counselling and the clients of counsellors. However, much less has been written about the other person in the counselling relationship. Little attention has been paid to the counsellors themselves: 'the experience of the counsellor or psychotherapist is not a topic which has received very

much systematic investigation' (McCleod, 1990, p.66). This can be considered a glaring omission because, although as illustrated above, theories have been developed to explain the need for counselling in contemporary western society these theories do not fully explain the growing numbers of counsellors. It does not necessarily follow that once a need develops or has been identified then that need will be met. The fact that counselling has been described as 'a stressful activity' makes the growth in numbers of practitioners even more of a puzzle. It is difficult to imagine, for example, why great numbers of people have trained, and continue to train, as counsellors if the work is exactly as Brady et al describe it here:

> 'Mental health professionals are regularly engulfed by their clients' pain and disability, are routinely confronted by conscious and unconscious hostility, and are ethically bound to secrecy concerning the most troubling confessions and occasionally the most heinous of crimes. All of this is accomplished under unremitting pressure in frequently less than humane working conditions with interpersonally disturbed patients. Emotional depletion, physical isolation and psychic withdrawal seem only too natural responses. Throw in the inescapable disruptions of our personal lives and one is tempted to accept Kottler's (1986: 8) dramatic assertion that : "if we ever really considered the possible risks in getting involved with a client, we would not do so for any price. Never mind that we will catch their colds and flus, what about their pessimism, negativity, and psychopathology?"'
> (1995, p. 21-22)

This naturally raises the question, if counselling is as stressful as Brady and others maintain then why is counselling such a growth industry?

1.2 The Sociology of Emotional Labour

Little has been published on what it feels like to be doing counselling, how counsellors cope with the stress of their work or in what ways the role of a counsellor impinges upon other aspects of a practitioner's life. In order to fully understand the continuing expansion of counselling in contemporary western society it is important to consider the motives of the people who choose to do it, how they themselves see their role, how well prepared they are by training and the costs and rewards inherent in the work they do.

Such an investigation is the aim of this study and drawing from current sociological debates promises to inform the knowledge we have of counsellors and their work. More specifically, the sociology of emotional labour has particular relevance to an investigation of this type as it incorporates discussions about professionalisation, gender divisions at work, medicalisation, public/private divisions and boundaries. Similar debates are also currently of interest to counsellors and counselling organisations.

Clearly, before it is possible to judge whether or not counselling can be classed as emotional labour it is first necessary to briefly outline the concept and the characteristics associated with this form of work. While it is not intended that this thesis will explore emotional labour as its principal focus, it will be argued that emotional labour is a useful analytical tool with which to understand the work of counsellors more fully. It will also be an argument of this thesis that the theory of emotional labour needs to be modified in the light of the findings of this study.

Unlike physical labour, emotional labour has received little attention in conventional analyses of work. Little light has been shed on emotion in relation to the labour process (Wouters, 1989). However, there have been a few empirical studies of emotions and emotional labour; of these, Hochschild's work with the flight attendants of Delta airlines published as The Managed Heart in 1983 is probably the best known. Various studies

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have followed it, most of them focusing upon nursing as a typical occupation within which emotional labour takes place (James, 1989; James 1992; Smith, 1992; Aldridge, 1994).

James describes emotional labour as 'the labour involved in dealing with other people's feelings' (1989, p.15). Hochschild defines the emotional labour of the flight attendants in her study in the following way:

> 'This labour requires one to induce or suppress feelings in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others - in this case, the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place. This kind of labour calls for a co-ordination of mind and feeling, and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality' (1983, p.7).

As Hochschild makes very clear, there is little new about emotion management, for in everyday life we all do a certain amount of acting. Most of us are aware that the way that we dress, or pose, for example, affects the way in which we outwardly appear to others and in turn influences their view of us. This can be described as 'surface acting', the body is the main tool and we are usually aware that we are doing it. Emotion management can also take the form of 'deep acting', which involves working not just on how we appear but also on how we actually feel. Again deep acting is part of normal life, most of us have at some time tried to force ourselves to have a good time, psyched ourselves up before some trial or another or made use of our imaginations through focusing on past emotional situations, imagining scenarios and so on. The purpose of this type of activity is often an attempt to stir up feelings that we wish we had or think that we should have and at other times we may be trying to damp down feelings that we wish we were not having.

What is new and an area of concern for many of the writers working in the field of emotional labour is an increasingly prevalent instrumental stance

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towards our capacity to play upon a range of feelings. In other words, the skills of emotion management have become marketable and some areas of employment actually demand them. Put very simply, once it was enough for employees to say 'Have a nice day', later it became important that the employees say it as if they meant it but now, ideally, they should actually mean it. Hochschild links this rise in expectations to increasing competitiveness between organisations, because when there is little difference between the products or services on offer then changing the attitudes of the workers is seen as a way to secure market share and increase profits.

When institutions become involved various elements of acting are taken away from the individual and replaced by institutional mechanisms. Emotion management moves up the level of the institution away from the labourer. More than surface acting is required of the workers; modern institutions now often suggest how workers should feel. One of the ways that this is achieved is to pre-arrange the worker's perspective. Institutions arrange their front stages, they guide the way their workers see and what they are likely to feel 'spontaneously'. Hochschild cites an example of workers dealing with emotionally disturbed children. Trainee workers did not know what to think or feel about the wild behaviour of the children. Their feelings were directed by senior workers who advised them to see the children as victims of uncontrollable influences related to their harsh and deprived backgrounds. They required kindness and indulgence in order that they may see the adult world as something other than hostile. Thus the trainee workers were taught how to feel about the children and expected to be warm and loving and to feel sympathy and tenderness towards the children even if they were being kicked, abused and screamed at. For the trainees then this necessarily involved a great deal of emotion work. A proper way to experience the child as well as a proper way to feel was understood by everyone as part of the job (1983, p.53).

There are clear similarities here to the ways in which counsellors are encouraged to feel about their clients. Carl Rogers, one of the most influential figures in the field of counselling, advocated that a successful counselling relationship should contain 3 basic elements - congruence, acceptance and empathy. Firstly, the counsellor must be congruent in the relationship, meaning the therapist should be genuine, being what she or he is without hiding behind a professional role. This authenticity requires that the therapist be highly self-aware: 'Congruence demands a willingness to express and to be..... It requires at all times that the therapist resist the temptation to seek refuge behind the mask of professionalism, the role of the expert or the mystique of therapeutic process' (Thorne, 1992, p.37)

The second vital element, according to Rogers, is that the client must receive positive regard from the therapist. This implies a caring that is unconditional, uncontaminated by judgements or evaluations. The therapist must experience an outgoing, non-possessive warmth for the client. This type of acceptance is not easy to accomplish as it requires counsellors to develop the capacity, 'from deep within themselves' (p.38) to accept people as they are and not as they would wish them to be.

Finally, if the therapeutic relationship is to be successful the counsellor must develop empathy. Of the skills required in counselling Rogers believed that empathy was the most trainable. It involves:

> 'being sensitive, moment to moment, to the changing felt meanings which flow in this other person, to the fear or rage or tenderness or confusion or whatever that he/she is experiencing. It means temporarily living in his/her life, moving about in it delicately without making judgements, sensing meaning of which he/she is scarcely aware, but not trying to uncover feelings of which the person is totally unaware, since this would be too threatening. It includes communicating your sensings of his/her

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world as you look with fresh and unfrightened eyes at elements of which the individual is fearful' (Rogers, 1980, p.42)

In his writings Rogers makes the point that the therapist is a highly important part of the human equation that makes up a successful counselling relationship. It is often stated in the counselling literature that more than methods or techniques must be utilised: the counsellor is the main 'tool' in a therapeutic relationship. As Rogers puts it, 'the counselor who tries to use a 'method' is doomed to be unsuccessful unless this method is genuinely in line with his own attitudes' (Rogers, 1991, p.19). Clearly Rogerian counselling requires more than trained responses: as stated, it requires authenticity, the involvement of the counsellor as a person with a particular philosophical outlook.

Authenticity or genuineness is therefore considered to be the key to a successful counselling relationship. Unlike writers working in the field of emotional labour, there is little new here, since this has long been accepted. In fact, a 'classic' counselling text written in 1967 states:-

'The counsellor must be a real person in the encounter, presenting himself without defensive phoniness, without hiding behind the facade of the professional role. The current concept of genuineness (or authenticity or congruence) requires the therapist's personal commitment; he is not simply "doing his job" like a technician' (Truax and Carkhuff, 1967, p.142)

What is required from counsellors is that they engage with their clients as themselves. It is made clear during training that any type of protective 'front' or distancing will hinder the development of a successful therapeutic relationship and so must be avoided. What is clearly required is emotional labour. As this is the case it is potentially fruitful to consider the main characteristics of emotional labour and apply them to the field of counselling.

Not only can it be successfully argued that counselling is a form of emotional labour, there is also a strong case to be made that counselling is a unique form of emotional labour. As suggested earlier people who use counselling skills to enhance their main occupation can be thought of as 'combiners'. Much of the work that has been done in the area of emotional labour has centred on workers who combine other skills with the emotional labour that is part of their work. For example, Hochschild's flight attendants obviously have various tasks to perform and many of the services they offer passengers are of a purely practical nature, serving food, demonstrating emergency procedures, selling duty free items and so on. Similarly, the nurses in the studies by Smith (1992) and James (1989) also have many duties to perform for the patients in their care. Aldridge makes this point: 'But at least nurses have routines to fall back on. If they are struggling with their motivation to do the job at all, are desperately tired, or find the patient very hard to handle, nurses can offer a skilled procedure skilfully done' (Aldridge, 1994, p.726)

Counsellors, however, have few, if any, practical tasks to perform; listening, empathising and talking are the skills counsellors offer their clients. In a sense then, if we continue with the idea of 'combiners' and 'pure' counsellors, counselling could be described as 'pure' emotional labour.

A review of the relevant literature reveals that one of the most striking features of emotional labour is that most of the writers in this area view the spread of emotional labour into the commercial world negatively. It is claimed that emotional labour is hard, demanding, work that frequently receives low reward and is often considered to be of low status. 'Emotional labour is hard work and can be sorrowful and difficult. It demands that the labourer gives personal attention which means they must give something of themselves, not just a formulaic response' (James, 1989, p.19)

Writers also argue that emotional labourers are usually women. James points out that 'one of the results of the gender division of labour is that

women carry the prime responsibility for working with emotions' (1989, p.23). Emotional labourers are supposedly able to draw upon abilities and skills that they and others consider to be 'natural' to them yet 'the supposed "naturalness" of women's caring role is central to the significance, value and invisibility of emotional labour and its development through gender identity and work roles' (p.22). Strong links are made between status and gender. The same writers who point out that emotional labourers are usually women claim that emotional labour is commonly connected with work of low status. James (1992) states that, at the time of her hospice study, 'there was almost an inverse law of status and skill in emotional labour' (p.503). There is, of course, already a wide literature detailing how women are most often involved in poorly paid, low status employment. Much of this work involves caring for and about others (Graham, 1983); in fact, part of the social construction of conventional womanhood is that women are better at caring and communication than men. Thus, it is argued, emotional labour is 'yet another gendered attribute, not a hard-won skill demanding recognition and reward' (Aldridge, 1994, p.726)

As well as gender and status, writers concerned with emotional labour have also pointed out that age is an important factor to consider. It would appear from James's study of hospice nurses that young nurses found performing practical tasks for patients who were experiencing grief, anger, loss, despair or frustration much easier than performing the emotional labour of listening and responding to them. One nurse admitted that when patients were very scared and crying out for someone to help them she felt very inadequate. Often the people most involved with the emotional care of patients were older nursing auxiliaries who despite their low status were greatly appreciated by younger nurses who valued the auxiliaries' 'experience of life'.

Much of the emotional labour literature is concerned with how the effects of performing this type of work are managed by the worker. It is claimed that there are human costs to performing demanding but low status work which

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requires a worker to think and feel in a way prescribed by management. This is the main focus of Hochschild's thesis. She claims that to suggest helpful techniques for changing feeling through training is to interfere in the signal function of feeling itself. Workers can be left feeling unsure about, cynical about or distanced from their true feelings. As she explains:

'There are three stances that workers seem to take toward work, each with its own sort of risk. In the first, the worker identifies too wholeheartedly with the job, and therefore risks burnout. In the second, the worker clearly distinguishes herself from the job and is less likely to suffer burnout; but she may blame herself for making this very distinction and denigrate herself as "just an actor, not sincere". In the third, the worker distinguishes herself from her act, does not blame herself for this, and sees the job as positively requiring the capacity to act; for this worker there is some risk of estrangement from feeling altogether, and some cynicism about it - "we're just illusion makers". The first stance is potentially more harmful than the other two, but the harm in all three could be reduced' (Hochschild, 1983, p.187).

1.3 The aims of the study

If the arguments put forward in the emotional labour literature about the 'psychological costs' of emotional labour are correct then we might assume that people who perform 'pure' emotional labour and have no other skills to offer or distract their clients with will suffer from them more than do workers who combine other occupational skills with the emotional labour they perform. This then raises the rather obvious question 'why do some people, many of whom have other options, choose to perform "pure" emotional labour in the form of counselling either as their main occupation or offer their services in a voluntary capacity?' . The main body of literature concerned with emotional labour does not appear to provide an answer to that question.

The fact that large numbers of people have chosen and continue to choose to train and work as counsellors appears to indicate that, in many ways, counselling is rewarding work and this examination of the motivations and the routes people take into counselling work suggests that there are rewards as well as costs involved in the performance of this type of emotional labour, and, indeed, that the former may well outweigh the latter.

In order to examine counselling as a 'pure' form of emotional labour it is necessary to re-address some of the issues that are raised in the emotional labour literature. In particular, for the purposes of this study, it is necessary to examine whether the performance of emotional labour has the uniformly negative consequences that some accounts imply (Hochschild, 1983; Leidner, 1989; Sutton, 1991).

There is widespread recognition of the value of Hochschild's early work, indeed she is now described as 'a key sociologist' (Williams, 1998) and the theory of emotional labour is considered to be pioneering because it 'effectively pioneered a whole new way of seeing the world, one which not only places human feeling at the heart of the sociological enterprise, but also provides a profound critique of the problems of authenticity and estrangement in late-twentieth- century capitalist society' (Williams, 1998, p.240)

However, despite the value of Hochschild's work some writers in this area have begun to acknowledge that there are few empirical studies that explore the issues that Hochschild and others raise concerning the social-psychological and affective effects of emotional labour on workers in front line service positions. As outlined earlier most of the studies that have been undertaken tend to highlight the negative social-psychological consequences, implicitly or explicitly sustaining the view that frontline service work has adverse consequences for workers (Wharton, 1993). For instance, Van Maanen and Kunda claim that 'the more emotional labour involved in a particular work role, the more troublesome work identity

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becomes to the role holder' (1989, p.54). Similarly Albrecht and Zemke warn that 'contact overload is a recognizable syndrome in frontline work' with displayed symptoms which include becoming 'robotic, detached, and unempathetic' (1985, p.114).

However such studies may supply only a partial picture. Amy Wharton's (1993) own quantitative study of emotional labourers in the banking and hospital industries found that, contrary to predictions based upon the literatue, emotional labour can be positively related to job satisfaction and is, therefore, not always psychologically damaging to the worker. Wharton points out that any claims that she can make are necessarily limited by the fact that her findings only pertain to the areas tested, namely emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction. Nevertheless she feels able to suggest that:

> 'not only should we inquire about the conditions under which emotional labour is distressful or emotionally enhancing, we should also identify the particular consequences and rewards associated with it. This would bring us closer to treating emotional labor as a multidimensional concept with diverse consequences for workers in different work situations' (Wharton, 1993, p.228).

Other writers, too, have called for greater attention to be paid to factors that may mediate the effects of emotional labour (Gordon, 1989; Wouters, 1989) arguing that there is little empirical research evaluating the consequences of emotional labour. Wouters, for example, argues that 'Hochschild's preoccupation with the "costs" of emotion work not only leads to a one-sided and moralistic interpretation of the working conditions of flight attendents, it also hampers understanding of the joy the job may bring' (1989, p.116).

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This study promises to inform and extend the sociology of emotional labour as well as widening our understanding of counselling. By focussing upon the characteristics, motivations, support systems and coping strategies of an occupational group who perform 'pure' emotional labour we can gain a greater understanding of the factors that may mediate the potentially negative effects of such work. A greater understanding of the strategies that counsellors adopt to cope with the stresses and emotional burdens that are a daily part of their workload could be of use to people in other institutions that expect emotional labour from their workers; emotional labour, which, it has been claimed, workers can find so arduous and de-personalising.

In addition to adding to the sociology of emotional labour this study also addresses current issues within the field of counselling and considers how sociology can inform counselling. This is particularly relevent at the present time because counselling organisations are facing issues of, and demands for, increased regulation. Various measures are being undertaken to professionalise the occupation and counselling organisations and individual counsellors are coming under increasing pressure to not only be aware of, and conform to, professional practice but also to become 'accredited' to a professional organisation. It is suggested that this movement is partly a response to a great deal of negative coverage in the media where it is frequently argued that regulation should be enforced in order to protect the interests of vulnerable clients. Sociology has much to offer to this debate by illustrating who actually benefits from occupational regulation and also by posing questions about what form of credentials could be demanded to demonstrate professional competence in an occupation where authenticity, spontaneity, genuineness and the use of self are considered to be mandatory.

It has already been suggested above that this thesis adds to the body of sociological literature concerned with emotional labour but an increased understanding of counselling can inform other areas of sociology. An understanding of the importance, and difficulties, of self-awareness for counsellors relates to the current preoccupation with reflexivity that exists among many social researchers, especially those involved in qualitative research. Another area of interest raised for researchers is the question of what can be achieved in a research interview and whether it is possible to liken qualitative interviewing to therapy as some writers have argued.

The sociology of emotions is a growing area within the discipline, and many writers are addressing the problems of researching and reporting emotions (Fineman, 1993; Finlay, 1996). It is currently being argued that new, more imaginative methods will be needed to study emotions sociologically (James and Gabe, 1996) and clearly an examination of counselling must add to that debate.

Finally this thesis considers what effect the dramatic growth in counselling and counselling culture is having upon wider society. The limitations of the study dictate that this final section must take the form of observations only but interesting questions are raised about the growth of counselling. What does seem to be clear is that counselling ideologies are gradually infiltrating ever widening areas of social life.

We turn now to the account of how the research that informs the project was carried out. An empirical study was clearly required in order to address the questions raised by the growth of counselling being at odds with expectations drawn from the emotional labour literature. A project of this type necessarily demanded a diverse sample and the counsellors who have participated in this study constitute such a sample (see appendix 1).

Respondents include full- and part-time counsellors, counsellors who work for organisations and counsellors who have their own private practices. The majority of the sample are female but some male counsellors have participated. Most of the counsellors are paid for their work but some offer their services in a voluntary capacity. A few of the respondents could be described as 'combiners', in that they utilise counselling skills as part of their main occupation, but the majority are 'pure' counsellors. As the study progressed it became increasingly apparent that a flexible methodology was required and the approach taken is explained more fully in the next chapter. Chapter 3 of the thesis examines the personal and social characteristics of informants and their beliefs about themselves as counsellors. Gender is the over-riding theme of this chapter. It became clear as the project progressed that in any study of who is chosen to train as, or who chooses to become, a counsellor deep-rooted ideas about gender are one of the important keys to greater understanding. Chapter 4 is concerned with the process of becoming a counsellor. It is because counselling is not generally a career that is chosen by the young but is usually a result of life experience that the motivations and the routes informants followed to become counsellors are of particular interest. Chapter 5 focuses upon the relationship that is formed between counsellor and client. It explores what counselling has to offer and compares the counselling relationship to other forms of personal relationships. Chapter 6 reports how the informants feel about the work they do, it examines both the costs and the rewards of counselling work and explains why, and in what ways, counsellors feel that the latter far outweigh the former. Chapter 7 considers whether, despite being an unregulated and diverse occupation, there exists a counselling culture. The ways, both formal and informal, in which certain standards are reinforced within the occupation are examined and the purpose of counselling norms and values are evaluated. Finally, in Chapter 8, the thesis concludes with an overview of the usefulness of the study both for counselling and for sociology and

poses further questions about the growth and the future of counselling and counselling ideologies.

Chapter 2

The Research Study

Introduction

In the social science world, reflexivity could perhaps be described as the buzz word of the 1990's. It is no longer enough for researchers to formulate a suitable research problem, acquaint themselves thoroughly with research methods through the literature and then enter the field armed with notebook, pencils and a tape recorder. Researchers are now encouraged to reflect upon the origins and influences of their study and to consider the effect they themselves might have upon the data they collect.

For this researcher, particular interest is attached to the similarities between the current concern with reflexivity in the social sciences and the constant striving for 'self-awareness' that counsellors profess to be engaged in. It could be argued that this is as a result of what North (1972) describes as 'psychotherapeutic ideology' infiltrating more and more areas of contemporary social life. In order to be reflexive and/or self-aware it is necessary for 'people workers'(be they researchers, counsellors, nurses, teachers, social workers, or flight attendants) to attempt to recognise and record their preconceptions, prejudices and feelings. Such emphases indicate that my work should contain autobiographical information which will account for my own interest in the topic of counselling.

This is no easy task, since without a great deal of reflection it is impossible for me to detail every influence on my work. One wonders where one should start in a quest for self-awareness and, perhaps more importantly, how much one is prepared to reveal to others. Context is, of course, the determining factor. For the purposes of this project a brief overview of what I consider to be, at this moment in time, the main influences on my choice of topic is all that is required. It is doubtful whether reflections upon my

childhood, my relationships with significant others or an account of my life experiences to date will be well accepted by my readers, however well I manage to link them to my choice of counselling as a topic for research. For counsellors, developing self-awareness is an on-going process aided by regular supervision. Few researchers are trained and supervised in the same way and they also have practical considerations that must be taken into account. This thesis is concerned with counselling and emotional labour, and space for these explorations is already limited so I cannot fill too much of it with autobiographical material. External factors and constraints usually dictate what is appropriate in any given situation. However, despite inevitable constraints there is value in reflexivity; a consideration of 'where we are coming from' enables researchers (and counsellors) to recognise the influences on their choices, their actions and their thoughts and feelings. This study has been constrained by various factors, these include those set by University and ESRC regulations relating to size, content and time limits, and my own lack of research experience.

This chapter is concerned with how the project developed within those constraints. The aim is to relate how the empirical work was carried out, describe the informants and the reasons for their selection, report the type of information that was collected and describe how these data were analysed. To begin though, in line with the arguments of writers like Reinharz (1983) and Stanley and Wise (1993), it is important that I reflect, albeit briefly, upon the origins of the study.

2.1 Background

The focus of this research stems from a personal interest in counselling that grew from my work as an advisor with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). Advice work entails listening to clients who come seeking all types of information, clarifying what they require, researching and discussing their options and then either supporting or representing them in whatever action they decide to take. CAB work is extremely varied but for the most part my

support was of a practical nature, examples include negotiating with creditors, guiding claimants through the welfare benefits system and helping people deal with the paperwork that follows a death in the family. While selection procedures for this type of work are quite stringent and training is on-going it was clear to me during my involvement [over five years] that, at times, CAB advisors were ill prepared to offer the type of emotional support that some clients appeared to need. Of course, other organisations existed that could offer the necessary emotional support and clients were referred to them but there were times when, although I had been thanked for my work and my support, I felt that had I had more skills I could have done more for clients with emotional problems.

A talk given to CAB workers by the Wessex Branch of the British Association of Counselling (WESBAC) led me to apply for a place on a recognised course in counselling skills. Again there were various selection procedures to be got through but eventually I was offered a place and began the 2 year part-time course in September 1990. I gained my certificate in counselling skills in July 1992 but did not become involved in counselling work as by then I was beginning my third year as an undergraduate at university. However, my counselling training caused my partner to become interested in counselling, he began his own training and eventually became a voluntary counsellor with Relate.

When the opportunity came for me to decide upon a subject for my thesis, counselling seemed to be the obvious choice for me. In addition to my own interest I was encouraged by counsellors with whom I was still in contact. Their enthusiasm for the project in the early days, despite the fact that I had little idea of what the main focus would be, played a part in my undertaking what seemed, at the time, like a massive task. I state my interest and my connections in order to make my own view of counselling clear. I feel that many people can benefit from it, counselling offers the opportunity for people to off-load and reflect upon various aspects of their own experiences. With help, clients can come to understand themselves and

their actions more fully, causing them to feel more in control of their own lives. However, as a sociologist with some counselling knowledge I am also interested in the ramifications of counselling skills and psychoanalytic theories infiltrating more and more aspects of social life. The sociology of counselling is an area that is worthy of much more study. While this project, as explained in chapter 1, is focused upon counselling as a specific form of emotional labour, the similarities between qualitative research methods and counselling skills are also worthy of attention.

When it came to considering how to approach the study the methodology literature was an important source of ideas and inspiration. One of the most powerful messages was just how difficult the whole project was going to be. Of all the writers perhaps C Wright Mills (1959) was the most reassuring when he stated: 'It is much better to have one account by a working student of how he is going about his work than a dozen "codifications of procedure" by specialists who often as not have never done much work of consequence' (p.4).

This chapter constitutes my account of how the fieldwork that informs the project was developed.

2.2 Methods of data collection

A great deal has been written about the changes in methodological thinking that have developed over the last few decades. Older texts placed great emphasis on notions like objectivity and avoiding bias (Goode and Hatt, 1952) and much of the early work on methods paid scant attention to qualitative methods; if they were mentioned at all then it was usually as a form of preliminary work to aid the design of the main research project. However, approaches to methodology went through a period of revision during the 1970's and 1980's and now qualitative research is beginning to be accorded the same attention and status as quantitative approaches. David Silverman (1993) is one of a number of writers who make the general

observation that no research method can stand on its own; he stresses that more open discussion about the analysis of data is more useful and important than justifying methods of data collection.

From the earliest stages it was intended that this would be a qualitative study, these are the ideas I feel most in tune with and this is almost certainly due to my own counselling training. Another researcher addressing the same topic would probably approach it differently. Pausing to consider the reasons for one's own approach is one of the first exercises for a reflexive researcher. As Allan (1991) states

> 'it is important to recognize that often the researcher may not appear to have to make a real decision about whether a qualitative or quantitative approach is adopted. The way the research problem is formulated and the research agenda specified gradually makes it "obvious" what approach is most suitable' (p.178)

It seems 'obvious' to me that an exploration of this type requires the use of qualitative methods. It is difficult for me to imagine attempting to understand the attitudes and feelings of any group of people through structured questionnaires or formal interviews. A qualitative approach has much in common with counselling ideology. Qualitative researchers value the views, opinions, perspectives and beliefs of informants and take them seriously. They pay attention to the outlook of the group under study in the same way as counsellors endeavour to view their clients with 'unconditional positive regard' from the outset. The aim here is understand how counsellors view their world, cope with their work and how that work relates to the rest of their lives. For me, that entails talking with counsellors and listening to what they have to say (and, on occasion, what they do not say), as well as spending time with them in order to observe them relating to each other and to

'outsiders'. In order to achieve this I utilised a number of research methods and mixed with counsellors both formally and informally.

2.2.1 Selection of informants

The counsellors who have contributed to this project are referred to as informants rather than respondents or subjects. Subjects are generally associated with formal or experimental contexts and respondents are usually thought of as individuals who respond to more structured surveys than this project, so, following Johnson's (1990) example, the term informant was chosen because the counsellors are

> 'individuals who tend to be interviewed in a more semi-structured or informal, in-depth, detailed manner in a naturalistic setting. Informants are often selected on the basis of their attributes, such as access to certain kinds of information or knowledge that itself may be a function of such things as social status, position in an organization, or comprehension of cultural knowledge' (p.10).

Writers like Sara Delamont (1992) argue that the method used to set up a sample or a group of informants is not that important. Again, it is stressed though, that what is important about sampling is honesty and reflexivity. A qualitative approach requires researchers to record how informants are selected and how access was negotiated. A researcher must be consciously self- conscious about her role, her interactions, and her theoretical and empirical material as it accumulates. It is by making all of these processes explicit that issues of reliability and validity are addressed.

It was clear from the outset that I would have difficulty deciding how to select a sample; even the word 'sample' itself with its connotations of representativeness and so on denoted a problem. Naturally it would be an impossible task for me to select a sample that could represent all the people who describe themselves, or who are described, as counsellors. As

explained in chapter 1 there is no clear definition of a counsellor to work from and counsellors work in a wide range of fields.

2.2.2 Gaining access: methods considered

Access to working counsellors could have been gained in a variety of ways. Initially, I considered applying to a counselling organisation in order to undertake training and become involved in counselling work in either a voluntary or paid capacity. This would have given me the opportunity of 'living the ethnographic life' as urged by writers like Rose (1990) and Adler and Adler (1987). Such a method would clearly have afforded me greater personal insight into the process of becoming, thinking and feeling like a counsellor than would listening to others talking. Total participant observation would have, in addition to gaining personal experience, put me in a convenient position to talk and listen to other counsellors. Participant observation was rejected, though, on the grounds that I could have been involved with only one counselling organisation. There was also the possibility that I might not be accepted for counselling training; most applicants to organisations like Relate, for example, are rejected. Being turned down for training would have made any further research applications to the organisation extremely problematic.

Another approach that was considered but rejected was the 'top-down' method which would have involved my contacting local counselling organisations and requesting permission to approach their counsellors. However, discussions with working counsellors when the study was little more than an emerging idea revealed that the managers of counselling organisations are often very wary of research that is not commissioned by them. This is understandable given the negative media coverage that counselling often receives. Such defensiveness means that, in some ways, counselling could be considered a sensitive topic. Social scientists generally consider a sensitive topic to be one that, 'potentially poses for those involved a substantial threat, the emergence of which renders problematic

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for the researcher and/or the researched the collection, holding, and/or dissemination of research data' (Renzetti and Lee, 1993, p.5)

Before research is completed it is impossible for any researcher, however sympathetic to the topic, to guarantee that their final account will be seen as favourable by the group under study. It is easy to see that many groups in society, including counsellors, may be apprehensive about being involved in a study over which they have no control. Another reason why it was decided to avoid contacting organisations directly was the very real probability that if official access was denied then individual counsellors might be reluctant to participate.

2.2.3 Gaining access: methods adopted

After deliberation, a 'bottom-up' approach was adopted in the search for suitable informants. This approach proved to be a sound choice because, as the fieldwork progressed, it became clear that many of the counsellors who contributed wore more than one counselling 'hat'. For example, it emerged that one informant, originally contacted as a GP counsellor, also ran her own private counselling practice, worked part-time as a staff counsellor for a local organisation and worked for a voluntary organisation. This proved to be a fairly common story. Other informants explained their counselling work in similar terms, they either worked as counsellors in more than one setting or they were also involved in areas like counselling supervision and/or training (see Appendix 2). It also became clear that not all of the organisations that counsellors worked for were aware of their counsellors' other counselling work; if I had contacted them 'officially' I might not have heard about 'multiple roles'. Snowballing, getting early informants to introduce me to more, proved to be an excellent method of recruitment for this study. I had little trouble obtaining informants and I felt that my independent status contributed to this.

The connections made while undertaking my own counselling training provided a good starting point for making contact with a diverse group of

working counsellors. Sara Delamont (1992) recommends 'maximising the research potential of settings, populations and archives already available, or under the control of known contacts' (p.66).

Fortunately I had retained a contact sheet from my own training course and sent a letter, a response form and an SAE to sixteen people. Of these, 12 replied, only one of whom had no wish to participate. I eventually interviewed all of the remaining 11 individuals despite the fact that four of them, although involved with counselling work, would be best described as 'combiners'. This was a promising beginning because these informants worked for a number of counselling organisations and were involved in different areas of counselling. Consequently they were able to introduce me to other counsellors and these introductions opened up more data gathering opportunities, both informally during social work-related occasions and more formally in one-to-one interviews

2.2.4 The pilot group interview.

However, before these one-to-one interviews began a group interview was set up as a form of pilot study. As Krueger (1988) points out a focus group is a particularly effective method of obtaining information that can be used to improve the planning and design of new projects. He explains

> 'Focus groups produce qualitative data that provides insights into the attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of participants. These results are solicited through open-ended questions where respondents are able to choose the manner in which they respond and also from observations of those respondents in a group discussion. The focus group presents a natural environment where participants are influencing and influenced by others - just as they do in real life' (p.30).

The group interview that began the fieldwork element of this project consisted of four counsellors (three women and one man). Typically a focus

group is composed of between seven and ten people. However, as Krueger notes, smaller groups (he calls them 'mini-focus groups') have distinct advantages in certain situations. A small group is preferable when the aim is to obtain in-depth insights for a specialised audience and when participants have had intense or lengthy experiences of the topic under discussion and have a great deal to share.

This was the case with the pilot group interview. The informants had little personal knowledge of each other but between them had a great deal of experience of counselling, both in private practice and for counselling organisations. The discussion started with some general open-ended questions from me (see Appendix 3) and lasted for about two hours. At first the informants were very aware of the tape-recorder but quickly relaxed and appeared to forget about it. At the end the counsellors professed to have enjoyed the experience and the opportunity to share thoughts and experiences with other counsellors. The recordings made were later transcribed and the data collected were used to inform the interviews that followed. All of the group members offered further help and two of the informants were later interviewed on a one-to-one basis.

2.2.5 Key Informants

The early focus group was set up by one of two 'key informants' who proved to be an invaluable source of information. Bernard (1988) suggests choosing key informants on the grounds of 'luck, intuition and hard work by both parties to achieve a working relationship based on trust' (p.177). This describes the relationship I had with my key informants well. I was extremely fortunate to have them and valued the working relationship we formed. We met, and still meet, regularly and I discussed my ideas with them as they developed. Their feedback aided and informed emerging theories and themes and was greatly appreciated. I was aware that these informants had participated in research projects through their organisations and were scathing about the lengthy questionnaires they had been required to fill in.

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In the early stages I was afraid that they might consider me to be taking advantage of them simply to inform my research. Such fears proved to be unfounded for, as Reason and Heron (1995) point out, a co-operative approach can actually prevent research being 'done on' people at a sub-personal level. They state:

> 'One can only do research with persons in the true and fullest sense if what they do and what they experience as part of the research is to some significant degree directed by them. So persons can only properly study persons when they are in active relationship with each other, where the behaviour being researched is self-generated by the researchers in a context of co-operation' (Reason and Heron, 1995, p.123).

