DISCOVERING A RELATIONSHIP:
Adolescents' Insights Into
the Counselling Relationship
in a Secondary School Setting

by

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to explore, with five grade twelve students, their understandings of the counselling relationships they shared with their counsellors in a single northern B.C. secondary school setting. The investigation was guided by four questions: (1) What conditions make it possible for the students to talk to a school counsellor? (2) What conditions give students the confidence to share private and confidential information with their counsellor? (3) What are the critical incidents during their counselling which affected the development of the counselling relationship? (4) What were the characteristic elements that constituted the counselling relationship between a school counsellor and a student client? Participants were identified by their school counsellors based on the following criteria: (1) the students were grade twelve students, (2) they were familiar with the counselling programme in their school, (3) they had developed a personal counselling relationship with the students, (4) the students could articulate their understandings of those relationships, and (5) they had not had a counselling relationship with the researcher. A series of open ended, in-depth interviews were conducted with the students. Grounded Theory method was used to analyse the data that was transcribed from these interviews. A conceptual model of the counselling relationship was developed consisting of five stages: the Motivating Stage, the Initiating Stage, the Comfort Stage, the Working Alliance Stage, and the Change Stage. Each stage was further divided into Key Categories and Subsidiary Categories that provided insights into conditions that fostered the development of the counselling relationship in the secondary school setting. The search for comfort in the counselling relationship was a constant theme throughout all stages and was identified as the core concept of the model. Several implications for practice were identified and included: (1) the centrality of the personal counselling relationship to the school counsellor's role, (2) the conflict between supervisory roles and the development of a personal counselling relationship, (3) the advantages of a multifaceted role for school counsellors, (4) the role of counselling as an arena of comfort, (5) the importance of giving students a role in the design of counselling services, (6) the importance of a professional friendship.
in the counselling relationship, and (7) the importance of clearly articulated professional identities for school counsellors.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction to the Study

Asking the pragmatist's questions – How does this view affect my view of the world or my commitments to it? – surely does not lead to “anything goes.” It may lead to an unpacking of presuppositions, the better to explore one’s commitments (Bruner, 1990).

The Beginnings: A Personal View From My Office

My personal recollections of counselling during the 1960s certainly do not foster memories of a warm, non-judgemental, and supportive relationship with my counsellor! I have no memory of a counselling centre, just of offices. I recall that I was the recipient of annual lectures about my “unsatisfactory” levels of achievement and the obvious fact that I could do better than I was doing; encounters which leave me cold to this day. I remember writing achievement and intelligence tests, the results of which I was never made privy, and I remember a guidance programme that was taught by my physical education teacher and which, in my adolescent way, I found to be dull, irrelevant, and certainly unwanted.

So, when I look out of my counselling office and see a counselling centre full of adolescents, as I have what I hope is a meaningful conversation with a student who chose to come and see me and, as I pause to consider the many students who do not come to see me, I find myself wondering about the counselling relationship that exists in this milieu.

The counselling relationship is typically valued in most therapeutic approaches (Corey, 1996; Lokare, 1993 & Sexton & Whiston, 1994), and yet the structure of the counselling relationship has spawned a strong and healthy debate in the literature (Greenberg, 1994; Gelso & Carter, 1985, 1994; Hill, 1994; Sexton & Whiston, 1994). In this debate, I find little work that investigates how adolescent students understand their experience of counselling and their personal relationships with their secondary school counsellors. Neither do I find insights about how they
believe a counselling relationship is initiated, and about the processes they believed help it develop and mature. In short, what makes it work or not work for them.

Therefore, this inquiry originates from my curiosity about the counselling relationship in a secondary school. I questioned the source of my curiosity and I believe it is not only rooted in my lack of understanding of the counselling relationship, but in my desire to give audience to the voice of the adolescents, and to record and interpret their understandings. Early in this study, a colleague asked me if I thought adolescents would have anything to tell me. It is evident that the problem is not whether they have something to say, but whether I am able to make sense of what they say.

While grounded theory used in this study is not intended to test a hypothesis, nor are the results intended to be verifiable, it does not mean that this is an exercise in academic mucking about. Rather it is an exploration that adds another dimension to our understanding of the counselling relationship in the secondary school. It gives voice to adolescent students, hopefully raises more questions, and suggests directions for future study.

A Rationale for the Study

In this study I explored, with adolescent students, their understandings of the counselling relationship in a secondary school setting and created a conceptual framework for the phenomenon in this setting. From an academic point of view, I believe that enhancing our understanding of the counselling relationship in this context is important, as it is rarely discussed in the literature on secondary school counselling programmes. If it is true that the counselling relationship plays an important role in counselling students, then it is reasonable to suggest that we make efforts to understand that relationship as perceived by students.

Insights into these relationships have practical applications as well. If we can develop better understandings of the students’ perceptions of the counselling relationship, we can use that knowledge to design more effective counselling programmes. For example, because of competing demands regarding what counsellors should do in a school (Borders & Drury, 1992; Cunanan & Maddy-Bernstein, 1994; Ibrahim, Helms & Thompson, 1983), counsellors are often asked to
perform roles that appear to be incompatible and may have the potential to impede the development of a counselling relationship. Understanding of how students understand an effective counselling relationship might assist counsellors and administrators: first, in determining what kinds of dual relationships impede effective counselling and what kinds enhance it; and second, in learning how to go about negotiating multiple institutional roles for counsellors and in communicating those roles to students.

A better understanding of the counselling relationship in the secondary school will also assist professionals in understanding the relationship among the diverse services offered by secondary school counselling programmes. This diverse base of services, while complicating any delineation of the role of the counsellor, offers students a variety of portals into counselling, each of which may provide both a needed service, and the opportunity for the development of a formal personal counselling relationship. Therefore, students may be introduced to counselling through portals such as course planning, post-secondary planning, or career planning, and those meetings may, in turn, make it easier for them to seek assistance for more personal issues in their lives.

While facilitating access, the diverse offerings of counselling in the secondary school setting and the nature of schools themselves combine to create a unique context for counselling. Within this setting, it is my experience that students often have little choice in their selection of counsellor; their counselling may be mandated for them; they come to counselling for a wide variety of reasons, most of which are not related to psychological issues. Furthermore, termination of counselling in the normal sense is complicated because even if personal counselling ends, the student continues to see the counsellor for a host of other curricular and academic reasons. While it can be argued that, individually, these characteristics are found in other counselling settings, it is their combined effect that I find unique and curious.

Although the opportunity to “connect” with adolescents is broad in the secondary school, it is also my experience that students easily can be “turned-off” relationships by what might appear to the counsellor to be trivial circumstances. For example, when I was in the classroom, I had the opportunity to teach a student with whom I thought I had developed a very good rapport. One day
The Research Question and Grounded Theory in General

In this study I investigated the co-participants' understandings of the personal counselling relationship as they experienced it during their participation in one secondary school counselling programme. For the purposes of this study, a counselling relationship was considered synonymous with a therapeutic relationship. At the outset of the study I focused on the students' perceptions of the:

(1) conditions that made it possible for them to talk to a school counsellor;
(2) conditions that gave clients the confidence to share private and confidential information with their counsellor;
(3) critical incidents during their counselling which affected the development of the counselling relationship; and
(4) characteristic elements which together constituted the counselling relationship between a school counsellor and a student client.

Also for the purposes of this study, the counselling relationship was considered a comprehensive term that included any other factors that contributed to the relationship between the co-participants.
and their counsellors. Finally, this study emphasized personal counselling rather than either educational or career counselling.

The analytical tool adopted for this study was grounded theory as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Glaser (1978, 1992, 1998). Glaser (1978, 1992) purported that the first essential step the investigator had to take when entering into grounded theory research was to dispense with assumptions and presuppositions, "especially logically deducted, a prior [sic] hypothesis" (Glaser, 1978, p. 3). He felt that this posture allowed the investigator to be sensitive to the richness of the data, and set the stage for a rigorous and systematic interpretation of that data that allowed for new insights about the phenomenon under study to emerge.

Glaser (1992) also suggested that the investigator should enter into a project without a problem in mind, but rather "with the abstract wonderment of what is going on that is an issue and how it is handled" (p. 22). In this context, even the research question evolves from the data analysis. Therefore, anyone entering into grounded theory research is on a journey of discovery, the end of which cannot be readily predicted or even anticipated. Therefore, while I posed a research question at the outset of this project there was no assurance that that question would remain viable when the research was complete. My abstract wonderment regarding the relationship between the counsellor and the adolescent client was clear, and that mystery was at the source of the formal questions I asked.
CHAPTER 2
Methodology

Heisenberg's Indeterminacy Principle demonstrated that, at subatomic levels, the future state of a particle is not predictable, and the act of experimentation to find its state will itself determine the observed state (Hale-Haniff & Pasztor, 1999).

A Personal Perspective

My past experiences with research, both as a subject and as a research assistant, focused on quantitative research. As a subject of various research projects, I invariably found myself questioning both items in surveys and their subsequent interpretations and I often wished that I had the opportunity to explain to the researchers how I was interpreting the questions or statements. As a research assistant, I was surprised and, in part, confounded by the difficulty of constructing a very simple, culture free survey (Downing, et al., 1979; Downing & Thomson, 1977). What seemed to be very simple survey items to me, as a young researcher, were made complex by cultural milieu in which the various groups of respondents were situated. Very early in my career, then, I came to believe that the personal "story" of the "subject" could add important dimensions to the findings of the research. I also came to believe that interaction between the subject and the investigator might be important to the outcome of the research, and that context is important to the study as a whole.

My desire to investigate the adolescent students' lived experiences did not presuppose that there was a universal "truth" or reality to be discovered but, rather, that there was a rich set of personal understandings about the processes operating on and within the counselling relationship that could be negotiated through the interaction between the co-participants and me. It gave voice to the individual, provided a sense of context, and allowed for serendipitous discovery.
Research Framework

The overall framework for this study is qualitative research, a branch of inquiry that Denzen and Lincoln (1998) indicate has had "... a long and distinguished history in the human disciplines" (p. 1) and is recognized as an important research approach in the social sciences (Guba & Linclon, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Denzín and Lincoln (1998) indicate that it is difficult to provide a clear definition of qualitative research because, "It has no theory, or paradigm, that is distinctly its own" (p. 5), nor, they expanded, does it use any "distinct set of methods" (p. 5). Instead it uses an eclectic mix of methods and strategies that are chosen to address the context and intent of the inquiry at hand. However, if qualitative research eludes a detailed definition, it can be typified, in a general sense, by its "naturalistic" and interpretive processes, by the extended and/or intensive interaction between the investigator and co-participants, and by its emphasis on socially constructed understandings.

Miles and Huberman (1994) describe qualitative data as "sexy" and suggest that they produce "thick" and "rich" descriptions of the lived experiences of individuals in localized contexts. Whether or not one perceives them as sexy, qualitative data are indeed rich and thick and they add a dimension to the body of knowledge on a given subject that cannot be achieved through the quantitative methodologies alone because of their adherence to objectivity and factors external to the subject. The intensity and prolonged duration of the interactions between the investigator and the co-participants combine to produce understandings that Miles and Huberman (1994) depict as having "... a ring of truth that has strong impact on the reader" (p. 10). This verisimilitude does not imply a single reality or truth but, rather, acknowledges that the understandings explicated are rich with the lived experiences of the co-participants and, therefore, are familiar to readers even if they differ from the readers' own experience.

Within the qualitative research framework, this study adopts what Guba and Lincoln (1994) define as a constructivist paradigm. They describe a paradigm as "... a set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates or first principles. It represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the "world," the individual's place in it, and the range of possible
relationships to that world and its parts …” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 107). Their concept of a research paradigm (see Appendix A for a table of Alternative Inquiry Paradigms) suggests that it is comprised of three sets of beliefs: (1) an ontology, or our understandings of the fundamental nature of being and what we can know about it; (2) an epistemology, or set of beliefs about the relationship between ourselves and whatever it is that we were trying to understand; and (3) a methodology, or means of finding out what there was to know. The ontology of the constructivist paradigm, as they conceive it, is relativist and interprets “realities” as “… multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature … and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions” (pp. 110-111). The epistemology is subjectivist and assumes that the investigator and the co-participants are, “… interactively linked so that the “findings” are literally created as the investigation proceeds” (p. 111). The methodology is dialectical and can “be elicited and refined only though interactions between and among investigator and respondents” (p. 111). So, in this context, a constructivist methodology derives from the belief that realities are really subjective understandings or constructions based on experiences in social contexts, and that we can understand these only through interactions between and among people.

Constructivism, as suggested above, is a broad “umbrella term” (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 1999) that incorporates the varying traditions of social constructionism and developmental constructivism without discriminating among them. The central tenet of constructivism is that understanding is constructed in a social context (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 1999; Moshman, 1997; von Glaserfeld, 1997), a precept that is central to this study. How the individual understands and interprets the world is bound by a rich interplay among the social, cultural, institutional, and historical forces (von Glaserfeld, 1997) through which the individual filters experience. Therefore, in our interaction, the co-participants and I negotiated, in concert, common understandings through our dialogue. Our understandings are not generalizable without more widespread theoretical sampling, nor do they attempt to establish universal truths. Rather they represent understandings that are localized both contextually and temporally.
The Co-Participants

The co-participants for this study were grade twelve students in a single secondary school in northwestern British Columbia, Canada, and were clients of two counsellors in that school. Prior to and during this study the students had personal counselling relationships with their school counsellors. During my briefing sessions with the counsellors it was clear that the counsellors perceived these personal counselling relationships to be much less frequent than the educational and career counselling relationships they shared with other students.

I used a purposive sampling process (Palys, 1992), a method that allowed me to “select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (Patton, 1990, p. 163). Potential co-participants were proposed by their school counsellors. I outlined the study with the counsellors and requested that they (1) identify grade twelve students who might be willing to participate, (2) discuss the study with them, and (3) seek their willingness to discuss participation with me. The counsellors were asked to base their choices of potential participants on the following criteria: (1) the students were grade twelve students, (2) the students were familiar with the counselling programme in their school, (3) each counsellor felt they had developed a personal counselling relationship with the students they were proposing, (4) the counsellors believed the students could articulate their understandings of the counselling relationship, and (5) the students had not had a counselling relationship with the me.

One counsellor proposed two potential co-participants (in October, 1999), and the other proposed four (two in April, 1999, and two in October, 1999). My initial meetings with two prospective co-participants were conducted in April, 1999, and with four others in October, 1999. During these meetings I verbally explained the research to the students and, if they agreed to consider participation, I gave them letters explaining the research and consent to participate forms for both themselves and their parents (see Appendices B, C, & D). Of the six students I interviewed, five agreed to participate in the study, returned the consent forms, and became co-participants. Data collection interviews with the first two participants were conducted during April, May and June, 1999 and with the last three during November and December, 1999 and January
and February, 2000. Because of the curricular and extracurricular commitments of the five co-participants, and the considerable investment of time demanded by the research interviews, I conducted the interviews at each student's convenience.

**Setting**

The setting of the study is the counselling programme of a single, public secondary school in Northwestern British Columbia. The school enrolls students in Grades 8 through 12 and has a total student population of approximately 1050 students. The counselling programme has three full-time counsellors. Their counselling loads are divided alphabetically so that each counsellor serves approximately one-third of the student population, or approximately 350 students. Apart from new registrants from outside the school district, students enter the secondary school from seven elementary feeder schools.

As part of a programme to ease the transition of students from elementary to secondary school, counsellors meet with each of the grade seven teachers to discuss the students' academic and social performance. Subsequent to the teacher/counsellor conference, another meeting is held, this time with the students, to discuss their concerns about moving to the secondary school and to answer any questions they might have about what to expect when they arrived at their new school. Through these meetings each of the counsellors has access to information about the students in his or her counselling load and also has the opportunity to make early contact with them.

The counselling department members provide academic, career, personal, and social counselling to the students; function as referral agents (for counselling concerns that require specialized services); and are responsible for the scheduling of students' academic programmes. They do not provide any family counselling services and clearly announce that they are not psychologists. Because of the scheduling requirement, each counsellor meets with each of the students in his or her counselling load at least once a year. The counsellors also volunteer their time to assist with teams, clubs, and social events within the school and, as such, are active members of the school community.
Counsellors are available to students by means of self-referral and through referrals by the administration, teachers, and parents. In most cases this means that students have immediate access to their counsellors. The counselling department members view the students as their primary clients and, within the bounds of Canadian criminal law, their confidences are respected in all instances, save issues related to the safety of the student or others.

Data Collection

Because of the exploratory nature of this investigation, and the constructivist research paradigm, I chose an unstructured interview format (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). My decision was based on the belief that relevant issues would emerge from the dialogue and their meanings could be negotiated as the interviews proceeded without the necessity of a list of questions. My use of the unstructured interview also allowed the co-participants the greatest freedom in determining what important issues were to be introduced into the conversation, because the flow of conversation was not bound by a predetermined and artificial structure imposed by me. I viewed each co-participant as the expert about his or her life, believed that he or she had something to communicate to the investigation, and held that together we could negotiate common understandings. The unstructured interview also offered both the co-participant and me the opportunity for serendipitous insights or discoveries and, finally, it presented us with a forum for the negotiation of different understandings about phenomena that might not have arisen from structured interviews.

I began each initial interview with a review of the purpose and process of the interview, an explanation of the audio recording equipment, a restatement of the participant’s freedom to withdraw from the research at any time, and an offer of refreshments. I commenced the interview with the statement,

<Participant’s Name>, I would like you to discuss your experience of counselling with me for a bit. Perhaps think back to a counselling session that is clear in your memory. What do you remember about that session that either helped you feel closer to the counsellor or perhaps made you feel more distant? I don’t expect you to tell me the details about why you went to the counsellor; I’m really interested in your reactions to how that meeting felt to you.
I recorded the interviews on a Sony Walkman Recorder using a high quality omni-directional microphone. Although the students were aware of the recording equipment, its small size and quiet operation made it unobtrusive and it was very quickly forgotten in the ensuing dialogue. Each interview lasted for approximately one hour after which I asked the co-participants if there was anything else they wished to add to the interview, if they were comfortable with the process, if they had any suggestions on how to make other interviews better, and if there was anything that bothered them about the interviews or their comments.

I transcribed the audiotape recordings of the interviews and made notes about passages that seemed incomplete and/or unclear. Because, as Lapadat and Lindsay (1998) noted, the transcription is but a representation of a representation (the recording) of an event (the interview), there was considerable distance between the written word and the original dialogue. In order to minimize the effects of this distance and to make me as familiar with the data as possible, it was important that I assumed the labour of transcription rather than eliciting professional assistance, despite the fact that this slowed the interview process considerably. The transcriptions themselves were word for word records of the interview tapes, however, I made no attempt to produce exhaustive analyses of the various paralinguistic or nonverbal elements of the conversations. I chose a simple word-for-word transcription because the intent of the study was not to develop theory about language, but to negotiate an understanding of the students' beliefs about the counselling relationship as they experience it. Furthermore, the analytical processes used in grounded theory, and the use of member checks (i.e., communicating my understandings to the students in order that they have an opportunity to confirm, clarify, or modify them), offered me the opportunity for continued negotiation of understandings that, for the purposes of this study, would not be enhanced by exhaustive coding.

I identified initial open codes which I attached to associated memos using NUDIST Vivo software and compared them to my bracketing diagram (see Figure 1, p. 18) to check for bias. This bracketing diagram is a graphical representation of my understandings about the counselling relationship at the outset of the study. I also conducted member checks to confirm my
understandings with the co-participants. Where necessary, I arranged subsequent interviews to clarify data from the preliminary interviews and to expand the initial coding categories. This process continued until no new information appeared from the coded data.

**An Overview of Grounded Theory**

In this qualitative research project I utilized the principles of grounded theory analysis as formulated by Glaser & Strauss (1967) and Glaser (1978, 1992) as a tool for data analysis. It is an inductive and emergent method that does not presume an *a priori* theory (Glaser, 1992). The strength of grounded theory for me is found in its flexibility, its organizational strategies, and its usefulness as a tool to assist me in generating new insights.

Grounded theory differs from many other research methods in the form and function of the research question and the use of technical literature. Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1994) and Glaser (1992), the leading proponents of grounded theory emphasise that grounded theory is a process of discovery rather than a tool for testing the relationships among variables. Both authors suggest that the research question should not arise from an intensive study of the literature and the subsequent identification of gaps, discrepancies, or inconsistencies in that literature. Rather, Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that, “The research question … is a statement that identifies the phenomenon to be studied” (p. 38). Glaser is more colourful when he suggests that the investigator should dispense with the idea of a problem and should move into the investigation with a sense of “abstract wonderment” (p. 22).

Glaser (1992) also stipulates that, “There is a need not to [emphasis added] review any of the literature in the substantive area under study” (p. 31). Strauss and Corbin (1990) present a similar decree although they recognize that all investigators bring some prior knowledge to the study. The rationale for their prohibitions against conducting an intensive literature review prior to data analysis is most succinctly provided by Glaser who says,

This dictum is brought about by the concern to not contaminate, be constrained by, inhibit, stifle or otherwise impede the researcher’s effort to generate
categories, their properties, and theoretical codes from the data that truly fit, are relevant and work with received or preconceived concepts that may really not fit, work or be relevant, but appear to do so momentarily. It is hard enough to generate one's own concepts, without the added burden of contending with the "rich" derailments provided by the related literature in the form of conscious or unrecognised assumptions of what ought to be found in the data (p. 30).

The literature comes into use later in the analytic or writing process when the concepts are firmly established and even then is not used to verify the extant model, but rather "to add to, extend or vary the extant theory" (Glaser, p. 33). For this reason I have identified the literature section of this study as Chapter 5, rather than as the more common Chapter 2.

The original work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) is somewhat ambivalent as to its ontological orientation. While they espouse the phenomenological belief that the investigator should interact with the world during the inquiry process, they simultaneously adopt the positivistic position that meaning emerges from the data independent of either the co-participant or the investigator (Charmaz, 1994 & deBúrca & McLoughlin, 1996). More current observations (Charmaz, 1994, deBúrca & McLoughlin, 1996, Glaser, 1978, & Strauss & Corbin, 1994) favour a subjective, postmodern stance for grounded theory. In this context, Charmaz (1994), describes a social constructionist view of grounded theory as one that interprets "the process of categorization as dialectical and active, rather than as given in the reality and passively observed by any trained observer" (p. 74). For the postmodern investigator, then, the conviction that theory emerges from the data independent of the co-participants and the investigator is replaced with the belief that it is an active, dialectical process.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) based grounded theory on the concept that theory can evolve from and can be grounded in data through the use of strategies for systematic collection and analysis of that data. It is a slow and demanding approach, especially for initiates, that achieves rigour through its methods (Glaser, 1992, p. 16), however, Charmaz (1994) points out that, "each researcher who adopts the approach likely develops his or her own variations of technique" (p. 112). A peculiar and somewhat frustrating characteristic of grounded theory method is the considerable variation of jargon used among grounded theory practitioners (deBúrca &
McLoughlin, 1996). As much as is possible, I chose to adopt the terminology originally suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

Miles and Huberman (1994) characterize grounded theory as research that is related to the discovery of regularities through the “identification (and categorization) of elements, and exploration of their connections” (p. 7). Stern (1994) postulates that it is fundamentally different than other methods in several ways:

1. The conceptual framework is generated from the data rather than from previous studies, although previous studies always influence the final outcome of the work.
2. The investigator attempts to discover dominant processes in the social scene rather than describing the unit under study.
3. Every piece of data is compared with every other piece rather than comparing totals of indices.
4. The collection of data may be modified according to the advancing theory; that is, false leads are dropped, or more penetrating questions are asked as seems necessary.
5. Rather than following a series of linear steps, the investigator works within a matrix in which several research processes are in operation at once. In other words, the investigator examines data as they arrive and begins too [sic] code, categorize, conceptualize, and to write the first few thoughts concerning the research report almost from the beginning of the study (p. 119).

By using “member checks” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981), which provided the co-participants with the opportunity to explicate their observations and to critique the investigator’s interpretations, I had, not only the opportunity for clarification, but also a tool I could use to establish an atmosphere of respect and cooperation. Mann (1993) illustrates this when he suggests that member checks offer an opportunity for “... the researcher to give something back to the people and the settings studied” (p. 132). It also allowed me to extend and enhance the dialogical nature of the evolving understandings.

**Method**

While Glaser (1994) indicated that a variety of data, both qualitative and quantitative, could be incorporated into grounded theory analysis, I chose a qualitative process that used unstructured interviews as its data source. I conducted initial interviews with two co-participants. I transcribed these interviews and conducted an initial open or substantive coding of the data. During this
process, I examined the data line by line and assigned a code that conceptualized each incident to each isolated occurrence. During this process, I constantly compared events for similarities and as questions and suppositions arose, I made decisions to (1) gather more data, (2) seek clarification through member checks, and/or (3) reassess the emergent categories (Charmaz, 1994).

Memoing was a process that I interwove with the open coding process described above. Memoing was simply recording ideas as they occurred during the analysis of the data. However, Glaser (1978) stipulated that it was so critical to the development of emergent concepts that coding must always be halted to memo a thought or idea. While the memos were records of the thoughts, ideas, and interpretations that came to mind as I examined the interview data, they became essential elements in the evolving structure of the analysis. Memos also served as a source of suggestions for further data gathering and, because they were derived from the codes, I could link them together into the “bare bones analytic framework” (Charmaz, 1994a) of the finished work. Stern (1994) reminded us that although a memo was ideational, it originated in the data and therefore was grounded. Therefore, as open coding proceeded, I was simultaneously able to develop a repository of data in the form of the memos. For example, Lisa, in her first interview, said, “...it just feels better that someone is there to listen to me and doesn’t dismiss me. Till another problem pops up and I go back.” I assigned “Acceptance” as the initial code for this passage, and wrote following memo,

Lisa (1) feels accepted when she is listened to and is not dismissed. Acceptance is, of course, tied directly to trust. Not dismissing someone and accepting them is particularly attractive thought to me, but to adolescents, who seem to be so easily dismissed in our society it is very important. Of course the idea of unconditional acceptance is very important to Rogers (1957) and many other of the modern therapists, but it might well be very important to adolescents in particular.

