

Student Counsellors' Perceptions of the Effects of Recording the
Counselling Interview.

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Abstract

The use of audio and videotape recordings in counsellor education for the purpose of training and supervision is controversial. Although recordings give counsellors and supervisors direct access to the counselling session and therefore the skills of the counsellor, a number of concerns have been recorded both in early research (Betcher & Zinberg, 1988; Frankel, 1971; Gelso, 1973; Goldstein, 1988; Lamb & Mahl, 1956; Niland, 1971; Van Atta, 1969) and more recently in counsellors' correspondence to the NZAC Newsletter (Anonymous, 2006; Grant, 2006) regarding the effects on counsellors, clients and on the counselling process itself. There is a scarcity of current research on whether or not recording of counselling or therapeutic interviews actually interferes with the counselling process. The few empirical studies of the effects of recording are inconsistent in their findings and their methodological flaws preclude meaningful interpretation of the literature as a whole (Goldstein, 1988). This qualitative research study focuses on one aspect of recording counselling interviews; the perceptions of counselling students. Thirteen counselling students enrolled on counsellor education programmes at five tertiary educational settings in Auckland and Christchurch, New Zealand participated in interviews. They indicated that they perceived the process of recording to be anxiety promoting, initially having an effect on their ability to be completely present in the counselling interview. They also reported that recording was extremely beneficial to the development of effective counselling skills. Counsellors perceived the process of recording to be a potential threat to the developing relationship between counsellor and client but many were able to manage this concern by establishing trust and rapport before introducing recording. The majority of the student counsellors perceived that they became more confident with the process over time, moving from a state of anxiety in initial recordings to a more relaxed style with practice. This has implications for future practice and for early introduction to frequent recording in counsellor education programmes.

Key words

Counsellor Education, Practicum Assessment, Recording interviews with clients.

Chapter One

Introduction

This research focuses on the ways in which counsellors perceive the effect of a teaching tool, audio or video recording on their counselling interviews. For the purposes of this research the following definition of counselling is used. According to Burks and Steffre (1979):

Counselling denotes a professional relationship between a trained counsellor and a client. The relationship is usually person to person, although it may sometimes involve more than two people. It is designed to help clients to understand and clarify their views of their life-space, and to learn to reach their self-determined goals through meaningful, well-informed choices and through resolution of problems of an emotional or interpersonal nature (p.14).

In terms of universal qualities that constitute counselling, Pelling, Bowers and Armstrong (2006) suggest that “the essentials of the field come down to facilitating a client’s growth in self-understanding...and perhaps also a theme related to an idealistic hope of working towards human liberation and empowerment” (p.43).

How these aims are achieved usually depends upon the approach of the counsellor. An approach which has made a significant contribution to most counsellor education programmes is Person-Centred Therapy (PCT), also known as client-centred therapy. This model was developed by Carl Rogers in the 1940s and 1950s and is one of the most widely used models in counselling and psychotherapy.

Mearns (1997) reports that Rogers increasingly emphasised the ‘person’ of the therapist as an active ingredient in the therapeutic process. Therefore rather than being regarded as merely a shadowy reflector, greater emphasis was placed on the therapist’s congruence in the therapeutic relationship (Mearns, 1997). Congruence implies that therapists are real “that is they are genuine, integrated and authentic during the therapy” (Corey, 2000, p.177). Rogers (1987) himself indicated that this approach embraced the personhood of the therapist as well as that of the client. A person-centred counsellor therefore, is expected to be able to meet his or her client at considerable relational depth and work with whatever existential content he/she finds there (Mearns, 1997). He or she is expected to show empathy to his or her client, which implies that the therapist will sense client’s feelings as if they were his or her own without becoming lost in these feelings (Corey, 2000). A person-centred counsellor is also expected to show unconditional positive regard for his or her client. Rogers defined this as “caring for the client as a separate person with permission to have his own feelings, own experiences” (Rogers, 1957, p.98).

A central question in the present research concerns the nature of student counsellors' perceptions about recording the counselling session and whether this interferes with their ability to care for the client in the way Rogers advocates as briefly outlined above.

While many counsellor trainers encourage development of these qualities, it is difficult to assess whether or not novice counsellors are able to demonstrate these fundamental attributes. In 1965 Roberts and Renzaglia noted that the recording of counselling sessions is commonplace for the purposes of training students in practicum. Recording is used for demonstration, assessment and supervision. While the practice of recording clinical interviews is common, research as early as 1956 has suggested that it can influence the way in which clinicians conduct therapy and consequently their perceptions of the effects of their therapy (Lamb & Mahl, 1956). Lamb and Mahl (1956) found that of forty therapists who used recording during therapy, thirty-five percent reported feeling self-conscious of techniques and of being more careful during every interview and 7.5 percent said that they were disturbed sufficiently to give less attention to the patient. Fifty-two percent reported that they conducted their therapy differently while recording than while not recording and of this number, 76 percent felt that this influenced the effects of their therapy.

The concept that the observer has an effect on the observed was first documented in 1927, when Elton Mayo studied the Hawthorne Works of the Western Electric Co. During an attempt to measure the effect of lighting levels on productivity, researchers observed that both higher and lower levels of lighting increased productivity. They found productivity rose through a combination of internal rather than external factors, including the workers knowing they were being observed and measured. This became known as the Hawthorne effect (Wickstrom & Bendix, 2000). Similarly, Speer and Hutchby (2003) note that in sociological research, participants' awareness of the presence of recording devices is often believed to have a detrimental effect on the 'authenticity' or 'naturalness' of the data collected. They describe the "one-way mirror effect" which is based on the idea that there is a realm of social interaction that is natural which is disturbed or distorted by the presence of the researcher and more specifically, their recording device. Speer and Hutchby (2003) further explain that it is implied that 'natural' interactions may only be captured in research if the researcher is able to stand behind a one way mirror, unnoticed by the participants. The

dilemma exists as “the necessary procedures for recording social behaviour in its integrity themselves lead inevitably to the distortion of the very phenomena to be analysed” (p.317).

Although observation during counselling sessions does not fall in to the realm of research, this phenomenon is applicable to the recording of a therapeutic session between counsellor and client as it may, in a similar way, effect the process and/or content. However, analysis of changes in behaviour due to counsellors’ and their clients’ knowledge that they are being observed has received little recent attention in the counselling literature. Consequently, it presents an important issue for discussion when considering the recording of counsellor/client interviews for the purposes of training and assessment in counsellor education programmes and/or counsellor supervision. In terms of its effect on the therapeutic process, Sigmund Freud, in his early lectures on Psycho-analysis (1915-1917) argued against observation on the grounds that an external observer would intrude on the process and serve to “silence” the patient (Freud, 1963)

While there is concern that recording may have a detrimental effect on the counselling process, there is a counterview that there may also be beneficial effects. For as long as recording technology has been available, there has been discussion about its usefulness in counsellor professional development; for example Schon (1983) explored its potential as an effective tool to facilitate reflection on the counselling process and Pelling and Renard (1999) considered its advantages in supervision.

My interest in the effect on counsellors and clients of recording interviews comes from my own experience of recording interviews during counsellor training. Anecdotally, I felt that it limited my ability to be completely present with the client. Furthermore, I perceived differences in the clients’ behaviour during a recorded session; for example I thought they provided desirable responses rather than exhibit their normal genuineness. I then noted a number of concerns have been recorded both in early research (Betcher & Zinberg, 1988; Frankel, 1971; Gelso, 1973; Goldstein, 1988; Lamb & Mahl, 1956; Niland, 1971; Van Atta, 1969) and more recently in counsellors’ correspondence to the NZAC Newsletter (Anonymous, 2006; Grant, 2006) regarding the effects of recording counselling sessions on counsellors, clients and on the counselling process itself. These factors encouraged the present research which investigates the ways counselling students perceive the effects of recording on their development of counselling interviews. In this dissertation the literature is reviewed in chapter two and chapter three outlines the methodology used.

Chapters four, five and six contain analysis of the data and chapter seven the discussion, implications for further research, practice, an evaluation of the study and conclusion.

The following review seeks to explore existing literature concerning the effects of the use of audio and video to record the counselling interview. Effects on the counsellor, the client and the counselling process, during training and supervision will be discussed.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

This review of the relevant literature separates research highlighting the benefits of recording the counselling interview and that which emphasises the negative aspects of recording during the counselling session.

Positive Effects of Recording the Counselling Interview: Counsellor Professional Development

A number of researchers support the use of videotaping counselling sessions for the purposes of training and supervision; most consider the practice beneficial to the development of skills and practice of counsellors (Baltimore & Hickson, 1996; Pelling & Renard, 1999; Feltham & Dryden, 1994; Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987). In relation to video feedback for counsellor trainees, there have been suggestions that it can be an important adjunct to conventional counsellor training. One researcher concluded that counsellor trainees, after viewing videotapes of their interviews, tend to change their self-perceptions, gain in both confidence and in awareness of their personal qualities and therefore increase their desire for further self-development through study (Frankel, 1971). This section firstly considers the benefits of recording for the purposes of supervision followed by a review of the literature concerning the benefits of recording for counsellor training and development.

Recording for Supervision - Positive Effects for the Counsellor and the Counselling Process

Pelling and Renard (1999) identify the advantages of using audio/video to record counselling sessions for the purposes of supervision. They report that it enables high levels of accuracy in observation of counsellor/client interactions which can then be evaluated with a view to further develop the counsellor's skills (Pelling & Renard, 1999). The authors also suggest that a recording of the counselling interview may facilitate the ability to identify incongruities between verbal and non-verbal behaviours which may then form the basis of discussion between the counsellor and supervisor. In addition, any biases that may be negatively affecting the counsellor's practice may be noted, enabling specific feedback to be provided by the supervisor (Pelling & Renard, 1999). This direct observation of the counsellor's work by the supervisor

encourages higher level feedback and, by association, benefits the counsellor's professional development (Pelling & Renard, 1999).

Feltham and Dryden (1994) advocate recording as part of the supervision process as it serves to increase levels of objectivity in comparison with counsellor self-report techniques, which are more subjective. The counsellor is able to reflect on their skills and interactions as observed on the tape, rather than from a purely retrospective view. This view is echoed by Aveline (1992) who states:

In a literal sense, audio and video recordings provide a direct, factually correct vision of what transpired in the therapy session. It is this direct access, unfiltered through the therapist's recollections, that is the prime advantage of recording. The patient and therapist can be heard in action, and seen if on video, which is a very different matter from those events being reported (p.349).

Aveline (1992) as a supervisor, is an advocate of video-recording for the purposes of supervision as he claims that viewing a recording "brings the patient alive and increases my involvement" (p.350). This author also argues that viewing recordings during supervision demonstrates how the therapist deals with transference and emotionally-charged issues which can then be discussed with the supervisor. If tapes are kept by trainee counsellors, comparing them over time may allow trainees to see how their formation as therapists is progressing and identify areas of performance that need further work (Aveline, 1992).

Videotaping therapy sessions is therefore often recommended to increase accuracy within the supervision process which in turn will enhance counsellor professional development (Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987).

Benefits of Recording the Counselling Interview for Counsellor Training and Professional Development

Recorded counselling sessions have long been advocated as a tool for counsellor professional development. For example Baltimore and Hickson (1996) suggest that videotaped counselling sessions as part of a portfolio of evidence of a trainee counsellor's achievements are of great benefit in counsellor education programmes as:

... the demonstration of basic counselling skills and theory-based interventions (e.g., empathy in relating to clients, use of confrontation, listening and reflecting skills) can be chronicled over time in a videotape and audiotape-based format (p.115).

This benefits the student counsellor as demonstrations of performance via video or audio tapes serve to record the development of their skills from the beginning to the end of training. They also provide student counsellors with a vehicle for self-assessment combined with a “longitudinal demonstration of their performance” (Baltimore & Hickson, 1996, p.115) which can subsequently be used for assessing the student counsellor’s potential for work after training or further study.

Videotaped counselling interviews have been deemed useful in allowing course facilitators to identify gaps in student skills which can lead effectively to correctional intervention and thus facilitate the achievement of educational goals (Baltimore & Hickson, 1996). Further, it has been suggested that students who have completed portfolios including videotaped counselling interviews contend that it was a positive and valuable growth experience (Baltimore & Hickson, 1996). This finding is supported by Barnes, Clark and Thull (2003) who propose that the process of developing a portfolio including the recording of counselling interviews has value beyond merely the production of the portfolio itself. Findings from their research indicated that throughout the process of portfolio development, candidates found value in the project in both the summative and formative sense. That is, the portfolio was not only a culminating record of their practicum, but it enhanced learning along the way. The authors conclude that the process itself had become a rich learning experience (Barnes, Clark & Thull, 2003).

However, if the counsellor is the only beneficiary of recording the counselling interview, then there may be ethical implications for its use, particularly in relation to client well-being.

Positive Effects of Recording the Counselling Interview: Benefits for the Client

Supervision and Positive Effects for the Client and the Counselling Process

Pelling and Renard (1999) suggest that recording of counselling sessions for the purpose of supervision benefits the client as well as the counsellor as it enhances the quality of the therapy the client will receive in future sessions. A video-recording of a counselling session allows a third party to oversee the process and

comment on the dynamics as they are enacted, which may facilitate future therapeutic good practice. The supervisor may also provide “expert” insight into the client’s interactions which may facilitate effective interventions by the counsellor and consequently lead to a desired outcome for the client (Pelling & Renard, 1999). However the question remains: will the counsellor-in-training’s therapeutic skills improve sufficiently swiftly to benefit the individual client who has been subject to the recording?

Aveline (1992) notes that if tapes are kept, they give tangible evidence to the degree of change in the client as well as the therapist over time. This is a valid argument for recordings to be used in the counselling session to demonstrate client change in addition to celebrating progress. It is also proposed that the tape may symbolise the therapist’s interest in and concern for the client (Aveline, 1992). Aveline (1992) notes that when a session is not recorded, it may be considered by the client to be a signal of loss of interest by the therapist.

While the benefits of recording counselling sessions as an assessment and supervisory tool are apparent, potential negative effects on the counsellor, the client or the counselling process itself (Roberts & Renzaglia, 1965) need to be considered.

Negative Effects for the Counsellor and the Counselling Process

There is a preponderant view in the literature that the greatest effect of observation is on the counsellor (Zinberg, 1985). Lamb and Mahl (1956) found that 40 percent of clinicians reported disturbance during the recording of therapeutic consultations, some suggesting that they were self-conscious of techniques, relating their carefulness during every interview and others indicating awareness that their disturbance affects the levels of attention they give to the patient. However, this research presents a number of limitations, most importantly a small sample selection, which reduces the generalisability of its findings.

