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The role of religious commitment on the development of professional counselling empathy

An investigation of student counsellors in Barbados

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The role of religious commitment on the development of professional counselling empathy: an investigation of student counsellors in Barbados

By Antoinette Rock

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Education

University of Bath
Department of Education

July 2013

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	ii
Abstract	v
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 The Research Problem	1
1.2 Defining the research question	2
1.3 A preliminary finding	2
1.4 The aims of the research	3
1.5 The context of the study	3
1.6 The cultural and religious background of the students	4
1.7 Researcher's stance	6
1.8 Relevance of the study	8
1.9 Organisation of chapters	9
2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE	11
2.1 Introduction	11
2.2 Organisation of the Review of Literature	13
2.3 Counselling Practice	14
2.3.1 Concept and definition	14
2.3.2 The Cultural Dimensions of Counselling	15
2.3.3 The Role of Empathy in Counselling	17
2.4 Empathy	18
2.4.1 Theoretical perspective on empathy	18
2.4.2 Practical expression of empathy in everyday life	21
2.4.3 Measurements of Empathy	23
2.4.4 How Counsellors develop Empathy	26
2.4.5 Barriers to the Development of Empathy	27
2.5 Religion and Religious Commitment	28
2.5.1 Concepts and definitions	28

2.5.2	The psychology of religion	30
2.5.3	Religion and spirituality	32
2.5.4	Religion, culture and empathy	32
2.5.5	The therapeutic value of religion	34
2.5.6	The influence of religion on empathy	35
2.5.7	The measurement of religious functioning	35
2.5.8	Opposing views on the role of religion in Counselling	36
2.5.9	How religious values influence the therapeutic relationship	37
2.6	Summary	38
3	RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	40
3.1	Overview	40
3.2	The research problem	40
3.3	Rationale for using a qualitative approach	41
3.4	Ethical conduct of the research	41
3.5	Sampling procedures	42
3.6	Data collection methods and procedures	43
3.7	Data analysis methods	46
3.8	Trustworthiness	49
3.8.1	Validity	50
3.8.2	Reliability	51
4	RESULTS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION	54
4.1	Introduction	54
4.2	Part I: Identifying manifestations and characteristics	55
4.2.1	Overview	55
4.2.2	Positive manifestations	56
4.2.3	Negative manifestations	66
4.2.4	Mediating manifestations	71
4.3	Part II: Developing student profiles	79
4.3.1	Overview	79

4.3.2	H6 – an exemplar for a positive role	80
4.3.3	H4 – an example of a negative role	82
4.3.4	H5 and L1 – examples of mixed roles	84
4.3.5	L3 and L2 – further examples of a positive role	86
4.4	Discussion of Chapter 4 outcomes	87
5	USING THE MANIFESTATIONS TO CONDUCT FURTHER ANALYSIS ON MODERATELY RELIGIOUS STUDENTS	90
5.1	Introduction	90
5.2	Part I: Review of individual interrelationships	91
5.2.1	Overview	91
5.2.2	Empathic Stance	92
5.2.3	Empathic attunement	93
5.2.4	Empathic communication	94
5.2.5	Empathic knowledge	96
5.3	Part II: Practical use of the findings	97
5.4	Discussion on Chapter 5 outcomes	100
6	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	106
6.1	Response to Research Question	106
6.2	Strengths of the research	106
6.3	Challenges encountered in the research	108
6.4	Recommendations for further research	109
6.5	Final reflection on where this research leaves the reader	111
	REFERENCES	114

Abstract

This study sought a better understanding of the role played by student counsellors' religious commitment as they develop the empathic competencies necessary to become effective counsellors. This phenomenon was explored within a counselling course at the Open Campus, University of the West Indies, Barbados. The literature shows there has been no such study carried out within this locality, and that there is a dearth of empirical research that explores the complex interplay between counsellor empathy and their religious commitment. The theoretical orientation was grounded in the counselling literature with emphasis on the integrative approach to counselling used within the class.

Three highly religiously committed students and three low committed students were selected based on their religious commitment scores using the Worthington et al Religious Commitment Inventory. The data for these six respondents were analysed using a thematic approach, from which the main findings were obtained. A further sample of three moderate religiously committed students was also selected and their data analysed to see if the categories held up with a different sample.

Methods used to gather data were qualitative personal narratives and responses from an open-ended questionnaire. The Thwaites & Bennett-Levy empathy typology was used to analyse and interpret students' professional empathy. These findings were then compared with the students' opinions of how they thought their religion would impact on their counselling practice. Because theory suggests the potential for positive and negative functions of religion, I was open to the possibility of both influences impacting on students' empathy.

The findings suggest that students' religious commitment is not as great a determinant of effective professional empathy, as is the maturity of the students and how they process and manage their religion. The findings are significant in that they would serve to inform counselling trainers who work in similar situations.

1 INTRODUCTION

Although there is a wealth of literature on counselling and spirituality, most research focuses on the integration of faith or spirituality into counselling or on how to work with clients' spiritual or religious beliefs. There are very few empirical studies on the impact of counsellors' religious or spiritual beliefs on their counselling work.

(Walker, Gorsuch and Tan, 2005)

1.1 The Research Problem

Over the seven years of teaching the Certificate in Counselling course at the Open Campus, University of the West Indies, one of the issues that became apparent related to the possible existence of a linkage between the students' religious beliefs and how these beliefs influenced their development of professional counselling competences. A search of the literature revealed that little empirical research had been carried out within this area. Most researchers who had researched similar topics concluded that 'more research needed to be done'. The literature showed that the subject had been broached several times, but I could not find relevant empirical research which focused on the topic, and which could lead me to an understanding of how to manage the phenomenon with which I was faced. The quotation with which this thesis begins (Walker, Gorsuch, & Tan, 2005) sums up the results of my search, and also strengthens my motivations for conducting the present study.

The current counselling course, like most initial training courses, addresses the issues of counsellor values, beliefs, identity and attitude, and pays particular attention to the influence of these personality attributes on therapeutic practice. Although the focus of this course is on teaching mainstream counselling using Egan's integrative counselling approach (2007, 2010), which has no specific religious bias, more often than not the students' concerns about counselling issues reveal deep religious convictions. A major and recurring concern was that they may find it difficult to suspend their religious beliefs in order to adopt the unbiased stance required of the counselling practitioner within mainstream counselling. Should there be a relationship or sets of interrelationships between students' religious commitment and their development of the professional counselling empathy, then it is worth seeking a clearer understanding. If a better understanding of this phenomenon could be achieved, it would redound to more effective teaching, learning and counselling training.

1.2 Defining the research question

To provide the specific focus for this study, the research problem discussed above was summarised by defining the research question as follows:

What role does a student counsellor's religious commitment have on his or her ability to acquire the professional empathy necessary to become a fully effective counselling practitioner?

The research question does not seek to predict the extent to which religious commitment might impact a student counsellor's ability to become professionally empathic. The focus is on understanding 'the role' of the students' religious commitment, and how their empathic competences might be influenced by the 'role'. The concept 'role' is conceptualised in terms of its positive, negative and mediating functions. Accepting that religious commitment, as an aspect of one's culture will impact on the individual's mental processes, the research question is designed to focus on identifying and understanding the types of influences religious commitment is likely to have on the development of empathy.

The following three questions bring more clarity by expanding the research question into the areas to be addressed in investigating the problem.

1. How does a student counsellor's religious commitment manifest itself as she learns to be a professionally empathic counsellor?
2. What are the influencing interrelationships that link each of these religious commitment manifestations to the student's developing ability to become professionally empathic?
3. Are these interrelationships likely to influence the student's ability to develop professional empathy in a positive or negative way, or a combination of both?

1.3 A preliminary finding

The main reason for conducting this research is to reach a deeper understanding of the role that the religious beliefs of student counsellors play in the development of professional empathy, rather than to attempt to explain the existence of a statistically significant relationship. However, as a precursor to conducting the current research, I undertook a small quantitative study with the entire class where I sought to find out if there was any correlation between the two variables, religious commitment and empathy. By using a brief religious commitment survey, Religious Commitment Inventory 10 (Worthington, et al., 2003) and the Empathy Quotient (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004), a weak correlation co-efficient was found, denoting an insignificant relationship between religious commitment and

empathy for the students. This preliminary finding, although limited because of its monotonic nature, was useful for providing the following:

1. A background on which to position the research study;
2. Further motivation to explore the interrelationships between religious commitment and empathy which a quantitative study might not be able to investigate; and
3. A baseline from which the most suitable respondents for the qualitative study could be transparently selected.

1.4 The aims of the research

The primary aim of this research is to generate new knowledge and understanding of the influences of students' religious commitment on their development of empathy. I also wanted to understand the deeper meanings of these interrelationships. I wanted to find out what it is about religious commitment that could influence the way the students perceive and understand the world and others. My assumption is that there is no fixed way of knowing or understanding the reality of the students, and I am more interested in understanding how the social world of the students is constructed. The kind of knowledge considered to be most relevant is that which is described by McLeod (2011) as 'narrative knowing', that which is associated with the everyday accounts of human action, usually in the form of stories. McLeod (2011) says that good qualitative research is always grounded in samples of concrete, everyday life, such as statements that the respondents make. This study uses data collected from students' written coursework (reflective narratives). The data are analysed in terms of patterns and themes, and interpreted in relation to the wider meanings and significance informed by the religious and counselling literature. Although presented as individual cases, the data presented ultimately merges into a wider cross case analysis that provides the type of knowledge that leads to another way of knowing what it is about religious commitment that could influence students' developing professional empathy.

1.5 The context of the study

The Open Campus was developed as an extra-mural institution to provide short professional courses such as certificate courses, as well as associate degrees and diploma courses to adults. It is an adjunct faculty of the University of the West Indies.

The certificate in counselling course is an evening class, comprising 135 contact hours of mainly experiential learning, consisting of participation through discussion and role-plays. Through these techniques, students are required to expand their self-knowledge and awareness by working with each other to reflect on the different topics covered.

An understanding of the major counselling theories and the application of these theories to practice are supported through lectures, tutorials, video presentations and textbooks. A further aspect of the course focuses on contemporary issues in counselling, with special emphasis on the local context, with visiting facilitators presenting on topics such as spirituality, substance abuse or adolescent counselling needs and approaches. Assessment of progress is based on both written examinations and practical activities.

Typically, students will include individuals who either want to become practising counsellors or want to incorporate counselling skills into their work (e.g. police officers, members of the clergy, teachers and nurses). From this latter category, the course attracts students from both the public and private sectors. For many, the course provides an introduction to counselling. Class sizes tend to lie in the range of 20 to 30 students, with student ages ranging from the early twenties to those in their late fifties. Although not formally tested, applicants are expected to be mature persons who can already reflect on their life experiences and reach solutions to typical problems encountered in their individual work situations.

The counselling approach used on the course is integrative in nature, informed by humanistic ideals, but incorporating relevant ideas from other counselling orientations. According to Corey (2010, p448), integration of counselling theories is now an established and respected movement that is based on combining the best of differing orientations so that more complete theoretical models can be articulated and more efficient treatments developed. It can be described as having a secular approach, but nevertheless considers the societal or cultural needs of the student counsellors and the populations they are being trained to work with. An important feature of the study examines how the universal understanding of empathy informs the meanings and interpretations of the student counsellors' religious beliefs.

1.6 The cultural and religious background of the students

Barbados, like most of the islands in the Caribbean, can be described as a church going society.

Of particular importance to this study is the fact that the 2000 census highlighted that 95 % of the Barbadian population claim affiliation to a Christian church. The history of the island has grown out of a past where, according to history texts, the people who were brought to the island in the 17th to 19th centuries were forced to give up their indigenous religions and take up the practice of Christianity.

There is a high visibility of church attendance with a significant percentage of the population attending some form of religious gathering at least once a week, and major life events such as funerals and baptisms tend to be marked within the Christian tradition.

There are many religious programmes on the radio and television, and all state schools begin their day with some kind of Christian worship. It is assumed that everyone has some form of religion, and not many people admit to being atheist. It is therefore fair to say that religion is at the centre of Barbados culture, and that one's religiosity, or the church attended can often be of significance in the acquisition of spiritual or religious capital. Some students speak of about receiving 'spiritual sustenance' from going to church. This I consider to be connected with the idea of hope, and is difficult to conceptualise in a detached and unbiased way. Although this 'spiritual sustenance' is often referred to by Barbadians, the term spirituality is seldom used, with people referring to themselves as 'religious'.

The decision to use 'religion' as a construct rather than 'spirituality' is in keeping with this local preference. The debate on the differences and similarities between the two concepts, and the cultural interpretation and connotations of the term 'spirituality' is considered to be outside the scope of this study.

Cultural studies draw attention to the importance of addressing the role that the cultural context of individuals plays in the formation of their mental processes and behaviour. Multi-cultural and postmodern theorists also embrace this cultural stance, and are including religious and other cultural aspects into their counselling approaches (Egan, 2010; Corey, 2010; McLeod, 2003). This means that an understanding of the religious dimension of the current participants must be considered within their cultural context. (The scope of this study remains focused on the participants' religion, yet at the same time being cognizant that their religion is not isolated, but remains fixed within their other lived experiences).

Considering the population of Barbados, especially the extent to which religious ideas are used in resolving problems there is an obvious interest in counselling training, even if the figures enrolled in my class are used as an example. Over the past seven years of teaching the course, between thirty to sixty persons apply to do this particular course annually.

Local knowledge shows that there are also other courses held at the teachers' college and other smaller institutions such as churches. Additional evidence supporting the need for and the growth of counselling is that therapeutic counselling is now recommended, for example, as an option to punitive action by the courts, and also as an alternative to addressing some social problems, where the church might have been used in the past to resolve the majority of societal concerns.

This study provides an interesting intersection where the application of counselling, as a scientific method meets and interacts with the more traditional or cultural religious attitudes and values presented by students as they seek to become counsellors who are able to relate to multi-cultural populations.

1.7 Researcher's stance

As well as being a practising counsellor, I am a trainer of counsellors, and have been a school teacher for a considerable part of my life. This research is therefore motivated by my interest in human development and learning, and is conducted through the lens of an educator and counselling practitioner. As a counsellor I have been trained how to bracket my views and to be aware of the influences of transference and countertransference within the counselling relationship. In section 3.8, I provide details of the trustworthiness strategies employed in this research to assist in bracketing my views as I have sought to provide an accurate account of the phenomena of religious belief, professional empathy and the possible interaction between the two. In order to be alert to the possibility that my personal prejudices and opinions have influenced the study, the following personal details provide an understanding of my background which influence the stance and position taken in this research.

Although I was raised in the Anglican tradition, and remain a committed Anglican, my views on religion and the role it plays in the lives of people have changed over time. As a child and in my early teenage years I accepted that Biblical teachings should be adhered to unconditionally. As an adult and latterly a researcher in the Social Sciences, although I still believe in the existence of God, I now see the Bible, together with its associated teachings, as a cultural artefact or construct which has evolved over many millennia, and which continues to evolve. As such I believe that the Bible and how it is interpreted maps out a continuously changing model for how human communities can best continue to flourish and to respond to evolutionary pressures.

I acknowledge that in the early stages of my life I used my religion both extrinsically and intrinsically – that is, my religion heavily shaped the way I conducted my daily life as I interacted with those around me (extrinsic usage), as well as providing me with a basis for reflecting on how the universe was created and how it continues to evolve and function (intrinsic usage). (cf Allport's intrinsic/extrinsic theory.) More recently, my religious beliefs align more closely with Batson, Schoenrade and Ventis's (1993) conceptualisation of Means and Quest as a way of shaping my moral and ethical values and for reflecting on important existential questions.

I now rarely use my religion in social situations, and I have to admit to a somewhat cynical view of how many subscribing to the Anglican faith, or indeed to other religious denominations, use their faith extrinsically to gain social and political advantage, or merely to avoid having to take responsibility for their own lives.

In respect of my personal stance on the question of professional empathy, I am of the firm belief that an effective counselling relationship is an empathic relationship. My experience as a practising counsellor, and the observations I have been able to make over thirty years in education and counselling, I conclude that that empathy is both an observable trait and a skill that is acquired in early life through developmental experiences and which in later life can be enhanced by professional training. I understand empathy as clearly distinguished from sympathy and compassion – conceptions which are often incorrectly ascribed by laypersons as being synonymous with the concept of empathy. (NB My perspective on professional empathy is further discussed in 2.4.2.)

My religious beliefs, my views on empathy and my experience of working with students and other professional counsellors, together with reflections on my own experience, left me at the time immediately prior to undertaking this research uncertain as to the influence the one phenomena may have on the other – hence my motivation to undertake the research now presented in this thesis. Having been born in Barbados and, as a consequence, into the culture the students on the current course years later have also been born into, I regard myself as being familiar with the local culture and religious predispositions of the students .

Part of my life was spent in the UK, where I completed my secondary education as well as my undergraduate, post-graduate education and my counselling training. As a result of this, a certain amount of acculturation and development would have taken place. I also have a view of Barbadian culture which may well be influenced by the Western European perspective that prevails in the UK. My perspective, based on the anecdotal evidence available to me as a resident of Barbados, is that a majority of Barbadians tend to rely on their religious belief extensively when making decision about their lives – in both extrinsic and intrinsic contexts. I believed, however, that the majority of the population would rely on religious teaching to a far lesser extent when making daily decisions about their lives. With these dual perspectives, I acknowledge that at the time the research started, I would not have been surprised to find that a student's ability to become professionally empathic was affected by their religious belief.

As noted above, the trustworthy strategies for managing the above opinions and possible prejudices are discussed in section 3.8. Immediately before this, towards the end of section 3.7, I discuss how I have used a constructionist stance in my analysis of the data and have

sought in my search to be unbiased in interpreting the students' statements, to explore the meaning ascribed to each statement at what Braun & Clarke (2006) describe as a latent level, rather than the shallower semantic level which is also possible. The ramifications of these strategies and possible implications of research bias entering the analysis and generation of conclusions are discussed in section 4.4.

1.8 Relevance of the study

A survey of the research literature at the University of the West Indies provides no evidence of research having been undertaken in the areas of empathy and religion within counselling psychology. The fact that counselling psychology is a relatively new discipline on the curriculum of the University of the West Indies in Barbados could explain this situation. I have been unable to find any published literature on the topic of counsellor training in Barbados.

This study, therefore, provides a contribution to the counselling psychology and education literature. It should provide an opening for students and practitioners seeking to improve their practice by paying attention to the issues addressed relating to the development of counselling training, particularly on their psychological development. A survey of the international empirical literature also shows limited research on how the religious views of the counsellor influences the counselling relationship, whereas there is an abundance of literature on the impact of the religious views of the clients on counselling outcomes.

This study is also relevant at this time because it provides the opportunity for an empirical investigation to be undertaken, and therefore make a useful theoretical and practical contribution to the needs of future students of the institution being researched. Counselling researchers, including McLeod (1994), state that there is, within the international community, a desire to understand more about the experiences of different cultures and the implications of this for multicultural counselling theory and practice. I believe that this study should also be seen as an addition to the cross-cultural counselling literature.

My literature search shows that the broad areas of counselling, empathy and religion have been widely researched. What makes this study different is that research of this kind has not been done in Barbados before. The context within which the study is situated presents an interesting and added dimension because, unlike elsewhere in the industrialised western world, religious explanations and references are regularly used as a normal part of everyday life. Of interest is how the student counsellor, who depends on her religious belief for guidance, will manage situations within a counselling context where a more psychologically based western European style approach is needed.

Most of the counselling theories that inform practice have been developed for western European and industrialised societies, within a particular socio-historical cultural context, and tend to be proposed as secular theories. Therefore, the particular philosophical stance and worldviews proposed by these theories may conflict with those of the students being researched. Some of these counselling theories also tend to be culturally biased, and cannot readily be applied cross culturally to the concerns and problem situations of people living in societies and cultures whose worldviews are different.

1.9 Organisation of chapters

The purpose of Chapter 1 is to introduce the research problem, and the reasons for carrying out this investigation. The rationale for the formation of the research question is given, with an explanation of why this question needs to be addressed. This chapter presents a frame or background for the study.

Chapter 2 presents the review of relevant literature. The purpose of this second chapter is to help locate the research question within the literature. By presenting some of the main arguments and assumptions posited regarding religious commitment and professional empathy, a conceptual framework for investigating the research problem will be developed.

Chapter 3 discusses both the general conceptual logic of the investigation and the specific details of the data collection. The reasons and purposes for collecting certain kinds of data are explained. It relates the ethical concerns for the study, the selection of respondents, the methods of data collection, the specific details of the data gathering instruments, and details regarding the analysis of data.

Chapter 4 presents the main findings of the study. A thematic analysis was used to identify and develop the main categories, known in the study as ‘manifestations’. The second part of this chapter analyses the six individual cases to show how the ‘manifestations’ are being used to justify the overall findings.

The aim of Chapter 5 is to use the ‘manifestations’ developed in chapter four to carry out further analysis in relation to three new cases. The reason for carrying out this analysis with three new cases is to find out if the manifestations as developed from the first six cases can be used effectively to understand how religious commitment can influence the development of professional empathy. The objectives of this independent analysis are to provide an additional perspective on the thematic analysis undertaken to derive the findings of the study and to demonstrate how the findings of the study can be used in future in practical classroom and research situations.

Chapter 6 brings the thesis to a close. The main conclusions are presented, as well as a brief reflection on the strengths and limitations of the research. Recommendations for further and future research are given, together with a final reflection on the contribution this research makes to the theoretical, methodological and practical domains in which the concepts of religious commitment and professional empathy are used.

2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The review of literature focuses primarily on the main arguments posited by theorists relevant to religious commitment and empathy in counselling.

In order to focus the study on understanding the role that student counsellors' religious commitment plays in the development of empathy, the literature was reviewed to find out what was already known about the phenomenon. The theoretical assumptions, and main concepts, which provide a rationale and framework for conducting and presenting my study, are also discussed.

It has been difficult to find empirical literature that has specifically investigated the specific topic of counsellor religion and its relationship with empathy.

A search of the libraries of the University of the West Indies for abstracts of dissertations, theses and journal articles relating to religion, counselling and empathy revealed that no relevant studies had been carried out locally or regionally. So that I could learn more about religion in Barbados, I compensated by enrolling in a Diploma of Theology class at Codrington College, University of the West Indies. The major websites PsycLIT, PsychInfo, Medline ERIC and Dissertations Abstracts were searched for published and unpublished studies that examined counsellor religion and empathy. The psychology of religion literature accessed was found to be conflicting and incomplete. McLeod (2003), Williams and Watts (2007), Paloutzian and Park (2005) and Hood et al (2009), are amongst many researchers who agree that the psychology of religion needs to be the subject of further systematic research.

In the literature there is not a clear distinction between religion and spirituality. Although spirituality issues overlap with religious issues, the focus of this study is on religious commitment. Any references to spirituality are used when the two concepts are taken to have the same meaning. I also searched the literature published by the American Psychological Association (APA) and the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) for research that could provide empirical findings regarding counsellors' religion and empathy.

The most recent and closely related research on counsellor religion and empathy that I found was carried out by Morrison & Borgen (2010), and Duriez (2004). Although researched in western industrialised cultures, these studies have provided comparable insights for use in this research. Additional searches were carried out on counsellor education programmes and training texts for use in the United States of America, and the United Kingdom. Kahle &

Robbins (2004) believe that religion is suppressed in many training programmes because some counsellors believe that religious issues should be referred to religious counsellors. In three of the main counselling training texts (Gladding, 2009; Corey, 2009; McLeod, 2003), I found that there was much consensus on the integrating of spirituality and counselling in counsellors' work. Outcome research has been widely researched, but little empirical work was found that focused on investigating how religion impacts the psychic function of empathy.

The empirical literature revealed much research where the purpose was to prove either the good or ill of religion, that is, researchers took a theological rather than a scientific approach to the study of religion, for example the research conducted by Morrison & Borgen (2010). The purpose of this current study is to investigate religious commitment. It is not to investigate spirituality; nor is it about religious, spiritual, or mystical experiences, although I acknowledge their importance in counselling. The transpersonal aspect of counselling theory and practice is outside the scope of this study.

Two obvious perspectives are the opposing arguments which provide the background for this research, that is, those theorists who see religion as playing a positive role in counselling practice, and those who do not. Although the research is not directly focused on whether religion should be included in counselling or not, and is written from a neutral analytical viewpoint, an understanding of current thought on the subject is relevant to get an overview of why it is important to study this phenomenon within this particular religious context at this particular time.

Of the two perspectives, there is that articulated by Feltham (1995, p. 93) who argues that 'it is essential to place counselling in a religious perspective because the concepts of conscience, covenant, community, altruism, love, confession, enlightenment, and many others are so central to religions, and have obviously informed counselling theory and practice'.

On the other hand, the opinion given by Heelas and Kohn (1996, p294) represents the voices of the other side: 'Psychotherapy (counselling) many would argue, is scientifically informed....within this frame of reference, religion or spirituality is the enemy.'

A survey of the literature revealed that historically, these two sides have remained distant, in an antagonistic relationship, but more recently, McLeod (2003), reflecting the views of other theorists and counselling trainers, recognises a 'rapprochement' of religion and science. He says that this is leading to better understanding of religious and psychological behaviour. An example of how this combining of religion and science can help understand problems of living was carried out by Rizzuto (1993) who recognised that 'the psychological literature on

religion offered abundant statistics about all types of religious subjects, but little that could help us understand living human beings.’ Her study showed, by re-defining the methods of psycho-analytic theory, how it could be used to understand the religious functioning of people.

Researching the concept of empathy provided a wealth of literature on the nature and functions of empathy. The empirical research was thoroughly reviewed, and the most relevant studies presented which could help in understanding the development of empathy. The research literature fell short in not being able to reach a consensus regarding the definition of empathy, the assessment of empathy, and the components of empathy. The literature review discusses some of the challenges surrounding the investigation of empathy, and identifies the most suitable approaches that could be used by practitioners within the field of counselling to gain a better understanding.

2.2 Organisation of the Review of Literature

The literature review begins by presenting a brief overview of the theory and practice of counselling providing the context within which the interrelationship of student counsellors’ religious commitment and empathy takes place.

Having established this counselling context, the review then explores the concept of empathy, by seeking a working definition. The review then examines the nature of empathy and how it is practically expressed in everyday life, and the role of empathy within counselling practice.

Of particular importance to the study is an understanding of the assessment and development of empathy. An overview of the main empathy assessment and measurement methods discussed in the literature is presented with the aim of identifying the most appropriate approach for use in the study.

The next section then examines the subject of religion as a significant part of the counsellor’s culture, and the importance of religious commitment. This is supplemented by a review of the views currently expressed in the literature on the psychology of religion. An exploration of the theoretical assumptions regarding how religious commitment can be assessed, and how religious commitment may influence counsellors’ values, perceptions and behaviour, with a particular focus on professional empathy is then provided.

The chapter concludes with a consideration of how some of the perspectives addressed in the chapter specifically motivate the research effort particularly in the interpretation of the positive and negative influences of religious commitment on the development of professional empathy.