Having the co-operation of these two 'gatekeepers' meant that I was introduced by them and seen as 'all right' by other counsellors; such acceptance engendered trust in other counsellors which made access to 'private accounts' (Cornwell, 1984) more likely. The fact that I was invited to many gatherings meant that I became a familiar face, counsellors would greet me by name and introduce me to others as a friend of theirs, 'doors were opened' in order that I could contact further informants. It became clear during the early stages of fieldwork that there exists an informal 'network' of counsellors in the Wessex region who either know or know of each other. Access to members of this network meant that I was invited along to a variety of events, both formal and informal.

Networking of this type has long been accepted practice in ethnographic research. Ethnographers like Kimball and Partridge (1979) admit that most ethnographic sampling is haphazard or less than explicit but, most of all, it is opportunistic. The process of building upon or expanding opportunistic samples through the use of social networks is described here:

> 'After choosing anyone who cooperates, the next step is to follow a network. At first one interviews those people who are easily

accessible. Then, ethnographers use the help of this first batch of people to introduce them to a widening circle of friends and relations. The "networking" label derives from the fact that ethnographers utilize the personal networks of their earliest contacts to expand the sample' (Werner and Schoepfle 1987, p.183-4).

This is a piece of useful advice in that it takes the fear out of sampling, there are no questions of representativeness or related matters raised although there are still problems. Clearly I wanted counsellors not their friends and relatives so needed to become part of the social circle that was concerned with friends and colleagues from work (although I did meet plenty of friends and relatives!). Certainly networking was utilised when I wanted to talk to specific categories of counsellors, experienced counsellors, ex- counsellors and male counsellors in particular.

Another advantage to having two key informants was that I could seek clarification about details I found confusing. Johnson (1990) recommends that 'potential informants should be considered on the basis of formal and informal roles, positions and statuses' (p.31). The classic example here has to be Whyte's (1955) relationship with Doc who acted as gatekeeper to those he studied in <u>Street Corner Society</u>.

> 'Doc was an extraordinarily valuable informant. Whenever checked, his accounts seemed highly reliable. He was also well-informed about what was happening in his own and other groups and organizations in his district. This was due to the position he occupied in the community social structure. Other leaders discussed with him what they were doing and what they should do' (p.127)

There are a great many similarities here to the key informants in this study. One of these was involved in supervision, management and training as well as carrying her own caseload and the other was involved in GP counselling,

private counselling and voluntary work. Between them they therefore had access to a great deal of information about different realms of counselling work and mixed with many counsellors of varying experience.

Woods (1986) and Delamont (1984) both explain that key informants can be the source of vast amounts of information and, in a sense, can be proxy participant observers in areas that are inaccessible to the researcher. There is inevitably a problem of bias but it can be argued that bias of one sort or another is a problem inherent in virtually all research. Again, as in counselling, awareness is probably the best solution which emphasises that a self-reflexive stance is a continual project and all aspects of research are a matter of selective perception. This is an area that has received a great deal of attention from feminist writers who have shed new light upon the interview situation.

2.2.6 One-to-one interviews

Much has been written about the existence of power relations in the interview situation (Oakley, 1981; Graham, 1983; Finch, 1984). It has been argued, particularly by feminist writers, that within traditional interviews the interviewers have power because of an asymmetrical distribution of rights and obligations. More specifically, there has been a disparity of disclosure rights - the interviewer obtains information from respondents without being required to reveal anything in return. Writers like Oakley and Finch have advocated a style of interviewing based on reciprocity and mutual self-revelation which, they claim, will lead to greater disclosure and the collection of 'better' data. These are interesting arguments which have been very influential as a critique of traditional methods. However, there are problems with such assertions as Wise (1987) and other writers have pointed out. All experiences are as individual as the people who experience them, and it is unwise to see reciprocity as a 'magical device for the instant dissolution of inequalities' (Wise, 1987, p.66).

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It may be interesting to note here that counsellors very rarely disclose personal information to their clients and feel that this helps the relationships they have with their clients rather than hindering them. This is discussed more fully in a later chapter; for now it is enough to suggest that although mutual disclosure may well encourage a relationship to form, anonymity encourages people to disclose and explore more without introducing the obligations and constraints that have been shown to be part of other relationships. Lee (1993) points out that a mutually self revelatory interviewing style may well distort the information that is disclosed. Brannen (1988) claims that in-depth interviews provide considerable opportunity for respondents to influence the form and content of the data. She observed, though, that respondents very rarely asked the researchers about themselves and often apologised for this apparent lack of interest at the end of an interview.

Perhaps the reasons for this are linked to the fact that interviews are a common feature of modern social life, they are not unique to social research. As Silverman (1993) points out, interviews of one sort or another are featured in the mass media every day, 'perhaps, we all live in what might be called an "interview society", in which interviews seem central to making sense of our lives' (p.19). The fact that interviews are now so commonplace might lead people to assume they know what is expected from them if they are involved in one. They must answer questions thoughtfully, watch out for any 'trick' questions, look relaxed, be entertaining perhaps but there is very little requirement that they should ask questions in return. If context is taken into account then the data obtained from interviews may be a form of cultural script rather than a unique response. Thus it can be argued that interviewers and interviewees actively construct some version of the world appropriate to what they take to be self-evident about the person to whom they are speaking and the context of the question.

Such thoughts caused me to consider the type of data I could obtain from one-to-one interviews. I was sure that no counsellor who agreed to an interview would actually lie to me but I was also aware that I would be interviewing and observing trained interactors - self-aware individuals with a range of social skills who were practised in an interview situation. Certainly I felt that their status was at least equivalent to mine although a few professed to be impressed by the fact that I was associated with the university so must, therefore, be very clever. Brannen (1988) claims that such an interview would be more likely to be interactive and to conform to the model of a conversation between equals. This was not my experience, since I was rarely asked about myself or the project, and little conversation took place. And yet, I would argue that the atmosphere was relaxed and the informants were at ease. The interviews took place in the informants' homes, I was always offered refreshment, the informants talked at length although an interview schedule (see Appendix 4) was roughly followed, often returning to some point or another to enlarge upon it or clarify something, and all of them claimed that they had enjoyed the experience and agreed to a further interview if required.

The context of an interview situation must influence the type of data that can be obtained from it which is why, as the project developed, it became clear that a mixture of methods was required, the interview transcripts would be more valuable if they were supplemented and compared to data collected in more 'naturally occurring' settings.

2.2.7 Lurking

As previously stressed, the transcripts that arose from the first group interview and the one-to-one interviews which followed supplied much of the data that informs this project. Of equal importance though are the fieldnotes that were made during the many instances of non-participant observation in which I became involved. Mixing informally with counsellors was an enormous advantage for me, hearing how counsellors talk to each other

about their work was perhaps even more valuable than asking them open-ended questions and noting their answers.

Having two key informants and a constantly widening circle of counselling contacts meant that I had frequent opportunities to 'lurk and watch' (Delamont, 1984, p.27) counsellors in a variety of settings. Many such gatherings occurred in the homes of counsellors. I was invited to Christmas parties, leaving parties, birthday celebrations, informal suppers and dinner parties either on my own, as a friend of a counsellor or with my partner. I have attended two Annual General Meetings, some staff meetings and a training session for new counsellors. I regularly met with a small group of counsellors for a pizza or a drink and spent one memorable evening at a casino with a group of family therapists. I gave a talk to a large group of GP counsellors about my project and recorded their feedback during the discussion that followed. I have spent three re-union week-ends with a group of counsellors who trained together.

My own role at such gatherings is difficult to describe accurately. I can recognise aspects of my own behaviour in the methods deployed by Gans (1982) who described himself as a 'researcher participant' during his study of Levittown. He viewed his role as someone 'who participates in a social situation but is personally only partially involved, so that he can function as a researcher, as, for example, when I went to parties given by the people I was studying, and sometimes steered party conversations to topics I was researching' (Gans, 1982, p.54).

He goes on to admit that distancing himself from the group under study was easier in some situations than others;

> 'Uninvolvement was easiest at public meetings, for there I had only to be a passive observer and, besides, as a researcher I was not a total or real resident of the community, and thus could remain detached from the political issues under discussion. At parties or during conversations with friends and neighbours,

however, the temptation to become involved was ever-present. I had to fight the urge to shed the emotional handcuffs that bind the researcher, and to react spontaneously to the situation, to relate to people as a person and to derive pleasure rather than data from the situation' (p.54)

However this is not a true description of the role I played - although, like Gans, I obviously did not always play the same role. Woods (1986) is perhaps closest to my own method because he claims that, in a sense, one is always participating. It is virtually impossible not to have any effect upon a situation under observation and difficult indeed not to become involved in some way in the life of the group or institution. Wood's experiences have led him to prefer the term 'involved observer' (1986, p.39)

Like Gans I also found that even when it was announced to people that I was there to study them, people soon forgot and reacted to me as a participant. Upon reflection I did little to dispel this and many of the informants that I spoke to at informal gatherings were almost certainly unaware of the reasons for my interest in their work, their coping strategies or their personal relationships.

2.2.8 Going native

During the participant observation and the one-to-one interviews I appeared to have little difficulty gaining access to counsellors and getting them to talk to me. This was certainly due to my having the contacts that were discussed earlier but perhaps my own personal characteristics also played some part. In many ways including age, social class and general appearance I am very much like the 'average' counsellor. On more than one occasion it was assumed by others that I was one and I was also frequently encouraged by other counsellors to take my own training further. A different researcher may have received different responses. Perhaps if the researcher had been

perceived by the counsellors to be unsuited to their type of work they may have expressed themselves differently.

My own similarity to many of my informants brings us to the classic difficulty encountered in ethnographic studies, the problem of 'going native'. From the beginning I recognised that this could be a problem for me. My own counselling training, the fact that my partner is a counsellor, added to the fact that I developed close relationships with some of the counsellors in the study indicate that I may identify very closely with the group under study. My informants were also open, friendly and warm and many showed interest in me and my work. At times I found conducting fieldwork much more amenable than the academic environment of the university which often seems to be centred more on competition and rivalry than support or interaction. This, of course, in many ways is an unfair comparison, since much of the time I spent with counsellors was when they were 'off-duty'. In addition, although I do think they were genuinely interested in me, I was focusing on their work and concerns, they believed me to be positive about counselling and I was asking them to talk about themselves which is an unusual role for a counsellor.

2.2.9 Ethical considerations

I experienced misgivings about the ethics involved in some parts of data collection. These arose during a week-end reunion meeting of Relate counsellors who had trained together and their relationship had developed into friendship. I was invited as the partner of one of the counsellors and realised immediately that the event had possibilities as a data gathering exercise. Much of the conversation during the week-end concerned counselling, counselling training, how these new counsellors were coping, what type of relationships they had with other counsellors in their branch of the organisation, how helpful they found supervision, how they dealt with problem clients, and how their counselling work affected other areas of their lives. When I was asked questions about myself I did take the opportunity of

briefly informing them of the focus of my research but this was a social gathering. Those present had a great deal to talk about themselves and my research was fairly unimportant to them.

Clearly, in that situation it was not possible to tape record conversations or to conduct one-to-one interviews with individual participants. Although during the course of events I was able to ask a few questions, most of the data collected were obtained through listening to the counsellors talking to each other. I joined in the conversations to some extent as I was a member of the party and remaining silent and observing would have been discomforting for all of us. My intention was to minimise the effect I had upon the gathering although, of course, the fact that I was there would have had some effect. I was aware at times, like Gans (1982), that my contributions were designed to encourage them to continue with or enlarge upon things that were being said. In that sense I was conducting 'informal interviewing' as Homan (1991) describes here:

> 'informal interviewing is informal in the sense that there is no contemporaneous note-taking and that any cautions and information concerning the nature of the research, in the context of which the conversation is conducted, were given on an earlier occasion. The significant factor in both observation and interviewing is that the investigator is perceived by subjects in a role and with a purpose other than those of research. The definition of the situation as a research act may prevail with the investigator but it is not dominant in the perceptions of the subjects' (p.104-5).

This describes my position well; my main role in this group of counsellors was as the partner of one of them not as a researcher with an academic interest in counsellors.

I did have some qualms about making notes about a group of people who were revealing a great deal of very personal information to each other and

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were very welcoming and hospitable to me: 'Once the fieldworker has gained entry, people tend to forget he is there and let down their guard, but he does not; however much he seems to participate, he is really there to observe and even to watch what happens when people let down their guard' (Gans, 1982, p.59)

Other writers have encountered similar problems; they claim that it is difficult to set aside the role of researcher and often find themselves using their friends for the purposes of research: 'In the field, one's subjects became one's friends; outside it, one's friends became one's subjects. One would always have a scrap of paper and a pen available' (Homan, 1991, p.169)

I reassured myself that my stance towards counselling is essentially a positive one and that I had been as open and honest as I could be and, again, like Gans, I eventually came to accept that some guilt is inevitable for a researcher engaged in participant observation.

As well as my feelings of guilt there were also practical problems concerned with note-taking to contend with. At first I developed 'ethnographer's bladder' (Ditton, 1977, p.5) and took frequent opportunities to leave the room to scribble notes or talk into my tape recorder (it was a big house, I could not be overheard!) but, aware that the group may become concerned for my health, I gradually relaxed and recorded my observations less frequently.

Making notes about people without their explicit permission raises the issue of confidentiality. In the group interview and during one-to-one interviews confidentiality was addressed directly and promises were made.

It is not only the managers of counselling organisations who are aware of the negative coverage that counselling often receives and it would have been understandable if individual counsellors were reluctant about contributing to a research project that could result in further negative reports about counselling work, intentions, motivations or outcomes. However, while such apprehensions were occasionally aired by informants in this study this was not their main concern. Of far greater importance to them were my

assurances that no-one else would have access to tape recorded interviews and discussions.

Confidentiality is one of the keystones when building a successful counselling relationship, and only one of the many counsellors who informed this project ever gave me information that could identify any of their clients and she remained unaware that she had done so. In fact, on two occasions when the interview had gone on longer than expected I was rapidly ushered from counsellors' houses in order to guarantee that I could not meet an arriving client on my way out. Some counsellors felt that not only their names but their voices too could perhaps be identified and identification of counsellors could lead to the identification of their clients. Although few clues were given to clients' identities, counsellors often used cases to illustrate or emphasise the points they were making. Their concerns were that if ever the project became public there was a remote possibility that those clients may recognise their own stories. In order to allay these concerns I promised that no-one else would hear the tapes, they would be transcribed as quickly as possible and that names and all other identifiers would be altered in the resulting transcripts.

2.2.10 Identification

This led to a consideration of choosing pseudonyms for the main informants. During the early stages of the project I attempted to follow the example of Coffield et al (1986) and encouraged contributors to choose their own pseudonyms. This suggestion was met with some amusement and the idea was eventually abandoned on the grounds that names like 'Fifi La Femme' and 'Tululah Stairway' might seem inappropriate. As an alternative I chose first names for my informants that seemed to me to be the same 'type' of name as their own. Clearly, some of the methods employed during data collection meant that I had little or no knowledge of many of the people who contributed, either to me directly at a social gathering or to an assembled group at a more public function so no details

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of these informants can be included. Pen portraits of the main informants are included (see Appendix 4) but it is stressed that they are not the only contributors to the study.

For the reasons cited above it would also be virtually impossible to specify exactly how many informants have contributed to this study. Originally it was planned to conduct a number of interviews that would constitute the pilot phase of the project and then move from there into more 'official' one-to-one interviews that would make up the body of the data. However this was not how the data collection actually developed; there was no definitive pilot phase because each phase informed the next. The first focus group informed the interviews and each interview informed the next. This is further complicated by the fact that many of the data that were collected were not obtained through formal or arranged interviews. In all sixteen formally arranged taped interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed, in addition, the thesis is informed by the extensive fieldnotes which were collected on the other occasions as described above.

The majority of informants are female; only four of the transcribed interviews involved male counsellors. The reasons for this are fairly clear; counselling, at the level being studied here, is predominantly a female activity and that in itself constitutes data. I made a point of taking every opportunity to talk to male counsellors in other situations and was interested to hear how the few males were talked about by female counsellors. Gender is one of the areas explored in the body of the thesis.

2.3 Analysis

While it would appear that a great deal has been written about data collection, much less seems to be available that explains what to do with data once they have been collected. And, of course, one of the characteristics of qualitative research is that it is possible to collect enormous amounts of material. It is not surprising then that Silverman

(1993) can disparagingly state that some accounts of qualitative research resemble 'a disorganised stumble through a mass of data' (p.43).

My own 'mass of data' included a very long transcript from the group interview, sixteen laboriously typed transcripts from the one-to-one interviews, a large file full of fieldnotes that are the result of various instances of lurking, and innumerable scraps of paper with scribbled notes or quotes on them. In addition I made two or three attempts at systematic diary keeping, collected a box file of newspaper cuttings and many, many notes to myself. This constitutes a worrying amount of paper and yet analysis of it began almost immediately. Analysis begins in the field (Bogden and Bilken, 1982) and all researchers constantly do preliminary analysis while data are being collected. Obviously I did not record everything I saw and heard during my fieldwork; this would have been an impossible and anyway pointless task. Without consciously thinking too much about it I was keeping the project manageable and forcing myself to narrow down the focus of the study as advocated by so many writers including Delamont (1992) and Silverman (1993).

It is now widely recognised that research does not necessarily occur as a series of neat stages. Researchers have to move between different facets of the research process wherein problems, theories, methods, research design, data collection and data analysis overlap and interlink (Bryman and Burgess, 1994). Analysis, then, is not an activity to be undertaken at the end of a research project, it is a central part of the continuous process of doing research.

It was necessary that such preliminary analysis of the data should occur throughout the course of the fieldwork in order to facilitate theoretical sampling, a method which allows early findings to shape the data collection. For example, observations made by female counsellors about male counsellors caused me to seek out male counsellors. Similarly, examples of occupationally based 'black' humour in social settings encouraged me to

listen to humorous remarks more attentively and so on. This method was chosen over what has been described as 'dredging' - choosing a setting and collecting all the data available in it relevant to a previously decided problem.

How does one describe analysis? The generation of concepts is one of the most frequently mentioned methods of data analysis. Researchers are advised to immerse themselves in their data, seek out patterns and be sensitive to inconsistencies. They should pay attention to the type of words chosen by informants because how people say things can be as interesting as what people say. They must be aware of repetitions of words or incidents and listen out for irregularities and unusual incidents.

My own method involved following this general advice. I listened to my tapes several times before I transcribed them and made rough notes of anything I found interesting or which stood out in some way. I read through my transcripts and fieldnotes many times in order to thoroughly acquaint myself with my data. Margins were marked and sections were highlighted and thoughts jotted down. I made provisional lists of topics as themes began to emerge. After coding the first few transcripts and fieldnotes by hand I began to utilise the Ethnograph computer package which allows data to be coded, filed and indexed more systematically. The advantage here was that data could be searched for overlaps and relationships between categories could be identified and explored.

There are, of course, disadvantages with any coding scheme. Whether done by hand or computer, once a given set of categories has been decided upon, codes can furnish a powerful conceptual grid from which it can be difficult to escape. While this 'grid' is helpful in organising data analysis it can also deflect attention away from uncategorised activities (Atkinson, 1990). One of the ways around this is to 'code densely', to generate as many codes as possible even if some seem a little 'wild' (Delamont, 1992). I have found it useful to return occasionally to the my transcripts and

fieldnotes because things can be missed or re-interpreted in light of new thoughts and the original data can be re-read in quite a different way.

Various writers suggest methods that may aid analysis. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) and Woods (1986) suggest that building typologies and taxonomies where the researcher aims to delineate subgroups within a general category can be a useful strategy. Certainly the identification of 'pure emotional labourers' and 'combiners' as described in Chapter 1 aided my own early analysis and helped to steer the data collection. Sara Delamont suggests that 'working hard to make sex and gender problematic in the research setting is a useful strategy' (1992, p.32). There are problems associated with such advice of course, as Silverman (1993) warns; it is, for example, possible to swing too far and accord gender issues too much importance. Other variables like age and class may be as important and perhaps we should resist the recent tendency to employ gender as an explanatory catch-all (McKeganey and Bloor, 1991).

Writers like Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) explain that one of the key problems in ethnographic research is finding an overall theme, model or argument which organises the data in a coherent way; when this is discovered the line between relevant and irrelevant becomes clearer. It could be argued that there is a danger in following such advice too early on in the research process. Searching for, and settling on, an overarching theme too soon may well prevent a researcher noticing other important emerging themes.

Although it is relatively easy to talk about coding, categorising and overarching themes, one's own system of analysis is actually difficult to dissect and I am not the first to encounter problems trying to explain the process:

> 'Ideas and hunches emerge during the encounter and are
> explored or eventually discarded as fieldwork progresses. Writing
> up involves a similar experience. The ensuing analysis is

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creative, demanding and all consuming. It cannot be fully comprehended at the early writing-up stages by someone other than the fieldworker' (Okely, 1994, p.21).

For Okely the ways in which she makes sense of her material cannot be routinised and streamlined. One of the advantages of being both the fieldworker and the author of a study is that ideas can germinate in their own time and through one's own thinking. Much analysis occurs as feelings or 'hunches' and often it is difficult to state their origins. Often the information found in the transcripts, in notebooks or in relevant published literature acts only as a guide or a trigger for the emergence of new ideas or theories.

Once again there are similarities between research and counselling. Many counsellors have problems describing exactly what they do, how they build relationships with their clients and the ways in which their thoughts about their clients develop. Counselling has been described to me as both an art and a science. Counsellors need their training and their knowledge of psychological theories but they also claim to have 'flashes of insight' or 'a sense of something else'. They cannot always explain their instances of intuition; sometimes it may be the way a client says something, their body language, the use of a particular word or the counsellors' own felt reactions to them but 'something happens' that gives the counsellor new insights.

Perhaps researchers too should acknowledge that the process of analysis is not easily described and admit that often we are inspired, not by systematic interrogation of our carefully collected data, but by drawing upon:

> 'the totality of the experience, parts of which may not, cannot, be cerebrally written down at the time. It is recorded in memory, body and all the senses. Ideas and themes have worked through the whole being throughout the experience of fieldwork. They have gestated in dreams and the subconscious in both sleep and waking hours, away from the field, at the anthropologist's desk, in

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libraries and in dialogue with the people on return visits' (Okely, 1994, p.21)

Respondent validation, as advocated by Delamont (1992), can be a useful device to employ. The feedback I received after presenting my work to a staff meeting of GP counsellors was extremely useful. Checking with participants to see if they recognise the validity of the analysis being developed can confirm or disprove developing theory. However, it is important to remember that informants who are living the experience do not necessarily have a better view of reality than the researcher does.

Conclusion

This account of my study is too ordered, since the whole process reads like a well-thought through plan of action. It is important to mention that not all aspects of this project went as planned; I have experienced periods of doubt, enthusiasm interspersed with feelings of boredom and long stretches of time when little appeared to have been accomplished. Some of the interviews went very well, others not so well, one interviewee did not turn up, gatherings that promised a lot yielded little and often it was a chance remark or a throwaway line that set me thinking afresh about new themes and sent me back to the data after a period of lost interest. There have been many times when, were it not for the encouragement of my supervisor, my partner and my key informants, I was ready to abandon the whole project. This is, of course, not a unique story; Woods (1986) writes that it is customary for ethnographers to 'flounder around' in the data. He describes research as like life, full of ambiguities, inconsistencies, illogicalities and generally messy.

Perhaps this chapter should end as it began, with reflexivity. Why is the discussion of the use of self so important? The literature assumes that it is because the self is the major instrument for data collection, 'one must "tune" this instrument so that it is able to collect "valid" data' (Lipson, 1991, p.75).

Ethnography involves interaction between a researcher and the group under study; clearly, then, all recorded observations will include something of the researcher. In research, as in counselling, the self is the main instrument, and it is important to consider whether, and how, the instrument could be improved. It is through reflection, experience and feedback that this can occur, so taking 'a step back' every so often to consider the impressions you are giving informants, how the process of research is affecting you, the areas in which you feel confident and the situations that you are avoiding can go some way toward 'tuning the instrument'. As counsellors are well aware, being reflexive and self-aware is difficult and not always comfortable. Research that is as open and as honest as possible may leave the researcher feeling vulnerable but it is knowledge of the writer that allows readers to answer Agar's (1980) question 'Who are you to do this?'

Chapter 3

Who becomes a counsellor?

Introduction

As this study concerns counsellors and their emotional labour it is necessary for the focus to be upon the 'personal' rather than the 'technical'. There have already been studies examining the use of counselling theory and evaluating counselling skills but for the purposes of this study what is of more interest are the personal and social characteristics of my informants and their beliefs about themselves as counsellors. There is little new in this for the counsellors concerned because whereas 'reflexivity' may be a fairly new approach in the social sciences and therefore one that is often viewed with suspicion, considerations of self-awareness and self supervision are an integral part of counselling culture.

The beliefs that the counsellors have about themselves and their work are extremely important when we consider the emphasis that is placed on the idea that the counsellor is the main tool of the counselling trade. It is stressed in the counselling literature, during training and by my informants that while learned skills and theories are necessary for effective counselling to take place the main implement or tool that is utilized when a counselling relationship develops is the counsellor. This implies that, in some way, a prospective counsellor should be a special type of person, he or she must have certain characteristics, attributes or skills. As an example, when asked whether, with training, most people could become a counsellor, Liz replied

> 'I think that with training most people could understand what it [counselling] was all about and learn the skills but whether everybody could actually put it all together and use it and whether people would trust them, I don't know. I think you've got to have (pause) there must be something else, something within

the counsellor as well as the training. You've got to care about people and want to help them to help themselves'.

The fact that this idea is accepted within counselling ideology means that counsellors, perhaps more than any other occupation, must work towards being both self-aware and confident enough to practise. None of the informants here makes any claims to perfection, they say that they are not the 'experts' that some clients might like them to be, they do not have the answers to all of life's problems; in fact their own lives are far from perfect. What they do claim is that they work towards being 'good enough' to help other people through counselling. Perhaps, though, even such limited claims say a great deal about those people who train and practise as counsellors: 'To be 'good enough' to help people who are deeply damaged by life is to make a strong statement about one's own sanity, knowledge and competence.' (McCleod, 1993,p.202)

As was noted in chapter 1, many writers are sceptical about the motives of counsellors. In 1971 Templar invited psychotherapists 'to examine themselves closely and attempt to determine to what extent they are serving themselves and to what extent they are serving the troubled individuals they work with' (p. 236). More recently, Raj Persaud (1996) pointed out that any investigation into what type of people want to become counsellors has been largely neglected. Perhaps, though, his question is too limited; what is of interest is not only who may want to counsel but also what types of people are chosen to train as counsellors. All of the informants in this study have undertaken counselling training and all of them had to participate in a selection process. For most informants this involved a personal interview, a group interview and some form of presentation on a previously unknown topic. Many more people apply for counselling training than are accepted to train. Clearly then there are organisational criteria that prospective counsellors must meet which would indicate that there will be similarities between those who are selected and things which set them apart from those not selected. This chapter should go some way to answering

questions about characteristics that selectors are looking for and the reasons why some successful applicants eventually 'self-select' and decide that they are not suited for a counselling role.

One of the main aims of this thesis is to demonstrate that counselling is emotional labour. It has been argued that emotional labour is generally performed by older women employed as semi-skilled or unskilled workers (James, 1989), and popular images of counsellors usually portray them as middle-aged and female. Some of the male informants in this study have observed that clients are often surprised to find that their counsellor is a man. One male counsellor showed me a letter of thanks that he had received from a female client; the letter took the form of a poem and clearly stated that the client had, at first, been both surprised and apprehensive when she was introduced to her male counsellor. This suggests that gender is an issue that should be explored even though, initially, I had misgivings about focusing on gender as a research strategy. The fear was that 'problematising gender' as a research strategy (Delamont, 1992) only furthers ideas about similarity and difference without exploring underlying issues as explained here:

> 'Understanding of gender in the social sciences has been so thoroughly shaped by the idea of difference that it frequently seems that the only alternative available to maximising difference has been to minimise it by focusing on evidence that men and women do not differ. Yet neither strategy confronts underlying issues of power, status and domination' (Crawford, 1995, p.7)

The clear message from the data collected however is that gender should be an, if not the, over-riding theme of this chapter. It became clear that in any study concerned with the personal and social characteristics of counsellors, ideas about gender are an important key to understanding. This is surprising, perhaps, given the fact that counsellors claim that they strive to see their clients as individuals, and that they talk frequently about

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viewing their clients with 'unconditional positive regard'. As the project developed it became clear, however, that counsellors despite these claims do actively recognise and accept the existence of gender differences and even expect them to affect the counselling relationship.

One of the advantages of approaching the study in a variety of ways and utilizing more than one research method was that the data collected revealed more than one 'account' of a specific area. During the more formal interviews gender difference did not appear to be an issue and yet, more informally, listening to conversations while 'lurking' or talking to counsellors outside an interview situation a different story began to unfold. In a sense then I was given access to both the 'public' and the 'private' accounts (Cornwell, 1984) of counsellors. Cornwell found that in formal interview situations where the researcher was relatively unknown informants tend to 'put on their best face' (Laslett and Rapoport, 1975) and present a 'public account':

> 'Public accounts are sets of meanings in common social currency that reproduce and legitimate the assumptions people take for granted about the nature of social reality. There is a public account of most subjects which occur with any regularity in everyday conversations, the point being that in sticking to the public account of whatever it is they are discussing - whether it is work, or money, husbands, mothers, children, or the local doctor - the person doing the talking can be sure that whatever they say will be acceptable to other people' (Cornwell, 1984, p.15)

When asked directly, most of the informants in this study claimed that becoming a good counsellor had little to do with whether a person was male or female. The 'public' accounts tended to follow the line that some people have abilities or skills that others do not, and that this has little to do with gender but rather rests upon differences between people. Some people

have the ability to empathise with others, to remain non-judgemental, not to be shocked and, most importantly, to really care about others.

However, data collected during informal 'lurking' or mixing with counsellors as an involved observer revealed a further set of more 'private' beliefs which appear to conflict with the public view. Cornwell (1984) describes private accounts as springing 'directly from personal experience and from the thoughts and feelings accompanying it' (p.16). Many of the counsellors expressed beliefs about 'natural' differences between men and women in terms of feelings, behaviour, empathy, and communicating with others.

Both the 'public' and the 'private' views of my informants are explored below and form the first and second sections of this chapter. The third section dwells less upon what counsellors verbalised about the characteristics required of, or that are common to, practitioners but reports observations made during the study.

3.1 The Public View

Critics of counselling often imply that as it involves 'only' talking and listening to people anyone could do it. Attention is usually drawn to the fact that counselling is, as yet, an unregulated activity and often examples are chosen to illustrate just how easy it is to gain some sort of counselling certificatation (the controversial comedian Bernard Manning's membership of the BAC is perhaps the most famous example). It has also been suggested that counselling is done by people who cannot do much else or by people who are profiting from the unhappiness of others. The counsellors in this study are well aware of such popular opinion, as is illustrated here:

> 'and I know that some people wouldn't respect me as a
> counsellor, because of what other counsellors are supposed to
> have done. I mean, a friend of my husband's thinks there's
> money to be made and has found a course on counselling that

you do by correspondence - and he's going to do it! (laughter)'
(Bernice)

It is clear that many outsiders do not see counselling as skilled work, which is perhaps why, like other forms of emotional labour, it is associated mainly with women. There are also similarities to other aspects of emotional labour; writers like James (1989) assert that most people either do not want to perform emotional labour or feel unable to do it which is why it is assigned to middle-aged, female workers. Middle-aged women are deemed to have skill in dealing with other people's feelings by virtue of the fact that they have had families of their own, thereby developing their 'natural' ability to care for and about other people.

There are echoes of this in the reasons stated by my informants for getting involved with counselling. Ideas centred around natural ability, given skills etc.:

> 'I realised that I could come alongside people and that I do have the ability to listen. You do definitely need some sort of natural aptitude, ability, call it what you will. For me it's a God-given talent, it is something that I have, that I know is a gift' (Olivia).

There were a few exceptions and these generally came from men. One male informant admitted that, at the outset, his motives for seeking training were 'dubious', explaining that he applied for training with a voluntary organisation in the first instance 'because my marriage was in tatters, my wife and I rowed and got at each other all the time and, to be honest, she was much better at that sort of thing than me. I needed some weapons in order to retaliate and to defend myself!' (Paul).

Needless to say, Paul did not divulge his motives during the selection procedures he went through, and as far as he could remember he talked about wanting to do something worthwhile. He went on to discover that counselling was rewarding and interesting in its own right and continued to

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work as a counsellor even after his marriage ended in divorce and the 'weapons' he had sought were no longer required. Another volunteer counsellor told me that he felt he led a very good life and wanted to 'give something back' through doing 'something for nothing'. He did say though that he did not want to volunteer for just anything, he wanted to do something that was both challenging and interesting, indicating that his motivation was not entirely altruistic.

It is significant that it was mainly female counsellors who talked about their 'natural' abilities or gifts when considering why they were suited for counselling. The attributes that the female counsellors frequently referred to included the ability to be accepting, and the fact that they cared about people. In conversations patience kept coming up, and sensitivity, instinct, self-awareness, an interest in people and natural empathy were all referred to. The point made was that training courses on their own were not enough, there had to be something more, something within the person, before they could become an effective counsellor: 'You can't counsel in any prescribed way, I've met people who think they are counsellors because they've had some training but you can see they've totally missed it, they do it without any sort of gut feeling in it somehow and the clients know.' (Sue).

Open-mindedness was something that was also stressed frequently by male and female informants, being able to accept people the way they are without judging them or being shocked by their disclosures. These requirements are reflected for example in one part of Relate's selection procedures. Applicants are given a topic and asked to speak about it to a group. My informants report that the given topic is usually of a sexual nature, either talking about intimate areas of the body or discussing some form of sexual activity. This need for unshockability is related to ideas of acceptance in counselling, as the counsellors explain they may not always approve of, or agree with, the behaviour of some of their clients but they must still endeavour to regard them positively in order that the counselling relationship can develop. Counsellors clearly cannot jettison all their own

personal values or private beliefs but they must be able to set them aside when counselling. While working with a client they are guided primarily by the non-judgemental perspective which they believe is central to the construction of a trusting relationship: 'I don't know whether empathy is enough - I think you've got to have that unconditional positive regard, I know it's a well used cliche but unless you can go into counselling, of any type, without being judgemental then you're lost' (Vicky).

