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# What is Helpful? Stories of Counselling by Asian Canadians

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

What is Helpful? Stories of Counselling by Asian Canadians

by

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A THESIS

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## **Abstract**

My interest in Asian Canadians' perception of helpful counselling emerged from the discrepancy I felt between my personal counselling experience and the knowledge I learned from the current literature. Informed by knowledge of acculturation and the worldview of collectivism, scholars have identified some useful counselling strategies for Asian clients. Nevertheless, it has been argued that current understandings fail to address clients' perspective. Using a narrative approach to research, I conducted this study aiming to gain a better understanding, from the perspective of East and Southeast Asian clients, of how counsellors could improve service delivery. Eight participants shared stories of their counselling experiences. Themes emerged reveal that counselling was once perceived as problem-oriented, but became a valuable experience when clients were able to gain different perspectives and self-awareness. The results also highlight that client's self-agency plays an important role in the counselling process. Implications of these findings are discussed.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

Canada has become one of the most ethnically diverse nations in the world. Not only has the number of visible minorities increased, but the ethnocultural composition of the people has also become more complex. According to Statistics Canada (2008a), the representation of visible minorities has increased from 4.7% of the total population in 1981 to 16.2% in 2006. Among the 16.2% of visible minority population, nearly 70% are Asian heritage, which is more than 11% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2008c). Regardless of their appearances (e.g. colour of skin, hair, or facial features), individuals who reported to have an Asian origin make up the third largest group in Canada; the largest group has a North American origin and the second largest group has an European origin. According to the Population Census in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2008b), individuals of East or Southeast Asian descent represented 7.08% of the total population, including those who reported East or Southeast Asian origin as their only ancestral background and those who reported it as part of their multiple ancestral backgrounds. This is one of the fastest growing minority groups in the Canadian society (Kuo, 2004).

Research has suggested that people from an Asian cultural background may face unique cultural pressures, which may lead to various mental health issues (e.g. Cheng, Leong, & Geist, 1993; Leong, Kim, & Gupta, 2011; Ruzek, Nguyen, & Herzog, 2011; Olivas & Li, 2006). For example, acculturative stress describes the kind of stress generated from the process of adjustment between a new culture and one's culture of origin (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). Acculturative stress might be experienced

differently depending on a number of factors, such as the values held by an individual (Ruzek et al., 2011); language proficiency (Lueck & Wilson, 2010); and other social and psychological factors (e.g. Cheng et al., 1993; Noh & Avison, 1996). In particular, people of Asian descent in Canada may face high demands of cultural adjustment as they are commonly from a more collectivistic society, whereas Canada is a more individualistic nation in comparison. Furthermore, these individuals may have a help-seeking attitude that is very different from people who have a Caucasian cultural background (Yoon & Jepsen, 2008). For these reasons, mental health service providers in Canada need to increase awareness and skills to provide culturally competent service for people of Asian descent (Kuo, 2004).

Multicultural counselling has received increasing attention among researchers in the past three decades (Worthington, Soth-McNett, & Morena, 2007). Although research studies have mostly been done in the United States, Canadian researchers and counsellors have also made substantial contributions to the literature of cross-cultural psychology. For example, John Berry's model of acculturation has been extensively researched in studies of culturally diverse clients, including Asians (see Berry, 1999; 2001 for details of the model).

In light of this line of research, counselling professionals started to explore ways to serve needs of diverse clients. One important concept arisen from the movement of multicultural counselling is multicultural counselling competence (MCC). In addition to the skills and knowledge required to be competent counsellors, D. W. Sue and Sue (2003) argued that “more superordinate and inclusive concepts” (p. 10) of counselling competence is needed to embrace cultural differences and similarities while our clients

are becoming so diverse. Therefore, D. W. Sue and colleagues developed the model of Multicultural Counselling Competencies that focus on multiple dimensions such as individual awareness, professional knowledge and skills (D. W. Sue, 2001). This model has been updated and revised by Arredondo and colleagues to be included in the multicultural guideline of the American Psychological Association (Worthington et al., 2007).

Pedersen (2009) argued that a contextual understanding is the ultimate outcome of multicultural awareness. Multicultural counselling may become so central in the future, that cross-cultural psychology will not be spoken of as such and as often, because it will be widely accepted that the study of psychology is inherently cultural (i.e. study of human behaviours must consider cultural factors). Pedersen furthered his argument into persuading that it is possible for multicultural counselling to become the “fourth force” of modern psychotherapy, following psychodynamics, behaviourism, and humanism.

Following this notion, Arthur and Collins (2010) developed a more recent multicultural counselling framework based on the Canadian context, namely Culture-Infused Counselling (Arthur & Collins, 2010; Collins & Arthur, 2010a, 2010b). They defined Culture-Infused Counselling as “the conscious and purposeful infusion of cultural awareness and sensitivity into all aspects of the counselling process and all other roles assumed by the counsellor or psychologist” (Arthur & Collins, 2010, p. 18). This definition implies that all counselling is multicultural, and thus all counselling process should be culture-infused. Nowadays, most counsellor education programs include a multicultural counselling component to support counsellors-in-training to enhance their levels of cultural competence (Collins & Arthur, 2010a; D. W. Sue & Sue, 2003). As part

of enhancing cultural competence, counsellors need to be familiar with the populations who live in their local communities and be prepared to work with clients whose worldview is diverse to their own.

## **1.2 Introducing the Topic**

Despite the growing body of research literature on effective counselling for culturally diverse clients, the rate of underutilization among Asian clients is still high (Kang et al., 2010; Yoon & Jepsen, 2008). Researchers have speculated various reasons that discourage people of Asian descent from seeking or continuing with professional services (Leong & Lau, 2001). These include, for example, the degree to which an individual adheres to traditional Asian values (Kim, 2011); the degree to which an individual is acculturated (Ruzek et al., 2011); the concept of loss of face (Leong et al., 2011); different conception of mental health (Leong, et al., 2011; Yoon & Jepsen, 2008); and lack of familiarity with counselling (D. W. Sue & Sue, 2003; Yoon & Jepsen, 2008). Results from these research studies are mixed. For example, a study has shown that loss of face was associated with low tolerance of help-seeking related stigma (Leong et al., 2011); another study showed, however, that loss of face had a direct positive association with help-seeking attitude (Yakunina & Weigold, 2011).

As an immigrant of Chinese descent (East Asian), I have developed a strong interest in multicultural counselling, specifically for the Asian population. Beyond identifying the potential barriers to underutilization of mental health service among people of Asian descent, I am interested in another question that I feel is important as I learn more about counselling for Asians: What counselling is helpful for Asian clients? It seems that although effectiveness of counselling is important, the meaning of

effectiveness varies. For example, while some argue that traditional Asian values may hinder counselling outcomes and help-seeking attitudes (e.g. Wang & Kim, 2010); others suggest that some Asian values such as deference to authority can possibly enhance the counselling process (e.g. Kim, Atkinson, & Umemoto, 2001). Although these studies provide valuable knowledge about counselling Asian clients, it seems that current understandings of psychotherapy fail to address Asian clients' interpretations of what constitutes a successful therapeutic interaction. In other words, clients' voices remain unknown. What do they see as helpful? What made a counselling experience positive? These are the questions that interest me and led to the current thesis.

Gordon (2000) has illustrated how the client/therapist relationship is central to different theoretical orientations in which psychotherapy is applied. Because there are at least two partners, our understanding of psychotherapy should include not only the professional definition which is based on the therapist's theoretical assumptions, but also the help-seeking person's experience and understanding of his/her own experience through the interaction with the therapist. Other researchers have echoed this view and conducted research that helped bring in clients' perspectives (e.g. Binder, Holgersen, & Nielsen, 2010; and Bonsmann, 2010).

Multicultural counselling scholars have engaged in the debate of the appropriateness of a universal approach (known as the etic approach) or a cultural specific approach (known as the emic approach) to counselling with culturally diverse clients (Daya, 2001). A key point is whether or not there are universalistic approaches that can be applied across populations, or if specialist approaches are needed for particular populations. One consideration in this debate is the introduction of a common

factors approach. Common factors refer to counselling components that are often observed in the counselling process that can provide a possible explanation to counselling effectiveness. Fischer, Jome, and Atkinson (1998) outlined four common factors, which include a shared worldview between the counselling and the client. A shared worldview may refer to a shared language, thought processes, rationales for or views of mental health issues, or cultural values. Using the common factors perspective, counsellors who share clients' worldviews may develop a better therapeutic relationship and have a better chance to work with their clients to develop interventions that are more appropriate. What underlies the common factors approach is the importance of taking clients' perspective into account.

Frank and Frank (1998) stated that the common factors approach implies that "psychotherapy is... a branch of rhetoric, the art of persuasion" (p. 589). As such, they argued that it is not suitable to use objective, quantitative methods to evaluate counselling effectiveness, as effectiveness is contingent upon subjective elements such as worldviews. For example, questionnaires usually employed in quantitative studies may limit participants' responses in a presumptuous way. The results from these studies may not be able to capture the elements that are not already described in the well-developed questionnaires. Therefore, Frank and Frank encouraged a new paradigm to research these elements, which focuses on the meaning of counselling events and takes into account the context and the perspectives of the involved parties in which effectiveness might occur.

### **1.3 Personal Context**

My interest for this topic grew from being an Asian myself, and the discrepancy I felt between my personal counselling experience and what I learned in my study of

counselling. My journey with counselling started when I enrolled in a counselling and psychology diploma program in Hong Kong many years ago. It was a requirement that all students in the program attend counselling before they can graduate. Counselling was not a common practice at that time. Probably because I was in a counselling program, I was very open to this idea. However, it was difficult for my family and friends to understand what I was doing. So all I said was, “it’s a school requirement.”

After I came to Canada, the idea of cultural differences started to catch my attention. Specifically after starting the master’s program in counselling psychology, the term multiculturalism intrigued me. I started to immerse myself in the literature about counselling for Asian and have learned a lot about the differences between my culture of origin and the so-called mainstream culture traditionally inherent in counselling. Another thing I learned is that Asian people in North America do not like to go to counselling, and if they go, they often end treatment prematurely (Kang et al., 2010; Yoon & Jepsen, 2008). In order to support the retention of clients, therapists may need to adopt a different style of counselling, such as a directive style (Li & Kim, 2004; Yoon & Jepsen, 2008). This idea struck me because that was not my experience.

As I learned to do reflective writings, I started to reflect on my personal counselling experience. What I found, first of all, is that I did not like to go to counselling. Perhaps I did not initiate it, but I did not refuse it. At least I did not feel shame for going longer than I was required because I felt that I needed it. Second, I do not remember hoping for directiveness from my counsellor. Though I do remember getting annoyed when my counsellor asked me what my goals were in the beginning. I used to think, “if I knew what I wanted, I won’t come to you.” But it did not mean that I wanted my

counsellor to tell me what to do or what I should do. I simply did not know what I wanted. But I did know that it was good to have someone to talk to. Third, I did not leave the treatment “prematurely”. I even stayed for longer than I had to in terms of the requirement of the diploma program. Therefore, what I learned from the literature did not fit with my experience. I recognized that my situation might have been different from those research participants described in the literature because the mainstream culture within which I had my counselling was an Asian culture, not a Western culture. I do also identify with some of the values and beliefs described that are claimed to be possibly hindering successful counselling. I still wondered what Asian clients have to say about counselling in the Western culture.

#### **1.4 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of my study is to elicit stories from clients of East or Southeast Asian descent about their views of helpful counselling from their own counselling experience in Canada. Research has shown that there is significant difference between experiences of first generation immigrants and that of generations thereafter (e.g. Ho, 1995; Gloria, Castellanos, Park, & Kim, 2008; Miller, Yang, Hui, Choi, & Lim, 2011). For this study, I intend to focus on the experiences of first generation immigrants as it is assumed that they experience the greatest cultural differences between their culture of origin and the Western Caucasian culture that is inherent in the North American mental health system (Kim et al., 2001; Leong & Lau, 2001). The aim is to bring their voices into the discussion of what constitutes a successful therapeutic interaction. My hope is to learn from their experiences and utilize their language to enrich and transform these

experiences into useful discussion and information for counselling professionals

(Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

In order to achieve these aims, I decided to use a qualitative research design to guide this study. Specifically, I chose thematic narrative analysis as it has an exclusive attention to the content of stories told and allows me to focus on the language of research participants (Riessman, 2008). The question asked in this study is formed based on the ontological assumption that reality is subjective and multiple. According to the worldview of social constructionism, these multiple realities are negotiated socially and historically (Creswell, 2007). In other words, these realities, the counselling experiences of Asian clients in this case, can be very different depending on the interaction of the involved parties and their backgrounds. It is my intent to bring in those voices that can directly describe these differences (or similarities) in the counselling encounters so as to enrich the discussion about effective counselling for Asians. From this perspective, I also attempt to apply the lens of the advocacy worldview when designing this research, although there is no specific action agenda as a result of this research.

#### ***1.4.1 The Research Question***

The overarching research question that I attempt to answer in this study is the following: What do East or Southeast Asian clients perceive as helpful in their counselling experience in Canada? As this question formed the base of my research, I am also interested in clients' perception of counselling, their expectations, what was experienced as positive in the therapeutic interaction, and any suggestions they may have for improvement. To re-emphasize the purpose of my qualitative study, I would like to borrow Netto, Gaag, Thanki, Bondi, and Munro's (2001) phrase, my focus is "...on the

perceptions and experiences of clients... not the appropriateness of [any] theoretical models of counselling" (p. 4).

### **1.5 Potential Significance of the Study**

One important limitation in the existing multicultural counselling literature is that actual clients were not involved in most studies (Kim, Ng, & Ahn, 2009). These studies were usually conducted using methods such as having Asian international students view videos of simulated counselling sessions or asking volunteer clients to fill out questionnaires after participating in one session of counselling. The presenting problems of these research participants could possibly differ from those of actual clients in both dimension and degree of severity. Furthermore, questionnaire and psychological instruments presume a certain ways of describing clients' realities. Thus, using these instruments precludes the clients from providing new understanding about what they have actually experienced. Therefore, in order to answer the question "what is helpful" in an open and non-presumptuous way, it is important to elicit those voices from actual clients who have engaged in the counselling process.

### **1.6 Definition of Concepts**

There are some terms and concepts that I would like to clarify for a clearer presentation of this thesis. First of all, helpfulness, as the focus of this study, is defined as a construct that is experienced by the clients in the way and through the words they perceive as valid. I did not attempt to define helpfulness in a specific way using my words or any definitions used in the professional world. It is because it would possibly limit the scope of this study and my analysis in a specific way. My aim for this study was to get participants to talk about helpfulness from their perspectives using their own

languages. This way, the participants may be able to contribute in defining or redefining helpfulness for the Asian population. Pre-defining the word for this study did not fit with this direction.

The described counselling experiences can be a concurrent or a retrospective account of their counselling experiences. I intended to recruit participants who have worked with counsellors who are professionally trained. Those include psychologists, social workers, family therapists, pastor with counselling training, and other professionally trained counsellors. In order to capture these experiences that could be articulated in words, I intended to recruit East or Southeast Asian adult client participants in Canada. East or Southeast Asian in this study means anyone who self-identified as such. They include, but not limited to, individuals of Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese, or Taiwanese descent.

In the current thesis, there will be a lot of comparative statements contrasting the Asian culture and the mainstream culture. By mainstream culture, I mean the Western culture that is traditionally inherited mainly from the European and the North American culture. In the literature, researchers and scholars have used terms like Western, Caucasian, white, American, Euro-American, or Anglo-American to refer to this culture and people with this cultural background. Following this tradition, I also adopt these terms to refer to as the mainstream culture in Canada. I recognize the heterogeneity embedded in these terms, so as in the terms Asian or East or Southeast Asian. However, my aim of this study is not to compare cultures of two specific countries. It was also not feasible for me to conduct a study that addresses the specific within group differences (Leong & Lau, 2001). Therefore, I attempt to approach this research topic with a

background that concerns a more general understanding of the difference and similarities between the East and the West.

As mentioned, I intend to focus on the experiences of first generation immigrants. The definition of first generation in this study follows the definition that has been posted by other researchers. That is, first generation individuals are themselves foreign-born and then immigrate to Canada as adults or adolescents (Miller et al., 2011; Statistics Canada, 2008a). To capture the difference between people who immigrate to Canada as adults and those who immigrate as adolescents, the term 1.5 generation has been used to refer to the latter group in the literature (Miller et al., 2011). In my study, however, I do not attempt to differentiate the experiences between these two groups. Therefore, I will refer them as first generation regardless of the age they immigrated to Canada.

Throughout the thesis, I will use some terms interchangeably to refer to the same thing. I would also like to clarify those before I move on. First, the term counsellor and therapist will be used interchangeably to mean counselling professionals. The same applies to counselling and therapy, which mean the counselling profession. In this thesis, there is no different meaning implied by these different choices of word. Second, as I employ thematic narrative analysis as my research framework, I use terms like story and narrative to refer to the conversation I had with my participants and the written content I collected from them. These terms are commonly used by narrative researchers to refer to the data they collected (Riessman, 2008). It is important to note this because meanings are derived from these stories and narratives of one's lived experience.

## **1.7 Structure of the Current Thesis**

In this chapter, I have introduced to the reader the area of concern within Asian counselling for this study and introduced my research questions. Following the purpose I have laid out and using the terms I have defined, I will present the current literature on counselling for Asian in the next chapter. In Chapter Three, I will outline the design of my narrative study, which is formed based on the worldview of social constructionism, constructivism, and Riessman's (2008) framework for thematic analysis. I will also present the detail procedure for data collection and analysis. I regard Chapter Four and Five as my results chapters. In Chapter Four, I will introduce to the reader my research participants, whom I call storytellers. Then in Chapter Five, I will present the themes emerged from the storytellers' narratives. The themes will be organized so that they follow a temporal sequence of a full story form (Bamberg, 2012; Riessman, 2008). Finally, in Chapter Six, I will discuss my findings based on the literature presented in Chapter Two and finish the thesis with some implications for counselling and future research.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

Since the mid-1960s, people of Asian descent have often been referred to as the “model minority group” in North America (Chou, 2008; M. Lo, 2008). Compared to immigrants from other regions of the world, Asian immigrants are seen as “more likely to achieve higher success than other minority groups, especially in economic advantage, academic success, family stability, low crime involvement, etc.” (Chou, 2008, p. 219). Words commonly used to describe Asians include intelligent, hardworking, self-disciplined, and courteous (Leong et al., 2011; D. W. Sue & Sue, 2003). This popular view, taken up by many in North American society, may bias the public to think that people of Asian descent are a group of highly capable persons who have very few problems adjusting to a new environment (Leong et al., 2011). Although an analysis of census figures might seem to support this view, it has been demonstrated that the concept of “model minority” is, in fact, a myth (Leong et al., 2011; D. W. Sue & Sue, 2003). For example, despite the fact that Asian Americans have a higher median income, they also face a higher prevalence of poverty (D. W. Sue & Sue, 2003).

In the realm of mental health issues, the “model minority” myth has also contributed to misunderstandings of psychological well-being among people of Asian descent (Leong et al., 2011). Because of their tendency to underutilize mental health services (i.e., not initiating help-seeking behaviours or not persisting in treatment; Leong & Lau, 2001), mental health systems in North American society tend to underrepresent Asian clients, which then exacerbates the model minority myth (Leong et al., 2011). Living under the mask of the model minority, people of Asian descent may be expected to live up to particularly high standards. Inability to live up to these standards may lead to

experiences of shame and doubt of self (Maibom, 2010). Thus, another layer of pressure is added onto the shoulders of those who may already be experiencing difficulties; there is pressure to conceal or ignore psychological issues by avoiding professional help (Costigan, Hua, & Su, 2010). This can become a vicious cycle, in which the more people of Asian descent become susceptible to psychological issues, the more they may underutilize psychological services, thus increasing their vulnerability to mental health issues.

Research has shown that people of Asian descent who do seek help tend to present more severe problems than White Caucasians (Leong et al., 2011). Other studies have shown that Asian international students experience higher levels of psychological distress when compared to Caucasian students (e.g., Cheng et al., 1993). Underutilization of psychological services in this context does not necessarily translate to better mental health. Thus, “the pattern of usage should not be confused with levels of need or help-seeking for emotional problems” (Mays & Albee, 1992, p. 552). Along with the model minority myth, underutilization among people of Asian descent highlights a lack of understanding of Asian experience in North American society and the limitations of mental health systems for providing appropriate services to this group of people.

It is clear that counselling professionals need to put greater effort into creating appropriate and effective treatments for people of Asian descent (Leong et al., 2011). It is within this context that the importance of knowing what is appropriate and what is effective has come to the forefront. What constitutes helpful counselling? Who has a say in determining what is helpful? Are current understandings enough and how do we

improve current practices? These are some of the questions that guided my research about inquiring into Asian clients' voices about counselling.

In this chapter, my intent is to provide a literature review on the general understanding of useful counselling for people of Asian descent in North America. It is noteworthy that although my study focuses on the experiences of East and Southeast Asians in the Canadian context, literature on this topic from across North America and Europe is relevant. It is widely accepted that the differences between Asian cultures and White Caucasian cultures can be understood within the cultural dimensions of individualism and collectivism (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004). It is also commonly agreed that Asian cultures tend to be associated with collectivist values, and Caucasian cultures with individualist values (Hui, 1988; Kuo, 2004; Williams, 2003). As Canadian society is dominated by White Caucasians, it can be understood that its dominant culture is the Caucasian culture, hence individualist culture. In this study, it is assumed that the experiences of Asians in North America and Europe are similar in terms of the cultural differences they experience between their culture of origin (the East) and the dominant cultures in which they are living (the West). Therefore, knowledge claimed in other Caucasian individualistic societies is considered relevant in understanding the experiences of Asian clients in Canada. It is, however, not my intent to generalize the experiences of Asians across these societies. Rather, it is important for further research to be conducted in order to understand potential similarities and differences across geographical regions and cultural contexts.

Similarly, I will provide a literature review on the understanding of counselling experiences for people of Asian descent, including people from various countries on the

Asian continent. As Leong and Lau (2001) stated, it is not always feasible to conduct research including only one homogeneous group of people. There tend to be within-group differences for any seemingly homogeneous group (Ho, 1995; Patterson, 1996). Many cross-cultural studies on Asian counselling experiences in the current literature chose to include people from various Asian ethnic origins. This knowledge is still relevant to the current study because, overall, these ethnic groups represent collectivist cultures. Once again, however, it is important to learn more about different ethnic groups as well as individual differences when possible (Ho, 1995). As D. W. Sue and Sue (2003) stated, a “different culture may have its own distinct interpretation of reality and offer a different perspective on the nature of people... it is highly probable that different racial/ethnic minority groups perceive the competence of the helping professional differently” (p. 15-6). Therefore, I have decided to narrow my population of interest to Canadians of East or Southeast Asian descent.

## **2.1 Current Views of Effective Counselling**

In consulting the current literature, I learned that there are two main ways researchers and scholars have come to understand the effectiveness of counselling for Asian clients in the North American context, which I organized into two levels. The first level is through understanding the process of acculturation experienced by Asian immigrants. Acculturation is a concept that focuses on the degree to which a person of Asian descent adheres to the Asian culture and/or the Western culture. The second level concerns the understanding, through the cultural dimensions of individualism and collectivism, of specific values from each cultural system that influences Asian clients’ attitude to seek counselling and their experience of the counselling process. In the

following sections, I will discuss how each of these levels contributes to the current understanding of effectiveness of counselling for people of Asian descent.

### ***2.1.1 Understanding from the View of Acculturation***

Acculturation is a concept that describes the process of cultural changes that occurs when two or more cultures meet on an individual, community, or national level (Berry, 1980, 1999, 2008). On an individual or community level, acculturation has been used to refer to the process in which a person or a group of people negotiate between one's own culture of origin and another, more dominant culture (Yeh, 2003). It is believed that acculturation is a bilinear process that encompasses two ways of adjustment. The first process involves the adoption of the new culture, which is known as contact-participation (Berry, 1999) or acculturation highlighting the ways in which a person adapts to a new culture. The second process involves the adjustment of retaining or letting go of one's culture of origin, known as cultural maintenance (Berry, 1999) or enculturation, highlighting the ways in which a person modifies one's own culture (e.g., Ho, 1995; Kim & Omizo, 2006; Miller, 2007). These adjustments take place on multiple levels, which concern dimensions such as values, beliefs, and behaviours (Miller, 2007, 2010). The acculturation and enculturation process is an important factor in understanding the effectiveness of counselling for people of Asian descent because it may have an impact on their psychological functioning, attitude towards professional help-seeking, and their experience of the counselling process.

Berry and his colleagues (e.g. Berry, 1980, 1999, 2005, 2008; Berry, Kim, Power, Young, & Bujaki, 1989) theorized four categories to describe the different ways through which people acculturate. These categories include assimilation, separation,

marginalization, and integration. Research has suggested that integration, which describes a person's wish to interact with both cultures, might be the most preferable strategy in terms of maintaining healthy psychological functioning because people who are integrationists were found to be "almost always the least stressful" (Berry, 1999, p. 16). For example, Kim and Omizo (2005) found that Asian Americans who had a strong adherence to both Asian cultural values and European American cultural values perceived themselves to be good and worthy members of the Asian American group. In addition, adherence to Asian cultural values was found to have a positive association with collective self-esteem, whereas adherence to European American cultural values was positively related to cognitive flexibility and self-efficacy. These findings led Kim and Omizo to suggest that counsellors inquire into their Asian clients' value acculturation and enculturation in order to increase the effectiveness of counselling.

Although supported by research, the idea of biculturalism as accomplished through the integration strategy suggested by Berry's (1980, 1999, 2005, 2008) model of acculturation may need critical reflections. It is because the model itself and research referencing this model are not without limitations (Chirkov, 2009a). One criticism that is particularly relevant to counselling concerns the applicability of the suggested four acculturation styles. For example, Weinreich (2009) questions the implicit assumptions underlying Berry's model of acculturation in which cultures, both mainstream and original, seem to be "benign and congenial" (p. 125). As such, people's choices of acculturation style are free from discriminations and oppression. However, it is often not the case in the real world. Identity formation or reformation using any acculturation style

may not be by choice, but as a function of multiple influences within the context (Bhatia & Ram, 2009).

Furthermore, identity change along with acculturation is a continuous process (Phinney, 2002). In addition, ethnic identity is a fluid concept. Changes of ethnic identity should be considered and discussed within a specific context and about specific aspects (e.g., ethnic identification or subjective sense of belongingness to an ethnic group, see Phinney, 2002 for detailed descriptions). Making global comparisons and comments about one's ethnic identity related to acculturation may not be as valuable. Therefore, I invite the reader to continue reading this section about the link between acculturation and multicultural practices keeping in mind that there are limitations concerning the model in general (see Chirkov, 2009b for a summary of these limitations).

Consistent with the multi-level or multi-dimensional view of acculturation and enculturation, Miller et al. (2011) cautioned therapists to pay attention to specific dimensions when analyzing clients' mental well-being. For example, these authors found that better mental health was associated with higher value acculturation (i.e. participants showed a stronger adherence to Western values) and higher behavioural enculturation (i.e. participants showed a stronger preference to behave in ways congruent with their culture of origin), but not behavioural acculturation (i.e. behaviour congruent with the mainstream culture) or value enculturation (i.e. maintenance of original cultural values). Higher behavioural enculturation was related to higher acculturative stress. Ruzek et al. (2011), on the other hand, found only that Asian Americans who have adopted European American values (i.e. higher value acculturation) displayed lower level of psychological distress. In contrast to Miller and colleagues' findings, Ruzek et al. found that higher

behavioural enculturation and lower value acculturation predicts higher levels of anxiety among Asian Americans. These findings demonstrated the complexity of the acculturation process undergone by people of Asian descent in North American society. Further, they suggest that therapists need to be sensitive to Asian clients' subjective experiences when inquiring into their acculturation process.

The degree to which Asian Canadians acculturate and enculturate has been shown to be an influencing factor on their willingness to seek professional help (Leong et al., 2011). In their study, Leong et al. (2011) found that individuals who had a strong adherence to their Asian culture tended to be less open to discuss their problems. They also seemed to have a lower level of recognition for the need for professional help. In contrast, stronger adherence to European American cultures and positive conceptions of mental health were associated with more favourable attitudes towards professional help-seeking. In another study, Miller et al. (2011) found that only the values aspect of acculturation was related to help-seeking attitudes. In particular, they found that stronger adherence to European American values was associated with more positive attitudes towards seeking professional help. These results are consistent with other research investigating help-seeking attitudes (e.g., Loya, Reddy, & Hinshaw, 2010). As it has been shown that attitudes towards professional help-seeking plays an important role in clients' perceptions of counselling effectiveness (Constantine, 2002), these studies suggest that understanding the acculturation process could help practitioners learn about help-seeking barriers among people of Asian descent, which may then open up opportunities to increase counselling effectiveness.

Furthermore, acculturation seems to have an impact on what and how people of Asian descent tend to share information about personal experiences. J. C. Chen and Danish (2010) conducted a study to investigate the predictive ability of acculturation on the willingness of distress disclosure and emotional self-disclosure. Their findings suggested that Asian individuals who adhere strongly to Asian cultural values were less likely to disclose psychological distress. Their participants also indicated a higher willingness to disclose emotions to friends than to unrelated, but trusted, adults such as counsellors or mentors. Therefore, acculturation may play a role in Asian clients' preference of counsellor, counselling types, and how they may experience counselling.

In sum, the results from these studies have suggested that exploring clients' acculturation and enculturation process and adjusting counselling strategies to match their needs might be a way to make counselling more helpful for East and Southeast Asians. In the next sub-section, I will move on to the second level of understanding counselling effectiveness for Asian clients identified above, which concerns how people of East or Southeast Asian descent adhere to some specific Asian values that might influence their counselling experiences. As mentioned, I will base my review on the cultural dimensions of collectivism and individualism.

