

Field Work in Counselling

Life Outside the 50-Minute Hour: The Personal Lives of Counsellors La vie hors des séances de 50 minutes : étude sur la vie privée des conseillers

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effect that becoming and working as a professional counsellor, including training and professional practice, has on one's personal life. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 professional counsellors, asking how their training and professional practice has affected their personal lives. Bogdan and Biklen's (2003) method of thematic data analysis was used. Findings revealed participants experienced primarily positive effects, which impacted their personal lives in a variety of ways and in a range of areas.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude examine les effets sur la vie privée associés à l'accession et à l'exercice de la profession de conseiller, y compris la formation et la pratique comme telle. Des entrevues qualitatives semi-structurées ont été menées auprès de 6 conseillers professionnels; on leur a demandé comment leur formation et leur pratique professionnelle avaient influencé leur vie privée. On utilisa la méthode de Bogdan et Biklen (2003) d'analyse de données thématiques. Selon les résultats de la recherche, les participants ont constaté des effets principalement positifs, qui ont eu une incidence sur leur vie privée de diverses façons et dans une foule de domaines.

Counselling, in the way that we understand it today, is a relatively young profession (Gladding, 2004). Researchers have explored the professional development of counsellors (Skovholt & Jennings, 2004), the reasons that people choose to become counsellors (Barnett, 2007; DiCaccavo, 2002), the characteristics of effective counsellors (Patterson & Welfel, 2000), and the therapeutic relationship (Aveline, 2005; Crits-Christoph & Gibbons, 2003). The literature refers to some of the hazards of working as a professional counsellor, including counsellor burnout (Emerson & Markos, 1996; Kottler, 1993; Maslach, 1976), vicarious traumatization (Baird & Kracen, 2006; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995), and compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress (Figley, 1999). The concept of the *wounded healer* is widely discussed (Burton & Topham, 1997; Cain, 2000; Herman, 2001; Mander, 2004; Sussman, 1992; Wheeler, 2002), pointing to the idea that the *person* in the counsellor role is also of significance.

Considerable gaps exist in the literature on how training to become and practice as a professional counsellor impacts the personal lives of counsellors. A search of online databases including Academic Search Premiere, Ebsco Host, Psych Info, and Google Scholar using search terms such as “personal life” and “private life,” along with “counsel(l)or” and “counsel(l)ing,” yielded research articles published before 1987 with few references after that date. This suggests that the literature about those who become counsellors and the impact the profession has on their personal lives may be outdated. Here we begin with a summary of this past literature to establish context for the present study.

LOOKING BACK

Available literature on the personal lives of counsellors is scant at best and comes from a historical era in the profession that is very different from our current social context. Maurice, Klonoff, Miles, and Krell (1975) found that many counselling trainees made some of their most important changes and decisions during the period of counsellor education, which impacted the course of their adult life to follow. This is a significant statement that must be interpreted within the current historical framework.

The theories, training standards, and research base upon which counsellors were trained in the 1970s will have some relevance to the current postmodern era. However, many changes have occurred since then, making a comparison with today's counsellor training programs dated and perhaps inappropriate. For example, Maurice et al. (1975) suggest that students preparing as trainees are training for work that will be done in their “adult life.” In fact, in Canadian higher education institutions today, which includes the authors' home university, students have already completed 4 years of undergraduate work, have frequently served in other occupations previously, and have obtained years of work experience in the helping field by the time they arrive for counsellor training.

Guy (1987) reviewed the common stresses experienced as part of counsellor education. He cited the unspecified nature of psychotherapeutic work, psychological mindedness, personal psychopathology, and changes in values and perspectives. Guy (1987) postulated that as a result of their academic studies, supervision, personal therapy, and early work experience, counselling students become more internally focused, causing trainees to lose themselves in endless analysis and introspection, thereby restricting spontaneity. Farber (1983) also identified personal psychopathology—and the tendency for students to discover psychopathology within themselves—as a further source of stress connected to counsellor education. Based on these historical studies it would seem that while counsellor education could be an exciting time of growth for the counsellor-in-training, it could also be a time infused with many stressors.

