

# **Marketing counselling in New Zealand: The images of practice.**

## **Abstract**

The discourse of counselling includes such terms as caring, helping, empathising, guiding, empowering and facilitating growth. These terms do not sit easily alongside those associated with the discourse of marketing -products, promotion and profit. Nevertheless, many counsellors are now working in a market environment in which they must advertise and sell their services. The ways they market those services have the potential to affect the meaning of counselling. In this paper, I use an exploratory study of one marketing device, counselling brochures, to discuss their influence on current definitions and images of New Zealand counselling.

## **Introduction**

### *The development of counselling in New Zealand*

The development of New Zealand counselling and the resulting emergence and growth of its professional body, now known as the New Zealand Association of Counsellors, Te Ropu Kaiwhiriwhiri o Aotearoa, is well documented (Winterbourn, 1974; Webster and Hermansson, 1983; Hesketh and Kennedy, 1991; Hermansson and Webb, 1993; Small, 1995; Miller, 1996 and 2001; Manthei, 1996; Hermansson, 1999; Wadsworth, 1999). This literature provides detail about the way that the government supported and influenced the establishment of a Vocational Guidance Service in the 1930s, a Psychological Service in 1940s and, in the 1960s, policies for the appointment of guidance counsellors in high schools to help deal with the increasing numbers of socially, educationally and 'behaviourally troubled' adolescents (Winterbourn, 1974). Some of the literature also documents the major policy changes

that were introduced by the Labour Government in the mid-1980s and the ways that resulting social and economic restructuring led to changing patterns in the provision of social services (Hermansson and Webb, 1993; Hermansson, 1999; Miller 1996 and 2001). The effect of these government policies on counselling differed according to specialities within the field. In schools, counsellors found that they needed to actively promote the value of their work to colleagues. In vocational guidance, with constant restructuring of the service, counsellors faced a changing work focus and a number of redundancies. Some vocational guidance counsellors followed the course of action taken by a number of social workers and their colleagues in social service agencies by moving into private practice counselling.

While the term, private practice, conjures up an image of counsellors gaining an income by counselling private individuals for a fee, in New Zealand, this is not strictly the case. At the same time as the government was reducing its financial support for general welfare services, it was providing financial support for some specialist groups within the health and welfare sectors. Specifically, government subsidies were available for counselling of particular client groups – people seeking rehabilitation counselling, couples seeking reconciliation or divorce, people who had been sexually abused, and some people who could be defined as having a disability.

One major influence of the changing government policies on counselling was, therefore, an increase in the rhetoric of professionalisation as some counsellors sought general government recognition for their work as an important social service and specific recognition for work that was subsidised. This introduced a competitive and market-oriented element to the counselling field that had previously enjoyed a cooperative structure largely supported in publicly funded institutions. Private sector counsellors, particularly, found themselves having to market their services using a

variety of techniques. In this paper, I examine one technique: the brochure. I describe the brochures of eight counselling agencies, forty-four counsellors and seven organisations promoting specific models of counselling and explore some of the ways in which marketing approaches are being used in New Zealand counselling. I suggest that while some cooperation still exists between private sector counsellors, their advertisements reflect obvious competition for business. I also suggest that, while some of the content of these advertisements is shaped by professional associations, most counsellors are using their own guidelines to market their services. They are making their own decisions about how to promote a professional, credible image while providing information on the benefits of counselling to potential clients. In this way, the market is shaping new meanings for counselling.

### *Competition in counselling*

Competition and associated claims-making is central to marketing strategies (Lovelock, Patterson and Walker, 1998). In New Zealand, however, because much of the work of counsellors was shaped by government (the government strongly influenced who would work in the Psychological Services, who would provide vocational guidance, who would provide secondary school counselling and who would train those counsellors) competition has not been their central concern. More recently, however, the environment in which counsellors work has become one in which cooperation **and** competition exist. Macdonald's view that inter-relationships are important describes this environment well. He argued that:

*Professions...are competing in a market place where they may or may not impinge on each other and where they also compete, conflict and collaborate*

*in a quite non-systematic way with non-professionals, with their clients and with the state (Macdonald, 1995:16).*

In this new environment, counsellors are being asked to simultaneously serve clients on two levels. On the first level are the clients who require counselling. On the second level are referral agents and such third-party funders of counselling as: the Accident Compensation and Insurance Corporation, Work and Income New Zealand, and the Family Court. Since one criterion for some third-party funding is membership of a recognised professional association, this situation requires counsellors to cooperate with one another to get their association to meet the recognition criteria. At the same time, they (the counsellors) must compete with one another for access to referral agents and the limited number of clients. This requires them to persuade their association to adopt strict membership criteria that may limit the number of eligible counsellors. It also requires them to use marketing strategies to attract potential clients. Evidence that this has occurred can be seen in the ways that counsellors advertise, not only their academic and practical credentials, but also their affiliation with professional associations and their achievement of government accreditation. In using this strategy, the counsellors assume that these credentials are readily accepted by the public as indicators of professional services.

