
Professional Characteristics of Canadian Counsellors: Results of a National Survey L'identité professionnelle des conseillers canadiens : résultats d'une enquête nationale

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ABSTRACT

With statutory regulation of mental health professions clearly at the forefront in many Canadian jurisdictions, counselling appears to be experiencing internal tensions regarding its vision and direction. The goal of this study was to collect data directly from Canadian counsellors to more clearly define the current practices of counselling in Canada. We developed a web-based survey and invited members of the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) to respond: 511 (22.9%) completed surveys were returned. Survey data indicate that CCPA members do not believe that the professional identity among Canadian counsellors is clear and coherent and they do not perceive that the profession is widely respected among the public for the services it provides. However, respondents expressed a very high degree of satisfaction with their career decision to become counsellors. The findings have implications for counsellor education as well as the practice of counselling in Canada.

RÉSUMÉ

Plusieurs juridictions canadiennes ont manifesté leur intention de réglementer la pratique professionnelle reliée au domaine de la santé mentale. Ces projets mettent en lumière certaines tensions à l'intérieur de la communauté des professionnels du counseling. Ces tensions manifestent des perceptions différentes en ce qui concerne la vision et la direction que doit prendre la profession. Le but de cette recherche visait à collecter des données chez les conseillers canadiens afin de cerner leurs pratiques actuelles. Nous avons développé un questionnaire en ligne et invité les membres de l'Association canadienne de counseling et de psychothérapie (ACCP) à y répondre : 511 (22.9 %) membres ont rempli et retourné des questionnaires. Les données produites par la recherche démontrent que les membres de l'ACCP participant au sondage ne croient pas que l'identité professionnelle des conseillers canadiens soit claire et cohérente, et ils n'ont pas la perception que la profession du counseling jouisse d'une reconnaissance répandue parmi le public canadien pour les services rendus. Par contre, les répondants ont exprimé un niveau de satisfaction élevé en ce qui concerne leur choix de carrière comme conseiller. Les constatations de cette recherche ont des implications pour la formation des futurs conseillers ainsi que la pratique de la profession du counseling au Canada.

The profession of counselling has a long history of reflecting on its identity. In Canada, counselling is an emerging profession, and its scope of practice is still being defined. At the time of this writing, there exists legislation that regulates counselling in two provinces: Quebec and Nova Scotia. While Nova Scotia has recently passed legislation protecting the title “counselling therapist” and is in the process of implementing this legislation, Quebec is still the only province in Canada with fully functional statutory regulation and licensing for counsellors (i.e., the protected title is “guidance counsellor” or “conseiller/conseillère d’orientation”). The *Ordre des conseillers et conseillères d’orientation et des psychoéducateurs et psychoéducatrices du Québec* (OCCOPPQ) is the regulatory body entrusted with ensuring that its members have the educational and professional requirements for practice in Quebec. Although statutory regulation is but one aspect of professional identity, there are some other strong legal and political currents that are shaping the practice of counselling in Canada. Of particular relevance is the regulation of “psychotherapy” in the provinces of Quebec and Ontario.

In 2009 Quebec developed statutory regulation that protects the title of “psychotherapist” and reserves the act of psychotherapy for certain groups (e.g., members of *Ordre des Psychologues du Québec* and *Collège des Médecins du Québec*). Ontario is in the process of developing similar regulation. In the Ontario *Health System Improvements Act* 2006 (an omnibus bill with numerous changes and additions to the *Regulated Health Professions Act* 1991), new professional colleges were established; among these was the College of Psychotherapists and Registered Mental Health Therapists of Ontario. Rather than relying on a scope of practice to control access to psychotherapy, the Ontario Psychotherapy Act (Government of Ontario, 2007) provides for an authorized act of psychotherapy as well as a limitation on the use of the titles “psychotherapist” and “registered mental health therapist.” The ripples of these activities can be felt at a national level.

For instance, at its annual meeting in May 2009, the Canadian Counselling Association passed a motion to change its name to the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) “to reflect a growing reality in the work force related to our profession and to keep in sync with the legislation initiated across the country” (CCPA, 2009, para. 1). Another recent landmark is the first formal definition of counselling psychology in a Canadian context adopted at the 2009 annual meeting of the Canadian Psychological Association (see Beatch et al., 2009). It appears that the significant changes to the regulatory landscape provide unparalleled opportunities for the counselling profession to shape its future course, and, more than ever, counselling needs to define itself from within or risk being defined by other stakeholders with their own professional interests.