2.3 Counselling Practice

2.3.1 Concept and definition

The basic definition of counselling used in this study is that issued by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. Although others may make a distinction between counselling and psychotherapy, during this study both terms are used interchangeably, and sometimes ‘therapy’ is used for variation.

The term counselling includes work with individuals and with relationships which may be developmental, crisis support, psychotherapeutic, guiding or problem solving. The task of counselling is to give the ‘client’ an opportunity to explore, discover and clarify ways of living a more satisfying and resourceful life.

(BAC 1984)

This definition highlights three important features that, for a full understanding, can usefully be explored: the objectives of the process; typical counselling clients; and, the nature of the therapeutic (counselling) relationship between the counsellor and client.

Irrespective of the counselling tradition or model employed, the literature is reasonably consistent in its assumption that counselling comprises a therapeutic relationship between a professional counsellor and a client that has the objective of helping the client to address one or more psychological needs. Casey (1996, p176), for example, sees this therapeutic relationship as having the objective of developing clients’ personal and public lives and helping them achieve their personal goals.

Rogers (1975) believes that counselling has the objective of enhancing a client’s psychological well-being, such that the client is then able to reach her full potential. An additional perspective is provided by Cephas (2010) whose view it is, that counselling has the objective of helping clients develop skills that may help them to effectively confront and cope with their uncertainties and conflicts. He further suggests that counselling provides clients with three developmental opportunities: a) to improve their relationships and generally increase their personal effectiveness; b) to improve their ability to solve personal problems; and c) with the help of the counsellor, to explore and express feelings more effectively, to examine beliefs, and, as a consequence, to work toward making healthy changes in their lives.

With reference to the types of client who attend counselling, the literature refers to normal cognitively functioning individuals as well as those who are mentally challenged (Casey 1996). In addition, Feltham and Dryden (1993, p. 6) suggest that counselling is sought by

people in distress or in some degree of confusion, who wish to resolve these conditions in a relationship which is more disciplined and confidential than friendship and perhaps less stigmatising than the helping relationships offered in traditional medical or psychiatric settings.

With respect to the dynamics of the counselling process, three significant features of counselling are articulated by Casey (1996) and Cephas (2010), respectively. The fact that counselling is theory based and can be a developmental or an interventional process, which focuses on the client's goals; secondly that counselling emphasizes the facilitative role adopted by counsellors, a facilitative role that is directed towards personal growth, development and self-understanding, and also that counselling should be a confidential, non-judgemental conversational process. A significant theme underlying this description is that, in practice, the counselling process provides clients with the chance to talk over what is on their minds and gives them an opportunity to improve their relationships and generally increase their personal effectiveness.

Theorists, including Feltham & Dryden (1993, p. 40) address the importance of the ethics governing counselling, and define counselling as a principled relationship characterised by the application of one or more psychological theories and a recognised set of communication skills, modified by experience, intuition and other interpersonal factors that respond to the client's intimate concerns, problems and aspirations. Feltham & Dryden (1993) further state that the predominant ethos of counselling is one of facilitation rather than giving advice or coercion.

The outline described above sets out the generic understanding of counselling that guides the course being investigated and also this study. So far, the word counselling has been used to refer to the main practice in which religious commitment and empathy play significant roles. I have avoided the use of psychotherapy, mainly due to the definitional conflicts between the concepts of counselling and psychotherapy. However, with the recognition that there might be slight differences, for the purpose of this study, unless otherwise specified, no distinction will be made between counselling, psychotherapy, and therapy: the words will be used as though they are interchangeable.

2.3.2 The Cultural Dimensions of Counselling

The literature appears to be particularly sparse on the question of the applicability of counselling practices in different cultural contexts. In discussing the importance of culture on counselling practice, McLeod (2003, p. 245) explains that the culture within which a person exists is complex, and by implication difficult to understand. He further states that this has implications for counsellors especially in light of multicultural counselling. Rather

than try to impose a prescribed counselling approach on to other cultures, McLeod recommends that the counsellor should take 'an emergent approach' to counselling, that is, that they should use a schematic model of the ways in which the personal and relational world of the client and the client's assumption about helping or 'cure' can be culturally constructed.

'Counselling', according to, McLeod (2003, p. 39) 'is an activity that is inextricably bound up with the culture of western industrial societies'. While this may be an accurate statement, the idea of people helping others in a 'counsellor style' situation, is according to Egan, (2007, p3) a cross-cultural phenomenon. McLeod's statement above perhaps refers to the origins and nature of modern day counselling, which has direct links with the Judaeo-Christian philosophies. However, without venturing into a historical debate, the fact that countries like Barbados would have been influenced by these same religious ideas, although not defined as a western industrialised society, is experiencing similar problems of living like other more developed societies. The difference here is that people are still strongly committed to their religion, and look to their religion for answers whereas in some western industrialised countries, counselling may be used more frequently.

Corey (1997, 2010) in his teaching texts, discusses the importance of being culturally skilled, and explains that it is going to be the culturally skilled counsellor, who is knowledgeable about the racial and cultural heritage of the client, who is going to be more likely to be effective in their counselling interactions. From an anthropologist's perspective, Geertz (1973), theorises that everything that members of a culture do represents some aspect of what life means to them; and this meaning has historical roots which have evolved and been shaped over many years. He explains that the complexity of cultural influences is difficult to understand and has important implications for counsellors. He concedes, however, that, as they can never hope to fully enter into the cultural reality inhabited by clients, counsellor need to be cautious when entering their lives.

Pederson (1991) proposes a new counselling perspective that takes into consideration the cultural context of the individual and he explains that it is membership of a culture or cultures that is one of the main influences on the development of personal identity. He also suggests that the emotional or behavioural problems a person brings to counselling are a reflection of how relationships, morality, and a sense of the good life are understood and defined in the culture(s) in which the person lives (1991). The perspectives offered by Geertz (1973) and by Pederson (1991), therefore, suggest that the cultural dynamics that influence both the counsellor and the client are therefore important considerations in determining the efficacy of a counselling relationship.

2.3.3 The Role of Empathy in Counselling

In the more recent (and nowadays more commonly encountered) forms of therapeutic relationship, including those found in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and Humanistic-Experiential Therapy practices (Patterson in Egan, 2010, p. 48), interventions with clients intentionally focus on establishing empathic communications between the counsellor and the client, thus requiring a different sort of relational dynamic to that exhibited by psychoanalytical/psychodynamic therapists.

A review of the counselling training literature reveals that, among the range of professional competencies, the concept of empathy is frequently identified as the most valuable and important attribute of the effective counsellor. The oft-times quoted assumption posited in person-centred therapy by Rogers (1967) that a warm, empathic relationship was one of the necessary and sufficient conditions for therapeutic change is accepted by many persons interested in the more humanistic approach to counselling. An examination of the major counselling theories reveals that, although techniques and strategies might differ, it is generally agreed that empathy is one of the key ingredients in promoting psychotherapeutic change. (Beck, Rush, Shaw and Emery, (1979); Bohart and Greenberg, (1997); Rogers 1967).

A contrary argument is proposed by Gladstein (1977) who, in a review of the literature on empathy, concluded that there was little evidence to support the belief that empathy facilitated counselling outcomes. He stated that ‘despite the large number of theory, discussion, case and process articles describing the positive relationship between empathy and counselling outcome, the empirical evidence remains unequivocal’.

In spite of the uncertainty this contrary argument may create, counselling trainers such as Egan (2007), Gladding (2009) and Nelson-Jones (1995), and theorists whose work focuses on the therapeutic relationship as in Humanistic/Existential approaches, continue to include empathy as a major component in counselling training. Clark (2007), having carried out extensive work into the understanding of empathy, shows how empathy, no matter the definition, plays a role in thirteen different approaches to helping such as nursing, social work and counselling. This study accepts that, given that, in order to help clients, counsellors need to be able to gain an accurate understanding of their clients’ emotional state, and communicate that understanding back to the client in a way that brings about a positive difference in the client. Without accurate perception and communication, effective counselling is unlikely to happen, according to Egan (2007). If these ideas about the value of empathy are accurate, there is enough reason why counsellors should endeavour to develop and use their empathic competence within their counselling interactions.

2.4 Empathy

2.4.1 Theoretical perspective on empathy

A review of the literature revealed much ambiguity and confusion regarding the meaning, outcome and nature of the concept empathy. In a review of the psychological and nursing literature, Morse et al (1992) suggest that the quandary about the meaning and components of empathy arises from the subjective nature of the concept, the complexity of the empathic process as well as the incomplete conceptualization in the literature.

Kunyk & Olson (2001) conducted a comprehensive analysis of the literature on empathy in 2001 and identified five possible perspectives: a) empathy as a human trait; b) empathy as a professional trait; c) empathy as a communication process; d) empathy as caring; and e) empathy as a special relationship (2001, p. 318). Carl Rogers (1959, pp. 210-211), the originator of Person-Centred Therapy, and the first major advocate of using empathy as a core counselling competence, initially defined empathy as a state of mind. He said that:

The state of empathy, or being empathic, is to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person, but without ever losing the 'as if' condition. Thus it means to sense the hurt or the pleasure of another as he senses it and to perceive the causes thereof as he perceives them, but without ever losing the recognition that it is as if I were hurt or pleased and so forth. If this quality is lost, then the state is one of identification.

Rogers (1995) suggested that empathy comprised two competences; the capacity of the counsellor to sense or feel what the client is feeling and the ability to communicate this sensitivity to the client at a level that is attuned to the client's emotional state. Truax & Carhuff (1967, p. 555) further qualified this definition by emphasising that the counsellor should try to gain deeper meanings than what Rogers suggested...

Accurate empathy involves more than just the ability of the therapist to sense the patient's 'private world' as if it were his own. It also involves more than what the patient means. Accurate empathy involves both the sensitivity to current feelings and the verbal facility to communicate this understanding in a language attuned to the client's current feelings.

A more recent and more expanded conceptualisation of empathy by Thwaites & Bennett-Levy (2007, p. 596) identifies seven characteristics of empathy comprising the following elements...

- 1) *Therapeutic empathy has both emotional and cognitive aspects;*
- 2) *Empathy involves a specific mode of information processing, where therapists can observe and reflect on their own emotional reactions in order to understand the client;*
- 3) *Empathy can be differentiated into four distinct components:*
 - a. *Empathic attunement as a perceptual skill;*
 - b. *Empathy as a therapeutic stance;*
 - c. *Empathic communication as a relational or communication skill;*
 - d. *Declarative knowledge which is acquired as part of a therapist training and may influence pre-existing empathic stance, attunement, and communication skills;*
- 4) *Empathy serves a number of functions in the therapeutic process;*
- 5) *Therapeutic empathy is likely to be a product both of long-standing aspects of 'the person of the therapist' and of knowledge and skills learned as a result of training;*
- 6) *Training strategies can be identified to promote therapeutic empathy;*
- 7) *Empathy is highly related to, but distinct from sympathy, validation and compassion.*

Thwaites & Bennett-Levy's perspective (2007), while on occasions using different terminology, reinforces the view that empathy is a trait driven competence and a communication process, similar to that identified by Kuyk & Olson (2001). What it adds to the definition of empathy is the suggestion that the Kuyk & Olson's (2001) 'communication process' is more than merely exchanging information in a way that is acceptable to the therapist and the client (2001).

With their mention of 'specific modes of information processing' and of 'training strategies', for example, Thwaites & Bennett-Levy (2007) suggest that 'communication process' is one of engaging in specific communication strategies that use professionally developed competencies and models of therapeutic intervention to achieve rigorously defined therapeutic outcomes. Their identification of sympathy, validation and compassion as not constituting empathy further delineates what empathy is and what it is not.

The real value of Thwaites & Bennett-Levy's (2007) model lies in the progression it shows for a counsellor to reach what Thwaites & Bennett-Levy refer to 'complex empathic attunement'. As can be seen from the figure, there are two pre-cursor competences, 'natural empathic attunement' and 'cognitive empathic attunement', that need to be developed before a counsellor can be considered to possess 'complex empathic attunement'. These precursor

competences appear to match directly with Kunyk & Olson’s (2001) classifications of ‘empathy as a human trait’ and ‘empathy as a professional trait’.

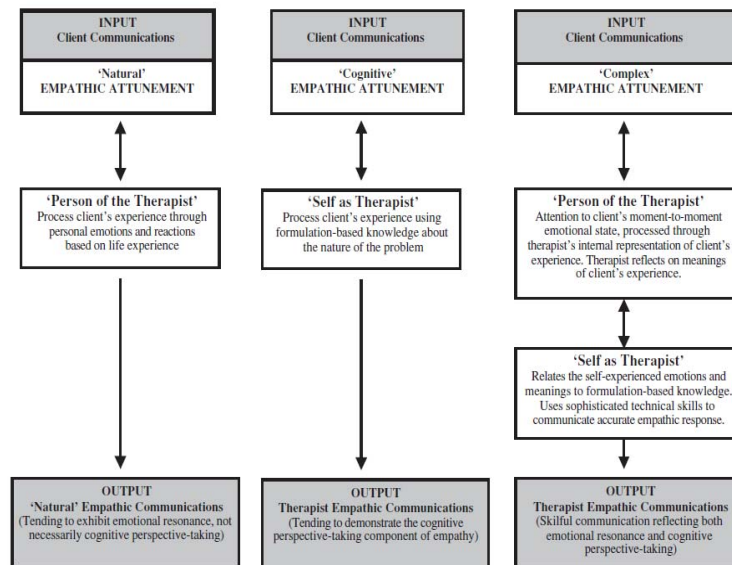


Figure 1: Thwaites & Bennett-Levy Model of Empathic Components

Thwaites & Bennett-Levy’s (2007) articulation of the component parts of empathy fits closely with the conceptualisations proposed by other theorists, including Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright (2004) who delineate empathy into ‘affective, natural or innate empathy’ and to ‘cognitive empathy’.

Note: Elsewhere in this thesis, the term ‘professional empathy’ has been used to indicate the competence identified by Thwaites & Bennett-Levy as ‘complex cognitive empathy’.

The developing viewpoint set out in this section is agreeable with the viewpoint advanced by Egan (2007) who expressed the opinion that ‘accurate empathy’ is achieved only when counsellors have the ability to view clients’ worlds from the clients’ point of view and are able to communicate this understanding back, using the counsellor competences of: (a) perceptiveness; (b) know-how; and (c) assertiveness.

To conclude this section, having developed an understanding of empathy as a human trait, a professional trait and a communication process (Kunyk & Olson, 2001), it would appear reasonable to acknowledge Kunyk & Olson’s remaining ‘empathy as caring’ and ‘empathy as a special relationship’ as additional definitional boundaries within which to discuss what we mean by empathy and the context within which empathy is used by counsellors in their therapeutic interventions.

2.4.2 Practical expression of empathy in everyday life

Of particular importance to counsellors in training is a knowledge of what empathy is like in a practical sense. That is how the counsellor can understand what they are seeking to achieve using their everyday experiences to construct a working model of what constitutes professional empathy. Eisenberg, Murphy and Shepard (in Ikes 1997, pp73-104) summarise the literature up to and including 1997 concerned with defining what constitutes empathic practice. Their analysis highlights the term “perspective taking” as emerging from their literature review, with “perspective taking” having three aspects according to Ford (1979) and Shantz (1975)...

- 1) *Visual perspective taking – the ability to take another’s perspective visually*
- 2) *Affective perspective taking – the ability (or tendency) to understand another’s emotional state*
- 3) *Cognitive (or conceptual) perspective taking – the ability (or tendency) to understand another’s cognition*

Their review of the literature on how human beings acquire these three “perspective taking” competencies highlights the evidence that exists to describe how infants and older children acquire the skills to “understand their own and others’ mental states” (p75). Two particular aspects emerging from their analysis are: firstly, that a child’s developing “perspective taking” skills focus on individual emotions (e.g. fear, anger, disgust, and so on); and secondly, that this developing “perspective taking” takes place within (and is influenced by) the “context” and “culture” within which the decoding process takes place. They point particularly to the child’s developing ability to decode the more complex emotions (e.g. disgust, shame and guilt), where an accurate interpretation of another’s emotional state is dependent on an understanding of the ‘context’ and ‘culture’ within which the emotion is being experienced. In their analysis, Eisenberg, Murphy and Shepherd also point to the need for a child’s developing empathy to move from the egocentric frame of reference existing when they are born and into their infancy, to a non-egocentric frame of reference, whereby they have the ability in later life to appreciate and take into account of the fact that other people have desires, beliefs and thoughts which influence those persons’ emotional states (p104) – and therefore the accuracy with which the observer can achieve empathic accuracy.

While apparently remote from how the notion of empathy can be appreciated in a practical, day-to-day sense, Eisenberg, Murphy and Shepherd’s analysis usefully provides a practical view on what the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy model refers to as ‘natural empathy’. Furthermore, their analysis shows that even children have the ability to start developing an early form of cognitive empathy, whereby they can start to reflect on another person’s

emotional state. For the student counsellor, therefore, there arises the notion that their professional empathic competence needs to develop in a way that appreciates the characteristics of individual emotions and the context and culture within which a client's emotions are presented.

Hodges and Wegner's review of the literature between 1949 and 1996 (1997, pp 311-339) observes that empathy has both emotional and cognitive components and that these components can occur either automatically, where there is no reflection on the part of the observer, or in a controlled way, where the observer's empathic reaction is shaped by their conscious thought. In the first instance, where an empathic reaction occurs automatically, Hodges and Wegner use the example of religious zealots who by definition automatically adopt a viewpoint which aligns with their churches' teaching – an empathic perspective that not necessarily reflects the context and culture of the person who is being observed. In the second instance, where an empathic reaction occurs in a controlled way, Hodges and Wegner use examples which highlight the 'hard and effortful task' of purposefully reflecting on the person's emotions and the context and the cultural environment within which the emotions are being experienced, to gain empathic accuracy (p320). Building on this, Hodges and Wegner (p325) suggest...

All told...the production of perspectives is a difficult and effortful process that requires the use of cognitive strategies to introduce the right items to our attention: the situational cues, facial expressions, goal information, reminders of our own experience, and other "handholds" that can yield accurate empathy.

They then note that "controlled empathy" can further be observed being used directly or indirectly. In the first instance, empathic accuracy is enhanced by the observer thinking carefully and purposefully about the person's emotional circumstances. In the second, our empathic reactions can either be enhanced or suppressed by, for example, focusing our attention on or averting our eyes away from visual clues (e.g. studying or looking away from scenes of an atrocity shown in a film).

Finally, in the concluding section of Hodges and Wegner's work, they propose a theory of "ironic processes in empathy control". While the detailed conception of their theory is outside the scope of this thesis, it is relevant to note the interaction this theory proposes between the primary thought process initiated when an observer seeks to engage in a controlled empathic process (involving a search for meaningful information on which to rely) and the secondary thought processes that frequently occur in parallel that have the potential to subvert the first thought process, with contradictory information – hence the proposed terminology 'ironic processes in empathy control'.

Hodges and Wegner state...

The upshot of this reasoning is that controlled empathy can sometimes produce an opposing automatic effect – a tendency to take perspectives that are consciously rejected or to abandon perspectives that are consciously sought. We suspect that this tendency may underlie many of the instances in daily life when we find that our attempts to influence our own levels of empathy descend rapidly into perverse and counterintuitive errors of perspective taking.

(pp 328-329)

A particular circumstance they mention is that of mental overload (e.g. potentially overwhelming thoughts arising in stressful situations) subverting the observers attempt to arrive at an objective perspective that is free from any biases and contradictory thoughts.

For the student counsellor, the implications of Eisenberg, Murphy and Shepard's and Hodges and Wegner's observations are that within the structure for empathic competence offered, for example, by the Thwaites and Bennett-Levy model discussed above, is that they can be empathic without apparently possessing any meta-knowledge – indeed they are likely through their early, teenage and adult development years likely to have developed a certain level of natural empathy, which they can access automatically. They may have also acquired through this developmental process (particularly in the latter teenage and early adult years) the ability to apply a certain degree of controlled (c.f. cognitive) empathy. For the enhanced accuracy required by the concept of professional empathy, however, they are likely to require further knowledge of and ability to apply the skills needed to manage the cognitive processes that can impact the accuracy of the outcomes of a counsellor's reflections on a client's empathic status.

2.4.3 Measurements of Empathy

Having sought to define the meaning of empathy, it is now appropriate to consider how empathic competence has been measured in practice. As with the definitions of empathy considered in the previous section, the systematic and accurate measurement of empathic competence is also complicated by the contradictory perspectives evident in the literature. To consider this topic in detail, nine survey instruments and assessment frameworks have been examined. The conclusion is that there is still a diversity of views on what actually needs to be measured when determining a person's empathic competence. Davis (1980; 1983) suggests, for example, that the measurement of empathic competence requires examination of two criteria: 'empathy as a process' and 'empathy as an outcome'. According to Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright (2004), however, such measurements require the

measurement of what they refer to as ‘state empathy’ and ‘trait empathy’; ‘trait’ signalling inherited empathy and ‘state’ signalling what is currently being experienced.

Even more recently, Thwaites & Bennett-Levy (2007), with their qualitative assessment framework for professional counsellors, have suggested that it the person’s ‘natural empathy’, ‘cognitive empathy’ and ‘complex cognitive empathy’ competences that need to be addressed. Thwaites & Bennett-Levy (2007) highlight a need to consider at a practice level a person’s empathic ‘stance’, ‘attunement’, ‘communication’, and ‘knowledge’ in any assessment of empathic competence. Notwithstanding the above proposed focal points for measurement, with a consideration of the objective of empathic competence being to understand another person’s emotional state, the empathic person must always be seen to have the ability to operate in what cognitive psychologists define as the ‘affective domain’ and the ‘cognitive domain’ – fundamental domains that sometimes appear to map directly with the theories of Davis (1996), Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright (2004) and Thwaites & Bennett-Levy (2007).

A widely used approach is Hogan’s empathy scale (Hogan, 1969), which measures empathic competence as a cognitive process. Mehrabian & Epstein (1972) defined empathy in terms of its affective qualities, with their questionnaire being designed for the measurement of ‘emotional empathic competence’. Davis’ Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) instrument claims to combine both cognitive and affective aspects of empathy, but suffers from the criticism that it also measures factors which are only tangential to empathic competence (e.g. imagination, emotional self-control, and such like).

Although it is outside the scope of this study to critique these scales in detail, suffice it to say that elsewhere they have been used to: determine an individual’s high or low empathy (Hogan, 1969); to rate individuals’ emotional responses given a number of situations; and, referring to Davis’ questionnaire, to rate individuals using the four subscales of ‘perspective taking’, ‘fantasy’, ‘empathic concern’, and ‘personal distress’, these four subscales consisting of items relating to both cognitive and affective elements of empathy (Davis, 1996). Although Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright (2004) agree that Davis’s (1996) scale was ‘the best measure of empathy to date’, they concluded that it measured ‘processes broader than empathy’, and although correlating with the concept of empathy, the processes assessed could not always be regarded as empathy. They noted that researchers in the area of empathy ‘have traditionally fallen into two camps; theorists who have viewed empathy in terms of affect, and theorists who have taken a more cognitive approach’.

They argued that ‘both approaches are essential to defining empathy and that in most instances, the cognitive and affective cannot be easily separated’ (2004, p. 165). With their

continuing research into the link between autism and empathy, Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright (2004) designed their Empathy Quotient questionnaire to measure the broader psychological processes which they considered to be related to individuals' empathic ability. Although their research was carried out with high-functioning Asperger's individuals (according to Baron-Cohen these are individuals who have an empathy deficiency), the results are still considered useful in moving forward an understanding of empathic qualities in regular people, as well as counsellors (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004).

It continues to appear, however, that there is not yet a consensus on how empathy can be measured satisfactorily. Stueber (2012) observes that...

Remarkably, no significant correlation has been found between the scores on various empathy scales and the measurement of empathic accuracy.

Although the extent of Stueber's (2012) research is unclear, it is of interest to note that his opinion is based on the views, amongst others, of Davis & Kraus (1997), who concluded that the failure of different measurement approaches to correlate between themselves resulted from limitations of self-reporting questionnaires. Furthermore, Stueber (2012), again relying on Davis & Kraus's (1997) opinions, states that...

...the lack of correlation indicates that people in general have little meta-knowledge regarding their empathic ability.

Stueber (2012) also highlights a fundamental concern with the questions that some of the questionnaires ask. Referring to the work of Holz-Ebeling & Steinmetz (1995), Stueber (2012) expresses the opinion...

Particularly in Hogan's and Mehrabian and Epstein's questionnaires, one has to be worried about the insufficient semantic correspondence between the content of the items probed and the conception of empathy presumed by the authors of the questionnaire or even the concepts of empathy as articulated in [by those questionnaires].

A key concept in considering which measurement instrument to use appears to be that of 'empathic accuracy' as explored by Ickes and contributing authors in their book called Empathic Accuracy (Ickes, 1997). Using this concept, Stueber (2012) goes on to express the view that even the Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright (2004) EQ questionnaire, although the best available at this time, does not provide empathic accuracy. His view is that...

...neither the authors' definition nor their included items sufficiently distinguish between affective empathy, sympathy, and personal distress. As many other

authors, [Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright] tend to think of affective empathy as an amalgam of empathy proper, sympathy, and personal distress.

On a positive note, two relatively recent developments present a more optimistic outlook. Firstly, the publication by Thwaites & Bennett-Levy in 2007 of their natural, cognitive, and complex cognitive model to describe in detail the competences required to effectively address the affective and cognitive competences that make up empathy, while not a measurement instrument as such, does now provide what appears to be a useful framework within which to assess the competence of a counsellor.

Secondly, with advances in social cognitive neuroscience, there have been advances in mapping what happens in the brain as a person exhibits empathic (or non-empathic) behaviour and relating this neural activity knowledge in with other theories on empathy (Decety & Jackson, 2004; Gazzola, Aziz-Zadeh, & Keysers, 2006). This development has allowed Gerdes, Lietz, & Segal (2011) to start development of an Empathy Assessment Index, which from early trials appears to provide a more accurate method of assessing a person's empathic competence than previously available instruments.

2.4.4 How Counsellors develop Empathy

Rogers (1975), referring to Person-Centred therapy (but attributable to other counselling approaches as well, such as Thwaites & Bennett-Levy's (2007) Cognitive Behaviour theoretical assumptions), expresses the opinion that empathy can be learned. This viewpoint is supported by the fact that most counselling training manuals and courses include the theory and practice of empathy in an effort to expose their students to exercises in developing empathy (Egan, 2007; Corey, 2009; Gladding, 2009).

Dryden (1996), author of several counselling texts, has observed that the ability of the therapist to be empathic is not developed overnight. He justifies his statement by saying that, because 'a client's inner world is complex and confusing', the counsellor needs to be able to 'marshal the full range of their emotional and cognitive abilities if they are to convey their understanding thoroughly' (p. 135).