### ***Competition and marketing of professional services***

Prior to the 1980s, marketing in New Zealand was an activity mainly associated with the selling of products such as beer, cereal or motor cars (Lovelock, Patterson and Walker 1998). Government policies of the 1980s, however, reduced the government regulation that constrained competitive activity in a number of service

industries and these industries faced new ways of working. Lovelock *et al.* (*ibid.* 1998) consider that marketing provided some of the service industries with a tool for survival. They state that: *among the keys to competing effectively in this new and challenging environment are skills in marketing strategy and execution – areas in which many service firms have traditionally been weak* (Lovelock *et al.*, 1998: 5). A further effect of new government policies was the legal pressure that forced professional service associations, such as those associated with the law, medicine and accountancy, to remove or relax bans on advertising and promotional activities. Lovelock *et al.* (1998: 13) note that *financial pressures and the desire to appeal to more customers are forcing public and nonprofit organisations to reduce their costs, develop more efficient operations, and pay more attention to customer needs and to competitive activities*. A decade earlier, Kotler and Bloom (1984) noted that in North America professionals were turning to marketing to help them cope with increasing competition, greater public dissatisfaction with the professions and several other changes in their external environments.

## **The place of marketing in counselling**

In the case of New Zealand counsellors, I note that they are turning to marketing to help them cope with competition, but that this is not without its tensions. First, some counsellors are reluctant to have anything to do with selling. This is supported by Davis (1996) who, in a book promoting marketing for therapists, indicates that there is a general image amongst counsellors that anyone who does marketing is located somewhere between a used-car salesman and an outright liar. She states that service providers frequently see marketing as something they certainly wouldn't want to do themselves, *'we are ethical' they seem to think, and 'we*

wouldn't want to push anybody into anything' (Davis, 1996: 2). Second, counsellors have to be aware of both levels of clients they serve. Thus, while they can use particular terms to attract counselling clients, they may need to use different terms to satisfy the needs of third-party funders. Kotler and Bloom (1984) suggest that to go overboard in serving one type of client could lead to a loss of trust with important third parties – government agencies, insurance companies, colleagues etc. Nevertheless, it is generally recognised that advertising is often the first point of contact between counsellors and clients and plays an important role in providing factual information about services (Lovelock *et al.*,1998; Davis, 1996). It is instructive, in these terms, to think about the following quotation from Davis (1992:2).

*Most good clinicians engage in marketing everyday. Gathering background information about clients is a type of marketing research. When you, as a clinician, develop a treatment plan to solve a client's problem, the process is like developing a marketing plan to solve a business problem. And when you convince a client to stick with treatment, take a risk, or follow an aftercare plan, you are selling. Whether your style is consultative, suggestive, or confrontational, the action is the same: you are marketing.*

### ***Claims about service quality***

According to Abbott (1988), when an occupational group enters the competitive field of work jurisdiction, it must engage in claims-making about the work quality of its members. Since a feature of the 1980s, in New Zealand, was growing customer discontent with the quality of products and services, there was a

change in perceptions of quality (Lovelock *et al.*, 1998). Traditional notions of service quality (internal standards) were replaced by the new imperative of allowing quality to be customer-driven (*ibid.*, 1998). At this time, however, we find that counsellors' professional associations were still appealing to traditional notions of service quality, that is, internal standards, to make claims about the quality of service of their members. Evidence of this can be found in current Codes of Ethics of the New Zealand Association of Psychotherapists, New Zealand Psychological Society and New Zealand Association of Counsellors. For the New Zealand Association of Counsellors, for example, the purpose of the Code of Ethics is: *to establish and maintain standards for Members and Applicants of the New Zealand Association of Counsellors and to inform and protect members of the public seeking their services... Counsellors of this Association, in assenting to this code, accept their responsibilities to clients, colleagues, the Association, agencies and the wider community (NZAC Code 2002)*. Similarly, for the New Zealand Psychological Society, the *code is a standard for professional behaviour* ([www.psychology.org.nz](http://www.psychology.org.nz)) and for the New Zealand Association of Psychotherapists the code *provides a statement of what clients and the general public may expect from the Association and its members* ([www.nzap.org.nz](http://www.nzap.org.nz)).

