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COUNSELLING AND RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL VALUES: A MALAYSIAN STUDY

A thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of

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in

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at

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by

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DEDICATION

In loving memory of my father:

Haji Md. Yusoff Bin Haji Omar
(11 April 1940 – 23 June 2007)

Who did not live to see the completion of this thesis, but whose spirit is always being with me. Your hopes, words and love have provided sustenance and strength in moments of sadness and heaviness, and in moments when the walk was lighter and inspiring. You stood along that path cheering me on in your own ways. ‘Pak’, this is for you.

ABSTRACT

The developing interest which led to this research project started when I was employed as a counsellor and a counsellor educator in an Islamic faith-based academic institution in Malaysia. Within these positions, I noticed that my encounters with religious and spiritual values in counselling and teaching practice did not match with what I experienced in the counsellor education programme. This is perhaps due to the Malaysian counselling practices that had its history from Euro-American counselling models which emphasise the practice of objective and value-neutral stance. Within these models, counsellors' conceptual and theoretical understandings of counselling were strongly shaped and developed. Therefore, the study draws on this history and questions the effects of this stance in Malaysian counselling practices. In particular, this study explores how Malaysian Muslim counsellors are positioned when religious and spiritual values intersect with their counselling knowledge.

This study employed poststructuralist and social constructionist frameworks as its theoretical and methodological base. Positioning theory, deconstruction, power/knowledge, language, and the making of meaning are some of the approaches used in this study. As a mixed methods project, the study used a survey and interview conversations to generate research data. The survey was to gain general views about participants' perceptions of the topic researched, and the interviews were to investigate the ways taken by counsellors in working with religious and spiritual values.

Both quantitative and qualitative findings show that there are similar understandings among participants about the lack of training on how to address religious and spiritual values in counselling, and the gap that exists between counselling models, and religious practices. In qualitative findings, these participants reported that they have to find their own ways to weave both counselling and religious knowledges together in order to help clients. Hence, through this study, a religiously sensitive counselling approach that uses a value-investigating practice is suggested.

GLOSSARY

Baju Kurung	A traditional Malay women's outfit
Da'wah	Calling or making an invitation to Islamic faith
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
Fasakh	An application for Muslim women to divorce their spouses
Foulard	A veil (in French)
Hadith	The words of Prophet Muhammad
Halal	Something that is lawful and permitted in Islam
Haq	From Arabic word which means 'the truth'
Haram	Something that is unlawful and forbidden in Islam
Hikmah	Speaking thoughtfully and goodly counsel
MasyaAllah	An Arabic phrase indicating appreciation for an aforementioned individual or event. The closest English translation is 'God has willed it'. It is used to show joy and praise. It is an expression of respect and is said when hearing good news
Nusyuz	Showing disobedience in a certain way that is not approved by Islam for example committing adultery or having sex outside the marriage relationship
PERKAMA	Persatuan Kaunseling Malaysia
Purdah	A Malay name for veil which covers most of the face
Quran	Muslims' holy book
Ramadan	The 9 th . month of Islamic calendar
Solah	Prayer
Syariah Court	A court which has jurisdiction concerning Muslims' matters

Syariah Law	Islamic law
Syed	A title that denotes the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad through his grandsons
Talaq	A husband's unilateral right to end a marriage
Taqwa	Fear of God
Tudong	A headscarf
Ulama	Islamic religious scholars

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction and background to this study

I approach this study from my own personal and professional histories as these stories have inevitably shaped the central ideas in this study. I am a Malay-Muslim counselling practitioner and practice educator trained within the Western-modernist traditions of counselling theory and practice. Among the prominent experiences shaping my interest are an Islamic childhood in a predominantly Muslim country, Malaysia; the years I spent in a religious school and tertiary education where I studied Islamic philosophy and theology; participation in the social justice and religious movement in 1990s; my social-religious contribution as a volunteer; and currently an academic counsellor education position in an Islamic Studies faculty. In my professional life, I have worked mostly with Malay, Muslim, middle class heterosexual women clients, and counselling students.

Throughout those years, as a counsellor and teacher counsellor, in my different positions and capacities as a professional, I came to realize that values, especially religion and spirituality, are aspects of human experience whose presence it is impossible for me to miss. Often clients and counselling students bring issues of religion and spirituality in the landscape of competing ideas. For example, clients might bring to counselling questions like their failure to attend to certain Islamic basic tenets such as wearing veil; performing *solah* or prayer five times a day; or a desire to pursue personal choices by refraining from religious observance. In other situations, clients seem to question aspects of religious knowledge and practice. Examples of these questions are: “Is there more than one God?”; “Has the prophet made a mistake?”; “I disobeyed my husband, thus do I have to be punished for my sinful behavior?”. When people step into a counselling session, the effects of such questions may produce the feeling of being lost, overwhelmed, trapped and having sinned. As these questions trigger significant implications for them as a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ Muslim, it is common to hear them talk about the serious difficulties of such

problems. Some of these clients may try to gain my professional ‘advice’ on such matters. Such ‘advice’ is expected to stem from my professional qualification as a counsellor, or from my strong religious background.

Along with clients’ concerns about the effects of these troubling questions, I also, to some extent, have experienced personal discomfort when meeting with religious and spiritual matters in counselling. In my effort to work with these values, I frequently have found myself self-conscious, restricted, stifled, and even unproductive as a counsellor. In this situation, I do not feel that I lack either counselling or religious knowledge/skills about how to help these clients, yet I feel undertrained and feel something is missing from both knowledges about how to work with clients bringing such problems.

My counselling training emphasised a solid grounding in an objective, neutral and impartial clinical insight. However, with respect to the situations I noted above, this approach did not offer much help. A “value-neutral”, “objective” stance along with the “symptom-searched method” (Fulford, 1997) appeared not to fit with what clients brought to sessions. Although I value the objective view that my counsellor education offered, it did not provide sufficient skills about how to incorporate religious and spiritual values into counselling practices, or how to think to hold both professional and religious values simultaneously when these values intersect or compete. At that particular moment, the intersection of religious dilemmas and the objective value-neutral counselling become confusing and problematic. For example, a Muslim woman came to counselling distraught with grief, believing her brothers’ view that she has caused her mother death through leaving her marriage, and thus breaking the *Syariah* law¹. In such a situation, an objective, value-neutral stance appeared to me to be problematic, in that it lacked compassion and understanding of the client’s situation.

¹ Islamic law and regulations

Therefore, in an attempt to understand what is happening in therapeutic discourse, I used this study to investigate views and experiences of other Malaysian Muslim counsellors in terms of religious and spiritual values, and counselling. I investigated the ways these values are expressed, or not, in Malaysian counselling practices. The study explored counsellors preferred ways of practising at this intersection, of spirituality and religion, and the epistemic system of counselling in Malaysia. The intention of this study was to gain understanding about what both religious and spiritual values and counselling knowledge meant to Malaysian Muslim counsellors, and what this means for their practice. By understanding counsellors' responses, beliefs, and attitudes towards religion and spirituality in counselling, this study offers their views on ways those values may have manifested in counselling practices.

In this study, I also call upon many other voices: theoretical voices, academic voices, the voices of participants and my own voice that was shaped by a strong desire to contribute to my own understandings of this matter. In doing so, I take up poststructural and social construction ways of thinking as a theoretical and methodological research backdrop. The theory and practice within poststructural and social construction orientations offered new perspectives for this research, in which I became very interested. My choice for this theoretical framework is not to disregard the philosophical view of modernist thought, or the work done within a modernist tradition, but to seek other alternatives in exploring the possibilities of thinking otherwise for counselling research and practice. I will show these two theoretical strands in more detail as I report this study in Chapter Three and Chapter Four. For this introductory chapter, I continue to outline the course that I travel across in the articulation of counselling practices in Malaysian context with respect to religious and spiritual values.

Introducing Malaysian's cultural and religious diversity

Malaysia, which is located in Southeast Asia, is a culturally and religiously diverse country with about 28 million people (Malaysian Department of Statistics, 2010) Along with West Malaysia or Peninsular Malaysia which lies between Thailand and

Singapore, East Malaysia that comprises the states of Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo, and shares a common border with Indonesia, is also part of the country. Its multiethnic and multicultural population comprising Malays, Chinese, Indians, and other indigenous ethnic groups profess a variety of faiths. Most Malays are Muslims; Chinese are mostly Buddhists, Taoists or Christians; the Indians people are mainly Hindus or Christians; and some indigenous people are animists. There are also sizable Sikh and Eurasian communities that make up the remaining population (Mey, Othman, Salim, & Che Din, 2009). Each ethnic group strongly adheres to their religious beliefs and cultural traditions. Religion is described as an important sociocultural value in these communities, and is seen as a part of everyday life (Pope, Musa, Singaravelu, Bringaze, & Russell, 2002). Although the practices of religious values might vary from one individual to the other, for most Malaysians, religion and spirituality are aspects that they take into account in guiding their decisions about how they practise their lives. Therefore, counsellors are advised to take these values into account when meeting with such clients (Hassan, 1993; Jaladin & Amit, 2008; Pope et al., 2002).

As religious and spiritual meanings in Malaysia might differ from Western contexts, at this point I provide some background about how Malaysians think about, and distinguish the term of religion and spirituality, particularly among the Malay Muslim people. I begin the following section by first showing the general idea of religion and spirituality from a wider perspective. Then, I will show the understanding and practice of these terms in Malaysian Muslim context.

Religion and spirituality: A wider and Malaysian Muslim perspectives

Scholars define religion and spirituality in various ways. Some scholars seem to use 'religion' and 'spirituality' interchangeably; for other counselling commentators, drawing a distinction between these two concepts is thought to be useful for some clients (Helmeke & Bischof, 2002; West, 2010). According to Walsh (2009) religion is perceived as an organized, institutionalized belief system, where people in that group practise a set of theological beliefs that encompass scriptures, teachings, rituals and religious ceremonies. The practice is often linked to a supernatural or

transcendent power, that is, a belief about the existence of a higher power or God (Park, 2005).

Spirituality, on the other hand, is distinguished as a more personal quest for the sacred. It includes “one’s values, beliefs, mission, awareness, subjectivity, sense of purpose and direction, and a kind of striving toward something greater than oneself” (Frame, 2003, p. 3). It is a sense of inner wholeness, a relationship with other people, and a way involve with the non-human environment (Stander, Piercy, Mackinnon, & Helmeke, 1994). From this viewpoint, spirituality can be seen as based on ethics and philosophy where a set of moral standards is used for living (Aponte, 2002). According to authors like Richard and Bergin (1997), it is possible for one to be religious without being spiritual, and spiritual without being religious. This description suggests that spirituality may or may not include the belief in a deity or be associated with formal religion. Therefore, spirituality might speak to the nature of individuals’ relationship to the world, whether or not it is supernatural, or ascribes to theistic beliefs and practices.

In a Malaysian context, particularly in the Malay population, the culture is shaped by a strong influence of Islamic religion (Haque & Masuan, 2002). For many Malays, Islam plays a significant role in their lives, where most of the basic Islamic practices can be seen in their daily activities. Such practices are five-time daily prayers, Quran reciting, Friday mosque congregational prayer, a pilgrimage to Mecca and fasting during *Ramadan*². Like other Muslims around the world, Malaysian Muslims believe in one God who is called Allah. They see the Quran, the Muslim’s holy book, and sayings of Prophet Muhammad as guidance. These texts offer detailed accounts of religious prescriptions, historical events and moral values. Malay Muslim people participate in religious rituals and ceremonies where these activities enact piety to Islam, and connect Muslim individuals and their families with the larger community and its heritage. As Malaysian Muslims experience a transition to modernization,

² The ninth month of the Islamic calendar.

some conflicts and dilemmas arise when they try to balance secularization and Islamic values (Mutalib, 1993). When this happens, many would turn to religious leaders and scholars for spiritual guidance. In this sense, religious leaders are people who Malays believe they can trust and consult if there are problems that are associated with Islamic faith and beliefs. Hassan (1993) makes this point clear for therapists to consider when they are engaging with clients whose religion is interwoven in most aspect of their lives. He writes:

For the Malay client, his culture is almost synonymous with his religious ideology, because for him Islam is not only a religious ideology but also an attitude as well as a way of life. His religious ideology not only provides a reason or meaning for his existence on earth or reassures him of his continued existence after his death, but also strongly influences his daily life and his mundane activities, such as food he eats and how he eats it, the clothes he wears and how he wears them as well as how he relates to himself, his family members and members of his community. (p. 93)

Through Islam, Malay clients might experience a sense of connectedness with Allah, and their spiritual values are related to Islamic faith. Thus, this study will focus on the meaning and practice of religious and spiritual values within an Islamic context rather than seeing religion and spirituality as separate entities. Therefore, both terms will be used interchangeably when referring to the concept of religion and spirituality.

Counselling practice in Malaysia

Counselling in Malaysia began with school guidance in the 1960s after Malaysia achieved its independence from British colonialism in 1957 (Othman & Aboo-Bakar, 1993). Since then counselling has developed as a profession not only in school settings but also in various government, non-government and community settings. Within the last four decades of counselling in Malaysia, the movement has been facilitated by counselling theories and practices which mainly originated in Euro-American culture. In those early years, many Malaysian counselling and psychology pioneers received their professional education in the United States. Therefore, when

they first established counselling programme in Malaysia, the United States training models, curricula, textbooks and counselling theories were adopted (Lloyd, 1987). The therapeutic approaches that were widely introduced ranged from analytic to experiential and relationship-oriented, to action models. Counselling theories include psychoanalytic, reality, existential, client/person-centered, behavioral, cognitive and rational emotive behavior therapy. Only in the last 10 years have there been some discussions about an integrated model, including multicultural awareness which resonates with the diverse culture in Malaysia (Mey et al., 2009; Sumari & Jalal, 2008). Some attempts have been made to integrate therapy from a religious/spiritual perspective (Abdul Kadir, 1994; Azhar & Varma, 2000). However, this effort has continued to be a challenge given that cross-cultural, religious perspectives counselling in this country are still at their early state (See & Ng, 2010).

In relation to counselling models and practices, Malaysian therapeutic orientations are influenced and shaped by the prominent and persuasive philosophical framework of modernist thought. Therefore, most of the counselling philosophical references and texts are from authors whose theoretical backgrounds are associated with the development of modernist ideas. To name a few, these figures include Alfred Adler, Viktor Frankl, Rollo May, Burrhus F. Skinner, Albert Bandura, Arnold Lazarus, Albert Ellis, Aaron. T. Beck, William Glasser and Carl Rogers. Some of the central ideas in modernist framework are the notions that counsellors can take active responsibility for the psychological functioning of their clients; they should be interested in the process of encouraging clients to evaluate their own behavior and the consequences of their decision (Everts & Mohd Noor, 1993); and they employ theories as tools to see clients' problems within this professional frame of reference. On these terms, counsellors are seen as professionals who have privileged knowledge, experts who possibly can describe clients' problems, and act according to a set of prescribed activities to find possible resolutions for clients' best interest (Kaye, 1999). This modernist framework also provides Malaysian counsellors with logical, objective and empirical methods, particularly featuring quantification, statistical inference and controlled experimentation for investigating verifiable facts

about clients' presenting problems (Othman, Abdul Rahman, & Yusof, 1983). These orientations lead to a perspective that counsellors can make assumptions about people's lives – counsellors can know ahead what people need by calling on generalisations. On the basis of generalisation, knowledge is taken as universal, making it applicable to more than one situation. Metcalfe (2005) explains:

Knowledge claims tend to be supported by physical measurements or theories that have to be shown to be true across space and time, that is, universal...When a scientist can repeat an experiment anywhere and anytime, and get the same result, this helps define scientific knowledge. Repeatability and generalising appear to be linked. The same is true of prediction. A knowledge claims that withstands counter-claims over time suggests it can be the basis for prediction. Generalising, repeating and/or predicting seem inter-related in some complex manner. (p. 2)

However, since these theoretical approaches are developed outside Malaysia, there have been some suggestions that these models need to be redeveloped to suit clients' local culture and personal world. Pope, Musa, Singaravelu, Bringaze and Russell (2002) write:

...like any other technique or strategy, model or theory, it [therapeutic model] can never be wholly imported from another culture with expectations of similar results. Culturally appropriate modifications will always need to be made. The analogy is like planting a new variety of rice that has been developed in the United States and watching it grow under the environmental influences of the Malaysian culture. It may or may not take root; it may need less water, more phosphorus; it may bear unusual fruit; but over time it will adapt to Malaysian conditions or die if adaptation fails. (p. 269)

This quote seems to imply that without proper deconstructions, counselling within the adopted format might not match the cultural values of Malaysian people. However, there are few local studies and literatures to suggest that these counselling approaches have shaped and reshaped the needs, cultural and religious values of Malaysian community. Most of the available literatures are either theoretical in nature regarding

the suitability of imported Euro-American models for Malaysian context (Othman et al., 1983; See & Ng, 2010; Varma & Zain, 1996), or recommendations for counselling models to be revised so that these models might fit local needs (Everts & Mohd Noor, 1993; Mey et al., 2009; See & Ng, 2010; Sumari & Jalal, 2008).

In terms of counselling approaches that are widely used, Mohamad (2008) found that humanistic approaches, in particular Roger's (1962) client/person-centered therapy, has been ascribed and followed closely by Malaysian counsellors and clients. This model is described as having certain values that resonate with the interests of Malaysian clients, especially in its non-directive, egalitarian approach. The egalitarian relationships and counsellor's personal qualities are assumed to facilitate clients' personal growth. It also assists clients to be more open with their problems, and therefore, more positive about the counselling sessions. Another prevalent approach in Malaysian counselling practices is the action-oriented therapy. This therapy has been a significant guideline in most of career counselling (Pope et al., 2002), vocational and academic matters (Othman & Aboo-Bakar, 1993), and in some health profession contexts (Azhar & Varma, 2000; Everts & Mohd Noor, 1993). According to Haque (2005), the practice of action-oriented models resonates with these settings because they provide counselling with an objective, but nonetheless non-judgmental purpose.

Despite the high regard Malaysian counsellors might have for both client/person-centered and action-oriented approaches, they also hold concerns about the limits and inadequacies of those approaches for Malaysian context (Mohamad, 2008). These concerns were not described in detail. However, there are critiques that have been made outside Malaysia about their limitations. Hermansson (1998) writes:

I experienced growing frustration with the Rogerian style. I valued its focus on clients – their views of the world, their experiences, their needs, their goals – but was put off by its lack of direction, its relative passivity, and its seemingly endless cycle of exploration in search of insight. (p. 1)

In addition, Corey (2005) points out that although client-centered counselling holds strong emphasis in its egalitarian relationships style, “it is difficult to translate the core conditions [of this approach] into actual practice” (p. 179), for example, how to do non-judgmental and unconditional positive regard. These two concepts might be unintentionally misunderstood by some counsellors. One of the possibilities of the misunderstanding is, as Corey (2005) explains:

Practitioners with a person-centered orientation have a tendency to be very supportive of clients without being challenging. Out of their misunderstanding of the basic concepts of the approach, some have limited the range of their responses and counseling styles [only] to reflections and empathic listening. Although there is value in really hearing a client, and in reflecting...counseling entails more than this (p. 184).

On the other hand, action-oriented theories and practices are perceived as focusing too much on psychoeducational strategies in order to produce cognitive and behavioral changes (Corey, 2005). These approaches might be read as too direct and impose specific therapeutic techniques or procedures that could limit clients’ free-choice in working with their own problems. In a diverse Asian culture like Malaysia, in which people might value tight emotional bonds to familial and social norms, and value interdependence of relationships rather than independence, they are not likely to respond favorably to therapeutic methods that seem to persuade them towards independence. These values that people hold could be in conflict with the method suggestions of disputation. In this situation, such clients might feel hesitant to question or to relinquish their basic cultural values. Perhaps that is why Carl Rogers’ non-directive orientation is more acceptable to Malaysian society as it seems to be resonant with their cultural traditions and beliefs.

In speaking about Rogers’ non-directive orientation, specifically unconditional positive regard and full acceptance of clients, counsellors also might take these approaches as something that has to do with neutral practices in counselling. Levitt, Neimeyer and Williams (2005) write:

Some safeguard is required to prevent therapists from inflicting their values upon clients. In most of these cases, the proposed solution has a rule-like quality as it offers to therapists a monolithic caution to minimize the influence of values as much as is possible, not to influence a specific sets of values, or to adopt a style of transparency. Therefore, the rules we design tend to function without regard to contextual dynamics within specific therapeutic interactions and without understanding how these values function within therapeutic tasks. (p. 123)

Perhaps, based on this premise, the desire for counsellors to be value-neutral by employing Rogers' unconditional positive regard comes from the assumption that the concept can protect clients from the imposition of counsellors' values, thus providing safety against the abusive of professional power. By accepting clients' situations unconditionally, counsellors might be positioning themselves as respecting clients' autonomy. In a Rogerian approach, respecting clients' autonomy means that counsellors allow clients the freedom to discover their own personal solutions and decision making (Vincent, 2005). This action - the giving of freedom to clients - therefore might be seen as resonant with the idea of not using counsellors' power and position while helping clients to make their own choices.

However, besides these approaches, Carl Rogers also proposes the concept of congruence and genuineness, which suggests that counsellors can show their thoughts and feelings that are present in the relationship with the client. Vincent (2005), in describing the meaning of Rogers' congruence, writes:

Congruence means that the therapist does not deny any experienced feelings, and that there is a willingness to transparently be any persistent feelings that arise within the relationship, and to communicate them within the relationship if appropriate. When might it be appropriate to share such feelings? For Carl, this would seem to be either if the feeling persists over time or the feeling gets in the way of deeply hearing a client. (p. 27)

A potential pitfall is that counsellors may try too hard to be non-judgmental and supportive of clients so that their counselling responses may deprive clients of congruence and genuineness. As counsellors are also human, it seems impossible for them to be neutral, to not have personal and professional values (Bergin, Payne, & Richards, 1996). Thus, an attempt to work somewhere in between, that is, to hold on one's values and at the same time to respect clients' autonomy, by not misusing professional power, is not an easy task. The effort to place both ideas side by side might be less than smooth, as my experience was, and as I heard anecdotally from other counsellors. Chapter Two will provide more discussion about the influence of objective and value-neutral practices in counselling.

Given that non-judgmental and value-neutral approaches might not provide what Malaysian counsellors are looking for when working with difficult and complex matters that involve religious ideas and prescriptions, counsellors have looked for more effective approaches that might allow religious and spiritual values to be taken into account. In middle of the 1990s, some counsellors tried to intersect their counselling practices with religious and spiritual approaches (Abdul Kadir, 1994; Azhar & Varma, 2000; Haque & Masuan, 2002). The endeavour mirrors the development of religious spiritually-centered counselling and pastoral ideas in the Western world (G. Lynch, 2002; Richards & Bergin, 1997, 2000; Tan, 1996; Thayne, 1998; Watts, 2001; West, 2000). And the movement towards these ideas in Malaysia reflected the strong Islamic values embedded in many areas of Malay Muslims lives. However, this movement (religious spiritually-centered counselling) is a slow-growing process, and there is a scarcity of local and international academic material based on Islamic perspectives for Malaysian Muslim counsellors refer to.

Despite the absence of these materials, there are some discussions on how to weave religion and spirituality into counselling from non-Islamic frameworks. This approach is called pastoral care or pastoral counselling, where its basis rests on Christian beliefs and rites (G. Lynch, 2002). The counsellor who practices pastoral counselling has an in-depth Christian religious training, knowledge and background.

This counselling is offered within the community of faith (Lartey, 2002). There is another approach that is not exclusively Christian-based but is more general in incorporating religious and spiritual ideas into counselling (Faiver, Ingersoll, O'Brien, & McNally, 2001; Frame, 2003; Richards & Bergin, 1997). Counsellors within this framework deal with religious problems by drawing on spiritual and religious strategies without themselves ascribing to religion and spirituality. In other words, they may employ secular counselling models and at the same time raise spiritual aspects to therapy when needed. Given that this idea has developed and established itself quite well in other religious environments, and since the integration of religious and spiritual aspects in Malaysian counselling is still emerging, the idea of pastoral care might be considered as an approach to suit Malay religious clients.

However, as Islam is different from Christianity or any other religions in terms of its beliefs and traditions, the word *pastoral* is not employed in the practice of Islamic Malaysian counselling. Counselling approaches that use religious ideas are generally called, for instance, the *incorporation of religious/spiritual approaches into counselling*, or a *counselling practice from an Islamic perspective* (Abdul Kadir, 1994; Azhar & Varma, 2000; Haque, 2005; Haque & Masuan, 2002). Some of these counsellors choose to integrate religious and spiritual values in an eclectic way, and not attach themselves to any particular theoretical approach to counselling. On the basis of eclecticism, counsellors try to select a counselling model that is appropriate for a client, but at the same time suits their own individual therapeutic style and strength. Perhaps by using an eclectic approach these Muslims counsellors would find more alternatives to work with a diverse range of religious problems. This assumption seems to resonate with Corey's point of view about the reason for the trend toward integrative approaches in psychotherapy. Corey (2004) says:

...no single theory is comprehensive enough to account for the complexities of human behavior, especially when the range of client types and their specific problems are taken into consideration. Because no one theory has a patent on the truth, and because no single set of counseling techniques is always effective in working with diverse client populations. (p. 272)

However, without counsellors being taught how to bridge and weave between professional knowledge and the sacredness of religious teaching, the importation of pastoral ideas and spiritual strategies may invite some implications.

Islam, like any other religion, is associated with knowledge, rites, scriptures and teachings. The sacred content in Quran are often characterized or interpreted through institutionalized religious authority, where this authority provides religious adherents with a picture of what Islamic is; the meaning of life, and the nature of human being and the world. This authority might also recommend certain actions that people should take in order to respond appropriately to these religious ideas (Hill et al., 2000). This authority inevitably is caught up in a power/knowledge relation (Foucault, 1980). Such a form of power can express in ways that are benign or malign, where the authority functions to preserve the well-being and the needs of its people. For Foucault, this type of power that has concern for well-being is called pastoral power (Carrette, 1999). Pastoral power is a power technique which Foucault identified with Christian institutions (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983), where a pastor is metaphorically positioned as a shepherd and the believers are portrayed as the pastor's flock. On the basis of this concept, the pastor will lead, guide and take care of each individual member of his flock.

Although in Muslim communities the term pastoral is not used, and Islam does not have the same emphasis on being pastoral, there is a similarity about how religious care for Muslims within Islamic tradition is described. In Islam, there are no priests, pastors or ministers. However, there are people who play a significant role in the lives of Muslim because of their religious position and Islamic expertise. These people are called *ulama* or Islamic religious scholars whose religious knowledge are seen by Muslims as their main source to guide them in what they should know concerning Islam and its teaching (Azra, Dijk, & Kaptein, 2010). This teaching is performed through the concept of care where an *ulama's* role in spreading Islamic knowledge, guiding Muslims about the Islamic rules and obligations, and leading Muslim worship services are resonance with the Christian idea of 'tending the flock'.

However, for Muslims, this is not the only position people can turn to for advice and guidance. A lay person who has knowledge about Islam, as well as other professional knowledge, but does not hold a position of *ulama* might also take up a similar position. They can be teachers, medical practitioners, social workers, mediators, and of course, counsellors. Within this position, pastoral power might be exercised through the work of compassion for clients, which is inherent in the helping relationships. This position might shape the actions of the individual practitioner in persuading clients to act in accordance with their professional recommendations, however, through embracing the gentle, supportive and well-caring side of the practice (Caughlan, 2005). One of the effects of this power is that it allows counsellors to be positioned as knowledgeable observers while clients are expected to follow what is assumed to be best for them. From this context, the “technology of power” (Foucault, 1991a) positions clients to comply with the terms of professional/religious discourses. The chapters that follow will provide detailed discussion of the subjects of power relations, power and knowledge, and how power positions people.

Keeping in mind the potential use of the idea of pastoral power, I questioned whether Malaysian Muslim counsellors might feel that they have to hold dual power roles (professional and religious roles) when meeting with Islamic religious values or problems. In this situation, the question arises, whether the objective, value-neutral practice is an option to avoid this dual relationship, and/or in some way is seen as an approach to release the tension between the two competing ideas. A further question concerns how clients are positioned when counsellors try to navigate counselling practice with neutrality, but at the same time might want to attend to clients’ religious and spiritual needs. Furthermore, there is the question of possibilities for dialogue between this neutral stance, and religion/spirituality themes in counselling.

In summary, the development of counselling in Malaysia coincided with the ascendancy of ideas about empirically supported treatment and the evidence-based practice movement. Each of these orientations is grounded in Western empiricism,

and thus ideas about objective, value-neutral, bias-free science, and of an objective, value-neutral scientist practitioner. As White (1997) suggests, therapists – and I would include counselors - are not separate from these dominant ways of thinking about professional practice. Given this wider professional climate, it is not surprising that counselling in Malaysia is permeated by ideas of professional objectivity and neutrality, and that there have not yet been robust local discussions, or research, about the intersection of counselling and values, and particularly counselling and religious and spiritual values.

The research question

The central research question that I addressed in this study is to understand what counselling, and religious and spiritual values mean to Malaysian Muslim counsellors. In order to answer this central question, I addressed the following subsidiary questions:

- a) What do Malaysian Muslims counsellors think about the relationship between spirituality and religion, and professional counselling?
- b) How do Malaysian Muslim counsellors position themselves in this relationship between spirituality and religion and their professional counselling practices?
- c) How are Malaysian Muslim counsellors positioned when spiritual knowledge and values and counselling knowledge and values compete?
- d) In meeting with clients, how do Malaysian Muslim counsellors respond when they encounter competing values and knowledge between religion and counselling?
- e) What meanings do they make when clients centre religious and spiritual values in understanding and addressing problems?
- f) What do counsellors think clients would say about how they want counsellors to respond to clients' expression of spiritual and religious values?

The first three research questions are set up to explore what subject positions these participants are occupying when working with religious and spiritual values in counselling. The notion of a subject position is a space that a counsellor occupies within a particular discourse when speaking or acting. This concept is discussed by Davies and Harré (1990, 1999), and van Langenhove and Harré (1999). The theory of positioning may support an exploration of how discourse operates in the production of counselling relationships and of counsellors' personal subjective responses. It is part of a broader theory of power that suggests that power permeates a speaker's words as they draw upon discourse. Therefore, my interest in this study is to pay close attention to language that participants use in order to consider how both discourse and subject positions are produced and shape counselling practice. I shall elaborate further on subject positions and positioning theory in Chapter Three, and this idea will be revisited in the final discussion in Chapter Ten.

While these first three research questions focus specifically on positioning, discourse and its constitutive power, the rest of the research questions emphasise the response and meaning that participants would make when clients speak about religious and spiritual matters. These questions investigated discursive approaches the study's participants draw on in navigating counselling conversations that involve religion and spirituality, and their challenges and efforts in weaving both counselling and religious knowledge in practice.

Although I did not expect that research participants would provide an experience similar to mine with respect to these values, I had hoped that the individual participants would offer stories which would allow me to gain knowledge into their practices in this regard. I sought to explore and understand their stories through poststructural and social constructionist theoretical concepts. These theoretical concepts also informed the research methods for this study.

Reading ahead

Chapter Two represents an overview of the literature on the value-neutral stance and neutral counselling practices, noticing the historical location of this practice in counselling traditions, and in the Malaysian context. One of the main ideas which this stance offers is to respect clients' autonomy, particularly in making decisions about important aspects of their lives. From this stance, neutrality requires counsellors to keep their own personal views and values to themselves since these values might be influential on some clients, and therefore might lead counsellors to misuse their professional power. However, the idea that counselling itself is a value-laden practice has led some researchers and practitioners to ask questions about the rationale of a value-neutral stance, specifically when meeting with clients who bring religious or spiritual matters into counselling. Thus, this review of literature summarises some of the interacting roles between counselling and religious values, and shows certain approaches that incorporate religion and spirituality into counselling.

This is followed by Chapter Three which elaborates the theoretical foundation that underpinned this research project. The broad theoretical orientations of this study weave between poststructuralist and social constructionist knowledges. Conceptual tools such as deconstruction, the relationships between power and knowledge, discourse and subjectivity, positioning theory, reflexivity, language and meaning making, are highlighted (see Chapter Three). These concepts offer ways for counsellors to consider how to hold both professional and personal values without being in a position that might lead them to disregard clients' agency. These concepts pose a significant challenge for counsellors to consider the power that is ascribed to their professional position, and invite them to always be aware of the constitutive effects of such power and discourses.

Chapter Four is an account of the way I designed and conducted this study. In this chapter, I extend the application of poststructuralist ideas to how I approach participants, the ethical considerations that guided the research process, the methods

of generating data, selecting, and making meaning of the texts. I decided that a mixed methods approach would provide a meaningful way to explore what is experienced and represented as Malaysian Malay Muslim counsellors' experience working with religious and spiritual values. In this process, a qualitative approach via face to face interviews with participants was considered as primary, while a quantitative method through using a survey served as a tool for supporting the research goals. I employed a discursive analysis, using positioning theory, to analyse and interpret the interview texts. My starting point during the process was to see individual stories as discursive productions rather than 'true' accounts of participants' experience.

In Chapter Five, I share descriptive findings that the questionnaire produced. In general, the findings show the relationships between participants' counsellor education about neutral practices and their actual experience meeting with values in religion and spirituality. Even though participants were aware that religious values are significant for clients, uncertainty about how to incorporate these values into practice brought discomfort for practitioners. These survey findings helped me to form the basis of subsequent semi-structured interviews for the later stage of the research process.

Other chapters that follow relate the qualitative findings. These are Chapter Six to Chapter Nine. In each of these chapters, I offer the significant discursive themes that shape participants' individual responses. In the analysis, my focus is on the discursive practice that constitutes and positions each participant who spoke with me in the interview meetings. These themes range from discourses and discursive practices; gender matter; justice within Islamic courts; working with homosexuality; Islamic dress codes; Islamic discourses; and faith-based counselling. In speaking of these themes, participants showed how they negotiate between counselling roles and Islamic values. They showed how they position themselves and are positioned when Islamic values seem to intersect with what they have learned in counsellor education programmes. Alongside research participants' own stories of counselling practice, I

also describe some accounts of how participants' clients are positioned when a religious topic is central to the counselling conversation. From this situation, the working of position calls can be seen, where these calls are changed, refused and/or accepted by clients (Davies & Harré, 1990). In the last chapter of qualitative findings, Chapter Nine, I bring forward participants' perceptions of the counsellor education that they experienced or received, with regard to religious and spiritual values. The chapter suggests that there is a similar understanding among participants about the lack of training on how to address these matters, and the gap that exists between counselling models, and religious practices.