An understanding of the kind of empathy needed by a counsellor within the counselling relationship consists of both affective and cognitive elements. Several psychologists including developmental, cognitive and social theorists, Mead (1934), and Piaget (1932), have identified the importance of empathy in social understanding. Piaget (1932), for example, theorized that interpersonal skills encourage altruism and moral thought. He explained that as the child's cognitive structures evolve, such as role-taking, the child learns to decentre, or become less ego-centric, and becomes more able to anticipate, identify, and

understand what another individual may be thinking. Presenting this background to empathic development in individuals is important for an understanding of the development of empathy as a broad value or personality disposition begins early in life.

This study, however has presented a definition of empathy for counsellors as residing in both the affective and the cognitive domains (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004) therefore counselling training attempts to increase the student counsellor's empathic abilities by teaching her how to respond using both components.

Since counselling research suggests that the empathic relationship is essential for effective therapy, most counselling training texts pay much attention in enabling student counsellors to become competent and confident in the skills associated with the development of empathy. In Chapter 6 of Egan's 'The Skilled Helper' and the accompanying workbook (2007), he identifies a number of communication skills that are important for student counsellors to practice and become skilled to become empathic professionals. These communication skills include particular types of listening and questioning, responding both verbally and non-verbally, showing perceptiveness, and being assertive.

It is believed that if counsellors have already started a programme of awareness of their values and beliefs, and have come to understand the importance of developing an empathic relationship, according to Egan (2007, p. 44), within a structured processed based programme, counselling students can learn how to bring about this state of empathy in themselves. Counselling trainers can choose from a wide range of assessment tools developed to test students' empathic development status.

2.4.5 Barriers to the Development of Empathy

The main goal of counselling is to assist a client to reach full self-awareness and understanding so that she can live more effectively. The role of the counsellor, as mentioned before is to connect with the client in such a way, that she can experience what it is like to 'walk in the other's shoes'. However, this does not always happen, and this is one of the main reasons why empathy as a skill needs to be taught to student counsellors. This section examines some of the perceived barriers to empathy, and narrows the focus to show the significance of religious commitment as a potential barrier.

Patterson (1985) lists differences in sex, age, religion, socio-economic status, education and culture as impediments in the development of empathic understanding between counsellors and clients. Although not an exhaustive list, counsellors who are keen to help their clients need to be aware of all of the factors mentioned, and indeed equip themselves with the

knowledge to work effectively with all types of clients regardless of the differences they encounter.

It is my understanding that the counsellors' religious belief could be a potential barrier, but acknowledge that religious belief is not an isolated construct; it is complicated by both the values and attitudes which are a part of its nature, and also the position it holds within a complex arrangement of cultural and other variables.

Having differing religious views and 'remaining loyal to one's faith' are often identified by the counsellor in training as prohibiting full empathic understanding of the client's situation. The ability to suspend one's personal beliefs and views, and enter the subjective reality of clients is accepted by most counselling theories as an essential competence (Rogers, 1975).

The suspension or bracketing of one's views and beliefs in order to experience the client's world involves the complex processes of, among others, the client's transference, and the counsellor's counter-transference. These two phenomena, which the counsellor learns to understand, can be used to enhance or hinder the counselling process. Mention is made of these phenomena because of the important role that these counsellor and client responses can play in counselling in general and empathy in particular.

As an enquiry that introduces the counsellors' religious frame of reference as a major contributing factor in influencing empathic ability, this study also addresses what other researchers have found about the negative and positive influences of religious belief, and whether religious commitment makes a positive or negative contribution to the development of empathy.

2.5 Religion and Religious Commitment

2.5.1 Concepts and definitions

The search for definitions of religion that can be used in a psychological context resulted in conclusions similar to Batson, Schoenrade and Ventis (1993) who suggested that religion is a difficult concept to operationalize. The following conceptualisations helped to confirm my understanding that, within the social sciences, there is not usually a clear and concise definition of terms, but a variety of contributing ideas, which might work together in a multi-dimensional way to bring clarity to the concept.

A thorough review of the literature on psychology revealed that although there is an upsurge in interest in religious or spirituality issues, there are few empirical studies which produce psychological analyses of religious phenomena (Belzen & Hood, 2006; Hood & Belzen, 2005). Yinger (1967), in trying to find a workable definition, concluded that any definition

of religion is likely to be satisfactory only to its author, suggesting that the author should develop a suitable workable definition which fits the purpose of the research.

This rather cynical, but seemingly often expressed opinion is supported by Zinnbauer & Pargament (2005), who concluded that there was no consensus on what actually constituted religious (belief) and that prospects for a consensus in the near-term future were remote. The most useable theoretical assumptions identified were found in the area of cultural psychology and anthropology. Clifford Geertz (1973), for example, in his work as an anthropologist, located the concept of religion firmly within a sociological framework. He suggests that religious belief typically comprised five complementary components...

- 1) *A system of symbols;*
- 2) *Which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men;*
- 3) *By formulating conceptions of a general order of existence; and*
- 4) *Clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that;*
- 5) *The moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.*

He also observed that religion, like culture, is a system of communication. From a critical and psychotherapeutic perspective, Edwards (1998), sees religion as a dogmatic system of thought which urges us to seek truth outside ourselves; whether from priests, gurus, ancient texts, or a transcendent and immanent God (p. 209). This sentiment has echoes of the theoretical assumptions of object relations theory, which perceives religion as a process where individuals perceive God as an object on which to depend.

Bergin (1991), well known in religious circles for his extensive research into religious matters, defines religion as a multidimensional construct with conflicting qualities and effects; a view supported by Paloutzian and Park (2005, p. 8), who perceive religion not as being one thing, but as a multidimensional variable that is among the most complex properties of the human mind.

This idea of religion as a property of the human mind introduces the psychological aspect of religion which is challenging because one can only make assumptions about how religion influences an individual's psychological processes, because of the complexity of the nature of religion.

Another view, that of Rizzuto (1993), a Christian psycho-analyst, is that religion, or its absence, is not a separate realm of the person, but an integral part of a personally organised belief system dynamically organised by the developing self, and that it is not possible to tease apart religious belief or unbelief from the fabric of the self.

2.5.2 The psychology of religion

As noted in the previous section, the psychology of religion is an area in which there is a history of there being little consensus amongst theorists and empirical researchers (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). As is evident from the current literature the issues in reaching a consensus can perhaps be said to arise from three factors: the complexity surrounding the concept of religion itself; the lack of clarity over the interaction between religion and spirituality; and the profusion of potential interactions between a person's cognitive, emotional, social and moral functioning, which, given the number of religious persuasions in the world, is impacted by a multiplicity of cultural and other phenomenological differences existing between the people of interest to academics and empirical researchers. This already complex situation is made more complex by the occurrences, as reported by, for example, Nielsen, Hatton and Donahue (2013), of 'individuals carrying multiple, potentially conflicting, identities, as when conservative Christians who are homosexuals are faced with reconciling their religious views with their sexuality'.

Within this apparent morass of complexity, Paloutzian and Park (2013) bring together useful guidance on how best to consolidate a conceptual model in order to facilitate an overall understanding of the psychology of religion. They reiterate the conception of a Religious Meaning System (RMS) originally discussed in the first edition (2005) of their *Handbook on the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*. They also propose the idea of the Multilevel Interdisciplinary Paradigm (MIP), a conception that acknowledges that 'research on religiousness and spirituality needs to be conducted at all levels of analysis, the findings need to be related to each other, and the knowledge therefrom needs to be integrated'. In addition, they observe that over recent years the psychology of religion has been more fully integrated into the general field of psychology, with a growing acknowledgement that religion (together with its attendant spirituality) can play a significant role in what Paloutzian and Park refer to as 'human welfare' (p. 7).

In a practical sense, in order to build on Paloutzian and Park's themes, it is useful to consider the views of Watts and Williams (2007) who recommend a cognitive approach to understanding why people are religious. Watts and Williams express the opinion that psychological theories provide a more useful way of understanding religious belief than a reliance of meta-theoretical constructs. Within this light, the literature suggests a growing research interest in psychological theories such as attachment theory, coping theory, lifespan theory and attribution theory for gaining better insights into understanding religious behaviour. For example, Pargament (2007) reports on the use of attribution theory to help clients redirect their emotional experiences within a religious setting. Also, over the past

several decades, there has been an upsurge in research that attempts an understanding of the psychological processes of individuals as they engage in religious practices. For example, Gubi (2008) investigates the use of prayer in mainstream counselling and demonstrates how prayer can be psychologically understood; and West (2004) examines how counsellors can usefully integrate spirituality into the therapeutic encounter.

Piedmont (2013) charts the growth of interest in the psychology of religion and spirituality over the four years that the APA Psychology of Religion and Spirituality journal has been published. He observes that the ‘field has grown and matured tremendously’, with much ‘high-quality, interdisciplinary, empirical research conducted on the topics of spirituality and religiousness’. His review of the literature shows that the subject can be broken down into four fundamental parts. Firstly, there is the school of thought that sees religion as a cultural entity / artefact, orientated to providing the individual with an understanding of what is required to live a pro-social life. Secondly, there is the school of thought that sees religion through the lens of a coping and well-being mechanism, a mechanism to be used, for example, when depression, grief or sadness set in. Thirdly, there is a literature that sees religion through the lens of the power dynamics available within society, by being a member of a religious order or community (Allport’s (1950) conception of extrinsic, immature religion). The literature also acknowledges that some find religion helpful in understanding imponderable existential questions – for example: How was the universe created? Why am I here? What happens when I die? (Allport’s (1950) conception of intrinsic, mature religion, and Batson et al’s (1993) concept of Quest.)

A difficulty evident in the literature, however, is, as observed by Piedmont (2013), that at least some of the above perspectives are often regarded in the light of a person’s spiritual behaviours and practices, rather than in the light of their religious beliefs per se. This then calls into question how the literature, psychologists and those involved in psychotherapy distinguish between the two concepts. In section 2.5.3 of the thesis, a distinction is made by the Dalai Lama between religion and spirituality, but mention is made here because religion is hardly ever addressed without mention of the spiritual aspect, a perspective that aligns with Pargament’s (2007) view that spirituality is a ‘function of religion’.

While this thesis is concerned with ‘religious commitment’, an understanding of the psychology of religion can benefit from the closely associated, and sometimes overlapping subject of the psychology of spirituality, as discussed below.

2.5.3 Religion and spirituality

Although the words ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’ are sometimes used synonymously, it is important to acknowledge that they are in practice different concepts. The difference is explained by the Dalai Lama in Davis (1996, p. 22) which he states...

Religion is concerned with faith in the claims of one faith tradition or another, and is connected with systems of belief, ritual prayer and related formalised practices and ideas. In contrast, spirituality is concerned with qualities of the human spirit, including positive psychological love and compassion, patience, contentment, personal responsibility and a sense of harmony with one’s environment.

It is clear, however, that the term ‘religious belief’ may sometimes be used synonymously with the term ‘spirituality’, particularly when the term ‘spirituality’ is used in the context of a belief in God and the associated doctrines of a religious faith.

The foregoing review of academic viewpoints points to the complexity in reaching a working definition of religion mainly due to the multidimensional nature of the concept. For the purpose of the current study, I will use a multidimensional definition incorporating some of the main ideas discussed above and accept that, as now discussed in more detail below, religion is a complex cultural construct that can be closely associated with the properties of empathy.

2.5.4 Religion, culture and empathy

The social sciences, in particular social and cultural psychology and anthropology provide theoretical assumptions to help in understanding how our attitudes, perceptions and values are informed by the culture in which we are socialized and live. Culture, defined as a unique meaning and information system, shared by a group and transmitted across generations, that allows the group to meet basic needs of survival, pursue happiness and well-being, and derive meaning from life is accepted as a given within this study, and it provides a platform for the foundation on which this study is based (Matsumoto & Juang, 2008).

There is no doubt that religious beliefs provide a pervasive cultural influence in many societies. In order to understand the implications of this influence on the counselling process, this part of the literature review focuses on demonstrating the extent to which religion can be regarded as a cultural phenomenon and then, looking into the detail, how as a cultural phenomenon, religious belief might impact a person’s empathy. To provide the most insightful context for the study, the review of the literature set out here will focus particularly on counsellors and how their competences might be influenced by religious belief as a cultural phenomenon.

In line with my understanding of psychological theories of behaviour, I have adopted the viewpoint that all humans possess the same human mental processes, but that as individuals we respond differently according to, among other factors, the cultural influences to which we are exposed; the experiences we have had (particularly during the process of socialisation and education processes). The way in which we perceive the world is also informed by these processes.

McLeod (2003, p. 244) observes that the original foundational approaches to counselling were clearly 'mono-cultural' in nature, designed especially for western, mainly American, industrialised societies, and had little to say about culture or cultural difference. In response to demands by culturally sensitive theorists, however, Pederson (1991) suggests that membership of a culture (or cultures) is one of the main influences on the development of personal identity, and that the emotional or behavioural problems a client might bring to a counselling session are a reflection of how relationships, morality and the sense of the good life are understood and defined in the culture(s) in which that person lives.

As an example of the non-western European dynamic alluded to by Pederson (1991) (an example which is particularly relevant to this study), Hylton (2002) observes that as manifested in their talking, singing, eating, drinking and in virtually every artistic, social and political activity, religion is very deep rooted among the Caribbean people. The historical role played by religion in the 'struggles of people', according to Hylton, has been so influential, that any socio-political analysis or any contemporary political movement that fails to take this fact into account will undoubtedly be committing a grave error (2002, p. 1). Although relating to culture in general, it can be seen from Hylton's (2002) observation, that Pederson's (1991) opinion can equally be focused on the impact religion, as a cultural construct, can have on both counsellor and client.

By bringing attention to the interplay between culture and religion and how these two constructs from a sociological perspective influence family beliefs and values, child rearing goals and practices, and ultimately, the developing individual, Spilka, Hood, et al (1996, pp. 80-81) provide two useful insights into the function in practice aspect of religion. Initially, they point to the extent to which religious practice can define and shape an individual's personal experiences, belief systems and identity, seeing 'faith' or 'religious belief' as a key feature of human existence, a key feature which offers guidance on such conditions as human suffering and the causes of mental and moral problems.

Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger & Gorsuch (1996) then, as their second observation, build on the first observation by pointing to the fact that, although there are major differences in the explanations adopted by practitioners, 'religion' and 'counselling therapists' are pursuing, in

their respective quests for the better understanding of the uncertainties of life, the same goals (pp. 80-81). This second observation, suggesting that 'religion' and 'counselling therapy' are pursuing the same / similar goals, is reinforced and expanded on by the views of existential therapist Van Deurzen (1999), who suggests that 'counselling therapy' is now not only fulfilling a similar function to 'religious belief', but is indeed being replaced in modern western society by counselling therapeutic practice as a new paradigm for living.

2.5.5 The therapeutic value of religion

In the foregoing discussion, religion was perceived as having negative influences on empathy. There is much research which addresses the positive value of religion, and although a direct link may not always be seen, the social-level experiences gained by the religious counsellor can be favourable to the individual's developing personality, which for me, includes the ability to be empathic. Blando (2006), claims that religion helps the counsellor to support her clients connecting to others, and helps the counsellor to participate in positive social relations as well as social and community activities.

Rizzuto (1993) is of the opinion that knowing about persons' religious/spiritual functioning can provide useful information regarding their relationships with other people. It would seem reasonable to extend this opinion to encompass the religious and spiritual functioning of counsellors when she says...

The relationship that a religious counsellor has with God is also a useful predictor in assessing how a client will respond to her clients. The type of God and religious beliefs a person has is a precious document of the individual's psychic vicissitudes during development. (p. 18)

Within this setting, counselling could be described as a form of positive psychology, where a counsellor is entrusted to assist a client to live a more positive life, and in this case, the counsellors themselves would be expected to demonstrate the positive empathic characteristics paramount to the counselling process and outcomes.

Among the theoretical explanations with which beginning counsellors may become acquainted are ideas taken from Object Relations Theory and Attachment Theory. Both theories can offer insights into how individuals' early experiences can shape their interpersonal styles, as well as their predisposition to religion. These interpersonal styles lead to patterns of interaction such as re-enacting parental dynamics in later life situations.

With a particular focus on religion, Object Relations Theory assumes that one's level of 'object relations development' is highly associated with the nature and quality of one's relationship with God. Attachment theory also seeks to explain how individuals attach

themselves to a safe and protective entity, in the case of Christians, this entity is God. In both cases, devout believers would relieve themselves of all responsibility and allow God to look after them. These ways of being are significant for counsellors who might be using their religious values, intentionally or unintentionally to assist their clients.

2.5.6 The influence of religion on empathy

In a study of Catholic undergraduate students, Luyten, Corvelyn and Fontaine (1998) and Muse (1992) found a positive relationship between empathy and religious integration in Christian graduate students. Similarly, Maciak (2002) found a positive correlation in his study of spiritual well-being and empathy in Christian graduates. And using the critical incident technique, Morrison and Borgen (2010) concluded that religion and spirituality tended to help rather than hinder a counsellor's empathy towards their clients.

In their study, Morrison & Borgen (2010) required twelve Christian counsellors to identify incidents when they believed that their religion or spirituality had helped or hindered their empathy. According to the researchers, the methodology used provided rich and insightful findings to a little researched phenomenon, and has paved the way for others to build on this kind of research. This having been said, Morrison & Borgen (2010, p. 14) pointed out that 'the key motivation for some participants was to combat negative perceptions that Christianity is about rules and judgement'.

Duriez (2004), in his research into the religion/empathy relationship suggested that the religious-empathy relationship should be understood in terms of how people process religious content, rather than in terms of whether or not people are religious. In his study of 375 Psychology students from a Belgian university, he concluded that religion had no connection whatsoever with empathy. It is interesting to note here that the students investigated were not religious.

2.5.7 The measurement of religious functioning

A review of the literature revealed numerous studies that explored the different components of religiousness or religiosity in people. Most studies were found which used single or quantitative measures.

Tsang & McCulloch in Davis (2003, p49) see the need to develop measurement strategies which can assess broad dispositional differences in religious tendencies or traits so that one might draw conclusions about how religious a person is.

Having developed and tested the effectiveness of the RCI-10 Religious Commitment Inventory, Worthington (1988) theorized that people who were highly committed to their religion tended to evaluate their world on dimensions based on their religious values. He

went on to suggest that, because of the history of religious conflicts in doctrine, people within a western religious tradition constructed 'zones of toleration', defined along three dimensional lines...

- *Authority of scripture or sacred writings;*
- *Authority of ecclesiastical leaders;*
- *Degree of identity with their religious group.*

Worthington (1988) further hypothesizes that people in 'counselling relationships' may also have 'zones of toleration' for different values defined by those three dimensions, such that when a client encounters a counsellor whose values are perceived to be outside a client's zone of toleration, the client would be likely to either: (a) resist counselling, or (b) prematurely exit counselling.

Some aspects of religion may be inadequately measured because they are difficult to articulate through open ended questions.

2.5.8 Opposing views on the role of religion in Counselling

The academic literature on the place of religion in counselling presents two opposing views. On the one hand, Freudian psychoanalysis rejects the notion that religion has any place in counselling practice. On the other counselling theory in the literature accepts that religion, particularly when the spiritual element is emphasized, can play a positive role in the development of counsellor's competence. These opposing perspectives are contextualised by McLeod (1997) when he states that psychology (where counselling resides) is based on secular philosophy and scientific thought, whereas religion is based on traditional and postmodern ideologies. This provides the basis on which the debate stands.

In support of an argument that 'religion belief' has no place in a counselling relationship, initial reference can usefully be made to the work of Sigmund Freud, the 'originator' of psychotherapeutic practice, who from a psycho-analytic standpoint, generalized that all religions originate from unfulfilled psychological needs, and therefore was of the opinion that religion was an illusion which arose largely as an unconscious neurotic response to the repression felt when people in a civilised society were not able to fulfil all of their desires immediately (Freud, 1927 in Plante, 2007)

As a professed atheist, Freud (1927/1961 in Plante, 2007) described religion as infantile, an obsessional neurosis). From a sociological perspective, Stark and Sims-Bainbridge maintain the thrust of Freud's argument by defining religion as a system of compensators that rely on the supernatural; compensators being a body of language and practices that compensate for some physical or frustrated goal (Stark & Sims Bainbridge, 1996).

Stark and Sims-Bainbridge point to the fact that unlike ‘specific compensators’, which are used where there is a failure to achieve specific goals, and ‘general compensators’, which are used where there is a failure to achieve any goal, it is only ‘supernatural compensators’ that can be used to explain death or the meaning of life (Kunin, p85, in Stark Rodney and William Sims-Bainbridge, 1967), Ellis (in Worthington et al, 1996), the founder of the Rational /Cognitive Behaviour Therapies, concludes that religiousness is irrational and is implicated in emotional disturbance. He further explains that religion is emotionally harmful when it is a pietistic, rigid, dogmatic belief in, and reliance upon some kind of supernatural, divine or higher power.

Having carried out extensive research into the training of counsellors in the UK and Kenya, as well as researching into the influence of religion and spirituality on counsellor effectiveness, West (2004, p. 1) concludes that counselling and psychotherapy have a problem with religion as it does not easily fit with the professional and secular image that many therapists seek to present to the world.

However, Halmos (1966) explains that the counsellor applies himself in a way which suggests a set of convictions, a powerful mood, a moral stance, and a faith. He says ‘to call this exercise an outcome of faith is, I believe, well warranted, for it has many of the characteristics of human experience and behaviour with which we associate the notion of faith’ (p7). This idea may be developed to thinking about how, and if there is a scientific explanation for whether counselling works.

2.5.9 How religious values influence the therapeutic relationship

Secular counselling practice by definition requires the counsellor to bracket (isolate) their religious views from the therapeutic relationships they establish with their clients. Within the context of this requirement, Bilgrave and Deluty (1998; 2002) conclude that counsellors’ personal and professional selves appear to be shaped by cultural influences, including their professional and religious orientations.

Much research has been conducted on the effects of religion on the mental health of individuals. While the subject of mental health is not directly related to the study, these studies could also have implications for the students’ ability to be empathic. Bergin (1991), a well-known researcher on religion, having reviewed the literature on the effects of religion on mental health, and having carried out 14 studies and 20 individual data sets found no generalised correlation between an individual’s religious participation and adjustment. Despite that, in his landmark work, *Psychotherapy and Religious Values*, Bergin (1997) expressed the view that religious values do, in practice, inevitably influence psychotherapy. Worthington et al (1988), in agreement with further work done by Richards & Bergin

(1997), suggested that religion affects both the process, and also the outcome of psychotherapy.

Allport's (1966) theoretical findings have also influenced the way practitioners think about religion. He suggested that religious people could be divided into two groups, those who use religion in an intrinsic way, and those who use religion extrinsically. He differentiated between mature and immature religion: the mature religious person having a dynamic and open minded approach to religion, and being able to maintain links between the inconsistencies of religion. Allport (1966) believed that religion could be beneficial for psychological well-being, especially when it is fully internalised such as the case in intrinsic (mature) religiosity.

The significance of Allport's (1966) theoretical stance is that it provides researchers with a set of characteristics and behaviours that may be observed within the counsellor depending on whether she uses her religion in an intrinsic or mature way), or an extrinsic immature way). The latter, according to Allport (1966) is associated with the dysfunctional use of religion.

Emerging from Allport's (1966) theory, comes a sense that there is inevitability that 'religious belief' influences a counsellor's practice. The main barrier appears to be the way a counsellor manages her religious beliefs'. With the counsellor who uses her religious belief in an 'extrinsic, immature way' the likelihood is that she will find it difficult to bracket her views in the therapeutic dialogue. For a counsellor who uses her religious beliefs in an 'intrinsic, mature way' the likelihood is that she will have little difficulty adhering to the principles of secular counselling practice, including the bracketing of personal views.

From the foregoing it appears that the developmental journey needed for a religiously inclined secular counsellor to become fully effective requires the development of a mature, intrinsic approach to their religion, and to other cultural influences that may impinge on their ability to be effective.

2.6 Summary

In this review I have presented several points of view based on the theoretical findings and assumptions of multiple researchers in the fields of religion and counselling. The objective was not to reach definitive conclusions, but to present some of the ideas that helped me to think about the topics in the way I do, and to provide a theoretical framework for the study.

It is apparent that counselling and religion have common interests and goals, and that both practices are significantly impacted by, and can also impact the psychological processes of

the individual. Both practices are also constructed according to the culture in which they function.

An important insight is that the hostility between religion and counselling is decreasing in light of advances in educational thought, and this has positive implications for the integration of counselling and religion, which could be beneficial for counsellors who are struggling with ethical and moral dilemmas relating to their own religious commitment.

The literature opens up the challenges and confusion surrounding the understanding of empathy, mainly due to the limitations of definitions and complicated measurements of empathy. The cultural and religious dimensions of counsellors are too complex for ideas from mainstream counselling to be entirely transposed onto the culture being researched. The methods of measurement have to be modified or new ways of investigating need to be developed to suit the needs of the culture where the study is carried out. The literature on the study of empathy has provided questions that need to be answered in relation to its understanding and development within the reality of a concrete empirical study.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

The chapter starts by discussing the research problem, the content of the research question, and the design, the conduct and the data gathering and data analysis tools that were used in the inquiry. Arguments are presented for the use of a qualitative approach, which, due to its flexibility, allows me to follow the data in an unrestricted manner and uncover the meanings that would lead to a better understanding of the role of student counsellors' religious commitment on professional counselling in Barbados. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the management of the trustworthiness procedures used in maintaining valid and reliable research.

3.2 The research problem

The research problem on which the research question is based arises from the concern frequently highlighted by the students that their religious beliefs are at times in conflict with the precepts of mainstream counselling and, more particularly, with the principles on which professional empathy is based.

The aim of this inquiry is to find out what it is about religious commitment that could influence the way student counsellors perceive and understand the world, and how they relate to the world and others, particularly in terms of their professional counselling empathy.

The literature appears to contain little in terms of developing a coherent account of how religious commitment might influence a student counsellor's ability to become professionally empathic. What the literature does show is that aspects of religious commitment, such as Bible reading and prayer can have a measurable influence on a person's affective and emotional states and mood (Worthington, et al., 2003). Morrison & Borgen (2010) in their recent critical incident study, have sought to show that a religious counsellor's commitment to God can result in a combination of 23 'helping behaviours' and three 'hindering behaviours'. The Morrison & Borgen study, although of interest, relates to religious counselling rather than the mainstream counselling which is the focus of this study. Duriez's (2004) study of 230 students in Belgium, on the other hand, suggested that religious commitment did not lead to any differences in 'how nice these students were'. What these references to the literature tended to suggest at the start of the research design stage was that there was a high likelihood that religious commitment had some sort of role in influencing a student counsellor's ability to achieve professional empathic competence but that this role had not yet been defined with any degree of certainty. The literature also

tended to suggest that the relationship was highly complex and multifaceted, characterised by an ambiguity in the definitions for the key terms of the phenomena. With little precedent evident in the empirical literature on how the religious commitment and professional empathy relationship can be explored, this inquiry seeks to bring an understanding to this problem.