Roberts and Renzaglia (1965) found that student counsellors trained in the Person Centred approach to counselling were less client centred when they believed the interview was being recorded. Their experiment investigating responses in either a recorded or non-recorded condition found that student counsellors were less able to demonstrate their presence and congruence in the recorded session. They suggest that counsellors may have felt “freer to implement their learnings when the threat of recording was

removed.” (p.15). Once again, a small sample size limits the generalisability of the findings and the study itself was later criticized on ethical grounds (Tyler, 1965). However the findings reported by Roberts and Renzaglia (1965) were supported in the literature review and personal experiences of Zinberg (1985) as he suggested that when he was aware that the recorded therapeutic interview would be heard by others, he had a sense of that potential audience. He stated that this awareness remained with him, as it reportedly did with his students, even after months of routine recording. Therefore a part of the counsellor’s awareness, while focusing on the client, “also considers how the interview will sound and look to an audience” (Zinberg, 1985, p.892). Zinberg (1985) also suggested that the social uniqueness of the therapeutic situation is disrupted by observation as he commented that as a therapist he became more concerned about the dignity of the client during observed sessions and therefore interacted in a more “usual social fashion” (p.892) than he/she would without the recording device. This obviously has implications for the quality of the therapy the client receives during a recorded session. Conversely, one must consider that Zinberg’s (1985) views are based essentially on his readings and anecdotal evidence in addition to his experience as a teacher, rather than on his own systematic empirical research findings.

Findings from an earlier study however, are in alignment with the views previously recorded. Niland (1971) conducted an investigation into student counsellors’ perceptions of videotaping and his report indicates that although they found feedback to be a valuable acquisition in the process, beginning counsellors perceived monitoring to have an inhibiting effect upon their performance. These findings were also reflected in a study conducted by Friedman, Yamamoto, Wolkon, and David (1978) who investigated the attitudes and experiences of clinical supervision for residents and supervisors at a clinic both before and after videotaping and presenting a therapy session. Friedman et al (1978) concluded that clinicians found the procedure of videotaping psychotherapy sessions for supervisory purposes anxiety-provoking, leading to less positive views about this process than before the taping occurred. The face validity of Friedman et al’s (1978) research appears sound as they recorded the effects of videotaping a session on the attitudes of clinicians towards the process of recording and its use in supervision. However the findings lack generalisability as the research was conducted in one location with a small sample of participants.

When evaluating the advantages of recording the counselling session in terms of objectivity, the question of authenticity must surely come into play (Speer & Hutchby, 2003). If the recording of the session has an effect on the participants, then perhaps the recording produced is not an accurate representation. If

authenticity is in question, and the recording process has had an effect on the counsellor's practice, then this may mean that the accuracy suggested for supervision (Stoltenberg & Dolworth, 1987) is questionable. Betcher and Zinberg (1988) note "What may appear to be objectivity may in fact be a more far reaching restrictiveness because the therapist feels more inclined to "follow orders" at the cost of his or her natural style" (Betcher & Zinberg, 1988, p. 800).

Further, it is believed by some researchers that there are potential problems in ratings of videotaped interviews (Waltrip, Strauss, Heinrichs, Jauch, & Oltmanns, 1988). They suggested:

While a taped interview may provide a standard situation for all raters, it does not provide the experience of 'being in the room' with the patient. The clinician's phenomenological experience in the interview provides important information for clinical judgement, which is absent while viewing a videotape (p.200).

Such arguments need to be considered when assessing videotaped interviews. Research findings also suggest that the counsellor is not alone in experiencing negative effects from the recording of counselling situations.

Negative Effects of Recording the Counselling Session for the Client

A number of studies present conclusions which state that the recording of a counselling interview may have a negative effect on clients (Friedman, Yamamoto, Wolkon, & David, 1978; Gelso, 1973, Grant, 2006; Roberts & Renzaglia, 1965; Tanney & Gelso, 1972; Van Atta, 1969). Roberts and Renzaglia (1965) reported that when clients were aware that a counselling interview was being recorded, they were more likely to speak favourably about themselves than they did when they believed recording was not taking place. The authors concluded that this was an indication of the effect of recording on the client and therefore, the process. It was postulated that the threat of exposure on a permanent record may have inhibited the clients' negative self-references (Roberts & Renzaglia, 1965). However, since awareness of the recording of the interviews occurred for both the counsellor and client simultaneously in this study, the findings do not divulge whether recording affected both participants in the counselling process, or one of the individuals and the resulting differences in their responses, rather than the recording, caused differences in the other participant's behaviour (Gelso, 1973).

Still, it seems reasonable to expect that the prospect of being videotaped would present a serious impairment to help-seeking for many people (Van Atta, 1969). In a study of a group of counselling centre clients in the United States of America (n = 89), more than a third demonstrated anticipated inhibiting effects of observation – to a degree that if observation were a required condition, they would reject the counselling relationship altogether (Van Atta, 1969). Van Atta (1969) suggests that the clients felt that observation “dampens what they apparently experience as the rather stimulating experience of individual counselling” (p.439). Yet it must be considered that the reports from the clients in this investigation were projections of what they may feel in a proposed situation. How they would really feel and respond in an authentic observed interview may not actually correspond with their reports. Nevertheless, the research provided an opportunity for clients to record their objections to observation of the counselling process, and according to the author, they did so (Van Atta, 1969).

Gelso's (1972) study on the effects of audio and video recording on clients supports the previous findings as his investigation suggests that clients are negatively affected by the recording process. He concludes from the self-reports of clients who participated in the study that recording inhibited the self-exploration of clients with personal problems and resulted in less satisfaction with the counselling process. However one important limitation in this study was the absence of a control group of clients who were not recorded at all. This was addressed in a further study by Gelso and Tanney (1972), the results of which indicated that self-reports were affected by recording and in addition, non-recorded clients found the process most stimulating; video-recorded clients finding the process least stimulating. Both studies used a self-selecting sample of psychology students, from which a sample of “clients” was formed. In terms of ecological validity the findings accrued from such a sample in an experimental setting may not easily translate to real life counselling situations.

Grant (2006) suggests that the client loses the “unconditional regard” of the counsellor because he or she must also have some regard for the views of the audience – who may be the teacher or the supervisor – as well as for the recording device. This view is supported by Roberts and Renzaglia (1965) who found, that student counsellors trained in the Person Centred approach to counselling were less client centred when they believed the interview was being recorded.

Grant (2006), in support of the idea that recording the counselling interview has a negative impact on clients, also suggests that “the naïve authenticity of the counselling engagement is compromised” (p.30) by the recording process as the counsellor and client are involved in another project which involves making a tape for an unknown audience. This appears to be a valid statement however it is based on an individual opinion rather than on empirical research. Further research is required in this area in order to support or refute the views presented.

Discussion and Proposed Research Question

This selective review of the literature uncovers conflicting views about the impact of recording counselling interviews for the purpose of training and supervision. When considering the conclusions of previous research, further important questions arise. Firstly, does the recording of the session take something away from the therapeutic intervention? Secondly, are there specific conditions or situations where it might be too costly and potentially unethical in terms of client wellbeing to video or audio-tape counselling interview? If so, what might these conditions or situations be? Thirdly, as raised by Grant (2006) when we seek a client’s permission to record a counselling interview, are we placing her/him in a “double bind” (Grant, 2006, p.30)? Grant (2006) suggests that “if she refuses, she causes problems for her counsellor who may consequently not like her; if she agrees she denies her own fears and disquiet about the process.” (p.30). Fourthly, what are counsellors’ perceptions of the recording of the counselling process for the purposes of training? Do the costs (if indeed they exist) outweigh the benefits or vice versa? Although some of these questions have been asked in previous research, the answers remain elusive to date.

It also becomes clear that there is a scarcity of current research on whether recording of counselling or therapeutic interviews actually interferes with the process and its outcome. The empirical studies of the effects of recording are sparse and inconsistent in their findings and in addition, their methodological flaws preclude meaningful interpretation of the literature as a whole (Goldstein, 1988). This review highlights some of the ethical difficulties inherent in researching this topic. If these questions are to be addressed in future research, it is important to first establish whether there are perceived to be positive or negative effects of recording counselling sessions on counsellors and their clients.

Chapter Three

Research Design

A Simplified Model of Research

When developing a design for my research project, it became apparent that the use of an effective model would be both helpful and necessary in order to facilitate the organisation, planning, execution and writing up of the research. An effectual and simple model of the research process is presented by Punch (2005) which emphasises a logical step by step framework. The model firstly frames the process in terms of the research questions that identify the focus of the investigation. Secondly, the model stresses determining the data necessary to answer the question identified; therefore establishing how the research will answer the question. Thirdly, the model proposes designing research that will render both collection and analysis of data relative to the nature of the research question. The final step of the model is to use the data collected to answer the question (Punch, 2005). I found this model to be useful in developing a design for this research project. My first step was to pose the following research question:

What are student counsellors' perceptions of the effects of audio or video recording the counselling session?

This question lends itself to the use of qualitative research methods including in depth interviews of counsellors and their clients who have had the experiences of their interviews being recorded. The question serves to organise the project as its clarity gives the research direction and coherence (Punch, 2005). It allows the research to have boundaries as it contains an indication of the method of data collection (self-report from interviews) and guides the sample selection (a self selecting or voluntary sample of student counsellors). The question also provides a conceptual framework for the writing up of the research project as the focus (recording of a counselling interview and its perceived effects on counsellors and their clients) is clearly identified as well as the relationship to be explored. The research question also determines the data to be collected for the purposes of the research; which will be qualitative data from interviews conducted with a sample of the population of student counsellors. Therefore, according to Punch (2005), the research question meets the criteria which establish its central role in the research process.

The following chapter outlines the design for my research project based on the proposed research question.

Research Paradigm - Interpretivist (Constructionism)

The research question focuses on perceptions which cannot be measured or understood objectively. For this reason a positivist approach which perceives reality to be objective and fixed, independent of human consciousness, governed by observable and knowable laws which can help predict and control human behaviour (Sarantakos, 2005) is inappropriate. A constructionist approach, which suggests that there is neither objective reality nor truth, but that reality is constructed (Sarantakos, 2005) is deemed more appropriate. My research design is therefore situated in the interpretive paradigm which stems from constructionism of which there will follow a brief discussion.

For the constructionist, knowledge is defined as the meaning which emerges from peoples' interaction with the world. From this viewpoint, the reality people experience in their daily life is constructed by them and based on their interpretation (Sarantakos, 2005). The perspective of my research design, based on the research question, resonates with this view as it rests on the belief that only the research participants are able to interpret their own experiences.

According to Neuman (2003) the interpretive paradigm (which he terms approach) is the “systematic analysis of socially meaningful action.....in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds” (p.76). Research conducted within the interpretive paradigm seeks to understand details of interactions between people and their everyday experiences in the context of their environment (Neuman, 2003). According to Neuman (2003), this paradigm is the foundation of research techniques which incorporate and are sensitive to context and which use a number of methods to further understand others and the ways in which they see the world. Gaining empathic understanding is therefore more important than exploring and testing the laws of human behaviour (Neuman, 2003). Such understanding was considered integral in seeking to answer the proposed research question in a way that was meaningful both to participants and the wider counselling population. It was desirable to develop an understanding of how the participants interpreted their experiences in the context of the counselling situation. It seemed prudent that as the nature of the topic explored (counselling)

particularly lends itself to the notion of empathy and understanding, research in this area be situated within the interpretive paradigm.

A Qualitative Approach

According to Neuman (2003) the goal of the interpretive researcher is to develop a greater understanding of social life and to discover how people in their everyday life (and natural setting) construct meaning from their experiences. The researcher is able to share the interpretations of the people s/he studies as the aim is to see things from their point of view or even through their eyes (Neuman, 2003). As the qualitative approach to research shares these characteristics and goals insofar as it takes place in the natural setting appropriate to the participant (Creswell, 2003) and is focused on studying meaningful social interaction, rather than external observation of people (Neuman, 2003), it is appropriate that my research project, which is situated in an interpretive paradigm, utilize this approach.

In order to investigate the identified topic and to seek answers to the research question posed, engaging with participants either at home or in their educational/workplace setting was desirable. The aim was to develop a deeper level of understanding of their experiences within their natural environment by enabling them to use their own voice and present, in their own words, an interpretation of their experiences. Using the qualitative approach enabled participants to describe their subjective and social constructions of the research focus and enabled me as researcher to further interpret their words (Creswell, 2003).

A Case Study Research Strategy

As the proposed research question sought to establish the perceptions of the participants in their own words, in a natural setting, then the case study was considered as a potential strategy choice for the current research design.

Yin (2005) suggests that case studies can provide both “descriptive richness and analytical insight into people, events and patterns as played out in real-life environments” (p.xiv). He further proposes that in comparison to other methods, the strength of the case study lies in its ability to explore in detail a case within a real-life context (Yin, 2005). This method of investigation enables the researcher to explore topics which may not be fully approached by other research methods and the case study may also be employed

in conjunction with other methods in order to increase the quality of the information gathered (Yin, 2005). Yin (2005) suggests that there are distinctive topics that are highly suited to the use of a case study method, for example when research addresses a descriptive question: what happened? The case study strategy was deemed appropriate for use in the current investigation as the research question seeks to identify and understand the perceptions of the participants in a particular context. The question may therefore be asked: What happened for you?

Case study methods involve systematically collecting sufficient information about an individual, group, event or social setting to allow the researcher to effectively understand how it functions or operates or indeed perceives the world (Berg, 2001).

Punch (2005) suggests that there are four characteristics of case studies and the first is that the case is a 'bounded system' (p.145). The case studies included in the current study are bounded by the characteristics of the participants who have engaged in the counselling process both with and without the presence of a recording device. The group in focus for the purposes of this study consists of participants who are contextualised within the process of counselling and have experienced the role of counsellor in both recorded and non-recorded interviews.

Secondly, Punch (2005) proposes that it is important to establish that "the case is a case of something" (p.145). Stake (1994) agrees that identification of the case is important and that the case needs to be a specific one. For the purposes of the current study, the cases are trainee counsellors who have conducted at least one counselling interview which was recorded either by an audio or video recording device.

Thirdly, Punch (2005) states that there needs to be an attempt to preserve the wholeness of the case. However, since it is impossible to study everything about one case, specific focus is required. The research question for my dissertation provides a clear and highly specific focus for my research.

Fourthly, a characteristic of a case study is that multiple methods of data collection are likely to be used in a naturalistic setting (Punch, 2005). The current research design utilized both individual and group interviews (focus group) as forms of data collection.

It is proposed by Stake (1994) that researchers have different purposes for studying cases and he suggests that case studies can be classified into three types. Firstly, the intrinsic case study, which is undertaken when a researcher wants to understand a particular case because of its uniqueness or ordinariness, rather than because it represents other cases. Therefore the role of the researcher is to better understand the intrinsic aspects of the particular case rather than to test abstract theory or to develop new theoretical explanations (Stake, 1994).

Secondly, the instrumental case study, which aims to provide insight into an issue or seeks to refine a theoretical explanation. The intention of the researcher is therefore to gain a deeper understanding of some external theoretical question or problem. The case itself serves only a supportive role or provides background for the research interests of the investigator.