Chapter Ten is the discussion chapter, in which I discuss the study's implications and draw together some of the threads selected from the data in Chapter Six to Chapter Nine, and the theoretical groundings of this study. In this chapter, I argue for a counsellor education that can offer a counselling framework for working in religiously sensitive ways. I put forward the DVD counselling role-play which I used to generate data for this study as an example to introduce some notions of poststructuralist and social constructionist ideas in the counsellor education programme.

CHAPTER TWO

VALUE-NEUTRAL STANCE, RELIGIOUS VALUES, AND COUNSELLOR EDUCATION

Introduction

In Chapter One, I described how the Malaysian counselling profession has been shaped by counselling in the West, particularly from the United States, and how counselling is strongly oriented toward modernist models. Along with these models, counsellors are introduced to and taught about objective and value-neutral practices. The transportation of a value-neutral approach, however, has invited some implications for the practice of counselling in Malaysia. In this chapter, I explore the issues that are associated with the objective, value-neutral stance in counselling. I rely on international literatures as there are very few local studies that research this matter. Included in this discussion is an investigation about how a value-neutral stance is established in counselling settings, and its effects on counselling practices. I then show some studies and theoretical writings that call into question the tenability of this stance for counselling. Next, I present counsellors' interests and their different approaches related to religious and spiritual values. Finally, I show some discussions on counsellor education programmes, including poststructuralists' considerations that will be useful to counsellor training courses.

A value-neutral stance in counselling

It has been reported that the value-neutral stance emerged from an empirical and scientific worldview when psychotherapy was developed within a scientific discipline in the twentieth century (Zilboorg & Henry, 1941). As a branch of science, psychotherapy is assumed to be based on observation and experiment, and in principle, to be open to objective testing (Fulford, 1997). For instance, behaviorist movements focused on the influence of stimulus response bonds, which operated on the assumption that people, especially their actions, were the result of the operation of natural cause-effect laws (Bandura, 1977; Skinner, 1953; J. B. Watson, 1925). This means that people's acts have antecedent causes that produced the behaviors and would reproduce them again if the same conditions were repeated (Paloutzian, 1996).

These objective methods in some way aim to eliminate biases which might result from, among other things, the values or beliefs of individual practitioners. The goal of these methods has been to understand human beings in a framework that is free from human biases (G. Watson, 1958). These biases might stem from cultural, ideology, religion, political, or any other non-scientific sources of knowledge.

Also arising from clinical and empirical studies was Freud's psychoanalysis model. Freud (1964) described the work of a therapist as that of a "surgeon who puts aside all his feelings" (p. 115) suggesting that it is not only possible but desirable for personal feelings to be kept out of therapy. This idea of keeping personal beliefs, values, and feelings out of therapy implied that it is then possible for therapists to have no influence on the course of therapy. Freud further held that a therapist should be "opaque to his patients, and like a mirror, show them nothing but that is shown to him" (p. 118). This metaphor seems to suggest that therapists' own beliefs or values should be kept inaccessible to the client and it shows that neutrality was valued in this theory.

Although behaviorist and psychoanalytic approaches are only a few of the models in mental health professions, their scientific and objective strategies appear to shape and influence the psychotherapy world. These models created an atmosphere in which the practice of objective and value-neutral counselling is promoted, and reinforced. Within this position, counsellors are required to hold back on their personal views and values. They are expected to apply the scientific value of objectivity to therapeutic practices in order to allow for a correct view of the client and unbiased application of scientifically-derived counselling. Another purpose of the objective and value-neutral practice is to protect clients from counsellors' views that might be influential, or perhaps coercive to clients (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2003). Consequently, there are counsellors who not only have to discern what, when and how to disclose their values in counselling conversations, but also have been unwilling to share those values with clients. This action seems to resonate with the ethical concerns that some counsellors hold; that is, clients should be allowed to take

any particular actions to their problems without counsellors' direct interventions (Tjeltveit, 2004).

On counsellors' ethics of practice, humanistic psychologists such as Carl Rogers (1962) were very careful about the authoritative roles that counsellors might hold in counselling relationships. Authoritative roles which locate all professional expertise in the therapist do not fit with Rogers' not-directive counselling orientation, which is the client-centered therapy. Client-centered according to Rogers (1978) means "a person was not treated as a dependent patient but as a responsible client" (p. 24). In this counselling model, the root of client-centeredness is the valuing of clients' perspectives, not the counsellors' expert knowledge which might be produced from neutral and objective viewpoints. Therefore, the importance of an authentic relationship between counsellor and client is emphasised by Rogers (1962). Within this relationship, a counsellor demonstrates personal qualities such as empathy, genuineness, warmth, and positive regard towards the client. However, these personal qualities are not similar to counsellors being neutral of their values but their purpose would naturally encourage counsellors to respect clients' well-being and their autonomy about how clients want to live their lives.

The high value that Rogers placed on respecting the freedom and autonomy of clients throughout therapeutic processes appeared to have provided a direction for counsellors to think about ethical practices in their counselling. One of the effects of this ethical practice is the articulation of clients' freedom and autonomy in most counselling code of ethics, including the Malaysian Counsellors' Code of Ethics and Practices (PERKAMA, 2008). For example, under the subheading '*Tanggungjawab Kaunselor Terhadap Klien*' (Counsellors' Responsibilities Towards Clients), it specifically states that Malaysian counsellors "...should respect clients' autonomy in making their own decisions" (principle 5) so that their rights will not be violated, and "...cannot practice, agree to or advocate any discrimination..." (principle 7) that will lead to unjust practices. From these clauses, it is clear that counsellors should be respectful toward clients and aware of their value differences. The question arises

then: how might a counsellor proceed or act when he or she is confronted with a particular value that is complex like some values in religion and spirituality. In such a particular situation, if the counsellor holds similar values with a client, should she ignore those values in order to reduce harm? Or, should she simply refer the client to another counsellor in order to avoid imposing or influencing on the basis of the counsellor's own values? But then, what exactly does it mean to not impose or influence one's values on clients? Or, if a counsellor wants to work with those values, what actions can she take that will show care to the clients?

Bond (2000), who speaks about standards and ethics for counsellors writes:

In the early stages of a counselling relationship there is an inherent inequality between the person seeking help and the person offering help. It is arguable that current trends towards professionalization increases that inequality by adding the weight of collective authority to that held by the counsellor as a person. In the absence of a strong and firmly rooted ethic of respect for individual autonomy, the client could be subjecting himself to manipulation according to the counsellor's agenda or for other purposes. (p. 75)

From this description, it appears that the notion of power which is embedded in counselling relationships has some connection with the act of imposition. As most people seek counselling at a time of difficulty, they are more vulnerable. Therefore, power could be unevenly distributed between counsellor and client, where the session might be in the favour of the counsellor. For this reason, counsellors are advised to be conscientious about the values inherent in the process of counselling (Bond, 2000; Tjeltveit, 1999). The idea of value-neutrality is also linked with counsellors' responsibility to take care of the clients' welfare, and this includes avoiding an action that can foster a client's dependency in counselling and therapeutic processes (Steen, Engels, & Thweatt III, 2006). From this viewpoint, the position of neutrality may offer some precaution and safety to counsellors, particularly when a counsellor seems to anticipate the solution to the client's problem (M. E. Miller, 2000).

Some critiques of a value-neutral stance

However, some counsellors find several problems with the intention to reconcile the idea of value-neutral practice with respect to client autonomy in counselling (Slife, Hope, & Nebeker, 1999; Tjeltveit, 2004). The theoretical and practical grounds of counselling, for instance, can position counsellors in some way. Counsellors are trained in certain theories and concepts about human nature, and the skills of how to work with people's problems. Therefore, when a counsellor enters a counselling conversation, the particular counselling framework invites the counsellor to bring this value system along. Counsellors practising in any counselling model thus will demonstrate a belief in the importance of the particular model and its values, and might encourage the client towards a particular way of thinking, feeling or acting (Spong, 2007). In this sense, the therapeutic models themselves are not value-neutral since these models involve their own implicit value orientations (Brammer, Shostrom, & Abrego, 1989; Rober & Seltzer, 2010). When counsellors are positioned with the value-neutral stance, the question that arises then is how counsellors can do both – reformulate to be neutral, and at the same time there is a considerable counselling-based influence taking place. The influence the counsellor has on their clients through therapeutic approaches can intentionally favour these professional values in a subtle way. In addition, the influence of the counsellor on the client derives not only from her counselling orientation, but also from her presence in counselling (Spong, 2007). These aspects can be the counsellor's personal faith, culture, beliefs, values, interests, or even the places at work. Therefore, many authors have argued that value-neutrality is not possible in counselling (Beutler & Bergen, 1991; Blocher, 1989; Corsini & Wedding, 2005; Feltham, 2010; Holaday, Leach, & Davidson, 1994; Kelly & Strupp, 1992; Loewenthal, 1995; Mahalik, 1995). They also question whether a value-neutral stance is beneficial and/or necessary for clients' improvement since the counsellor and client's values are part of the counselling process.

Some practitioners also have pointed out that the challenge of maintaining a neutral position while having strong feelings with their own values is intimidating for them

as counsellors (Martinez & Baker, 2000; M. E. Miller, 2000). The challenge is particularly when counsellors have to work with clients' problems that have connection with moral values, and the effects of these values on the clients' lives. On this view, Feltham (2010) illustrates two examples of how counsellors might be inclined to help clients who are thinking about the moral implications of their decisions.

Counsellors working with anorexic women may consider the view that is sometimes put forward, that it is the client's right to decide on her food intake and weight, but ultimately they [counsellors] will hold very strong views about the preservation of health and life. Student counsellors respect the right of each client to decide on whether or not to continue with his or her course of studies but they will be aware of the setting and its norms, and may subtly exert some pressure in favour of 'student retention'. (p. 152)

In speaking about counsellors' moral responsibility, Doherty (1995) argues that therapists have an obligation to help clients to understand and be responsible for the consequences that their behaviours could have on them and others. From this standpoint, addressing questions to clients about what clients perceive as a good life seems ethical because counsellors' responses to moral values might bring certain benefits to clients. Whiting, Nebeker and Fife (2005) find that many therapists felt a stronger responsibility to guide their clients in relation to moral values in order to produce a good counselling outcome. This responsibility comes from the commitment of wanting to do what is best for them. By being morally responsive and refusing to accept destructive behaviour, practitioners also invite clients to access the consequences of their choices (Crenshaw, 2004). If a therapist remains neutral about a client's action which may be harmful to self or others, the therapist is assumed to be unethical (Carlson & Erickson, 1999; Whiting et al., 2005).

However, questions about counsellors' moral and/or ethical obligations, that is, about what is considered as ethical or unethical, 'good' or 'bad' guidance must be balanced through counsellors' own consideration as pointed out by Tjeltveit (2004). If this consideration does not take place, any ethical claims with respect to counsellors'

moral obligations/values towards clients would be contestable. Whiting and Fife (2007) comment that a therapist can take a position in a way that respects the client's values, even if the therapist's values are different from the client's. The discussions about values should not be coercive, on a therapist's direction, but within the therapeutic dialogue, in which the client has been invited to consider her choices in light of the values that she holds (W. J. Doherty, 1995; Whiting & Fife, 2007). This position of value exploration that counsellors invite clients into then could perhaps restrict counsellors from imposing their expert role in the counselling relationships, particularly when the conversation is about beliefs and values which can be complex, multifaceted and personal. This complex, personal value system can be religious, spiritual, and cultural and may significantly influence people's life orientation and play important roles for them.

In the following section, I will highlight relevant literatures about how religion, spirituality and counselling may share some common grounds in respect of values and roles. I also will discuss literature that presents some counsellors' approaches in addressing religious and spiritual values within different counselling models, and the struggle they encounter meeting with probable competing ideas between religion/spirituality and counselling.

Interests in religious and spiritual values in counselling

There are counselling literatures that show a growing interest in religious and spiritual values in therapeutic practices (D. A. Anderson & Worthen, 1997; Bergin, 1991; Feltham, 2010; Martinez & Baker, 2000; Steen et al., 2006; Watts, 2001). This growing interest reflects an increasing awareness for many counselling practitioners about the importance of these values in counselling, and has generated ideas about the responsibility for counsellors to attend competently to the religion or spirituality in which clients operate (Aponte, 2002; Carlson & Erickson, 2002; Consoli & Williams, 1999; W. J. Doherty, 1995; Walsh, 2009). In accord with these literatures, the reason to consider these values in counselling is because of the interacting role which counselling, and religion or spirituality share. Some of the interacting goals between

religion and therapy are explained by Stander, Piercy, Mackinnon and Helmeke (1994) as:

to foster a sense of perspective, to give meaning to life, to provide rituals that transform and connect, to provide social support networks, to structure society and set ethical norms, to give an identity and heritage to its members, to support families, to facilitate positive change in individuals, to look out for the physical and emotional welfare of its members, and to educate its members. (p. 29)

From this perspective, religion, spirituality, and counselling appear to take up similar goals where both fields promote the growth of the individual, and contributing to the greater good of the community. Counselling and religion are areas where clients might be looking for the meaning in life as both can help clients in their psychological, and spiritual healing (Lines, 2002). With regard to religion and spirituality, such healing accords with the belief in God as loving and caring; where people can ask God for help and forgiveness, show their commitment to honesty and goodwill, and their participation in emotional transcendent transporting of spiritual rituals, and practices such as prayers and meditative exercises (Helminiak, 2001). These religious and spiritual values are believed to be helpful to some clients who consider a spiritual-based lifestyle is important.

Accordingly, counselling is tailored to meet the best needs of clients. Whether the client's needs may or may not be spiritual or religious, the purpose of counselling is to foster clients towards establishing supporting values, and make their life better (Bergin, 1991). On this view, Pargament (2009) lends support by saying that "whether religion and spirituality are part of the solution, or part of the problem, it [religion or spirituality] is an important and legitimate assessment question for psychotherapists" (p. 392) to consider this matter in their practices. Furthermore, it has been reported that more and more counsellors have taken up their own religious and spiritual values in their work with clients (West, 2000). For example, there are counsellors who speak how their faith has become the source of supporting them in therapy, and how they include religious and spiritual values in their approaches

(Stander et al., 1994). These values also have been described as helping some counsellors to see the connections between clients' problems and social justice (Carlson & Erickson, 2002; Waldegrave, Tamasese, Tuhaka, & Campbell, 2003).

Religious spiritually-centred counselling and spiritual approaches

Because of the increasing acknowledgment that these topics are important for both counsellors and clients, certain efforts have been made to intersect or incorporate religion and spirituality into counselling. Such effort has developed a number of different therapeutic models. One of the models is called religious/spiritual guidance, or pastoral counselling: its approach is spiritually and religiously centred (Lines, 2006). The motivation for this type of counselling comes from the view where a religious ethic of love (agape) is adopted (Vaughn & Dacey, 2003). The ethic is based on the biblical injunction which asks Christian believers to love their neighbours like they love themselves (Vaughn & Dacey, 2003). The request to love in this principle is to extend the caring behaviour for other human beings which is described as “among the highest qualities of human morality” (Kurtz, 2000, p. 162)

The counselling model that is based on religious guidance or pastoral ideas is used by all types of religious tradition and beliefs, although it is developed and implemented more with Christian orientations (G. Lynch, 1999). Practitioners within this framework employ therapeutic approaches that emphasise both traditional religious methods such as prayer, meditation and blessing, and non-transcendent techniques, such as religious guidance and discussions about religious scriptures (G. Lynch, 2002). The practice of religiously-centred counselling is common among practitioners who are religious or spiritually oriented themselves. However, some approaches can be used by non-religious counsellors as one is not required to believe in God or any religious doctrine, but to be willing to respect the client's spiritual beliefs (Richards & Bergin, 1997). Since God and scriptural teachings are emphasised as a frame of reference, pastoral counsellors would take an active interest in spiritual guidelines or directions. At the same time, they value the theoretical and conceptual ideas of therapy (Dayringer, 1998). The skilled pastoral counsellor may

combine these two fields of interest when meeting with religious clients, which they may draw on any religious/spiritual elements to guide the counselling process (Helminiak, 2001). Thus, counselling conversation is carried out within the landscape of the mutually accepted religious or spiritual discourse and practices.

Besides this model, other approaches for counsellors to work competently with religious matters regardless of counsellors' theoretical or religious orientations are based on specific and well-designed strategies. To name a few, the spiritual genogram (Frame, 2000) is a classic tool used to examine the transmission of family religious patterns across generations and open up possibilities of choice. Through this approach, counsellors may understand how clients' spiritual or religious legacy continues to influence their current beliefs and practices. Spiritual autobiography (Faiver et al., 2001) is another way to address a client's spiritual and religious story. This process provides counsellors the opportunity to gain insight about the unique journey that clients have taken in relation to their religious lives. The writing of spiritual biography helps clients and counsellors to become aware of the important, but unexamined, aspects of clients religious experience that they wish to explore further.

Some ethical challenges with regards to religious and spiritual values

Although these approaches have attracted many practitioners, there are some concerns about the ethical challenges arising from counselling practice with religious and spiritual matters. These concerns range from a fear that counsellors would influence clients with their own beliefs to concerns regarding the professional boundary between religious and counselling services (Gonsiorek, 2009; Steen et al., 2006). Such concerns are described by Richards and Bergin (1997) as:

...when therapist attempt to preach, teach, or otherwise persuade clients that their own particular religious or spiritual ideology, denomination, cause, or worldview is the most correct, worthwhile, moral or healthy...especially when these values are contrary to clients' values and lifestyle preferences. (p. 154)

The attempt to get clients to adopt some religious or spiritual ideas can be unethical, particularly when there are clients who view these ideas as not liberating, or who in some way may be positioned under the scrutiny of a dominant religious discourse (Zinnbauer & Barret, 2009). In Foucauldian terms, this gaze is identified as pastoral power (Carrette, 1999), as has been described in Chapter One. Pastoral power may position clients under surveillance. This practice of surveillance uses Foucault's panopticon concept which he adopts from Jeremy Bentham, a social theorist and English philosopher (Chambon, Irving, & Epstein, 1999). The panopticon is illustrated as a place of punishment or prison where prisoners are watched and supervised by an observer from a high tower. The tower creates an illusion in the prisoner's minds that everything is visible to the observer inside the tower. Even though the observer is not inside the tower, the prisoners will not be able to tell whether they are being observed or not.

For a client who finds herself in conflict with certain religious practices - in which she might see religion as representing the panopticon – discussions on religion and spirituality might make her more reserved and uncomfortable, even with the best intention of the counsellor, concerning the discussion towards her problems. A client may feel unprepared to deal with the emotions that the discussion would unleash, and thus may attempt to avoid discussing any religious resolutions. In this situation, an open discussion about religious and spiritual values would not be possible, and a counsellor's efforts to have a discussion could lead to the unintentional imposition of the counsellor's own values, or of the values of a religious institution (Zinnbauer & Barret, 2009).

Gonsiorek (2009) points out that if counsellors wish to intersect religion and spirituality in their practices, they need to make sure they are competent to do so. This view emerged because of the professional role boundaries that some counsellors may gradually slide from one to the other, that is, from a counsellors position to a spiritual role, or vice versa. This situation might occur particularly when a counsellor simultaneously holds both counselling and religious knowledge. The dual position is

said to bring counsellors to face unique challenges in therapeutic setting. One of the challenges is the possibility of them being caught in a double bind situation – “wanting guideposts for responsible behaviour and at the same time embracing a constructive [religious] view of epistemology” (Stander et al., 1994, p. 33). When facing such challenging matters, Richards and Bergin (2000), and Wiggins (1996) contend that it is important for counsellors to know how best to work with these values in an ethical manner. One of the suggestions is that counsellors should critically examine their own value systems so that the implicit value systems can be examined properly (Beutler & Bergen, 1991). Vachon and Agresti (1992a) write:

It is generally recognised that therapists’ values do, in fact, change the values of clients. We may no longer overlook exactly what therapists believe nor may we ignore how therapists deal with values in therapy. There is an ethical responsibility to engage in clarifying implicit values in the counseling process. (p. 510)

Another alternative is for counsellors to be explicit about their values and openly discuss the values with clients, either prior to therapy or during therapy, or both (Slife et al., 1999). This approach, which could be termed self disclosure, is seen as a way to open a dialogue about values and value differences. Bergin (1985) suggests that such disclosure increases client freedom in the session because counsellors’ values are open for discussion, and such discussion will not lead to hidden agendas. Furthermore, clients can make informed decisions about how they want the therapeutic process to be carried out when counsellors are willing to disclose their own personal values (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2000).

Both approaches appear to suggest that counsellors must take the time to explore their own beliefs, and the role that religion and spirituality plays in their lives, in the lives of their clients, and in counselling processes. This action can be performed by counsellors engaging in a self-reflective process (Schlosser & Safran, 2009). Self-reflective process may help counsellors to investigate whether religious values are facilitative, restrictive or inhibitory in relation to their work with clients. Without reflexivity, counsellors might not be aware of the effects that their personal, and

professional values might have on clients, and the influence of these values on their counselling practices. The practice of reflexivity is significant within poststructuralist and social constructionist writing. According to scholars in this paradigm, reflexivity involves “turning one’s reflexive gaze on discourse, [that is] turning language back on itself to see the work it does in constituting the world” (Davies et al., 2004, p. 361). In this context, counsellors who take up reflexive practice in their approaches would call for a critical investigation of how certain discursive act can constitute the practice of counselling. Chapter Three provides detailed overviews about poststructuralist and social constructionist premises. However, in the following section I offer some review of poststructural and social constructionist counselling approaches that have contributed to the area of working with religious and spiritual values.

Opening conversational space for religious and spiritual values in counselling

Along with the spiritually-centred counselling orientation and other spiritual strategies, there is another recent perspective on how counsellors can work with religious and spiritual values. This perspective stems from postmodernism, and the related notions of a social constructionist epistemology, where the concepts emphasise the use of collaborative language system or dialogic conversation (H. Anderson, 2007a; M. E. Griffith & J. L. Griffith, 2002; Hoffman, 1993). Anderson (1999) describes this dialogic conversation as one in which “people [the counsellor and client] are talking *with* each other rather than *to* each other” (p. 3). Within this approach, counselling dialogue is positioned as “an interactive process of interpretations of interpretations ” (H. Anderson, 2005, p. 499), where one interpretation invites another. The purpose of the interpretation process is to help clients and counsellors to understand what meanings are produced in the counselling conversations.

Collaborative language system emphasises participation of counsellors that is non-hierarchical (Monk & Gehart, 2003). Conversational practices become the focus of therapy that engages the counsellor and the client (McNamee, 1996) which help the

client to construct new narratives or interpretations of religious and spiritual matters. On the basis of this conversational practice, a space is opened for clients to offer what they understand about religious practices and their meanings, and therefore they might construct the kind of religiosity that is resonant with their own religious perspective (Thayne, 1998). The two-way dialogic process invites both counsellor and client to explore the position of religion and spirituality in the client's life. The invitation entails a place for both parties to examine the religious experience that is shaping clients' personal selves, and the way they view the world. Religious and spiritual matters which clients bring into counselling are not seen as a 'problem' that has to be solved but as a story or narrative that is socially constructed and language-meaning generated (H. Anderson, 1993). For counsellors in this framework, they are more interested in the meaning-making of religious stories, than the problem-saturated description in clients' speaking.

In undertaking this exploration, collaborative language system counsellors position themselves in a not-knowing stance. This stance requires that the counsellors' understanding of clients' religious matters are not limited by counsellors' prior religious experiences and knowledges (H. Anderson & Goolishian, 1992). The counsellors' not-knowing position, however, is distinct from the value-neutral position. Not-knowing in these counsellors' terms does not mean that counsellors have to lay aside their own value position, or pretend that they do not know anything, or be in a blank place. On the contrary, the position of not-knowing is guided by a curiosity about what is not yet known about clients' religious and spiritual aspects, and about what has been contributing to the shaping of their religious discourse (Freedman & Combs, 1996). Anderson and Goolishian (1992) explain:

The not-knowing position entails a general attitude or stance in which the therapist's actions communicate an abundant, genuine curiosity. That is, the therapist's actions and attitudes express a need to know more about what has been said, rather than convey preconceived opinions and expectations about the client, the problem, or what must be changed. The therapist, therefore,

positions himself or herself in such a way as always to be in a state of 'being informed' by the client. (p. 29)

Through 'the state of being informed', counselling conversations are not in tune with the counsellor's agenda, but in the preferred direction of the clients. In this context, the therapeutic process is practised in a way that can empower the client's agency (Davies, 2000a). A client's agency in a collaborative language systems counselling context is described as "a personal perception of freedom, or competency to make sense, and to act" (H. Anderson & Goolishian, 1992, p. 31). Within this position, clients may reflect and make choices of what is best for their lives. Although, the orientation appears to leave the direction of counselling to clients, this does not mean that counsellors are passive in the counsellor-client relationships, and their counselling approaches. Instead, these counsellors position themselves as conversational artists who are very much responsible to the production of counselling therapeutic dialogue, and where the activity is shared with clients (H. Anderson & Goolishian, 1992).

In another postmodern approach to therapy which is the narrative therapy, White (2000) describes that the position which narrative therapy practitioners employ as "decentred but influential". White (2005) explains:

It is the intention of the [narrative] therapist to take up a 'decentred and influential' position in conversations they have with the people who consult them. The notion 'decentred' does not refer to the intensity of the therapist's engagement (emotional or otherwise) with people seeking consultation, but to the therapist's achievement in according priority to the personal stories of people's lives. In the context of this achievement, these people [clients] have a primary authorship status, and the knowledges and skills that have been generated in the history of their lives are the principle considerations. The therapist is influential not in the sense of imposing an agenda or in the sense of delivering interventions, but in the sense of building a scaffold, through questions and reflections. (p. 9)

In a “decentred and influential” position, counsellors share with clients the responsibility of shaping the counselling conversations. This stance is called co-authoring (Winslade, Crocket, & Monk, 1997). The co-author position means that the counsellors work alongside clients in generating a dialogically shared meaning about the clients’ narratives around religious and spiritual values and experiences - an approach which is rather similar to the collaborative practices. What differs between these two therapies is their views on the therapist positioning, where a narrative therapist would consider clients’ stories within a socio-political lens (Monk & Gehart, 2003). Stories of religion and spirituality are explored through clients’ social and cultural practices. These practices might produce religious narratives that can be restrictive, oppressive, or liberating. Alongside clients, counsellors will trace the performance of religious discourse and its effects in clients’ lives and relationships. In what follows, I bring forth two examples of counselling conversations within a poststructural paradigm with respect to religious and spiritual values. The first example shows how this value opens up possibilities for healing, and the second illustrates how the client perceived God as ignoring his suffering. I picked out both examples from Griffith and Griffith’s (2002) conversations with their clients.

In the first example, the client (Mary) pictured her troubled marriage as “cleaning up the debris” (p. 54), but she was determined not to leave the marriage. She linked this metaphor with the experience she had when she was in the nursing school:

Mary: I will never forget what I saw. The devastation. There were bodies, dead and wounded out in the open, homes demolished. We worked for days afterward, cleaning up the debris...In fact, that’s more like where I feel I am now, rather than in the middle of the storm. I’m cleaning up the debris.

Melissa (the counsellor): As you are cleaning up debris, where is God?

Mary: Just beside me. Right next to me. As I pick up a board, he’s picking up the heavy end, making the board somehow supernaturally lighter.

Melissa: I guess you learned as a young nursing student that in the middle of a peaceful day, storms can come quickly, without warning, bringing great devastation.

Mary: Yes. That is a lesson one never forgets.

Melissa: If you were out there steadily cleaning up the debris, with God alongside you, lifting heavy ends of the boards, and suddenly, another storm hit, then where would God be?

Mary: Where would he be? I'm not sure. But I do know that he would know what to do. If there were a ditch he would grab me and run there. He would put me down in the ditch and lay on top of me. Or, if there was no ditch nearby, or if we couldn't get to the ditch in time, he would get my body on the ground and cover my body with his own till the storm passed...

Before discussing what this example illustrates, I offer a second example. Here, Mr Holloway (the client), was struggling with serious gangrene that could kill him. However, for some reason, he has stopped considering an amputation as an option to save his life. In the counsellor's effort to search with him the potential sources of hope and meaning, Griff (the counsellor) asked Mr. Holloway the reason for his decision not to go along with the plan (J. L. Griffith & M. E. Griffith, 2002, p. 262).

Mr. Holloway: I prayed like hell. I asked God to take this away...but he didn't.

Griff: Do you have a sense of what God would want you to do right now?

Mr. Holloway: He wouldn't want me to kill myself.

Griff: What do you think God understands about your situation?

Mr. Holloway: He knows I've done the best I could.

Griff: Can you feel God's presence?

Mr. Holloway: (he showed no response)

Griff: Is it that you feel you know what God would want you to do, but it is hard to understand what he has in mind, or to trust him right now?

Mr. Holloway: (he nodded silently)

Griff: What does God know about you as a person that gives God the confidence that you can bear this?

Mr. Holloway: The Bible says that God won't give you anything heavier than you can bear.

Griff: Do you have any sense of what God might be experiencing as he witnesses your going through this?

Mr. Holloway: (sobbing) I'll go along with it [the amputation].

From these examples, when speaking about religious discourses and their constitutive effects, poststructural counsellors appear to be investigating the operation of such discourse in clients' speaking. The notion of discourse in poststructural understandings has close association with the notion of power. From Foucault's (1980) analyses of power, he argues that power is exercised, not possessed, and it is both repressive and productive. In a counselling context, this understanding of power relations enables counsellors to identify and/or inquire about more readily the effects: liberations and/or limitations of religious ideas and practices on clients. White and Epston (1990) write:

We could assume that persons are incited to perform operations through the technique of power, on their lives and relationships in order to subject themselves and others to the specifications for personhood and relationship that are carried in these truth discourses. (p. 28)

Therefore, when counsellors can help clients to see the construction of this religious discourse which has positioned them into a particular lifestyle and way of thinking, clients might reset their positioning to these religious ideas and practices, and therefore they may decide whether or not to unpack or deconstruct the religious assumptions which have contextualised their lives. However, the purpose of

deconstruction is not to challenge the presented religious values, but to open up possibilities for clients to consider how they are positioned and how they want to accept or change these positions (Freedman & Combs, 1996; J. L. Griffith & M. E. Griffith, 2002).

In the following Chapter Three, I offer more discussions about the notion of deconstruction. However, for the purpose of this chapter I present White's (1991) terms on this notion.

According to my rather loose definition, deconstruction has to do with procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices: those so-called "truths" that are split off from the conditions and the context of their production; those disembodied ways of speaking that hide their biases and prejudices; and those familiar practices of self and of relationship that are subjugating of person's lives. (p. 27)

As presented in Griffith and Griffith's examples, poststructural counsellors employ deconstruction as an attempt to liberate subjugated knowledges that the clients may have access to. These knowledges and stories might be overlooked, forgotten or neglected because of the dominant ideas/stories that may not have allowed clients to notice other aspects of their experiences. By using a deconstructive approach, which consists of "systematic inquiry that makes explicit the interpretative assumptions out of which a particular belief emerged" (J. L. Griffith & M. E. Griffith, 2002, p. 151), clients can consider other religious or spiritual stories that have been a source of support in their lives. On this basis, deconstruction offers clients the opportunity to understand the meaning and influence of the religious beliefs. Once they understand the historical and social contexts of the beliefs, clients' position might shift.

The literature in this area is not local to Malaysia, but this study considers its potential relevance to the counselling practice in Malaysians religious context. The postmodern counselling approaches in this chapter offer a framework that emphasises collaborative relationships between a counsellor and a client. Through such

relationships, the construction of religious and spiritual discourse can be explored and investigated.

Religious and spiritual values: Training and counsellor education

These literatures have shown that there are current trends moving toward more openness for counsellors to be in dialogue with spiritual and religious matters. Yet, for some reasons, counselling practitioners continue to struggle to find a proper way to ask questions about how religion and spirituality matter in their clients' lives (see Eriksen, Marston, & Korte, 2002; Genia, 2000; Helmeke & Bischof, 2002; Thayne, 1998). It appears that the previous belief in a value-neutral stance has made discussions about counsellors' personal values less relevant, therefore perhaps a less important part in the counsellor education or training process. As religious and spiritual values are present in counselling, it is important for counsellors to be able to have knowledge about how to dovetail these two fields when meeting with clients.