Furthermore, in the mid 1990s, the New Zealand Association of Counsellors published a pamphlet to promote counselling services which were safe and accountable. In this, clients were advised that it was their right to ask to which professional association a counsellor belongs, to ask about the counsellor's supervision and to view the counsellor's code of ethics. The client was also advised that a full member of the New Zealand Association of Counsellors is professionally trained and is expected to be trustworthy, respect confidentiality, listen carefully, help

the client sort out how he or she would like things to be different and to support the client to make changes of choice.

These Codes of Ethics, and information pamphlets, are readily available to the public. They are therefore able to attract the attention of both types of client groups: people who seek counselling, and referral or third-party funding agencies. While some of the needs of these two types of clients are the same, each client group has specific indicators of quality that it wants to be demonstrated. Davis and Freeman (1996) note that referral sources [such as third-party funding agencies] want professionalism, consultation, prompt return of reports or evaluations but individuals and families want understanding, unconditional regard, respect, empathy, and consideration. Furthermore, Leicht and Fennell (2001) note that while accountability and efficiency are things we need collectively, when clients need professional services on an individual basis they demand a professional service that they know, trust and with which they can meet face-to-face on a regular basis. This raises questions about the types of information available to clients who may want to choose a counsellor.

### ***Information available to potential clients***

The need to compete for clients heralded an increase in research into client preferences for counsellor characteristics (Hartlage, and Sperr, (1980), Giles and Dryden, 1991). Some of this research also supported the idea that it was helpful to clients for counsellors to provide information about the counsellors and the counselling process (Epperson and Lewis, 1987; Manthei, 1988; Giles and Dryden, 1991). In New Zealand, however, until recently, there have been few general sources of such information available to potential clients. Those that do exist include: the



‘Directory of Counselling and Psychotherapy’ (Webster, 1992), Gm resource and referral directory (2002), two pamphlets about choosing a counsellor, one published by the New Zealand Association of Counsellors and one published by the feminist social workers committee and a counselling guide book for clients written by Manthei and Miller (2000). Each of these sources of information, suggests aspects of counselling that clients should look for and, in this way, each has the potential to shape the meaning and definition of counselling work and quality.

Wivell and Webb (1995) note that the ‘Directory of Counselling and Psychotherapy’ (Webster, 1992) includes a description of various counselling approaches and some hints about choosing a counsellor. The directory comprises a list of counsellors and counselling agencies with details about their qualifications, approach, area of speciality, supervision details, fees and code of ethics. This, then suggests the necessary criteria for clients to evaluate the service of counsellors. Similarly, the pamphlet printed by the feminist social workers committee (undated but early 1990s) advised clients to take time to find someone whose training, style and personality are suited to their needs. Further, clients were advised to ask potential counsellors about the number of sessions, length of visits, qualifications, cultural beliefs and values, agency orientation and philosophy, cost, attitude towards women, goals and the model the counsellor uses. In their book promoting informed choices for clients, Manthei and Miller (2000) listed the following as useful information: qualifications and training, experience of working with specific problems, code of ethics, supervision, professional association, fees, estimate of time in counselling, insurance payments, length of session, cancellation policies, model of counselling, policy on confidentiality and complaints procedure.

### ***The marketing of counselling in New Zealand***

While the lists above suggest the type of information that counsellors might provide when they are marketing their services, it is up to individual counsellors to determine the text and images that will be most likely to attract potential clients. This flexibility is available to members of the New Zealand Association of Counsellors because constraints set by the Association are minimal. Even the statement in the 2000 version of the Code of Ethics (*NZAC Handbook, 2000:26*), that *Counsellors shall adhere to professional standards in advertising the availability of their services* has been omitted from the 2002 Code (*NZAC Handbook, 2002*).