My memo made an observation about the coded passage, but also extended that idea to incorporate thoughts that I may or may not have followed up as I incorporated additional data. While my memo mentioned Lisa, this was only to confirm the reference; my focus was on the code itself and therefore on a conceptual discussion. My memo also brought to the focus literature that was of
interest. For example, the idea of unconditional acceptance and the suggestion that adolescents felt they were not readily accepted in our society might be areas of the literature that I needed to examine. Finally, the memo reflected the dyadic nature of our communication and the negotiated understandings that we developed through the dialogue.

During this process I also experimented with various diagrams in an attempt to find visual representations for my developing understandings. These diagrams also functioned as another form of memoing for me. For example, Figure 1 (p. 18) was the initial conceptual diagram that I created before the interviews began and that served as a conceptual bracketing that identified and illustrated my preconceptions about the counselling relationship. It announced that my initial understandings about the counselling relationship were influenced by preliminary readings of Gelso and Carter (1985, 1994) in that it clearly illustrated their postulation that the counselling relationship was composed of three major elements: the real relationship, the unreal relationship, and the working alliance. I clearly identified those divisions in this diagram.

The process of open coding initially allowed me to develop categories at a significant rate, but my use of constant comparative method progressively slowed this process. As the number of categories increased, I compared more and more items with each other and made decisions about how to expand or reduce the categories to fit my emerging understandings. As the relationship between and among codes became more apparent to me, I was able to define the properties of the developing categories. My use of memos played a very important role in this process, as it was a tool through which I was able to clarify my ideas about codes and categories. As I expanded the memos, links between them became apparent to me. These linkages suggested relationships between and among the categories, which, in turn, assisted me in establishing the “fit” of the data prior to further analysis. For example, early in the coding process I developed a memo for the category, trust, and extended links from it to three other memos: (1) shared experience, (2) friendship idealized, and (3) control issues. These linkages suggested to me that the category trust might be broken down into sub categories and/or that it was a variable that was somehow related to
Figure 1. The initial conceptual diagram of the counselling relationship, established prior to interviews and serving as a conceptual bracketing tool.

despite these other variables. As the fit of the data became clear to me, and as I refined the properties of the categories, I was able to strengthen and clarify these connections.

Selective coding (Glaser, 1978), or what Stern (1994) aptly described as “concept formation”, constituted the next element in the analysis matrix I used to generate the conceptual framework from the data. I also isolated the core category or variable from the data by reducing that data and linking concepts together. During this process I also identified the properties of the
emerging key stages of the conceptual model and delineated and refined any categories subsidiary to them, again by constantly comparing data to that previously categorized.

My data analysis, at this stage of the process, formed a well developed, conceptual model of the phenomena under study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), that consisted of related key stages, key categories, and subsidiary categories. My only remaining tasks were to assess whether or not additional data was needed to saturate any thin categories (i.e. categories derived from few, or mostly similar, students' descriptions). I made this determination based on whether or not I felt additional data would reveal new insights. When the conceptual model was complete, I conducted a review of relevant literature for ideas that I could use to add to, extend, or vary the extant model.

**Ethical Considerations**

Miles and Huberman (1994) provided qualitative investigators with a comprehensive ethical framework for their investigations that included discussions of: (1) informed consent; (2) benefits, costs, and reciprocity; (3) harm and risk; (4) honesty and trust; (5) privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity; (6) intervention and advocacy; (7) research integrity and quality; and (8) conflicts, dilemmas, and trade-offs.

1. **Informed Consent**

   Appendices B (Student Letter of Introduction and Informed Consent), C (Parent and Student Consent Forms), and D (Parent / Guardian Letter of Introduction and Informed Consent) outlined the intent of the study, the interview structure, the protection of confidentiality, the reciprocal nature of the study, and the voluntary nature of participation.

2. **Benefits, Costs and Reciprocity**

   In response to the question, "Was there anything you wanted to say that you didn’t get a chance to say?" (see Appendix E, Interview Protocol), Joe said,
I have a lot of things on my mind that I'd like to get out, too. So, this is an opportunity for me to push out my ideas and tell someone else... like... like maybe to change the future or maybe change it so that other people have the advantages that I never had. I think that's what I get out of this, I don't know. I just think it's great, it awesome.

This investigation offered adolescent students the opportunity to have a voice, to share in a process of discovery, and possibly to have some influence on counselling programmes in secondary schools. Although ethical considerations precluded their names being published, they, in a very real sense, were co-participants in the study. Without their commentary and their willingness to enter into a dialogue, there would have been no study. While the benefits to the co-participants were intangible, the costs in their time were very real. The interview format was demanding of the students’ time and therefore, the interviews were conducted at their convenience. While this slowed the progress of the interviews considerably in some instances, it was essential to the atmosphere of respect that was important to the dialogical process.

3. Harm and Risk

Because of the phenomena under investigation in this study, there was little likelihood of harm coming to the co-participants. They were not asked to reveal personal details about their lives or their counselling, but rather to examine their understandings of the counselling relationship in the context in which they experienced that relationship. However, even the most benign appearing interview process had the potential to enter into areas that may have resulted in distress to the co-participants. Therefore, each interview had a simple briefing and debriefing process (see Appendix E, Interview Protocol) that was intended to reaffirm the clients’ comfort in continuing with the investigation and their levels of distress with the process at the end of interview session. Should the co-participant have demonstrated signs of distress, the worry would have been addressed and, if necessary, appropriate referrals would have been made.
4. Honesty and Trust

This study presented the co-participants with a transparent statement of intent and process. There were no “hidden agendas” nor was there any need to present what Miles and Huberman (1994) described as a “fake persona” in order to trick the co-participants into revealing that which they would rather have kept private. In fact, the co-participants were the final arbiters of the content they were comfortable in presenting. A practical demonstration of this occurred during a member check with Tabatha. In our review, she realized that she had discussed an issue of her family life that she did not want exposed in the paper. I assured her that her wishes were of paramount importance, that those details were not at all relevant to the study, and that they would not be revealed in the paper.

5. Privacy, Confidentiality, and Anonymity

The issues regarding the privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of the co-participants were discussed in Appendices B (Student Letter of Introduction and Informed Consent) and E (Interview Protocol). The confidentiality protocol was followed in accordance with the ethical guidelines for the study and those of the ethics committee of the University of Northern British Columbia. The only exception to the guarantee of confidentiality was in relation to issues of abuse and safety (see 6. Intervention and Advocacy below). It was interesting to note that one of the co-participants would rather have had her “real” name used in the study. Although she agreed to a pseudonym, she was proud of her contributions and did not feel that confidentiality was “really necessary.”

6. Intervention and Advocacy

A statement regarding the necessity of intervention was made in the Letters of Introduction and Informed Consent (see Appendices B & D) given to parents or guardians and students who were potential co-participants. The co-participants understood in advance of their participation that any disclosures of abuse or harm to themselves, or of threats to others would be reported to the
appropriate agency. In one instance, this clause was the stated reason for one student’s refusal to participate in the study.

7. Research Integrity and Quality

My own integrity and adherence to the grounded theory method and the constructivist paradigm were the primary guarantors of research integrity and quality. In addition, copies of the developing chapters of this study, and where necessary synopses of chapters, were given to the co-participants for their review and comment. Their observations or criticisms were part of the recursive nature of this study and ensured the integrity of the data and the analysis of it. Furthermore, as this was my first venture into qualitative research, the assistance of my faculty advisor, Dr. Tom Strong, and my committee members, Dr. Cindy Hardy and Dr. Dennis Procter, contributed to the integrity and quality of the research.

8. Conflicts, Dilemmas, and Tradeoffs

Although there was little potential for conflict with the co-participants of the study, the same could not be said for my colleagues. They pre-selected the participants for the study based on their counselling relationships with them and therefore, it was those counselling relationships that we were discussing in our interviews. Although it did not prove to be an issue, there was the distinct possibility that the students might communicate negative comments about their counsellors, comments that were potentially embarrassing. Even though my colleagues were aware of this potential and accepted it without concern, it still could have presented a dilemma in the presentation of the data.
CHAPTER 3

Analysis of the Interview Data

In this chapter I describe the technical aspects of how I developed the conceptual elements that I translated into my conceptual model of the counselling relationship in a secondary school. I derived its elements from the transcriptions of ten interviews conducted with five co-participants using an unstructured interview format. The conceptual elements of this model consisted of open coding categories (i.e., collections of open coded passages); the properties of the open coding categories; selective codes, which I identified as, key stages, key categories, and subsidiary categories (see Figure 2, p. 24); and a core concept. Chapter 4 will return the co-participants' voice to the discussion by illustrating my conceptual model with relevant passages from the transcripts. Chapter 5 will integrate concepts from related research into the model, and all will be used to inform the discussion that follows in Chapter 6.

Open Coding

Open coding consisted of examining the transcribed data, line by line, to identify and label ideas that were present in the text that may be important to the discussion at hand. The constant comparative method involved an ongoing process of comparing each idea found in the text with the others ideas found in order to identify similarities among them and to begin the process of collecting those ideas together into a category. However, before I began the transcription and coding process, I created a conceptual model of my understanding of the counselling process at the outset of this investigation (see Figure 1, p. 18). This model served as a simple tool with which I could bracket my early understandings and biases, and against which I could assess my open coding to ensure that I was not forcing the data into a framework based on previous knowledge. Regularly checking emerging codes against each other using the constant comparative method and against the bracketing diagram allowed me to develop a set of open codes that were as free of my preconceptions as was possible.
As each code was assigned, I transferred it to a slip of paper. Each slip of paper was grouped with other passages of the same or similar codes that together formed an emerging category. This strategy allowed me to compare passages and recode them when necessary simply by moving a slip of paper. It also provided me with a simple visual approximation of the amount of data in each coding category. The table I added as Appendix F showed the number of passages coded for each open coding category, the number of co-participants who were represented by each open coding category and combined score derived from the product of both. I used it to suggest a
possible starting place for subsequent analysis based on the supposition that topics discussed frequently might be of greater importance to the co-participants.

However, of greater significance to me, considering the philosophical orientation of this investigation, was my personal interaction with the data. It was that interaction that provided me the grist for conceptual insight. I found that the processes of developing and labeling coding categories, and of writing memos about my reactions to specific codes, were valuable to me during this stage of analysis. For example, the open coding category Safety was coded in 10 passages and across 4 of the co-participants. However, the count of individual coded passages did not provide any information about how to conceptualize those coded passages. In this case it was a single passage by one co-participant that gave me the “eureka” insight that safety is an important concept. The critical phrase was one used by Lisa when she discussed the importance of counselling to students. She said, “You’ve got to feel safe somewhere!” I wrote the following passage as my first entry into a memo on safety,

Wow! This is a powerful statement of trust that embodies a lot for Lisa. It is telling of her discomfort with other arenas within the school and suggests that counselling is an area that embodies qualities that are related to her sense of well-being. There is also a feeling of resignation in her comment ... like you’ve got to be somewhere, but that really enhances this observation with a touch of pathos about the “system” and her place in it. Hmmm... I think a place to be safe is something quite different than just anyplace. I’ve got to keep that in mind. Anyhow, Lisa doesn’t like school and the implication is that while school is not a good place for her, counselling is. Perhaps there is a refuge role for counselling that is important to her and other students. If this is so, it might be important to look at research that addresses the role of a refuge, a safe place, whatever.

The passage and my response to it established it as an important factor to which I would pay further attention as analysis proceeded. Thus, it was possible that a category could be quite thin as a measure, but thick in rich understandings. Of course, the converse was also true that a category with numerous coded passages might well reflect a lot of talk about nothing. In short, numbers could point out, but concept and understanding were derived from interaction with the data. I followed a similar process for the remaining 38 open coding categories and when completed, I
conducted member checks with the co-participants by providing them with the emerging categories and encouraging them to respond with their comments, criticisms, and insights. (Note: I conducted member checks periodically throughout the remainder of the analysis as was necessary to confirm my understandings with the students. I provided them with summaries, diagrams, my memos relevant to their commentaries, and drafts of chapters to seek clarification. I will not refer to those each of those occasions separately.)

When I completed open coding I had identified 39 open coding categories. Because they represented only preliminary understandings they may have contained redundancies that were addressed as analysis proceeded. I next reread the original coded passages and the memos attached to each, looking for descriptive words and phrases that I then used to develop brief descriptions of the properties of those categories (see Table 1, p. 28). For example, when considering Acceptance I isolated the following key words and phrases from the coded passages and the memo: reciprocal, unconditional, encouraging, affirmative, focused, builds confidence, comfortable, reflective, confirming, feels good, doesn’t judge me, respectful, makes time, equal, listens, respectful, available, not controlling, no discipline, pleasurable, influenced by expertise (see Appendix G for a table of all key words and phrases considered). Then, while making constant reference to the original coded passages, I transformed this list of items into the following statement of properties,

The co-participants' recognize that the counsellor accepts them unconditionally. They feel acknowledged and report that the counsellor makes time, encourages, affirms and listens. It is revealed in a non-judgemental and respectful atmosphere in which the co-participants indicate they are equal partners. When the co-participants experience acceptance they reciprocate the same (see Table 1, p. 28).

The development of the categories, their labels and their associated statements of properties, necessitated an intense personal interaction with the data that advanced my understanding of the coded categories.

The memos that I wrote for the open coding categories extended my thoughts about the codes and developed another layer of information that was available for subsequent analysis. They
contained my insights into the links among code categories. Appendix H is a table that shows the number of links among the memos. Each link is one way, so that a link I drew from acceptance to comfort would not automatically generate a link from comfort to acceptance. My record of the number of links made was another example of data that pointed a direction (in that it indicated which categories were linked to the greatest number of other categories), but did not provide any conceptual information about the characteristics of those links. Appendix I, on the other hand, is a table that illustrates to what memos each open category was linked and, unlike Appendix H, provided me with conceptual information about the characteristics of those links.

**Selective or Conceptual Coding**

My intent during selective coding was to reduce the number of open coding categories into a condensed selective coding structure, and to link the resulting concepts into a conceptual model of the counselling relationship. During this process, I focused on the open coding passages, their categories and the properties I defined for them; the memos attached to those codes; the links among memos; and any other tools I used such as conceptual diagrams and computer generated reports. The conceptual diagrams were informal tools I used to create graphical representations of the ideas I was considering to help me see possible relationships. N-Vivo software has powerful search tools that allowed me to search for words, phrases, and codes from the original transcriptions in a variety of different ways that I found useful in exploring concepts and their relationships. I returned to the original raw data only to check the larger context of coded passages. It is important to note that although I assigned codes to specific stages and categories, there was significant crossover among stages. For example, the counsellor’s skills played a role in all stages of the counselling relationship, yet I assigned the coded category only to the Comfort Stage. This was because my assessment of the co-participants’ commentaries most clearly suggested awareness of those counselling skills during the Comfort Stage.
Table 1. Properties of open coding categories derived from key words and phrases in the coded passages (see Appendix G for a table of the key words and phrases used.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Properties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>The co-participants’ recognize that the counsellor accepts them unconditionally. They feel acknowledged and report that the counsellor makes time, encourages, affirms and listens. It is negotiated in a non-judgemental and respectful atmosphere in which the co-participants indicate they are equal partners. When the co-participants experience acceptance they reciprocate the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Availability &amp; Continuity</td>
<td>The degree to which the counsellor is accessible to the co-participants over time. It is related to feelings of familiarity, informality, trust and comfort. It provides time for the relationship to develop and for the flow of the personal narrative to be developed and maintained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>The communication of genuine interest and commitment resulting in feelings of comfort and nurturance. It may be demonstrated when the counsellor extends herself beyond that which the co-participants consider the norm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Change</td>
<td>A modification or change to the presenting condition that produces a sense of comfort, reduced anxiety, positive feelings, and direction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Comfort</td>
<td>Recognition of reduced tension and relaxation that is negotiated over time and is experienced when the co-participants’ personal limits are respected, when there is a feeling of familiarity and genuineness in the counselling environment, and when there is the presence of humour. It eases contact, fosters confidence, and produces feelings of empowerment, liberation, and confidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>The expressed understanding that both parties in the counselling process are faithful to that process and to each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>The essential tool through which understanding is negotiated. It includes verbal communication as well as paralinguistic and prosodic devices and conveys balance, confidence, trust, genuineness and comfort. The co-participants favour informality and relaxation. Misunderstandings may result in a broken relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>The adolescents’ feelings of self-assurance. It is fostered by acceptance and the co-participants’ belief in the counsellor’s professional abilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
<td>An essential condition for the co-participants in which they believe that their confidences will be respected by the counsellor. It stimulates openness and self confidence and results in an atmosphere of comfort and freedom from worry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Confirmation</td>
<td>Reflective communication on the part of the counsellor that authenticates the co-participants’ feelings and produces feelings of support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>The realization both of the power differentials existing between adults and adolescents and the desire of the co-participants to make decisions and to exercise choice without the intervention of adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Counsellor Role</td>
<td>The role of the counsellor as perceived by the co-participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Counsellor Skills</td>
<td>The skills demonstrated by the counsellors as perceived by the co-participants. They report that their counsellors are non-judgemental, reflective, emotive, supportive, empathic, and confirming. They maintain professional distance, are flexible, listen and attend, encourage and respect the comfort levels of the co-participants and can use humour. The co-participants describe them as genuine and honest. They also reveal that the relationship can be constrained by the co-participants’ lack of confidence in the professional abilities or if the counsellor is too empathic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Counter-transference</td>
<td>The transference to the co-participant of issues in the counsellor’s life. It is very thinly reported as the counsellor’s frustration with the student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Properties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Disclosure</td>
<td>The co-participants' willingness to reveal pertinent information to the counsellor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>A shared sense of immediate focus and concentration on the issue at hand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>The several immediate environments in which counselling takes place in the school milieu. They variously describe the school as a whole as cliquey, judgemental, and alienating. The classroom is seen as impersonal and unsuitable for personal discussion, wherein a positive experience is determined by the personal traits of the teacher. They also report that maintaining discipline and evaluating students may interfere with the development of a positive teacher – student relationship. They describe the counselling environment as a shared environment that is positive, comfortable, and familiar, where they experience rapport, shared awareness. It is friendly and relaxed and facilitates discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Familiarity</td>
<td>The expression of comfort that results from awareness of and experience with the life space of the co-participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Friendships</td>
<td>The co-participants' observations about the friendship qualities in their relationships with their counsellor, and their beliefs about their peer relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>A part of the working alliance in which the counsellor provides non-directive suggestions and alternatives for change to the student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>The co-participants' freedom to make their own decisions within the counselling relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Initial Contact</td>
<td>The co-participants' experiences of their initial meeting with their counsellor. It is expressed as a tentative time, generally lacking in emotional investment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Insecurity</td>
<td>Related to a sense of power differential and lack of information about the counselling process. It is communicated as intimidation, fear, and uncertainty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Institutional Demands</td>
<td>The co-participants' beliefs of the demands and parameters placed both on themselves and the counselling programme by the managers of the institutional setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Motivating Events</td>
<td>Those external and internal events and conditions that motivate students to enter into counselling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>That personal and candid quality of the counselling relationship fostered by trust and characterized not only by the disclosure of personal information, but also by active listening as identified by the co-participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Other Counselling Experiences</td>
<td>Previous counselling experiences that have an impact on the co-participant’s willingness to enter into school counselling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>The co-participants’ awareness of the language tools employed by the counsellor and in the power differential existing in the relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Personal Experience</td>
<td>Previous experiences of the co-participants that affect their willingness to enter into counselling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Preconceptions</td>
<td>Beliefs held by the co-participants that affect their willingness to enter into counselling. The result of previous experience, rumour, and personal understandings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Professional Distance</td>
<td>A sense of personal distance from the co-participants that allows counsellors to be more objective than parents in the discussion of their personal problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>The sense that the counsellor recognizes and acknowledges the co-participants both within and without the counselling setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Roadblocks</td>
<td>Those identified factors that interfere in the development of the counselling relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>A non-judgemental and caring atmosphere in which the counsellor assumes an advocacy role for the co-participants. It results in feelings of security and comfort in which the co-participants state they are free to discuss sensitive issues without fear of discipline. It may also be identified as a refuge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Properties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td>The co-participants’ identification of their personal characteristics, qualities, and needs. It is associated with a growing sense of independence, self-confidence and self-esteem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Shared Journey</td>
<td>The co-participants’ understandings of shared experiences, trust, commitment and respect with the counsellor as they relate to the co-participants’ presenting problems. It is typified by examples of self-disclosure on the part of the counsellor; and feelings of comfort, familiarity and support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>While initial opinions about the counsellor may be formed quickly, the co-participants indicated that the relationship develops gradually over time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>An essential element in the counselling relationship that is related to respect of confidentiality and professional competence. Tenuous at the outset of the relationship, it builds as the relationship develops, allowing the co-participants to discuss intimate concerns with comfort and the assurance that their confidences will be respected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>Working Alliance</td>
<td>That aspect of the counselling relationship during which the co-participants and the counsellor work together in identifying problems and planning strategies to effect change. It exists within a comfortable, respectful, non-directive atmosphere that reduces stress and accommodates challenges on the part of the counsellor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I initially examined the relationships among the open coding properties, looking first at the links among the memos for a sense of why they were linked and second at their coding properties, seeking insights into process and sequence. For example, the memo for the open coding category, Openness was linked to the memos for Acceptance, Shared Journey and Trust. In the memo for Openness, I wrote the following passage that is associated with the link to Trust.

Tabatha has many good reasons for placing tight limits on the relationship and the communication she has with her counsellor. These come from a historical and pragmatic perspective, but are also from one rooted in her life experience. Because of her family’s mental health issues, she is looking for answers and seems very much aware of the limits of her school counsellor - most likely because the counsellor has advertised her limits. This is a primary issue of trust that is not associated with her fears about confidentiality, her personal liking of the counsellor, or her belief in the importance of counselling. It is situated in the context of her family setting that in turn contributes to a need for something greater than her counsellor can offer.

One conceptual insight this passage provided me was that the co-participant’s willingness to communicate was associated with the degree of confidence or trust she had in her counsellor’s professional abilities. This insight was powerful and important because it was unique among the discussions of the other three co-participants that were coded for openness. Those three co-
participants also associated openness to trust, but in all cases reported trust as a concept associated with confidentiality.

Following this process I examined all the open coding categories, condensed some into new selective coding categories, and expanded others to reflect new understandings. I defined the resulting selective codes as key stages (see Table 2, p. 33), for which I developed statements of properties (see Table 3, p. 36); key categories; and subsidiary categories. I interpreted the key stages as general conceptual categories, the key categories as principal divisions of the key stages, and the subsidiary categories as divisions of the key categories (note that only the motivation stage had more than one key category).

Transference and Countertransference

Transference and countertransference both appeared in my original conceptual model (see Figure 1, p. 18). I eliminated transference early in the selective coding, and countertransference later in the selective coding because I could not clearly associate any passage in the transcriptions to either phenomenon. If I accept Gelso and Carter’s (1994) proposition that transference was omnipresent throughout psychotherapy, then the danger existed that I would impose that proposition onto the data. In this sense, I could have interpreted the co-participants’ preconceptions of their counsellors as “pre-formed transference” (Gelso & Carter, 1994, p. 302), or their friendships with their counsellors as transference. However, the transcriptions provided no support for any interpretation other than these were the genuine responses of the co-participants. Therefore, I felt that based on the evidence at hand I could not force either transference or countertransference into the developing model.

Key Stages

I examined the open codes and first focused on Motivating Events, because for me it identified conditions that preceded any formal counselling interaction and therefore represented the first elements that had influence on the development of the counselling relationship. Other Counselling Experiences, Personal Experience, and Preconceptions also represented conditions
that were existent prior to formal contact and I also grouped them with Motivating Events. I identified this grouping as the Motivating Stage and, by examining the properties assigned to the open codes, I developed the following statement of properties:

That stage of the counselling relationship prior to formal, counselling interaction during which internal and external pressures motivate the co-participants to enter into school counselling. It is influenced, both positively and negatively, by the previous experiences the co-participants have had (including previous counselling experiences) that affect their willingness to enter into counselling, and by the beliefs they have developed through rumour, previous experience and personal understandings.