As this chapter previously discussed, several training programmes have been suggested to equip counsellors with this knowledge. Some of the approaches in training appear to be technically-oriented, emphasising more on specific strategies (Faiver et al., 2001; Frame, 2000); and some concentrate on ways to integrate religious contents into therapeutic sessions (G. Lynch, 2002; Richards & Bergin, 1997; Tan, 1996). Each of these counsellor training programmes may have a particular interest in teaching student counsellors their own approaches, and in offering the students ideas on how to handle value differences and the gaps between what is taught and the actual practice. However, there are some concerns about the counsellors' ability to see the possible gaps. The concerns arose from assumptions that the programmes might have not provided sufficient training, or might have over-trained counsellors about how to employ those approaches (Kelly, 1990; Shafranske & Malony, 1990; Spong, 2007). The potential implications from such training might be that some counsellors could feel incompetent to address religion and spirituality in counselling - due to the lack of training, (Helmeke & Bischof, 2002), and some could

be too confident in using those approaches that they might not be aware of the effects of the approaches on clients. Cade (1998) writes:

A therapist can often become too clearly identified with the arguments in favour of change through genuine concern, sometimes through becoming over-responsible, or sometimes when operating on behalf of an agency with statutory responsibilities. Whether that position is explicitly or implicitly communicated, he or she can become, as it were, the main 'customer' for how a family or how a particular family member should be. It is as though the therapist has then colonized the list of arguments in favour of the change(s)...(p. 148)

When speaking about the colonizer position in therapeutic settings, Rober and Seltzer (2010) add:

Well-intentioned therapists may often end up positioned as colonizers in the therapy room. [When meeting] with views of families emphasizing their deficiencies and inadequacies in coping with the stresses and problems of life, such 'deficit' understandings intentionally or unintentionally create situations where therapists are expected to take over and to solve the problems. Family members, on the other hand, are expected to collaborate with their therapist and his/her good intentioned professionalism. (p. 126)

Although Rober and Seltzer are not making reference to the concept of Foucault's power, it appears that a colonising position is intertwined with the power notion which Foucault argues in many of his writings (Foucault, 1984, 1995; Lemke, 2001; McNay, 1993). However, the knowledge to identify this power relation or colonising position is often not developed, or discussed, in some counsellor education courses. This state of things, as Rober and Seltzer (2010) point out, owes much to the "systems of diagnostic classification, and also by the dominant belief in our society that where suffering is present, professional helpers are required to act to relieve the suffering using evidence-based knowledge and techniques" (p. 126). Therefore, when there are counsellors who experience discomforts working with religious

matters (Eriksen et al., 2002), even though they are knowledgeable about how to incorporate these values into counselling, this experience may not surprisingly be difficult for the counsellors to recognise.

Perhaps, one of the reasons for such an experience is because counselling is well known as a profession which opposes oppression and exploitation (Lago & Smith, 2010). Therefore, when counsellors are not taught how to reflect and think about the political aspect of the employed approaches, they might feel the position they are taking is in some way violating the client's autonomy and rights. In this situation, counsellors may feel that they have been positioned as professional problem solvers, or as experts. In their roles as professional problem solvers, as experts, the ethical practice of non-exploitation can easily be lost sight of (Cade, 1998). Foucault (1995) calls this effect as normalisation, and a discourse that positions counsellors as professional helpers, as experts is a normalised practice. The normalised practice is 'normalising' in the sense that it constructs norms around which individual counsellors are incited to shape or constitute their counselling practice. Thus, in those norms counsellors subtly are forged to support or to take counselling positions/activities that are commonly and generally accepted. This includes taking up expert positioning.

Vachon and Agresti (1992a) write, "It is important to acknowledge that it is a skill to understand how the counselling process is value-laden" (p. 510). Therefore, it is also seems necessary that training assists counsellors to develop skills in understanding the effects of power (including pastoral power in a religious context), and normalising practices in their counselling work. The important aspect of such training will invite counsellors to be aware that they are simultaneously undergoing the effects of power and exercising power over others. White and Epston (1990) argue:

If we accept that we are always participating simultaneously in domains of power, thus we would endeavour to establish conditions that encourage us to critique our own practices formed

in this domain. We would work to identify the context of ideas in which our practices are situated and explore the history of these ideas. And, instead of believing that therapy does not have anything to do with social control, we would assume that this was always a strong possibility. Thus, we would work to identify and critique those aspects of our work that might relate to the techniques of social control. (p. 29)

This could mean that to weave both counselling, and religious and spiritual values, requires counsellors to have the skill and knowledge to examine the positions that these two fields might imply to the individual counsellor, and to the client. To achieve this kind of learning, that is, inviting counsellors to reflection, training courses are suggested to move beyond the traditional, singular methodology of teaching and training (hooks, 1994; McNamee, 2007). McNamee (2007), on relational practices in education, states that traditional epistemological teaching-learning practices have formed education as “a technique or method for conveying knowledge”, and not as learning where “both teacher and student engage in a process of making meaning together” (p. 314). Where the teaching and learning have not become a joint activity, a conversation - in which the teacher and student can generate different understandings of what counts as knowledge - the practice in turn, will have certain implications for the counselling profession. It is possible that teaching and training practices might eventually produce counsellors as “huskies”, an analogy which Davies (1996) introduces and criticises in her article on management practice in contemporary tertiary educational settings.

Managing academics is like herding cats...as a team of huskies. Train them well, point them in the direction you want, and off they run. The huskies will work towards that end-point for any number of reasons: because they actually perceive themselves as having no choice; out of blind devotion to the driver; because that is the way the team is going; maybe because there might be some food at the end; or maybe the end of the whip. They do not need to know or question why they might be headed in that direction or in that way. The success of the exercise will not be determined by anything other than whether in systems terms it was achieved efficiently. (p. 13)

It seems that if training is shaped into activities which are conducive only for conveying knowledge; if learning is not more than the mere transfer of contents of the textbook to the mind of student (Bakker, Eskell-Blokland, & Ruane, 2010); and if students are not invited to make meaning in the light of their context and knowledges, they may not be encouraged to think critically about whatever subject matter they are presented with, or come across. hooks (1994) claims:

to engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars, and critical thinkers to cross boundaries, the barriers that may or may not be erected by race, gender, class, professional standing, and a host of other differences. (p. 130)

She further argues that when teachers choose to position themselves as the experts, they are likely to hear what their knowledge repeated – the texts told – rather than the voice of the student coming for the learning. In speaking about the role of a teacher and academic texts within this position, Bakker, Eskell-Blokland and Ruane (2010), write:

The lecturer becomes an extension of the textbook, a conveyer of the knowledge held with the pages, to the exclusion of other sources of knowledge, such as local knowledge, indigenous knowledge and personal experience. In class, pressure is exerted on the lecturer to become an entertainer and a performer, a face attached to a module for the student with which the student interacts but is no longer an essential element in the process of learning. One can ask whether the lecturer has become obsolete. (p. 8)

The possible effects if learning that proceeds in such a process are that student counsellors might passively take up knowledge without being challenged in ways that could open the opportunity to be in a critical, reflexive position. Therefore, they might not know how to examine the values that informed their personal and professional positions, and the effects of these positions to the practice. Thus, how religious and spiritual matters are engaged with counselling are likely to be very much influenced and shaped by what the students are taught in counsellor education programmes.

This chapter has reviewed the literature in a number of areas relating to religious and spiritual values and counselling, including a value-neutral stance; spiritually-cultured counselling; conversations based in poststructuralist ideas; and lastly training. I turn now to considering, in more detail, the theoretical foundations of this study.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS WHICH SHAPE THIS STUDY

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I introduced the available Western-derived postmodern and collaborative approaches that seem to offer ways of producing dialogue that potentially has something to contribute to the research dilemma that produced this study. In this chapter, I offer a thorough account of the foundational concepts that underpin both these approaches and the theoretical orientation of the research method. I will first show some theoretical tools that poststructuralist scholars use and how these concepts are applied in counselling. Then, I will question whether these ideas might offer some possibilities for religiously-informed counselling in Malaysia. In order to do so, I begin with Derrida's idea of deconstruction. Once I have introduced this concept, I move to bring forward the Foucauldian base of power/knowledge. Next, I show Davies' positioning theory, and finally social constructionist ideas about language and meaning making.

Deconstruction

An attempt to define Jacques Derrida's deconstruction is not an easy task as Derrida himself was reluctant to give a definitive definition to deconstruction (Norris, 1987). He even makes clear that deconstruction is not something that could be applied or used as a means of reading and interpretation. This response appears in the "Letter to a Japanese friend" which was written by Derrida (2003) to a translator puzzled by how to translate *déconstruction* and *deconstruire* into Japanese. In his response, Derrida writes:

All sentences of the type 'deconstruction' is 'X' or deconstruction is not 'X', *a priori*, misses the point, which is to say that they are at least false. As you know, one of the principal things at stake in what is called in my texts 'deconstruction', precisely delimiting of ontology and above all of the third person present indicative: S is P. (pp. 26-27)

In another piece of writing, Derrida continues to explain his view about deconstruction:

Deconstruction is neither a theory nor a philosophy. It is neither a school nor a method. It is not even a discourse, not an act, nor a practice. It is what happens, what is happening today in what they call society, politics, diplomacy, economics, historical reality, and so on and so forth. Deconstruction is the case. (Derrida, 1990, p. 85)

According to Derrida (1990), to think of deconstruction as a method would pull it back into the traditional concepts and categories which have shaped the dominant Western discourse. Perhaps that is why in his own teaching context, Derrida keeps trying to “fight and oppose the rigid definition of programs, disciplines, the borders between disciplines...and [that] there should be philosophy across the borders, not only in philosophy proper” (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, pp. 6-7). In this respect, Derrida tries to critique structuralist thought in dealing with written texts, but his argument also applies to texts of all kinds. He claims that the meaning in (or of) a text is not given in the binary oppositions, distinctions or categorizations in the text (Derrida, 1990). A text in Derrida’s term may be read in many different ways, and different meanings may be ascribed to it, as making sense of a meaning is a fundamentally open process.

However, according to Derrida, deconstruction is not a matter of rejecting all binaries/boundaries. Deconstruction is more a matter of negotiating with the instability of certain boundaries, that is, by showing how this or that boundary does or does not hold. It involves asking questions about the border or the frame of matters. It is about exploring the margins, limits and borders of texts by putting into question their dominant philosophy, legitimacy and authority (Derrida, 1990). In other words, deconstruction is “to reverse the hierarchy” (Derrida, 1981, p. 57), and/or to disassemble all notions that involve the primacy of a subject, writer or speaker. Within this context of Derrida’s approach in deconstructing the hierarchical notions, Culler (1982) writes:

...the deconstruction upsets the hierarchy by producing an exchange of properties. If the effect is what causes the cause to become a cause, then the effect, not the cause, should be treated as the origin. By showing that the argument which elevates cause can be used to favor effect, one uncovers, and undoes the rhetorical operation responsible for the hierarchization and one produces a significant displacement. If either cause or effect can occupy the position of origin, then origin is no longer originary; it loses its metaphysical privilege. A nonoriginary origin is a 'concept' that cannot be comprehended by the former system and thus disrupts it. (p. 88)

Although Derrida suggests that the idea of deconstruction should always be in process, always at work, and is not in an affirmative form (Derrida, 2003), I bring here some understandings of deconstruction that are described by other authors who have found Derrida's work invaluable, in order to gain more understanding about deconstruction in their terms.

Sampson (1989), describes deconstruction as "to undo, not to destroy" (p. 7). Deconstruction, on these terms, is understood as not to reject, or destroy, but to leave people with a broader, fuller understanding of a text. According to Sampson (1989), Derrida's aim in deconstructing is not to replace something with something else that is different founded on the same frame, but the intention is to open up the text to scrutiny so that people can be provided with alternatives readings and stories. More than this, it might offer a space for them to create their own alternative, expanded understandings rather than being dominated by previously restrictive thinking.

Another understanding of the idea of deconstruction is explained by Davies (2000b); she prefers to use *troubling* to describe deconstruction. The meaning for *trouble* here is "to agitate or [to] make rough" (p. 14). Davies' preference for the word 'trouble' is rather different to some readers of deconstructive text. Her focus is to trouble the power relation within the binaries, since to dismantle binaries is so difficult. Davies (2000b) argues:

Binaries are not so easily dismantled, and deconstructive work often can do no more than draw attention to the binaries and to their constitutive force. For some people, in some readings, deconstructive work may facilitate a different take-up of meaning, beyond the binaries. But this does not undo the continuing force of relations of power that operate to hold the binaries in place. (p. 14)

In many of her writings, Davies chooses to bracket some words where she finds it hard to dismantle these binary patterns such as ‘[in]scription’, ‘[re]present’, ‘[im]possibility’, ‘mo[ve]ment’ and so forth (Davies, 2000b, 2003, 2005; 2006). Her intention is to draw attention to the constitutive acts of reading, and writing the words, so that the constitutive power which is embedded in these words can be troubled (Davies, 2003). This kind of troubling or deconstructive thinking thus, as Davies (2000a) says, “requires us to take on board contradictory thoughts and to hold them together at the same time.” (p. 134).

While Davies at times uses brackets as her strategy to trouble, Derrida already had brought forward the tactic of putting a word/a concept/a thought under erasure or *sous rature* (Sampson, 1989). This tactic asks us to “learn to use and erase language at the same time” (Spivak, 1976, p. ix), and to learn about how to “letting go of each concept at the very moment [we need] to use it” (Spivak, 1976, p. xviii). For example, the word, deconstruction if put under erasure - ~~deconstruction~~ - would enable me to continue to use a useful concept (deconstruction) while at the same time indicating my intention to trouble, undo, contest, renew or unsettle it. By proposing this textual strategy, Derrida is pursuing his intention to produce multivocal/multimeaning texts which can “slip and slide in many directions as he continually finds and claims space for the otherness within the text” (Ferguson, 1993, p. 27).

Thus, in tailoring my understanding of deconstruction in this study, I have drawn from what Derrida suggested, and from writers who have followed him. I wish to use deconstruction to see what alternatives it offers in relation to counselling practices,

and to possible understandings of what clients bring to sessions. I wish to explore how deconstruction can help both practitioners, and clients, to think about the kind of discourses that are produced in counselling relationships, and how they work with such discourses. In the territory of religion and spirituality, I would like to think that deconstruction might offer some space about how counsellors can think and find new spaces in our personal and professional lives.

Deconstruction and counselling

In this section, I will show links between deconstruction and counselling. I begin with Parker's (1999) substantial writing about how psychotherapy can be deconstructed. Parker locates himself with poststructural and social constructionist counsellors who situate their practices in the context of discursive and postmodern approaches. These counsellors use a range of postmodern frameworks in counselling and see the practice as a potentially deconstructive system or 'text' (Parker, 1999). Therefore, most of their work is associated with deconstructing therapy, where practice is opened up to critical inquiry and reflection (see White, 1991). The purpose of deconstruction in this context is similar to Davies' term, *troubling*, as these practices reflect Derrida's deconstruction. Parker (1999) suggests an approach:

...not to dismantling psychotherapy so that it can then simply be reconstructed but to develop an account of something different...a practice that is always *in process* [deconstruction] rather than something fixed, a movement of reflexive critique rather than a stable set of techniques. (p. 2).

The task of deconstructing counselling is to create a different therapeutic place where the position of a counselor is "troubled", and counseling is not perceived as a privileged way of holding superior knowledge of clients and their lives, but is intended to invite clients into collaborative relationships. Within this context, clients may be positioned as the therapist's collaborative partner in the relationships of counselling (H. Anderson, 2007a). Postmodern counsellors see deconstruction as an approach so that clients can find a place for self-reflection, and agentic positioning. This aim is to create a transformative therapeutic practice (Parker, 1999; Sluzki,

1992). The practice allows the counsellor to invite speculations about the way counselling affects, and is affected by others - an event, the client or the counsellor. It is a position in which counsellors have more space to think about power relations in practice. On power relations in counselling, Sluzki (1992) writes:

...issues of power may be evolved, that is: who has what rights to define the nature of the problem, and the nature and goals of consultation; who can impose what on whom; who can generate initiatives; who is in charge of proposing [possible] solutions; in which arena is the problem located; and who will monitor the process. (p. 5)

These questions are sometimes made explicit to the client, but generally they are implicit, conveyed by counselling interactions, and perhaps by other socially constructed ways of addressing the frame that contextualizes the therapeutic conversation. Larner (1999) writes, "For both psychotherapy and deconstruction, the dilemma of power is how to take a position" (p. 40). He continues to say that on one hand counsellors have to structure the interview meeting in order to let the clients have a voice, to be empowered. But on the other hand, the power which counsellors hold through being positioned to speak as experts may put them in the position of unwittingly exerting power. Thus, deconstruction in this context takes place at the level of questioning the authority of this professional power. This action, as Derrida's contribution (1992) emphasises, is a powerful move because therapy tends to be understood as a non-dominating practice.

From this viewpoint, counselling as a practice, proceeds through being with the client where a dialogue of meaning and sharing takes place. For example, in collaborative language systems, there is a stance of "not-knowing", that is, the counsellor always "being informed" by the client (H. Anderson & Goolishian, 1992, p. 29). The notion of "talking with" not "talking to" (H. Anderson, 1999, p. 3) as described in Chapter Two, allow counsellors to take a position which emphasises "ethical relations to the other" (Larner, 1999, p. 46). On Derrida's terms, this position constitutes the concept of responsibility, which has close connection with the matter of ethics and justice

(Derrida, 1999). In the context of counselling, using Derrida's perspective on responsibility and ethics, not only are counsellors responsible to develop non-colonising relationships with clients, but they also are invited to respond to the social justice/injustice shaping clients' lives (Rober & Seltzer, 2010; Waldegrave, 1990; Waldegrave et al., 2003). When thinking and reflecting about the history of Malaysian counselling practice, the decolonisation theory becomes evident to me. I will briefly discuss this theory in Chapter Ten as it becomes significant to the later stage of this study.

Derrida (1992) writes, "deconstruction is justice" (p. 15). Derrida's thoughts on justice in this essay are around law and legal contexts. For Derrida, there is a distinction between law and justice. Law represents the domain of given rules and their concrete application. Justice, on the other hand, "is not the law. Justice is what gives us the impulse, the drive, or the movement to improve the law, that is, to deconstruct the law. Without a call for justice we would not have any interest in deconstructing the law" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 16). On these terms, Derrida's deconstruction is not aimed at the destruction of the law, but at the improvement of the law. Therefore, the sense of 'deconstruction is justice', as Caputo (1997) writes, "keeps an inventionalist eye open for the other to which the law, as law, is *blind*...the eyes of justice are fixed on the silenced and oppressed..." (p. 131).

However, I would suggest that justice also applies to the ethical-political stance the counsellor takes in the context of clients' problems and lives. This stance involves a position on how to work towards justice in counselling practice. It offers counsellors a perspective to see justice in counselling as 'empowering' the client. Within this ethical-political stance, any matters that may position clients under oppressive conditions will be deconstructed and examined in counselling (Waldegrave, 1990; Waldegrave et al., 2003). In this way, privilege power which embedded in these matters will be destabilized. Waldegrave (2009) writes, in the context of therapy:

To deconstruct monopolistic power, we need to honor differences.
The 'break throughs' in gender occurred when women powerfully

asserted their different perspectives and men began to honor them. The same is true for culture. When people's cultures are honored, their sense of belonging is also honored and that enhances their experience of wellbeing. When middle class people enter the worlds of those who are poor and actually observe and listen to their experiences and hopes, they know that inadequate housing, minimal education and insufficient income are the cause of most of their stresses and consequent responses rather than their inadequacies or pathologies. (p. 98)

This orientation sees social justice and therapy as professional actions to trouble or disrupt unjust societal values, structures, policies, and practices which might disadvantage certain groups or people (see Butler, 2003; McNay, 2000; Waldegrave et al., 2003). Counselling, therefore, is an action that connects with the efforts of giving voice to marginalized/oppressed groups and their experiences. As Riger (1992) explains, "giving voice means identifying the ways in which people create meaning and experience life from their particular position in the social hierarchy" (p. 734). It also helps clients to value their own thoughts and emotions when dominant discourses or ideas may discourage them from speaking out or claiming their own rights and voices. The task of deconstruction is, therefore, to enhance such voices, and by supporting clients both within and outside the therapy. In doing so, counsellors with a deconstructive approach help clients make visible the shaping effects of such discourses (see White & Epston, 1990, for example). This approach helps these counsellors, for example, to "push aside the hegemonic claims of dominant interpretation, such as those of racism, capitalism, or patriarchy" (Ferguson, 1993, p. 28), in order to provide some discursive positions for clients to make well-informed decisions about their lives.

For an understanding about how power and its constitutive effects are linked with deconstruction, I will next show Foucault's work on power/knowledge and discourse.

Foucault's power/knowledge and discourse

Derrida's critiques, and his emphasis on power and deconstruction, have a close connection with the work that Foucault (1980) develops in relation to structural and

relational power, which is termed as power/knowledge. For Foucault, power and knowledge are a 'couplet', that means these two terms are not one-and-the-same, but separate entities with reciprocal relationships (Foucault, 1980). The basic understanding of this concept is that power is exercised rather than possessed; power is not primarily repressive, but productive, and is analysed as coming from the bottom up rather than from the top down. That is, modern power, rather than being exercised by sovereigns, is seen as existing in action, is negotiated within social interactions, and is connected to knowledge (Foucault, 1984). Using a metaphor of power as capillary and productive, Foucault (1980) explains:

Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization [therefore, individuals are] in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power...[they are]...the vehicles of power, not its points of application. (p. 98).

Thus, this concept of power/knowledge highlights that power relations are enacted in all interactions, whether this interaction has an emancipatory intent or not (Sarup, 1993). In the context of counselling, the professional power relation is not the only one present. Capillary power is a power that circulates. In this respect, the client may claim an agentic position, and challenge/trouble the professional power which the counsellor holds to generate his or her self agency; for example, questioning the counsellor's interpretations relating to their problems. From this perspective, the power/knowledge relation draws attention to contestation over knowledge claims, and the ways in which, what Foucault (1980) describes as 'a regime of truth', is established, as I go on to explain through the following paragraphs.

Foucault's theory of technology power of the experts is valuable in that it can help counsellors understand how their work may enact a subtle form of social control (Foucault, 1991a; Lerner, 1999). The articulation and the effects of power are unavoidable for both the counsellor and the client because while people exercise power, they are also subjected to it. In this study, the notion of Foucault's power/knowledge is employed to assist in illustrating some of the ways in which

dominant discourses are sustained in power and knowledge relations, and are reproduced through social practices, including counselling.

Weedon (1997) provides a useful description about how discourse works.

Discourses, in Foucault's works, are ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and the relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects which they seek to govern. (p. 105)

Foucault (1972) himself describes discourses as "practices which form the objects of which they speak" (p. 49). The ways in which discourse and power/knowledge relations work together are made visible in Doherty's (2007) suggestion that discourse is "a body of ideas, concepts and beliefs that have become established as knowledge, or as an accepted way of looking at the world" (p. 193). Thus, discourse can be seen as "a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events" (Burr, 2003, p. 64).

However, discourses are not only about what can be said and thought, but they also shape/prescribe who can speak, when, and with what authority (Parker, 1999). Therefore, possibilities for meanings may be acquired by the social and the institutional positions that a person holds. Meaning can thus be produced through institutional practices, and the power relations inherent in those practices (Ball, 1990). In this respect, any institutional practices, such as counselling, education, law, medicine, social welfare or religion, shape what it is possible for individuals to do or say, through the power/knowledge relations. This concept, Foucault calls the 'art of governing' or governmentality, which is using the technology of power to conduct or govern the self, or others (Lemke, 2002). In this context, governmentality, invites an

individual to internalise rules and laws. Dominant knowledges produce system of rules and practices by which people come to govern themselves.

With respect to counselling - as a profession, and as a discourse that engages with the practices of care - governmentality can be understood on the terms which Rose (1990) describes as:

...technologies for the government of the soul operate not through crushing subjectivity in the interests of control and profit, but by seeking to align political, social and institutional goals with individual pleasures and desires, and with the happiness and fulfillment of the self. Their power lies in their capacity to offer means by which the regulation of selves - by others and by ourselves - can be made consonant with contemporary political principles, moral ideals, and constitutional exigencies. (p. 257)

The professional knowledge and/or status which counsellors hold in counselling, therefore, confers on them authority about how to 'conduct' counselling practice. This knowledge situates counsellors within modes of professional action that are seen as practices of caring, but at the same time it also positions counsellors to submit to disciplinary power (Rose, 1990; White, 1997). The disciplinary power embedded in counselling knowledge and practice does not necessarily need to come with force to be effective. This power manages to shape both the counsellor and the client through noncoercive intelligible ways and without this becoming visible. The invisibility of disciplinary power, as Foucault (1995) says, works in such a way that "not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes" (p. 138). Within this frame, counsellors through counselling knowledge may provide an authoritative version of a client's problem and may act accordingly to a set of prescribed therapeutic activity to correct it (Kaye, 1999). Therefore, regardless of counsellors' well intentioned motives to help clients, counsellors may be positioned to use normalizing judgment and the power of privileged knowledge, and their own positioning in the counselling room to shape what becomes possible.

On the basis of such disciplinary power, individuals internalise practices and knowledges on which their discipline is based. It is the disciplinary technologies that make possible submissive behavior, and docile bodies, through concerted actions of many disciplinary technologies (Foucault, 1991a). Through constant ‘training’ of bodies, individuals’ activities are shaped and influenced by these technologies. However, the process often is not recognized as such because power in some circumstances “is tolerable” (Foucault, 1976, p. 86).

For example, Foucault discusses how in a capitalist economy, families are seen as effective producers in the state’s economic development. Families become the source of productivity, where men – fathers – are positioned to be the main provider for the household, simultaneously maximizing the strength of the state’s economy. Foucault (1979) writes:

The art of government...is essentially concerned with answering the question of how to introduce economy – that is, to say the correct manner of managing individuals, goods and wealth within the family...and of making the family fortunes prosper – how to introduce this meticulous attention of the father towards his family into the management of the states. (p. 10)

Women – mothers – then are positioned to tolerate the production of this male labour force by holding the traditional role as nurturing mothers and supportive wives. These roles are so well-internalised that both men and women enter into the process willingly, even though it is not necessarily in their own interest, but is in the interest of the state. The internalised roles become tolerable when these roles operate more and more as a norm, and the norm becomes the means through which self is regulated.

For more clarification, I bring one of Burr’s (2003) examples of how this disciplinary power operates and produces docile bodies, showing how women and men are persuaded to willingly submit to this kind of disciplinary power in order to sustain a stable marriage and family life. Burr writes:

...marriage and the family play a crucial role in the maintenance of capitalist economy. It is vital that men, as workers, are able to appear each day in the market-place ready to sell their labour power. Women play a central role both in this daily production of the labour force, and its renewal from generation to generation in the form of children who will in turn become workers. But it is also vital that women provide these services free of charge. The idea of the family wage, that a man should be paid enough money to support not only himself, but a dependent wife and children, serves further to legitimate women's position as provider of free services to her husband and family. (p. 74)

This example shows that gender discourse and its constitutive power plays an important part in positioning men and women into the traditional female and male binary. Taking Foucault's analysis of power technology, governmentality, and the shaping effect of discourse, this example shows the simultaneous process of what Macleod and Durrheim (2002) call subjectivising and objectivising of both men and women. Through power relations, subjectivising constitutes individualised subjectivities, and by objectivising, it uses the operation of power to transform people into objects or docile bodies who uncritically perform the available unexamined discursive repertoire.

Therefore, it is not difficult to see the resonance of Derrida's deconstruction with Foucault's analyses of power. In this context, the deconstructionist approach is not simply to draw attention to the culturally constructed categorizations, but also to the traditional role binaries (e.g. male over female; white over black; counsellors over clients) that appear to produce conventional assumptions in a society (Burman, 1998).

In the following section, I bring another important theory that needs to be discussed with respect to power relations and discourse, and that is central to this study. This theory is positioning theory which I draw from Davies (1991, 2003), Harré and van Lagenhove (1991; 1999), and other scholars who take an interest in the working out of discourse for people in social, cultural and political contexts. However, I begin

first with Davies' discussion of subjectivity, and the relation of this subjectivity to the concepts of discourse and agency.

Discourse, subjectivity, agency and positioning

Davies (1992) in giving an example about the process of individual subjectification and the concept of positioning within discourse, writes:

When I talk about the experience of being 'a woman', I refer to the experience of being assigned to the category female, of being discursively, interactively, and structurally positioned as such, and of taking up as one's own those discourses through which one is constituted as female. (p. 54)

In this example, Davies is showing the relationship between discourse and subjectivity, and how discursive constructions and practices may be produced in the ways in which we experience ourselves and our bodies. Through this example, Davies (1992) shows that discourse may shape us as particular kind of people (i.e. as a woman) and shape our relationships with others on those terms. In a later description, she shows that discourses work as constitutive forces and that "their field of play is the individual subject" (Davies, 1998, p. 134). These constitutive forces "mis(shape) them [the subjects] in any number of ways" (p. 134). However, this assertion does not mean that the individual subject is seen as passive subject, but a subject who is constitutive of, as well as constituted within, discourse. On these terms, in constituting, or producing and reproducing discourse, individuals contribute to determine what kinds of subjects they might be, as they recognize the discursive constitution of their lives, and resist, refuse or contest this constitution. This act of recognizing and responding is what Davies (1991) called agency.

Davies' articulation of the concept of agency is quite different from the modernist idea of agency. Davies (1991) points out that agency within a modernist framework is grounded in an elitist and individualistic tradition. A modernist concept of agency constructs agentic acts as purely individual acts, involving individual freedom of choice, rationality and moral authority. In Davies' description, agency within

modernist concept is considered as autonomous from the social context, which is external to the selfhood of the individual. The choices that the individual makes are based on rational thought which is seen as coherent with a rational and knowable identity. Therefore, the individual person is expected to and can speak for themselves, as well as accepting full moral responsibility for their own action. This is the bounded individual, with whom a counsellor will take an objective and value-neutral position, employing empirically supported treatments.

By contrast, speaking from a poststructuralist perspective, Davies (1991) argues that agency is not bound to a notion of autonomous, external and essential personhood. Instead agency is constituted within multiple and contradictory discourses that are available around us (Davies, 2000a). Agency, according to Davies, is not outside discourse. The speaking position that a person holds within discourse is discursively and interactively constituted, and is open to shifts and changes, which is in line with the way in which of discourses also shift and change (Davies, 1992).

In what follows, I explore the concept of positioning that has a strong link with agency and discursive practices. van Langenhove and Harré (1999) introduce positioning as a process in which one takes up a position in relation to other people or contexts. A subject position is located within social interactions where the person claims the right to his or her subject status. A subject position, as Davies (1992) describes it, involves “a subject who realizes, recognizes, speaks, writes her (collective) subjected condition and searches out the ways in which the patterns that hold that subjection in place can be subverted and turned to other ends” (p. 59). From that position, a person may formulate or explain what happens around him or her on the terms of the particular images, story lines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practices in which they are positioned (Davies & Harré, 1990).

In this situation, one might take the notion of positioning as non intentional or intentional. For example, people who are speaking from a privileged position - a

position which one might be bestowed on the basis of race, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, or other key characteristic - might not see or notice that this position could make them capable of inadvertently imposing assumptions on the people whom they speak about or work with. This privileged speaking creates constraints on the lives of people who are less privileged. A speaker may become so enmeshed in the positions implicit in their talk that these positions become invisible (Burr, 2003). This invisibility then serves to authorize the speaker's speech or claim. There are many dimensions of discursive positioning that can take place when one positions oneself and another in talk, as Davies and Harré (1990, p. 50) point out:

- A conversation will be univocal if the speakers severally adopt complementary subject positions which are organized around a shared interpretation of the relevant conversational locations;
- One speaker can position others by adopting a story line which incorporates a particular interpretation of cultural stereotypes to which other speakers are invited to conform, indeed are required to conform if they are to continue to converse with the first speaker in such a way as to contribute to that person's story line; but
- Sometimes second speakers may not contribute because they do not understand what the story line is meant to be, or they may pursue with their own story line, quite blind to the story line implicit in the first speaker's utterance. In this situation the non-contribution or silence is seen as an attempt to resist the story line offered; but also
- They may conform or keep silence to such an utterance because they do not define themselves as having choice to speak their own story line, or having the kind of speaking position that enables them to speak their preferences.

This analysis of the strategies one can adopt in dealing with speaking experiences, shows how “one can examine the very processes and discourse through which the constitution of self takes place” Davies (1992) writes:

One can develop strategies for maintaining an illusion of a coherent unitary self through such strategies as talking of roles or through denial of contradiction, or one can examine the very processes and discourse through which the constitution of self takes place. (p. 57)

Through these positioning strategies, people accept, change or resist any subject positions that are offered, moving within and between discourses in which subjectivity or personhood is constituted. This possibility of choice in a situation or discourse then provides people with the possibility of acting agentically, in response to recognising the discursive constitution of the self.

Davies’ positioning strategies brings the study to the term of position call. This term is introduced by Drewery and Winslade (1997) and Drewery (2005) who explain how the ways people are invited to respond to position calls can in turn produce various positions including subjugated or agentive subjects. Subjugated subjects might be produced by an authoritative and/or careless speaking while agentive subjects might be produced by a respectful conversational practice or relationship (Drewery, 2005). However, these two examples of positioning – subjugated or agentive – are not fixed and definite in the process of conversational exchange. Power relations are involved in the production of position calls which can result in the personal experience of being located in one or a number of positions. In the moment people speak, they are not just the “recipients of the influence of social discourse, they are also producers and reproducers of discourse in their participation in social exchange” (Winslade, 2005, p. 353). This view suggests that people’s speaking produces discursive positioning of self and of others (Harré & Langenhove, 1991).

Positioning theory is relevant to both the research process of this study, and to its subject matter. In Chapter Four, I offer a more detailed commentary on the use of

positioning theory as an analytic strategy employed to investigate my research texts. Here in this chapter, I offer a little more commentary on the value of positioning theory for counselling.

The concept of positioning invites counsellors to make meaning of their clients' experiences on terms of how they are positioned in various social and cultural contexts, as well as in the counselling itself. This position is usually experienced and told by these clients as problematic in their lives. The value which this theory contributes to the counselling process is to help clients to identify and re-position themselves in other alternative landscapes that are more satisfying (Winslade, 2005). Counsellors could utilise the practical concept offered by this theory by making visible the discursive position that produces problems in the client's personal world, and how this experience of being a person is negotiated within the wider context of the socio-political domain. In such a scenario, positioning theory, as Winslade (2005) explains:

...opens space for people to make choices, to take stands, or to protest injustice. [It] allows people to make links between personal stands they are taking and the wider politics of meaning-making in their social worlds. (p. 355)

Although a discourse might not be changed in certain situation, discursive positions could be shifted. Through the lens of discursive positioning, the nuances in discourses can be analyzed and examined so that clients can make a decision to choose a more favourable position in relation with a problem (Winslade & Monk, 2008). The possibility of shifting to a preferred position, and between positions is seen as critical in the counselling process because in such discursive conditions clients may have the space to loosen the grip of a conflict or problem, or move toward a greater understanding of how their lives are positioned within larger discourses.

Winslade (2005) provides some example of counselling conversations that illustrate how practitioners can assist clients to negotiate a positioning shift within discourses

in order to reshape the negative effects of a problem and to open up new possibilities for living. The following is one of Winslade's (2005, pp. 359-360) examples about a client, Maria, who is experiencing distress from the process of marriage separation.