### **A small case study**

My interest in the marketing of counselling in New Zealand has developed alongside my interest in the effects of third-party funding on the development of counselling. As I explored counsellors' approaches to marketing I noted that the Yellow Pages is the most common form of advertising. Advertisements using this medium have steadily increased in number over the last decade. Although I am currently examining their content, in this paper, I have chosen to look at another emerging form of advertising, the counselling brochure. My reason for this approach is that the size and structure of Yellow Pages, like classified advertisements, limits the potential of the advertiser to elaborate on his or her services. Vestergaard and Schroder (1985) suggest that classified advertisements contain very few persuasive elements and are often merely notices informing interested segments of the public that something is available. The brochure, on the other hand, can serve the counsellor *by promoting a professional image, contributing to [his or her] credibility, and carrying information to the community about [her or his] services* (Porras, 1996). It is therefore more likely to influence the public image of counselling.

Since 1995, I have collected all counselling brochures available to me. While this collection is not comprehensive, it provides the basis for an exploratory analysis and is a place to start in considering the influence of marketing on current trends in New Zealand counselling. For this paper, I examined seven brochures that are associated with particular counselling approaches, eight agency brochures (in which individual advertisements for 36 counsellors are placed) and eight brochures in which individual counsellors advertised their services. The paper reflects my attempts simply to describe the content of and interpret the image portrayed by these brochures.

### ***Counselling Brochure Images***

Counsellors' brochures are placed in medical centres, social service agencies, churches and libraries. Their aim is to attract referrals from personnel in an agency, and clients, using images and words which in some way describe the services offered. They are designed to communicate anticipatory expectations about counselling and reinforce notions of 'here you will gain'.

There are three types of brochures that I have examined.

#### *a) Brochures related to counselling approaches*

These brochures have a dual purpose relating to counsellors and clients. Some of these brochures advertise short training courses and workshops for counsellors. They describe the qualifications and experience of professionals who are expected to attend the workshops. Others, however, expect both professionals and counselling clients to attend courses for personal development. It is in these dual purpose

brochures, that I have found commonly used marketing techniques. These include, the use of an attractive design and visually attractive paper, the use of photographs to enhance the written description of the service, the inclusion of quotations from satisfied users of the service (testimonials), bold headings to catch the reader's attention and phrases claiming the benefit to clients who use the service. These techniques address a problem associated with the marketing of services suggested by Lovelock *et al.* (1998). The problem is that since a service is an intangible performance, it is more difficult for clients to evaluate than a physical product. Furthermore, the harder a product is to evaluate in advance of purchase or use, the greater the perceived risk for the customer. Thus, according to Lovelock *et al.* (1998), the marketing techniques used in brochures should reduce pre-purchase perceptions of risk.

The following examples demonstrate that these techniques are commonly used in these types of brochures.

In brochures advertising Narrative therapy, Neurolinguistic programming and Art Process work, the following beneficial outcomes are claimed. *Participants in...workshops invariably find them empowering, useful and fun, and leave the workshop with real skills to apply in their own working lives.*

*Transform relationships and achieve personal changes quickly and easily.*

*Develop personal creativity, confidence and clarity, improved relationships and a love for the world.*

In brochures that advertise personal development, we have the following examples. *If your life deserves Love, then you deserve to give yourself the opportunity to nurture your ability to build loving relationships and in a supportive environment we will explore techniques...which you can use to more effectively listen to the*

*messages your body can give you...recognise your own wisdom and enhance your capacity to deal with and lift over the various operative problems you encounter.*

While some of these brochures may not strictly fit the counselling/therapy model, the similarities they have to one another certainly help to blur the image of what is and what isn't counselling. The claims that are made in them leave no doubt that counselling is a business whose viability depends on successfully persuading potential clients to purchase the service. Goffman (1976) argued that the task of the advertiser is to favourably dispose viewers to his [or her] product, and to show a sparkling version of that product in the context of a glamorous event. These brochures can certainly be interpreted as advertisements of this sort in which the image of counselling is promoted as a product that is focused on the future and is a necessary component of healthy living.

b) *Counselling agency brochures*

At the organisational level, Kotler and Bloom (1984:35) note *that a responsive organization...makes every effort to sense, serve, and satisfy the needs and wants of its clients within the constraints of (1) the legal and ethical standards of its profession and (2) its financial resources.* In this group, we find brochures in which corporate values of accountability and quality are prominent. I have examined eight brochures advertising the services of counselling agencies. In these brochures, five advertise their services as low cost, all provide details of the hours of their service and six include the word 'confidentiality' in the description of the service they provide. In this respect, these brochures resemble notices of information for clients. There are, however, other statements in these brochures that encapsulate the discourse of counselling and have the potential to influence its meaning. The first very closely

resembles the statements made about counselling in the NZAC information pamphlet. *Committed to providing an affordable counselling/therapy service empowering people to make effective changes in their lives. Clients can expect: a safe environment, a respectful and non-judgemental attitude, confidentiality, honesty, sensitivity and warmth.* Similarly, the following statement highlights safety, confidentiality and a professional service: *Committed to providing friendly, yet professional premises which provide for privacy and confidentiality, and which ensure safety, particularly in the area of violence prevention work.* In another brochure the phrase representing the counselling discourse helps to define counselling as a process (journey) shared by the counsellor and client: *Together we explore, discover and clarify ways of living more resourcefully and towards greater well-being. We aim to help people make their own unique journeys in ways that are liberating and purposeful for them.*