### ***2.1.2 Asian Values: Informed by the Worldview of Collectivism***

Individualism and collectivism are two constructs of an identified cultural dimension that describes national cultural differences (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004). These constructs have been described as different worldviews that provide frameworks for individuals to interact with the world (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). It is essential to introduce the concept of worldview here because it plays an important role in

understanding the counselling process, particularly in multicultural counselling (Williams, 2003). Strong links have been found between worldview and psychological variables such as self-concept, psychological well-being, and relationality (Oyserman et al., 2002). A shared worldview is indeed one of the common factors identified within a universal approach for culturally specific contexts (Fischer et al., 1998). Within the common factors approach, a shared worldview may be operationalized in sharing languages, thought processes, plausible rationale for a problem, cultural values, and views of mental health. As such, the worldview dimensions of individualism and collectivism have particular relevance to the discussion of effective counselling for people of Asian descent.

According to Hofstede (1980), the worldview dimensions of individualism and collectivism refer to how individuals relate to each other as in-group members. Individualism is defined when individuals are independent in relation to one another and priority is usually given to personal goals over the goals of a larger group (Triandis, 2001). In contrast, collectivism is defined when individuals are highly integrated, people are interdependent, and priority is usually given to the goals of in-groups. Individualism and collectivism have been described as two ends of a continuum (Hui, 1988; Williams, 2003). Scholars have identified some differences between individualism and collectivism (e.g. McCarthy, 2005; Oyserman et al., 2002; Williams, 2003). For example, with regards to self-concept, individualism was found to correlate with personal success, whereas collectivism put focuses on affiliations and sense of belongingness (Williams, 2003). In addition, these two cultural dimensions seem to have political and economic

ramifications (McCarthy, 2005). For example, collectivistic cultures were shown to have lower suicide rates and higher marital satisfaction.

The relationship between these worldview dimensions and counselling is not as straightforward as one might assume (McCarthy, 2005). For example, there are specific values that characterize each cultural worldview; however, it should not be assumed that any collectivist culture is devoid of individualistic values, and vice versa. To add to the complexity, the degree to which a person is more collectivist or individualist also varies (see allocentrism versus idiocentrism in Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). On an individual or psychological level, collectivism is closely related to interdependent self-construal. It describes the concept and experience of self as an interconnected part of a social relationship (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Various effects of the interdependent view of self have been identified within different domains including cognition, emotion, and motivation. Of particular interest and importance to effective counselling for East or Southeast Asian Canadians is “the way in which collectivism and interdependent self-construal are manifested in Asians’ preferred manners of helping, problem-solving styles, and stress-coping responses” (Kuo, 2004, p. 159).

Understanding a person from an angle of the individualism and collectivism dimension moves us to further explore how counselling, which is commonly assumed to have internalized many individualistic values, can be helpful for East or Southeast Asian clients, who often display strong adherence to collectivistic values (Kuo, 2004; Williams, 2003). A number of Asian collectivistic values have been identified in the literature. These include, but are not limited, to “avoidance of family shame,” “conformity to family and social norms,” “deference to authority figures,” “maintenance of interpersonal

harmony,” “self-control and restraint” (Kim et al., 2001), and “loss of face” (Leong et al., 2011; Yakunina & Weigold, 2011). Researchers have attempted to understand the effect of adherence to these values on Asian clients’ view of counselling, attitude towards professional help-seeking, and experience of the counselling process. However, results of these studies are mixed.

For example, Wang and Kim (2010) demonstrated that adherence to the Asian value of emotional self-control was negatively correlated to counselling outcomes, such as building a positive working alliance. Fowler, Glenwright, Bhatia, and Drapeau (2011) commented that there is a high tendency of emotional self-control among individuals of Asian descent. As collectivism implies restraint in emotional expression (Oyserman et al., 2002), people living in a collectivist culture believe that emotional suffering “should be done silently” (Fowler et al., 2011, p. 153). Therefore, talking about emotions in front of another person might be considered undesirable. The implication here is that it might be helpful for counsellors to recognize how challenging it could be for people of Asian descent to discuss emotional issues or distressful feelings during the counselling process (Wang & Kim, 2010). In other words, if counsellors are not sensitive to this potential challenge, counselling may be regarded as unhelpful in their Asian clients’ eyes. These results also suggest that emotion-focused counselling might not be appropriate for people of Asian descent. Instead, counselling with a cognitive emphasis might be more relevant or acceptable to Asian clients (Kim et al., 2001).

However, in a study that investigated South Korean clients’ perceptions of counsellor effectiveness, Seo (2010) found that counsellors who emphasized expression of emotion were perceived as more effective than those who emphasized expression of

cognition. Similarly, Kim, Li, and Liang (2002) found high adherence to Asian cultural values to be associated with better counsellor cross-cultural competency when counsellors focused on expression of emotion rather than cognition. Thus, it is hard to conclude, on the basis of current research, how adherence to collectivistic values such as emotional self-control might affect Asian clients' views and/or actual experience of counselling.

Another example concerns the potential negative effects associated with "loss of face" (Leong et al., 2011). Loss of face is "defined as the threat or loss of social integrity, especially in the interpersonal and psychosocial relationship dynamics among Asian Americans" (Leong et al., 2011, p. 142). Results from Leong and colleagues indicated that individuals of Asian descent who are most concerned about loss of face tend to be less able to tolerate stigma associated with professional help-seeking. This group of individuals also showed less openness to discuss personal problems with professional therapists. The authors concluded that concern regarding loss of face is potentially associated with negative help-seeking attitudes among people of Asian descent.

Contrary to these results, Yakunina and Weigold (2011) found a direct positive association between the effect of loss of face and stigma concerns, and attitudes towards professional help-seeking of East and Southeast Asians. A possible explanation offered was that loss of face and stigma are associated with anxiety about sharing psychological issues with people in their social circle. Discussing psychological issues with significant people in an individual's life may risk bringing shame to one's family by disclosing personal private issues to a community shared by the family. People of Asian descent who adhere strongly to shame avoidance may perhaps find it safer to talk to a

professional who will keep confidentiality (Kim, 2011). Again, with these contrasting results, it is hard to conclude the potential role that loss of face may play in the counselling experiences of Asian clients.

Research efforts have also been dedicated to understanding how other aspects of collectivism and individualism influence perceived counselling effectiveness among Asian clients. As discussed, counselling as a practice has developed within a more individualist cultural background, whereas people of Asian descent are from a more collectivist cultural background. Caucasian therapists' and Asian clients' worldviews may vary on an individual level of independent and interdependent self-construal (Kuo, 2004). Investigating the effect of matched or mismatched worldviews between Caucasian therapists and Asian clients on counselling outcomes and clients' perceptions of counsellors' effectiveness then became an interesting topic to me.

Kim, Ng, and Ahn (2005; 2009) conducted two studies to examine this idea. In the first study, where volunteer Asian clients participated, the authors found that a matched worldview, operationalized by counsellors' agreement or disagreement of clients' view of problem cause, would lead to better counselling outcomes, in terms of working alliance and perceived counsellor empathy (Kim et al., 2005). However, the matched or mismatched conditions did not differ in counsellor creditability.

In the second study, where actual clients were involved, these authors found that matched worldviews, as operationalized by clients' perceived matching on belief about problem etiology, would lead to positive counselling outcomes (Kim et al., 2009). These outcomes included counsellor credibility, counsellor empathic understanding, counsellor cross-cultural counselling competence, client-counsellor working alliance, and the

likelihood of recommending the counsellor to another person in need of counselling.

These results were not only significant, but also demonstrated large effect sizes.

Perhaps then, another way in which collectivism, individualism, and different construals of self might influence the effectiveness of counselling depends on how similar therapists and clients are to one another. These results support the view of a shared worldview between counsellors and clients suggested by the common factors approach (Fischer et al., 1998). Although it is commonly assumed that the counselling culture is greatly influenced by the worldview of individualism and thus may need serious modifications to become applicable to clients from collectivist cultures, it may not be as pessimistic as one might think. In a national survey in the United States, Kelly (1995) found that American psychologists were in fact more collectivistic than individualistic. To conclude this subsection, I would like to borrow McCarthy's (2005) words, “[a]s the counsel[l]ing profession evolves into a more culturally sensitive system, more research on the association between cultural orientation and the entire counsel[l]ing process would be beneficial” (p. 114).

## **2.2 Strategies Implied by Current Understanding**

Although not conclusive, researchers have shown a number of ways through which acculturation and the cultural constructs of collectivism and individualism might affect counselling effectiveness for people of Asian descent in North America. Despite the mixed findings, researchers have attempted to identify some potential strategies that might be useful for counselling people of Asian descent (Kim et al., 2005). As discussed, exploring Asian clients' acculturation and enculturation process and understanding the effect of adherence to various Asian collectivistic values could be helpful. In the

following sub-sections, I will present some specific and pragmatic strategies that have been discussed among researchers and counselling practitioners, which are thought to be useful in providing helpful counselling for people of Asian descent.

### ***2.2.1 Directive Style of Counselling***

Researchers have argued that people from collectivist cultures who have an interdependent construal of self, such as people of Asian descent, tend to highly value relationships (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and the hierarchy implied in these relationships (Kim et al., 2001; D. W. Sue & Sue, 2003). These individuals usually seek help with an expectation that someone with better knowledge will be able to give guidance and advice (Kim, 2011). Thus, it has been argued that a directive counselling style, rather than the dominant counselling style where therapist and client assume equal power, is more appropriate for people of Asian descent and could lead to a more productive counselling process (e.g., Kuo, 2004). In fact, research findings have shown some support for this argument. For example, Yoon and Jepsen (2008) found that their Asian international student sample showed a greater preference for directive counselling styles than their American student sample. Li and Kim (2004) also found that Asian American students, who were in an experimental directive counselling style condition, perceived counsellors to have better empathic understanding and cross-cultural counselling competence than those who were in the nondirective counselling condition. Similarly, Kim and colleagues (2002) found that counsellors who focused on immediate problem resolution were perceived to have developed greater client-counsellor working alliances with Asian clients. These results suggest that a directive style, pointing to more concrete and specific resolutions, was preferable by Asian clients.

Kuo (2004) offered a possible explanation to this preference. He stated that Asian cultures tend to be highly collectivistic. In-group memberships and relationships are very important. People within an in-group usually have well-defined roles and creditability is usually attributed to people in positions of authority. As counsellors are well-trained professionals whose role is to offer help, Asian clients tend to see their counsellors as occupying a higher position in a relationship hierarchy, whereas they themselves in a lower, hence submissive, position. With the need for clear role boundaries, Asian clients often expect clear goals and tasks to be given by the counsellor, often referred to as a directive style.

This preference can also be explained by the rationale of gift giving within the Asian culture (Kim, et al., 2003; Li & Kim, 2004). It is a concept proposed by S. Sue and Zane (1987) when working with people of Asian descent. Due to lack of understanding of long term counselling benefits, Asian clients might see it as more helpful when they are able to receive immediate benefits (i.e. gifts), such as guidance in reducing stress. A goal for counselling, as expected by Asian clients, may be related to receiving concrete strategies (Li & Kim, 2004). Therefore, Asian clients may see directive counselling as more helpful than nondirective styles.

However, there are some controversies regarding the research on Asian clients' experiences of counselling. In Yoon and Jepsen's (2008) study, most of their Asian international students showed a lack of knowledge about counselling. For example, counselling may have been understood as "consultation," for example, which in Chinese languages indicates getting advice from some professionals (Chang, Tong, Shi, & Zeng, 2005). Thus, the question is: how accurate are these expectations if clients do not even

know what to expect? D. W. Sue and Sue (2003) agreed that counselling and psychotherapy are concepts that are foreign to many people of Asian descent. What these clients really expect may not be the directive style of counselling that is currently represented in the literature.

Li and Kim (2004) recruited volunteer Asian clients when they experienced career-related problems for a single session of counselling. As the authors pointed out, career clients might expect to have more directive suggestions and advice because of the nature of career issues. Thus, it is reasonable that they found a directive style of counselling more beneficial. Expectation might be different for clients with other issues such as emotional problems and for those who would expect to have more than one session of therapy. In addition, Li and Kim did not find differences in clients' perceptions of counsellor creditability between the directive and nondirective conditions. Meyer, Zane, and Cho (2011) illustrated that the perception of counsellor credibility may be related to perceived support and perceived similarity. It may then be speculated that counselling outcomes were not related to how directive the counsellors were. Rather, the outcomes may have been influenced by how much support an Asian client can imagine getting from the counsellor, and how similar the Asian client perceives him/herself to be in relation to the counsellor. In this case, what Asian clients prefer may not be the directive counselling style as proposed, but the kind of support they receive, how their roles are defined, and perceived similarity between themselves and their counsellors.

### **2.2.2 Racial Matching**

Another approach that has been suggested for counselling people of Asian descent is to create a racial matching between therapist and client (Wang & Kim, 2010). That is,

to have therapists of Asian descent counsel clients of Asian descent. It is assumed that therapists with a similar cultural background would better understand Asian clients' values, beliefs, and cultural rituals. However, the benefit of racial matching is controversial (Fowler et al., 2011; Meyer et al., 2011). While some studies have shown positive associations between racial matching and favourable outcomes, others have shown no effects (Meyer et al., 2011).

One of the significant advantages of racial matching may concern the language shared by Asian clients and their therapists. Since language barriers have been identified as a contributing factor to acculturative stress (Lueck & Wilson, 2010), having a therapist who speaks the same language may help an Asian client ease into the counselling process. However, Tseng (2004) cautioned that even when the therapist and the client share a common language, the meanings behind words and the values embedded in this language may not be the same. Therapists who speak a different language from their Asian clients may be able to be more sensitive to these differences.

The biggest criticism of racial matching between therapist and Asian clients perhaps concerns the availability of therapists who have an Asian cultural background (Fowler et al., 2011). It is not always possible to assign a therapist with an Asian background to an Asian client in a counselling intake process. It may be more practical to gain knowledge about the counselling process and outcomes for Asian clients that are perceived to be beneficial through racial matching.

Meyer and colleagues (2011) conducted a study to investigate the mediating effects between racial matching and its potential benefits. Their findings suggest that racial matching has led to participants' perception of greater counsellor credibility, which was

an effect mediated by participants' perceived similarity. According to the authors, there are two kinds of similarity. Experiential similarity occurred when participants felt similar to the therapists in terms of life experiences, culture, and social class. Attitudinal similarity referred to similarity in values, attitudes, and personality. Meyer et al. found that the mediating effect between racial matching and counsellor credibility was experiential similarity. A positive relationship between attitudinal similarity and working alliance and therapist credibility was also found. The mediating effect here was perceived support, which was defined as "the belief that support is available from another person" (Meyer et al., 2011, p. 336), irrespective of whether or not actual support was received.

These results suggest that perceived similarity, both experiential and attitudinal, and perceived support are important factors to productive counselling outcomes. Although counsellor creditability is important to counselling (S. Sue & Zane, 1987), the implication of these results is that racial matching may be one of the many ways to increase counsellor creditability. When racial matching is not available, there are other ways that therapists can "match" with their Asian clients, such as on attitudes, values (Meyer et al., 2011), or worldviews (Kim et al., 2005, 2009). The significant positive relationship found between attitudinal similarity and working alliance provided an even more hopeful implication for counsellors with a variety of cultural backgrounds to work with people of Asian descent. The working alliance is considered to be as important as, if not more important than, techniques to promote therapeutic changes (Goldfried & Davila, 2005). The results of Meyer and colleagues' study seem to suggest that with attitudinal similarity, building strong working alliances with Asian clients and producing helpful counselling outcomes is possible.

While racial matching may or may not enhance Asian clients' experience of counselling, the results of this line of study have a more general implication to counsellors who work with clients of Asian descent. Meyer and colleagues (2011) asserted that "targeting attitudinal and value similarities between themselves and their clients is a practice that all therapists, regardless of race, can undertake to build rapport and to establish credibility with Asian clients" (p. 342).

### ***2.2.3 Ways to Self-disclose***

In a commentary, Kim (2011) reviewed a journal article about client motivation and expanded his view to multicultural counselling. He mentioned how some theories that emphasize emotional expression or encourage clients to talk about underlying problem might be a mismatch for Asian clients. He explained that expression of emotions is in conflict with Asian values of emotional self-control and avoidance of family shame. Because of this conflict, some researchers have suggested that a focus on client expression of cognition and task-oriented content is more appropriate (Kim et al., 2001). For example, Kim and colleagues' (2003) found that Asian college student volunteer clients tended to rate counsellors who focused on strategies as more helpful than those who focused on approval, reassurance, and feelings.

However, in another study, Kim et al. (2002) found that counsellors were perceived as more multiculturally competent when they emphasized the expression of emotion rather than cognition among Asian client participants. Similarly, Seo (2010) found that counsellors were perceived to be more effective when they focused on the expression of emotions. It may then be speculated that it is more important for counsellors to be sensitive when discussing emotional issues with their Asian clients (Wang & Kim, 2010),

rather than putting strong emphasis on one aspect or the other. Because results from this line of research are mixed, further research is warranted to add to current understandings about the preference and effect of Asian clients' ways to self-disclose in a counselling setting.

#### **2.2.4 Multicultural Counselling Competence**

Another important line of scholarship that has investigated the relevance and effectiveness of counselling for people of Asian descent focuses on counsellor multicultural counselling competence (Li, Kim, & O'Brien, 2007). As a pioneer figure in developing a model of *multicultural counselling competencies* (MCCs), D. W. Sue provided the following definition for multicultural counselling:

Multicultural counselling and therapy can be defined as both a helping role and process that uses modalities and defines goals consistent with the life experiences and cultural values of clients, recognizes client identities to include individual, group, and universal dimensions, advocates the use of universal and culture-specific strategies and roles in the healing process, and balances the importance of individualism and collectivism in the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of client and client systems. (D. W. Sue & Sue, 2003, p. 16)

In line with Berry's (1980, 1999, 2008) bilinear and multi-level model of acculturation, D. W. Sue's (2001) MCCs model describes multicultural counselling competence using four levels (individual, professional, organizational, and societal) together with three cultural competence components (awareness, knowledge, and skills) across different racial groups. The model provides a framework for counsellors to

increase their level of competence in working with culturally diverse clients, including Asians. It outlines the first competency as counsellors' awareness of attitude, beliefs, and biases towards different cultural groups. With this awareness, counsellors then need to learn cultural knowledge that is relevant to the particular cultural group they are working with. Finally, counsellors need to obtain skills to approach and engage their culturally diverse clients in a culturally sensitive way. This model highlights the important role cultural awareness plays on all levels of multicultural competence.

More recently, and relevant to the Canadian society, Arthur and Collins (2010) developed the Culture-Infused Counselling framework within which culture is defined to include not only ethnicity and race, but also other identity factors. Those include, but are not limited to, dimensions such as ethnicity, gender, age, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, language, and the intersections of these dimensions in forming unique cultural identities. The framework places specific emphasis on cultural awareness of the self (the counsellor) and of other people (the client; Collins & Arthur, 2010a). It suggests that although interventions and techniques are important, they are only part of the counselling process. Rather, the working alliance should be considered as an overarching construct in which culture is infused through awareness. Therefore, awareness of cultural elements such as values and beliefs is foundational.

When considering different cultural values, it is interesting to notice how some of the professional standards and code of ethics that are based on Caucasian Canadian values might actually become irrelevant in helping people from an Asian cultural background (see Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association, 2007; Canadian Psychological Association, 2000, for examples of ethical codes in the Canadian context).

For example, dual relationship is a professional taboo. However, it might have a very different meaning in the healing relationship among Asian people (D. W. Sue, 2001). One relevant idea of the MCCs models is that it is important for counsellors to be aware of their own cultural values and the potential negative effects of these values on their Asian clients (Arredondo et al., 1996). As mentioned, increasing counsellors' self-awareness and awareness of their clients' culture are fundamental to promote a culturally sensitive working alliance with the clients (Arthur & Collins, 2010; Collins & Arthur, 2010a). When counsellors encounter racial differences, their communication of their acceptance and respect for these differences is paramount. Research has shown support for this notion. Li et al. (2007) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between client adherence to Asian cultural values and counsellor acknowledgement of value discrepancy. Counsellors who acknowledged racial differences within the counselling session were rated as more culturally competent than those who did not.

In general, research seems to suggest that counsellor multicultural counselling competency contributes to favourable outcomes for people of Asian descent (Wang & Kim, 2010). However, Asian Canadians still seem to be skeptical about counselling (Fowler et al., 2011). Counselling remains a foreign concept and a last resort for many people of Asian descent (Kuo, 2004). Furthermore, the underutilization and dropout rate among clients of Asian descent of mental health service remains high.

Dean (2001) argued that multicultural competence is indeed flawed. She proposed that instead of focusing on counsellors' competence, we should focus on our "lack of competence" (p. 624). By doing so, she contended that therapists should obtain "understanding" rather than "knowing" or knowledge about another person's culture,

which might be different from them. To obtain understanding requires different forms of inquiry, such as questioning. When we adopt a “not knowing” stance, for example, we become more open to learning about another person’s story. In this sense, what might be missing from the literature is an “understanding” of Asian clients’ view of counselling and what they have to say about it.

### **2.3 Clients’ Views of Helpfulness**

Leong et al. (2011) stated that “therapy is an interactive process – one that is based upon communication” (p. 142). If therapists want to know how to increase the effectiveness of counselling for Asian clients, we might want to ask them about it: What do they see as helpful? What do they want to get from therapy? One may argue that the literature has covered a lot on this ground. For example, as discussed, Asian clients seem to prefer directive styles of counselling; based on the concept of gift giving, Asian clients tend to want concrete strategies or solutions for their problems; Asian clients may find it difficult to discuss their emotions, and so forth. The research that has been conducted examining these preferences, however, has produced mixed and limited results.

Many studies that have attempted to understand Asian clients’ perspectives on counselling used analogue designs, such as those presented in this chapter (e.g. Li et al., 2007; Meyer et al., 2011; Wang & Kim, 2010). Analogue design is an experimental design that invites participants, who are not clients themselves, to view one or more sample counselling session video segments and then respond to different questionnaires or psychological instruments that the researchers deem sufficient to answer their research questions (such as a questionnaire on counsellor credibility or working alliance). There are a number of problems associated with this research method. First, participants are not

clients. They view a counselling video in which someone else was the client, instead of experiencing the impact of counselling themselves. Second, these participants are usually college students. Their understanding of the videotaped interactions may be different from that of the general public. Third, which is a limitation also recognized by some researchers, there is a difference between “observer-participants” and real clients in terms of life experience (Li et al., 2007). Some researchers have tried to minimize this limitation by inviting volunteer clients to come for a single session of counselling. However, it is still unclear if the problem nature and severity level for these volunteer clients would be similar to those of actual clients (Kim et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2003; Kim et al., 2002; Li & Kim, 2004). Fourth, some studies (e.g. Li & Kim, 2004) recruited a particular kind of clients, such as career clients. Again, the nature of problem, hence the expectation and experience of counselling, may be different from clients who present different types of issues, such as depression (Li & Kim, 2004).

More importantly, most of these studies, if not all, used various kinds of questionnaires or scales. One limitation of using these instruments is that they are typically developed in the English language. When translated into Asian languages, they may not convey the exact same meaning. One might argue that most of these are well-known and well-tested instruments that have demonstrated very good psychometric properties in various language versions (e.g., Hui, 1988; Kim & Hong, 2004). However, the meaning of each of the questionnaire items might not be the same for all respondents. As discussed, different concepts and experiences of self (i.e., the independent or interdependent self-construal) may lead to different self-processes, such as those processes involved developing self-esteem (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). When answering

a questionnaire, people with an interdependent construal of self, such as people of Asian descent, may look at an item very differently from those who have an independent construal of self. For example, conformity may mean “inability to resist social pressure and to stick by one’s own perceptions, attitudes, or beliefs for independent selves,” but could also mean “willingness to be responsive to others and to adjust one’s own demands and desires so as to maintain the ever-important relation” for interdependent selves (example taken from Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 247).

The question for researchers using rating scales or questionnaires to investigate Asian clients’ counselling experience is: Are they talking about the same thing as the clients are? It is not to say that a questionnaire or a well-developed psychological instrument can only be used among certain kinds of people. A particular instrument might very well be valid and reliable for people with different types of self-concept. However, the caution is that results or scores collected from these instruments might represent different meanings that may be unknown to researchers. Furthermore, people from different cultural backgrounds might have different response styles on Likert or rating scales (Zax & Takahashi, 1967). For example, research has shown that East Asians are more likely to give midpoint or neutral scores while North Americans, including people from the United States and Canada, are more likely to give extreme scores (C. Chen, Lee, & Stevenson, 1995; Zax & Takahashi, 1967). These different response styles may create further problems, especially when doing cross-cultural comparison using these scores (Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 2002).

As described earlier in this chapter, Tseng (2004) cautioned that “even when the therapist and the [client] share a common language, the meanings behind words and the

values embedded in language... may vary from one person to another" (p.153).

Questionnaires are usually self-report measures. Thus, there is minimal communication between researchers and respondents. Without sharing a common context, such as one at an interview, and communication nuances, it is even harder for researchers to know how their participants make meanings of and respond to the questionnaires.

Similarly, Mishler (1986) highlighted the weaknesses of survey research by pointing out that answers are influenced by how the question is formulated and who asks the question. In questionnaire research, researchers or questionnaire developers design both questions and answers. Respondents' freedom for how to answer a certain question is thus already limited. Their interpretation of each answer may also vary enormously. My concern here is that, how much of a participant's lived experience can be represented in an instrument score?

One way of getting closer to understanding what our Asian clients think or experience is perhaps to ask them about it. As Rennie (2001) stated, “[w]hen clients are consulted about what it is like to be in counselling and psychotherapy, they have many wonderful things to say” (p. 83). He contended that when research is conducted using self-report questionnaires, the results are usually very limited. When research aims concern counsellor predictions and control of counselling effects, clients' self-agency in how they contribute to the helpfulness of counselling is usually suppressed. In addition, clients' voices tend to be limited because of the positivist research paradigm adopted by many researchers (Gordon, 2000). Quantitative research, which is usually conducted within a positivist paradigm, often deals with understandings of counselling from testing theory or from a psychological perspective (Gordon, 2000). Meaning-making in the

therapeutic situation is often unexamined. My intention is not to say that quantitative research studies are not valuable. On top of those studies, however, we may also want to hear some of these “wonderful things” to enrich our understanding about clients’ experiences. Perhaps we may want to start asking Asian clients questions about what they think of their counselling experiences and what they would suggest to improve counselling so that it is more helpful for them.

In the current literature, there are few research studies that directly ask clients of Asian descent about their counselling experience. Jim and Pistrang (2007), for example, conducted a qualitative research using interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore Chinese clients’ perspective of the therapeutic alliance in the United Kingdom. They interviewed eight English-speaking Chinese individuals who had recent or current experience in therapy. Consistent with some quantitative results, these Chinese individuals had different opinions on how beneficial it would be to have a therapist from a similar culture. Some shared that it was very important because therapists were able to recognize the role of cultural values in their problems. Yet others talked about the benefit they were able to get from seeing non-Chinese therapists. For yet others, a therapist’s cultural background did not seem to have much importance in terms of the therapeutic alliance.

Another interesting finding concerns Chinese clients’ views of responsibility in therapy (Jim & Pistrang, 2007). For these individuals, therapy was “a process of self-discovery” and therapists were guides or teachers who offered something for them to learn. However, in order to achieve self-discovery and learning, these individuals recognized the need to own their problem and their responsibility in moving through the

therapeutic process. This recognition was demonstrated in how some individuals talked about their disappointment in therapy being partially related to their own lack of motivation or preparation.

Similarly, Netto et al. (2001) conducted a larger scale (N=38) qualitative study that explored the views of Asian clients and non-clients on the perceptions of counselling needs and preferences in the United Kingdom. For those who had counselling experience, Netto et al. also examined their views on the impact of their past experiences. Their findings indicated that most of their participants had little to no knowledge of counselling. Consequently, there was very little or unclear expectation for counselling service. It appears that there were some difference and similarities in counselling needs and preference between clients and non-clients. For example, non-clients would like to have the option of having counselling at home, while most clients were satisfied with having it at an agency. Both clients and non-clients would expect counsellors to be respectful of their cultural values and beliefs.

In terms of client experience, the results of Netto and colleagues' (2001) study were quite similar to that of Jim and Pistrang (2007). For example, about half of the Asian clients in Netto et al.'s study saw little importance in the ethnicity or race of the counsellor. The other half had strong preferences for either an Asian counsellor or a non-Asian counsellor for various reasons. What these participants added to this discussion is the concern of language. While many of these Asian clients spoke of the importance of the availability of counselling in Asian languages, the preference for the ethnicity of counsellor was closely related to their comfort in speaking English. Also, there were concerns that an Asian counsellor might be someone from the same community of the

client. Hence, confidentiality might be jeopardized. In that case, a Caucasian counsellor was preferred.

In addition, these Asian clients articulated some essential counsellor qualities (Netto et al., 2001). These qualities, which included good listening, supportive, encouraging, gives hope, patient, and polite, are universal in terms of building good therapeutic relationships (Jim & Pistrang, 2007). Most of the Asian clients felt that their counselling experiences were positive (Netto et al., 2001). In contrast with some quantitative results regarding emotional self-control, these Asian clients appreciated that counselling has provided them with a safe place for healthy emotional expression. The experience was seen as helpful in the way that it brought them considerable comfort and relief. Although some participants talked about their feelings of discomfort with intense emotional expression, they found that helpful in a confidential setting during counselling.