The counsellors in this study all appeared to talk very frankly about feelings, emotions and sex. In fact, some of them admitted that they had to 'tone it down' when in the company of non-counsellors and remember that many people have difficulty or are unused to talking openly. Not surprisingly perhaps those counsellors who specialised in sex therapy felt that to be unshockable was particularly important for their work, as was the ability to convey understanding and acceptance to their clients.

Academic ability and educational achievement are rarely formally examined during selection processes. There were references to this during the data gathering phases of the study. Some of the counsellors confided that they were a little in awe of my connections with the university and a few stated that it was lucky 'cleverness' was not required for their work. Interestingly the literature available, although there has not been much written in this area, also reports little relationship between the academic competence of counsellors and their success on a training course (Beutler et al, 1986) which confirms the view held by counsellors that high academic achievement does not correlate with high counselling efficacy. It is important to note here though that counselling training, even training to be a volunteer, involves a great deal of reading and much of the recommended literature is not instantly accessible. It would also appear that although information about applicants' academic ability is not actively sought by counselling organisations, the selection procedures that were described contained elements which were useful indicators of an applicant's literacy and intelligence levels. For example, written 'life lines' were requested from

those applying for a WESBAC counselling course, in addition instant presentations on given topics were part of the interview process and observations were made of how applicants related verbally to each other. Most of the training courses the informants described required detailed written notes, essays, a diary and/or a dissertation of some sort. Yet some of the counsellors observed that being too clever could actually constitute a hindrance because it led to intellectualising rather than feeling. One of the few 'public' criticisms of male counsellors by females was that men tended to say 'I think' rather than 'I feel' which, it was claimed, inhibits empathy.

For the counsellors what is more important than academic ability is 'clinical memory' i.e. the capacity to remember information conveyed by the client, possibly over long periods of time (Shaw and Dobson, 1988). Informants stress the need to be able to 'hold onto all the threads' and keep track of all that clients have said in order that they can reflect back, confront clients or make comparisons at a later date. Although all of the informants make detailed notes about each client, virtually all of them claimed that note keeping was an arduous task and at any given time they were invariably behind with their notes. One counsellor joked that she couldn't leave counselling even if she wanted to because her organisation would then find out how behind her notes were! Notes are not made or referred to during counselling sessions so, in order to keep abreast of the developing story and spot the consistencies, inconsistencies and changing emphases inherent in a client's account a certain degree of mental agility is required.

It is recognised by all of the informants in this study that there are more female than male counsellors working as counsellors. Those in supervisory positions or with managerial responsibilities informed me that, although their organisations were anxious to attract male trainees, not many men come forward and of those that did only a few are accepted as suitable for training. Many of the explanations offered for a shortage of male volunteers centred around the belief that volunteering is more difficult for men as they have less time available due to the pressures of full-time work coupled with

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family commitments. It was suggested that men did not want to commit the amount of time demanded by organisations like Relate. Some female counsellors also suggested that men were not interested in the status that they felt counselling training had given them because men could usually obtain status from their main occupation. If, as the counsellors suggest, men are less willing or able to counsel as volunteers then this may be a partial explanation for the low numbers of male counsellors. It was noted that many female informants started their careers by working as volunteers for organizations like Relate, Cruise or the Samaritans or for self-help groups that were centred around a particular problem before moving on to being employed as counsellors. Other women had come to counselling from female-dominated occupations like nursing or social work. Traditionally, such occupations require emotional labour from their workers which is why they have attracted the attention of writers interested in it (James 1989, Smith 1992, Aldridge, 1994).

Another factor suggested as an explanation for the low numbers of male counsellors is that counselling is neither a well-paid nor a secure occupation. A significant number of my informants either work part-time supplementing their income with another form of work, are married to a main wage earner or are employed in more than one counselling role. Private practice can be more lucrative than counselling for an organisation but it is less secure. While some private practices may flourish economically if the therapist is well-known or can counsel in a prestigious area, most counsellors charge quite modest fees. For example, Vicky, who is a well-qualified and experienced counsellor, charges £25 per hour and feels that this is a fair amount for what people get. She pointed out that what is often forgotten is that counsellors must pay for their training, supervision, insurance, professional memberships and premises. As Vicky observed, 'counselling is not something you do to get rich!'. Colin Feltham endorses this view in his discussion of the stresses of counselling as a private

practitioner and warns counsellors that there are difficulties involved with relying upon counselling for an income. He recommends

> 'that you do not rely on counselling to supply all your income, unless you have extremely good qualifications and contacts, extended contracts for work, or if you do not need to make much money. Some practitioners keep a full-time or part-time job and begin to develop a private practice "on the side", making the transition only when they are confident that there will be sufficient work to keep them solvent.' (Feltham, 1995, p.119,)

These 'public' explanations from counsellors certainly partially account for the low numbers of males compared to females who counsel. What was noticeable, both in the counselling literature and during recorded interviews with my informants, was that there appeared to be little consideration of gender differences as a further explanation. Many of the counsellors appeared to be surprised when asked whether, in their opinion, the sex of a counsellor affected their ability to counsel; a few even thought my questions rather pointless, as was the case with Beth, who stated 'I think the empathy bit is either there or not there whatever sex you are so gender is quite irrelevant, quite irrelevant really'.

Most though, after some consideration, observed that the way men were brought up, or societal expectations of men may mean that men might need more help 'to get in touch with their feelings'. The general view, during interviews with practitioners, was that most female counsellors thought that gender was not an issue, the ability to counsel has more to do with what type of person one is rather than sexual differences. Many counsellors observed that some women would make lousy counsellors and some men would make very good ones; men, they claimed, were even able to be intuitive. The following statement was typical of many:

> 'I think it is an awareness, an ability to care, and having patience with someone, probably that's important. To be patient (pause)

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and sensitive and I think men if they're allowed to be like that are just as good as women. I think though an awful lot of men are brought up with an image of how they've got to be, not to be in touch with feelings and so on - so it's nurture not nature' (Charlotte).

It seems clear that Charlotte and many of the other counsellors who inform this project may recognise Julia Woods' assertion that an individual's ability to form intimate relationships can be affected by their gender 'through participation in social life, most individuals become engendered, that is, they come to understand what it *means* to be female and male within a particular culture. Simultaneously, they learn men's and women's positions within a culture, relation to each other, and "appropriate" ways of thinking, acting and feeling' (1993, p.28).

The idea that men may initially find it harder to counsel because of their upbringing and the norms of the society in which they live was a popular one with informants. It was observed that although some women found the self-awareness element of their training difficult, men often found it even more so.

> 'They're just not used to talking about their feelings - and that applies to the counsellors and the clients - but once they've got over that, and been helped to get over it, they respond really well - often even better than the women. I think it must be a release really - to talk freely after all that macho stuff' (Maggie).

While the reasons offered by informants during the planned interviews appear to explain the disproportionate number of women, compared to men, who counsel, the more informal methods of data collection that were utilised uncovered further relevant information. As a contrast to the more public opinions of counsellors, in private, or 'off the record' many informants appeared to hold stronger or more deep rooted beliefs about gender

differences. It was felt by many informants that these differences did affect counselling ability.

3.2 The Private View

On the surface, the reasons put forward during the more formal data gathering stages of the study did appear to account adequately for the disproportionate number of women who counsel. Yet despite such explanations there still appeared to be a general feeling that, apart from practical explanations centred around status, financial reward or opportunity, women do find the tenets of counselling easier to grasp than men. A male counsellor observed

> 'If you went out into the street and picked ten men and ten women at random and tried to make them into counsellors you would probably have a much better chance with the women. That's my gut reaction - because it seems to be fairly obvious that fewer men go into counselling, fewer men see it as a vocation, as something they might want to do or be able to do, therefore one must assume that women have a greater leaning towards counselling, a greater affinity with it if you like' (Andrew).

Clearly, despite public protestations to the contrary, in private many informants do appear to subscribe to the idea that gender does affect counselling ability. At times I have been part of an all female group of counsellors who, as might be expected, sometimes talk about their work and their colleagues. On one occasion when a group was being quite scathing about a male colleague they explained that although 'he probably looks great on paper and has a great C.V.' he lacked warmth, intuition and social skills. Another experienced counsellor described a highly qualified male she worked with: 'I respect him, I mean I think he's brilliant - very, very good - but he can miss the subtleties sometimes. Things that women notice.

It's awful isn't it? What a horribly sexist thing to say. But I do think it has something to do with being female' (Sue).

A female GP counsellor felt that the characteristics associated with successful counselling were strongly linked to the traits associated with femininity. She, and other members of her discussion group, felt that clients usually felt happier talking to women about their deepest fears and feelings 'because, rightly or wrongly, such talk is associated with women' and so clients felt more comfortable, more natural, confiding in a woman. During an animated, taped discussion the counsellor claimed 'masculine traits - macho stuff, if you like - would put the client off. They come for understanding, for empathy, not for masculine traits'. This was an interesting point because this counsellor (and others who agreed with her) clearly believed that 'traditional' masculine traits do not include the capacity to feel empathy or understand another person's feelings. Yet during the same discussion the counsellors (male and female) all agreed that, with training, some men could counsel.

One of the clear cut themes emerging from a study of counsellors who had resigned from Relate was that academic male counsellors encountered difficulties with the organisation. It was found that men tended to drop out earlier and at a faster rate than women (Heisler, 1987). Many of the reasons cited for this self-deselection were related to the fact that Relate is managed by women and most supervision is done by women. It could be argued that this situation is hardly surprising given that the organisation originally set out to use the volunteer labour of professional married women (Lewis, Clark and Morgan, 1992). However some men still felt uncomfortable with the fact that the organisation was female-dominated, as expressed here;

> 'Towards the end of my commitment in MG [marriage guidance] I attended regional meetings and I was very strongly aware of female predominance at the top in the counselling organisation, this was very unhealthy at tutor level and above for balance and

frankly snobbishness and exclusive attitude by them'. (male
counsellor cited in Heisler, 1987, p.28)

It would appear that such feelings have not disappeared. Some of the male
counsellors in this study talked about their organisations only wanting a
certain type of male trainee, described by them as a 'feminized man'. It was
claimed that female selectors and managers choose only a 'certain type of
male' for training. It was interesting that my male informants discussed
these concerns with me only in a fairly informal way; there was little desire
to be quoted or to talk about such issues during interviews that were tape
recorded.

In addition to being reluctant to discuss their difficulties operating within
female dominated organisations, some male counsellors stated that they did
not discuss their counselling work too much away from the counselling
sphere. Paul said that he was happy, even eager, to talk about his
counselling work with those closest to him but he was unwilling to discuss it
with the male teachers he worked with. He felt that it showed him up as
unmanly, 'a bit soft'. If he did talk about it he tended to dwell on the training
week-ends where virtually all the other trainees were female and the males
were 'well-tended'. This was said in a light-hearted way, in front of female
counsellors. He acknowledged that he was insinuating that the training
sessions were more sexually charged than they actually were in order to
impress his non-counselling colleagues. During our conversation he freely
admitted that, apart from a few shared jokes, nothing of a sexual nature had
occurred during his training week-ends. Despite his developing 'self-
awareness' it was clear that this male counsellor still felt the need to
perpetuate 'traditional' images of men in his wider social circle in order to
preserve his own self-image and feel accepted.

Another of the male informants talked about stereotypical views of male
counsellors as all being 'poofs' and one man described feeling very unhappy
and uncomfortable on one occasion when he was 'out with the boys' at an

Indian restaurant. Many of his companions were drunk and some of them were being very loud (he claims he was neither) when he recognised a client at another table. He said he was embarrassed at being seen by the client and yet would have also been embarrassed to explain why to his friends. Female counsellors too have expressed the view that male counsellors are different to most other men. Female informants have confided that it would be difficult to imagine being sexually attracted to a male counsellor because they were usually either 'a bit wet or gay'. Reflecting upon the images of male counsellors, Andrew said, 'it's interesting, when I was training there were quite a number of gay men training as counsellors and it seemed to me that I was in the minority, not only few men but even fewer heterosexual men'.

Evidence from other sources does indicate that the concerns of some of my male informants are beginning to be voiced in wider arenas. In December 1995 Relate News, the newsletter of the Relate organisation, outlined the concerns of the 'Men in Relate' group by posing questions relating to the fact that fewer men than women use the Relate service. They pointed out that although the Board of Trustees had a preponderance of males (72% male/28% female), throughout the rest of the organisation the balance is the reverse of this. For example, the Men in Relate group claims that 85% of Relate counsellors are women compared to 15% who are men. Centre managers too are usually female (84%). The group stressed that they were not attempting to assert male power but rather to find out whether such an imbalance had any effect on the way prospective clients viewed their organisation and called for opinions and comments from other counsellors. A Relate workshop was planned for June 1996 at the Herbert Gray College in Rugby with the purpose of exploring 'Men and relationships, Men and counselling and Men and Relate'. The two-day workshop offered male counsellors an opportunity to meet and work in an all male setting in order to explore their experiences of gender and sexuality, promising 'to provide

male counsellors, supervisors and trainers with a rare, if not unique, opportunity within this predominantly female organisation'.

Interestingly this workshop was scheduled to take place over two week-days clearly ignoring the fact that most male volunteer counsellors are likely to be employed full-time. More recent issues of the Relate newsletter have continued with the same theme, various letters and articles have been featured which call for the organisation to examine its attitude towards men both as clients and as counsellors. Some male counsellors believe that Relate should now be practising positive discrimination, the organisation should be actively recruiting men, advertisements should be framed in ways that will attract men and placed where men are likely to see them (Sanders, 1997).

It should be stressed here that not all of my male informants were connected with Relate and feelings of alienation were not voiced by everybody, although all did agree that their counselling organisations were 'female-dominated'. In fact, many informants (male and female) claimed that it was easier for a man to be selected for training. In that sense some males saw the preponderance of females as an advantage stating that the situation made it much easier for a man to be accepted for training because counselling organisations 'were desperate for men', in order to present a more balanced profile to the public.

I would suggest that it is not surprising that some male counsellors profess to feeling alienated within their particular counselling organisations. Men are in the minority at all counselling meetings, they are usually tutored and supervised by women, they claim that most of their clients are women and they are aware that many of their female colleagues either do not view them as 'real men' or see them as in some way 'different' to other men.

3.3 The Researcher's View

Both the public and the private views of the counsellors reveal much about their social characteristics and personal beliefs. The methods employed for this study have resulted in further data which did not come from verbal interactions with informants but from observing those under study. Naturally such observations can be criticised for being too subjective in that most of the observations I have made when talking with and observing counsellors in a variety of situations have not been corroborated by the counsellors themselves. As outlined in Chapter 2, this often makes observation the most uncomfortable part of data collection for the researcher because it involves making assumptions about people who are often offering hospitality or who are engaging in genuine interaction and who are probably unaware that such judgements are being made about them.

The above exploration of the characteristics and self-perceptions of counsellors makes it very clear that gender is an important, current issue. Gender, though, is not the only issue of sociological interest in this study of an occupational group. The fact that most counsellors are middle-class is recognised in the counselling literature; as McCleod states 'most counsellors and psychotherapists are middle class' (1993, p.109). Counsellors themselves recognise that most practitioners are middle-class; Heisler (1987) revealed that short serving, ex-counsellors were often concerned that selection procedures had been biased towards 'the articulate middle-class' and it was suggested that there was 'a need to encourage other than middle-class whites' (p.25). Class is also often stressed in negative reports in the popular press, as this example illustrates: 'So who are they? Mostly middle-class women with dangly earrings and diplomas from dubious institutes, speaking fluent psychobabble and uttering phrases such as "hey, find your space" and "you need some "me" time"'. (Lewis-Smith, 1996)

However, while the counselling literature does acknowledge that counselling is usually a middle-class activity, the concerns that are raised are usually

centred around how this fact may affect counsellor-client relationships rather an exploration of why, and how, this situation has come about. The informants in this study made little of the class issue when directly asked about it. One of the few counsellors who commented on class recognised that most of the counsellors she knew were middle-class and put this down to the fact that counselling training must be paid for by the trainee. This may well partially explain why almost all of the informants would be described, and would probably describe themselves, as middle-class.

My own observations confirm that, at least in the area of study, counselling is a middle-class activity. Although I asked no direct questions relating to the income or family class background of my informants I was invited to the homes of counsellors on many occasions, either as a researcher for an interview or as a guest at a social event. All of the informants who contributed to this study appeared to be home owners, many of the homes I visited would be described as large and comfortable, and some were situated in quite prestigious areas. At the social events I attended, including parties and dinner parties, it was clear that most of the informants were married and many partners were professional workers. Not surprisingly those informants who were not married or in settled relationships were most likely to be employed as counsellors and/or to have a busy private practice. Clearly, single informants were relying upon counselling for their income and so were less likely to be found in voluntary positions.

Perhaps one of the most striking common features of informants was their skill at social interaction. Almost without exception, the counsellors were welcoming, warm and hospitable; they listened attentively to me and very rarely interrupted or pre-supposed my questions. Naturally one might expect this from people whose occupation demands successful relationship building but in social settings the same social behaviour could also be observed. For example, during a particularly lively discussion that took place one evening I observed that the same consideration was shown to everyone who participated. The opinions being expressed were disparate, the

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discussion became very animated and some members of the group spoke more than others yet everyone was given the opportunity to put their point of view without interruption or harassment. Even in disagreement there appeared to be little hostility or resentment. Unlike many other 'lively discussions' I have experienced the counsellors appeared to be able to disagree without insulting each other, belittling others' points of view or feeling resentment.

Of course social skills and communication styles have received a great deal of academic attention. Meltzer (1978) argued that social class differences in counselling are due to linguistic factors. More famously perhaps, Basil Bernstein's theory of linguistic codes explains why middle-class people may appear to be more adept at verbal communication than those from a working class background (Bernstein, 1971). Bernstein theorised that the 'elaborate' codes of the middle classes were more grammatically correct, more logical and more descriptive than the 'restricted' codes of the working-class. He attempted to show that the way people speak can give them access to, or exclude them from, educational knowledge and positions of power and privilege. Certainly the way that counsellors speak is an important element of the work that they do which may explain why counselling is a middle-class activity. The counselling relationship is built through talk; the expression of thoughts and feelings is central to successful work which would explain why those most able to express themselves clearly, and to listen attentively to others, are drawn to it and selected for it.

Other writers have pointed out that there are class differences in not only what is said but in the way it is said. Argyle (1988) states 'voice is one of the basic cues to social class' (p.149), and claims that middle-class accents are more clearly articulated, have more intonation and are less blurred than working-class accents. In addition, consonants are sounded more clearly and the middle class are less likely to stumble over their words. Most of the

counsellors in this study spoke very clearly, although not generally at great length.

When considering the ways in which the counsellors expressed themselves I was struck by how quiet their voices often were, a fact that actually made some taped conversations quite difficult to transcribe. Listening to the tapes it was also noted that counsellors tend to speak quite slowly, they repeat back questions, consider their responses and often clarify both what was asked and what they say themselves. On the early tapes I became aware that I tended to break silences; clearly they were more comfortable with silence than I was. A few counsellors informed me that their way of speaking had been commented upon during their self-awareness training and in supervision and, as a consequence, they had made efforts to change. For example, when asked about any personal change that had occurred since she began counselling, Sue replied

> 'Yes - this goes back to Personal Growth and Development because one of the things my tutor was really hard on was that I smiled too much and laughed too much and that actually it looked as if I wasn't taking things seriously and I really worked on that with clients and within the group - you know, the counsellors - I would actually listen to people seriously without laughing or smiling or whatever - so yes, I did actually change.'

Another counsellor told me that it had been pointed out to him that he was too 'eager' when talking, he had been advised by his supervisor to work out what he was going to say before starting to talk rather than 'thinking about what he was going to say as he went along'. He claimed it had been one of the most useful things that had been said to him even though, at first, he had found it hard to take because it had felt like personal criticism. A few of the male counsellors admitted that, in group sessions, they had been criticised by female counsellors about the way they talked or the time they took to say anything. When I discussed this with female counsellors some of

them recognised a tendency for 'the men to take the floor' if they were allowed to.

It should be noted here that the counselling literature also reveals that the majority of counsellors are white. Writers like d'Ardenne and Mahtani (1989) and Dupont-Joshua (1996) point out that for effective cross-cultural counselling to take place then issue of race and culture must be addressed within counselling organizations. This study can make no observations about race beyond noting that all of the informants were white, reflecting the fact that the area within which the study took place has a very low ethnic population.

Conclusions

It could be argued that in many ways this chapter contains little that is new or very revealing. The informants in this study have confirmed many commonly held beliefs and stereotypes about counsellors. As we have seen, most of the counsellors involved with the study are female and virtually all of the informants would be described as middle-class. However, rather than merely accepting this situation within counselling and focusing upon how it may affect the counsellor/client relationship which is the approach taken by the counselling literature or, as the popular press do, portraying gender and class imbalances within counselling negatively, this chapter has attempted to examine why things are the way they are.

At the beginning of the chapter it was reported that Persaud (1996) wanted more study into the efficacy of counselling and, more specifically, into what types of people want to do it. This is interesting when we consider that the motivations of very few other occupational groups are examined in the same way. Many of the critics of counselling and counsellors come from male-dominated areas of the medical profession, particularly psychiatry and psychology (Harris, 1994; Persaud, 1996; Wessely, 1996). Although many of the doubts they voice are centred around the fact that it is difficult to

evaluate the efficacy of counselling, perhaps the fact that most 'common counsellors' (Sivyer, 1995) are women is significant.

Certainly gender comes across from the data as an important issue for the counsellors. Unlike the other forms of emotional labour that have been studied, counselling is quite unusual as an occupation as it appears to prize much of what is traditionally viewed as 'feminine' above the 'masculine'. The main product in counselling is the formation of a trusting relationship between the counsellor and the client and all informants have stressed that the quality of their counselling depends entirely upon the quality of that relationship. Traditionally, it is women who are generally given the responsibility for the building and maintenance of personal relationships. The tasks of producing and reproducing caring relationships is work that Lynch (1989) describes as 'solidary labour'. It is this association of femininity with taking care of relationships that can potentially cultivate problems for male counsellors.

One of the main assertions from the emotional labour literature is that such work is often seen as unskilled and of low status, as described here: 'The invisibility of emotional labour and its associations with family care mean that it has ambivalent status. While the ideological values of family care may be attractive, the low status and unacknowledged transferability of the skills mean that they do not fit effectively with professional strategies' (James, 1992, p.504).

It would be difficult to argue, though, that counselling is work of low status. Although counselling is not necessarily economically well-rewarded, regular employment is available, the occupation is growing rapidly and it is possible to build a successful private counselling practice. Clearly then, when examining who chooses, and is chosen, to train as a counsellor it is the content of the work rather than its status that must be considered.

The 'public' face of counselling argues that what is important is not gender but the 'person' of the counsellor. Developing this view, therefore, it follows

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that men can become effective practitioners. In fact, as stated earlier, counselling organisations are anxious to recruit more male trainees in order to present a more balanced service to the public.

The 'private' view expressed by the counsellors does, however, imply that there exists a strong feeling that women are often more accomplished at emotional labour than men. Female skills, they claim, include a greater capacity for empathy, sensitivity and a 'natural' instinct which allows women to communicate better than men usually can. This is, of course, not new; many writers have explored the differences in the ways in which men and women communicate. A common theme in the literature is that men fear intimacy whereas women fear isolation. Gilligan (1993), for example, suggests that the male way of looking at things 'protects separateness' and the female way 'sustains connections'. The private beliefs of many of my informants are, therefore, hardly surprising; they are in accord with a controversial corollary of feminist therapy theory which puts forward the argument that if women are specialists in being in relationship, and if counselling is, in essence, a relational process, then it must follow that women should be, on the whole, more effective counsellors than men (Collier, 1987).

When we turn to the data that were collected through observation it transpires, again, there is little that is new to report. This group of informants confirms that most counsellors are middle-class. Even those counsellors with working-class backgrounds will usually have entered counselling through higher education or primary training via a profession such as nursing, teaching or social work.

The 'public' view of counselling is put forward by Combs (1986) in his examination of the differences between good and bad 'helpers'. He states that what makes a good helper 'is a consequence of the helper's perceptual organisation or belief system, especially beliefs about empathy, self, what people are like, and the helper's purposes' (p.51). These are similar

characteristics to those endorsed by my informants as the necessary requisites for counselling work. However, this is not necessarily the complete picture; the findings from this study imply that it is also advantageous for a prospective counsellor to be female and middle-class.

All the evidence confirms that most 'common counsellors' are, in fact, middle-class and female. What the data suggest though is that rather than seeing this situation negatively and striving to correct it, it may be worth considering whether in fact, middle-class women do usually make the best counsellors. If we link middle-class communication styles to the 'natural' skills of women then it seems clear it is this group who are most likely to have the pre-requisites that selectors are looking for when choosing prospective counsellors.

The aim here has not been to judge whether the situation regarding the gender and social class of counsellors is either 'right' or 'wrong' but to understand how it occurs. The counsellors report that their clients generally expect to see a woman when they begin counselling. It is not uncommon for the client of a male counsellors to request a transfer to a female worker. Clearly many of the counsellors themselves also feel that women make better emotional labourers than men. The reasons for such feelings are rooted in the fact that counselling is a social activity, as explained here;

> 'Both the clients who come for counselling and the counsellors themselves are participants in social life and bearers of the attitudes, values and behaviours espoused by the particular social groups to which they belong. The power of any social system to shape or determine the lives of its members is immense' (McCleod, 1993, p.108).

When talking about their work and their feelings about being counsellors one of the main things that is stressed by informants is that not everybody is suited to the work. Most informants described how they 'came' to counselling rather than having made a conscious decision to choose

counselling as their career. A person does not complete their training and then 'be' a counsellor. Informants talk about their 'journey' or describe a process of 'becoming' a counsellor. This idea of 'becoming' is a common theme in the counselling literature, examples of titles include Carl Rogers (1961) <u>On Becoming a Person</u>, Dryden and Spurling (1989) <u>Becoming a Psychotherapist</u>, and Corey and Corey (1989) <u>Becoming a Helper</u>. The next chapter explores this process and examines common routes or 'journeys' into counselling.

Chapter 4

The Process of Becoming

Introduction

In some ways this chapter is an extension of the last one because an examination of the social and personal characteristics of counsellors can provide only a partial explanation of why they choose to do the work they do. All of the informants in this study emphasised that they 'came' to counselling not as a consequence of early career choices but because of their own life experiences. This is hardly surprising given that counselling is not, as yet at least, the type of occupation that one would choose as a career while at school.

Many of the informants in this study claim they gradually 'drifted into' counselling work or found that they had 'headed towards it without realising'. The analogy of 'a journey' was a popular theme when people were describing their routes into counselling work and most informants claimed that it was their own life experiences that 'put them on the road'. Routes into counselling are explored in more detail in the first section of this chapter.

Popular images of counsellors often stereotype them as 'do-gooders', people who may be misguided but are usually well-intentioned and who want to help others. Many of the counsellors described themselves as people who 'care about others' and when asked about the counsellor \ client relationship more than one counsellor described the feeling they have towards their clients as love. Such strong feelings suggest that the counsellors are motivated by humanitarian instincts, they care about people in general and try to build trusting relationships with their clients, many of whom feel very much alone as they lack other social interactions. The second section of this chapter considers how far counsellors see

themselves as altruistic, and raises the question of whether they are motivated less by altruism than by self-interest.

The third section of this chapter returns to the theme of 'the journey towards counselling' and points out that while formal counselling training involving both the theories and the skills may give a counsellor the trappings and, perhaps, the appearance of a therapist more is actually required. As is explained here:

> 'When did I become such a person [a counsellor] and experience the reality of a confident professional identity? Certainly it was not on the day that I received my diploma from the University of Reading, important as that day was. The movement towards such an identity was more complex and concerned with profounder issues than that of receiving legitimization from an academic institution' (Thorne, 1989, p.62).

While informants claimed that their own life experiences brought them to counselling, invariably the self-awareness or personal therapy element of their training was described as the next essential factor. In many cases, personal therapy had played, and often continues to play, an important part in bringing about the self-development and self-knowledge that informants believe is necessary for them to be able to operate effectively as counsellors. What needs to be emphasised here is that although all of the counsellors stress the value of self-awareness, they also pointed out that consideration and evaluation of the self is not always a pleasant or immediately rewarding experience. This is in contrast to some popular opinion that sees striving towards self-awareness or greater knowledge of the self as 'self-indulgent navel gazing'.

The chapter concludes with a consideration of how the background and personal development of counsellors has relevance for the broader debate about emotional labour. In particular the counsellors' beliefs about their

motivations for choosing to do the work they do will inform theories concerning who does, or is expected to do, emotional labour.

4.1 Life experiences

Of the common themes that emerged during this study, the marked similarities in the stated origins of the desire to do counselling work were significant. It should be remembered that the informants work in widely different counselling environments; some are in private practice, some are involved with general practice counselling, some are volunteer counsellors for organisations like Cruise, Relate, the Samaritans and the Citizens' Advice Bureaux, some informants counsel as part of their main occupation, others volunteer to counsel in addition to their main occupation and, indeed, some combine these different forms of counselling work. Yet, despite their different counselling destinations, most of the informants stated that it was their own personal life experiences that made them consider counselling as an occupation.

When asked how they came to be counsellors, many of the informants began with accounts of their childhood and/or early life. Of these, a small number of counsellors cited a family interest, as this example illustrates:

> 'I think it was a very strong influence in my home, my father was very interested in psychology and we used to talk a lot about it at the dinner table. I grew up with phrases like "anal retentive" as other people grew up with Manchester United 3, Leicester 2 or whatever. My father wasn't a professional, he just had a great interest. So when I eventually got the chance, a psychology degree was what I wanted' (Vicky).

Many more of the informants identified particular events or problems in their early life as the catalyst that set them on the road to counselling. Some of these accounts were personal and upsetting for the counsellors concerned (and clearly it would be unethical to provide details or ascribe them to

particular informants). It is sufficient to relate that these included family breakdown, dysfunctional families, child abuse, sexual abuse, and alcoholism. Other accounts described childhoods where, because of unavoidable situations, informants felt they had been adversely affected, as illustrated by this example:

> 'I had a lot to work on because of problems in my childhood. Very soon after my birth my mother was ill for a long period of time and I was put with different aunts and uncles throughout my early childhood, there was no real bond with my mother' (Bernice).

Other counsellors discussed situations they had experienced in their adult lives which led them to seek counselling themselves or to consider the idea that counselling would have helped them and could help others experiencing similar situations. For example, Sue talked about the break-up of her first marriage and the problems she encountered when dealing with her own and her children's feelings, while Judith described how she had felt both when her child was diagnosed as seriously ill and during his slow recovery.

An observation that merits mention here is that when informants were asked what brought them to counselling they answered quite readily. This was clearly a question that had been asked before. When this was commented on it was explained that most of the selection procedures they described encouraged such reflection. Even those counsellors who described quite traumatic incidents and experiences appeared to recount them fairly easily. Including this observation is not an attempt to trivialise their experiences in any way but to point out that practising counsellors have generally spent time considering, and being encouraged to explore, their own motivations. Most of the informants were well aware that the incentive to do counselling work was often rooted in their negative life experiences.

Of course, this study is not a comparative one. It may be the case that, if asked, people who are involved in other occupations would also refer to their early experiences when explaining why they chose to do the work they do. Occupations in the caring professions are often chosen at an early age but these are usually inspired by more positive influences like familial expectations or role models (Allen, 1988). Although it could be argued that being influenced by negative experiences is relatively unusual, it is a phenomenon that is recognised in the counselling literature.

> 'Many people choose to become counsellors or psychotherapists because they were the psychologically precocious children in their family. As youngsters they intuitively got involved with understanding and trying to help the pain and distress of a disturbed or limited childhood home. Often they were co-called [sic] 'care-taker' children, and they became inappropriately the confidante of a parent or they were the eldest siblings taking care of the others in a dysfunctional family. Such early training and experience in the world of disturbed and disturbing feelings can create an appetite for tending wounds' (Clarkson, 1994, pp.101-2).

It has, therefore, been established that many counsellors will either have had troubled backgrounds and/or their desire to counsel may be related to their position in their family structures. It may be suggested that a lot of eldest children become carers in adult life, on the basis of the argument that they feel that this is a 'natural' position for them because of caring for younger siblings in the past.

However, recognising that counsellors may have early experiences in common does not, in itself, answer the question of motives. Why do they counsel? Why would people who have experienced problematic childhoods, who may have been forced by circumstances to assume a responsible or caring role in their early years or who had encountered emotional trauma in

their adult life wish to enter an occupation that focuses on such experiences? Why are such individuals drawn to an occupation that has been shown by Dryden (1995) to cause stress to its practitioners?

The counsellors who inform this study offer answers to such questions when they claim it was through their own difficulties that they were made aware of what was helpful, how important some types of help were, what was not at all helpful and, perhaps most importantly, the type of help they wanted but was not often available: 'It was personal experience - being in a very difficult situation in my life and thinking 'I wish that I could somehow help people who are going through what I'm going through'. My own experiences really made me realise how much people out there do need help' (Olivia).

There is of course little new in the discovery that people who have (or could have) benefited from a service often wish to either 'put something back' into the system that helped them or help others who are in the same situation. As Titmuss found when researching altruism amongst blood donors, 'It is a remarkable fact that men and women who have received blood transfusions give blood and continue to give it on a generous scale' (1970, p.137). A high proportion of blood donors have themselves been given blood transfusions.

In turn such claims raise questions about whether some experience of suffering is necessary in order that counsellors can understand and empathise with their clients. Clearly there are times when direct experience of similar difficulties can be extremely valuable; there is sometimes a need for those who are often termed 'wounded healers' or 'victim counsellors'. Such people have personal knowledge of a specific problem or area and can offer help and support to current sufferers. It is often claimed that only someone who has 'been through it' can really understand how a sufferer is feeling. This idea of 'experienced support' is often the cornerstone of self-help groups and organisations. There are many such groups; breast cancer sufferers provide but one example: 'Volunteer counsellors, especially those who have been 'victims' of breast cancer, may well be able to offer their

fellow sufferers a form of experiential empathy that few of us fortunate enough to have avoided breast cancer could ever hope to emulate' (Fallowfield, 1991, p.111).