Maria: Most of the time I just ask myself why did this happen? Why did my marriage break up? These questions just go round and round in my head.

Counsellor: So the questions trouble you a lot. Do they ever get answered? Do you have troubling answers, that [also] bother you?

Maria: I think I wasn't good enough. I wasn't a good enough wife.

Counsellor: In what way might you be "not good enough"?

Maria: He would tell me that he didn't love me any more because I got too fat. And it's true, I did put on too much weight. I just wasn't attractive to him any more.

Counsellor: What was that like for you?

Maria: It really hurt. He was judging me in such a shallow way and it was just not fair.

Counsellor: So, on the one hand you were tempted to believe the story that you weren't a good enough wife, but on the other hand you wanted to object and say that's not fair.

Maria: Yes but after he left, I was so upset and I just felt so bad about myself and I blamed myself a lot.

Counsellor: You lost touch with the "it's not fair".

Maria: Yes.

Counsellor: What if we were to talk a little about the “it’s not fair” story? To give it more of a chance to stand up to the story of you not being good enough. Would that be of interest to you?

In this example, Winslade shows that the practical value when a counsellor listens to the effects of discursive positioning is that it invites the possibility for people to turn the normalizing gaze of discourse (in this scenario the male patriarchal gaze on the female body) in another direction. In other words, when the counsellor in this counselling conversation says to Maria, “You lost touch with the ‘it’s not fair’”, this counsellor is bringing forward her words in the context of “justice” - an alternative discursive position that brings forth her resistance to being positioned as worthless and unattractive. This is the working out of “deconstruction as justice” (Derrida, 1992), as discussed earlier in the chapter. This approach is likely to deconstruct the internalized discourse of patriarchy which is spoken to her through her husband’s utterance. Thus, in this way the meaning of a term such as *worthless*, or *unattractive*, can be challenged and contested.

Language and the making of meaning

In this section, I give attention to social constructionist ideas about language and the making of meaning. The focus will be on what social constructionist perspectives offer in understanding the social and cultural practices that construct people’s utterances, which in turn construct how people view the world.

The basic idea of social constructionism is that “as we communicate with each other we construct the world in which we live” (Gergen, 2009, p. 4). Therefore, the making of meaning is a shared and public activity where a word gets meaning because of its usage and place within the language construction that people engage in. This idea is particularly linked to Wittgenstein (1963), a language philosopher who says that people behave according to social conventions through the use of words. Within a pattern of language activities, people are forming a kind of knowledge that describes their situation to each other. In this sense, language is used as a tool, a navigation device that allows members of a culture to coordinate ongoing relations

among them (Burr, 2003). The established meaning of a word in the process of social understanding, thus, is not fixed and does not determine how it will be applied in the future because meaning creation may differ and change across cultures and contexts. What is created through language such as knowledge, meaning, therefore, is perhaps only one of multiple possibilities (H. Anderson, 2007b). Thus, knowledge or reality is not seen by social constructionists as a grand narrative in which this might be taken for granted as an absolute truth, but rather there are various possible alternatives to take up. However, even though realities and knowledge are considered socially constructed, and meanings are contingent, it does not mean that everything goes and nothing exists outside the linguistic constructions. On this assumption, Gergen (2009) writes:

Social constructionists do not say [that] there is nothing, or there is no reality. The important point is that whenever people define reality – that death is real, or the body, the sun, and the chair on which they are sitting – they are speaking from a particular standpoint. In describing it [the reality] you will inevitably rely on some tradition of sense making. Each of these descriptions is legitimate in the traditions in which they were created. (p. 4)

From this perspective, Gergen is saying that because people perceive and conceptualise knowledge or reality within a particular culture or context, therefore, meanings are produced through these contexts. Meanings are constructed in a particular culture, and from a particular point of view. The way people understand what is accepted as true, is bound by relational, historical and communal domains. For social constructionists, the point is not to abandon matters that people take as real and true, instead the idea is to offer a call for a reflexive stance towards the way people normally talk and think, towards what could be taken for granted, and might therefore have certain implications to their lives and others. As Winslade's example shows, the 'true' and 'real' of what Maria thought as "not good enough" is not something that is passively received from a social constructionist lens, but to the contrary, counsellors can contest the matter through active deconstructive questions by inviting an unpacking of the discourses. As Gergen (2009) continues to explain:

...the potential of constructionist ideas [is that] actions are not constrained by anything traditionally accepted as true, rational, or right. Standing before us is a vast spectrum of possibility, an invitation to innovation. As we speak together, listen to new voices, raise questions, ponder alternatives, and play at the edges of common sense, we cross the threshold into new worlds of meaning. (p. 5)

The invitation to explore possibilities, thus, may open space for a new form of language, and thus a way interpreting the world. When Maria's counsellor asked her, "In what way might you be "not good enough"?", this question appears to change the authority of meaning and discourse. It opens the story of "not good enough" to the "it's not fair" story. The attempt to question the authority of meaning in this counselling conversation allows Maria to examine taken for granted ideas, truth claims in the story, and the contexts that Maria and other people may take up in relationships (Freedman & Combs, 1996). In doing so, individuals may constantly reshape, revise and upgrade their own stories, and in some ways loosen the restrictions of dominant cultural stories.

As language is seen as formative (Monk & Gehart, 2003), social constructionist counsellors seek to recognize the contextual and interpretative understandings within the therapeutic process. Stories that clients bring into counselling are read as actively generated within sociocultural and relational contexts, therefore, each story represents only one version of the multiple realities. In presenting their problems, clients perhaps are not aware that their stories are shaped by the way they interpret or visualize it. This interpretation brings with it the clients' histories, beliefs, assumptions, intentions and linguistic practices in which they live in, and in which they use these aspects in participating in social interactions. Social constructionist counsellors caution that when clients seek therapy, the interpretation of problem stories would position clients in a state of believing that these problems are a reflection of their identity, or a "reflection of certain truths about their nature and

their character, about the nature and character of others, and about the nature and character of their relationships” (White, 2007, p. 9).

Hence, when listening to clients’ stories, these counsellors tend to hold the stories tentatively, yet at the same time they are aware of the real effects these stories might have for the clients. Within the therapeutic process, counsellors listen to the dominant story, but they also seek the “unsaid” and the “not-yet-said” story in clients’ speaking (H. Anderson, 2007b, p. 14). From this perspective, it seems that events or ideas that do not get storied or are thinly described are of interest for these counsellors, such as story of “it’s not fair”. The interest perhaps comes from an understanding that when there are limited, narrow interpretations of a situation, problems might develop as at the same time other perspectives, even ones that might be preferred, are excluded or marginalised (White, 1997). In other words, thin description is seen as opening few options for action to change a complex situation. Therefore, counsellors within this framework give special attention to the process of highlighting different points of view by exploring possible new meanings from already-storied events, thereby constructing new narratives and new language alongside clients (Freedman & Combs, 1996). The process is carried out through various types of conversation, and one of these conversations is called telling and re-telling conversation (White, 1995; 1997), which emphasises clients’ telling and re-telling the preferred stories of their lives. In this way, the unique and personal aspects of a story are engaged.

White (1997), in referring to the work of Myerhoff (1982), describes how it is through engaging with clients in the telling and re-telling of the preferred meanings of their stories that lives are richly described. As stories of a client’s life are linked to shared values, beliefs, desires and commitments in the process of telling and re-telling, this leads to multiple contextualizations of their lives that contribute to a richness of narrative resources. White (1997) explains:

These narratives resources contribute significantly to the range of possible meanings that persons might give to their experiences of

the world, and to the range of options for action in the world. And, in that this range of options for action would not be available to persons whose lives are poorly read, these narrative resources are constitutive of life – they contribute to the shaping of life; they make life up. (pp. 16-17)

The process of telling and re-telling in narrative social constructionist counselling invites clients to re-authoring the positions in their lives (White, 1995). Clients can become more influential, as authors, about the positions and stories they wish to take in shaping their personal identity. This involves a process of giving more strength to clients' hopes, values and dreams that are associated with their preferred identity conclusions (White, 2001). Through re-authoring aspects of their stories, clients are at the same time re-visiting the meaning that they attribute to their experiences and having the opportunity to name these new experiences. The renegotiation of meaning then provides alternative readings for the story line, and therefore, generates rich description of their own knowledge and skills that perhaps will open up options for clients to think outside of what they have normally thought.

The concepts of language constructions and meaning making, in the framework of social constructionism, thus, involves opening the view to the discursive work being done by words and social interactions in positioning clients in therapeutic encounters and social relations. It also places dominant meanings and experiences in question so that the individual client could be better positioned to make choices about how they want to live their lives within their own context. In other words, the politics of making meaning, from this perspective, acknowledges that there are likely to be opportunities for clients to act and make the changes they wish to make in accordance with their personal preferences. Again, in this chapter the emphasis of my discussion of language and meaning has been on counselling practice. In Chapter Four, I give further attention to meaning-making as I describe the analytic strategies I applied to my research texts.

Why Poststructuralism and Social Constructionism?

The importation of poststructuralist and social constructionist ideas into counselling context perhaps could generate both discomfort and excitement for some counsellors. For the former, the poststructuralist and social constructionist practice of calling into question the objective interpretation of clients' well-being, and the problems they bring, may trouble some counsellors' customary patterns of professional action, for example, to achieve a position of neutrality with respect to people who we help. However, poststructuralist and social constructionist counsellors take a critical position where they can construct, deconstruct, use and/or even critique professional power through discursive counselling practices. Likewise, poststructuralists and social constructionists call into question taken for granted beliefs or truth claims. They see truth claims as socially constructed discourses that may carry potentially problematic implications for clients. In combination, the notions of deconstruction, power and knowledge, positioning, language formation and meaning making in some ways challenge the traditional view of counselling as a value-neutral and objective process.

In terms of excitement, I was delighted by poststructuralist and social constructionist ideas that might offer counsellors possibilities of bring about fresh transformation in counselling practices, particularly in enhancing counsellors' reflexivity and creativity as helping professionals. In a context of religiously-informed counselling, where counsellors might be taking a particular religious stance, these counsellors might want to reflect on power relations and the shaping effect of religious discourse on clients. Winslade's previous example shows how the counsellor's deconstructive questions about the effects of the "not good enough" story in Maria's life have positioned her in a more agentic place. Therefore, in relation with religious discourse, religiously-informed counsellors may inquire about how a religious stance may position clients; whether the value that clients are standing for is helping them to make meaning about their lives in a way that opens up possibilities; whether this value would provide an agentic place for clients to choose alternatives; or, the stance

is just exercising its own power. For counsellors who are interested in such power effects, these kinds of questions might have something to offer.

However, I note that certain matters, with respect to religion and its values, can become differently ask-able, particularly when some premises of religious values might not be easily questioned. That is, these premises might not be considered available for deconstruction. In this case, a religiously-informed counsellor might take only what is resonant with them in order to emphasise what might lead to improvement in the client's life. Perhaps, one example of the practice is to be aware of the professional power relations they are enacting, and the acts of governmentality they are inviting. These questions are threaded through the discussions in Chapter Six to Chapter Eight.

Scholars within poststructural and social construction frameworks are not suggesting any singular set of practices that counsellors should follow. Rather, they contribute to what might be seen as an ongoing tradition of questioning, critique and development of the field of counselling. For example, it was out of questioning psychoanalytic practice that Carl Rogers came to develop what we now know as client-centered therapy, a now taken for granted set of practices in the counselling landscape. And, over at least the last half century, critical sociological commentaries on counselling and therapy have continued to question how counselling functions, where its authority comes from, and what its effects are (Füredi, 2004; Halmos, 1970). These commentaries draw attention to power in particular. As Rogerian therapy once emerged outside of a then-dominant psychoanalytic tradition, so social constructionist and poststructuralist ideas and applications in counselling might be seen to stand outside currently-dominant empiricist modes. In particular, social constructionism and poststructuralism offer concepts and practices that invite counsellors to reconsider the position of counsellor, particularly in relation to authority. Seen in this light, the ideas and practices that are employed in this thesis do not reject the past, that is, reject accepted mainstream counselling practices, but they continue a tradition of critique and development that might offer the field

potential new possibilities. In this study the intention is to unpack and trouble counselling practices in relation with religious and spiritual values; that is to deconstruct, and particularly to consider questions of justice. It is in this spirit that this study intends to make, a contribution to counselling in Malaysia, to explore the possibilities of an alternative approach to the practice of counselling, and particularly how we can work with religious and spiritual values, in relation with already available values and knowledges in counselling practice.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss research concepts that have contributed to the method employed in this study of Malaysian Muslim counsellors' positions when meeting with religious and spiritual values in counselling. I begin with the description of this study as being a mix of methods, through using both a survey and research interview conversations. I argue that the contributions of both quantitative and qualitative dimensions are complementary and related because the former provided an initial understanding about dominant professional ideas relating to religion and spiritual matters. The latter offers opportunity to present participants' subjective views about their approaches in working with religious and spiritual ideas in counselling. As outlined in Chapter Three, poststructuralist and social constructionist frameworks may be interwoven with qualitative research. Conceptual tools such discursive analysis and subject positioning were used in analyzing the research texts. During the process of describing how these conceptual tools were employed, I will show an example of a research DVD counselling role-play transcript, to illustrate the use of deconstructive approaches in working with religion and spirituality. This DVD, as I later explain, was one of the inquiry strategies used. However, before I go further with the methodological articulation, I tell my own story of how I came to engage with poststructuralist and social constructionist ideas in relation to research practice.

The personal positioning as a researcher

Before beginning my doctoral study, my theoretical paradigm, research methodological approaches, lens in writing literature reviews, and my counselling practices were grounded within modernist thought and perspectives. In fact, my entire academic life has been largely influenced and shaped by this way of thinking and knowing in doing research. Being trained as a modernist, and an empiricist, I pushed myself to find knowledge that is objective and 'true' through empirical methods and observations. It was my assumption that these approaches were the

'correct' way to discover human phenomena and worldviews. However, in certain circumstances, especially in the practice of counselling and teaching, this view did not seem to help me to understand clients or my work well enough. I remembered, in one of my research supervisions for example, that I struggled to convince a postgraduate student to structure a concrete and reliable research method according to my empirical perspective. After a long discussion, to my surprise, she stopped my fixed approach by asking, "Is this the only way to do it?" I was tempted to answer her but strangely her question made me think about other possible ways of doing research. However, since I had no experience of other approaches to offer her, I persevered in my old ways as that was what available to me at that particular moment.

Reflecting on her comment, I began to ask myself the same question. I followed my hunches and allowed myself to be curious about other possible ways of researching, particularly qualitative approaches. However, this was a very difficult and challenging process because my particular background did not invite too much flexibility in making such a shift, particularly a shift from a positivist worldview to a qualitative, interpretative one. I really believed that my former method was the only valid, well-grounded way of doing research. My professional world was always centered on the ideal quantitative method and experimental design, which gives order and organization to the world and suggests that what I study is in no way subjected to my view or my existence in it (Rhodes, 1996). At the same time, since I knew that it was impossible for me to remain unattached to the subjects whom I studied, the notion troubled me.

This sense of troubling moved me to search for other paradigms. I started my journey when I was accepted to further my study at the University of Waikato. The internalization of new paradigm studies (postmodernist and poststructuralist views) which allows me to view my research in different ways and perspectives, opens a space to loosen what I had come to experience as the grip of objectivity, and the expectations of formerly 'correct ways' when researching people's lives. These

paradigms in some way invite me to consider the political content of theories and methodologies, and offer the possibility of seeing people's experience within multiple positions, and of recognising the presence of multiple voices and views when analyzing any data. What is taken as 'reality' is open to question and disruption in these approaches. For example, instead of seeking to describe and generalise the function of counselling practice when dealing with religious values, poststructural approaches allow for the possibility of exploring how the practice came to be constructed in the way that it is. Questions become more possible, such as what are the taken for granted assumptions which have shaped the practice, and other political inquiries that value plurality, fragmentation and multi-vocality (Burman, 1997; Cheek, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Weedon, 1997).

Even though the shift sometimes remains difficult, the process has given me many values for understanding the world. In this position, the new methodological paradigm positions me close to the idea of deconstruction (Derrida, 1984). Deconstruction provides a way for me not to displace my objective view, but to trouble or unpack this view in order to balance my way of investigating. Therefore, in this study, I constructed a methodological approach in a way that represents my professional and personal background and experiences, as these had special connections with the aim of this research project. This account is considered as being equivalent to what Eisner (1996) notes, that the researcher has to find a place for what is personal between her experience and the research project.

Through this research, I sought answers to questions that emphasised how counselling experience with religious and spiritual themes is created and given meaning. The voices that are woven in this study allow and surface certain strands of values, beliefs, purposes, desires, commitments and hopes, and for me created a fresh perspective on the research adventure. These voices include those that I have generated from the interviews – a form of research practice that is new to me - as well as from the survey, with which most of the participants and I are so much more familiar.

The mixed methods approach

I employed a mixed methods approach for two reasons. First, it has the potential to address complex questions such as gender, race, culture, nationality, beliefs and other hierarchal forms of social identity (Hesse-Biber, 2010). Second, because this approach can yield richer results for this study, in which findings from one method can be clarified or illustrated with the use of another method (Greene, 2007). The mixed methods approach includes the incorporation of quantitative and qualitative techniques. Some of these techniques include the use of demographic analysis, participant surveys, in-depth interviewing, and participant observation (Creswell, 2010). In brief, these were the steps of the research process, each described more fully as the chapter continues:

1. Written survey sent to participant counsellors, with a DVD role-played counselling session. This survey contains multichoices and open questions. Some questions related to the DVD which I sent to these participants.
2. In person interviews with some participant counsellors who participated in the survey.

In this study, the combination of survey and research interviews was used in order to gain a fuller understanding of the research problem. The purpose of the survey method was to invite the wider perspectives of Malaysian Muslim counsellors about religious and spiritual values in a counselling setting. It was also intended to help in developing semi-structured interview questions for the qualitative section, by alerting me to the interests of other counsellors. The results from this survey contributed numerical data which add value to the overall research findings. For example, it offered an overview of participants' demographic backgrounds, which may not be included in an interview meeting. The survey data allowed me to make some connection with the findings in the qualitative portion, that is, in asking whether the findings from both approaches are consistent or not.

While the quantitative techniques delivered information in a hard data format, qualitative inquiry worked to give meaning to these numbers, and added an in-depth understanding of research results (Hesse-Biber, 2010). The qualitative aspect of the study was concerned with the broader concepts of participants' stories, and the contexts that shape and locate those stories. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005):

these practices [qualitative approaches] transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them. (p. 3)

In this sense, researchers who adopt qualitative approaches and techniques might consider capturing participants' experiences in their own language as this could offer the opportunity to embrace the meaning of experience first hand.

In the context of this study, I used interview conversations as the qualitative material (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Kvale, 1996). The development of interview questions was based on an interest in the ways Malaysian Muslim counsellors construct their narratives to make sense of what happens in their counselling context and professional lives. Parker (2005) explains:

People tell stories about particular things that happened to them or about the course of their lives in a certain culturally-specific way. The order of telling, the puzzling about powerlessness in the face of external forces, the social relations that determine what counts as important for life and the style in which a story is told, are bound together so that it seems as if the individual storyteller is the centre, as observer and actor. (pp. 73-74).

Therefore, my intention was to understand the meaning given to the events that happened to these counsellors, and the actions they took in counselling practice with

respect to religious and spiritual values. I wanted to trace how the counsellors' speaking and practice are put together, and how they are connected with the stories of others. In doing so, I perceived participants as authors of their own lives and meaning-makers of the world they reside in (Hesse-Biber, 2010). I focused on participants' language, that is, the use of discourse to achieve particular meanings as Muslim counsellors who are working with religion and spirituality matters.

In addition, by using a poststructural and social construction research perspective, I can be aware of my own involvement in the research conversation and the text produced. Agger (1991) explains that the way researchers organise a so-called 'scholarly' investigation and writing, represents certain views about what constitutes scholarship and how the scholarship should be conveyed. This scholarship makes possible the exercising of authority and power, and on the basis of that power, researchers might in some way dismiss some participants' points of view in the process of listening to their stories, selecting text, or reporting these stories. For this reason, poststructural concerns about power served as a guide for me as a researcher to be not so much the privileged author, but perhaps a privileged editor or storyteller of the participants' views. Hence, the storyteller position privileges me to make analytical comments on the research materials, and on meanings that are co-produced within the research relationships. These meanings are the result of a reciprocal activity; an uncovering process in which I was partnered by participants who hold local knowledge and expertise (Drewery & Winslade, 1997). However, although research interviews may be seen as partnerships, I was positioned to make meaning of the research materials that were produced from the interviews. Burman (1994) writes:

[texts] do not speak for themselves. Meaning inheres not only in the text but in our construction and reading of it, the analysis is inevitably selective. At the outset we [researchers] need to identify the questions in relation to which the analysis is structured, present the rationale for the material used and introduce the material itself. (p. 55)

In the section below, I show the analytic approach that I used to investigate the transcript texts that were produced in the research interviews. I clarify in particular the choices I made about how I selected, wrote and produced the data-representation. I also take up an account of the research process and the ethics of my research relationships with the texts.

Approaches to qualitative analysis

The approaches to analysis that I employed were drawn from a poststructuralist frame, in particular discursive analysis and positioning theory. However, rather than taking these approaches as a set of procedures or formulae to analyse the complexity of the data texts, I used these analytic methods as a guide to understand the constitutive force of discourse in these texts. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe, this kind of task is one of the positions that qualitative researchers might take in crafting the analytic process.

The researcher may be seen as a *bricoleur*, as a maker of quilts, or, as in filmmaking, a person who assembles images into montages. As *bricoleur* or maker of quilts [the qualitative researcher] uses the aesthetic and material tools of his or her craft, deploying whatever strategies, methods, or empirical materials are at hand. If new tools or techniques have to be invented, or pieced together, then the researcher will do this. (p. 4)

Following what Denzin and Lincoln have suggested, I carried out an approach to analysis of the texts in a way that ‘pieces together’ possible discursive tools. The analysis of the texts was drawn from discourse analysis theory which studies the ways language produces meanings (Fairclough, 2001; Potter, 1996a), but the style of analysis was rather different from some examples of the use of this theory in other studies (Fairclough, 1992; Potter, 1996a; Taylor, 2001). My analytic approach was somewhat similar to that which Crocket (2001) introduced as analyzing “instances of discourse practices” (p. 128). By this mean, the analytic task concentrated more on the interplay between “discursive practice and discourses-in-practice” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000, p. 499), or in Crocket’s (2001) terms “the discourse practices at work

producing us as certain kinds of counsellors” (p. 127). These practices shape what kind of positions is offered to counsellors in their counselling practice as they engage in discursive practice. In describing this way of going about analysis, Gubrium and Holstein (2000) point out:

At one moment, a researcher might look for discursive practice in order to assess the local availability, distribution, and/or regulation of resources for reality construction. In Wittgensteinian terms, this translates into attending to both language-at-work and language-on-holiday, alternating considerations of how language games, in particular institutional discourses, operate in everyday life and what games are likely to come into play at particular times and places. In Foucauldian terms, it leads to alternating considerations of discourses-in-practice on the one hand and the locally fine-grained documentation of related discursive practices on the other. (p. 500)

This type of investigation suggests that the participants’ linguistic performance about events and phenomena in counselling practice is not a neutral description of events or effects but serves specific discursive purposes (Gill, 1996). Therefore, my work on articulating the practice of discourses in participants’ texts was pointed more towards the power of conversational context; what participants said about their counselling practices from moment to moment, working with religious and spiritual values (Shotter & Katz, 1999). The purpose of investigating participants’ moments of speaking was to represent the possible gaps and/or openings in the speaking. These were pieces of information that were sometimes difficult for me to see and interpret, but they led the study to the kind of understanding about how counsellors were shaped and what was possible for them and their clients as they uttered a certain word or phrase or sentence at certain moment.

Davies and Harré (1990) note:

Among the products of discursive practices are the very persons who engage in them. An individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who constituted and reconstituted through the various

discursive practices in which they participate. Accordingly, who one is, is always an open question with a shifting answer depending upon the positions made available within one's own and other's discursive practices and within those practices, the stories through which we make sense of our own and others' lives. (p. 46)

As the positioning of the participants in this study was shaped by a variety of discursive practices - that is, the practice of institutional policies, and other repertoire such as counsellors' professional, cultural and social values or background - the stories counsellors told and the meanings available to them thus varied in terms of how counsellors used language, concepts and discourses that were relevant to their respective counselling sessions.

People use words to draw their attention and ours to aspects of their own sayings and doings, to unique details of their lives, that might otherwise pass us both by unnoticed, and particularly, to yet-to-be-created relations between such details. (Shotter & Katz, 1999, p. 82)

When I worked with transcript texts, often the unique details were not easily discerned. The texts were not as straightforward as I thought it would be. The texts showed the sequential presentation of participants' stories but their surface did not show the subtle and nuanced meaning also present in each of these stories. In order to understand how a discourse comes to constitute participants, and participants' counselling practices, I lifted an element, a nuance out of the texts to inspect this nuance more closely. This lifting process opened opportunities for me to identify, name and explore the discourses that produce participants' way of working with religious values. It also helped me to identify the complexities of discursive practices that these discourses produced, and the complex effects of these practices for participants, their clients and counselling relationships. By exploring 'discursive practice' and discourse-in-practice' at work, I then identified the position calls (Drewery, 2005) that come and go when these discourses had called participants into a particular position when meeting with religion and spirituality. The positions that participants occupied in the moment, therefore, led me to explore the complexities of

shifting relations of power in therapeutic encounter. This power relation exists between counsellor and client. It also exists within participants' work setting.

Situating this study in a number of theoretical strands

Within the process of identifying and exploring discursive practices and discourse, I called on discourse theory, positioning theory, and the notion of power relation which is based on the works of authors like Foucault (1971, 1980, 1991b), Derrida (1984, 1992; 1997), Fairclough (2001), Davies and Harré (1999, 2001), and Hare-Mustin and Marecek (1990; 1994). Discourse theory helped me to understand how an individual counsellor works, in subtle and complex ways, in his or her professional role with clients, and with religious values, and how they are positioned within discourse. I used this theory to consider the function of discourses in producing the counsellors' own views. I asked about the discursive ideas that counsellors' talk depends upon; that is, how discourse was put together, and what was gained by this construction (Potter & Wetherell, 2005) that formed the background of this talk. I explored how the talk works as counsellors take part in these discursive practices, in which counselling questions are allowed and limited when it comes to religion and spirituality themes. This inquiry indicates that the discursive context of counsellors' professional and personal culture produced particular actions when counsellors met with religion and spirituality matters.

The findings chapters illustrate how these three Malaysian Malay Muslim counsellors in the study have shown that, when meeting with religious and spiritual values, they found difficulty in working with both professional and Islamic ideas that were available to them. These illustrations show how discourses have shaped the practice of counselling, and the conversations counsellors had had with clients. They show the range of acts which counsellors performed in their talk when working with religion and spirituality, and the power relations that constituted the counselling relationships. This range of acts were called on to do what Fairclough (2001) suggests is offering a representation of self. On the basis of this concept, I suggest that counsellors were using language and stories in particular ways to contextualise or

recontextualise their own counselling activities. The process of (re)contextualisation was performed according to counsellors' subject positions within the storylines they were telling.

As I have used them in this analysis, *discourses*, *positioning theory* and *position calls* maintain an interrelated relationship. Discourses provide subject positions for individuals to occupy: through one's utterance the positions of the speaker and the hearer are discursively established (Davies, 2003). In positioning theory, what is said helps situate and define others, at the same time it situates and defines oneself (Davies & Harré, 1999). However, a position can easily change: a person's positioning may fluctuate depending on the narratives through which it is constructed. Additionally, positioning is negotiable, in a sense that one individual can question the position call they are offered. Or, in other words, counsellors can take up or refuse the position calls that were offered in counselling practice. Harré and van Langenhove (1999) explain:

People will differ in their capacity to position themselves and others, their mastery of the techniques so to speak. They will differ in their willingness or intention to position and be positioned. They will also differ in their power to achieve positioning acts. (p. 30)

However, when a person has taken up a particular position as their own, "a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular image, metaphors, story lines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned" (Davies & Harré, 2001, p. 262).

The concept of positioning in this study focused on how counsellors' subject positions were accomplished and what was shaping its accomplishment. I traced the ways counsellors positioned themselves and others, and how they proceeded to reposition themselves and others. I focused on what participant counsellors were saying with regard to religious and spiritual values, the particular moment these

utterances were delivered and/or established. From here, I examined the implications of Foucault's (1984) concept of power/knowledge. That is, some speakers perhaps will have more power to speak or act than others because of the knowledge they possessed. In this sense, the discourses that participants have access to and draw upon directly positioned them as they negotiated meaning with their clients. My analysis demonstrates how this occurred.

In this study, discourse analytic inquiry helps to attend to what was implicit and taken-for-granted in participants' descriptions, explanations and interpretations of their counselling practices. Discourse analytic inquiry offers and points to the ways in which counsellors took up positions in relation to discourses in the very moment of making an utterance in a research conversation. It draws attention to what Crocket (2007) describes as the "value of asking about the moment by moment production of professional practice and culture" (p. 24). The investigation, using a 'moment by moment' analogy, therefore may bring forward the discursive influences available in counselling practice. When these influences become more visible to counsellors, they can make more informed choices about the positions they wish to take up in relation to professional discourses, religion and spirituality. Thus, this is one of the main contributions that this study wishes to make; that is, to introduce a kind of research inquiry to counselling in Malaysia, and shows its possible practical implications.

Research ethics

This study had the approval of the University of Waikato's Faculty of Education Human Research Ethics Committee. Methods for recruitment of participants, providing information and asking for consent were given particular attention. The privacy and non-identifiability of participants, particularly those who participated in the interview, is an important consideration. In this thesis, these interview participants are identified by pseudonyms: Abas, Sue and Mohammad. As I describe later in this chapter, I drew on poststructuralist and feminist authors to guide me through questions of the ethics of representation.

Research process: The first phase

The first stage of this mixed method research process was the generation of the survey data. For the first survey I sought participants among Malaysian Muslim counsellors who had graduated from counselling programmes and were practising counselling at that time. Participants came from two categories: religious institutions and rehabilitation centres. My intention in choosing this group of participants was to bring forward stories from the grassroots position of counsellors who probably were experiencing the intersections between counselling knowledge, and religious and spiritual values more than others. Their stories would provide a clear picture of what happened in their professional activities, and what knowledge these counsellors might or might not need in dealing with this matter.

My first step to recruit these participants was by informally approaching selected members from the two groups, using email and phone calls. I recruited them by searching their current address listed in their institution's directory. This was done through an internet search. For participants from the rehabilitation centres, I requested permission from their employers to carry out data generation. The permission was needed due to confidential matters and the sensitive nature of the settings. The responses received from these people were very supportive of the study. Subsequently, I sent a formal letter inviting their employees to join the project [appendix 1], and the information concerning the intended purpose and objectives of the research were posted [appendix 2]. These letters explained about my research interest and the research process. Along with these letters, I attached a form to invite participants' consent to participate in the research survey [appendix 3] if they were interested. Out of 50 forms sent, 14 were returned to me consenting to participate in the survey.

A set of research materials, which included a DVD of a role-played counselling session, a second consent form for participants' agreement to be involved in individual research interviews [appendix 3(a)], and a questionnaire [appendix 4], was

sent to these 14 participants. However, out of 14 DVDs sent, only 9 were returned. As English is the medium in the DVD counselling conversation, a transcript of the role-played DVD in Malay language was also attached. The purpose of the Malay transcript was to facilitate participants who did not use English as a primary mode in their daily work. Participants in this phase of the study were given information about the interview phase, and invited to participate.

The attached DVD was a role-played counselling session on the theme of religion and spirituality. The counselling session used a narrative therapy approach which was scripted in consultation with my supervisors. This counselling session was role-played by a Master of Counselling graduate, as the counsellor, and an undergraduate student known to me, as the client. Both of them are Muslim women who generously contributed their time and energy to this project. A full transcript of the DVD counselling conversation is shown in Appendix 6. An example of narrative therapy conversation in this DVD:

Hayati: Yes, but now my life is going nowhere. My life has so changed from that moment I told my mother I wanted a divorce. Ahmad and Rahman [my brothers] blame me for not being a good and obedient wife. If I'd stayed in the marriage, my mother would still be alive.

Counsellor: If you had been the kind of "good and obedient wife" that Ahmad and Rahman think of, what would have been expected of you?

Hayati: I would have stayed in the marriage, and been a good wife to Ali. He is a good man. There is nothing wrong with him. But there was just no love in the marriage and I did not want Ali to suffer because of it.

Counsellor: You are speaking about ideas about being a good wife, and you have said that you did not want Ali to suffer because of there being no love in the marriage. Is there any connection between those two ideas?

Hayati: You know that in religious teachings, if there is no love in the marriage, and a woman is not willing to give herself in love, then she would think twice about the marriage. It was not a sudden decision to want the divorce.

Counsellor: It wasn't sudden?

Hayati: No, while people believe many things, what I understand is that Islam supports women, in certain circumstances, to ask for a divorce from their husbands. I know that divorce is more supported when the husband has behaved badly – that's what my brothers keep telling me – but if I had had a child that I did not love, that would also be a sin that I would bring on our family. But now that I feel so miserable, maybe I was wrong. Maybe my brothers are right and the divorce is the sin that caused my mother to die.

The use of a DVD offered a non-direct form of enquiry. My intention was to invite participants to respond to the DVD rather than being positioned to respond directly to me. This step left participants more free to comment when the dilemma is presented on a DVD featuring people unknown to them. Thus, in this situation, participants were not asked to comment directly on their own professional lives, or on mine. This DVD offered participants opportunity to reflect on their professional experiences of counselling practice and religious values, and their observations of the role-played counselling session.