The body of literature published before 1987 also explored some of the personal effects of professional counselling practice. Physical and psychic isolation in therapeutic practice was repeatedly identified as one of the greatest sources of

stress and displeasure among psychotherapists in professional practice (Bermak, 1977; Deutsch, 1984; Goldberg, 1986; Hellman, Morrison, & Abramowitz, 1986; Kottler, 1986; Tryon, 1983). Additionally, Malcolm (1980) suggested that counsellors' attempts to provide a stable, neutral, and safe environment for their clients, requiring that counsellors restrain emotional reactivity, could lead to the development of "emotional tightness" as counsellors minimize or deny their own feelings and inner experience. Even more serious was the possibility that the counsellor would become alienated from his or her own feelings (Freudenberger & Robbins, 1979). Moreover, studies on the friendships of therapists, such as the one done by Cogan (1978), found that counsellors who had been practicing for more than 10 years reported very few friendships, when they had previously reported much enjoyment and satisfaction from many more friendships.

While this body of literature from more than 20 years ago is interesting, we cannot assume that it is reflective of the experiences of professional counsellors today. The economic climate, the standards for professional training and practice, and the overall theoretical orientations of counsellors have changed tremendously in the last two decades as we have entered the era of managed care and postmodern constructivist approaches to therapy.

A MORE RECENT VIEW

Very little recent empirical research has investigated the personal lives of counsellors. A more recent study by Truell (2001) explored the negative effects of counsellor education on the trainee by interviewing 6 graduates of a diploma program in counselling at a United Kingdom university. Using in-depth semi-structured interviews, grounded theory, *ex post facto* research, and action research methods to guide the study, Truell found that counselling training both positively and negatively affected trainees' relationships with their spouses, children, siblings, parents, and friends. Additionally, the results indicated that counselling trainees became more selective about which friends and family members they wanted to spend time with. Truell also found that training had led to a change in self-expectations, leading to negative feelings of depression, anxiety, and sadness.

McAuliffe (2002) interviewed 12 counselling students in a focus group regarding personal change they experienced during their studies. Three other students from a senior internship seminar were also interviewed individually. Responses were clustered with the assistance of a text analysis computer program. The researchers identified three categories of changes in students based on the results: (a) increased reflexivity, (b) increased autonomy, and (c) valuing dialogue.

While the results from Truell's (2001) and McAuliffe's (2002) studies help clarify and describe the experiences of counselling students, their contribution is limited in informing us about the impact this training and practice has on the personal lives of counsellors. As these appear to be the only two studies currently available in the literature on the personal lives of counsellors, our study sought to

answer the question: *How does becoming and being a professional counsellor affect the personal lives of counsellors?*

METHOD

Participants

Recruitment methods included purposeful sampling by randomly selecting professional counsellors from the Victoria Yellow Pages under the term “counsellors.” The first author phoned the potential participants (over 30) to invite them to participate in the study. Only 7 answered their phone, and 1 declined participation due to being away during the month interviews were taking place. Recruitment also included posters displayed in a variety of agencies where professional counsellors are employed.

The posters did not lead to any additional participants. Consequently, the final sample of 6 professional counsellors (4 female, 2 male; all aged 40+) who obtained a masters’ degree in counselling 2–10 years ago were all recruited through the telephone recruitment strategy.

The participants graduated with their masters’ degrees in counselling psychology between 1998 and 2006: 5 from a university in British Columbia and 1 from a California university. All 6 participants worked in private practice, although 3 were also employed by local agencies in Victoria. One participant reported working 15–20 hours per week, 4 participants reported working 20–25 hours per week, and 1 participant reported working 30–35 hours per week. Participants reported working with individuals, couples, groups, and families, and their areas of counselling work included issues such as grief and loss, cancer, trauma, relationships, family dynamics, personal growth, family-of-origin, and employment/work concerns.

Research Interviews

Upon receiving ethical approval from the authors’ home university, the first author conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with each participant. Interviews ranged in duration from 80 to 100 minutes. Participants were asked to discuss how they felt their personal lives had been affected by their training and career as a counsellor. Guided by the literature reviewed above and based on feedback from a pilot interview, the first author created five interview questions (see Table 1). At the end of each interview, participants were asked if there were any questions that had not been asked that they felt should be addressed.

Data Analysis

Prior to data analysis, interviews were transcribed by the first author. Transcriptions in this case were not merely “verbatim” records of research interviews but represented interpretive choices made by the researcher. Hence, during the transcription process, the first author transcribed the audiotapes, choosing different type sizes to indicate changes in volume and using colour-coded text to represent general emotional tone in the interview.