Thirdly, the collective case study, which involves the extensive study of several instrumental cases which may have some common characteristics and are selected in order to allow deeper theoretical understanding or an enhanced ability to propose a theory about a broader context (Stake, 1994). The current research design employed a collective case study as I sought to extensively study a number of instrumental cases in order to allow a rich understanding of the perceptions of the participants within the context of the counselling interview which in turn may enhance our theoretical understanding relating to this process.

A commonly perceived problem which arises from the use of the case study is that of its generalisability (Punch, 2005): how can we generalise the findings from the study of one or very few cases? In response to this, Davidson and Tolich (1999) argue that “qualitative research does not seek to generalise to the whole population but to provide a precise description of what people said or did in a particular research location” (p.34). However, Punch (2005) suggests that a case study can in fact produce generalisable results by developing propositions based on the studied case which can then be assessed for their applicability to other situations. An aim of the present research would be to develop propositions from analysis of the data collected from the cases studied in order to assess their applicability to the experiences of others who have participated in recorded counselling situations.

Sampling - Selection of Research Participants

Sampling refers to the selection of research participants who represent the population to be investigated, to make inferences about that population (Berg, 2001). This is particularly relevant in research that seeks to generalise from the research findings to the general population.

Davidson and Tolich (1999) point out however, that qualitative methods do not emphasise representativeness in selecting a sample. So rather than a sample being drawn from probability theory which includes random selection of participants, a qualitative researcher selects from essential and typical units and any generalisations are then based on typical cases (Davidson & Tolich, 1999). Ezzy (2002) also stresses that the most important point about sampling when using qualitative methods is that the sample is purposeful. A purposeful sample is one:

... that provides clear criteria or rationale for the selection of participants, or places to observe, or events that relate to the research questions (p. 74).

Since the aim of the present research was to gather perceptions of a select group of people, namely counsellor trainees, sampling focused on the essential criteria; their experience in the use of video or audio recording in a counselling session.

The sample included thirteen student counsellors, aged between 30 and 60 years, six males and seven females, at various stages in their counsellor training; from year one to post internship. The students were a volunteer group, selected from five tertiary institutions in New Zealand. This constitutes convenience sampling, whereby the researcher uses a sample that is available to her/him because of its accessibility (Bryman, 2001).

The convenience sample of 13 was selected by advertising, using a leaflet for distribution in the counsellor education departments of the following five New Zealand tertiary institutions:

The University of Canterbury – three students volunteered.

The University of Auckland – three students volunteered.

Laidlaw College – six students volunteered.

Massey University – one student volunteered.

Unitec Auckland – one student volunteered.

The institutions were selected on the basis of my relationship with the establishments and contacts in the counsellor education departments which allowed accessibility. Institutions were contacted initially and appropriate consent to research was sought from Heads of School. Trainee counsellors who had gained experience in recording one or more counselling interviews were invited by advertising leaflets to participate in either an individual or group research interview (Appendix I).

Characteristics of Participants

Table 1: Participant Gender, Length of Training, Counselling Experience and Recording Experience.

Participant	M/F	No. of Hours Recorded	No. of Hours of One to One Counselling	Training to Date
E	F	12	500+	2 Years (FT)
L	F	5	500+	3 Years (PT)
Y	F	6 (peers & groups)	100+	2 Years (PT)
W	F	5	30	3 Years (PT)
D	F	20	90	2 Years (PT)
M	F	200	200	6 Years (PT)
G	F	10	80	2 Years (PT)
V	M	10	360	3 Years (PT)
S	M	30	300+	4 Years (PT)
R	M	3 (clients) 20 (peers)	33 (face to face) 2 Years telephone counselling	2 Years and 3 months (PT)
P	M	15	250	1 Year (FT) 6 Months (PT)
B	M	10	160	2 Years (PT)
K	M	20	340	3 Years (PT)

The student counsellors who participated in this study were at differing stages of their counsellor training, some engaged in or having recently completed a 3 year Diploma in Counselling course and others at various points in Post Graduate Counsellor Education Programs. Consequently the participants had varying levels of experience in counselling clients and in recording counselling sessions. For example, one student had little recording experience with clients and some with peers, and another recorded all sessions

with her many clients. Other participants were positioned somewhere along this continuum. Purposeful sampling allows for participant differences within the research focus; recorded counselling interviews.

Participants' Approach to Counselling

Although a variety of approaches were represented across modalities in which the participants were trained, the common theme was a client/person centred philosophy which formed the foundation of all the participants' training. Of the thirteen participants, three (E, L and Y) were trained in a solution focused approach, one (W) in the narrative approach and nine (M, D, G, B, R, V, P, S and K) in the person centred approach. Most of the student counsellors reported that they had received additional training in at least one of the following: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Narrative Therapy, Interactive Drawing Therapy, an Existential approach and Psychotherapy.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues arise in social research as it necessitates the collection of data "from people, about people" (Punch, 2005 p.276). Since qualitative research often intrudes into peoples' lives (Punch, 2005), researchers must ensure the rights, privacy and well being of the people they study (Berg, 2001).

The following ethical considerations arose in the current research project.

A primary ethical consideration for me was that of participant voluntary involvement. Berg (2001) notes that volunteer participants may be manipulated by the researcher into volunteering especially when the teacher researches their student. Since I have taught counselling students, I wanted to avoid the possibility that students may feel compelled to participate in order to maintain favour (Berg, 2001). My research design attempted to address this concern of the potential misuse of the power relationship between teacher and student by ensuring that the participants were not presently, nor previously, students enrolled on papers on which I have taught.

A second ethical concern is that participants are fully informed about the nature of the research. Informed consent seeks to avoid deception or misinterpretation in addition to preventing psychological harm (Berg, 2001). When conducting this study, I ensured that the student counsellors were fully informed by

distributing a detailed account of the nature of the research and how it was to be conducted which included a statement about the right to decline. This was in the form of participant information sheets, either given directly to potential volunteers or sent out to the tertiary institutions explaining the nature and aims of the research (Appendix II). On meeting the student counsellors, I ensured that we took the time to read through the participant information sheets, answering any questions that arose and informing participants of their right to withdraw at any stage of the process. When participants stated that they understood the information presented to them, they were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix III).

Confidentiality is an important ethical issue in qualitative social research as it is important that the identities of the participants are guarded (Berg, 2001). The current study addressed the issue of confidentiality by keeping records of interviews and focus groups in a safe place and by ensuring that all written data was anonymised.

Data Collection by Interview and Focus Group

As a case study strategy was used, and the research question sought an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of the participants, data collection methods of both individual and group interview were employed. Lofland and Lofland (1995) define interviewing as “a guided conversation whose goal is to elicit from the interviewee rich, detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis” (p. 18). The selection of the interview method may be justified by May’s (2001) observation that interviews capture rich insights into the experiences, opinions and feelings of the participants. Using interviews to collect information from participants is appropriate when the researcher wishes to investigate emotions, experiences and feelings rather than more factual matters as they need to be explored rather than simply reported (Denscombe, 1998). I decided to use the interview method in my research as the data to be collected were obviously based on experiences and feelings and therefore it was deemed most appropriate for adoption.

The type of interview used for data collection in this research was semi-structured (Appendix IV). This interview type allows the researcher to utilise a standard format and have control over the questions asked, but subsequently seek clarification and elaboration on the answers given (May, 2001). This ensures that the researcher is recording the participant’s voice as their experiences are relayed in their own words, which is the aim of the current research.

A focus group was also employed as a means of collecting data as this allowed the exploration of the attitudes, perceptions and feelings (Denscombe, 1998) of a small group of student counsellors on the topic of recording counselling interviews. It has been suggested that focus groups can be beneficial as the explicit use of group interaction allows gathering of data and insights which may be less accessible without the interaction between the group (Punch, 2005). Furthermore, the group situation helps facilitate the views, perceptions and motives of the participants so that common themes and opinions may be established (Punch, 2005). The present study incorporated the use of one focus group which consisted of three trainee counsellors who had not participated in individual interviews. The aim of the focus group was to draw out common perceptions, themes and views of the counsellors about the recording of the counselling interview.

Thirteen participants who volunteered to take part in the research project were interviewed; ten of these were individual one-to-one interviews which lasted from forty minutes to one hour and fifteen minutes and three volunteers were interviewed together in a group interview which lasted for approximately two and a half hours. Interviews were recorded by an audio digital recorder for which permission to record was requested from participants beforehand. Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner and McCormack Steinmetz (1991) advocate the usefulness of recording the research interview as this allows for analysis through repeated studying. Participants were later sent copies of their interview transcripts to ensure appropriate representation of their perceptions and opinions on the topic in question (Ely et al, 1991).

Compiling Interview Questions - Validity

An important consideration when collecting data is whether the interview questions accurately reflect the concept the researcher is actually looking for (Davidson & Tolich, 1999). Davidson and Tolich (1999) suggest that in qualitative research, the researcher is not seeking to support his or her hypothesis, rather he or she endeavours to provide a valid description of what people said in a particular research location. The researcher's confidence about the nature of the data emerges, therefore, from the use of explicit processes that enable participants to feel able to speak freely about the topics and that allow readers to clearly observe how the researcher has reached some themed interpretations of the participants' words (Davidson & Tolich, 1999).

During the data collection stage of this research project, I became increasingly aware of the importance of flexibility within qualitative research. Davidson and Tolich (1999) emphasise the value of flexibility for qualitative researchers and suggest that for some “The ability to adapt the method as the subject changes is seen as a key strength” (p.29). As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) indicate:

Traditional researchers speak of the design of a study as the product of the planning stage of research. The design is then implemented, the data collected and analysed, and then the writing is done. While qualitative researchers have stages, the work is not as segmented. Design decisions are made throughout the study - at the end as well as the beginning. (p. 55).

After originally formulating a set of interview questions (Appendix IV A) and C)) that I believed encompassed the issues arising from review of the current literature, and using these questions in a couple of interviews with student counsellors, I consulted with my supervisors who suggested that the questions may be a little rigid and structured. As a result of this feedback and beginning use of the constant comparative method (discussed in the following section on data analysis) I reorganised the interview questions in a way that allowed the participants to tell the story of their experience in their own words (Appendix IV B) and D)). One example of this reorganisation was that I began with a very open and general question “What were your overall perceptions of the recording of the counselling interview?” By asking this question first I found that the data which ensued was rich and detailed – more so than in earlier interviews. I was then able to use prompts and further questions in order to ensure that themes from the literature as well as those arising from previous interviews had been covered. I learned through further reading and reflection that the design process involves, as Bogdan and Biklen (2007) articulate “negotiation between you and the informants over what the study will be” (p.55).

The number of and nature of research participants, the research question and finally the interview questions and the way in which they were posed, were modified and changed during the data collection stage in response to arising themes and my reflection on the process. One example of this was that during an early interview, a participant commented that she was far more nervous when recording for the purposes of supervision than she was when recording for assessment. Taking this statement into consideration, I subsequently asked later interview participants about perceptions relating to this idea.

The interview method of data collection, although a powerful research tool has been defined as problematic in terms of researcher skills and interviewer bias (Punch, 2005). Indeed, Punch (2005) suggests that the more unstructured the interview, the more communication skills the researcher needs to have. In addition, he ascertains that the interviewer may lead the respondents by the type of questions presented, their sequence and the way in which they are asked, including language issues (Punch, 2005). Similarly, Denscombe (1998) notes that qualitative data are the product of a process of interpretation and the researcher's values, identity and beliefs cannot be separated from the process. Qualitative researchers in general accept that the 'self' is inevitably a part of the analysis and therefore should be recognized as such (Denscombe, 1998). When designing and conducting research in the social world, Neuman (2003) purports it practical to consider the epistemological standpoint of the researcher – which will ultimately guide the way in which the research is conducted.

Thus, it is acknowledged that the researcher's identity, values and beliefs will certainly play an integral part in the production as well as the analysis of the data in the current research study. As a qualitative researcher, I would argue that I am as much a part of the research process as the participants and that it is therefore inevitable that some bias will naturally occur during data collection.

Validity and Truth

Truth value asks whether the researcher has established confidence in the truth findings for the subjects and the contexts in which the research was undertaken (De Vos & Fouche, 1998). In this study, the idiographic, qualitative research design contributed toward truth as I immersed myself consciously in the interview process in order to understand the perspectives of the participants I was interviewing; that is "the focus [was] on an insider perspective" (Mouton & Marais, 1990, p.70). The credibility strategies employed in this study consisted firstly in using tape recordings of the participant's opinions and perceptions; secondly, as the researcher, I transcribed each recorded interview myself, therefore becoming consciously immersed in the data. Thirdly, after the transcription process was complete, I sent a copy of the transcribed interview to each of the relevant participants to ensure that it was a true representation of their perceptions and opinions. Finally, as I became extremely familiar with the transcripts, I was able to maintain consideration of the holistic nature of discussions during coding, therefore limiting the occurrence of

fragments of interviews being taken out of context. Use of such strategies will serve to demonstrate credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings which are detailed in the following three chapters.

Summary

The focus of this research was the research question: What are the perceptions of student counsellors on the effects of audio or video recording the counselling session? As outlined in this chapter, a qualitative interpretive approach was considered appropriate. Data collection involved individual and focus group interviews that were recorded, transcribed and analysed using a constant comparative method for theme generation.

Chapter Four

Data Analysis

Introduction

The following three chapters provide an account of the process of data analysis during this study. This chapter provides an introduction and detailed explanation of the process, whilst chapters five and six discuss the main themes arising from the data.

Data analysis in qualitative research is defined by Bogden and Bilken (2007) as the systematic process of searching and arranging data accumulated during research to enable the researcher to establish findings. May (2001) suggests that using a coding system enables a researcher to identify and describe patterns and themes which occur throughout the data. This involves working with the data, breaking them down into manageable items, coding them and then searching for emerging patterns (Bogden & Bilken, 2007). The first step when developing a coding system is searching through the data for topics and patterns and writing words and phrases to represent them (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). For the purposes of data analysis in the current study, the raw data transcribed from recordings and notes from the interviews and focus group were consequently examined and coded for particular perceptions, ideas or events relevant to the aims of the research question. Common themes or interconnections emerging from the data collected were noted, categorised and selected for interpretation. It was then possible to compare these themes and interconnections with existing theories or explanations and to develop these in line with the findings from the current research (Denscombe, 1998).

The differences between data analysis and interpretation are easily defined as the latter involves explaining and framing the findings in relation to theory and the literature. However in qualitative research the two may become difficult to distinguish as findings and ideas tend to emerge simultaneously (Bogden & Bilken, 2007). An obvious example arose during the analysis of the participants' definition of the counselling process, which emerged as personal interpretations of existing theory. This can be demonstrated by the following statement from one participant:

The literature is overwhelmingly supportive of the idea that the relationship is 90 percent - most of the evidence I have read says that the quality of the relationship determines the outcome.