These findings are valuable in terms of adding knowledge to what is “commonly” known in the quantitative literature. However, I have not yet been able to find anything regarding Asian client experiences in North America. It is timely to include their voices in the literature pertaining to how counselling in the North American context could better service clients of Asian descent.

## **2.4 The Importance of Consulting Our Clients**

Gordon (2000) has illustrated how the client/therapist relationship is central to different theoretical orientations within psychotherapy is applied. The concept of relationship suggests that there are at least two partners and interaction is a key component. Thus, understandings of psychotherapy should include not only the “professional” definition, which is based on the therapist’s theoretical assumptions, but

also the “help-seeking” person’s understanding of his/her own experience through the interaction with the therapist.

From this point of view, Gordon (2000) argued that it is important to research counselling and psychotherapy from a range of ontological perspectives to add knowledge to the current limited understanding. Other researchers have echoed this view and conducted research that helped bring in clients’ perspectives (e.g. Binder et al., 2010; Bonsmann, 2010). For example, Binder and colleagues (2010) conducted a phenomenological study focusing on how clients describe good therapeutic outcomes. Having learned some views from their participants, which were different from current, popular understandings of “good psychotherapy,” the authors concluded the following:

Phenomenological exploration of [clients’] own descriptions of good outcome appears to be a valuable source of information that can correct or develop the more formal, bureaucratic, or theoretically determined conceptions and criteria for treatment evaluation and mental health. Hence, further studies should be highly welcomed.

(Binder et al., 2010, p. 293)

As discussed in Chapter One, the idea of including clients’ perspectives in multicultural research also stems from the concept of sharing worldviews between clients and counsellors as suggested in the common factors approach to counselling. Worldviews may refer to values, thought processes, and rationales for mental health issues. These are elements that may be better captured using research paradigms other than the positivist quantitative approaches (Frank & Frank, 1998). A qualitative approach might be a better suited for exploring the rich experiences of people’s experiences of counselling.

Being aware of or listening to clients' voices is not only important in research, but also in clinical settings. It is because

[W]hen the practitioner is sensitive in this way, good working alliances can be developed in 'directive' as much as in 'non-directive' approaches to counselling and therapy, depending on what clients want in terms of their needs, overall and in the moment. (Rennie, 2001, p. 88)

Therefore, client experiences and voices are valuable and worth paying attention to by both researchers and practitioners. In order to provide culturally sensitive and appropriate services to people of Asian descent in Canada, it is important to explore what these people have to say about counselling.

## **2.5 Chapter Summary**

The focus of my study is on understanding how people of East and Southeast Asian descent experience counselling, which inherited many traditional Western individualistic values. In this chapter, I reviewed a number of research studies that have been conducted across North America and the United Kingdom. In reviewing these studies, I organized the current literature so that they reflect two levels of understanding counselling effectiveness for Asian clients. First, our understanding of effectiveness is discussed through knowledge and theories of acculturation. Second, the cultural dimensions of collectivism and individualism, and various cultural values associated with collectivism, are presented in relation to Asian clients' experience of counselling. Informed by this knowledge, scholars have formulated some strategies that might enhance the experience and counselling outcomes for people of Asian descent. These strategies include directive

counselling styles, racial matching, ways of inviting self-disclosure, and multicultural counselling competence.

Despite these valuable findings and proposals, I argue that there are a number of limitations regarding the knowledge that is claimed by this line of research. The most important limitation is that these studies did not work with actual clients, but participants who observed others in counselling interactions or attended counselling for the purposes of the research. The use of questionnaires or psychological instruments may also create problems for understanding lived experiences. Actual clients' voices are regarded as being very valuable in both research and clinical work. It appears that Asian clients' voices of what they think is helpful in counselling are missing in the current literature. While some European scholars have recognized the importance of inquiring into Asian clients' experience of counselling, less attention has been given to this experience in North American society, and particularly the Canadian context. It is my intent to explore how East and Southeast Asian clients in Canada perceived their counselling experience in order to enrich current understanding of the helpfulness of counselling for this population.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

My aim for this research was to understand counselling experiences from the perspective of East or Southeast Asian clients. As noted in the previous chapter, current knowledge about counselling effectiveness for Asian clients is limited. Two key issues identified in existing research are that, (a) studies often have not been based on actual clients, and, (b) the use of questionnaires or psychological instruments may disguise the meanings about counselling made by culturally diverse individuals. In order to capture the voices of East and Southeast Asian clients about helpful counselling in Canada, I was interested in collecting stories of their first person counselling experiences. The guiding research question for this study is: What do East or Southeast Asian clients perceive as helpful in their counselling experience in Canada?

In this chapter, I will describe and discuss the methodology I chose to employ in answering my research question. First, I will outline the philosophical orientations of social constructionism and constructivism that were the basis of my study. Next, I will orient the reader to thematic narrative analysis and the reasons why I chose this approach to guide my study. I will also discuss the issue of trustworthiness under the chosen research paradigm and approach. Next, I will guide the reader systematically through my method and procedures for data collection and how I interpreted the collected stories. As I have collected the stories in three different languages (English, Cantonese, and Mandarin), I will explain how I managed the issue of translation during the research process. Lastly, I will outline the procedures I have used to ensure the study was conducted in an ethical manner.

### **3.1 Research Paradigm**

I position the current study within the philosophical orientations of social constructionism and constructivism. Social constructionism, though without a commonly agreed definition, can be considered as in opposition to positivism (there is a truth) and empiricism (the truth can be observed) in the traditional scientific world (Burr, 2003). It invites us to challenge the notion of objective observation as taken-for-granted knowledge of our world and about ourselves. Scholars regard social constructionism as an alternative to the traditional way of knowledge inquiry, because it provides us a postmodern way of gaining knowledge (Hibberd, 2005). Instead of seeing what we know as what it “really” is, social constructionism suggests that we, as humans, construct our knowledge as we attempt to know about what we want to know (Levin, 2007).

From this perspective, knowledge is constructed, or co-constructed by people in the course of interactions, taking into account sociocultural beliefs, and by means of language (Burr, 2003). Thus, reality is related to other individuals and cultural influences (Carpenter, 2011). Social constructionists are particularly interested in the social actions among humans, in which knowledge construction is made possible. As social interactions occur within a specific culture, timing, and with people bringing in diverse backgrounds, ways of knowing and what we know are culturally and historically relative and specific (Burr, 2003).

In a similar vein, constructivism asserts that knowledge is a result of human creation (Levin, 2007). It is noteworthy that constructivism is sometimes confused with social constructionism because they seem to share many fundamental assumptions (Burr, 2003). Constructivism, instead of focusing on the social aspect of the human world, is

considered a theory about the nature of reality (Callison, 2001) as well as a model of learning that grants agency to the learner (Coborn, 1993). Constructivists argue that knowledge about the world does not exist independent of a knower (Callison, 2001). Learning occurs when we engage in a process in which we, as learners, attempt to make sense of what we do not know based on our own previous understanding about the world. Since no two person's experiences are the same, knowledge about the new unknowns will be different. As such, constructivists believe in the notion of multiple realities (Carpenter, 2011). There is no one reality more valid or truer than the other (Callison, 2001). What is relevant depends on the context and the way in which a person interprets the world.

Because reality is not any kind of pre-existence to be discovered, acquisition of knowledge does not occur by simple transmission (Coborn, 1993). Rather, it requires a learner's active engagement while interacting with the outside world. As active agents, we create new knowledge while bringing in pre-existing ones. We interpret things in a fashion that we want it makes sense and is meaningful to us. Therefore, by actively engaging in the process and choosing the way in which we think appropriate for a particular purpose, we construct our own knowledge that helps us to move on in life. Coborn (1993) called it “meaningful interpretation” or “meaningful learning”. What it implies is that while we cannot be sure how close our knowledge is to the “actual reality,” even if there is one, meaningfulness becomes more important than the truthfulness of the knowledge we create.

Together, social constructionism and constructivism form the foundation of my research paradigm. These worldviews are a departure from the purposes and practices of the traditional psychological and positivist scientific way of inquiry (Burr, 2003). There

are a number of implications that are particularly relevant to my research. In the following, I will outline and briefly discuss each of them with reference to my study.

1. The understanding of East and Southeast Asian clients' counselling experience is socially constructed.

Approaching this research from a social constructionist perspective, I see that counselling experiences of East or Southeast Asian clients are constructed by themselves, their counsellors, as well as myself, the researcher, in the course of researching. Each participant's experience can be seen as firstly co-constructed by the participants and the counsellors through their interactions. The experience was situated in the context of counselling, for whatever purpose the counselling had. When I met with my participants, the exchange of our conversations allowed co-construction of knowledge about helpful counselling in the context of researching. Informed by constructivism, I see that both participants and myself were active agents in giving meanings to helpful counselling. The purpose was to generate agreed understanding, yet allow space to appreciate the different views of reality between myself and the East or Southeast Asian clients.

2. All research parties, including the researcher and the participants, are cultural beings, who bring significant contribution to the knowledge of helpful counselling.

Because of different life experiences, my participants and I carried preconceived ideas about various concepts examined in this research, such as counselling, counselling experience, and helpfulness. For example, my understanding of counselling is mainly informed by my education, while my participants' understanding might be informed by mass media and/or their interaction with their counsellors. The

co-construction of helpful counselling within the context of this study is highly influenced by our historical knowledge. Thus, the resultant knowledge is contingent on our previous understanding of the world.

3. Language used to described the experience of counselling is worthy of special attention.

According to social constructionists and constructivists, language is an important means for learning and knowledge construction to occur (Burr, 2003; Callison, 2001; Cobern, 1993). Burr (2003) described language as having a nature of “constantly changing and varied in its meanings” (p. 46). It is a social entity that is closely related to human experience. People use language not only to communicate thoughts and ideas, but also to create and structure their experiences within different contexts. Therefore, in order to learn about East and Southeast Asian clients’ experience of counselling and their understanding of how counselling can be helpful, I needed to pay close attention to how we languaged counselling experiences in our communication, including both spoken and written communication. Particularly, as Burr (2003) stated , “new research practices must take a greater interest in language”. Doing so allowed me to stay sensitive to the role of language in my study.

4. All experiences are subjective and contingent, including the researcher’s and the participants’.

From the traditional approach to science, the goal is often to describe “a truth” as if it is independent of human experience. Thus, the researcher can take a step back from what is being researched and approach it with an objective mind. Social constructionists object to the notion of objectivity (Burr, 2003). As discussed above,

knowledge is constructed by people who have previous experience and understanding about the matter at hand, through interactions by means of language, and within and for a particular context; to ignore these factors is impossible. As such, in asking East or Southeast Asian clients about their counselling experience, my goal was not to find what the experiences “really” were, but attempt to understand how they make sense of these experiences. In doing so, I also needed to be aware of my own previous knowledge that might bias or inform me to take the conversation in a certain direction. In addition, I need to be careful not to fall into the trap that my interpretation of these narratives are the only interpretation. When I analyzed the result, I was careful about making claims that were relevant to my research purpose.

5. No one account of experience is more valid than another. Each of them is a result of meaningful interpretation and thus, in itself, conveys important meanings.

As the goal of my study is not to find an objective truth about helpful counselling, I see that the stories I have collected are all valid. Each of these stories provides rich and thick meanings, and therefore, they are all important. Informed by constructivism, I adopt the position that meaningful learning from the process of research is the focus. For that, I paid close attention to the meaning making process throughout my interactions with the participants. I also focused on the meanings conveyed in the stories as I analyzed them.

6. Working under this research paradigm allows room to search for self-agency.

Constructivists’ idea of learning is that people learn from engaging in active interpretation rather than by simple transmission (Coborn, 1993). Social constructionists also emphasize active involvement in co-constructing knowledge

through social interactions (Burr, 2003). This implied self-agency plays an important role in how we make sense of the world (Mahoney & Granvold, 2005). This perspective allows conversation of and about self-agency. The participants' self-agency can be exhibited through our interactions as well as within their stories of counselling experience. I became sensitive to how self-agency played out throughout the research process.

7. The research about clients' experience of counselling is powerful when it encourages further conversation within the field (Coborn, 1993).

Both social constructionism and constructivism have a future oriented goal (McNamee, 2004). Coborn (1993) asserted that “[i]nquiry activities are powerful specifically when they promote discourse” (p. 110). It is because when learners start talking about knowledge, they engage in active interpretation and negotiation, which then help the learners to create a coherent life (McNamee, 2004). Burr (2003) argued that knowledge is closely related to social action as knowledge inquiries usually attempt to encourage some actions and discourage others. Although there was no specific action planned, this study aims at creating more conversations within the area of Asian counselling to facilitate further conversation about helpfulness in clients' eyes.

8. It is important to produce a reflexive account of inquiry.

Because obtaining objectivity is regarded as impossible, social constructionists stress that everyone attempts to learn about the world from some perspectives (Burr, 2003). Thus, there will be assumptions formed and acting upon in people's behavior. When approaching the research question, I must acknowledge my assumptions on

which my hypotheses and questions are based. I also needed to “work with [my] own intrinsic involvement in the research process and the part that this plays in the results that are produced” (Burr, 2003, p. 152). In particular, my research question arose from the discrepancy I felt between my personal counselling experience and what I gleaned from the literature on other Asian clients’ experiences. The position from which I view other people’s experience would play an important role in my interpretation. Therefore, throughout the research process, I have kept a reflection journal to monitor my thoughts and experiences to help sustain and transfer knowledge (Callison, 2001; see Appendix A for an example of my journal). I also referred to it as I wrote up this thesis so as to capture my reflexive voice throughout the meaning making process in this research.

9. It is important to recognize the potential power differential between the researcher and the participants.

Embedded in the positivist research paradigm is also the unspoken power differential between the researcher and the researched. As the goal of such research is to find “truths”, researchers’ opinions are automatically granted more power and are seen as being able to provide a more “valid” account of the research topic.

Accordingly, participants’ voices are often underrepresented, or sometimes misrepresented (Burr, 2003). Social constructionists argue that participants are not merely passive recipients of the research conditions. Rather, their voices should be perceived as valid as that of the researcher. Therefore, as a researcher for this study, I needed to be aware of the potential power differential that is inherit in the practice of

traditional research approaches; and pay attention to how I might have influenced the interaction between the participants and myself.

### **3.2 Research Approach**

Approaching my study from the perspectives of social constructionism and constructivism direct my attention to the role of narratives in the process of knowledge inquiry. Narrative (here refers to story being told through conversational exchanges) has been argued as the bridge between social constructionism and constructivism as it provides a common ground for the two philosophical orientations to focus on the relational aspects of meaning making (McNamee, 2004). In order to achieve the research aim, I chose to employ thematic narrative analysis to guide the study. My research focus is to gather and interpret narratives or stories of lived counselling experiences in textual form from East or Southeast Asian clients (Josselson, 2011). As discussed, my aim is to understand these experiences through meaning making, and then theorize about them in a way that makes sense to the counselling profession.

Narrative analysis can be referred to as a family of research methods that have a particular focus on the interpretation of texts in storied form (Riessman, 2008). These texts can be in written, oral, or visual form and are about life experiences that are narrated socially. Narrative researchers collect these texts, which are referred to as stories or narratives, then analyze them for meanings for the purpose of exploring and conceptualizing human experience (Josselson, 2011). Narrative scholars have identified that there are three different types of narrative analysis in general (Bamberg, 2012; Riessman, 2008). In this thesis, I borrowed Riessman's (2008) terms for these narrative analysis types: thematic analysis, structural analysis, and dialogic/performance analysis.

In fact, Riessman had identified a fourth type of narrative analysis, which concerns visually presented data such as pictures and photos. As my research worked with spoken and written discourses, I will limit my discussion to the first three types that deal with words.

Thematic analysis focuses exclusively on the content of stories; that is, the “what” in the stories (Riessman, 2008). Structural analysis, on the other hand, pays closer attention to the linguistic formation of stories; that is, the “how” in the storytelling. Dialogic/performance analysis goes beyond the “how” in structural analysis. It focuses on not only the actual texts collected for research, but also other elements that tap into the interactive nature of how texts are performed and created among speakers. Bamberg (2012) explained that this type of analysis focuses on “storytelling as activity” that includes linguistic means as well as other bodily means. Riessman (2008) argued that thematic analysis is the most common and straightforward method in applied settings. As my research goal is to enhance the understanding of helpful counselling from the perspective of East and Southeast Asian clients (i.e., the “what” in stories), I felt that thematic analysis is most relevant for this study.

### ***3.2.1 Thematic Narrative Analysis***

As mentioned, thematic analysis has an exclusive focus on the content of stories told, which allows researchers to explore what we can learn from what is experienced (Josselson, 2011; Riessman, 2008). This method guides researchers to analyze narratives as cognitive structure in terms of plots, themes, and coherence (Bamberg, 2012). As such, narrative researchers strive to “keep a story ‘intact’ by theorizing from the case rather than from component themes (categories) across cases” (Riessman, 2008, p. 53).

Josselson (2011) also asserted that a distinctive feature of narrative analysis is “its endeavour to explore the whole account” (p. 226), searching for how meaning is created as a whole by the integrated parts. Thus, although each part of a story is important, the whole is considered greater than the sum of its parts.

One implication of keeping a story “intact” is paying special attention to the temporal sequence of the story told (Riessman, 2008). Retaining the sequential order within the unit of analysis allows researchers to be sensitive about developmental changes in the story, and then theorize about them (Mishler, 1996). In narrative research, a story is regarded to have a beginning, middle, and an end (Josselson, 2011). Therefore, in my study, I followed this tradition and attempted to keep all participants’ stories and the resultant story of their experience in a temporal sequence as I analyzed them. Specifically, I put effort in organizing my understanding of helpful counselling in a full story form (Bamberg, 2012; Riessman, 2008). A full story form includes a number of conceptual units related to storytelling (Bamberg, 2012). These include an abstract, an orientation, complications, an evaluation of the situation, a resolution, and a closure. As the reader will see in Chapter Five, I organized the emerged themes into these conceptual units to make a full-formed story. This choice was informed by the narrative feature of paying attention to the sequence of actions.

### 3.2.1.1 Narratives and Meanings

To analyze the collected narratives for meanings, it is first important to clarify what narrative means. Riessman (2008) cautioned researchers not to assume a clear and simple definition of narrative while working with narrative approaches to research. It is because narrative may refer to the stories told by research participants, the interpretative account

of these stories by the researcher, and the constructed understanding of the reader after engaging with the research results. As mentioned in Chapter One, I use the word narrative to reflect stories told by the participants, primarily, in my study. I made this decision because I hoped to provide a clear presentation to the reader and to prevent misunderstanding or misinterpretation. However, it is not my intention to narrow the meanings that narrative may carry throughout my research.

To provide some understanding of the relationship between narrative and meaning making, I borrow Bruner's (1986) concept of cultural psychology or folk psychology. Bruner asserted that meaning making is closely related to culture. Culture is an environment and condition that is created by our ancestors, and we continue to create it throughout our lives (Mattingly, Lutkehaus, & Throop, 2008). It offers interpretive means for us to understand the world. Narrative within a culture is not only a method of communication, but also a mode of thinking that helps to create meanings in the world. Therefore, it is a tool we use to make sense of the world and our experiences. As we continue to interact with the world and others, meaning making is an ongoing process. As such, a story told is not just a story of an experience, but also a story of our cultural world. From this perspective, the participants' stories are their stories about their learning of counselling and what counselling means to them in this particular research setting. For me, as the researcher, these stories can enhance therapists' understanding of what is considered as helpfulness and that can help us create favourable environments for our future East or Southeast Asian clients.

### **3.3 The Issue of Trustworthiness**

Validity is an issue that all social science researchers, including those who employ a traditional positivist paradigm and those who employ a postmodernist paradigm, need to address. Traditionally, validity is believed to be a demonstration of the truthfulness of an event presented in numeric data and statistical analysis (Polkinghorne, 2007).

According to this definition, it is almost impossible for studies, such as the current one, that attempt to inquire into the meaning to demonstrate validity. However, Polkinghorne (2007) argued that validity is “an argumentative practice” that researchers attempt to convince the reader that “a knowledge claim is justified” (p. 476). Since the nature of knowledge claimed by traditional social scientists is different from those claimed by postmodern researchers, including narrative researchers, Polkinghorne argued that narrative researchers should create and employ different approaches to validate their findings.

One important concept, which arose from creating new approaches for validation, is trustworthiness (Polkinghorne, 2007; Riessman, 2008). Instead of searching for historical truth, narrative researchers strive to understanding meaningful life events and human experiences. Experience does not always reflect what has actually happened. Rather, it is subject to a person’s previous knowledge and understanding about the event. Thus, searching for historical truth is not the aim of narrative research. As such, validating whether the collected narrative is a true account of what happened is not relevant. Instead, how well the assembled text can represent the storyteller’s experience and how the researcher’s interpretation of assembled text is justified through presentation, are the foci of the narrative way to validation (Polkinghorne, 2007). In other words, validation of

a narrative work concerns the trustworthiness of the project in terms of how well it represents the meaning of the investigated events.

Riessman (2008) stated that narrative researchers seek “situated truths” instead of historical truths. It means that the narratives collected from storytellers are “truths” that are placed within a certain context. Narrative researchers can demonstrate validity by providing the context in which the claims about these “truths” are made (Polkinghorne, 2007). The context serves as evidence to which the readers can refer when making an informed judgement of the trustworthiness of the claims. In this study, I situate myself within the discussion about helpful counselling for Asian clients in a Western culture. I approached this topic by interviewing East and Southeast Asian clients who had counselling experience in Canada. This approach is informed by worldviews of social constructionism and constructivism. I conducted the study using narrative methods to research. In particular, I employed thematic narrative analysis to interpret the narratives I collected from the participants.

### ***3.3.1 Trustworthiness of the Assembled Texts***

To demonstrate trustworthiness of the collected narratives of my study, I attempted to address the following issues: (a) experienced meaning is more complex than language can capture, (b) not all meaning a person has about a situation is available in awareness for this person to articulate, (c) a participant may refuse to reveal their feelings and understandings to a stranger, and (d) the collected narratives are products of co-construction between participants and researcher (Polkinghorne, 2007). To address these issues, I needed to, first, become aware that these conditions might affect the interaction between the participants and me. For example, I am aware that my role of being a female

counselling psychology graduate student might have implied to the participants that I am a caring person who is knowledgeable about counselling.

During the interview, I adopted a “not-knowing” stance (Dean, 2001) which allowed me to listen carefully to the participants’ stories and ask questions to clarify any unclear expressions or meanings. I also attempted to provide a warm and trusting environment for the participant to self-disclose. In addition, I asked questions that helped the participants to reflect on their experience so that their experienced meaning could become more available in their awareness to be articulated. Because some of the participants felt more comfortable to speak one language or the other, I had the advantage of offering the option of speaking the languages that I know, including English, Cantonese, Mandarin, or a combination of two of these languages. My aim was that the participants could provide a spoken account that is closer to what they experienced with a language tool that they are familiar.

According to Polkinghorne (2007), there are other actions I could take to ensure the trustworthiness of the collected narratives after the interview. For example, I have provided a copy of the transcripts to each of the participants for verification. I have also returned to some participants for clarification or further exploration when there was unclear expression in the interview recordings.

### ***3.3.2 Trustworthiness of the Interpretation***

In narrative research, trustworthiness of the researcher’s interpretative account of the collected stories can be demonstrated by the rich details and meaningfulness revealed from the stories (Polkinghorne, 2007). The goal of narrative interpretation is to deepen the reader’s understanding of the meaning in the stories. Emerged themes are usually

intertwined because they are interrelated as a whole, but separate enough to be discussed for deeper meaning (Josselson, 2011). Therefore, one way to validate the interpretation is look at whether or not it creates valuable meanings.

To help the reader to trace and retrace my steps of making arguments in later sections, I have so far presented my position as a researcher, and how I situate my study as clearly as I can (Polkinghorne, 2007). I also recognized the importance of being transparent about my assumptions based on my experiences personally and academically. In addition to the research paradigm and approach I have discussed above, I will now outline some assumptions that have come to my awareness as I conducted this study.

### 3.3.2.1 My Personal Assumptions and Biases

1. I believe that all humans are intrinsically good.
2. I consider myself as an interdependent self and adhere to many collectivist values as I see relationships more important than any other kind of individual success.
3. My experience of personal counselling led me to think that counselling is helpful in general.
4. My knowledge about counselling led me to believe that counselling is one sufficient way to help people who are going through difficult situations.
5. As an immigrant myself, I might have similar or different experiences to the participants I interviewed.
6. My ability to speak two Chinese languages might have biased me to think that I understand some of the Chinese-speaking participants better than other interviewers.

7. As noted previously, my interest in researching Asian clients' experience of counselling arose from my personal experience. Prior to conducting the current study, I engaged in an autoethnographic research about my own counselling experience (S. L. K. Lo, 2011). In this study, I found that a clear definition of the client and the counsellor role was important in the early stage of therapy. Counsellor's directive feedback was important also in the early stage, but my expectation for counselling shifted as the counselling proceeded. My learning from this research activity might have also influenced how I arrived at the current results.

### **3.4 Method of Data Collection**

In the current study, I define narrative as stories of counselling experiences by East or Southeast Asian clients. This also served as the data for analysis. I collected narratives about counselling using two methods. One was a semi-structured interview and the other one was reflective journal writing. These methods helped create narratives in both verbal and written form. The participants were firstly invited to an interview at which I asked them questions about their stories of counselling experiences. The questions were designed in a way that helps elicit the sequential order of the counselling experiences (see Appendix B). I then provided the participants with the same set of questions to bring home (see Appendix C) and encouraged them to reflect on the interview and write down narratives that would enrich their told stories.

Using semi-structured interview allowed me to prepare questions, which then served as a guide to ensure that the interviews covered a similar ground in terms of information collected from each participant (Turner, 2010). At the same time, it gave me

the flexibility to follow up with details that each participant might offer. Having predetermined questions implies that I, as the researcher, was likely to have more control over the interview, and thus might have restricted the participants from telling their stories in certain ways. I was aware that I could have used a more open-ended single question, such as “tell me your counselling experience,” to start my interviews. However, my assumption was that it might not have been easy for East or Southeast Asian clients to volunteer to participate in a study such as this one. It could be even harder for them to talk about their counselling stories without guidelines. Therefore, I chose to employ semi-structured interview and be sensitive and flexible about sharing power with the participants in the research setting (Riessman, 2008). For example, I supported them to go in the direction they wanted when questions were posed.

The reason for choosing an interview and a take-home written reflection as the methods of data collection is that they provide a good balance for the type of data collected. On one hand, a semi-structured interview can prevent putting pressure on participants who do not want to develop lengthy accounts of experiences with a stranger (Riessman, 2008). On the other hand, written reflection invites an extended account in a perhaps more comfortable setting (Riessman, 2008).

### **3.5 Procedure for Data collection**

Upon receiving ethics approval from the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board at the University of Calgary, I recruited participants using a number of methods. These included posting recruitment posters (Appendix D) around the university campus, counselling centres, and cultural community centres; and sending email invitations through a university listserv and to individual counsellors working with clients who

might be interested in participating. My recruitment materials contained information about the purpose of the study and requirements for volunteer participants. As I speak fluent English, Cantonese, and some Mandarin, I also indicated that interviews could be conducted in any of these languages.

Interested parties were invited to contact me via email or phone call. We then scheduled a time for an interview. I met most of the participants in a private room on the University of Calgary campus. Two of the interviews took place at a quiet corner of a public place such as a library. I met one of the participants at his home. In the beginning of each interview, I started with a detailed description of my project and informed the participants about what they would be asked to do; using a script I had prepared (Appendix E). Then, I explained the consent form (Appendix F) and asked each participant to take time to read and sign the consent if he or she agreed to participate. I also gave the opportunity to the participants to choose their own pseudonyms. Once they signed the consent forms, I turned on my audio recorder and began the semi-structured interview.

Before an interview ended, I provided the participants an opportunity to provide me with any information or stories that we had not discussed and they would like me to know. Upon turning off the audio recorder, I explained to the participants what I would like them to do with the reflective journal. I asked that they would return the journal to me within two weeks after the interview, via email, mail, or in person.

After meeting with the participants, I transcribed the audio-recorded interview verbatim in the language in which the interview was conducted. During transcription, I started an initial analysis by jotting down some thoughts or questions that I wanted to

explore further and highlighting some segments. The transcripts were given to each of the participants respectively for any clarification of meaning, changes if they required, and other comments. I asked that they return their feedback within two weeks. Upon receiving the returned transcripts, I attached the journal entries to their corresponding transcripts for further analysis.

### **3.6 Procedures for Data Analysis**

In narrative research, transcription is seen as highly interpretive (Riessman, 2008). Therefore, I considered that my analytical work started when I transcribed the audio recordings of the interviews. It was important that I did the transcription myself because transcription can lead to significant changes in how I understand what was said (Mishler, 1986). It also encouraged me to listen to the recordings repeatedly to make sure that my transcripts were as accurate as possible. Although Mishler (1986) has demonstrated that revisions of transcripts, even years later, would make changes in the meaning of the stories told, the findings presented in this thesis are my most current understanding of the narratives at the time of writing.

The first round of transcription involved transcribing all interviews verbatim and listening carefully to the conversations between the participants and myself. I also made notes on the side of the transcripts of any thoughts that I had that might contribute to a further understanding of the narratives. During this round of transcription, I already noticed some recurring themes in each transcript. Therefore, I colour coded phrases, clauses, sentences, or paragraphs that seemed to denote similar meanings. The initial groupings are shown in Table 3-1.

I then sent each of the participants their corresponding transcripts for content verification, addition, or deletion. I also invited the participants to read some initial analyses and give me feedback. All of the participants except for one were able to return the transcripts with their feedback within two weeks. I followed up with the one participant who did not return his transcript and received his consent to continue my work with the transcript in its original format.