Different fonts were selected to represent the researcher's experience of each participant. This method of transcription was used in an attempt to faithfully represent the research interview as the first author experienced it.

The first author then organized the transcribed interviews for thematic content. This involved going through the data and coding it for "meaning units" through a careful and thorough process of reviewing each transcript and separating the dialogue that pertains to the research question from other extraneous dialogue (e.g., checking the time or comments about the weather outside).

Thematic analysis as described by Bogdan and Biklen (2003) was used in the data analysis in this study. This process involves several steps. First, the data were searched for regularities and patterns as well as for topics covered, noting words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns. These words and phrases became coding categories, which formed a means for sorting the data. Responses expressed in each of the interview transcripts were noted by the first author and extracted from the transcripts to form distinct categories of data.

Second, by applying and modifying these categories, the first author went back through the data and marked each phrase or word with the appropriate coding category. This process was reviewed and repeated three times between the first and second authors to ensure that the data had been organized to reflect the responses participants had clearly expressed in the interviews. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), deciding exactly what phrases and words pertain to each specific coding category is the only way to form clearly supported themes. Third, categories of responses that were endorsed by at least 3 participants were reviewed and refined to form clear and coherent themes with supporting quotes. This process was also reviewed by the second author to ensure the description of the themes fit seamlessly with the supporting quotes from participants.

In addition to the review and validation strategies involving the second author described above, the participants in this study were asked to review the results and validate that they represented their experiences well. This helped ensure that the data were organized with exclusive regard to the themes that participants actually generated. By including these validation strategies as part of the data analysis, the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research was enhanced (Black, 2008; Wilber, 1999).

Table 1
Interview Questions

Primary Interview Question:

"How has your counselling education and professional practice affected your personal life?"

Follow-up Interview Questions:

- (a) "What is your experience of change within yourself?"
 - (b) "How have your relationships with your partner, family, and friends been changed?"
 - (c) "How has your communication changed?"
 - (d) "How has learning about individual psychology affected your personal life?"
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RESULTS

A total of 17 themes emerged from the analysis. Participants were articulate and reflective in reporting their experiences. All of the themes were endorsed by a minimum of 3 out of the 6 participants. All of the themes that emerged as unique and distinct in relation to how becoming and being a professional counsellor affects one's personal life are included in Table 2.

Table 2

Results

Themes	Endorsement Ratio
Better relationship with self	6 / 6
Improved communication	6 / 6
Greater self-awareness and self-understanding	6 / 6
Better interpersonal relationships	5 / 6
Evaluation of integrity of self	5 / 6
Increased acceptance of others	5 / 6
Richer life	5 / 6
More presence	5 / 6
Better boundaries	4 / 6
Better self-care	4 / 6
Better understanding of immediate family members	4 / 6
Clarification of values	4 / 6
Interweaving of personal and professional	4 / 6
Selective investment of personal energy into relationships	4 / 6
Sense of gratitude.	4 / 6
Decreased personal resources	3 / 6
Increased spiritual connection	3 / 6

It should be noted that a number of themes pertain to improvement of relationships. While the researchers considered combining these themes into one single theme representing "improved relationship," review of the data clarified that there were several specific and clearly distinct categories of data within this larger umbrella of "improved relationships." Thus, based on these categories, the various themes presented here emerged as strong individual themes, each of which was individually validated by participants.

Finally, one notable category of responses pertaining to the financial aspects of becoming and being a professional counsellor also emerged during data analysis. However, these responses were quite varied in their context and thus did not form a clear and coherent theme. The following is a summary of the themes with representative quotes from participants, using the pseudonyms chosen by participants.

Themes and Supporting Quotes

BETTER RELATIONSHIP WITH SELF

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice their relationship with themselves has improved. For example, participants found that they could trust themselves more, felt more comfortable with themselves, felt more whole, or felt more like their true selves.

Tim: “On another level, ... another way of looking at it, like, the ego identity that I had held for myself before was dissolving and this more essential self was coming through and being expressed. And connecting with the deeper sense of knowing which goes with the trust in myself and ... relying more on that, and in ... an artful intuitive way.”

IMPROVED COMMUNICATION

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, they became better communicators in their personal lives. Participants expressed that they are able to communicate more effectively with others.