Here, analysis and interpretation emerged simultaneously as the importance of the relationship within the counselling process arose as a dominant theme which required examination in the light of recording the counselling session.

Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996) further note that analysis is an ongoing process which may occur throughout the research, with early analysis informing later data collection. Early in the data collection process of my research, I identified questions not answered by analysis of the interview transcripts and therefore subsequent interviews were undertaken with these issues in mind. For example, in early interviews participants identified technology as important when discussing intrusiveness and I was interested to discover particular situations or types of technology that may affect the process. I therefore incorporated further questions in relation to technology for subsequent interviews.

The following section focuses on data analysis and interpretation, and begins by providing a description of the inductive approach used to analyze the data. I will explain how the data were organized, categorized and coded and will subsequently present the findings of the study.

Analysis of Data Using the Constant Comparison Method

The constant comparison method developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) is a guiding principle of the analysis process in both the grounded theory approach and in many other traditions of qualitative research (Boeije, 2002). This method was chosen for use with the data as Boeije (2002) advocates:

[Constant comparative method is] ... a purposeful approach that can be used by researchers will not only systematize their work, but will also increase traceability when they describe how they used and implemented the approach in their research practice (p.392).

By using constant comparison in analysis, I was able to decide, on the basis of provisional theoretical ideas arising from analysis and reflection upon previously gathered data, what further information needed to be gathered and from which source (Boeije, 2002). For example I recognized an imbalance within the group interviewed as it consisted of a female population without representation of male student counsellors. In order to address this issue, I conducted interviews with a further 6 student counsellors who were male. Therefore by comparing throughout analysis, the researcher is able to inductively develop a theory by categorizing, coding, establishing themes or categories and connecting them. Existing data were able to

be analyzed and compared with new data which enabled arising questions to be addressed effectively, enhancing the analysis process (Boeije, 2002).

How the Data Were Organized, Categorized and Coded

Boeije's (2002) step by step approach for constant comparison proved both useful and systematic in the analysis of my data. Texts from the transcription of interviews with thirteen student counsellors provided the data for analysis as I attempted to reconstruct the perspectives of the group studied. I began with transcripts from three individual interviews ranging from 30 to 50 minutes with female student counsellors. Each interview was recorded and transcribed within two days and the result was a large body of textual data which focused on explaining perceptions and experiences related to recording counselling sessions and the effects of this on the counselling process. On analysis of the transcripts it became clear that the nature and order of the interview questions were imposing structure on the data and as a result, providing a barrier to gathering richer, unsolicited ideas and perceptions. I decided (with some guidance from my supervisors) to restructure the questions (Appendix IV), beginning with a general inquiry about students' overall perceptions of the process of recording counselling interviews. I used the restructured format to then conduct a focus group interview involving three female student counsellors, which allowed the collection of rich and interesting data. Using the less structured format allowed students to openly discuss experiences and perceptions without eliciting directed responses. Subsequent interviews with one female and seven male student counsellors were longer (50 minutes to 1hr 10mins) and yielded rich, in-depth and reflective information. Analysis of the three hour focus group transcript also highlighted the need to make distinctions between novice and more experienced recorders as this may have affected the nature of their perceptions and experiences.

The format of the semi-structured interviews evolved over time due to the application of the constant comparative method. Further questions emerged from analysis of early interviews which were incorporated into later ones, some early questions abandoned and others refined. A further example of this process came from the difference in a student counsellor's perception of recording for the purpose supervision and for the purpose of assessment during an early interview. I recognized that this may be an important distinction and therefore included a relative question on this issue in later interviews.

Coding

Dey (1993) proposed that two activities define analysis, namely, fragmenting and connecting. Fragmenting identifies and selects the separate themes emerging from an interview and attempts to put them in an order which is relevant to the research question (Dey, 1993). This process of coding was conducted in the first instance by hand, which involved reading transcribed interviews and intuitively establishing categories. Every passage from each of the transcribed interviews was analyzed to determine what was said; each was labelled with a provisional code. In this way, the consistency of the interview was examined and discrepancies noted (Boeije, 2002). A discrepancy I noted from three interview transcripts involved students' initial perception that recording had minimal or no observed effects on the counselling process, followed by later recall of examples which demonstrated that recording had an obvious effect either on their practice or on their perception of the client's experience. Other fragments of the interview which were similar were allocated to particular codes, with new information given new codes. During this part of the process, appropriate categories were being developed and labelled.

Secondly, after revising the codes several times, fragments from the transcripts were allocated to each particular category using the NVivo computer program. At this stage the process involved attaching labels or codes to each unit of text and writing what Lofland and Lofland (1984) call theoretical memos. Each code at this point referred to an idea or theme. The result of this procedure was the construction of an inventory of codes, beginning the process of conceptualization (Boeije, 2002). Although the fragmenting process is valuable in qualitative analysis, there are certainly implications of taking a fragment from the context of the interview as a whole. The idea of a comment being taken out of context for the purposes of illustration has implications for accuracy of representation and therefore for validity of findings. Taking this into consideration, I attempted to maintain the theme of the dialogue when extracting fragments for the purpose of coding by reading and re-reading the precisely transcribed interviews in order to assert familiarization with them.

Connecting involves interpreting the interviews as a whole, both together and case by case which emphasizes the context and takes account of the richness of the data (Boeije, 2002). Interpretation occurred both during data analysis and following this process when forming conclusions about the findings.

When new data no longer produced new ideas or material, categories were deemed saturated. This marked a point where interview excerpts fitted themes from other interviews, with no new themes emerging. It was at this point that I decided that data collection was complete.

Initial Findings of the Research: Student Counsellors Perceptions of the Counselling Process and its Benefits

Context

Despite the variety in the approaches to counselling and experience of the student counsellors who participated in this study, it became clear that there were distinct similarities in how they perceived the counselling process and how it benefits clients. The following section outlines the emerging themes which constitute the student counsellors' perceptions of the core conditions which are most important in the counselling process.

Participants' Definition of the Counselling Process

When asked for a personal definition of the counselling process, a common theme emerged from the participants' responses as most referred to the relationship between the counsellor and the client as instrumental in the facilitation of positive change for the client. Student V explained:

It is all of the elements that are included around a client and a counsellor working together...It [the person centred approach] establishes a relationship, and that's the beginning and the end really. That's where it starts and where it finishes.

R similarly suggested:

A process that helps the client to clearly identify a problem...and ways of working towards changing this. The counsellor facilitates this through interaction and the relationship built up with the client.

B highlighted particularly important aspects of this relationship:

To be real and honest – to build trust and rapport – it's all the relationship.

This view was firmly supported by P who based his belief on his reading of the literature as well as his experience:

the literature is overwhelmingly supportive of the idea that the relationship is 90 percent - most of the evidence I have read says that it is the quality of the relationship determines the outcome.

Many of the participants included a notion of trust building in their definition of “counselling process” – as S stated:

if the client understands that I am there for them, then that makes a lot of difference. I think that a client centred approach gets that message across to the client. It's a nice way of building up trust.

W who trained in a Narrative approach also referred to the importance of trust in the counselling process:

Well isn't that [trust] what counselling is all about? If you don't have that then you have nothing.

Participants' Perception of the Benefits of Counselling

It was evident from the responses of the participants to a question on this topic that there was considerable agreement about the benefits of counselling. A theme of client empowerment in a respectful, attentive and trusting relationship where effective emotional change may be facilitated emerged. R's response highlights this theme:

Clients are better able to find their own sort of way of being in the world in their relationship with others – hopefully, if it has been successful, then they will feel more positive and more empowered.

One participant (D) spoke of a counsellor providing benefits to the client such as:

Someone to talk to about what is going on for them – someone not involved in the client's life who can hear her.

P perceived counselling to be:

A safe environment in which to facilitate change.

A further beneficial aspect of counselling identified by the participants was allowing the client to uncover their own problems and to establish their own solutions. As K further explains:

Counselling gives the client space and time to do this in an environment that is respectful to them.

B proposed that counselling benefits clients as:

They don't perceive me as anyone better in a power relationship. [They know] that I love them, that they are loveable and that they can say what they want to say really, which ultimately leads to growth.

Summary

These initial findings provide a clear context from which to explore the effects of recording interviews. The context that may be altered by recordings is one where counselling is regarded as beneficial to clients, especially when it occurs as part of a trusting relationship.

Chapter Five

Analysis of the Main Themes

Having identified in the previous chapter, the conditions the student counsellors recognized as important in facilitating an effective counselling environment, their perceptions of how recording may affect these conditions is explored in the following two chapters.

Participants' Perceptions of the Effects of Recording Counselling Interviews - "The Third Person in the Room"

All of the participants interviewed related perceptions of being distracted at some stage, during the recording of a counselling interview. One student S stated his perceptions of its presence in the counselling room quite succinctly:

You know, it's like a third person sitting in the room.

This was echoed by G who perceived the recording device as extremely distracting to herself as a counsellor:

It's like somebody standing there watching you, listening to you – you know, observing you.

Another participant V reflected:

you know, there is always that part of me that's taken up with the recording that's going on.

However, not all student counsellors viewed the process of recording the counselling session as affecting their counselling skills or the counselling process. There now follows a discussion of the main themes arising from the interviews in relation to how the students perceived recording to affect the process of counselling.

Technology

Technology, for the purposes of this study, refers to the type of equipment used for recording. This arose as a common theme when discussing the effects of recording on counselling practice. There were common concerns about using technology in general:

Logistics

A number of students referred to the technology used in recording a counselling session as anxiety promoting. This was perceived in a number of ways, for example three of the students perceived the logistics of locating, carrying and setting up the technology at the counselling location as particularly difficult with potential problems for both counsellor and client. L explained the issue in the following way:

In terms of the actual machinery being used, that for me has been an issue because of the different places that I have been doing the recordings – it wasn't always the easiest thing to organize; as in physically. It meant carrying equipment from here to there – and ending up in a place, sort of out of puff! Then having to be relaxed with a client. I mean it's flawed with those kinds of difficulties when you are out in the field as it were.

Equipment Failure

The idea of equipment failure or poor quality of recordings was a common theme, and a number of students highlighted their concerns about this, for example L explained:

I made a recording and it was no good because the tape recorder – there was a kind of hiss – ...and I was really not comfortable to have to explain to her (the client) that it was not a recording that I was going to be able to use. She would have been really disappointed about that.

Students highlighted the need to be prepared for the eventuality of equipment failure as one student suggested:

The only thing I can think of is for students to be 'techno-savvy' like to know how to operate the recorder, know how everything works and I would encourage them to take some spare batteries and tapes. And before you even start the recording, just practice so that you know that it's working. Because if you don't know that – another lady in my class – it just threw her – just the technical side of recording.

P also noted his views about technology failure:

Yes I have worried about the technology letting me down – but I will back it up with another just in case.

Technological Compatibility

Participants relayed worries about the compatibility between their recording device and the means by which it would be played back by assessors. This was perceived as an additional stressor to the student counsellor when recording for the purposes of assessment. R stated:

well technology because of compatibility is a bit of a drawback. I know....I find that when I record on this (camcorder) it is too big to fit on a CD, so now I have to find a way of putting it into some format that I can use to physically hand it in to my lecturers. And there may not be compatibility between their software and mine.

When students talked about the effects of recording on counselling sessions, they made a distinction between those of audio-recording and video-recording.

Students' Perceptions about Video-recording

Perceived Effect on Clients

The students participating in this study perceived that the use of video-recording equipment was much more intrusive in the counselling process than the use of audio-recording devices. Many of the students reported the perceived effects of using video with clients as anxiety promoting or facilitating self-consciousness in the client. This idea is demonstrated by a quote from B who related an experience he had when video recording with a client:

there was a huge difference there about the camera being on and I noticed when we were recording that he was looking at the camera all the time. So there is a whole self-conscious thing going on for the client.

Similarly S noted:

the drawback (in video-recording) is often for the client as they are going to be more self-conscious – you know, it is not a small hidden camera – you have something resting on a tripod over in the corner so it is just a big distraction.

Students referred to the physical presence of the video camera as most distracting in many instances as V stated:

I think that it is one thing to have a little tape recorder on the table than to set up a big camera thing – although I know you can get smaller ones now. But still, even the thought that it is being videoed is different to audio.

Student Professional Development

Although there was agreement about the intrusive and anxiety promoting nature of video-recording, five of the participants perceived that recording their sessions by video was more beneficial in promoting the development of their counselling skills than audio recording. This was mainly discussed in terms of video providing a visual as well as audio account of the counselling session, therefore allowing more detailed analysis of counsellor and client behaviour and non-verbal communication. For example R a novice recorder and more experienced counsellor stated:

Sometimes you have to stand outside and observe mentally what you are doing – once I see myself on camera – because I am a visual person – I find that a lot easier to do.....I have been able to see my own kind of progress.

S who is a more experienced counsellor and recorder explains why he believes video recording to be beneficial to the development of his counselling practice in the following quote:

I always feel that the video-recording is good because you can see a lot and hear a lot, it's easier to do analysis of the whole thing because you are able to see it. For example if someone is deep breathing or sighing – its easier to see on video and so in terms of analysis it is easier to talk about it [with my supervisor].

Therefore although the use of video was perceived by many of the students to be intrusive, affecting both counsellor and client in terms of self-consciousness, it was also perceived to be a useful tool in the development of counselling skills and therefore enhanced professional development.

Students Perceptions about Audio-recording

Perceived Effect on Clients

Although many of the students interviewed perceived that the presence of audio-recording devices could be intrusive in the counselling interview, they generally viewed these as less so than video-cameras. However, many of the students perceived that clients became anxious in the presence of an audio-recorder and that this affected their counselling session. Students discussed the idea that clients may have felt vulnerable in the presence of the recorder and that they were afraid that what they said on tape might later be judged by those who listened to the recording. K noted:

In some of them, they (clients) were looking at the recorder...they would look at the recorder and wonder what this thing is doing, or now they are going to say something wrong – I am kind of guessing this, but that is the kind of feeling I got from them. And I used to hide the recorder under a book or something and just have the microphone out so that they couldn't see anything turning or there was nothing that would take their focus.

The above quote highlights two important points; firstly, the consideration the counsellor has for their clients in the recording situation; and secondly that this is only the counsellor's perception of how the client may have felt in that situation and not an objective piece of information.

Many students generally perceived that their clients were less affected by the presence of technology if discretion was used when putting it into use. Participants often discussed the benefits of using small, unobtrusive devices or making the presence of a recorder less obvious: P commented:

The less intrusive technology that is used then the less likely it is to interfere – probably from the client's perspective.

R echoed this statement with his perception that clients are less aware of discreet equipment:

It's kind of hidden in the corner of the room anyway. They sort of don't see it and forget that it's there.