Table 3-1

My Initial Groupings of Themes

| Colour Code | Possible Themes                           |
|-------------|---|
| Yellow      | Counsellor qualities                      |
| Pink        | Client-counsellor connection/relationship |
| Green       | Reason for going to counselling           |
| Light blue  | Asian clients characteristics             |
| Red         | Meaning of counselling                    |
| Purple      | What was helpful                          |
| Dark blue   | Client self-agency                        |

Upon receiving the returned transcripts, I read them each carefully, periodically listened to the recordings as I followed the transcripts, to see what changes the participants made. I also cleaned up each transcript by deleting some utterances and repeated words or phrases that did not add more meanings to the narratives (for an example of this process see Appendix G).

Two of the participants provided reflective journals, which I transferred to their corresponding transcripts for further analysis. As I went through them, I closely looked for passages that I might have missed based on the thematic groupings I developed during the first round of analysis.

In the next phase of analysis, I created a new document for each of these groupings and collected extracts from the transcripts that I highlighted for each group. In order to

keep the stories intact without possibly fracturing them (Riessman, 2008), I carefully organized the extracts so that they follow the chronological sequence of the original transcripts. As discussed, I carefully organized my semi-structured interview questions to help elicit stories in the actual order of occurrence (see Appendix B). Staying close to the chronological sequence of the transcripts helped me to stay close to the order of event as they happened for the participants.

Next, I read each of these new documents and started putting together extracts that appeared to have similar meanings. This round of grouping slowly evolved into overarching themes and sub-themes as I compared each participant's narratives. It is noteworthy that thematic narrative analysis is a case centred method to research (Mishler, 1996; Riessman, 2008). Cases can represent individuals, groups, communities, organizations, or even nations. I aimed at creating a meaningful discussion based on the stories collected from the participants as a group of East and Southeast Asian clients, to facilitate further understanding of effective Asian counselling. In order to do so, on the one hand, I perceived the participants as individual cases with different counselling experiences. Therefore, I treated each participant's story as a unique story of counselling experience. These unique experiences will be presented in Chapter Four. On the other hand, I also saw them come together as one case of Asian clients in presenting my ideas of what contributes to successful counselling for Asian clients. As a result, I focused on themes that are common in most or all of the participants' stories, focusing mainly on the experiences that seem to be more prominent across all stories.

Consequently, I arranged the emerged themes into a temporal ordered sequence that was common to all of the participants. Here I adopted Mishler' s (1996) method of

arranging “episodes in their real-time chronological order” (p. 86) to reflect the importance of attending to the sequence of life events. As Riessman (2008) points out, one of the characteristics of narrative inquiry, that is different from other qualitative research methods, is the ability of the researcher to pay attention to “particulars,” which include the sequence of actions. The resultant story will be presented in Chapter Five.

### ***3.6.1 Translation***

Since I did some interviews in English and others in Cantonese or Mandarin, I need to be transparent to the reader about the issues related to translation. As mentioned, I transcribed each interview in the language in which it was conducted. I continued to work with these transcripts in their original language during the analysis phase. Some segments of the Chinese transcripts were translated into English for the purpose of discussion with my supervisor who is English speaking. In other words, translation did not happen until I discussed the emergent results with my supervisor. The translated version of these segments was attached to the original transcript or with the segments in their original language for easy reference. Some of these translated segments became samplers in the results chapters.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

As mentioned, this study was approved by the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board at the University of Calgary. In addition, I recognized that my role as a researcher might have co-created an intimate relationship with the participants by doing the interviews together (Josselson, 2011). As I was aware that it is important to remain in my professionally responsible role in the scholarly community, I was careful to maintain the boundary between the participants and myself. I was also transparent with the

participants about the potential harmful effects of the interview. For example, I cautioned that a participant may become upset talking about his or her experience. As the researcher, I needed to be prepared for situations to come up (Josselson, 2011). In particular, I discussed the potential harm with the participants and provided them with a list of community and counselling resources available in their area of living (see Appendix H). They were encouraged to seek appropriate services if needed. No participants indicated any distress during or after the interviews. Rather, three participants indicated that they were interested in the list of resources for other reasons, such as curiosity about such kind of service available.

### **3.8 Chapter Summary**

Based on the worldviews of social constructionism and constructivism, I approached this study using a narrative framework for inquiry. In particular, I followed Riessman's (2008) description of thematic analysis to elicit stories from East and Southeast Asians who had previous counselling experience so as to enrich our understanding of helpful counselling from clients' perspectives. Informed by the postmodern ideas penetrated in the chosen research paradigm and research approach, I recognized that I needed to utilize an informed strategy to address the trustworthiness of the research process. In this chapter, I have described the detailed procedures I have taken to collect the stories and how I have analyzed them. I have also outlined my assumptions and biases coming to this study for the reader to judge the trustworthiness of my results and knowledge claimed. In the next three chapters, I will proceed on to outline and discuss the findings of my study.

## **Chapter Four: Result Part I - The Storytellers and Their Stories**

Through the review of the literature on counselling effectiveness for people of Asian descent, I started to question what some of these counselling experiences are like for East and Southeast Asian clients in Canada. As an East Asian myself, I reflected on my own experience of counselling and found that how counselling was helpful for me was different from what is described in the current literature. As my curiosity grew stronger, I decided to find some answers to my question by conducting the current research study.

In Chapter Two, I reviewed the current literature on how scholars have conceptualized and understood helpful counselling for people of Asian descent, particularly within the North American and the European context. I also posted my questions and critique about how much prior research actually represents Asian clients' experience. In Chapter Three, I outlined the design of my study, which is based on the worldviews of social constructionism and constructivism, and through the approach of thematic narrative analysis. In addition, I provided a detailed account of how I proceeded to collect and analyse the stories co-constructed between the participants and myself. Starting from this chapter, I will present and discuss my results, based on learning from the stories I collected from the East and Southeast Asian participants in my study.

From this chapter on, I refer to my research participants as *storytellers* since they helped me understand and learn about the lived stories of their counselling experience during the interviews. Although I recognize that I, as a researcher and an interviewer, co-constructed the stories of their counselling experiences in order to meet the purpose of my study , the focus of my analysis is on “what is said” rather than “how it is said”

(Riessman, 2008). Thus, I consider ownership of the stories as belonging mostly to my research participants, as they are the narrators of their stories.

Nine East and Southeast Asian individuals volunteered to participate in my study. During one of the interviews, I found that the storyteller did not have counselling experience herself, but was interested in participating in my study because she was a psychology student at a university. I explained to her that the aim of my study was to collect stories of lived counselling experiences and therefore excluded this interview from the study. The interviews from the remaining eight storytellers were included in my data analysis. It is noted that although I intended to capture stories of counselling experiences with professionals such as psychologists, I was unable to verify the backgrounds and qualifications of the storytellers' counsellors. It was because the storytellers were not able to provide this piece of information due to lack of knowledge or that they did not remember. In the following, I will describe each of the counsellors as described by the storytellers to the best of my knowledge to aid the reader's understanding of the quality of these counselling encounters.

Two of eight storytellers returned a journal entry to supplement their interviews. All others advised me that the interview was sufficient. Some storytellers added new comments and clarifications when they reviewed their transcripts. No storytellers deleted anything that was on the transcripts. Before jumping into the results of my data analysis, in this chapter, I will introduce each storyteller to the reader. In each of the following sections, I will provide background information and a story plot of the eight storytellers' lived experiences of counselling. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I treated these experiences as unique story of each storyteller. Following these unique stories, I will

present the emerged themes that are common to most or all storytellers and the resultant story in Chapter Five.

#### **4.1 Elizabeth**

Elizabeth was the first person to respond to my recruitment posting. At the time of the interview, she was 37 years old. When I asked her about her ethnic identity, she identified herself as Vietnamese. We then had an interesting conversation regarding place of origin. She told me that when people ask her where she is from, she has different answers depending on what context she is in. Elizabeth explained that she was born in Vietnam, and came to Canada when she was five years old. She stated, “If I am outside of Canada, I would say Canadian. If I am inside of Canada, I am Vietnamese.” She explained that when she is outside of Canada, she assumes that people want to know where she comes from in terms of where she grew up. Thus, she would say she is from Canada. When she is in Canada, she would then assume that people would know she is a Canadian. By asking where she is from, she thinks that people want to know her ethnic origin. Therefore, she would say Vietnamese.

During the interview, Elizabeth disclosed that she only had one counselling experience, but two attempts of seeking professional help. The first attempt, which successfully led to her only counselling experience, was about 10 years ago. She said that she had not thought of counselling at that time. Elizabeth stated that she had gone through a difficult breakup and her manager at work saw she was still angry and bitter even months after the breakup. Her manager suggested she seek counselling through the Employee Assistance Program.

Elizabeth stated that her psychologist was a Caucasian male, about 50 some years old. She told him about the breakup and stated that she would like to “get rid of the anger.” Although after five to six sessions, when the counsellor told Elizabeth that she had improved and thus no longer needed therapy, Elizabeth did not think it was as helpful as she had hoped. She said that the therapist asked her to keep a journal about her feelings and thoughts. However, she could not make a connection between keeping a journal and getting rid of her anger. She commented that the journal was “a good exercise” but “unnecessary homework” for her. She clarified that she did feel better afterwards, but she attributed that more to other factors, such as the readings about relationships she did after the counselling, talking to people about relationships, going to church, and having more life experiences in general. She stated that her therapist might have been the “initial catalyst” who helped her realize that she wanted to explore different perspectives.

Elizabeth seemed hesitant to regard her counselling experience as helpful and began to tear up when she talked about her experience, “...I personally don’t think [the counselling] was helpful... As you could see it still affects me.”

Elizabeth also mentioned a second attempt at seeking counselling, about 5 years after her first experience, for issues related to child abuse that happened at a school in which she used to work. She explained that it has had a profound impact on her, despite not personally witnessing any of the incidents. As the school board asked everyone to “hush it up,” she had no channel to voice her concerns or discuss how the events affected her. Though Elizabeth initiated a call to a psychologist within the school board to seek help, the psychologist did not return her call. Elizabeth commented that it has been so long that she did not see the point of seeking counselling anymore. Her final comment

about her experience with counselling was that it could be helpful “when it is immediate,” but “... will I do counselling again? I don’t know.”

#### **4.2 David**

David identified himself as a 21-year-old Chinese landed immigrant in Canada. When he was seventeen, he was an international student in the United States where he had his counselling experience. David described how he experienced cultural conflict with his English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) teacher, who then involved a school counsellor to help resolve the issue. Therefore, David said going to counselling was not a voluntary action, although he also said that he was not forced to go either.

David told me that he was learning English in a level 2 ESL class at that time. However, he felt that his language skills were more advanced than the skills required for the level 2 class. Thus, upon finishing his in-class assignments, he would do his own thing, such as reading English newspapers. His ESL teacher saw it as oppositional behaviour and wondered if David was developmentally suitable for a regular class. Therefore, the teacher invited a school counsellor to discuss the issue. The school counsellor showed that David was developmentally fit for a regular class. David was able to remain in the regular level 2 class, under the condition that he would obey class rules and comply with the teacher’s instructions.

Although the counselling experience was not voluntary, David commented it was, in fact, very positive. He said that his counsellor was a female Chinese counsellor who could speak David’s mother tongue. They only met once about this issue. David stated that counselling was helpful not only because the issue was resolved afterwards, but also because he felt supported by his counsellor. He also described how they developed a

good therapeutic relationship. David specifically pointed out that what he most appreciated about the experience is how his counsellor “did not trust me in the first place. She did her own investigation... (translated)” which then showed that David was trustworthy.

My experience of co-constructing story with David was somewhat different from my experience with other storytellers. As I was sensitive about the power I might exercise as the researcher during the interview (Marshall & Batten, 2004), I actually found that David took a lot of initiative and control in the co-construction of his story. He devoted some of the interview to providing his perspectives on how to become a competent therapist for the Asian population. I had to carefully redirect the conversation to meet my study goal, at the same time not interrupting David’s preference of how he would like to tell me his story. This interview was probably an interview where I referred to my semi-structured questions the least.

David’s conversational agency (Massfeller & Strong, 2012) was also evident in his choice of language throughout the interview. As mentioned in Chapter Three, I invited storytellers to use English, Mandarin, or Cantonese to describe their counselling experience. David speaks Mandarin, yet our interview started with English as all my research materials and questions were prepared in English. After a few conversational exchanges, David initiated using Mandarin in his response to my questions in English. In addition, because my Mandarin is somewhat limited, I sometimes struggled in getting my ideas out in the conversation. David would then invite me to use English for that particular sentence by saying “you can use English.” From this point of view, we jointly decided that our conversation would continue in both English and Mandarin.

### **4.3 Paige**

Paige was 27 years old and had been married for about a year at the time of interview. She had engaged in pre-marital counselling provided by a male pastor with her husband at a local church. The couple met their counsellor for about five sessions before they got married. Paige informed me that her pastor followed a booklet when doing counselling. She described how he used a different topic in each chapter to guide them to talk about things like financial arrangements and relationship with in-laws. Paige said she and her husband were hoping to continue with the pastor in the future to discuss topics that they had not been able to cover before their marriage.

Paige described her counselling experience as very educational, in terms of both concrete learning and self-awareness. She stated that she has learned some new skills and strategies to deal with situations that may come up in her marriage. She appreciated that these were all congruent with her religious beliefs. She also found it particularly helpful to have a “scheduled time” to talk to her husband with someone else being present to facilitate and/or mediate the conversation about things that they did not have time to talk about in their busy daily life. Paige stated that she has learned a lot about herself, her husband, their relationship, some unspoken issues and conflicts, their beliefs, and even things that they had never thought of. She also shared with me that she found counselling as a way in which she can find support and feel safe to talk about issues she might have in the future. She said that she and her husband have built a very good relationship with her pastor and feel that he will be the “go-to person” if they ever have issues.

The decision we made together about what language to use in our conversation is worth noting. Paige informed me that she was originally from Hong Kong and moved to

Canada when she was 12. She is fluent in both English and Cantonese. When I asked if she preferred English or Cantonese, she said she was comfortable with either. As the interview materials I prepared were in English, we continued our conversation in English. Although I invited Paige to speak in Cantonese at any time if she needed to, she seemed very comfortable using English in our conversation. It is interesting how we did not speak a single word in Cantonese although it is our mother tongue.

In summary, Paige indicated that counselling was a very positive experience and she would seek help again if she needs it.

#### **4.4 Grace**

Similar to Elizabeth, Grace identified herself as both Canadian and Asian. More specifically, she is a South Korean who immigrated to Canada 15 years prior to the time I met with her. At the time of interview, she was 36 years old. Her only counselling experience took place about six years ago when she encountered some hardships with her friends and in other relationships. Grace stated that although there are things that she appreciated about counselling, overall it was not a very good experience.

In contrast, Grace never mentioned anything negative when she talked about her experience during our conversation. My gut feeling was telling me that there was something missing while we talked. Although I tried to invite her to talk about what might have been missing by using different questions and varying my tone of voice (Mishler, 1986), I also realized how I needed to respect her choice of what not to disclose. At the end of the conversation, after the audio-recorder was off, I decided to share my gut feeling with her. At that time, she revealed that she was withholding certain information on purpose, as she thought I was only interested in the positive side of things.

She said she did not want to “ruin” my results, as my research topic is around “helpfulness.” I appreciated her thoughtfulness and clarified that sharing negative experiences would be as valuable as positive ones. After the off-the-record conversation, she agreed to provide the information she had in her journal entry.

Upon reflection, I wonder if Grace’s negative experience of counselling started with her negative impression about counselling. She described to me during the interview that counselling was something “not for me”; it was for severely mentally ill people. For her, her decision to seek counselling was an “emergency” situation in which she needed someone to talk to. Grace had three sessions with the same Caucasian male counsellor, who was a student counsellor at a university counselling centre. She particularly appreciated how the counsellor demonstrated exceptional listening skills and how she felt heard. However, she wondered if there could have been more than listening that her counsellor could have done.

Grace explained that she attended three free sessions as a student at that university. She could not afford further sessions; therefore, at the end of the third session, she told her counsellor that she would not be coming back. Grace described the reaction of her counsellor as rude because he “cornered me in front of the door with his arms holding the door closed” and asked her “a long series of questions” about the termination.

Grace put in her journal, “the meaning of counselling changed of course, rather abruptly because he made me feel so heard and understood but at the very end, he made me feel like it was wrong of me to come to him in the first place.” This was the only counselling experience she had. However, Grace seems to have a different perception of

counselling now as she continues to learn about counselling from school and other people.

#### **4.5 Victor**

My experience with Victor began with a rather extensive explanation about my research. It is worth noting this because I think this experience gave me insight into how important it is to help protect research participants' vulnerability in participating in any kind of human research, which I will discuss in Chapter Six. Here, I focus more on the description of what happened.

At the outset of the interview, when I reviewed consent with Victor, I had to offer further clarification about the nature of the interview and the focus of my study. Throughout the interview, I had to continue redirecting the focus away from issues that led him to counselling and towards his actual experience of counselling itself. It seems that Victor might have misunderstood the purpose of my visit at the beginning, as he tended to offer me his story of the issues he had difficulty with, rather than the story of his counselling experience. I carefully monitored the interview so that the purpose of the interview was clear at all times.

Victor was 55 years old at the time of the interview and identified himself as a Chinese-Vietnamese. He came to Canada as a refugee 35 years ago and has lived here ever since. According to Victor, his English is very limited. Since he speaks fluent Cantonese, I carried out the interview mainly in Cantonese, with some English vocabularies from time to time. Regarding his counselling experience, Victor told me that he had a total of three counselling experiences; two for couples counselling and one for individual counselling. The individual counselling, that finished three months prior to our

interview, lasted for about one and a half years over twelve sessions. In our interview, we talked about all three of his counselling experiences with a main focus on his individual counselling experience as he considered that most helpful.

According to Victor, he went for counselling because he has been struggling with depression. He was going through a complicated divorce, so he went for couples counselling with his wife at first to try to resolve their issues. However, he stated that it was not helpful and he stopped going after one session. He mentioned that his wife suggested going to couples counselling again with another therapist, but it did not work out either. Victor explained that because the second therapist was in contact with his wife first, he did not feel that the therapist was taking a neutral stance. After a long period of struggling, he went to a third counsellor by himself hoping to regain his mental health.

Victor described his third counselling experience as “mental health food (translated).” He specifically pointed out that this experience was helpful, not because the counsellor helped him to resolve his family conflict, but because someone was there to listen to him, give him a clearer picture of what was happening, help him understand himself and the problem situation, and assist him in choosing the right action. However, when I asked him in what way the counselling was helpful and useful to him, he said, “...it’s between me and my wife. A third person cannot help much. But at least I can talk to him, someone who understands me (translated).” Towards the end of the interview, Victor also stated, “... to change or not... it’s me. He just listened (translated).”

#### **4.6 Lucy**

Lucy identified herself as Japanese. She moved to Canada when she was 10 years old. At the time of interview, she was 28. Lucy’s counselling experience was limited to

one session of couples counselling. Her boyfriend invited her to counselling after she found out that he cheated on her. She was 18 years old at that time and had very little knowledge about counselling. She stated that her anger about the cheating had become problematic to their relationship. Thus, her boyfriend suggested going to counselling together.

Lucy stated that the counsellor was a Caucasian male who was her boyfriend's family counsellor. She said that she was surprised to find out that her boyfriend had been seeing this counsellor for family issues for a period of time. Lucy described that her boyfriend was secretive about it.

Lucy stated that she was very skeptical about seeing a counsellor. She said, "...it's for somebody that is sick, or has a major problem... very ill... I didn't think it was necessary for me." She did not find the counselling helpful at the end mainly because she did not feel that she had "someone on my side." She felt that the counsellor was "on it" with her boyfriend's narrative about how to get rid of her anger, as if the problem was created by her. Although she appreciated the counsellor for other things, she still felt that it was not necessary for her to go. Thus, she refused to continue after one session.

During the interview, Lucy repeatedly pointed out that she did not think it would be necessary for her to go to counselling, in the past, in the present, or in the future. I became curious because it seemed to me that there was a strong negative impression of counselling. Thus, I inquired about her understanding of pre-marital counselling. She indicated that she had never heard of it and thus had no idea what it was. Upon my description of pre-marital counselling, Lucy became very engaged and seemed very interested in what I was telling her. Towards the end, she said, "I would be very

interested in that. That sounds more appealing to me... I think I am going to Google it and see."

#### **4.7 Judy**

Judy had the most experience of counselling, in terms of variation of counselling and number of occasions, compared to all other storytellers in my study. She was 27 years old at the time of interview. Her first counselling experience started in 2008 with an Asian female pastor at a church. The subsequent experiences happened in 2010 and 2011, in which she had worked with a psychotherapist, a psychiatrist, and a psychologist. She considered the first counselling experience working with the pastor as the most helpful. While she attended counselling mostly on an individual basis, there was once when she invited her partner for a session of couples counselling.

Judy identified herself as a Chinese who has lived in Canada for 11 years. She knew that I spoke fluent Cantonese, which is also her native language. Therefore, without any specific discussion, we started our conversation using Cantonese, which became the main language used throughout our interview, supplemented by some English vocabularies from time to time.

Perhaps due to her rich experience, Judy seemed to have a very clear idea of what counselling meant and what she hoped to accomplish by attending counselling. During the interview, I felt that I was able to go deeper with each question I asked and Judy was able to give me clear elaboration of her thoughts. She also seemed to be very clear about my research purpose, thus we were able to focus on the story of her counselling experience.

One thing that stood out for me in the interview with Judy was her sense of self-agency, which is one of the themes I will discuss more in the next chapter. She told me very specifically that she was the one who initiated the help-seeking process, whereas most of my other storytellers described their role in the process as rather passive. Throughout our conversation, Judy referred to how she has and will continue to take responsibility for counselling to be helpful for her. For example, she described counselling as having a deep learning curve to self-awareness. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.), *learn* means “to gain knowledge or understanding of or skill in by study” or “to acquire knowledge or skill or behavioral tendency.” By using the word *learn* in the description of counselling, Judy seemed to imply that there is an active component in the process of acquiring self-awareness, a process which Judy saw as very important in counselling. She also mentioned that she has decided to “take a break (translated)” from the intensive counselling she just had in order to allow space for herself to think about what she has gained and what else she still needs from counselling. She said, “...I think client needs some time to oneself and think. Cannot continue non-stop. I don’t think that’s good... or become... a situation of dependence... may lost oneself, I think. So having a quiet time, down time is needed (translated).”

Another thing that I experienced in the interview with Judy, which stems from her ability to clearly elaborate her understanding of counselling, is that there seemed to be a subtle shift in what counselling meant to her as a function of her rich experience. When I asked Judy what counselling meant to her before any experience, she said, “To help a client to find answers... to problems (translated).” Later on when we came back to the same question, but referring to after her counselling experience, she said, “It’s not really

to help you find answers or solutions... [It is to] help you understand yourself, help you understand your problems (translated)."

#### **4.8 Odele**

Odele identified herself as a Chinese, who speaks fluent Cantonese and English. When we first met, she greeted me in English. I opened up the option of speaking Cantonese by asking her preference of language at the beginning of our meeting. She appreciated that and said she preferred to do it in both, as she felt more comfortable with English sometimes and Cantonese other times. Therefore, we agreed to do that in our interview.

Odele was 28 at the time of interview. She told me that she moved to Canada when she was about 11 years old and has lived here ever since. Her first and only counselling experience was about three years prior to the interview. She stated she sought counselling related to couples issues, which then turned into pre-marital counselling. She said that before she came to Canada, she did not know what counselling was because there was no such thing in the Chinese city she came from. She stated in confidence that the last generation (referring to the generation of her mom and dad) would refuse counselling and see it as something very negative. Although she said she was more open, she explained that if it had not been for pre-marital counselling, she would not have known what counselling was, other than something about problem-solving.

Odele's story is in fact another story of shift in the meaning of counselling. In response to my question about her initial impression of counselling, Odele initiated a conversation of how the meaning of counselling has changed for her. She said, "It was like when you have some problems that you can't solve, then you go see a person who

can help you to solve. But after I went... for me... I think, counsellors are not there to help you solve problems. [They] are to help you be aware of the problems (translated)." This stood out for me because it seemed to me that Odele's new understanding of counselling, or this shift in the meaning of counselling, was quite significant in her experience. As our conversation continued, the theme of "it's not problem-solving, it's self-awareness" continued to move through the interview. Later in the conversation, it became apparent that self-awareness has become an important factor in what constitutes helpful counselling to Odele.

What stood out for me in this conversation is Odele's description of "preparation" before going into counselling. We spent quite some time on this topic because she repeatedly came back to it as we talked. She explained that preparation means being mentally prepared for any questions, from the counsellor that may be asked of her. When I asked her how she would think the counsellor was able to help her in the process, she said, "... my mentality going in [was] whatever she asks me, I won't lie about it, 100% honest. I think that's the only way she could help me (translated)." It struck me as it was such a powerful message to hear during the interview. I still remember thinking that it was the first time I have ever heard someone describe helpful counselling in such a way.

#### **4.9 Chapter Summary**

The aim of this chapter was to introduce to the reader the eight storytellers, who have helped me in co-constructing narratives of helpful counselling, and their unique stories. Elizabeth, David, Paige, Grace, Victor, Lucy, Judy, and Odele are all foreign-born Canadians of East or Southeast Asian descent. Their counselling experiences vary in terms of number of occasions and types of counselling. They also had unique views of

how counselling was helpful or not helpful. Some experiences seem similar to each other; some seem very different. There are, however, some common threads shared by most or all of the storytellers. In the following chapter, I will provide a detailed account of my analysis of these threads.

## **Chapter Five: Results Part II – The Emerged Themes and a Possible Collective Story**

Narrative research focuses on how meaning is made through storytelling and the understanding of these narratives (Riessman, 2008). In my study, I chose to use thematic analysis to focus on the content of the stories co-constructed between myself and the storytellers about their experiences of counselling. In Chapter Three, I outlined the procedures of my data analysis. In Chapter Four, I introduced the eight storytellers and their unique stories. In this chapter, I will provide an interpretive account of these narratives (Riessman, 2008), focusing on the prominent themes across all storytellers. Through the understanding of these stories, my hope is to be able to enrich and transform these experiences in a meaningful way for researchers, practitioners, and others who may be interested in this topic (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

In the current thematic narrative analysis, I did not plan to focus on how the stories were told (e.g. at what point of the interview, how the storytellers organized their stories in the way they did; hence, the telling), but what was told (i.e. the content of the story; hence the told; Riessman, 2008). Thus, I focused on putting the themes together to make the story congruent with the temporal sequence of the told instead of the telling. I will present the results of my final analysis in the following sections in an order aimed to create what I call “a collective story of East and Southeast Asian clients’ experience of counselling,” striving to use the language that the storytellers used in their narratives. I invite the reader to read my analysis as if it is a full story. As previously discussed, a full unit of story includes an optional abstract, an orientation, a complication, an evaluation of the situation, a resolution, and finally a coda or a closure that marks the end of the story

(Bamberg, 2012; Riessman, 2008). In the following sections, I will begin with an orientation and a complication, introducing the storytellers' perception of counselling and their understanding of the profession; followed by an evaluation they made to understand the counselling experience; an identified resolution they attempted to use; and the closure, which contains their resultant conclusion about the counselling experience. The purpose of doing so is to create an easily understandable story that will guide the reader through the process of how I came to my understanding of how counselling can be helpful for East and Southeast Asian clients. I will present the story with excerpts extracted from my interviews with the storytellers (see Appendix I for transcription notations).

## **5.1 Orientation and Complication**

### ***5.1.1 Perception of Counselling***

Although most of the storytellers had some understanding of what counselling was before going into it, one said she did not know what it was. A common impression among the storytellers was that counselling is problem-oriented and that it is a private matter.

#### **5.1.1.1 Counselling is Problem-oriented**

When I asked the storytellers what they knew about counselling and what counselling meant to them prior to their experience, seven of them engaged in a conversation about a problem, which I call *problem talk*. Following is an extract of my conversation with Elizabeth about what her impression of counselling was. Here she introduced the idea of “something not [being] right” about her (line 14 to 15) and of counselling being about problem-fixing (line 21).

Excerpt 5-1: Example of problem talk

1 S: ... So what did you know about counselling before your first  
2 experience? Like what was your impression, what counselling  
3 meant to you, or even if you knew what counselling was?  
4 E: I just thought that it would help me deal with emotions and  
5 feelings. I know that it would be someone I could talk to. So that  
6 was my impression. That's what I thought.  
7 S: Like before the counselling?  
8 E: Yes, because for someone to say that I needed counselling  
9 [laugh] you know... because he just said that I seem really angry  
10 and then I probably need a professional to help me deal with that.  
11 So that's why I decided seek that.  
12 S: So what was the experience for you to hear that? Someone just  
13 say to you that "oh, you need" [...]  
14 E: Counselling? I think it was an indication to me that there is  
15 something not right about my reaction to what had happened. I  
16 think it is just raw emotions that, like I said, things just [p] I don't  
17 know if you've ever feel, if you can ever really get over a  
18 situation. So, that's funny.  
19 S: So counselling at that time meant to you someone to talk to,  
20 someone professional that can [...]  
21 E: To fix my problem.  
22 S: To fix your problem.  
23 E: Yea

Towards the end of this excerpt (line 21), Elizabeth stated explicitly that she was expecting the therapist to "fix my problem." It was very clear that Elizabeth considered counselling was to solve problems. I also noticed in this excerpt how Elizabeth repeatedly used the term "deal with" (line 4 and 10) to indicate what she expected to happen in counselling. It seemed that she saw something problematic in her life, and she needed to do something about it. Elizabeth was encouraged by her manager to seek counselling, as the manager noticed "something not right" about her. In our conversation, she repeatedly stated that her goal was to "get rid of the anger." At the end, she did not find this counselling experience helpful. In retrospect, there were, perhaps, already some hints as

to why the counselling was not helpful. It was probably because the therapist did not “fix” her “anger problem” (line 14 to 18).