Gail: “You know, my training helps me have more effective conversations with people. Yeah I’m able to ... bring both the learning that I’ve had ... and life experience into how I, you know, how I deal with people, how I address things, how I interact. I think some of the communication, some of the work with couples ... I think sometimes it’s helped me bite my tongue ... realizing that sometimes, the best ... way to handle a situation is not to, heheh, not to say those things, hehehe that you’d like to say. Heh.”

GREATER SELF-AWARENESS AND SELF-UNDERSTANDING

Participants reported that due to the training and/or practice, they are able to be more aware of their own internal processes. Participants expressed having more understanding of their own thoughts, feelings, sensations, or patterns of reacting.

Tim: “[M]ore understanding, more aware of my own inner process, yeah, focused more on that. It helped me to understand my own experience ... Well, this whole change is really fuelled by me ... becoming more intimate, aware of my own experience, of my own process, and my own being.”

BETTER INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, they have better interpersonal relationships. Participants reported that their relationships have qualitatively improved, deepened, or become warmer.

Allan: “[T]he one specific thing that occurred to me, is that I’m tender-er with people, tender-er with people that I love and care about in my life. And, less afraid to show them that I care about them ... more embracing. I guess I felt ... happier in relationship, and less stuck in some way.”

EVALUATION OF INTEGRITY OF SELF

Participants reported that due to their practice, they find themselves reflecting on how they live their lives and evaluating how well they integrate the lessons from their work into their personal lives. In other words, they strive to practice what they preach to their clients, and reflect on the level of congruence or integrity between their professional practice and their personal lives.

Sparky: “[W]hat I recommend to clients, I practice. I don’t really see being able to recommend something I don’t practice. Yeah. Just to reiterate, is that ... I try to practice what I preach, so if I’m recommending things to people, I often think in my mind, Ah! When’s the last time you did that? And then do something about it ... and I don’t recommend things that I’m not prepared to attend to myself.”

INCREASED ACCEPTANCE OF OTHERS

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, they are more accepting of other people. Participants expressed being more tolerant, forgiving, compassionate, or understanding of others in their lives.

Gail: “It tends to help me be a lot more accepting ... of people. Better, perhaps have a greater understanding. I think it’s absolutely increased my capacity for compassion. And so it really helps me accept bad behaviour and understand it, that really what’s underneath that, is their needs, attachment needs. Yeah ... it’s just certainly helped me be more compassionate of other people, and understanding.”

RICHER LIFE

Participants reported that due to training and/or practice, they find their lives to be richer or more interesting.

Anne: “It brings this richness into my life, which I think I said at the beginning ... I don’t know what else, beyond sort of adding this richness to it. Yeah, so I think, well what if I hadn’t gone there, and done that program? And what if I wasn’t doing this work? It seems that my life would be less rich. For sure.”

MORE PRESENCE

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, they find they are able to have more presence. Participants expressed being better able to stay present in the moment, to stay engaged with others, and to avoid falling into old roles.

Sparky: “It gives me a lot more freedom, and a lot more energy in the moment, just to deal with my world, to engage with my world. But I’m wanting more to be in this moment. And if I find myself ... kind of ... being drawn into those places, I use strategies to bring myself back to this moment and be paying attention, and to be moving on.”

BETTER BOUNDARIES

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, they have better boundaries in their interpersonal relationships. In other words, participants reported being more willing to set boundaries, seeing boundaries as important in relationships, or having more boundaries in their relationships with others.

Gail: “I think just a willingness to set boundaries better ... boundary work is one of those areas that we all, you know, women in particular perhaps, but lots of people struggle with setting good, healthy but flexible boundaries. And I think it’s helped me, you know, just with my brothers and things, being able to set a boundary, and the realization that you do need to be able to say ‘no.’ So [it] definitely has improved my ability to set boundaries and my giving myself permission to do so, and knowing that that does make a difference, in how you feel.”

BETTER SELF-CARE

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, they have come to practice better self-care. Participants reported using strategies for taking better care of themselves, such as doing more things they enjoy or making healthier day-to-day choices.

Allan: “I actually do more self-care as a result. And you know, some of that is sitting and meditating more, or if just making sure I get out for a walk, on a grey day like this, more often, or whatever it is.”

BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF IMMEDIATE FAMILY MEMBERS

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, they have a greater understanding of the psychology of their immediate family members. Participants were able to understand the psychology around some of the behaviours and reactions their immediate family members habitually engaged in.

Sparky: “The one [relationship] with my sister used to be kind of ... competitive. Very competitive, not kind of. Very competitive. She’s a younger sister, and she was always competing with me. And I didn’t understand that. And once I understood that, I was much more able to be appreciative of her. I don’t know that that would have happened otherwise.”

CLARIFICATION OF VALUES

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, they have gained some clarity around their values. Participants reported feeling clearer about their values or what they feel is important or a priority in their lives.

Anne: “I think that it’s made ... it’s created a lot more clarity for me about what’s important in life ... I also explored it from my own personal experience, and out of that I gained more clarity about what I needed and what was important.”

INTERWEAVING OF PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIVES

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, their personal life and professional work are seemingly inseparable and interwoven. During the interviews, participants reported that it was difficult for them to discuss their personal and professional lives as two separate topics.

Tim: “You know it’s like there’s not separation between ... the process, the personal life, the professional life, it’s just all ... all one experience. I don’t even think about it separately. Yeah, it’s just all one experience.”

SELECTIVE INVESTMENT OF PERSONAL ENERGY INTO RELATIONSHIPS

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, they have chosen to maintain those meaningful and satisfying relationships while letting go of more superficial or one-sided relationships. Participants expressed being mindful or selective of the time and energy they were willing or able to invest into a relationship.

Norah: “But then I’ve also been aware that ... maybe letting other relationships go. This is what I’m willing to do with some people and this is what I’m not willing to do with some people. I wouldn’t say so much a ... maybe it’s a selection process, but what I’ve gotten clear about is that in my adult relationships, so aside from kids, or elderly or really ill, I’m wanting reciprocal or mutual relationships. And now that I do a fair amount of intense personal work, I’m just not willing to ... maintain relationships that aren’t reciprocal. So, I don’t know that it was a selection process, but it was a stopping of certain behaviours on my part that used to maintain some relationships, so now I don’t do that. If it doesn’t feel reciprocal or mutual with both people wanting the relationship, and attending to it, I’m just not going to participate.”

SENSE OF GRATITUDE

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, they experience a sense of gratitude in their lives. Participants expressed appreciation for their families, community, the opportunities they have had, and life in general.

Gail: “[S]ome of the learning made me feel really, very fortunate and thankful that I received the upbringing that I did. It made me very thankful that I was able to ... you know, have a pretty good family life, and good attachment. Well, I think it’s made me very grateful for my marriage, and for my husband. So, I think that I’ve really ... probably appreciated him more. I think too, it’s like ... I was, also by taking the training and then working in private practice, have really come to value my own life experience.”

DECREASED PERSONAL RESOURCES

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, they sometimes find they spend personal resources, such as personal time or energy, thinking about or engaging with work-related matters, which means a decrease in personal resources available to be spent in their personal lives.

Norah: “[W]ell, what I noticed in my personal life now is, sometimes on days when I have had quite a few clients or clients with really intense issues, I’m not all that interested in listening to anybody else at the end of the day ... so what it’s done is, it’s increased my capacity to listen, but that capacity to listen is sometimes used up at work. Which means that there’s less of that available for my spouse or I need a rebound period where I can kind of ... fill up my own gas tanks again. Sometimes that may only take a couple of minutes, but sometimes that might last a day or two.”

INCREASED SPIRITUAL CONNECTION

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, they have experienced an increased spiritual connection in some way.

Allan: “[I]n particular, that has... prompted me to have, a more regular ... I’m hardly the world’s greatest meditator, but a more regular mindfulness practice. Partly because I see how much it helps my clients, partly because some of my clients do it, partly because it’s part of the training that I have. Some of the ... a lot of the body-centred work required developing a certain kind of mindful awareness. I do that more, and that actually supports my spiritual life more.”

Notable Category of Responses

While this did not emerge as a distinctive theme or answer to the research question, it should be noted that all 6 participants discussed the financial aspects of becoming and being a professional counsellor. These responses were also clarified with all 6 participants during the validation phase of data analysis. Several participants noted that they have less money or monetary benefits now that they are professional counsellors in comparison to their previous career choice. Others reported that their training did not prepare them for the business aspects of being a private practitioner, thus requiring them to work harder than expected in order to be financially successful as professional counsellors owning and operating their own practice. Lastly, 1 participant pointed out that professional counsellors are regularly required to fund their own professional development in order to maintain an expected level of competency.