I identified Initial Contact as an open coding category associated with the first meeting between the counsellor and the co-participant. As such, it suggested to me the next stage in my model of the counselling relationship and included conditions associated with the early interactions between the counsellor and the co-participants. I included Confidentiality because it was an essential element to all the participants’ willingness to communicate their concerns to the counsellor. I related Insecurity to the co-participants’ uncertainty about counselling itself and their insecurity in dealing with adults. Perception was included because it reflected the co-participants early awareness of the counsellors’ language tools and the power differential in the relationship. Roadblocks, was incorporated because the co-participants seemed to be especially sensitive to what they saw as negative behaviours or conditions during this stage. Finally, Safety was associated with a non-judgemental atmosphere in which the counsellor was identified as an advocate for the student. I identified this stage as the Initiating Stage, and using the open coding properties for the above categories, developed the following statement of properties:

That stage in the negotiation of the counselling relationship associated with the initial interactions between the counsellor and co-participants. It is a tentative stage, during which the counsellor and co-participants negotiate understandings about confidentiality and issues of safety. Because of its tentative and exploratory nature, the relationship is especially sensitive to potential roadblocks during this stage. A non-judgemental and caring atmosphere in which the counsellor communicates an advocacy role for the co-participants supports the developing relationship and results in feelings of security and comfort for the co-participants.
Table 2. Open coding categories assigned to key selective coding stages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Stage</th>
<th>Open Coding Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivating Stage</td>
<td>Motivating Events, Other Counselling Experiences, Personal Experience, Preconceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiating Stage</td>
<td>Confidentiality, Initial Contact, Insecurity, Perception, Roadblocks, Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort Stage</td>
<td>Acceptance, Comfort, Communication, Confirmation, Control, Counsellor Role, Counsellor Skills, Environment, Independence, Institutional Demands, Openness, Professional Distance, Recognition, Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Alliance</td>
<td>Availability &amp; Continuity, Caring, Commitment, Confidence, Disclosure, Friendships, Guidance, Self-awareness, Shared Journey, Trust, Working Alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>Change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I identified the Comfort Stage as the third in my model of the counselling relationship (although at this point I had not labelled it). I examined the properties of the remaining open coding categories and the memos attached to them, and identified those that I felt best described a strengthening of the relationship. I evaluated the remaining open coding categories and tentatively placed Acceptance, Comfort, Communication, Confirmation, Control, Counsellor Role, Counsellor Skills, Environment, Independence, Institutional Demands, Openness, Professional Distance, Recognition, and Time together as components that suggested a strengthening of the relationship to me. Finally, I used their properties to develop the following statement of properties for this stage:

That stage in the negotiation of the counselling relationship associated the co-participants’ reported feelings of familiarity and equality in the dyad, of being respected by the counsellor, and of having independence to make their own decisions. They report it is fostered in a non-judgemental and positive environment that results in reduced tension; easier interaction; and feelings of liberation, empowerment, and confidence that encourage openness in the dyad. During this time the counsellor’s role as an advocate is clarified and the co-participants become aware of the counsellors’ skills and genuineness.

How to name this stage was less clear. I thought it might reflect either acceptance or comfort. I returned to the properties of the open codes and examined them again. I interpreted
Acceptance to be a condition largely dependent on the skills of the counsellor, but Comfort I
interpreted as a more inclusive concept that was dependent not only on the counsellor's skills, but
also on the co-participants' active involvement, their preferences, and the environment in which the
counselling took place. Based largely on this difference, I chose Comfort as the designation for
this stage of the counselling relationship.

I identified the Working Alliance open coding category as central to the next stage in the
development of the model of the counselling relationship. I sketched a tentative model of my
understanding (i.e., Motivation → Initiation → Comfort → Working Alliance) and Working
Alliance seemed a good fit in that it moved beyond the personal relationship to focus on the
presenting problem and strategies to effect change. However, the co-participants also frequently
referred to a friendship they felt with their counsellor. They described this relationship in terms of
deficiencies and disappointments they experienced when bringing their problems to their peer
friends. They reported that their peers, when assisting with their problems, were often poor
listeners, frequently judgemental, often more concerned with their own problems, and were
untrustworthy (they did not keep confidences) when compared with their counsellors. They
reported their disenchantment only in regard to incidents when they sought help from their peers
and not with other aspects of their peer friendships. I interpreted a strong emotional component in
the friendship in passages such as the following that were taken directly from the transcripts:

Joe: She really... she really cares, she doesn't take advantage of me, and use
me or anything like that, she... um... she knows that she gives me... um... she
puts her trust in me and I put my trust in her like and it's true... it's genuine...
whereas other friends um lie behind your back...

Joe: it's sort of a mature thing too, we've got a real interesting friendship and a
strong friendship.

Kennedy: Like she, she doesn't... well, she doesn't ... um... criticize, the
judgment, actually that's what it is, she won't judge me. It's not like any other
friend I have.

For this reason I chose to recognize the importance of their expression of friendship by embedding
it within the Working Alliance Stage rather than defining it as something subsidiary to it.
Following the same procedures outlined above I assigned the following open coding categories to this stage: **Availability & Continuity, Caring, Commitment, Confidence, Disclosure, Guidance, Self-awareness, Shared Journey, Trust, and Working Alliance**. I included them in this stage because I associated their properties most closely with collaboration and the establishment of common goals, and with the mutual investment of emotion and effort directed at bringing about satisfactory change. Based on my assessment of the open coding properties, the properties I assigned to this stage were:

That stage in the negotiation of the counselling relationship in which the counsellor and co-participant work together to clarify the problems the co-participants bring to the counselling relationship, and to develop strategies that will effect satisfactory change. Behaviours that foster, in the co-participants, the belief that the counsellor cares and is genuinely interested in them, and is committed to help with their problems increase their confidence levels. The co-participants communicate immediacy in their need for support, and, therefore, the availability of the counsellor, and the continuity of the service are very important to them. Trust is well established and the co-participants are comfortable in disclosing relevant, personal details to the counsellor. An idealized friendship may be imbedded in this stage. It is rooted in the non-judgemental, safe, and focused interactions that they find with their counsellor that are often absent in their relationships with their peers.

I determined **Change** was the final stage in my evolving model of the counselling relationship. Although the specific nature of change was particular to the individual, in a general sense it represented something that they recognized as different in their condition that resulted in an improved state for them, either temporarily or over a long term. I identified the following statement of properties for **Change**:

A modification or change to the presenting condition that produced a sense of comfort, reduced anxiety, positive feelings, and direction. For the co-participants, change was often associated with the development of coping strategies.
Table 3. The properties of the key stages of the counselling relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Stage</th>
<th>Statement of Properties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivating Stage</td>
<td>That stage of the counselling relationship prior to formal, counselling interaction during which internal and external pressures motivate the co-participants to enter into school counselling. It is influenced, both positively and negatively, by the previous experiences the co-participants have had (including previous counselling experiences) that affect their willingness to enter into counselling, and by the beliefs they have developed through rumour, previous experience and personal understandings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiating Stage</td>
<td>That stage in negotiation in the counselling relationship associated with the initial interactions between the counsellor and co-participants. It is a tentative stage, during which the counsellor and co-participants negotiate understandings about confidentiality and issues of safety. Because of its tentative and exploratory nature, the relationship is especially sensitive to potential roadblocks during this stage. A non-judgemental and caring atmosphere in which the counsellor communicates an advocacy role for the co-participants supports the developing relationship and results in feelings of security and comfort for the co-participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort Stage</td>
<td>That stage in the negotiation of the counselling relationship associated the co-participants’ feelings of familiarity and equality in the dyad, of being respected by the counsellor, and of having independence to make their own decisions in the counselling relationship. It is negotiated in a non-judgemental and positive environment and results in reduced tension; easier interaction; and feelings of liberation, empowerment, and confidence that encourage openness in the dyad. During this time the counsellor’s role as an advocate is clarified and the co-participants become aware of the counsellor’s skills and genuineness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Alliance Stage</td>
<td>That stage in the negotiation of the counselling relationship during which the counsellor and co-participant work together to clarify the problems the co-participants bring to the counselling relationship and to develop strategies that will effect satisfactory change. Behaviours that foster, in the co-participants, the belief that the counsellor cares and is genuinely interested in them and is committed to help with their problems increases their confidence levels. The co-participants communicate immediacy in their need for support, and, therefore, the availability of the counsellor, and the continuity of the service are very important to them. Trust is well established and the co-participants are comfortable in disclosing relevant, personal details to the counsellor. An idealized friendship may be embedded in this stage. It is rooted in the non-judgemental, safe, and focused interactions that they find with their counsellor that are often absent in their relationships with their peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Stage</td>
<td>A modification or change to the presenting condition that produces a sense of comfort, reduced anxiety, positive feelings, and direction. For the co-participants, change is often associated with the development of coping strategies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key Categories and Subsidiary Categories

At this point in the analysis I had reduced the data from 39 open coding categories to five new and general selective coding categories (the key stages). These new categories formed the backbone of my conceptual understanding of the processes involved in developing a counselling relationship in a secondary school setting. However, I retained the original 39 open codes, their properties, and attached memos. I used them as data to help me break the stages into key and
subsidiary categories that would explicate the stages and provide detail for the conceptual framework. When necessary I used the open coding data, while in other cases I simply recoded the original passages to reflect my new understandings. Figure 3 (p. 39) shows the final relationship among the key stages, key categories, and subsidiary categories (see Table 4, p. 41 for the properties of the subsidiary categories).

I divided the Motivating Stage into two key categories: Energy & Inertia and Motivating Factors. I identified Energy & Inertia with previous experiences and preconceptions the co-participants reported that would either inhibit or enhance their willingness to enter into counselling. I thought of Energy as those factors that provided impetus to change their help seeking behaviours and Inertia as those factors that acted to keep the student on the same path or in the same place and therefore, worked against change. The co-participants reported that those experiences and preconceptions reflected either their personal experiences, or were the result of third party communication that often took the form of rumour. Therefore, I created the subsidiary categories, Personal Experience and Rumour – Third Party. I divided the key category, Motivating Factors, into two subsidiary categories, External Forces and Internal Forces. The external forces reported by the co-participants were parents who placed pressure on the students to see their counsellors. When the co-participants reported their motivation as stemming from pressures applied by others (e.g., parents) I identified their motivation as extrinsic. When they described their motivation as something other than pressures from others (e.g., the self-expressed wish to solve a problem) I identified it as intrinsic.

I identified only one key category in the Initiating Stage, and labeled it, Initial Contact. I interpreted it as a time when the co-participants made early judgements about issues related to confidentiality and the overall sense of safety of the relationship, as indicated in the actions of the counsellor. As a result, I identified Confidentiality and Safety as subsidiary categories. I gave Confidentiality a category of its own because of its importance to the co-participants as witnessed in both the thickness (the number of passages coded) and breadth (the number of co-participants coded) of its open coded categories (see Appendix F), despite the fact that it was also a key
constituent in the co-participants’ feelings of safety. I included in Safety other early impressions of the co-participants that contributed to or distracted from an overall feeling of safety. These included early reported perceptions of body language and power differentials, as well as behaviours they interpret as negative or positive, respectful or disrespectful, and encouraging or discouraging. I identified Comfort as the key category for the Comfort Stage. I condensed the original twelve open coding categories into six subsidiary categories, namely: Acceptance, Counselling Role, Counsellor Skills, Environmental Characteristics, Independence, and Openness and Self-disclosure, based on my interpretation of the properties of the open coding categories and their relationship to the co-participants’ feelings of comfort. I included Counselling Role and Counsellor Skills in this section, because the co-participants communicated the greatest awareness of their counsellors’ skills beginning with this stage and continuing into the Working Alliance Stage, and because they had established a strong sense of the counsellors’ role as it related to their personal contexts. Although important during the Initiating Stage, I found that the environment took on greater significance to the co-participants in this stage and reported this as important to their feelings of comfort. I also identified the co-participants’ reports of feeling independent and accepted with their expressions of comfort. Finally, I identified counsellor Self-Disclosure as a discrete category, although I had originally embedded it within the Counsellor Skills coding category during open coding. I made this decision based on the importance that the co-participants placed on occasions when they reported their counsellors’ use of self-disclosure.

I identified only one key category in the Working Alliance Stage and labelled it Working Alliance. Again, using the open coding properties and attached memos, I reduced the original twelve open coding categories associated with the Working Alliance Stage to the following six subsidiary categories: Advocacy, Availability / Continuity, Caring, Guidance, Shared Journey, and Trust / Honesty. Each of them had properties that I related to the conjoined efforts of each counsellor and co-participant in clarifying problems and facilitating change. Advocacy was important because of the intercessionary and supportive role that the counsellor may have assumed with parents, teachers, and administrators in bringing about change. My understanding of
Figure 3. The relationship among Key Stages, Key Categories and Subsidiary Categories.

- Motivating Stage
  - Energy & Inertia
  - Motivating Factors
- Initiating Stage
  - Initial Contact
- Comfort Stage
  - Comfort
- Working
  - Working Alliance
  - Friendship
  - Alliance
- Change Stage
  - Change

Key Stages: Motivating, Initiating, Comfort, Working, Change
Key Categories: Energy & Inertia, Initial Contact, Comfort, Working Alliance, Change
advocacy became clearer to me, not from the original coding of the interviews, or the properties of the open coding categories, but from my memos, particularly those associated with professional distance and the role of the counsellor. I identified Availability / Continuity as the importance the co-participants place on having access to their counsellors when they wanted or needed access, and the constancy of the counsellor herself (i.e., their counsellor did not change frequently). Caring was a category I linked to the co-participants’ sense of the counsellor’s commitment to their issues. I associated Guidance with the co-participants’ mention of their counsellors’ non-directive suggestions regarding strategies that might effect change. I identified Shared Journey with the co-participants’ sense of shared experience, trust, understandings, and commitment with and by their counsellors. Finally, Trust / Honesty was a category I identified as illustrative of the links among the co-participants’ trust in their counsellors’ ability, their assurance of confidentiality, and their willingness to be open and honest in their disclosures.

Change was the final key stage that I identified in the counselling relationship. It stood upon its own without any further divisions. By definition it was the goal of the Working Alliance Stage and most often was evidenced by the development and application of coping skills and strategies. For example,

Joe: I haven't even been thinking of the next day I just been concentrating on the now, you know, so I don't get worried as much...like I used to be. I used to worry a lot about, you know, what if I don't get that done or tomorrow's going to be a bad day or what if I don't get that job interview or stuff like that...

Kennedy: So, I'm not really worried... and, because every time I've gone in there I've come out feeling better.

Joe: And, she reflected a lot, like just from small like not even from a half an hour, just helping me, like getting things organized. She made at big impact on me. And I studied balloonfull’s after that.
Table 4. The properties assigned to the subsidiary categories as a result of selective coding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivating Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Experience</strong></td>
<td>The co-participants' personal life experiences that either inhibit or enhance their willingness to enter into personal counselling with their school counsellor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rumour / Third Party</strong></td>
<td>The experiences and rumours communicated by friends, parents and others that contribute to preconceptions that may either inhibit or enhance the co-participants' willingness to enter into personal counselling with their school counsellor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal Forces</strong></td>
<td>The intrinsic motivators that encourage the co-participants to enter into personal counselling with their school counsellor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Forces</strong></td>
<td>The extrinsic motivators that encourage the co-participants to enter into personal counselling with their school counsellor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiating Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confidentiality</strong></td>
<td>The co-participants' confidence that, within the limits of legal responsibility, their confidences will be respected within the counselling relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Safety</strong></td>
<td>A non-judgemental and caring atmosphere that results in feelings of security and comfort. The co-participants are free to discuss sensitive issues without fear of discipline.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comfort Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Acceptance</strong></td>
<td>A feeling of unconditional acknowledgment typified by the counsellor taking time, encouraging, affirming and listening. It is revealed in a non-judgemental and respectful atmosphere in which the co-participants feel they are equal partners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Counselling Role</strong></td>
<td>The co-participants' awareness of the role of the counsellor and their comfort with that role as it pertains to their developing relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Counsellor Skills</strong></td>
<td>The co-participants' awareness of the skills of the counsellor and the confidence that awareness communicates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environmental Characteristics</strong></td>
<td>The familiarity and comfort of the counselling environment to the co-participants' and the counsellor's familiarity with the school environment. Does not always have a positive response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independence</strong></td>
<td>The sense that the co-participants feel respected as individuals in the relationship and have the power to make decisions on their own in the counselling relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Openness &amp; Self-disclosure</strong></td>
<td>Openness reflects the level of transparency, existent in the relationship, by means of which the participants exchange their understandings about the issues under discussion. It is a function of trust and is negotiated in an atmosphere of confidentiality and safety. Openness exists as both the readiness of the participants to communicate relevant personal details about the issues as well as behaviours that communicate that readiness. Self-disclosure is openness particular to the counsellors' willingness to relate relevant personal anecdotes to the co-participants when appropriate to the counselling interaction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working Alliance Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advocacy</strong></td>
<td>The co-participants' understanding that the counsellor will assume the role of advocate for them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Availability / Continuity</strong></td>
<td>The availability of the counsellors to the co-participants and the continuity of counselling within the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Caring</strong></td>
<td>A sense of genuine interest and commitment resulting in feelings of comfort and nurturance. It may be demonstrated when the counsellor extends herself beyond that which the co-participants consider the norm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guidance</strong></td>
<td>A part of the working alliance in which the counsellor provides non-directive suggestions and alternatives for change to the counsellor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared Journey</strong></td>
<td>The co-participants' understandings of shared experience, trust, commitment and respect with the counsellor as they relate to the co-participants' presenting problems. It is typified by examples of self-disclosure on the part of the counsellor; and feelings of comfort, familiarity and support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trust / Honesty</strong></td>
<td>Trust is an essential element in the counselling relationship that is related to respect of confidentiality and in the counsellor's ability to address the co-participants' problems. It provides a framework in which the co-participants feel confident and free to be open and honest in their disclosures.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There was often a recursive aspect to change in that adjustment experienced in one area could lead to new plans for change in another area. To illustrate this aspect, I used a double headed arrow between the working alliance and change found in Figure 3 (p. 39).

The Core Concept

The core concept was that concept that appeared to be an underlying theme common to all of the stages in the evolving conceptual model. When I identified the core concept as Comfort, I underwent another eureka experience. I first focused on Trust as a core concept because my professional experience suggested that trust was very important to my relationships with students. However, when I examined the data in the conceptual framework, I was dissatisfied with Trust because it was not consistent throughout the stages. When the co-participants made statements such as Joe’s, “It's just been a really progressive thing it's not, too many times I've been in there that it's been... it wasn't just like "that"... that I get all this trust or something, it isn’t like that ... a not just like that, I can't just instantly... you know,” I was left with the feeling (and it was nothing more) that trust was very important, but it was not central to all aspects of the model.

As I repeatedly reviewed the data, I became aware that the references to comfort in the transcripts were very common (i.e., comfort is found in 126 paragraphs in the interviews). Because a core concept is central to all stages of the conceptual model, I immediately examined the properties of each key stage to assess how comfort fit into that stage. To be sure, it was a concept common to all stages. There was a ubiquitous quality to comfort that was evident in the co-participants’ discussions. In the Motivational Stage, comfort appeared not only as the co-participants’ expressed positive, personal, and vicarious experiences with counselling that encourage them to enter into counselling, but also as the discomfort evidenced throughout the internal and external pressures that underlay their decisions to enter into counselling. In the Initiating Stage, comfort was expressed as an important aspect of both the co-participants’ need for confidentiality and safety. As described above, the central focus of the Comfort Stage was comfort. The students’ feelings of empowerment and relaxation that developed in the Comfort
Stage provided a collaborative atmosphere for the Working Alliance Stage. Finally the Change Stage was illustrated by change that, as suggested by the co-participants, resulted in comfort that was typified by reduced anxiety and a sense of direction and well-being.

The Conceptual Model

Figure 4 (p. 44) represents the final conceptual model of the counselling relationship. I grouped the six key categories: Motivating Factors, Energy and Inertia, Initial Contact, Comfort, Working Alliance / Friendship, and Change into five stages: Motivating Stage, Initiating Stage, Comfort Stage, Working Alliance Stage, and Change Stage. I used double-headed arrows throughout the model to indicate that the categories interact with each other in both directions and are not discrete elements. It is important to note that the Key Stages also interact with each other and therefore the stages of the model are fuzzy rather than discrete.
Figure 4. Conceptual Model of the counselling relationship in a secondary school.
Good counsellors do care and are not indifferent to the difficulties faced by individuals. The counselling relationship itself can be viewed as a kind of temporary shelter. In those times when the individual has no place to go, no one to turn to, no one who will listen respectfully, the counselling relationship can offer temporary emotional shelter (Peavy, 1997, p. 19).

The Co-Participants’ Voices

Because of grounded theory’s emphasis on conceptual understandings and theory generation, there is a tendency for the “voice” of the co-participants to disappear from the discussion. This is despite the preeminent role that voice played in my determination of the open coding categories and their properties, determinations upon which all subsequent analysis was based. I believed, from both a philosophical and a methodological perspective, that the words spoken by the co-participants are of primary importance to the record of this research. Therefore, I have included this chapter to communicate their voices and to show how they informed my conceptual model with their rich and, I believe, important contextual understandings. I illustrated each stage of the conceptual model with examples from the text of the interviews. The names of the co-participants that follow were aliases chosen by them to protect their confidentiality.

Motivating Stage

Properties (from Table 3, p. 36): That stage of the counselling relationship prior to formal, counselling interaction during which internal and external pressures motivate the co-participants to enter into school counselling. It is influenced, both positively and negatively, by the previous experiences the co-participants have had (including previous counselling experiences) that affect their willingness to enter into counselling, and by the beliefs they have developed through rumour, previous experience and personal understandings.

Joe

Joe entered into the counselling relationship reluctantly. He was having trouble with his grades and his attendance at school, and those difficulties translated into problems with his parents. He said,
Well – my parents weren’t getting any feedback from me – I wasn’t telling them anything about school at all – like, “What’s happening here; what’s happening there; how are your grades?” I’d always tell them, “Good, good, fine, fine,” even if they weren’t good. And finally, one day they caught on to that and said, “We are going to the counsellor.”

In another interview, Joe revealed that, “Because it was either I sort things out or, or I was supposed to leave my house, so, that kind of encouraged me, too.” In short, the ultimatum presented by Joe’s parents became the precipitating factor that pushed him into counselling.

Although the motivation to enter counselling was an important step, it was not axiomatic that the co-participant acknowledged a problem at this stage. Joe went because of his parents’ ultimatum and he reported that he felt that he, “really didn’t have a problem at all,” and that he really didn’t want to be there. So, although he was aware of the difficulties he was having with school and his parents, Joe reported no intrinsic motivation to enter into counselling.

Kennedy

Kennedy was motivated to enter school counselling for much different reasons than those Joe reported. She suggested that, “it was a group problem when I was in grade eight . . . when you have all those little quarrels and stuff, you go to the counsellor and you start getting into more detail about what’s going on.” She was aware that the counsellor might be able to assist in mediating the problems she and her friends were experiencing. Although Kennedy was not clear from whence this assurance originated, it was important to note that this was not her first experience with counselling. Some time before she entered Grade 8 her parents separated and she reported that she was “forced” to see a counsellor outside of the school. She described that experience as,

weird at first . . . that I . . . I didn’t see myself as intimidated to go – kind of weird sitting down with a complete stranger and telling him about you – you know – about how you feel and stuff . . . it’s kind of odd, but when I came out of there, I felt a little bit better.

She reported that, although she was unable to develop a “relationship” with the outside counsellor, she still had a positive experience. Therefore, unlike Joe, Kennedy believed that counsellors could
be of some assistance to her even if they did not develop what she considered a relationship. Thus, the context that she brought to counselling was much different than that brought by Joe.

Lisa

Lisa's counsellor had been a Home Economics teacher before she assumed the counselling role, and Lisa experienced a positive relationship with her at that time. She described their early relationship as beginning,

when I first got endometriosis and I talked to her about it, even when she was just my teacher. She had the same surgery as I did; I think that's when it first started connecting. That was another problem after I got sick with the other stuff ... I was expecting to get it when I was about 28, but 16! ... Because I had some options to do with medications and stuff like that – she just had some ideas about it.

After this experience, Lisa felt comfortable bringing a wide variety of problems to this same individual when she moved to the counselling role. She said, “it’s not like an ongoing thing that we are dealing with, it’s just if something goes wrong, I go and talk to her. It’s not like I have this big ... No, no, no, it’s just small little ones that just pop up.” In fact, the events she described varied from the day-to-day frustrations with teachers and the school system to the unexpected death of a teenage friend. She reported a significant, common, medical experience that, when shared, established a connection between them. It was important to note that this experience occurred in the classroom setting before any formal counselling relationship began. The practical implication of this was that Lisa and her counsellor (previously a teacher) negotiated their way through the Initiating Stage of the model prior to counselling. Therefore, unlike Joe’s experience, it was easy for her to drop in whenever something went wrong.

Martha

Martha also had her counsellor as a teacher during her earlier grades and found her to be, “a really good teacher, she was good to her students and stuff like that and rarely ever got mad and she was always nice to everybody and she was just a person, a really easy person to talk to.”

Martha reported herself as a discipline problem. She whispered,
I’ve got a behavioural problem! According to most people – to teachers, especially in elementary school, and I’ve had bad experiences especially with, like, vice-principals and principals in elementary school. And there really wasn’t a counsellor to go to in like elementary school. So, it was just dealing with the teachers. And the administrators always took the teacher’s side and they didn’t listen to me. And, I don’t know, that bugged me a lot.

While obtaining assistance with problems related to teachers and administrators was an important reason for her to see a counsellor, she indicated that, “asking questions, getting applications for university, and stuff like that,” also served as necessary motivators. Martha reported that she felt confident in visiting her counsellor with a wide variety of issues and concerns. She indicated that her motivation to see her counsellor was not stimulated by other individuals and she had a good understanding of some of the behaviours that caused her difficulty. In short, unlike Joe, she acknowledged the problems she brought to counselling.

Tabatha

Tabatha’s mother applied considerable external pressure to convince Tabatha to see her school counsellor. She said, “My mom sometimes says, ‘Go and talk to her,’ because she doesn’t know how to help me, you know. So she tells me to come down and talk with Ms. Jones.”

Although Tabatha did as her mother suggested, she was less than confident about bringing her issues to the school counsellor, preferring instead to see a “real psychologist, psychiatrist, professional.” She explained,

I really want to see someone, because like my friend went through a lot like this and it helped her out a lot. So, sometimes I want to see one because sometimes it seems like I am losing my mind and I know so many people in my family who have, and I am constantly paranoid that I am going to. And it is, ‘Help me now, now before it happens.’ [It is important to note that subsequent to these interviews, Tabatha’s counsellor did refer her to a psychiatrist and Tabatha received answers to the questions with which she was concerned.]