These brochures, again, vary in style. Attention has been paid to the quality of paper, the attractiveness of the front page and words that engage the reader. Their purpose is to both inform clients of their service, to promote a professional image and to persuade clients to purchase that service. Their effect is to further shape the meaning and definition of counselling. In the case of these brochures, they set the scene for counselling to be perceived as a commodity, but one that caters for people on low incomes. They also shape the meaning of counselling as a service through which people can purchase solutions to overcome personal problems. The key words are contained in one brochure in which the aim of the service is to *ensure that services are enabling and empowering.*

c) *Individual counsellors' brochures*

There are 15 brochures which contain 44 individual advertisements of counsellors in my collection. Of the 44 counsellors, 35 are women. There are no Maori or Pacific Island counsellors represented in these brochures. This raises a question about whether it is possible for Maori counsellors to embrace the market discourse being discussed here. I note that while there are individual differences in style, the guidelines suggested in the Code of Ethics of the New Zealand Association of Counsellors appear to be used by most counsellors. Thus, there is little variation in the way that counselling is defined by membership status, qualifications and availability of services. There are, however, differences in the way training, competence and counsellor characteristics are displayed.

***Information that helps set the professional image of the counsellor***

*Qualifications and credentials*

All but one counsellor advertised their qualifications using more-or-less standard symbolic forms, for example, M.A. (Psych.); Dip Soc. Wk., M. Ed. (Counselling); Cert. Counselling (see Table 1). Interestingly, counsellors sometimes used different ways to signify the same qualification, for example, the M.Ed. degree from the University of Canterbury was described as M.Ed. (Counselling), M.Ed. (Cert. Counsel) and M.Ed. (Cert. Counselling). It is unclear if this is because counsellors did not know the correct degree title, (M.Ed.) or, if they wanted to insure that potential clients recognised their qualification as being one involving counselling.

TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE

Nearly all counsellors listed their membership to a professional association as a credential (see Table 2). Exceptions include four clinical psychologists in one agency, one counsellor who is known to be a member of NZAC and five student members (all of whom are known to be applicant members of NZAC). The most common professional association was NZAC (72% of the 40 counsellors who listed memberships), next was MNZASW (17.5%).

## TABLE TWO ABOUT HERE

### *Practical arrangements*

Fifty-five percent of counsellors included a map locating their rooms, 71% provided information that a session would last 50–60 minutes and 55% included opening hours. Only four counsellors included a statement about the number of sessions a client could expect. These expectations ranged from ‘long term’, and ‘varies from person to person’, to ‘six sessions is a good guide’ and ‘normally 2 – 3 sessions’. One counsellor advertised a free introductory session.

### *Fees*

Most counsellors (82%) and agencies included a fee structure in their information pamphlet. The majority (68%) advertised a sliding scale. Nineteen counsellors (43%) advertised that they were ACC accredited, and twelve ((27%) advertised that they were registered with the Family Court. One counsellor also described a cancellation policy.



### *Accountability*

In these brochures, accountability is a term associated with membership of a professional association. Twenty one counsellors (48%) included accountability in the description of their service. Of these, accountability for 17 was subsumed in their agency brochure and their agencies stated that all counsellors were accountable to the NZAC Code of Ethics. One agency (11 counsellors) stated that counsellors were expected to have supervision. No other counsellors mentioned in their brochures that they received supervision.

### *Confidentiality*

This word was used as a descriptor of the service by 17 counsellors (39%). In most cases, the word was used as part of a list, for example, 'I offer a safe, supportive, confidential and empowering environment'. In no brochure were limits on confidentiality addressed.