DISCUSSION

The current study sought to explore how the personal lives of counsellors were affected by their counsellor training and professional practice. The literature previously reviewed would suggest that any impact of training and practice in counselling on the personal lives of counsellors would likely be negative (e.g., Farber 1983; Guy, 1987). The authors were therefore somewhat surprised that many of the themes emerging from the interviews indicate participants experienced improvements in a variety of areas within their personal lives.

Overall, the results suggest that participants experienced improvements in their relationships and in their lives in general, which fits with many of the findings dis-

cussed, such as those by Guy (1987) and Maurice et al. (1975). More specifically, this investigation found that participants improved their patterns of communication, gained a better understanding of their immediate family members, felt an increased acceptance of others, and overall experienced a qualitative improvement in their interpersonal relationships.

The findings from this investigation also fit well with those of Truell (2001) and Cogan (1978). Specifically, participants in this investigation reported a selective investment of personal resources into relationships such as friendships. Additionally, instead of this being an undesirable effect, participants reported that it resulted in the maintenance of only those relationships that were reciprocal and satisfying, and participants reported better interpersonal relationships overall. Participants also reported better boundaries, which again fit with Truell's (2001) findings.

While many of these themes support some of the previously cited research literature, there were also some discrepancies between earlier findings and the results of this study. For example, the results of the current study did not support the restrictive introspection, alienation from one's own feelings, or "emotional tightness" discussed by Guy (1987), Freudenberger and Robbins (1979), and Malcolm (1980). Reports from participants in the current study of having more presence, better interpersonal relationships, and a richer life suggest that intense introspection did not lead to a restricting of spontaneous responding or decreased genuine connection with others for this group of professional counsellors.

Interestingly, physical and psychic isolation, described by several researchers as one of the greatest sources of stress and displeasure among psychotherapists in professional practice, was not reported by participants in this study (Bermak, 1977; Deutsch, 1984; Goldberg, 1986; Guy, 1987; Hellman et al., 1986; Kottler, 1986; Tryon, 1983). Instead, participants reported an increased connection with others, themselves, and the world around them. Furthermore, the results of the current study—especially the notable category of responses pertaining to financial satisfaction—reflect some of the recent findings of Gazzola, Smith, King-Andrews, and Kearney (2010). Gazzola et al. found that professional counsellors can feel very satisfied with their career decision and work, while simultaneously feeling dissatisfied with the money they earn.

Unique Findings

Lastly, it should be pointed out that the interweaving or interconnectedness of the personal and professional lives of counsellors emerged as a clear theme in this investigation. This interconnection of personal and professional lives has been markedly omitted from the research literature to date. Curiously, while the relationship between one's personal developmental process and the choice to become a professional counsellor has been extensively researched—such as the literature on the wounded healer (Cain, 2000; Herman, 2001; Mander, 2004; Sussman, 1992; Wheeler, 2002), the contrasting relationship—between the process of becoming a professional counsellor and one's personal life—has been overlooked.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

A major limitation to this study is self-selection bias, which may have influenced the results found here. It is possible that those professional counsellors who have been positively affected chose to participate in the study, while those whose personal lives have not been affected, or have been negatively affected, were not interested in participating. Moreover, the methods of recruitment used may have excluded any professional counsellors who are currently underemployed or unemployed, as these counsellors may not have been listed in the phone book or seen the recruitment posters.

Furthermore, all of the participants were practicing as professional counsellors in the greater Victoria area, which from the first author's perspective has its own "laid-back" lifestyle and culture. For this reason and perhaps the moderate climate, it is known to have a competitive market for professional counsellors. This may have also influenced the themes that emerged, insomuch as it may have accentuated the number of positive themes with the participants.

Applicability of these findings is also limited to the profile of the participants involved. Replication of this study using different sampling and recruitment strategies, as well as a greater number of participants or variety of participant characteristics, will further support and strengthen the current findings.

A further recommendation for further research, building on the current investigation, is to explore whether professional counsellors working in different settings and with different populations experience their training and/or practice to have affected their personal lives in different ways. Additionally, longitudinal studies on this topic could explore how one's personal life is affected at different points during the process of becoming a professional counsellor.