It should be recognised though that personal sensitivity to a problem is a unique experience and the reaction of each individual, whilst sharing some common reactions and insights, is clearly coloured by her/his own personality and personal history. Each biographical backdrop will affect the reactions, and the coping strategies employed when individuals are faced with a life crisis. It is partly for this reason that Fallowfield and others have expressed doubts about the usefulness of 'victim counsellors'. Staying with breast cancer sufferers as an example, it is true that every patient experiences her own unique experience. Each individual, while sharing some common reactions and insights, has her own personal history, social and sexual relationships, occupational commitments, future plans, dreams and expectations which will ultimately affect her adjustment and the coping strategies she employs. All too often such idiosyncratic factors can interfere with one woman helping another cope with her diagnosis and disease (Hawker, 1993).

It has also been suggested that many potential 'victim-counsellors' have as their primary motivation either an unacknowledged or subconscious desire to understand more of their own experiences through trying to help others (Reissman, 1965).

Trained counsellors may criticise self-help groups for making members dependent upon group support. Although it can be an extremely valuable experience, the opportunity to tell and re-tell your story does not, in itself, necessarily help people to accept and move on:

> 'With no pressure to leave, the longest-standing member may well end up as the group leader; unfortunately, that person may have been in the group for so long because they have had, in the jargon, an abnormal grief reaction and be the least competent to

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lead the others. Professional counsellors also point out that self-help groups are self-selected which, as with bereavement pathography, magnifies both their usefulness for those who fit in and their uselessness for those who do not. Critics argue that self-help groups should have a professional consultant to advise on such issues' (Walter, 1994, p.130).

In addition to such problems Fallowfield explains that some victims need to be actively discouraged from counselling work as much for their own protection as for that of others.

'It can be very distressing, unless one has considerable skill and training, to get too close to the emotional difficulties that a woman with breast cancer may be experiencing. When this happens to someone who shares the same diagnosis, it can be particularly destructive and damaging. At the very least victim-counsellors should be given supportive supervision if they are to be effective; they should also be people who have managed to cope well with their own cancer, be emotionally stable, and display good communication skills, especially good listening skills' (Fallowfield, 1991, p.112).

Similar concerns were voiced by my informants, who also felt that some prospective helpers are motivated by their own unmet or unacknowledged needs. When asked about their own early training many of the counsellors were critical of selection procedures and some informants described other trainees whom they felt had been unsuitable for counselling training:

'Some of the people on that course should not be counsellors - I can think of one particular woman who was on one of my early courses - she wanted to leave her job and become a counsellor but she was completely freaked out, she needed therapy herself desperately. She would never have made a counsellor until she'd done an exceptional amount of work on her own personal

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problems yet she got through the course. I don't think she ever thought she needed therapy herself and I think that's true of lots of, well, certainly some, counsellors in counsellor training'.
(Vicky)

Most of the counsellors in this study believed some experience of suffering was necessary in order to aid the development of empathy. It was not regarded as necessary, however, to have suffered the same experiences as one's clients because then personal issues could intrude into the client/counsellor relationship. Becoming involved with a client's problems may entail a counsellor having to face their own shadows, hurt or distress (Hawkins and Shohet, 1989). When this occurs the practitioner must utilise their own support systems or coping strategies and also recognise that, sometimes, supervision must be sought.

The need for life experience and some personal knowledge of suffering would partly explain why most counsellors, and all of the informants in this study, are middle-aged or older. Of course not all middle-aged people have experienced personal pain and of those who have not all could become (or would even wish to become) counsellors, so some experience of suffering should be seen as a necessary but not a sufficient condition. Other factors require investigation, and we turn to these now through an examination of the motives for counselling.

4.2 Altruism or self-interest?

The suggestions by informants in this study that some trainees were 'in it for themselves' or had unacknowledged personal problems raises the question of counsellors' motivations. Concern is often expressed both in the media and by more academic writers that counsellors and psychotherapists have dubious motives for undertaking the work that they do. In a culture where we are constantly being told about the collective decline of altruism, those

who choose to do a lot of helping are often viewed with suspicion. To take but one example, in 1971 Templar wrote;

> 'These, in general are the people who want to have their emotions tickled. For them, psychotherapy is the equivalent of a soap opera with the exception of greater variety and real tears. There are a limited number of soap operas on television. The psychotherapist can hear as many types of stories as he is willing to positively reinforce' (p.235).

It could be argued here that this situation no longer exists, since there have never been so many soap operas on television but, at the same time, the growth in numbers of counsellors and psychotherapists has been significant. Templar continues his attack by claiming that psychotherapists get vicarious pleasure from hearing and talking about the problems, lives and sexual activities of others.

However, rather than being constantly curious about the personal lives of other people, the counsellors in this study recognised that curiosity, or plain 'nosiness', was to be avoided:

> 'I think it's dangerous, when you're being told about details which maybe could have a sensational element to them the temptation as a human being is to ask that little bit extra which maybe you can rationalise as being part of your study of the case, your professional study of the case but it's not always the case. It can be damaging, you've got to be careful and consider boundaries, the sexual dynamics of the relationship and things like that' (Vicky).

During informal conversations a few informants admitted that, at times, one of the hurdles they had to overcome when counselling was not avid interest but a sense of boredom. More than one counsellor admitted to times when they had maintained eye contact, made encouraging noises and thought 'I

wish you would bloody well shut up'. They claimed that the clients concerned were unaware of their feelings and if the situation went on for a while they would take such a case to supervision in order to gain some insight or discuss how they could rescue the relationship.

Another accusation that is levelled against counsellors concerns the issue of power. Templar states 'If someone has a need for power, doing psychotherapy is certainly one path for him to take for gratification of this need' (1971, p.235). Jeffrey Masson claims 'therapists wield enormous power, whether or not they seek it' (1993, p.298). As Lupton observed during her study of doctor/patient relationships:

> 'To care for someone in that way is to express a love and acceptance of sorts, but is also to exert a certain degree of power over the person who is cared for. Caring may be understood as a gift, an action that requires something in return from the person who is cared for, thereby creating an imbalance of power' (1996, p.165).

In general the counsellors answered questions about power very seriously. Most professed to feeling uncomfortable about the idea of having power over their clients. They were aware that if a therapeutic relationship is successfully established with a vulnerable client then it was almost inevitable that, for a while at least, that client might see them as having the answers to their problems. As Chris explains:

> 'I think it swings backwards and forwards but at the end of the day the therapist is in a very powerful position because they - in the mind of the client - have the power to heal. I sometimes get them to listen to music or use the therapy ball, no-one has ever said no. Clients have a lot of faith in their therapists which gives them a strong - I mean, if I say, "you're going to walk out of here, you're going to go home and feel better" - I wouldn't say it like

that but it's how it could be interpreted - then they'll feel great for a while at least. That is quite a powerful position'.

The counsellors stress that power in itself is not necessarily a bad thing, professionals in other occupations also have power over their clients or patients and this is seldom questioned in the same way. What is important is how power is used:

'I must use my personal power to the full. It is the direction of the power which is the issue. If it is directed towards exercising and validating my belief system, increasing my power over my client, then it is in danger of becoming tyrannical. However, if it is directed towards my client becoming his own locus of evaluation, then it is likely to be empowering' (Mearns, 1992, p.80).

Naturally, counsellors are only human, they admit to enjoying the feeling of developing useful skills and having power, just as most other workers do :

'I mean if you're trying to be altruistic or whatever the word is - I mean it is genuinely nice to see people grow and come to realise things about themselves or about their relationship that they hadn't before and actually... I mean genuinely that is really nice - to watch people sort of saying "Oh, I hadn't really thought of it like that" - and you've made a difference. I suppose that sounds quite powerful, a bit of power in a way, but it is good. It is nice to be someone that can help. It is powerful, being able to make a difference. It can give you quite a buzz'. (Sue)

Perhaps one of the most important things to remember when considering the power that counsellors have over their clients is the fact that there is nothing to keep people going to a counsellor. A counsellor may be powerful in the sense that they can open up new avenues of thought for their clients but they have no power to counsel people who do not want to be counselled. They also have no means of keeping clients who no longer

desire their services; people must seek or want counselling for themselves and the informants stress that this is the only way that counselling can be effective. For this reason counsellors have expressed doubts about the efficacy of compulsory therapy, for example before marriage or before divorce.

Despite the fact that the informants denied having the enormous amount of power over others that some writers have claimed, they are aware of the images they may unwittingly present to some clients. When asked how they thought their clients saw them most informants said that they were often seen as 'experts'. The counsellors claimed that clients often believed that their therapist had 'all the answers' and no problems of their own. Concerns were voiced about this. Although it was felt to be inappropriate for a counsellor to reveal too much of their personal lives to their clients (because it would impinge upon the client's time and change the relationship), informants were uncomfortable with the idea that clients would hold unrealistic images of them. They also felt that the clients who saw them as experts were often the most difficult to counsel because they were unable, or unwilling, to take power and responsibility for themselves. One counsellor exclaimed:

> 'You hardly dare speak! The more you say to clients of that
> personality type "Now, what did we do last time? who decided
> that? who did it? It was you" and then they say "Ah, yes, but I
> wouldn't have known what to do unless you told me" and I hadn't
> told him, of course I hadn't told him!' (Fay).

However, in another way power is an important issue for the counsellors. They profess to be motivated, particularly during their early training and practice, to acquiring power over themselves rather than their clients. As described above, many informants stated that they had experienced problems in their own lives which caused them to appreciate counselling, and want to practise it themselves. They addressed such issues during the

self-awareness or personal therapy element of their training, claiming that this was how they came to terms with their own experiences and came to understand themselves and their behaviour more thoroughly. Understanding and self-awareness enabled them to change their behaviour and avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. Clearly, therefore, it is not only the clients who benefit from the counselling relationship.

One of the most significant findings of this study has been that virtually all of the counsellors state that doing counselling work has enriched their own personal lives. This is surprising given that Hochschild (1983) and other writers on emotional labour have claimed that undertaking emotional labour has a detrimental effect upon the worker. The rewards of counselling are discussed in more detail later in chapter 6, but claims that counselling work can enrich the life of the counsellor would indicate that practitioners accept self-interest as part of their set of motivations.

What was required of the counsellor was that they had come to terms with their own problem areas or past experiences, had accepted themselves and their identities 'warts and all' and in doing so felt more in control of their own lives. One counsellor has described the moment when the bad feelings she had previously held about herself changed as 'an important turning point in her life'. She wrote:

> 'It was the beginning of a search for an identity and a true self
> which continued through my analysis and my work as a therapist.
> The search for identity is, of course, a never-ending process, and
> many other factors contributed to making me into the person I
> am now, but the powerful wish to be myself and not to be
> coerced into becoming what I was not began at that moment.
> This also played an important part in the wish to enable others to
> discover their identities and true selves'. (Bloomfield, 1989, p.39)

So, rather than viewing the motives of counsellors negatively as based on self-interest, it could be that they should be seen as based on altruism in the

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sense that they want to help to enable others to be as self-aware as they have become.

Again, though, this is only a part of the story because informants were adamant that having had experience of trauma and accepting or coming to terms with that experience would not be enough to ensure that an individual would be a suitable candidate for counselling training. It was stressed time and time again that counsellors need to care about their clients. In fact, as stated earlier, more than one counsellor described the feeling they had for their clients as 'love' rather than caring.

Therefore this is not an either/or situation, most of the counsellors claimed to be both altruistic and selfish and were aware that these two motives feed into each other. Many of the informants stated that they were rarely purely altruistic, and they also did not believe that many people are motivated only by regard for others.

> 'Surely there is always a personal motive? - some reasons may be less admirable than others but I don't think that matters too much as long as you are aware of them - I know that, with me, I do really want to do something useful, something that is of use to others, I want to work with people and develop skills that may help them - but at the same time, I know that it feeds some part of me, some bit of me wants to have those skills - wants to be needed perhaps - I get a lot from doing what I do, so I'm hardly selfless am I?' (Andrew).

The importance that is placed upon counsellors understanding their own motives brings us to the third section of this chapter which concerns the issue of self-awareness.

4.3 Self-Awareness

All of the informants in this study, the counselling literature and even those who are critical of counselling frequently stress the vital importance of counsellors understanding the motives that lie behind their desire to be involved in counselling work (Persaud, 1996; Templar, 1971). Vague assertions about 'wanting to help others' or 'doing something useful' are not, in isolation, seen as suitable reasons for becoming a counsellor and the informants state that such people are usually 'weeded out' during the training process. It was noted that the criticisms that informants made of early training schemes were rarely made of more advanced training or follow-up courses. There is a general belief that unsuitable candidates come to recognise their unsuitability through the self-awareness element or personal development sections of counsellor training and supervision.

Virtually all of the informants stressed the need for, and the value of, self-awareness training. During one group meeting some of the informants discussed a local training course that focused only upon teaching psychological theory and counselling skills and they described it as an inadequate form of training: 'because theory and skills are not enough - without personal growth and development you couldn't be a counsellor - the self-awareness elements of training are essential' (Chris)

> 'Of course you can never be the perfect person - but you do need to know what's going on for you so it doesn't get reflected into or alter the situation with the client. I guess if you say that a counsellor is properly trained maybe it should mean that they have a proper therapeutic background too. I'm thinking now of somebody who said to me "I'd love to be a counsellor" and I thought "no way! not until you've dealt with your problems"' (Fay).

The informants described self-awareness in similar terms to those used when describing the process of 'becoming' a counsellor. It was acknowledged by the counsellors that they will never 'know' or understand

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themselves completely. Self-awareness is not a target than can be attained through training, personal therapy or work experiences, it is described as 'a journey', reflexivity is a continuing project for practising counsellors.

> 'The self-awareness stuff, that was brilliant. I think that was the bit I really needed although it was very painful at times. We had gone through a similar process in our nurse training, so I went to the course sort of thinking "oh yes, been there, done that, bought the tee-shirt" and then discovered so many more layers, it was very hard and it's not over. I think, well, I know, that there's still more down there'. (Liz)

> 'It's so important - I now know things about myself so I can know if they're getting in the way - if that's coming from me or from the person you're counselling. Obviously not 100%, I don't think anyone - unless you have psychotherapy 3 times a week for years like one of my friends has, for years - and even then I don't know whether you can know yourself absolutely. Obviously there are still things maybe that I'm not aware of, things that could come between me and a client but I am much more aware of a lot of things that I wasn't before. If you didn't recognise them you'd think it was the client, you know what I mean? You wouldn't be able to differentiate' (Kathy).

It was made clear by the counsellors that they do not consider personal growth and development as self-indulgent 'navel-gazing'. It would also be inaccurate to suppose that increased self-awareness is just a fortuitous and agreeable by-product of the process of becoming a counsellor. Some informants claimed that increased self-awareness had allowed them to be more accepting of themselves as well as of others: 'Yes, and recognizing my own needs and allowing myself to admit to those needs - that was something I never did before - I always had such expectations of myself' (Sarah). Informants pointed out that although, on occasions such as job

interviews, people may be asked about their 'strengths and weaknesses', it is quite difficult, without the aid of training and supervision to assess oneself in that way. In addition, such knowledge is not always satisfying:

'I think more about me as a person, I'm more critical of myself than I used to be which I don't actually like and I'd rather I didn't have that but I am more accepting as well. I mean I know where my faults are and I know better where my strengths lie. Yes, I'm accepting of both a bit more than I ever was but in some ways it's much easier to not know' (Beth).

Most of the informants declared that the personal development or self-awareness element of their training, although ultimately rewarding, was difficult for them, as these counsellors illustrate:

'becoming more self-aware isn't always very pleasant of course. Some sides of it can be very painful. When I was on my course I thought that everything was quite positive even though others were saying it was painful for them. Not for me, I used to say "I just look at it and then I get over it and it's fine and it's useful". That was me blocking beautifully, in more recent times I've come across something that was in fact pretty horrible, something that happened to me when I was quite young and I've had to face it and deal with it and it was, is, very painful' (Charlotte).

'I was only aware of something going wrong when I was keeping a counselling journal, writing down feelings. I was writing down things that I didn't understand, transferences onto people that were interesting but I didn't know quite what I was playing at. The time came when I thought I've got to really look at this and see what's going on. I have found things in me that are very uncomfortable and are still being resolved - but I think that I'm quite grateful that it happened' (Olive).

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These examples show that becoming self-aware may necessitate a re-examination of traumatic or unpleasant experiences from the past. Other counsellors faced with unresolved issues in their own lives felt encouraged to make difficult decisions, Sue describes how training and work experiences caused her to examine her own personal relationships: 'I think the counselling training affected us in that I started looking at myself and because of that I started looking at him and us and you know, thinking "now hang on I'm not too sure about this that and the other"'. Increased self-awareness, and a consideration of what she needed and wanted in her life caused Sue to examine her marital relationship. Eventually she and her partner were divorced which, she claims, was the right thing to do. However, although she is now free to follow her own career path, she has more confidence in herself and is much happier, Sue and her ex-partner both believe that if she had not begun counselling training they would probably still be married.

The male counsellor who admitted that he had originally undertaken counselling training in order to have 'weapons' to use in arguments with his wife (chapter 3) also stated that being encouraged to consider his own actions and feelings caused him to see his domestic situation differently:

> 'I was focusing on the arguments more than the reason for the arguments, we were no longer happy together - and the faults were probably more mine than hers, I came to see that - it's sometimes so easy to blame the other person and not accept any of the responsibility when things go wrong -just play the role of martyr - when, in fact, you are actually behaving very badly. I couldn't see it, I just couldn't see past winning arguments and scoring points. But it wasn't going to make either of us any happier - we separated, we're divorced now - we can actually get along quite well now when we meet up' (Paul).

Successful counselling depends upon the relationship that develops between counsellor and client, or as Wilkins (1997) states 'the process involves a meeting of the real self of the therapist with the real self of the client' (p.4). It is because counsellors must engage personally and develop this 'intimate' state with different clients day after day, week after week that they are encouraged to take care of themselves in order to remain emotionally strong. As Vicky said; 'on my counselling course I took on board that I had to do some work on myself, since then I've done a lot of personal therapy and with the course I'm on at the moment it's stressed that you've got to get yourself right before you can even hope to be of any use to anyone else! (short laugh)'. This view is endorsed by Petruska Clarkson:

> 'this may lead to the false idea that counsellors and psychotherapists should be perfect individuals who have resolved all their personal issues and who are untouched by the stresses, challenges and upsets of life. Of course this is not the case. Training in counselling and psychotherapy should never make us immune to the pain, the confusion and the intricacies of our human existence. Hopefully it can but put us in a better position to deal with ourselves and others from some measure of wisdom, compassion and understanding. Self-knowledge is not an inoculation against life. Only counsellors and psychotherapists who are still engaged in the struggle to become more human can empathize from their own experience with the pain and confusion of others' (1994, p.102).

Conclusion

Those writers who question the motives of counsellors often claim that they are driven by self-interest, as Templar (1971) suggests here, 'doing psychotherapy satisfies needs for prestige, power and money; provides sexual and other emotional stimulation; and permits the expression of sadistic and of nurturant behaviour' (p.234). Such strong assertions about

the motives of counsellors are frequently voiced which would suggest that many people would be cynical about some of the motives expressed by my informants. It would appear that the desire to support others who are suffering from emotional disturbance is often viewed with suspicion:

'The man in the street generally regards psychotherapy as an eccentric occupation. Most people have a rather limited capacity for sympathy with the troubles of others, and find it inconceivable that anyone, all day and every day, should choose to listen to stories of distress. Some imagine that, were they in the shoes of the psychotherapist, they would become intensely impatient; others that they would succumb to despair. In their eyes, the psychotherapist is regarded either as mentally ill himself, or else as a kind of secular saint who is able to rise above ordinary human limitations. Neither view is true' (Storr, 1979, p.165).

The evidence presented in this chapter indicates that questions relating to the motivations of counsellors cannot be answered with either/or statements. The principle object of counselling is to help others, not to help the counsellor. It is clear though that becoming a counsellor has been, and continues to be, rewarding for the informants in this study. Despite the difficulties many of them encountered in self-awareness training nearly all of them felt that it had been of benefit to them in that it had helped them to come to terms with their own problems and issues. Furthermore, they recognised that self-awareness must be an on-going and integral part of the personal and professional development of counsellors. As Storr notes 'understanding other human beings requires that the observer does not simply note their behaviour as if they were machines or totally different from himself, but demands that he make use of his own understanding of himself, his own feelings, thoughts, intentions, and motives in order to understand others' (1979, p.168).

Many of the counsellors recounted traumatic or emotionally upsetting incidents in their own lives that they felt had contributed to their interest in counselling work. However, it was made clear that the experience of adversity or problems was not enough to indicate whether or not an individual could perform counselling work. Self-awareness and the acceptance of one's own shortcomings combined with the personal qualities discussed in the previous chapter were what was required of a prospective counsellor.

It is important to note that none of the informants claimed to be altruistic, all those who contributed offered descriptions of the ways in which being involved in counselling work had enhanced their own lives and/or personal relationships. Even those who had experienced change in their personal lives following their involvement in counselling work declared that those changes had been positive. What should be emphasised here though is that the counsellors do not feel that they benefit at the expense of their clients. Many of the benefits that they experience are as a result of the work that they do and the relationships they form with their clients, their peers and their supervisors.

The emphasis on self-awareness for counsellors is an essential element of their training and practise as Clarkson explains:

> 'The journey towards becoming a counsellor or psychotherapist and remaining fruitfully active in this difficult profession must be accompanied by constant soul-searching and disciplined controlling of the borders between one's own problems and difficulties and those of the people we serve. To this end, most people remain in personal therapy and supervision for most of their professional lives' (1994, p.103).

The importance of the personal growth and development elements of counsellor training and supervision should perhaps be noted by organisations that demand emotional labour from their workers. If a worker

is routinely faced with situations that resonate strongly with unresolved issues in her/his own background then clearly that worker may suffer emotional stress or, at the very least, be ill-equipped to perform their work satisfactorily. This chapter has argued that not every individual has the ability to perform emotional labour. If, for whatever reason, a worker is unable to identify with the human problems and difficulties their patients/clients may present them with then it is unlikely that an effective relationship will be formed.

Self-awareness is one of the key methods counsellors use to improve the relationships they form with their clients - the next chapter examines the counsellor/client relationship.

Chapter 5

The Counselling Relationship

Introduction

The current British Telecom slogan 'It's good to talk' is a reflection of the popular idea that 'a problem shared is a problem halved', that it is helpful in some way to 'get it off your chest' and talk to other people if you have a problem. Television talk shows, radio 'phone in programmes, problem pages in newspapers and magazines all serve as illustrations of the belief that humans need to share their problems and experiences with each other. The belief appears to be that once a problem has been shared with another it will become easier to solve or, at least, easier to bear. Such popular ideas naturally assume that each individual does have someone to whom they can turn when in trouble or distress. It is usually assumed that this is a function that friends or close family perform.

This chapter addresses popular ideas about counselling and, in particular, explores whether counselling is, in some ways, a substitute for friendship. The intention is to show that from a sociological perspective counselling, despite prevalent opinion, has little in common with friendship or other personal relationships. The relationship that develops between a counsellor and a client is a paradoxical one. It is an intimate relationship in the sense that the client discloses information of a very personal nature, yet it is also a professional relationship with clear boundaries which prevent it from becoming any more than a working union.

5.1 A substitute for friendship?

A recent study by Myles Harris (1994) focusing on the growth of counselling in the National Health Service describes such counselling negatively as 'a licensed state friendship service'. In the media there are many articles that suggest counselling is in some way a substitute for friendship. Victor Lewis-

Smith (1996), writing in the Daily Mirror, claims that 'A generation ago, the only counsellors you could consult were called mum or dad or best friend but their results were no better and no worse than today's professionals'. In similar vein, Tessa Dahl (1993) in <u>The Guardian</u> states 'we used to have friends, now we have therapists'. Such media coverage reflects commonly expressed ideas about counselling. It is assumed by many that people who seek counselling are rather sad, lonely individuals who have little family support or no friends to turn to. Counsellors would disagree with such notions; most would claim that their client group is extremely varied, many of their clients are in close contact with family members and have a wide circle of friends and acquaintances. In their experience though, having people around does not necessarily mean they can be of help, as Yvonne, an experienced counsellor, explains:

> 'but even people that have got lots of people around them find that they can't talk about their problems with those people - their family or their friends - either it's too embarrassing to talk to their personal people or they may feel that they just don't understand and they need to talk to somebody who is a couple of steps back from the situation - who's not involved, who can put a different point of view across or feed back to them what they're saying - without being judgemental or calling them silly or not saying "well, that's happened to me and I did so and so" and proceeding to dish out advice. They find that can be quite useful - you can be very lonely with a problem even with a lot of people around you'.

It is, of course, worth mentioning the rather obvious fact that not everybody does have close friends or trusted family members to talk to when faced with a problem. The conventional wisdom that 'problem families are also "friendless families"' (Tonge <u>et al</u>, 1983, p.39) has its equivalent at the individual level. Studies have shown that crisis periods in people's lives are often accompanied by the waning of their close relationships. Allan (1989) uses the examples of long-term illness, long-term caring, unemployment,

marital violence, and divorce to illustrate this. If we accept that most friendships are situationally specific then it is not difficult to understand why drastic changes in an individual's social situation may be accompanied by the loss of their friendships.

Some of the counsellors in this study discuss clients who have claimed that there is no-one in their lives they could talk to. The examples given are often unemployed men or, as Maggie explains here, people who have made drastic life changes:

> 'you are there for them - really to talk to because on top of everything else that happens in their lives, or perhaps because of what has happened, their relationships break down - you can never underestimate the value of a job for people, particularly men, although I know that's probably not the sort of thing to say these days ..'

> 'for instance, people who have come out as being gay having perhaps been married for many years. They may have a wife and children or a husband and children. The whole family just falls apart because that person can't cope with the lies any more, friends disappear - they've decided that they have got to be honest, then, having been honest they find they are totally without the support they have always had and they've got to build a new life'.

The majority of people though, do have people to whom they can turn and this discussion is not intended to be a refutation of the idea that talking to those closest to you helps puts problems into perspective. Most of us, at times, share troubles and concerns with our friends and usually benefit from the experience. There are times when advice from others or hearing how somebody else dealt with a similar problem to one's own can be of enormous benefit. Often simply talking to another person and airing one's feelings is enough. However, there are also times when voicing one's

feelings to a sympathetic listener is not enough. So while we must acknowledge that it is possible for a great deal of self disclosure and intimacy to occur between friends or family members we must also recognise, as Allan (1989) does, that not all the problems that individuals may encounter are pertinent to their close relationships. Even when problems are made known to those closest to us it does not follow that they will always be able, or even wish, to offer help in anything but a general sense. There are various reasons for this and a brief examination of them is required before turning to consider what counsellors can offer that friends and family cannot.

Sociological studies emphasise that friendship is usually a relationship based on equivalence and, over time, there tends to be a broad reciprocity to the exchanges between friends. 'The essence of friendship from a sociological standpoint is that it is a tie of equality' (Allan, 1989, p.108). When support or assistance is required in the short term, be it of a practical or emotional nature, then opportunities for repayment are frequent. Most of us can think of occasions when we have stepped in to help a friend, provided a sounding board or 'a shoulder to cry on' and we know that our friends have done or would do the same favours in return. However, the situation becomes more complicated when the support that is required is time-consuming, complex or long-lasting. Whether or not friends are willing to assist, studies show that other demands must often be put before friendship when dividing our time. During times of personal crisis, individuals may need to talk about their problems, their feelings and their emotions at great length and go over the same ground many times. Provision of regular, non-reciprocated support by one side may threaten the basis of equality inherent in the friendship relationship. If the need continues for a long time then, in such situations, the friendship may well begin to fade.

It is also worth remembering that the term 'friendship' covers a wide range of relationships and in some cases people may feel that it is inappropriate or too obtrusive to be burdened with their friends' problems. At a popular level,

friends may be seen as people to socialise with, to have fun with, rather than individuals who give or require much emotional support. This view of friendship is captured in the following passage by the columnist Julie Burchill:

> 'When, pray, did people start thinking that friendship was about Keeping in Touch, Being There for You, and Little Things Meaning A Lot? When I was growing up in the 1980s we never used to sit around tormenting ourselves and our loved ones over the meaning of friendship. We knew what it meant. It meant you using them, them using you and both of you never having to say you were sorry. It meant no loyalty expected or given. And above all, it meant never being boring' (1995).

The counsellors in this study cite various examples that indicate clients are aware that focusing on personal problems can threaten their close relationships, they often seek counselling in order to <u>keep</u> their friends. According to the counsellors, many clients claim that they sought counselling because they were aware that they had talked to their friends 'too much', even though they still had more to say and work out for themselves. Neil, a male counsellor working for Relate states, 'when friends start avoiding you then you seek counselling'.

Overburdening another with your problems could be considered selfish. Respondents in Brannen and Collard's (1982) study of disclosure claimed not to want to shock, overburden or upset their relatives and/or friends. 'Shielding' others, especially children, may be particularly important as disclosure of some types of personal material can be damaging not only to the person disclosing but to those close to them as well. Counsellors report that the majority of their clients are concerned with issues connected to their personal relationships, it therefore follows that it is often difficult to air them without causing argument, upset or feelings of disloyalty. For example, many personal problems are connected to feelings about a marriage partner

and talking about them to people they know without their being there to put their side of the story or stand up for themselves could be interpreted as serious betrayal, as well as placing the listener in an awkward position. Another issue to consider here is that of competition. One woman in Brannen and Collard's study stated that she was unwilling to tell her very close friend about her marital problems because her friend's marriage seemed so untroubled.

Such feelings are linked to the fact that friendship is important for the sense of identity it provides. Many people feel uneasy about their insecurities, weaknesses or failings becoming known to others as disclosure might result in loss of dignity, status or self-esteem. Self-management and self-presentation necessarily involve decisions about disclosing personal failings, as Goffman highlights in his classic identification of the dilemmas involved in everyday interaction: 'To display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when and where?' (1968, p.57).

There is widespread recognition that friendship is almost always conditional, and that people could be shocked or upset when faced with certain issues or concerns. They may feel pity, which could, for some, be even worse. Friends may not intentionally move away when innermost thoughts or fears are disclosed but unconditional positive regard, one of the basic tenets of counselling, is often too much to ask of a friend.

When Brannen and Collard (1982) explored general orientations to the disclosure of personal problems they found, not surprisingly perhaps, that some respondents were generally positive about confiding in their friends or family while others would be reluctant to do so. The majority of respondents who held negative views about discussing their personal troubles with friends or family were men. In fact many men stated that they did not share their concerns with anybody at all. Attitudes and feelings about revealing private areas of self to others were tempered by references to deep-seated

feelings of being unable or unwilling to communicate personal troubles to other people, and the respondents themselves linked this to their early socialisation. Other studies have also noted that there are gender differences in communicating feelings or emotions, and men have been described as 'emotionally distant' (Duncombe and Marsden, 1993, p.227).

Men are often portrayed, and portray themselves, as being unable, unwilling, or not needing to communicate personal problems to other people. Many admit that their reluctance is rooted in feelings about weakness or failure. Such feelings are often paramount when the problems concerned are of a sexual or emotional nature. There are more clear links here with Goffman's ideas regarding stigma and 'undisclosed, discrediting information' (1968, p.57), since many people avoid disclosing personal information because they fear embarrassment or humiliation.

5.2 The Counselling Relationship

Perhaps then it is easy to understand why many people, and men in particular, reject the idea of turning to friends or family and are more in favour of 'neutral' people who can offer 'a little more distance, a little more anonymity' (Brannen and Collard, 1982, p.38).

Brannen and Collard surmised from their study that men were reluctant to disclose personal problems because of internal restraints of self-identity and women because of external constraints of significant others. They claim that internal constraints arising from socialisation are more effective than those associated with external agents of social control. It follows therefore that men are more likely than women to be totally opposed to disclosure both in principle and in practice, while women oppose disclosure in principle but not always in practice. This may help to explain why all of the counsellors involved in this study usually have more female than male clients at any one time. Counsellors frequently expressed views indicating that they are aware of how reluctant many men are to discuss their problems and their feelings,

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as two experienced counsellors explain here: 'men are not as used to talking about their feelings but once we've got over that they often respond better than women - I think an awful lot of men are brought up with this image of how they <u>should</u> be, it's nurture not nature' (Vicky) and 'I think that's why there aren't as many men being counselled, it's them thinking that they have to be strong and not accepting they have weaknesses, unless a man is really aware that good can happen then they're not going to come forward' (Charlotte).

Interestingly though it emerged through discussion with the counsellors in this study that when men do seek counselling they appear to adapt to it very well. One female counsellor stated that she enjoyed working with male clients because, in many ways, male problems were more 'solvable' as men were often in a strong position to promote change in their lives. Female clients, she claimed, were more frequently constrained by practical responsibilities towards children, partners or parents and further restricted by lack of money. Several other counsellors claimed that it was more difficult to get male clients 'started', because they were often very suspicious at first but that once the relationship had developed and their trust had been gained men often appeared to get more from it than some female clients. Male and female counsellors both made this point:

> 'that's the trouble - men find it hard to talk or even admit that they have got a problem in the first place - and when they do eventually come along they often seem to need us far more than the women do - perhaps because they've got to a worse state before they've got there' (John).

> 'I think a lot of men think you are going to go in and judge and think "what a wally, he can't cope" - it's this macho thing - they feel they should be able to cope and they're afraid to cry or break down - but once they've talked to you and got used to the idea of talking, and they trust your reactions, then it can work really well.

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Once they do get going it can be difficult to stop them - years of feelings pour out!' (Liz).

Both the counselling literature and the respondents in this study stress that one of the most important characteristics of the counselling relationship is that of anonymity. At the outset of the therapy it is important that the client and the counsellor should not be known to each other. In order that trust can be developed the client must be able to rely upon complete confidentiality from the counsellor; this encourages disclosure and minimises any possible feelings of shame, humiliation or awkwardness. It is also significant that the counselling relationship is a finite one; most of the counsellors in this study state that six to eight sessions lasting 50 minutes each is 'the average contract' made with a client. Some counsellor/client relationships may be much shorter, perhaps only one or two sessions may be required and, of course, many relationships last a great deal longer than the average contract.