Tabatha was motivated to enter counselling in a search for answers she had about her own mental health. Normally this would suggest to me that she came to counselling for reasons personal to her. However, because she really wanted to see a psychiatrist or professional psychologist, the primary impetus behind her visit to the school counsellor was her mother. That said, Tabatha did
bring other concerns to her school counsellor. She said that although she felt she could not bring the “big issues” to her school counsellor, she did come with issues related to: (1) school (including post-secondary), (2) getting organized, and (3) graduation. She reported that these issues also were important to her because, “she doesn’t know anything about them.”

**Energy and Inertia**

When asked if having her counsellor as a teacher made it easier for Lisa to go to counselling, she responded, “Yes, I knew her before.” Martha also suggested that, “it was kind of easy just going into the counselling relationship with her.” Their experiences suggested to me that positive interactions outside the counselling relationship had the potential to make it easier for adolescents to bring their problems to a counsellor and; also, that, the counselling relationship could be a natural extension of that first set of interactions.

In a similar way, Kennedy’s early experience with counselling outside the school suggested that a counsellor might be able to assist her group in resolving the social problems they were having in Grade 8. Although she reported that she did not have what she would describe as a counselling relationship with the outside counsellor, she said he was, “good to talk to” and that he helped her to “feel a little bit better.”

However, previous experience did not necessarily facilitate the initiating of counselling for all of the students. Joe reported that he and his parents were previously involved in family counselling and in that setting he felt,

I had no control over – um – that bondage between my counsellor and my parents … I was on the outside, I was, like where am I? You are – it was like they are talking about me, but I’m not, it seems like I’m not even there – I mean this was bad. And like, that wasn’t fair at all.

It is apparent that the family counselling experience did not meet Joe’s needs. He felt that he had no room to negotiate in the relationship, and that he was anonymous. After that experience he was placed into individual counselling. Of those sessions he reported,
some counsellors even had to, some counsellors even went out of town for good, they would leave their job and I, there would be new counsellors that would come in and have to get to know me all over again and ask the same questions all over again, not helping me. Some were even worse than others, in counseling, like. So there is, I don’t know. I felt like real alone -- in my battle.

Considering that Joe felt alienated in family counselling, and abandoned in personal counselling, it is not surprising that those experiences acted as disincentives for him to visit the school counsellor. Tabatha’s early experiences with the mental health problems in her family and with her friends defined the level of counselling relationship she was willing to negotiate with her school counsellor. Because she was concerned about her own mental health and was convinced that, no matter how comfortable she felt with a school counsellor, that counsellor could not provide her with the expert assessment she desired, she was only willing to bring certain issues to her counsellor. In Tabatha’s case, the social context in which she negotiated her understandings worked against her developing a counselling relationship with a school counsellor.

Rumour, preconceptions, and image can also have a dramatic impact on the likelihood of an adolescent entering into a counselling relationship. Referring to a time before his first meeting with his counsellor, Joe said, “My first impression of counsellors was that they just help you pick out your classes and everything.” Tabatha made similar observations when she said,

I didn’t know what a counsellor did; I didn’t know what a school counsellor was until Ms. Jones came and got me … I just had no clue. I thought that if you had problems in Grade twelve with your timetable, you came to the counsellor … I didn’t even know how to make an appointment, down here, so I didn’t really care to.

Martha suggested that students may be reluctant to visit their counsellor because,

Maybe they’ve been to other schools somewhere, or maybe they’ve had a bad experience somewhere, or maybe they’ve heard something about that counsellor, like maybe they’re mean or something. I don’t know. Or, they could also think that counsellors are something like administrators type people. They just don’t care.

Kennedy added a slightly different perspective when, at different times during her first
interview, she suggested that:

(1) I think maybe some kids are a little more—intimidated, or—they’re afraid—I don’t know, maybe they’re—don’t know how to express themselves or something.

(2) I think, like—when you haven’t been in there before, it’s kind of hard to go in there because it’s kind of like a secret feeling in there—it’s kind of like being—it’s all in confidence

(3) secure is a good way to put it. It’s like when you haven’t ever been behind one of these doors—it’s kind of—worry—like you have to say something. I don’t know what it is, not for me any more, but for other kids.

She was suggesting that adolescents were not confident in talking about their problems and when this “intimidation” was combined with the feeling of mystery about counselling itself, it resulted in uncertainty and worry.

Tabatha added still another insight when she discussed the complications of self-image and adolescent culture. She suggested that many students would not attend counselling because, “Like in grades 8 to 10 you’re going around, even in grade 11 you’re going around like, ‘Well, you know, I shouldn’t be, like you know, worrying about this at school. I’ve got to be worrying about being a hot shot.’”

The importance of the students’ awareness of the school culture was also illustrated when Lisa suggested that students, especially those in grade 8, may not go to counselling,

Because I think people know. The people see you in the counselling area and they say, ‘Oh, what are you here for?’ And I think it’s not always just to get classes changed and stuff. ... I think other people will hear about it. ... and they just make fun of you and stuff like that.

Lisa’s suggestion was that, at least at some level, within the adolescents’ social context, it was not acceptable for them to acknowledge problems by seeking assistance for those problems and the very act of seeking assistance meant assuming the risk of being mocked.

Finally, the nature of the problems themselves could act to inhibit the co-participants’ willingness to participate in school based counselling. As we have seen, Tabatha’s personal
experiences and her desire for a professional assessment of her mental health left her wanting something more than she felt her school counsellor could offer. She was, therefore, reluctant to commit to the relationship with her school counsellor. Kennedy, on the other hand, described a time when her problems were so severe that she could not bring herself to visit her counsellor even though she did have faith in the counsellor’s ability to help her.

Initiating Stage

Properties (From Table 3, p. 36): That stage of the counselling relationship associated with the initial interactions between the counsellor and co-participants. It is a tentative stage, during which the counsellor and co-participants negotiate understandings about confidentiality and issues of safety. Because of its tentative and exploratory nature, the relationship is especially sensitive to potential roadblocks during this stage. A non-judgemental and caring atmosphere in which the counsellor communicates an advocacy role for the co-participants supports the developing relationship and results in feelings of security and comfort for the co-participants.

Confidentiality

As Lisa suggested above, the very act of coming to a counselling centre may imply that students have problems and that implication may subject them to the mockery of their peers. While she indicated this was mainly a problem with students in grade 8, it was apparent that she felt conspicuous while in the counselling area and suggested that this was so for other students as well. While there was obviously no breach of confidentiality in an ethical sense in this situation, it does imply that there were social constraints influencing help seeking behaviours and that confidentiality was a significant concern for adolescents. That said, the co-participants had negotiated understandings about confidentiality that satisfied their concerns.

Joe, too, commented on the importance of confidentiality when he discussed the early stages of his counselling relationship,

I could tell her something and I know she’d never tell anyone about it. It’s — she probably has to deal with a lot — she gets a lot — it’s a lot of confidential information she hears about so, she’s probably not really interested in that.
What — or gossiping, or telling other people what you have to say, ’cause she’s heard all this and it’s — it’s I don’t know, it’s a faith.

At this point in the relationship, Joe’s negotiated understanding of confidentiality is considerably different than that of Martha’s, Lisa’s or Kennedy’s; but it is his understanding and it works for him. Tabatha also felt her confidences were respected, however, for her the issue was less critical because she said, “I really don’t tell her very much, you know. I tell her, basically, this is what happened yesterday and this is what I’m upset about, but I don’t tell her anything else, you know, like anything.”

Safety

In two separate interviews, Joe described his first experiences with his counsellor as, “There wasn’t a like or a dislike … just — a limbo like kind of … she was very — just — flat lined, really. I don’t know how to say it.” To illustrate that the “flat lined” feeling was not a negative one, Joe said,

The body language really communicated that she could communicate with me — you know — in a way that most people can’t communicate with me … she would look me in the eye you know, the eye contact would be perfect you know — I wouldn’t be scared to look her in the eye. She’s very open.

The atmosphere of safety negotiated, Joe said, “We were able to work it [the pressures that motivated him to come to counselling] into a problem.” He continued, “so she would get me to do things — would be — to be — to write things down, like, like in steps and stuff.” For the first time in Joe’s counselling experience he was not feeling alone in his “battle” and he said, “I’d want to face the day in the morning, so I’d want to get up.”

For Kennedy, the experience was somewhat different. She stated that she expected both understanding and safety from counselling. Her counsellor, she said “is, is a familiar face — I see her every day and I deal with her all the time.” She described her first time seeing Ms. Jones alone, “Yes, the very first time. I’m pretty sure it was just about school — if I’m thinking correctly, it was just about my timetable. So, she said, ‘So, how are you doing?’ and I just started talking and
everything – goes out! It always happens that way.” Because she reported a positive relationship with her parents and confidence in expressing her feelings, she said, “I just wasn’t intimidated at all … I’m pretty easy expressing what I feel, but seeing that I didn’t know her, I don’t really know – I was comfortable.” So, where for Joe, the initial counselling sessions were tentative and focused on identifying a problem and establishing some immediate plans, Kennedy’s first sessions provided her with an atmosphere in which she felt comfortable to let “everything” out (although in her second interview she did add the qualification that, “actually I didn’t tell that much”). When asked about what made her feel so comfortable during that first session, she replied, “I kind of liked her room … When I saw it. I don’t know, I like the way it was set up – the atmosphere, it was comfortable … And, like, her room’s always kind of messy – with lots of colour, and I don’t know.”

Many of Lisa’s and Martha’s initial experiences in counselling were coloured by their positive experiences with their counsellor when she was their classroom teacher. However, Martha acknowledged that she saw differences in the roles. She suggested that the counselling relationship was, “more open – she wants me to do what I think is right – it’s just easier to talk to her about stuff.” Both co-participants indicated that the primary factor that made it easy for them to connect with their counsellor was her ability to listen. Lisa said, “I think it’s just that she listens. Yes, she makes time, it’s not like she hasn’t got anything else to do, she doesn’t push you out the door even if she has another appointment.” Martha’s response was similar. When asked what made it possible for she and her counsellor to connect, she said, “She listens and then gives her opinion. She’s not one of those who interrupts in the middle and says, ‘Well you should do this’.”

Lisa also described a situation that illustrated how a negative experience can act as a “roadblock” to the development of the counselling relationship. During her grade 8 year she suffered a lengthy illness and when she returned to school, she found she was far behind in a required subject and sought assistance from her counsellor. The response she received from the counsellor made her feel,
like I was a little kid ... she treated me just like, like it was kind of like my fault I was failing these classes, but I was sick and I really couldn’t do much about it. And then once my mom phoned her it was kind of like, ‘It’s okay, we can do it now.’ It was like because she was an adult, things worked and because I was a kid it didn’t.

What was evident in this incident was that Lisa had no room to negotiate an understanding with her counsellor because her concerns were not validated. Lisa reported that the result of this experience was a lasting discomfort with that counsellor, a discomfort that prevented a relationship from developing.

Tabatha’s experience with the development of a counselling relationship was affected by her desire to see a psychiatrist or a psychologist, and her conviction that her school counsellor could not provide the expertise she desired for resolving her “big issues.” However, she did feel confident in approaching her school counsellor with issues related to school and, despite her reluctance, did share parts of her “bigger issues.” She indicated that the primary factor that influenced her decision about the counselling relationship during the Initiating Stage was her confidence that “they know where I’m coming from.” She made it clear that, for the “big issues”, she had to be confident that her counsellor possessed a clinical understanding of the problems that her family and friends experienced and the skills to diagnose her own condition. For the school related issues she recognized her counsellor’s expertise and was confident in her ability to deal with those concerns. Clearly, Tabatha felt that she was able to negotiate the kind of counselling relationship she would have with her counsellor.

The Comfort Stage

Properties (From Table 3, p. 36): That stage in the negotiation of the counselling relationship associated the co-participants’ feelings of familiarity and equality in the dyad, of being respected by the counsellor, and of having independence to make their own decisions within the counselling relationship. It is negotiated in a non-judgemental and positive environment and results in reduced tension; easier interaction; and feelings of liberation, empowerment, and confidence that encourage openness in the dyad. During this time the counsellor’s role as an advocate is clarified and the co-participants become aware of the counsellors’ skills and genuineness.
Comfort was a consistent theme throughout the students’ commentaries. The context in which the references to comfort appeared was essential to the understanding of the role of comfort in the relationship. For example, Joe, when asked how he felt about making a visit to his counsellor, responded, “Comfortable.” He continued,

I’m a very shy person and to feel that comfort, not being rejected, but actually being accepted, I feel, I feel good and it really helps my self-esteem, I guess and in um when I was younger I could never ask and I was always told to speak only when being talked to you know, so I was very quiet.

He described comfort in terms of acceptance that was, in turn, juxtaposed with his understanding of his place in his family. In another context, Joe associated comfort with his counsellor’s respect for his personal limits of disclosure, and, in still another, with the steps taken in assuring his confidentiality. Kennedy found comfort in the décor of her counsellor’s office, and in familiarity she experienced with her counsellor. Lisa found comfort in an informal atmosphere that allowed for humour. Martha experienced comfort in the context of “dropping in” for a variety of reasons. Finally, Tabatha associated comfort with the expertise of her counsellor, but also with the informal atmosphere of the counselling.

Acceptance

Acceptance is a feeling of unconditional acknowledgment typified by the counsellor taking time, encouraging, affirming, and listening. It is negotiated in a non-judgemental and respectful atmosphere in which the co-participants feel they are equal partners.

Respect was an important and sensitive issue for these adolescents and Lisa suggested that it was not always present in her interactions with adults, “Well, in talking with the public, you don’t, you know, get treated very nicely. So ... I like when people respect me, because I respect them.” In another interview she indicated that one of the two factors that most strongly influenced the effectiveness of counselling for her was, respect [the other was availability].

Joe said of respect, “it gives you the drive to go on, it expands your mind, and makes you more open to the world.” It was an experience that he reported was empowering to him. The
deference and esteem implicit in the Oxford dictionary definition of respect (Thompson, 1995) were evident in his counsellor’s willingness to allow him to tell his story in his own way. He said, “she would only get as deep into it as I wanted to. She wouldn’t ask me anything deeper than I wanted; than I didn’t feel comfortable with.” Joe reported a feeling of control that gave him status and self-worth in this relationship. That feeling was at odds with his previous life experiences, of which he said, “I never really ask questions or anything, I never ask the teachers questions or anything, I never do anything for myself. I would always end up in a hole until someone rescued me.” The need to be rescued was replaced by Joe’s understanding that he was in control. He said,

it wasn’t anyone else’s battle to win, it was my battle with me to win, I had to, I had to – go to school by myself, ask questions by myself, I had to regain knowledge for my benefit, I had to do things for my benefit and, and, once I realize that I took all that stuff when I was younger for granted – um – Ms. Jones actually helped me boost, I actually listened to her, I actually, I started listening to teachers, I was learning things. I started going, ‘Wow, I should have done this a long time ago!’ And I got help.

Being heard and cared for provided comfort to the co-participants. For example, Lisa said, “it just feels better that someone is there to listen to me and doesn’t dismiss me.” For Joe, his counsellor’s willingness to extend herself for him was a telling sign of acceptance. He said, “she went out of her way to actually, like to actually see me do good.” Kennedy responded to reflective communication (Egan, 1998) when she reported hearing what she already knew to be true. She said, “I just have someone who cares, who’s going to – um – confirm what I’m feeling. Kind of make me understand it a little bit more. I guess it’s more like talking to me.” Martha suggested that it was simply the willingness of her counsellor to wait. “She listens and then gives her opinion. She’s not one of those who interrupts in the middle.” She also communicated that this was an experience reported by others, “I’ve heard lots of people say that before, like most counsellors are interested in what you have to say.”

A non-judgemental stance was also very important to the co-participants’ feelings of being accepted. Rogers (1957) identified it as a key, facilitating element in the counselling relationship and the co-participants’ responses certainly reinforced that perspective. Joe identified a non-
judgemental stance with an understanding one and said, “I couldn’t have done anything if it weren’t for her understanding.”

Being judged was expressed as a common experience for the co-participants, both with parents and friends. Lisa said of her peers, “Yeah, like even on what you wear, they judge you ... they’re not accepting and they don’t understand a lot of things I went through.” Martha elaborated, “Like my parents want to be able to do the same thing [i.e., to listen and help], but they’re parents and they just want the best for their kids and they judge, even if they say they don’t judge you, they do to a certain degree. And even my friends judge me to a certain degree.” Later, she added, my friends are very judgemental and are not willing to listen. I’ve never met more judgemental people in my life. I think that’s what you get for living in a small town. As human beings we are very judgemental, we judge the way they dress, how much money they have, where they live, what colour of skin they have, stupid stuff like that. But, even I judge people about stuff like that – here I am being hypocritical.

The non-judgemental stance of the counsellors gave the co-participants the confidence to communicate their issues without being condemned or diminished in the eyes of their counsellors.

For Kennedy, the sense of being accepted translated to a feeling of “relief” because she could communicate what was bothering her. Lisa felt that she was recognized and appreciated and said she knew this because of, “the way she treats me, and like if I’m in the halls, she’ll come and say, ‘Hi,’ to me and stuff like that. She doesn’t treat me, like I’m a problem.” Martha said that being accepted allowed her to “open up”; and Joe described the effect as, “actually being accepted, I feel, I feel good and it really helps my self-esteem.” Even Tabatha, who we have seen was willing only to accept her counsellor in a limited role, communicated a feeling of acceptance when she said, “she talked to me like a grown up, like I was a grown up and she would comment on how I would speak like a grown up and it just made me feel – older, like I was on the same level as her instead of lower than her.”

Negative experiences affecting the co-participant’s feeling of acceptance and comfort can also occur within the dynamic of the counselling relationship, such as those we saw in Joe’s
experience with family counselling. However, they can also occur in events that are outside the immediate counselling setting. For example, Joe said, "possibly if I saw you outside of school or something and said, 'Hi,' and you didn’t say anything – maybe there would be – I don’t know – the student might think, like for me, I would think, 'Well, that’s your job and school. To say, ‘Hi,’ and maybe that she’s, that person’s being fake.'"

Kennedy illustrated the effects of events external to the counselling setting when she talked about a counsellor she saw outside of the school. She found that she liked the counsellor, and her commentary about the counselling sessions suggested that she experienced personal insight from the few sessions they had together. However, when I asked her if she felt she had a counselling relationship with him, she said, "I wouldn’t call it any kind of relationship, because I saw him the other day in the bank and he didn’t even recognize me." For Kennedy, being recognized by her counsellor was important to her personal definition of a relationship. She elaborated,

and I like it when she recognizes a change. Like a while ago I cut my hair and in an exam she came up to me and whispered, 'I like your hair like that.' It was cool. Or like when I’m wearing something different, she’ll say, ‘Oh, I love your new boots.’ That’s cool. 'Cause when she notices, I like that. 'Cause you don’t feel like you’re just another student going in telling your problems – and you might know she does pay attention, but you know, it’s kind of reassuring to know you’re still in mind.

**Openness and Self-disclosure**

Self-disclosure was a tool that demonstrated the level of transparency in the relationship and contributed to a sense of openness through which the participants were able to negotiate their understandings about the issues under discussion. Openness and self-disclosure were associated with guarantees of confidentiality and feelings of trust and safety in the relationship. Openness was communicated both through action and as the behaviours that communicated that openness to the students. For example, Joe said,

the body language really communicated that she could communicate with me – you know – in a way that most people can’t communicate with me – she knows me more... she would she would look me in the eye you know, the eye contact
would be perfect you know – I wouldn’t be scared to look her in the eye. She’s very open.

Egan (1998) defined experiences, like Joe’s, as indirect self-disclosure and contrasted it to direct self-disclosure, which was a timely and appropriate sharing of personal experience by the counsellor.

The co-participants in this investigation identified both indirect and direct self-disclosure, but also recognised that they brought their own openness to the relationship as well. However, openness and honesty were not specific measures. Kennedy illustrated this when she said,

I’m pretty open, but sometimes I think when I go in and talk to her it’s like – I’m feeling – as intense as my feelings are I kind of try to like relax a little bit when I’m talking to her and maybe I’m more like I want to sort out what I’m feeling.

Sometimes she felt ready to tackle the issue directly and sometimes she wanted to relax in the interaction, and was aware that she could accomplish this by controlling the flow of information she shared with the counsellor. Tabatha, as we have seen, understood this very well and reported that she negotiated the nature of the relationship she had with her counsellor by controlling the information she was willing to share. Lisa also recognized her role in facilitating the relationship when she said, “I have to be open and tell her, I can’t tell her just little bits, it has to be the whole thing or else it won’t work ... she can’t give a good suggestion.”

The counsellors’ self-disclosure was important to Joe. When asked what a counsellor meant to him, he said, “a counselor means to me – a helping hand – a lift up – a lift – like um – sharing experiences being passed through – like, um – stories of my counselor telling me about her past and everything and examples of what I’m dealing with.” When she talked about the stories her counsellor recounted, Lisa said that those stories demonstrated that, (1) “she can identify with some of the problems I am going through”, (2) “she trusts me enough not to go and tell other people”, and (3) “you’ve [her counsellor] got more problems than me and you’re still here.” Lisa’s final comment was said with laughter and she clarified it by saying, “not feeling alone; other people
have gone through it, too.” So, there was a sense of companionship that was communicated to Lisa by her counsellor’s openness, as displayed through her use of self-disclosure.

**Environmental Characteristics**

The school and counselling environment played an important role in the social context of the emerging relationship described by the co-participants. Kennedy found the immediate environment of her counsellor’s office comfortable. She said that, for her, the atmosphere was important in establishing rapport with her counsellor and that it “fits.” She said, “I’m used to going in there and sitting in the chair right by the door. And, like, her room’s always kind of messy – with lots of colour.” She continued to say that, if the room were cold and sterile, “I wouldn’t want to be there, no,” and “probably the reason I keep going back and dealing with the same person is – like – comfortable.”

Both Joe and Kennedy reported that the counsellors’ familiarity with the school environment helped them to communicate with their counsellor. In two separate passages, Kennedy said,

> Ms. Jones is here, so she has a lot more idea of the atmosphere, and the kids, just a lot of things. So, it’s easier to talk to her. Compared to someone who doesn’t even know how or even what I do, or nothing.

> And another thing is being familiar with – about my life already. Because my life is here, I spend a lot of time at this school, right? So, she’s already kind of familiar with it all. So, it makes it that much easier to go in and instead of having to explain so much – like you already know this, so that’s how I feel you know.

Joe expressed a similar perspective when he said about counsellors outside of the school, “they wouldn’t know, they wouldn’t have a clue, they would have to – like everybody else, it takes time to get used to something. And the counsellor would take quite a while to learn what it is like.”

The environment also had the potential to diminish the counselling relationship. We have seen in the Initiating Stage that, especially during the early grades, Lisa felt conspicuous in the counselling office, suggesting it was as if everyone was aware of the reasons she was there.
Kennedy indicated that there was an aura of mystery about the counselling offices and reported “when you haven’t been in there before, it’s kind of hard to go in there because it’s kind of like a secret feel in there.” This uncertainty is resolved as the relationship develops during the comfort stage and the students and their counsellors negotiate their relationships.

Tabatha expressed something of a paradox in her observations about the counselling atmosphere. She said, “It’s a great environment, it’s a friendly environment, it’s cool to come out here and hang out and stuff”, “I like it down here [counselling offices]. It makes me feel smart. With all these books and stuff on universities”, and “you come down here and everything is accessible and it’s not uptight down here, so it’s comfortable.” Still, she said, “but I don’t know. I just don’t like talking here, I feel that everybody knows what I’m saying as soon as I say it.” No matter the attractiveness and the appeal of the environment, her conviction that her counsellor could not provide her with the expertise she desired defined the kind of relationship she was willing to negotiate.

**Independence**

Independence was the negotiated condition in which the co-participants felt they were free to make their own decisions within the counselling relationship. They may have received suggestions from their counsellor, but ultimately each co-participant felt responsible for the direction he or she chose. Joe said, “Ms. Jones, the counselor, pushed me, gave me a little push... like, gave me a little independence... and I was on my own, I had to think and choose my own thoughts.” He said this was important, but was clear that, for him, it was not the same as total freedom and he also sought guidance. Independence gave him the opportunity to make decisions, including decisions about the guidance he was receiving.

Kennedy said of her previous counsellor,

I don’t really like – see also – when I went to him before, he would kind of tell me, I don’t really know how to say this, was almost like he was telling me about – about problems or what I’m like – and I don’t like that. Where Ms. Jones doesn’t really need to tell me what I’m like, she is just trying to assist me in, in figuring out what I’m feeling.
Kennedy responded well to the independence she had to assess herself. Lisa expressed similar observations but emphasized the importance of her control over the context. She said, “it depends on what it entails. Like if it’s something about school, I want to solve it, but if it is something about my life, I just get suggestions.” When it was specific information she was seeking, she wanted definite answers, but when it was a life problem, she wanted guidance rather than direction.

The independence Martha felt in her counselling relationship marked a difference between it and the relationship she experienced with her parents and school administrators. About that difference Martha said,

Well, she doesn’t control me – she doesn’t control me, no. She’s more like, ‘Well, it’s your decision; it’s up to you.’ And she basically gives you suggestions and stuff like that. She’s not one to say you should do this, she’s nothing like my parents who say they want me to do this and they still say it’s my decision, but if you don’t do it then they’re going to be a little upset. So, like the administration, you’re supposed to follow rules and if you don’t they get mad and so they have control over you, too. But like a counsellor, they don’t – they’re more like – easy to talk to.