### ***Information that helps shape the meaning of counselling***

#### *Competence*

Since clients have not been educated about the criteria to use in evaluating counsellors, there is scope for counsellors to use their own discretion about what information they will use to attract potential clients. Kotler and Bloom (1984) suggested that a problem for marketing professional services was that clients wanted professionals who have had prior experience with their situations. This, of course, is an ideal that is difficult to obtain. In its place, therefore, we have claims about

competence. In claiming competence, a counsellor signals to potential clients that he or she is well qualified to deal with their counselling needs. In brochures, competence is a word used in the general text. It is a term implied in the self-descriptions of counsellors' experience and specialisation. Nearly all the counsellors listed some area of counselling in which they specialised. Not surprisingly, half listed a common focus of counselling, relationships (including family and couples), other common specialities were young people and children (25%), sexual abuse and trauma (21%), loss and grief (18%), stress (18%), spiritual issues (18%).

Counsellors did not, however, specify the experience they had had working with these specific problems. Thus, while seven (16%) of the counsellors claimed extensive experience working with particular clients or problem types, few counsellors were able to support their claims of competence in particular areas with specific experience or qualifications (see Table 3). Ten assumed that a background in such training as teaching, nursing or school counselling would qualify as proof of competence, and three mentioned the counselling approach in which they had been trained.

Similarly, experience tended to be linked to time rather than training or quality. Thus, 16 (36%) included in their advertisement, a description of the length of time they had been a counsellor. Three counsellors (7%) used such phrases as 'varied life and work experience' to claim competence and two (4 %) simply claimed they were experienced therapists.

TABLE THREE ABOUT HERE

### *About the counsellor*

In keeping with the view that clients want to see and talk with the person who will be providing the service (Kotler and Bloom, 1984), and that the success of any therapeutic endeavour depends on the participants establishing an open, trusting collaborative relationship (Sexton *et al*, 1997) most counsellors (71%) included a photograph of themselves. Furthermore, eleven (25%) counsellors included personal comments about themselves. These comments help to situate counselling in strong family relationships and in an identity grounded in place and community. The most common personal comments concerned family composition (n=7). Other comments were about the counsellor's place of birth, church connection and, for three counsellors, the fact that they were mothers. One comment was more general *I am a caring compassionate person*.

### *Respectful practice*

Since the theme of the 2002 NZAC/IAC conference was 'respectful practice', it is also interesting to determine the ways in which counsellors promote this aspect of their service. The notion of respect is often associated with issues of understanding and recognising diversity. Sue and Zane (1987) comment that one of the problems with providing effective services was the inability of therapists to provide culturally responsive treatment due to a lack of familiarity with the cultural background of the client. In my sample, there are only three counsellors who describe any cross-cultural focus in the description of their work. The idea that counselling involves respect for a client, however, is described in the advertisements of 24 counsellors. In one agency brochure (eleven counsellors) the statement is made that *we try to respect and look*

*after the needs of everyone, regardless of creed, culture or socio-economic background.* In a brochure of seven counsellors, clients are promised *a respectful and non-judgemental attitude.*

## **Discussion**

In looking at the overall content of these brochures using the list recommended by the feminist social workers, this sample of brochures provides information about the counsellors' qualifications and professional association affiliation, about practical arrangements such as fees, length of sessions and the hours the counsellor will see clients. Only one third of these brochures, however, provide information to potential clients about the model of counselling used by the counsellor or the counsellor's ethos. Most clients will find the words 'accountability' (associated with the ethical code under which the counsellor operates) and 'confidential' in the brochure. They will not, however, find any information on the extent or limits of these terms. Clients will have to assume the counsellors' competence in a particular area because most counsellors list special areas but do not provide information on any extra training/education. Similarly, clients are expected to assume that length of experience in counselling, or breadth of experience in life are indicators of competence. Potential clients will find some personal information about the counsellor that may help them choose a counsellor. They will, however, find very little information about the expected number of sessions that their counselling will take, about any supervision arrangements of the counsellor or about cultural beliefs and values of the counsellor.

The growth and development of counselling in New Zealand has occurred alongside restructuring of the health and welfare services. Since counselling is an

occupation that is susceptible to changes in government legislation, market driven approaches that have emerged in other service industries have also created a situation in which counsellors have had to compete with one another for work. We now have a situation in which counselling has become a commodity to be bought and sold in the market place. These brochures are testament to the fact that there is definite competition for counselling business. Further research could go beyond such a local sample and explore counsellor brochures throughout New Zealand to gain general images being portrayed. Further, it may be useful to separate brochures in which student counsellors advertise their services from those of counsellors who have been in private practice for some time. This will highlight the different marketing techniques, and resulting images, required by counsellors who are faced with attracting both potential clients and referral agents. Another interesting sub-group would be school counsellors who are now using brochures to market their services to the school community. These brochures have the potential to influence the meaning of school counselling.