In Canada there exists a considerable overlap in the practices of allied mental health professionals in particular between clinical psychologists, counselling psychologists, social workers, and psychotherapists. Howard (1992) suggested that counselling psychologists are what they do, not what they say they do. Following from this, if we are to define counselling in this way (i.e., by observing the practice of counsellors), then we can certainly proclaim that diversification in professional

roles is a characteristic of the profession (Fitzgerald & Osipow, 1986; Gazzola & Smith, 2007; Smith & Drodge, 2001). However, Neimeyer and Diamond (2001) caution that continued diversification of function “may at once be a boon and bane” (p. 50).

Gazzola and Smith (2007) reported that counsellors in Canada work in numerous sectors of society, from high schools to government agencies to private practice and industry. The versatility of counsellors is a defining feature of the profession, but at the same time it exposes a fundamental weakness: counsellors are drifting away from their core professional values. For instance, Hansen (2007) argues that counselling’s humanistic values are at odds with those of the health care system.

In addition to the diversity that exists within the profession of counselling, we also note that diversity exists regarding the practice of counselling and/or psychotherapy. Domene and Bedi (in press) conclude that given the apparent diversity in Canada regarding counsellor training, licensure/certification, professional affiliations, and work settings, it may be misleading to refer to a singular profession of counselling and psychotherapy. They point out that a wide range of mental health and human development practitioners engage in the practice of counselling and/or psychotherapy as part of their work.

Although counselling in Canada has its own unique history (see Domene & Bedi, in press, for an excellent overview), Hiebert and Uhlemann (1993) noted that Canadian counsellors “have been willing to accept American perspectives and positions as being appropriate for Canadians” (p. 286). Indeed, a considerable overlap exists in the literature on counsellor identity from the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada.

Traditionally, the counselling discourse was informed by a holistic understanding of the person and embraced a wellness model of practice. In general, counselling embraced a developmental perspective (Gale & Austin, 2003; Hanna & Bemak, 1997), favouring prevention (Romano & Hage, 2000), social justice and advocacy (Hage, 2003; Speight & Vera, 2008), and promoted a multicultural understanding of the person (Sue, 2001). The person–environment interaction was a central consideration in its conceptualization of presenting issues (Lichtenberg, Goodyear, & Genther, 2008), and expertise in career assessment and counselling was one of the profession’s hallmarks.

Increasingly, however, there have been internal pressures for counselling and counselling psychology to embrace the medical model of practice (Chwalisz, 2003) whereby services (i.e., treatments) are remedial and presenting issues conceptualized as pathologies couched in the nosology of the *DSM*. Indeed, the preventative approach has become a “hard sell” in the current context that clearly favours short-term gains (Coons, 1990; Hiebert, Simpson, & Uhlemann, 1992).

Totton (1997, 1999) argues that professional status is the main motivation for promoting a medical model of practice within counselling. He concludes that those who are trusted to deal with mental and emotional states are not necessarily those who have the most training in psychotherapy (e.g., Totton cites the example of the M.D. degree assumed to be the best preparation for treating mental health)

and that we automatically accept this. He notes that counsellors may personally disavow the medical model but work within it in for financial reasons (Totton, 1997).

While some have argued that counsellors can alter the system from within (i.e., educate professionals within the medical model about prevention, multiculturalism, and so on), it is also true the system will alter the counsellor (Totton, 1997). Indeed, Mrdjenovich and Moore (2004) found that counselling psychologists working in health care settings show a decrease in identification with the more traditional counselling values. They conclude that this can lead to difficulties for counselling psychologists wanting to contribute to their field. It appears, therefore, that professional identity is context-bound (Gazzola, Theriault, Audet, & De Stefano, 2008), and counsellors consequently will adopt some of the professional values of members of other disciplines with which they practice. Although this is expected and potentially healthy for the field, it also can create confusion among trainees entering the field.