It is the fear of revealing 'discrediting' information that makes a counsellor's anonymity and the promise of confidentiality so important. There are limits to the amount of knowledge that friends and family have about each other. As Allan notes, 'While there is a folk belief that total disclosure is the sign of real friendship, in reality friends rarely know everything about one another' (1989 p.107).

The counsellors also work on the assumption that we do not reveal everything about ourselves to our friends. The idea that we do has more to do with the ideology of friendship discussed earlier than what actually happens within most friendships. Friends may promise never to reveal confidences and in many cases they never do but, nevertheless, the relationship may be altered. Beth explains why in the following way:

> 'with friends you are too close, I don't want to know everything
> about my friends - and no matter how confidential it is or you are
> that person has told you and six months down the line when

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everything's perhaps been sorted out they <u>can</u> think "I wish I'd never said anything, I told her that and now I've got to see her every day outside the school". So it's not just us, what we don't want to know - in a few months time that person is still living down the road and how are they going to feel having told you the things they told you?'

The character of counselling work necessitates counsellors being constantly aware of boundaries. When discussing their own friendships and family relationships virtually all of the respondents stressed that they would never counsel people close to them, even if requested to do so. As Kathy noted of a friend,

> 'she asked if she could see me as a counsellor and I had to explain that it wouldn't be right - because I didn't want to know all her personal details, all about her marriage and her husband, I didn't want to know all that and she wanted to tell me but I didn't want to know - she's a friend, it's not right'.

So while much of the literature on friendship emphasises the ideology of friends 'being there' for each other, listening to each other's problems and supporting each other (Rawlings, 1992) it is often the very closeness of the tie that can prevent them being helpful in some situations. In addition to issues like trust, reciprocity, burdening and competition there is also the problem that even when friends do want to help there is a limit to what they can do; listening and sympathy may not be very helpful, or simply not enough.

'When a friend comes to "talk his problems over" with us, we pick up enough clues to know what sort of response is wanted: sympathy, advice or a sharing of our own problems' (Cohen and Taylor, 1977, p.73). Counsellors are well aware that their clients have often shared their difficulties with friends or family before reaching the stage where they seek more formal help. Many respondents explained that going to family or

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friends can often end in upset, unwanted advice or 'I told you so' scenarios. Neil cited one client who, in desperation, had decided to bare all about his marriage to his parents yet received nothing but comments like 'you made your bed and you must lie in it' and 'this has nothing to do with us'. His parents made it very clear to him that they were unwilling to talk about his problems and this was why he turned to Relate. The limitations on the help family members or friends are able or willing to offer is hardly surprising. However much they love you (and we should recognise that sometimes this may not be very much at all), they tend to have fixed ideas about you and may well feel threatened if childhood experiences or their relationships with you are questioned or examined. Consequently friends and family members' ways of listening and giving advice may meet their needs first and your needs last.

In contrast, the relationship between counsellor and client has little in common with two friends exchanging intimacies. The counselling exchange is virtually all one-way and whereas a friend may offer advice or express sympathy as discussed above a counsellor will offer no advice but will try to understand exactly how you are feeling and why you feel the way you do. In the process the client may be encouraged to face uncomfortable truths about themselves.

What the counsellor offers is a 'safe' place, both literally and figuratively, for disclosure to take place. All of the respondents stressed the importance of the counselling environment. Clients generally have a regular 'slot' that they can rely on, counselling takes place at the same time, and in the same place each week (or fortnight or month depending upon the contract between them). The counsellors stressed the importance of not being interrupted and many of them showed me the precautions they take to prevent interruptions occurring; these ranged from telephone answering machines and notices on doors to the dire warnings they gave their children! Private counsellors take pains to remove many of their most personal belongings from the room in which counselling takes place. Personal

memorabilia like family photographs can distract from the work in hand and may even cause pain to a client, as Pam explained:

> 'you see, at the beginning, in fact all of the way through, you're never sure what's going to come out and if someone is hurting about their family relationships or feeling rejected or something then having photographs of my brood smiling at them from all over the room isn't fair. Say someone came and his daughter hadn't spoken to him since her wedding day - or had died on her wedding day or something - and there's the picture of my daughter's wedding there then that could cause pain - this has to be their space for that time and my life shouldn't impinge on their time'

Counselling, at its most basic, is an offer of time and space for exploring feelings and an 'invitation' to talk (Gilbert, 1992). The counsellors in this study state that their main aim is to offer clients openness, genuineness, confidentiality and unconditional positive regard. The early stages of the counselling relationship are spent establishing the trust that is required for therapy to take place.

One of the most important requirements is that the counsellor remains non-judgemental even when faced with 'ugly and repulsive realities in the lives of clients' (Biestek, 1961, p.136). It is important that the client can express her/himself without feeling 'discredited', or that the counsellor condemns or is shocked by what is revealed. The counselling relationship therefore does not resemble friendship; counsellors offer not sympathy but 'empathy'. Empathy involves remaining relatively detached but understanding and sharing another's feelings. When listening empathically one listens and attends to more than that which is being said. Empathic listening involves noting possible areas of hidden shame or resentment, recognising the fear of loss or the disappointment that can lie behind attacks on others or self-attack. Anger can often hide a fear of being marginalised or devalued, for

example. A good measure of empathy is whether or not it enables clients to continue with their narrative and deepen understanding (Gilbert, 1992). One of the earliest and most basic aims of a therapeutic relationship is that the counsellor demonstrates to the client 'I understand. I show you I understand, and you understand that I have understood' (Gilbert, 1992, p.11).

Empathy then is a way of 'being with', an 'in-tuneness' to the client. It entails exploring a client's feelings about an issue in order to develop understanding rather than assuming that such understanding exists already. Examples that are frequently cited include societal expectations of appropriate feelings for particular situations. Fay, a GP counsellor who also has her own private practice, cited a case where a client's mother had died and she had received a great deal of sympathy from friends and relatives, as a consequence of which the woman felt unable to express the anger she had always felt towards her mother and the guilt she experienced because of her feelings of relief when her mother died. She found that she wasn't sleeping well and was beginning to question what sort of person she could be, to feel so differently from what was clearly expected of her. Through counselling she was able to come to terms with the fact that her relationship with her mother had not been good, her mother had not always treated her well and she felt a great deal of resentment towards her. After a while the client was able to accept that, to recognise that not all parent/child relationships are wonderful, and by doing so she was able to accept her mother as she had been and to leave her feelings of guilt behind and get on with her own life. The aim of counselling is not to dwell on past experiences in order that people can feel sorry for themselves but to see things more clearly and accept them for what they were in order to move on.

Empathy's very nature demands a great deal of concentration, of feeling, of emotional labour from the counsellor. Counsellors recognise that all human beings have certain basic common needs: physical, emotional, intellectual, social, and spiritual. In adverse circumstances these common needs are felt

with a special poignancy. Counselling highlights needs like the need to be treated as an individual, to communicate feeling, to be accepted, not to be judged, to make one's own decisions and to have one's secrets kept confidential. The intensified awareness of these needs is the origin of the dynamic interaction of attitudes and feelings between the client and the counsellor (Biestek, 1961).

Counsellors develop various core skills which aid the construction of this therapeutic relationship, to convey to the client a sense of being understood and cared for while at the same time acting as an encouragement to explore and discover. They prompt, reflect feelings, paraphrase, summarise, they remain aware of the client's and their own non-verbal behaviour, they concentrate on open questions, they confront, and they acknowledge therapeutic ruptures (what might be called in lay language 'getting it wrong'). Clearly this is not the place to examine counselling skills in depth, and the emotional costs of counselling for the practitioners are examined in more detail in Chapter 6, but it is perhaps necessary to acknowledge here that even the most basic counselling skills require a great deal from the practitioner. Counselling is demanding and tiring work, particularly so when, as these counsellors explain, the relationship has been developed and the client has reached the stage of exploring difficult or painful issues: 'I think the costs are far greater than most people outside realise in terms of emotional output and energy gone - if you're really to be with them then you must put so much in to the relationship' (Sue), and:

> 'if you're doing the job properly you have to give of yourself - there are times when the relationship is such, that you know so much about them, and if you're really being empathic then you do feel some of the pain that they're going through - that can take it out of you - most days, remember, I see six clients' (Sarah)

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However, the demands inherent in the counselling relationship do not rest entirely with the counsellor. The respondents in this study stress that entering counselling is no easy option or the 'sanction for selfishness' that some have suggested, for the act of seeking counselling places various responsibilities on clients in relation to their contribution to the counselling process. The fact that the term 'the therapeutic alliance' is frequently used both in the literature and by the counsellors is a clear indicator that both the counsellor and the client contribute to the relationship and work towards any changes that take place.

The client's role in a successful counselling relationship is recognised as a difficult one by the counsellors and many informants expressed admiration for their clients. Often clients may be disclosing personal details or histories that they have never verbalized before, they may be facing issues and expressing feelings that they have suppressed for years. At other times counsellors will challenge their clients in order to help them reflect upon their own actions and input into situations that they have always blamed upon others. 'They go through absolute hell some of them - you have to sometimes go for the jugular - and at the end they turn to me and say "thank you so much!"' (Pam)

The counsellors appreciate that the work the clients must do is not confined to the counselling sessions, much of it occurs in the periods between sessions when they may be left with a great deal to consider and reflect upon:

> 'because the clients do work hard - the work that's done in the
> sessions is the very least of it - the major part of their work
> actually goes on in the times between sessions -sometimes they
> come through the door the next time saying "I've been thinking
> about so and so" and, whoosh - they've really moved on' (Sarah)

5.3 Producers and Consumers

As outlined in Chapter 1, there has been a dramatic growth in counselling services during the last 20 years. Many people view this development negatively and, as was noted above, much of the media coverage that counselling has attracted portrays counsellors as charlatans of one sort or another. A frequently expressed anxiety concerns payment for counselling. It is often suggested that people are in fact buying friendship or intimacy, despite the fact that counselling actually has little in common with friendship (as was demonstrated above). Critics suggest that therapists encourage a dangerous dependence in people, and that counsellors encourage people to keep coming to them in order to stabilise their own income rather than through any genuine concern for the client (Harris, 1994). Clearly such accusations cannot be levied at all counsellors because many of them work voluntarily and others for organisations. None of the counsellors in this study who work for an organisation receive more than their monthly salary and most claimed that continuing counselling relationships for longer than was necessary would increase their waiting lists which were a real concern for many of them. The idea that they encouraged dependence in order to secure their income did cause some amusement: 'don't they say that about driving instructors as well? - we could do that, I suppose - "yes, Mr Smith, another fourteen sessions and I think we'll get to the bottom of why you think that too many people take advantage of you!" (John). Another way to boost counsellor's income was also suggested, 'we could go the other way and have productivity bonuses, or be paid for "piece-work" - get the clients through as quickly as possible - that would sort out the waiting lists as well!' (Sarah).

In his well-known book Against Therapy (1992), one of Jeffrey Masson's main objections is that therapists make money out of other people's misery. In similar vein the novelist Fay Weldon (1995) describes grief counsellors as 'ghouls' and 'parasites'.

The rather obvious point here is that the same could be said of many other occupations that attempt to alleviate human suffering. Counsellors are aware that some clients do become overly dependent upon their counsellors but rather than encouraging dependence, many of the counsellors in this study revealed that such clients are often the most difficult to deal with. When asked to outline a case that they felt was a failure, many of them mentioned dependent clients.

> 'there was one male client - I just didn't enable him to get anywhere, all he wanted to do was to sit and talk to me - he just seemed to want my attention rather than to get anywhere, to make any changes - I felt I didn't actually enable him at all - he'd 'phone me up and then I had to keep him at a distance' (Bernice).

> 'one client in particular, I have a nasty feeling that she's got too much invested in having problems - she's a real heart-sinker, I just feel as if I'm up against a blank wall, I don't know where else to go or what else to do - and I've told her that but she insists she gets a lot of benefit from our sessions and just having someone there for her - she says she wants it but she's not doing it if you see what I mean - not doing any work - it's a current problem for me' (Liz).

> 'she wanted so much from me, much more than I could possibly give - and I blame myself partly because I could feel this enormous pain coming from her and I felt at one point that I would do anything to make it better for her - but the boundaries weren't there - my fault again, at the time I was relatively inexperienced - she wanted a counsellor, a friend, a mother - everything. Much more than I could ever give her' (Charlotte).

So, rather than over-dependence ensuring a steady income for counsellors, it is seen as a problem for them, one that many respondents would take to

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supervision. The whole issue of payment for counselling, though, does deserve more attention. Writers exhort people to turn to their family and their friends, to spend their time improving those relationships rather than buying a form of 'pseudo-concern'. It is necessary to consider who, within those groups, traditionally offers, or perhaps used to offer, the sort of services that people believe counsellors now provide. The suggestion here is that it is generally women who are expected to fulfil such a role. As reported in Chapter 3 many of the female respondents claim that male clients have professed to feeling more comfortable talking to a woman, that it seems more 'natural'. If we consider social change over the last few decades - the decline of the extended family, the growing incidence of single-parent families, the large numbers of adults now living on their own, the influence of feminism and the rising rates of female employment, it could perhaps be argued that the antipathy towards counselling is related to the fact that so many counsellors are women. Many writers have argued that women are more intuitive, expressive and comfortable with feelings than men. If the emotional labour literature is accurate then many women are abdicating much of the emotion work that they provided in the private sphere and taking their communication and emotional skills into the market place.

Most emotional labourers are women according to writers like James (1989) and Hochschild (1983). Much of the work that has been done on emotional labour centres on occupations that are, in some respects, quite routine and menial. Most of the counsellors in this study are middle-class, middle-aged, white women. They are, in the main, well-educated and many are married to professional men. They are individuals with options, they are not driven by poverty, circumstances or lack of alternatives. In the past such women were often offering their skills for no direct financial reward, either through their immediate or extended families or through voluntary work. The suggestion here is that people do not like to pay for services that they expect to get for nothing. Taking 'pure' emotion work into the public sphere means that it

becomes impersonal - an intimate act becomes a commodity. There are strong links here to Duncombe and Marsden's (1993) ideas regarding women's growing expectations of men and personal relationships, women are beginning to demand more and give less or, at least give less unconditionally.

The counsellors themselves are not operating in social isolation, they are aware of societal norms and values and the roles that different genders are expected to play. Many of the female counsellors in this study professed to having feelings of unease about payment. Relate counsellors are aware that many of their clients are surprised by the 'contributions' they are expected to make, as Relate is viewed as a charity (which it is) and charities are associated with giving services rather than charging for them. Relate counsellors informed me that at the present time they are advised to work on an average of £27 per session. Contributions vary as clients are means-tested at the first session and a figure agreed upon. Nevertheless Relate counsellors sometimes feel uneasy about the size of the contributions and the pressure from their branch to ask for more. The largest contribution obtained by a counsellor in my sample was £40 per session but every client, whatever their circumstances, is expected to contribute something.

Some counsellors in private practice also profess feelings of discomfort about charging their clients - the following excerpt from an interview with Beth, who works part-time as a GP counsellor and also has private clients, illustrates this well:

SH - what feelings do you have about charging clients?

B - I hate it - I hate it

SH - can I ask how much you charge?

A - ten pounds an hour - I can't ask for any more. I hate asking for it - I'm not very good at the whole private bit, I don't like it. Each time they've come I've said, after a few times, even when they've been coming here for quite a

while - I've said "are you sure you're happy about coming here because if you come to the surgery it's free?" (laughs)

Why, when all of the counsellors have expressed that their work is skilled and very demanding do some feel uncomfortable charging for it? The argument being put forward here is that much of the work involved in the 'pure' emotional labour of counselling could be described as 'women's work', and traditionally such work has been seen as having no direct financial reward. This would explain both why some counsellors profess to feel uncomfortable about charging clients and why counselling is unlikely easily to achieve professional status.

Conversely, despite the doubts surrounding payments for counselling, many counsellors expressed the view that it was important that clients do pay for counselling. The reasons for this were concerned with ideas like commitment, the importance of recognising that this was a working relationship and valuing the experience. As Sarah said,

> 'and they are coming to you because they want to be there, they have looked for a counsellor, they want professional help and they've reached the stage where they're prepared to work. And if they are paying they certainly work harder which causes the contract they make to be shorter'

It is felt that paying for counselling emphasises to the client that this is, of necessity, a producer-consumer relationship. Although all of their exchanges are of a personal nature and a strong bond develops between counsellor and counselled there is virtually none of the reciprocity that characterises most other close personal relationships. Yet counsellors are aware that clients often feel very strongly towards them. This may be because as Wiles and Higgins state in their analysis of private patients' attitudes to their doctors, 'People are likely to feel more comfortable being "friends" rather than being assertive and consumerist in a relationship of

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inequality in which they experience feelings of vulnerability and dependence' (1996, p.18).

Conclusions

The argument throughout this chapter has been that prevailing ideologies of friendship influence feelings about, and expectations of, counselling. Popular perceptions of counselling often tend to view it as an occupation that involves little more than listening to or befriending sad, lonely or self-indulgent individuals and allowing them to get things 'off their chest'. If this were the case then criticisms of counselling would, perhaps, be well-founded, and, possibly, friends and family members could serve the same purpose as counsellors. However, as has been demonstrated, there are limits to the amount, or type, of information people feel able to disclose to their friends or family members. There are also limits to what people who are close to us want to hear, are able to cope with, or can do to help. Through counselling, individuals are able to reflect on their own feelings and emotions without considering the feelings of the person to whom they are disclosing. They are helped to recognise and understand patterns of behaviour, they are given time and attention and are supported while they try to effect changes in themselves that not only help them to deal with the immediate presenting problem but may help them to cope better with other problems in the future.

The counselling relationship is a very restricted one, it is bounded by both time and space, and is characterised by non-reciprocity and by confidentiality. There is no on-going relationship between counsellor and client; counsellors avoid socialising with clients and there is little or no acknowledgement of their relationship if they meet away from the counselling environment. Despite the fact that counselling, by its very nature, involves a great deal of personal information being disclosed by the client, the counselling relationship is a producer-consumer one. For many clients though, it may be more acceptable to think of their counsellors as

friends rather than accept the more prosaic realities of counselling or, indeed, of friendship.

Another argument put forward here is related to the observation that the majority of counsellors, like other emotional workers, are women and this fact influences outside perceptions of counselling as an occupation. Traditionally occupations involving a majority of workers who are female have had difficulty attaining occupational status and this an area of interest that will be addressed in greater depth in Chapter 8. The next chapter discusses the costs and rewards of counselling work.

Chapter 6

Do the Costs of Being a Counsellor Outweigh the Rewards?

Introduction

It has been argued in the previous chapter that the counselling relationship is a unique one. Although it is an intimate personal relationship characterised by trust, it is also asymmetrical because it is of necessity non-reciprocal. At first it may be difficult to understand what counsellors have to gain from participating in a deeply personal relationship with each of their clients. Such considerations become more interesting when we remember that many counsellors volunteer their labour so do not gain financially from becoming involved in counselling work. It has already been established that counselling is difficult work which not everybody is suited to performing. Indeed, the first section of this chapter bears out the assertions made in the emotional labour literature about such work being arduous and onerous at times precisely because it demands the worker's use of self.

Where this study differs from the emotional labour literature is in arguing that the counsellors do not view the fact that they must be prepared to become personally involved in their work as a problematic issue. The second and third sections of this chapter detail the informants' beliefs that emotional labour, when the necessary boundaries are in place, has the potential to be very rewarding, fulfilling and can have positive effects upon the wider social and personal lives of its practitioners. Within a constantly fragmented and fragmenting social world they are able to stay true to, and in touch with, their own beliefs and values. In short, pure emotional labour is a holistic way of working which fits in with ideas of 'becoming and being' which are the goal of the counsellors. The argument is not that the work is easy and/or that everyone would be better off doing it. In fact, as previous chapters have illustrated, not everyone is suited to it and self-awareness is not always as pleasant as it may at first appear. Despite the difficulties that

they encounter, though, the counsellors in this study assert that the rewards of their work far outweigh the costs.

6.1 The costs of counselling

It has been claimed that the performance of emotional labour can have negative effects upon the worker. Hochschild (1983, p.187) argues that there are three stances that emotional labourers seem to take toward work and that each carries risk. If a worker identifies too strongly with the job then she/he risks experiencing burnout. If workers distinguish themselves from their work Hochschild argues they are less likely to experience burnout but may blame themselves for making the very distinction that is protecting them and denigrate themselves as 'just actors' who lack sincerity. The third stance that may be taken is to dissociate oneself from the work without blaming oneself because it is accepted that the job requires the worker to act or perform. This third stance, argues Hochschild, may cause the worker to become cynical and view herself as merely an 'illusion maker'.

Arguably counselling work bears most resemblance to Hochschild's first stance, since counsellors identify very strongly with the work they do, they offer a personalised service and strive to be authentic in their relationships with clients. Most of the counsellors in this study have stated that their decision to undertake counselling training and work has ramifications which have affected the whole of their lives. Hochschild believes, however, that this first stance towards work is the most dangerous in that it has the potential to cause the most harm to the worker. Hochschild states that 'the worker may become accustomed to a dimming or numbing of inner signals. And when we lose access to feeling, we lose a central means of interpreting the world around us' (1983, p.188).

What is of interest here is that while Hochschild believes that emotional labourers who identify too strongly with their work are likely to suffer stress and are susceptible to burnout or 'emotional deadness', the counsellors are

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claiming that, while it can be difficult at times, their work actually enriches other areas of their lives.

Other writers have pointed out that often it is the misconceptions about the nature of emotional labour that can cause problems for its practitioners. Assumptions about emotional labour being 'just talking really' and a gendered attribute rather than a hard-won skill that demands both recognition and reward (Aldridge, 1994) can lead to a situation where emotional labour becomes invisible, a 'hidden component' which, although often unrecognised, is vital to the many forms of care-work (James, 1989). It is this very invisibility that can cause problems for workers because, as James and others have stressed, emotional labour is hard work and can be as exhausting as physical labour. 'As with physical labour, after a sustained period of emotional labour, an alternative or a rest are necessary' (James, 1989, p.27).

For the full-time counsellor usually seeing 6 or 7 clients a day, a rest or 'an alternative' between appointments is seldom possible. As stated previously, counsellors have little to offer their clients apart from emotional labour, since only very rarely are there physical tasks to perform that can give the practitioner a respite from dealing with the emotions of others.

It has been claimed that few professions provide their practitioners with the satisfactions, challenges and variety that counselling work does (Brady et al, 1995). However, with rewards come costs; counsellors are made aware of the hazards of their work during their training and supervision. Many of these issues have much in common with the negative consequences detailed in the emotional labour literature. In addition, as with emotional labour, the informants in this study recognise that people may view their work very negatively, seeing it as unskilled and/or depressing. Some counsellors described the reactions of friends who ask how they can bear to spend all day with people moaning on about their problems, listening to sob

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stories, one after another. This is not a view shared by the counsellors, as Beth explains here:

> 'but sob stories are just the first time really. Of course they have to come along and begin by telling their story don't they? Sometimes that can be the worst time for them, spitting it all out. Once they've done that they can build up from there, not necessarily right away or even by the end of the session, perhaps it'll take weeks, but they've started'.

During the study it was made clear that, although the counsellors do not feel that their work is depressing, the therapeutic role is not seen as an easy one. Counselling is considered to be difficult work.

> 'I have never attempted to deny to myself or to others the arduous nature of a therapist's work. The intense concentration required in therapeutic relationships, the anxiety generated by close involvement with those who are often highly self-destructive, the relentless pressure of a seemingly endless stream of clients - all of these can induce exhaustion and a sense of powerlessness in the face of implacable forces. What is more, there is often the experience of battling against formidable odds because of family or societal pressures which constantly threaten to undermine the client's progress in therapy or seem to reduce the therapeutic relationship to little more than an ineffective palliative administered once or twice a week. It is gruelling and demanding work and the therapist who denies this is mendacious, deluded or incompetent' (Thorne, 1989, p.63/64).

Clearly one of the problems of genuinely engaging with clients and empathising with their experiences is that the counsellor runs the risk of feeling the pain of their clients. There are occasions when the experiences

related by the client can impinge upon areas of great sensitivity to or bear a strong relation to events that have occurred in the life of the counsellor.

Charlotte explained that it was through her counselling training that she came to recognise the significance of an unpleasant incident that she experienced when she was young. Although she gained a great deal more self-awareness, recognition of the incident heralded a painful period of growth for her as she gradually acknowledged her own feelings and how they influenced regular patterns of behaviour. When a similar issue was raised by one of her clients Charlotte admitted that it was a problem for her:

> 'It is difficult if the same issue, or sort of issue, comes up - then, yes, it is hard. It is quite extraordinary that I am dealing with a client who is, who has experienced the same problem as me but I've actually helped that client advance into it and I'm further back in my own development on that (short laugh). I feel I know the right things to say and I've got the skills and I don't let on and reveal my emotions to the client because that wouldn't be helpful for the client but it does sometimes make me feel pretty wobbly underneath. I have to come away from it and calm down' (Charlotte).

Even if the counsellor has not personally experienced similar problems there are still some areas with which they admit they have problems. Some issues are difficult to dissociate from or put out of their minds once a session has ended.

> 'Of course it doesn't do any good bringing things home but it's sometimes hard to leave it at work. Usually it's when I'm struggling with something that (pause) gets to me, that presses my buttons, if you like. There was one in particular that really got to me, a child abuse case, and I just couldn't leave it behind, it was coming home with me and I needed lots of supervision to get through that one. The unprofessional side of me was - well, I

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just wanted to go and find this fellow and do untold damage to him. It made it difficult to work with the client, to be with her, because I was trying to sort my own feelings out' (Liz).

Many of the counsellors who inform this study stated that they found some cases particularly problematic. Some of the informants admitted they had difficulty when clients presented problems involving experiences of child abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault or rape. Others stated that it was impossible to pinpoint which types of issues might trigger feelings of their own, as Vicky explains:

'It's not necessarily the most difficult cases, some clients just get to you and it's all to do with transference and counter-transference - I'm sure you understand that. You know what they say, you spend 80% of your time thinking about 20% of the clients. That's very true and it's not necessarily to do with, if you like, the seriousness of the case in terms of personal suffering. For example, one particular client lately, she is such a courageous person that just sitting opposite her is awe-inspiring. I just don't know how she has got through. With that sort of client you can't just say "bye". They stay with you for a while, it makes you feel very emotional, humble - you need a de-brief sometimes'.

Perhaps one of the most striking differences between counsellors and care workers who perform emotional labour as part of their main occupational role is that counsellors are made aware of the pitfalls inherent in the work they do. Much of counselling training concerns such problematic issues in order that counsellors can be prepared for them because it is recognised that they will occur.

'If you're doing the job properly you have to give of yourself, a lot of the time you're in there but aware that this isn't mine, it's theirs. There are times though when they hit the spot because the

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relationship is so strong. You've got to know each other and you more or less feel that you know the family, you've heard all about the people they are related to and about the relationship - you know so much about them and if you're really empathic you do feel some of the pain the are going through and it can be quite difficult sometimes' (Sarah).

The uniqueness of some aspects of each individual case mean that general training can never prepare counsellors completely for what they go on to encounter, and dealing with the unanticipated emotions that can be generated by some cases will be an important function of counselling supervision.

Although counsellors expect to become emotionally involved with their clients and realise that some client problems will resonate strongly with them, serious problems can occur when a counsellor encounters such cases at a time when they are also experiencing upheaval or difficulty in other areas of their lives. An informant who, because of stress, had taken a substantial amount of time off work described the period leading up to her sick leave:

> 'Normally you have a variety of clients who are all at different stages in their counselling but what happened last year was that although the clients were very different they all had really multiple, horrendous problems - some quite devastating problems. They all seemed to be going through the same stage together, they hit that big pit together which made my work really hard. And this was at a time when I was dealing with a lot of personal, home stuff as well, things to do with my children' (Judith).

It was significant that during conversations with counsellors they stressed the need for congruence if they were to work well as counsellors. They explained that, for them, the term congruence meant 'getting yourself right'

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and having one's own life in order. They clearly do not expect to lead trouble free lives, never experiencing problems or difficulties of their own. It is recognised that personal concerns will arise for counsellors just as they do for all other workers. For the majority of the time counsellors are aware of what is going on in their lives and feel able to deal with or accept what is happening to them. Very occasionally, though, personal problems will arise that counsellors find difficult to set aside. If they find that they are dwelling on their own issues then that may interfere with their counselling work. It is this situation that they describe as incongruence.

One informant felt, at times, 'as if I was shouldering the problems of the world'. When she was beset by family problems she felt she was managing neither home-life nor work very well:

> 'suddenly wham! everything is on you and you want some
> counselling yourself - you want someone to be there for you and
> instead you've got to put on this happy face and say "right, here
> we go again, let's start again, let's take on board everybody's
> problems again" and sometimes you have it all day long and you
> go home and start again, that's what it feels like sometimes'
> (Linda).

Although the majority of counsellors who inform this study are women it was still not surprising that the informants who voiced such problems were all female. Certainly there is a substantial body of sociological knowledge (including the work on emotional labour) which explains why this would be likely to be the case. In her study of dual-career parents Hochschild found that it was the women who were more deeply torn between the demands of work and family and experienced conflict between the two areas. One of Hochschild's informants supplied the name for her study as described below. Although Hochschild's informant focused more upon the burden of the practical rather than the emotional, the following excerpt resonates strongly with Linda's description:

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'It was a woman who first proposed to me the metaphor, borrowed from industrial life, of the "second shift". She strongly resisted the *idea* that homemaking was a "shift". Her family was her life and she didn't want it reduced to a job. But as she put it, "you're on duty at work. You come home, and you're on duty". After eight hours of adjusting insurance claims, she came home to put on the rice for dinner, care for her children, and wash laundry. Despite herself her home life *felt* like a second shift. That was the real story and that was the real problem' (Hochschild, 1989, pp.6-7).

It is clear that counsellors share similar problems to those that face other emotional labourers. Even the most experienced counsellors state that, at times, it is sometimes difficult not to lose yourself in your work and to over-identify with the emotions and needs of the clients. In this sense comparisons with Hochschild's assertions that workers can suffer negative consequences and become susceptible to burnout can be made. The dissimilarity is that counsellors, throughout their training and during practice, are aware of the possible dangers of their work. All of the counsellors in this study recognised the need for regular supervision and all claimed that they would not work without it. Many of them also strongly advocate personal therapy for practising counsellors, although they acknowledge that this could not be made compulsory for all practitioners. As detailed in chapter 4 it was repeatedly emphasised that not everyone is suited to performing emotional labour and many aspects of counselling training and supervision are designed to protect the worker as well as the clients. It is certainly significant that a book containing developmental exercises for practising and trainee counsellors states 'it is not recommended that you follow any of the exercises without the normal support systems in place (training group, supervision and personal counselling)' (Crouch, 1997, p.xiii).

Of interest in this examination of the costs to practitioners of performing counselling work is the fact that, when asked about such issues, informants

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tended to focus first upon material costs rather than emotional difficulties. This may partly be a result of the phrasing of the questions but further discussion revealed that most counsellors did not immediately think about the issues outlined above because these were an expected hazard of their chosen occupation. In that sense counsellors were prepared to feel the pain of their clients and were not surprised to find that, at times, it was possible to feel overwhelmed or overburdened by the work they had chosen to do.

An area of concern for some of the informants was that their material investment in becoming trained was often quite substantial but was rarely recognised. It was found that most of the GP counsellors and those in private practice had personally paid for the majority of their counselling training and continued to invest in further short courses and day workshops. If counsellors have private clients then they must provide a suitable room, secretarial support, pay for the necessary insurance and for their own regular supervision. Those who work for counselling organisations are assigned a supervisor but if they desire or require personal therapy then they must pay for it. In addition to these expenses there is a growing pressure upon clients to become accredited counsellors. As well as the financial outlay involved candidates are required to invest a great deal of time and complete what one counsellor described as 'a mountain of paperwork'.

The informants who offered their services in a voluntary capacity had been trained by the organisations with which they are involved. All travelling expenses were met and accommodation was supplied for residential courses. However, while this training required no financial outlay the cost of their training was impressed upon individual trainees and commitment to the organisation was expected in return. More than one volunteer counsellor stated that counselling completely took over her life in the earliest stages of her training. A great deal was expected from those who undertook training with Relate while employed full-time as there are evening commitments at least twice a week and a number of compulsory residential week-ends (six

at present) at the training college in Rugby. In addition, trainees were required to undertake extensive reading and keep detailed notes for supervision. Dissatisfaction with the organisation is expressed when, on top of this time investment, counsellors are asked to engage in non-counselling activities like administration and fund-raising (Heisler, 1987).

In addition to the emotional and material costs incurred by informants, feelings of disillusionment were also frequently experienced, particularly in the early stages of practice.

Despite media coverage describing the power that counsellors wield over their vulnerable clients, most of the informants described feelings of disappointment in their early counselling relationships. Some admitted that when they began their training they did have ideas about becoming wiser or 'all-knowing' but as trainees they rapidly became aware that they were not learning to be sages dispensing wisdom (Thorne, 1989). In fact as Sue describes:

> 'I mean at the time you always feel you aren't good enough and that the best counselling is going on in the next room and you are just playing at it in this room. I felt that all the time and I feel that still now but I think, I think in a way it's essential that you do feel like that because otherwise you'd give up trying if you thought you'd reached the pinnacle. That would come across to the client and you wouldn't be real any more - do you know what I mean?'

Other counsellors cited similar feelings. One male counsellor stated that in the early stages of his counselling career he felt unable to bring up his own cases at case discussion meetings because he felt inadequate in his dealings with his clients. Gradually he came to realise that even experienced counsellors often felt the same way which gave him the confidence to participate in, and gain benefit from, peer group meetings. In similar vein Sue explains that now that she is an experienced practitioner

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she recognises that it is important for counsellors to retain their humility even when their self-confidence has increased:

> 'I do now think I am a good counsellor, you have to have a certain amount of self-confidence but as I said people who think they have reached the pinnacle, who believe they <u>are</u> the best are <u>not</u> the best because they believe it. Do you know what I mean? It is a Catch 22'.