3.3 Rationale for using a qualitative approach

The primary aim of this enquiry is to explore the phenomenon, in order to reach a better understanding. My belief, guided by my epistemological position is that the data are contained within the responses of the students, and that I must explore the lived experiences of the students to achieve the most satisfactory research outcomes.

According to McLeod (2011) there are many qualitative strategies that can be applied in counselling research. He notes that most counselling research has focused on the outcomes of counselling, and like much qualitative research has used interviews or open-ended questionnaires to collect data from clients regarding their experiences in counselling. This research uses students' reflective narratives as the main data collection method, as they enabled me to conduct the research in unobtrusive manner, while generating the data necessary to fulfil the objectives of the study. A qualitative approach to this inquiry is used because of the flexibility of design, flexibility in selecting the methods of gathering and analysing the data.

3.4 Ethical conduct of the research

Several writers on qualitative research address the importance of ensuring that the research is conducted in an ethical manner. Bogdan & Biklen (1992, p. 54) state that the nature of the research should be disclosed before the collection of data. Holloway (1997) and Kvale (1996) remind researchers about informed consent, and Bailey (1996) warn that deception while conducting research can be counterproductive. This section begins by addressing those concerns that were dealt with before the study began.

The ethical standards guiding the research are those governing the conduct of research published by the University of Bath and the University of the West Indies, and, because the study also involves my role as a practising counsellor and counselling teacher in Barbados, the ethical standards published by the Barbados Association of School Counsellors.

Before starting the study, written approval was given by the Ethics Committee at the University of Bath and permission to proceed with the research was granted by the Head of the Open Campus at the University of the West Indies in April 2011.

Respondent anonymity, confidentiality and privacy were identified as ethical concerns at the start of the research study, and were maintained throughout the entire research process. In ensuring that the students' rights were not violated, nor their interests disadvantaged, I took the following steps: (1) getting participant approval and maintaining continuing transparency with those involved; (2) ensuring participant details were not made available to anyone except me and those immediately involved in my research activities; and (3) keeping all records of data and outcomes from the research process from which students could be identified are stored safely.

To gain participant approval I briefed all 26 students in the class on my planned research activities prior to starting any data collection. At the same time I explained the procedures I would use for the protection of their anonymity, how I would maintain confidentiality and privacy, and briefly outlined my responsibility in ensuring the ethical conduct of the research. I also explained that any student in the class could withdraw from the research activities at any time, should they wish, without having to give me an explanation. They unanimously agreed to participate.

Those students whose data and responses I have quoted specifically provided written approval, giving informed consent to proceed with presenting their data in my thesis.

In protecting students' anonymity and privacy, all data collected from students has been transcribed and consolidated into an electronic database, which is not accessible to anyone but me. All references in that database refer to students by a student code (e.g. H6 and H4).

3.5 Sampling procedures

In explaining that the goal of qualitative research is to produce intensive, authentic descriptive accounts of experience and action, McLeod (2003) warns against recruiting too many respondents. He says that this could prove impossible to do justice to their contribution in the research report. In adhering to the advice that large numbers are not necessary for valid research, I limited my choice of sample to six cases for the initial analysis (Chapter 4), followed by a further three cases for the verification review undertaken subsequently (Chapter 5).

Six cases were selected to provide a range of religiously committed students to be investigated. Using the religious commitment scores from the Worthington RCI-10 inventory, three students whose religious commitment scores were the highest in the class, and three whose scores were the lowest were chosen. This sampling procedure was considered appropriate for the generation of adequate data to address the research question, and was used to obtain extremes in student perspectives.

A second sample of three students was selected after the initial analysis was carried out. The sample was drawn from the middle range of the Worthington RCI-10 inventory, representing three moderately religious students. This sample of new cases was deliberately selected because the purpose was to do further analysis with individuals who had not been involved in the initial generation of the manifestations, characteristics and interrelationships. Table 1 presents biographical details for the nine cases used.

It is confirmed that, while a check was made to ensure that the submissions for the nine selected students had comprised responses that were adequate for the intended thematic analysis, there was no attempt to choose the ‘best responses’ from the 26 students in the class.

Table 1: Biographical details of sampled students

Ref. No.	Age	Gender	RCI-10 Religiosity Score	Religious affiliation	B-C&W Empathy Score
Initial Sample					
L1	32	F	11 / 3%	No affiliation	56%
L2	30	F	23 / 33%	Not given	43%
L3	25	F	10 / 20%	No affiliation	38%
H4	41	F	49 / 98%	Pentecostal/Christian	60%
H5	43	F	47 / 94%	Seventh Day Adventist	58%
H6	44	M	48 / 96%	Christian	66%
Additional Sample					
M1	28	F	32 / 55%	Anglican	76%
M2	44	F	34 / 60%	Christian	70%
M3	37	F	37 / 68%	Pentecostal	68%

3.6 Data collection methods and procedures

Overall, the data required for the inquiry was collected from four class exercises involving: a religious commitment questionnaire; a biographical and background questionnaire; and two reflective narratives. These data gathering tools were designed as adaptations of exercises that were scheduled to be undertaken by students as an integral part of their coursework. To improve the likelihood that students conveyed an authentic version of their knowledge, views and attitudes, no distinction was made at this time between which pieces of coursework were going to be used for the research. Additionally, the nine students whose data has now been analysed were only selected after the four coursework pieces had been submitted by all 26 students. Once the decision to use particular coursework pieces was made, written permission was sought from the students whose data were to be used in the research.

As noted by several qualitative research writers, including McLeod (2011), qualitative research does not specify any particular method for data collection or analysis. A major component of my counselling course lies in equipping students with the ability to use reflective narratives as a means of developing their counselling competences. Furthermore, the course includes training for the effective use of 'supervision' (during which time reflection on practice is a necessary prerequisite) to improve their practices. Accordingly, I chose the two reflective narratives as the main data collection instruments, while the two standardised questionnaires were used to aid selection of students for the data gathering cohort.

In choosing the reflective narratives, my aim was to take advantage of how the students narrated their realities and how they used their voices to do this in a subjective way. Silverman (2006), advises that methods should be our servants and not our rulers. This made sense to my choice of this data collection method, as the naturalist and non-invasive approach chosen would allow me to gain more authentic and relevant data on students' beliefs and perceptions about their religious commitment, than would be available from the alternative approach of using standardised instruments.

Additionally, as the reflective narratives to be used were already part of the coursework defined by the syllabus, it was deemed important that the approach chosen would not place an added burden on the students' time.

Because of this, it was also considered that the students would not feel they were 'under scrutiny' as in an interview, and that they would also benefit from having time to think through and analyse their experiences and opinions, in order to generate richer and more authentic perspectives.

The collection of background data

An initial short questionnaire was developed to obtain biographical data on all the students in the class. The data collected provided the background data as well as general information about religion which helped in formulating the cases. The questionnaire required students to make statements about 'things of which they might be proud or value' and about 'what motivated them to want to become counsellors'. The questionnaire also required students to indicate 'how important religion was to them' and 'the role that they thought religion played in counselling practice'. The 'importance of religion' and 'role of religion in counselling practice' questions sought to establish a preliminary view of how they believed that their religious commitment influenced their lives.

Data Collection for Religious Commitment

The Worthington et al Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI-10) was selected mainly because of its suitability as a brief screening tool for the assessment of religious commitment (Worthington, et al., 2003). I elected to use it because of its proven reliability and validity, (having been tested in six studies for which the data is available for examination) as an effective measure of Religious Commitment among Christians. The RCI-10's definition of religious commitment as '*the degree to which a person adheres to his or her religious values, beliefs and practices and uses them in daily living*' (p. 85) is appropriate for use with my student population. It has also been recommended for limited use in assessment for counselling, and also research. I also chose to use it because it is a brief survey of 10 questions. It also claims to be able to distinguish between people with high religious commitment versus those that are not so highly committed (p. 89). I chose it because it is not invasive, and because it uses a Likert scale, is simple to administer. It also provided the baseline data from which to start the study because the findings were correlated with the Empathy Quotient to find out if there was a relationship between the two variables, religious commitment and empathy. The results of this inventory were used to select the respondents based on their religious commitment.

Data collection reflective narratives

The main data gathering methods comprised two reflective narratives

in which the questions were directed to the participants' experiences, feelings, beliefs and convictions about their religious commitment and how they believed they would behave in a professional counselling situation, where empathy is a major requirement for the counsellor.

These two reflective narratives required the students to write not less than 400 words on the following topics...

The role of religion in my life and my counselling practice: The stimulus for the reflective narratives included a number of guiding questions that required students to consider, for example, how their religious belief influenced their personal identities and how this then shaped their ability to be counsellors. The brief also required students to identify significant religious events in their lives that had brought them to the position they were in now. Finally, the brief asked students to consider what information about their religious commitment they would feel appropriate to disclose to future clients. The objective of the exercise was to get students to reflect on, and describe the extent to which they were aware of the effect their religious commitment might have on how they might behave as potential counsellors.

The use of my religious tenets and how they influence specific aspects of my counselling practice: this data collection method sought to gather data which would show how the students applied their religious principles in their everyday lives. This second reflective narrative was designed to be more provocative. Again guiding questions were used to ensure students addressed the objectives of the reflective narrative. This time, students were required to state how they might bring the tenets of their religious faith into their counselling practice. Following this, students were then required to reflect on the conflicts with mainstream counselling practice such usage of their tenets might involve and how such usage might create undesirable effects with clients who did not share their particular beliefs. The objective of this final exercise, therefore, was to encourage students to define the boundaries they would place on their exposure of the religious beliefs to clients and how they would manage these in practice.

3.7 Data analysis methods

All of the qualitative methods that seek to uncover patterns of meaning in informant accounts of experience are, in one way or another, involved in the analysis of themes. A theme that emerges when someone talks is more than the content of what a person is saying; a theme is a recurring pattern which conveys something significant about what the world (or the particular aspect of the world being discussed) means to a person (McLeod, 2011).

Braun & Clark's (2006) thematic analysis approach is used to analyse and understand what effects student counsellors' religious commitment had had on their development of empathy by extracting meaningful categories or themes from the religious data. The empathy typology of Thwaites & Bennett-Levy (2007) is used as a framework for categorising, interpreting and understanding the components of empathy. By making inferences and assumptions from the students' words, links and interactions between their religious commitment and empathy are made. The thematic method is considered suitable because it allowed the voices of the respondents to be heard (O'Neill 1998, p. 45 in McLeod, 2011). At the same time extracts from these voices provide a more general set of themes which were then interpreted as 'manifestations'. These are then examined in terms of students developing empathy and possible implications for counselling practice.

With an emphasis on establishing if religious commitment does have an effect on a student counsellor's ability to acquire empathic competence, the technique used in this study to understand the data collected is effected through an analysis of the themes inherent in the data. The objective is to ensure that each emerging theme from the analysis 'captures something important in relation to the overall research question' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 10). The analysis concentrates on identifying 'characteristics' and 'manifestations' that the

student counsellors may have acquired as a result of their religious commitment. My rationale for this specific focus is that it is these students 'manifestations' that will dictate whether their religious commitment has an effect on their ability to become empathically competent or not, and the 'characteristics' identified, help define the boundaries of its associated 'manifestation'. The example set out in the following description of the analysis strategy illustrates the principles employed.

In order to ensure relevance to the research question, emerging 'manifestations' and attendant 'characteristics' are subjected to a test if they can be shown to have a potential positive or negative impact on a student counsellor's developing ability to become professionally empathic. The test applied is based on demonstrating that the emerging manifestation has the potential to enhance or to inhibit the students' ability to develop one or more of the four empathy components identified by Thwaites & Bennett-Levy (2007); namely: empathic stance, empathic attunement, empathic communication and empathic knowledge.

In order to facilitate the use of the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy model, ten 'elements' are also used to provide improved sensitivity for locating the influences emanating from the manifestations and characteristics identified from the thematic analysis. These ten 'elements', derived from a detailed consideration of the literature on empathic practice, have been designated to be associated with the four components of the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy model as defined in Table 2 (as provided at the end of Chapter 3). Table 2 also provides a practical definition of each of the ten 'elements'.

In order to illustrate the principle used: the theme that religious commitment might lead to 'enhanced perceptiveness' emerged as a potential manifestation early on in the analysis. When tested against the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy components, it was decided that it passed this initial test and therefore qualified as being relevant to my research question. In conceptual terms, 'enhanced perceptiveness' was interpreted as having a positive effect on a student's ability to achieve 'perceptual depth', one of the skills applying to being empathically attuned, the second competence in Thwaites & Bennett-Levy's four-component model. Braun & Clark (2006) explain that this approach, where themes are identified by deductive, theoretical reasoning, is 'analyst driven' and 'provides a less rich description of the overall data', but produces 'a more detailed analysis of some aspect of the data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 10). My objective is to explore the single phenomenon of the potential for religious commitment to impact a student counsellor's ability to become professionally empathic; therefore, this approach seemed appropriate for the analysis.

An important feature of the methods of analysis is that frequency of occurrence for emergent themes is not considered to be important, but that significant or comparable statements are important.

The question of whether the analysis describes each manifestation at a semantic or latent level, my engagement with the data follows Braun & Clark's advice that

...a thematic analysis at the latent level goes beyond the semantic content of the data, and starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations – and ideologies – that are theorised as shaping and informing the semantic content of the data. (2006, p. 13)

In order to enable the development of a theoretical understanding of the 'broader assumptions, structures and/or meanings...underpinning what is actually articulated in the data' (p. 13), the conceptual nature of each manifestation is then subjected to a search for related themes in the data and in the research literature.

In order to illustrate the principle: 'enriched ability to address client issues' emerged as another manifestation that met this study's initial Thwaites & Bennett-Levy test. A subsequent review of the literature resulted in the discovery of work done by Johnson & Ridley (1992). They identified four mechanisms whereby in a religious counselling setting, religious beliefs can be used by a counsellor to 'enriched ability to address client issues' (Johnson & Ridley, 1992). Although applied to a religious counselling setting, my review suggested these techniques might also be applicable to mainstream counselling, where an integrative approach is taken.

A further review of the data then revealed particular instances where my students provided evidence of a likelihood of their employing one of more of the Johnson & Ridley (1992) mechanisms to enhance their ability to be empathic competent. Thus, in this case, my analysis was able to interpret the initial concept of the manifestation identified, in the light of both related theory and of further, less obvious characteristics in the data. From the eleven manifestations identified in my analysis, there are ten instances where characteristics were identified in the data and then expanded by reference to the literature, and one where a review of the literature stimulates the discovery of characteristics and subsequent exploration of the literature. In this way, the study is able to provide the depth of understanding sought by adopting Braun & Clark's (2006) 'latent level' analysis in preference to the 'semantic level' alternative they offer.

While my analysis naturally takes an interest in the language used by the students, the implication of the epistemological stance I have adopted is that their meanings in what they

say have been interpreted in the light of language typically used by academics and practitioners involved in mainstream counselling. With my stance, I have not sought to interpret their meanings in terms of the students' own cultural background, religious teaching, or their emotional state at the time they wrote their narratives. To illustrate this point: H4, one of the religious students, stated...

Although we have been taught that our religious beliefs should not be used in the therapeutic sessions, I am of the opinion that Bible based teachings does and will bring a fresh perspective on the holistic restoration of an individual or individuals seeking change and transformation. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." John 14:6

I have interpreted this statement to indicate a manifestation that negatively impacts on H4's ability to control her impulse to allow her prejudices and biases to affect her ability to maintain an appropriate empathic stance (Thwaites & Bennett-Levy, 2007). Clearly, from H4's perspective, she is of the opinion that to circumvent the principles in mainstream counselling will benefit her ability to be empathically competent. My analysis does not seek to explore this difference in sense and meaning evident from trying to understand H4's perspective. The assumption made in this case is that H4, with the mind-set she had when completing her narrative, will introduce bible based teaching into her practice, despite knowing that it is considered to be undesirable. In adopting this perspective I have been mindful of the warning that

...thematic analysis conducted with a constructionist framework cannot and does not seek to focus on motivation or individual psychologies, but instead seeks to theorise the socio-cultural contexts, and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that are provided. (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 14)

My assertion is, however, that to address the motivations and individual psychologies of my students is not relevant to my quest to conclude if religious commitment does or does not impact a student counsellor's ability to be empathically competent. Such details on the manifestations and characteristics I have identified are clearly of interest, but will necessarily be the subject of research which is outside of the scope of this present study.

3.8 Trustworthiness

It is my understanding that the validity of qualitative research depends on the truthfulness and authenticity of the research, and the measures taken by the researcher to ensure that the research has remained 'true to the facts'. The following measures describe how issues of validity and reliability were addressed during the research study.

3.8.1 Validity

Validity was considered under the headings of reactivity, respondent bias and researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reactivity was taken to refer to the effect that the presence of the researcher has on the ‘research setting’, particularly the people involved; respondent bias to the behaviours which respondents may exhibit, such as obstructiveness and withholding information, to, at the other extreme, respondents trying to please the researcher; and researcher bias to occurs when the researcher brings assumptions and preconceptions to the research setting that influence the results obtained (Robson, 2002, p. 172).

In order to reduce the threats to the validity of the research, I employed the following measures: firstly I undertook a period of intense reflection on my possible prejudices towards religion and towards the religious attitudes evident amongst members of my class; secondly I focused on my research design; finally I focused on using the techniques of ‘prolonged involvement’, ‘peer debriefing’, ‘member checking’, and ‘audit trail’, as recommended by Padgett (1998, pp. 94-102).

To minimise the threat of any unarticulated biases affecting my judgement, prior to starting my data collection activities, I attended a six day course on religion that was part of the Diploma in Theological Studies course offered by the theology faculty of the UWI. The course, which focused on contemporary religious issues, provided an opportunity for intense personal critical reflection on my own religious commitment and how this differed from those of some of my students. Amongst other benefits, these periods of critical reflection enabled me to re-explore my strategies for subsuming my feelings when dealing with people whose views do not align with my own. Being attended by over thirty religious leaders representing all denominations on the island, my presence on the course also provided an opportunity to develop a more informed perspective of religious life in Barbados. The experience of attending this course was intended to help reduce the threat of researcher bias influencing the findings.

In respect of ‘prolonged involvement’, I was associated with the class for twelve months. Padgett (1998) suggests that ‘prolonged involvement’ tends to reduce the threat of ‘reactivity’ and ‘respondent bias’, but points out that it also has the potential to increase the threat of ‘researcher bias’ affecting the final outcome. To counter this increased threat (and to build on the potential to reduce the risk of reactivity and respondent bias affecting my final outcome), I purposefully sought to maintain an unbiased stance in my interactions with students. Being an experienced teacher and counsellor, trained to ‘bracket’ my views, the task of maintaining an appropriate mood and tone in my class was not considered to be a difficult task.

Member checking was carried out when I met with the individual respondents towards the end of the data analysis period and sought their opinions on whether my findings represented an accurate portrayal of their religious commitment, and professional empathy profile. To avoid respondents feeling I was being negative, I presented the manifestations and characteristics that had emerged from their responses, not only as research data, but as objective feedback on their progress towards becoming professional counsellors. A particular point I made was that the respondents needed to reflect on the accuracy of my interpretation at the time the data was collected, not at the time of my ‘member checking’ review. Between them, respondents made a number of suggestions for what turned out to be minor adjustments. The findings were reviewed and amended where applicable in the light of this feedback. The intention of the member checking approach was to reduce the threats of reactivity, researcher bias and respondent bias affecting my findings.

Following the advice of Robson (2002, pp. 175-176), the ‘audit trail’ procedure used comprised keeping a research journal and records of student narratives and questionnaires, and, through the computerised database used, a record of all data used and decisions made during the data analysis phase of the project. The intention of constructing an ‘audit trail’ was to reduce the threat of researcher bias affecting the validity of my findings.

3.8.2 Reliability

Robson advises that unlike a fixed design qualitative research project where there is a standardised methodology, establishing reliability for a flexible design qualitative research project, where there is no standardised methodology, is often difficult. He goes on to say that researchers adopting a flexible design approach, therefore, need to concern themselves with the reliability of their methods and research practices. With no standardised procedures to follow, he recommends that a flexible design requires the researcher to be thorough, careful and honest in carrying out research, and being able to show that this has been the case (2002, p. 176).

To address the main points of Robson’s reliability advice, I adopted a systematic process for managing the students’ data comprising three features. Firstly, the coursework submissions that formed the student data used in the analysis were transcribed into a single electronic searchable word-processed database. Secondly, the analysis of the Worthington RCI-10 survey used to provide a profile of the students’ religious commitment was undertaken on a spreadsheet, which allowed thorough checking of the results. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the analysis of the students’ data was facilitated by using a second spreadsheet to create a database, which allowed tracking of all decisions made in relation to the selection

of manifestations, characteristics, and interactions with the components and elements of the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy (2007) model.

Apart from providing a means to undertake focused reliability checks on the data and the analysis of the data, the three electronic sources contribute to the audit trail used to maintain the integrity of this study.

Table 2: Components and Elements of Thwaites & Bennett-Levy model

Component	Element
Empathic stance	Mood & Tone: Ability to manage mood and tone of an empathic exchange with another person / client.
	Perceptions & Opinions: Ability to isolate personal viewpoints and beliefs from empathic exchange with another person / client.
Empathic attunement	Perceptual Depth: Ability to “see” underlying emotional state of another person / client
	Authenticity: Ability to convince another person / client that they really can “feel” the person’s / client’s emotional state.
Empathic communication	Client Validation: Ability to question another person / client and articulate that person’s / client’s deeper emotional state, with an ability to put that emotional state into a context that convinces client that their feelings are normal under prevailing circumstance.
	Feedback: In exchange with another person / client, regularly confirms what is being said, to ensure they are understanding evidence being provided correctly.
	Type of Engagement: From a process point of view, degree to which questioning, affirming, summarising, etc. are part of a structured approach to discussing person’s / client’s emotional state, etc.
Empathic knowledge	Theoretical Knowledge: In empathic exchange with person / client, evidences ability to employ theories and models associated with mainstream counselling practice and other relevant theoretical constructs.
	Experiential Knowledge: In empathic exchange with person / client, evidences ability to employ learning from personal life-experiences.
	Procedural Knowledge: In empathic exchange with person / client, evidences ability to structure therapeutic session according to agreed protocols.

4 RESULTS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

To address the research question, the results, analysis and discussion are presented in two parts. Part I sets out the results of my search for specific themes, known as manifestations, and subthemes, known as characteristics, together with examples from the students' data. This illustrates how the chosen manifestations and characteristics were selected and defined. Part II uses the identified manifestations and characteristics identified to compile profiles for the six students whose narratives were used in the initial analysis. The second part discusses how the student profiles presented increase my understanding of how students' religious commitment is influencing their ability to become professionally empathic. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the results, where it is argued that by identifying relevant manifestations and characteristics and then using them to demonstrate how they can potentially influence the students' evolving practice, it can be assumed that religious commitment can influence a student's development of professional empathy.

Table 3: Positive Manifestations and Characteristics

Manifestation	Characteristic
Enhanced Perceptiveness	Improved empathic vocabulary
	Experience
	Role models
A more positive view of human nature	Increased respect for client
	Being non-judgemental
	Valuing people / clients as unique individual
	Accept contrary views from others
	Nurturing and caring for others / conscious of needs
	Recognising client's struggle / compassion / understanding
Confirmed ethical standards	Enhanced familiarity with applicable ethical standards
	Experience of applying ethical standards in practice
	Role models
Improved sense of equality	Full sense of self-awareness on part of counsellor
	Belief in equitable relationship
	Adherence to humanistic philosophical perspective
Enriched ability to address client issues	Religious treatment / analysis concepts being used
	Prayer and religious contemplation generating hope
	Use of scriptural truths
	Intervention of divine agent

4.2 Part I: Identifying manifestations and characteristics

4.2.1 Overview

Part I of my interpretation of the data suggests that for the six students whose narratives I have analysed, it can be argued that there are eleven manifestations and 41 characteristics that help define those manifestations. Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5 summarise these manifestations and characteristics.

Table 4: Negative manifestations and characteristics

Manifestation	Characteristic
Limited World view	Failing to acknowledge some biblical context not relevant today
	Tendency to interpret bible literally, not symbolically
Restricted and confused thinking	Lack of personal thought
	Unreasonably fixed perspective
	Being told what to believe, not making up own mind.
	Clients act in a way that is counter to student's belief system
Differing expectations	Counsellor's theological stance more conservative than client's
	Counsellor's theological stance less conservative than client's

Table 5: Mediating manifestations and characteristics

Manifestation	Characteristic
Confidence and assertiveness	God has inspired student
	Belief that God will not allow student to fail
	Improved social skills due to church community involvement
	Exchanging religious capital for social capital
	Enhanced levels of introspection because of ability to pray, etc.
Validation of Self	Awareness of societal and personal culture and values
	Understanding of how self can influence counselling process
	Understanding of where counsellor is weak
	Enhanced awareness of how their emotions impact others
	Flexibility and openness to new ideas
	Awareness of shadow-side and how counsellor manages this
Self-Disclosure	Greater range of life-experiences on which to draw
	But can lead to shutting down to consider other possibilities
	Greater sensitivity to timing and content of self-disclosure

It should be noted that those manifestations and characteristics highlighted in the above three tables are the subject of a further exploration in Chapter 5, where the system of manifestations and characteristics evident from Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5 are the subject

of further verification testing using alternative data from three other students (M1, M2 and M3).

4.2.2 Positive manifestations

Enhanced perceptiveness

H6 provides the most clearly articulated and compelling evidence that his religious beliefs have given him ‘enhanced perceptiveness’. In addition to H6, H5, L3, L2 and L1, all provide statements that suggest the way they perceive or understand the world around them is positively influenced by their religious commitment.

In developing the ‘enhanced perceptiveness’ manifestation, I used the term ‘perceptiveness’ in the sense of the perceptual skill required to be empathically attuned to a client’s emotional state. Ickes captures the essence of the meaning I assumed, when he describes accurate perceivers as those who are consistently good at ‘reading’ other peoples’ thoughts and feelings (Ickes in Egan 2010, p163). From a more theoretical standpoint, Thwaites & Bennett-Levy’s (2007) description of perceptiveness as ‘the skill of being able to operate within the internal frame of reference of the client...listening from the inside as if [the counsellor is] the other...being attuned to the nuances of feeling and meaning as well as the essence of another’s current experiences’ (p. 598) more specifically helps to understand the importance of this manifestation.

In H6’s case, his narratives suggest his religious commitment gives him access to an enhanced vocabulary, practical experience and access to role models for good empathic practice. Set against a background of having achieved the highest Baron Cohen & Wheelwright (2004) empathic quotient score amongst the students surveyed, the following statement from H6 affirms his belief that his faith has made a significant contribution to his empathic competence, with amongst other attributes, his ability to understand people’s emotional state.

Empathy, sincerity, patience, confidence, respect, for people, warmth, and a caring nature (apart from the obvious professional qualities) are some of the qualities which are needed to be a good counsellor. I see the focus of my faith on working with people and trying to get to be the best that they can be, as a way of assisting in the development of these qualities in my own life.