For instance, in a qualitative study of doctoral students in a counselling psychology program (Gazzola et al., 2008), only 2 of the 7 students clearly favoured the professional title “counsellor” to describe themselves. Of the 7 students, 1 was unsure and stated that she is debating between “counsellor” and “psychotherapist,” 1 preferred to be called “psychologist,” 2 stated that they equally prefer “psychologist” and “psychotherapist,” and 1 preferred “psychotherapist.” The authors concluded that the doctoral students were receiving conflicting messages from their professors and that the students were influenced by these messages.

The inclusive nature of the philosophy of counselling psychology attracts a diversity of faculty not found in other specialties (Hawley & Calley, 2009), but at the same time different professors have allegiances to various specialties (e.g., clinical psychology) and students expressed confusion and concern about their own place within the mental health sector. Indeed, Hawley and Calley (2009) report that 25% of faculty members in counsellor education programs in the U.S. had non-counselling degrees. The diversity of professionals found within the field of counselling may be a hallmark of the discipline (Fitzgerald & Osipow, 1986) but may also diffuse the collective identity of the profession (Domke, 1982).

The profession of counselling appears to be experiencing internal tensions regarding its vision and direction, and there seems to be little consensus regarding the distinctive role of counsellors within the mental health professions. A key consideration for counsellors is how to embrace both their traditional values and the dominant discourse emerging in the field that is informed by the medical model. It is unclear whether this is possible or desirable, but the need to collect information on the practices of counsellors in various jurisdictions in Canada can help the profession in making informed choices. The goal of this study was to collect data directly from Canadian counsellors in order to more clearly define the current practices of counselling in Canada. We hope that these data may contribute to distinguishing counselling from other allied mental health professions.

METHOD

Participants

The Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA), the national association that represents professional counsellors, assisted the researchers by distributing our request for participation in this survey to its membership. At the time that this survey was conducted in 2004, there were 2,330 active CCPA members, 73.4% of whom were women. Approximately half (50.9%) of all CCPA members were Canadian Certified Counsellors (CCC). The CCC designation identifies counsellors who have met specific professional standards, including a graduate degree in counselling. Professionals with the CCC designation have graduate training related to the theory and practice of counselling and have completed supervised internships during their training. The reader is referred to the CCPA website for full certification requirements (www.ccpa-accp.ca/en/member-benefits/certification/). According to the CCPA, 2,233 of its members, or 95.8% of total membership, had access to e-mail at the time this survey was conducted.

Procedure

The CCPA announced the purpose of the study in its monthly newsletter, *Cognica*, in March 2004 and invited readers to participate in the survey. CCPA sent all of its members an e-mail message with our request and a link to our anonymous online survey in April 2004. This invitation to participate was repeated in a second e-mail message in June 2004. The link provided opened a “splash page” that allowed participants to choose an English or French version of the survey. Participants were automatically directed to a page that included a summary of the nature and purpose of the study and a statement of informed consent.

Participants who provided consent by clicking on “agree” proceeded to the survey. Participants who clicked “disagree” were thanked and were not provided access to the survey. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Participation in this study was voluntary and all participants were anonymous to the researchers. Ethical clearance for this study was granted by the Research Ethics Board of the University of Ottawa.

Measure

An English version of the survey was developed based on several sources. Most of the survey questions were developed on the basis of an exhaustive review of literature relevant to the construct of counsellor professional identity. Some questions were drawn from an earlier smaller-scale survey of professional counsellors that examined work roles, professional formation, and career satisfaction (Smith & Drodge, 2001). A research team composed of the researchers and graduate students in counselling used this literature to generate questions and corresponding items and subsequently refine them in light of the survey objectives.

Once the draft instrument was completed, it was circulated to five doctoral-level counsellor educators in Canada for feedback and suggestions. The research

team subsequently reviewed the input from the counsellor educators, and the instrument was revised in light of their feedback. The revised questionnaire was then pilot-tested with three professional counsellors to ensure the readability and optimal formatting of the instrument, and several minor changes were made in light of the counsellors' comments. It was professionally translated into French. The translated version was verified by three bilingual (English-French) counsellor educators to ensure that the wording was accurate and that each question captured the intended meaning. Once the questionnaire was deemed fit for distribution, a web page was created and the French and English versions of the survey were uploaded.