This notion of counselling as problem-solving was also found in other storytellers’ experiences. They used terms like “quick fix” and “get over” to describe how they expected counselling to be helpful. I, however, named this theme *problem-oriented* instead of *problem-solving* because I wanted to capture the broader meaning conveyed by multiple storytellers. In the following translated extract, Judy talked about counselling as related to a problem, but it is not solely about problem-solving.

Excerpt 5-2: Counselling is not solely problem-solving (partially translated)

- 1 S: Before going to counselling, what was your understanding about
- 2 it? What did it mean to you?
- 3 J: It is to help a patient or a client to find answers.
- 4 S: Find answers. What kind of answers?
- 5 J: Answers to a problem.
- 6 S: Is it a kind of problem-solving? Or just understanding?
- 7 J: Understanding.
- 8 S: Understanding.
- 9 J: Not necessarily to solve a problem.

As the word *problem* is usually attached with negative connotation, counselling also meant something very negative to some of the storytellers. Three of them went so far as to describe a problem as a severe mental illness. Thus, counselling was for severely ill people only, “not for me.” They had never heard of anyone that they knew who had used counselling. It was almost a shock to them that they “needed” to go. Following is my conversation with Lucy about what counselling meant to her.

Excerpt 5-3: Counselling was not for me

- 1 L: I think it provided a place for those to open up and speak. But it’s
- 2 not about small problems like I had, like more major problems,
- 3 like year of depress, you wanna kill yourself. So you have to talk
- 4 to somebody about it, something like that. But not the kind of

5 problems that I had, such as relationship problems. I thought it was  
6 more a life or death situation would be more appropriate for  
7 counselling. That's the impression that I had. So I was really  
8 surprised when I was asked to go. I was like [laugh] you know,  
9 what is wrong with me?

To others, however, the idea of going to counselling was not as negative. Instead, it was something that was worth a try. They had heard something about it through church, school, friends, or even family members. In the following excerpt, Odele explained what she expected from counselling.

Excerpt 5-4: Counselling was worth a try (partially translated)

1 O: I think my expectation was to first know how to {deal with the  
2 problem}. So the expectation was low. I didn't expect anything to  
3 change dramatically after counselling. I was gonna try it out. I just  
4 thought that the counsellor might be able to help.

It appears to me that the storytellers had various levels of understanding about counselling before their own firsthand experience with it. Some of them had learned about it through church or school. Others had no exposure to it whatsoever. Although all of them spoke of counselling as something related to problems or problem-solving, the degree to which they felt it was positive or negative varied depending on their life experience. Irrespective of how it was perceived, the stories of counselling experience started with a problem.

#### 5.1.1.2 The Nature of Help-seeking is Private, Hence Counselling is Private

Having a “problem” defined, the next thing is the matter of where and how to seek help. The storytellers told me that it was not easy to decide to go to counselling. In fact, four of them did not see themselves as having a choice; instead, they felt “forced” into the situation or were “invited” to seek counselling. It was not an easy process because

they said help-seeking is a private matter. It is not something that they would talk about just anywhere. In the following extract, Grace explained it very clearly.

Excerpt 5-5: Talking about problem is not encouraged I

1 G: I think it was probably my [...] That's what I heard growing up, like  
2 from everywhere, in my opinion. Talking about problems, you  
3 know, you are supposed to keep quiet.  
4 S: Like in terms of not ever talking about it or just talk about it to  
5 certain kind of people?  
6 G: Just not talking about it.  
7 S: Just not talking about it?  
8 G: Yea, I think so. It was very, like if you have a problem, you hide it  
9 rather than [...] the first thing is not talking about it, hide it. I think.  
10 Rather than talking about it with someone.

As indicated by Grace (line 1 to 2), this concept of not talking about a problem was learned from elsewhere. It might have been related to her being from a cultural background that is different from the European-American culture, which is seen as the mainstream culture in Canada. In my conversation with Odele, she mentioned the influence of culture.

Excerpt 5-6: Talking about problem is not encouraged II (partially translated)

1 O: Yea. And {counselling}'s not {well-known}, especially the last  
2 generation. We, those who were born after the 80's are more open  
3 up to counselling. But before that, like the last generation is a bit  
4 stubborn about this. Because family issues are not to be spread out.

“Family issues are not to be spread out” (line 4) is actually in Chinese a very famous idiom. As a Chinese myself, I can speak to its deep meaning. “Family issues” here refers to family problems. In direct translation, it actually reads “family ugliness” (家醜). No one wants to show ugliness to others. Thus, they are meant to be kept inside the family, not shown to other people. In the traditional Chinese family ritual, talking about problems outside the family was not only discouraged, but rather strictly

prohibited. A family member could get into deep trouble if someone else in the family knew he/she did so. Therefore, talking about problems was traditionally a taboo. As Odele indicated, this notion might have changed for people in newer generations. However, the need of keeping things private still appears to exist.

While Odele described a typical example in the Chinese culture, this theme was prevalent among other storytellers from different Asian countries. Among them, there were Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese storytellers who talked about this private nature of help-seeking. Thus, counselling is a private matter for them as well. It is not something to be talked about anywhere to anyone. It is something rather secretive. For example in Excerpt 5-7, Elizabeth, who identified herself as Vietnamese, talked about this notion of privacy as an Asian.

Excerpt 5-7: Counselling is private in this culture

1 E: But for me, it's still [...] it's not like I'd go around telling people...  
2 If I have a therapist or counsellor or psychologist, I wouldn't be  
3 going around telling people ... Asians, maybe we are private. For  
4 that, it seems like [...] there is something deficient about you if you  
5 have to seek professional help, especially to do with your  
6 emotions...

### ***5.1.2 The Professionalism of Counselling***

Although the idea of counselling was not common to many of the storytellers, they did talk about how counselling as a profession could potentially be an indicating factor of its helpfulness. Because of this idea of professionalism, counsellors were seen as creditable, trustworthy, and looked upon as authority figures that could offer help. In Excerpt 5-8, Victor explained how his perception of counsellor's experience and professionalism helped him build trust with his counsellor.

Excerpt 5-8: Counsellor is professional (translated)

1 S: Did you trust him right at the beginning? Or it built up slowly as  
2 you talk?  
3 V: Because I think he [...] is quite experienced, so I quite trust him.  
4 S: So trust started right at the beginning?  
5 V: Yea. He is a professional. He is a professional counsellor. He was  
6 there to help me.

#### 5.1.2.1 Ethical Standard

A prominent theme among the storytellers was their counsellor's ethics. In particular, the storytellers most appreciated a counsellor's obligation to keep client information confidential. In the following extract, Odele talked about how she is willing to trust a therapist as long as he/she is a registered or licensed professional.

Excerpt 5-9: Trust starts with profession ethics (partially translated)

1 O: I think {you} need to be mentally prepared. Because you don't  
2 know {the counsellor}, and you are mentally prepared, then [...] Like, counselling is about trust. Similar to me talking to you (the researcher), I trust that you will keep our conversation  
5 confidential. This is a work ethic. This is their professional [...] If  
6 he/she is a professional, he/she is not supposed to tell other people  
7 about my private stuff. Like I knew [...] I wish she had the ethics. If  
8 she didn't, I am just unlucky. But she was a licensed counsellor, I  
9 trusted her work ethics.

She later added the following comment into the transcript when she reviewed it.

Excerpt 5-10: Comments from Odele when reviewing her transcript

1 I think I would still go for a counsellor with a license, so there's a  
2 difference between a licensed one and non-licensed one, I believe the  
3 licensed counsellors are more professional or they have certain  
4 techniques to follow.

In the above two excerpts, Odele repeatedly used the word *professional* (line 5 in Excerpt 5-9 and line 3 in Excerpt 5-10) to emphasize the importance of her statement and to make the link to ethical standards that therapists must adhere to. It is also noteworthy

how she used the research situation as a metaphor to describe therapist's ethics as a fundamental ground for relationship building between therapist and client (line 3 to 5 in Excerpt 5-9). Perhaps, once again, prior understanding of the profession might help. Later on in our interview, Odele disclosed to me that she learned from her husband, who is completing a social work degree, about the importance of professional ethics in a counselling setting. The experience of having someone close to her explaining this important piece of information helped her understand and gain confidence in counselling professionals.

On the contrary, lack of professionalism may harm the client/therapist relationship in a very significant way. For example, Grace tried to avoid talking about her unpleasant experience of counselling during our interview. She, however, explained from her journal that at the end of the third session, when she decided to terminate the counselling process, her trainee therapist cornered her at the door after the camera was off and interrogated her about her reason for termination. In her journal, Grace commented:

Excerpt 5-11: Grace's comment about her negative experience

- 1 I felt he was hypocrite in some sense because he turned from a nice guy
- 2 to an angry detective. He lacked professionalism and I wasn't very
- 3 impressed with his reaction. Counselling meant something different
- 4 afterwards because I didn't feel respected. Had I been respected until
- 5 the very end, it would have remained the same.

In line 3 to 4, Grace commented, "counselling meant something different afterwards." It illustrates how a therapist's lack of professionalism can create damage not only to one particular experience, but also to a person's perception of the whole profession. Grace stated that even if she was able to continue counselling, she was not sure if she would go back. Grace's story cautions both practicing therapists and

therapists-in-training to be aware of their behaviour, both in front of others (or a camera in this case) or behind the scenes. Grace explained that her therapist was in desperate need of hours to complete his practicum course. It is, however, absolutely unethical to do harm to a client in any way. Although she was left with an unpleasant feeling after this experience, she learned from other life experiences that it was only a single incident. She has decided to become a therapist herself and she took that experience as an example to remind herself how important ethical practice is for a counsellor.

#### 5.1.2.2 Physical Environment

Three of the storytellers have described how the physical environment could possibly enhance their experience. For example, Lucy was very skeptical about going to see a counsellor. In fact, she described that experience as “going to war with nothing in hand” because she had the impression that the counsellor sided with her boyfriend and thus she was going to fight the two of them. However, the first thing that “calmed [her] nerves down” (line 5 in Excerpt 5-12) was the comfortable environment she discovered when she stepped into the counsellor’s office. The following extract is how she described it.

##### Excerpt 5-12: A comfortable environment helped to calm the nerves

- 1 S: Yea, and you mentioned at the very beginning, you described how  
2 the environment was... different from what you expected or what  
3 you thought of. Do you think that's helpful or not? Like having a  
4 cozy environment and couches, or would it be [...] .  
5 L: I think it helps to calm the nerves down before you actually go into  
6 an interview and start talking about [...] Cause yea, if you are in a  
7 hospital, you would probably be a little more nervous than you are  
8 in that regular household. Oh, there was a dog too. And I was  
9 patting a dog; it was a golden retriever in the living room. And I was  
10 just pat the dog and played with it. In that sense, it kinda calmed  
11 me down. Cause I've never been in a counselling before. He has,  
12 so {my boyfriend} was like, “yea, there's a dog.” But for me, I

13 didn't know what was coming. So it does calm me down until you  
14 get there. Once you are in the room and start talking, I don't think  
15 it matters what kind of chair you are sitting in, or what kind of  
16 painting you are looking at. As long as you feel comfortable with  
17 the person, then you can open up just as much as you are in your  
18 living room.

## 5.2 Evaluation of the Counselling Experience

### 5.2.1 Characteristics of Counsellor

There were several important counsellor characteristics that the storytellers identified as contributing to a positive counselling experience. These included a neutral third person stance that was taken by the counsellors, their ability to demonstrate good listening, and other humanistic characteristics such as being authentic, genuine, reliable, and calm. I will describe each of these in detail in the following sub-sections.

#### 5.2.1.1 Counsellor as a Neutral Third Person

I adopted the term *third person* and combined it with the word *neutral* because all but one of the storytellers talked about this characteristic of their counsellors, using either or both of these terms. Third person, according to the storytellers, means that the counsellor was either an outsider to the current issue or an outsider to the storyteller's social circle. As such, the counsellor was either a third person to whoever was involved in the issue (e.g. a couple issue) or someone who could provide a differing opinion to whatever had already been offered. The importance of being a third person, as described by the storytellers, is that the counsellor will be free from being biased towards a person or a stance. Hence, the counsellor can be neutral to the issue at hand. For example, being an outsider of a storyteller's social circle, a counsellor is then unknown to the client's background, friends, or family. There is no relationship to begin with. The storytellers

felt that the counsellor would have no reason to be biased towards anyone or to be presumptuous about anything. He or she could then look at the issue as objective as one could. In this sense, the counsellor could also be non-judgemental. For example, as described in the previous chapter, David talked about how his counsellor's choice of taking a neutral stance was a key to building trust in the counselling relationship.

In the following extract, I provide another example from my conversation with Lucy, who shared her view on how counselling was and could potentially be helpful to her even though she did not feel that counselling was a good fit at that time. As described in the previous chapter, Lucy was invited to counselling with her boyfriend's family counsellor after her boyfriend cheated on her. Lucy described that she was very angry about it and that she could not trust her boyfriend anymore. She had talked to her friends and family but she found that the counsellor was able to provide her with another view of the issue.

Excerpt 5-13: Counsellor was an outsider with respect to client's social circle

- 1 L: ... It helped that somebody said that if you want this relationship  
2 to work, you have to do this. Because all of my friends would say,  
3 "oh break up with him. He's a bastard." My parents found out  
4 which they were really not happy about, and say "break up with  
5 the guy." And, nobody else really offered a solution how to get  
6 that relation, how to make that relationship work, cause it's not  
7 something that anybody would teach you in school. It's not  
8 something [...] if your friends don't agree with you, they are not  
9 gonna give you [...]
- 10 S: Alternatives?
- 11 L: Yea, alternatives. They are not gonna be like, "what do you want?"  
12 Nobody said, "what do you want? If you want this, you go this  
13 way. If you want that, you go this way." I wasn't really given that  
14 kind of support from anybody else. So having a counsellor say, "if  
15 you want this, you are gonna go this way. But if you want that, you  
16 are gonna go that way." So it's something that I didn't [p]

In this extract, Lucy described that she felt her family and friends were biased. Although she did not disapprove the support provided by them, she also appreciated the options given by the counsellor. The alternative view was seen as an extra support that she would not be able to get elsewhere (line 13 to 14). It is clear that Lucy appreciated the counsellor's respect of her being a free person to choose whatever she wanted to do. It was also experienced as beneficial when the counsellor helped open space for her in searching for different alternatives, depending on her decision as to whether or not to continue her relationship with her boyfriend.

#### 5.2.1.2 Counsellor Provides Good Listening

The second most mentioned counsellor characteristic was the ability to provide good listening. The storytellers talked about this in various ways under different circumstances. Some of them mentioned it when I asked them to pinpoint some positive experiences in counselling. For example, listening was described as a tool counsellors used to guide the process towards a positive result. So the client felt heard and understood. Other storytellers talked about listening (or lack of) as they described their negative experiences. Yet, some others described how listening was, not only exhibited by the counsellor, but also facilitated in the counselling process so that counselling became an environment for good listening, especially in couples counselling.

#### Excerpt 5-14: Counsellor created listening space

- 1 S: In your opinion, what did he, the counsellor, do that made the  
2 experience positive for you?  
3 L: He did listen to me. And he stopped the other person from talking  
4 while I am talking. And that was helpful because nobody can do  
5 that. And I think that XXX (Lucy's boyfriend) trusted the guy, so  
6 he listened to the counsellor more than I would say. And he had  
7 gained that trust that he would listen rather than me screaming at  
8 him. {The counsellor} provided that moment where we can both

9           listen to each other...

In this excerpt, Lucy described clearly how the counsellor was able to create space for her and her boyfriend to listen to each other instead of arguing (line 8). Paige also described similar scenarios where she and her husband would have gotten into intense arguments if her counsellor did not step in and facilitate good listening between the two of them. She went further to describe her counsellor as a mediator in these situations. Due to this, her understanding of helpful counselling has become a “scheduled time” for talks between her and her husband.

In contrast, when good listening was not present, counselling could go in the opposite direction. In the following translated extract, Victor explained why he did not continue the couples counselling that he went to once with his wife.

Excerpt 5-15: Lack of listening (translated)

1   V: But the most important is that as a counsellor, you need to listen to  
2   both sides and then explain things. My wife was lying a lot, I  
3   didn't say anything. Then at the end, {the counsellor} said, "You  
4   two shake hands." As a counsellor, you need to work things out  
5   slowly. We were not even convinced, and she asked us to shake  
6   hands. That's no use. You need to listen to both side and analyze  
7   and explain how to solve the problem.

By “shake hands” (line 4), Victor meant that the counsellor was asking him and his wife to reconcile at the end of their first session. Clearly, Victor did not feel heard or understood in this particular experience, as he mentioned, “I didn’t say anything” (line 2 to 3) and “we were not even convinced” (line 5). Although it was not the only reason why Victor decided not to continue the counselling, lack of good listening and a lack of listening space were described as part of the reason.

### 5.2.1.3 Other Characteristics

Other counsellor characteristics mentioned included: respectfulness, authenticity, genuineness, sincerity, politeness, a calming presence, empathy, and being non-judgemental. Here, non-judgemental means something a little bit different from the one described under *counsellor as neutral third person*. Non-judgemental here refers to a counsellor's general attitude towards a client. Victor touched on this while he appreciated and empathized with counsellors for how challenging their work could be.

Excerpt 5-16: Counsellor cannot be too challenging (translated)

1 V: ... He gave some advice, but he was not critical about you. So {I  
2 think} it's difficult to be a counsellor, when giving critical opinions  
3 [p] like when {the counsellor} says {client's} weakness or so [...] the  
4 client could be upset about it, right? So the counsellor can't be too  
5 direct. He can only listen and then explain to you, what is good,  
6 what is not.

Although Victor did not use the word non-judgemental, his speech implied that counsellors need to be careful about giving negative feedback to clients. It concerns the counsellor's attitude; that a counsellor should not be "too direct" (line 4 and 5), and that they should "explain" (line 5), in a way that does not "upset" the client (line 4).

All of the listed counsellor characteristics are distinct but also closely connected with one another. According to the storytellers, these characteristics together could help enrich the connection between counsellor and client and facilitate trust building, which in turn helps makes the counselling useful and positive. The following excerpt extracted from Judy's interview illustrates the strong connection she had with her counsellor when the counsellor exhibited these characteristics.

Excerpt 5-17: A strong connection between client and counsellor (partially translated)

1 J: When there is someone [...] What happened was the pastor prayed

2 with me, she really [...] she is [...] it's herself [...] not only empathize  
3 from a counselling point of view, but she wanted to help you from  
4 her heart.  
5 S: Very genuine? Very authentic?  
6 J: There is a human relationship. A human relationship, instead of  
7 facing a wall. Like a machine can give you a lot of "oh, that's sad.  
8 That's not good." But [...]  
9 S: Different connection?  
10 J: No connection. Of course I understand sometimes counsellor needs  
11 to back off. But to me, in that situation, I felt the connection...  
12 S: How did the connection happen? How do you think it developed?  
13 J: Pray. Simply by praying. It's not like the connection between  
14 friends. But you know it's there.  
15 S: Is it a spiritual connection?  
16 J: Yes. You can feel her caring heart.

In line 13, Judy mentioned that praying was very important for her. She further explained it when she reviewed her transcript, "when the counsellor prayed for me, also showed that she did indeed wanted me to be helped from her heart, since praying has to be from the heart." The above excerpt and the comment Judy made afterwards speak to the deep connection she felt between her and her counsellor. It is especially clear when she used the phrases "from her heart" (line 3 to 4) and "human relationship" (line 6) as compared to "no connection" (line 10), with a "wall" (line 7), or a "machine" (line 7). My interpretation of the strong contrast is that there is a spiritual connection (line 15), which led Judy to re-emphasize that it was "her caring heart" (line 16). Thus, the genuineness and the authenticity exhibited by Judy's counsellor were key for the relationship built between Judy and her counsellor. Judy commented that out of her three counselling experiences, this was the most helpful and impressive.

### **5.2.2 Counsellor's Role: To Give and to Provide**

In the earlier stage of my analysis, I actually had this theme named *guidance*. Three of the storytellers regarded their counsellors as mentors. They described the benefit they

received from counselling as options, directions, assistance, and guidance. For example, Odele used the metaphor of parenting to described how counselling could be a guide or assistant to a client.

Excerpt 5-18: Counselling is like parenting (partially translated)

- 1   O: Because counsellor will not be in your life forever, and your
- 2   session will not go on and on and on, there will be an end day.
- 3   When it ends, it's like kids, you as parent can only guide them to a
- 4   certain age... Counsellor is more like an assistant role. He/she is
- 5   not a dominate role.

After repeatedly reading and re-reading the transcripts, listening and re-listening to the recordings, I started to wonder what guidance actually meant. It seemed to me that guidance was not being used to in a traditional sense by the storytellers. Inspired by David, informed by the literature, and combined with further explanations from other storytellers, a theme of *giving by the counsellor* slowly emerged as a replacement to guidance. As David was describing his relationship with his counsellor, he explained his view on how a trust relationship could be built.

Excerpt 5-19: Trust was based on giving (partially translated)

- 1   D: Yea, then we built a good relationship. And that is one thing that I
- 2   want to say, if you want to build relationship, like I said you have
- 3   to give some [p]
- 4   S: Giving?
- 5   D: You need to firstly contribute, giving. You need to give that
- 6   person something then you can build relationship and trust.

As discussed in Chapter Two, gift giving has actually been proposed as a strategy to enhance the effectiveness of counselling for Asian clients (S. Sue & Zane, 1987). The suggestion was made based on the observation that people of Asian descent do not usually understanding the long-term counselling benefit. Thus, immediate benefits (i.e., gift) such as guidance in reducing stress might be perceived as more helpful. Thanks to

Odele, I was able to link guidance to giving. When I asked her how the meaning of counselling has changed for her after her personal experience, she said the following.

Excerpt 5-20: Guidance to self-awareness (partially translated)

- 1 O: Guidance. Guidance, assistance towards self-realization, and self-awareness, self-learning. It's about self.

In this extract, Odele introduced an important concept, self-awareness, which is another significant finding in this research. I will detail my analysis in a later section. Here, I would like to invite the reader to focus on the connection between guidance and what Odele wanted (i.e. self-awareness). In fact, awareness either about self or about the issue was something that Odele perceived as helpful, and indeed for other storytellers as well. Once the storytellers felt that they had gained awareness, counselling was perceived as helpful. Therefore, guidance for them was not only strategies or skills that could possibly help them solve a problem or ease the pain. Instead, what they needed was the company, possibly provided by a counsellor that could walk them through the path of searching for awareness. Counselling can be regarded as a companion, and a counsellor's role is to provide that company to their clients.

Counsellor's giving can sometimes mean options, feedbacks, or different perspectives. Taking Elizabeth as an example, she repeatedly said that her therapist asking her to keep a journal was not enough, and thus she did not see the helpfulness of the counselling she received. By "not enough," she explained, she was looking for something else. Although she was not able to name it at the beginning of the interview, she stated later that she wanted a different perspective. Her reading and talking to different people about relationships was able to give her the different perspective she was looking for; but in her opinion, her therapist did not give that to her. Thus, lack of

counsellor's giving might be one cause of a negative counselling experience. Grace has also shared that although she was appreciative of her counsellor's listening, she was confused by him not "saying something back" throughout the first session. She mentioned that one thing she remembers that stood out powerfully for her was the last comment made by the counsellor as she was leaving (a "door conversation"; line 1 in Excerpt 5-21), in which her counsellor said for her to "honour yourself."

Excerpt 5-21: Getting feedback from counsellor was important

- 1 G: I really like that door conversation, what he said to me. The last  
2 word I did remember. Like that was the most powerful and that's  
3 what I remember from the counselling. The last words from  
4 counsellor. And I think that contrast between like him saying  
5 nothing and finally he said something, at the end.  
6 S: So am I correct to say that you were expecting [...] Because earlier  
7 on you said that you were telling him your story in the first session  
8 and then you expected that [...]  
9 G: He would say something.  
10 S: Yea, he would say something back. But he didn't during the  
11 second session, but then he finally said something. That sort of  
12 gave you something, which is what you wanted? For him to give  
13 you something?  
14 G: Yea, absolutely.

In this extract, Grace brought up the difference between "him saying nothing" and "he said something" (line 4 and 5). I remember wondering if the difference here is that saying is giving and listening is receiving. Thus, I checked my hypothesis by proposing the word *give* (line 12). She agreed. It then appeared to me that she was looking for some "givings" by her counsellor. Although she appreciated his listening, at one point she said, "The first session was purely listening... this is weird." Thus, too much listening (i.e. receiving on the counsellor's end) was "weird." Later in the interview when I asked her what she would like to change in the counselling process to make it more positive, she came back to the "door conversation" she mentioned in the interview. She stated that she

would like to have it earlier, and be more formal within the session, not at the door as if it was a “random thing to say.” My interpretation is that she was looking for some givings from the counsellor. At least in retrospect, it would have been more beneficial to have some givings from the counsellor to the client in an earlier stage of counselling.

### ***5.2.3 Similarities between Client and Counsellor***

In the multicultural counselling literature, one of the proposed ways to ensure effective counselling for culturally diverse clients is racial matching between client and counsellor (Fowler et al., 2011; Meyer et al., 2011). There have been a lot of debates among counselling professionals and researchers on its effectiveness and practicality. I became curious. From client’s point of view, does it really matter?

The first person who initiated the idea of matching (or mismatch) was the first storyteller, Elizabeth. She talked about it in regard to not feeling connected with her counsellor.

Excerpt 5-22: Culturally mismatch between counselling and client

- 1 S: So do you remember anything else that he did was helpful for you  
2 in your experience?  
3 E: [p] No, I can’t say that I found it help [.]. Just because I think [p]  
4 He was a man, I didn’t think he could relate to what I was going  
5 through. Number two because he [p] he was a different generation  
6 [laugh] He was older, so I didn’t think he understood.  
7 S: How old was he?  
8 E: I think he was probably in his 50’s, and I was 26 [.]. about 27 at the  
9 time. So that’s why I was like [p] Yea, I just thought, “okay, he is  
10 old-school.” That’s what I thought. So [...] it’s just that [...] I had  
11 talked to my friends about it and they are females, but they didn’t  
12 go through the same experience [...] And so for them to match me  
13 up with him which is not his fault or anybody’s, but I just felt [...] he  
14 couldn’t really relate to me. So I’d just do what he asked me to do  
15 and then the session will be over...

Elizabeth (in Excerpt 5-22) did not talk about race, but culture in general. As noted in Chapter Two, the concept of culture is broader than race and ethnicity (Arthur & Collins, 2010). It also includes, but not limited to, dimensions such as age, generation, gender, and sexual orientation. In this extract, the first thing Elizabeth mentioned was gender (line 4). Age or generation was also a concern (line 5 and 6). Elizabeth described that to match her up with an older male was a “fault” (line 13) because it created the lack of connection.

In addition, Paige stated that if she were to choose a therapist again, she might choose someone with a similar background in terms of, for example, gender, and age. Lucy had similar ideas as well, and she added that ethnicity or race might make a difference, as people from a similar ethnic background would understand her norms, beliefs, and values better. Odele echoed that, but she noted that age was less important than a therapist having similar life experiences to the client. She also added one important concern, which is language barrier. Although it was not an issue for her, she could see how it could be an issue for people who cannot speak English, for example. Judy experienced the language issue herself. It was not very significant, but she finds it easier to use her native language in counselling. Judy said that she could see the pros and cons of having someone from a different ethnic background. In the following translated excerpt, she explained why it would be a difficult choice between a counsellor from a similar ethnic background and someone from a different ethnic background.

Excerpt 5-23: The pros and cons of different ethnic background (translated)

1 J: Because people with a Chinese background usually has a narrower  
2 mindset. Western people are not. But another problem is language  
3 barrier. What you say, what you try to explain, you don't know if  
4 the other person [...] like there is one more layer (of complexity).

5 Even if we speak the same language, we can't be sure if we  
6 understand each other 100%. It's like that's why you have to send  
7 {the transcript} back to me. We are talking about another language  
8 here, so higher chance of miscommunication.  
9 S: So do you think you can benefit from another culture because it  
10 will give you another perspective?  
11 J: Yes.  
12 S: They have more open-minded ideas?  
13 J: Yes.  
14 S: But then language itself could be a barrier because of the  
15 possibility of misunderstanding.  
16 J: Yes.

Grace, David, and Victor were the storytellers who did not think that match or mismatch of cultural background between counsellor and client matters.

Sitting with this wide range of ideas about matching, I could not come to a single simple conclusion as to what was perceived as helpful. It seems very personal and preference seems to vary from individual to individual. However, the idea of perceived similarity suggested by Meyer et al. (2011) seems to fit the scenario. They concluded that when clients feel similar to their counsellors, they also perceive the counsellors as supportive, which then appears to increase therapist credibility and strengthen the working alliance. Thus, racial matching was only one way that may help increase perceived similarity. There are other ways that the storytellers perceived a good match, such as attitudes, values, and personality.

Indeed, only one storyteller mentioned the issue of racial matching in our conversation. Each of the storytellers had different views on which part of their cultural background might be important to the helpfulness of counselling. Across the board, similarity seems to be the preference over difference (although difference still has some

advantages according to Judy). To some of the storytellers, similarity is possibly an indicating factor to perceived helpfulness of counselling.