Perceived Impact of Recording on the Student's Counselling Practice

Performance Anxiety

It was clear from the participants' responses that all had experienced performance anxiety during the early stages of their training as a result of recording counselling sessions and that this had a perceived effect on their counselling practice. Students generally felt quite anxious when they began recording sessions early in their training, as now experienced recorder E looked back and reported:

I remember that when I started my first [recorded] interviews that I was very nervous and that definitely impacted on the counselling process. I had a self-consciousness, and particularly because most of the recordings I have done have been for assessment, so there is the sense of appraisal, checking that I am using techniques properly, that I have done certain things. In early recordings, there were clunkers! Yeah, I remember being very wound up and finding it quite

horrible. Yeah, that sense of publicness, that the counselling session is becoming sort of public, or there is going to be an audience to it. So that was sort of my early experience.

This quote highlights the complexity of the issue, as on the one hand, the student describes how anxious she was during early recording sessions; however she also highlights its usefulness in developing good counselling practice in her reference to “using techniques properly”. The view that early recordings were anxiety promoting was supported by fellow focus group member L’s perception:

Yes, and again thinking back to certainly the early ones [recordings] that I did, I remember being so on edge, I wanted to do all of the right things and being in that really conscious setting that I realized straight away that it was really untypical of the way I normally worked with a client.

Another participant W, who is less experienced, suggested that early recording significantly affected her work and that she had never really learned to relax during the recorded sessions. She stated:

Yes, even to the point where the tape clicked off before the end of the session, and that’s when I felt I did my best work.

Many of the participants reported a continued anxiety about recording for the purposes of assessment during their training. Student P who has recorded 15 hours of counselling interviews identified the problems with trying to set up the counselling session as an example of good practice rather than allowing the process to unfold spontaneously. He explains:

I mean it has interfered with my process in particular interviews I think, on some occasions where I have been trying to capture a good piece of counselling to use for an assignment – because it has created a sort of performance anxiety.

Although students discussed perceptions of anxiety around recording, it was clear from analysis of the transcripts that on reflection, participants considered recording a worthwhile practice which facilitated the development of their counselling skills. As R states:

I think for me particularly, I was pretty anxious when I first started and I feel that it helped me figure things out for myself – as well as getting feedback from peers and supervisors – I have been able to see my own kind of progress.

This was supported by S who reports:

For me personally, I have always found that a video session – when you sat down and analysed the session – it has really helped. I mean for me it’s fantastic. You have the whole session and you don’t want to miss out on anything, so it’s all there.

Concern about Being Inappropriate – “getting it right”

Many of the students interviewed explained their anxiety during recorded sessions as the result of their concern about saying or doing something inappropriate during the session and the idea of ‘not getting it right’ on tape. Students were affected by thoughts that they would not perform on tape as ‘perfect counsellors’ or that they would not demonstrate a ‘perfect performance’ as a counsellor in a recorded session that would be analyzed by someone else. Such feelings were reported by D, a student who is an experienced recorder. She discussed her feelings of anxiety in relation to her concern about saying something inappropriate on tape, although she also expresses a view that she is beginning to trust the process:

I find it harder to relax with my client. Perhaps worrying about what I might say wrong, inappropriately. I don’t think they [tutors] believe you are that worried, they say “trust the process” and actually I am just learning how to do that now. It takes time.

Another student B who has had less experience in recording held a similar view:

I felt that there was a sense that I had to get it right – you know – some sense of anxiety. Yes, that’s the main thing I think. That is the main thing I have to do around recording – just to manage that [anxiety].

Other participants discussed their concern about getting it right for the purposes of supervision. This is demonstrated by a quote from S, an experienced recorder who explained:

There is a little bit of human nature in trying to be perfect, so sometimes I can become self-conscious, like when there is something there that can be analyzed by somebody else like my supervisor – I am going to try as hard as possible not to have a ‘boo boo’ question in there!

W, a novice recorder with relatively little counselling experience reported extreme anxiety around recording for the purposes of supervision. She explained this in terms of her feelings of vulnerability as a trainee counsellor being assessed by someone more experienced and falling short of expectations. The following quote highlights her perceptions:

it feels like the ultimate in tests – you know? I would rather take it to my tutor – by a long shot – and be marked on it than take it to my supervisor. Because she has been in the game for a long time and I haven’t – there is a whole inferiority thing happening – you know, she could kick me off my placement – there is the whole thing that goes with that. I mean she is kind of judging me as a working counsellor and I don’t really feel like I make the grade just yet.

Moving from Extreme Nervousness to a More Relaxed Style

Although students reported initial anxiety when recording early counselling sessions, many highlighted the move from extreme nervousness over time and with continued practice, to a more relaxed style with clients when recording. Eleven of the thirteen participants reported such an increase in confidence with the process over time as E, a more experienced recorder and counsellor, explained:

I ended up recording seven people and I got more and more relaxed with it. And more OK – and partly because I knew I could just discard some of the tapes if they weren't going to work out. But as I relaxed, to some extent with the client, even though it would be a different counselling dynamic, sometimes I felt that the client and I were kind of mutually demonstrating our relationship and our progress. And that was a kind of good thing as well, I mean we had this opportunity to go 'well, OK, this is how we work together' and even though both of us were performing a little bit, there were some good feelings around that. Yeah, once I got over nervousness and could feel a little more confident in myself.

This statement was supported by another member of the focus group, L:

I would just like to say that exactly like you, the more recordings that I have done, the more relaxed I have become; but I have still been aware that it is going to be listened to by someone else, so it doesn't eliminate that different response totally.

Aiding Development in Counselling Practice

A recurring theme arising from analysis of the data was the acknowledged importance of recording and reviewing audio and video-taped sessions for skill development during counsellor training. All participants discussed the value of recording interviews with clients in developing their counselling practice. Many highlighted the idea that recorded sessions allow retrospective analysis of counselling skills and responses to clients which facilitated awareness and action when required. Students recounted experiences of working with supervisors and tutors in skill analysis from recorded sessions to improve practice. Overall, recording was perceived as a necessary and beneficial practice in counsellor training, although in many cases, anxiety promoting. A quote from K, an experienced recorder, highlights the perceived benefits for development in counselling practice:

You can see things that you have done well, things that you haven't done so well; you can see how you are sticking to the process and you might also find out what is going on for you; like how come

you went down that track. Or parallel processing, transference and counter-transference – that kind of stuff. Yes, it is so beneficial.

This perception was shared by R, a novice recorder in his response to a prompting question about the effect of recording on skill development. He perceived the process to be greatly beneficial in the development of his counselling practice as the following quote demonstrates:

I think I kind of improved quite rapidly from watching that video. I improved and relaxed actually. I was able to see things that I maybe could have done better and also see that I wasn't as bad as I was actually critiquing myself generally.

L, an experienced student counsellor who recorded relatively few sessions noted the importance of recording for her professional development:

Well for me as a counsellor, knowing that I am going to make a recording and being more conscious, I have read more books and been more conscious of my skills, and you know, planning – so it's just about refreshing and sharpening up your practice.

P a more experienced recorder echoed these perceptions of benefits in terms of skill development:

It gives you a chance to hear you as you really are. I remember the first transcript I made last year when on placement and I picked up on the number of closed questions I asked. I also picked up some other stuff – like the client told me some significant things and I just kind of went "Oh yes?" and then carried on with my next question. So I have learned from listening to my own tapes.

P alongside four of the other participants discussed his intention to continue to record sessions once his training is complete:

I believe it is important and I intend to keep doing it once I finish [my study], I won't stop recording.

Implications for Benefits for Clients

Nine of the thirteen participants perceived their counselling skills to be enhanced by the recording process for supervision and assessment which benefited their client with whom they recorded. K perceives recording as beneficial to clients as it helps with the development of his skills which could serve them at a later date:

Having recorded it and going back over it, you can see so much; things that you missed, inconsistencies; you can see where you went wrong or what you could have done better, it just helps you to pick up on the stuff that you missed during that time.

This perception was also echoed by P in his view that recording improved his practice which has a beneficial impact on his clients:

In a sense that if I was recording to look at what I was doing in order to improve my practice, then if I get better as a counsellor; that is going to impact on my client

R agreed with this idea as he explained how watching an early video helped to improve his practice:

I was very unsure of myself and what was helping my clients was when I watched the video, it really opened my eyes to how I was, and I think I kind of improved quite rapidly from watching that video.

E further explains her perceptions on this topic, suggesting ways in which the process of recording sessions has developed her practice and therefore indirectly benefitted the clients involved as later sessions would be influenced by her learning:

And the other thing, and this is sort of an advantage by a few removed, could be that I actually listen to myself. You know, I spend time with that tape and that potentially has some advantages to my practice – and impacts on the client. And even me reflecting on the visual and spoken relationship – kind of seeing things I didn't see – and I know that I have done that and it has changed some of my behavior with clients - I think in ways that have been positive for them as well.

Monitoring Performance in Supervision

Most of the participants indicated that recording interviews and reviewing them at a later date with their supervisor was helpful in monitoring their performance and therefore their development as a counsellor. M an experienced recorder and counsellor reported:

I tend to hammer myself more than praise myself, I do tend to see more of the things I did wrong than the things I did right, but then when I have been able to take a couple of them [tape-recordings of counselling sessions] to supervision, she [supervisor] said: "did you realize that you were doing this and you have done that all the way through?" and I'm like "Oh have I?" And she says "Yes and that's a good thing". And I am like "Is it?" I hadn't really noticed I was doing it and you start to think that the training and the practice and the learning are starting to come naturally, some of it. And for her to hear that, and say that to me – I couldn't have picked it up for myself in that instance. It's getting me ear-trained.

R who is less experienced as a recorder equally viewed this practice as beneficial as can be demonstrated in his comment:

I think for me particularly, I was pretty anxious when I first started and I feel that it helps me to figure things out for myself as well as getting feedback from peers and supervisors – I have been able to see my own kind of progress.

Some students were acutely uncomfortable with the recording process overall, however even the most reluctant recorder G, who only recorded when absolutely necessary expressed a perception of the usefulness of recording counselling sessions for the purposes of supervision:

I suppose you need it to go off something – you know, how I'm doing? So, you know, they get to hear me talking with someone. And for me the best thing is the issues that come up – when they are heard in supervision, they can advise me and comment on that. I suppose it is the same thing if I bring it up verbally though.

Many of the students commented on the variance between the experience of recording and the future outcome. Some discussed the pains of engaging with the process but the acknowledgement that on reflection, it was a beneficial and necessary part of the process. V a relatively experienced recorder and counsellor described the recording process as “painful but very good.” When prompted, he suggested that:

It was painful due to the hours and hours of transcript, listening to your own voice, listening to all the things you wish you said differently – the way I make mistakes – listening to that ‘ad nauseum’!

This participant then went on to discuss, on reflection, the perceived benefits of recording to his learning and development:

Just in the way you see and hear how I respond in situations and interventions and how easy it is to follow the client in a particular way and not in others. How many options there are during a session, you know? That's one of the things that struck me – I did this, when I could have done that.....and why didn't I ask about that? Yes and the parallel process that goes on. I mean without a good taped session I wouldn't be aware of it so much, unless it was really obvious and really stood out. But it is really good at picking out the more subtle parallel processing. I knew I would get into supervision and get feedback that would be constructive.

Safety in Counselling Practice

Some of the student counsellors expressed a view that recording counselling sessions and then viewing them later with their supervisor provided a model for safety in counselling practice. It was noted by many of the student counsellors that this information when shared with clients may allow them to rest assured in the

knowledge that they as counsellors in training were monitored by a clinical supervisor who oversaw their practice. This view may be demonstrated by a quote from M, an experienced recorder and counsellor who reported:

I think it makes me more professional and much more aware of trying to follow the model. I think that the benefit for them (clients) is that it keeps me on my toes and it keeps me aware that I could be monitored and in that sense, I think there is a benefit (to the client)...there is a safety issue as well, yeah.

V also experienced in recording and counselling echoed this view that recording work for use in supervision was beneficial for his clients in terms of promoting safety in practice. He stated:

I think that in a roundabout way it is (beneficial to clients). First of all as I said before, it will give them an idea that my work with them is safe, it is being monitored.

Summary

While student counsellors expressed concern that they were distracted by technology hardware and visual intrusion, some considering that their clients were also distracted, all noted that this was a feature during early stages of their training. They mentioned initial nervousness that recordings would demonstrate their incompetence to their supervisors but they all recognised the powerful effect on their counselling practice of having the opportunity to gain visual or auditory feedback on their counselling sessions.

Chapter Six

Themes Continued

The following chapter outlines the student counsellors' perceptions of the effects of recording on the relationship between themselves and their clients.

Genuineness

Student Counsellor's Ability to Remain Genuine and Present with the Client

A further emerging theme was the idea that recording affected the student counsellor's ability to be genuine and present with the client. Participants differed in their views about whether or not their genuineness and presence with their clients was affected by recording. More than half, eight of the 13 respondents, were in agreement that their ability to be genuine and present was significantly affected by recording the session. Many highlighted the preoccupation with accurate practice in terms of the model taught as a detractor from their usual genuineness and presence with clients. Most agreed with L, an experienced counsellor with relatively little recording experience, in her belief that as a result of these issues:

There is a real danger of this (recording) affecting the genuineness of the counsellor's reaction.

A comment from B a fairly experienced recorder, demonstrates this concern:

What I would do one-to-one without a tape on is not the same as I would do with a tape on. What I would do is to go back to what I think the tutors are looking for. So I am more relaxed, I'm more myself without a tape on. I will use what I have learned in terms of micro-skills, but not the structure. Sometimes I have fallen into the trap of sounding almost like a robot on the tape.

This view was shared by Y a student who had limited experience in recording who stated:

I felt the ones (recordings) I did were very staged and I kept thinking 'OK, I have to fit in an 'exception' and I have to fit in a 'miracle question', I have to fit in a 'noticing task' and that I am not really listening to the client because I am too busy thinking 'I have to fit this in and that in' so I just felt that it was really staged.

Some students felt quite strongly about this issue, for example G who had resolved to keep recording to a minimum, responded to a prompting question about the difference in her response to a client during a recorded interview and one that was not recorded in the following way:

[In the sessions that were not recorded] I just felt more free to – well I relax a lot more and I just feel more free to concentrate on the client – and I am not – you know, there is always that part of me that's taken up with the recording that's going on. I think it hinders the freedom for people to say what it is they wanted to say for the client. It hindered me because part of me is taken up with concentrating on this thing that is going on. I don't think I can fully be there for the client when the thing is turned on.

Other students however (six of the 13) did not perceive that the recording of the counselling session affected their presence or genuineness with clients. K stated:

Overall, no, I don't believe so (that there is an effect of recording on presence and genuineness). Because as I say, just in those first few initial moments [there was some nervousness], and then it was back to work as per normal.

B, an experienced recorder posed an interesting perspective in his belief that recording may have affected his ability to be genuine but it also kept him on track. He stated:

Yes it does [interfere with genuineness] but it also keeps me from being complacent with my genuineness as well. For example, I wouldn't sit there and swear! Yes so there are two sides to that, it does interfere but it means that I am kept on track as well.