The resulting questionnaire¹ used for this survey of Canadian counsellors comprises 30 questions, most of which contained multiple items that require scaled responses. In addition, spaces are provided at several points in the questionnaire for writing more elaborate responses on issues addressed in the scaled questions. The questions generated data on themes relevant to the construct of counsellor professional identity, including four questions about work characteristics (e.g., setting, clientele, and professional activities); seven questions on professional formation (e.g., prior training, theoretical orientation, and professional memberships and accreditations); five questions regarding work roles and values and career satisfaction; and three questions about counsellors' status vis-à-vis other helping professionals in Canada. The remaining questions on the instrument tapped demographic data.

RESULTS

The response rate to the survey was 22.9% ($N = 511$). About half of the participants (49.1%) were Canadian Certified Counsellors. Because the admission requirements for CCPA membership differ significantly from certification criteria for CCC, it was decided to test for equivalency of responses across these two membership groups to determine whether or not the data from the two groups could be combined and treated as deriving from the same population (cf. Smith, Cousins, & Stewart, 2005). To this end, we used standardized scores for seven key variables derived from the survey (number of scale items is indicated in parentheses): Scope of training in counselling theory and practice (21), respect of allied helping professionals (7), contact with allied helping professionals (7), endorsement of work values typical of counsellors (11), satisfaction with income (1), private practice (1), and career satisfaction (3). Each of these variables was entered as a dependent variable in a two-way ANOVA with membership status (CCC vs. non-CCC) as the independent variable.

To reduce the chances of type II error, which is a more critical consideration in this instance than type I error, alpha was set at .20 for this series of tests (Winer, 1971, p. 379). The results showed that the effect of membership status reached significance on only one of the seven dependent variables (income). On the basis of these results, it was decided to pool the survey data and treat all participants as belonging to the same population.

Sample Characteristics

Consistent with the overall membership of the then-CCA, a little over three quarters (78.4%) of the survey respondents were women. Forty-three percent of respondents reported that counselling is their first occupation. Although participants came from all provinces and territories, almost half reported their primary province of work to be Ontario (24.8%) or British Columbia (23.5%). Respondents to the survey from Nova Scotia, Alberta, and Quebec constituted 15.6%, 9.1%, and 7.8% of the sample, respectively. The percentage of respondents from each of the remaining provinces and territories was less than 5% in all instances.

Most respondents (88.8%) used English in their counselling, 16% of participants reported that they counselled in French, and 6.5% counselled clients using another language. A large majority of our sample (85.1%) reported having a master's degree as their highest academic credential, followed by 8.4% who reported having a doctorate, and 6.5% who have a bachelor's degree. Most of the participants (87.6%) stated that their highest academic degree was in counselling.

Survey Findings

Professional identity. Respondents' perceptions of the professional identity of Canadian counsellors were explored in three items contained in the survey. These items queried respondents about the clarity of counsellors' identity as a professional group, their unique role in Canadian society, and the respect they receive from the public at large for their knowledge and skills (scale alpha = .58). Respondents indicated their level of agreement with these three affirmatively stated items on a 4-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 2 = *disagree*; 3 = *agree*; 4 = *strongly agree*). The mean score of 2.8 ($SD = .54$) for these items indicates that the counsellors who responded to this survey have inconsistent perceptions about the profession's identity, with many seeing counselling's identity as mostly clear and cohesive but many others viewing it less clearly.

Theoretical orientation. Counsellors were asked to rate on a 5-point scale the degree to which they used each of 10 theoretical orientations common to counselling and psychotherapy (1 = *never*; 2 = *rarely*; 3 = *sometimes*; 4 = *frequently*; 5 = *almost always*). Results indicate that the client-centred/humanistic approach is the most widely used approach in this sample of counsellors ($M = 4.29$, $SD = .87$) and used with significantly greater frequency than the second most-used approach, eclecticism/integrationism ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.29$). Other theoretical orientations used with moderate frequency include cognitive-behavioural ($M = 3.75$, $SD = .93$), postmodern (e.g., solution-focused, narrative) ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.10$), and purely cognitive approaches ($M = 3.50$, $SD = .96$). Two theoretical orientations used infrequently are the feminist approach ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 1.34$) and the psychodynamic approach ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.19$).