Martha was quick to point out that she was not blaming her parents for their desire to control. She said, “but they’re parents and they just want the best for their kids and they judge, even if they say they don’t judge you.” Kennedy elaborated,

Ms. Jones’ profession is being a counsellor, and she’s a lot more understanding about why things happen the way they do and how you feel and stuff – if I don’t know how – it’s that she understands a lot more of the reality behind the world – my mom, it would affect her personally – where Ms. Jones can’t really let it affect her personally.

She recognized both the distance afforded by the professional relationship with her counsellor and the immediacy of the personal relationship she has with her parents.

Counsellor Role

The role of the school counsellor was not always clear to the co-participants before they entered counselling. Tabatha expressed ignorance of the counsellors’ role during her early years in
the school. She said, “I didn’t know what a counsellor did, I didn’t know what a school counsellor was until Ms. Jones came and got me ... I thought that if you had problems in Grade twelve with your timetable, you came to the counsellor.” Joe’s initial assumptions were similar. He stated that this was due in part to the appearance, “that counsellors are always busy,” and in part to an eighth grade meeting the principal had with students. The message he received from that meeting was that counsellors dealt with academic problems. Lisa’s experience was opposite that expressed by Joe. Where he thought counselling was about academic difficulties, she said that she thought, “it was just for people with problems and stuff like that. But I didn’t know.” Joe’s observations suggest that the counsellors were not visible to him, and Lisa suggested that the best way for counsellors to make their presence known to students was to get out in the hallways with them. She says, “if people come around you get to know them really well.”

However, with the benefit of personal experience the co-participants reported a learned awareness of the scope of their counsellors’ roles (i.e., academic, career, and personal counselling). Martha indicated her understanding when she said, “if they’re having problems with their teachers, I mean, if they want to have courses changed, of course, I mean, if they just want someone to talk to. Um, stuff like universities and colleges, and stuff like that, scholarship, everything ... if they have a problem with the administration.” Lisa added, “it’s not just changing classes, it’s just dropping by to say, ‘Hi!’ It’s not a psychiatrist kind of thing, you know.” Interacting around these multiple roles also had the potential to offer portals into personal counselling services. Kennedy illustrated this when she said, “I’ve gone in and gotten into a really in depth conversation and got out what was tearing me apart inside – I didn’t even go in there for that intention in the first place – I might go in for something about my timetable, like to drop math.”

Lisa, Martha, Kennedy, and Joe also reflected on the suitability of the counsellor simultaneously assuming both the role of counsellor and of either classroom teacher or administrator. Lisa suggested that having her teacher become her counsellor worked out for her, although having the two roles simultaneously would mean that her counsellor wouldn’t always be
available when she needed assistance. She also suggested that a conflict between the counsellor and one or more students in the classroom might well turn those students away from counselling. She said, “You’ve got to kind of keep it separate ... the counsellor is more of a friend than a teacher is, because a teacher kind of has to keep control of the whole classroom and they can’t really be your friend while keeping a lot of authority, you know. And a counsellor doesn’t really have to do that.” Martha reinforced this view when she said, “I’d still be a little kind of worried about going to her because of that – say we didn’t get along or something.” She also pointed out that her relationship with her counsellor changed from when she experienced her as a classroom teacher. She pointed out, “She’s a lot easier to talk with – I mean, it was easy to talk with her before, but now we’re more on a one-to-one level and it’s easier to tell her.”

Martha and Kennedy also suggested that the dual role of counsellor / teacher might bring the counselling relationship into the classroom, a setting they both felt was inappropriate. Martha indicated that it was important for her to be the focus of the counselling and opined that with, “24 people around you. So, they’re [the counsellor] sort of focused on you, but you’ve got those other 24 people. Whereas, in counselling, it is just the one person and the counsellor.” Kennedy articulated a similar perspective. Although she developed friendships with the teachers, she felt the context of the classroom could not provide her with the time or atmosphere appropriate to working on her issues when she wanted to work on them.

Envisioning counsellors who simultaneously assumed an administrative role was problematic for those co-participants who addressed this topic. Martha indicated that most of her difficulties in school were related to conflicts with teachers and her experience suggested that administrators always took the side of the teacher. She identified the counsellor as an advocate for her and said of administrators, “they are not ones to be counselling people.” Kennedy provided the following example,

Okay, if she was like the vice-principal, she would be able to tell me what to do whether I liked to or not, like you’re expelled, or we’ll have to call your parents about this or something, I don’t know, or stuff like that, if that were the case. And those aren’t things I like! I don’t like being told what I’m doing if I don’t
want to do it. You know, if I'm talking to her about something, she can't tell me to do something if that's not what I want. 'Cause she doesn't really have - that control. Over my whole - like she has, persuasion - she can persuade things if it is necessary.

Later in the same interview she indicated that she wouldn't want the counsellor to be an administrator, because she said, “they're the ones who would have to punish you and crap like that. I don’t want that. That's not what I want at all. Um, and I want to feel like I'm being taken care of ... Like, the guidance is what I need.” It was clear that the administrator’s role was the antithesis of the counsellor’s role for Kennedy.

Joe expressed a unique perspective on the dual role of administrator and counsellor. He suggested that such a dual role had the potential to be quite positive because, he said,

say if you are a part administrator and part counsellor – if – actually it would mean a lot – it would – if you – instead of putting the student in jail – help them, you don’t isolate them. He would make them feel comfortable with the school, make them feel comfortable about themselves, make them like – don’t suspend them.

He indicated that the role of counsellor would influence the administrative role, leaving the administrator more understanding and supportive.

Kennedy was also aware of the role of power in the relationship. However, she was not only aware of her counsellor’s power in the relationship, but also the power that she held. Of the latter she said, “it’s not like Ms. Jones can punish me or anything like that, right. And I’m not afraid for her to know entirely who I am – like, I know I’m very close to my mom, I can tell her almost anything, but there is – a lot more I’d rather she not know, that, I can tell Ms. Jones.” Of the former she said,

well, there’s power over my emotions though. That’s a lot of power, right? ... when you’re talking to her, she can’t pretty much tell you anything – and because she’s – you know – 'cause you trust that person that she does or doesn’t have power over you – and you kind of have to think that – I really think you have to trust the counsellor because you’re telling them so much.
In her context, the belief that the counsellor could not punish her was empowering and allowed her to be open about issues that she might otherwise have felt were self-incriminating and would open her to some kind of punishment. She also recognized that her counsellor had both sensitive information about her and influenced her emotions. While she had to keep that fact in mind, she tempered her concerns with the trust she had in her counsellor.

**Counselling Skills**

The co-participants identified personal characteristics in their counsellors that were consistent with the facilitative conditions described by Rogers (1957), and the counselling skills outlined by Egan (1998). However, for them, the counsellors’ skills were understood in the context in which they experienced counselling and, therefore, were integral to the whole experience of counselling. Joe said, “I’m sure that somewhere in a big book somewhere, they go and they study counselors and they run across ways of dealing with people — children — where kids that do that, or have problems.” He recognized that his counsellor had learned about counselling, but understandably he was unable to label those skills. Similarly, Kennedy said of her counsellor’s queries about her well-being, “It’s more genuine, too, when she says it. I know she’s not asking, she’s not expecting, ‘fine’, she’s inquiring, she wants to know if I’m feeling better than last time I was in here.” She did not relate genuineness (congruence) to a skill that her counsellor may have learned and was using with her, but identified it as an integral part of her counsellor’s personality and of the relationship that they had negotiated. Throughout the interviews, glimpses of other counselling skills such as reflective listening, confirmation, non-judgemental stance, empathy, and unconditional positive regard were evidenced.

**The Working Alliance**

Properties (from Table 3, p. 36): That stage in the negotiation of the counselling relationship in which the counsellor and co-participant work together to clarify the problems the co-participants bring to the counselling relationship and to develop strategies that will effect satisfactory change. Behaviours that foster, in the co-participants, the belief that the counsellor cares and is genuinely
interested in them and is committed to help with their problems increases their confidence levels. The co-participants communicate immediacy in their need for support, and the availability of the counsellor, and the continuity of the service therefore are very important to them. Trust is well established and the co-participants are comfortable in disclosing relevant, personal details to the counsellor. An idealized friendship may be imbedded in this stage. It is rooted in the non-judgemental, safe, and focused interactions that they find with their counsellor that are often absent in their relationships with their peers.

Each of the co-participants brought his or her own set of issues to counselling and the negotiated strategies that they applied to the resolution of those issues formed the working alliance. It was interesting that they did not always seem to be aware that they were negotiating strategies. For example, Lisa said that she and her counsellor did not make formal plans because, she said, “I don’t really believe in plans. They don’t usually work out for me.” However, it was apparent that she and her counsellor did discuss her issues and solutions to them. She said, “Well, I have to listen to her. I have to be open and tell her, I can’t tell her just little bits, it has to be the whole thing or else it won’t work ... she can’t give a good suggestion.” The strategies she and her counsellor negotiated allowed them to address issues without the apparent structure of formal planning that Lisa found fruitless.

In contrast to Lisa’s experience, Joe very much wanted to identify problems and to make plans. He found the roots of the working alliance in his early sessions with his counsellor, where identifying difficulties and making plans for change were essential to his comfort in the relationship. The focus on readily identifiable problems and achievable goals early in the relationship allowed him to be involved and gain confidence. He said, “she would get me to do things – would be to write things down, like, like in steps and stuff, ‘Okay, this is what you’re going to do – take it one day at a time,’ and you know, little things. small little steps... And it would make me feel away better and it’s been working...” Joe made it clear that he had more and larger issues, however, and that it took, “Um, maybe a year and a half,” for the relationship to develop to a point were they could deal with them.

Kennedy found the counsellor’s ability to listen and reflect her understandings helped her to clarify her thoughts and plans. She said, “Usually, I feel like I can do... I like, to feel like I can
do almost anything, by myself, like I can solve all the problems by myself, but sometimes it's too much and when it's like that then I go in there. And then I just... I just always hear things that I kind of already know.” Like Joe, she recognized that her relationship with her counsellor had developed to this level over time. She said, “It's just been a really progressive thing, it's not too many times I've been in there that it's been... it wasn't just like ‘that’ — that I get all this trust or something, it isn’t like that — a not just like that, I can't just instantly... you know.”

In contrast to Joe and Kennedy, Lisa said, “I either connect with people or I don’t and it’s quick – it doesn’t – usually, if I like someone, I connect with them really fast, and if I don’t then it usually doesn’t happen.” For her the counsellor’s personality was important and she laughed when she said,

I think it is the blonde thing! ... I think it’s the personality, too! 'Cause we kind of have the same kind of personality in some ways – like if she was really serious – and I can be serious – but most of the time I’m not. And if it was like that, it wouldn’t work like that.

Friendship

The co-participants identified a sense of friendship within the context of the working alliance. It was a friendship that was defined in terms of the qualities that they found lacking in their peer relationships; qualities that better met their ideal of a friend. Joe, Kennedy, and Lisa made direct reference to this friendship. Martha did not identify friendship as a factor in her counselling relationship, but did allude to similar weaknesses in her peer friendships, that were not evident in the relationship she had with her counsellor.

Tabatha described the relationship she had with her counsellor as, “I don’t know. I think we’re kind of like, buddy, buddy type thing. Like I don’t mind, I’ll come and tell her, like if it’s like a little detail and I’m happy about it, I’ll come and tell her.” Her buddy relationship did not have the intensity of the friendship described by the other co-participants, an observation that was supported by the limitations she placed on openness and the level of relationship she desired. Despite this, Tabatha described it was important that she could, “come down here and not talk
about anything. It's just buddy, buddy, whatever, pals."

The most clearly illustrated characteristics of friendship that the co-participants associated with their counsellors were unconditional positive regard, a non-judgemental stance, and that they were told their confidentiality would be honoured. Kennedy summarized this when she said,

\[
\text{the thing about comparing – with any other friendship, like, it's like a friendship – I kind of think – it's more like what everyone wants from a friendship, but can't have. You know – like it's total confidence you can, you can tell them anything, but they – they're not judgemental at all. You don't worry – it doesn't change – I don't know. The understanding in the communication; it's exactly what someone would want from a real friendship, but, it's so hard to have.}
\]

Joe expressed similar sentiments when he talked about the reciprocal nature of his relationship with his counsellor. Trust, for example, he saw as a part of a collaborative understanding he had with her that he had not experienced with friends.

\[
\text{Well... she's a true friend, I guess ... She really... she really cares, she doesn't take advantage of me, and use me or anything like that, she – um – she knows that she gives me – um – she puts her trust in me and I put my trust in her like and it's true – it's genuine – whereas other friends um lie behind your back...}
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Lisa discussed confidentiality under the heading of "trust" and identified it as the one factor that best differentiated the friendship she had with her counsellor from that she had with her peers. She said, "It's more like a friend kind of thing," that was founded in,

\[
\text{'Trust. Because you never know if they're [peers] going to be your friend next week. Something stupid could come up – well, I know how girls react. You know, it can be like, 'You spoke to my boyfriend,' and then they'll freak out and go and tell a bunch of people different stuff. That's happened to me before ... And with Ms. Adams, it – nothing is going to happen – and even if we did, she couldn’t tell anyone else.}
\]

She also opined that her friends were concerned with their own issues and therefore, were unwilling to listen to her story. She said, "if I say anything, then they have to have a whole whack of problems, too. It's not just like trying to listen to me ... they say, 'Oh, I have something bigger!'"
Martha expressed similar concerns about her friends’ lack of respect for her confidentiality when she discussed the difficulty that she had in opening up to people. She also reported that her friends were prone to giving opinionated advice that was of limited use in working through her problems. Her reaction to her counsellor’s less directive stance reflected the collaborative nature of the counselling relationship. She said, “some of my friends are those kind of people who are, ‘Like you should do this!’ or they have their own opinions. I have a lot of friends like that, so I tend to ignore their opinions ... but, when I go to her [counsellor], I feel she gives me more to work with.” Finally, she suggested that her friends were neither good listeners, nor non-judgemental when she said,

she’s [her counsellor] more willing to listen and my friends are very judgemental and are not willing to listen. I’ve never met more judgemental people in my life. I think that’s what you get for living in a small town. As human beings we are judgemental, we judge the way they dress, how much money they have, where they live, what colour of skin they have, stupid stuff like that.

Guidance

Kennedy said, “I don’t expect answers from my friends, because of, if I don’t know, they don’t know.” She did indicate, however, that she expected answers from her counsellor in the form of guidance. She said, “Uh, huh. It’s just a little bit of guidance, I think. When you’re thinking all whacked out and you’re going through so many hard times, it’s kind of like you need a clear head and someone who’s thinking sensibly to get you back together again.” Guidance emerged from the interviews as part of the collaborative process and was discussed both as guidance and suggestions. Kennedy indicated that she wanted the guidance to be supportive, but not controlling. She said, “Um... and I want to feel like I'm being taken care of, I just want to kind of feel like I have someone like a friend that I don't need them, I don't want to feel like they have that much... control over what I do either. Like, the guidance is what I need.”

Joe distinguished between the guidance portion to his relationship and the friendship one. The guidance portion, he said, was “probably” established earlier than the personal one and was
much more “straightforward and blunt.” Although Ms. Jones’ made suggestions, they were part of a collaborative process in which Joe was an active participant. He said, “Um, and if I disagreed, I told her. Only because she said, ‘Is this okay for you,’ now, because she really cares.” He never interpreted his counsellor’s suggestions as commands and felt that he had independence in the relationship. He said, “Like independence is really important. And guidance. Independence and guidance at the same time.” Lisa also appreciated non-directive guidance from her counsellor and found it encouraging, sensible and respectful.

**Availability and Continuity of Service**

The availability and continuity of the counselling service were important elements in the working alliance. In the context of this investigation, availability referred to the ease with which the co-participants were able to make appointments with their counsellors and continuity referred to the stability of the dyad over time (the co-participants keep the same counsellor).

Lisa emphasized the importance of availability when she described her wants, saying, “Even appointments I make on, like say I come in, in the morning and make it for the afternoon is still not the same because I want to get it out now, and if I have time to think about it – like if I go to get my hair cut, I have to get it now, because I’ll change my mind.” Lisa’s need was immediate and her desire to seek help was transient. Martha echoed this need when she said, “it’s important! ‘Cause there might be a kid who goes in there, and is really depressed or something like that, and just being able to go in there and talk to her or any counsellor here, would help a lot, because it might come out in there.”

The importance of both availability and continuity of service were evident in Joe’s narratives concerning his previous counselling experiences. Of availability he said,

Um – well, it was very distant – I wasn’t able to see any of my counselors for two weeks at a time – they were always away and we’d always have to start over again, they’d always have to ask the same questions. It’s like they forgot me, like they did not even – it was like they didn’t even really want to be there.
Without access he felt unimportant and disconnected with the counsellor. He compared this to his experience with Ms. Jones,

Ms. Jones, on the other hand, she... she... she's going out of her way I guess to help me. And I think she would do that for anybody else. So, it's really different that way, but she actually cares, but the other counselors for the outside just... are doing their job and they are not really helping the problem, they are just analyzing the problem.

His experience with continuity in counselling was similar. He said,

some counselors even had to, some counselors even went out of town for good, they would leave their job and I, there would be new counselors that would come in and have to get to know me all over again and ask the same questions all over again, not helping me. Some were even worse than others, in counseling, like. So there is, I don't know. I felt like real alone. In my battle.

Shared Experiences

As we have seen, in his early experiences with counselling Joe felt alone and abandoned. However, we have also seen that he described his experience with his school counsellor as a helping hand and a sharing. He continued, saying that their relationship was like “sharing experiences... stories of my counsellor telling me about her... She’s actually feeling what I’m feeling. She’s actually there with me, she’s there for me. She is along, along the ride with me.” That he and his counsellor were together in his journey was empowering to Joe. Evident in this passage were the empathy and reflective skills of the counsellor, and the importance of self-disclosure in providing Joe with the support he needed.

Kennedy defined a relationship as, “a shared something... A relationship is when people share of something.” She demonstrated a practical aspect of this sharing when she said,

we both made a pact, like she has to do some paper and I had to do a paper, and so we would like make promises that we will get them done over the weekend and we will show them to each other on Monday and stuff like that, that part too, and like I’m hauling, like Oh, man, I’ve got to show this to Ms. Jones on Monday, so I’ve got to get it done.
Lisa typified her shared journey with her counsellor as “the blonde thing”, and said, “she can identify with some of the problems I am going through.” Tabatha revealed that, “She listens and makes me feel like I do have someone to talk to, that I’m not totally alone, you know.”

Caring

The feeling of being cared for was a powerful motivating force for Joe in that it gave him hope and the desire to continue his struggle. He said of his counsellor,

Ms. Jones is a great counselor she, she is very caring and she gave me a lot of hope and everything. And determination by encouraging me with encouraging words like, ‘You can do this, oh, I know you can do that!’ You know, making me feel better about myself, you know, so I’d want to face the day in the morning, so I’d want to get up ... it gives you the drive to go on, ... it expands your mind, and makes you more open to the world so you are realistic about things and you feel comfortable ... have more goals, better goals.

For Joe, caring was demonstrated not only by encouraging words, but also by actions that he felt demonstrated concern for him. He said, “she went out of her way to actually like to actually see me do good, actually seeing me move on.” Her caring was also communicated to Joe by his counsellor’s faith in him. He said, “she never doubted that I could achieve high grades and, you know, and the best things for me. She was always looking out for me.”

Kennedy also found comfort and caring in her relationship with her counsellor and she said,

Well, probably the reason I keep going back and dealing with the same person is – like – comfortable. ’Cause I’m going to get told something that makes me feel stronger, kind of. I don’t know, it’s just easy. I’m not afraid, I can say anything I want to – it’s kind of like I’m talking to myself. I just have someone who cares, who’s going to – um – confirm what I’m feeling. Kind of make me understand it a little bit more. I guess it’s more like talking to me.

She was gaining not only motivation to return to the counsellor, but a sense of voice, clarity, and validation, all of which contributed to a comfortable ethos and the desire to continue seeing her counsellor.
Communication skills were important to Lisa's sense of caring. In three different passages she said, (1) "She always has a response. Like if I said something she can tell I'm not making it up or anything." (2) "She doesn't treat me inferior to her, and she talks to me." (3) "... it just feels better that someone is there to listen to me and doesn't dismiss me." Tabatha measured caring in her counsellor's non-judgemental stance, her ability to listen, and her empathic response. However, she was not certain she was comfortable with that demonstration of caring. She found that sometimes sessions with her counsellor helped, but said, "Sometimes, but sometimes it is like she knows the people who I am talking about and she kind of gets into it, too and she kind of gets emotional and I'm like, 'Okay!'" Her reaction suggested that Tabatha was not comfortable with the level of knowledge communicated by her counsellor.

Advocacy

Joe reported that his counsellor was, "always looking out for me." This brief statement communicated the support and advocacy that he received from his counsellor. That contrasted with the feelings of betrayal and rejection that he reported in his other counselling experiences. Of those he said, "I told them the truth, and - they used it against me ... I was the one to blame ... I was the problem."

Martha's past conflicts with teachers and administrators left her with the feeling that she had little adult support in the school system. She said about her continuing difficulties with teachers and administrators,

According to most people ... to teachers, especially in elementary school, and I've had bad experiences especially with, like, vice-principals and principals in elementary school. And there wasn't really a counsellor to go to in like elementary school. So, it was just dealing with the teachers and the administrators always took the teacher's side and they didn't listen to me. And, I don't know, that bugged me a lot.

Martha did not refer to any active intercession on the part of her counsellor that could be interpreted as advocacy, an observation that also can be made of Kennedy's, Lisa's and Tabatha's interviews. Rather, all four alluded to the belief that their counsellors would support them. In part they
indicated that this belief was evidenced to them by the counsellors' willingness to take time, to listen, and to acknowledge their stories.

**Trust & Honesty**

Joe realized that honesty about his story was important to his working through his issues, however, it was evident from the following that his "real" story took time to emerge,

It was – honesty. Like I told her I told her the truth – I didn't hide anything from her. At first I was very closed and I wouldn't tell her anything, but finally I'd tell her what was really bothering me. So the problem would be fixed rather than stored and creating anxiety.

His early equivocation was understandable and underlined the elusive nature of honesty, truth, and reality. Although Joe indicated that, while he was not communicating what was "really" bothering him early in the counselling, he willingly addressed some less threatening issues. He said he, "was bringing different problems, so I was bringing her into my world." He was teaching his counsellor about his world-view, and as she learned he was able to be more open with the deeper issues in his life.

Implicit in Joe's openness was his ability to trust that his confidentiality would be respected. Once this "trust" was established, it had a palpable quality for Kennedy, who explained, "It's kind of weird – I can't – I don't know -- like I trust her almost entirely, like I could tell her anything. 'Cause I've told her a lot of stuff – with – it's kind of like I can see it and kind of feel it, but I don't know how to say it." She also believed that her trust had a positive effect on her counsellor when she said, "I think it might make her feel good the fact that I trust her so much."

Evidence that trust, although part of the early stages of the relationship, was constantly in negotiation, emerged from a comment Martha made regarding the conditions necessary to improve her counselling relationship. Although she indicated that she could not identify anything that would improve the relationship, she isolated "trust" as the factor critical in the maintenance of the relationship. She said, "I don't know, I mean the trust would have to stay the same, because if not, obviously the relationship would go down from there. I mean if I lost trust in her, then I would not
want to go and talk to her.” She also made it clear that loss of trust was related to issues of confidentiality. Tabatha, however, communicated that, in the Working Alliance Stage, trust was related to her confidence in her counsellor’s professional competence. So, although Tabatha enjoyed the company of her counsellor and was comfortable with the setting, she could not be comfortable with the working alliance.

Change

Change is elusive. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines change as “the act or an instance of making or becoming different” (Thompson, p. 218). However, change was not always perceived alike by the students and its understanding was unique to each of them. For example, when asked if counselling had brought change to her life, Martha stated, “No, not at all.” She explained that the reason she went to counselling was, “it’s just nice to talk to someone about things.” However, she also indicated that she brought her problems to her counsellor and that together they identified possible solutions. For example, her typical response to a conflict with a particular teacher was, “Just to freak,” but her counsellor helped her to explore alternatives that, when applied, resulted in a gradual improvement in her relationship with that teacher. While to an external observer that might have seemed to be an important change, Martha did not equate it with change when she was discussing the role of change in her counselling relationship.

For Kennedy however, change had a different flavour and importance. She stated,

there would be change, like when I say that I expect understanding, because I’m totally lost when I go in there... when I come out, I like to feel like I’m together and I know what’s going on and I’ve got a clear head -- and that’s usually how I come out. That’s exactly how I feel, more confident.

She identified the small changes that were manifest in the relief she felt when she left the counsellor’s office and said that, “Yes, so I guess I really do expect change, big-time.” Unlike Martha, she identified the solutions she found to her problems as reflective of change in her life and that without that change she would have, “quit going to her [counsellor] a long time ago.”
In contrast to Kennedy’s response, Joe indicated that his commitment to counselling would have been the same, even if there had been no change in his life. “Ms. Jones really cared about me,” he said, and that caring formed the basis of the friendship that he felt with Ms. Jones. In this context, the relationship he experienced was more important to him than the changes he experienced. However, Joe reported change in his life which he described as,

recycling paper … the sheets, dirty or something are put in the recycling bin – you’d get a new sheet back – so it’s a new beginning, and clears up, for example, all the spills on the paper would be like the problem – they recycle the paper and the spills aren’t there anymore, they’re washed out. They’re clean, you got a clean record, you feel great about yourself, and from that time on you’ve got to choose the right way to go.