H6 also points to the fact that his involvement in his church has given him the opportunity to work with people in less fortunate situations and therefore, through these experiences, to gain a better understanding of the range of human emotions he is likely to encounter in his work as a counsellor.

Unlike the timing of H6's religious developmental experiences, which for him started when he became interested in religion as a teenager, L2 highlights the influence on her of being brought up in a religious family. She specifically mentions family life and how her parents who acted as role models, caused her to reflect on the meaning of love and mercy. She also mentions how people got hurt, and the consequences of these emotional circumstances. L2 also mentions a significant religious experience that caused her to understand human emotions better; the case of a dying young man in hospital who she encountered in her job as a nurse. The young man's mother was distraught and begged L2 to put a prayer cloth under the young man's pillow. L2 said that this was against hospital regulations. However, she writes:

I thought that the mother was either in denial or had a psychiatric condition. Despite this I wanted to honour her wishes because I knew it would bring her comfort ... The mother was steadfast in her belief that her son was to recover from whatever illness plagued his body.

L2 finishes her account by saying that against all the odds the young man recovered from his terminal illness and went on to lead a normal life. More importantly, she highlights the dramatic effect that this experience had on her ability to understand the extremes of human emotions and behaviour. Like H6's account, L2's development in a religious environment appears to have, amongst other things, significantly influenced her perceptual, empathic attunement skills.

H5, L3 and L1's narratives similarly suggest that their religious experiences have influenced their ability to be empathically attuned. It is notable, that despite being the student who had the highest Worthington RCI-10 religious commitment score, H4's narrative did not show the experience her intense religious belief had given her, had made her any more empathically perceptive, than if she had not been a religious woman. H4's narrative, with its emphasis on Jesus being in control of her life, suggests that her reliance on Jesus might have displaced her responsibility and reduced her sensitivity to other people's emotional states. This final observation appears to correspond with the findings of Duriez (2004) who concluded that...

...it becomes apparent that religiosity as such has no connection whatsoever with empathy. In contrast, the way in which religion is approached tells a great deal about whether or not one is likely to experience feelings of empathy and, hence, to expose helping behaviour.

Considering these and other vignettes emerging from their narratives, it appears that the manifestation of 'enhanced perceptiveness' can be regarded as having the following

characteristics: (a) an increased vocabulary providing the ability to respond thoughtfully to an understanding of human emotions; (b) direct or indirect experience of working with others to determine and manage their emotions; and (c) by reflecting on the life of Jesus or other religious people (e.g. family members, fellow church members, and other exemplars of mature religious behaviour).

The characteristics of 'enhanced perceptiveness' were considered to have the potential to interrelate primarily with: 'mood and tone' and 'perceptions and opinions' (empathic stance); 'perceptual depth' and 'authenticity' (empathic attunement); and 'experiential knowledge' (empathic knowledge). In total, the analysis identified thirteen characteristic / element interrelationships applying to the 'enhanced perceptiveness' manifestation.

A more positive view of human nature

As the manifestation of 'a more positive view of human nature' started to emerge from my analysis, I developed it using Rogers' (1957) concept of unconditional positive regard for other people, a pre-condition that he linked with the concepts of congruence and empathy. These three conditions, he said, were the only and 'necessary conditions' that were needed to have an effective relationship. In respect of unconditional positive regard, he believed that counsellors need to treat their clients as though they were inherently good and should avoid conveying any judgement (1957), the specific quality that defines the 'a more positive view of human nature' manifestation.

H6's narrative, and those provided by L3, L2 and L1, suggest that for them religious commitment has led to an enhanced ability to see their clients as purposeful beings, who have a meaningful contribution to make to both their own therapy and, more generally, to the world. L2, for example, highlights the fact that she was taught to have 'patience, understanding, to be kind and not to show prejudice to anyone, irrespective of denomination, race or culture, in her childhood and teenage years, by her family and by going to church'. L2 also talks about being taught in church and at home about 'respect and morality'. L3's story about how she would deal with the pregnant girl ostracised by members of her church reveals a manifestation to be kind, respectful and non-judgemental, a manifestation that is underpinned by the following statement...

I am a religious person, I believe in god but my faith is not pinned to any title such as Christian, Anglican, or Catholic. My religious beliefs will not hinder my abilities to become a professional. Why? People of all cultures and race must have faith in something and I understand that. Your faith is what you are

at times and I will not persuade you otherwise. My goal is [to] understand not [to] believe in your particular situation.

H6 shows an even more comprehensively defined ‘more positive view of human nature’ manifestation. He states, ‘I love people and enjoy working with them.’ Another time, ‘I have been connected to [my] faith from my teenage years but I do not judge others and what they believe.’ He continues...

It is hard to divorce your person from your practices and I guess it takes skill and thought, so I am trying to continually develop these so that as I deal with people I will not impose myself and what I believe in them but will allow them to be able to grow and develop as individual while giving the professional help that they need.

This quotation expresses an intention on H6’s part to bracket his views when dealing with his future clients. This kind of relationship is considered to be desirable within most mainstream counselling practices.

Focusing more on the process of showing ‘a more positive view of human nature’, L1’s narrative explains that she will ‘help all clients, those who are religious and those who are not religious’. She goes on to say that she is more spiritual in her relationship with God and that this means she does not need to ‘let her biases interfere with her ability to help clients.

In practical terms, the narratives provided by H6, L3, L2 and L1, including the quotations now provided, suggest a combination of six distinct characteristics that could be interpreted as evidence of an ‘enhanced view of human nature’: (a) respect for the client; (b) being non-judgemental and impartial; (c) valuing a person and accepting them as a unique individual; (d) accepting the views and opinions of the other person; (e) demonstrating a nurturing and caring attitude and being conscious of the other person’s needs; and (f) acknowledging a client’s personal struggle and, in this context, showing compassion and being understanding.

The attitudes shown by H6, L3, L2 and L1 suggest a similarity with the Ancient Greek concept of agape, the love of one’s fellow man (Rogers, 1995), and the ideal discussed by Thwaites & Bennett-Levy, who suggest that the best orientation for a counsellor’s empathic stance is one that ‘infuses other aspects of empathic skill (attunement, communication skills) with a sense of benevolence, curiosity and interest’ (2007, p. 597).

The responses provided by H6, L3, L2 and L1 suggest their manifestation of ‘a more positive view of human nature’ is a product of their early religious experiences and in the case of H6, the considerable experience he has gained through being an active member within a religious community.

The characteristics of ‘more positive view of human nature’ were considered to potentially interrelate primarily with ‘mood and tone’ and ‘perceptions and opinions’ (empathic stance); ‘perceptual depth’ and ‘authenticity’ (empathic attunement); ‘client validation’, ‘feedback’ and ‘type of engagement’ (empathic communication); and ‘experiential knowledge’ (empathic knowledge). In total, the analysis identified thirty characteristic/element interrelationships applying to the ‘a more positive view of human nature’ manifestation.

Confirmed ethical standards

As noted by all practitioner guides on mainstream counselling, the long-term therapeutic success of a counsellor’s relationship with her client and, more generally, the credibility of the profession, depend on counsellors adhering strictly to the ethical standards laid down by the counselling associations and other ethical and legal codes that may exist in the jurisdiction in which the counsellor works. A student’s increased familiarity and working knowledge of concepts underlying these standards is therefore a desirable asset to be used in the student’s development to full professional status.

H6, L2 and L1 all emphasised, as a fundamental ethical standard, the need to refrain from imposing their religious (and other) beliefs onto their clients. H6 reflected on the fact that the ethical standards applying to his faith were consistent with those applying to his future counselling practice. L2 said that she was on the course because she wanted to be a more effective nurse and her narrative discussed the similarity between the ethical standards applying to her profession and those applying to her religion. While positively supporting the ethical principles of maintaining client confidentiality and respecting clients’ rights to safety and freedom of choice, L1 did, however, admit to what amounts to a countervailing shadow-side, where she said she would find it challenging to deal with anyone who admitted to dealing in obeah or voodoo. She also highlighted a latent antipathy towards having to deal with clients who use religion as ‘a mask to hide behind’. While these examples of having difficulty exercising the ethical principle of treating clients with respect are, from a student developmental point of view, worrying, it has to be said that L1 also clearly articulated in her narrative an appreciation of her need to learn how to manage these particular shortcomings.

The themes emerging from these three students’ accounts echoed some of the principles of person-centred counselling in identifying ‘qualities which are likely to contribute to peoples’ ethical living including trust in internal rather than external authority.....and a yearning and seeking for spiritual values that are greater than the individual’ (Nelson-Jones, 1995, p. 36).

In this respect, H5 acknowledged that she now appreciates that her 'religious values' are not 'ideal for everyone'. H5 says that through her training she is now seeing that she needs to be more aware of how her values 'are likely to influence her involvement with...different clients who have different values'.

H4 also made reference to the 'ethical and moral boundaries' that her religious faith afforded her. However, H4's insistence that she would use her biblical teachings to bring 'a fresh perspective on the holistic restoration of the individual' suggested that she may not always be able to see the differences created by her apparently literal interpretation of the bible and the ethical codes employed by mainstream counselling. For this reason, H4 is not included here as an example of how religious commitment can lead to 'confirmed ethical standards'.

Counsellors in Barbados tend to adopt and follow the ethical standards prescribed by the American Counselling Association (ACA) or the Barbados Association for School Counsellors (BASC). While no student made a specific reference to these or other professionally prescribed ethical standards, their data included evidence that the experiences they had gained as a result of their religious commitment had given them: (a) religious experiences which familiarised them with the ethical principles of their religion, so they already have a theoretical knowledge of what for most churches are the same as, or at least very similar to, those ethical standards employed by mainstream counselling practice; (b) practical experience with their church in applying these essentially common ethical standards in practice; and (c) the opportunity to witness others employing these standards, and is therefore able to emulate these role models in their developing practice.

The characteristics of 'confirmed ethical standards' were considered to potentially interrelate primarily with: 'perceptions and opinions' (empathic stance); and, 'experiential knowledge' and 'procedural knowledge (empathic knowledge). In total, the analysis identified six characteristic / element interrelationships applying to the 'enhanced view of human nature' manifestation.

Improved sense of equality

In order to maintain an effective counselling relationship, counselling theory states that the client and the counsellor should perceive each other equally. Furthermore, these theories consistently emphasise the importance of recognising that it is often the client who is the 'expert' who can (with facilitation by the counsellor) discern the root of her problem and ultimately resolve her concerns. Put another way, the counsellor should not regard herself as the person who is the holder of all knowledge on the subject of the client's issue(s).

With the exception of H4, all students provided evidence of appreciating this requirement for equality in the counselling relationship. H6 for example, links his sense of equality to his religion when he says:

Since in God's sight we are all as important as each other and we should all be treated equally, the Christian counsellor should apply this to counselling practice.

H6 also links his sense of equality to his religious belief when he says:

...believing that all life is precious is effective in helping me to see why each person, regardless of their issues or lifestyles is worthy of care and help. It helps me to see the need for impartiality and consistency with good attitudes to all clients.

H5 similarly traces her sense of equality to her religious beliefs:

The principles of Christian behaviour are ideal for non-Christians and Christians alike, where we are called to see the next man as our brother and by learning the art of forgiveness the counsellor / client relationship becomes therapeutic [and] produces positive thinking, feeling and acting [in harmony].

At the start of her class exercise on how religion is shaping her developing practice, L3 reflects on her professional objectives:

But what really makes a counsellor? It is not the title it is who you are. Someone who will take the time to listen and understand, show empathy and sometimes guides you through a decision. A professional counsellor embodies these manifestations with the aid of guidelines and theories. I am aiming to be that person.

Although acknowledging that she does not intend to be judgemental and suggesting she will show respect, kindness and will transact her work as a counsellor within a moral framework, L2 demonstrates less of a commitment to exercising equality in her future counselling relationships in her writing. This may be because she has merely omitted to consider this aspect of her future work. L1, by way of the starkest contrast with the other students, is the most specific in her intent, when she says: 'I believe everyone has to know what best suits them and their particular lifestyle'. This statement follows on from views expressed by L1 that counsellors need to appreciate that each client and client situation is unique, and that counsellors have to deal with each one in an unbiased way with an open mind.

For completeness, it should be noted that H4's narrative conveyed no sense of a willingness to entertain equitable counsellor/client relationships: the tenor of H4's commentary being that it is God's word that should prevail. (See Section 4.2.3 on positive manifestations for further explanation.)

Having considered the students' narratives, the following characteristics emerge as defining what constitutes the manifestation of 'improved sense of equality': (a) full self-awareness on the part of the counsellor; (b) counsellor believing that equitable relationships with clients are important; (c) adherence to humanistic philosophical perspective; and (d) an ability to manage biases and prejudices.

The characteristics pertinent to this positive manifestation appear from the data to rely on students' acceptance that the teaching associated with their religious commitment espouses the principle of treating all people as equals

The characteristics of 'improved sense of equality' were considered to potentially interrelate most prominently with: 'mood and tone' (empathic stance); and 'theoretical knowledge' (empathic knowledge). In total, the analysis identified four characteristic/element interrelationships applying to the 'improved sense of equality' manifestation.

Enriched ability to address client issues

The manifestation of 'enriched ability to address client issues' was formed from particular statements made by the students regarding how practices arising from their religious commitment had worked positively to help them deal with challenges presented to them by other people. The characteristics emerging while this manifestation was being developed appeared to resonate with the arguments presented by McLeod (2003, p. 371), who provides several reasons why counsellors should reframe their thinking on religious issues in their counselling work. Drawing on empirical research, McLeod suggests strategies which include addressing the religious dimension that may be used to increase the counsellors' effectiveness in addressing client issues. He highlights in particular four beneficial sources (cf. positive manifestations), originally identified by Johnson & Ridley (1992), that can be traced back to a counsellor's religious belief: (a) using religious ideas to augment counselling practices (e.g. using religious arguments to counter irrational thoughts); (b) using prayer to mobilise hope; (c) using scriptural truths to provide answers to problems; and (d) achieving inner healing using the thought of divine intervention.

As an example of item (a) in Johnson & Ridley's (1992) list, 'using religious idea', H5 talks about how she will use her religious conception of death to help clients who are troubled by their own or a loved one's demise. She says...

As an effective tool within my counselling, practice I can show how that by nature we are mortal and by nature death is inevitable, therefore it will not be left up to whether or not we did die but to how we die. [I can] show how we can feel at peace with ourselves even in the midst of death.

She goes on to talk about how she would help her client bring about ‘a smooth transition’ from anxiety to acceptance.

As an example of item (b): according to Johnson & Ridley’s list (1992), ‘using prayer to mobilise hope’, L2’s narrative mentioned earlier, where she allowed the mother of a terminally ill boy to place a prayer cloth under her son’s pillow and the boy miraculously recovered from his illness, could be used with L2’s (and indeed other counsellors’) clients, to help refocus clients’ attention from feelings of despair to the more constructive emotion of hope.

L3’s reference in her narrative to how she would have dealt with the shame felt by the unmarried pregnant girl who had been who had been forced to sit at the back of the congregation provides an example of Johnson & Ridley’s (1992) item (c) using ‘scriptural truths to provide answers to problems’. Here, L3, recognises the devastation and shame felt by the girl, and explains how she would encourage the girl to reconsider her circumstances in the light of a modern day interpretation of the bible, where the birth and care of babies under any circumstances are celebrated. Although L3 scores zero per cent in her Worthington RCI-10 survey response, she declares in her narrative that she is a religious person, but (as noted above) does not tie herself to any Christian denomination. Her mention of the pregnant girl ‘critical incident’ suggests that her non-denominational approach to religion provides her with the ability to help her future clients interpret the symbolic nature of the scriptures rather than the literal interpretation that is still understood by many religious people.

As an example of Johnson and Ridley’s (1992) item (d), H4 talks about how divine intervention continues to help her make important decisions in her life. Although H4’s manifestations of religious commitment are discussed elsewhere in terms of mainly negative influences on her ability to become professionally empathic, her mention of a ‘personal encounter with Jesus Christ’ having ‘transformed her life’ could, under the right circumstances, be considered to be an appropriate disclosure with an appropriately religious client.

While not providing concrete examples, H6 says...

The Christian faith has several tenets which can either enhance or hinder the counsellor-client relationship and as a result have a significant influence over the success of the process. While Christianity is largely an ethic-based faith, some of the ethical principles conflict with popular culture and if the Christian counsellor is unable to avoid imposing his particular bias on the client whose lifestyle practice or world-view is different, it can negatively affect the counselling relationship.

When taken with the knowledge and maturity shown elsewhere in H6's responses, the above statement suggests that he is already aware of the possibilities offered by Johnson and Ridley's list of four different ways religion could benefit a counsellor's ability to be professionally empathic.

As a concluding reflection, although Johnson and Ridley's (1992) 'sources of benefits to clients', interpreted as 'positive characteristics' were originally observed in a religious counselling setting, it is considered that the four options can be adopted in a mainstream counselling approach for clients who indicated a preference to examine their lifestyle issues within a religious context. Within mainstream counselling, although not specifically articulated by any of the surveyed students, the four possibilities for employing a counsellor's religious belief cited by Johnson and Ridley (1992) could also be applied in a secular setting, which employed other social, historical and cultural artefacts and constructs to replace those on which the techniques identified by Johnson and Ridley (1992) were based. This possibility opens up other perspectives on how a person's religious beliefs and experiences could enhance her ability to be empathic. As an example of this understanding, the data leads naturally to the assumption that a student like H6, would readily adapt his experience of, say, the therapeutic value of prayer and contemplation to, when working with an atheistic client, the therapeutic value of meditation or philosophical reflexion. Experience demonstrates that these non-religious alternatives could lead to similar outcomes, given the philosophical orientation of those practising the techniques.

The characteristics of 'enriched ability to address client issues' were considered to potentially interrelate most prominently with: 'validation', 'feedback' and 'engagement' (empathic communication); and 'theoretical knowledge' (empathic knowledge). In total, the analysis identified seven characteristic / element interrelationships applying to the 'enriched ability to address client issues' manifestation.

4.2.3 Negative manifestations

Limited World view

Corey (2009, pp. 29-30) states that counsellors need to understand their own and their client's 'cultural conditioning' and the 'socio-political system' in which the counsellor and client live. He explains that...

...the process of becoming an effective counsellor involves learning how to recognize diversity issues and shaping one's counselling practice to fit the client's worldview. It is an ethical obligation for counsellors to develop sensitivity to cultural differences.

Amongst other factors highlighted by Corey (2009), he lists religion as being an important part of the counsellor's and the client's cultural heritages. Corey's (2009) perspective became helpful in clarifying the manifestation of 'limited worldview' as it initially emerged from H5 and H4's narratives.

In the case of H4, her narrative relies frequently on specific scriptural references and strongly supports the belief that the bible should be interpreted literally. In response to the question 'What are your motivations to be a counsellor?' for example, H4 states...

(1) Isaiah 9: 6 Jesus is called 'counsellor', although this is but one of his many titles, I choose to embrace the aspect of helping someone to seek change in their life. (2) Corinthians 5: 17 therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation and old things have passed away, behold all things are new. Change is from the inside out.

Her account goes on to discuss a 'personal encounter with Jesus Christ' that has led to her transforming her life. In a discussion on the tenets of her faith, her narrative states...

The main tenets of my Christian faith are Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour of the World. Jesus Christ, the Second person of the God-head incarnate as a man, born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died on the cross, shedding his blood for the remission of sins. He was buried but rose from the dead three days later; he ascended to heaven presenting his blood as an everlasting sacrifice. He is now seated at the right hand of God waiting till his enemies be made his footstool by those who believe in him and have come to know him, those who rely totally on him every day.

While anecdotal evidence suggests that in some classroom settings H4 can communicate with her fellow students without constantly resorting to such religiously inclined language, it

is of concern that her written submissions do show such a limited view of the issues that may well influence her ability to be professionally empathic in her future practice.

Although not as literal in what she says in her narrative, H5 also demonstrates a tendency to resort to biblical concepts when discussing the types of issues she will need to work with in her professional practice. As an example, she expresses unyielding views on 'same sex marriages', with the following justification...

...one of my religious tenets is that marriage was ordain[ed] by God for a man and a woman and is a means of continuing the next generation (biologically), whereas same sex marriages prevent the reproduction of the next generation.

Unlike H4 whose Worthington RCI-10 Religious Commitment survey disclosed that her religious belief lay behind her whole approach to life and helped her answer all the questions she had, H5 indicated that although her religious belief lay behind her whole approach to life, it only sometimes helped her answer the questions she had. This contrast between H5 and H4 is echoed in other parts of their respective narratives.

Interestingly, although L1 also shows some strong biases arising from her religious beliefs (i.e. intolerance of people who practise obeah and voodoo), she is careful to point out that she was aware of her prejudices and was working on how to overcome them.

The overall goals of counselling are to help clients look for other options, solutions and to be creative in looking for ways of solving their problems. It is agreed that clients who come to counselling are usually troubled by feelings of guilt and shame, and in many cases, this stems from the concept of sin (i.e. beliefs about behaviour and what is good and what is bad) (Rogers, 1957). The limited, fundamentalist views apparent from H5 and H4's responses are, therefore, likely to be therapeutically inappropriate to those who are experiencing a sense of shame, and may lead to the client losing a sense of respect for the counsellor, and even leaving counselling.

The characteristics emerging from the students' narratives in relation to this 'limited worldview' manifestation were: (a) student failing to acknowledge that the bible was written to address issues arising in a different historical and cultural setting; and (b) student failing to acknowledge that often the scenarios provided in the bible and religious teachings are intended to be interpreted symbolically, rather than literally.

The characteristics of 'limited worldview' were considered to potentially interrelate primarily with: 'mood and tone' and 'perceptions and opinions' (empathic stance); 'perceptual depth' (empathic attunement); 'client validation' and 'feedback' (empathic communication); and 'theoretical knowledge' (empathic knowledge). In total, the analysis

identified seven characteristic / element interrelationships applying to the 'limited worldview' manifestation.

Restricted and confused thinking

Morrison & Borgen (2010) identified 'blind spots and biases which could inhibit empathy' as one of the 'hindering behaviours' reported by the twelve counsellors in their study who provided critical incident data to their research effort. 'Blind spots' according to Egan are part of the human condition ... they are things we fail to see or chose to ignore that keep us from identifying and managing problem situations (Egan, 2007, p. 149). A further perspective offered by Egan, who highlights the fact that 'blind spots' can involve counsellors who have a 'tendency to choosing to remain in the dark, remain in denial, or deliberately fail to see the consequences of their actions'. The data available to the study, however, did not yield evidence of these more detailed effects.

The two students who showed the possibility that this negative manifestation might also apply in their case were H4 and L1. H4 states that...

[The tenets of my religious faith] enable me to set ethical and moral boundaries and milestones on the counselling sessions with any client ensuring that the result of each therapy session is based on a solid foundation.

With this statement and another, in which she states that 'Bible based teaching ... will bring a fresh perspective on the holistic restoration of an individual', it is concluded that H4 is likely to face additional challenges in seeking to become a fully professionally empathic counsellor.

In L1's case, she demonstrates a worrying lack of empathy when she states...

...there are those who are just so self-righteous because they have suddenly 'found Christ'. These people are my friends, but, they really irritate me because they are so hypocritical and pretentious. When there is a problem, the first thing these people tell you is pray or make reference to God in some way.

This statement comes after an acknowledgement by L1 that she will need to keep her biases out of her counselling sessions and her statement that says 'I would not let sexual orientation, race, socio-economic background... influence my job as a counsellor'. The language used in L1's statement appears to suggest that she may be challenged in her future practice if she does not learn how to overcome this rather vehement view.

Although H5's view on how she could use her religious beliefs to deal empathically with clients who are faced with the reality of death demonstrates, as discussed in 0, an 'enriched ability to address client issues', there are other aspects of her beliefs in this area that do suggest a similar manifestation for 'restricted and confused thinking'. In her statement relating to when a person dies...

By trying to show that the body is in an unconscious state and that means that they can no longer love, hate, nor kill therefore there is not anything to permit them to our world

H5 reveals a perspective on death which many may find illogical. The fact that her declared intention is to disclose this belief to clients (as discussed in Section 0) is concerning, and is perhaps an example of where she is demonstrating that she has not fully considered the 'blind spot' in her thinking.

In support of finding a clearer definition for the 'restricted and confused thinking' manifestation, the following characteristics were also observed in H5, H4 and L1's narratives: (a) lack of personal thought; (b) maintaining an unreasonably fixed perspective; (c) being told what to believe rather than the student making up her own mind; and (d) people (future clients) acting in ways which run counter to the student counsellor's belief system.

The manifestation of 'restricted and confused thinking' interrelates with all ten elements applying to the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy model, therefore with all aspects of empathic stance, empathic attunement, empathic communication and empathic knowledge.

The characteristics of 'restricted and confused thinking' were considered to potentially interrelate primarily with: 'mood and tone' and 'perceptions and opinions' (empathic stance); and 'theoretical knowledge' (empathic knowledge). In total, the analysis identified seven characteristic / element interrelationships applying to the 'restricted and confused thinking' manifestation.

Differing expectations

Although having a secular orientation, mainstream counselling must nonetheless accommodate the beliefs of clients who, despite having a significant religious commitment, choose to seek mainstream counselling assistance. Where the mainstream counselling professional has herself a religious orientation, this raises the possibility of a developing dissonance between the counsellor and the client due to differing religious expectations. Morrison & Borgen (2010), in their work on critical incidents noted that:

In most instances, common faith led to expectations on the part of the counsellor that resulted in hindered empathy when the client did not meet those faith-based expectations.

The importance of identifying this particular negative manifestation is, as advised by Corey (2009, p. 74), that counsellors need to be aware of symptoms (such as strong aversion to certain types of clients, strong attraction to other types of clients, psychosomatic reactions that occur in therapeutic relationships, and the like). Where such issues exist, Corey recommends that the counsellor seeks professional help and perhaps have therapy to work out these personal issues.

The ‘differing expectations’ manifestation was identified in the narratives submitted by four of the students. They speculated on how they would react to future clients who were more religiously conservative than they were, or in two instances made provocative statements that suggested they would have difficulty dealing with clients who they regarded as religiously less conservative than themselves.

While not yet professionally qualified counsellors, H5, H4, L3 and L1 noted issues that, in the light of Morrison & Borgen’s (2010) finding, they might find challenging: H5’s and H4’s relating to the fundamentalist nature of their religious beliefs; L3’s and L1’s to the antipathy they feel to certain aspects of Christian belief. H6 and L2 also noted the potential for differences of opinion to occur, but, in their narratives, demonstrated that the differences they had identified were unlikely to influence their future professional practice.