Theoretical orientation was examined from another angle, which permitted us to determine the relative breadth of counsellors' theoretical preferences in their clinical work. To create this new variable, we assigned a value of 1 to each response indicat-

ing that a given approach was used either frequently or almost always. All other responses were coded as 0. These codes were totalled across the 10 different theoretical orientations listed in the survey. High scores on this new variable are therefore suggestive of a strong reliance on a broad range of different theoretical approaches, and low scores indicate a strong reliance on a restricted range of approaches.

On average, counsellors in the sample drew primarily from a total of 4.30 ($SD = 2.19$) different theoretical approaches; the modal number of primary approaches is 3. The data indicate that about 40% of the sample relied primarily on three or fewer approaches. On the other end of the continuum, about 30% of the sample frequently used six or more theoretical orientations to inform their counselling.

Career satisfaction. Counsellors were asked about their satisfaction with their career in four items and responded to these items on a 4-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 2 = *disagree*; 3 = *agree*; 4 = *strongly agree*). The first three items explored their satisfaction with their decision to become a counsellor, whether they would recommend the career to someone else, and if they would make the same decision again if they had to choose all over again. The final item asked respondents to indicate their degree of satisfaction with their professional income.

Internal consistency was calculated for the 4-item scale. Results of these analyses indicated that participant responses to the income item tended to be inconsistent with responses to the three other items and, consequently, significantly reduced internal consistency reliability of the scale. Consequently, it was decided that only the first three items dealing with career satisfaction would be aggregated (scale alpha = .81) and income would be treated separately. Results on these two scales show that respondents expressed a very high degree of satisfaction with their career decision to become counsellors ($M = 3.40$, $SD = .61$). However, the same cannot be said for their satisfaction with professional incomes. On the whole, counsellors do not appear satisfied with the money they earn ($M = 2.57$, $SD = .90$).

Professional information. We were interested in knowing the sources of information that counsellors use to follow developments and remain current in their professional practice. Therefore, respondents were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale the degree to which they used each of a total of 12 different sources of professional knowledge since finishing their graduate training in counselling (1 = *not at all*; 2 = *very little*; 3 = *moderately*; 4 = *considerably*; 5 = *completely*). An exploratory factor analysis of item responses revealed four distinct clusters of scale items (see Table 1). Based on item loadings for the four factors, these clusters are labelled *news media*, *professional seminars*, *consultation*, and *professional texts*. These item clusters were designated as subscales.

Table 1 shows the average of item responses across the sample for each subscale. The results show that counsellors rely most heavily and to an approximately equal degree on consultation and conferences/workshops to further develop their professional knowledge following their initial training in counselling. Reading texts like journal articles or trade books was also a knowledge source that counsellors used regularly, whereas news media were used as a source of professional knowledge to a considerably lesser degree.

Table 1
Sources of Professional Information

Factor ^a	Item	Loading	Mean (SD)	Alpha
Media	News media	.85	2.48 (.65)	.71
	Non-news TV/radio programs	.80		
	Internet information	.41		
Seminars	Conferences	.91	3.45 (.73)	.62
	Workshops	.46		
Consultation	Consultation with colleagues	.74	3.46 (.61)	.64
	Clinical supervision	.63		
	Clinical experience	.53		
	Consultation with other professionals	.43		
Professional texts	Personal counselling	.32	3.22 (.69)	.63
	Trade books/chapters	.84		
	Journal articles	.46		

Note. ^aPrincipal axis factoring; Varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization.

What Influences Professional Identity?

This survey was conceived to investigate counsellors' sense of professional identity. We chose to explore possible links between counsellors' sense of professional identity and the other variables tapped in the survey. Given the lack of literature on this topic, the variables were selected on the basis of hypothesized links the researchers made with professional identity. In addition to the variables discussed above, one single-item variable was also used in this analysis on which respondents indicated on a 4-point scale (from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*) the degree to which their initial graduate training in counselling addressed the professional roles and identity of counsellors ($M = 3.24$, $SD = .77$). The complete list of variables included in this analysis is included in Table 2.

Using the multiple regression program in SPSS 15.0, the criterion variable "professional identity" was regressed onto eight predictor variables entered simultaneously into the regression equation. Table 2 shows the results of the regression analysis. These results reveal that three of the eight predictor variables have a statistically significant relationship with the criterion (alpha was set as $p < .05$ for this and all subsequent analyses). Specifically, the results reveal that counsellors who (a) have higher degrees of career satisfaction, (b) had more exposure to professional identity issues in their initial training, and (c) earn more money, tend to perceive the counselling profession as having a more cohesive and clear identity relative to counsellors who had lower scores on these three predictor variables. Within the regression model the multiple correlation between the predictor variables and professional identity was moderately robust at .45, meaning that the predictors accounted for 20.6% of variance in the criterion variable scores.