The second phase

In the second phase of the research process, the interview conversation, I chose to recruit only three participants, using a strategy described below. Two of the participants were from the rehabilitation centre, whose counselling practice is faith-based, and the other was from an Islamic religious institution. They ranged in age from early thirties to early forties. In keeping the number of participants relatively small, I was able to focus intensively on the material offered by the three participants who engaged in the interview process. My attempt was to represent a thorough story of participants' individual viewpoints regarding their practice.

The method to select participants for the research interviews began by asking participants in the first phase to include the second consent form for the interview in a sealed envelope. Thus, participants remained non-identifiable to me as researcher when they returned the envelope with their questionnaire. However, to indicate which group participants are clustered, before sending them I wrote on each of these envelopes participants' type of institution: rehabilitation centre or religious institution. The three envelopes were then selected randomly by one of my supervisors, ensuring that I had one from each type of institution.

In this interview stage, ahead of meeting with each participant, I set out some guiding questions which were formed from the survey analysis. These questions reflected the theoretical interests of the study, and were not a series of leading questions. I used these questions as starting points to generate introductory, follow-up, probing and interpreting questions (Kvale, 1996). The form of questions was to invite further exploration, explanation, clarification or detail. These questions allowed the interview to remain conversational, but consistent in its purpose to guide the direction of the interview. Silverman (2006) writes, "While qualitative interviewers do not attempt to monopolize the conversation, neither do they fade into the background" (p. 112) From this view, interviewing is not just an open conversation that a researcher has with her participant, but is actively constructed and co-produced to address the research purpose. Some of the questions that I outlined and used are shown in Appendix 5.

I took care to limit my influence on the direction of this interview conversation. I was aware that in a poststructuralist view, participants' subjectivity may shift without notice and sometimes may not be apparent to the researcher (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003). This shift can be in an ongoing process. Therefore, even though I had a list of research questions, speaking space need to be opened so that participants could decide what to say, what to leave out, and how to frame stories while responding to the interview questions (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). My intention was that this

conversation would give participants sufficient opportunity to introduce and develop their own lines of thought, and would stimulate ideas in a relatively natural and spontaneous way.

All interviews took place in participants' institutions as these were the locations where they preferred the interviews to be conducted. The language used in the research interview was Malay. I speculated that interview meetings would be more effective if interviews are carried out in participants' own native language, and consequently would affect the findings of the study. There were two interview meetings for each participant, and each interview lasted between one to two hours. These interviews were digitally tape-recorded, with consent from participants.

Engaging with the research text

As this study employed a mixed methods approach, the texts were analysed in two ways. I described the initial survey data in a simple descriptive manner, reporting statistical data. This type of analysis is explained in detail in the next Chapter Five. For this section, I will focus on how the analysis of interview texts was carried out.

I transcribed and translated all interview transcripts into English language, since the interview conversations were performed in Malay. To enhance the trustworthiness/credibility of the translation, I consulted an external professional translator. This process was to ensure that I had not mistranslated the meanings participants conveyed to me. Failure to portray the intended meaning of the participants' words as close as possible could lead to misinterpretation of data (Esposito, 2001). The translator's task was to countercheck the grammatical structure of the words and the accurate use of vocabulary so that the translation was understandable and sounded as natural as possible. The challenge was to remain close to the original words and participants' context while translating. This includes not having missed or lost participants' emotional aspects. For this reason, the conceptualization of meaning, the individual situation, and the overall cultural context of the participants were then interpreted by me with some help from my

supervisors whose use English as their primary language. The process was carried out by helping me to use meaning-based translation rather than word for word interpretation (Esposito, 2001). These English version transcripts then were sent to participants for revision, in order to maximise the accuracy of these transcripts, and to represent participants' stories in their own terms.

During the process of analysing transcripts, one of the challenges was to break up long chunks of talk into specific stories (Fraser, 2004). One way of doing this was I initially listed the discourses that emerged from our research conversation. I organised these discourses into themes that reflected my questions and the interest of this study. I looked for consistency in participants' language use, stories and ideas. I also noted any information that seems to contradict these ideas. The aim was to see whether there were relationships among the discursive themes, and I identified the connection between participants' subjectivity and positioning when meeting with religious values. In this phase, I wrote down some of the specificities in each transcript. Then, I named stories so that I could extend my recall of the sets of ideas these stories contained. For example, I called one participant's story, 'I am God's worker' and I displayed the sentences taken from the middle of the quote in the following way:

Abas: I hold the concept of working for God, I work to bring mankind [sic] to their nature.

I also named stories from the actual phrases that participants used. For instance, while analysing participants' views about their counsellor education programmes in relation with religious and spiritual values, I called one story 'The training pulls me away from who I am'. This caption was taken from the participant's utterance:

Mohammad: How can I explain this...it is like studying maths or language, which I could not put my faith in it because it is not built on the faith or spiritual aspect. It [the training] is purely secular. It pulls me away from who I am [as a religious person].

Throughout the process, I was mindful of my position as a researcher in relationship to the research texts; about how I might interpret or misinterpret, manipulate, or produce meanings about the texts. I was aware of my own personal positions that might constitute the interpretative work that I did, and the processes of understanding participants' stories (Riessman, 1993). On working with interpretative views of data, Geertz (1973) reminds us:

What we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to. (p. 9)

Therefore, when I was selecting the research texts and analyzing findings, I was careful of the potential risks involved in interpreting someone's story, and about going public with their stories in order to be in relationship with my readers. I questioned the ownership of these narratives. I asked: who wields the final presentation and interpretation?; who owns the research participants' narratives? Chase (1996) in addressing the matter of ownership points out:

Who should control the interpretive process in any particular case depends in large part on the aim or purpose of the research and thus what kind of material needs to be collected and what kind of interpretation best suits that material. As long as decisions about these are made by the researcher [which is in line with the research aims]...I believe that claiming and acknowledging one's interpretative authority is imperative. (pp. 51-52)

Hence, given that each participant spoke about their own particular counselling practice, my position and responsibility as researcher required me to relate the meaning of these stories to the larger theoretical considerations. This way, the interpretation of discourses employed by participants can be described in a more contextualised manner, concentrating on "relations among particulars rather than abstract generalities" (Smythe & Murray, 2005, p. 183), so that one's intention can be addressed, and neither be misinterpreted nor overinterpreted. I see that this responsibility as incumbent on me as researcher.

The hardest part in writing and analysing transcript texts was to learn to read them in a way that would keep me from fitting participants' stories into what I think I know, that is from accessing only knowledge that told me what to read and how to interpret what these participants are saying. This was evident when there was a moment where I came to the point of *impossibility*. Impossibility is the point where there was a contradiction between what participants told me, a discrepancy that I could not make sense of, or when participants spoke about matters that were dissonance with my own beliefs and values, - and thus contested these values. For Parker (2005), this feeling of impossibility is not necessarily an error nor I had failed to gather enough information. He argues:

Psychology should not a search for ways to fit things together as if that is the way of truth. Instead it may be that differences of viewpoint between the different participants, (or between the participants and ourselves) are a function of such radically different lived realities and conflicts of political perspective that it would actually be a mistake to try and smooth over those differences using one overall covering account. (pp. 15-16)

In finding ways to work with such situations, I tried to be very careful to interpret what participants meant by a certain word, or to make sure that I attended to what was missing. For example, I considered talk that appeared to be unnoticed by participants, or unable to be spoken in their speaking (K. Anderson & Jack, 1991). I tried to show what these counsellors tend to accomplish by telling their stories in a particular fashion. Within the process, I undermined the usual assumption: that people say what they mean, and only mean what they say. I tried to show that everything that has been said perhaps has other meanings, or purposes that are not immediately visible. This approach, alongside the understanding of poststructuralist theoretical context about discourses at work, has helped me to maintain a respectful relationship with the text as I had had with my participants during the interview conversation.

However, there was a concern that in doing so I would not describe participants' stories fully in their personal uniqueness and individuality. Josselson (1996) puts it succinctly about her position on writing other people's lives, she says:

I do not worry much about betraying confidentiality. I disguise in such a way that I am certain that no one else could recognise the people whom I write...But I worry intensely about how people will feel about what I write about them. I worry about the intrusiveness of the experience of being "writ down", fixed in print, formulated, summed up, encapsulated in language, reduced in some way to what the words contain. Language can never contain a whole person. (p. 62)

Like Josselson, I also acknowledge this dilemma in my own writing. My participants were not actively involved in the process of analysis. However, I took a few steps for ensuring the transparency of this research, and reducing my own bias and reasoning. First, I sent participants the final transcripts for them to verify and give feedback, in which they could comment, and edit the transcripts for accuracy. Second, I maintained constant discussions with my supervisors in relation with these findings. These steps allowed me the space to be cautious of the possibilities of misleading and/or exploiting what participants meant in their texts, and kept me from writing down something that could be interpreted as criticising them. In this position, I wanted to acknowledge and honour what participants had offered and contributed to the study, and I did not want my authorship to drown out their voices. However, at the same time I also wanted to remain close to the political side of the research, when I positioned myself in relation to those who may read my research reports and those who may experience the world in ways that are different from my own views or participants' views. I wanted to take some responsibility for what I have analysed and produced. In this sense, I offer different possible interpretations, and I hope the implications of these interpretations will contribute to enhancing counsellors' practice in working with religious and spiritual values. I considered this way of writing and reporting is within the interest of what Parker (2005) writes as "fidelity to commitments made during a research event is the space for ethics" (p. 14), something

that feminist research has always recognised (see Butler, 2003; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1990; hooks, 2000; Lather, 1991; Letherby, 2003).

This chapter has presented an account of my positioning with the research method and the data texts. It describes the way I used discourse analytic inquiry to identify and explore instances of discourse practices in counsellors' speaking, as well as the research process and techniques. Finally, the chapter shows how I engaged with the texts from an ethical analytic stance.

CHAPTER FIVE

VALUE-NEUTRAL PRACTICES IN COUNSELLING AND RELIGIOUS VALUES: A QUANTITATIVE FINDING

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the initial survey. The purpose of this initial survey was to investigate the extent to which Malaysian Islamic counsellors experience competing ideas between their counselling-training knowledge and practices, and Islamic teachings when working with religious and spiritual values. Data generated through a survey is thought to be useful in gaining general views about participants' perceptions of the topic being researched (Alreck & Settle, 2004). These findings also provided some context for me as a researcher to develop potential interview questions for the later individual research meetings. In this thesis, they serve as a preliminary to the more detailed findings in the qualitative chapters that follow.

Participants and data generation

Participants involved in this survey are experienced counselling practitioners actively participating in counselling activities and services. All participants are Muslims, and Malay in ethnicity. Participants were randomly selected from religious institutions and rehabilitation centres where Islamic religious and spiritual matters are topics which most clients bring to counselling sessions. These institutions are located in most parts of the country, including the states of East Malaysia. Each institution has two to three counsellors who provide guidance and counselling to clients in each region. As there are 18 institutions and centres across the country, 50 questionnaires were distributed to prospective participants. However, only 14 were returned with complete responses.

Since the number of respondents is small, data analysis was conducted manually. The quantitative analysis simply presents descriptive statistics, to see if there are any marked patterns in terms of the distribution of participants' responses (Alreck &

Settle, 2004). For instance, the analysis considers if there is a contradictory response given between different questions.

Data were generated by means of a questionnaire comprising two domains with 11 and 9 items each (appendix 4). The first domain investigated counsellors' training knowledge with respect to religious and spiritual values in counselling. The second domain investigated counsellors' actual experiences or practice working with these values. Other questions enquired about factual information such as gender, age, status as a counsellor, and counselling theoretical framework. The majority of the items were Likert-like items based on a five (5) scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. However, in the results that follow, the 'strongly agree' and 'agree', and 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' categories are collapsed into a single category each, following McCall's (2001) suggestion for situations when the sample size is small. Therefore, instead of having five (5) possible sets of responses in the table, I present three (3) scaled scores in all tables.

Participants' demographic information

In this section, I present information concerning participants' age, gender, years of counselling practice and their professional status [Table 1].

TABLE 1
Participants' Demographic Information

Category	Percentage (%)	Number (n=14)
Gender		
Female	79	(11)
Male	21	(3)
Age		
Less than 30	14	(2)
30-35	57	(8)
35-40	29	(4)
Years of Practising		
Less than 2	29	(4)
2-10	64	(9)
10-15	7	(1)

Status		
Licensed and registered	7	(1)
Registered	29	(4)
Non-registered	64	(9)

All 14 participants are full time and qualified counsellors. Of these participants, 79% are women and 21% are men. 57% of the participants are aged 30 to 35 years, with 64% of them reporting to have 2 to 10 years experience in counselling practices. According to participants' self-report, 64% of them are non-registered counsellors, 7% are fully licensed, while 29% are registered counsellors. This small number of registered counsellors appears to resonate with Abdullah's (2003) report, which suggested that despite the registration requirement made by the local professional board, and since the Malaysian Counselor Act 1998 was enforced, there still a reluctance among qualified counsellors to register and obtain a certificate of practice.

TABLE 2

**Theoretical framework preferences:
Highest to lowest rank score**

Theoretical Framework	Rank order: Number of times mentioned	Number (n=14)
Marriage guidance	24	(11)
CBT	22	(10)
Client-centered	20	(9)
SFT	16	(7)
Eclectic	11	(5)
Systemic therapies	2	(1)
Others (specify)		
Transactional Analysis	2	(1)
Pastoral Counselling	2	(1)

Most of the participants employed two or more approaches in practice. Marriage guidance scored the highest value in the list with 24 scores. It is followed by cognitive-behavioural therapy with 22 scores, and client-centered with 20 scores. The rest include solution-focused therapy (16 scores); eclectic (11 scores); systemic

therapies (2 scores); and other approaches (2 scores), which are specified by some of the participants.

Participants' training knowledge

The following table presents participants' responses about their training knowledge. 11 items or statements were developed to inquire how a counselling conceptual orientation forms participants' practice when working with religious and spiritual values. Some of the statements touch on value-neutral practices in counselling, the role of religious and spiritual values in counsellor-client's lives and in practice, and the challenges of whether or not to accommodate these values in counselling. From eleven items, six that gave meaningful data are shown. This data is represented by items A1 to A3, A6, A8 and A9 in Table 3.

TABLE 3

Participants' *Training Knowledge*

Scales Indicator: 1 = *agree* 2 = *neutral* 3 = *disagree*

Items (6)	Percentage and Number (n=14)					
	- 1 -		- 2 -		- 3 -	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
A1 Counsellors should take a neutral position in counselling conversations	79	(11)	0	(0)	21	(3)
A2 The practice of neutrality is more important than the practice of compassion	64	(9)	7	(1)	29	(4)
A3 Counsellors should be able to work with clients whose values are different from them	100	(14)	0	(0)	0	(0)
A6 Counsellors should incorporate clients' values in therapeutic models in order to enhance positive counselling outcomes	86	(12)	7	(1)	7	(1)
A8 When a client wants to follow religious prescriptions, a counsellor should stay neutral	29	(4)	14	(2)	57	(8)
A9 Counsellors should support a client to uphold religious prescriptions and guidelines	100	(14)	0	(0)	0	(0)

As seen in Table 3, 79% of the participants stated they should hold neutral position in counselling conversation [A1]. Most participants perceived that not only is a neutral position possible, but neutrality is also more important than the practice of compassion towards clients' problems; this view is reported by 64% of the participants in the study [A2]. Both results seem to suggest that counsellors' training requires counsellors to hold their personal values intact while endeavouring to meet the needs of the client within the context of the client's value system. In this context, a counsellor's position would be expected to be as objective and unbiased as possible.

With respect to counsellors' competencies to work with clients' values which are different from their own, participants unanimously agreed that training should be able to prepare them to address these values in sessions [A3]. In relation to this agreement, 86% of these participants believed that if counselling models and approaches can provide a good understanding of client's diverse and sometimes complex worldviews, positive counselling outcomes could be anticipated [A6].

Although the majority of participants agreed with value-neutral practices [A1 and A2], it is interesting to note that more than half of the same participants (57%) reported that they did not agree with the idea that a counsellor should stay neutral when a client wants to follow religious prescriptions [A8]. They also all agreed that they would give a full support to a client, should the client want to obey the religious prescriptions and guidelines [A9]. This finding seems to suggest that participants are aware of their values and might want to use this knowledge to guide practice. It also shows how easy it is for counsellors to encounter a clash of the professional value system and the personal value system. Yet, in this situation it seems unrealistic to believe that counsellors can be comfortable and unbiased in all counselling situations since they also have their own personal values and cultural frame of reference (Bergin, 1991; Holaday et al., 1994).

Participants' practice experiences

The following Table 4 shows some results for the second domain of the questionnaire on participants' practice experiences. Similar to Table 3, not all data are presented in this table. Of nine items, only six which are considered to meaningfully describe participants' counselling experiences working with religious values are shown; items A12, A13 and A16 to A19. These items investigate whether or not participants experience conflicting ideas between their professional values and the values of religion and spirituality. The items also enquire if participants encounter difficulties in helping clients with different values, and if they experience a discrepancy between counselling's therapeutic purpose and Islamic culture.

TABLE 4

Participants' *Practice* Experiences

Scales Indicator: **1 = agree** **2 = neutral** **3 = disagree**

Items (9)	Percentage and Number (n=14)					
	- 1 -		- 2 -		- 3 -	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
A12 I encounter competing ideas between religious values and counselling in practice	43	(6)	14	(2)	43	(6)
A13 I experience difficulties in helping clients with competing values	29	(4)	21	(3)	50	(7)
A16 I experience concern that the therapeutic aim of developing personal choice may be at odds with the Islamic culture	71	(10)	0	(0)	29	(4)
A17 Some areas of the Islamic faculty advocate approaches that are not supported by counselling knowledge	64	(9)	7	(1)	29	(4)
A18 My own religious and spiritual values influence and contribute to my professional life	100	(14)	0	(0)	0	(0)
A19 I experience discomfort with neutral counselling practices that do not acknowledge these values	71	(10)	21	(3)	7	(1)

In respect of experience of dealing with competing ideas between religious values and counselling, the responses given by participants were equivalent for both ‘agree’ and ‘disagree’ categories with 43% each [A12]. Although 50% of the participants reported that they did not experience any difficulties helping clients with these conflicting values [A13], over 70% of these participants experienced discomfort with a value-neutral stance in counselling [A19]. This contradiction appears to show a tension present in most of the participants’ practices in working with religious ideas. Furthermore, all participants said that their own religious and spiritual values influenced their professional practices [A18]. It would therefore, seem that these participants are suggesting that the practice of neutrality in counselling may not be possible.

Despite the reported discomfort regarding neutral practices, participants also appeared to value the role that religious approaches may serve in a client’s life. This orientation was expressed in items A16 and A17, where 71% and 64% of the participants’ responses indicated that they had some concerns about the incompatible values and interests between counselling practices and Islamic traditions. While it would appear that they believed some Islamic approaches somehow may help clients, these participants’ responses would suggest that these approaches are not supported by counselling knowledges. Therefore, a dissonance may arise between a counsellor and client when there are value differences. For example, a client might hope that a counsellor will operate from a set of values that are more congruent with the client’s religious point of view, but if the counsellor chooses to uphold therapeutic values which may be at odds with a client’s culture, it may affect the client’s expectation and experience with counselling (Sadeghi, Fischer, & House, 2003). This dissonance also may lessen the potential for successful counselling outcomes.

Discrepancies between participants’ theoretical stance and their practice experiences

In the following tables, I juxtapose some of the participants’ counselling knowledge with regard to their theoretical stance [Table 3] and current practice experiences

[Table 4]. I place emphasis on certain points available in the findings, when a discrepancy exists between the two domains of data. In Table 5, the selected and important items which represent each domain are A1, A2 and A12, A19.

TABLE 5

Discrepancy between participants' theoretical stance and practice experiences in relation to neutral practices in counselling

Scales Indicator: 1 = *agree* 2 = *neutral* 3 = *disagree*

Domain	Items	Percentage and Number (n=14)					
		- 1 -		- 2 -		- 3 -	
		%	n	%	n	%	n
Theoretical Stance	A1 Counsellors should take a neutral position in counselling conversations	79	(11)	0	(0)	21	(3)
	A2 The practice of neutrality is more important than the practice of compassion	64	(9)	7	(1)	29	(4)
Practice Experience	A12 I encounter competing ideas between religious values and counselling in practice	43	(6)	14	(2)	43	(6)
	A19 I experience discomfort with neutral counselling practices that do not acknowledge these values	71	(10)	21	(3)	7	(1)

As seen in Table 5, these findings present some of the discrepancies that exist between participants' theoretical stance in relation to neutrality and their practices working with religious values. Although the theoretical stance domain shows that more than a half of the participants agreed with the idea of neutral position in counselling [A1&A2], it would appear that they encountered different experience in their actual practices [A12&A19]. This finding suggests that counsellors could encounter some difficulties when dominant counselling knowledge and their experiences intersect. For counsellors whose counselling knowledge is not congruent with their practices, they are likely to experience internal conflict when struggling with their own and/or professional values in relation to the values of their clients (Sadeghi et al., 2003). Such situation may mean that counsellors might feel

uncomfortable when trying to remain objective and neutral to clients who hold different values from their own.

Another discrepancy that is important to draw attention to concerns participants' views on the incorporation of religious and spiritual values in therapeutic models. This discrepancy is presented in Table 5(a) as follows.

TABLE 5(a)
Discrepancy between participants' theoretical stance and practice experiences
in relation to therapeutic models

Scales Indicator: 1 = *agree* 2 = *neutral* 3 = *disagree*

Domain	Items	Percentage and Number (n=14)					
		- 1 -		- 2 -		- 3 -	
		%	n	%	n	%	n
Theoretical Stance	A6 Counsellors should incorporate clients' values in therapeutic models in order to enhance positive counselling outcomes	86	12	7	1	7	1
	A7 Counsellors' values are communicated through counselling approaches	86	(12)	7	(1)	7	(1)
Practice Experience	A16 I experience concern that the therapeutic aim of developing personal choice may be at odds with the Islamic culture	71	(10)	0	(0)	29	(4)
	A17 Some areas of the Islamic faculty advocate approaches that are not supported by counselling knowledge	64	(9)	7	(1)	29	(4)

In the domain of theoretical stance [A6&A7], almost all participants assumed that therapeutics models and approaches can be used to communicate and incorporate

counsellor-client's values. However, this view appeared to be inconsistent with the practice experiences domain [A16&A17]; where higher percentages were given in terms of experiencing concern. Due to this discrepancy, dilemmas may arise when some of the clients' Islamic practices or beliefs cannot be integrated into counselling approaches. In the context of Islamic culture, religious teaching is viewed as an important component of the psychological health of many Muslim people. Therefore, for this teaching not to be supported by therapeutic approaches seems problematic. Patel and Shikongo (2006), in their research on a select group of Muslim psychology students to explore their understanding and handling of spirituality in a secular training programme, point out that practitioners who are constrained by non-integrative religious models are likely to experience feelings of frustration, conflict, uncertainty and inadequacy. These feelings can be the source of tension and distress particularly when these practitioners come to a stage where they feel the need to incorporate religious values into secular therapeutic models. The incompatibility between religious ideas and secular training models, according to these authors, might have negative implications for counsellors' practices, as well as to the counsellors themselves if they are religiously committed Muslims.

Participants' views on the importance of religious and spiritual values

While the earlier findings show the contradiction between theory and practice domains, there are responses that indicate participants' agreement about the importance of religious and spiritual values in professional practice. This finding can be seen as in Table 6.

TABLE 6

Participants' views on the importance of religious and spiritual values

Scales Indicator: 1 = *agree* 2 = *neutral* 3 = *disagree*

Domain	Items	Percentage and Number (n=14)					
		- 1 -		- 2 -		- 3 -	
		%	n	%	n	%	n
Theoretical Stance	A10 Spiritual and religious values provide a moral frame of reference in counselling	93	(13)	7	(1)	0	(0)
	A11 Spiritual and religious values are important for a healthy life style	93	(13)	7	(1)	0	(0)
Practice Experiences	A15 Religious and spiritual values help me to understand clients' problems	100	(14)	0	(0)	0	(0)

In both the theory and practice domains, these findings show that nearly all participants believed that spiritual and religious values can provide a foundation for healthy functioning for counsellors, their practices and clients [A10, A11&A15]. In this sense, the participants' responses might suggest that religion and spirituality may have contributed to ways participants view and carry out their professional and personal lives. It also supports what Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger and Gorsuch (2003) have indicated that religion and spirituality permeate not only the individual's psyche, but also his or her social and cultural spheres of life. From this perspective, religious values are not subjective elements that participants tack on to their representations and perceptions. Instead, the values appear to be unavoidable and intertwined with all facets of their lives.

Participants' responses to the DVD counselling role-play

In this section, I present results for the second part of the questionnaire which are the participants' responses to the DVD counselling role-play. I introduced the DVD in

Chapter Four, outlining its purpose and giving an example of the transcript. The role-play shows a young Muslim woman client and a Muslim woman counsellor. The young woman is concerned that her seeking a divorce has caused her mother's death. This is what her brothers tell her, that she has offended Allah. In this scripted role-play, the counsellor uses narrative therapy inquiry (White, 2007) to explore with the young woman the context and history of these ideas: it is a deconstructing conversation that offers the young woman position calls that go beyond those offered by her brothers' version of things, and that reconnect her with the values of her deceased mother, and with Islam.

There are two types of tables that are shown in this section: first, the Likert scale type [Table 7], and second, the 'yes' and 'no' response type [Table 7(a)]. Since not all participants indicated their choices within these 'yes' or 'no' criteria, the 'not-mentioned' category is added in Table 7(a). In each of these responses, participants were asked to explain the reasons for their chosen answer. These reasons are presented for both tables.

TABLE 7

Participants' responses to the DVD role-play

Scales Indicator: **1 = agree** **2 = neutral** **3 = disagree**

Items (4)	Percentage and Number (n=14)					
	- 1 -		- 2 -		- 3 -	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
B1 The counsellor responded to the client's situation effectively	79	(11)	21	(3)	0	(0)
B2 The counsellor seemed able to understand and appreciate the client's values or point of view	100	(14)	0	(0)	0	(0)
B3 The approach the counselor takes is different to my practice	43	(6)	14	(2)	4 3	(6)
B4 Watching the DVD conversation has helped me think about how I work with clients' religious and spiritual values	86	(12)	7	(1)	7	(1)

The results indicated in Table 7, show that most participants agreed that the counsellor in the DVD has responded effectively to the client's religious problems [B1]. In the open question all participants gave positive remarks about how the counsellor was able to understand and appreciate the client's worldview [B2]. They were pleased with the way the counsellor related to the client, and they gave positive comments about the approaches used in the DVD counselling session.

I think she [the counsellor] has demonstrated an understanding and supportive relationship. This approach can encourage the client to express her feelings and concerns in a more open way.

The counsellor provides enough space for the client to explore her problems, and follows the client's story with good counselling questions. Her responses have made it possible for the client to understand herself.

The inquiries open space for the client to access something that she might not be aware of. Because of her [the counsellor] responses, the client's situation has changed from discomfort to relief.

She is offering comfort to the client by listening and deeply focusing on what the client wants to tell her. Her ways have helped the client to recognise the connection between her marital problem and religious values. This opens up new possibilities for the client to make some possible link between the two aspects.

According to most of these participants, the DVD counselling conversation had somehow helped them to think about their own ways in working with clients' religious and spiritual values [B4]. Some of the comments that described these participants' views were:

Many of the counsellor's responses show that she acknowledges the importance of religious values in the client's life. She does not ignore these values but she also does not impose her own values on the client. The session has given me some knowledge that I can benefit from in my practice with regard to religion and spirituality.

The counsellor seems not to distance herself from the client's spiritual values and needs. Instead, she [the counsellor] allows the client to ponder on the meaning of these values in her life. The searching for this meaning is something that I shall consider in practice. Beautiful!!

With regard to the counselling approach employed in the role-play [B3], 43% of the participants reported that the approach was similar to their own, and another 43% said otherwise. Some participants who reported their approach was different to the approach in the DVD explained:

I would give more explanation to this client about religion and religious values if I meet with the same problems so that she [the client] could have more options.

While the counsellor in the DVD places much value on the client's story and her emotion, I would emphasise more on the active and directive approaches.

In sessions, I usually use the practice of giving guidance as a way to stimulate clients to work on their problems. This problem resolution might help clients to take actions and see what they can do to change.

If the client holds the same value with me, I prefer to address these values sooner rather than later.

It appears that these comments suggest more familiarity with directive approaches. In the following Table 7(a), the results further show participants' responses to the DVD role-played counselling. The questions in this part of the questionnaire explored participants' views on other aspects of the DVD.

TABLE 7(a)

Participants' responses to the DVD role-play

Scales Indicator: **Y = yes** **N = no** **NM = not mentioned**

Items (3)	Percentage and Number (n=14)					
	- Y -		- N -		- NM -	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
B5 Was the client's concern in this role-play similar to problems clients have brought to you in your counselling practice?	57	(8)	43	(6)	0	(0)
B6 Are there any specific parts of the role-play you are particularly interested in?	43	(6)	29	(4)	29	(4)
B7 Are there any specific aspects of practice that you want to consider further after watching the role-play in order to work with client values in counselling?	50	(7)	29	(4)	21	(3)

As seen in Table 7(a), more than half of the participants reported that the problem which the client in the DVD brought into counselling was similar with some of the clients' problems in their counselling practices [B5]. The similarity of the problem was explained as:

When clients encounter religious problems, some of them feel overwhelmed about whether or not to follow the religious guidelines.

Some clients come to counselling feeling trapped between their devotion to the religion and their personal interests.

Often clients feel upset when they are not able to make decision about these competing values.

On item B6, in which participants were asked if there are parts of the role-play that they would be interested in, 43% of these participants gave positive responses. They describe:

The counsellor does not convey her own values regarding the religious problem even though she might have some information about it. Instead she demonstrates care and respect to the client by asking stimulating questions for the client to ponder.

I like the way the counsellor recognises the client's need [for forgiveness]. The counsellor seems to appreciate the client's struggle by allowing her to express her feelings and thoughts in any way she likes. This approach is important for me because I also want to value my client's choice.

I like the way she [the counsellor] explores the topic on 'learning' and how sensitively she understands the client's experiences dealing with her marital problems. This approach facilitates the client to become more aware of her problem and allows her the freedom to explore religious values in her life.

The way she [the counsellor] leads the client to her [the client's] mother's voice is interesting. This way of responding is new to me.

On item B7, 50% of the participants reported that there are some specific aspects of the counselling practice in the DVD that they would like to consider further when working with clients' religious and spiritual values in counselling. These counselling aspects were noted as:

About how to respect the clients' rights in making their own decision and their hopes to hold on to certain religious values.

On client's beliefs towards religious ideas and teachings, and how others' opinions can support a client in looking for solutions.

About how the client might see her own potential in solving the problem. How she accepts and recognises the religious problems.

A summary overview of the initial quantitative survey

The findings generated in this survey represent a beginning. They offer particular evidence and explanations about the relationships between these two important domains; counsellor training or theoretical knowledge, and counsellors' practice experiences. Thus, they provide a background formulating of a number of tentative ideas as the basis for questions in the subsequent interview research conversations.

These quantitative findings suppose that value differences between counsellors' training knowledge and Islamic teachings are crucial ethical challenges that must be met to have effective delivery of counselling services particularly in Malaysian religious context. The first important finding to this study is the identification that the idea of counselling as a neutral practice seems to collide with counsellors' practice experiences. I consider this as a central ethical outcome, as most participants encountered this difficulty, and rated it as significant in producing discomfort in practice. Although in general, the participants indicated that they feel very strongly about the centrality of religion and spirituality in their (professional and personal) and clients' lives, actual integration of these values appear to be restricted by the counselling ideas and practices offered by secular training. It would appear that the training offers participants a set of counselling ideas and knowledge, but it has not shown them adequately what to do when they meet religious and spiritual values in practice.

CHAPTER SIX

RELIGIOUS VALUES AND COUNSELLING POSITIONING: AN EXAMPLE FROM AN ISLAMIC INSTITUTION

Introduction

This chapter offers a narrative discursive account derived from my interview conversation with Sue, a counsellor who works in one of the local religious institutions in Malaysia. Its first focus is on the institution's context which shapes the purpose and tasks of counselling as explicitly and implicitly informed by religious and spiritual values. The binding effects of the Islamic Family Law Act of Federal Territories for the practice of an Islamic counsellor are the second focus. The chapter then moves to consider how counselling is understood and practised when shaped by these ways. This consideration draws on a number of practice examples that Sue offers. It also explores Sue's account of contradictions between the counselling practices with which she is familiar, and the calls to engage with clients' concerns that are infused with religious and spiritual questions.

Counselling in an Islamic institution

When I meet Sue for our first interview conversation, she talks about how excited she is that the research topic explores religious and spiritual values, since this topic is of significant interest for her. She starts the conversation by expressing her concerns about some of her clients, particularly women, who at times she says, "are torn between family, husband, career as well as matters relating to religious beliefs and laws", and how she is "looking for ways to consult them in these situations". Pausing for a moment, Sue continues:

What is normally done at this institution is to give guidance on matters of responsibilities which are related to religious values...the individual responsibilities to family, God, and self. I give the client explanations...information [about religious guidelines] so that they can understand this from the beginning. The purpose is not to solve problems but to minimise the client's confusion. For example, when this mother says to my client that her attitude reflects a sinful

daughter, which made her feels sad and questioning herself if she is indeed a sinful daughter, it becomes a challenge for me. In this situation, I'd calm the client by giving her an initial explanation about her concerns.

At the beginning of this example, Sue speaks about the institution's educative framework that shapes her professional practice and identity. In this case, religious ideas that profoundly shape the institution become the guidelines for communication with the client. She says, "What is normally done at this institution is to give guidance". In this speaking, Sue is guided by the institutional discourse to take up an expert position and in a power relation with the client who consults her. Sue explains this practice, "I give the client explanations...information so that they could understand this from the beginning", seems to fit the expected institutional framework.