Where this study enlarges the perspective offered by Morrison & Borgen (2010) can be found in L3’s and L1’s narratives. In both cases, L3 and L1 are not members of an organised church and treat their religion as a private relationship they have with their Christian God. Using Allport’s (1950) theoretical insights, L3 and L1 can be considered to engage intrinsically with their religion, but to have no extrinsic dimension to their religious practice. In both cases, L3 and L1 demonstrate potential existence of shadow-side issues with those who practise their religion in a more overt, extrinsic way. L3, for example, relates in detail how she, in her formative years, challenged her family’s reasoning for making her go to church, and as discussed above, she also formed a jaundiced view of the political nature of the church after attending her grandfather’s funeral. While, as reported above, she claims to still be willing to work with people from all religions, it is suspected that even now, she will find clients whose religion involves a more extrinsic form of expression difficult to deal with. The intensity of these shadow-side feelings is confirmed when, in her account of her grandfather’s funeral, she says:

Overcome with grief I quickly became enraged when the pastor came to deliver his sermon. He was not at all interested in the fact that my grandfather had died and there were 100's of grieving family and friends in the audience. He continued to talk about the air conditioning in the church and the Members of Parliament who were present.

Similarly, L1 also expresses views to suggest a residual anger. In her case, an anger that stems from the irritation she feels for those who are 'self-righteous because they have suddenly found Christ'. In dealing with this issue, L1 states that she finds people who have just found Christ truly irritating (see previous section for a full quote). L1 also acknowledges that although these people are irritatingly religious, they could when attending mainstream counselling, '...be looking for more structured guidance'.

In summary, H5, H4, L3 and L1's narratives suggest that in mainstream counselling, they might exhibit the negative manifestation of considering their clients' religious beliefs are theologically less conservative than their own. Under these circumstances, this would tend to lead to reduced confidence in the counsellor's authority. Where it is the counsellor who is theologically less conservative, this might then be expected to lead to the counsellor developing an antipathy to her clients' religious belief, again leading to an undermining of the counsellor's authority. These suggestions build on Morrison & Borgen's (2010) observation that clients tend to experience better outcomes in religious counselling when the counsellor is theologically more conservative than the client.

The characteristics emerging in support of the 'differing expectations' manifestation were: (a) student's theological stance more conservative than potential client's stance; (b) student's theological stance less conservative than client's.

The characteristics of 'differing expectations' were considered to potentially interrelate primarily with: 'mood and tone' and 'perceptions and opinions' (empathic stance); 'authenticity' (empathic attunement); 'client validation' and 'feedback' (empathic communication). In total, the analysis identified ten characteristic / element interrelationships applying to the 'restricted and confused thinking' manifestation.

4.2.4 Mediating manifestations

Confidence and assertiveness

Bernes (2005) highlights the importance of counsellor confidence and assertiveness. Using the specific example of being able to talk to clients about theories being used, applicable concepts and treatment possibilities, he suggests that confidence goes...

... a long way towards instilling hope and expectancy and providing the necessary incentive to ensure clients become engaged within the agreed treatment plan.

Egan (2007, p102) also highlights confidence and assertiveness as being important qualities for the counselling practitioner. He states that 'accurate perceptions and excellent know-how are meaningless if they remain locked up inside you'. He warns that to be assertive without perceptiveness and know-how, 'is to court disaster'.

It is this potential for both positive and negative influences, together with the close relationship between confidence and assertiveness and perceptiveness and know-how, that suggest that this manifestation should be considered to have a mediating influence rather than specifically a positive or negative influence.

The data have been interpreted to suggest that H5 has yet to exploit her religious beliefs to gain a sense of confidence and assertiveness in her developing practices. H6, L3, L2, and L1 all appear to have developed an increased confidence and assertiveness as a positive manifestation of their religious beliefs. H4, on the other hand, appears to have developed an increased confidence and assertiveness as a negative manifestation of her religious beliefs.

As the student suggesting the greatest degree of 'confidence and assertiveness' as a positive manifestation, H6 confirms that his role as a church worker has given him the opportunity to help many needy people. In his narrative H6 also talks confidently about orientating himself pragmatically in the world that most of his clients will inhabit.

Many persons see Christians as being very judgmental, polarized, intolerant and inflexible people who see themselves as right and everyone else as wrong and who see the world through very narrow eyes and thinking. My faith has shaped me differently...this has helped me to see people as being important, and while not agreeing with every choice people make, [to be] able to respect their freedom of choice and views.

Furthermore, this statement from H6 could be interpreted as suggesting that he has recognised the possibility that the more negative aspects of religious belief, such as those evidenced by H4, are undesirable, and therefore not allowed to influence his practice.

By way of the contrast suggested, H4's assertion when talking about her ability to be a counsellor, suggests a confidence and assertiveness that is 'blind' to the reality of the modern world and mainstream counselling practice. For example, she says...

I was brought into this position by the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead who now lives within me enabling me and empowering me to live this Christian life and teaching me how to embrace hurting people. The Holy Spirit is still at work today. Again the significant encounter or event is my personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

While a statement that conveys ‘confidence and assertiveness’, the sentiment inferred by her statement will clearly challenge her ability to be professionally empathic and therefore a negative manifestation of her religious commitment.

Both H6 and H4 demonstrate a belief that God has inspired them to become counsellors, but H4 expresses views that suggests she not only believes that God has inspired her career ambitions, but that Jesus is actually guiding the development of her practice on a day-to-day basis. These observations on H6 and H4 tend to confirm the possibility that a student ‘confidence and assertiveness’ manifestation can either be a beneficial attribute or one that undermines the student’s ability to comply with the best practice on which mainstream counselling is based.

From the perspective of a student who has a lower, more intrinsic religious commitment, L3’s narrative, when she talks about a revelatory moment at the time of her grandfather’s funeral, does, however, appear to presage a growing confidence in her ability to deal with religious and other culturally based belief matters. Her narrative discusses how at her grandfather’s funeral the pastor had focused his attention on the air conditioning in the church and had obviously tried to please the ‘politicians’ in the congregation. She says:

I walked out of that service angry. I am now 25 and I see that these titles were used to separate different classes and culture. The church is mostly political than a place of learning. These thoughts are only my thoughts and I respect that other people [might] not agree with them. If everyone did agree on one thing there would be no room for counsellors. I will still work with Catholics, Christians, even Atheist. Why? Because that is their faith and everyone must have faith in something or someone.

Similarly to L3’s account, L2 and L1’s narratives also convey a positive sense of ‘confidence and assertiveness’ over their developing practices.

From the students’ narratives, there appears to be five potential motivators for increased ‘confidence and assertiveness’: (a) belief that God has inspired student / given student permission to act assertively and persistently; (b) belief that God will ensure that counsellor will not fail; (c) opportunities to improve social and other counselling related skills, arising

from participation in the church; (d) within a larger community, the ability of student counsellor to exchange their 'religious capital' for 'social capital' and (e) opportunities to engage in enhanced levels of introspection through prayer and meditation, leading to greater levels of self-awareness, which in turn leads to a greater level of self-confidence.

The characteristics of 'increased confidence and assertiveness' were considered to potentially interrelate primarily with: 'mood and tone' (empathic stance); 'perceptual depth' and 'authenticity' (empathic attunement); 'client validation', 'feedback' and 'type of engagement' (empathic communication); and 'theoretical knowledge', 'experiential knowledge' and 'procedural knowledge' (empathic knowledge). In total, the analysis identified more than twenty characteristic / element interrelationships applying to the 'increased confidence and assertiveness' manifestation.

Additional observations

Firstly, anecdotal evidence from the different denominations typically found in the West Indies suggests that some churches, for example the Evangelical and Pentecostal churches tend to focus on personal character improvement. While simple opportunities for individuals to develop their social and communication skills exist with most religions (e.g. singing in choir and reading bible lessons), those that focus on personal character improvement are more proactive in providing planned character development opportunities for their members. Although both H6 and H5 attend Seventh Day Adventist churches and H4 a Pentecostal Church, their narratives do not include any direct mention of specific skills acquisition opportunities relating to the religious commitment / professional empathy phenomenon of interest.

Secondly, the manifestation of 'increased confidence and assertiveness' was also considered to have the ability to effect the other manifestations identified by the study. For example, following the advice of Egan (2007) above, increased confidence could have a positive influence on a student's ability to build on her manifestation of 'enhanced perceptiveness'. Conversely, where a student's increased confidence is misplaced, this could have a damaging effect on her ability to build on her 'enhanced perceptiveness' manifestation.

Validation of Self

During the analysis that resulted in the identification of the 'validation of self' manifestation from the data, Egan's advice on understanding the 'self' was used to help develop a multi-faceted definition of what could usefully be defined as 'evaluation of the self'...

Establishing the degree to which counsellor's religious belief positively or negatively impacts her appreciation of (and acceptance of) the degree to

which she has the personal resources to use Respect as a Foundational Value; Empathy as a Primary Orientation Value; Genuineness as a Professional Value; Client Empowerment as a Responsibility-Focused Value; a Bias for Action as an Outcome-Focused Value.

(Egan, 2007, pp. 53-59)

In the light of Egan's ideal, the definition for the 'validation of self' manifestation suggested that a student counsellor should strive for an understanding of her values, attitudes and beliefs, and of the source of these and how they influence the counselling relationship.

Considering firstly, those students who exhibited negative 'validation of self' manifestations, H4 and H5 conveyed a general sense of having transferred responsibility for their actions to God and, as a consequence, of having absolved themselves of any responsibility for examining their ability to manage in a practical sense any of the values listed in the Egan inspired definition provided above. In the case of H4, she goes as far as saying that

...the life and work of Jesus Christ showed me that I could not change myself, that [in respect of] my thoughts, attitudes and behaviours, the only person who could bring [change in my] life was Jesus in me and I in him.

Whereas other aspects of her narrative accounts suggest that H4 does not always adopt such a literal interpretation of the bible, there is within her writing a pervading theme of a literal interpretation of the biblical quotes to which she often refers. While not being so specific in her quoting extracts from the bible, H5 nonetheless firmly adheres to the literal sense of the tenets of her faith. It should be noted that H5 does also elsewhere in her narrative acknowledge that some of her religious values might not be appropriate on all occasions.

L1, the only student whose narrative suggested both positive and negative 'validation of self' manifestations, she, as discussed above, openly shares two of her biases that could cause her to underperform with clients who are adherents of obeah or voodoo, or those who 'use religion as a mask to hide behind'. The positive perspective that emerges from these shadow-side prejudices is that L1 clearly states that it is part of her developmental agenda to address the issues involved. Added to this, L1 is quite clear that she does not want to 'force Christianity down anyone's throat'. She also proposes a certain respect for her future clients when she says: 'I believe everyone has to know what best suits them and their particular lifestyle'. Elsewhere in L1's narrative she builds on this statement with writing that conveys a strong sense of conviction in respect of exercising the values listed in the above Egan inspired definition. L1, therefore, appears to recognise the challenges created by the

negative aspects of her religious belief and, as a consequence, to be well positioned to build on those positive manifestations she clearly also has.

Considering those students whose religious beliefs appear to create or promote solely positive ‘validation of self’ manifestations, H6’s narrative highlights his ‘love of people’ and the fact he ‘enjoys working with them’. His writing conveys the personality of someone who is constantly looking for different perspectives by building on his knowledge and understanding. The relationship between his religious belief and his understanding of self is further evidenced by the following extract from his writing:

I credit much of who I am to my faith as I have interacted with my faith for most of my life. My world-view, work-ethic, morality and some of my talents have been shaped by these interactions and religious socialization. The written guidelines, unwritten consciousness, exhortation and even the expectation have all been instrumental in my development.

With his writing clearly suggesting that H6 can manage both the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of his religious commitment while simultaneously addressing the secular agenda created by his counselling practice, it remains to be seen how L3 and L2 manage their ‘validation of self’ manifestation.

It is only when L3’s more reflective writing is assessed that it becomes apparent that she believes in and worships God. While less difficult to find, L2’s narrative has to be studied carefully to establish that she also worships God. Both students, however, do demonstrate a positive ‘validation of self’ manifestation in their narratives.

The characteristics emerging from the data relating to the manifestation of ‘validation of self’ were: (a) knowledge and understanding of societal and personal cultures and values; (b) an understanding of the influences that values can have on behaviour in counselling relationship; (c) understanding where personal resources are weak, where the student will actively seek to redress this weakness (Egan, 2007); (d) enhanced awareness of how counsellor’s emotional expressions impact on others; (e) flexibility and openness to new information and ideas (Egan, 2007); and (f) awareness of shadow-side influences that could impact student’s ability to work effectively with clients.

The characteristics of ‘validation of self’ were considered to have the potential to interrelate primarily with: ‘mood and tone’ and ‘perceptions and opinions’ (empathic stance); ‘authenticity’ (empathic attunement); ‘client validation’ and ‘feedback’ (empathic communication), and ‘theoretical knowledge’, ‘experiential knowledge’ and ‘procedural knowledge’ (empathic knowledge). In total, the analysis identified more than forty

characteristic / element interrelationships applying to the ‘increased confidence and assertiveness’ manifestation.

Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure was identified in the data as another mediating manifestation. One student expressed how self-disclosure could be used in a positive way and two students expressed how self-disclosure could have negative repercussions.

The counselling training literature agrees that the ability of counsellors to constructively share their own experiences, behaviours and feelings to clients can be a significant asset leading to effective empathic understanding. The literature also recognises direct and indirect self-disclosure. Although the literature identifies these two types of self-disclosure, the manifestation of ‘self-disclosure’ emerging from the data only appeared to relate to direct self-disclosure. Direct self-disclosure occurs when a counsellor shares her experiences with the intention of helping the client come to terms with the presenting issues (Egan, 2007, p. 166).

Self-disclosure can work in a number of ways depending on the approach taken. It can place an additional burden on clients and clients sometimes misinterpret the intent of self-disclosure. On the other hand, self-disclosure can help the counsellor to appear more down-to-earth and honest. It can also be used to model appropriate ways of resolving client issues (Egan, 2007, pp. 166, 167). Under these circumstances, because of the positive and negative possibilities highlighted by Egan, self-disclosure was classified as a ‘mediating manifestation’.

Considering first those students whose narratives suggested a positive manifestation of self-disclosure: H6, L3, and L2. H6, talks on a number of occasions in his narrative about the fact that his religious commitment has led to him having an increased number of opportunities to work with the disadvantaged and needy. L3 and L2 demonstrate in their narratives their ability to appropriately self-disclose with descriptions of actual scenarios from their life experiences. L2’s recounting of how she helped the terminally ill young man in hospital by placing a prayer cloth given to her by the young man’s mother under his head provides a particularly appropriate example of how self-disclosure might be done in an actual counselling session. L3’s recounting of how she has dealt with the death of her son:

We continually re-create ourselves through our thoughts ... I am currently on the path after the death of my son life felt like it was against me for a while. Now his death shows me that I am alive, my life has a purpose and I am going

to live it doing what is meaningful to me and not for anyone else. Because in the end of the day 'we're born alone, we live alone, we die alone.

The important feature of L3 disclosure is that she discusses how she dealt with her emotional response.

Secondly, those students whose narratives suggested a leaning towards a negative manifestation of 'self-disclosure': H5 and H4. In contrast, how the counsellor shares information about him or herself can have a negative effect on the counselling relationship. The following statement, where H5 describes how she might self-disclose her personal beliefs, illustrates an approach which is likely to confuse her client:

[I would try to] show that the body is in an unconscious state and that means that they can no longer love, hate, nor kill therefore there is not anything to permit them to our world. However I will be mindful that they need time to come to a closure and reality

In this situation, H5 is speculating about having to deal with clients who believe that their deceased loved one is still visiting them. H5 appears to be using a literal interpretation of religious imagery to create an understanding of the client's situation that only clients who subscribed to H5's religious beliefs would find convincing.

A more extreme example of the inappropriate content and timing of self-disclosures is to be found in H4's narratives, which suggest she will tend to use frequent scriptural references and literal interpretations of the bible. This illustrates a situation where self-disclosure could have dire consequences for her relationships with her clients.

The student whose narrative suggested an ambiguity as to whether her self-disclosures would be positive or negative manifestations of her religious commitment is L1. In her narrative, L1 espouses strong views about her not being judgemental and not discriminating between religious and non-religious people. This suggests that her self-disclosures would result in a positive manifestation of her religious commitment. On the other hand, she expresses the view...

Personally, I don't think religion should play a role [in counselling]. Religion is a personal thing between an individual and their 'God' or higher being whoever they perceive 'it' to be. I think being spirituality is more important but again that too is personal. Sometimes religion may 'cloud your judgment' and make you less objective while counselling.

While her statement suggests a healthy regard for her future client's freedom to choose a religious or spiritual orientation, her suggestion that religion may cloud her judgement does suggest a bias that if disclosed inappropriately might destroy a counselling relationship. Other statements made by L1 also suggest the possibility of some of her views having the possibility of being perceived as being negative, when intended to be a positive manifestation.

The characteristics emerging from the data that help define the self-disclosure manifestation include: (a) religiously committed people having a greater range of life experiences on which to draw; (b) conversely, religious commitment can lead to limitations on the range of viewpoints available to the counsellor; and (c) religiously committed people can have greater sensitivity to the appropriate timing and content of disclosures, or, where they have a limited view of life, a reduced sensitivity.

The characteristics of 'self-disclosure' were considered to have the potential interrelate with all components of professional empathy: empathic stance, empathic attunement, empathic communication, and empathic knowledge. In total, the analysis identified seventeen characteristic / element interrelationships applying to the 'increased confidence and assertiveness' manifestation.

4.3 Part II: Developing student profiles

4.3.1 Overview

Part II of my data analysis suggests that by using the manifestations identified in Part I it may be assumed that in his narrative H6 presents as a student whose religious commitment is playing a significantly positive role in his development of professional empathy.

Conversely, this analysis suggests that the manifestations can be used to argue that in her narrative H4 presents as a student whose religious commitment, at her current stage of development, is playing a significantly negative role in her development of professional empathy.

Using similar arguments to those used for H6 and H4, this discussion then goes on to demonstrate how the manifestations can be used to examine H5 and L1 presentations as students whose respective religious commitments are playing both positive and negative roles in their development of professional empathy.

Similar arguments are used for L3 and L2 who present as students whose religious commitments are also playing significantly positive roles in their development of professional empathy.

The profiles presented for each of the students, focus on three particular aspects of how the manifestations can be used to examine the following features evidenced in their narratives; ‘degree of ‘complexity’, ‘level of maturity’, and ‘emerging issues’.

In respect of the degree of complexity, this current analysis suggests that there are between 152 (L2) and over 300 (H6) potential interrelationships between the characteristics the students exhibit and the individual elements of the four components of the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy model on which the overall analysis is based.

Considering the ‘level of maturity’, the evidence presented suggests that H6 is able to process his religious beliefs with a high degree of ‘pragmatism’, while H4’s data only provides evidence to suggest she can apply a much lower degree of pragmatism in the way she processes her religious beliefs. H5 and L1, as examples of students for whom their religious commitment results in both positive and negative influences, the analysis suggests that there is evidence that they are both starting to process their religious beliefs pragmatically. Similarly, both L3 and L2 appear to be acquiring the ability to process their religious beliefs pragmatically.

The word ‘pragmatism’ is used here and elsewhere in my thesis to denote a practical way of thinking or dealing with problems, a way that emphasizes results and solutions rather than theories. In practice terms, this quality will rely on the extent to which a student counsellor is willing to understand and adopt the symbolic representation of religious teaching, rather than to automatically assume a literal interpretation. The concept of pragmatism assumed, however, is not intended to imply a rigorous theoretical analysis or argument, but is used as a convenient term, to refer to how a student counsellor deals with religious perspectives within a mainstream counselling practice.

In respect of ‘emerging issues’, this explication of the data proposes that where positive manifestations have been identified, the students concerned should ensure they are capitalising on the benefits that are attributable to that manifestation. Similarly, the issues emerging from those manifestations yielding a negative influence on the student’s ability to become professionally empathic, are highlighted and ways suggested in which the student should address those issues.

4.3.2 H6 – an exemplar for a positive role

Of the six cases investigated, H6 is regarded as setting a standard for the ideal counsellor, a standard against which the other students can usefully be compared.

H6 already practises as a secular counsellor, and is attending the course to give him a better understanding of the specific principles of mainstream counselling and of the techniques it provides to handle typical issues.

His declared position is that religion is extremely important to him and that he believes his religious commitment helps him with his counselling practice. He says...

My faith has shaped me differently...this has helped me to see people as being important, and while not agreeing with every choice people make, [to be] able to respect their freedom of choice and views. I believe that all persons and counsellors have biases (not only Christians) and so being able to intentionally not impose these is important...

He declares that his religious commitment will not stop him being open-minded or cause him to be judgemental when dealing with his clients.

H6 expresses his religious commitment with significant levels of both interpersonal and intrapersonal activity. Having been religiously committed for more than 30 years, it is assumed that the role now described has been influential in the whole process of H6 developing his counselling skills.

Degree of Complexity

H6's development of professional empathy benefits from all five positive manifestations and, with a positive outcome, all three mediating manifestations. However, there is no evidence to suggest his practice is challenged by any of the three negative manifestations or with negative outcomes from the three mediating manifestations.

With 33 positive characteristics (nineteen relating to positive manifestations and fourteen to mediating manifestations) and engagement with all 10 elements assigned to the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy (2007) model, the religious commitment / professional empathy role employed by H6 appears to comprise 330 distinctly definable individual interrelationships.

Level of Maturity

With academic qualifications in psychology, theology, and teaching, H6 presents as being well qualified to handle intellectually demanding problems and situations. This interpretation of his intellectual ability is supported by the quality of his narrative and other class exercises, and his mature contributions to class activities.

H6 acknowledges that his religious beliefs lie behind his whole approach to life, but importantly demonstrates an openness to his decision-making when he indicates that his

religious beliefs only have moderate effect on his 'dealings in life'. H6 demonstrates a high level of personal reflection in his narrative. These observations support the idea that H6 has achieved the world-centric view that is regarded as an ideal in counselling practice.

When dealing with religious commitment issues in his narrative, and in class, H6 appears to be able to deal with his religious beliefs in a pragmatic way.

Emerging issues

Apart from advising H6 to continue to reflect on and exploit the positive aspects of his religious commitment, H6 appears to have no professional empathy issues that he needs to address.

4.3.3 H4 – an example of a negative role

In contrast to H6's profile, H4's profile describes a student counsellor whose religious commitment represents an extreme in exhibiting negative manifestations.

H4 does not have any prior experience of counselling and has not been employed in a job that has involved using mainstream counselling skills. In class, H4 presents as a pleasant but somewhat introverted student.

H4 scored 98% with her Worthington RCI-10 responses and declares that religion is very important to her. She also intimates that she relies on her religion at all times to guide her decision-making. Indeed, her narrative states that Jesus guides her in everything she does.

H4 expresses her religious commitment with significant levels of both intrapersonal and interpersonal activity.

Degree of complexity

H4's developing professional empathy is weakly influenced by the 'enhanced ethical standards' manifestation and, on occasions, by the positive aspect of the 'validation of self' mediating manifestation. The main feature of H4's developing empathy is that her religious commitment mainly plays a negative role. More particularly, H4's quest for professional empathic competence suffers from her 'limited worldview', 'restricted and confused thinking', 'differing expectations', and the negative possibilities arising from the mediating manifestations of 'confidence and assertiveness' and 'disclosure'. In contradiction to the positive role 'validation of self' mentioned above, she also demonstrates that she experiences challenges from this mediating manifestation.

With two positive characteristics and 22 negative characteristics (eight relating to negative manifestations and fourteen to mediating manifestations), resulting in a total of 24

characteristics, and engagement with seven of the elements assigned to the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy (2007) model, the religious commitment / professional empathy role employed by H4 appears to comprise 240 distinctly definable individual interrelationships.

Level of maturity

H4 may find it difficult to countenance any other viewpoint on client issues, but that which emerges from her religious teaching. H4's narrative frequently makes statements that rely on a literal interpretation of the bible. The views she expresses tend to be dismissive of arguments that do not obviously relate to the tenets of her faith. When called on to provide an opinion on typical client issues, she tends to resort to using interpretations that are based on her biblical teaching.

H4, therefore, shows a relatively low degree of pragmatism in the way she processes her religious beliefs.

Emerging issues

H4 needs to increase the degree of pragmatism she is able to use in her decision-making. She could do this by reflecting critically on the manifestations and characteristics highlighted by the analysis. In so doing, she should reflect on the consequences arising from the interrelationships these manifestations and characteristics have with the components and elements of the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy (2007) model.

For example, consider H4's statement...

Although we have been taught that our religious beliefs should not be used in the therapeutic sessions, I am of the opinion that Bible based teachings does and will bring a fresh perspective on the holistic restoration of an individual or individuals seeking change and transformation.

This statement has been associated with the 'leading to failure to consider other possibilities' characteristic, which is a negative outcome for the 'self-disclosure' mediating manifestation. One of the four possible interrelationships anticipated for this characteristic, is the linkage with the 'perceptual depth' element of empathic attunement, the second component of the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy (2007) empathy model.

In this case, H4 could usefully reflect on her reduced ability to probe her clients for the deeper meaning inherent in the client's emotional state (thus achieving perceptual depth). A successful reflection would lead H4 to appreciate better her need to acknowledge, for instance, the important role played by the client's own views.

Following this realisation, H4 could plan a course of action to address this and other possible 'self-disclosure' issues.

Because of the complexity of the many interrelationships involved in her reflection, H4 is likely to benefit from working with an experienced professional, who could help her appreciate the consequences of not addressing her current low level of pragmatism and the importance of taking the components and elements of the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy(2007) model into consideration.

4.3.4 H5 and L1 – examples of mixed roles

Although H5 and L1's Worthington RCI-10 scores indicate a big difference in their respective commitment to religion, and they would be expected to relate to their religion in different ways, they both demonstrated roles for their religious commitment that included both similar positive and negative manifestations.

Like H4, neither H5 nor L1 has direct prior experience of working as counsellors. L1, however, is a teacher and will have some indirect experience of working with young people in a pastoral capacity.

H5 had a Worthington RCI-10 score of 93% and L1 a score of 3%.

H5 expresses her religion with both intrapersonal and interpersonal activity. L1 avoids stating she is committed to a religion, but does admit to reading the Bible and engaging in prayer.

Degree of complexity

The developing competences of both H5 and L1 are influenced by all five positive manifestations, by the 'limited world-view' and 'restricted and confused thinking' negative manifestations, and by the positive outcomes for the mediating manifestations of 'confidence and awareness' and 'validation of self'. H5 is also influenced by the positive aspect of the 'self-disclosure' mediating manifestation.

With 33 positive characteristics (19 positive and 14 arising from mediating characteristics), six negative characteristics, H5 has a total of 192 different interrelations with the ten elements which define the four competences in the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy(2007) model to consider. With one less mediating manifestation, L1 has 182 different potential interrelationships to manage.

Level of maturity

Like H4, H5 declares that her religious beliefs lie behind her whole approach to life and has a tendency to support what she says by reference to the tenets of her faith. Unlike H4, acknowledges that she does not always rely on her religious beliefs when making decisions and declares that she has come to appreciate that clients may have beliefs and values that are not congruent with her own.

L1 states that religion is not important to her and it does not influence her 'dealings in life'. L1 does admit to using some religious principles in her life. She explains that this is due to the fact that they are good principles to live by and not because they are based on religious teaching. Although claiming to be able to work in a non-judgemental way, L1 does acknowledge a shadow-side that considers religion to be 'a mask people hide behind' and she does acknowledge an irritation with 'people who have recently found God'.