Table 2
Multiple Regression of Predictors on Professional Identity (N = 425)

Predictor variables	R	B	SE B	β
Total (all variables)	.45			
Breadth theoretical orientation		.007	.011	.027
Career satisfaction		.255	.044	.281***
Income		.063	.030	.100*
Information – News media		.072	.040	.083
Information – Consultation		-.024	.046	-.025
Information – Scholarly texts		.007	.039	.008
Information – Seminars		.038	.037	.050
Training: counsellor roles and identity		.153	.032	.213***

Note. * $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.001$

Career values. The survey data also permitted us to explore possible links between professional identity and the career values that counsellors espouse. To develop our values scale for this survey, two primary source materials were used: the Canadian version of the Values Scale (Fitzsimmons, Macnab, & Casserly, 1986) and the Rokeach Values Survey (Rokeach, 1973). The first was developed in the context of the Work Importance Study, an international study on career values led by Donald Super (see Super, Sverko, & Super, 1995).

The Rokeach Value Survey is a 36-item questionnaire designed to measure value orientations, including 18 terminal values (i.e., end states of existence) and 18 instrumental values (i.e., modes of conduct). While not a specific measure of career-related values, this scale permitted a broader perspective on the question of relevant values for the new scale. Using these source materials, we developed a 14-item scale of work values most relevant to the field of counselling. Respondents were instructed to indicate the degree to which each influenced their daily work as a counsellor on a 4-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 2 = *disagree*; 3 = *agree*; 4 = *strongly agree*). Survey results for these items are listed in Table 3.

The counsellors who responded to this survey identified 11 career values that are important to them in their professional work. These values (items 1–11 listed in descending order of importance in Table 3) were all rated as 3 or higher on the 4-point scale, indicating a general level of agreement on the importance of these career values for counsellors. Not surprisingly, the value of highest importance is helping others, highlighting the primacy of altruistic motives among Canadian counsellors. This is followed by the desire for counsellors to use their abilities and knowledge; growing and developing as a person is the third most influential value to this sample of counsellors. Scores on three values fell below 3 on the response scale, indicating that they are not consistently important to counsellors in their professional work. These include being admired by others, taking risks, and managing and directing other employees.

Table 3
Counsellors' Career Values

Item	Mean (SD)
1. Help others	3.88 (.37)
2. Use abilities and knowledge	3.85 (.40)
3. Grow and develop as a person	3.83 (.43)
4. Achievement	3.75 (.49)
5. Be creative and innovative	3.64 (.55)
6. Interact with others	3.62 (.56)
7. Have variety in work	3.60 (.54)
8. Have comfortable working space	3.49 (.65)
9. Make decisions and have own authority	3.37 (.63)
10. Financial security	3.37 (.65)
11. Advance in career	3.10 (.75)
12. Be admired	2.65 (.80)
13. Take risks	2.37 (.75)
14. Manage and direct others	2.30 (.74)

Note. Sample items have been truncated from the original survey format to save space.

To examine possible links between career values and professional identity, the latter was regressed onto the set of 14 career values in a simultaneous multiple regression analysis. The results of this analysis are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4
Regression of Career Values Predictors on Professional Identity (N = 385)

Predictor variables	R	B	SE B	β
Total (all variables)	.37			
Help others		.093	.083	.062
Use abilities and knowledge		.235	.083	.172**
Grow and develop as a person		.024	.076	.019
Achievement		.138	.064	.126*
Be creative and innovative		-.056	.057	-.058
Interact with others		.102	.058	.105
Have variety in work		-.124	.062	-.125*
Have comfortable working space		.066	.048	.083
Make decisions and have own authority		.042	.048	.049
Financial security		.026	.046	.032
Advance in career		-.124	.040	-.176**
Be admired		-.017	.036	-.025
Take risks		.092	.037	.129*
Manage and direct others		.048	.039	.066

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Five out of the 14 predictors accounted for significant variation in the criterion. These results indicate that counsellors who place higher importance on (a) using their abilities and knowledge, (b) achieving excellence, and (c) taking risks, and place lower importance on (d) having variety in their work, and (e) advancing in their careers, tend to perceive greater cohesiveness and clarity in professional identity of the counselling profession in Canada. Within this multiple regression model, the multiple correlation between the predictor variables and professional identity was a relatively modest .37, meaning that the predictors account for 13.7% of variance within the criterion variable scores.