### **5.3 Resolution: Client's Self-agency**

Using a narrative method to approach my research has allowed me to bring into the foreground the storytellers' experience of self-agency during counselling. As a case-based method, it allowed me to

focus on 'initiative and action' as located in cases... [and] to  
determine the range of variability among 'cases'... [as it would] lead  
to the development of more complex theories in which attention  
would be given to the many alternative ways in which human agency  
exhibits itself in the world. (Mishler, 1996, p. 90)

Clients' self-agency is not a novel concept, but a rather "suppressed" idea in the field of counselling and psychotherapy (Rennie, 2001). One reason may concern the phenomenon that clients' experiences of counselling are usually not readily observable by practitioners. Thus, the focus of research may logically emphasize on what therapists can do to enhance counselling effectiveness instead of on what the clients experience in the counselling process.

#### ***5.3.1 Client's Active Engagement - Be Open and Honest***

My interview with Victor was the first time I came across a statement about how honesty was important to counselling. The following translated extract highlights how Victor described it in our conversation.

Excerpt 5-24: Honesty is essential (translated)

- 1 V: I think me and my wife [...] the most important [...] seek counselling
- 2 [...] waste of money. You need to be honest, whatever is wrong in

3       the past, stop it. Whatever I did wrong, you can tell me, right? We  
4       both need to be honest, truthful. Then things can be resolved. If  
5       you are not, how can we resolve.

What I understood from this particular excerpt is that honesty in counselling is very important. So I literally wrote, “honesty is essential” as a note on the transcript after I highlighted this excerpt. Then, I questioned myself, “Why is it essential?” One understanding may be that if a person is lying in a therapeutic context, what the therapist is working on does not reflect the reality because what was claimed to have happened is not true. However, as I read and re-read Victor’s interview, it slowly appeared to me that the importance of honesty is not the objectivity that is embedded in what is commonly known as “the reality” or “the truth,” but the client’s active engagement in the counselling process by telling what one sees as truthful. In our conversation, Victor repeatedly said, “It’s no use if my wife doesn’t tell the truth.” He confessed that he had done something wrong and he was willing to work on his weakness. It did not seem to me that he was avoiding any negative comments towards him; but he kept on emphasizing that his wife was lying a lot. What I then came to understand was that Victor was actually disappointed by what he perceived as her “lying.” He did not see the sincerity in her wanting to “work things out together.” Due to that, he said that he was depressed for a long period of time.

From this perspective, what is implicit in Victor’s excerpt may be that he and his wife, as clients, had the power to decide what to tell (or what to lie about in this case). Therefore, they were active participants engaging in counselling. Honesty can then be interpreted as sincerity, one’s willingness to engage in a process of change. In other

words, honesty is essential to the effectiveness of counselling. Without it, in Victor's words, "it is no use."

In fact, the notion that clients need to be actively engaged in the counselling process is also observed in other storytellers' narratives, in which self-agency was exercised in a different form. For example, Odele used the term "mentally prepared" to describe how she took an active role in engaging in counselling. The following translated excerpt provides a story of what she meant by mentally prepared before going into counselling and why it is so important.

Excerpt 5-25: A story of being "mentally prepared" (partially translated)

1   O: Why need to be mentally prepared? Like a friend of mine, she did  
2   pre-marriage counselling at church. Her fiancé did not want to go.  
3   He didn't like counselling, very resentful about it. But in order for  
4   them to get married, that's one of the conditions he has to do. His  
5   mentality was very different. It's all about the attitude. His  
6   mentality was, "I will do this counselling. After that, my girlfriend  
7   will marry me. If I don't do it, she won't marry me. I want to get  
8   married, so I go. All I have to do is just to be there." So his  
9   mentality is different. But mine was that I felt like we (O and her  
10   boyfriend at that time) couldn't move on, I need to seek help. So I  
11   was mentally prepared. When {the counsellor} asked me some  
12   very personal questions, I was very honest. My experience, my  
13   feeling. As oppose to that boyfriend, his goal was to finish the  
14   session, so that he fulfilled his girlfriend's request. Then the job is  
15   done. So a lot of people go to counselling with different  
16   background. It will depend on whether the counsellor can open up  
17   a person throughout the session. But if a person is very stubborn,  
18   or he/she doesn't want to share personal stuff, counselling will not  
19   be useful for the couple. Because the mentality is not to seek help.

It is clear from Odele's perspective that being "mentally prepared," which means being very honest (line 11) in the counselling process, is necessary for counselling to be useful. Although counsellor's contribution, as in skills or techniques, is also important (line 16 to 17), "if a person is very stubborn... counselling will not be useful..." (line 17

to 19). According to Odele, “mentally prepared” is not something that happens during or after counselling, it is done before going into counselling and is initiated by the client. Therefore, it is the client’s active engagement, hence self-agency.

### **5.3.2 Client as an Active Driver**

According to the storytellers, not only were they open or did they want to be open and honest during counselling, they were and also expected themselves to be active drivers. By active drivers, I mean they assumed responsibility and took initiative in taking action for possible changes. In my conversation with Judy, when I tried to consult her view on how her counsellor could have been more helpful to her, she explained to me why she had decided not to continue with her therapist and why she thought the decision was important.

Excerpt 5-26: Client's need of "quiet time" (partially translated)

1 J: ...It's not that the psychologist was no good [...] But [...] maybe to a  
2 certain extent [...] Like, after a couple of session, I think [p] as a  
3 client {I} need to stop and think. Maybe I will go back to see her  
4 [...] Like the first counsellor, I still go to her after so many years. I  
5 will talk to her about my problems or if I need anything. But I  
6 think client needs some time to him/herself and think. Can't  
7 continue non-stop [...] I don't think [p] that's good. [p] The more  
8 you go [...] some people may rely on it, can't find comfort without  
9 it. Can't be happy without it. [p] Or [...] maybe not totally rely on  
10 {the counsellor}, but [...] When a third person always talks to you,  
11 or asks you a lot of questions to make you reach some answers  
12 [...]But if it has become a situation of rely, or become [p]  
13 S: Dependent?  
14 J: A situation of dependence, not necessarily dependent on [p] the  
15 comfort [p] May lost oneself, I think. [p] So having a quiet time,  
16 [p] down time is needed.

In this excerpt, Judy introduced the concept of “quiet time” or “down time” (line 15 and 16). When I further inquired, she described that “quiet time” is the time when a client takes a break from seeing a counsellor. She said that it is a time she finds necessary to

perform an evaluation, based on what she has learned from counselling, to decide what she wants to do next. She believes that it is the client's responsibility to make changes, not the counsellor's. As she stated in the following extract:

Excerpt 5-27: Client's responsibility I (partially translated)

1 J: But at the end of the day, the couple needs to come up with a  
2 resolution, a mutual one. The counselees need to find a resolution,  
3 which they accept. Can't totally rely on the counsellor.

Therefore, this act of taking "quiet time" is intentional, not random. It is the client's responsibility to "come up with a resolution," not the counsellor. Victor also seemed to agree with this idea of client's responsibility. He added that clients are the ones who own their future, not counsellors. He stated the following.

Excerpt 5-28: Client's responsibility II (translated)

1 V: He (the counsellor) could help us as a couple. But more  
2 importantly, it's me and my wife. At the end, this third person  
3 cannot solve our problem, it's between us. If we were willing to  
4 open up and talk about it, then he could have helped.{Otherwise},  
5 no, this third person can't help, nothing he could have helped.

In fact, for some of the storytellers whose counselling experience was not as positive, they still conveyed the importance of taking initiatives for possible changes to be possible. As mentioned, Elizabeth was not certain about what her counsellor had helped her with because she did not agree with journal writing as a method to deal with her anger issue. However, she still recognized that her counsellor might have been the "initial catalyst" to help her understand that gaining different perspectives would be helpful. Therefore, after the counselling, she went on reading books and talking to people to recruit what she needed. This act of taking steps beyond counselling is also

representative of client's self-agency, which, again, has made changes possible for Elizabeth.

## **5.4 Closure: Counselling Outcomes**

As the story is approaching the end, it is time to look at the outcome of counselling. What did the storytellers see as helpful gains from the counselling experiences? The answer to this question was interesting, especially when compared to what the storytellers expected of counselling at the beginning. I will come back to this comparison in the next section. First, the two important outcomes that the storytellers saw as most meaningful from counselling will be discussed.

### ***5.4.1 Counselling Helps to Gain Different Perspectives***

Gaining different perspectives was one of the meaningful outcomes for the storytellers. The idea of different perspectives, which is a term adopted from the storytellers' narratives, has already been mentioned throughout this collective story of the counselling experience. Different perspectives may refer to different options, ideas, and views. As discussed, the storytellers valued the third person characteristic of their counsellors not only because of the neutrality they were able to provide, but also because of the outsider's views on the issue at hand. As a person who is outside of the client's social circle, the counsellor is able to open space for the client to search for and possibly adopt a different explanation or understanding about an issue. The storytellers felt that it was important for them not to feel stuck in a situation. They felt that they are more able to come up with alternative solutions when their counsellors help open space for them. In some cases, solutions are no longer needed when the problem dissipates. In the following extract, Lucy highlighted this view.

Excerpt 5-29: Counsellor can provide different perspective

1 L: I am thinking that counsellor can provide me like a clear guidance.  
2 Like a more almighty feel. Because you are looking at things from  
3 one side usually, right? You are usually looking at things from  
4 your perspective. And you are not really putting yourself in other  
5 people's shoes. And I think counsellors can provide that. "What if  
6 you look at it this way?" A different perspective on things. And  
7 maybe that will lead to understanding something better, or letting  
8 go of something. Once you understand the other person, maybe  
9 you can let go of things. Or figure out a way to deal with it better.

Lucy mentioned guidance as well (line 1). As discussed, guidance may not necessarily mean concrete skills or strategies that clients can learn. Instead, guidance refers to, at least by most of the storytellers in this study, the support they see counsellors can provide throughout the counselling process. In this excerpt, Lucy was pointing specifically at different perspectives. It is noteworthy that Lucy used the term "almighty" (line 2) to refer to the feeling she expected to have towards a counsellor. It implies that there was a part of her who almost wanted to look upon the counsellor as a God-like (authority) figure who could provide something for her. Thus, it reinforces the view that I presented earlier on about counsellor's role of giving and providing something. This is also in line with the common understanding of Asian people's view of relationship between clients and counsellors (Kim, 2011). My focus of the current finding is, however, what can be taken from this view of counsellor as authority, to make counselling a helpful resource for Asian clients.

Lucy described the usefulness that different perspectives can have to help lead the client to further or new ways of understanding a problem or another person, which can then lead to possible actions (i.e. "letting go" or "deal with it" in line 7 and 9). To the storytellers, gaining different perspectives means that space is open for more possibilities.

In other words, by providing different perspectives, counsellors help open up that space. With wider space, clients feel less stuck, hence freedom is created. With this freedom, they can exercise their self-agency for possible changes.

To extend my understanding of how different perspectives could be gained, I looked for ways that the storytellers described the process. Two sub-themes emerged, namely issues being organized and empowerment.

#### 5.4.1.1 Issues Being Organized

Four of the storytellers stated that gaining new perspectives started with organizing their issues. They claimed that the problems or issues had surrounded them for a period of time and they could not see clearly what was going on. Thus, having a counsellor ask them questions helped organize their thoughts and see a holistic picture.

##### Excerpt 5-30: Obtaining a bigger picture of the issue

1 G: ... Second session he did start asking questions. He asked a lot. He  
2 had a lot of questions already prepared, it looked like. And he  
3 asked me questions, and he provided a holistic picture of what I  
4 was going through, in a way. And the second [interrupted by S]  
5 S: [interrupt] How was it like for you for him to ask you question and  
6 seemed prepared?  
7 G: I liked it.  
8 S: You liked it.  
9 G: Yea. And he was asking a lot more questions in the second  
10 session. So second session felt like I am answering his questions,  
11 rather than me benefit [...] Like I was benefiting definitely. Cause I  
12 was being narrowed down, in some way. Like my problem was  
13 being narrowed down, but also bigger picture. I think I was able to  
14 see a bigger picture in the process, yea.

In this excerpt, Grace stated that by asking a lot of questions, her counsellor helped her to see “a holistic picture” (line 3). She felt that her issue was “narrowed down” (line 12 and 13), but at the time she could also see “a bigger picture” (line 13). By narrowing down the issue, more space is open. In this sense, the issue was organized (i.e. narrowed)

in a way that helped Grace to become free to look at other things (i.e. bigger picture). It could be seen as a different way to look at an issue, as compared to before counselling, the issue was big and overwhelming.

Other than questioning, some storytellers commented that in order to help clients organize their issues, counsellors need to be a “fast thinker” (e.g. Judy) or an “analyst” (e.g. David) so that they are able to see the big picture themselves and then help clients understand it. Following is an excerpt from Judy’s interview in which she commented on the ability of a counsellor to be a “fast thinker.”

Excerpt 5-31: Counsellor as a fast thinker (partially translated)

1 J: Also, [it] requires you to think fast. You need to grasp the picture  
2 quick. I think experience is important. So you can see the whole  
3 picture of what has happened, instead of making assumptions.

#### 5.4.1.2 Empowerment

For three of the storytellers, different perspectives from the counsellor created empowerment for the storytellers, granting the storytellers power to look at the issue from a different angle. One example is Grace’s “door conversation” in which her counsellor said “honour yourself.” Another example is extracted from Elizabeth’s interview as shown in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 5-32: Empowerment

1 E: I think he gave me the power to see that I could overcome it. Like  
2 because it's within me [...] Because he's saying, "it's not your fault  
3 [...] like what has happened." And I think I need to see that, because  
4 a lot of times in my life I'm told it's my fault. So in that  
5 perspective it's good.  
6 S: So he sort of gave you that permission to see things differently?  
7 E: Yea, yea.

#### ***5.4.2 Counselling Helps to Gain Awareness and Understanding***

According to the storytellers, awareness and understanding were other important gains of receiving counselling. All of them talked about awareness and understanding in different ways, being found in different contexts, in response to different questions. It is one of the most supported themes in my analysis, one of the most identified gains in the storytellers' experiences.

Here, I would like to borrow Rennie's (2001) definition of self-awareness for ordinary folk to explain my understanding of what the storytellers meant by awareness.

What ordinary folk know about psychoanalysis notwithstanding, they take it for granted that they attend to themselves when doing so; and that this sense is about who they were, or are, or want to be in the future. They also take it for granted that reflections on their desires lead to decisions about what actions to take. And so, for ordinary folk, self-awareness and agency have much to do with how they govern their lives. (Rennie, 2001, p. 82)

In this definition, it is clear that self-awareness has something to do about the past (who they were), about the present (who they are), about the future (who they want to be), and about some issues (their desires lead to decisions about what actions to take). The storytellers added that it is also about other people, cultural backgrounds, upbringings, and life experiences. As such, what it means for counselling to help them gain awareness becomes a more straightforward concept. That is, counselling helps them attend to themselves; noticing what is going on inside; making sense of their own identity

within the domains of what they and others have done, are doing, and want to do; to form a clear picture of the current situation. It is important because they believe that with a clearer picture, they can then decide what actions to take, and what changes to make. This process appears to promote a self-centered approach, not in a negative sense, but because it seems to help the individual to focus solely on self in a helpful way. The following excerpt from Grace's interview captured this process.

#### Excerpt 5-33: Counselling is about self-awareness

1 G: What it is, I guess [...] Counselling is not just that people give  
2 advice, perhaps. Maybe it's about [p] Just being aware, helping  
3 people to be aware of what they really want, what they are looking  
4 for in the future [...] Yea, stuff like that. Something that is more  
5 vague, you know. I feel like I have better idea about counselling  
6 after because before counselling is just going to be heard perhaps,  
7 right? But then not only that, on top of that, it's to discover my  
8 voice. It's to be feeling [...] to explore [p] to become more self-  
9 aware perhaps.

The storytellers used words like explore, understand, discover, and become aware of to describe the process. They used terms like insight, awareness, realization, and understanding to describe the outcome. In Excerpt 5-33, Grace described awareness very elegantly by saying "discover my voice" (line 7 to 8). Once again, there is a sense of self-identity of who I am and what I am saying. As discussed, some of the storytellers were concerned about understanding their past. In fact, Elizabeth said that the lack of exploring the past is something she felt was missing.

#### Excerpt 5-34: Awareness about the past

1 S: ... Is there anything that he could have done to help you  
2 experience a more positive counselling?  
3 E: Maybe, I think [p] perhaps if he asked certain questions [...] I think  
4 because it was a very focused counselling. It was just to get over  
5 my break up. And I think because of that he focused only on that. I  
6 think if he [...] perhaps had looked at other aspects in my life that

7 makes me choose the people I choose, redo the things I do, or  
8 behave the way I behave, then maybe. Because I know that [p] I  
9 realize now issues that affect it, the relationship, the breakup and  
10 everything else, and my feelings etc. It's all ties into culture and  
11 upbringing.

For four of the storytellers, self-awareness is also about others and their relationships with others. This was especially the case for those who engaged in couples counselling. For example, Paige said the following:

Excerpt 5-35: Awareness about others and relationships

1 P: And then some of it is like things that I haven't even thought  
2 about. Like cause {the counsellor} asked a lot about like [...] So it's  
3 like a little bit of [...] understanding of each other. Find out how we  
4 better communicate, find out what each other wants, how to  
5 express love for each other and how to receive love kind of thing.  
6 And then we talked about what are your plans after you get  
7 married. Like your plans to have kids, or plans to move out, your  
8 plans to, you know, have your own family and things like that.  
9 And then how you like to divide your chores and everything in the  
10 house. So there is a lot of things that I [...] we didn't really talk  
11 about before we get married. And then now we talk about that.

Yet for five of them, it was critical to have awareness about the issue.

Excerpt 5-36: Self-awareness about the issue (partially translated)

1 S: If someone asks you now, "what does counselling do? How can it  
2 be helpful?" What would you say?  
3 J: Help you understand yourself. Help you understand your problems.  
4 S: "But I want to solve my problem?"  
5 J: But you have to understand the essence of the problem. For  
6 example, a husband and a wife get into argument, about something  
7 very little. Before they see counselling, they won't understand that,  
8 in fact, one side is careless, personality wise. The other side is very  
9 detail oriented. Maybe before they see counselling, one of them  
10 doesn't have enough self-awareness. They may not know. They  
11 would just argue and argue, and think "why are you like this? Why  
12 are you not detailed?" or the other side would think, "why are you  
13 so detailed? So picky?" But after they see counselling, at least they  
14 will have a better understanding of self. You need to have this  
15 understanding before you can find answers. That's [...] I think is the  
16 basic.

For two of the storytellers, awareness is important not only in the present or for the present issue, but also for the future as well. Some of the storytellers shared that it is a proactive measure, not to prevent problems from happening, but to help a person to be prepared when problems come. In the following excerpt, Odele talked about this idea.

Excerpt 5-37: Counselling as a proactive measure (partially translated)

1   O: My perception about counselling before is that you have a  
2   problem, the counsellor can help you solve it. But after the  
3   experience, I realized that the counsellor is not there to help you  
4   solve problem, but to help you aware of the problem. So that you  
5   can find your own way to deal with it. You can't really solve a  
6   problem within 6 sessions. But at least they help you aware of it.

Once again, counselling is not as problem focused as it once was. It is, instead, about life betterment. It is not only reactive, but also proactive. Therefore, with better understanding and self-awareness, there is a sense of hope for the future. There will be tools that clients can use to deal with future problems should they come up. I think this is an exciting result because it indicates the possibility of reducing the stigma that has been long attached to counselling, particularly for the Asian population.

### **5.5 The Meaning of Counselling: It Changed**

In this section, I will address the shift in the meaning of counselling as the storytellers progressed through the interview. I had originally placed this discussion under the section of *Closure* because it seemed to me that it is one of the counselling outcomes. However, I decided not to do so because for some storytellers, this was an outcome of the counselling experience. For others, however, it came out as a function of our interviews or life experience in general; so it was more individual.

As discussed in earlier sections, the storytellers considered counselling as problem-oriented. Most of them regarded the function of counselling to be problem-solving. Counselling was portrayed as neutral or rather negative; however, towards the end of each interview, counselling was not spoken of as problem-based anymore. It was about awareness, perspectives, and support, which may still lead to problem-solving, but not necessarily. Towards the end of the interviews, it seemed that the storytellers had adopted a new learning and understanding of counselling. I observed this shift in perspective in all of the narratives I collected for this study.

Two of the storytellers discussed a shift in their understanding during the interviews. For example, the following excerpt captures Odele's experience of this shift.

Excerpt 5-38: Shift in meaning as a function of experience (partially translated)

1    O: My perception about counselling before is that you have a  
2       problem, the counsellor can help you solve it. But after the  
3       experience, I realized that the counsellor is not there to help you  
4       solve problem, but to help you aware of the problem. So that you  
5       can find your own way to deal with it. You can't really solve a  
6       problem within six sessions. But at least they help you aware of it.  
7       Internally you can do better. If nothing gets better then you may  
8       continue the counselling.

For one storyteller, the shift was an outcome as a function of her life experience. To recap, Grace did not have a pleasant memory of her counselling encounter. However, she learned that counselling can be helpful and has decided to become a therapist herself.

Thanks to the narrative method of research, I was able to detect the shift that was observable as a function of the interview. I think it was made easy for me because I tried my best to keep the story intact. The shift in how the storytellers talked about counselling was noticeable during the interviews. However, it was not accessible until I did my analysis. As I was reading through each storyteller's narrative as a whole, the shift

became more apparent and clear across stories. If I had taken the themes and the extracts from the storytellers' narratives apart during my analysis, I would not have had a full story that would illustrate the changes in an obvious way. For example, it was apparent in the words the storytellers used. The word *problem*, for example, appeared more frequently in the beginning of the stories; then it became less and less used as the story approached the end. The word *awareness*, for another example, took up more and more space towards the end of the stories.

Another example can be taken from my interview with Lucy. In the beginning of our conversation, Lucy described explicitly that counselling was not for her. It was for people with severe problems, not "just relationship problems." She also indicated that she did not see the need of going into counselling. For whatever reason, I remember wondering if she had heard of pre-marital counselling, which is somewhat different from her view of "counselling is for severely ill people." Thus, I introduced the idea of pre-marital counselling to her at the end of our interview. To my surprise, she was very interested in it. She commented that, "now that I know, I will probably Google it and see... this information is helpful... I have never thought of it." In retrospect, the reason why I wanted to introduce pre-marital counselling to Lucy might have been that I just finished an interview with Paige who had discussed her pre-marital counselling experience. Alternatively, it might have been that I wanted to change Lucy's negative impression about counselling. Whatever the reason, Lucy's attitude towards counselling seemed to have changed quite dramatically.

## **5.6 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I have presented the emerged themes from all of the eight stories I collected from the storytellers. I organized the themes in a full story form, which I call “a collective story” of counselling experience informed by the storytellers in this study. This story includes four main components. First, I presented an orientation and complication, which introduced to the reader how the storytellers in this study perceived counselling as problem-oriented, private, yet professional. Second, I discussed my view on how the storytellers evaluate the counselling process and their relationship with their counsellors. Some counsellors’ characteristics, counsellors’ role, as well as similarities between counsellor and client were outlined.

Next, I compiled some ideas that the storytellers had in terms of what they could do during the counselling process to make the counselling experience helpful and positive. I named this section resolution, and it was about the storytellers’ views on self-agency. The story then ended with a closure, where the storytellers discussed some counselling outcomes they saw as meaningful and helpful. Those include gaining different perspectives and gaining awareness through counselling.

In addition to the full story, I became aware that there was a shift in the meaning of counselling for all storytellers. Although counselling was very much related to problems or problematic situations in the beginning of the story, it became something about awareness, perspectives, and support afterwards. To illustrate this in a visual picture, I organized the emerged themes in a temporal sequence and in the format of answering my research question, together with how the meaning has changed in Table 5-1.

In the next chapter, I will discuss what I have learned from this analysis within the context of the current literature. I will also provide my view on how my findings may imply for counselling practice and future research in this area.

Table 5-1

## Summary of the Analysis

| Temporal sequence<br>In full story form          | Before   |   | During   |   | After  |
|--|--|---|--|---|--|
|  | Orientation and complication<br><i>Perception of<br/>counselling</i>                       | Contribution of the profession  | Evaluation<br>Contribution of the counsellor   | Resolution<br>Contribution of the client  | Closure<br>Outcome   |
| What was/would have been helpful?                |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professionalism - ethics</li> <li>• Comfortable physical environment</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Characteristics of counsellor</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ As a neutral third person (Non-judgemental, no bias)</li> <li>▲ Good listening</li> <li>▲ Others (respectful, authentic)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <i>Counsellor's role to give and to provide</i></li> <li>• <i>Similarities between client and counsellor</i> (Gender, cultural background, etc.)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Self-agency</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Client's active engagement (be open and honest)</li> <li>▲ Be an active driver (responsible for change)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Different perspectives</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Issues being organized</li> <li>▲ Empowerment</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <i>Awareness and understanding</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ About self and others</li> <li>▲ About the issue</li> <li>▲ Hopes for future</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| Neutral  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Problem-oriented</i></li> </ul>                |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difference between client and counsellor (Ethnicity)</li> </ul>   |   |  |
| What contraindicated the counselling experience? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The nature of help-seeking is private.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of professionalism</li> <li>• Uncomfortable physical environment</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Too much listening</li> <li>• Not respectful</li> <li>• Difference from clients (religion)</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not open</li> <li>• Felt too vulnerable (judged)</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No options (for possible actions)</li> </ul>  |
| Meaning of counselling                           | <i>Problem-oriented</i>  |   | →  |   | <i>Awareness, understanding, and support</i>   |

## **Chapter Six: Combining the Two Worlds**

My interest in this research topic emerged from my own experience of engaging in counselling and learning about counselling as a graduate student. In learning about counselling, I read the literature about counselling for Asians, how it may not be a good fit, and how it may have to be modified in order to become appealing and appropriate for people of Asian descent. In engaging in counselling, I learned that I enjoyed the process; I became aware of the unknown side of myself; I appreciated the relationship I had with my counsellor. These contrasting experiences led me to question about the meaning of the differences; I wondered if there is something missing in the connection between the world of academic knowledge and the world of real life experience. I became very interested in listening to other people's stories. Therefore, I developed this study to hear what other people, who have a similar cultural background as I do, have to say about counselling. As such, my purpose was to elicit stories from East and Southeast Asian clients about how they perceive and describe helpfulness according to their own counselling experience in Canada.

Using thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008), the eight storytellers and I co-constructed a story about the meaning of helpfulness in counselling. This is a rich story that I organized into the format of including an orientation, a complication, an evaluation, a resolution, and a closure (Bamberg, 2012; Riessman, 2008), where meanings were made throughout these stages of story development. Important themes that emerged include perception of counselling, which was perceived as problem-oriented; recognition of the professionalism in counselling; characteristics of counsellor that were identified as helpful; counsellor's role to give and provide for the client; similarities between

counsellor and client, which may enhance the therapeutic relationship; client's self-agency in the counselling process; and finally, gaining different perspectives and awareness as an important result. In addition, I experienced a shift in the meaning of counselling as described by the storytellers from engaging them in the storytelling of their experience and reading the full story that we co-developed. While counselling meant something rather negative and was usually related to a problematic situation in life, it means something more positive at the end of the counselling experience. In this chapter, I will focus on the knowledge that I learned from engaging in this research, and connecting it to the current literature in the discussion of counselling practice. I will also address limitations of the current study, followed by implications for counselling and directions for future research.

## **6.1 New Knowledge or Different Meanings?**

In connecting the current findings to the literature, I was surprised to find that the experience of the storytellers appears to be very different from the commonly accepted knowledge of counselling among East and Southeast Asians. These differences led me to new understandings of the existing knowledge. They also allowed me to postulate new meanings about what is currently discussed in the multicultural counselling literature. What I see is that these understandings may not be new to us, yet sometimes it is misunderstood or misinterpreted by virtue of the word chosen to present the concepts. In fact, some of what I have learned from engaging in this study has already been discussed elsewhere. It is interesting how they played out very divergently in counselling practice.

### ***6.1.1 Guidance versus Givings***

Looking at the full story of the counselling experience, I learned from the storytellers that counselling had a problem-oriented nature at the beginning. It seems to fit with the current narrative in the professional world for Asian counselling. First of all, it is about problems, so it denotes negativity. While stigma is developed around it, a negative attitude towards professional help-seeking may follow (Loya et al., 2010). Second, problem implies that there needs to be a solution. If an Asian client sees counselling as a place to find problem resolution, focusing on cognition (Kim et al., 2001) and giving directive guidance might be more appropriate (e.g. Kim, 2011; Kuo, 2004). However, I found it interesting that none of the storytellers spoke of any expectation of directiveness from their counsellors. Words like guidance and assistance were used in some of the stories. However, they meant something broader than their traditional descriptions as in strategy or skill teaching. To the storytellers, guidance or assistance meant the things given by the counsellors. “Givings” may refer to not only skills and strategies, such as relaxation techniques; but may also refer to options, feedback, and different perspectives that will lead to self-awareness and understanding.

From this point of view, the current understanding of the concept of gift giving (S. Sue and Zane, 1987) may only be a part of the story. While immediate benefit such as relaxation techniques are regarded as helpful, other kinds of giving should not be ignored. Particularly revealed in this study, awareness and understanding with regards to the self, others, and the problem situation, are regarded as valuable gains from engaging in counselling. What is expected from counselling might be a broader view of the current situation to be gained through obtaining different perspectives. In fact, the storytellers

have described how counsellors can provide this kind of giving. By virtue of being a neutral “third person”, counsellors being themselves, humans, are already at the place of providing clients with some different understanding of their presenting concerns. By sharing different views of the concerned matters, counsellors were seen as providing companionship and making it possible for the storytellers to explore, understand, and discover their inner self, which was seen as a helpful gain.