The educational framework which upholds Islamic ideas aims to provide positive assistance to clients seeking counselling. The intention guiding this approach is to help individual Muslims to work effectively through the problems confronting them, based on the scriptural guidance and teaching. Hence, in terms of marriage preparation, educational models are designed to assist couples in building a scriptural understanding and foundation for their married life (Islamic Affairs Department, 2010). Sue explains:

We [counsellors] work with mostly marriage cases like...before every couple get married they will attend a pre-marriage course. A course that educates them about the responsibilities of a spouse, the responsibilities toward family and so on, within the perspective of Islam. It is only a matter of implementing this knowledge or not, that we have no control over. So when the clients come with marital problems, they come with the knowledge they have learnt. What happens is that sometimes, they have forgotten [about the knowledge] or they are not practicing it. So in counselling, what we do is to remind them about what they have learnt.

The models are based on the underlying assumption that it is important for Muslim couples to prepare themselves constructively for future challenges and conflicts that they may inevitably face at some point in their marriage. In the above example, Sue specifically points out that the aim of the marriage course is to educate clients “on the responsibilities of a spouse”, which is the main necessity in Islamic teaching pertaining to married life (Omran, 1992). At this stage, Sue’s position as a counsellor is constructed as educative. Because clients have already gained knowledge from the pre-marital courses, the education resumes when they step into counselling with marital problems. What Sue reports having done in her counselling session is processing the available information and guidelines which some of the clients may have forgotten or may have distanced from as they do not practice this in their marriages.

Hence, Sue situates herself within institutional discourse that ascribes to providing information and knowledge. Schmidt (2008), and Dyer and Keller-Cohen (2000) explain that discourses of institutionalism constitute workers’ knowledge and expertise, and that these discourses can provide meaning for the professionals about their actions and practice. For Sue, institutional discourses position her to speak with clients as a person who holds the knowledge clients need to live their lives. These institutional discourses have effects for Sue’s counselling practice and her clients.

The wider context – The Act

However, Sue emphasises that by giving clients “explanation and information”, her intention is only to “minimise the client’s confusion”. At the same time she also suggests that this step is uncomfortable for her. She speaks about her discomfort in wanting to give information when she would prefer to offer clients something else. Sue says:

The challenge is how I can help such clients. Although I am in the Counselling Unit, while working, I am bound by the 303 Act, which is the Islamic Family Law Act of Federal Territories. In whatever situations, this Act becomes the guideline.

In this example, Sue talks explicitly about the expectations in her institution that have shaped and formed the guidelines for her practice. She brings forward the Islamic Family Law Act. This Act is applied and used for family legislation in the *Syariah* Court³, particularly around the marriage process, registration, divorce and reconciliation. Basically, when a Muslim wife or husband finds themselves struggling with marriage relationships, the Act is applicable. She further explains what the Act means when clients come for counselling:

Most clients who come for marriage counselling, they are not aware of the procedures that are available for them, so the Act becomes a guideline to educate the client on matters that should be done when dealing with marital problems. For example, if the husband refuses to give maintenance, [what the Act says of] what action the wife can take. Sometimes the client is confused about all of this. The purpose of the sessions is to assist clients to get a clear picture of what actions can be taken in relation to their problems.

The Act has significant influence in Muslims' lives, and therefore, when it is used in counselling sessions the aim is to provide clients with particular information about Islamic law and court procedures. Its main intention is to equip clients with specific details about the law so they can later identify appropriate solutions to the problems they face. As the Act positions Sue to educate and guide her clients, this supercedes her counselling goals or practice.

The convergence between the religious values embedded within the Act and what she has been taught in her counsellor training is the challenge which Sue mentions in the research conversation. According to the Act, Sue is required to take all reasonable steps to ensure that clients would get 'good guidance' about the *Syariah* law. The law, which is also the state law, enters the counselling room and shapes her practice

³ *Syariah* court is a court which has jurisdiction concerning Muslims' matters, while *Syariah* refers to the Islamic law. *Syariah* law is only for Islamic faith followers.

in ways it would not shape the practice of a non-Islamic counsellor who is not associated with the *Syariah* law. As counselling is not independent of the law, Sue's endeavour is to find a way to work with the law alongside counselling as well as holding onto an ethical obligation towards her clients.

Negotiating elements of a counselling role

The idea behind the philosophy of counselling theory, which Sue prefers, positions her to create a conversation where client can explore their world and eventually arrive at solutions that are best for them. This idea places the client in an agentic (Burr, 2003) position. When agency is identified as participating in the "conversation that produce the meanings of one's life" (Drewery, 2005, p. 315) or the ability to act on the world by "resisting, subverting or changing the discourse" that shape one's life (Davies, 1991, p. 51), people can contribute to solving their problems without explanation and direction from a counsellor. On this point, Corey (2005) draws attention to the counsellors' role as "not to persuade or convince clients of the proper course to take but to help them to assess their behaviour so that they can determine the degree to which it is working for them" (p. 22).

a) Building rapport: A "therapeutic feel"

It seems that in a situation where the law and its relational power construct the counselling relationship and Sue preference to open spaces for clients through counselling, she is required to choose whether "to violate the [counselling] values and follow the law or to violate the law to uphold the [counselling] values" (Knapp & Gottlieb, 2007, p. 55). If Sue chooses to hold both considerations of agentic positions for the client as well as the guidance provided by the Act, the question arises, whether she will experience any difficulties when those ideas compete. On this, Sue says:

I think it does not affect the overall session because the Act provides me with some directions to respond to the client's problems. That is why I only use basic [counselling] skills like providing the right atmosphere which can help the client to experience a therapeutic feel and so on. I do not use any specific model or theories in sessions because I feel that I could not implement any theory or model which I

know is appropriate at that moment. My sessions are laid back and the discussions flow according to the client and are not based on particular theories.

In this particular situation, Sue does not see the competing discourses between the counselling practice and the guideline the Act required. She prefers the Act as an acceptable approach and weaves the counselling skills into a practice based on the Act. Sue calls on the counselling skills in order to build relationships and create a safe place for her client to move forward, but once the therapeutic connection is formed she does not call on counselling knowledge. Sue says that she proceeds with “laid back sessions and the discussions flow according to the client”. Norman Fairclough (1992), writes about how the counselling genre is used in places other than therapy room. For example, in some medical practices where the basis of doctor-patient relationships is less therapeutic, counselling skill is initiated to trouble the helper’s overt authority and expertise. In this case, Sue is taking up the same discursive practice of using counselling skills to initiate relationship. However, it is rather awkward that when she is situated in a discourse that requires a more therapeutic approach, knowledge of counselling is not called on throughout the sessions. It seems here that counselling knowledge, particularly the value-neutral models, are unlikely to be applicable and for the most part do not fit with the relationship and position she has with the client. She is uncomfortable about employing any particular theory because in her perspective the theory she knows could not be applied in a way she prefers.

b) Positioning self as an adviser

Therefore, it is not a surprise that when I ask Sue about how she positions herself within this circumstance, she says:

I would position myself as an adviser to the client. Although I position myself as such, I do not use an extreme approach like forcing the client to change. I fulfil my responsibilities [as a counsellor] and any decision made is in the hands of the client. It is just that my position here, I use a lot of religious values because it is the nature of this institution and the client knows about that.

A dominant discourse of counsellor professionalism emphasises that counsellors are not in the position of teaching or offering advice; to do so goes very much against the strong principle that the counselling process should empower clients and leave them to make their own judgement and decisions (Corey, 2005; Gonsiorek, 2009; Grimm, 1994). Given this preference, Sue's expression of taking up the adviser position seems to resonate with her reason not to first call on the counselling knowledge. Possibly, because the available counselling models are not seen as a medium to deliver the Act in a non-teaching-advising way, the position as an adviser is the only option for her.

The faith-based counselling service, which is guided by the institution's policy and the Act, appears to limit the options and choices of what may be incorporated or woven into counselling. The question then is: how is Sue to consider the relationships between the institutional policy, the law and available counselling models?; and, what is the role of her counselling knowledge and theories within this intersection, if she is to help the client? On one side, counselling models open up the therapeutic space for the empowerment of clients. On the other side, the Act and the faith-based institution framework inscribe values and religious ideas that may or may not enhance clients' empowerment. It appears that there is no dialogical space between these two aspects. In Sue's situation, the counselling knowledge does not account for spirituality, whereas the Act and the institution's policy prefer a different agenda. The Act and the faith-based institution would give precedence to religious values rather than clients' agency; while the counselling upholds its own principles that believe strongly in the empowerment of clients. Each of these practices is shaped by different discourses that in turn shape the counselling relationships. Within the interface of these practices – religion, the Act and counselling – Sue is positioned to discursively construct her professional actions in order to help the client.

Identifying a contradiction between counselling and religious values

The discursive action that she is looking for is the possible means of collaboration amongst these contrasting practices. In her example, Sue calls on some part of the

counselling that would work in tandem with the Act and the policy. She selects and chooses some counselling skills so the Act and the institution's policy could collaborate and simultaneously benefit the client. She shapes her counselling practice in order to compose actions that would be useful to the client's interest in that particular moment. Her attempt is to interweave the institutional policy and counselling, and to use the Act as information to help the client. It is left to her to make decisions and choices to combine the Act, policy and counselling in her practice.

By knowing how, what and when to select and choose, she works toward creating a safe place to act as a counsellor. Her actions aim to make sure that the Act and the institution's policy are not in conflict with her professional knowledge and skills. In these complex situations, where Sue is being positioned by all of these discursive practices, she tries to make a safest combination between the different landscapes. Hence, it is not altogether her choice to be directive or an 'adviser' as she said earlier. Rather, she is positioned by the Act and the policy, and by what she has been taught in her counsellor education. The complexities require her to read her clients' territory carefully, understand their problems and needs, and at the same time hold the map of the Act, as well as her institution. As the Act does not centre the client in the counselling conversation, which the counselling knowledge does, Sue is required to use her position as a counsellor to weave these competing discourses together.

Effects for counsellors of the contradiction

Even though she sees herself as an adviser and the position seems to place her in an authoritative role as her institution requires, Sue tries to remain accountable to clients by taking into account what is possible and what can be best for them. At that moment, it may be best for the client to keep the court and the Act in mind. Sue therefore emphasises, "I do not force the client" and "any decision made is in the hands of the client". Sue steps back from taking up authority, distancing herself from the decision which she presents as resting with her client. This step relates the point of tension in Sue's counselling practice: to find her way, between on one hand a more

informed/authoritative advice-giving position, and on the other a less centred position where the responsibility for decisions and action is seen to be in the client's hands. Taking up this position portrays Sue's own limited agency as a counsellor. This way can be interpreted as Sue is not being positioned well to question patriarchal, institutional practices and has to find a way to distance herself from the effects of the dilemma. She relates this as follows:

A counsellor should give total freedom to the client to make her final decision. However, when working with religious and spiritual values, I cannot practice this concept. It is difficult because I am bound by the Act and other procedures that give less freedom to the client to choose the appropriate action suitable for her needs. The client is also bound to certain procedures and as a Muslim, is bound to Islamic regulations and laws. If [I practised counselling] in a more open setting, perhaps the concept [of giving total freedom to clients] would be easier for me to apply.

Sue continues to explain the contradiction and tension arising from enacting the relationship between the Act and her ethical obligations as a counsellor:

For instance, in a case where a wife has a fight with her husband, the wife usually wants to move out from the house but the Act says that it is not acceptable particularly if the husband only made a "common mistake". Sometimes I do feel trapped...whether I should use or refer to it [the Act] or not [in order to support the client's decision] but there are times when I have to say it. If the client does move out, she can be convicted of nusyuz⁴ and this will cause implications for her.

Sue's example shows a powerful conjunction of discourses. She is caught between these strong, yet conflicting, ideas and seems unable to confidently place herself in either one. If she decides to comply with the Act, the session would become laden with the Act's requirements about what the client should do. Nevertheless, if she continues to perform a non-directive form of counselling, the client may not be

⁴ *Nusyuz* is an Arabic term which describes a wife's refusal to be with her husband without her having valid reason(s) to leave him as prescribed in Islamic Laws. In a divorce case, if the wife is convicted of *nusyuz*, this would affect her claim for maintenance.

protected from the harsh effects of the Act. The dilemma Sue faces is represented by Knapp and Gottlieb (2007) who comment:

When such conflicts arise, psychologists need to engage in an ethical decision making process to evaluate the alternative available to them and determine the best possible (or at least harmful) course of action. (p. 54)

In this situation, Sue is trying to find ways of avoiding disputes that emerge from the two conflicting ideas. This collision causes distress and confusion and consequently places her, and the woman client in vulnerable positions. The discursive struggle that occurs for her between religious values and professional knowledge, and between theory and practice, seem to be disconcerting as the different discourses compete for meaning and action. At this point, what counts as ‘good’ counselling and what is not, is contested. This contest may leave counsellors experiencing confusion and vulnerability.

I have experienced that [the confusion]. That is as if my mind is suddenly blank, not knowing what to do. If that happens, I will ask the client's permission for me to step back from the session for a minute or two, to clear my mind. Or, I will ask some more questions if I sense that I have gone off the topic.

Conceptualising the task as guidance

Navigating through the contradictory discourses hidden within counselling, Sue prefers to be attentive to her client's needs, preferences and well-being. She says:

I would like to focus more on the client's needs. Client's interests are more important and it depends on what the client wants. I will ask the client to think about the problem. But I will also take into account the client's capabilities to do what I've asked. If the client is not capable of doing that, then I will not force it. I will find out about her interest first.

If it is related to the institution's values, I will continue with these steps [informing her about the Act and telling her that the decision is hers]. Sometimes it feels uncomfortable [the Act], but for the benefit

of the client I will continue with the action. If the client feels satisfied, at least the problem is solved for now. That would be enough.

This example shows how Sue is trafficking between the religious values embedded within the institution, and the ethical standards and principals associated with her professional orientation. Therefore, rather than attempt to separate her client from the values; which may be important in the client's life, she sees it as culturally sensitive, necessary and appropriate to consider both the Act and what is important to the client (McMinn, 2009). For Sue, as long as she could be sensitive, and able to establish a respectful relationship with the client that takes account of "the client's capabilities to do what is asked", the steps she has taken, although may not going to solve the problem, would be enough for that particular moment.

Pargament (2009), writing about the relationships between psychospiritual character and the ethical complexities, states that dealing with religious and spiritual issues in psychotherapy can be inherently difficult and messy. From his view, because the spiritual and religious dimensions are indistinguishably interwoven in the process of the therapy as well as in the clients' lives, this topic cannot simply be preferred or ignored. Furthermore, as both counsellors and clients may have their own value positions when they interact with each other in the counselling room (Bergin, 1991; Blanton, 2004), attending to this dimension in ways that are reliable and congruent with their religious worldview might be seen as beneficial to both (Pargament, 2009). The question that would arise here is what effects does this value position have for counsellor-client relationships? The following excerpt presents Sue's viewpoint about this:

My responsibility is to help the clients see from another perspective than what they usually see so that they can make good decisions between the two aspects [religious values and clients' preferences]. In this situation, I do not state the values directly. I would consider first who my client is...the client's interests. If they seem able to accept the values then I will state it [the values] sooner compared to clients whose interests indicate otherwise.

Counselling praxis holds a long history where education and guidance are associated with counsellors' responsibilities (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). The value inscribed within guidance and educational frames requires counsellors to employ approaches that would enhance clients' development and potential (Lapan, 2001). With regard to the above example, Sue also seems to be guided by the stance of providing guidance and at the same time wanting to open space for the client to make decisions. However, the act of guiding may entail the affects of governing or regulating clients towards certain values that are led by these actions.

Michel Foucault wrote about the concept of governmentality (Lemke, 2002). He suggests it is an art of government to shape and act upon people's lives in order to achieve desirable directions or ways. Governmentality is not circumscribed solely in the political structures and power but also broadens into other general contexts such as religious, medical, sports, educational and psychological settings (Chambon et al., 1999; Markula & Pringle, 2006). In the context of counselling, governmentality can play a decisive role, particularly, if the notions of counselling "are translated into techniques of self-inspections and self-rectification" (Rose, 1996, p. 78), by counsellors who take expert positions. These techniques (e.g. the guidance and educational frames, as well as theories and models) are perhaps some of the examples of what Foucault calls "rules of doing things" (Foucault, 1991b, p. 79) which can be conceived as technologies for shaping behaviour and how things are done. The directive ideas that some counselling models and theories ascribe to might lead the counsellor to guide towards certain principles and goals, and expect clients, or the counsellor to follow such guidance. Thus, the power knowledge relation shapes the counselling relationship. Counselling practices or skills such as in the act of persuasion, expert advice, and professional support (Rose, 1996) carry with them the language of technologies of governmentality. Counsellors are positioned in many ways to hold experts knowledge, and therefore counsellors must be aware of the political value/power embedded in the language and knowledge being used in counselling (Parton, 1999). A platform can become available for counsellors to

exercise their power in a way that does not provide an agentic place for client to stand, as Foucault (1993) describes:

Governing people, in the broad meaning of the word...is not [always] a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarities and conflicts between techniques...which assure processes through which the self is constructed or modified. (pp. 203-204)

In Sue's example, it seems that the practice of governmentality operates through guidance when guidance is understood as a set of technologies. However, the guidance which Sue takes up is not visible as governmental procedures. It is hidden in the structure of professional expertise and institutional policy. Sue, as an individual counsellor, is subjected as a docile object, one who behaves "in accordance with a program of normalization" (M. Lynch, 1985, p. 43). This notion, normalisation, directs Sue's intention to produce intelligible attempts to shape the actions of clients as what she calls as "my responsibility to help". In this context, she appears to be unaware that the political power which is produced from the "responsibility" has accomplished its own objective by directing clients to "make good reflections" on their problems. The question, then, is what effect does this invisible power have in relation to clients' agency and freedom to make choices? How and what can counsellors do to avoid creating clients as objects of this professional power and will? If Sue is politically aware of the power knowledge relation that shapes the counselling relationship, how would she challenge this notion of normalisation?

Calling on counsellor's professional and personal knowledge

Earlier in her examples, Sue shows how she distances herself from taking up an authority position by encouraging clients to make their own decision. She repeatedly emphasises the importance of client's right to act. She said, "I believe that whatever the clients decide is the clients' rights, it is up to them what they want to do at the end of the session". Sue's act of stepping back from being directive perhaps derives from

the discomfort of being expected to be in control. In that exact moment of interaction with clients, she becomes aware of what happens to the counselling relationship when the Act and counselling discourses shape the exclusive rights to speak and act. She becomes the witness to the clients as being disempowered by these competing discourses. From her perspective, the Act and the guiding practices may affect clients whose interests these discourses claimed to wish to serve. Therefore, Sue tries to move away from superior knowledge claims and focuses on treating clients with respect and care. Weingarten (2003) describes how staying aware and being an active witness to oneself and others can create a path to compassion. Compassionate witnessing can lead counsellors to shift from the expert position to the role of one “who is aware and takes action to what s/he witnesses for the purpose of transforming” (Weingarten, 2003, p. 33). In relation to witnessing, Sue takes a stand to comply with a counselling practice that requires her to remain aware of the clients’ capacity to choose. She wants to be compassionate when witnessing their preferences and needs. Sue explains:

I will do what I think is best at the moment. What my intuition says, what my knowledge says...what these two areas of knowledge say. What are the client's wishes, what are the client's capabilities and what does the client expects from me. As well as what I can provide for them. That is what I do.

However, to witness with compassion sometimes can be challenging. In this example, Sue speaks of closeness and discursive empathy, which are distinct from expert knowledge that the Act requires her to hold. Her attempt in taking up this position aims to stay mindful of the discursive power of the Act and of counselling practices. The governmental act embedded in these practices would possibly marginalize clients as individuals who have their own ideas, thoughts, knowledge and preferred personal lives; people who are the experts of their world. For Sue to resist these discursive powers and treat clients as individuals who are able to decide their own lives probably would invite certain consequences for her as a professional counsellor. Because Sue is expected to adhere to the Act, she has to take care of

herself while holding to this Act. She says, “I am careful in weaving these knowledges so that I am not to be blamed [by the institution]”.

By stepping between the Act; which is providing guidance and giving direction, and attending to the client’s need, Sue is perhaps deliberately caring for clients and herself in the sense of “administering the power [presents in the counselling relationships]...” in a sensible way (Bernauer & Rasmussen, 1988, p. 7). In this context, Foucault explains that the act of caring for self is considered as ethical: “the one who cares for self, to the point of knowing exactly what are his duties...” (p. 9). Foucault further says:

One cannot care for self without knowledge. The care for self is of course knowledge of self...but it is also of a certain number of rules of conduct or of principles which are at the same time truths and regulations. To care for self is to fit one’s self out with these truths.
(p. 5)

Sue, in this particular example, adopts a position to fit her out with “rules and principles”. She carries out the rules and principles both in the Act and of counselling but at the same time she appears to resist the potential oppressive power embedded within these rules. She is careful to not dominate the clients by exercising oppressive power over them. As power is always present, she tries to step outside the restrictive positions offered by governmentality.

According to Burr (2003), there are many kinds of subject positions that can be taken up in the counselling conversation from moment to moment. Counsellors may take up or resist certain position calls. Sue, in her situation, resists being subjected in a position of power over the clients but her resistance appears to be her steps of valuing something. In Sue’s case, she is valuing the different types of value systems which enter the therapy room – the Act, counselling practices, religious values, and her own value positions. The complexities of these different values require her to be careful with her steps of practising counselling and working with clients.

Focusing on religious and spiritual values

In the following example, Sue shows how value positions might open ways to work out what options become possible for the clients. She goes on to an example of her practice in order to illustrate the position taken:

There is a case. The husband wants the wife to dress decently [based on his religious belief] but she refused. The wife does not want to obey the husband not because she does not know about the religious commandment on how to dress according to the religion's perspective, but it was her own choice. So the couple clashed there, because of their different views. So when this happens, I address the religious ideas on dressing so that they can have basic information about this.

In Sue's speaking, she shows that she does not stand outside of value positions. When the dress code is addressed, she chooses to call for Islamic guidance and addresses "the religious ideas on dressing". On one hand, by positioning herself in a knowing place, rather than an exploratory or inquiry position that might be more associated with counselling, Sue calls on the value of care in religious guidance when she becomes aware of the conflicting views between the couple in relation to the dress code. Sue continues to say:

In practice, if there are issues like this, I would speak about the haq⁵. I would discuss with them about Islam, if the clients need to know some aspects of the religious ideas. If what they believe are true according to what they have understood, then that it is. If what they have [about the dress code] is somewhat opposite with the law [Islam], I would explore their way of thinking. I would try to clarify any contradictions [between the law and clients' perception]. I do this within a counselling atmosphere.

In this context, I do not alienate my religious knowledge and values. I do not take my values and clients' values as trivial. To me, counselling knowledge in this setting is a bonus but not a priority.

⁵ From Arabic word which means 'the truth'. In this particular example, the truth refers to the care and values in Islamic religion.

There are other values and knowledge that are of the same weight to be woven with this professional knowledge, it can't just be denied.

This example shows how Sue does not take up a value-neutral stance in her counselling orientation. When she says, “I would speak about the *haq*”, she is giving emphasis to her own beliefs and values which might resonate with the clients’ values. By uttering the *haq*, Sue did not want to impose her values on the clients, but she intended the religious values be given “the same weight”, that is, by giving explanations about Islamic dress code, the values underlying these practices, are given a space in the counselling conversation. In her view, with respect to the circumstances such as the one mentioned above, religious knowledge and values might help clients obtain a clear picture about the dress code, so then clients can make possible choices. In other words, she is offering and inviting clients the possibilities to choose based on the knowledge offered. The “exploration’ as she said, opens up opportunities for clients to investigate available value positions within Islamic context. When she reads the territory of the couple perception as one of conflicting with Islamic principles of a dress code, she moves towards reconciliation of both views; the clients’ knowledge and the religious principles. She sets these steps carefully in order to invite the value of care to guide the counselling.

However, Sue’s stance of calling the *haq* might also invite clients into another position. Clients might accept the *haq* as something that has a regulatory function and they might not accept it as care. The effects of *haq* can be varied because “the truth” embedded in the *haq* can produce many meanings. By calling the *haq*, Sue may not be aware how the couple is positioned when the *haq* is highlighted. There is a possibility when Sue calls for the *haq* (besides calling the *haq* as her care for the clients), she is exercising the “care for self” (Bernauer & Rasmussen, 1988). In Chapter Nine I quote Sue when she expresses the importance to hold onto the religious knowledge, when she interprets the counselling knowledge as taking her away from the religious values: “If I am too obedient with the available counselling discourse...I might lose what I have, what I can offer”. As Sue accepts the institutional policy and regulation, her step to care for self might be read as subjecting

to the institutional gaze which shapes her practice. Within this situation, Sue may find herself in a position of carving a practice in which agency for herself and clients may be storied in “hybrid forms” as described by Hilsdon (2007):

Dominant discourses certainly have durable effects but their tools and symbols have been reinscribed to produce agency in hybrid forms. Agency is thus thought to arise from *within* existing societal discourses and symbolic structures rather than *in opposition to* them. In this process, multiple positionings for women, all of which are performative, are created. (p. 127)

The possibility for Sue not to comply with the institutional practice, is limited because her agency to act as a counsellor is “instituted and naturalised” (Hilsdon, 2007, p. 135) by the institution’s system. Therefore, when Sue’s freedom to act is institutionally situated and regulated, she moves back and forth between the institution’s regulatory system and her value of care. It is within this limited movement that she practices and opens up space for “agency in hybrid forms” for herself and the clients. In order to be agentic within this limited space, Sue appears to take up a shifting position. A position where she is able to proceed with what the institution requires from her practice, but at the same time refuse its restricting power. Sue’s action seems to be align with what Macleod and Durrheim (2002) writes as “the possibility of identifying and resisting concentrations of power” (p. 55). The actions of giving guidance and calling for the value of care provide her the position she prefers to foreground in her counselling practice. Within this position, she may resist some values that would not provide enough space for her religious values and yet at the same time she accepts the values which she considers she can incorporate. What seems to be important for her in the moment of counselling, is to serve as best as she can, the clients, while not losing the value positions she holds on to.

This section shows how Sue navigates the wide range of convergent discourses that come forth into the counselling sessions. These discourses which come in forms of religion, law, institutional and professional practices construct how ideas and thoughts are put into actions. The ideas that develop in each of these discourses

contain its own exclusive descriptions, accounts and values (Potter, 1996b), which are very much linked to the relationships of power, Therefore, the effects of these discourses are multiple and provide many challenges to work with. As the different practices inevitable carry different meanings and purposes, it is important for Sue to find creative and hybrid ways in helping clients. In this context, Sue wants to adhere to both the Act and the institution expectation, but at the same time she does not want to step into course of action that does not benefit her clients.

In this chapter, Sue argues that values matters to her. Values, whether these derive from religious and spiritual beliefs, institution's policies, counselling paradigm or counsellor-client's personal faith, serve as important components to Sue. However, as her counselling knowledge and training emphasise the value-neutral stance, incorporating values particularly which involves religion and spirituality into counselling has been difficult, and at times can be controversial. This situation seems to occur when she tries to trouble the value-neutral premises. With full of emotion but full with hopes she says:

Although there are voices that say counsellors like me could easily get caught up in giving advice, I don't mind...because I know that I'm not simply giving advice. I do not see these values trivial. The clients, who come to see me, bring these values with them into sessions. This institution also bears these values. The term, advice, is too subjective. The overall counselling structure behaves like an advice. I mean, not a kind of advice as we usually use in our daily terms but its [counselling] process has the signs of advice. It is a process that guides the clients towards what is beneficial for them and their surroundings. To me, I do not want my clients to go the other way around [other direction that would not benefit them]. So in my opinion, such accusations from those who said religious values might drive counsellors to give advice should be more careful when stating this.

Many authors (Gold, 2010; Gonsiorek, 2009; Pargament, 2009) have raised important questions concerning some ethical challenges associated with incorporating religion and spirituality into counselling and other mental health profession. These questions

focus around professional competencies, religious and spiritual biases, spiritually-oriented interventions, and counsellors' training and education. Although there are mixed impressions about the ethical concerns working with religious and spiritual values, some of the authors agree that these values cannot be fully disconnected from the therapeutic processes (Al-Issa, 2000; Helminiak, 2001; Pargament, 2009; Shafranske & Malony, 1990). With respect to Sue, she is taking up the latter part of this notion. The position she seems to desire is to participate in counselling where religion and spirituality can be valued and attended to. She argues that for counsellors to acknowledge religious values as an important part of counselling, neutrality is likely not possible. Through her examples, she questions how counselling practices can ethically ask counsellors to take up a value-neutral stance when counsellors at the same time live their lives to particular values. If counsellors wish to address these values in counselling, it does not mean that they would carelessly slide out of their professional obligations and call on their values, where to such a degree might be "caught up in giving advice". This erroneous assumption seems to her to trivialize religious and spiritual concerns. Sue further states:

*Why is that? Even in our society, people are constantly involved with these values. For example in Muslim community, Islamic laws are always been brought up. Matters of rewards and punishment, *halal*⁶ and *haram*⁷ are always asked. So how can counsellors work with these values properly if they have to be neutral and do not have sufficient knowledge about this, and what about the skills required dealing with such problems? To me, a counsellor cannot just leave these issues to religious advisors. The client is meeting the counsellor and the counsellor should take responsibility for the client's problems.*

In her work as a counsellor, Sue has witnessed in her everyday life and in counselling, clients who express connectedness to spiritual and religious beliefs and values. A sense of connectedness may include links to life purpose, past experiences and future hopes. In listening to these narratives, Sue discovers that religion and spirituality

⁶ Something that is lawful or permitted in Islam.

⁷ This word is opposite to *halal* which is unlawful or forbidden.

have particular effects on the ways clients tell their stories. It could offer choices for supportive, healing stories or in other situations could form part of the problem-saturated story. In either way, spiritual and religious values are playing an undisputedly critical role for the survival and growth of the clients. For the Muslim men and women in Sue's example and in the community, Islam is not just a part of life, practiced on certain days, but a way of life, which is practiced from moment to moment. Religious guidance, rules and laws seem to guide all aspects of the clients' lives where each person is required to live her or his life in accordance with these traditions and practices (Carolan, Bagherinia, Juhari, Himmelright, & Mouton-Sanders, 2000).

CHAPTER SEVEN

WORKING WITH GENDER, ISLAM AND JUSTICE

Introduction

In this chapter, I show an interdiscursive moment when the discourses of women, gender and justice, in Islam, intersect. I approach my discussion of this valuable research conversation as an opportunity to highlight Abas' ways of working around these matters, and the meaning he makes of the intersections of justice and women's difficulties, when the enforcement of some parts of Islamic orders do not appear fair and just. In Abas' story, he shows how some dominant religious discourses have situated him and the clients in such complex positions, and how power relations have shaped their counselling conversations. The chapter also represents the ways Abas tries to traffic between counselling knowledge and those religious practices and ideas. The interdiscursive moment which Abas offers provides an opportunity to explore the practice questions at the heart of this study, and to locate them in both theory and practice.

Muslim women and Islamic law/court

Throughout the research interview, Abas talks about his commitment to attend to clients' religious concerns and questions. In the story he tells, in regard to gender, the institution of marriage, and divorce, the apparent injustice to women becomes evident as men are given greater rights and privileges than women. Abas reports:

There have been many instances when the client questions these matters [he reports a client saying,]...“Why do such things happen...even after going to the court [Syariah Court⁸] only the men would win... Even the lawyers are men... They will of course side with the men...the judges are also men...they too will side with men”.

This example which is from Abas' practice resonates with my own experience of counselling women and hearing them question religious practices that position them

⁸ Syariah court is a court which has jurisdiction concerning Muslims' matters, while Syariah refers to the Islamic law.

unfavourably. Like many other Muslim women in different parts of the world, they continue to question and analyse their position in a society where men still dominate and shape the role of religious practices in day to day life. In some Islamic regions, religion and Islamic law are translated to construct and favour male domination or patriarchy in the name of Islam (Mir-Hosseini, 2006). Thus, women's rights and autonomy are restricted in the name of religious imperatives. The stories women tell contain pain and despair that are hard to endure. Likewise, Abas witnesses similar narratives. In the quote above, Abas represents the client's voice asking for justice and her rights in the practice of Islamic law and the courts. Her request echoes the Quranic⁹ principles that specifically forbid discrimination on the basis of gender (L. Ahmed, 1992). However, at that moment, it seems that justice was not reflected for the woman in the religious court that regulates gender relations and the rights of women. At this point, during the interview, I was curious to know how Abas might respond to the client and her experience of this. He replies:

I would say, "Let's take our discussion towards rationality...this is not prejudice nor bias of anyone...not emotional...why does Allah place the talaq¹⁰ on the man...women are given the right of fasakh¹¹. Is God fair? For example, if a man is in distress and could not build a good life together with his wife particularly when she commits nusyuz¹², religion provides space and a way for him to divorce the wife...'Let her go...but with the right method and manners...not divorce in which it can be cruel to the woman...let her go in a good way'...so said the Prophet".

This example shows how religious discourse shapes Abas' response to the client. This discourse brings into sight inherent and underlying facts in the Islamic family law about Muslims' rights to dissolve a marriage. In referring to *fasakh*, Abas is emphasizing that a wife has a right to end a marriage in the same manner as a husband may dissolve the relationship through *talaq*. Building on the Prophet's words, Abas points out that the annulment of a marriage should not be abused by

⁹ Religious text of Islam.

¹⁰ A husband's unilateral right to end a marriage.

¹¹ Application for Muslim women to divorce their spouses.

¹² Showing disobedience in a certain way that is not approved by Islam for example committing adultery or having sex outside the marriage relationship.

irresponsible behaviour. Such behaviour would inflict hardship or further injustice and discrimination against women. Through his words, it appears that his intention is to advocate that Islam, in principle, ensures protection for the rights for both Muslim women and men. As a counsellor who is also trained in Islamic education, teaching and practices, my experience would concur with Abas' knowledge. In negotiating within this position, Abas takes careful steps. While he wants to be attentive to the client's story, he does not want to disregard the value of religious practices. Abas' intention appears to invite the client into a mutual understanding of the purpose that the religious values hold. The clarification that he offers in this example is about helping client to gain an understanding of the religious values within the law.