DISCUSSION

A web-based survey was developed to investigate counsellors' sense of professional identity. Multiple regression analysis revealed that counsellors who (a) had higher degrees of career satisfaction, (b) had more exposure to professional identity issues in their initial training, and (c) earned more money, tended to perceive the counselling profession as having a more cohesive and clear identity relative to counsellors who had lower scores on these three predictor variables.

The respondents reported favouring an eclectic theoretical perspective, with a majority indicating that the client-centred/humanistic approach was their greatest influence. This finding supports the often cited importance of the humanistic roots of counselling (Hansen, 2007) but also finds that counsellors are informed by multiple theoretical perspectives (see Hawley & Calley, 2009).

Approximately 40% of the counsellors sampled indicated that they relied primarily on three or fewer theoretical approaches, whereas about 30% of our sample used six or more theories to inform their practice. This finding is consistent with those of past surveys that show a preference for eclecticism among clinicians (Garfield, 1994; Norcross, Karg, & Prochaska, 1997). Eclecticism also appears to be a practice preference among practitioners who work within a medical model (see Austad, Sherman, Morgan, & Holstein, 1992).

With a clear trend toward practice accountability (Barlow, 1996) and emphasis on empirically supported treatments (ESTs), it would be interesting for a future study to explore how counsellors select their therapeutic approaches and interventions. For instance, do counsellors select approaches that are supported by research and/or clinical evidence? Further research on Canadian counsellors' perspectives would be needed in order to further the discussion regarding the advantages and disadvantages of ESTs and the implications for practice for those who adopt theoretical perspectives that are not in line with current ESTs.

As a group, the counsellors who responded to this survey identified 11 career values that are important to them in their professional work. The value of highest importance to counsellors was helping others, highlighting the primacy of altruistic motives among Canadian counsellors. This was followed by the desire for counsellors to use their abilities and knowledge, and growing and developing as a person. The values that were judged least important were being admired by others,

taking risks, and managing and directing other employees. A modest correlation revealed that counsellors who place higher importance on using their abilities and knowledge and on achieving excellence, on the one hand, and place lower importance on having variety in their work and advancing in their careers, on the other, tend to perceive greater cohesiveness and clarity in professional identity of the counselling profession in Canada.

The overall perception of respondents was that counsellors in Canada do not possess a clear and coherent professional identity. Furthermore, the perception of respondents was that the public at large did not show high levels of respect toward counselling as a profession. Despite these negative perceptions, counsellors reported a very high degree of career satisfaction, although they were not satisfied with their income. This finding is perhaps an indication that counsellors' personal professional identities (i.e., their work with clients on a day-to-day basis) are not dependent on their perception of the collective identity of the profession. The high levels of satisfaction with the career in the face of these significant downsides suggests to us that Canadian counsellors are strongly committed to their professional roles and place a high value on the work they do in society.

Evidence from this study suggests that counsellors in Canada believe that they have not achieved a universally recognizable professional identity nor do they conclusively feel that the general public views them as being skilled and knowledgeable. Not surprising is the fact that, although many counsellors have no regrets with their occupational choice in this field and dedicating themselves to this challenging work, there remains considerable dismay with the inadequate financial compensation in this profession. Interestingly, counsellors who were fortunate enough to earn more money and had higher career satisfaction coupled with some training-level exposure to the attributes of professional stature confidently envisioned a stronger collective counselling identity.

Most telling about what it is that counsellors do and their distinctiveness are the aspects of their work that hold the greatest value. The altruistic motives that fuel their work and a strong desire for personal growth are at the core of their drive for achieving excellence. We believe that issues of professional identity ought to be discussed at both the counsellor education and the national level. Counsellors-in-training are very much influenced by their professors' positions regarding the profession, and direct counselling experiences clearly shape their professional identities (Bruss & Kopala, 1993; Gazzola et al., 2008). We believe that it is warranted for counsellor education programs to formally discuss issues of identity within their curriculums. Additionally, a national dialogue on counselling's core identity must be initiated for the profession to more clearly define itself vis-à-vis allied mental health professions. This seems particularly important in the current regulatory context in which there is a proliferation of different professional titles (e.g., psychotherapist, mental health therapist, clinical counsellor, guidance counsellor) and professional roles for counsellors.