This idea of gaining awareness and a different perspective actually coincides with Tomm’s (1988) idea of opening space in family therapy. In describing the effect of what he called “reflexive questioning”, he contended that one way to facilitate healing for families or clients in a therapeutic setting is to ask questions that can “*open space* for family members to entertain new perceptions, new perspectives, new directions, and new options” (Tomm, 1988, p. 8). He further described that the role of therapists in this mode of questioning is like “a guide or coach” who facilitate families or client systems to come to see new possibilities based on their own problem-solving resources. This notion of seeing the therapist as a guide to help facilitate generating different perspectives, and then creating one’s own solution to the problem situation, was clearly demonstrated in the story of helpful counselling as told through the eyes of the storytellers.

It may not be surprising that ideas from Western family therapy would fit well with the East and Southeast Asian storytellers. Although Western culture is closer to individualistic ideals (Kuo, 2004), family therapy concerns relationships within a system and among members of the system. This is congruent with the family-oriented nature among people, who are from a collectivistic culture and have an interdependent construal of self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis et al., 1988). On one hand, space opened by

the counsellor may be experienced as a gift. It is because there is now room to consider thoughts of significant others whose relationships are highly valuable (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), instead of having a narrow focus on the problem. On the other hand, while counsellors are usually seen as the more creditable person in the client/therapist relationship (Kim, 2011), their questions aimed at opening space and directing clients to reflect is also honoured. The theme of recognition of the counselling professionalism clearly demonstrates this idea as many of the storytellers described their counsellors as professional, and “they know what they are doing”.

### ***6.1.2 Directive versus Structuring***

My argument thus far has led me rethink the meaning of a directive style of counselling. It is clear in the current literature that counsellors’ directiveness has been one important focus of providing appropriate counselling for East and Southeast Asians. However, the debate is ongoing and there are some controversies. Although the storytellers did not discuss this explicitly, they gave me insight with respect to what directiveness means according to their experience.

In the literature, a directive counselling style has been commonly understood as a stance that counsellors take to provide concrete resolutions or giving guidance and advice to their Asian clients (Leong, Lee, & Chang, 2008). As illustrated in the helpful counselling narratives in this study, the storytellers did not talk about the counsellor’s directiveness. Instead, they talked about the support they got. Some of them specifically said that the problem had not been solved, but the support was still significant. Others even discussed how their counsellors did not give specific advice or direction, but helped them to understand the situation, gain better awareness, and guided them through finding

their own solution to a particular problem. For example, Victor mentioned that he did not like one of the counsellors he and his wife had seen, who asked them to shake hands at the end of the first session. It was perceived as premature advice in that the counsellor had directed the couple towards reconciliation without having fully understood the problem. Instead, Victor appreciated another counsellor who gave him options and helped him find his own direction. Therefore, if counsellors' directiveness is related to providing problem-solving strategies and advice, it is not related to helpfulness according to the storytellers.

Perhaps directiveness has a different meaning just as in the meaning of guidance. As described in Chapter Four, Paige appreciated that counselling for her was a scheduled time to talk about issues between her and her husband. She perceived that her counsellor's utilizing the pre-marital counselling booklet to structure their sessions was very helpful. Also discussed in the above, counsellors' questions aimed at directing clients to reflect were perceived as creditable and useful. The meaning unfolded here is perhaps that counsellors can maximize their clients' gain of different perspectives and awareness by being a director in the counselling process. In fact, D.W. Sue and Sue (2003) have cautioned that it is mistaken for counsellors to assume a highly authoritarian stance when working with Asian clients. Instead, carefully structuring sessions and providing guidelines on the experience of counselling are more important. As the storytellers have mentioned, they might have heard of counselling, but they had very limited knowledge about it. They did not know what to expect or what was expected of them, but to "give it a try", as Odele has stated. In such cases, it has been suggested that counsellors should take an active role in terms of taking charge of the therapeutic process

(Fowler et al., 2011), particularly in the early stage of therapy (Chong & Liu, 2002).

Vontress (1976) emphasized that counsellors working with culturally diverse clients need to structure and define their roles clearly to their clients very early on. Patterson (1996) also stressed that structuring is particularly important when clients do not understand the therapeutic relationship. He cautioned that failure to do so may result in misunderstanding and clients discontinuing therapy.

To a certain extent, counsellors who structure the therapeutic process well for their Asian clients can be regarded as directive. It is because they are directing and molding the experience for their clients. From this point of view, it is not entirely incorrect to say that directive counselling is more appropriate for Asian clients. Perhaps, directiveness has a multidimensional nature that warrants further investigation and clearer description.

Furthermore, timing or the stage of counselling also seems to be an important factor. As noted in Chapter Three, I conducted an autoethnography on my own counselling experience, in which I found that it was important to clearly define the roles of client and counsellor in the early stage of therapy (S. L. K. Lo, 2011). I also saw my counsellor's directive feedback as very important because I did not know what to expect and what was expected of me. As the counselling progressed, my focus slowly shifted from getting feedback to gaining insights and validating myself. The findings in the current study showed a very similar pattern. The storytellers spoke of their expectation of solving the problem in the early stage, but slowly became appreciative of the awareness and understanding gained from the process. The shift in the meaning of counselling was paramount to some storytellers. As such, it seems that the counsellor's activeness in the early stage in terms of structuring the process was important for the storytellers to learn

their role and what to expect from counselling. As therapy progressed, they could slowly take control in terms of what they would like to get, which then led to improvement in their life and hopes for future.

Coming from a social constructionist perspective, I see that the storytellers and their counsellors were co-constructing their counselling experiences. On one hand, the counsellors who took more initiative at the beginning to structure the session might have been seen as more creditable because they were perceived as the experts, and/or the professionals (Kuo, 2004). On the other hand, the storytellers slowly learned their role and came to realize what they could control as the counselling continued. Collaboratively the two parties co-created an environment from which the storytellers were able to benefit. From this point of view, the directive, or the active role played by the counsellors was especially important during the early stages, as the storytellers may have seemed more passive and dependent. However, as Chong and Liu (2002) stated, “the directive role may be transformed into a nondirective one in accordance with the client’s progress” (p. 53). Therefore, I argue that collaboration is not as inappropriate as it has been regarded in the literature while working with East or Southeast Asian clients. Rather, how collaboration plays out within the therapeutic relationship is the central question.

### ***6.1.3 Passive Clients versus Active Agents***

The discussion around the need of counsellors’ directiveness implies that clients of East and Southeast Asian descent are a group of passive clients (Chong & Liu, 2002). In fact, the literature has suggested this in a number of ways. For example, research has shown that people of Asian descent are reluctant to talk about emotions (Oyserman et al., 2002), Asians do not seek help until the problem is severe (Leong et al., 2011), they are

generally not open to counselling, they are submissive to authority (Kim et al., 2001), they do not advocate for their own goals (Triandis, 2001), and so forth. However, the storytellers have clearly discussed and demonstrated their self-agency within and through the process of developing their counselling stories. For example, Odele talked about how she “mentally prepared” before counselling. Victor took responsibility for the reconciliation with his wife. Judy mentioned the need for “taking a break” from counselling to digest what she had learned. David demonstrated conversational agency (Massfeller & Strong, 2012) during our conversation. Although these actions may not be as obvious as someone who is assertive in voicing one’s need, the sense of self-agency is so strong that it is guiding the storytellers’ actions before, during, and after counselling. In their eyes, they were actively engaging in the process, though it might not have been readily observable, or even, misunderstood as being passive, dependent, or prematurely terminating counselling.

Self-agency is related to self-concept and self-definition. Markus and Kitayama (1991) argued that self-definition of people with interdependent self-construal are different from those with independent self-construal. For interdependent individuals, the self is defined within relationships. Effectively adjusting oneself to various interpersonal conditions is experienced as important and through the control of inner attributes “that can disturb the harmonious equilibrium of interpersonal transaction” (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 228). Accordingly, the East and Southeast Asian storytellers were actively adjusting themselves in the relationships with their counsellors throughout the course of counselling. They were active listeners and analysts. They constantly reviewed and reflected on their own behaviours based on the counsellors’ effort of opening space,

sometimes through the use of suggestions or comments. Under the assumption of an interdependent self, this act is contingent on the counsellors' willingness and ability to explore the clients' feelings and thoughts. In return, the clients become appreciative and receive the counsellors' gifts by taking action gracefully according to the suggestions given.

From this perspective, "agency [is] experienced as an effort to be receptive to others" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; p. 240). Motives are highly social and other-referenced. It is noteworthy that East and Southeast Asian clients are not receptive to all counsellors. The decision is highly selective, depending on how the client feels about the connection with the counsellor. Some of the storytellers mentioned that they were willing to trust their counsellors because they have confidence in the profession. Either they had some knowledge about it or they had heard about it from other people in their ingroup, the professionalism demonstrated within counselling was perceived as an initial connection between the storytellers and their counsellors. Under the interdependent assumption, the clients demonstrated self-agency by taking the initiative to become receptive of counselling even though there was some skepticism or uncertainty.

#### ***6.1.4 Differences versus Similarities***

There are two pairs of differences and similarities that I would like to discuss in this section. First is the pair of differences and similarities between the storytellers as East and Southeast Asian clients and their counsellors. In the multicultural counselling literature, one of the proposed ways to ensure effective counselling for culturally diverse clients is racial matching between client and counsellor (Fowler et al., 2011; Meyer et al., 2011). There have been a lot of debates among counselling professionals and researchers

on its effectiveness and practicality. Although the storytellers did not directly talk about racial matching in their experiences, they appear to have some ideas of how matching between client and counsellor might (or not) have benefited them. They seem to see that similarities between client and counsellor have advantages over differences. Most of the storytellers spoke of their wish to have a counsellor of the same gender, similar age, similar experience, and ethnic background.

Meyer and colleagues' (2011) concepts of perceived support and perceived similarity may explain these findings. According to their mediation model of racial matching, when clients feel similar to their counsellors, they also perceive counsellors as supportive, which then appears to increase therapist credibility and strengthen the working alliance. Thus, racial matching is only one way that may help increase perceived similarity. There are other ways, such as attitudes, values, and personality. From this point of view, the storytellers' wish to have counsellors who have a similar background is related to their belief that these counsellors would have similar attitudes or values. As such, the counsellors would be perceived as being more supportive and/or having higher credibility. To the storytellers, perceived similarity seems to be a favourable factor to helpful counselling.

The other pair of differences and similarities concerns the view of how counselling is experienced between East and Southeast Asian clients and Caucasian clients. Today, literature on multicultural counselling seems to have a heavy emphasis on what might be different for culturally diverse clients from clients of the mainstream Caucasian culture (Patterson, 1996). According to the storytellers, counsellors are most helpful when they are neutral, non-judgemental, authentic, respectful, can provide good listening, and create

listening space. These counsellor characteristics are indeed common to all types of counselling. From this point of view, the storytellers, who are all East or Southeast Asians, seem to expect and have experienced their counsellor not very differently from their Caucasian counterparts. In terms of providing helpful counselling, these counsellor qualities are perceived as having similar importance, if not the same, for clients from both cultural backgrounds. A key question emerges: When considering multicultural counselling, is there room to consider similarities among all the differences?

Patterson (1996), along with many other multicultural scholars (e.g. Pedersen, 2009; D. W. Sue & Sue, 2003), has recognized that multicultural counselling might be more universal than divergent. Culture may be broadly defined to include not only ethnicity or race, but also gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, generation, and others (Arthur & Collins, 2010; D. W. Sue, 2001). As such, cultural differences exist almost everywhere, as do similarities. Counsellors' characteristics and attitude, rather than specific techniques that counsellors need to acquire, may be more important in providing appropriate service to diverse group of clients. Indeed, there are a number of problems with regards to specific techniques for different groups of clients (Patterson, 1996). What counsellors need to pay attention to are their own attitudes, ability to demonstrate empathy, and building rapport. These qualities, as Patterson (1996) stated, "are neither time-bound nor culture-bound" (p. 230).

Nevertheless, consideration of similarities does not imply that we can ignore the differences. Instead, it is more important to be inclusive. D. W. Sue and Sue (2003) have pointed out that though counsellor qualities such as those described above may be universal, how they are communicated to diverse clients still requires attention. For

example, inclusive cultural empathy, coined by Pedersen (2009), stresses the importance of embracing both similarities as well as differences between client and counsellor. He stated that it might also be the pathway of further development of a new culture in the counselling relationship, since it allows continual interaction between the two cultures. Perhaps Judy had given us some hints when she described the pros and cons of seeing a counsellor of the same cultural background and that of seeing a counsellor of a different cultural background. Differences and similarities are two sides of a coin. It is perhaps ideal to be inclusive and embrace both sides.

#### ***6.1.5 Cognition versus Emotion***

Research has suggested that focusing on clients' expression of cognition, rather than emotions, is more appropriate for people of East and Southeast Asian descent (Kim et al., 2001). This is related to traditional Asian values that emphasize emotional self-control, avoidance of family shame, and keeping face (Kim, 2011). For example, focus on cognition such as problem-solving seems to bear less shame than an emphasis on emotion which can be seen as a sign of weakness (Leong & Lau, 2001). However, the storytellers seem to suggest otherwise. As discussed, many of the storytellers went into counselling with the mentality that they had a problem at hand that needed to be resolved. However, they finished counselling with the appreciation of having their problem issues organized and better awareness and understanding. This was accompanied by the feeling of relief, empowerment, and having hopes for the future. For example, Victor stated that he did not want to involve his family of origin in the problem situation he was encountering with his wife. Grace said that she felt so betrayed that she had nowhere to go. Counselling was a place for them to unload the burden and to see other possibilities.

Once again, problems might not have been solved, but at least they felt relieved and empowered. As Victor described, “it was like mental health food... at least I can talk about it, someone was there to listen.” They seem to suggest that both cognition and emotions are of similar importance, if not the same.

The importance of emotional support is evident in the stories presented in this study. The storytellers seem to be suggesting that while cognition (including advice, suggestions, and feedbacks) is important, emotional support is also essential. It is interesting how the storytellers connected the idea of emotional needs with some traditional values they hold. They described their counsellors as a neutral third person, who is outside of the current situation or an outsider of the client system. As such, these counsellors are perceived as being almost burden-free from any possible bias or presumption and professionals who would keep confidentiality. It worked to the storytellers’ advantage because they felt freer to talk about their feelings without having to worry that these feeling expressions would be gossiped back to their social circle (Netto et al., 2001). Odele, for example, had mentioned her family value of avoiding family shame and loss of face. However, it was because of the very same value that she found that talking to a neutral third person who would keep confidentiality has an advantage.

With regards to emotion, Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) discussion about different kinds of emotions is also relevant. In outlining the differences between independent and interdependent individuals, Markus and Kitayama argued that there is a fundamental difference in how these individuals experience emotions. For people with independent construal of self, emotions are more likely directed to the self, Markus and Kitayama

called it “ego-focused”. Examples of these emotions include joy, anger, fear, and sad. On the contrary, people with interdependent self-construal would more likely to experience emotions that are directed to others, hence “other-focused”. As Markus and Kitayama explained, other-focused emotions such as shame and guilt, “typically result from being sensitive to the other, taking the perspective of the other, and attempting to promote interdependence” (p. 235). It then makes sense that it would be difficult for the storytellers to talk about these emotions in front of those they care about. Instead, talking to a burden-free person would be much easier. It is not to say that interdependent selves, such as the storytellers, do not have ego-focused emotions. However, it might be more important to deal with the other-focused emotions because maintaining and enhancing interdependence is very important.

The implication here is that it may not be so much about the choice between cognition and emotion as they are both important. It may be more about how and what cognition and emotions are to be addressed. From a social constructionist point of view, this is the job for each dyad of counsellor and client to work out within their therapeutic relationship, as each counselling relationship is co-constructed.

#### ***6.1.6 Section Summary***

Engaging in the thematic narrative analysis of the storytellers’ narratives has led to new understandings of the current literature. While there are many discussions around effective counselling for people of Asian descent, the storytellers gave me their account of helpful counselling from an East and Southeast Asian perspective. Comparing the academic literature and the storytellers’ worlds of counselling experiences, I was able to start questioning some meanings of the current understanding about counselling for East

and Southeast Asians. Although the storytellers used the same wordings, such as guidance and advice, as they are discussed in the literature, these terms seem to carry a deeper and broader meaning than is suggested in the academic world. In addition, there might have been some misunderstanding about the agentic nature of these clients and the need for emotional focus during therapy. My intent here is to bring attention to the importance of the client's voice in the meaning of counselling and how helpfulness can be experienced during the process. According to the story that the storytellers and I co-developed, what constitutes a helpful counselling experience includes the counsellor's giving in terms of opening space, structuring the session so that they can feel organized, the ability to exercise their self-agency as clients, and focusing on both cognitive and emotional expressions. In the following, I will discuss some limitations and ethical considerations that have arisen in the course of doing this research, as well as some implications for practice and future research.

## **6.2 Critical Reflections**

### ***6.2.1 Limitations***

Thematic narrative analysis employed in the current study is often criticized for its production of case-centered or context-dependent knowledge (Riessman, 2008). It is questionable how this type of knowledge can apply or generalize to the larger population concerned. Admittedly, my study included eight stories of counselling experience from East or Southeast Asian clients, which represent a very small number of East or Southeast Asians in Canada. I argue, however, the richness of these stories is additive to the current understanding of helpful counselling for this population in terms of generating a critical review of or extending and deepening existing concepts (Josselson, 2011). Flyvbjerg

(2004) argued that case-centered research deals with the complexities and richness of life experiences, which are often missing in neatly organized scientific experiments. With the details provided by the storytellers, I was able to reflect on what I have learned from the current literature and re-consider the meanings of those concepts in working with clients of East or Southeast Asian descent.

Throughout the research process, I strived to stay close to my research question that concerns how helpfulness was experienced. My approach to this study may be limited to my subjective understanding of helpful counselling (Flyvbjerg, 2004). My interpretations may also be biased because of my personal experience and being an East Asian. However, it is this very subjectivity and personal experience that allowed me to be more sensitive when I “close in on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice” (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 428). I shall reinstate that from the stance of social constructionism and constructivism, I reject the idea of objective truth (Burr, 2003). Therefore, my interpretation of the storytellers’ stories is only one way of meaning making. As the reader may read this thesis through a different lens, the results may take various directions.

I looked at the stories through a lens of multicultural counselling in which I focused on comparing what is currently understood and what the storytellers experienced. In fact, if I had adopted a different lens, the storytellers’ narrative may have had a very different meaning. For example, when I asked Elizabeth about her ethnic origin, she discussed her understanding of being a Canadian and Vietnamese. It seems that Elizabeth saw herself as having two different identities (i.e., Canadian and Vietnamese, but not Vietnamese-Canadian). It also appears that she was very comfortable with both of her identities. This

portion of the conversation reminds me of Berry's (1980; 1999; 2001) theory of acculturation in which bicultural identity is the "ideal" outcome for an acculturated immigrant. Phinney's (2002) theory about the fluidity of ethnic identity might also explain Elizabeth's idea of her own identity. It seems that Elizabeth saw her identity as very context-specific. Perhaps if I had approached the interview with a focus on identity formation and continued the conversation with Elizabeth about identities, I could have found something very interesting about the formation of bicultural identity.

There were also other concepts that I could have explored. For example, the storytellers' understanding and experience of counsellors' multicultural counselling competency, the effect of acculturation in their lived experience, or generational issues were some important factors recognized in the literature that might have influenced their meaning making of counselling. However, my goal was to add to the current understanding and encourage others to create space for reflections of what we claim to know by allowing clients' voices in. My decision of not restricting our conversations to what is claimed to be important may have contributed to the lack of discussion on these topics.

Another limitation of the current study is the lack of sensitivity regarding the within group differences among the East and Southeast Asian storytellers. Although they may share some common collectivistic values and other beliefs (Ruzek et al., 2011), there may still be subtle differences that could have influenced their experiences in counselling. However, it was practically impossible for me to include participants of one specific ethnic background.

### ***6.2.2 Ethical Considerations***

During the research process, I was aware of the power that I may have exercised by virtue of being in the role of researcher. For example, Grace initially did not talk about her negative feelings towards her counsellors. She was selectively telling the positive side of things as she thought positive-ness was the only valuable information for my study. Though the effect was not intended, my preparation of the research, including the research title, the interview questions, and so forth, might have implicitly set the rules for what stories are “appropriate” and what are not in this research context. This reflection made me even more careful when I moved onto the theme-searching phase of my analysis. In order to increase the trustworthiness of my study, I consistently referred back to the transcripts and/or listened to the audio tape, and reconsidered ideas that I was going to claim as trustworthy results of my study (Riessman, 2008).

Furthermore, my experience of interviewing the storytellers gave me insight into how important it is to protect research participants’ vulnerability while participating in any kind of human research. As noted in Chapter Four, my interview with Victor began with an extensive explanation of my research aim because Victor seemed to have misunderstood the purpose of my visit. I remember him saying after I presented the consent form to him, “I really appreciated your time and coming here to help me. So how many sessions are we going to have? (translated)” At first, I was puzzled. Then, I realized that he was referred by a counsellor, and my identity of being a psychology student might have implied that I was there to help him. By asking me how many sessions we were going to have, he might have seen me as another counsellor who provided counselling.

Having the tendency to become “the counsellor” while listening to his story, I was closely monitoring the conversation so as not to stray from my research purpose but also allowing Victor to plot his story in the way he wanted. At the same time, I was also sensitive to how I might have underestimated Victor’s control of our conversation. In reflection, I think it was important that I had carefully monitored our conversation. If Victor had really thought that I was another counsellor to provide counselling and without being sensitive and alert to that, I could have put Victor in an unnecessarily vulnerable place. It would have been unethical for me to not clarify my role as a researcher and let the misunderstanding continue without appropriate care throughout the interview.

### **6.3 Implications for Counselling**

The findings of the current study have demonstrated the importance of consulting clients of East and Southeast Asian descent when understanding how helpfulness is experienced. While it is important to be aware of the knowledge that we claim to know from the literature, it is also important not to take it for granted (Burr, 2003). Inquiring into and being sensitive about how this knowledge plays out in a client’s life is critical. Otherwise, a counsellor could create misunderstanding and mistrust in the therapeutic relationship. Therefore, one implication for counsellors who work with this group of clients is to have an open mind about what they know regarding this population. Sometimes this knowledge may play out just as described in books. Other times it may mean something very different depending on the client or the situation. A counsellor may want to check in with clients and inquire about their experience regularly to make sure that one is on the right track.

In other words, I argue that collaborative therapy, as a “way of being” or philosophical stance (Anderson, 2007), is appropriate, or in fact important for counselling for the East and Southeast Asian population. As such, it is important for counsellors to adjust the directive stance with these clients, if needed at all. As discussed, directiveness could mean structuring of the session or providing guidance in terms of opening space for clients to explore their options. When misunderstood, a counsellor could dictate the counselling process with the thought that he/she is providing sound practices to the Asian client. Ultimately, counsellors are expected to offer explanations, interpretations, and guidance to the clients (Tseng, 2004). It is, however, a counsellor’s job to find out to what extent these explanations, interpretations, and guidance are needed. The storytellers have clearly shown their self-agency by assuming ownership of their problems and responsibility to actively participate in the counselling endeavor. This self-agency should be recognized and honoured, and should be utilized towards the client’s benefit. In general, it is perhaps constructive to give voice to clients as a way to invite them to contribute to the helpfulness of counselling (Rennie, 2001). Sometimes it is not so much about what counsellors do, but how much clients perceive that they have engaged in the process that makes the experience valuable.

Collins and Arthur (2010a, 2010b) propose that instead of techniques and skills, a more important construct to consider in a multicultural counselling competency framework is working alliance. Working alliance has been argued as an overarching component that leads to effective counselling in general. In fact, emphasizing working alliance in multicultural counselling context is not a new idea. According to the common factors approach to multicultural counselling, working alliance is the first identified

curative counselling components that is observed across various counselling situations and divergent cultural healing methods (Fischer et al., 1998). As Fischer and colleagues (1998) have pointed out, “the curative properties of a given psychotherapy lie not in theoretically unique components... but in components common to all psychotherapies” (pp. 527-528), and “[a]lthough culturally specific treatments can play an important role in counsel[ing]... we believe that a great deal of attention has been focused on specific techniques, at the expense of attention to common factors in multicultural counsel[ing] and research” (p. 528). Perhaps learning what is common to helpful counselling, such as working alliance, and how these factors may play out with culturally diverse clients warrant more attention in multicultural counselling practice.

Another implication concerns the differences and similarities between clients and counsellors. It may be easier to detect differences particularly working with a minority group such as East and Southeast Asians. However, the results of my study demonstrated that similarities might be a more important focus than differences. Therefore, when working with East or Southeast Asian clients, one way to increase credibility and develop trust is to look for similarities, such as attitudes, values, and personalities (Meyer et al., 2011). Similarity in racial or ethnic background is only one of the many factors. Counsellors might need to look into other areas when racial matching is not possible.

Here, the common factors approach may again offer some insights. As discussed in Chapter One and Two, a shared worldview has been described as one of the four counselling components that are often observed to be part of the curative properties in the counselling process (Fischer et al., 1998). Exploring clients’ worldview and establishing a shared worldview with them might become a helpful tool for counsellors working with

East or Southeast Asian clients. A shared worldview between a counsellor and a client may include a shared language, shared thought processes, or shared cultural values. One particularly relevant concept is the cultural dimension of individualism and collectivism. Having a better understanding of these two constructs may be a good starting point for counsellors to become aware of their own worldview and to explore the worldviews of their clients (Williams, 2003).

The results of my study also have important implications on ways to enhance professional help-seeking attitudes among people of East and Southeast Asian descent. It has been argued that help-seeking attitudes are related to various Asian values. While Kim (2011) stressed that one cannot change Asian's characteristics and beliefs about counselling, there are ways to help them better understand the counselling nature. The shift in the meaning of counselling demonstrated in the storytellers' narratives has shed some light. As discussed, some of the storytellers, for example Odele, learned that counselling is a source of support in terms of gaining better understanding and awareness of their own experiences. Other storytellers, for example Lucy, learned from my interview with her that counselling could be less negative than she once thought. While stigma can result in negative help-seeking attitude (Eisenberg, Downs, Golberstein, & Zivin, 2009); stigma reduction through proper education and marketing may be useful (Loya et al., 2010). Education, as simple as in the conversation I had with Lucy, already seems useful. It has been argued that people of Asian descent often have very limited to no knowledge about counselling (Gloria et al., 2008; D. W. Sue & Sue, 2003; Yoon & Jepsen, 2008). Encouraging the use of counselling may require addressing some stereotypical views of mental health issues (Loya et al., 2010).

In addition, because East and Southeast Asians are unfamiliar with counselling, counsellors might need to take a more active role in educating the public about their services. As discussed in Chapter Five, storytellers who had previous knowledge about counselling, from school, churches, or other sources, seem to be more open to the idea of professional help-seeking. East and Southeast Asians' attitudes towards counselling may change when they become more educated about it. One way to advertise counselling may include an emphasis on confidentiality (Kim, 2011). One of the most appreciated counsellor characteristics in this study was the neutral third person role of the counsellor. The importance of this third person as being removed from the client's social circle, and who is obligated to follow ethical standards was critical. Thus, educating East and Southeast Asian clients about this part of the professionalism may increase counsellor credibility in general.

Furthermore, sharing successful counselling stories among people of Asian descent may also be helpful. As demonstrated in Chapter Five, the storytellers experienced a shift in the meaning of counselling. Counselling was once "problematic", but is now about awareness of self that leads to betterment of life, and hopes for the future. Sharing these experiences may help others who do not have much knowledge about counselling to learn how counselling might be helpful for them.

#### **6.4 Implication for Future Research**

The findings of my study have shown the importance of inquiring into East and Southeast Asian clients' meaning and experience of counselling. I encourage researchers to continue asking these questions to enrich our understanding of these meanings. Future research may focus specifically on a particular topic related to clients' counselling

experiences and how clients derive meaning from it. For example, the current results indicate how East or Southeast Asian clients may experience a directive counselling style differently. Future research can ask questions to engage participants in conversations regarding how they experience a directive counselling style or what it means for them to enter this type of therapeutic relationship.

One of the limitations of this study is that I did not look into how the storytellers talked about their counsellors' multicultural competence. One direction for future research would be to examine how East or Southeast Asian clients experience counsellors' multicultural competence, and compare that with how counsellors demonstrate it in sessions. Perhaps combining an instrument to check counsellors' multicultural counselling competency (MCC) with inquiring clients about their experience of counsellors MCC would be a direction to understand how MCC is experienced.

Another direction for research would be to examine each ethnic group individually so that it will be easier to "close in" and develop rich details of how helpful counselling is experienced (Flyvbjerg, 2004). As discussed, one important feature of narrative analysis is the case-centered nature that allows research to elicit thick stories of lived experience (Riessman, 2008). By "closing in" on each of the ethnic group, more details will unfold and the story of helpfulness among Asian clients will become richer as a whole.

Because of my ability to speak English as well as two different Chinese languages, I was able to interview the storytellers and analyze their narratives in these languages. While I consider this as an advantage, there might also be some limitations that I am not aware of as yet. Issues that have been discussed in the literature about interviewing

participants who speak different languages usually concerns the use of interpreters or translation issues during transcription (Riessman, 2008). Prior to the time I wrote this thesis, I was unable to find other studies that explore or explain the effect of having a principle researcher who is capable of speaking different languages conducting a study like the current one. Future research may look into this area for additional understanding.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

My strong curiosity about how counselling is experienced by people of Asian descent has driven me to the completion of this thesis. I am grateful that I have chosen this topic as my research focus because from what I have learned through this research project, I am now equipped with better language to explain to my people what counselling can do and how counselling could be meaningful to us. Thanks to the storytellers who volunteered to take part in this study, I was able to hear voices from East and Southeast Asian clients who have their unique views of counselling. Their stories have provided me a chance to reflect on my journey of becoming a counselling professional and my knowledge about this profession.