CONCLUSION

The current research helps to lay a foundation for future research in this area. This investigation provides much needed research to shed light on the primarily anecdotal body of literature that exists on this topic from over two decades ago. The findings suggest that the professional and personal experiences of counsellors are very much interconnected. More specifically, the results suggest that becoming and being a professional counsellor has primarily positive effects on the lives of the counsellors who participated and that it can affect many different aspects of their personal lives. It is hoped that this investigation will inspire other researchers to further explore the personal lives of professional counsellors.

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About the Authors

Barbara S. A. Kennedy is an M.A. graduate from the Counselling Psychology program at the University of Victoria, and a doctoral student in Counselling Psychology in the Division of Applied Psychology at the University of Calgary.

Timothy G. Black is an associate professor of counselling psychology in the Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies at the University of Victoria. He specializes in the areas of military to civilian transition for Canadian Forces veterans, post traumatic stress disorder, and integral approaches to counselling and psychotherapy.

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Appendix A

Participant Recruitment Poster

Department of Educational Psychology & Leadership Studies
University of Victoria

THE PERSONAL LIVES OF COUNSELLORS:

A Qualitative Exploration

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study on how becoming a professional counsellor affects one's personal life.

Desired participants are professional Master's level counsellors who obtained their Master's degree in Counselling between 2 and 10 years ago.

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to participate in a single one-to-one interview with the researcher, and a couple months later you would be asked to review the results obtained from your interview.

The interview is approximately 60 to 90 minutes, and the review of the results will require approximately 20 to 40 minutes of your time.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study,
please contact:

Barbara S. Alhanati

Master's student in Counselling Psychology

Phone: 250-812-2961

Email: alhanati@uvic.ca

This study has received ethical approval from the UVic/VIHA Human Research Ethics Board (Protocol #J 2008 – 96)

Appendix B

Telephone Recruitment Script

P = Potential Participant; R = Researcher

R: May I please speak to [name of potential participant]?

P: Hello, [name of potential participant] speaking. How may I help you?

R: My name is Barbara Alhanati and I am a Master's student in the Department of Educational Psychology & Leadership Studies at the University of Victoria. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Tim Black on the personal lives of counsellors. As part of my thesis research, I am conducting interviews with professional Master's level counsellors who obtained their Master's degree between 2 and 10 years ago in order to discover their perspectives on how becoming a professional counsellor has affected their personal life.

As a professional counsellor in the greater Victoria area, if you fit the criteria I would like to invite you to take part in this research study. Is this a convenient time to give you further information about the study?

P: No, could you call back later? (Agree on a more convenient time to call person back.)

OR

P: Yes, could you provide me with some more information regarding the interviews you will be conducting?

R: Background Information:

1. The interview would last about 60 to 90 minutes, and would be arranged for a time convenient to your schedule.
2. Involvement in this interview is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study.
3. The questions are quite general and will pertain to how you feel your education as a counsellor has impacted different aspects of your personal life.
4. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions you do not wish to answer and may terminate the interview at any time.
5. With your permission, the interview will be audiotaped to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis.
6. Once the data has been analyzed, I will ask you to review the results to make sure that it describes your experience accurately. This process will take approximately 20 to 40 minutes.
7. All information you provide will be considered confidential.
8. The data collected will be kept in a secure location and disposed of 12 months after the investigation is complete.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please feel free to contact my supervisor, Dr. Tim Black at 250-721-7820.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at the University of Victoria. However, the final decision about participation is yours. Should you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact the Human Research Ethics Office at 250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca.

R: Do you have any questions or concerns so far?

P: Yes... (Researcher responds to questions or concerns.)

OR

P: No. (Continue below.)

R: At this point, I would like to invite you to participate in the study. Would you like to become a participant?

P: No, I would not like to be a participant.

R: Okay, thank you for your time. Goodbye.

OR

P: Yes, I would like to participate in this study.

R: Great. When would be a convenient time for us to meet for the research interview? (Researcher and Participant schedule a mutually convenient time for the interview.)

R: Would you feel more comfortable participating in the interview in a research room at the UVic campus or at your professional office? (Researcher and Participant agree on location for research interview.)

R: Okay, I have you scheduled to participate in the research interview for [date/time/location]. Thank you for your time. Goodbye.

P: Goodbye.