There are times when counsellors find it difficult to hang on to their belief in counselling, they experience feelings of impotence, powerlessness, 'stuckness' and frustration. 'It is in such relationships that it becomes so blindingly obvious that I am not a powerful magician who can work miracles by offering acceptance, genuineness and empathy' states Thorne (1989, p.65) who argues that this situation must be accepted by therapists.

Informants say that when counselling is not effective it is often because some of the people who seek counselling are simply not ready for it, they are not prepared to examine aspects of their own lives and behaviour. Reasons put forward include the suggestion that this may be because it would be too hard or too painful for them to examine their own input into their situation. Counsellors have to set aside their own desires for such clients and accept that sometimes counselling is not successful:

> 'Isn't that to do with our expectations? I used to get quite hung up, I felt that in order for me to be a good counsellor they [the clients] had to grow. That was getting in the way. Now I have turned completely around and it is just about what I can give them in that time - that's my gift if you like, that attention. The rest is out there. I have reached the stage where I don't really have much personal investment in my client. I have investment in that time. It feels uncomfortable articulating this because I have recently moved into this way of being. But there are all sorts of things going on in the client that frustrate me - on a personal

level. I want to see them move, I want to see them grow but I have to let it go otherwise I get tangled up with my own stuff' (Chris).

It has also been suggested that many counsellors suffer from feelings of isolation (Brady et al, 1995). Such feelings are often a consequence of a counsellor's professional obligation to maintain confidentiality. Any disclosures about their working day or expressions of frustration or the sharing of a therapeutic success must be monitored closely to protect against breaching confidentiality. Some of the informants in this study agreed that, at times, maintaining confidentiality caused them problems:

'you can feel isolated, a bit alone - that's where confidentiality impinges. I mean, normally, if things happen at work you go round to your friend's house in the evening - or you ring them up - and talk about it, don't you? You can't do that' (Sarah).

During discussions about confidentiality most informants revealed that they do sometimes talk about their work, either with close friends or with their partners. It was emphasised however that they do not reveal the identities of their clients, they talk about them as 'a case'. However, as Fay explains any disclosures about clients are recognised as risky:

> 'you have to choose your people carefully - I know for example that what I've said to G. [a friend who is also a counsellor] will not go any further - and I know I've overstepped the mark at times - but it was good for me and knowing that it would not go any further - you have to be very, very sure of that because once you start the ball rolling, where the hell does it finish? - confidentiality is shot' (Fay)

The reasons given for discussing cases revealed that counsellors can feel that they have been left 'holding' a client's problem and feeling unsure about their own reactions. Normally such issues would be discussed with a

supervisor but, at times, a counsellor may have to wait a week or more for supervision. Self-supervision and peer-supervision can also be useful methods of coping with the strain of keeping client confidentiality, these are discussed in Chapter 7.

6.2 The rewards of counselling

As this research project progressed it became significant that, although ready to talk about the difficulties, the dissatisfactions and the frustrations of their work, informants almost always qualified their answers with some reference to the rewards of counselling work. This is in direct contrast to the literature on emotional labour which focuses mainly upon the negative consequences of performing work of this nature.

As stated earlier the counsellors do not feel that their work is depressing; rather, they believe in the efficacy of counselling and have very positive feelings about their clients.

> 'I think you should look on it [the work] as a privilege, to be the someone that they have told - you should respect them. If they've told me something really awful I always say "thank you for telling me that" because I think it takes a lot of courage, they're brave' (Beth).

Not surprisingly, all of the informants claim that the greatest reward for a counsellor is to feel that they have helped their client.

> 'It is genuinely nice to see people grow and - you know - come to realise things about themselves or about their relationships that they had not realised before. That is really nice - to watch people sort of saying "Oh I hadn't really ever thought about it like that" and make a difference. I suppose that sounds quite powerful but it is good' (Kathy).

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Other counsellors explained that clients did not always experience dramatic change but they felt that to be able to support someone during a period of emotional upheaval was reward enough.

'I think that it's seeing them sort themselves out really and just knowing that I've been able to be there for somebody. It's not always a huge success - you know, bright lights and so on - but the fact that I've been there when somebody hasn't been able to cope and know that somehow I have been able to make a difference. I think there is reward in just being able to see something from another person's point of view when they haven't been able to break through before. Other people haven't seen what they've been trying to say. It is sad sometimes, what they do have to say. I can't parcel it up too nicely - what I get from it because like most counsellors it's ongoing, I can't claim too many fantastic successes but it's satisfying to know that I have been part of a process many times' (Charlotte).

'I don't like to blow my own trumpet (laughter) - counselling can give you an enormous lift, it can be lovely. People outside counselling, don't understand why you do it because they think you're going to get terribly depressed listening to problems all the time but it's not really like that. Clients move on from one stage to the next, they're moving all the time - well, most of the time - and if they do start to cope it is lovely that you have had a part in helping them feel better. If they don't feel better - even then often they are just so pleased to have a bit of support, during an awful time. It's not patting myself on the back but yes, it is a nice feeling' (Maggie).

At times, as can be seen in the examples above, the counsellors struggled to articulate the reasons why they found their work so rewarding. They talked about their most successful or satisfying cases but often had difficulty

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explaining what had happened or why a particular relationship had worked well. These counsellors describe cases that they feel had a successful outcome but they cannot always identify precisely what the keys to success had been:

> 'I could talk to you about that for hours because what really happened there I don't know but I <u>was</u> part of it. I think the working alliance was just <u>so</u> powerful that the contribution from both of us did it. The working alliance, you know, created that situation. At the time I flew! We both did. I didn't come down for days' (Vicky).

> 'I'm still amazed at the progress some people make, sometimes without a lot of input. Sometimes they're saying "Thank you so much" and you're not always sure what you've actually done' (Sarah).

> 'I had a client a few months ago now who genuinely went through a huge cathartic experience. He came back one time and it was as if a great, black cloud had been lifted, he gave me a big smile and a piece of paper saying "you read that and I'll talk to you later". I thought he'd gone completely over the top, but it was - he'd written down what had been happening to him. It was fabulous, really lovely' (John).

Some of the counsellors described a successful counselling relationship as something that is created by the counsellor and the client but which has a life and a power of its own. Those counsellors with strong religious convictions felt that they were being used by God, as Olivia explains 'this probably sounds quite corny to you and it's rather embarrassing for me in a way. But in another way I can only speak as I see it, because I have faith, I believe in God and I believe that God is using me as a channel' (Olivia).

Although few counsellors expressed religious beliefs or talked about God as Olivia does, many of them described themselves as 'a channel' for a force that was greater than the sum total of their training, theories, experience and so on. Informants described this type of experience in various ways, they felt that 'when it clicked' or when 'it' happened then some force more powerful than either of the participants came into play. Something powerful, tangible, yet difficult to describe is constructed.

A group of GP counsellors described such encounters as 'peak experiences' and claimed that, whatever religious beliefs individual counsellors held, there was general agreement that some counsellor/client relationships became almost spiritual. Despite the fact that such experiences were difficult to articulate to a researcher, the group of counsellors appeared to understand the phenomenon being described. They stated that even though such experiences happened rarely they were worth striving for because, as one woman explained, 'although counselling can be demanding, taxing, frustrating and so on, that moment of deep connection is a spiritual thing'.

It has been reported that there are also more material rewards to be gained from working as a counsellor. We have seen that training may incur financial outlay for the counsellor and the financial rewards of counselling are rarely high; in fact, as Feltham (1995) points out, many counsellors in private practice suffer from economic stress. However the nature of counselling work means that practitioners can benefit in other ways.

When a client attends for counselling the counsellor has little or no idea of what the presenting problem will be or what will emerge during the counselling process. Counsellors working in GP surgeries report that even when clients are referred by their doctors, what the client has to say often bears little resemblance to what is written in the GP's referral notes. One GP counsellor dramatically likened entering the counselling room to the opening scenes of the television drama series 'ER', in which the doors of a hospital

casualty department crash open and some medical emergency is rushed in! The other counsellors present found this analogy amusing but exaggerated. Most appreciate the variety of their work, explaining that each client's story is unique to them which makes their work exciting, as described here:

> 'I find them all stimulating and challenging. And I love it - I enjoy my work so much. Yes, of course there are times when you get upset and all that sort of stuff, I get emotional at times but I'm glad I'm doing it and I wouldn't want to be doing anything else for the moment' (Maggie).

Of course there are occasions when a client begins to relate their story and the counsellor's heart sinks a little. Counsellors admit that, at times, they think 'oh, no, not again' (Olivia) or 'people are dying out there, get a life' (Vicky), but they endeavour to get past those initial feelings by remembering that although they may have heard similar problems before, the situation being described is a unique and problematic experience for the client in front of them and therefore demands their best attention. The counselling basics of unconditional positive regard for the client and active listening help the counsellor to fully engage and form a relationship with each client. The informants explained that if they found such initial feelings could not be overcome, they would consider they had a serious problem and take the issue to supervision.

In addition to the variety of presenting problems there are other opportunities for counsellors to vary their workload. Some of the practitioners in this study are also involved in teaching and training, others are involved with more than one counselling organisation which gives them access to different types of cases. Many of those informants who counsel for a voluntary organisation claim that counselling work contrasts well with their 'day jobs' and so offers them a separate working environment and wider life experience. Professor Windy Dryden, probably the most prolific writer in the counselling field, learned from experience that he was not able

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to counsel full-time. When given the opportunity he had initially been enthusiastic about working as a full-time counsellor after years of writing, training, supervising and counselling part-time. He soon came to realise, however, that he missed the variety of work and rapidly became restless and irritable without it (Dryden, 1992).

This appreciation of the variety of experiences that counselling work can offer was echoed by those informants who valued the personal autonomy that their work afforded them. Those in private practice were able to decide their workload, their times of work and the amount they could charge their clients. Counsellors who worked in GP surgeries made their own appointments with clients and decided how frequently and how many times they should see individual clients. Even though the 'average' counselling relationship lasts for six to eight sessions, GP, and Relate counsellors, in consultation with their clients, make decisions about the length of each counselling relationship. More importantly, all of the counsellors decided how best to handle each case that they were presented with. Regular supervision is crucial to good counselling practice but it is generally the counsellor who identifies problems and decides which cases to take to supervision.

It should also be noted that counselling is rewarding, fulfilling work for many, mainly middle-class, women who possess few educational qualifications. As an example, Sue, who trained with Relate and then went on to full-time work, claimed that one of the greatest rewards for her had been the opportunity to enter a new career in mid-life. Some informants appreciated being able to join an occupation where their own life experiences and 'life skills' had relevance. Although flexible working arrangements and autonomy are clearly appreciated, feelings about the work being worthwhile and helping others were also expressed. Some of the informants also valued being part of an occupational group, which gave them the opportunity to mix

with 'like-minded people'. This is an area that is explored further in Chapter 7.

A consideration of the rewards of counselling practice, both emotional and material, must contain some reference to the nature of the work. The fact that counselling requires the 'self' of the counsellor and is based upon the personal relationships that are formed between the counsellor and the clients allows counsellors to be the sort of people they want to be. Thorne (1989) explains that his work is immensely satisfying to him because it embodies the values he holds dear: 'my work as a therapist, although it is hard, demanding and exhausting is easy because it gives me the permission and the constant obligation to be the person I truly wish to be' (Thorne, 1989, p.64)

Despite the arduous nature of counselling work, Thorne continues to be 'not simply sustained but positively nourished ' (p.65) by the work. The informants expressed their appreciation of the work they do in similar terms. Although not all counselling relationships are successful many of them are a source of great satisfaction for the counsellors. They claimed, in Chapter 3, that trainee counsellors needed to genuinely care about (some said 'love') people. Thorne explains that being a counsellor enables people to love others in a focused way that is devoid of possessiveness and not easily side-tracked. Every therapeutic relationship offers the possibility of living in as integrated a way as possible. It is also acknowledged that counsellors are often loved by their clients, all informants believe this to be one of a counsellor's privileges.

In 1986, Combs showed that 'person-centred' attitudes and approaches are common to counsellors. This goes some way to explain why many of the informants in this study previously worked in professions like nursing and social work. They claimed that they became disillusioned with what are traditionally seen as 'the caring professions' because staffing levels and work practices left no time to spend with patients/clients. Many of those

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counsellors who had left other occupations to become counsellors expressed the view that 'people becoming numbers' left no time for personal care.

In direct contrast to the claims of the emotional labour literature, the informants valued the fact that counselling demands the worker's use of self. Much of their job satisfaction sprang directly from the opportunity to be 'real' at work and their work had positive effects which spilled over into their wider lives.

6.3 Effects on wider life

The stresses of counselling work have been well documented in the counselling literature (Dryden, 1995) and, as has been observed, these have much in common with the stresses associated with emotional labour. However, counselling writers have also detailed the positive effects counselling work has had upon them. Thorne (1989) is one such example.

When asked how they coped with the pressures of their work many of the informants claimed that their own family life was a source of comfort to them. One counsellor stated that 'just going home and appreciating what you've got' was a way of 'winding down'.

Andrew, a male GP counsellor who had left a more financially lucrative career in order to train as a counsellor, felt that the rewards of his work far outweighed the costs. He claimed that he often felt better at the end of a full day's counselling and that this was partly due to the fact that he recognised 'how privileged one was compared to others'. One of the consequences of counselling work is that the counsellor becomes deeply aware of the situations of others. This has the effect of recognising the value of one's own personal relationships.

There were some complaints from families about counsellors wearing their counselling 'hats' when at home:

'I feel that I'm a lot more patient when they [family and friends] have problems - much more so than I used to be - but I do have great problems with my daughter sometimes because I try to talk to her and she says "I'm not talking to a mum, I'm talking to a counsellor!' (Liz).

'I think I am probably a better listener now but I have to be careful that I don't theorise too much with my husband -I have to be careful that I don't start getting into counselling mode, just occasionally when he's - it's difficult to explain - he'll say "don't start intellectualising with me - I'm not one of your clients!" -or something like that' (Olivia).

However there was a general consensus among the informants that becoming counsellors had given them more than job satisfaction. They claimed that their own personal relationships had been greatly improved by the skills they had developed at work.

'I think they [her family] value the fact that you don't dish out advice - sort of launch into "I know about that and when it happened to me I did so and so" and that sort of thing. You learn to listen and just reflect things back to them - you do learn to be a good listener' (Liz).

Another counsellor claimed she now has better relationships with her mother, her friends, her children and her partner because she has learned to 'hold back' and avoid rushing in to fill silences and 'rescue' people from their own emotions. She is very proud of this achievement as she found it was/is a difficult thing for her to do.

There were many similar observations. Bernice found her family life has improved now that she allows other family members to express their feelings and have their disagreements with each other. She claims that she came to realise that although she should respect the feelings of others she

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is not necessarily responsible for them. As a consequence she doesn't attempt to 'smooth things over' as she did in the past and does less 'emotion work' in the home as she explains here:

> 'if they were having an argument I'd want to be protecting both sides and saying "no, no, no, don't say that" or "oh, God don't say that back!", "just listen to each other", and trying to smooth things over which, of course, doesn't usually help anything - they've got to get it out of their systems even though I wince at times' (Bernice)

Understandably perhaps a re-examination of one's self and relationships does not always lead to a greater appreciation of one's own situation. A few of the counsellors felt that becoming a counsellor had caused them to re-evaluate their own lives and realise how distanced they were from their partners. So while the majority of counsellors claimed that they came to appreciate their own lives more than before, a few of them (as evidenced in chapter 4) realised that drastic changes were necessary if their personal situation was to be improved. Where relationships were difficult but could not be changed or abandoned then utilising counselling skills gave practitioners ways of coping that they had not had before. Although they could not enter into a counselling relationship with difficult relations, the use of counselling skills offered a way of coping as described here:

> 'I realised that I had lost that bond with my mother and it was something that I had to work on. Once I had dealt with that I found I could cope with her more - I actually fall back on some counselling techniques when she 'phones me up, it's the only way I can handle it, just reflect back what she is saying. My relationship with her hasn't improved but it's given me a way of coping - a tool to cope - so I can reflect back what she's said without getting really upset. I mean, she's not a very pleasant

woman but now I don't get drawn into her melodrama and argument and the guilt trips that she tries to put on me' (Bernice).

Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated that becoming involved with clients, albeit within certain accepted boundaries, and giving of 'yourself' can be very rewarding for the worker. Performing emotional labour in the workplace does not necessarily have negative effects upon one's private life, in fact, as we have seen, informants report that it can improve other areas of their social lives. The evidence presented in this chapter demonstrates that the rewards of counselling work are not principally financial, they are related much more to personal satisfactions. The creation of successful counselling relationships and the experience of personal growth can benefit both clients and counsellors.

When examining the costs and rewards of counselling work it is important to recognise that counsellors and counselling organisations consider their work to be skilled, potentially stressful and time consuming. It has been argued that other forms of emotion work (for example the emotional labour that is performed to enhance a main occupational role or solidary labour that is performed in the domestic sphere), are often not recognised as 'real' work (James, 1989; Lynch, 1989). If the demands of emotional labour are not appreciated then support systems will not be in place to minimise the emotional costs of performing such work. It is significant that some of the findings in this chapter are in direct contrast to those of other studies (Hochschild,1983). This may be due to the fact that most counsellors would consider working without support to be bad practise and would not attempt it. Counselling support systems are examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 7

A Counselling Culture?

Introduction

Of all the popular criticisms of counselling that regularly appear in the media, the most frequently expressed concern the fact that, as yet, counselling is an unregulated activity. Yvonne McEwan (1997) (of Fife College of Further and Higher Education) recently launched a vitriolic attack on counselling in The Independent newspaper, stating that 'Professional counselling is largely a waste of time and does more to boost the ego of the counsellor than to help the victim'. She further claimed that 'the booming profession was at best useless and at worst highly destructive to victims seeking help' and attacked the lack of control or regulation over counselling by pointing out that anyone can set themselves up in practice as a counsellor by simply putting a sign in their window.

Strong claims such as these are usually unsubstantiated and although they are sensational it could be argued that assertions about counselling being a waste of time or 'highly destructive' would be invalidated by even one report from a client who can show that he or she has benefited from counselling. In fact, it must be noted that shortly after her published attack on counselling McEwan herself was exposed as something of a fraud for representing herself as a Professor (The Times Higher, 1997). However, what cannot be refuted is the accusation that counselling is an unregulated activity. Although measures are being taken by counselling organizations to rectify this situation, both the diversity of counselling that is offered and the different settings in which counselling is delivered may mean that one, all-encompassing register or regulatory body is impossible to construct. This does not mean that individual counsellors are unaware of the problem; indeed, concerns voiced by informants in this study indicate that the fact

that counselling is an unregulated occupation is also an issue of concern for its practitioners.

In 1996 the United Kingdom Register of Counsellors was launched and lauded as 'perhaps the most important innovation in counselling in this country this decade. It is set to act as the hallmark of good practice in counselling' (Thoburn, 1996). Although the original motivation for this register was to protect the employment mobility of U.K. counsellors in the face of European Union Regulations, the counselling organisations involved came to recognise that public concern, hostile media coverage and the establishment of other professional registers constituted a greater and more pressing problem for the occupation of counselling. It is now being proposed that all those who work as counsellors will eventually aspire to Registered Status, and that the day will come when clients will be able to verify the status and reliability of counsellors by asking whether or not they are registered. Routes to registration will be set and overseen by an Executive Committee thereby ensuring that the public are offered a safe and effective service and counsellors will be afforded professional recognition. Hoburn (1996) suggests that, although the Register still requires promotion and publicity, its establishment 'marks the coming of age of counselling in the U.K.'.

What is of particular interest here is that although most of the counsellors who inform this study expressed the view that counselling should be 'tightened up' and standards of training should be set in order to cut down on 'cowboy' counsellors, few of those informants who were not already accredited were actually working towards accreditation even though most appeared to be aware of the processes involved. There are different routes towards accreditation and these often depend upon the counselling organisation for which a practitioner works. Some informants have already achieved accredited status with their own relevant advisory/supervisory body but these were in the minority. Clearly there is an anomaly here; counsellors are expressing the view that counselling needs to be regulated

and counsellors should be accountable, and yet most were not following the routes to accountable membership that were available to them. The reasons given for this situation mainly centred upon the financial outlay required and the time involved in accreditation procedures. As Sarah explained:

'the problem is that there is not one accreditation but different accreditations. I think that counsellors are hedging their bets in a way, you see, you could be working for one organisation and be recognised as accredited by them and then move on to another organisation and be faced with a whole new form of accreditation. Once the BAC [British Association for Counselling] has got its act together and made it very clear what's required then more of us will go for it. In the meantime it's bloody expensive and you've got to have proof about your hours of counselling and supervision, it just doesn't seem worth going for - not yet anyway. I'm sure it'll all get better organised in the future - I suppose if it was compulsory things would be different but at the moment it's voluntary and all a bit fuzzy anyway. Most of us comply with the requirements of our particular organization, there's lots of talk but there's no overall standard or anything'.

What is also of interest is that most informants thought that being accredited would make little difference to the ways in which they worked. They explained that they continually strove to operate in a professional manner and that they were already accountable; to themselves, to their clients, to their supervisors, to their peers and/or to their organisation. Therefore, although counselling does not constitute a profession in the traditional sense, it is frequently described as one, and, when talking about their work, counsellors often use the terms 'professional practice' and 'professional attitudes'. Perhaps it is more accurate to describe counselling as an occupation with a distinctive culture. It can be argued that there does exist a

'counselling culture' and that part of the process of training, becoming and practising as a counsellor is to be socialised into this common culture. There has long been a recognition that some occupations encourage the development of sets of beliefs, customs or 'ways of being' in their practitioners, as David Morgan explains:

> 'That particular organisations and occupations can be described as having a culture has long been recognised in sociological writings. The term "culture" is used here to indicate a whole way of life, a focus on those features which are held to make a particular group distinctive: a network of shared experiences and symbols, ways of seeing and speaking and of being in the world. While all institutional settings develop some degree of cultural specificity, some cultures seem to be more distinct and bounded than others. What brings about this sense of distinctiveness varies from case to case but of significance in marriage guidance would be the processes of recruitment and training (including possible similarities in social background), the tensions and the stresses of the "work", the continuing importance of group or interpersonal relationships within the organisation and the possible 'spill-over' of organisational life into personal or domestic life.' (1992, p.10-11).

Waller made similar claims for the teaching profession. In his classic book The Sociology of Teaching in which he considered what personal qualities and characteristics were induced by the performance of teaching, Waller suggested that one of the factors that was important when determining an 'occupational type' was 'traumatic learning within the occupation' (1984, p.160).

The focus of this chapter is to consider whether, and how, counsellors learn and internalise counselling culture. As has already been explored counselling is an occupation that has a myriad of training courses and

programmes, great emphasis is placed upon the use of 'self' in the counselling relationship and, in the main, counselling work consists of unsupervised, private, one-to-one or small group encounters bounded by promises of confidentiality. Against a background of occupational autonomy, how can counsellors learn to conform to the formal and the informal, or unwritten, rules of their chosen occupation? How do they develop the 'cultural specificity' described above by Morgan?

Information gleaned from the informants in this study as well as from the counselling literature confirms that there are unwritten 'rules' or strongly held beliefs about what constitutes good and bad practice for counsellors, and that these beliefs are common to most counsellors whatever their client group. As explored in the previous chapter all of the counsellors spoken to in the course of this study, either formally in interview situations or informally at social gatherings, hold fast to the belief that no counsellor should work without supervision. One of the strongest messages coming from practising counsellors is that regular supervision is essential and that to work without supervision is one of the clearest examples of bad practice. Supervision is regarded as essential because it provides individual counsellors with support, advice and an impartial overview of their work. It is argued here that supervision also plays a large role in the regular re-enforcement of counselling culture.

The first section of this chapter is concerned with formal supervision. The functions and types of supervision are examined, as are the problems that can arise within a supervisory relationship. Sections two and three are concerned with the informal ways in which counselling culture is reinforced. It is argued that counsellors learn from the counselling environment and from each other how to 'be' counsellors.

7.1 Supervision

Although similarities in appearance, behaviour and work experiences do occur or develop among counsellors by virtue of the fact that they train together, share the same work environment and may also spend time together socially, such observations on their own would not constitute a strong enough argument that a counselling culture exists. While it is argued that a counselling culture develops during training and is reinforced through interaction with work colleagues, the strongest means of culture reinforcement is through supervision.

As in other occupations, confidence and ability grow with experience, yet every relationship that is built up between counsellor and client is a unique episode for the counsellor involved, one for which training alone may not fully prepare him or her. It is also important to remember that confidentiality is one of the most important elements of counselling. While the assurance of confidentiality may enable clients to reveal feelings they may have never voiced before, those same assurances may leave a counsellor feeling isolated, especially if the counselling session has been a particularly challenging one. Counsellors often need to be reassured themselves, they may require guidance and support, and they also need their errors pointed out to them. The most important form of supervision is one-to-one supervision which we explore below along with other forms namely self-supervision and group or peer supervision. All of the counsellors in this study had access to one-to-one supervision (although the frequency of it tended to vary in accordance with the number of hours worked and the organisation worked for). The counselling literature points out that supervision, particularly one-to-one supervision, performs three vital functions, namely, support, education and management (Dryden, Horton and Means, 1995). These functions serve to protect and support the counsellor, the client and (where applicable) the organisation. Supervisors also play an important part in protecting the reputation of the profession overall as it serves to reinforce ideas of good and bad practice.

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7.1.1 Support

As addressed in the previous chapter, one of the clearest advantages of supervision is the maintenance of the personal and professional well-being of counsellors. Without breaking confidentiality a counsellor can talk over challenging or troubling clients with someone who has counselling experience. 'Supervision is a help there - if there's something that you can't handle or is getting too much then there is always someone you can talk to about it' (Kathy).

The most basic function of supervision is to provide reassurance for the counsellor and to provide support and a 'safe place' to off-load any emotional disturbances she/he may feel after dealing with the emotions of clients. Although, ideally, the supervisor knows the counsellor well, she/he is distanced from the client and so is in a position to comment upon the counselling relationship and its progress (or lack of progress). Supervision also offers a place for supported reflection, since a counsellor is encouraged to consider in what ways she/he may be influencing or restricting the therapeutic process:

> 'because you have no way of knowing - especially when you are training - you have no way of knowing that what you are doing is right. There's just you and the client and how do you know that this isn't you that's directing this or that? Your opinions and thoughts can come in - you need to have someone else going through it with you sometimes - to look at what's happening' (Sue).

The importance of supervision is highlighted by the fact that there was general agreement from the counsellors who inform this study that immediate or almost immediate access to their supervisor was the ideal situation. As Bernice said: 'you may have just had supervision, if an incident

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happens today you may not have supervision until next Friday which means you can be left hanging, worrying about something for a whole week'.

Those informants who could contact their supervisor at any time, either in person or by telephone, felt that this was an important source of support for them. There may be times when counsellors will be confronted with an issue where they will need immediate advice or support. Crises can occur and immediate access to an experienced supervisor can be reassuring for the counsellor concerned, as a counsellor with her own practice explains here:

'Although I work on my own it means I'm not on my own. If there's an emergency you do need reassurance and back-up pretty quickly. Like a client of mine strongly implied that he was intending to kill himself and I felt I could do virtually nothing. I got on the 'phone to my supervisor and she just told me practical stuff, what I could do (which was very little). But she was there, backing me up so I didn't feel I was on my own with it. In fact she endorsed what I'd already done which was to write to him after our session telling him I was there for him if he wanted me. There was so little I could actually do - it was wonderfully helpful to know that I had done and said the right things. I wasn't on my own. I think I would have taken the responsibility on me if he had killed himself'.

However, even when immediate access is available it is very unusual for counsellors to make contact with their supervisors between their scheduled meetings. Some informants explained that even when very concerned about a client they tried to 'sit on things' for a while before rushing to contact their supervisor. The knowledge that support is there if it is needed is often enough to help them cope.

7.1.2 Education

As well as giving the counsellor support, reassurance and the chance to reflect upon their work, the supervisor's role is also that of educator. The problem of maintaining client confidentiality and not discussing the details of individual cases with other people is that counsellors can sometimes get 'stuck', they can simply run out of ideas. Supervision from experienced counsellors can be a means of moving forward by helping the counsellor to integrate theory and practice.

A counsellor working in a medical setting recognised the problems faced by some fellow workers who performed emotional labour without supervision:

> 'I have a friend who does a lot of counselling within oncology, nothing to do with my training, it's quite different. But she has no supervision and I know she finds it - she desperately needs it really. She doesn't have any support for her job and yet, because what she does is confidential and one-to-one and she doesn't have anybody to mull things over with she finds it very hard. Nowhere to bounce ideas around or reassuring her that what she's doing is right. Obviously she could go blindly on and not realise that she's doing something quite wrong' (Liz).

John illustrates that the education element of counselling is very valuable and that the supervisor/supervisee relationship is an equal one when he described some successful supervision he had experienced:

> 'I was lucky to have found a guy who was expanding his model range, we experienced a good interchange of ideas and thinking, bouncing ideas etc. and I found it very useful. I really gained from that supervision, given things to try, teaching as well as normal 'client-type' supervision. I've lost him now'.

The education element of supervision was made clear by the many informants who stated that their supervisors had recommended further short courses, lectures and books to them.

7.1.3 Management

The counsellors themselves recognise that supervision is a multi-functioned exercise; a number of counsellors pointed out that supervision is a way of monitoring the service that clients receive. 'It is not always about 'self-care' for the counsellor, the supervisor is basically there to protect the client' stated one informant. This function of supervision was not resented and, contrary to popular media assertions about counsellors causing emotional damage to their clients, the counsellors in this study were anxious that safeguards were in place to protect their clients. The very nature of a counselling relationship, with its emphases on confidentiality and forming a trusting bond between counsellor and client, means that observation or tape-recording of counselling sessions would be inappropriate. Counsellors discussing anonymous cases with another experienced practitioner is an acceptable way of gaining input.

Clearly during supervision only the counsellor's perspective can be presented, albeit as openly and honestly as possible. Informants point out that clients are offered opportunities to give feedback (usually through questionnaires) and are encouraged to comment upon the counselling they have received. One counsellor articulated an obvious point when she said 'We encourage them to talk, remember, they tell you when they think it's not going well, you know. And, of course, they can, and do, make their feelings known - with their feet!'. Despite these opportunities which clients have to indicate to counsellors any dissatisfaction with the service which they are receiving, counsellors do still sometimes worry whether what they are doing for their clients is 'good enough'.

7.1.4 Issues taken to supervision

Clearly the cases that counsellors are most anxious to discuss with their supervisor are those that are causing them concern because of the nature of the problem or the lack of progress they appear to be making. It is interesting to note however, that counsellors do not just take their problems to supervision, they may also take other reactions to their work that they feel are inappropriate. For example, after she had described a case that had gone very well for the client, one which she felt could be described as a success, Vicky added: 'it was great, we both flew on it - and didn't come down for days. I thought I was **the** person - which is disgusting really. In fact, I had to take those feelings to supervision and personal therapy'.

The purpose of counselling, she went on to explain, is about empowering clients, believing in the clients' ability to make positive changes which will improve their lives. It is not, Vicky stressed, about boosting one's own sense of power. Taking such an issue to supervision enabled her to reflect upon the importance of humility for a counsellor. While there is satisfaction to be gained from a successful case it would be wrong, even dangerous, to imagine that any counsellor actually has the power to do things for a client.

Another example of a case where supervision was required was a case where an adult female client was staying in an abusive relationship but having counselling in an effort to improve it. The strong feminist beliefs of the counsellor involved meant that she was tempted to tell the client to just get out of the relationship rather than try to understand it and make it work. Her supervisor reminded her of her role, that of an enabler not an advisor. Any decision to leave had to be reached by the client, it could not be forced upon her by the counsellor.

These examples illustrate the ways in which supervision operates to reinforce acceptable counselling practice. Counsellors are supported and 'cared for' by their supervisors but they also protect the interests of the clients by monitoring the counsellors' progress. Supervisors also help to

further the education of their supervisees and remind them of the limitations of their role. This is an important part of the professional culture into which counsellors are socialised, but because it clearly goes against much of the 'common sense' of contemporary culture (for example that it is laudable to do things for others in difficulties) there is a constant need for counselling culture to be reinforced.

7.1.5 Problems of Supervision

Naturally it would be inaccurate to imagine that supervision was always successful or helpful; just as some counselling relationships are not successful, so some supervisory relationships do not 'gel'. Various complaints were made about supervision and, of these, probably the most frequent concerned the suitability and/or ability of the supervisor. Some counsellors complained that their organisations combined the role of supervisor with that of manager, and they resented the fact that the supervisors to whom they were allocated were also their line managers. Clearly, being honest and open is more difficult when your supervisor is the person responsible for your promotion or continued employment. In the area of the study GP counsellors are attached to the County Psychology Service and are assigned to supervisors who are psychologists. Some complain that psychologists are bound by learned theories and have little experience of connecting emotionally, arguing that a degree in psychology does not equip an individual for counselling, as explained here: 'In this organisation psychologists are supervisors. The counsellors are given someone to work with, sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. There are problems with psychologists coming from an academic, a theoretical background, they are working to specific 'models' - 'by the book' and they can be quite rigid' (Sarah).

As well as questioning the adequacy of their supervision a few informants also recognised that it was too infrequent. How often supervision is required depends very much on the caseload of the practitioner although clearly a

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counsellor working full time requires more supervision than a volunteer working for a few hours a week. It was generally accepted that supervision was time consuming and expensive for the organisation or individual concerned:

> 'I don't think we are well supervised and it is something that is recognised in the clinic. But it is very difficult to build in because supervision takes a lot of time and people who are paying wages don't want time spent on that. They want time spent on clients because they've got to hit production figures or whatever, they've got to produce the numbers, enough have to be got through the clinic in order for it to be viable' (Sue).

A further problem that is accepted and recognised by informants is that there is a shortage of suitably qualified supervisors in the region. Ideally a supervisor should be an experienced counsellor who has undertaken specialist training in supervision. The ideal, however, is not always available and counsellors often have to settle for less (Wilkins, 1997).