Despite her antipathy for planning, Lisa, too, felt change was essential to a successful relationship. She described the problems she brought to counselling as, “small, little” ones that she and her counsellor dealt with as they came up. She said,

if I just need to vent, like a lot of things went on this weekend with my money and a whole bunch of my friends, and I just needed to get it out. I said I just needed to vent and we didn’t have to get into a big long in depth about it. If I need to get it out, I can go and get it out type of thing instead of talking about it forever and beating it to death.

Counselling was, for her, “a kind of stress relief,” that was important because, she said, “When I get stressed, I get really sick.” Venting was an important tool and it brought equally important relief to her life.

What was particularly interesting about the co-participants’ experiences of change was their emphasis on coping strategies and relief. Martha and Lisa looked for advice and worked with their counsellors to find solutions to small problems. Kennedy found strength and clarification in the reflective skills of her counsellor and Joe found renewal. While Kennedy and Joe indicated that they felt better immediately after leaving the counselling office, this state did not seem to last and they soon returned to counselling. Yet, they both reported that there had been change.
Summary

The co-participants in this investigation communicated a rich range of factors that motivated them to enter into counselling. They also suggested that the role played by preconceptions, assumptions, previous experiences or awarenesses, and beliefs - in either facilitating or frustrating future counselling relationships - were significant. Together these observations formed the foundation of the Motivating Stage of the model.

The first tentative contact with the counsellor was established during the Initiating Stage of the relationship. In order that the co-participants could feel confident in communicating their concerns, issues and/or problems with a school counsellor they had to first feel safe that their stories would be heard in confidence, and that they would be treated with attention and respect. The individual factors that contributed to an atmosphere of safety varied considerably among the co-participants. For Joe, it was found in his counsellor’s body language and their early planning. For Kennedy, it was communicated through her counsellor’s familiarity with the school environment and the décor of her office. For Lisa, it was in her counsellor’s attending skills and willingness to devote time to her. For Martha, safety was fostered by her counsellor’s listening skills and attention. Finally for Tabatha, it was found in her belief in the counsellor’s ability.

The Comfort Stage of the relationship was that time during which the students negotiated those factors in the relationship that contributed to feelings of support, encouragement, strength and physical well-being; clarified their understandings of their counsellor’s role; and positioned themselves in the counselling relationship. During this stage they developed a sense of independence and control in the counselling relationship and, at the same time, were reassured that they were cared for and accepted.

During the Working Alliance Stage the participants worked together to bring about a satisfactory outcome to the problems or issues that the co-participants brought to counselling. It was typified by the sense of a shared journey and cooperation. Embodied within the working alliance was what the students defined as “friendship”. It was a friendship that was associated with
the counselling context and was defined by deficiencies the co-participants found in their peer relationships. Of particular importance to it was the assurance of confidentiality and acceptance they enjoyed with their counsellor that was missing in many of their peer relationships.

In the **Change Stage**, change, in the form of a satisfactory outcome, was interpreted as the goal of the working alliance. However, the experience of the co-participants suggested the understanding of change could be very different for each individual and that it was not uniformly valued over the other stages of the relationship.
CHAPTER 5
A Review of the Literature

Any generalization about teenagers immediately calls forth an opposite one. Teenagers are maddeningly self-centered, yet capable of impressive feats of altruism. Their attention wanders like a butterfly, yet they can spend hours concentrating on seemingly pointless involvements. They are often lazy and rude, yet, when you least expect it, they can be loving and helpful (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984).

Literature Review in Grounded Theory

The grounded theory method I chose for this study differs from many other methods in the form and function of the use of technical literature that impacts on the form of this report. Strauss and Corbin (1994) and Glaser (1992), the leading proponents of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss were the originators of this method, see Strauss and Corbin, p. 8), emphasize that grounded theory is a process of discovery rather than a tool for testing the relationships among variables. Both authors specify that the research question should not arise from an intensive study of the literature and the subsequent identification of gaps, discrepancies, or inconsistencies in that literature. Strauss and Corbin suggest that, “The research question … is a statement that identifies the phenomenon to be studied” (p. 38). Glaser is more colourful when he suggests that the investigator should dispense with the idea of a problem and should move into the investigation with a sense of “abstract wonderment” (p. 22).

Glaser also stipulates that, “There is a need not to review any of the literature in the substantive area under study” (p. 31). Strauss and Corbin (1994) present a similar decree although they recognize that all investigators bring some prior knowledge to the study. The rationale for their prohibitions against conducting an intensive literature review prior to data analysis is most succinctly provided by Glaser who says,

This dictum is brought about by the concern to not contaminate, be constrained by, inhibit, stifle or otherwise impede the researcher’s effort to generate categories, their properties, and theoretical codes from the data that truly fit, are
relevant and work with received or preconceived concepts that may really not fit, work or be relevant, but appear to do so momentarily. It is hard enough to generate one’s own concepts, without the added burden of contending with the “rich” derailments provided by the related literature in the form of conscious or unrecognised assumptions of what ought to be found in the data (p. 30).

The literature comes into use later in the analytic or writing process when the concepts are firmly established and even then is not used to verify the extant model, but rather to seek out ideas from the literature that can be used “to add to, extend or vary the extant theory” (Glaser, p. 33). Therefore, I have placed the literature chapter of this study as Chapter 5 to reflect its sequence in the development of the paper.

The Counselling Relationship in General

Gelso and Carter’s (1985) article on the counselling relationship forms an important foundation for debate on the structure of the counselling relationship. In their article, they propose a model of the counselling relationship that is comprised of three components, a real relationship, an unreal relationship, and a working alliance. As part of the model, the authors provide an interesting insight that forms an important building block to this study. They posit that Rogers’ (1957) facilitative conditions (i.e., genuineness, congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathy) are the basis of typical definitions of the counselling relationship. While they do not take issue with those conditions themselves, they do take issue with Rogers’ suggestion that the facilitative conditions are sufficient to the relationship. They suggest that this sufficiency leaves the clients in a passive role without control over or influence on the relationship. Rather, they suggest, the therapeutic relationship is “something that exists and develops between counsellor and client as a result of the feelings, perceptions, attitudes and actions of each toward and with the other” (p. 185), a direction that forms a clear link with the collaborative aspects of my contextual model.

Sexton and Whiston’s (1994) empirical review of the state of research on the counselling relationship expands Gelso and Carter’s framework. In it the authors provide not only a critical overview of current thinking about the counselling relationship, but also suggest that research
focusing on the counselling relationship as a social construction will expand our understandings about the counselling relationship.

Gelso and Carter (1985, 1994) suggest that the “unreal” relationship portion of their model is comprised of transference and countertransference phenomena. I initially included these two components in the early stages of data analysis, but later eliminated them because, as I indicated in Chapter 3, I could not identify them in the students’ commentaries. However, Gelso and Carter are adamant that these phenomena exist in some form in every therapy. Sexton and Whiston (1994) provide a relevant insight into this inconsistency. They suggest that, from a social interaction perspective, the unreal relationship can be “an expected part of the coconstructed relationship. Both client and therapist bring to the counselling interaction beliefs, expectations, and patterns of interactions in which they have previously engaged” (p. 63). As such, it can be seen, not as a distortion or unreal, but rather as a part of the personal, contextual framework that each party brings to the negotiation of the relationship.

In a related insight, the definition that Gelso and Carter (1994) provide for the “real” relationship is odd in that it is exclusionary rather than a statement of meaning. They describe it as a dimension of the counselling relationship that includes everything that is not transferential. They even began to equivocate on that definition of reality when they state,

any definition or description of reality is inseparable from the perspective of the perceived and is thus continuously influenced by all factors impinging upon that perceiver, including transference. Theoretically, however, some notion of reality must exist or there could be no such thing as transference as a distortion of reality... (p. 297).

In essence, they said that reality had to exist to support the definition of transference as a distortion of reality. In the conceptual model developed in this study I did not subscribe to the necessity of preserving transference as a distortion of reality, but rather view it as one of the factors that acts on the perceiver.

Gelso and Carter (1985) describe the third component of their model, the working alliance, as collaborative, a characteristic that is consistent with this investigation and other significant
literature written on the subject (Frieswyk, et al., 1986, Gelso & Carter, 1985, Horvath & Luborsky, 1993, Sexton & Whiston, 1994). Sexton and Whiston also suggest that from a social constructivist perspective the working alliance might be “a measure of the degree of agreement concerning the coconstruction of the relationship” (p. 63) and therefore, the “desired outcome of the process of coconstruction” (p. 63). The focus on process suggested by Sexton and Whiston is also evident in the conceptual model developed in this investigation.

**Counselling in the Secondary School - A Fuzzy Picture**

Cioci (1994) and Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1984) suggest that the school environment is often a difficult one for adolescents, wherein they face academic and social challenges, and too often, fail to make important personal connections with the teachers and other adults charged with their education. This observation paints a backdrop for the conceptual model developed in this study in that counsellors are among the adults charged with the students’ education, and the interactions they have with students are often intensely personal. The difficulties with the environment are most evident in the Energy and Inertia factors of the Motivating Stage of the conceptual model wherein peer pressures and personal experience impact on the students’ readiness to engage in a personal interaction with an adult authority figure.

These difficulties are complicated by the students’ lack of clarity about the role of the counsellor in the school setting. Although much has been written about the role of the counsellor in the secondary school setting, that role remains far from clear (Burtnett, 1993; Ibrahim, Helms & Thompson, 1983). Counsellors may act as academic, career, personal, and social counsellors and may adopt a wide range of other potentially conflicting roles such as clerk, disciplinarian, instructor, evaluator, coach, or mentor (Cunanan & Maddy-Bernstein, 1994; Ibrahim, et al., 1983; Landrum, 1987). These diverse roles may have their roots in the personal preferences of the counsellor or in the demands of the institution, or in a combination of both. For example, comprehensive counselling programmes (Borders & Drury, 1992; Gysbers, Hughey, Starr & Lapan, 1992) require the counsellor to teach guidance classes and to evaluate students’ progress as
part of the programme design, while the decision to coach a team or sponsor a club might be within the personal purview of the counsellor. Yet, despite the wealth of material on the counsellors’ role, the literature is not clear about how these disparate roles impact on the counselling relationship itself. It is reasonable to conclude, however, that if the professionals lack clarity, so do the students and that lack of clarity will have a confounding influence on students’ help-seeking efforts.

Specific Insights from the Literature

Help Seeking and the Motivating Stage

The first stage of the conceptual model developed in this study examines the motivational factors that influence the students’ willingness to enter into personal counselling. The literature presents some interesting insights into this issue. Bowman (1997), in a book discussing post traumatic stress syndrome, suggests that our understandings of individual responses to toxic or “significant adverse life events” (p. 2) are influenced by long standing popular and professional assumptions that suggest that the toxic event itself is central to the human distress response. In her work, however, she suggests that individual differences are more important in the development of posttraumatic responses than the event itself. This interpretation accounts for the differences in individual responses to similar toxic events that are a reflection of the individual factors that each individual brings to any interaction. One conclusion that she draws that is of most relevance to this study is that most individuals are resilient enough to traverse adverse events in their lives and emerge without debilitating psychological conditions. Bowman’s observations suggest that the Motivating Stage of the counselling relationship is sensitive to the individual characteristics of the students and that common reactions to similar toxic events cannot be assumed.

Other authors present similar insights into help-seeking behaviours that are particular to adolescents. Offer and Church (1991) in their chapter in the Encyclopedia of Adolescence, and Offer and Schonert-Reichl (1992) in their review of research on adolescence, question common assumptions or “myths” about adolescence and present several observations about the help seeking
behaviours of adolescents. Offer and Schonert-Reichl, in particular, suggest that contrary to popular myth: (1) normal adolescence is not a tumultuous period, and "a significant percentage of adolescents (80%) do not experience adolescent turmoil, relate well to their family and peers, and are comfortable with their social and cultural values" (p. 1004); (2) although there seems to be a linear relationship between age and negative mood states, adolescence is not typified by extreme and frequent changes in mood, and the frequency of mood changes does not differ from those experienced in pre-adolescence; and (3) adolescent thought is not immature. While other researchers might argue that 20% of adolescents experiencing turmoil is adequate evidence that this period is tumultuous, the authors' observations suggest that many students may not seek counselling assistance with their personal problems because they do not need that assistance. The obvious implication to our understanding of the Motivating Stage of the counselling relationship is that most students will not avail themselves of a personal, counselling relationship with their counsellor regardless of how comfortable they might feel with that prospect.

Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1984), in a creative and interesting study of conflict and growth in teenage years, also report that the adolescents in their study indicate positive emotional states in 71% of the events they measured. However, the students also demonstrated less investment in their activities than working-class adults, and the authors hypothesize that "they appear to be more alienated from what they are doing" (p. 86). This sense of alienation is not generalized across the range of their activities, but rather is focused on adult oriented contexts that, "appear to conflict with the goals of teenagers, thereby introducing entropy in their motivational state" (p. 89). Csikszentmihalyi and Larson identify school classrooms, hallways and libraries as areas that students perceive to be adult dominated. Because the counselling programme is run by adult staff members, it is reasonable to suggest that the counselling area may also be perceived as an adult dominated area of the school by students, and as such they would tend to avoid it.

In another enquiry into help seeking in adolescence, Schonert-Reichl and Muller (1996) describe adolescents who acknowledge seeking the help of a professional as older, reporting lower self-worth, and communicating less self-consciousness. Conversely, they suggest that
adolescents, who do not seek the help of professionals, have a high sense of global self-worth, believe that seeking professional help is an “admission of inadequacy” (p. 725) and therefore a “threat to self-esteem” (p. 725), and are too self-conscious because they are concerned about privacy issues or because they think their issues are too personal. There is no suggestion in their data that those adolescents who do not seek professional assistance are without need, only that their personal characteristics and beliefs present a barrier to help seeking. In fact, Ryan and Stiller (1994), in their study of adolescent representations of their relations with teachers, parents, and friends, suggest that “adolescents who do not turn to others may be a particularly at-risk group of students because they may be interpersonally isolated and do not actively reach out for help” (no page numbers*). Offer and Schonert-Reichl (1992) add another dimension to this picture of help seeking behaviours when they report that

only 9% of adolescents perceived seeking therapeutic help as a possible option. Surprisingly, the severity of the problems was not found to be directly linked to whether or not an adolescent chose therapy; many other factors were involved. In fact, these researchers found that as problems increased, the propensity to enter therapy decreased (p. 1011).

This certainly parallels Kennedy’s observations recorded in Chapter 4 and indicates that not only is counselling not perceived as an option for most adolescents, but that the severity of the problem is not necessarily a factor that motivates students to seek counselling assistance.

Rickwood (1995), in a study of the effectiveness of help seeking among graduating students in Australia, found a similar response and reported that only 5 to 10% of the students in his study indicated that they sought professional help for problems they found to be worrying, depressing, or upsetting. Schonert-Reichl and Mueller (1996) suggested that this may be because students increase their use of friends for support as they move to middle adolescence.

*The lack of page numbers for this in-text reference is consistent with current APA guidelines on the citation of references taken from on-line databases such as EBSCO and Academic Search Elite. These guidelines can be found at http://www.apa.org/publications.
The literature I consulted suggests that the Motivational Stage of the counselling relationship is complicated by more than rumour, third party influences, and personal experience. It is also influenced by an adult oriented context that is not inherently comfortable to adolescents, and involves personal characteristics and social factors that are generally antagonistic to the development of a personal, counselling relationship. There is also the suggestion that some students who may be in need of personal counselling may not avail themselves of those services. Providing a counselling environment that encourages needy students to access counselling is important in bringing the service to the students who most need it.

The Initiating Stage - Building a Relationship Over Time

The students in this investigation identified the Initiating Stage of the counselling relationship as a tentative stage during which the counsellor and the student negotiated understandings about confidentiality and safety. This is reinforced by Grafanaki and McLeod (1995) who found, in a study of congruence in the initial session of counselling, that there were occasions when both the counsellor and the client were unwilling to acknowledge incongruence and progress suffered as a result. The authors suggest that unfamiliarity and the need to make a good impression affect the partners’ willingness to acknowledge their incongruence and speculate that openness and transparency develop over time. This reflects the tentative and sensitive nature of the Initiating Stage, but also mirrors the developmental nature of the counselling relationship.

Hale-Hanniff and Pasztor (1999) describe the communicative nature of the counsellor and client interaction as a process of “developing and maintaining communicative fit with the client system” (Paragraph 55). The importance of communicative tools is pointed out by Peavy (1997) in his book on constructivist counselling. He posits that communication in counselling is typified by empathic listening and a response that requires attention be paid not only to the spoken word, but also to speech patterns and paralinguistic devices such as moments of silence, body language, and facial expressions. Because communication is a process directed at mutual understanding, he maintains that the co-participant assumes an active role in the process. When adolescents are not
provided with an active role and are not received as responsible individuals, the counselling relationship is at risk. This was illustrated by Lisa in Chapter 4 when her counsellor did not believe her story about her illness and only took action on Lisa’s behalf after checking her story with Lisa’s mother. The result was a rift between Lisa and the counsellor that never healed. Malekoff (1997), in his book on group counselling with adolescents says,

Adolescents demand to be taken as whole people. They resent being categorized, diagnosed, and placed in “special” classes or groups. They want to deal not only with the personal troubles that have been highlighted by adults but also with normative issues that they find troubling, challenging, or simply interesting. And they want to have fun (p. 21).

This emphasizes the importance of the Initiating Stage of the relationship in establishing a non-judgemental atmosphere in which the adolescents feel confident in communicating their issues in their own time.

Self-disclosure and Comfort

Among the many tools of communication, helpful counsellor self-disclosure is a tool that the students in this study perceived to be important to building their comfort in the relationship. Knox, Hess, Peterson & Hill (1997), in a qualitative study on self-disclosure, confirmed that, “Clients were indeed affected by these revelations, an affirmation of the potency of therapist self-disclosure that is consistent with earlier research” (p. 280). Helpful self-disclosure, they posited, reassured and normalized the clients’ feelings about themselves, humanized the counsellor, and provided new insights for the client and equalized the power differential in the relationship. These characteristics of helpful self-disclosure illustrate the importance of mutual understandings to the Comfort Stage of the conceptual model.

Life Space - Into the Working Alliance

Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1984) describe the life space of adolescents as “a topography of experiential settings, each associated with specific constraints and opportunities” (p. 89). Within this landscape, adolescents report the lowest levels of motivation in areas that were highly
structured by adult society. The authors present a geographic representation of the life space that is consistent with the students' observations about their counsellors' familiarity with the school environment. However, in Chapter 4 Joe suggests that he is sharing his personal world with his counsellor. Joe presents a more intimate image of a shared environment that is described by Peavy (1997). Peavy suggests that life space is a “circumambient template by means of which we perceive and interpret the world, ourselves and our relationship with others ... constructed from experience and is made up of our ideas, prejudices, assumptions, beliefs, values, habits, and learned skills” (p. 60). These are the conditions that students bring to the Initiating Stage of counselling relationships, conditions they negotiate and clarify through the Comfort and the Working Alliance Stages.

Comfort

In her doctoral dissertation, Call (1994) suggests that comfort is indicated, “by feelings of calmness, satisfaction, acceptance and ease as opposed to high arousal, challenge, disapproval and discontent” (p. 32), and occurs when arousal is balanced (i.e., when it is neither very high, nor very low). Simmons, Burgeson and Carlton-Ford (1987) and Call (1994) describe the context in which comfort is experienced as an “arena of comfort”. They define it as an interpersonal context typified by a soothing atmosphere in which adolescents feel accepted and at ease, and in which they can relax and be themselves. They also contend that the mental health of adolescents, particularly female adolescents, is responsive to comfort across a wide range of contexts. Call (1994) argues that “comfort in peer, school and work contexts helps adolescents cope with stressors at home, both directly – through perceptions of discomfort and psychological adjustment, and conditionally – through buffering the effects of change and discomfort on adjustment” (p. iii).

Although a comfort arena appeared to have psychological advantages for adolescents both in a direct and in a buffering sense, Simmons, Burgeson, Carlton-Ford and Blyth (1987) caution that comfort can not be seen as an all encompassing state, but rather as a supportive one.
Adolescents, they contended, continuously face many uncomfortable events in their lives, and require successful coping skills to address those challenges.

Call (1994) also indicates that, “Support and absence of stress are central ingredients to the construct, but Simmons’ conceptualisation of the comfort arena goes beyond them through its emphasis on rejuvenation and positive impact on self-concept” (p. 157). The suggestion, then, is that while comfort does not need be present in every aspect of the adolescents’ lives, it is important that arenas of comfort exist to provide respite, and to allow for rejuvenation. This will better equip adolescents for the stressful arenas in their lives. Both the characteristics of comfort outlined by Call and the identified benefits of arenas of comfort provide support for the Comfort Stage of the conceptual model and reflect the importance the students assign to comfort in their counselling relationships.

Humour and Comfort

A seldom discussed, personal quality of counsellors is their sense of humour. Joe suggests that a joke is important in diffusing, “the most brain racking time” and both Lisa and Tabatha stress the importance of being able to “joke around” to comfort. Golden and Borden (1999) suggest that humour plays a role in building rapport, reducing tension, promoting insight, stimulating creativity, and promoting risk taking. However, they also caution that humour has the potential to be harmful if not used judiciously and with sensitivity to the culture of the client and to its purpose in the working alliance. They also point out that poor timing in the use of humour and insensitivity to the immediate context can make the counsellor appear incompetent and insensitive. In an interesting aside, Kush (1997), reporting on the results of a study on humour appreciation and counsellor self-perceptions, found that counsellors perceive that their sense of humour diminishes as their levels of education increase. Kush warns that if counsellors, especially in the high-school setting, perceive themselves as becoming less humorous, so may the students. It plays an obvious role in the Comfort Stage of the counselling relationship, but also has application to the Working Alliance Stage.
The Role of the Counsellor

The work of Borders and Drury (1992), Brott and Myers (1999), Burtnett (1993), Cunanan and Maddy-Bernstein (1994), and Ibrahim, et al. (1983) suggest that the role of the school counsellor is far from clear in the secondary school system. Blaire (1999) further argues that if students are optimally to use a counselling programme, the process of counselling must be clearly understood and actively pursued by the counsellors. Blaire suggests that awareness of the process of counselling must be clear not only to the students, but to parents, teachers, and school administrators so that there are no conflicting demands placed on counsellors through misconceptions about their roles. One way to accomplish this is suggested by Brott and Meyers (1999) and Harrison (1993) who argue that counsellors must develop a professional identity that provides a frame of reference visible to all those with whom they interact. Such a clearly defined identity has the potential to communicate well defined parameters about the role of the counsellor and has the potential to clarify teachers’, administrators’, parents’, and, most importantly, students’ understandings about roles of counsellors. If this professional identity is negotiated with students and is experienced along with the factors that bring them comfort in the relationship, then it is likely to play a positive role in the Motivating Stage of the relationship.

Friendship

Three of the five students in this investigation refer to their counselling relationship as a friendship. Mallinckrodt, Gantt, and Coble (1995), in a paper discussing the development of the Client Attachment to Therapist Scale, provide a rationale for that happening when they argue that, “the developing therapeutic relationship may be seen as a specialized form of adult attachment” (p. 308) that can be activated by “any close, intimate relationship that evokes the potential for love, security and comfort” (p. 308). Pistole and Watkins (1995), in an article designed “to stimulate interest in the clinical utility of attachment theory” (p. 457), postulate that the counsellor functions as a “safe haven” (p. 463) from which the client is able to investigate their issues. The emphasis the students in this investigation place on the security they felt with their counsellors, in contrast to
that they experience with their friends, reflects of this observation. Their peer relationships are often transitory and even when they are stable, Rickwood (1995) cautions that “one of the ‘costs’ of seeking help for psychological problems from friends and family may be reciprocal listening to their problems” (p. 699). The effect of this sharing, he suggests, might aggravate distress rather than ameliorate it. His comments support Lisa’s observations about her friends when she says, “if I say anything, then they have to have a whole whack of problems, too. It’s not just like trying to listen to me ... they say, ‘Oh, I have something bigger!’”

Winstead, Derlega and Lewis (1988), in their review of theories of personal relationships, also suggest that there are strong parallels between personal and therapeutic relationships that are evidenced by feelings of “interdependence, commitment and caring” (p. 110). They continue, however, to point out that there are significant differences between the two types of relationships that are evidenced by the “asymmetry” of the counselling relationship and the “symmetry” of the personal relationship. For example, the counselling relationship may strive for mutual understanding, but that understanding is mutual only with reference to understandings about the adolescent’s problems, and while the counsellor may use self-disclosure, it is not symmetrical to that of the students’ disclosure. In personal relationships, however, Rickwood (1995) suggests that the partners tend to be much more equal in their sharing of issues. In fact, as we have seen above, the reciprocal nature of sharing among friends might prove a hindrance to effective counselling outcomes.

Therefore, the friendship that the students experience in the counselling relationship is directly tied to the close bond of sharing that they experience and to the asymmetrical nature of the Working Alliance Stage in that the focus is on the students’ problems. This asymmetry does not preclude a sense of equality in the relationship, rather it recognizes that the parties bring different issues, information, and skills to the relationship.
Change and Outcome

The focus of the literature discussing the outcome of counselling is on the relationship between the quality of the counselling relationship and counsellor and client satisfaction with the outcome. Because none of the students in this study had terminated their counselling when interviewed, satisfaction with outcome is not an issue in this discussion. However, the students did discuss personal changes throughout their interviews. These changes were evidenced in the behaviour management skills Martha learned to apply to her conflict with her teacher, and the coping strategies that Joe, Lisa, and Kennedy applied to their daily issues. In a sense, the changes were as variable as the individuals and situations involved.