## **Conclusion**

Goss (1983) states that advertisements tell us more about the culture that produced them than about that which they attempt to sell. In this paper, therefore, I have used a sample of counsellor's brochures to explore the influence of the market environment on current images of New Zealand counselling. The content of these brochures highlights factors which support dominant views of counselling as safe, respectful, professional, confidential and beneficial. Counsellors are using these terms in their advertisements to compete with one another for clients, but, they are mindful of some of the guidelines set by their professional associations. They are also mindful of the needs of referral agents and third-party funders to support services

that are accountable and efficient. Indeed, these needs appear to dominate counsellors' decisions about how to market their services. Thus we find, in this sample of brochures, that most counsellors attempt to attract clients by displaying their qualifications, their membership of professional associations and their eligibility to provide subsidised counselling in specialist areas. These characteristics, that can be substantiated and are likely to satisfy the needs of referral and third party funders are becoming the main criteria for defining counselling.

There are, however, a number of counsellors who are prepared to risk undermining their credibility with the referral and third party funders by including descriptors in their advertisements that cannot be readily substantiated or evaluated but which may appeal to particular counselling clients. These descriptors, too, have the potential to shape our understanding of counselling in a market environment. When counsellors promote themselves as caring and supportive listeners who are accountable and experienced they are asking clients to enter their service on trust. When counsellors use phrases such as 'I enjoy helping people' or 'I am a compassionate person' they are upholding common beliefs about the types of people counsellors are and about counselling being a 'helping' service. When they promise clients self actualisation, fulfilment, spiritual achievements, personal growth and discovery they are using marketing techniques that favourably dispose clients to their product. Yet, how can a client know whether it is possible to transform relationships quickly or what the promise made in one brochure to *lift over the various operative problems you encounter* means ?

In their brochures, counsellors have tried to find a balance between the discourse of counselling and a new discourse which incorporates the language and practices of commercial marketing. While it is heartening to see that the discourse of

counselling has not been completely subsumed by a marketing discourse, there are indications that the current balance still leaves the needs of some clients unmet. The main omissions include information about the process of counselling and the meaning of terms such as experience, confidentiality and/or supervision. Inclusion of these types of information would, I suggest, respect the needs of the clients to be fully informed about counselling and would enhance, rather than undermine counselling's professional image.

## References

- Abbott, A. (1988). *The System of Professions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bruthiaux, P. (1996). *The discourse of classified advertising*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Davis, J. (1996). A therapist's view of marketing. In, J. Davis & M. A. Freeman (Eds.) *Marketing for Therapists*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Davis, J., & Freeman, M. A. (Eds.). (1996). *Marketing for Therapists*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ellmer, R., & Olbrisch, M.E. (1983). The contribution of a cultural perspective in understanding and evaluating client satisfaction. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 6, 275-281. In. Alison Johnson, Client Satisfaction with Therapy: Ethnicity, Treatment Category, and Other Demographics [lyris\\_wordsmith@hotmail.com](mailto:lyris_wordsmith@hotmail.com).
- Epperson, D. L., & Lewis, K. N. (1987). Issue and informed entry into counselling: Perceptions and preferences resulting from different types and amounts of pretherapy information. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 34, 266-275.
- Giles, S., & Dryden, W. (1991). Fears about seeking therapeutic help: The effect of sex of subject, sex of professional and title of professional. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 19(1), 81-91.
- Gm resource and referral directory (2002) [www.gmd.net.nz](http://www.gmd.net.nz).
- Goffman, E. (1976). *Gender Advertisements* London: Macmillan Press.
- Gorman, B. C. (1996). Responding to the changing behavioural healthcare marketplace. In, J. Davis and M.A. Freeman (Eds.). *Marketing for Therapists*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass: 14 –27.
- Goss, J.D. (1993). Placing the market and marketing place: tourist advertising of the Hawaiian islands, 1972-92. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 11:663-688.
- Hartlage, L., & Sperr, E. (1980). Patient preferences with regard to ideal therapist characteristics. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 36(1), 288-291.