H5 and L1 are both starting to become more pragmatic in the way they manage their religious commitments. They both still need to consider how to improve their pragmatic decision-making skills – H5 from the extreme religious commitment perspective demonstrated by H4, L1 from the perspective of a lapsed Christian.

Emerging issues

Apart from the issue of improving their pragmatic decision-making skills, H5 and L1 need to work to address the effects of their respective negative manifestations and ensuring they fully appreciate the value of their positive manifestations.

For an example of dealing with a negative manifestation, consider H5's statement made when she talked about the problems she foresees when her future clients present her with issues to do with marriage...

Since one of tenets is that marriage was ordained by God for a man and a woman and is a means of continuing the next generation (biologically).

Whereas same sex marriages prevent the reproduction of the next generation.

Within the context of her narrative, H5's statement indicates the following characteristic / manifestation combinations: 'failure to acknowledge some biblical contexts not relevant today' (Limited Worldview); 'lack of personal thought' and 'being told what to believe, not making up own mind' (Restricted and confused thinking); and lack of 'awareness of societal and personal culture and values' and lack of 'flexibility and openness to new ideas' (Validation of Self).

Out of the many interrelationships H5 should reflect on, that between ‘failure to acknowledge some biblical contexts not relevant today’ and, for instance, ‘feedback’ as an element of empathic communication (third component of Thwaites & Bennett-Levy (2007) model) is worthy of further consideration.

Consequently, H5 needs to appreciate that same sex marriages are now accepted by many in the western hemisphere and to colour her feedback to her client with the sentiments expressed in the quoted statement will disenfranchise many clients.

Like in H4’s case, H5 and L1 may well benefit from undertaking their reflections on their negative manifestations with an experienced professional.

4.3.5 L3 and L2 – further examples of a positive role

With Worthington RCI-10 scores of 0% and 33%, L3 and L2 have religious commitments ratings that vary considerably. L3, despite having a 0% score, declares that she is a religious person, but that her faith is not pinned to any ‘title such as Christian, Anglican or Catholic’. In practice, with their propensity to treat religion as a private affair, L3 and L2 appear to have similar levels of religious commitment.

Neither L3 nor L2 has prior direct experience of counselling, but L2 as a nurse, does have some experience of dealing with people in a therapeutic situation.

L3 and L2 both declare that they do not use their religious beliefs in their decision making. They were both, however, brought up in religious family environments.

L3 and L2’s religious commitment focuses on an intrapersonal involvement. Neither student’s religious commitment is expressed in an interpersonal context.

Degree of complexity

L3 and L2 empathic practices are both influenced by the positive manifestations of ‘enhanced perceptiveness’, ‘a more positive view of human nature’, ‘improved sense of equality’, and an ‘enriched ability to address client issues’. Their practices are also influenced by the positive aspects of ‘confidence and assertiveness’ and ‘validation of self’. In addition, L2’s practice is influenced by the positive manifestation of ‘confirmed ethical standards’.

L2’s developing practice is influenced by 30 positive characteristics (19 positive and 11 arising from mediating characteristics), with 152 different interrelationships with the elements of the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy model.

L3's developing practice, being influenced by 27 positive characteristics (16 positive and 11 arising from mediating characteristics), is subject to 141 different interrelationships with the elements of the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy model.

Level of maturity

L3 does not use her religious belief in any of 'dealings in life'.

L2 declares that her religious beliefs lie 'moderately' behind her whole approach to life and that her religious beliefs 'somewhat' influence all her dealings in life.

Emerging issues

As with H6, L3 and L2 do not appear to have any professional empathy issues to deal with. The task for L3 and L2 is to ensure that they build on the positive manifestations that have been identified.

4.4 Discussion of Chapter 4 outcomes

The significance of the research on which Chapter 4 has been based is six fold. Firstly, it explains how the manifestations and characteristics arising from a student counsellor's religious commitment systematically interrelate with the components and elements of a recognised model of professional empathic competence. It is acknowledged that the approach taken to gathering and interpreting H6, H5, H4, L3, L2 and L1's data cannot guarantee the extent, if any, that the manifestations, characteristics and interrelationships identified apply to these particular students in practice. However, it is now argued that the approach taken, with its frequent referral back to the empirical and practice literature, is sufficient to assume that the manifestations, characteristics and interrelationships identified are features of the role that religious commitment can play in a student counsellor's development of professional empathy.

Secondly, Part II of the analysis and interpretation of the data demonstrates how the identification of the manifestations, characteristics and interrelationships identified in Part I can be used in a practical way to get a better understanding of where and how they need to manage their development of professional empathy. With the technique established it is now possible in a practical setting to map how a student counsellor's religious beliefs might influence her progress towards professional empathy positively, rather than negatively. While the numbers of possible interrelationships is potentially huge, the findings now presented offer researchers and counselling teachers a means of targeting key issues for students more quickly than was previously the case.

Thirdly, the findings demonstrate the potential complexity of the relationship between a student counsellor's religious commitment and their development of professional empathy. With potentially hundreds of different interrelationships, it is now clearer why there is little consensus in the theoretical, empirical and practice literature on how religious commitment influences students in their journey to full professional empathic practice.

Fourthly, while not providing a fully formed view on the moderating influence of 'maturity' in the student's management of their religious commitment while developing full professional empathic competence, the Part II findings do provide a clearer starting point with which to consider the concept of 'pragmatism in processing religious beliefs'.

Fifthly, the findings of the research described in Chapter 4 shows how the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy model of professional empathy could be operationalized in a practical situation. While the research in the study focuses on religious commitment, the manifestation, characteristic, interrelationship approach used, could be extended to analyse any phenomenon whereby students' attitudes, emotional state or environment had the potential to influence their development of professional empathy.

Finally, the findings of the research have provided an illustration of how reflective writing can be used by counselling students to examine their attitudes, prejudices and biased behaviours, and to review their approaches to developing professional empathy, and to more generally develop their counselling practice. While the reflective writing approach adopted did not provide the immediate opportunity that, say, semi-structured interviews would have provided for checking my students exact meaning in each of their statements, it is argued that the approach adopted benefited from three strengths: firstly, it helped minimise the likelihood of reactivity on the part of the students to my presence; secondly, it avoided the impact my biases might otherwise have had on what the students said; thirdly, as noted by Cresswell & Plano Clark (2011), narratives often yield valuable information about the context from which a respondent's statements have been made; and finally, the technique adopted minimised the risk of data gathering 'interfering in the ongoing flow of everyday events' (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, & Sechrest, 2000). Also, in selecting a reflective writing approach I assumed that the social constructionist approach I adopted, where I focused on whether religious commitment had the potential to influence a student counsellor's ability to achieve professional empathy, but not the extent to which any such influence may impact the student counsellor, did not require me to investigate the subtle nuances of students' meanings. Had I assumed a realist perspective, where a more detailed discourse and text analysis would have been required, my reliance on reflective writing may not have yielded appropriate reliability results.

Having identified these six significances for my findings, it is recognised that as a 'first of its kind' the research findings must nonetheless be regarded as being tentative and as requiring further development.

It is also acknowledged that the 'technique' used would become more useful in a practical context, if it were allied to simultaneous use of other psychological evaluation techniques. For example, the concept of 'maturity' and 'pragmatic processing of religious beliefs' could be more accurately explored using, say, the measuring instruments used by Dudley & Cruise (1990) or by Kristensen, Pedersen & Williams (2001) in their work on religious maturity. Other, more routinely used psychometric tests could usefully be used to determine a student's personality traits. With this additional information, together with a proactive engagement with the student, the researcher / teacher would be able to get an ever greater insight into the student's approach to developing an 'ability to pragmatically process their religious beliefs'.

5 USING THE MANIFESTATIONS TO CONDUCT FURTHER ANALYSIS ON MODERATELY RELIGIOUS STUDENTS

5.1 Introduction

As a result of the analysis of the data described in Chapter 4 it can be argued that the approach taken, with its frequent referral back to the empirical and practice literature, is sufficient to claim that the manifestations, characteristics and interrelationships identified are genuine features of the role that religious commitment can play in a student counsellor's development of professional empathy. The objective of this activity was to carry out further analysis, to find out whether there would be any differences between this sample of students and those whose data developed the themes, now called the manifestations. The intention was to conduct an independent analysis of the narrative data for three further students in the class: M1, M2 and M3. This further analysis was conducted without any reference to H6, H5, H4, L3, L2 and L1's data. To facilitate the analysis, M1, M2 and M3's data was analysed using a version of the manifestation inventory set out on the spreadsheet used to manage the students' narrative data in Chapter 4. To help maintain the independence of this analysis, the version of the manifestations inventory used was cleared of H6, H5, H4, L3, L2 and L1's data prior to uploading of M1, M2 and M3's data.

Again, as with Chapter 4, this chapter is presented in two parts. Part I examines the extent to which the identified manifestations and characteristics can be used to highlight specific interrelationships applying to M1, M2 and M3's data. Apart from conducting this independent analysis to compare the findings presented in Chapter 4, the present discussion sets out specific examples to explain how the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy model has been used by the study to test the acceptability of an emerging theme as a manifestation or characteristic.

In Part II, the data is used (as was the case in Part II of Chapter 4) to show how working profiles for counselling students can be produced for the classroom. In this exploration of the data, more explicit discussion is provided on how the numbers of interrelationships that possibly exist have been calculated. This gives additional visibility of the approach taken by this research, to keep track of the very large numbers of interrelationships found to be possible.

M1, M2 and M3 were selected as the three students who had the mid-range scores in the Worthington RCI-10 survey conducted at the start of the data gathering period. The approach used sought to provide as great a contrast with H6, H5 and H4, as the three top

scoring students in the Worthington RCI-10, and L3, L2 and L1, as the three bottom scoring students on the Worthington RCI-10 survey.

The biographical profiles for M1, M2 and M3 are as follows. M1 refers to herself as an Anglican, and has an RCI 10 score of 32 (64%). Her Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright Empathy Quotient score is 61 (76%). She has a Bachelor's degree, and says she does not outwardly describe herself as Christian or religious. She also states that 'certain aspects of my religious leanings have guided me through life'. M2 is a banking official, who says that her life has always been shaped by religion. She refers to herself as Pentecostal, and has a Worthington RCI 10 score of 34 (68%). Her view is that religion forms the basis of one's identity, which impacts one's relationships. She expresses the view that religion forms our approach to counselling practices. M3 describes herself as a housewife, with a religious affiliation to the Pentecostal church. Her Worthington RCI 10 score is 37 (74%) and her Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright Empathy Quotient score is 54 (68%). M3 does not think that religion plays a role in counselling practice. She however, acknowledged that most of the helping qualities she has, were developed from being raised in the church.

5.2 Part I: Review of individual interrelationships

5.2.1 Overview

Part I sets out an interpretation on the findings of the manifestations, characteristics and interrelationships analysis using M1, M2 and M3's data. To make the findings more accessible, four examples of the types of interrelationships are presented.

To help clarify the complexity involved, Table 6 and Table 7 have been provided at the end of Chapter 5. Table 6 provides a map of the characteristic to empathic element interrelationships assumed by the spreadsheet inventory. The map presented uses the nomenclature 'P' to indicate a positive interrelationship, 'N' to indicate a negative interrelationship and, in recognition of an ability to be either positive or negative, a 'B' to indicate a mediating interrelationship. Table 7 provides the statistics relating to the numbers of characteristic / element interrelationships suggested by the statements made by M1, M2 and M3 in their text extract. A final part of Table 7 shows that there are 132 interrelationships possible, given one example of each of the 'interrelationships' identified within the 'manifestations inventory'.

With over 30 text extracts included in M1, M2 and M3's narratives, many of them giving nuanced accounts of more than one characteristic, the analysis (as can be seen from Table 7) shows that there were nearly 800 potential characteristics to element interrelationships for the characteristics identified. It is clearly not feasible to report on each one.

To concentrate on a meaningful portrayal of the interrelationships encountered, while also demonstrating the specific effect identified ‘interrelationships’ are likely to have on the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy ‘components’ and ‘elements’ involved, therefore, the commentary now provided focuses on four detailed examples, one under each of the heading: empathic stance, empathic attunement, empathic communication and empathic knowledge.

5.2.2 Empathic Stance

For this review, the component of empathic stance is considered together with its two elements (as defined in Chapter 3): ‘mood and tone’ and ‘perceptions and opinions’.

The significance of the major influences these manifestations exert on the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy model is that the findings of the study can now identify up to 35 different religious commitment / empathic competence factors that might influence a student counsellor’s ability to acquire the empathic stance needed to become fully professionally empathic (see Table 6).

As can be seen from Table 6, there is an indication of a multiplicity of potential interactions between these 30 plus factors and a student’s acquisition of an appropriate empathic stance. The Table 6 ‘manifestations map’ also demonstrates that all manifestations identified are considered to affect empathic stance, except the manifestation of ‘enriched ability to address client issues’. This means that empathic stance can have up to 67 interrelationships with characteristics defining the ten manifestations concerned: eighteen positive interrelationships; thirteen negative interrelationships; and eighteen positive and eighteen negative mediating interrelationships.

For the purpose of showing how these empathic stance interrelationships work in practice the example of ‘recognising client’s struggle / compassion / understanding’ (a characteristic of the positive manifestation of ‘enhanced view of human nature’) is now presented.

First Example: M3 has provided a statement which suggests that her religion has given her an enhanced ability to ‘recognise client’s struggle’ (B.6 in Table 6), a characteristic of the positive manifestation ‘enhanced view of human nature’. As will be seen from the manifestations map in Table 6, the ‘recognising client’s struggle’ characteristic is considered to have, amongst other interrelationships, an interrelationship with ‘mood and tone’ as an element of the component ‘empathic stance’.

As noted previously, Thwaites & Bennett-Levy define empathic stance as the attitude that helps the therapist ‘infuse other aspects of empathic skills (attunement, communications skills) with a sense of benevolence, curiosity and interest’ (2007, p. 597). M3 suggests an empathic stance that aligns with this definition when she says...

I prefer to discuss opinions based on mutual discussions and information, maybe even proof, which would allow and encourage people to come to a resolution which best suits them and change if they see it fitting, necessary or beneficial to themselves.

Elsewhere she reveals an attitude towards her future clients which shows an intention to 'bracket' her views, when she says '*I try not to judge others or their personal lifestyles*'. She goes on to emphasise that her resolve will not be affected where clients have been involved in lifestyles that are '*frowned on by society*'. In her narrative, M3 goes on to reflect on how her religious faith has given her the opportunity to manage her own 'personal struggle' and on how she has sought to understand how people manage the challenges they face in their own lives. The hope is that M3 will be able to build on this manifestation to achieve the 'infusing' effect highlighted by Thwaites & Bennett-Levy.

M3's narrative, therefore, is considered to provide a good example with which to describe the dynamics of the 'recognising clients struggle' characteristic interrelationship with the 'mood and tone' element of empathic stance.

5.2.3 Empathic attunement

As has been noted elsewhere in the study, the skill of empathic attunement is a 'perceptual skill' which involves an active on-going effort to 'stay attuned on a moment-to-moment basis with the client's communications and unfolding process' (Thwaites & Bennett-Levy, 2007, p. 598).

The assumption is made that within Thwaites & Bennett-Levy's conceptualisation of empathic attunement there are two elements: 'achieving perceptual depth'; 'achieving authenticity'. The first element is considered to comprise an ability to 'see' underlying emotional state of the client; the second element, an ability to convince the client that the counsellor really can 'feel' the client's emotional state.

Second Example: M1 has provided a statement which suggests that her religious commitment has given her an 'enhanced perceptiveness' under the characteristic headings of 'Experience' and 'Role models' (A.2 and A.3 in Table 6). As can be determined from the manifestations map in Table 6, the two characteristics identified have, amongst other interrelationships, interrelationships with 'perceptual depth' and 'authenticity'.

M1 states in her commentary, '*I know from personal experience that in troubled times a listening ear is very comforting*'. In her response to a question asking her to explain how her religious belief impacts her ability to become a qualified counsellor, she talks about having personally experienced the feelings of isolation when as a younger person, members of her family were not prepared to listen to her and give her advice. She talks about this early

experience motivating her to now ensure she is available for relatives and friends in need. She also talks about her experiences with her church...

Most of my childhood, teenage and adult years were spent in the Anglican Church. I spent many hours at Sunday school, taking part in activities such as lesson reading, peer groups and also visiting the elderly and sick of the parish who could not attend church. I learnt a lot and I believe that the person I have become is as a result of my religious background.

With the second highest Baron Cohen and Wheelwright Empathic Quotient score in the class (76% compared with 81%), it is likely that M1's developing practice has and will continue to benefit from the religious 'experience' and the 'role models' her narrative suggests, gained from being a member of the Anglican Church.

It would also appear that M1's 'experience' includes that derived from informally working with people to help them manage their emotional issues, and also from the learning that has taken place through working with role models from her church (e.g. church elders, other members of the congregation, and the like).

In passing, it is also considered that M1's 'enhanced perceptiveness' will also benefit her empathic stance and her empathic communication skills.

5.2.4 Empathic communication

From the early work undertaken for this study, it is suggested that the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy competence of empathic communication can be regarded as being informed by the three sub-competences of: 'client validation'; 'feeding back'; and 'establishing appropriate types of engagement for given counselling occasions'. The first of these focuses on the counsellor's ability to question another person or client and to articulate that person's deeper emotional state, in a way that convinces the client that her feelings are normal under the prevailing circumstance. The second sub-competence focuses on the process used in exchanges with a client, in which the counsellor regularly confirms what is being said, to ensure there is accurate understanding between the two. The third focuses on the degree to which the counsellor is able to engage with appropriate questioning, affirming, and summarising skills to ensure a structured approach to discussing the client's emotional state.

Thwaites & Bennett-Levy consider that good empathic communication 'should seek to relate thoughts, emotions and behaviour at every appropriate opportunity' (2007, p. 599). They suggest that 'good empathic communication reflects both clients' emotional experience (articulated and unarticulated) and their frames of reference'. They also point out that that

accurate empathic communication involves both cognitive and emotional aspects, and that empathic stance, empathic attunement and empathic knowledge are all intimately involved.

The example now presented illustrates one of the manifestations and characteristics identified as having a major influence on empathic communication are from the narratives provided by M1 and M2.

Third Example: M1 and M2 have provided statements which suggest that their religious commitment has given them an ‘enriched ability to address client issues’ under the characteristic heading of ‘use of scriptural truths’ (E.3 in Table 6). As can be seen from the manifestations map in Table 6, the characteristic identified has, amongst other interrelationships, interrelationships with the elements of ‘client validation’ and ‘feedback’.

The idea behind the ‘enriched ability to address client issues’ manifestation sits with the idea of some aspect of a student’s religious commitment providing a resource that can be used in the therapeutic exchange between a counsellor and a client. Apart from the use of ‘scriptural truths’, the definition for this manifestation also includes the characteristics of: using ‘religious treatment / analysis concepts’ derived from a counsellor’s religious belief in the therapeutic process; using ‘prayer and religious contemplation to generate hope’; and, for clients who will respond appropriately, the idea of suggesting the ‘intervention of a divine agent’ in order to alleviate a client’s anxiety.

In the case of M1, her narrative suggests she might use the following ‘scriptural truth’ in her future counselling practice...

I always keep the commandments in mind and I am also guided by a strong conscience. There is always that nagging voice prompting me to do or not to do and what could be the repercussions of my actions.

M1’s commentary demonstrates a belief that her religious beliefs should only play a ‘small part’ in her practice, but what she says does indicate a significant level of continuing dedication to her church. As noted in the second example above, M1’s narrative also suggested that she would possibly use such exhortations as ‘judge not, that ye be not judged (Matthew 7 1-2)’. With this and the quotation provided above, it may be assumed that there is a significant probability that M1 will use, where appropriate, biblical references (‘scriptural truths’) to help clients appreciate what constitutes pro-social behaviour and what constitutes antisocial behaviour.

In a similar vein, M2’s narrative also suggests that when appropriate she will use such references. In her commentary she discusses the possibility of clients who subscribe to other religions having beliefs that will ‘vary or conflict’ with her own beliefs. She makes a

specific reference to the use of existential therapeutic techniques that will help her to work with clients to resolve conflicting values and beliefs. To summarise in a simple way the points she was making, she used the quote, '*Honour thy father and thy mother; and thou shall love they neighbour as thyself (Matthew 19: 19 KJV)*'.

The important manifestation lying behind all the 'enriched ability to address client issues' characteristics is that reference to religious values, techniques or to God must be made in circumstances that suit the client's own religious beliefs, and must not be imposed on the client by the counsellor.

Under circumstances where such references are not appropriate to the client's religious beliefs, this manifestation could become a negative manifestation rather than a positive one.

Under circumstances where the 'scriptural truths' characteristic suggested is used positively, however, M1 and M2 empathic communication ability could be, it is suggested, improved through the richer vocabulary and the greater understanding scriptural truth appropriately interpreted can provide.

5.2.5 Empathic knowledge

Thwaites & Bennett-Levy define empathic knowledge as 'what therapists learn from teachers or from reading during training and professional development'. They note that empathy knowledge acquired through counsellor training is one of the key factors that differentiate 'therapeutic empathy' from 'natural empathy'. They point to the fact that empathic knowledge introduces the counsellor to more complex concepts (e.g. working with the therapeutic process, dealing with more complex issues of security and resistance, etc.) (2007, pp. 599-600).

The three elements of the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy's component of empathic knowledge assumed by the study are: 'knowledge of theories relating to empathy'; 'knowledge that comes from experience'; and 'knowledge of agreed protocols and procedures applying to the practice of mainstream counselling'.

The manifestation selected for Fourth Example has, according to the definitions provided in this study, a major influence on both empathic stance and empathic communication.

Fourth Example: M2 has provided statements which suggest that their religious commitment has given her an 'improved sense of equality' under the characteristic heading of 'adherence to humanistic philosophical perspective' (D.3 in Table 6). As can be seen from the manifestations map in Table 6, the characteristic identified has, amongst other interrelationships, an interrelationship with the element of 'theoretical knowledge'.

In a written presentation on how her religion affects her practice, M2 demonstrates an appreciation of humanistic counselling principles when she says...

It is my belief that every normal human being has a desire to be respected, recognized and accepted, in our own unique way. Hence I consider it very important to respect my clients, as well as myself in the counsellor-client relationship.

Her description of her intended approach to her future practice is demonstrated further when she says...

I will always seek to employ the following qualities which I consider valuable in every counsellor-client interaction: a) Respect for human rights and dignity; b) Appreciating cultural differences and human experiences, while remaining non-judgmental; c) Providing for and ensuring the integrity of the counsellor-client relationship; and d) Maintaining client confidentiality and ethical principles

While M2 does not make specific reference to the theories underpinning humanistic counselling practice, she has, as part of her counselling course, been exposed to the person-centred therapy of Carl Rogers, and to Rollo May's existential psychology. She has also been exposed to the principles of Gestalt Therapy and other therapies which rely on humanistic principles.

For the purpose of this analysis, the combination of statements made and knowledge of what professional development she has achieved were taken to indicate that M2 is showing a tendency towards 'adhering to humanistic principles' – and as such, is demonstrating an 'improved sense of equality'.

5.3 Part II: Practical use of the findings

Using the findings of the validation review, Part I has set out four examples of how the manifestations and characteristics identified in Chapter 4 can be used to trace individual interrelationships for individual characteristics, tracking the characteristic through its corresponding manifestation, to one or more of the four Thwaites & Bennett-Levy components, and then to one or more elements. The examples and discussion provided in this part of the chapter uses these same findings to illustrate an approach to using the original manifestations and characteristics in a research or teaching context where an overall picture is required of the effects that a student's religious commitment has on their ability to become professionally empathic.

Included in this section is a hypothetical report, based on the findings of this new analysis, which shows the type of complete religious commitment / empathic competence report that can be produced for students by using the manifestation and characteristics identified. In so doing, this should be regarded as supplementing the illustration of overall student profiling provided in Part II of Chapter 4.

Table 7 sets out the numbers of instances where an emerging theme from M1, M2 and M3's data has suggested an impact on their respective Thwaites & Bennett-Levy components. The table shows M1's data resulting in 192 characteristic / element linkages; M2's in 343; and M3's in 234 linkages.

An important feature of the analysis is that although M1, M2 and M3's narratives responded to the same class exercise, there is a significant difference between the numbers of characteristic / element linkages between each of the students. This difference is attributable to the fact that M2's responses were more detailed than M1 and M3's. Also, M2's statements tended to be more frequently applicable to more than one characteristic and hence, through the analysis, to more element linkages with the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy competences, than was the case for M1 and M3.

What the information in Table 7 illustrates is the suggestion that, for M1, M2 and M3, the numbers of interrelationships between religious commitment characteristics and professional empathy elements are distributed, in descending order of importance, as follows: empathic communication (range 30% to 37% of total interrelationships), on empathic attunement (range 25% to 30%), on empathic stance (range 23% to 29% of total no of interrelationships), and on empathic knowledge (range 10% to 15%).

With, according to Thwaites and Bennett-Levy, a relationship between empathic stance and counsellor "attitudes", empathic attunement and empathic communication and "skills", and empathic knowledge and "cognitive function and experience", the distribution of results tends to suggest that M1, M2 and M3 have gain more in terms of "skill development" from their religious commitment than is the case for "attitudinal developments" and "development of cognitive function and experience". This having been said, it must be remembered that Thwaites & Bennett-Levy note that empathic stance, empathic attunement, empathic communication and empathic knowledge are themselves interrelated: thus suggesting that even with an apparent bias in terms of the advantages gained from the religious commitment characteristic / empathic element interrelationships identified, this bias is likely to be ameliorated by the internal interrelationships within the Thwaites and Bennett-Levy model – thus leading to a levelling of of any particular bias that might become apparent from the results of the thematic analysis reported on herein.

Moving to the concluding stage of the analysis, M2's data has been used to produce an extract from the type of report that the spreadsheet inventory now established can facilitate. The following is an extract from a report I have written as M2's course facilitator...

Course facilitator's assessment of M2 and her religious commitment

M2 is a banking official, who says that her life has always been shaped by religion. She refers to herself as Christian, and has a Worthington RCI 10 score of 34 (68%). Her view is that religion forms the 'basis of one's identity, which impacts one's relationships'.

With 339 positive manifestation characteristic, empathic element interrelationships allocated to her Thwaites & Bennett-Levy professional empathy profile and only four to negative interrelationships, M2 presents as a student whose religious commitment could potentially have a significantly positive effect on her ability to become professionally empathic.

The 339 positive manifestation characteristic statements applying to M2 can be classified more precisely as 101 (29%) statements which were empathic stance related, 87 (25%) which were empathic attunement related, 103 (30%) which were empathic communication related, and 52 (15%) which were empathic knowledge related.

With a recent Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright score of 70%, M2 appears to have a well-developed innate empathy. What the analysis suggests is that as her Certificate in Counselling course proceeds, she can usefully reflect on how she can exploit the positive manifestations from which she appears to benefit, to best effect.