Hawley and Calley (2009) recommend five steps to improve counselling's collective identity: (a) promote faculty hiring of professors with strong counsellor

identities, (b) continue to harness legislative strength, (c) reconcile the profession's humanistic roots, (d) promote title ownership, and (e) conduct research that builds on counselling's strengths. A number of these recommendations are appropriate in a Canadian context and reinforce the wisdom of optimizing the current momentum.

Legislation on the practice of psychotherapy in the provinces of Quebec and Ontario seems to be creating a ripple effect across the country. In Canada the opportunity to more clearly define counselling within the context of the larger mental health professions has presented itself. National associations, like the CCPA, as well as educational institutions that train counsellors, need to take leadership roles in articulating the similarities and distinctions of counselling vis-à-vis other mental health professions. Just as the American Counseling Association made counsellor identity its priority in its visioning document entitled "20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling" (Kennedy, 2006; Rollins, 2006, 2007), it is important for the CCPA to continue to discuss the collective identity of counselling at the national level.

With regulation of the profession on the horizon, it is likely that counsellors' allegiances will narrow to the provincial colleges that will grant them their practice license. That is, counsellors in each province may need to meet different requirements for licensing/certification. For instance, the requirements for being a "psychotherapist" in Ontario may be different than the requirements for being a "counselling therapist" in Nova Scotia. National associations like the CCPA will face increasing challenges to promote a cohesive national identity and consolidate the various provincial nuances. Further, graduate training programs can contribute to the professional identity dialogue by promoting individual counsellor identity through its curriculum as well as through modelling by counsellor educators.

The traditional counselling values of embracing a developmental perspective (Gale & Austin, 2003; Hanna & Bemak, 1997), favouring prevention (Romano & Hage, 2000), favouring social justice and advocacy (Hage, 2003; Speight & Vera, 2008), promoting a multicultural understanding of the person (Sue, 2001), and being guided by the person-environment interaction (Lichtenberg et al., 2008) are being seriously challenged from within the profession itself to embrace a medical model of practice (Chwalisz, 2003; Hansen, 2007). One path privileges the immediate health care needs of individuals while the other advocates for social change that, if prioritized, could form a visionary force that catalyzes the profession beyond these traditional values to new levels of research and practice innovation.

Aspiring to become more than the "drones of the helping professions" within a relentless health care system, the ultimate identity of counselling appears to be at a crossroad (Hanna & Bemak, 1997, p. 195). In order to conceptualize or negotiate those distinct aspects that are primary to the profession's identity, perhaps results captured within the snapshot of this study that allude to our legacy as social advocates who opt for "the road less traveled by" (Hage, 2003) invite further engagement both individually and collectively.

Limitations

The findings of this survey must be considered in light of several limitations. The response rate was lower than hoped for, and it is impossible to say the degree to which the sample is representative of the population of Canadian counsellors based on the data available to the researchers. The fact that the survey was conducted through a web interface on the Internet also raises other possible limitations related to accessibility of computers and the ability to use them. On the other hand, studies do show that Internet-based research is not on the whole of lesser quality than traditional means and may, in fact, have some distinct advantages (Reips, 2002).

The psychometric properties of the different scales in the survey are not universally strong. For example, internal consistency reliability for a number of the scales we constructed for our analyses are low by conventional standards. We nonetheless retained these scales, given the exploratory nature of this survey. Additionally, we have only limited evidence of the validity of these scales, primarily of the content variety, which inheres in the scale development procedures themselves. Finally, it is important for readers to keep in mind that the design of this survey, which was cross-sectional and correlational and precluded making causal inferences, may have limited our findings and conclusions. Additionally, our analyses are confounded by shared method variance, given that all items on the questionnaire are of similar format and are answered by the same respondents.

Note

- 1 A complete copy of the survey may be obtained by contacting the first author or by visiting <http://www.uottawacounselling.ca/links-e.htm>

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