As discussed in this very last chapter of my thesis, the key learning from engaging in this study is that I have come to new understandings of the current literature. As mentioned in earlier chapters, although I identify and agree with some Asian characteristics described in the current literature, I still had many questions regarding the current concepts about effective counselling for people of Asian descent. With the help of the storytellers, I am now able to look deeper into the meaning of these concepts. For example, guidance may be a more useful concept when it is conceptualized as “givings”, such as space opened by a counsellor for clients to consider alternative views of a

situation. Directiveness could be understood as a multidimensional concept that may entail better structuring of the counselling process in earlier stages. Emotion is perhaps as important a focus as cognition for East and Southeast Asian clients.

With these new understandings, I am encouraged and I encourage other practitioners to continue incorporating clients' voices in their practice so as to enhance helpfulness in the counselling service provided. Most importantly, practitioners should not underestimate or misunderstood clients' exercises of self-agency during the counselling process. To reiterate, I suggest that collaborative therapy as a philosophical stance (Anderson, 2007) is appropriate for clients of East and Southeast Asian descent. In addition, I call for attention to the application of common factors in multicultural counselling practice. To summarize, I suggest that counsellors are more likely to be able to develop a culturally sensitive working alliances with their Asian clients and many other culturally diverse clients when they assume a "not knowing" stance (Dean, 2001), pay close attention to the worldviews of self and clients (Fischer et al., 1998), and increase cultural awareness of self and others (Arthur & Collins, 2010; Collins & Arthur, 2010a),

I would like to end the thesis with an invitation for all counselling professionals to rethink the meaning of multicultural counselling. *Multicultural* describes the inclusion of multiple cultures. It has been suggested that the definition of culture should be more inclusive so that it entails not only ethnicity but also dimensions such age, gender, socioeconomic status and social class, sexual orientations, religion, and their unique intersections (Arthur & Collins, 2010; Collins & Arthur, 2010a; D. W. Sue & Sue, 2003). According to this definition, we are working with multiple cultures on a daily basis,

whether or not we work with clients from a visible minority group. As such, my invitation is to consider all counselling to be multicultural (Arthur & Collins, 2010), in which we can appreciate the similarities found in all counselling as well as embrace the differences we experience.

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## **APPENDIX A: AN EXAMPLE OF MY JOURNAL**

August, 2011

In my literature search, I find that I feel very uncomfortable with the suggestion about a directive style of counselling for people of Asian descent. I want to find argument against this suggestion because I do not think that it is true. The more I read about it, the better I understand about this claim. The claim itself may be valid, but there seems to have some misunderstanding, or unclear meaning about it. Like in D. W. Sue and Sue's (2003) book, they pointed out that it is a mistake to assume that Asian Americans want authoritarian and highly directive stance from the counsellor. It is more about the structure, which Patterson (1996) has also talked about.

I started to feel an urge to clarify if there is any misunderstanding. Or at least I want to bring to the audience's attention that caution is needed when reading works about this claim. I think this is important because otherwise counsellors might do harm to Asian clients.

## **APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

|                                  |           |            |            |             |
|----------------------------------|-----------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Name (preferred pseudonym) :     |           |            |            |             |
| Age:                             |           |            |            |             |
| Gender:                          |           |            |            |             |
| Ethnicity:                       |           |            |            |             |
| No. of years residing in Canada: |           |            |            |             |
| Initial counselling experience:  | 0-3 month | 3-6 months | 6-9 months | 9-12 months |
| Date of interview:               |           |            |            |             |

1. How many times have you been in counselling?
  - a. If more than once, which one of these experiences you find most helpful?
2. What did you know about counselling before your first counselling experience?
3. What did counselling mean to you before your first experience?
4. What was your main reason(s) for seeking counselling?
5. What kind of counselling did you seek/receive? (Individual, couple, family)
6. Do you have any idea of what the main theoretical orientation your counsellor(s) used?
7. Can you tell me about your counselling experience?
  - a. How did it start?
  - b. How did it develop after that?
  - c. How did it end?
8. What did you find helpful during sessions?
9. What did you find helpful in the process of counselling as a whole?
10. In your opinion, what did your counsellor do that made the experience positive for you?
11. What other things happened in the counselling process that made the experience positive for you?
12. What would you like to change in the process if you could? How?
13. Did the meaning of counselling change after this experience? If yes, how?

## **APPENDIX C: BRING-HOME JOURNAL ENTRY FORM**



### **Reflective Journal Entry**

Please reflect on your interview with me, write one journal entry that you think would help to enrich your story about your first counselling experience in Canada. You can either write on this paper, or use other format (e.g. computer typed) to give your response. I have included some sample questions that we have discussed during the interview to provide you with ideas. They are at the back of this sheet. You are welcome to use them or write whatever you would like to regarding your first counselling experience in Canada. There is no word limit. Please return your journal entry within two weeks of receiving this form.

Sample questions that may help with your journal entry:

1. Is there any other thing that you would like to add to your story of your counselling experience? You may use the following questions to help develop your story.
  - a. How did it start?
  - b. How did it develop after that?
  - c. How did it end?
2. What did you find helpful during sessions?
3. What did you find helpful in the process of counselling as a whole?
4. In your opinion, what did your counsellor do that made the experience positive for you?
5. What other things happened in the counselling process that made the experience positive for you?
6. What would you like to change in the process if you could? How?
7. Did the meaning of counselling change after this experience? If yes, how?
8. Any other thing you would like to add?

Upon completion, please return your response to me using encrypted email format  
Shirley Lo: lkslo@ucalgary.ca

## APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT POSTERS

### D.1. English version

**TALK ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE**  
Volunteer research participants needed

Research has shown that Asian Canadians seem to see counselling differently from their Caucasian counterparts. A research study is being conducted at the University of Calgary to look at what Asian Canadians see as helpful in counselling. Come share your own experience of counselling in Canada.

If you and/or your friend(s),

1. identify yourself as Asian (e.g., Korean, Chinese, Japanese, and etc);
2. are 18 years of age or older;
3. have received counselling in Canada (through counselling professionals, psychologists, social workers, churches, or other channels); and
4. are willing to meet with me and talk about your experience during an interview\*.

Please send me an email or leave a phone message:

Shirley Lo, Graduate student @ University of Calgary  
(403)966-8240  
[lksllo@ucalgary.ca](mailto:lksllo@ucalgary.ca)

\*Interview can be conducted in English, Mandarin, or Cantonese.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Shirley Lo<br>(403)966-8240<br><a href="mailto:lksllo@ucalgary.ca">lksllo@ucalgary.ca</a> |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

## D.2. Chinese version

### 你的經驗淺談 志願性學術研究參與

有研究表明，亞裔人仕對心理輔導的看法似乎跟西方人仕有所不同。卡加里大學(University of Calgary)現正進行一項研究，探討亞裔人仕對心理輔導的看法。目的是希望了解亞裔人仕從心理輔導過程中得到怎樣的幫助。同時亦希望可以進一步探討如何改善輔導型式來符合亞裔人仕的期望，令他們可以得到更大的幫助。現誠邀你來分享你在加拿大的輔導經驗。

如果你，或你認識的朋友：

1. 是亞洲人（如中國人，香港人，台灣人，韓國人，日本人等等）；
2. 年滿 18 歲或以上；
3. 有在加拿大接受過輔導（經輔導專業人仕；心理學家；社工；或教會等渠道）；
4. 並願意與我會面\*，分享你的個人經驗。

請向我發送電郵，或留電話訊息。我的聯絡方法如下：

Shirley Lo, 卡加里大學碩士研究生  
(403)966-8240  
lkslo@ucalgary.ca

\*會談可以英語、國語或廣東話進行。

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Shirley Lo<br>(403)966-8240<br>lkslo@ucalgary.ca |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|

## **APPENDIX E: INFORMATION SHEET (VERBAL PRESENTATION)**

### **What is helpful? Stories of counselling by Asian Canadians Information about the study (Verbal presentation)**

This study is a Master's thesis project. The aim is to better understand the counselling experience among Asian Canadians in Canada. In particular, I am interested in hearing what you, as a client, have to say about your counselling experience, what is helpful and what is not.

To participate in this study, I will ask you some questions that are related to your first counselling experience in Canada. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to one hour. This will be taken place here in this room after you have agreed to participate and signed the consent form. The interview will be audio-taped. Only my supervisor and myself will be able to have access to it. The tape will then be transcribed to a word document for the purpose of analysis. You will have a chance to look at the transcripts and make changes before it is analyzed.

After the interview, I will also ask you to take one of these reflective journal sheets home (showing the journal sheet). I hope that you will reflect on what we have talked about today and your counselling experience. Then you can write anything that you think would give me more details and help me to understand more about your experience. You don't have to follow this format. You can hand write it or computer type it, then email it back to me or drop it down at the designated drop box for this study. I will use those as part of your story for analysis.

Once you have signed the consent form, we can start the interview. However, you have the right to withdraw from this study at any point of time. I also want to be up front with you that though the questions I am asking sound neutral, it might trigger strong feelings. At any moment if you feel uncomfortable to continue, please let me know. I also have some information on community and counselling resources for the Calgary area if you need them.

(Then explain the consent form.)

## APPENDIX F: CONSENT FORM



Appendix F  
**Educational Studies in Psychology**  
**Faculty of Education**

Research Project Title: **What is helpful? Stories of counselling by Asian Canadians**

Participant Consent Letter for participation in the research project stated.

Researcher: Shirley Lo, Graduate Student, Educational Studies in Psychology, University of Calgary  
Supervisor: Helen Massfeller, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Educational Studies in Psychology,  
University of Calgary

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

The purpose of this research is to better understand the counselling experience of Asian clients in Canada through stories from their personal counselling encounters. In particular to collecting stories, this research will involve a 30-60 minute interview between the researcher and you (the participant) regarding your counselling experience. You are also invited to take the questions that were asked at the interview with you and write one journal entry reflecting on the questions and the interview. Information collected will be analyzed and written up for a Master's Degree research thesis. The study data will be securely stored on a password-protected computer in the case of electronic files or in a locked filing cabinet in the case of physical materials. The findings will be presented in a thesis defence and professional conferences. To participate in the research, please read and note your agreement to the following terms:

- I agree to provide my name, gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, employment status, and number of years residing in Canada. Yes  No
- I give my permission for written notes to be made during the interview. Yes  No
- I give my permission for the use of an audio recording device during the interview. Yes  No
- I understand that participation is absolutely voluntary.
- I understand that I am free to terminate the interview at any time and data collected to the point of withdrawal will be retained/used.
- I wish to remain anonymous, but you may refer to me by a pseudonym. The pseudonym I choose for myself is: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes  No
- I understand that the content of the interview might trigger my emotions. In case of such distress, I will be provided with contact information for local counselling services.
- I understand that I will have the opportunity to review the written summary, and if I want to provide feedback, I will do so within two weeks of receiving the materials. I also understand that failure to respond within the time limit will be taken as approval from me to use these materials as is.
- I understand that only the researcher and her supervisor will see the signed consent form and my name or any other identifying information will not be used in the poster presentation or in any other presentation of study results.

- I understand that all interview notes and/or tapes will be destroyed one year after the thesis defence.
- I understand that the counselling centre from where I was recruited will not be made aware of my participation in this research study.
- I understand that participation, non-participation, or withdrawal will have no effect on any services received from the counselling centre.
- I understand that if I require more information regarding the interview and/or the research, I may contact Shirley Lo at (403)966-8240 or [ikslo@ucalgary.ca](mailto:ikslo@ucalgary.ca), or her supervisor: Dr. Helen Massfeller of the University of Calgary's Educational Studies in Counselling Psychology at (403) 220-3866.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information provided to you about participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

---

Participant's Signature

Date

---

Investigator and/or Delegate's Signature

Date

---

Witness' Signature

Date

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Senior Ethics Resource Officer, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-3782; email [rburrows@ucalgary.ca](mailto:rburrows@ucalgary.ca).

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

## **APPENDIX G: TRANSCRIPT CLEAN UP PROCESS**

### **G.1. Example of verbatim transcript**

1 S: So what did you know about counselling before your counselling  
2 experience?  
3 P: Em... Not much... You know, I always thought that.... you go and  
4 talk to somebody about your problems [laughed].  
5 S: Yea, yea?  
6 Yea. And then... sometimes.... well, I don't know. I felt like I can  
7 get some insight from talking to another person, so then maybe they can  
8 give me some guidance on a topic, or ... em... dealing with my stress.

### **G.2. Example of cleaned transcript**

1 S: So what did you know about counselling before your counselling  
2 experience?  
3 P: Not much [.]. You know I always thought that [p] you go and  
4 talk to somebody about your problems [laughed].  
5 S: Yea?  
6 Yea. And then [.]. sometimes [p] well, I don't know. I felt like I can  
7 get some insight from talking to another person, so then maybe they can  
8 give me some guidance on a topic, or [.]. dealing with my stress.

## **APPENDIX H: COMMUNITY AND COUNSELLING RESOURCES**

### **Health and Wellness:**

- 1) Nutrition Class - Healthy Living Provided by: Alberta Health Services, Southland Park III, 10101 Southport Road SW, Calgary, Alberta T2W 3N2, 403-943-6753
  - program that promotes healthy eating choices and provides free nutrition resources and services to the health professionals, educators and the general public
- 2) <http://www.healthstandnutrition.com/index.php>
  - a local Calgary company that caters to individual nutritional counselling, group and corporate programs and retreats
- 3) Nutritional Counselling: Provided by Talisman Centre, 2225 Macleod Trail S, Calgary, Alberta T2G 5B6, 403-233-8393
  - nutritional counselling with a registered dietitian

### **Counselling Service In Calgary:**

- 1) Calgary Counselling Centre  
Suite 200, 940 - 6 Avenue S.W.  
Calgary, Alberta  
Canada T2P 3T1  
(403) 691-5991 – intake line  
(403) 265-4980 – general enquiry  
[www.calgarycounselling.com](http://www.calgarycounselling.com)
  - The centre provides individual, group, family, and couple counselling for depression, stress, eating disorders, separation and loss, parent-child conflict, domestic abuse prevention, sexual abuse, anxiety/panic attacks, sexuality/intimacy, anger problems, health issues, personal growth, self-esteem, and pastoral counselling. The service can be accessed by calling the intake line or filling out an intake form online. The centre also provides various programs with different themes, such as marriage preparation and employee assistance. One of the emphases of the centre is multilingual support, which means that they have the capacity to provide counselling in different first languages other than English, e.g. Cantonese, French, Hebrew, Kazakh, and etc.
- 2) Theravive  
[www.theravive.com](http://www.theravive.com)
  - Theravive is a network of licensed and professional counsellors, therapists, and psychologists. It provides information on therapists who provide individual therapy, marriage counselling, and other mental health resources. Individuals can go to the website to search for therapists that are in/close to their area. It covers Canada as well as the U.S.

- 3) Distress Centre  
 Suite 300, 1010 - 8th Avenue SW  
 Calgary, AB T2P 1J2  
 (403)266-4357 – crisis line  
[www.distresscentre.com](http://www.distresscentre.com)
- The Distress Centre is a non-profit social agency that delivers 24-hour support by offering a crisis. It also provides counselling and resource referral services to Calgary and the surrounding area. The counselling service can be accessed through the crisis line by requesting a counselling intake. The Distress Centre provides support to any kind and any level of distressed individuals.
- 4) Serenity Now Wellness Centre  
 501- 30 Avenue NW  
 Calgary, AB  
 T2M 2N7  
 (403) 454-7600  
[www.serenitynowwellness.ca](http://www.serenitynowwellness.ca)
- The centre emphasizes whole body healing. It consists of different professionals including psychologists, counsellors, social workers, and acupuncturist. The centre provides individual, family, couple, and child and adolescent counselling specializing in anger, addictions, anxiety, depression, trauma, fertility, chronic pain, stress, child behaviour concerns, family conflict, and divorce.

### **Couples Counselling**

- 1) [www.triopsychology.com/Couples](http://www.triopsychology.com/Couples)  
 Suite 202, 1235 17th Avenue SW  
 Calgary (403) 206-7865
  - Open & Effective Communication Learn, Connect & Resolve Today
- 2) Calgary Counselling Centre  
 940 6 Avenue Southwest #200, Calgary  
 (403) 265-4980
  - Centre helps families, couples, children, men and women  
[www.calgarycounselling.com](http://www.calgarycounselling.com)
- 3) [www.nathancobb.com](http://www.nathancobb.com)  
 200C Haddon Road SW, Calgary, AB  
 (403) 255-8577
  - Helpful Guidance for Difficult Issues Conflict, Infidelity, Disaffection

## **Family Support**

### 1) Calgary Family Therapy Centre

#300 - 2204 2nd Street SW.  
Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2S 3C2  
Telephone: (403)802-1680  
Fax: (403) 270-7446  
E-mail: fraserm@ucalgary.ca

- CFTC is a clinical outpatient treatment program which provides specialized services in family therapy for families of children under 18. Approximately 500 families are seen per year, including a wide range of types of families and presenting problems which provide a rich resource for clinical training experiences. The Program also provides ongoing teaching and serves as a base for conceptual research in family therapy.

### 2) Eastside Family Counselling Centre

255 495 36 St. N.E. Northgate Mall,  
Calgary, AB T2A 6K3  
(403)299-9696

<http://www.woodshomes.ca/index.php?page=eastside-family-centre>

- It is a free walk-in counselling service centre. Service is available on a first-come, first served basis. No appointment is required. The centre provides services to youth and families with a wide range of problematic situations. The centre emphasizes on brief therapy, which aims at providing immediate relief for concerning issues. Therapy sessions are usually 50 minutes, offered up to five times to each individual per problem.

### 3) Catholic Family Services of Calgary

250, 707 - 10 Avenue SW  
Calgary, AB T2R 0B3  
Telephone: (403)233-2360  
Fax: Fax 403.205.5295  
E-Mail: info@cfs-ab.org

- Catholic Family Service provides a broad menu of programs and services which include counselling services. The counselling services target families, couples, and individuals who find themselves in challenging financial situations. Catholic Family Service provides individual, couple and family counselling specializing in parent-child conflict, couple's issues, depression, anxiety, healing from trauma, marriage preparation, and sexual abuse. They also offer multilingual support by either providing counselling in different first languages or with interpreter.CFS serves people of all ages, faiths and cultures, with a focus on the poor and working poor. Counselling services aim to help families and individuals work through issues that create barriers to living a healthy, happy and fulfilling life.

- 4) **Jewish Family Services Calgary**  
#420 5920 - 1A Street SW  
Calgary, AB, T2H 0G3  
Telephone: (403)287-3510  
Fax: (403)287-3735  
E-mail: info@jfsc.org
  - JFSC offer services and programs in the spirit of Jewish tradition and values: social justice, compassion, and a commitment to repairing the world. Individuals and families coming to JFSC receive holistic care, meaning that all of the clients' issues are addressed simultaneously to the best of the ability of the agency. JFSC functions as a broadly based social support and safety net for the clients it serves. JFSC has a team of professional, qualified counsellors who provide a variety of services including individual, couples, and family therapy as well as group work. Services are accessible to everyone in need and fees are calculated on a sliding scale according to family income.
- 5) **Eastside Family Counselling Centre**  
255 495 36 St. N.E. Northgate Mall,  
Calgary, AB T2A 6K3  
(403)299-9696  
<http://www.woodshomes.ca/index.php?page=eastside-family-centre>
  - It is a free walk-in counselling service centre. Service is available on a first-come, first served basis. No appointment is required. The centre provides services to youth and families with a wide range of problematic situations. The centre emphasizes on brief therapy, which aims at providing immediate relief for concerning issues. Therapy sessions are usually 50 minutes, offered up to five times to each individual per problem.

#### **Career Counselling Resources:**

- 1) **Student Success Centre**  
University of Calgary  
Services: Strong-Intrest Inventory and Myers-Briggs Assessment  
Contact Person: Carol Wert  
[cwert@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cwert@ucalgary.ca)
- 2) **Calgary Public Library**  
[www.calgarypubliclibrary.com](http://www.calgarypubliclibrary.com)  
Service: Career Tours & Drop-in Career Coaching
- 3) **Calgary Career Counselling Team (CCCT)**  
Address: Suite 301, 609 – 14st, N.W.  
Ph: (403) 261-5085
  - CCCT offers workshops to develop strategies for career success.

### **New Immigrant-Serving Agencies**

- 1) Calgary Catholic Immigration Society  
3rd Floor - 120 17 Avenue SW  
Calgary, Alberta T2S 2T2  
Telephone: 403-262-2006  
Fax: 403-262-2033  
E-Mail: [contact@ccis-calgary.ab.ca](mailto:contact@ccis-calgary.ab.ca)  
Website: <http://www.ccis-calgary.ab.ca>
- 2) Calgary Immigrant Women's Association  
First Street Plaza  
200 - 138 4 Avenue SE  
Calgary, Alberta T2G 4Z6  
138 4 Avenue SE Calgary, Alberta T2G 4Z6  
Telephone: 403-263-4414  
Fax: 403-264-3914  
E-Mail: [reception@ciwa-online.com](mailto:reception@ciwa-online.com)  
Website: <http://www.ciwa-online.com>
- 3) Centre for Newcomers  
125 - 920 36 Street NE  
Calgary, Alberta T2A 6L8  
920 36 Street NE Calgary, Alberta T2A 6L8  
Telephone: 403-569-3325  
Fax: 403-248-5041  
E-Mail: [e.novakovic@centrefornewcomers.ca](mailto:e.novakovic@centrefornewcomers.ca)  
Website: <http://www.centrefornewcomers.ca>
- 4) Immigrant Services Calgary  
1200 - 910 7 Avenue SW  
Calgary, Alberta T2P 3N8  
910 7 Avenue SW Calgary, Alberta T2P 3N8  
Telephone: 403-265-1120  
Fax: 403-266-2486  
E-Mail: [info@immigrantservicescalgary.ca](mailto:info@immigrantservicescalgary.ca)  
Website: <http://www.immigrantservicescalgary.ca>

## **Resources for Treatment of Mood Disorders**

- 1) Bipolar Clinic: Alberta Health Services  
Foothills Hospital, Unit 24  
2nd Flr., Special Services Building  
1403 - 29th Street NW  
Calgary, Alberta, T2N 2T9  
Phone: 403-944-1491  
Fax: 403-270-2093
  - Assessment and treatment for individuals with mood disorders and their families. Potential clients must be referred by a physician or psychiatrist through Access Mental Health.
  - Access Mental Health: 403-943-9374
- 2) Calgary Counselling Centre  
Suite 200, 940 - 6 Avenue S.W.  
Calgary, Alberta, T2P 3T1  
Phone: 403.691.5991  
Fax: 403.265.8886  
Email: contactus@calgarycounselling.com
  - Individual counselling for mood disorders
  - Group Program: Managing Depression Program
  - Participants begin in individual counselling, and then may be referred to the Managing Depression Program, which is a 12-week group program aimed at helping group members gain skills to better cope with their depression
  - Fees assessed on a sliding scale
- 3) Mental Health Walk-in: South Calgary Health Centre  
Alberta Health Services  
South Calgary Health Centre  
2nd floor, Mental Health Area  
31 Sunpark Plaza SE  
Calgary, Alberta, T2X 3W5  
Phone: 403-943-1500
  - Walk-in, single session counselling for individuals of all ages

## **Addiction Services**

- 1) Adult Addiction Services: Alberta Health Services (AHS)  
1177 11 Ave SW, Calgary  
403-297-3071
  - Provide outpatient addiction counselling services to adults (18+); individuals or families
  - Offer a wide variety of group programs at all stages of change, including a two week day program, as well as a Family and Friend program for those concerned about someone else's use or gambling.
  - Makes referrals to residential treatment options across Alberta

- Areas of focus include alcohol, other substance, and gambling.
- 2) AHS - Youth Addiction Services  
 1005 - 17 Street NW, Calgary  
 403-297-4664
  - Provides a variety of programs on an outpatient basis to youth (under 18) and their families to help them develop a substance and gambling free lifestyle.
  - Makes referrals to residential treatment options.
- 3) Lander Treatment Centre  
 P.O. Box 1330, 221 – 42 Ave. W.,  
 Claresholm, AB T0L 0T0  
 Phone: 403-625-1395 fax: 403-625-1300
  - Offers a three-phase residential treatment program for adults who are committed to recovering from addictions, initial phase is three weeks long.
  - Offers a variety of other programs including Tobacco Cessation Program, Family Program, Beyond Sobriety Workshops.
- 4) Concurrent Program: AHS - Foothills Addiction Centre
  - The Addiction Program incorporates treatment, education and research of concurrent disorders across the health care continuum.
  - The Addiction Centre specializes in comprehensive assessment, diagnosis and treatment of adults/adolescents with substance/behavioral addiction concurrent with a mental health and/ or chronic physical health condition.

### **Gambling Addiction Resources**

- 1) AHS Addiction and Mental Health, Adult Day Treatment and/or Adult Outpatient  
 1177 11 Ave SW, Calgary, Alberta  
 403-297-3071
  - Non-residential, day treatment programs for people who have substance use or gambling problems.
  - Length of treatment is dependent upon specific program attending.
- 2) Alberta Gamblers Anonymous  
[www.gamblersanonymous.org](http://www.gamblersanonymous.org)  
 403-237-0654
  - To help individuals cope with and recover from a gambling addiction.
- 3) Problem Gambling Alberta
  - Toll Free Line: 866-461-1259
- 4) Aventa Addiction Treatment for Women  
[www.aventa.org](http://www.aventa.org)  
 403-245-9050

- Offering women with alcohol, drug, and gambling addictions the opportunity for a healthy life and a new direction through treatment, education, and support since 1971.

### **Eating Disorders Treatment**

1) Calgary Eating Disorder Program

403.955.7700.

- Referral from a community family physician is required to access treatment.
- The Calgary Eating Disorder Program offers services that are provided across three different sites: Alberta Children's Hospital, Foothills Medical Centre and Richmond Road Diagnostic & Treatment Centre.
- The Calgary Eating Disorder Program is part of Alberta Health Services (Calgary Zone) and a member of the Southern Alberta Eating Disorder Network. The program provides specialized services to meet the needs of Albertan's of all ages, with a diagnosis of anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, or an eating disorder not otherwise specified. A continuum of care spanning from promotion and prevention to early intervention, and treatment options are offered.

2) Pediatric Weight Clinic (PWC)

Suite #402 - 4600 Crowchild Trail NW

Calgary, Alberta, T3A 2L6

(403) 547-8992

- At the PWC we help overweight children and youth make lifestyle changes. These changes can lead to a healthy, positive future that includes, but is not solely focused on, weight loss and weight management. The treatment program involves the child, their family and a team of professionals who provide psychological, medical, nutritional and physical activity support. The PWC treatment program offers different levels of service to meet the individual needs of all families including: full team assessment, full treatment program, individual sessions, and, physician follow-ups.
- The medical component of the PWC program is fully covered by Alberta Health Care for Alberta residents. The non-medical components of the program (psychologist, nutritionist, physical trainer) are not covered by Alberta Health Care however we work with families and their extended health care plans to assist in covering the fees for these services.

3) Juno House

1902 5A St SW

Calgary, AB Canada T2S 2G1

403.209.0997

- Specializing in adolescent girls' and young women's mental health. The mission for Juno House is to motivate girls and young women to build their

capacity for emotional health, while inviting their parents to develop a more coherent understanding of themselves and their children. Juno House provides individual and family counselling at our office in Calgary, and facilitates connections with nutritionists, medical doctors, psychiatrists, personal trainers, and other professionals in the community as needed.

- We work with clients in all aspects of mental health, including: eating disorders, anxiety, addictions, self harm, body image, self-esteem, anger management, grief, stress management, assertiveness, sports performance enhancement, family therapy.

### **Diversity Resources for Gender and Sexual Diversity**

- 1) Calgary Outlink – Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity  
(Beltline): 1528 16 Avenue SW, Calgary, Alberta, T3C 0Z8  
Telephone: 403-234-8973 or 24h Telephone: 1-877-688-4765  
("Out Is OK" 24h Help and Crisis Line provided by Calgary Distress Centre)
  - Calgary Outlink, previously known as the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Association (GLCSA), provides support, education, resources, and networking to the GLBTQIA and Calgary communities.
  - GLBTQIA = Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Intersexed and Allies
- 2) New Directions  
Telephone: 403-234-8973  
Email: info@calgaryoutlink.ca
  - Drop in peer-support group to provide support and resources for individuals who identify as transsexual or inter-sexed. The group meets every 3rd Friday of the month from 7pm to 9pm at Calgary Outlink."
- 3) Sexuality and Gender Diversity Resources Unit Constable – Lynn MacDonald  
Calgary Police Services  
Telephone: 403-206-8150  
Email: pol3118@calgarypolice.ca
  - "If you have been physically, verbally, financially, emotionally or sexually assaulted, threatened, harassed or stalked by your partner or ex-partner, then you are a victim of same-sex domestic abuse."

## APPENDIX I: TRANSCRIPTION NOTATIONS

|     |  |
|-----|--|
| ... | Deleted text for the convenience of presentation   |
| []  | Observable expression other than speech within bracket   |
| { } | Modified or inserted text to enhance the ease of understanding of the text within bracket                      |
| ( ) | Further explanation of the previous word or phrase within bracket  |
| [.] | Short pause, usually less than one second  |
| [p] | Longer pause, usually one second or more   |
| ?   | Rising pitch   |
| .   | Falling pitch  |
| XXX | Obscure information that is potentially identifiable of participants or other related people's real identities |