Michael White, in an interview with Mclean (1994), points out that a therapist may consider actions to bring their own knowledge into therapeutic conversations as a personal responsibility. Giving the example working with men who were abusing their partners, White goes on to say that, to be accountable to the victims, conversations with violent men about abuse and domination in the lives of their partner and children are both essential and helpful. The purpose of the conversation is particularly to challenge the abuses of power that are subjugating the lives of others. Although Abas' story is rather distinct from violent and abuse, I make the link with White's example: Abas, too, appears to choose to take some political actions. By initiating discussion of a context in which it becomes possible for the client to associate with some values of the law, Abas appears to be hoping that the relationships between the client and her religion can be experienced in different manner, and might open up some new directions for her. The political actions which Abas takes appear to represent Monk and Gehart's (2003) proposal about how therapist can be positioned as a socio-political activist. On these terms, the position of a therapist is described as initiating "political interventionist applications" (p. 23), where the therapist addresses more directly the effect of social cultural practices on the clients. In addition, Brown (2007) notes that, since therapists are present, situated and embodied in their professional work, a neutral reaction, response and hearing of a story are not possible.

...knowledge is joined in the telling, hearing, and re-authoring of stories. From this view, there are multiple, coexisting positions of knowing...that are always interpretive and partial. (p. 13)

Therefore, a therapist such as Abas, who wishes to offer his knowledge, may do so but without claiming that the knowledge presented is an absolute truth. But then, this proposition is not easy and straightforward as it appears to be.

Power relations in counselling relationships

As knowledge is inevitably related to power (Foucault, 1984), therapists cannot avoid participating in situations where there are power relations in therapy. The political implications and power/knowledge relations that are embedded in counselling discourse may position clients less favourably to negotiate the counselling relationship if these discourses are not presented carefully. Furthermore, as a therapist commonly has more power in terms of the institutional and professional positions (Davies, 2000a), the client is typically more vulnerable within the relationships. Kaye (1999) explains:

Therapeutic activity perpetuates the concept of the therapist as having privileged knowledge, a socially accredited expert who can provide an authoritative true version of a problem...In practice this gives rise to a top-down and instrumental therapist-centred activity – one in which the therapist acts instrumentally via dialogue on the client's narrative and behaviour in order to change it rather than working collaboratively together with the client toward new solutions which the client finds fitting. (p. 21)

Furthermore, Hare-Mustin (1994) adds:

The therapy room is like a room lined with mirrors. It reflects back only what is voiced within it. If the therapist and family are unaware of marginalised discourses, such as those associated with members of subordinate gender, race, and class groups, those discourses remain outside the mirrored room. (p. 22)

At first, when I heard Abas' response to this female client, I wondered in what way power/knowledge relations shaped and/or influenced the way he language the client's dilemma, and whether this relation of power is visible to Abas? Or, whether there are other dominant discourses that might favour masculine interests in shaping his response? And, if there are any, how these practices position the client in the counselling relationships, and shape her way of thinking? These speculations are explored in what follows.

In the two examples above, Abas shows how he negotiates his own meaning-making with the client in order for both their voices to be present in the conversation. However, as he represents the client who speaks the injustice, it appears that a reflexive gender response, that questions gender inequality, is absent from his comment. It turns out that the dominant gender discourse is perhaps constructing Abas' position. This discourse happens invisibly in the way his words position the client when he says, "Let's take our discussion towards rationality...this is neither prejudice nor bias of anyone...nor emotional." What is seems to be absent here is a reflection on how the response is shaped by the privileging of gendered values and patriarchal practices of rationality, and the different paths available for men and women when a divorce is requested. Hare-Mustin (1994) points out that dominant discourses are so familiar that they are taken for granted and even fade from our view. Likewise, gender, as one of the predominant discourses, permeates understanding in a subtle and taken for granted manner. Gender, then, cannot be disentangled from one's worldview and is performed unconsciously (Calef, 2009). With respect to Abas' response, dominant gender discourse appears to sustain male privilege, by endorsing rationality and eschewing emotional responses. Such a response can have unintended effects, marginalizing the client's experiences as a woman.

At this point, in the interview with Abas, I hold some concerns about the power of the statement and the possibility of it silencing women, or positioning them as passive subjects. Without further speculating about the political implications that this

interaction would imply, I enquire of Abas about the client's reaction upon hearing his response. He replies:

The client will usually say, "Of course you will understand my situation. You're a counsellor, you learn about these things. You have the knowledge on the matter, and so on. In court, they too have the knowledge. They too have learnt, and so on. But why do they treat women like this?"

Abas then continues to relate the rest of the conversation, connecting and resonating with the disappointment the woman experienced. He begins to speak both parts of a counselling dialogue that he had with his client, G:

Abas: They're [lawyers and judges] just humans...they have their evaluations...they have their own ideas...they have something that they hold on to at the time...for example, during decision making and so on. If you asked me about rights just now...about men's right to talaq...and women's right of fasakh.

G: Well, I did apply for fasakh in court but it fell through anyway.

Abas: Maybe the court or lawyer or those responsible...have their own way and goals...perhaps in their view is to leave some space for you to think about your relationship with your husband...as husband and wife, there is still a chance...compared to if you're separated.

G: We've already reached this stage...how can we get back together...even more, he has already abused me.

Abas: Let's review your evaluation on the fasakh application problem. Is it because you have no strength left to cope with your husband's behaviour? What you are going through is a marital experience that you feel has reached its end and so you've applied for fasakh, hoping to break away from this marriage.

G: Is that so difficult? After all this which he has done to me? I don't want it anymore. Just let me go.

Abas: Maybe in all of these situations, your husband still thinks about reconciliation in your marriage.

Drewery (2005) writes that “discourses offer positions which people may or may not take up as subjects” (p. 312). Hence subjectivity as a product of discursive interaction opens a variety of possibilities for the ways one takes up a position call. Although in the above illustration Abas offers the client a position call that invites her to contemplate the problem from another point of view, the call offered is not likely to make available an agentic position. She seems to have resisted his call. Speaking again about how the court has failed to treat her *fasakh* application fairly, as well as disclosing the story of abuse in the marriage relationships, she is asking for Abas’ acknowledgment of her pain and difficulties. In her resistance to the call Abas offers, she creates another kind of platform to negotiate her position and make sense of her story.

Abas, on the other hand, might not be aware of how he has stepped into a conversation where he is shaped by a discourse, which offered the kind of invitation his client could not easily accept. Davies’ metaphor of discourse (1993) perhaps demonstrates how discourses such as gender, religion, class and patriarchy could be invisible to the discourse user (clients and counsellor). Davies describes how discourse may act like a piece of glass which could be looked through: without actually seeing the glass, one might not notice its existence unless it was shattered or cracked. In this sense, Abas might not notice that gender and religious ideas have been discursively performed in his interaction: they are invisible as the lens through which he is looking. Probably because these ideas are too obscured, in being widely accepted by the dominant culture, he did not question this reality. Supporting Davies, Burr (2003), writes it thus: “discourse can serve to mask an underlying reality of which people are kept ignorant” (p. 83). For Abas, because the discourse is masked and therefore is invisible to him, he is not well positioned to listen to what the client wanted to tell about her experience of suffering from the influence of unjust and oppressive practices. For example, when she said that “he has already abused me...I don’t want it anymore. Just let me go,” Abas did not respond to this aspect of the narrative. Instead, he moved the conversation to the religious account of *fasakh* application as an option open to her.

Stories of women standing up for their rights, making abusive practices visible and demanding justice, and supporting the empowerment of women, are constantly and publicly raised, debated and witnessed, in Malaysia (Chandrakirana, 2009; Foley, 2003), and elsewhere around the world (Brownridge, 2009; Jefferson, 2004). However, the similar story, of naming injustice, presented by this client seems not to offer Abas narrative coherence. He appears not to recognise her call for justice as legitimate. In this instance, he is perhaps, on the terms of Weingarten's (2000) typology, empowered but unaware of the woman's state. By refocusing the counselling to the *fasakh* application problem, Abas shines the light on the religious guidance aspect of the counselling. Although, at this stage, Abas might assume that the guidance would present its intention to her, this guidance itself may perpetrate a somewhat unyielding point of view. The guidance position consequently disengages Abas from the woman's experience of pain and suffering. Weingarten (2000) argues that such unawareness of the shaping effects of discourse can bring about risks of excluding or even negating what a client has experienced in her life.

Negotiating counselling roles and religious values

Nevertheless, Abas' genuine feelings of care for the woman are real. He takes a particular stand to support her in the only position available and visible to him. In the previous example, when he says, "They're [lawyers and judges] just humans...they have their evaluations...they have their own ideas...they have something that they hold on to at the time", he is emphasizing that all the men who are involved in the court system are only "human", and as ordinary human beings they have their own limitations and abilities. He also thus points out the possibility of them being wrong in what they are doing. He is not saying that the actions taken are the correct interpretation of the scripture, nor is he saying they are doing God's work. On the very subtle level, it might be seen that he is perhaps offering a critique. In saying that the men and court are just humans, he sees that the injustice the client experiences is a human error. Although, by giving such response, Abas seems to offer an impression that the woman client should accommodate their humanness, he offers empathy to the pain she suffers from the unequal treatment in the justice system. Thus, this incident provides an example of the dilemma that may face counsellors as

they work to manage the tension between a system and clients' stories of injustice and unfairness.

Later in our interview, I asked Abas what he would do to assist the client to feel at ease when she re-enters the court system and faces the authorities. My intention with this question was to understand his preferences in thinking about the complex situation, and the position he is looking for in opening up possibilities for the woman. Referring to the same conversation he reports himself as saying to her:

When you apply for fasakh, you are asking for your rights. However, in terms of religious procedures and laws they require you to bring forth evidence of the reasons why you want to annul your marriage. Normally, people will not take action [apply for fasakh] if there are no reasons that push them to do so.

In your case, perhaps the probable reason is that you are abandoned, you are neglected...you are denied the rights that you are entitled to. In this situation, a fasakh application is necessary. I think you will be able to prove to the court and state your case rationally, in a way it can be accepted by others. And if you can speak in court based on what you want, I think you can do this.

In his first response, Abas acknowledges the validity of the client's application because it is based on reasonable grounds. He also hears the vulnerable position she is in when facing the court system and authorities. He understands how poorly women are positioned when they go to court with emotional responses, and he understands that the court will listen only to arguments which are presented rationally. His intention is to help her position herself as well as possible because the court works as a place where rationality is valued. Thus, he advises the client of his belief that she is able to perform what the court requires. Here, Abas once again shows his interest in the social justice for the client. It appears to be that this aspect of social justice corresponds closely to Islamic knowledge, which promotes women's rights and gender equality (Mir-Hosseini, 2006). However, the counselling response that would enact the social justice framework seems less available, which leads Abas

to practice within a guidance stance. In the dialogue, Abas then goes on to represent the client's feedback:

G: If the court can easily understand me, that's good. But when I speak for myself, while my husband has his lawyer, they will just twist the case.

Abas: So, what's your position now - your capabilities? What can you do to represent your case?

G: I dare not speak for myself in the court.

Abas: There are ways and alternatives. If you feel that you are not able to speak for yourself, there are services provided by the authorities, for example, help from the Legal Aid Bureau. They will try to help, as you expect them to.

Up to this point, Abas' reported dialogues can be read in a number of ways. On one side, his response mirrors the rationality of the court, and resonates with a humanistic counselling approach that attempts to recognise client's capabilities, of personal growth and choice (Birtchnell, 2002). In this position, Abas chooses to provide a practical solution to the dilemma of legal representation, by informing his client of the Legal Aid Bureau, rather than making a counselling response to the woman's experience and fear. In working from a pastoral guidance position, he is perhaps stepping out of a neutral counselling discourse. From a guidance standpoint, it is important for counsellor to offer pastoral care by giving good quality information (Corsini & Wedding, 2005; G. Lynch, 2002). Abas further explains his reason for the action taken:

I want to know what the client wants to understand about her own situation and what she wants to achieve from her efforts. In this situation, I could be her friend who has legal information, informing her of the actual opportunities that she can benefit from. I am not biased, that is, I will not say, "That's just it...your husband is just like that. There is nothing left to do. As a woman, what can you do?" I do not use an approach like this. Usually, I will try to inform the client about what they can do in order to achieve their hopes when they come to see me.

On the other side of his practice, Abas also positions himself as a man who has concerns for social justice for women. He is very clear of his intention not to be biased against women, and of wanting to enact practices of social justice. However, this guidance position, in the form of information-giving, carries with it the possibilities of regulating a client's action and choice-making through the power relation of counselling and the religious institution. Abas' focus on procedures, so that his client is in a better position in court, leads to his taking responsibility for proposing action. Therefore, there is perhaps some risk in taking this kind of action: when counsellors become overly responsible for the client and focus too strongly on activities towards change they may adopt a somewhat colonizing position (Rober & Seltzer, 2010). This approach may lead counsellors to explore clients' stories in terms of a counsellor's frame of reference, rather than a client's, thereby limiting the range of possible exploration (Kaye, 1999).

Finding ways to work with multiple values in a counselling setting encourages Abas to consider a range of responses. It is interesting to notice that Abas provides the client with enough space to be able to change the position call. I wonder what it is, under such circumstances, that makes it possible for the client to keep moving in the direction she prefers. In her situation, she might just take up Abas' recommendation, but there seems something in the relationship which he offers that provides a space for her to repeat her experiences so that he has to pay attention to them. On the other hand, Abas is making himself available to the client's story, and she somehow identifies the space that he provides. The counselling rapport or relational connection that Abas has built makes it possible for her to continue to express her experience, even when he keeps presenting the religious teaching in their conversation.

Or perhaps there are other explanations for her actions. Women's personal narratives are often subjected to dominant discourse that works to maintain the male status quo in families and communities (Davies, 1992; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1994; McNay, 1993). This status quo generates a male-oriented normalizing practice (Foucault, 1984) which can produce problems in women's lives. For women who want to lead

their lives within a different perspective, this normative male way of doing things inevitably has effects on women's freedom to act (Monk & Gehart, 2003). It limits women in making decisions about their lives even though there are many choices that are open for them. Yet, there are many women who do not wish to act in complicity with this status quo (hooks, 2000). For these women, they pursue a different path. One way of expressing their non-compliance to dominant patriarchal practices is by asserting women's points of view. However, in doing so, women often find themselves having to repeat their ideas, thoughts and meaning making constantly so that they can be taken seriously, and for their voices to be heard. With respect to this client, her tenacity to speak her experience may reflect the bigger social-political situation of marginalized women's voices. Abas represents his client as persisting to express her perspectives. This would suggest that his listening has a sensitivity to the injustices of her situation.

Men experiences, women voices: Working with homosexuality

In the next section, I bring another example Abas offered from his practice. In this situation he appears to give precedence to counselling practices rather than employing the religious guidance stance he demonstrates in the preceding example. The following tells a story of how Abas positions himself when meeting a male Muslim client who comes out to him to speak about living a gay and trans-sexual lifestyle. In the following dialogue Abas represents his conversation with the client whom he calls E:

E: You must want to say something when you see me like this [the client comes in a woman's dress].

Abas: Why are you saying that? Can you tell me what do you think I'm going to say to you?

E: Maybe you're going to say that I'm a sinner... that I've committed a lot of immoral behaviour...a person who is not grateful to God.

Abas: What's on your mind that you probably want to tell me when you say that?

E: This thing [being homosexual] is not right.

This exchange shows that the client is aware of the religious discourses about heterosexuality and homosexuality. A growing literature on the topic of homosexuality has shown that homosexuality has been a life style identity claim in practically all cultures and among all people (Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris, & Hecker, 2001; Card, 1992; Haldeman, 2004). However, for a variety of reasons, homosexual people live their lives in secrecy in many societies. The exact number of homosexual people may therefore not be known. In many religious societies, not only in Islam but also in some other major religions, homosexuality is often criticized and condemned. For people ascribing to the Islamic faith, homosexuality is forbidden and a sin. This view, or interpretation, draws on passages from the Quran and *Hadith*¹³ to support the contention that homosexuality is a sin. On these terms the claim is that homosexual behaviours are evil and considered deviant or unnatural (Schmidtke, 1999). From this stance, this sexual orientation goes against the normal and moral purposes of sexual intercourse (Buchanan et al., 2001). Some have even gone so far as to say that homosexuals are part of a social sickness, mentally ill and are a curse (Haldeman, 2004). Others believe that religious leaders have to come together to oppose sexual rights for homosexual people (He'lie, 2000), while others who strongly oppose these practices advocate severe punishments for Muslim individuals who engage in homosexual behaviours (Minwalla, Rosser, Feldman, & Varga, 2005). These positions of being outlawed, marginalised and rejected therefore render Muslim homosexual people extremely vulnerable.

Thus, when Abas' client comes to see him, it comes as no surprise that the client E experiences similar vulnerability and conflict. The client anticipates that a heterosexual religious male counsellor, such as Abas, would hold the same prejudice against homosexuality. In the assumptions the client expresses, he positions Abas as offering a deluge of homophobic comment on his client's appearance and sexual

¹³ The Prophet Muhammad's words

practices. However, contrary to the client's fear, Abas' immediate response indicates the opposite. For Abas, there is a sense of unease when the client foresees a stereotypical judgement of him, his clothes and his homosexual behaviour, and life style. Abas is aware that this presumption can bring about a distance in the counselling relationships, if he does not take a different stance than the one the client has pointed out. Hence, in order to build a counselling relationship, Abas stays in a curious position and asks what informs the client's response. He says, "What is on your mind that you probably want to tell me when you say this?" In this position, Abas is practising the central counselling skill of enquiring (Corey, 2005). At this point, he is interested to learn about the context of the client's life:

When the client said what he has done was not right, a sin...at that moment, my intention is to focus on my goal which is to explore his experience...to understand the difficulties that he has to face within this lifestyle [being gay/homosexual].

I'd like to know how he makes a living or deal with human contempt...getting insults from people...on having to continue to work as a sex worker because it is the only thing he can do.

So in this moment, I guide him to explore and understand his experiences and his story of being gay until he understands these things...and what his perspective of his own experience is? It moves me to give him space.

Unlike the previous example, where Abas offers the position call of religious teaching to a woman client, this time he takes up a counselling position call. Here, he shows a different aspect of his counselling practice. Without preferencing religious ideas about homosexuality as a sin, he chooses an approach to counselling that explores the client's story. This allows Abas not to centralise religious prescriptions. Preferencing religious prescriptions at the beginning of the counselling could have been interpreted as homophobic that may influence his practice. So, at this moment, Abas decides that there will be no premature rush to direct the client with religious teaching. He locates himself in the exploratory position as he explains his practice, "I guide him to explore his experiences...of being gay...his perspective of his own

experience”. With this intention, Abas brings forward the significance of the client’s own understanding of his sexual orientation. In doing so, he also may come to respect the client’s sexual identity by understanding the struggle and difficult path that the client is engaged in. Abas’ position, thus, provides the client with space and hope to speak about his sexuality. The counselling context provides an opportunity for the client to speak with honesty where the same space might not be available in other public or private spheres (Minwalla et al., 2005).

Exploring client’s religious and gay identities

Abas reports to me that in the later stages of his counselling conversation with E, E identifies an important topic: E’s relationships with God. As researcher, I do not learn how Abas’ work with E has moved their conversation from E’s expressions of homosexuality to this religious talk, but in his reflecting Abas describes E’s attachment to God and religion as strong and meaningful. E perceives God as a friend, to whom he turns for guidance and comfort. The connection between his religious identity and gay identity remains intact even though he experiences the dissonance of being a Muslim, and living a homosexual lifestyle. In the following snippet from the dialogue Abas represents, Abas and E come to a discussion where E senses guilt when he fails to offer his prayers to God:

Abas: What happens when you do not pray?

E: Obviously, I have forgotten Allah.

Without further illustrating this conversation in detail, Abas turns to me and says:

In this situation, I wouldn't rush directly on issues regarding religion and spirituality because I fear the client is not ready to accept these. But once the client speaks about religious matters, he opens the door for me to move ahead with this topic...in a very subtle way. But it is up to the client to accept what he would want to share about this.

In this example, Abas again remains in an exploratory and curious style of counselling. He witnesses the client as he speaks of a desire to serve the Lord and the significant value the client places on being a good Muslim. Such a desire is evident to Abas as if he understands that the client's religious values might provide him with a positive sense of himself as a gay person. In Abas' counselling position, when the religious identity seems to strengthen aspects of client's preferred self, he sees this as an opportunity to support the client's spiritual quest, which is to continue to have an active religious life and a meaningful relationship with God. Hence, in helping the client with this spiritual journey, the approach that Abas adopts is something that his client might interpret as a gay-friendly religious stance, a stance that can be accomplished "in a very subtle way", as Abas said. This approach makes possible for Abas to bring the care and love of God to the client despite the client's sexuality. Abas reports that it is important to nurture these spiritual values in the life of this client.

When the client begins to talk about religion and spirituality, then I don't think it's wrong for me to attend to this matter. For example, I would say, "You speak about how prayer is important to you...how this makes you feel good because it demonstrates your commitment to Allah. And how this (prayer) is a sign that you do not disregard your faith". In this situation, I want to understand why the client feels that way? Why does the client give such examples? Perhaps he is hoping for something to happen in his relationships with God...

Being a homosexual person as well as yearning for a relationship with God is not easily integrated, because these two aspects are incompatible in an Islamic perspective. Homosexual Muslims experience huge conflict to integrate their homosexual and religious identities. Some of them might achieve identity integration when they hold a positive religious and gay identity, but for some this integration might not be achieved because of the exclusion that the community and religious law makes of homosexual persons (Hammoud-Beckett, 2007). Others might simply turn away from religion as they initially feel betrayed or rejected by Allah (Minwalla et al., 2005). Given these different notions, Abas in this example, is working to provide a place for the client's spiritual stories alongside his homosexual identity. He wants

to engage in a conversation that can honour the client's beliefs and values. He wants to understand what circumstances would be necessary for the client to speak the role of spirituality in his lives, and how the speaking of these values would empower him as a Muslim gay person. This invitation and the questions that Abas proposes to E are examples of his care for the client's hope to stay connected to his religious values and identity. As for E, the experiences of support that Abas offers reassure him to pursue the spiritual path which has been significant to him, even though the journey at times might be difficult in terms of his sexual orientation. Abas' compassionate position serves and invites the client to engage in a richer description of his self-belief, of why he is living his life in certain ways, accepting himself as the way he is; a person who neither abandons his Islamic faith nor the reality of his sexuality.

White (1997; 2007) explains that rich description often leads clients to rich conclusions about their identities and experiences, and these have many positive effects. This richer narrative can destabilize the hold of problem narrative upon the client. Thus, rich description can evoke clients' consciousness to pursue their desire, hope, commitment, values and beliefs in life, and to do what they want do. In responding to E's story, Abas' position has opened space to appreciate aspects of E's identities that some might be oblivious to. In this position, Abas is open to be informed about what E has been experiencing from the effects of the religious ideas of being a homosexual person. This recognition and acknowledgement may have contributed to E getting through as a person of faith who is also homosexual. Abas' practice reflects the intentions and values that he holds as important in his profession as a counsellor. E's next response to Abas seems to confirm the effects of these intentions and values. This is shown in the following conversation of Abas' brief encounter with E when they meet outside counselling, during the fasting month of *Ramadan*¹⁴:

¹⁴ Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and it is the Islamic month of fasting, in which adult Muslims are expected to refrain from eating, drinking, having sex or indulging in anything that Islam forbids; from dawn to sunset.

When I meet E again [in the shopping complex], he is still with his way of life, still carries his own sexual values. But what touches me in that meeting is when he said, “I am fasting today”. So, at least at that moment I knew he still holds to his religious values as well.

If Abas had not supported E’s gay identity alongside his longing to be faithful to Allah, E would not have the option to reduce the harshness of the voices of ‘sinful’, ‘immoral’, ‘bad’ or ‘ungrateful to God’, which he had spoken in the excerpt first reported by Abas. Then, he may not have had the space to embrace the religious practices. Thus, the kind of self that E prefers would be less available. Since Abas is aware of all the complexities and the effects of his work with E, the counselling is set up in a way that he describes:

Never force clients to do something they don’t want to do. I would never say anything that can upset them. I try not to have prior opinion on what the client has said even though this sometimes can be challenging. Particularly when the client discloses the deed that he has done...something that seems to go against the religious tradition.

Following this explanation, I ask, “How will it be for you if the religion disapproves of what the client does in his life?” I had no idea how my question positioned Abas at the time; since he was aware that I was a religious counsellor myself. He might have interpreted my enquiry as questioning or doubting his loyalty to the faith [although this was not my intention]– of not being a ‘good’ believer – since he is aware that “the deed he [the client] has done...is against the religious tradition”, and he [Abas] seems to be fine about it. But I am hoping that my question would help us understand the complexity working preferences better. Although he looks a little surprised, he seems to appreciate the ideas that the question brings forth. He replies:

The question is...how I need to approach such problem? How would I engage in a conversation where there would be some views that might not fit the client or oppose the religious scripture? What might be the effects of such conversation to both sides?

Abas goes on to say that his experience, at some points, is difficult even though he appears to find resolutions in his work with E. In the above example, it is critical for him to identify a comfortable position between professional counselling and upholding religious values. It seems that a binary between counselling values and religious values binary creates a complicated context to locate himself, between the two locations. As in the situation with E, while Abas believes that religious values might be rehabilitative, it would not be right to assume that these values fit clients in all situations. But to ignore these values also feels dilemma, so negotiating these two ideas in the landscape of Abas' professional setting is really challenging.

Working with the dilemma

Abas' examples have shown us how counsellors' might be shaped or produced in terms of interdiscursivity when multiple discourses such as gendered values, professional knowledge and religious values meet. I noticed that Abas is trying hard to find his way around working with gender, sexual identification and orientation, and social justice; how clients may be positioned in relation to this matter; and how he is positioned. In these previous examples, Abas offers two different stories, yet they are so similar in their complexities with regards to religiosity and Abas' political positions. In working with a homosexual man, he orients his counsellor position to being compassionate towards the client's gay experiences, probably in the hope that it will create a space where homosexuality is rendered transparent. However, in working with a female client in relation to her struggle with the justice system, a woman-centred perspective is not practised. In this situation, Abas turns to religious guidance. In a society or culture where the men's development and experiences are privileged, there is a strong invitation for a counsellor to act on the terms of this privilege. While both the male homosexual client and the heterosexual female client may occupy minority positions, the invisibility of the gender discourse as illustrated in the examples might position the woman client in a doubly disadvantaged position. Hare-Mustin (1987) points out:

...because of the dominance of male institutions, women actually receive dual socialization. They are socialized in the dominant male culture,

despite being largely excluded from it, as well as in the female sub-culture. (p. 23)

However, approximating an understanding of women experiences requires a fine-tuned consciousness with regard to the marginalisation of women in society.

While we can look at the female client as a case example for a gender explanation of Abas' practice purposes, there is also a possibility that Abas' differential treatment for the homosexual man relates to the private nature of the counselling with him. In this context, E, the homosexual client, is trafficking his sexual activities in a space that is more secluded from the presence of the authority, even though the homosexual activities are considered as a sin. However, G, the female client, is already present in the public legal sphere where she is interacting with the court and the Islamic law system. At this particular stage of counselling with G, Abas' work is already relevant to the law system, which his institution has connection to. Abas' practice, therefore, is expected to be in line with the legal requirement in relation to G's *fasakh* application. Since the institution and the law produce certain ways out of which Abas acts in providing counselling, they may together have restricted Abas to be more sympathetic to G than E.

At the same time, within the mental health arena, homosexuality has had more acceptance than the well-being of women. While homosexuality has been removed from the DSM¹⁵ where it is no longer considered an illness (Silverstein, 2009), the situation for women in the same diagnosis system has not changed. The personality disorder criteria, in particular, are considered gender biased: it "assumes unfairly that stereotypical female characteristics are pathological" (Jane & Oltmanns, 2007, p. 166). Further, Hare-Mustin & Marecek (1990) draw attention to the absence and invisibility of women in the profession of psychology, not just that there are few women recognized in the discipline, but also the invisibility of women's experiences in the field. If this is what was provided in Abas' counsellor education, it is perhaps

¹⁵ Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders

not surprising that Abas is more compassionate with a homosexual man's stories, for this discourse may be more available to him than gender discourse. Furthermore, perhaps homosexuality is more visible as a "problem" area because of the fact that there are more severe punishments in Islamic law, and other political issues surrounds it such as the risk of getting AIDS; which might lead Abas to assume that it is his responsibility to work this "problem" area out in his practice.

In this chapter, Abas has shown a wide range of responses from guidance, pastoral care, information giving to exploratory enquiring. He has offered complex counselling situations where counsellors may "enter into relations of contestation and struggle" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 148). In struggles between varieties of religious, spiritual and gender discourses as well as professional counselling values, the journey is not easy because it is a constant discursive struggle to position ourselves as counsellors to hear in order to care. Although we might possess the same skills and enthusiasm in each of our counselling sessions sometimes the counselling outcomes that we produced might come out differently. Thus, counsellors have to decide on considering a number of possible alternatives to act, which not acquired with ease.

CHAPTER EIGHT

I AM GOD'S WORKER

Abas' second story: 'Hikmah' as a way to understand a client's well-being

This chapter presents another theme that Abas expresses as important to him in positioning himself as a counsellor, in working with counselling and Islamic religious values. In this next example, he speaks about his strong relationship with God and how God's call has the most power in constructing his professional identity story. He says:

I hold the concept of working for God, I work to bring mankind [sic] to their nature. I do counselling for clients so that they are able to live their lives as they should. God has given me the duty to help them to see this.

From Abas' speaking, it seems that "the concept of working for God" is associated with awe, reverence and communion with the creator. He refers to God's leading as a motivation, and spiritual explanation for the counselling position which he holds in helping clients. Spiritual phrases like "God has given me the duty" and "working for God" appear to be ways of understanding his counselling work as answering God's purpose. This purpose is about delivering the warmth and love of God as he emphasises:

I believe in God's love...which is why in each of the counselling session, I hope that there would be something good from God to the client, like peace of mind for the client to feel. This is God's gift.

Abas' hope is that his position will facilitate the love that he intends to deliver. The position he wants to take up is neither a missionary effort nor an attempt to convert clients in a religious sense, but a way of being that can generate moments of connection and understanding. Hence, he introduces another spiritual term that he calls *hikmah*. Abas appears to call on *hikmah* in his practice in order to appreciate and understand clients' well-being. In the following example, he describes *hikmah*:

How tactfully you understand the thoughts and feelings of the client. It is a way of speaking thoughtfully and a kind of wisdom in which you transfer your understanding [about their world] to your clients.

Abas' description of *hikmah* aligns with the Islamic point of view. Within Islam *hikmah* means having insights or deeper understanding and ability to make sound judgments about the possible causes and effects of certain phenomena (Rosenthal, 2006). These insights can be obtained by understanding thoroughly the genuine nature of a problem, and investigating each circumstance of a matter. *Hikmah*, however, works with a consideration that harm shall not be caused or inflicted on oneself or on others. This means that after gaining full knowledge of the possible effects, one has to act wisely, and apply what is appropriate, without causing any harm to anyone. Actions based on this approach mean that counsellors must maintain flexibility and open mindedness about ways to approach a client's problem.

In this account of his work, Abas brings Prophet Muhammad's examples and speaks of how the prophet has demonstrated *hikmah* in many ways. Abas illustrates *hikmah* in the Prophet's relations with his family and friends, as well as foes, and throughout the Prophet's Islamic missions. Abas tells an interesting story of how Prophet Muhammad foresightedly conveyed a wise response to infidelity and how he used *hikmah* understandings in carrying out the processes:

There was a man who went to the Prophet. This man asked for permission to have sex outside marriage because he could not control himself. The Prophet dealt with him with wisdom and care and asked him if he would approve of someone else having sex with his wife. The man said, "no". Then the Prophet replied that the woman with whom he plans to have sex is also perhaps someone else's wife.

In this story, Abas appears to hold on to the Prophet's ideas that call for wisdom, patience, tolerance, grace and forgiveness when facing someone's religious concerns. The Prophet's teaching is showing Abas to take into account the psychological aspects of the person, and the society in which the person lives. In the Prophet's

example, he does not merely say, relying on his authority as a Prophet, that the man is wrong or bad because of his intention. Instead, he speaks in a way that the man could understand, taking care to use an example that relates to the man's life. It seems that the Prophet's motive for taking up this position is to open space for the man to reconsider his decision. As a person who values religious ideas, this example has a constitutive effect to Abas. It is aligned with what he has mentioned earlier about taking up a "kind of wisdom" when working with clients, an approach that Abas wishes to follow. This is why he insists:

I want to give space to the client – for him to look at himself. I want to help him see the options available to him. So, when he feels at ease with what he is seeing, he would be able to do what he wants to do voluntarily. He would not have the feeling of being forced by me or somebody else.

When people have the space to accept who they are and to understand what happens around them, they might acknowledge themselves as people with potential, capabilities, thoughts, and choices. This is the space that Abas tries to attend to. He feels that by providing the space he might help the client to be the best the client can be; to develop as the client wishes. Abas might be hoping that once these capacities are recognized clients may be led to undertake projects that they wish to engage in their lives. Abas then draws attention to counselling as a place to experience God's guidance and love. He emphasises that:

These are spaces which I have to prepare for those who come here, for clients to get what God wants to give them which is his love and guidance. Through counselling we can share something that might be meaningful, not only to the client, but to me as well. It is a sort of God's love.

In this moment, Abas seems to suggest that the important therapeutic point is that God's love creates a reliable environment that encourages openness for the client as well as the counsellor. On the part of the counsellor, this love allows acceptance. Acceptance involves letting go of judgments, and opens up a way of being that does not impose a self on others (Game & Matcalfe, 2010). It suspends the intention of

counsellors knowing how the clients' lives should have gone or should go. Thus, it opens up care for counsellors to listen and share. It is in this position that Abas could be with his clients in a deep way, sharing, giving and receiving. In the following, Abas continues to explain his counselling position and to describe how clients are positioned when God's love enters the counselling conversation:

I enjoy my work...I've gotten peace from my work because I can be a listener to others...and others can share their stories with me. We shared things together. At the same time, I get to know all sorts of people and their life experiences. God has given this to me, and everything that happens [in the counselling session] is invaluable, which should not be taken as trivial. Those who come to see me here...I think of them as guests of God. They were sent to me...God chose me to help him or her.