In a provocative conclusion to his longitudinal study of the effectiveness of help seeking in late adolescence, Rickwood (1995) suggests that none of the sources to which the adolescents in his study turned, including professionals, “helped them reduce their emotional distress” (p. 700). He does not suggest that there is no benefit to be gained from interactions between the counsellors and adolescents, only that there is no change in the adolescents’ psychological state. The practical lesson to counsellors, Rickwood suggests, is that adolescents are in need of coping strategies that help them to refocus their anxieties and problems away from themselves. This is similar to the observations of Compas, Orosan & Grant (1993), who, in an article on adolescent stress and coping strategies, argue that coping strategies that emphasize distractive rather than ruminative processes facilitated “problem-focused coping, instrumental behavior, and a sense of control over the environment” (p. 345). This suggests that the Change Stage of the counselling relationship is likely to reflect the results of successful coping strategies rather than changes in psychological state.

Summary

In keeping with the principles of grounded theory, the discussion of the literature in this chapter extends our understanding of the conceptual model developed in the study. The general overview of research on the counselling relationship provides a framework for this research and
also brings into focus the move toward collaborative models of interaction between counsellors and their clients. Applying this analysis to counselling in the secondary schools contextualizes the discussion to the secondary school setting and emphasizes the lack of a clear understanding of the role of secondary school counsellors within the school community, a confusion that mirrors the students' lack of clarity about their counsellors' roles. The specific insights section provides additional insights into the stages of the conceptual model, but also extends discussion of some of the specific observations of the students that I thought were important to illustrate.
... complex processes don’t evolve as a unit. Take feathers for flight as an example: They didn’t spring full-blown from naked skin” (Sawyer, 1998).

My intent in this investigation was to conceptualize the understandings and experiences of the students and to co-construct a conceptual model of those understandings. Therefore, in this chapter I reexamine the original research questions and discuss them in light of both the results of this study and previous research and knowledge, commented on the implications of the study to the practice of counselling in a secondary school, making suggestions for future research, and identified the limitations of the study.

I began this study with a number of preconceptions and expectations that I bracketed in my initial conceptual diagram and personal reflective writings. I strove to approach the study with abstract wonderment, and sought to negotiate understandings with my co-participants in the spirit of grounded theory method. What I discovered surprised me. The final conceptual model, although it contained recognizable elements of the Gelso and Carter (1985) model, clearly was much broader in scope and described a process that illustrated the students’ understandings about how the counselling relationship evolved. Because the students brought unique experiences and understandings to their personal relationships with their counsellors, the conceptual model was flexible and accommodated the negotiation of the conditions and understandings that the students, and by default the counsellors, thought important. It also reflected the students’ insights using, for the most part, their language. Their understandings included concepts such as comfort and friendship that I found challenging and exciting. I also expected strong ties to peers as providers of support and was surprised to find that while the students valued their peers, by grade twelve, they did not generally perceive them as effective sources of help with their problems.
Characteristic Elements of the Counselling Relationship

The conceptual model of the counselling relationship that I constructed with the students during data analysis (see Figure 4, p. 44) describes my interpretation of the characteristic elements that constitute the counselling relationship as understood by the students. Central to the model is a process that embodied not only the interaction of the students with their counsellors, but also the factors that motivate the students to enter the personal counselling relationship. The motivating factors introduce an understanding of how factors brought to the counselling relationship influenced its development.

The conceptual model accommodates the individual concerns, understandings, and experiences that the students bring to the counselling relationship and provides a structure that facilitates negotiation of how the relationship is understood and functions. The Motivating Stage brings into focus the factors that motivate the student to engage in personal counselling. The model accommodates motivating factors that the students identified as external to them, (e.g., pressures from others) as well as those they felt were internal to them. It also accommodates the insights from the literature that communicate the personal and social factors that affect adolescent help seeking behaviours.

During the Initiating Stage, the ground rules of confidentiality and of safety are established. This is a tentative time during which the developing relationship is most vulnerable to misunderstandings and to events that the students identify as either violations of their confidentiality or their safety in the relationship. Communication skills are important and the adolescents are particularly appreciative of a non-judgemental stance that is typified by the counsellor giving students the time to tell their story, listening with respect, and refraining from giving direction.

The Comfort Stage is a time during which the student and counsellor consolidate their understandings about each other. Mutual understandings about abstract concepts such as acceptance and independence are negotiated and each relationship develops its own structure that
defines the roles of the counsellor and the student in the relationship. During this stage the
counsellor and the students learn to be open and transparent with each other as uncertainties about
the counselling environment are resolved. Awareness of shared understandings are communicated
through appropriate counsellor self-disclosure and students become aware of the skills that their
counsellors bring to the relationship.

The Working Alliance Stage moves the focus of the relationship to the problem(s) the
students bring to the counselling relationship. The availability of the counsellor to the students and
the continuity of the counselling service are especially important to the students during this stage of
the counselling relationship. There is a sense of immediacy in their need for access to their
counsellors and once a personal relationship is developed with a counsellor, they want to retain that
counsellor. The continuity of the relationship allows for shared experiences with their counsellors
that may be perceived as a shared journey wherein the counsellor acts as a guide and support. The
students may perceive the relationship at this point as a friendship that is typified by trust, honesty,
and caring.

Change is the final stage in the model and is perhaps the most difficult to address because
none of the students' counselling relationships had terminated when the interviews were
conducted. Change is the stated goal of the working relationship, but is not uniformly valued by
the students. There is also little evidence that change, experienced by the students who reported it,
is reflective of a change in psychological state; rather, the change seems more a product of coping
skills. Even Kennedy and Joe, who indicate that they always felt better immediately after leaving
counselling, did not experience that change as a lasting state.

Talking To A Counsellor

The conditions that make it possible for students to talk to their counsellors are reflected in
the Motivational and Initiating stages of the conceptual model. The students in this study generally
report positive relationships with their school counsellors and in this sense communicate insights
favourable to their positive experiences. That is expected as they were selected because their
counsellors believed they shared a relationship. The discussions, however, produce more than glowing tributes to the students' counsellors. In fact, the students clearly articulate factors, both systemic and personal, that act as roadblocks to the development of a personal counselling relationship. These roadblocks also form important clues to the conditions that are favourable to the establishment of a good counselling relationship. The systemic roadblocks stem, for the most part, from a lack of a clear understanding about what a counsellor does in the school, and with the level of professional expertise that the counsellors communicate. The personal roadblocks are related to difficulties in personal interactions with students and counsellors. They are illustrated by Joe's previous counselling experiences, Lisa's interactions with her eighth grade counsellor, and Tabatha's discomfort with her counsellor's use of empathy. The complexity of these relationships is also illustrated by the contrasting interpretations that the students apply to their counselling. For example, while Tabatha was uncomfortable with her counsellor's empathic response, Joe found it to be both comforting and encouraging. This suggests to me that none of the key stages, key categories, or subsidiary categories represent absolute measures to the students, but rather depict continua of experiences and understandings that are particular to each individual.

The conditions that make it possible for the students to talk to a counsellor are framed by factors that are both external and internal to the counselling dyad. Those factors include issues that motivate the students to enter into personal counselling, previous personal and vicarious experiences that serve to promote or inhibit that participation, and their responses to their initial contacts with their counsellor. These factors are not static “realities”, but rather are dependent on a variety of social and environmental experiences. Therefore, the conditions discussed below are also general frameworks that allow for uniquely personal understandings.

While the factors that motivated the co-participants to enter into personal counselling were unique to each individual, they share the common characteristic of communicating discomfort with some sort of existing condition. The data in this study also suggest that personal experience and third party commentaries play a significant role in either inhibiting or encouraging the students' participation in personal counselling.
The students also discussed how personal characteristics, such as lack of confidence, might deter some students from seeking counselling help. Conversely, they suggested that, because of their self-confidence and/or concern for their self-image, some “hot shot” students may not want counselling assistance, observations that were similar to those made by Schonert-Reichl and Muller (1996). Even the nature of the problems the students presented influenced their willingness to discuss those problems with their counsellors. This rather counterintuitive observation is also made by Offer and Schonert-Reichl (1992). These observations suggest that for some students no conditions are effective in encouraging them to seek counselling help. However, they also indicate, that for other students, conditions that encourage contact and interaction with counsellors might act as door openers, and might mitigate the negative effects of low confidence levels.

The data also suggest that the students’ lack of awareness of the counsellors’ role in the school is a barrier to their help seeking. This observation is reflected in the general sense of confusion regarding the role of the school counsellor that is also evident in the literature (Cunanan & Maddy-Bernstein, 1994; Ibrahim, et al., 1983; Landrum, 1987). It also suggests a communicative difficulty that is more in line with that discussed by Brott and Meyers (1999) and Harrison (1993) who argue the importance of clearly articulated, professional identities for school counsellors. If students have a clear understanding of what their counsellors do, they can make better-informed decisions about seeking help.

Kennedy’s suggestion that the mysterious atmosphere around counselling intimidates some students indicates the importance of the environment in the development of the relationship. Because of social disincentives against help seeking, students may also feel self-conscious visiting the counselling offices. The multifaceted role of the school counsellor can ameliorate these difficulties by dispersing the focus of the students’ visits among a number of possible services. The effect of this, of course, is dependent on how clearly those facets of the counselling role are communicated.

The co-participants’ observations about their initial contact with their counsellors are coloured by their previous experiences. Favourable, or even neutral previous experiences promote
a positive initial session while negative experiences promote a more tentative response. Assurances of confidentiality play an important part in the students’ willingness to continue with personal counselling. A sense of safety for the students is also important to a communicative atmosphere. The students respond to the counsellors listening skills, to the counsellors’ body language, to environmental cues, and to the counsellors’ willingness to devote time to their narratives.

Sharing Confidences

The conditions that give the students in this study the confidence to share private and confidential information are found in the factors discussed above, as well as in the development of comfort in the relationship and the establishment of a working alliance. Comfort, is typified “by feelings of calmness, satisfaction, acceptance and ease as opposed to high arousal, challenge, disapproval and discontent” (Call, 1994, p. 32). In this light, the students respond positively to non-judgemental responses, and a sense that they are given a voice in the counselling relationship. This is a complex interaction that is evidenced by the counsellors’ communication of respect for and acceptance of each student’s story, social context, and language. The students want to be viewed and treated as “grown-ups”, and they interpret equality in the relationship as meeting that want. This is an unusual experience for them as they report that their relationships with parents, teachers, administrators, and adults in the community generally place them in a subservient role.

The students also respond well to an understanding that they have independence in the counselling relationship. They seek guidance from their counsellors, but are encouraged that that guidance is communicated as suggestions rather than the direction that is typical of their experience with their parents, teachers, and school administrators. They interpret their counsellors’ guidance as a gentle push that they are free to accept or dismiss without recrimination. There is no pressure to deal with issues they are reluctant to address. Again, the non-judgemental stance of the counsellor is important to the development of a comfortable atmosphere. There is also an atmosphere of informality in the counselling centre that they generally find comforting. It is not too serious or “up tight”, and there is room for laughter and, as Lisa said, for “just dropping by”.

The multi-faceted role of the school counsellor also was conducive to the communication of personal issues for Kennedy. She indicated that her visits to her counsellor were often initiated by small concerns over courses and the like, but often resulted in intense counselling sessions. In her case, the role of the counsellor as an academic advisor afforded a portal to a personal counselling opportunity. This suggests a powerful tool for school counsellors as it provides a non-threatening context through which the student can access the counsellor. Considering how easily Lisa was "put off" her eighth grade counsellor, however, counsellors must be cognizant of the importance of every interaction with students if the tool is to be beneficial. In this light, a poorly managed educational advising session might result in a serious roadblock to the development of a personal counselling relationship.

While different facets of the counselling role have the potential to act as portals to personal counselling, the same cannot be said for dual roles such as counsellor/teacher or counsellor/administrator. The students indicated that the disciplinary and evaluative roles of the classroom teacher and the authoritarian role of the administrator can work against the development of positive counselling relationships. They also suggested that such dual roles would make their counsellors unavailable to them when they needed support. Continuity of counselling service was also an issue for Joe because of his experiences with outside counselling. There he experienced frequent changes of counsellors that left him feeling abandoned in the counselling process. This suggests to me that students will be most open with counsellors when there is a non-judgemental atmosphere, constancy in assignments, and ready availability of service to them.

The counselling skills demonstrated by the counsellors were evident in the discussions of the students throughout the stages of the model; however, the students expressed the clearest recognition of them during the Comfort Stage. Key skills that the students identified are effective use of body language, empathy, reflective response, unconditional positive regard (non-judgemental stance), and genuineness. The importance of these skills is evidenced simply by the students' awareness of them. While they are evident throughout the students' commentaries, they are not all recognised by all students. This suggests that the students are aware of different aspects
of the counsellors' skills and responded to them uniquely. The only skills commonly recognised by students were listening skills and a non-judgemental stance.

Another important condition communicated by the students was a caring atmosphere. Caring was an abstract concept that was evidenced in the counsellors' confirming and affirming responses. It was given form by their listening and responding skills and by their validation of the students' narratives. The students also recognised caring when their counsellors extended themselves beyond what the students expect. They also expressed an awareness that the counsellor was sharing a journey with them. This condition was given shape through the recognition and sharing of common experiences, traits, and conditions as well as through the negotiation of shared commitments. By this stage in the relationship they believed that they could trust the counsellor and could be honest in communicating their stories, assured that their confidences would be respected.

Closely associated with caring was the advocacy role of the counsellor in supporting the students. Joe most clearly addressed its importance when he suggested that his counsellor was always looking out for him. The other students alluded to it when they discussed the efforts of their counsellors that went beyond what they recognised as the norm. The personal aspect of the relationship was evidenced in the students' feelings of friendship with their counsellors. That the relationship was defined in terms of conditions found lacking in their peers is especially revealing. Although they value their peer relationships, the students in this study did not find their friends to be either respectful of their confidences or effective sources of support.

**Critical Incidents**

None of the students identified any incidents as critical to the development of the counselling relationships that they had with their counsellors. Rather, they indicated that those relationships developed over time without any significant perturbations. The actual nature of the timeline for the development of the relationship was particular to each student, and was reflective of individual need and negotiation. That said, Joe, Lisa, and Kennedy alluded to critical experiences with other counsellors that gave shape to what critical events might look like. What
was particularly informative was that critical incidents did not have to be dramatic events such as those reported by Joe. His feelings of alienation and abandonment were indeed distressing to him and were evident in the telling. However, the incidents mentioned by Lisa and Kennedy were of much lesser magnitude, yet also had major implications for their developing relationships. Lisa’s experience with her eighth grade counsellor that was discussed above left her permanently distanced from her counsellor. It represented a single fleeting event that had a lasting effect. Kennedy also reported that although she found some benefit in conversations with her outside counsellor, she could not define their communications as a relationship. The incident that defined their relationship for her, his failure to recognise or acknowledge her when she met him in a bank, was also fleeting, but important in its impact. She contrasted that experience to those she experienced with her school counsellor, who not only recognised her, but was aware of personal changes such as clothing and hair styles. For Kennedy, the relationship was personal. The practical implication here is that counsellors must be aware of every interaction they have with students as even minor events can have a profound influence on any potential counselling relationship.

**Implications for Practice**

This study is closely tied to a specific context and generalising the results to other populations must be done tentatively and with more study. That said, the findings provide first hand descriptions of the situation studied that reveals detailed and rich understandings and insights. While not generalizable in a traditional sense, these insights are applicable to informal decision making that presents opportunity for further study, new insights and refinement of the model. Finally, the model exists as a hypothesis that future quantitative studies can test to validate its predictability and generalizability.

The students in this study clearly valued the personal counselling relationships they had with their counsellors and their commentaries present a vivid testament to the power of a personal counselling relationship to help them cope with the vicissitudes of school life in an environment
that Cioci (1994) and Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1984) suggest is often difficult for them. For these students, the personal counselling relationship served as a valuable tool. However, in spite of its value for these students, the literature suggests that the majority of students will not need a personal counselling relationship during their years in school. Therefore, the kind of counselling relationship described by the students in this study constitutes the exception rather than the rule.

This study also makes it clear that the personal counselling relationship takes time to develop, that the students do not want their counsellors to change, and that the students value ready access to their counsellors. In short, personal counselling places specific demands on a school counselling programme. Considering the confusion surrounding the role of the counsellor suggested by Burtnett (1993), Cunanan and Maddy-Bernstein (1994), Ibrahim, et al. (1983) and Landrum (1987) there is an obvious danger that the importance of personal counselling relationships to a small group of students can be lost amid the competing demands on counsellors to provide a range of other services.

One solution to protecting the counselling interests of this minority group of students is to establish the personal counselling relationship as the core of the counselling programme about which all other counsellor roles are constructed. In such a scenario, the model of the counselling relationship developed in this study plays a central role assessing the potential impact of other roles. For example, the desire to place a counsellor in a disciplinarian or supervisory role would be examined against the students' need for safety, confidentiality, openness and independence in the relationship, and clerical roles would be evaluated against their impact on the availability of the counsellor to the students.

It is clear that classroom teaching roles and administrative roles where counsellors are required to discipline or evaluate students are problematic when measured against their possible impact on the counselling relationship. While the formal, classroom setting offers teachers and students the potential to foster positive relationships as evidenced by the experiences of Lisa and Martha, those advantages are outweighed by the potential for harm that may result from the teacher's disciplinary actions or negative evaluations. All stages of the conceptual model emphasize
the importance of a non-judgemental stance for counsellors in the counselling environment and that stance cannot be realized when the counsellor is required to evaluate and discipline students. Furthermore, the hierarchical structures of the classroom and administrative office also work against the atmosphere of equality that is valued by students in the counselling relationship.

However, not all alternative roles for counsellors work against the development of counselling relationships. In fact, the multifaceted role of secondary school counsellors allows counsellors to make contact with students in a variety non-threatening and supportive ways (e.g., when selecting courses, and when receiving information about post secondary education and careers). While the literature suggests that most students can suffer the personal vicissitudes of life without the support of a counsellor, both the students participating in and the literature reviewed for this study suggest that there are social and personal factors that act as roadblocks to help seeking behaviours for adolescents who do need support. Furthermore, confusion surrounding the role of the counsellor, such as that expressed by the students in this study, obscures any clear understanding of the nature of the counselling available. In this context, any interactions between counsellors and students are important contacts and provide opportunities for the counsellors to communicate directly with students about their role, confidentiality, and safety in the relationship. If viewed with the counselling relationship in mind, sessions such as vocational guidance and academic advising can also serve to dispel any sense of mystery the students may have about counselling, and can act as portals to personal counselling for students who otherwise might avoid seeking help. In this sense, they are roles that have a good “fit” with the conceptual model, facilitate the development of the counselling relationship for those who need it, and offer valuable services to the whole student body.

The students in this study clearly identified comfort as an important facet of their total counselling experience. They associated comfort with a wide range of characteristics that included the décor of the counselling office; feelings of familiarity with the counselling environment; an atmosphere of respect and equality; humour and informality; a feeling of being accepted; and a professional and non-judgemental atmosphere in which they were given independence to make
their own decisions. For the most part, once they had reached the comfort stage of the relationship they enjoyed being in a counselling relationship. However, it is also clear that they did not always feel that way. Lack of clarity in the role of the counsellor combined with social prohibitions against help seeking, rumour and past experiences all had an effect on how they perceived counselling in the motivating and initiating stages of the relationship. The commentaries of the students suggest two broad approaches to addressing these issues. The first approach is for school counsellors to communicate a professional identity to students that fits the model of the personal counselling relationship. Lisa suggested that the best way for counsellors to make their role clear to students is to get out into the halls and talk with the students. Therefore, establishing a presence among the students is an important way that counsellors can communicate who and what they are about to the students. In short, counsellors must get out of their offices. A second and associated strategy is to increase the number of early opportunities the students have to experience the counselling centre and to have relaxed and informal interactions with counsellors. These can include small group seminars, information sessions, and support groups. Suggestions for such activities should be solicited from the students in order to increase their sense of ownership in the process.

On one level, the rationale for developing a comfortable counselling centre focuses on the belief that a comfortable environment will attract more students and increase the opportunity for contact between counsellors and students. However, the work of Call (1994) and Simmons, et al. (1987) on arenas of comfort suggests to me that a comfortable counselling centre can provide respite and rejuvenation for students in what is often a difficult environment. In turn, the energy derived from this rest can help them cope with the social and academic stressors they face in their school lives.

The indicators of comfort that Call (1984) describes, with their emphasis on balance, acceptance, and a relaxed, easy atmosphere, make a good fit with the characteristics of the comfort stage of conceptual map developed in this study. However, when Csikszentmihalyi and Larson’s (1984) suggestion that adolescents are alienated from adult oriented contexts is combined with the importance that the students in this study placed on independence and equality in their relationships
with their counsellors, it becomes clear that students should have a role in determining how the counselling centre should be structured. These negotiations offer students a sense of ownership of the programme that can lessen their perceptions of adult dominance in the setting. This input can be accommodated in a variety of ways, but regular surveys and focus groups suggest strategies that have the potential to facilitate both a broad, generalized body of information as well as focused and detailed information.

The students in this study all found cause to question the reliability of their friends as effective helpers. There was no indication that the students did not value their peer friendships, but rather that they saw their counsellors as more reliable and effective helpers than their friends. As a result, during the working alliance stage they frequently defined their relationships with their counsellors as friendships, albeit professional friendships that embodied levels of caring and constancy that they desired in their peer relationships. That the friendship develops during the working alliance stage is important as it indicates that the students associate friendship with an effort to bring change to problems in their lives. The students’ commentaries also indicated important steps that counsellors can take to reinforce the students’ sense of an effective professional friendship. The most important steps are the maintenance of a non-judgemental stance, unconditional positive regard, and assurances of confidentiality. However, other smaller attentions are also important. Kennedy emphasised how important it is that her counsellor recognised her outside of the school. She also responded well when the counsellor remembered small details about her clothing and purchases. The little “off topic” details matter. Allowing students to come in “just to talk” was important to the students, as was the counsellors willingness to make time despite a busy schedule. The clear message to counsellors is that attention to small details and a willingness to make accommodations can help build a strong counselling relationship.

Suggestions for Further Research

Much more research on the counselling relationship in the secondary school setting is necessary. This study focused on students’ understandings of the counselling relationship, but
additional research that incorporates the counsellors’ insights will provide rich new data. Of particular interest might be panel discussions or dialogues with both the students and counsellors that allow them to negotiate their understandings and to communicate mutually agreed upon responses.

Counselling in the secondary school context is unique, not in its individual characteristics, but in the scope of those characteristics. First, it often begins before the students enter secondary school when counsellors visit feeder schools to begin transition programmes. Second, it terminates artificially when the students leave school. Furthermore, even if there is a cessation of personal counselling during the students’ tenures in the school, the multi-faceted role of the counsellor ensures that some kind of counselling contact will be maintained throughout the students’ secondary school years. Third, the counsellor often assumes a variety of counselling roles that may act as portals to personal counselling. Fourth, as part of their responsibilities in the school community, the counsellor may be required to assume supervisory responsibilities that may be detrimental the development of a counselling relationship. Fifth, it does not operate on a fee-for-service basis. Therefore, research exploring how counselling within the school setting differs from counselling in other mental health settings is suggested. The results of such research can be of benefit not only to the design of school counselling programmes, but to inform counsellor training programmes.

Research into each of the key stages, key categories, and subsidiary categories of the contextual model developed in this study will add to the understanding of the counselling relationship in the secondary school context. Of particular interest to me is the investigation of comfort and arenas of comfort. If, as Call (1994) suggests, arenas of comfort offer significant benefits to students, then it is interesting to speculate how best to develop a comfortable counselling environment within the school setting that is responsive to cultural, class, and gender issues that might inhibit students participation in a counselling programme.

An exploration of the friendship that the students identify with their counsellors is another area of research that is suggested by this study. The students in this study expressed very definite
opinions about the ineffectualness of their peers as sources of help for their problems. Because they defined their friendship with their counsellor in terms of the deficiencies they found in their peers, it is interesting to wonder if this perception is typical of students by the time they reached grade twelve, or if it is a product of the positive relationship they have with their counsellors.

The observations made by the students in this study, and those made by Rickwood (1995), also bring into question the nature of change in secondary school counselling. The students' commentaries seem to indicate that the changes they experienced were adaptive and that counselling assisted them with coping strategies rather than changes in psychological states. This observation, while tenuous, is important for both the understanding of the working alliance and the nature of change itself within the secondary school context. Therefore, research into the nature of changes experienced by students in the personal counselling relationship is desirable.

Finally, research investigating how the multi-faceted role of the school counsellor functions as a gateway or portal to personal counselling is seen to be both interesting and beneficial. Such research can contribute to understandings of how to make school counselling services more attractive and available to students who otherwise might not access them.

Limitations of the Study

An important limitation of this study is its scope. The counselling relationship is a complex construct that embodies a variety of subsidiary processes such as the development of comfort and feelings of acceptance. Because this study provides an overview of the entire construct, it gives only peripheral attention to those other processes.

Within the limits discussed above (see Implications of the Study, p. 104) the study is neither generalizable nor verifiable. The sampling is purposive rather than exhaustive and the study is directed at discovering not a universal truth or reality, but rather at the in-depth exploration of a model of the students' understandings about the counselling relationship. As such, the conceptual model represents an hypothesis that provides opportunity for future study.
The study is also limited by gender bias. Both of the counsellors were female and four of the five students involved were female. The purposive sampling also means that the co-participants were limited to those students who were identified by their counsellors as sharing counselling relationships with them. It seems possible that three other categories of students might have different understandings of the counselling relationship. These include students who want a relationship, but for some reason are unable to initiate it; students who feel they do not need a counselling relationship; and students for whom the counselling relationship is a failed experience. The study is also unintentionally biased in the composition of the sample, and does not address issues of gender, class, or culture that might have an influence on the students’ participation in the counselling programme.