Another complaint also concerns management. A number of counsellors believed that their management were always looking for ways to save money by cutting back on supervision because they had no idea of its function, or even of why counsellors might require it. A Relate counsellor railed against full-time management in Relate Centres, suggesting that counselling experience should be a pre-requisite for Relate management because without it managers could not fully understand the work that counsellors do:

> 'For counsellors have feelings, and believe they should be heeded. It is very easy for them to feel let down if they are not treated as sensitive and vulnerable human beings. Those cosy chats with that nice (if a little stingy) Mr and Mrs Bloggs are

incredibly tiring. Is this so difficult to understand?' (Relate News, April 1996)

However, even though they do ask for a greater understanding of the stresses of their work, counsellors do not want their supervisors to counsel them. Some counsellors cited instances where they felt that supervision was being confused with personal therapy. Such concerns are mirrored in the counselling literature (Rosenblatt and Mayer, 1975). While good supervision must inevitably consider the personal reactions of supervisees and help them to deal with them effectively it is important to focus upon professional development rather than personal defects.

Despite the problems that may occur most practitioners had mainly good things to say about their supervision, and the negative issues that were raised had, in the main, been rectified. It is because the supervisory relationship is such an important one for a working counsellor that she/he will endeavour to sort out any problems or change their supervisor. It is also not unusual for a counsellor to have more than one supervisor because they practise in more than one field of counselling.

7.1.6 Self-Supervision

Throughout this thesis it has been stressed that counsellors are continually striving for self-awareness. Supervision helps them to do this as supervisors challenge the theory they utilise, the methods they use and their reactions to individual clients. As with the counselling process itself the actual supervisory sessions may act as a catalyst introducing ideas and raising issues to consider, but much of the work is done between those sessions. Self-supervision is an on-going form of self-regulation and self-awareness that is part of the process of preparing for one-to-one supervision. The supervisory relationship is a professional one, it is not 'a casual chat'; the supervisor is not a friend, in the same way as counsellors are not 'friends' of their clients. Counsellors claim to prepare well before supervision, they may

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be required to produce full case notes and/or a working diary and be prepared to defend and explain the approaches they have taken with their clients as well as remaining open to new ideas. Self-supervision has been described as: 'a form of supervision that is always relevant, even if you are receiving good supervision elsewhere. One aim of all supervision is to help practitioners develop a healthy internal supervisor which they can have access to while they are working' (Borders and Leddick, 1987, p.27).

It is clearly understood that, as with all working relationships, both the supervisor and the supervisee have responsibility for the quality of the supervision. Toward this end counsellors are encouraged to practise self-supervision after each case, or if not practicable then after each day of cases. They keep notes not only to record details of a case but also to reflect upon their feelings towards a client and the approaches they have chosen, as described here:

> 'I think you have to have supervision, you must have someone to refer to, your skills can rust up, you know? You are not always aware of what you are doing - and that is essential. It also encourages the development of your skills. Self-supervision is something I wasn't introduced to on my first course but people were talking about it when I went on a further training course and I've found that really useful too. At the end of every session you sort of analyze what you have done, where you're coming from, how you feel and so on. I do it in note form but it's just for me, I don't show those notes to anyone - but I'll also suggest things to myself, should I try this method or whatever' (Charlotte).

7.1.7 Peer supervision

Self supervision aids both one-to-one supervision with a trained supervisor and peer or group supervision. Peer supervision consists of regular, scheduled meetings with working colleagues in order that their experiences

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of work can be aired and support and/or opinion sought. Group meetings have some advantages over individual supervision because they may offer a wider range of learning opportunities and perspectives. Peer supervision serves to reduce feelings of isolation, enabling counsellors to give and receive support from each other thereby promoting a sense of unity. A successful group can provide a supportive atmosphere of peers in which new staff or trainees can share anxieties and learn how others have dealt with similar feelings and issues.

Peer supervision is available to many of those informants who counselled for organisations although, perhaps understandably, it is rarely available to those counsellors in private practice. Most of those who participated in group work claimed it was a valuable addition to formal supervision. There are clear organisational advantages to peer counselling, since it is cost effective and fewer counselling hours are lost (Hawkins and Shohet, 1989). When peer counselling is available in addition to one-to-one counselling it is welcomed by practitioners.

However, it would appear that peer supervision can present as many, if not more, problems as individual supervision. Some informants voiced concerns about peer counselling being used to replace, or reduce the frequency of, one-to-one counselling. Despite requests from counsellors in her organisation, one informant with responsibilities for training and support admitted that although she recognised many of its advantages, she was wary about introducing regular peer supervision because she feared the organisation would see its introduction as an excuse to reduce the frequency of individual supervision.

In addition, difficulties can arise within the groups themselves. Working in any group means that group dynamics have to be dealt with. If members are made aware of group dynamics then they can be used positively to increase the self-awareness of trainees. However, the group process can also be destructive and undermining, particularly if an element of

competitiveness develops within the group. Several informants claimed that they felt that their groups were regularly hijacked by the most experienced and/or vocal members. Recognising and rectifying this situation requires a skilled facilitator. Hawkins and Shohet (1989) also point out that it is possible for members to get so involved with an examination of the group dynamics that no client work gets done!

7.2 Informal Reinforcement

We turn now to the more informal, yet in may ways no less effective, ways in which codes of conduct and ideas of good and bad practice are reinforced. Clearly the length of the thesis and the limitations of the study preclude an examination of every aspect of counsellors' day-to-day work, so three examples have been selected to illustrate areas where conformity is enforced or encouraged. We will examine dress before turning to issues surrounding physical contact and humour.

7.2.1 Dress

When one examines popular stereotypes or images of counsellors, the ways in which they present themselves visually are frequently referred to. Theodore Dalrymple (1996) claims that 'Counsellors have a uniform. The male of the species (comparatively rare) wears tweed and corduroy with brown shoes...The female of the species looks pale and washed out, rather like her dress... Her hair is dry and tends to be wavy'. Such comments are not meant to be complimentary, and while using such unflattering representations of individual members to criticise a whole profession may be effective, it certainly lacks originality. Over fifty years ago Waller pointed out that teachers' mode of dress is affected by their occupational attitudes. He argued that teachers are generally conservatively dressed and they also often have 'a set of the lips, a look of strain, a certain kind of smile, a studied mediocrity, a glib mastery of platitude' (1984, p.163). While Waller's view of teachers may be disparaging, he did recognise that members of an

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occupation generally strive, consciously or unconsciously, to 'fit in' with their colleagues.

> 'If these traits, or those essential ones which make up the major outlines, are found among the generality of teachers, it is because these traits have survival value in the schools of today. If one does not have them when he joins the faculty, he must develop them or die the academic death. Opinions might differ as to how widely these characteristic traits are found among the members of the profession and as to how deeply they are ingrained, as to whether the ordinary man might see them, or only one with the curse of satire. But Henry Adams has said that no man can be a school master for ten years and remain fit for anything else, and his statement has given many a teacher something to worry about' (p.163).

When asked, most informants were aware of counsellor stereotypes, and there was a general belief that their clients expected them to look 'a bit like social workers'. Not surprisingly perhaps, even though informants found questions about their own appearance quite amusing, they could provide quite detailed descriptions of a 'typical' counsellor, as Sue illustrates here:

> 'It's very much like a social worker I think. Someone middle-class, female. They look very sort of, (laughs) they've got sandals and long skirts and an alice band - and nice cardigans. And one of those blouses with frills and the high collar - and they must have that alice band!'

Although most informants claimed not to have changed the way they dressed when they became counsellors, many of them conceded that there was quite a lot of truth in the stereotypical 'look'. Indeed some counsellors did admit that they had intentionally modified their own image to fit in with an occupational norm. When asked about how they dressed for work most informants claimed that they aimed to be 'smart but casual'. They made a

point of wearing nothing too memorable or noticeable in order that their clients were not distracted from the purpose of the encounter. Some of the female counsellors left their wedding and engagement rings at home, some male counsellors removed their wedding rings, other counsellors said they would avoid wearing anything 'flashy' or 'sexy'. They claimed that this was not because they were worried about their personal safety but because they wished to be as 'anonymous as possible'. All of the counsellors, both men and women, said they would avoid wearing formal suits because that image could be interpreted as too powerful. Male volunteer counsellors who wore suits all day as a matter of course took a change of clothes with them if they went to counselling straight from their place of work. One male counsellor related a story about how he had been taken to one side by the manager of his organisation and told not to wear shorts when counselling because the sight of his bare legs may upset or distract his clients. At first he had been a little put out by this instruction but after discussing it with other counsellors he saw the point. The issue was, he explained, that shorts might be fairly unusual and therefore would be memorable.

Of course finding that there is an element of truth in popular stereotypes is hardly surprising; who would not recognise the imagery of the crumpled, distracted academic or the immaculately turned out ex-service man? What is useful, apart from determining whether such images are accurate, is, if they are, asking why do occupational groups develop or adopt a particular image?.

The similarities in appearance between counsellors must be partly due to the fact that, in the main, they come from similar class backgrounds and tend to be of comparable ages. However, it is clear from this study that counsellors do reflect upon the image they are presenting to their clients, and how that image might influence the therapeutic relationship they are trying to forge. The anonymous image that counsellors are encouraged to strive for serves to help to keep the clients focused upon the counselling rather than on the counsellor. Another factor some informants mentioned

was concerned with making the clients feel comfortable. At the first counselling session it is not unusual for clients to be quite 'dressed up', as if for a formal interview. Some counsellors claim that an informally dressed counsellor encourages clients to relax.

Attempts to be as anonymous as possible are clearly successful as illustrated by the fact that many informants reported they were often not recognised by their clients and former clients when they encountered them away from the counselling environment. As Kathy declared, 'it is quite strange, after all you have been with them for hours. Any other relationship it might be quite hurtful perhaps - them seeing you as a bit of a blank wall!'.

Of course, despite the counsellors' conscious efforts to present a relatively anonymous impression to their clients there are limits to uniformity. It could be argued that it is possible to hide behind a uniform, to become a role rather than a person. While 'smart but casual' was the most common reply to questions about presentation, most informants stressed they aimed to 'be themselves'. Suppressing their own individuality would not be in accord with the 'genuineness' counsellors endeavour to bring to the counselling relationship. As one GP counsellor commented, 'when I'm in the NHS I dress to a level commensurate with the environment but, at the same time, I try to be a little off-beat, still myself'.

7.2.2 Physical Contact

Turning to the second example of an area where counsellors follow professional norms in order to avoid occupational hazards, we now examine how counsellors deal with the issue of physical contact in relation to their clients.

Writers in the field of social psychology have long considered the significance of touch during social interaction. Touch is theoretically rather puzzling because although it involves an invasion of personal space it is

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sometimes very well received. On the other hand there are many situations when even the slightest deliberate touch may be quite inappropriate.

> 'Perhaps the most basic meaning of touch is that an interpersonal bond is being offered or established , rather like a direct glance or a shift to greater proximity. And, like gaze, it seems to function to strengthen other messages, for example of persuasion. However, touch also carries the implication of invasion of privacy, and exposure to aggression or sex' (Argyle, 1988, p.226).

Common observation indicates in which public situations bodily contact is permitted; these include sport, dancing, crowds, medical attention, encounter groups and greetings and partings. Argyle points out that in all of these situations different types of touch are deemed to be acceptable, yet even the slightest deviation from the norm will be noted and may be viewed with suspicion. This is because touch has two main dimensions of meaning, namely warmth and dominance. Studies have indicated that the person who touches is seen as having enhanced status, assertiveness, and warmth while the person who is touched is seen as having less (Major and Heslin, 1982; Florez and Goldman, 1982).

It is because counsellors have been made aware of the significance of touch during their training that they adhere to the general rule of not touching their clients. The reasons for this are understandable when we consider that counsellors have little idea what sort of issues clients are going to present them with. If, to take a rather obvious example, a client is coming for counselling because they feel uncomfortable having physical contact with others then clearly the counsellor's outstretched hand is not necessarily welcome. Informants point out that even such a seemingly innocuous gesture as a welcoming handshake may be inappropriate in a counselling situation. Counsellors claim that they generally take their cue from the client, if the client offers their hand then they shake it.

It is not unusual for clients in a counselling situation to become distressed - the counsellor's reactions to distress differ from common practice in that they rarely rush to quieten a client who is angry or comfort clients who are tearful. It is to be remembered that, as detailed in Chapter 5, although the counselling relationship is a personal one, it is not friendship. Counsellors do not try to 'stem the flow' of emotion. One counsellor explains how she had to suppress her immediate reactions to seeing another person in distress:

> 'I had a very good friend who started me off with that, she was also a counsellor and she had the guts to point things out to me - how I tried to rescue people from their own feelings. It was a very good lesson to learn. I was in a very tricky situation at one time, I had to sit and watch someone go through enormous pain - and not rescue them. It was so difficult, I felt very emotional but pleased that I'd been able to do it - to do the best thing for the client' (Shirley).

This does not mean that counsellors are emotionally cold, distanced or have become estranged from human feeling. Perhaps the opposite is true because counsellors constantly strive to empathise with their clients, to put themselves in their clients' shoes in order to understand their clients' feelings. Informants have explained that when the relationship is very strong, or the story being told is very distressing then empathising with the client can result in their becoming distressed themselves. The counselling method is to allow a client to experience distress, anger, sadness, bitterness etc. and try to experience it with her. The normal, untrained response to other people's emotion often involves touch; actions such as patting, holding or putting an arm around the distressed person are often accompanied by soothing words or noises. In addition people in emotional pain are frequently encouraged to 'look on the bright side' or told that 'things can only get better'. Such responses have been termed 'hope work' (Walter, 1994) but they are often inappropriate or unhelpful. Actions to help a distressed

person frequently stem from the onlooker wanting the distress to stop because it makes them feel uncomfortable. Silent empathic support is the counselling method but, as social researchers have observed, this is a difficult talent to master (Cannon, 1989; Brannen, 1988).

It is also important to remember that when emotions are articulated they often include feelings of hostility or anger. Again, counsellors do not try to calm or soothe an angry client, nor are they shocked or frightened by displays of anger. This does not mean that they are distanced from the client; in fact, in order that the counsellors can accept and understand the emotions of their clients they must be affected, but they must not act upon their own feelings. Anthony Storr explains:

> 'Openness toward emotion should imply that psychotherapists display an unusual tolerance of emotional expression in others. If someone starts to shed tears, many people become embarrassed, angry, or feel at a loss and run away from the situation. Psychotherapists, on the other hand, need to be able to facilitate the expression of distress on the part of the patient without themselves becoming so distressed that they want to escape. It is important that patients be allowed to weep without the therapist immediately trying to stop them. A good deal of conventional comforting is as much aimed at relieving the distress of the comforter as that of the sufferer. Therapists must also be capable of facilitating the expression of anger, even when it may be directed toward themselves; another feature of psychotherapy which the layman finds hard to understand' (1979, p.160).

When such issues were raised at a group discussion some informants admitted that their professional reaction to emotional clients still surprised them because it was directly opposed to the ways in which they would respond to those closest to them:

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'It occurs to me now that we're talking about emotion how often I can sit in front of someone crying without their tears bothering me. I'm not saying I have no feelings, I do. Those not familiar with counselling methods would probably be upset or concerned about somebody crying - it amazes me that I can be sat in front of somebody and not be affected by the process. It's not like it is with a friend, I would be differently affected, I would comfort a friend, I would touch them' (Fay).

It should be noted however that distinctions between theory and practice were uncovered when the issue of touching clients was raised. Despite the assertions that were made about never touching their clients, most informants qualified their original claims during group and informal discussions. Although all of the informants claimed to avoid physical contact at the beginning of a counselling relationship or during expressions of emotion, most did reveal that, as the alliance developed, they were likely to briefly touch a client's arm or shoulder 'to slow them down, to ground them' (Vera) or touch can be used 'as a gesture of reassurance or to equal things up again after an imbalance of power - if they've shown a lot of emotion then a touch can restore the balance' (Chris).

Several counsellors said they embraced some clients when they left for the last time. Again such gestures were generally initiated by the client although one counsellor said that at the end of a relationship she usually wanted to embrace her clients before they left for the last time. She explained that she always asked for permission:

'I just say, "I would like to give you a hug, can I?", it seems quite natural to do that, I wouldn't hug without asking and most clients seem to be fine with it - although I have had one or two refusals and of course that's OK too - I respect their feelings' (Vera).

Such deviations from the occupational norm were freely discussed and generally accepted and understood by counsellors talking among

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themselves. On a few occasions counsellors related incidents that they were unsure about and listened to the reactions of their peers. During a group meeting one GP counsellor who revealed that he had responded to a request for comfort from a client received reassurance from a fellow counsellor, as follows:

> John - 'I know you don't generally but from time to time I have used touch, it's been quite important - one elderly male client, after a few sessions, actually asked me "please hug me". I couldn't resist that, the guy was breaking down in front of me - I hugged him, held him, we just stood like that for ages '

> Judith - 'If I felt it was right, if somebody said that then I probably wouldn't hesitate either. You've got to trust your instincts sometimes, go with your intuition. But once it had happened it could 'block' you, that would be my concern'

It was interesting to note here that although Judith reassured John she also pointed out to him that such actions could cause problems.

As with the issue of dress it was made clear that, although counsellors recognise and accept the codes of practice that exist and are emphasised during training, at times certain guidelines are ignored. Counselling, like other forms of emotional labour, requires the worker's use of self which means that no two counsellors will counsel in the same way. As was emphasised in Chapter 1 the counsellor must be 'authentic' in the relationship, and in such a situation tight, uniform codes of practice are clearly unworkable and would be unenforceable.

7.2.3 Humour

The criticisms of counsellors in the newspaper article referred to earlier were not confined to criticising their appearance; Dr Dalrymple (1996) also

claimed that counsellors do not have a sense of humour and are generally morose.

> 'Jokes produce a pained response from counsellors, as if the world were too grim for laughter. The only time I have seen counsellors genuinely cheerful en masse was shortly before Operation Desert Storm, when the psychological well-being of allied soldiers likely to be maimed, gassed and burnt was being planned. Then counsellors had a spring in their step and a song in their heart'.

Of course there can be little profit in relying too much on unsubstantiated, wild claims such as this one. It is relevant though to recognise that humour is seldom mentioned in counselling writings. A study of this type necessitates an extensive review of the relevant literature and for this researcher one of the most striking omissions appeared to be the lack of references to humour.

This does not imply that counsellors have no sense of humour; the omission is much more likely to be related to the fact that counsellors are often suspicious of humour that can arise within the counselling environment. It is well known that humour can be used as a device for coping with difficult situations, or to mask or avoid emotion, or to release tension. Joking behaviour may be used by clients to distract attention from feelings or distance unpleasantness (Linstead, 1988).

In contrast what was notable during the study is that counsellors frequently recount the humorous aspects of their work when in the company of other counsellors. Counselling work involves confronting human issues via the medium of a strong personal relationship so it is hardly surprising that humorous incidents will occur. What should be emphasised here is that while informants could, and did, supply a mine of 'funny stories' originating

from their own experiences of counselling work it was significant that these were generally stories 'told against themselves'.

This is in accord with more specialised studies of humour which describe shared laughter as an enormous aid to group solidarity and claim humour serves as a tool for equalizing and levelling (Woods, 1984). When a counsellor relates a funny experience to other counsellors they generally respond with their own contributions and humour 'sessions' develop. Shared backgrounds mean that counsellors can 'pick up on' the stories of their colleagues without the details having to be explained and when all can identify with a situation then a sense of group identity is reinforced.

The observations of instances of counselling humour that were made during the course of this study do not constitute a systematic examination. It has been acknowledged that humour is a difficult phenomenon to investigate, 'It is quite easy to become solemn about humorous phenomena, and, in becoming self-conscious about something which is usually regarded as natural and spontaneous, to witness it evaporating before our eyes' (Linstead, 1988, p.123).

For the purposes of this study it is enough to report that in the instances of humour related by informants to each other rarely were the problems presented by clients mentioned. Certainly during the research no fun was made of individual clients or of their problems. The tales that were told generally involved instances where circumstances produced a humorous incident, as this GP counsellor's tale illustrates:

> 'I came unstuck when one of the rooms I had to use was set up
> with a comfy chair for the doctor and a not so comfy chair, so I
> rearranged it by bringing in another comfortable chair for the
> client. Equality of status and so on. The client came in and sat
> down and [loud raspberry] - all the air rushed out the seat - and I
> corpsed, absolutely corpsed!' (John).

Another counsellor described a session where:

> 'I was counselling in one room, it was going quite well and the
> couple were well into it when a fight broke out in the room next
> door. I could hear shouting and banging about, it sounded like
> the chairs were being thrown - yet my couple went on as if
> nothing was happening. I couldn't believe it, I had a hell of a
> problem giving them my undivided attention!' (Neil).

There are many other examples of counsellors laughing about their own efforts to continue to offer the basic tenets of counselling against a background of difficulty. What was amusing in the stories above is that in both cases the counsellors were trying to offer clients undivided attention and a 'safe' place to explore their feelings in an environment that seemed to conspire against them. In the first example the client had been slightly embarrassed but the counsellor had collapsed with laughter, he admitted that he had 'lost it', he could not stop laughing and had to excuse himself to recover 'leaving the poor client just sat there waiting'. In the second example the relationship had not been damaged even though the counsellor had been totally distracted by the events in the next room. Other memorable stories included a tale of a counsellor trying to preserve confidentiality while working in a room with paper-thin walls, and a lively account from a counsellor who had spent some time counselling a woman who had been misdirected and actually wanted to see a chiropodist.

As Woods (1984) made clear, 'these howlers, errors and misjudgments are accepted as a contribution to sociation and the endearing quality of human failure, and that is how they are celebrated' (p.193). As well as providing entertainment, this form of humour serves to reassure other practitioners because it shows that things do not always go well for other workers. Not all counselling relationships are successful and it can be reassuring to hear that even experienced counsellors can make mistakes or circumstances can conspire against them.

As with issues of dress and touch, these examples of humour illustrate the tensions inherent in being 'authentic' in the counselling relationship. In earlier chapters it was stressed that in order to 'connect' with their clients counsellors must genuinely care about others. Emotional labour entails bringing one's sense of self into the workplace; clearly if a counsellor is being genuine s/he must bring her/his sense of caring into the relationship. However, being authentic does not mean only being caring, other aspects of counsellors' personalities such as their senses of humour and compassion are also brought to their counselling relationships. Each working encounter is a unique and unpredictable experience so while respecting occupational guidelines the counsellors accept that, on occasion, they will want to touch their clients or laugh. Despite being aware of the risks involved they recognise that a trained response is not always possible or even desirable, and on other occasions when they feel their responses are inadequate or inappropriate the counsellors accept that they are 'only' human after all.

7.3 Social Life

So far in this exploration of a 'counselling culture' we have examined the working practices of counsellors but it is also relevant to look at whether or not being a counsellor 'spills over' into the personal lives of practitioners as Morgan (1992) suggests. It has been established already in Chapter 6 that counselling work carries both costs and rewards which affect the domestic lives of its practitioners.

It was clear that counsellors frequently socialise with other counsellors or those in associated caring professions. Of course there is little that is unusual in workmates or colleagues meeting away from the workplace. Shared work experiences and conditions allow workers to meet and talk without long explanations about what they do or how they do it. Informants in this study stated that, at times, they were reluctant to tell non-counsellors what they did for a living because of the reactions they sometimes got.

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Whereas the counsellors are unwilling to discuss their work for reasons of confidentiality,

often the people they meet are all too willing to pour out their problems, or the problems of their 'friends'. Another fairly common reaction was suspicion or hostility because some people felt even the most innocent questions may be an attempt to analyse them.

For these reasons counsellors often felt more relaxed in the company of other counsellors. In addition, counselling work necessitates counsellors becoming fairly unshockable and very open in their conversations with others. During the research some of the overheard conversations may have been considered inappropriate for other social gatherings. In particular, discussions that were centred around sexual activities were often very direct and open, which is perhaps not surprising when counsellors and sex therapists are socialising. Informants recognised that when they were together they were probably more candid about their feelings than most other social groups. One counsellor claimed that 'in outside company I do try to tone myself down a bit'. She professed that she found it easier to mix with other counsellors even if she did not know them because 'we're usually tuned in, we can get into each other more quickly, real conversations and so on'.

During the study it was interesting to observe that when groups of informants interacted socially they were quite demonstrative in their affection for each other. In direct contrast to the caution they employed when touching their clients, many of the counsellors kissed and embraced when greeting or parting with other counsellors. The counselling 'hug', an enveloping embrace, was commonly observed - between male and male, female and female and male and female counsellors. When asked about this close embrace Neil explained:

> 'It starts with the training really, especially the self-awareness groups, people are quite raw at times, you have to open up and

share a lot of things with your training groups. That can be very
hard, especially if some aspect of yourself that you're not too
happy about is being aired and discussed or if you're talking
about something upsetting - people get emotional - someone
hugs you as a sign of support or comfort, some people even ask
for a hug. It would be strange if that happened in my working life
but in counselling it isn't, it seems quite normal. And it is very
nice, most people are so scared of physical contact or are too
inhibited or think it will be misinterpreted, or whatever. When
you've shared a lot of stuff with others and heard them do the
same then you do become very close. Not with all other
counsellors but with some, certainly - that's why we hug,
because we can, it's a sort of bond'.

The counsellors' treatment of, and attitudes towards, each other may reflect
the counselling ideal of being accepting and genuine in their approach to
clients. Although all of the informants felt that unconditional positive regard
for others was extremely difficult and not always achieved, they claimed that
it was something they always strived for, both at work and in their personal
lives.

'It's nice to hug another person, isn't it? It's all part of the
accepting stuff. We hear people exposing themselves when
we're working, we encourage them to do it and we try to accept
them and think positively about them. If we're doing that with
strangers then surely we must do it with our own people. It's
warm, it's belonging and all that stuff. Anyway I like it, I like to
hug people and I like to be hugged - the world would be a better
place if more people did it!' (GP counsellor).

Conclusions

This chapter demonstrates that despite the lack of outside regulation there
does exist an occupational culture - a 'culture of counselling'. Counsellors do

believe in certain standards, counsellors share norms and values with other counsellors and rules of practice both formal and informal are reinforced through informal contact with other counsellors and more formally through various types of supervision. Of these, one-to-one supervision with an experienced, qualified supervisor is the ideal and it is significant that many informants would welcome more supervision.

Once again the issues raised in this chapter have relevance for other emotional labourers. If trained counsellors recognise the need for regular supervision, if they need the support, reassurance and guidance that supervision can offer and even refuse to work without it then clearly other emotional labourers would also benefit. Where do the emotional labourers in other organisations go for feedback, support, direction and criticism? It is also important that such support must be of a specific nature because problems arise when line managers act as supervisors. As has been brought up in other chapters, workers may become involved in emotional labour for a variety of reasons. If there is no-one to question workers' motives and raise issues like transference and counter-transference then at worst the worker and/or the patient/client may suffer, and even at best it may be that the emotional labour being offered will be of the wrong sort which would be a waste of an organisation's time and money.

If the negative consequences of emotional labour detailed in the sociological literature are to be minimised or avoided, safeguards need to be in place for all emotional labourers. In addition, an understanding of the limitations of such work must be emphasised in order to protect both workers and consumers. Protection of clients is a major issue for individual counsellors and counselling organisations and methods of formally regulating counselling are currently under consideration. The codes of practice described in this chapter are, at present, adhered to voluntarily. We turn now to the final chapter where the future of counselling and issues of formal regulation are discussed.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

Introduction

This final chapter draws together the themes of the previous chapters but rather than re-iterating what has been argued in the body of the thesis it is my intention that the chapter will also consider the usefulness of this sociological examination of counselling as emotional labour. It is argued that areas of sociology, particularly the sociology of the professions, have relevance for counsellors and counselling organisations who are currently concerned with formulating plans to regulate the occupation. It is also proposed that a study of counsellors and their approach to their work can inform areas of sociology, in particular the sociology of the emotions, the sociology of emotional labour and qualitative research methods. It is also suggested that wider society has been, and continues to be, influenced by the rapid growth of counselling and the spread of counselling culture.

To this end the chapter is divided into three sections, the first considers what counselling can learn from sociology, the second considers what sociology can learn from counselling and the third considers how contemporary society has been affected by the rapid spread of counselling ideology.

8.1 What can sociology offer counselling?

It was noted in Chapter 7 that it is not only media commentators who are concerned about the lack of regulation in counselling. Many practitioners too are concerned both about the lack of regulation in, and the absence of

recognition of, counsellors and psychotherapists as an occupational group. While it could be argued that such concerns may be the result of negative media attention and could therefore be viewed as a form of defensiveness, it is notable that issues of regulation receive a great deal of attention in some of the most recent counselling literature (Wilkins, 1997; Horton and Varma, 1997). What is of particular interest is that most counselling organisations have focused upon professional recognition as the route to their becoming accountable for the actions of their practitioners. At present, as explored in the previous chapter, it is generally supervisors who oversee the work of individual workers. As Carroll observes:

> 'Supervisors, whether they like it or not, are entrusted with being
> gatekeepers of their profession. It is they who will assess
> whether or not trainees are ready to work as practitioners, with
> which clients and in what contexts, and in particular whether they
> are able to work ethically and professionally' (1997, p.144).

Sociology has long been interested in the professions. While the locus of attention may have shifted over time from 'what part do the professions play in the established order of society?' to 'how do such occupations manage to persuade society to grant them a privileged position?' as MacDonald (1995) suggests, sociological interest has invariably been focused upon the amount of power wielded by professional groups, how status is maintained and who benefits from it. Clearly the sociology of the professions cannot be discussed in any detail here. As in many other areas of sociology there is a problem of definition to contend with which can be only noted. Eliot Freidson points out that there will probably never be a solution to the problem: 'The concrete, historical character of the concept and the many perspectives from which it can legitimately be viewed, and from which sense can be made of it, preclude the hope of any widely accepted definition of general analytical value' (1994, p.27).

For the purposes of this chapter it is sufficient to recognise that counselling organisations have begun to address the issue of gaining professional recognition. Practitioners are being encouraged to become accredited and both the literature and the informants in this study frequently use the terms 'profession' and 'professionally' when talking about aspects of their work. In addition the most commonly expressed concerns are centred on the fact that, at present, anybody can call themselves a counsellor or a therapist and set up a counselling practice. For counsellors and psychotherapists one of their most pressing problems is to implement some form of occupational closure in order to protect clients and instil confidence in, and bestow status upon, their occupation.

Perhaps the first and most important lesson from a sociological perspective for counselling is that, despite counsellors' assertions and best intentions, professionalisation may not be in the best interests of their clients. Traditionally professionals have been largely independent of significant formal control by non-professionals and responsible mainly to their own professional associations and to fellow professionals (Freidson, 1994). The emphasis in the traditional sociological literature has been upon the self-governing nature of the professions which is exercised on a formal level by the professional associations who have the authority to discipline or expel their members. Studies have illustrated however that expulsion or indeed discipline of any sort has been rare, and professions tend to rely upon informal means of control rather than formal sanctions. Of current importance to counsellors is the knowledge that in recent years professionalism has come under fire and much of the criticism has been centred upon this issue of professions being self-governing. It has been the case for at least several decades that professional associations, particularly those associated with the corporate state, began to be accused of self-interest. Over time the public view of professions has become tarnished; this is partly a result of the enormous expansion of knowledge among most members of society. Now rather than engendering respect, it is frequently

suggested that professionals appear to be putting their own rewards and convenience above those of their patients and clients (Perkin, 1989). It can be surmised even from this small amount of evidence that although the professionalisation of counselling would ensure that each individual practitioner must attain the requisite credentials, the purpose of these would be to enhance the status of the profession and they would not necessarily guarantee that clients would be better safeguarded from unscrupulous or inadequate therapists than they are at present.

Counsellors themselves recognise that one of the biggest problems they face in their attempt to regulate and become accountable is the problem of defining their occupation. As was detailed in Chapter 1 there are numerous names that describe a variety of 'talking cures' that are habitually confused with each other. 'Counselling', 'psychotherapy', 'psychoanalysis', 'psychological counselling' and 'therapy' are all common terms but the differences between counselling and psychotherapy are the ones that are most frequently and hotly debated. A comparison of the functions of counselling and psychotherapy reveals much common ground (Bond, 1996). Yet it must be acknowledged that this is a debate that is unlikely to be resolved, particularly as there now exist two quite separate voluntary professional bodies both determined to establish separate procedures for registration or accreditation and standards for training and good practice (Horton, 1997). (This refers to the British Association for Counselling (BAC) and the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKPC)). Horton writes: 'Much has been written and debated about the seemingly intractable problem of differentiating between counselling and psychotherapy and the often implied if not explicit claims for the superiority of one approach over others' (1997, p.5).

The need for a united therapeutic profession has been recognised yet writers have expressed doubt whether a combined occupational strategy is possible given that: 'counsellors and psychotherapists are often ruthless

rivals intent on survival and the acquisition of economic, professional and ideational power or advantage' (Thorne, 1992, p.247).

Horton points out that the rivalry between counsellors and psychotherapy is grounded more in the desire for professional status and reward rather than being based upon evidence of differences in effectiveness:

> 'If we believe the overwhelming research evidence that fails to indicate any general superiority of one approach over another then one logical conclusion may be that the essence of this debate is more about professional status, levels of remuneration and competition for work than about any real differences either within or between counselling and psychotherapy' (1997, p.5).

This position bears a strong resemblance to the teachers' registration movement which began at the end of the nineteenth century. Professionalism has long been attractive to teachers, yet divisions among teachers themselves based in class, religion and gender prevented the emergence of a unified and self-governing profession at a time when it appeared to have been possible. One of the major causes of failure lay in the fact that the teachers involved with secondary and higher education were mainly male and elementary teachers almost invariably female. Male secondary teachers considered their academic background, achieved at university, to be superior to that of female, elementary teachers who merely held certificates of competence after training at designated colleges. In addition male teachers argued that large numbers of females in teaching reduced levels of remuneration and the status of the occupation as a whole. Thus rivalry between teachers led to disagreements within the occupation as a whole and, it is argued, weakened the case for teaching becoming self-governing (Parry and Parry, 1974). It is interesting to note that, as detailed in chapter 3, despite the attempts being made to attract male trainees, currently most counsellors are female and hold a variety of counselling

certificates and qualifications, yet the psychologists and psychotherapists referred to by informants are mainly male with university degrees. There are no reasons to believe that counselling is an exception to the general observations made by Witz (1992) about the gendered nature of professionalization processes.