E who was interviewed as part of a focus group voiced a perception reported by four of the other participants when she explained that although she thought that recording had particularly affected her ability to be present and genuine with clients during early recorded interviews, this affect diminished over time with practice and experience. She explained:

Once I had got to a point of doing them quite frequently, I don't think I was as sort of staged in my responses or I don't think my response was as different than if it wasn't being recorded.

Participants' Perceptions of the Effects of Recording on the Client's Ability to be Genuine

Students often discussed their concerns about how recording affected their clients. This does not indicate client perceptions of the process, as recorded here are the perceptions of student counsellors alone. Six of the participants perceived that recording the counselling interview had the effect of reducing the client's ability to be genuine during the session. Many students discussed counselling experiences in which the client behaved differently during recorded sessions, or made particular comments which indicated that they

were not responding in their usual manner. Y, an inexperienced recorder and counsellor, related her perceptions in the following way:

Well I was thinking about what I said about putting on a performance – especially if they (clients) are younger people – you know they want to say the right thing, especially if they have got a bit of anxiety – they don't want to be doing it wrong. You know, so they are thinking about what they are saying as well. So I guess the impact would be that they wouldn't be so genuine.

She later suggested:

You know, I don't think that clients are going to be particularly open to expressing emotion in the same way when they are being recorded.

K, after having recorded 20 sessions, perceived that recording may have had an effect on the client during the initial stages of the interview but that this faded as the session progressed:

it does to begin with, like the first five minutes....I guess they were wondering what was going to happen but once they pass that sort of initial nervousness or whatever, they will kind of just be themselves.

Student Counsellors' Concern for their Clients

All student counsellors interviewed discussed their concerns about how recording may have affected their clients. Some suggested that this process facilitated compliance as the client, in their efforts to please the counsellor, acted out the role of 'a good client' who had been 'successfully treated' by them.

Client Compliance

Many students discussed the idea of the client 'repaying' the counsellor by agreeing to be recorded. The following quote by experienced counsellor E provides a good example of this theme:

Yeah, I mean I had that word (compliance) going round in my head before I said – em what I think I have noticed with some of the clients – when they have done me this favour of agreeing to be recorded – the sessions in my mind often demonstrate a lot of compliance. Where they are very compliant clients for that session – where they hear my questions and they answer in kind of beautiful, you know, almost rote ways. I have known times when I thought 'oh we have just had this great kind of formulaic kind of session' because they [the client] have gone along with me and that is often different with how we would normally interact.

S offered an interesting slant on this perception in his articulation of concerns about client well-being and compliance:

I actually feel that that after a recording a client may feel that they have left something behind. You know, it's like a third person sitting in the room. It does not involve the relationship you have built with the client at all....That's why I feel that sometimes 'is the client indulging you?' Because it is just for you.

This quote demonstrates a number of S's concerns about his clients when the interview is being recorded. Firstly, that they are leaving some part of themselves behind in the counselling room as their feelings and thoughts have been recorded by the counsellor. Secondly, that the client is indulging the counsellor as this process benefits only the counsellor. And thirdly, that the recording of the counselling session invites another person into the room – a perceived audience who is observing the process and listening to the client's personal story.

Power Relationship and Informed Consent to Record the Counselling Interview

Another concern which arose from the data was associated with the power relationship between the student counsellor and client when asking for permission to record sessions. Many of those interviewed commented on times when they were in doubt about the ethics surrounding seeking client permission to record sessions, some stating that they were troubled that the client would not be in a position to decline should they be uncomfortable about participating in a recorded session. Student L commented:

And the other thing about that power dynamic is whether clients feel that they can actually refuse. That concerns me, it really concerns me. And the other concern is clients who agree and who go away and think about it....I think clients would actually agree in the moment, go away and have huge doubts during the week, but can't come back and say because of their lack of assertiveness perhaps – and their anxiety levels. I worry about the guilt and shame that that introduces for those clients.

This student added that she had considered a further potential ethical issue surrounding the power relationship between student counsellors and their clients:

I have been conscious, and hopefully this hasn't happened for me, but as the pressure builds to complete a particular exercise by a certain deadline, then I can see that some student counsellors could actually put clients under pressure to comply – either consciously or unconsciously.

E's statement about her concerns relating to seeking clients' permission to record sessions further highlights the issue:

I felt really nervous about asking people and also a bit embarrassed for – just really cautious about putting too much onto someone. It sets that protective feeling. But also it felt like a power dynamic was being set up and I was potentially in the position where I was going to be imposing – and I didn't really like it. Yeah, I struggled with that. I think that I find that clients are doing us a favour and I think that there is something going on there that could be a little dodgy ethically.

Another student, K, reported feeling anxious about asking clients for their permission to record the session as he was concerned that it may affect his relationship with his clients:

I was anxious...that it would affect the relationship; that they would think "this person, or this guy's just after his own agenda – he doesn't actually care about me" or whatever.

G felt particularly strongly about the ethics involved in recording interviews with clients from different cultural backgrounds. She discussed at length her extreme concern for client feelings and her own experiences of being asked to participate in recorded counselling sessions:

I didn't feel good about asking them because I remember when I was asked to do it – and I didn't want to be taped but I didn't want to disappoint the person asking. And I know that as an Islander...you are probably going to get a 'yes' from people. And people sense that it's not really a good thing to be asked – but if you ask them, they'll do it...because you asked them – but they don't feel happy that you asked them. Yeah, I was uncomfortable that I was asking anything from a client – it's just not worthy – they didn't come to help me with my counselling practice. They think that I am just there for them.

P explored an interesting dichotomy when asked how he felt about asking clients to participate in a recorded interview. He differentiated between client groups and how he felt about requesting permission to record sessions, stating that his uneasiness about asking university students was not present when asking school students as he was more familiar with working with the power relationships within the school setting. He stated:

that's interesting because I think that I actually feel different when I ask a University student – it seems perhaps that it is part of a power relationship – that because I am used to being in a school – I have been a teacher and a senior manager – that asking a secondary student to co-operate with something feels more comfortable – or maybe they are in a situation of less power...Whereas

I remember asking one of my University students – I kind of felt that they might feel that it was more intrusive.

This issue was perceived differently by V as, in his experience, he was able to request permission from adult clients as they were able to understand the reasoning behind the recording process. However, when working with school students, he was reluctant to ask for permission to record sessions as this may have been perceived as a further complication in an already potentially difficult process for them:

I had no problems with the adult men as they understood my position; they understood I was training...and I think they were glad that they could help. And they understood the process of confidentiality as well....and I think the boys (from his placement in a school), my sense of it is that they didn't understand all of that as well as the men did. Or there may have been a perception – especially those that were sent for counselling – they were not too happy with the process anyway – so taping it was an added complication I think.

The above quotes are indicative of the many concerns of the student counsellors relating to which clients may be considered as suitable to seek permission to record sessions with. Many of the student counsellors discussed their worries about how clients would feel about their requests and the notion that they were imposing on them. A number of these concerns centred around the issue of confidentiality.

Confidentiality

All participants perceived confidentiality to be of paramount importance during the recording process and many discussed how they ensured that clients are fully informed about what will happen to the recording once the session is over. Six of the thirteen student counsellors interviewed believed that the issue of confidentiality promoted anxiety in clients when recording. B, a reasonably experienced recorder related an experience where his client seemed reluctant to discuss a sensitive issue when the tape was recording. He perceived this to be due to the client's concern for confidentiality, however, it must be noted that her reaction may have been associated with self-consciousness or some other issue. He remembered the experience as follows:

I noticed that when I asked one lady a particularly deep question, she looked over at the video camera before answering and I actually offered to turn it off – so how did that reflect? It shut down an area of that person's life that needed to be looked at or talked about.

G also believed that recording prevented clients from discussing some issues although she did not offer any perceived reasons for their hesitance:

The clients that I have counselled, they...were very conscious of the recording – and it's happened quite a few times – as we have gone to finish the session and I turned it off (the recorder) they would start talking about what I think they wanted to talk about. Yes well in the times I turned it off, and they started talking, it was something that they hadn't talked about the whole session we had been talking!

A similar perception was noted by S who discussed a pronounced concern for the feelings of his clients when they participated in a recorded session:

I have also noticed that even when the clients get into it and it is okay when we are recording, when they want to say something really sensitive either they shy away from the recorder or they look at the recorder and talk. So you have created something there. So the process would not be quite so easy for him – you know?

L offers her perceptions about the effect of recording the interview on clients and their concerns about confidentiality:

I am just thinking about some of the clients I have met – that if they had been in that situation, they would have been selecting what they would have been talking about, knowing that it was being recorded. So that once again brings in another variable to the process. I have got older clients and I have had clients who have actually expressed that concern and have needed to actually know names of people who would be watching the video.

Two student counsellors believed the effect to be minimal and only related to a particular client group – for example, R believed this issue to be directly linked with the trust established between the counsellor and client:

I think for clients who are concerned about external locus of evaluation or other people's judgment about them – and extremes would be (range of mental illnesses) then it could be dangerous if they feel that...because trust is another thing isn't it? And if clients have major trust issues then they might agree and then worry about what was being done with that video – you know U tube or MySpace and that kind of thing. So I think that it is really important how the counsellor introduces it.

The other participants did not perceive there to be an effect on clients' responses due to confidentiality involved in recording the interview. As P suggests:

in terms of their demeanour and their freedom to talk, it didn't seem to inhibit them at all. I did not detect any change in interaction because we were taping.

One student reported feeling protective towards clients when recorded interviews were being appraised by tutors/supervisors. She reported her concerns about how clients may be discussed by others viewing or listening to recordings:

I think I had a protectiveness about the clients being appraised themselves, the people (clients) being commented on or depicted in ways that I can't really see them. So I think that there is an element that comes into who you choose (to record with) and why and what I sit with when I am recording.

Once again, many of the student's quotes highlight their initial dilemma about which clients to approach with a request about recording counselling sessions. This discussion arose across many of the themes and speaks of the students' overall concern for the wellbeing of their clients.

Relationship between Counsellor and Client

The theme of the relationship between counsellor and client appeared often in the data however, once again the participants were divided in their perceptions about whether recording the counselling session has an effect on this relationship. Some of the students believed that recording the counselling sessions may actually interfere with the relationship between counsellor and client and others highlighted the ensuing opportunities to celebrate the relationship and the process that recording promoted. Six student counsellors believed that recording the session detrimentally impinged upon the relationship between counsellor and client. Students cited trust building as imperative when building and maintaining the counsellor/client relationship and many perceived recording to potentially interfere with this process; for example students participating in the focus group agreed with the statement from L:

... [Recording] certainly has the potential to alter and even jeopardise ongoing counsellor-client relationships.

E, an experienced counsellor and recorder, commented on her belief that the focus on demonstrating technique during recorded sessions affects the relationship between counsellor and client:

... that really important relationship between client and counsellor – and I think that the recordings would be much more technique orientated. I think that undoubtedly is going to have an effect on

how the counselling for that session goes and the ongoing relationship as well – there has been this shift.

S, another experienced counsellor and recorder, also felt that the process of recording could be detrimental to the building of trusting relationships with clients:

Yes I mean it is a one-way thing, it doesn't really benefit the client in any way. It's for you – and you know, you are trying hard to build up a trust and rapport in a very different way.

He noted, along with most of the participants, the importance of building the relationship first before introducing recording to the client:

... just to wait for 2 or 3 sessions before recording – then slowly introduce it.

Other students agreed with this philosophy of practice; for example W an experienced recorder stated:

Yes, if that happened to me as a client [recording during a first session with a counsellor], it would potentially damage the relationship that I could build with that person and make me feel that I didn't really trust them initially. It would be better for me, and that's the way we are taught, to build a rapport first before slamming them with "we'll tape this". I think that's really important, if you are not doing that, you might as well not be taping as you are not going to get any quality work out of it.

Students therefore acknowledged that recording could potentially damage the building and maintaining of trusting relationships with clients and in turn offered some solutions they had used to address this problem.

Rapport Building

All of the participants suggested that recording the first or very early sessions with clients may disrupt the rapport-building process and therefore potentially damage the budding relationship between counsellor and client. D, an experienced recorder, reflected upon an experience of wanting to record with a particular client but deciding that this would be counter-effective in their first session together:

And another client, it was her first session and she went straight into it and I know I would have had to stop her and say "we are going to tape this, would you sign a consent form?" But with her, I didn't kind of want to stop her and so I didn't do it.

Students who did not believe recording affected their relationships with clients suggested that it was important not to record during the first few sessions. K, an experienced recorder, reported his belief that building rapport before recording sessions was essential to the client/counsellor relationship:

I wouldn't record the first one, two or three sessions – I would build a rapport first so that then...the trust is there.

This was a view supported by many of the student counsellors and is once again demonstrated by V's statement:

I think that if it were introduced in the first session, it might [have an effect] – my sense is that I would not introduce it in the first session. But I establish the relationship first so that the client has a sense of trust.

This was echoed by R in his response:

Well the first client I used – I think it was session three or four that I recorded – so I had already built up a relationship with her – and so we were sort of familiar with each other and so I didn't remember noticing anything different about her responses or her demeanour at all.....but I think that it is definitely important to build a relationship first...Yes so I certainly wouldn't advocate doing it [recording] in session one...I would never use it [a recorder] in session one.

Positive Effects on Relationship - Opportunity to Celebrate the Process

Although there were perceptions of possible detrimental effects of recording the counselling session on the counselling relationship, there were perceptions of positive effects also. Four of the thirteen student counsellors perceived that recording the counselling interview had a positive effect on the counselling process in general as it presented an opportunity to celebrate how they and their client worked together. E introduced the idea in the following way:

I think for some of my clients – even in the contrivance of the set up – we had some really positive sessions which were about demonstrating our progress together – and their progress in relation to the changes they were making. So even some of the deliberateness around that session was actually quite positive and called upon us to have a 'yeah how we have worked together and what's been going really well'.

L, another experienced student counsellor, also reported using recording as an opportunity to celebrate the client counsellor relationship:

Being solution focused, I have actually said to a couple of clients that it is really a compliment that they have been asked to do this, that there are certain things about the relationship we have that

has made me think of the possibility of taking part in the recorded session – and that has really had a positive effect on that client – it's like 'wow! You know, there is really something different here'.

V noticed that for some of his clients, their self-esteem was given a boost by the recording process:

I wonder if having the session recorded gives the client the sense that what they bring is important. I think I have picked it up from a few clients – they have straightened their back as if to say 'mm I am being recorded!'

Client monitoring of their own Progress

Four of the students commented on how the process of recording the counselling session may benefit the counselling relationship, specifically for the client in terms of enabling them to monitor their own progress.

For example L states:

For me, another advantage would be that there is an opportunity for the client to either listen to or watch the tape and to see how well he or she is actually doing. Or to actually go over that conversation which, for many clients, as it is for the counsellor, that moment is lost, you know, it goes into cyberspace. But to have it recorded, and if there is an opportunity to actually re-live it as it were, and to learn from it.