- Hermansson, G. & Webb, S. (1993). Guidance and counselling in New Zealand: Weathering a decade of transformation. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 16(3):213-229.
- Hermansson, G. (1999). *Pieces of Silver: 25 Years of the New Zealand Counselling and Guidance Association/New Zealand Association of Counsellors*. New Zealand Association of Counsellors.
- Hesketh, B. & Kennedy, L. (1991). Changes and responsibilities: policy challenges confronting careers guidance in New Zealand. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 19(3):246-257.
- Kotler, P. & Bloom, P. N. (1984). *Marketing Professional Services*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Leicht, K.T., & Fennell, M.L. (2001). *Professional Work: A sociological approach*. Massachusetts: Blackwell.
- Lovelock, C.H.; Patterson, P.G., & Walker, R.H.(1998). *Services Marketing Australia and New Zealand*. Sydney: Prentice-Hall.
- Macdonald, K.M. (1995). *The Sociology of Professions*, London:Sage.
- Manthei, R. (1988). Client choice of therapist: Rationale and implications. *Psychotherapy*, 25(3), 334-340.
- Manthei, R. J. (1996). Counselling in New Zealand: Past, present and future developments. In, W. Evraiff (Ed.), *Counselling in Pacific Rim Countries*. San Mateo, California: Lake Press.
- Manthei, R., & Miller, J. (2000). *Good Counselling: A guide for clients*. Auckland: Pearson.
- Miller, J. H. (1996). From unity to diversity. *New Zealand Journal of Counselling*, 18(2):36-49.
- Miller, J.H. (2001). Professional Faces: Professionalisation as Strategy in New Zealand Counselling 1974 –1998, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. University of Canterbury, Christchurch.
- Porras, A. (1996). Promoting your services. In, J.Davis & M.A. Freeman (Eds.). *Marketing for Therapists*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Rose, N (1990). *Governing the Soul: The shaping of the Private Self*. London: Routledge.
- Rosengarten, I. B. (1996). Customer Service. In, J.Davis & M.A. Freeman (Eds.). *Marketing for Therapists*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Sexton, T.L., Whiston, S.C., Bleur, J.C., & Walz, G.R. (1997). *Integrating outcome research into counseling practice and training*, ACA: USA.
- Small, J.J. (1995). Encountering counselling: a reminiscence from John Small. *New Zealand Association of Counsellors Newsletter*, 16(3):55-59.
- Sue, S., & Zane, N (1987). The role of culture and cultural techniques in psychotherapy: A critique and reformulation. *American Psychologist*, 42:37-45.
- Vestergaard, T., & Schroder, K. (1985). *The language of advertising*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Wadsworth, T. (1999). The foundation of the New Zealand Association of Counsellors. *New Zealand Association of Counsellors Newsletter*, 20(1):11-12.
- Webster, A.C., & Hermansson, G. L. (1983). Guidance and counselling in New Zealand. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*. 61:472-476.
- Webb, S.B. (1998). NZAC: Helping make a difference. *New Zealand Journal of Counselling*, 19(2):67-79.
- Williamson, J. (1978). *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*. New York: Marion Boyars.



- Winterbourn, R. (1974). *Guidance Services in New Zealand Education*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
- Wivell, R. & Webb, S. (1995). Choosing a counsellor: an exploratory case study. *New Zealand Journal of Counselling*, 17(2):35-44.

## Tables

**Table 1: Qualifications listed by counsellors\* n =44**

M.A.(Psych_ and/or registered psychologist	Univ. post-grad counselling/ guid. degree	Social Work diploma or equivalent	Tertiary Institute counselling certificate	Nursing qualification
12	13	7	10	6

\*Some counsellors mention more than one qualification.

**Table 2: Credentials listed by counsellors\* n=44**

MNZAC	MNZAP	MNZPsS	MNZASW	ACC approved	Specialist Cert <sup>o</sup>
29	4	8	7	19	10

\*Some counsellors mention more than one credential

<sup>o</sup>**Specialist certificate** ( eg., NLP, Family Therapy, Gestalt, Transactional Analysis, Men's violence programme, special needs). Note: many of these appear in capital acronyms and are therefore not easily interpretable by clients.

**Table 3: Experience listed by counsellors n = 44**

Description of experience	Counsellors
Experience (and extensive experience) of working with (client or behaviour types	7
2 – 5 years experience	4
6 -10 years experience of counselling/therapy	5
11 – 20 years experience	2
More than 20 years	5
Experienced therapist	2
Background in.. (eg., teaching, nursing, school counselling)	10
Trained in (counselling approach)	3
General experience (eg. Varied life and work experience, considerable experience)	3
Phrases showing enthusiasm (eg, I enjoy, am passionate about, I work lovingly...)	3