Before steps can be taken towards unification, discussions which are centred around the establishment of a single, regulated therapeutic profession must therefore recognise and take account of current divisions within what Cassie Cooper (1997) describes as 'this mythical community'.

An argument that simply links the lack of cohesion within therapeutic occupations to gender differences would be simplistic. Another problem for any form of regulation must be the enormous range of counselling and psychotherapy services that are demanded and/or on offer. The breadth of issues brought to counsellors is enormous, ranging from support for the bereaved to the treatment of obsessive-compulsive disorders; from making a simple career decision to undertaking a total upheaval of one's relationships and lifestyle; from giving up smoking to recalling and healing childhood sexual abuse; from deciding about optional cosmetic surgery to dealing with cancer; from listening to home-sickness stories to alleviating chronic depression, and so on. Feltham asks:

> 'can a single profession or discipline hope realistically to embrace and address all such matters, which traditionally have been the domain of doctors, priests, mystics, philosophers, teachers, family members and friends? Psychotherapeutic systems such as the person-centred approach, psychoanalysis and primal therapy, tend to hold themselves up as explaining all human suffering and having the keys to resolution of them all. We surely need to think rather more rigorously than at present where the lines of our aspirations, competency and accountability are to be drawn' (1997, p.34).

It seems sensible to argue that in order to become accountable a unified counselling occupation must, of necessity, make its boundaries clear. Traditionally a profession must stake a claim to a specialised body of knowledge and expertise; a profession that specialised in therapy would have to state clearly the areas in which it could be effective in order that it could be truly accountable. Evidence from this study suggests that this would be a difficult task. As was detailed in chapter 5, in order that successful counselling can take place a special relationship must be built between the counsellor and the client. In effect, counselling consists of two people working towards the same goal and the formation of a trusting alliance is crucial if progress is to be made. Clients are not passive recipients of the counsellor's knowledge and expertise and it has been demonstrated here that the therapists both acknowledge and respect the amount of work that clients must undertake in order that successful counselling can take place. It is because of this that counsellors have expressed doubts about compulsory counselling for particular circumstances, for example before divorce proceedings. Sometimes clients are not ready or prepared to commit themselves to counselling, and if this is the case then there is little that the therapist can do apart from suggesting that the client return when they want and feel able to participate fully. For this reason it can sometimes be difficult to predict where counselling would be successful. As one informant explained:

> 'A lot depends upon the client, if they want it badly enough and the time is right they'll go for it. That's why you can have one client who will accept and gradually come to terms with the most horrendous past, who will accept it and learn how to function despite it - while another won't be able to get past a mild case of 'the can't help its', if you see what I mean' (Sarah).

Possibly the biggest obstacle to a unified, regulated counselling profession would be deciding upon what credentials would demonstrate professional competence. One of the main functions of a regulated profession is to

establish occupational closure through determining who is able to practise efficiently. Traditionally this has been achieved through the establishment of minimum standards of entry.

In order to consider the prospects for such a development, it is necessary to ask whether it is possible to establish minimum standards of entry for counselling, and where a regulatory body would begin. While it may be feasible to stipulate some academic standard, it has been made clear in the body of this thesis that academic achievements are not the most important pre-requisites for a successful counsellor. In Chapters 3 and 4 it was established that there are no direct routes to counselling; informants stressed that their routes into counselling were grounded in their own life experiences and that their desire to train as counsellors developed gradually. Counsellors, they claim, have to be warm, intuitive, open-minded, skilled at social interaction, non-judgemental and unshockable. It was felt by informants that a degree of life experience was essential to cultivate the skill of empathy and they felt that it was significant that most counsellors are middle-aged and female.

The beliefs of informants reflect the strong and commonly-held belief within the occupation that the personal development and self-awareness of the practitioner will affect how far it is possible to help a client to develop. Throughout this thesis it has been emphasised that the informants feel that their personal development is as important for their work as their professional development. As Paul Wilkins (1997) argues, counsellors need to develop both personally and professionally if they are to become complete practitioners and, in the process, they become fuller, more rounded people.

This, of course, raises the problem of how to determine what is 'enough' personal development. Such a question reveals that precision in this area would be impossible. What type of personal development is relevant, how much of it is necessary, is one type of development worth more than

others? Most importantly, what constitutes personal development, is it linked to life experience and, if so, should experiences be positive, negative or a mixture of both? Such questions could go on and on but it soon becomes clear that what some may see as personal and professional development, others may not.

> 'A common view seems to be that what is necessary is that there should be evidence of development and that it makes sense and/or that it has been processed in such a way as to be useful. Because of this, assessors for individual accreditation are likely to have different ideas of exactly what constitutes appropriate development' (Wilkins, 1997, p.17).

Clearly, personal growth cannot be set as a job requirement. Winter and Maisch point out that the 'essential quality of performance within a role cannot be expressed in a list of detailed specifications which are simply added together to indicate the required overall accomplishment' (1996, p.39). At present such difficulties can work to the advantage of counsellors because, rather than being prescriptive, they at least allow a personal route to accreditation. Counselling organisations are therefore not looking for and will probably be unable ever to look for the attainment of a list of targets. Quality rather than quantity is what is required by the voluntary organisations that are currently in existence but they have been criticised for being either too lax or too stringent. Bernard Manning's membership of the BAC was used by the media to illustrate how easy it is to become a member using fake qualifications (Lacey, 1996), while Gibbon (1990) has asked for a 'case by case' consideration of applications for accreditation to the BAC rather than what she described as 'the rigid bureaucracy' she encountered when her application was turned down.

Yet another complication is pointed out by Horton (1997) when he acknowledges that the personal and professional development of counsellors is not complete at the end of their training. Although other

professionals, once they have completed their period of training, have to gain experience and are required to familiarise themselves with new developments within their profession, it is unlikely that they would be classed as 'still training' for the whole of their professional lives. As detailed in Chapter 4 the informants in this study describe the process of working as a counsellor as one of 'becoming', they feel that becoming a counsellor is a form of journey without end, in which progress is made but the end is never reached. Self-awareness is viewed as a continuous project and each new counselling relationship is unique and makes new demands upon them which is why supervision of their work is always necessary. In addition to regular supervision, counsellors require on-going training and development (Cooper, 1997).

It could be argued that professional development, i.e. the extension of skills and knowledge, is a requirement for all professional workers. Becoming a 'reflective practitioner', if it means learning from experience does, in some senses, apply to all workers. However, becoming a reflective practitioner has deeper connotations for counsellors and therapists who must focus on their own feelings and attitudes towards individual clients and/or the issues they are bringing to counselling. A consideration of the question 'where am I in this?' is probably not a requirement for most professional workers.

It has also been demonstrated here that although counsellors take note of and generally adhere to common codes of occupational practice, one of the satisfactions of their work is the knowledge that they themselves are the main tool in the therapeutic process. While they recognise the value of their theoretical training and do not work without supervision, counsellors are aware of the need for genuineness and authenticity in their work. They are not bound by rules and regulations and realise, as shown in Chapter 7, that at times they must have faith in their own instincts and intuition when dealing with their clients. Spontaneity and 'gut' feelings are of value to a counsellor who is empathising and 'being with' a client. Explaining such processes to a third party is not always easy. This was made clear during

the period of the research by the many counsellors who used ambiguous phrases like 'and then I knew we were there', and 'it clicked, we were in' when describing counselling encounters. It is difficult to imagine how such skills (if such they are) could be routinised or taught. Professional guidelines and regulations would inhibit spontaneity; formulaic responses and 'watching one's back' would discourage intuitive modes of working. Yet if counselling is to become a regulated and accountable profession such measures would have to be taken, individual workers would lose their autonomy, they would be bound by the rules imposed by their regulatory body and be made to rely upon theory and trained responses.

Some writers claim that moves toward professionalisation mean that such measures are already in evidence and they view recent developments with misgivings:

> 'One result of this growth of knowledge and the urge to meet the emerging demands is that the professional workers have devised additional methods of developing their competence. As skills developed, professionals have become more 'professional'. Skills can become a way of helping some, but of not helping other people. If the client does not fit one's skill, one cannot do anything, or one does not want to do anything. Another effect is that as skills get more expert, the work of giving psychological help gets more technical. The professional begins to get absorbed in the technicalities of the work and can lose sight of the fact that the fundamental and basic factor in giving personal help is the concern of one human being for another' (Cooper, 1997, p.230).

In one sense there is little new in this. A sociological examination of other caring professions indicates that in order for a profession to gain status it is necessary for knowledge to be valued over and above practise. An aspect of professional practise that presents a problem for any of the caring

professions is the expectation of objectivity. 'The assessment of a case, the definition of a client's needs, the application of professional knowledge and the attainment of a solution or outcome must all be achieved without professional judgement being obscured by personal involvement or emotion (MacDonald, 1995, p.137).

It became evident during the course of the study that the counsellors believed that the most important pre-requisite for a prospective counsellor was that they should care about other people. The basis of counselling is to form strong relationships with others, their purpose is to become emotionally involved with another, to empathise with their situation, to feel the emotions that they are feeling. It is difficult to imagine remaining objective under such conditions and if the need to do so becomes mandatory then the occupation itself must change. Professional counselling would depend, not upon the person-hood of the counsellor, but on what that counsellor has achieved in terms of certificates. It should be noted that among the demands for the professionalisation of counselling there can be heard a few notes of dissension. Sivyer views the demise of the 'common counsellor' as follows:

> 'The often fearful forces that would 'tighten up', and professionalise the art, above all the craft, of listening, might, if we are not careful, endanger the work of the common counsellor, who has the expertise, the sense of knowing and feeling how to be with a client, but not necessarily the academic ability or compliance to pass tests successfully and thus become, in the eyes of others and even self, an expert. For just as indubitably as the craft of counselling needs expertise, so undoubtedly it does not need experts' (1995, p.276).

This consideration of the professionalisation of counselling highlights the inevitable tension between conformity to rules and guidelines and individual initiative in response to the uniqueness of each counselling case. To resolve these tensions, a sociological perspective informed by studies of related

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occupations can illustrate the limits of professionalisation and make a valuable contribution to debates about the future of counselling.

8.2 What counselling can offer sociology

If sociology has much to contribute to the development of counselling, so too is the reverse true. It was demonstrated in Chapter 1 that counselling is a 'pure' form of emotional labour. It is because counsellors have few, if any, practical tasks to perform for their clients that their main task is to listen, and less frequently, to talk. As we have seen counsellors empathise with their clients. If a client becomes emotional or relates stories which are distressing then the counsellor endeavours to feel and understand the client's pain. Unlike other emotional labourers, counsellors cannot escape or dilute those emotions through any physical act.

> 'Other professionals take care of their own distress through projecting it into their clients and needing to make their clients better. When the client gets too close, the doctor may reach for his prescription pad, the social worker may give advice, the probation officer plan a contract, and each in his or her own way is trying to take the pain away. Sometimes this is necessary as the pain and hurt in the client have become unmanageable for them and they need temporary relief before returning to face that wound within themselves. However, professionals can reach too quickly for ways of making it better, for their own needs, for it is they rather than the clients who cannot bear to sit with the pain and distress' (Hawkins and Shohet, 1989, p.153).

It seems clear therefore that a study of counsellors and the relationship they have with their work must have a great deal to offer the study of other professions in which practitioners sometimes find performing emotional labour difficult.

Until now most sociological studies of emotional labour have focused upon workers who use, and are encouraged to use, emotional labour to enhance the performance of their main occupation. Most writers view the commercial use of emotional labour negatively, claiming that it can prove to be detrimental to the worker. However, as detailed in Chapter 6, one of the most significant findings of this research has been that counsellors claim their work, although arduous and stressful at times, is generally satisfying with many 'high points'. In addition, in direct contrast to the assertions made by Hochschild (1983), many of the informants feel that since they became involved with counselling work their personal relationships have improved. It is worth reiterating here that a significant number of the informants are volunteers, and that others have moved into counselling work from different occupations to which, if they wished, they could return.

It should be stressed that this finding in no way negates or is intended as criticism of the sociology of emotional labour. In fact much of the data obtained from counsellors supports previous findings. Emotional labour is hard, demanding work yet often it is considered to be of low status because it is believed to be a 'natural' skill. There is a common belief, even among some counsellors, that women are better-suited to dealing with emotional issues than men. It is also claimed by some contributors to the emotional labour literature that the people who are chosen to do such work are generally middle-aged women who have experienced caring for others through raising a family (James, 1989, 1992), and it must be noted that many of the informants in this study also thought that a degree of maturity was necessary for trainee counsellors.

However it has been made apparent that other personal qualities are also essential for counsellors. Both the informants and the counselling literature stress that not everybody is suited to performing emotional labour. They also make the point that many of those who wish to support others and believe they are suited to such work are often misguided. Although some of the counsellors do believe that women are more often suited to counselling

than men are, they also recognise that this is a result of socialisation and have frequently pointed out that by no means all middle-aged women can undertake counselling work. The importance of self-awareness has been stressed in most of the preceding chapters; this strong emphasis on continuing personal development should be of importance to organisations expecting emotional labour from their workers. An examination of motives and an exploration of how one's own sense of self and personal attitudes have been shaped can protect the worker from the effects of the emotions of others. While this may sound fairly simplistic, all of the informants in this study claim that developing their own self-awareness, having to face, and come to terms with, their own strengths and weaknesses and accepting their own limitations is probably the most difficult aspect of becoming a counsellor.

The importance of regular supervision for counsellors emerged as a strong theme in the data. As was demonstrated in Chapters 6 and 7, none of the informants would work without supervision. In fact the quantity and quality of supervision is an area of great concern for some counsellors who feel that organisations see cutting supervision as a means of saving money and increasing client turnover. Supervision is a requirement of the voluntary, regulatory bodies that are in existence and accreditation procedures stipulate how much supervision is required. It is because counselling supervision acts to protect the practitioners, the clients and the organisation that employers of other emotional labourers might be led to consider its implementation. There is some evidence that caring occupations have introduced measures to support their workers but frequently it is line managers who are given the task and this situation naturally inhibits the worker. It has also been reported that, even where they are available, there has been a low take-up rate of emotional support services in occupations like nursing (Hawkins and Shohet, 1989). The lesson from counselling is that regular supervision needs to be seen as crucial to effective working, workers should be trained to realise the function and importance of

supervision. It is not an option for counsellors to seek supervision only when they feel they need it because, as they point out, sometimes they are unaware of that need. The recognition of 'what's mine and what's theirs', i.e. when transference and counter-transference is occurring, is not always easily reached (Casement, 1985) yet it needs to be recognised if a helping relationship is to be successful. To summarise, it is argued here that an examination of the measures counsellors take to protect and take care of themselves could be of benefit to other emotional labourers who, it has been claimed, suffer negatively from the effects of their work upon their personal lives and sense of self (Hochschild, 1983).

An exploration of the work of counsellors could also be of benefit to those involved in the development of social research methods. There are two main issues to be addressed here. The first is to recognise that qualitative research can have an emotional impact upon the researcher (Ramsay, 1996; Wilkins, 1993). The second point concerns claims made by some researchers that research interviews can be of some therapeutic value for their respondents (Oakley, 1981; Ebaugh, 1988).

This study of counselling can inform both of these areas. If social research requires the emotional labour of the researcher then, as is the case for other emotional labourers, the researcher should learn from counselling how to protect her/himself from the emotional pressures of that work. This is particularly important when research involves issues of a sensitive nature (Brannen, 1988). Clearly it is not feasible for every researcher to undertake counselling training but an honest consideration of one's own motives for choosing a particular project, the recognition that we do 'take things personally', an appraisal of one's own coping strategies and the trusted opinion of one's progress from an experienced other could go some way to

avoiding some of the acute anxieties Wilkins (1993) professed to feel. Being reflexive may be a current preoccupation for qualitative researchers but how reflexive should they be, how open and honest can they be about

themselves without the challenge of self-awareness training, and peer and individual supervision? The counsellors in this study claim that continued self-awareness is one of the most difficult aspects of their work. If they as trained, supervised practitioners find it difficult, how are social researchers to go about it? The hardest lesson we could learn from the counsellors is that not everyone who wants to do it is suited to performing emotional labour; perhaps academic interest in a particular topic is not enough to ensure that all qualitative researchers can engage with and be trusted by their informants.

The second, related point concerns what can be achieved by a research interview. Clearly, it should be recognised that most people, given the opportunity, might enjoy an opportunity to talk about themselves, at length, in a research interview. Sometimes, as has been reported, strong feelings and displays of emotion have been aroused by interviews but it does not necessarily follow, whatever the client may say, that research interviewing can be likened to therapy. The reasons for this have been outlined in Chapter 5, but basically they are centred on the purpose and the function of the research interview. The sociologist Ian Craib observes: 'one of the few things we [psychotherapists] end up certain of is the extraordinary difficulty in distinguishing between one's own emotions and those of others and how readily people tell you what you want to hear' (1995, p.157).

Some writers have recommended the use of counselling skills as a useful research 'tool' (Coyle, Good and Wright, 1994) and it is clear that some of the basic counselling techniques would be of benefit to a researcher. However, the ethics of such a practice require consideration. A counselling relationship carries on for as long as it benefits the client, and it seems clear that researchers will not be able to offer their informants such support. It is unethical to encourage a respondent to 'open up' and then leave them to deal with their emotions.

What this study of counselling offers to social researchers should have particular relevance to those interested in the sociology of emotions. Academic interest in emotion has been growing rapidly in recent years and contemporary writings have triggered a great deal of lively debate. In the sociology of emotion, James and Gabe have observed, 'passion was both part of the subject matter and an outcome of this subject matter' (1996, p.2). Much of this debate has centred upon the feasibility of examining emotions sociologically. It has been pointed out that emotions have been under scrutiny for thousands of years yet: 'academic treatises have played a lesser part than lay experience, combined with the sense and symbolism explored in great and popular works of literature, art and music from Shakespeare to Goya to the Beatles' (James and Gabe, 1996, p.3).

It is significant perhaps that Craib (1995), who is a psychotherapist and a sociologist, has been critical of the sociology of emotions, arguing that sociological studies of emotion run the risk of colonising and narrowing the understanding of emotion. It would appear that if emotions are to be studied sociologically then more imaginative methods than those now available will have to be developed (James and Gabe, 1996). The study of emotions therefore presents a challenge to sociology in that it is methodologically fraught and highlights what have been identified as 'the limits of sociology' (Craib, 1989).

It would be difficult to predict what new methods may develop but an examination of counselling might cause sociologists to consider why questions about feelings and emotions are so difficult for respondents to answer. Craib has made the point that it can take a year or more of psychotherapy before people can reach a level of confidence to talk about their feelings in a relatively uninhibited way. The counsellors in this study have said that talking about feelings is difficult for most people. When asked 'how do you feel?', most clients respond with their thoughts rather than their feelings. Emotions are difficult for most people, and in the light of this researchers should recognise that some of their questions are probably

almost impossible to answer and yet, invariably, an answer will be given in order to please the researcher, not look stupid or to bring the interview closer to the end. As Craib has argued, sociologists need always to be aware that they can study emotions only at a relatively superficial, abstract level. Perhaps sociologists could learn from counsellors how to ask questions about emotions effectively but it seems unlikely that much progress could be made during the time normally allowed for an 'in-depth' interview. Obtaining satisfactory answers would then lead to problems of analysis, since each relationship is a 'unique' encounter. Any data that are collected would be difficult to analyse, categorise or compare.

> 'The emotional mind is far quicker than the rational mind, springing into action without pausing even a moment to consider what it is doing. Its quickness precludes the deliberate, analytic reflection that is the hallmark of the thinking mind .... actions that spring from the emotional mind carry a particularly strong sense of certainty, a by-product of a streamlined, simplified way of looking at things that can be absolutely bewildering to the rational mind. When the dust settles, or even in mid-response, we find ourselves thinking, "What did I do that for?" - a sign that the rational mind is awakening to the moment, but not with the rapidity of the emotional mind' (Goleman, 1996, pp.291-2).

Emotions are not rational and counselling demonstrates that many of us do not always understand our own responses. We are therefore often unable, however willing, to explain them to another. In fact, counsellors have argued that many of the explanations offered to 'explain away' emotional outbursts are unconnected to the true 'trigger'. A credible sociology of emotions would have to overcome this fundamental problem. Just as counselling writers are questioning whether or not a single occupation can embrace and address the myriad of issues that are now being presented, so sociologists should perhaps consider whether their discipline is suited to an examination of emotions. It may have to be accepted that an inter-disciplinary approach is

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required or even that sociology, at least as it is currently constituted, has relatively little to contribute in this area.

8.3 Towards a Counselling Culture?

The final section of this thesis concerns the growth of counselling and the spread of counselling culture. Clearly, a small study of this type does not produce the kind of data that could be used to predict the future of counselling, or, indeed to make more than a few observations about its influence on the development of the wider society in which it is located. However, undertaking a study in any area heightens the awareness of the researcher and, in the case of counselling, it seems significant that the basic tenets of counselling are to be seen in more and more areas of everyday life.

However easy it may be to be cynical about counselling (and we have seen many examples of cynicism from the media in the body of this thesis), its influence cannot be ignored. Many people would now consider, and indeed have sought, counselling when they are facing problems. Most of us are now familiar with a great deal of counselling terminology ranging from stereotypical 'how did you feel?' questions to recognising the need for 'time out', 'I' statements and 'empowerment'. More and more occupations are employing a staff counsellor and counselling methods have infiltrated most occupations, particularly social work, nursing, and personnel work. In addition, large organisations connect with counselling in their advertising; Boots assures their customers that 'Boots cares', The Midland informs us that it is 'the listening bank, and British Telecom not only advise us that 'it's good to talk' but will supply a book endorsed by such luminaries as Dr Raj Persaud and the newscaster Trevor McDonald, explaining how to do it.

Why is it now considered necessary to stress notions of care and the importance of communication? It is claimed that we are living during a time of uncertainty, described by Dunant and Porter as 'The Age of Anxiety'

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(1997) and by Beck as 'The Risk Society' (1992). It is being argued that many individuals are experiencing a 'growing sense of helplessness' because old certainties have given way to feelings of being out of control. Dunant and Porter claim that:

> 'This lack of control has leaked into our personal lives too. As global capitalism defines the need for shifting labour patterns and structural unemployment, the job security which was once the bedrock of the working population has now been effectively eroded. Education, which used to be the ladder to an upwardly mobile future, is now, as often as not, simply the gateway to the dole queue. Instead of having one skill you are now expected to have two or three: portfolio lives may sound desirable on paper but how you go about getting one makes for its own sense of uncertainty' (1997, p.xii).

Arguments centred upon fears and anxieties about work, the erosion of the traditional family, increased crime, advancing technology, the damaged environment and so on are, of course, familiar to sociology. Counsellors too are aware that people are now facing more uncertainty than in the past and the spread of counselling and counselling ideology may be described as an attempt to do something about it. The other side of the coin to less certainty is more choice. Choice can be overwhelming if people are unable to cope with it and counselling is designed to empower individuals in order that they accept and come to terms with aspects of their lives that cannot be changed and feel secure and confident enough to grasp new opportunities as they arise. It is about the development of personal strength and new skills.

The growth of counselling thus needs to be addressed by sociologists. As van Deurzen has asked:

> 'What does it say about a society when one of its main growth industries is that of counselling and psychotherapy? What does it say about a culture when people need to turn to experts in order

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to learn how to manage their day-to-day lives and their ordinary human relationships?' (1996, p.vii).

An answer may well be related to the idea that people in a society in a state of change need to develop new skills and methods of coping. Counselling claims that every one of us needs to feel cared for yet in many ways it could be argued that new uncertainties indicate a lack of care for the individual. The development of a caring relationship is central to successful counselling and perhaps it is this promise of care, described by many counsellors as love, that is required at this time. This is not a new proposition. North (1972) ended his study of counsellors by claiming that the promise of care given by therapists offered hope to 'isolated' man - 'even if it is not true' (p.292). The main difference here is that, having examined counselling as a form of emotional labour, it could be argued that it is true, counsellors do care.

Susie Orbach claims that therapy (in her case psychoanalysis), has contributed a great deal to social knowledge, since through it we have learned more about human agency. Few people see themselves as puppets, they may not completely understand why they do some of the things they do or the feelings they feel but 'in a part of their inner experience there resides the idea that they are authors of their own lives' (1997, p.156). Counselling endorses such ideas, it offers people the chance to develop new confidence and new skills. Whether or not they are effective for everyone is debatable but at the very least they are worth trying in instances where traditional methods and coping strategies appear to be failing. Counselling encourages people to become emotionally literate, a skill, it is claimed, that encourages the development of new perspectives and new approaches. For example, Orbach discusses new methods of problem solving in schools and in families: 'The circle in school, parenting groups with psychological perspectives, anti-bullying programmes, mediation for parents who are separating, are instances that will make emotional literacy a commonplace rather than an uncommon experience' (1997, p.158).

It has also been suggested that the spread of complementary medicine, concerns about animal welfare, and the growing numbers of vegetarians indicate society is experiencing 'a widespread leaning towards what I will call "gentleness"' (Douglas, 1994, p.23). Other indicators of a 'sea-change' in society have been cited, the most talked about example in 1997 being the huge public displays of emotion after the death of Diana, Princess of Wales.

The proliferation of popular self-help books that are available also indicates that many people want to improve their personal relationships, develop skills and increase self-confidence. Some counselling organisations have suggested that many of us are emotionally ill-equipped to maintain our personal relationships, they stress the importance of developing what Goleman (1996) has termed 'emotional intelligence' and advocate 'relationship education' being taught in schools because: 'First of all, there is a renewed interest at all levels of society in how people learn about making relationships alongside a growing awareness that hoping the younger generation will "catch" emotional well-being like measles is whistling in the wind' (Bowler, 1997, p.1).

Who would teach such skills? It is significant that the counselling organisation, Relate, are currently exploring ways to develop such a service. Relate training development managers are considering how to market and promote 'emotional literacy' courses to schools and education authorities (Relate News, July 1997).

Conclusion

The question of whether we are moving towards a society that will become even more influenced by counselling culture is a difficult one to answer because, as has been argued above, counselling is a diverse activity encompassing competing interests. Clearly a solution to the competition for status that exists within counselling occupations is from many perspectives desirable because without it internal conflicts may impede the growth of 'the

talking therapies' and/or lower their status. It has also been illustrated that not everyone is suited to the performance of emotional labour. Not everyone is suited to counselling work, for even if the desire to counsel exists it has been shown that training and qualifications are not enough. Counsellors need to have special qualities.

At the same time it must be acknowledged that counselling is not a 'magic cure' - social and personal problems cannot be solved instantly by counselling because counselling is based in the relationship that is formed between the counsellor and the person who seeks counselling. It cannot be applied to people in the same fashion as medical interventions because individuals have to want it and be ready to work within the relationship.

Even if the question can be answered satisfactorily (and it does seem in many ways that we are moving towards a counselling society) we are left with other questions, such as:-

- What did people do before there was counselling? Why are such measures no longer considered to be adequate?

- What is driving the growth of counselling? Is it supply or demand?

This thesis by looking at counselling sociologically as emotional labour, does not finally resolve these questions, but it does at least discredit some of the grosser stereotypes and misconceptions that abound in this field. It has also argued that, for sociology as much as for counselling, it is crucial to address the question of how people feel and to expect the answers generated to lead to a good deal of hard but rewarding work.

Appendix 1 - Counselling Status of 23 Named Informants

Name	Part / Full Time	Pure / Combiners	Voluntary / Paid / Both
Andrew	F	P	P
Bernice	P	C	P
Beth	P	P	P
Charlotte	F	P	B
Chris	P	P	P
Fay	F	P	B
John	F	P	P
Judith	P	P	V
Kathy	P	P	V
Linda	P	P	V
Liz	F	C	P
Maggie	P	P	V
Neil	P	P	V
Olive	P	P	V
Olivia	P	P	V
Pam	P	P	V
Paul	P	C	V
Sarah	F	P	P
Shirley	F	P	P
Sue	F	C	B
Vera	P	P	V
Vicki	F	P	B
Yvonne	P	P	V

Appendix 2 - The Named Informants

Andrew

Sex - Male

Age - 50

Marital status - married with children

Previous occupation - actuary

Counselling work (paid) - General Practice counselling

Bernice

Sex - female

Age - 39

Marital status - married with children

Main occupation - teaching

Counselling work (paid) - student counselling

Beth

Sex - female

Age 42

Marital status - married with children

Previous occupation - nursing

Counselling work (paid) - private practice, General Practice counselling

Charlotte

Sex - female

Age - 38

Marital status - single

Previous occupation - teaching

Counselling work (paid) - private practice

Counselling work (voluntary) - Samaritans, Youth Service

Chris

Sex - female

Age - 37

Marital status - married with children

Previous occupation - social work

Counselling work (paid) - General Practice counselling (part-time)

Fay

Sex - female

Age - 49

Marital status - divorced with children

Previous Occupation - secretary

Counselling work (paid) - private practice, General Practice counselling, company counselling

Counselling work (voluntary) - Samaritans

John

Sex - male

Age - 43

Marital status - married with children

Previous Occupation - own retail company

Counselling work (paid) - private practice, General Practice counselling

Judith

Sex - female

Age - 45

Marital status - married with children

Previous occupation - nursing

Counselling work (voluntary) - oncology counselling, Relate,

Sex therapy

Kathy

Sex - female

Age - 43

Marital status - divorced with children

Main occupation - decorator

Counselling work (voluntary) - Youth Service

Linda

Sex - female

Age - 38

Marital status - married with children

Main occupation - student

Counselling work (voluntary) - counselling for the Citizens' Advice Bureau

Liz

Sex - female

Age - 51

Marital status - married with children

Main occupation - psychiatric nurse

Counselling work (paid) - community nursing

Maggie

Sex - female

Age - 51

Marital Status - married with children

Main occupation - artist

Counselling work (voluntary) - Relate

Neil

Sex - male

Age - 42

Marital status - married with children

Main occupation - graphic designer

Counselling work (voluntary) - Relate

Olive

Sex - female

Age - 41

Marital status - married (twice) with children from first marriage

Main occupation - credit controller, large engineering company

Counselling work (voluntary) - Relate

Olivia

Sex - female

Age - 35

Marital status - married with children

Main occupation - childcare

Counselling work (voluntary) - Christian counselling

Pam

Sex - female

Age - 37

Marital status - married with children

Main occupation - childcare

Counselling work (voluntary) - Relate

Paul

Sex - male

Age - 48

Marital status - divorced with children

Main occupation - teacher

Counselling work (voluntary) - student counselling, Relate

Sarah

Sex - female

Age - 44

Marital status - married (twice) with children from both marriages

Previous occupation - nursing

Counselling work (paid) - private practice, General Practice counselling,
counselling training, counselling supervision

Shirley

Sex - female

Age - 52

Marital status - N/A

Previous occupation - social work

Counselling work (paid) - General Practice counselling

Sue

Sex - female

Age - 46

Marital status - married (twice) with children from both marriages

Main occupation - social worker/family therapy

Counselling work (voluntary) - Relate

Vera

Sex - female

Age - 56

Marital status - widowed with children

Main occupation - computing

Counselling work (voluntary) - Samaritans, Cruse

Vicky

Sex - female

Age - 55

Marital status - divorced with children, living with male partner

Previous occupation - public relations

Counselling work (paid) - private practice; General Practice counselling,

counselling training, counselling supervision

Counselling work (voluntary) - HIV/AIDS counselling

Yvonne

Sex - female

Age - 36

Marital status - single

Main occupation - personnel manager

Counselling work (voluntary) - counselling victims of rape, Samaritans

Appendix 3 - Questions raised in group discussion

[although the following questions were raised not all of them were answered fully. As the interview progressed the group relaxed and members entered into discussion often raising and responding to issues of their own]

What types of counselling work are you involved in?

What did you do before you became counsellors?

What sorts of problems do the majority of your clients bring?

How would you account for the dramatic growth in counselling activities in recent years?

How do these influences affect your own lives and your own work?

Counselling has been described as stressful work - what are your reactions to that?

What particular aspects of your work do you find difficult?

How do you 'switch off'?

How important is supervision? How is it arranged?

What sort of issues do you take to supervision?

Do you consider counselling to be a career?

How would you describe the counselling role?

Could most people be trained to counsel?

Are men and women equally able to counsel?

Have your own expectations of counselling work been realised - how does counselling work compare to previous occupations?

How does counselling for an organisation compare with private practice?

How do G.P.'s feel about the counselling service? Are their referrals appropriate?

In what ways has counselling work changed you - if at all?

How do you think the clients view you?

How do you feel about touching clients?

What are the rewards of counselling?

Appendix 4 - Questions raised in one-to one interviews

How did you become involved in counselling work?

What types of counselling are you currently involved in?

What counselling training have you had?

What types of selection procedures have you gone through?

What sort of life experience should prospective counsellors have? Is it necessary that they have experienced problems of their own?

What is your workload like just now - varied? - too much? - too little?

How many clients do you see in an average day?

Do you keep notes? Do you have time to make notes between clients?

Are you also involved in admin. work - how much?

Do you see counselling work as a career?

Where do you see yourself in 5 years time?

How do you feel about charging clients? How much do they pay?

How do you feel about the supervision that you get?

How important is the counsellor/supervisor relationship?

What types of issues do you take to supervision?

What happens if problems arise for you between supervision sessions?

In what ways, if any, has the counselling work you do affected your private/personal life?

How easy is it to keep your work and your wider life separate?

'Switching off' - how do you do that?

How would you account for the growth in counselling in recent years?

Can you explain 'being with' a client to me?

Are there advantages to private practice? (If applicable)

In what ways would you touch a client?

Are the majority of your clients male or female?

And the counsellors you work with?

Do men or women make better counsellors? Are there any differences between them?

Do you dress in a particular way when counselling?

How do you think your clients view you?

What about forming a friendship with a client - have you? would you?

Would you counsel a friend if asked to?

Can you give me an example of a successful counselling relationship - a case that you have been pleased with?

How about a failure - a case where you couldn't connect or where counselling didn't seem to help the client?

Has maintaining confidentiality ever been a problem for you?

What, for you, have been the costs of counselling?

And the rewards?

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