R agreed that recording may have benefits for the counselling relationship and discussed the possibility of future use of recorded sessions with clients in order to ascertain their progress and to affirm positive changes which may have occurred:

I wonder, as it benefits me from seeing them so much, whether the client will benefit from seeing them as well. And so one idea I have for future research is to give the clients a copy of the video of each session and reviewing it before the next session and then...measuring their progress. I have read some work by Irvin Yalom and he has used audio tapes with clients who would listen to them before the next session and had found this quite effective.

Summary

In this chapter the relationship between counsellor and client was highlighted as crucial by student counsellors and they raised their concerns about recording and its perceived interference in both building and maintaining such relationships. This problem was averted by building rapport with the client first and recording later, once a relationship was established. However, students also highlighted that recordings

may, for a number of reasons and in some situations, be beneficial to their clients. It may be considered that the perceived effect of recording the counselling session may depend mainly on the experience of recording and attitude towards this process, of the counselling student.

Chapter Seven

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The picture of the effects of recording counselling interviews, which emerges from the perceptions of student counsellors in this study, complements that provided in the counselling and psychotherapy/psychiatry literature. The data both reflect and highlight many of the existing findings and in addition, provide an insight into the feelings and perceptions of the student counsellors when faced with engagement in the process of recording. Much of the literature, based on traditional positivist paradigms, focused on the effects of recording the therapeutic interview without seeking to uncover underlying perceptions and feelings of counsellors/therapists involved in this practice. The empirical studies of the effects of recording are sparse and inconsistent in their findings and in addition, their methodological flaws preclude meaningful interpretation of the literature as a whole (Goldstein, 1988). In order to address the issues effectively in future research, an in-depth analysis of the perceptions of counsellors in relation to recording sessions was required. This research project, in many ways, provides insight into such perceptions.

The findings of this investigation uncovered that student counsellors perceived there to be distinct advantages and disadvantages in recording the counselling interview, but that on the whole, for most students, the benefits in terms of the development of their counselling practice, outweighed the costs of initial performance anxiety and concerns for client well-being. Here I consider the issues raised by participants both in light of relevant literature and with respect to their contributions and implications for counselling practice.

Effects on the Student Counsellor - "The Third Person in the Room"

A powerful theme emerging from the data was the analogy of "the third person in the room" with reference to the presence of a recording device. All of the participants interviewed reported being distracted in varying degrees by the presence of the recording device, some reporting extreme performance anxiety and others initial nervousness. This finding supports both the early claims from the 1950s of Lamb and Mahl

(1956) that recordings influence the way in which clinicians conduct therapy and later conclusions drawn by Roberts and Renzaglia (1965) and Zinberg (1985). Zinberg (1985) discussed the presence of a sense of a potential audience when recording counselling sessions, which was similarly referred to by a number of the students in this study. Roberts and Renzaglia (1965) found that student counsellors were less client centred when they believed the interview was being recorded, many reporting feeling freer to implement their counselling skills when the threat of recording was removed. This view is sustained by many of the students' perceptions recorded in this investigation as a number of participants stated that their ability to be present and genuine in the counselling process was hindered by recording.

Grant (2006) in his correspondence with the New Zealand Association of Counsellors Newsletter suggested that the client loses the 'unconditional regard' of the counsellor because he or she must also have some regard for the views of the audience – who may be a teacher or supervisor of the student – as well as for the recording device itself. These views were both mirrored and complemented by the perceptions of the students participating in this study as most agreed that the presence of the recording device was at best distracting and potentially anxiety promoting. All students participating in this research deemed the attentive and respectful relationship between client and counsellor as paramount to effective counselling. Many students clearly felt that their ability to be genuine and present with the client was hindered by the recording process. Students openly discussed their concern about 'getting it right' when recording sessions, and therefore felt that the attention their clients received from them suffered as a consequence.

Effects on the Client

A number of student counsellors who participated in this study remarked that their nervousness during recording may have hindered their genuineness with clients. This issue is raised in the literature by both Roberts and Renzaglia (1965) and Grant (2006). While clients were not interviewed in this study, the perception of students that this would have a negative effect on their clients and the counselling relationship was clear. Student perceptions of how clients responded to recording of sessions may be based on an assumption that if their ability to be genuine is effected by the process, then the ability of their clients' would be similarly affected. Roberts and Renzaglia (1965) found that clients were more likely to speak favourably about themselves when they were being recorded, a finding which is reflected in the

perceptions of a number of students who participated in this investigation. Several students stated that they perceived the client to be less genuine and forthcoming during a recorded counselling session, although it must be highlighted that this finding is based purely on the perception of the student counsellors and does not reflect the views of their clients. Gelso (1972) also suggested that clients were negatively affected by the recording process, finding recorded sessions least stimulating. Many of the student perceptions recorded in this report support this finding, some suggesting that clients looked at the recording device when they were about to discuss sensitive information about themselves. Grant (2006), in support of the idea that recording the counselling interview has a negative impact on clients, also suggests that “the naïve authenticity of the counselling engagement is compromised” (p.30) This view is reinforced by a number of student perceptions which herald a concern that clients tend to shy away from the recording device when speaking about sensitive issues. Some went as far as to suggest that clients may not respond in an authentic way when the counselling session is recorded.

The conclusions drawn by both Grant (2006) and Roberts and Renzaglia (1965) that counsellors trained in a person centred approach were less client centred during recorded sessions received some support from the data collected in this study. The following quote from a student, which reflects the perceptions of many of the participants, highlights this point: “there is always that part of me that is taken up with the recording that’s going on”.

Other students report that their performance as counsellors was significantly affected by the recording which in turn would affect the service provided to their clients.

Student Counsellors’ Concern for Clients’ Well-being

Of the students interviewed for the purposes of this investigation all introduced this unsolicited theme into the discussions, reporting explicit feelings of concern for their clients during the recording process. Many reported feeling extremely uncomfortable when requesting permission to record a session and others strongly advocated sensitivity in approaching the issue

A common theme of the power relationship between counsellor and client arose from the data; an issue raised by Grant (2006) who suggested that counsellors who request permission to record sessions with

clients may be placing them in a 'double bind'. Grant (2006) claimed that this creates a difficult situation for the client who would want to please the counsellor and so may deny her own fears about the process. Many of the student counsellors' perceptions mirrored this concern, some feeling quite strongly averse to the process itself, believing that it may affect their relationship with their clients. Others discussed ways of managing this concern through open discussion with clients. This view is supported by the trend to attach a strong valence to ensuring that the client has the opportunity to decline to participate in recording during any stage in the process. All students advocated resisting recording with clients during early counselling sessions in order to facilitate a trust building process. The theme of the importance of the relationship; building rapport and engaging the client with the process before recording arose consistently throughout the data.

A number of student counsellors differentiated between client groups when discussing the power relationship involved when requesting permission to record sessions. One student reported greater feelings of discomfort when approaching adult clients rather than young people, whilst another felt less happy inducting young students. Other participants suggested that they would be discerning about which clients they would choose to record with, some feeling that those with more serious mental health problems may not be suitable candidates to record with as they may be more severely affected by the process. The importance of anticipating negative consequences of recording the counselling session for clients is highlighted in the data as students were generally supportive of protecting their clients from any ensuing adverse effects and therefore considered these carefully.

Effects on the Counselling Relationship

The data reflect a variety of student perceptions regarding the effects that recording the counselling session has on the client/counsellor relationship. Many students perceived there to be a potential negative effect when recording, both on counsellors, their clients and consequently their relationship; a finding which lends support to Gelso (1972) who believed that clients were negatively affected by the recording process and that this in turn would affect the counselling relationship. Participants openly discussed the importance of a trusting relationship with clients and its implications for effective therapy. Many held concerns about jeopardising such a relationship by introducing a 'third person in the room' which may unsettle clients and have an impact upon their ability to be completely present with them.

However another common theme arising from the data was that recording presented an opportunity to celebrate the client/counsellor relationship and the work they had achieved together. Pelling and Renard (1999) suggested that recording the counselling session benefits the client as well as the counsellor as it enhances the quality of the therapy the client will receive in future sessions. This will ultimately affect the quality of the counselling relationship. Aveline (1992) proposed that the tape may symbolise the therapist's interest in and concern for the client in addition to demonstrating client change, providing an opportunity to celebrate the counselling process. Both views are supported in the current study as many of the participating student counsellors perceived the recording process to provide an opportunity for review and celebration of client progress and therefore as an affirmation of the counsellor client relationship.

Moving from Nervousness to a More Relaxed Style

Although there are undoubtedly perceived drawbacks when recording counselling sessions, a common theme arising from the data set was that of students becoming more relaxed with the recording process over time. More experienced recorders (and counsellors) reported that after recording a number of sessions, they found that they were able to respond to their client in the usual way, with a genuine, client centred, more relaxed style. This finding does not support the early literature reporting the adverse effects of recording on the ability to be client centred (Lamb & Mahl, 1956, Roberts & Renzaglia, 1965 and Zinberg, 1985). While this may be related to more advanced or inconspicuous recording equipment, it appears that the more recording is practiced, the more likely the student counsellor is to become accustomed to the presence of the recorder in counselling sessions. Those who recorded more frequently in their programmes had become much more relaxed with its implementation. This finding may have implications for early introduction of regular recording in counsellor education programmes.

Effects on Counselling Practice

The resulting perceptions accrued from this research suggest that there are benefits to be derived by student counsellors when using videotaped counselling interviews for the purposes of training and supervision. Frankel (1971) concluded that trainees tend to change their self-perceptions and gain in confidence and awareness of their personal qualities after viewing videotapes of their interviews. The findings from this study support this conclusion as many of the participants discussed the benefits of

recording in a similar way; for example several students recognised after viewing videotaped interviews, that they were more effective in their use of counselling skills than they had previously perceived. Others highlighted the opportunity to change undesirable mannerisms or behaviour in future sessions after initial viewing of recordings. Overall, students participating in this study identified the use of video as beneficial to their training and development of counselling skills.

A number of researchers, including Pelling and Renard (1999), Feltham and Dryden (1994) and Aveline (1992) have concluded that using audio/video to record counselling sessions for the purpose of supervision was advantageous for counsellors. They suggest that observing the skills of the counsellor during interaction with clients allows feedback during supervision and so aids professional development (Pelling & Renard, 1999). The perceptions of student counsellors participating in this research reflect these conclusions as many discussed the benefits of using recorded interviews in supervision, suggesting that this process accelerated the development of their counselling practice. One student highlighted that the opportunity to review recordings with her supervisor aided development in self-awareness and in her confidence as a counsellor in training. An interesting finding was that even the most reluctant recorder acknowledged the benefits in recording for the purpose of supervision as the feedback and subsequent advice from her supervisor was helpful to her counselling practice.

The importance of recording interviews in counsellor training and assessment was a common theme arising from the data as many students perceived this to be an anxiety promoting but ultimately beneficial process. Baltimore and Hickson (1996) and Barnes, Clark and Thull (2003) concluded that the use of recorded counselling sessions as evidence of a trainee counsellor's achievements are of great benefit in counsellor education programmes as well as providing a tool for enhancing learning. These conclusions are supported by the findings of this study as the participating students often provided examples of ensuing professional skill enhancement when discussing the benefits of recording for the purposes of assessment.

Implications for Practice

The particular focus of this research has been to gather the perceptions of student counsellors about the effects of recording counselling sessions on their clients, their own performance in those sessions, and on the counselling process itself. On analysis of the views and experiences of the participants, it becomes

clear that both students and teachers support the view that the benefits of recording outweigh the drawbacks. It is also interesting to note that while students have concerns about the process, many have found effective methods of managing their concerns. It is in the identification of how some students are effectively managing their concerns that we are able to move forward in establishing and advocating best practice in this area. The findings may be useful to form the basis for informed speculation about strategies for improving the use of recording in counsellor education programmes and for the purposes of supervision. Firstly, to respect the importance of the relationship in effective counselling, students advocate at least building rapport and trust with a client before requesting permission to record a session. Most suggest that they would never record during the first three interviews.

Secondly, the findings suggest that the more obvious the technical equipment, the more intrusive it is in the counselling interview. Therefore students advocated the use of discreet, even hidden devices which will not attract the clients' attention.

Thirdly, a number of discussions included the idea of discernment when approaching clients with requests to record sessions. Students suggest that counsellors apply sensitivity when selecting clients with whom to record sessions.

Fourthly, the link between comfort, confidence and experience was clear. Experienced recorders suggested that the more they recorded their counselling interviews, the more relaxed and authentic they became in the process. This has implications for the practice of recording in counselling education programmes as it appears that recording early and regularly during the course promotes desensitisation to the presence of the recording device and therefore allows the counsellor to 'be themselves' during recorded interviews. The suggestions made by the participants in this study provide potentially valuable contributions to the development of recommendations for consideration when making decisions about recording client sessions and facilitating the process of recording with clients.

Implications for Future Research

Although a number of age groups and ethnicities were represented in this research, the majority of the participants were New Zealanders of European descent and therefore are not representative of the bi-

cultural or multicultural population who are training and working in the counselling profession in New Zealand today. A number of ethnicities were not represented at all in the study's sample and therefore the findings may not be generalisable to the counsellors of these ethnic backgrounds. This fact may have played itself out in the data in various ways, for example the lack of reference to factors such as race in the participants' accounts. Further, there arose from the dataset a number of student concerns about requesting permission to record counselling interviews and the implied power relationship between counsellors and clients in this situation. One student in particular introduced the issue of cultural differences in perceptions about participating in counselling and the recording process. Although this study provides some insights into student counsellors perceptions on this issue, this is obviously an area which warrants further research as it is one which has the potential to affect the unique dynamic between counsellor and client. Ethnicity has been investigated in the counselling literature; however there are no accounts of the effects of recording of counselling interviews on the perceptions of counsellors and clients from different ethnic backgrounds. Therefore conducting further research on recording counselling interviews with participants from a variety of ethnic backgrounds may be enlightening.

Student counsellors participating in this study provide a clear, if complicated picture of their perceptions of the effects of recording on the counselling process. In order to establish a more thorough and comprehensive analysis of the effects of recording in this area, it is important to gather information from all related and relevant sources. In this instance these sources are the counsellor and the client. The data from this research is not inclusive of the perceptions of clients, just those of student counsellors. Therefore future research is required to clearly establish the views of clients who have had experience of participating in recorded interviews.

A further potential area of research may be to explore if there is an optimal time to introduce recording in a counsellor education programme to promote confidence in the process of recording throughout the rest of their training. In addition, researchers may wish to determine how often students need to record during their training in order to become practiced and unaffected by this process.