The data collected in this study also represents the understandings of only one half of the counselling dyad. Therefore, there is no communication of mutual understandings, nor are there insights communicated by the counsellor partner in the dyad. This is an acceptable limitation because my intent was to investigate the students’ understandings, but it also suggests further study that might provide more balanced and richer understandings.

Despite my attempts to remain as non-directive as possible in the interview process, I was very much a subjective partner in the dialogues. The open-ended nature of the interviews, while offering the greatest latitude to the students, also meant that the conversations proceeded intuitively and that conversational threads followed were subject to our conjoined interests and curiosities. In short, I was not a neutral observer, but had a significant influence on the flow of the dialogue. It is also true that as a white, middle class male, I also bring a particular interpretive lens to the analysis that may be reflected in the final model.

Finally, the study was limited by the requirements of the faculty of graduate studies for a research proposal that included both a set of formal research questions and a preliminary literature review. As indicated in Chapters 2 and 5, both predetermined research questions and a preliminary literature review are inconsistent with the grounded theory method (Glaser, 1992; Strauss and Corbin, 1994), because they have the potential to bias the emergent theory toward a predetermined
goal or other expert opinion. I attempted to minimize any bias resulting from the research questions and literature review by carefully bracketing my understandings at the outset of the research. While I cannot measure the effect the research proposal might have had on the outcome of this research it is interesting to see how much the final conceptual model differed from my original bracketing model.
REFERENCES


Lapadat, J. C., & Lindsay, A. C. (1999). Transcription in research and practice: From standardization of technique to interpretive positionings. *Qualitative Inquiry, 5*(1), 64-86.


## APPENDIX A

Basic Beliefs (Metaphysics) of Alternative Inquiry Paradigms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Positivism</th>
<th>Postpositivism</th>
<th>Critical Theory</th>
<th>Constructivism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontology</td>
<td>Naïve realism — “real” reality but apprehendable</td>
<td>Critical realism — “real” reality but only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehendable</td>
<td>Historical realism — virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender variables; crystallized over time</td>
<td>Relativism — local and specific constructed realities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>Dualist/objectivist; findings true</td>
<td>Modified dualist/objectivist; critical tradition/community; findings probably true</td>
<td>Transactional/subjectivist; value-mediated findings</td>
<td>Transactional/subjectivist; created findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Experimental/manipulative; verification of hypotheses; chiefly quantitative methods</td>
<td>Modified experimental/manipulative; critical multipluralism; falsification of hypotheses; may include qualitative methods</td>
<td>Dialogic/dialectical</td>
<td>Hermeneutical/dialectical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Taken from: Guba & Lincoln, 1994 (p. 109)

The basic belief structures of four research paradigms as proposed by Guba and Lincoln, 1994. Note that the dotted line separating the ontological and epistemological categories for critical thinking & constructivist paradigms indicates a blending of the categories; in short, the differences between the ontology and the epistemology are not clear in this interpretation.
APPENDIX B
Student Letter of Introduction and Informed Consent
Counselling Relationships Research Project

Dear <Student’s Name>,

I am writing to ask if you would like to help me with some research I am doing. This letter should help you understand why and how this research is being done so that you can make an informed decision either to participate or not to participate.

I am a graduate student at the University of Northern British Columbia and am completing a master’s thesis in Educational Counselling. One of the requirements of that degree is to complete a thesis which is, for the most part, an original piece of research on a subject of interest. I chose the subject of counselling relationships because of my curiosity about what makes counselling more comfortable and/or effective for some students than it is for others. I find myself wondering about the nature of the relationship that develops between the student client and the school counsellor and how this relationship might make it easier for some students to use and benefit from the services of counselling.

When I began to research counselling relationships in general, I found that while experts believe counselling relationships are important, they don’t fully understand the details about how those relationships work. I also found that there is little research examining the details of the counselling relationship that forms between counsellors and student clients in the secondary school setting. While the outcome of any research cannot be predicted, it is safe to hope that if we can better understand the workings of the relationships between counsellors and student clients, we can develop better counselling programmes.

Because I am interested in your thoughts and opinions, you will be asked to participate in at least two interviews. The first tape recorded interview will be about one hour long and will seek your thoughts about counselling relationships in the school setting. I will transcribe your interview and then will analyse that transcript to pick out the important ideas and “themes” about counselling relationships from what you have said. I will then ask you to participate in a second one hour, tape recorded interview wherein you will have the opportunity to what I think I have found in your original interview. At that time you can tell me more about your ideas or you can correct anything you think I have got wrong. I also may ask you to expand on some topics about which I am uncertain or unclear. The goal is
for both of us to have a very clear understanding of your ideas. This process will continue until we are both certain you have nothing more to add to your portion of the study.

So, if you consent to participate by signing the attached consent form you will be agreeing to a series of interviews. The interviews will be conducted in my office in the counselling area at Mount Elizabeth Secondary School and each will last no longer than one hour. You will select the time of the interview and your parents will be made aware of that time. Because I am aware of the busy nature of your lives, I would like to have all interviews completed by 5:00 p.m.

Although your participation in the study will be strictly confidential, you must realize that should you tell me about any instances of abuse or of threats to the safety of yourself or others, I am required, by law, to report those instances to appropriate individuals or agencies. A code name, which you will pick, will be used in all references to you in the study; I am the only person who will know your real name. It is also important that you understand that you are not obligated to continue with this research and can withdraw from it at any time. The study will be conducted according to the University of Northern British Columbia's guidelines for ethical conduct of research and you will receive a copy of the study when it is completed.

Thank-you very much for agreeing to assist me with this research. I greatly appreciate your commitment of time and effort in working with this study. Without your thoughts and contributions there would be no study, therefore, I want you to consider yourself as a fully functioning participant in the research rather than a "subject" of the research. In order for you to participate, however, you must complete the attached consent form and to have a parent or guardian sign it as well.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact me at 632-6174 or my advisor, Dr. Tom Strong at the University of Northern British Columbia, 250-960-5401.

Sincerely

Doug Thomson
APPENDIX C

Consent Form

Counselling Relationship Research Project

Participant:

I, ____________________________, consent to participate in the research project on counselling relationships as described in the attached letter from Doug Thomson. My signature below indicates that these data may be used for research for a master's thesis in Educational Counselling as described in the letter. I also agree that the interviews with me, conducted in this study, will be removed only for the purpose of transcribing their contents. When the transcriptions are complete the original tapes will be physically destroyed. My real name will not appear anywhere in any of the transcripts.

I also understand that I am not under any commitment to continue with this research and that I am free to withdraw from this project at any time.

Signature: ____________________________ Date: ______________

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact me, Doug Thomson, at 632-6174 or my advisor, Dr. Tom Strong at the University of Northern British Columbia, 250-960-5401.
Parent/Guardian:

I, __________________, acting as the parent or guardian to, ____________, consent to allowing my <son or daughter> to participate in the research project on counselling relationships as described in the attached letter from Doug Thomson. My signature below indicates that these data may be used for research for a master's thesis in Educational Counselling as described in the letter. I also understand that the interviews with my <son or daughter> will be audio tape recorded. These tapes will be secured in the researcher's office and will be removed only for the purpose of transcribing their contents. When the transcriptions are complete the original tapes will be physically destroyed. My daughter's real name will not appear anywhere in any of the transcripts.

I also understand that my <son or daughter> is not under any commitment to continue with this research and that <she or he> is free to withdraw from this project at any time.

Signature: ____________________________ Date: ______________

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact me, Doug Thomson, at 632-6174 or my advisor, Dr. Tom Strong at the University of Northern British Columbia, 250-960-5401.
APPENDIX D

Parent / Guardian Letter Of Introduction And Informed Consent

Counselling Relationships Research Project

Dear <Parent / Guardian Name>,

This letter is very similar to one given to your <son or daughter> requesting <his or her> participation in a research study I am conducting and will serve to acquaint you with relevant details of the research. It is intended to give you an understanding of why and how this research is being conducted so that you can make an informed decision whether or not to allow your <son or daughter> to participate.

I am a graduate student at the University of Northern British Columbia and am completing a master’s thesis in Educational Counselling. One of the requirements of that degree is to complete a thesis which is, for the most part, an original piece of research on a subject of academic interest. I chose the subject of counselling relationships because of my curiosity about what makes counselling more comfortable, and/or more effective for some students than it is for others. I find myself wondering about the nature of the relationship that develops between the student client and the school counsellor and how this relationship might make it easier for some students to use and benefit from the services of counselling.

When I began to research counselling relationships in general, I found that while experts believe counselling relationships are important they don’t fully understand the details about how those relationships work. I also found that there is little research examining the details of the counselling relationship that forms between counsellors and student clients in the secondary school setting. While the outcome of any research cannot be predicted, it is safe to anticipate that if we can better understand the workings of the relationships between counsellors and student clients, we will be more effective in bringing the counselling programmes to a greater number of students.

Because I am interested in the participant’s thoughts and opinions, the students will be asked to participate in at least two interviews. The first tape recorded interview will be about one hour long and will seek their thoughts about counselling relationships in the school setting. I will transcribe that interview and then will examine what each participant has said to try and pick out their important thoughts and ideas about counselling relationships and to arrange those into general “themes”. I will then ask them to participate in a second one hour,
tape recorded interview wherein they will have the opportunity to review the themes I have identified and to expand on their ideas or correct my interpretations. I also may ask them to elaborate on some topics about which I am uncertain or unclear. The goal is for both of us to have a very clear understanding of their ideas. This process will continue until we are both certain neither of us has anything more to add to the categories.

So, if you consent to participate by signing the attached consent form you will be agreeing to allow your child to participate in a series of interviews. The interviews will be conducted in my office in the counselling area at Mount Elizabeth Secondary School and each will last no longer than one hour. Your <son or daughter> will select the time of the interview and you will be made aware of that time. Because I am aware of the busy nature of their lives, concerns such as dinner hours and the importance of study time, I would like to have all interviews completed by 5:00 p.m.

Although your <son or daughter’s> participation in the study will be strictly confidential, you must realize that should <he or she> tell me about any instances of abuse or of threats to the safety of <himself or herself> or others, I am required, by law, to report those disclosures to the appropriate individuals or agencies. A code name, which each student will pick, will be used in all references to your child in the study; I am the only person who will know <his or her> real name. It is also important that you understand that, once begun, your child is not obligated to continue with this research and can withdraw at any time. The study will be conducted according to the University of Northern British Columbia’s guidelines for ethical conduct of research.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact me at 632-6174 or my advisor, Dr. Tom Strong at the University of Northern British Columbia, 250-960-5401.

Sincerely

Doug Thomson
APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol

Counselling Relationships Research Project

**Briefing**

The participant will be thanked for participating in the project and will be offered refreshments. Efforts will be made to ensure that the interview setting is comfortable for the participant and that he or she is at ease.

The participant's consent will be confirmed and together we will review the purpose of the interview. It will be emphasized that the interview is intended to gather the participant's thoughts about counselling relationships and that there are no wrong answers or points of view. It will also be made clear that they will always have the opportunity to revisit the data, to clarify or modify anything they have said, and to have input into how the research is conducted and the data is interpreted. I will also remind each participant that additional interviews are likely and will be scheduled at a later date and that he or she is free to leave the study at any time. At this time I will explain the legal and ethical responsibility to report any disclosures of abuse or threats to the safety of the participant or others to appropriate individuals or authorities. The participant will then be given an opportunity to ask questions about the research. This briefing will also be used as a final test of the recording equipment.

**Questions**

Only an opening statement is identified to initiate discussion with the client. The interview is intended to be unstructured so as to obtain a rich body of data which is not forced into a predetermined "mold" by the researcher. During the analysis of the initial interview, a list of queries or prompts will be generated which will serve as aids to the
clarification and elaboration of the emerging concepts and themes which will occur in subsequent interviews. Therefore, the interview protocol will be amended as the research proceeds.

The opening statement will be: "<Participant’s Name>, I would like you to discuss your experience of counselling with me for a bit. Perhaps think back to a counselling session that is clear in your memory. What do you remember about that session that either helped you feel closer to the counsellor or perhaps made you feel more distant? I don’t expect you to tell me the details about why you went to the counsellor; I’m really interested in your reactions to how that meeting felt to you."

**Debriefing**

If the participant expresses any concern or distress with the interview, that worry will be addressed, noted, and, if appropriate, the participant’s parent or guardian will be contacted immediately and/or a referral will be made to the student’s school counsellor, school district special counsellor, student’s physician, or an appropriate counsellor in an outside agency will be made.

The participant will be thanked for participating in the interview and will be asked:

1. Was there anything you wanted to say that you didn’t get a chance to say?
2. Is there anything else you would like to add?
3. What steps could be taken to make this interview even more comfortable for you and other participants?
4. If you were setting up this interview was there anything you would have done differently?

The participant will then be asked if he or she is willing to continue as a partner in the study and a tentative date and time will be established for the next interview. He or she will be advised that the interview date will be confirmed once the current data is transcribed and analysed and that his or her parent or guardian will be advised of the date and time. The participant will again be thanked for participating in the study and will be advised that the interview is concluded.
APPENDIX F

Passages Coded By Category

The number of passages coded for each open coding category, the number of co-participants in which those codes were identified, and a combined score representing the product of the passages coded and co-participants coded.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Category</th>
<th>Passages Coded</th>
<th>Co-participants Coded</th>
<th>Combined Scores (Product)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsellor Role</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating Events</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roadblocks</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Alliance</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Shared Journey</td>
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<td>Change</td>
<td>43</td>
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<td>Counsellor Skills</td>
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<td>Friendships</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Institutional Demands</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>Environment</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>85</td>
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<tr>
<td>Availability &amp; Continuity</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>64</td>
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<td>Preconceptions</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>Safety</td>
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<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter-transference</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>Initial Contact</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Distance</td>
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<td>Engagement</td>
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<td>Other Counselling Experiences</td>
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<td>Commitment</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Confidence</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Disclosure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Familiarity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX G

Key Words and Phrases Used in Developing Open Coding Properties
Organized by Key Stages
(derived from open coding passages and their associated memos)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivating Stage</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivating Events</td>
<td>Academic pressures, parental pressures, family problems, desire for independence, peer problems, small problems, last resort, stress, psychological concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Counselling Experiences</td>
<td>Distant, difficult to access, lacking continuity, uncommitted, uncomfortable, lack of continuity, counsellor did not recognize, felt inferior, no equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Experience</td>
<td>Previous counselling brought tension, counsellor previously as teacher brought comfort, experience of friends is encouraging, family problems produce anxiety and demands for special expertise (can close other helping relationship)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preconceptions</td>
<td>Role of counsellors uncertain, counselling not understood, not a place to go, 20 minute fix, adult can’t relate to adolescent, opinions of peers differs from own experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiating Stage</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
<td>Essential, confidence respected, comfortable, freedom from worry, stimulates openness, lack of destroys trust, stimulates self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Contact</td>
<td>Flat, lacking in character, direct, professional, clarifying, cautious, testing compatibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>Awareness of counsellor (body language, linguistic devices, power differential)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roadblocks</td>
<td>Lack of recognition, lack of control, anonymity in dyad, feeling of isolation, unavailability of counsellor, tone of voice, blaming, rushing the session, bad experience, disciplining, stigmatizing, broken confidence, classroom setting, patronizing, not caring, directive or controlling, too serious, rumours, lack of privacy, small community, familiarity, too much empathy, lack of professional credentials, too strict, seriousness of problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Understanding atmosphere, feels acknowledged, respected as individual, secure, comfortable, confidentiality respected, dealing with safety issues, a refuge, freedom from discipline, caring, advocacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comfort Stage</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Reciprocal, unconditional, encouraging, affirmative, focused, builds confidence, comfortable, reflective, confirming, “feels good”, non-judgemental, respectful, makes time, equal, listens, respectful, available, not controlling, non-disciplinarian, pleasurable, influenced by expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort</td>
<td>Reduces tension, in place when personal limits are respected, eases contact, fosters confidence, familiar, empowering, liberating, relaxing, takes time, genuine, humour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Essential tool; body language; conveys balance, confidence, familiarity; reflective; communicates trust, genuineness; conveys emotion; silence is important; meanings must be negotiated; informal is good, relaxed, natural, comfortable; misunderstandings = broken relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmation</td>
<td>Reflective interaction, support, authenticate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Related to power; making positive choices; controlling behaviours in adults is negative, differs from guidance, related to trust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsellor Role</td>
<td>Helper, supportive, sharing, non-judgemental, professional, powerful, comfortable, not in classroom, non-disciplinarian, friendship, informal, advocacy, multi-dimensional (emotional, educational, social, advisor), not therapeutic, personal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsellor Skills</td>
<td>Clarifies, professional distance, mutual respect, encouragement, professional knowledge, reflective, respecting comfort levels, attending, self-disclosure, supportive, emotive, confirming, flexibility, listening, attending, non-judgemental, genuine, honest, empathic (and too empathic), uses humour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>1. Whole school: alienating, cliquey, favouritism by administration, judgemental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Classroom: impersonal, undesirable for discussion of personal issues, discipline intrudes, evaluation intrudes, positive experiences depend on what teacher is like (vague)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Counselling: shared environment, positive atmosphere, comfortable, familiar facilitates, rapport, shared awareness facilitates discussion, friendly, relaxed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Freedom to make own decisions; not experienced at home, in classroom or with administration; feeling of maturity; freedom to make mistakes; free from external control; related to guidance (suggestions); comfortable; self-determination encouraged, encouraging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Demands</td>
<td>Re: student: academic pressures, controlling student, discipline, attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Re: counsellor: scheduling, scheduling role opens door to personal issues, disciplinarian role inhibits relationship, availability important, classroom role not good for some students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>Personal, candid, listens, essential to process, characteristic of a relationship, trusting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Distance</td>
<td>More understanding, different perspective, lack of is distracting (too much empathy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>Previous counselling made him feel invisible, no bond without recognition, anonymous without, counsellor recognizes and acknowledges outside office, counsellor is aware of personal details, remembers name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Adolescents need time, relationship takes time to develop, gradual development of relationship, initial opinion can be quick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working Alliance</strong></td>
<td><strong>Availability &amp; Continuity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. absence of: no sense of counsellor concern, uncaring, loss of faith in self, uncomfortable,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. presence of: time for relationship to develop, maintains flow of personal narrative, encouraging, comfortable, time to develop trust, serves immediacy of need, informality, trust, familiar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>Counsellor goes beyond the expected, sets an example, genuine, supportive, involves commitment, results in comfort, nurturing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Mutual, extends self, faithfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>Self-awareness, results from acceptance and related to credentials and image of professional, comfort with professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure</td>
<td>The willingness of the adolescent to reveal pertinent information to the counsellor. Influenced by trust in the counsellor's level of expertise.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Friendships

1. Counsellor as friend: “true” friendship, trustworthy, caring, honest, faithful, mature, develops over time, different context than with peers, non-judgemental, safe, accepting, understanding informal

2. Peer Friendships: judgemental, questionable advice, transient relationships, broken confidences, not accepting, not trustworthy

### Guidance

Precedes friendship, provides options, sensible, helps adolescent ground self, a guide rather than a master, stabilizing, suggests rather than directs

### Insecurity

With adults: intimidated, afraid, uncertain
With counselling: uncertain, mystery, counsellor intimidating, familiarity is intimidating.

### Self-awareness

Recognizes problem; behaviour pattern revealed; aware of personal characteristics, qualities and needs; clarify issues: care for self; change brings self-confidence and self-esteem; growing independence; personal responsibility; revealed in dialogue; nature of problems inhibits relationship

### Shared Journey

Not alone, reciprocal sharing, counsellor self-disclosure, mutual respect, shared commitments, feelings clarified and understood by both, reflection, shared emotions, familiarity, comfort, shared environment, shared experience, shared trust, sharing only adolescent’s problem, support, learned “rules” of relationship

### Trust

Develops over time, starts with openness, more personal details added as it builds, related to respect of confidentiality, faith, intimate, makes counsellor feel good, comfortable, comes with respect, essential to relationship

### Working Alliance

Joint planning, identifying problems, defining problems, develops over time, counsellor respects comfort levels, counsellor assists with plans, caring, revealing, supportive, provides options, manageable, provision of tools, empowering, understanding, allows challenges, comfortable, reduces stress, non-directive, reflective, mutual respect, considerate, relaxing.

### Change

A function of caring & encouragement, gradual, comfortable, related to coping, important, feels good, a “fit”, visible, related to maturing, reduces anxiety, strengthens, gives direction, challenging, reassuring, magical.
### APPENDIX H

**Table 2 of Open Coding Memo Links**

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<th>Memo</th>
<th>Memos Linked</th>
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<td>Openness</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comfort</td>
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<td>Commitment</td>
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<td>Trust</td>
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<td>Counsellor Role</td>
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<td>Confirmation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working Alliance</td>
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<td>Control</td>
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<td>Roadblocks</td>
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<td>Initial Contact</td>
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<td>Other Counselling Experiences</td>
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<td>Personal Experience</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Professional Distance</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shared Journey</td>
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<td>Availability &amp; Continuity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preconceptions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Disclosure</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
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<td>Engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Familiarity</td>
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<td>Recognition</td>
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<td>Guidance</td>
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<td>Time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
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<td>Counter-transference</td>
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<td>Environment</td>
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<td>Institutional Demands</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivating Events</td>
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## APPENDIX I

### Table of Open Coding Memo Links

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<th>Friendships</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>2. Counsellor Role</td>
<td>2. Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Control</td>
<td>5. Roadblocks</td>
<td>5. Independence</td>
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<td>10. Recognition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Shared Journey</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Trust</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Availability & Continuity

| 1. Comfort                      |                                    |

### Caring

| 1. Counsellor Role |                                    |

### Change

| 1. Control          |                                    |
| 2. Counsellor Skills|                                    |
| 3. Roadblocks       |                                    |
| 4. Working Alliance |                                    |

### Comfort

| 1. Acceptance       |                                    |
| 2. Communication    |                                    |
| 3. Counsellor Skills|                                    |
| 4. Disclosure       |                                    |
| 5. Environment      |                                    |
| 6. Familiarity      |                                    |
| 7. Friendships      |                                    |
| 8. Professional Distance |                                    |
| 9. Roadblocks       |                                    |
| 10. Safety          |                                    |
| 11. Time            |                                    |
| 12. Trust           |                                    |

### Commitment

| 1. Acceptance       |                                    |
| 2. Shared Journey   |                                    |

### Communication

| 1. Counsellor Skills |                                    |
| 2. Engagement        |                                    |
| 3. Preconceptions    |                                    |
| 4. Roadblocks        |                                    |
| 5. Trust             |                                    |

### Confidence

| 1. Safety            |                                    |
| 2. Trust             |                                    |

### Confirmation

| 1. Caring            |                                    |
| 2. Counsellor Skills |                                    |

### Control

| 1. Guidance          |                                    |
| 2. Independence      |                                    |

### Counsellor Role

| 1. Acceptance        |                                    |
| 2. Availability & Continuity |                                    |
| 3. Change            |                                    |
| 4. Confidentiality   |                                    |
| 5. Counsellor Skills |                                    |
| 6. Environment       |                                    |
| 7. Friendships       |                                    |
| 8. Professional Distance |                                    |
| 9. Safety            |                                    |
| 10. Trust            |                                    |

### Counsellor Skills

| 1. Acceptance        |                                    |
| 2. Professional Distance |                                    |
| 3. Safety            |                                    |
| 4. Time              |                                    |

### Counter-transference

| Disclosure           |                                    |
| 1. Counsellor Skills |                                    |

### Dedication

| 1. Counsellor Role   |                                    |

### Engagement

| 1. Trust             |                                    |

### Environment

| 1. Comfort           |                                    |
| 2. Counsellor Role   |                                    |
| 3. Safety            |                                    |

### Familiarity

| 1. Acceptance        |                                    |
| 2. Communication     |                                    |
| 3. Environment       |                                    |
| 4. Time              |                                    |

### Initial Contact

| 1. Friendships       |                                    |
| 2. Roadblocks        |                                    |

### Insecurity

| 1. Confidentiality   |                                    |

### Institutional Demands

| Motivating Events    |                                    |
| 1. Acceptance        |                                    |
| 2. Environment       |                                    |
| 3. Working Alliance  |                                    |

### Openness

| 1. Acceptance        |                                    |
| 2. Shared Journey    |                                    |
| 3. Trust             |                                    |
| 4. Trust             |                                    |

### Other Counselling Experiences

| 1. Counsellor Role   |                                    |
| 2. Roadblocks        |                                    |

### Perception

| 1. Communication     |                                    |
| 2. Counsellor Role   |                                    |

### Personal Experience

<p>| 1. Roadblocks        |                                    |
| 2. Trust             |                                    |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preconceptions</th>
<th>Safety</th>
<th>Trust</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Trust</td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Control</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Professional Distance**

| 2. Environment | 2. Communication | 2. Caring |

**Recognition**

| 1. Trust | 1. Counsellor Role | 3. Counsellor Role |
| | | 1. Caring |

**Roadblocks**

| 5. Guidance | 5. Working Alliance | 5. Working Alliance |
| 6. Independence | | |
| 7. Institutional Demands | | |
| 8. Recognition | | |
| 9. Safety | | |

**Self-awareness**

| 3. Counsellor Role | 3. Roadblocks | 5. Trust |
| 5. Trust | | |

**Shared Journey**

| 5. Trust | 5. Trust | 5. Working Alliance |

**Time**

| | | |

**Working Alliance**

| 5. Control | 5. Control | 5. Control |