The perspective suggested is supported by the fact that M2 has only one negative characteristic, an expression of 'restricted and confused thinking' that maps on to her empathic stance and empathic knowledge profiles.

As a result of this review, it is recommended that M2 addresses the following specific priorities:

- 1. Reflect on the negative manifestation suggested by the statement 'Religion forms the basis of shaping our identity. Our identity impacts our relationships. Counselling is conducted in counsellor-client relationships. Hence religion forms our approach to counselling practices'. This statement was considered to suggest an*

‘unreasonably fixed perspective’, a characteristic of the ‘restricted and confused thinking’.

2. *Reflect on the three statements allocated to the characteristic ‘God has inspired student’. As one of the characteristics to the ‘confidence and assertiveness’ moderating manifestation, the trait indicated could impact on her empathic competence positively, but conversely, if by misjudgement it led to the student’s beliefs being inappropriately conveyed to a client, it could prove to undermine M2’s ability to maintain appropriate empathic stance, empathic attunement and empathic communications competences.*
3. *With five different statements pointing to ‘enhanced levels of introspection, etc.’...*

(The complete list in the report is not included here, but it contained a total of ten actions for M2 to consider.)

In summary, M2 has provided evidence in her written work that she has the potential to use her religious commitment to considerably enhance her development as a counsellor, particularly in respect of the development of her professional empathic practice.

In presenting this report it is recognised that the analysis on which it is based could use transcripts from semi-structured interviews and focus groups in addition to the guided narratives on which the report presented relies.

Because it involves a highly complex network of interrelated factors, the workload and discipline to conduct an assessment such as the ones discussed would be time-consuming and would require a high level of course facilitator concentration on tracking observed interrelationships. At this stage of development, however, it is considered that this workload would still be manageable, particularly if a proprietary version of the characteristics / element inventory database used in this study were available to the course facilitator.

5.4 Discussion on Chapter 5 outcomes

The significance of the findings of the analysis for the three moderately religious respondents is (as was also the case for the research presented in Chapter 4) six fold. Firstly, it is argued that the analysis has shown the manifestation inventory devised in Chapter 4 provides a viable method of improving our understanding of the ‘role of religious

commitment' in a student's developing professional empathic practice. While this further analysis used data from student counsellors in the same educational setting, it was conducted on three alternative students whose developmental journey to becoming professional counsellors was to a large extent independent from the original students whose data was used in the initial analysis and development of the themes. The analysis was also completed many weeks after the analysis of H6, H5, H4, L3, L2 and L1's data, without reference back to that data.

Secondly, while it is not claimed that the list of manifestations, characteristics and interrelationships is complete and rationalised to the point where the manifestation inventory can be considered for widespread use, the findings of the analysis in this chapter did not reveal a need to make significant amendments to any of the features incorporated in the Chapter 4 manifestations inventory as it stands now.

Thirdly, this analysis has further confirmed the huge complexity that exists in understanding the interrelationships that operate within the 'role' now identified for religious commitment in a student's development of professional empathy.

Fourthly, the presentation in Parts I and II of Chapter 5 of the examples of how the manifestation inventory can be used in practice, lends further weight to the argument that the manifestation inventory could be developed as a universal 'tool' to aid future research and to assist counselling trainers to chart and act on potential interrelationships applying to individual students.

Fifthly, Part I of Chapter 5 has further illustrated the value of the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy model for the systematic and practical understanding of professional empathic competence in a mainstream counselling practice.

Finally, the work underpinning the further analysis with the three different students has emphasised the value of 'reflective writing' in how student counsellors can develop their professional practices. The experience as teacher of M1, M2 and M3 has given me a new insight into how their professional empathy was developing at the time the data was being collected, an insight that has now caused me to reflect on my own practice and on my plans for delivering my Certificate in Counselling course in the future.

Supporting the discussion in Chapter 4, the analysis in this chapter also highlights the fact that in a real-teaching situation, a manifestation inventory analysis would best be conducted in consultation with the student. The additional dialogue this would encourage would help gain further perspectives on the student concerned (e.g. motivations and personality traits) and would allow the course facilitator to check the intended meaning of key statements in

the students narrative. Such an exchange would also allow the course facilitator to explore any emerging manifestations, characteristics or interrelationships not currently listed within the inventory.

Additionally, as mentioned in Chapter 4, the conduct of a manifestations, characteristics and interrelationships review could usefully be undertaken in conjunction with the gathering of other data on the student or counsellor concerned (e.g. personality tests, religious maturity test, and the like).

By way of concluding my discussion on the findings of Chapter 5, I would now put forward the suggestion that the evidence now provided gives sufficient justification for the manifestations inventory to be developed further into a standard diagnostic instrument. The anticipation is that such a standardised instrument could be routinely used by students, researchers and counsellors to understand better the influence that religious commitment can have on the development and sustainment of professional empathy. Clearly, such development work would need to take into consideration a number of factors, including the following four...

The fact that the manifestations inventory currently relies on socially constructed professional counselling language to attribute meaning to student narratives, may on occasions, result in a misleading interpretation. The technique evolving from this research could, therefore, be improved by introducing further tests to ensure that there are no significant differences between inferred meanings and those intended by the participant in the analysis.

Building on this first factor, as has been suggested, the technique used with the manifestations inventory would benefit from supplementary data gathering, to equip the teacher, research or counsellor with further evidence with which she can understand better the likely impact that personality and other psychic phenomena could have on the perspective being developed (e.g. results from psychometric tests, religious maturity surveys, etc).

Similarly, the technique used with the manifestations inventory would benefit from a greater visibility of other cultural influences and environmental factors that could impact the perspective developed on a participant. Clearly, under certain circumstances, the influence of other cultural factors may mask the perspective arising from use of the manifestations inventory. These other factors need to be understood for a meaning perspective to be obtained.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the characteristics, manifestations, and interrelationships on which the manifestations inventory is based will most certainly need to be rationalised, with a particular emphasis on simplifying and unifying the descriptions used, and on ensuring that positive, negative and mediating manifestations are appropriately identified.

Section 6.4 discusses further the further research effort that could take place to develop the manifestations inventory as is now proposed.

Table 6: Map of manifestations, characteristics, interrelationships, components and elements

Code	Manifestation	Characteristic	Stance - Mood, etc.	Stance - Perceptions, etc.	Attunement - Depth, etc.	Attunement - Authenticity, etc.	Comm. - Validation, etc.	Comm. - Feedback	Comm. - Engagement	Knowledge - Theoretical	Knowledge - Experiential	Knowledge - Procedural
A.0		GENERAL	P	P	P	P					P	
A.1	Enhanced Perceptiveness	Improved empathic vocabulary	P	P	P	P						
A.2		Experience	P	P	P	P					P	
A.3		Role models	P	P	P	P						
B.0		GENERAL	P	P	P	P	P	P	P			P
B.1	Enhanced view of human nature	Increased respect for client	P		P	P	P	P				
B.2		Being non-judgemental		P	P	P	P	P				
B.3		Valuing people / clients as unique individual	P		P	P	P	P				
B.4		Accept contrary views from others		P			P	P	P			
B.5		Nurturing and caring for others / conscious of needs	P		P	P	P	P				P
B.6		Recognising client's struggle / compassion / understanding	P		P	P	P	P				
C.0		GENERAL		P							P	P
C.1	Confirmed ethical standards	Enhanced familiarity with applicable ethical standards		P								P
C.2		Experience of applying ethical standards in practice		P								P
C.3		Role models		P								P
D.0		GENERAL	P								P	
D.1	Improved sense of equality	Full sense of self-awareness on part of counsellor	P									
D.2		Belief in equitable relationship	P									
D.3		Adherence to humanistic philosophical perspective	P									P
E.0		GENERAL					P	P	P	P		
E.1	Enriched ability to address client issues	Religious treatment / analysis concepts being used									P	
E.2		Prayer and religious contemplation generating hope							P	P		
E.3		Use of scriptural truths					P	P		P		
E.4		Intervention of divine agent									P	
F.0		GENERAL	N	N	N		N	N	N	N		
F.1	Limited worldview	Failing to acknowledge some biblical context not relevant	N	N	N		N	N		N		
F.2		<i>Tendency to interpret bible literally, not symbolically</i>	N		N		N	N		N		
G.0		GENERAL	N	N						N	N	
G.1	Restricted and confused thinking	Lack of personal thought		N								
G.2		<i>Unreasonably fixed perspective</i>		N	N						N	N
G.3		Being told what to believe, not making up own mind.			N							
G.4		Clients act in a way that is counter to student's belief system	N	N								
H.0		GENERAL	N	N		N	N	N				
H.1	Differing expectations	Theological stance more conservative than client's	N	N		N	N	N				
H.2		Theological stance less conservative than client's	N	N		N	N	N				
I.0		GENERAL	B		B	B	B	B				
I.1	Confidence & assertiveness	God has inspired student	B		B	B	B	B				
I.2		Belief that God will not allow student to fail	B		B	B	B	B				
I.3		Improved social skills due to church community involvement	B		B	B	B	B				
I.4		Exchanging religious capital for social capital	B			B	B	B				
I.5		Enhanced levels of introspection because of ability to pray	B		B	B	B	B				
J.0		GENERAL	B	B		B	B	B		B	B	B
J.1	Validation of Self	Awareness of societal and personal culture and values	B	B		B	B	B				
J.2		Understanding of how self can influence counselling process	B	B		B	B	B				
J.3		Understanding of where counsellor is weak	B	B		B	B	B				
J.4		Enhanced awareness of how their emotions impact others	B	B		B	B	B				
J.5		Flexibility and openness to new ideas	B	B		B	B	B		B	B	B
J.6		Awareness of shadow-side and how counsellor manages	B	B		B	B	B				
K.0		GENERAL	B	B	B		B	B	B	B	B	B
K.1	Self-Disclosure	Greater range of life-experiences on which to draw					B	B			B	
K.2		shutting down to consider other possibilities		B	B			B		B		
K.3		Greater sensitivity to self-disclosure timing / content							B			B

Table 7: Statistical data for M1, M2 and M3

Student Reference	Manifestation Parameter	Thwaites & Bennett-Levy Competences										Row Totals
		Stance - Mood, etc.	Stance - Perceptions, etc.	Attunement - Depth, etc.	Attunement - Authenticity, etc.	Comm. - Validation, etc	Comm. - Feedback	Comm. - Engagement	Knowledge - Theoretical	Knowledge - Experiential	Knowledge - Procedural	
M1	Positive	19	6	13	13	12	12	1	5	4	0	85
	Mediating Positive	16	10	6	16	18	18	0	2	4	2	92
	SUBTOTAL POSITIVE	35	16	19	29	30	30	1	7	8	2	177
	COMPETENCE TOTAL +VE	51		48		61			17			
	Negative	3	2	2	0	2	2	0	3	1	0	15
	Mediating Negative	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	SUBTOTAL NEGATIVE	3	2	2	0	2	2	0	3	1	0	15
	COMPETENCE TOTAL -VE	5		2		4			4			
	GRAND TOTAL	38	18	21	29	32	32	1	10	9	2	192
COMPETENCE TOTAL	56		50		65			21				
M2	Positive	37	26	26	26	23	23	7	15	16	6	205
	Mediating Positive	23	13	12	23	23	24	3	4	3	6	134
	SUBTOTAL POSITIVE	60	39	38	49	46	47	10	19	19	12	339
	COMPETENCE TOTAL	99		87		103			50			
	Negative	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	4
	Mediating Negative	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	SUBTOTAL NEGATIVE	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	4
	COMPETENCE TOTAL	2		0		0			2			
	GRAND TOTAL	61	40	38	49	46	47	10	20	20	12	343
COMPETENCE TOTAL	101		87		103			52				
M3	Positive	13	6	11	11	13	13	4	6	4	2	83
	Mediating Positive	19	6	19	19	20	23	2	4	2	3	117
	SUBTOTAL POSITIVE	32	12	30	30	33	36	6	10	6	5	200
	COMPETENCE TOTAL	44		60		75			21			
	Negative	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	4
	Mediating Negative	6	2	4	6	6	6	0	0	0	0	30
	SUBTOTAL NEGATIVE	7	3	4	6	6	6	0	1	1	0	34
	COMPETENCE TOTAL	10		10		12			2			
	GRAND TOTAL	39	15	34	36	39	42	6	11	7	5	234
COMPETENCE TOTAL	54		70		87			23				
Generic total	Positive	10	8	8	8	7	7	2	4	4	1	59
	Mediating Positive	11	7	5	11	12	13	1	2	2	2	66
	SUBTOTAL +VE	21	15	13	19	19	20	3	6	6	3	125
	COMPETENCE TOTAL +VE	36		32		42			15			
	Negative	6	7	2	2	4	4	0	3	1	0	29
	Mediating Negative	11	7	5	11	12	13	1	2	2	2	66
	SUBTOTAL -VE	17	14	7	13	16	17	1	5	3	2	95
	COMPETENCE TOTAL -VE	31		20		34			10			
	GRAND TOTAL	38	29	20	32	35	37	4	11	9	5	220
COMPETENCE TOTAL	67		52		76			25				

6

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Response to Research Question

In the light of the findings of the research, it is now concluded that religious commitment does for many students have a role to play in the development of their full professional empathy.

Furthermore, the research shows that to understand the nature of that role, it is necessary to determine how students interpret their religious commitment in relation to their developing counselling practice, and to examine how particular aspects of their religious commitment interact with aspects of their developing professional empathy.

The research has demonstrated that there is a multiplicity of potential interrelationships that can operate within this role, which frequently overlap or interact, and that as a consequence, each student's role for religious commitment needs to be considered individually.

The findings have suggested that there were no discernible differences between the high, moderate and low religious commitment students in terms of the influences that religious commitment could have on their ability to develop professional empathy. But the findings do suggest that the relationship between the ability of a religiously inclined student to manage her religious belief pragmatically and her ability to become professionally empathic is significant.

6.2 Strengths of the research

At this concluding stage of the research, it is argued that the two principal strengths of the research reported on in my thesis are: (a) the contribution to the literature that my findings provide, and (b) practicality, usefulness and transferability of the techniques used to generate my findings.

(a) Contribution to literature: From my review of the theoretical and empirical literature, it is now apparent that the findings from the study can be considered to be unique and, correspondingly, can be seen as having made a contribution to the counselling and psychology of religion literature.

The literature on the phenomenon of religious commitment impacting the development of a student's professional empathy is sparse and contradictory. My search found no published work which covered any aspect of student counsellor training in the context of the highly religious communities typically found in the Caribbean. The literature highlights the many challenges in researching the psychology of religion. Although only of tangential relevance to the context of my study, I have sought to address these many challenges by building on

the research undertaken by Morrison & Borgen (2010) and Duriez (2004). The first suggesting a significantly positive relationship between religious commitment and a student's ability to become professionally empathic, the second suggesting no relationship at all. Where I have added to the literature is that both of these studies avoid positing the type of logical interrelationship that this study has proposed.

Also building on the work of others, my use of the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy model (2007) of empathic competence has demonstrated it to be an effective tool for assessing and guiding work of the type undertaken in my study. There appears to be no published research findings that rely on the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy model in the way my research has. This was surprising, as a perceived strength of the model was that it provided a clear conceptualisation of the empathic competence required by a mainstream counsellor. This contrasts with other models of empathy described in the literature, where there is less clarity than with the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy model. Accordingly, my research has demonstrated that the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy model can be used to provide a well-articulated structure within which to systematically study the dynamics of developing professional empathy: in my case, through the identification of the 'manifestations', 'characteristics' and 'interrelationships' now presented in my findings.

With these perspectives in mind, it is suggested that the uniqueness of this research and the lack of findings from other research workers should be acknowledged, and a recommendation accepted that the study could usefully be repeated with other counselling classes, to validate and refine the findings now presented further.

(b) Practicality of techniques and transferability of the research approach: The complex nature of the 'interrelationship' between 'manifestations', 'characteristics' and the acquisition and development of professional empathy had been identified at the start of the study. The design of the data collection and analysis procedures used responded positively to this initially perceived complexity, by logically articulating how the role of religious commitment could influence a student's development of professional empathy. The research design was then executed in a practical manner to enable the articulated interrelationships to be tested in a real-life setting.

The main features of the research design were: (i) using the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy model to describe professional empathy, and operationalizing its four 'components' by defining ten 'elements'; (ii) conceptualising the evidence of a student's religious commitment as a 'manifestation', with attendant 'characteristics'; and similarly, (iii) by identifying the 'golden thread' that linked 'characteristics' to 'manifestations' to the four 'components' and thence to the ten associated 'elements' of the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy model as

interrelationships. With these clear conceptions of the interrelationships between religious commitment and professional empathy, the methodology was, it is now argued, based on a well-structured, easily understood, and practically applicable model – the ‘manifestations inventory’.

Additionally, with its requirement to review each emerging ‘characteristic / manifestation’ combination in the light of available theoretical, empirical and practitioner literature, the initial identification and validation of the emergent findings was managed with little equivocation on which characteristics or manifestations were valid.

The experience gained from implementing the research described in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, demonstrates, it is suggested, that the research design employed not only provided an appropriate research methodology, but also provides the basis for a teaching and research technique that could usefully be used in future day-to-day research activities and counsellor training.

6.3 Challenges encountered in the research

Of the many encountered, the two most significant challenges were: (a) managing researcher bias, and (b) managing the complexity and diversity of the ‘interrelationships’ between identified ‘manifestations’ and ‘characteristics’ and the ten elements associate with the four Thwaites & Bennett-Levy components.

(a) Findings subject to researcher’s interpretation: Critics of qualitative research often identify the subjectivity and likelihood of researcher bias to distort a study’s findings. In order to illustrate the point, I am aware that I am apt to classify students who are polite, who are respectful of other students’ views in class discussions, and who do their class assignments to a high standard as being the most promising performers in the class. While the thematic analysis of the first six students’ data was in progress, I was aware of the potential problem of favouring H6, for example, who fits my ‘ideal profile’, and, as another example, to be dismissive of L1 and L3’s narratives. L1 and L3 can be unnecessarily controversial in class discussions, and a concern could have been that I might have been unduly disparaging about their ability to become professionally empathic.

As noted in the thesis, my training as a professional counsellor included training to bracket my personal views. In the case of this research, having reflected on the events that have surrounded my gathering and analysis of the data, I would argue that my personal opinions have not impacted my interpretation of the data in a way that subverts my intention to present findings that reflect the reality of how religious commitment can influence a student’s development of her professional empathic competence.

Part of my rationale for making this claim is that, when interpreting the meaning of what students had said, I relied on the language and meanings typically used in mainstream counselling practice. By doing this, I was able to reduce my reliance on my personally constructed ideas of language and meaning. This feature of the study's analytical strategy was enhanced by, for example, using the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy model of professional empathic practice to facilitate consistency of language and meaning. Frequent reference to the counselling training literature to support validation of emerging 'characteristics' and 'manifestations' also helped to maintain a standardised view of the language used and the meanings inferred.

(b) Managing complexity: As is evident from the variety of interrelationships reported for the surveyed students, the number of distinct religious commitment influences that the findings suggest can affect elements aligning with the four Thwaites & Bennett-Levy components can be large. From an analytical point of view, a challenge for the study has been managing these large numbers. After the experience of having tried initially to manage the analysis manually, it is now argued that research of this kind, with the potential for hundreds of interrelationships, necessarily has to be undertaken using electronic databases of one form or another – in my case the spreadsheet based 'manifestations inventory'.

6.4 Recommendations for further research

While there are many avenues that could be pursued to build on my research, I would suggest that future research activity could usefully focus on five developments: (a) further testing to examine the phenomena of personality and the psychological profile of the individual, particularly in respect of the developmental experiences discussed in 2.4.2, and how these impact a student counsellor's ability to become professionally empathic; (b) further clarification and expansion of the concepts of 'maturity' and 'pragmatic processing of religious beliefs'; (c) further refinement of the 'manifestations inventory'; (d) testing the approach used and conclusions drawn in other denominational and geographical religious settings; and (e) testing the approach used over time, to establish if in the short to medium terms, the inter-relationships between the manifestations, characteristics, components and elements remain stable.

(a) Personality and psychological profiles: As is evident from the discussion in 2.4.2, the acquisition of both innate empathy, and to a certain extent cognitive empathy, occurs naturally in childhood, through a person's teenage years and in early adulthood. Similarly, as evident from the discussion in 2.5.2, religious commitment is a complex psychological phenomenon that also develops through a person's life. It is acknowledged that this study did not seek to understand the personalities and psychological profiles of the students in the

research cohort and how these might influence their ability to become professionally empathic. While such omissions, it is argued, are acceptable with the social constructivist stance adopted, for specific insights on individual students, the emerging research model now proposed would benefit from an understanding of the effects of such personality and psychological effects. For example, the literature on attachment theory (Kirkpatrick & Hood, 1990) and attribution and coping theory (Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009, p. 6) could be used to further develop the model now in prospect. More generally, with further work it is suggested that the manifestations model could usefully be employed to link in with other psychological phenomena relating to the multi-level interdisciplinary perspective as advocated by Paloutzian and Park (2005) – a perspective discussed in more detail in 2.5.2.

(b) Complexity, maturity and pragmatic processing of religious beliefs: While implementing the research programme, it became apparent that ‘manifestations’, ‘characteristics’ and ‘interrelationships’ will themselves be moderated by other factors. More specifically, in undertaking my analysis it became apparent that the degree to which a student could ‘manage social, emotional and cognitive complexity’ and ‘pragmatically process her religious belief’ were possibly key determinants of a student’s ability to achieve the demanding standards set by the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy model. It also became apparent that the influences exerted by religious commitment (as investigated by this research) on the acquisition of professional empathy could themselves be significantly influenced by student attitudes, and other cultural, environmental and psychic phenomena. To gain a better understanding of these external influences better would help validate the findings now presented and would help in the development of the ‘manifestations inventory’ made available by this research.

(c) Developing ‘manifestations inventory’: It is suggested that an investment in further research and development work on the spreadsheet based ‘manifestations inventory’ used by the study would be worthwhile. What is needed is further clarification on and rationalisation of the ‘characteristics’, ‘manifestations’ and ‘interrelationships’ on which the manifestations inventory is based. This further work could usefully be based on collecting and analysing data from other students in other denominational and geographical settings. It could also usefully seek to confirm the definition of the ‘elements’ and ‘components’ which constitute the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy model. With the developments now proposed, the ‘manifestations inventory’ used by the study could then be developed for more widespread use by counselling teachers, students and counsellors themselves, and researchers who have a need to explore the subtle nuances of empathy.

(d) Other religions, religious and cultural settings: The value of my research findings would be considerably enhanced if they were tested with students from other religions and, within the Christian tradition, different denominations and geographical settings. Would, for example, a Muslim student counsellor face the same or different challenges?

(e) Longer-term stability of inter-relationships: The outcomes reported on in this thesis arise from a cross-sectional study and therefore do not take into account time dependency effects. In practice, different students will progress through their course material (and other learning experiences) at different rates and in different ways. It would be valuable, therefore, to examine these possible time dependency effects by conducting a longitudinal study to track how different students' professional empathic competences develop over time, and in the light of ongoing learning experiences.

Such additional research would necessarily have to take account of the possibility that the mainstream counselling model assumed by my research may not apply in another religious context. It would also have to take account of the fact that there may be differences in the understanding of empathy that prevails in another part of the world. To have data from a broader context, however, would help identify if the 'manifestations', 'characteristics' and 'interrelationships' emerging from my findings could be applied universally, or whether they would have to remain specific to highly religious communities in the Caribbean – the focus of this present study.

6.5 Final reflection on where this research leaves the reader

From a theoretical perspective, the outcome of the research reported on in this thesis provides a new structure within which to conceptualise how a student counsellor's religious commitment can impact their ability to acquire the professional empathy they need to become what Rogers (1961) describes as a "fully functioning person" and thus, an effective counsellor. Before being considered as a viable theoretical model, however, the conceptual structure now proposed (e.g. the inter-relationships between manifestations, characteristics, components and elements) needs to be developed further. The issue that will make such a development difficult is the complex web of interwoven interrelations associated with the phenomena of religious commitment and professional empathy. The further research recommended above will go a long way towards consolidating the linkages now foreseen between a student counsellor's affective, cognitive and conative world, and the intended meanings in what they say and do. As articulated in my thesis, the theoretical and empirical literature appears incomplete and in places contradictory. Accordingly, there is unlikely in the future to be a consensus view on a model for the relationship between religious

commitment and a student's ability to acquire professional empathy, that covers all cultures, religions and models of secular (and perhaps religious counselling practice).

From a methodological perspective, the outcome of this research demonstrates how reflective writing narratives can be used effectively under circumstances where research participants have an ability to engage in reflective writing and reflective thought. In my case, a significant aspect of my student counsellors' training lies in their developing an ability whilst on my course to reflect on the types of situation they will encounter in their future counselling practices: therefore, reflective writing was within the competence of the students. Had the research been directed at, say, lay persons, reflective writing as a means of gathering data would probably have not been a viable data collection approach unless supported by other data gathering and checking techniques. More generally, my research reinforces the usefulness of using a systematic thematic analysis of statements made by a cohort of survey respondents to establish the inter-relationships between two complex social phenomena. Notwithstanding the suggested power of the technique, it is emphasized that the research reported on in my thesis is presented on the basis of a social constructivist point of view, where the meanings intended by respondents are inferred from an interpretation of the language used as accepted in general mainstream counselling practice. Had I chosen to adopt a realist perspective (Morrison & Borgen, 2010), where the researcher attempts to delve into the real intended meanings of research participants, the use of reflective writing and its interpretation using thematic analysis, may have proved more challenging.

From a practical perspective, the use of the Thwaites & Bennett-Levy conceptualisation of professional empathy in the study has provided an example of how this model can be used to provide a rich and instructive account of the individual skills and learning required by mainstream counsellors as they seek to develop their counselling competencies. In Chapter 5 an illustration has been provided to show how the manifestations inventory and its attendant references to characteristics, components, elements and inter-relationships can be used as a evaluative tool by teachers and supervisors of counselling practice, to help students and practising counsellors to reflect on their competencies. As shown by the examples given, the manifestations inventory approach, whilst complex in its conceptualisation, can be used to highlight specific problems associated with the dynamics of the interaction of a student or practising counsellor's religious commitment with their exercising of their professional empathy. By using this approach, teachers and supervisors have a means of not only understanding the likely positive, negative or mediating interactions present in the counsellor's practice, but also the means to communicate this understanding is to their students or practising counsellor to assess and build on the strengths or rectify the weaknesses identified in their practices.

In summary, this study has the potential to make a significant contribution to the theoretical and empirical literature, to the methodologies available to social science researchers studying the interactions between multiple phenomena, and to practitioners of mainstream counselling practice. As stated in the thesis, there remains a number of overwhelming complexities with the phenomena studied and with the interaction between them. My findings must be regarded, therefore, as only a step forward on the journey towards understanding the role of religious commitment in the student counsellor's quest to achieve full empathic competence.

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