Additional Considerations

The issues of representativeness and generalisability have been considered and evaluated in other sections of this dissertation. Another issue that warrants consideration concerns the subtle parallel process which is evident when engaging in dialogue with participants about their authenticity during recorded counselling interviews, whilst conducting research in which both participants and researcher are recorded. If the authenticity of the counselling situation is jeopardised by the process of recording, then surely the research process is similarly compromised. Although there are no obvious solutions to this problem it needs to be considered as a limitation of the study and the irony of this situation is certainly noteworthy.

I would suggest that when evaluating the benefits and costs of recording interviews for the purposes of research, the benefits of ensuring accurate representation of participant responses, leading to increased rigour and therefore validity, outweigh the costs of reduced authenticity. This cost may also be reduced by researcher experience in recording interviews and building rapport with the participants during the interview process.

Conclusions

This study aimed to investigate the perceptions of counselling students about the effects of recording counselling interviews on themselves, their clients and on the counselling process overall. Findings arising from a rich dataset demonstrate that student counsellors perceive the process of recording to be anxiety promoting, initially having an effect on their ability to be completely present in the counselling interview, although extremely beneficial to their development of effective counselling skills. Counsellors perceived the process of recording to be a potential threat to the developing relationship between counsellor and client but many were able to manage this concern by establishing trust and rapport before introducing recording. The majority of the student counsellors perceived that they became more confident with the process over time, moving from a state of anxiety in initial recordings to a more relaxed style with practice. This has implications for future practice and for early introduction to frequent recording in counsellor education programmes.

The research aims were met as the idiographic nature of the research method and procedure encouraged an unsolicited, fuzzier, more contextualised view of recording counselling interviews for the purposes of

assessment and supervision during training. Implications for counselling practice and future research in this area were identified and outlined.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Advertising Leaflet



An Opportunity to Participate in Counselling Research.

Title: Effects of Audio or Video Recording a Counselling Session.

My name is Marion Gossman and I am currently undertaking a Masters of Education Degree at The University of Christchurch. I am also a counsellor involved in teaching and assessment in counsellor education programmes in New Zealand and I would like to invite you to participate in a research project.

The aim of the study is to investigate the perceptions of student counsellors of the effects of audio or video recording the counselling session.

The study will investigate:

- Whether student counsellors perceived there to be any effects of recording the session on their clients and the counselling process.
- What student counsellors consider the effects to have been.
- Whether the perceived effects of recording have positively or negatively impacted the process of counselling.

Your participation would involve an interview of approximately 45 minutes. Student counsellors are also invited to participate in a focus group interview, which will take approximately 1 hour.

Thank you in anticipation for your time and help in making this study possible. If you would like to participate in the proposed research project please phone me on (09) 525 1833 or email me at mariongossman@hotmail.com.

Appendix II: Participant Information Sheets - General

Seeking Permission from Dean of Faculty, University of Canterbury

Title: Effects of Audio or Video Recording a Counselling Session.

My name is Marion Gossman and I am currently undertaking a Masters of Education Degree at The University of Canterbury. I am also involved in teaching and assessment in counsellor education programmes in New Zealand and I am writing to seek your permission to access the campus in order to recruit counselling students to participate in a research project.

The aim of the study is to research the impact of audio or video recording the counselling session on student counsellors and their clients. The study will investigate:

- Whether student counsellors and their clients perceived there to be an impact of recording the session on the counselling process.
- What student counsellors and their clients considered the impact on them to be.
- Whether the perceived effects of recording positively or negatively impacted the process of counselling.

Student participation in the study will either involve one interview that will take about 45 minutes or taking part in a focus group interview which will last for approximately 1 hour..

Participant interviews and focus groups will be audio-taped. In an interview situation and at participants' request, the tape recorder will be turned off at any time. I will be transcribing the tapes myself and confidentiality will be maintained.

A transcript of the interviews will be sent to participants in due course so that they can verify that it is an accurate record of their opinions and perceptions, or for them to make changes if they wish to. Participants have the right to withdraw from this study at any time, or withdraw information they have provided up until the data analysis stage, which will be approximately three months after the interview. The information collected will be treated in a confidential way and every effort will be taken to ensure participant privacy is protected. Transcripts and consent forms will be stored separately and securely for six years in my supervisor Judi Miller's office at the University of Canterbury Campus and then destroyed. Tapes will also be kept in a safe place for a period of 6 years.

Information collected from the interviews will be analysed and emerging themes and issues will be reported. On completion of this study participants will receive a summary of the main findings. The final report will be submitted for assessment for the Masters of Education from the University of Canterbury and a copy of the thesis will be accessible at the University of Canterbury library. Findings will also be used for publication and as a background for further research.

Thank you in anticipation for your consent and help in making this study possible. If you would like further information about the proposed research project please phone me on (09) 525 1833 or email me at mariongossman@hotmail.com.

My supervisors' details are:

Dr. Judi Miller

Associate Professor and Co-ordinator of Counsellor Education

And Sue Besley

School of Educational Studies and Human Development

University of Canterbury

Christchurch

New Zealand

Ph: 03 364 2546

For any inquiries regarding ethical concerns please contact: The Chair, University of Canterbury Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Canterbury, Level 6, Registry Building.

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the School of Educational Studies and Human Development, College of Education, University of Canterbury

Appendix II: Participant Information Sheets - Individual interviews



Date Information Sheet Produced
1st February 2008

Project Title
Effects of Audio or Video Recording a Counselling Session

An Invitation

To participate in a 40 minute research interview about your perceptions of the recording of a counselling interview in which you have participated.

What is the purpose of this research?

The aim of the study is to research the impact of audio or video recording the counselling session on student counsellors and their clients. The study will investigate:

- Whether student counsellors and their clients perceived there to be an impact of recording the session on the counselling process.
- What student counsellors and their clients considered the impact on them to be.
- Whether the perceived effects of recording positively or negatively impacted the process of counselling.

How was I chosen for this invitation?

As a student counsellor or a client of a student counsellor, you were presented with the opportunity to participate by advertisement at your place of study or counselling agency on the basis that you have been involved a counselling interview that has been audio or video-recorded.

What will happen with this research?

Information collected from the interview will be analysed and emerging themes and issues will be reported. On completion of this study you will receive a summary of the main findings. The final report will be submitted for assessment for the Masters of Education from the University of Canterbury and a copy of the thesis will be accessible at the University of Canterbury library. Findings will also be used for publication and as a background for further research.

If you agree to participate in the study, I would like to audio tape the interview. At your request, the tape recorder will be turned off at any time. I will be transcribing the tapes myself and confidentiality will be maintained.

What are the discomforts and risks?

The only discomfort will be the time it takes to conduct the interview. There are no risks involved as the interview will only seek your opinion on a process.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

I will do my best to ensure that the interview runs to time and that no more of your time is taken.

What are the benefits?

The benefits include the opportunity to contribute to our understanding of the impact of recording on the counselling process which may ensure best practice to allow future clients to benefit from safe and effective counselling. It may also benefit trainee counsellors as findings may lead to ways in which recording can be used to assess and improve practice without hindering the process.

How will my privacy be protected?

The information collected will be treated in a confidential way and every effort will be taken to ensure your privacy is protected. Transcripts and consent forms will be stored separately and securely for six years in my supervisor Judi Miller's office at the Education Campus and then destroyed. Tapes will also be kept in a safe place for a period of 6 years.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

As previously stated, the only cost of participating will be your time.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You have a month to consider this information as the proposed interview dates will be in March and April 2008.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Please contact me directly by telephone or by email.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

A transcript of our interview will be sent to you in due course so that you can verify that it is an accurate record of your opinions and perceptions, or for you to make changes if you wish to. You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time, or withdraw information you have provided up until the data analysis stage, which will be approximately three months after the interview.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns about the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr Judi Miller, email, phone number

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher contact details

Marion Gossman, mariongossman@hotmail.com Tel: 09 525 1833 or 021 062 5666

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Education, University of Canterbury

Appendix III: Consent Forms - Individual interviews



Project Title
Effects of Audio or Video Recording a Counselling Session

Project Supervisor
Dr Judi Miller, School of Education, University of Canterbury, email, phone

Researcher
Marion Gossman, mariongossman@hotmail.com

Please tick

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the information sheet dated dd/mm/yy
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the interview and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided fro this project at any time prior to the completion of the data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a copy of the report form the research.

Participant's signature:

Participant's name (please print):

Participant's contact details:

.....

.....

Date:/..... 2008

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Education, University of Canterbury

Note: Participants should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix III: Consent Forms - Focus Groups



Project Title
Effects of Audio or Video Recording a Counselling Session

Project Supervisor
Dr Judi Miller, School of Education, University of Canterbury, email, phone

Researcher
Marion Gossman, mariongossman@hotmail.com

Please tick

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the information sheet dated dd/mm/yy
I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.
I understand that notes will be taken during the focus group and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
I understand that identity of my fellow participants and our discussions in the focus group is confidential to the group and I agree to keep this information confidential.
I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided fro this project at any time prior to the completion of the data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
If I withdraw, I understand that while it may not be possible to destroy all records of the focus group discussion of which I was part, the relevant information about myself including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will not be used..
I agree to take part in this research.
I wish to receive a copy of the report form the research.

Participant's signature:

Participant's name (please print):

Participant's contact details:

.....
.....

Date:/..... 2008

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Education, University of Canterbury

Note: Participants should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix IV (A): Focus Group Question Schedule - Original Form

Question 1: What is your length of training to date?

Question 2: What do you think are the advantages / disadvantages, to student counsellors, of recording of counselling interviews?

Question 3: In what ways do you think that recording counselling sessions has an impact on the counselling process?

Question 4: What do you think are the advantages / disadvantages, to the client(s), of recording of counselling interviews?

Question 5: In what ways do you think that recording counselling sessions has an impact on the client(s)?

Question 6: Are there any differences between video and audio recording in terms of impact on counselling interviews?

Question 7: Do you feel that recorded counselling sessions are in any way different to sessions which have not been recorded? If yes, in what ways do you perceive there to be a difference?

Question 8: How did you feel about asking clients whether sessions could be recorded? What accounts for these feelings?

Question 9: Do you perceive that the recording of the counselling session affects how you respond to the client during the interview? If yes in which ways are your responses affected?

Question 10: Is there a difference in how you perceive the recording of counselling sessions for supervision and those for assessment?

Appendix IV (B): Focus Group Question Schedule - Amended Form (prompt questions)

Question 1: In what ways do you think that recording counselling sessions has an impact on the counselling process?

Question 2: Do you feel that recorded counselling sessions are in any way different to sessions which have not been recorded? If yes, in what ways do you perceive there to be a difference?

Question 3: Do you perceive that the recording of the counselling session affects how you respond to the client during the interview? If yes in which ways are your responses affected?

Question 4: In what ways do you think that recording counselling sessions has an impact on the client(s)?

Question 5: What do you think are the advantages / disadvantages, to the client(s), of recording of counselling interviews?

Question 6: How did you feel about asking clients whether sessions could be recorded? What accounts for these feelings?

Question 7: Are there any differences between video and audio recording in terms of impact on counselling interviews?

Question 8: Is there a difference in how you perceive the recording of counselling sessions for supervision and those for assessment?

Question 9: What do you think are the advantages / disadvantages, to student counsellors, of recording of counselling interviews?

Question 10: What is your length of training to date?

Question 11: How many counselling sessions have you recorded to date?

Appendix IV (C): Interview Schedule - Original Form

Question 1:

Approximately how many hours of counselling clients have you achieved up to this point?

Question 2:

How many counselling sessions with clients have you recorded?

Question 3:

Were the sessions audio or video recorded?

How many of each?

Question 4:

Was more than one session ever recorded with one individual client?

Question 5:

How many sessions were not recorded?

Question 6:

How did you feel about asking the client if the session could be recorded?

Question 7:

Did you feel that the recorded counselling session was in any way different to sessions which had not been recorded?

Question 8:

If yes, in what ways did you perceive the recorded session to be different?

Question 9:

Did you perceive that the recording of the session affected how the client responded during the counselling interview?

Question 10:

If yes, in which ways were his/her responses affected?

Question 11:

Did you perceive that the recording of the counselling session affected how you responded to the client during the interview?

Question 12:

If yes, in which ways were your responses affected.

Question 13:

Do you believe that the recording of a counselling session has an overall impact on the counselling process?

Question 14:

If yes, could you identify the impact/s you believe it has?

Question 15:

What do you perceive the benefits of counselling are for the client?

Question 16:

Do you think that recording the counselling session is beneficial to the client?

Question 17:

Do you think that recording the counselling session is beneficial to you as a student counsellor?

Question 17:

If yes to either or both of the above, in what ways do you think it is beneficial?

Question 19: How much training in counselling skills have you had to date?

As this is a semi-structured interview schedule, the list of questions is not in its completed form. It is expected that each participant response will illicit new information which may then require prompts and probes to elaborate on the participant's perceptions.

Prompts will include:

"Can you give an example of this?" or "Can you explain this further?"

Appendix IV (D): Interview Schedule - Amended Form (prompt questions)

Overall general question: What are your overall perceptions about the effects of recording the counselling session?

Question 1: In which counselling approach/es are you trained/do you practice with clients?

What do you think are the most important aspects of this approach?

Question 2: What do you think the benefits of this counselling approach are for the client?

Question 3a: Do you believe that recording the counselling interview affects the counselling process?

Question 3b: If so, in what ways does it affect the process?

Question 4: Did you feel that the counselling sessions you recorded were in any way different from those sessions you did not record?

Question 5: If yes, in which ways were they different?

Question 6: Did you perceive that the recording of the session affected how the client responded during the counselling interview?

Question 7: If yes, in which ways were his/her responses affected?

Question 8: Did you perceive that the recording of the counselling session affected how you responded to the client during the interview?

Question 9: If yes, in which ways were your responses affected.

Question 10: Do you think that recording the counselling session is beneficial to the client?

Question 11: If yes, in what ways do you think it is beneficial?

Question 12: Do you think that recording the counselling session is beneficial to you as a student counsellor?

Question 13: If yes, in what ways do you think it is beneficial?

Question 14: Do you perceive that there are any drawbacks in recording the counselling session for :

a) The client?

b) You as a student?

Question 15: How much training in counselling skills have you had to date?

Question 16: Approximately how many hours of counselling clients have you achieved up to this point?

Question 17: Approximately how many counselling sessions with clients have you recorded?

Question 18: Were the sessions audio or video recorded?

How many of each?

Question 19: Do you believe that there is a difference in video and audio recording in terms of their effects on the counselling process?

Question 20: Was more than one session ever recorded with one individual client?

Question 21: How did you feel about asking your clients for their permission for the sessions to be recorded?

Question 22: Did you perceive there to be a difference between recording interviews for the purposes of supervision and recording for assessment?

As this is a semi-structured interview schedule, the list of questions is not in its completed form. It is expected that each participant response will illicit new information which may then require prompts and probes to elaborate on the participant's perceptions.

Prompts will include: "Can you give an example of this?" or "Can you explain this further?"