Counsellor as a servant of God, client as a guest of God

This example shows how Abas sees himself as a chosen one, a person who is invited by God to responsibility and commitment to counsel others. In this position, Abas seems to indicate that to be a good servant one has to have a sense of submission and duty toward God. According to Anderson and Worthen (1997), submission is viewed as a subjective engagement to the creator and enhances one's life, leading to corresponding behaviour. Given this notion, Abas' submission to the "concept of working for God" and acceptance of God's duty, provides him with a sense of purpose and direction in his professional practice. Therefore, when he says that "everything that happens...should not be taken as trivial", Abas is determined to serve his clients as best as he can, to help them discover what lives mean within the care of God's love. This determination, gives Abas the satisfaction and pleasure in regard to his counselling work.

As for the clients, Abas considers them as "guests of God", who should be attended with humbleness and modesty. In Muslim and Malay tradition, it is a very important element that guests are received with hospitality, warmth and kindness. As a host, Abas opens a door to these qualities of giving, in which he produces an experience of belonging for the guest (the client) to feel welcome. The counselling meeting at the

open door of hospitality allows the client to feel connected with the counsellor, and to share whatever is at hand. The practice of care and respect comes from Abas' commitment to be a good host as it fosters a being together - "we shared things together"- to patiently listen. With hospitality and care, honest and respectful dialogue may take place. In fact, the spaces and hospitality that Abas provides seem to have profoundly affected some of his clients. This is addressed by one of Abas' clients who he represents in the following reported dialogue:

F: Just coming here, I just feel at home. I like the fact that I can be myself.

Abas: Why do you feel this way?

F: Because I have seen many people about my issues. I went to the religious office and I met a lot of people out there, but I didn't get what I wish for, like the things that you gave me.

Abas: May I know what was it that you thought I have given you?

F: I think the space for me to express what has happened. You can accept me as I am. I mean with others, I feel that there is not enough room for me to speak, to tell them about my intention. But you respond well to me, as if you can understand what I have been going through. With you, if I can't achieve anything, at least I get peace of mind when I talk with someone who understands me.

Abas represents how the client experiences the feeling of being acknowledged and accepted. Based on hospitality or hospitable acceptance, Abas makes the counselling space safe for the client to say what the client wants to say. Abas' acceptance welcomes the client, without requiring any commitment to change. In this way, hospitality seems to let the client "get peace of mind". Turning to me, Abas explains:

Sometimes the client can be the counsellor, and I am the client, because the client can also teach me about life, about relationships and human experiences. Therefore, I am not asking the client to change, or saying "Don't do this or do that". So, in this situation, I

do not feel uncomfortable with what the client had brought up. The opportunity to learn counselling, which God gave me, is to beautify my approach working with the client. It [counselling] is aligned with da'wah¹⁶.

Abas aligns himself with both *da'wah*, and counselling traditions, in terms of not blaming or directing clients. In Islam, *da'wah* denotes calling or making an invitation to people to understand the faith and Islamic life. This calling is a kind of practice that meets Allah's commandment which says, "Call humans to the path of your Lord [Allah] by wisdom and goodly counsel" (Quran 16: 125). In the Quran, Allah also emphasized that there is "no coercion in religion" (2:256). Therefore, a Muslim who practices *da'wah* is asked to make the call without coercing or putting force on anyone. The work of *da'wah* can only be performed with the free consent of the person whom we call. In Abas' situation, *da'wah* knowledge has positioned him to offer the call to the client toward Allah that is free from judgment. In this position, he is taking up the spirit of *hikmah* - "wisdom and goodly counsel" - that appears to correspond with the non-directive and non-judgmental counselling position within Carl Rogers' legacy (1962) in counselling. Abas sees *hikmah* and counselling as two approaches that share some similar characteristics. For example, the Islamic concept of *hikmah* - such as care, speaking thoughtfully, giving spaces - is compatible with counselling elements of care, trust, partnership, compassion, and good listening skills. Through both *hikmah* and counselling concepts, Abas is positioned to listen openly, reserve judgment, and remain open to work flexibly with clients.

Hospitality as a practice in counselling

In the next section, with regards to Abas' practice of *hikmah* and hospitality, I will offer two readings. First, I will tell a story on the terms of Abas' good intentions for offering hospitality in a counselling conversation with his client. Then, I will present the second story from a more critical position, showing how gender and/or patriarchal

¹⁶ From Arabic word that means 'to invite'. It is an invitation to Islam and its teaching that should be free of coercion or intimidation.

discourses can shape the construction of counselling relationships in ways that might not be congruent with good intention.

Earlier, Abas talks about how hospitality, through *hikmah*, might open spaces for the client to speak. He wants to stay within this storyline of caring, and hospitality is seen as a way to bring forth this concept of care and welcome. In order to illustrate his orientation, Abas goes on to an example of his practice. Abas begins by saying:

If you look at this institution, it is a counselling centre that mostly works with religious problems. When clients come here, there must be a protocol - like the wearing of clothes must be appropriate to this kind of institution. But here we do not impose any dress code - you may come in whatever clothes you are wearing.

Then pausing for a second, he continues to tell me about a conversation that he had with a female client:

There was a client of mine who desperately came and really needed someone to help her. This girl was as if in a hurry, a mess. Her shirt wasn't tucked in, her dress style was like...[Abas at this time is showing me a sign of a sleeveless spaghetti strap dress that the client was wearing]. Never does anyone walk in here with that style. She said to me, "I'm sorry sir, my dress is like this".

Abas' representation of the counselling conversation follows:

Abas: Why do you say that? Is there any sign anywhere in this office that says you have to wear a dress in certain way?

B: I'm not sure. I didn't get the chance to look at any sign anywhere.

Abas: Do you feel comfortable coming here?

B: Not really, but I had to.

Abas: That's alright. That will be no problem. But what I'm going to tell you is that what you have with you is who you are, and that is the way you come to me.

At the beginning of our interview, Abas clearly states his awareness of dominant ideas around Islamic dress code. According to Abas, because this value has become a norm and natural part of an institution working with religious issues, clients are expected to practice a proper dress code. However, in his conversation with his client, Abas chooses not to adhere to this prescription, and provides an example by emphasizing to me that “we do not impose any dress code”. Instead, he chooses to challenge and trouble the idea of a code. When the client, who desperately wanted counselling, apologises for the way she is dressed, Abas attempts to explore her discomfort by asking if she had seen any sign that signified the dress code. Perhaps by offering this kind of response, Abas is hoping to trouble the familiar norms and standards of Islamic dress code that have become internalised. In doing so, *hikmah*, as he explains earlier, is taken up as a way of inviting the client to a more comfortable place. In this example, *hikmah* allows Abas to accept the client the way she is. His action seems to fit with what he believes in terms of speaking thoughtfully, and this appears to open up a space for him to do what is required by *da’wah* when engaging with a person who is struggling with religious matters. This definition invites Abas to open himself to the ever-changing condition of people and their worlds, without being oppressive or judgemental. Abas further states:

I feel that whatever is said by the client, for example, if the client said, “I have committed adultery” or “I am gay...I am lesbian” or “I am a womanizer”, whatever they want to say. For me, that is just the way it is, which the client had honestly told me. So, in this way [by taking up hikmah], I still have the opportunity to approach and explore the clients’ principles and values.

In this example, Abas remains hospitable to the client. He takes the value of hospitality from *hikmah* discourse, and from the value of being God’s worker. Within these discourses, Abas is talking about hosting the client in the context of love and understanding. Through his perspective, *hikmah* comes to develop the kind of hospitality that welcomes all stories, even though some of these stories contradict Islamic religious ideas. For Abas, hospitality is not only about a generous and cordial welcome, but, more importantly, is about being open to clients and their problems.

In this sense, hospitality implies the providing of hospitable spaces to the client. As Abas continues, he begins to speak about some dimension of these hospitable spaces, and one dimension that he seems to emphasize is about the rights of the client. He describes these rights:

I think I should do something for the sake of clients' rights, which is for them to get something beneficial or to hear something that is meaningful or to feel good about themselves.

When I ask Abas to further explain what he means by this, Abas, with very much enthusiasm, continues to tell more of his counselling with B:

The client whom I mentioned just now is frustrated with her life. But after several sessions, she seems to accept the thing that happened to her. Why do these circumstances take place in her life? And why God does not let anything happen for no reason. She understands all of these values.

So in the following meeting, she comes in with a knowledge that she has understood, of where she chooses to stand. In this session, she begins to wear a blouse. Then, she wears a baju kurung¹⁷. There is nothing in those meetings that I mentioned about the dress codes or about Islamic values to her, although the clothes themselves carry certain values in this institution. In the end, she wears a head cover and then she does not come for a long time. Until one day when she returns again, I couldn't recognise her because she does not look the same as when we first met. This time, I could only see her eyes. She puts on a purdah¹⁸. I was quite surprised to see her [with a purdah] that I said, "MasyaAllah¹⁹...this is what God has given you, that is not from me....God has wanted us to meet and there you have received a gift from God".

¹⁷ A traditional Malay woman's outfit which is a knee-length, loose, usually floral-patterned tunic, and matched with the same pattern long skirt. This outfit covers most parts of the body.

¹⁸ A Malay name for veil which covers most of the face.

¹⁹ An Arabic phrase indicating appreciation for an aforementioned individual or event. The closest English translation is 'God has willed it'. It is used to show joy and praise. It is an expression of respect and is said when hearing good news.

Near the beginning of Abas' explanation, he describes how *hikmah* and hospitality help him to hear and accept "whatever the client wants to say", without any prior judgment. Abas describes that the non-judgmental spaces provided by hospitable actions are ways to bring forth the kind of benefit that the client might need in counselling. He associates these benefits with the basic rights to which all clients are entitled: "to get something beneficial, meaningful and to feel good". The question arises then of who decides what is beneficial and/or meaningful for the client, and which values inform this decision. In speaking about client's rights, Abas positions himself within a discourse of counselling ethics that invokes a principal of beneficence. Beneficence, particularly in the Malaysian counsellors' code of ethics is not precisely defined, but the notion of clients' rights is specified in one section of the code (PERKAMA, 2008)²⁰. However, Abas' positioning within the principle of beneficence resonates with the common practice of beneficence within the Malaysian context, where this principle is understood as enhancing client well-being (T. I. H. Ahmed, 2003). Abas understands his client's well-being as having been enhanced through his offering *hikmah* and hospitality, with the effect of her having changed her dress.

Hospitality and counsellor's subjectivity

In the above example, Abas illustrates the client's understanding of "the thing that happens to her", and the client enters the later counselling meeting "with a knowledge that she has understood, of where she chooses to stand". Through this knowledge "she [then] returns again" with a different appearance that "does not look the same". I suggest that this example may demonstrate how dominant discourses can shape counsellors' ways of working. In this particular scenario, I wonder if Abas is taking for granted some particular aspect of the hospitality associated with *hikmah* that positions him to proceed with counselling as he did. In counselling relationships, a counsellor might call for hospitality as an approach to provide spaces to the client, but because of it is a complicated concept, it should be used with great caution

²⁰ In Malay language PERKAMA stands for Persatuan Kaunseling Malaysia which is the Malaysia Counselling Association.

(Raffoul, 1998). Derrida (2000), in speaking about hospitality, writes about how this idea can raise difficult questions concerning the distinction between unconditional hospitality, and the politics of hospitality. Derrida explains that in the name of unconditional hospitality, the host has to treat the other (the guest) with unquestioning welcome, “the right of a stranger [the other] not to be treated with hostility when one arrives at someone else’s territory” (p. 4). However, as the master of his own territory, the host might also identify the conditions of hospitality he wants to offer. In this context, when conditions are implemented, the limitation of hospitality is practised (Derrida, 2005). This conditionality, Derrida argues, “is the beginning of the constitution and the implosion of the concept of hospitality” (2000, p. 5). If counsellors want to consider hospitality as one of the practices in counselling, it is suggested that they develop “the formation of a critical consciousness to the social-political implications of the [hospitality] notion and the ways in which it is put to use” (Dikec, 2002, p. 235). This suggestion is proposed due to Derrida’s concerns about “the problem of the relation between an ethics of hospitality (an ethics as hospitality) and a politics of hospitality” (Raffoul, 1998, p. 276). Because the line of distinction between ethics and politics is arbitrary or subjective, one can be blinded to the possible effects of hospitality. Dikec (2002) describes Derrida’s politics of hospitality as follows:

A politics of hospitality is a politics of capacity, of power with regard to both the host and the guest, concerning the power of the host over the guest and vice versa. The sovereignty of the two powers may not, however, be equal. And when inequality of power comes into play, it could easily translate into discrimination and domination. Worse still, this translation may co-opt the language of hospitality. (p. 237)

The political action of offering hospitality, via *hikmah*, by counsellors who wish to do so may or may not indicate a practice of power of the counsellor over the client. For example, with respect to Abas’ reported practice, the changing style of dress that this client makes may have been influenced by Abas who shows a gentle, hospitable way towards religious prescription of a dress code. This practice might resonate with what

the client is looking for over this time. But the changing may, as well, be influenced by other resources that she has gained outside the counselling relationship. It is a possibility that because Abas has hosted her with respect, love, care and unquestioning welcome (Derrida, 2000), this has given her a similar space like the one that Abas' client F felt, that is, "the space for me...[to] get peace of mind when I talk with someone who understands me". The spaces that are made available may have invited her to find other strengths, helping this client to weave the pieces of her life towards these changes. Abas read the clothing changes his client made as her re-connecting with religious values, and to the unconditional hospitality which he offered in their meetings.

Hospitality and its limitations

While hospitality may provide some positive effects for clients, nevertheless it carries certain limitations. The second reading that I offer here is another possible account that can be read of the hospitality that Abas makes available. When Derrida (2005) writes about unconditional hospitality and unquestioning welcome, he also at the same time alerts us to the power relationship that operates within the politics of hospitable practices. This power relationship, to an extent, can limit the true operation of unconditional hospitality. The matter of power brings me back to Foucault's (1984) particular observations on normalizing judgement as one of the disciplinary mechanisms/techniques associated with power relations. In regards to Abas' example, when Abas reports that he said to his client, "we do not impose any dress code", and then tells me in the research conversation that "no one walks in here [the institution] with that style", I wonder if normalizing judgment is contributing to shape Abas' speaking. As a technique that involves the maintenance of acceptable standards, normalizing judgment is meted out to enforce compliance. If we think of Abas, his institution's policy, and the institutional relationship with religious ideas about dress code, Abas himself might be bound to certain rules of dressing. Whether Abas is aware of it or not, these rules relate closely to the disciplinary power that Foucault (1991a) explains in this way:

[disciplinary power] defines how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus, discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, 'docile' bodies. (pp. 137-138)

What the rules do to Abas, and perhaps to his co-workers, is normalize, that is, move their perceptions and preferences towards the norm that subtly legitimizes a religious dress code. This code constitutes Abas and his co-workers, and ideas about how to dress 'properly', giving the client or anyone who goes to the institution an idea that wearing proper dress, according to the code, is required. However, this dress code is not signified by "any sign that says, *one* has to wear a dress in certain way". The signifier does not necessarily have to be visible in the form of a written sign to clients who come to the institution. It is shown in the way counsellors dress. The message will come across to clients without the embedded rules being spoken. In other words, the gaze does not have to be put into words in order for it to be present in the conversation. Perhaps that is why, when Abas asks the client if she feels "comfortable coming here" she replies, "Not really, but I had to". Thus, this example shows that hospitality cannot always be unconditional, because hospitality itself has its own limitations (Derrida, 2005). It can be limited by rules or laws, or the exercise of power, or through the working of other dominant discourses that may or may not be visible. In the situation Abas describes, it seems that the normalizing judgment that is performed may be invisible to the institution and its workers.

Speaking the unspeakable – The dress code/talk

In the reported dialogue between Abas and B, it appears that this dress talk has not been an easy subject for either of them. Neither Abas nor B, in their conversation, has a way of speaking this topic overtly to each other. Even though the dress code about how women and men should dress when coming to the institution is not visibly written, the expectation of this unwritten code is well-understood by B. Knowing that her dress is not in accord with the code, B experiences some discomfort meeting with Abas. However at that moment, she could not speak or explain further about her

feelings. Likewise, Abas is also affected by this dress talk. He acknowledges B's uncomfortableness meeting him in the strap dress but he never speaks directly about the dress code with her. Instead, he reports himself as having tried to comfort B by saying, "What you have with you is who you are, and that is the way you come to me". However, when Abas represents to me the meeting that he had with B, he names the unwritten code - "no one walks in here with that style". Perhaps because my dress at the time of our research interview is compatible with the institution's values, this utterance is easier to deliver to me, a colleague, than it is when he is speaking with B. Through these words - "no one walks in here with that style" - Abas reveals the institutional expectation regarding the dress code when people come for service. From this view, both Abas and B are in a situation where they could not speak what could be called 'the unspeakable'. In Abas' account we see how a matter such as clothing sometimes can be difficult to talk about, especially in a straight open manner. In this example, Abas and B struggle to articulate their thoughts and feelings about clothing, and through Abas' reassurance the subject is left unexplored and unopened for interpretation. In this struggle, both Abas and B step into a discourse that limits their speech acts, and to a certain extent silences them from speaking the unspeakable. Mazzei (2003), in an article which explores the meaning of silence amongst her research participants about culture and race in education, writes:

In this culture of silence it became evident that rather than one silence, there were multiple silences. There were silences that were polite or comfortable silences; thoughts not spoken for fear of offense. There were silences grounded in...a cultural blindness. There were silences that were veiled: intending to conceal or at least muffle thoughts or actions. There were silences that were intentional: a choosing not to speak. And there were silences that were unintelligible: perhaps purposeful but not readily discernable. (pp. 363-364)

Although Mazzei's categories of silence directly focus on the field of education, not counselling, her ideas serve in some way to clarify Abas and B's intention for not speaking further about the clothing subject.

In Abas and B' dialogue, I believe that Abas' silence about the dress code is not intended to trivialise or disrespect B's experience of the expected dress code. But, perhaps Abas is silent because he cannot find a right way to say that her dress is unacceptable to the institution's values. In this context, Abas wants to give unconditional care to B, but at the same time he does not experience congruence between B's dress and the value that his institution carries. Therefore, when B tries to speak about this code, it is hard for Abas to bring the topic into their conversation - other than through indirect reassurance - even though he is aware that the dress code needs to be spoken, and/or troubled. For B, because there was no more dialogue exchange about the code, perhaps she is locked in silence. Any thoughts and discomfort about the institution's cultural practices of the code is curtailed when Abas chooses not to speak more about the unwritten code.

However, by saying to Abas, "I'm sorry sir, my dress is like this", B manages to speak in some way about the code, and perhaps tries to contest this unspoken practice. Abas, on the other hand, could not afford to listen to her apology. Instead of being reflexive to B's impression that she can only come to the institution with a 'proper' dress, he highlights her utterance as a misreading of the dress code: "Is there any sign anywhere in this office that says you have to wear a dress in certain way". From B's view, she reads the institution's value well enough. She is aware that the institution holds religious values. Therefore, she conveys her reading of the institution's values by making a comment about her dress and its relation to the institution, and to Abas as a person who represents the institution. B's acknowledging comment communicates that she has read the context correctly, but Abas' question about the 'sign' disputes her reading of the context, and refuses her acknowledgement. He appears to deny that there is a hierarchal religious guideline that a client has to conform when coming to the institution. In this situation, he is individualising the discursive phenomena by implicitly saying that she has misjudged the institution's value system, which somehow foreclose the possibility of further dialogue about the dress code.

There is also a possibility that Abas' silence about the dress code is shaped by the patriarchal discourse embedded in the religious view about how Muslim women should dress. It has been claimed that the dominant idea that good Muslim women should practise veiling, as a symbol of worship and piety to God, and Islamic principles, derives mostly from fundamentalist male Islamic clergy who judge women's devotion to Islam by their wearing of the veil (Bartkowski & Read, 2003; Mernissi, 1991; Najmabadi, 1993). These male clergy draw their pro-veiling viewpoint by highlighting some passages in the Quran that seem to support this religious practice. For example, one verse in the Quran which says women are "not to display their beauty and ornament" but rather "draw their head cover over their bosoms" (Quran 24:31) is interpreted as a divine command, to urge Muslim women to take up veiling as compulsory. However, this interpretation is contested by several Muslim scholars who see the clergy's language of veiling as a gendered and sexualised account (Hassan, 2001; Mernissi, 1991; Shaheed, 1994). They argue that Islamic devotion and piety do not depend on the veil, but are based on the true belief to God, which can be manifested in many ways without women having to wear the veil. In fact, the fundamental theological assumptions that veiling is a symbol of piety, which shape the way Muslim women are viewed, appear to undermine other Quranic text that says, "the most noble of you [male and female] in the sight of Allah is the one with most *taqwa*²¹" (Quran 49:13). This text emphasises the importance of *taqwa* amongst Muslim people regardless their gender. The concept of *taqwa* positions Muslim women and men to choose between what is good and just, and what is evil and oppressive. Thus, their devotion and piety are judged by God for how they choose to act, not for faithfulness to a dress code (Wadud, 2009).

Returning to Abas' conversation with B, when he reports to me the changing of B's dress, by saying to her, "*MasyaAllah*....this is what God has given you [changing

²¹ Literally the word *taqwa* means 'fear of God'. However, the 'fear of God' is defined as in the state of being conscious of Allah; feeling the presence of Allah in every Muslim's movement and behaviour. It is a fear that comes from an acute sense of responsibility to practice moral virtues and good conduct, in order to gain Allah's blessing (see Ohlander, 2005).

from a strap dress to purdah], that is not from me...God has wanted us to meet and there you have received a gift from God”, Abas appears to not have considered whether he is speaking within the dominant patriarchal religious practices of the dress code. He appears not to give consideration to whether his speaking is positioning B in submission to the code. Abas’ speaking of B’s changes, which ends with “God has willed it [masyaAllah]”, has somehow subjected B to the power of religious discursive practice. Hassan (2001) writes:

Women’s identification with body rather than with mind and spirit is a common feature of many religious, cultural and philosophical traditions. However, though women traditionally have been identified with body, they have not been seen as ‘owners’ of their bodies. The question is, who controls women’s bodies – men, the State, the Church, the community, or women. (p. 65)

When Abas sees the changing of B’ dress as some form of success of his practice; praising to her the word “MasyaAllah”, Abas at some point is representing the stereotypical position given to women, not only in relation to women’s identification with the body, but also conforming with patriarchal practices on how to discipline women’s bodies. In this situation, it must be open to question whether B’s choice to make the changes is really operating from a position of her free rational choice. It might be asked whether her action is framed within patriarchal perimeters that tend to normalise her and other Muslim women’s subject position in regard to the practice of veiling. Abas’ silencing of further dress talk – through his question about signs, and his reassurance – and B’s subsequent silence, become a way to require B to accept, and enact the institution’s dominant practices and values. Thus, B is in a position where she might be thinking that, unless she is veiled, she will not be fully accepted by Abas, and the institution. In this scenario, the changes of dress are made when she returns for her following counselling sessions. Davies (1991) in speaking about positioning explains:

the subject’s positioning within particular discourses makes the chosen line of action the only possible action, not because there are no other lines of action but because one has been subjectively

constituted through one's placement within that discourse to *want* that line of action. (p. 46)

In this context, for B to act on the line of action that is chosen by the institution's values seems inevitable. She goes on with this line because there might not be other lines of action that she can access, since the dress code matter is unspeakable.

Veil and Muslim women

While the veil is interpreted by some women scholars as part of a system of patriarchy (Hassan, 2001; Mernissi, 1991), for other Muslim scholars it represents women claiming their rights. Some Muslim women see veiling as their rights to express their religious adherence in public space (Osman, 2003). For these women, the wearing of the Islamic headscarf or veil is the manifestation of a particular Islamic belief which shows their preference for an Islamic identity claim (Read & Bartkowski, 2000). The veil is a symbol of their declaration of a preferred religious identity and value. Responses from Malaysian Muslim women in Tong and Turner's (2008) study lend support for this view. Instead of seeing the adoption of the veil as imposing restrictions and designating gender inferiority, women in this study regarded veiling as one of their most important religious values that they would take on voluntarily (Tong & Turner, 2008). Therefore, the visible manifestation of religion through the veil cannot be seen as a symbol of oppression of Muslim women, because Muslim women invest a range of different meanings to the wearing of the veil. Speaking in the context of contemporary France, Lyon and Spini (2004) in their argument about the right of wearing the veil (*foulard* in French) as a religious freedom indicate:

The problem is not the *foulard* in itself, but the *foulard* as an object of free choice. If it becomes an object of free choice starting from conditions of equality, the *foulard* can take on a non-regressive symbolic meaning which bears witness to the legitimate defence of a particular tradition in a condition of freedom. Banning the *foulard* means denying Muslim women this chance to tie elements of modernity and tradition in new ways which sees them as

autonomous subjects in their lives while conserving those differences that they perhaps wish to retain. (p. 341)

These authors continue to say that “the veil is not a thing but a sign, and as such, it calls neither for blind approval nor condemnation, but for attention to its meanings as women who wear it have something to say” (p. 344). Furthermore, the adoption of the veil does not position Muslim women according to a conservative idea for them to be in home. Veiled women have not heeded the call to stay at home. Instead, they have used the Islamic mode of dress to create their own public space outside the house, to work and socialize, where they are treated with respect (Hatem, 2002). The veil does not translate to Muslim women occupying subordinate status to their male counterparts. For many Muslim women around the world, and in Malaysia, this view is particularly true. According to Anwar (2001), in Malaysian Muslim society, women are not expected to veil outside their home because veiling is not legally required in Malaysia. Women are free to choose to veil or not. Veiled or unveiled, Muslim women can participate in public arenas and their participations are welcomed. They can work outside the home, and be economically independent. They can own and inherit properties. They are not forbidden from mixing freely in public space. They do not need the written permission of their husbands or male guardians to travel abroad nor are there traditions to segregate women’s quarters in Malay Muslim homes. They enjoy equal access to education and have long enjoyed the benefits of a more egalitarian Islam. In research conducted in Kuala Lumpur, Malay Muslim women who wear a headscarf, veil or *tudong*²², identify themselves as modern women enlightened in the ways of Islam (Mouser, 2007). These women emphasise that the wearing of *tudong* does not control or constrain their activities. Instead the *tudong* has helped them to engage actively in the construction and performance of their gendered identities. For some of these women, the *tudong* becomes an opportunity to adorn themselves. Because the wearing of *tudong*, its colourfulness, and fashionable style are distinct from other Islamic cultural contexts,

²² *Tudong* is a Malay word for veil.

such as in Middle Eastern countries, these women are expressing individual desires for personal beauty, and at the same time symbolize their commitment to Islam.

In other research on veiling, the veil is associated with the pious acts of people, in which religious action is the choice that individuals make to construct their lifestyles, especially within the religious sphere (Tong & Turner, 2008). This act of piety involves bodily practices related to diet, bodily discipline and clothing, where one's values and beliefs can be expressed. By retaining the veil, some women are expressing religious devotion to God, and the veil acknowledges their religious virtues, constructing women's identity as pious Muslims.

Since the matter of dress is not so problematic in Islam, B's decision to veil can be interpreted as portraying the values she holds as a Muslim woman. There is a possibility that her decision may be motivated by B's preferred values that she might feel as neither irrational, coerced, nor contradicting her identity, rights and self-worth. B's choice to step into this powerful position -to choose to veil - perhaps aligns with the discussion which these authors offer, that veiling is a combination of acts in expressing one's freedom to practice religious belief; one's commitments to the faith; a fulfilment of spiritual satisfaction; and/or more importantly, a convenient expression of identity and religiosity (Lyon & Spini, 2004; Mouser, 2007; Tong & Turner, 2008).

While veiling carries many possible meanings, in the story Abas tells of B's transformation it would appear that the hospitality of the institution and of Abas' practice perhaps holds some conditions. While there are no written signs that regulate dress, there is nonetheless the possibility that many unwritten signs regulate dress.

Abas speaks of "working for God": "I do counselling so that they are able to live their lives as they should". As a servant of God, his hope is to offer clients hospitality based on *hikmah*: "I want to give space to the client – for him to look at himself. I want to help him sees the options available to him. So, when he feels at ease with what he is seeing, he would be able to do what he wants to do voluntarily".

Nonetheless the contradiction remains, as Abas makes clear: “The wearing of clothes must be appropriate to this institution. But we do not impose any dress code”. While counselling and religious values come together in *hikmah* and hospitality, the question of which meanings come to prevail, and how they come to prevail, remains complex, as the two readings I have offered of Abas’ story show. Without explicit conversation about dress, in which the client speaks the complexities of her experience, there is perhaps the possibility that hospitality was more conditional than Abas intended.

This is the question this study was intended to address: how do Muslim counsellors, in Malaysia, practice when matters of religion and spirituality are present for our clients? How are we shaped by religious values and counselling values? Abas gift to my research questions, through his story of himself as God’s worker, is indeed one of hospitality. By inviting me to dwell in his practice, as a guest, and to hear his stories, Abas has offered the opportunity for me to take forward a commitment to a hospitality of inquiry as I navigate between counselling and religious values in my teaching, and counselling practice.

CHAPTER NINE

COUNSELLOR EDUCATION

Introduction

In this chapter, I present some excerpts from the research interviews with three counsellors; Mohammad, Sue and Abas. These excerpts illustrate their perceptions about the counsellor education that they experienced, in relation to religious and spiritual values. My conversations with these counsellors suggest that there are similar understandings among them about a lack of training on how to address religious and spiritual matters in counselling, and a gap that exists between counselling models, and religious practices. I will discuss in turn how each of these counsellors highlights a different, and similar, aspect of the gap in their counsellor preparation curriculum. I start first with Mohammad, whose interviews spoke solely about counsellor training that is based on secular ideas, and how he views himself working with spiritual values in the world of secular counselling. I then go to excerpts from Sue's conversation, where she appears to criticise the practice of neutrality, and the preference of this practice in the counsellor training model she experienced. Finally, I show how the practice that Abas has reported may have been shaped by his training: that is, how the training may shape the way he gives responses to clients who come to counselling with challenging religious problems.

Mohammad: "The training pulls me away from who I am"

Mohammad goes into detail about the dilemma about the need to better manage the tension between his religious experience, and counselling knowledge. According to Mohammad, tensions exist when an adequate intersection between counselling approaches, and religious concepts, cannot take place in counselling conversations because of the gap between each domain. The gap that exists between counselling and religious ideas is expressed by Mohammad as challenging, and somewhat confusing.

In my Islamic education, the core of the study is based solely on the Quran and Hadith. It [Islamic education] locates an individual within the context of Islamic faith. However, when I began a formal training in counselling, the knowledge gained was totally different from what I know about people and religion. I get confused and uncertain. It is like I have to be a different person in each of these areas of knowledge.

There seems a distinct identity that needs to be kept apart when Mohammad is positioned by these two kinds of knowledge in practice. As a counsellor who also has a formal training in religious education, Mohammad is positioned in two competing roles: one is the role of the counsellor, and the other might belong to a spiritual guide. Here, religious knowledge and his counsellor programme do not complement each other.

The counselling is based on the knowledge of human science in ways that are non-holistic, secular, worldly rather than spiritual. No attempts are made throughout the curricula to relate counselling with religion. I mean there is no explanation about the relationships between humans and God, or the effects of religion on the life of a human being. Even though such questions are raised [in training] the explanation given is rather hazy and vague.

The content of training courses is described as somewhat broad in helping counsellors to understand the psychological aspect of clients' lives, but with one exception – religion is the only area that seems to be ignored. Religion and spirituality is a topic that his counsellor education did not recognise as relevant to practice because of the secularly-based training and orientation. In the following example, Mohammad shows how he encountered a conflict that produces awkwardness in taking up the counsellor training process. He says:

How can I explain this...it is like studying maths or language, which I could not put my faith in it because it is not built on the faith or spiritual aspect. It [the training] is purely secular. It pulls me away from who I am [as a religious person]. The process is hard to swallow at the beginning but I have no other choice because the course is just as it is. I have to accept and understand what is being

taught. Whatever I can digest I would digest but if not, I just ignore it.

It appears that the training model does not see the teaching and learning of counselling, and religious values, as a process where Mohammad is invited to be in dialogue about how to work with difficult religious questions. In such situation, the teaching approach does not attempt to address Mohammad in the context of his own local knowledge about Islamic teaching and culture. Therefore, the teaching is performed in a language that is not familiar to him, but is familiar to the individuals within the training institution. On such an approach, Bakhtin (1990) writes:

...the [teacher] puts his own ideas directly into the mouth of the [student] from the standpoint of their theoretical or ethical (political, social) validity, in order to convince us of their truth and propagandize them. (p. 10).

For Bakhtin (2004), this teaching approach is called monologue, where someone who knows and possesses the knowledge, will teach and show someone who (in one's view) is ignorant of it, and/or in error. In conventional epistemological teaching practices, this concept seems to be accepted by teachers and students as a mutual relationship (McNamee, 2007). It is applied in most teaching and learning context including religion and spirituality. However, this type of practice may produce monologic conditions. Bakhtin (1992) describes this condition as:

...ideological values and signifying practices which constitute the living reality of language are subordinated to hegemony of a single, unified consciousness or perspective. In other words, monologism denies the individual's capacity to produce autonomous meaning. (p. 26)

In Mohammad's situation, when he is not invited or challenged to make meaning about how to traffic between religious ideas and counselling practices, the available position that is offered to him at such particular moment, is either to work in secular approaches, or from religious perspectives - "Whatever I can digest I would digest but if not, I just ignore it". In this speaking, Mohammad appears to see the training gap.

However, the discursive terms to articulate the gap outside secular-religious binary training model are not available, and the approaches provided in the training could not bring him into new territories; such as, how to work with some religious ideas in different and multiple ways.

The limited space that Mohammad reports having in training to seriously consider religious matters has produced a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards his studies. He also seems to express some doubts about the relevance of training to his own beliefs, and to his practice. Having received no training to deal with religious problems, Mohammad expresses his unpreparedness to competently work with religious materials in therapy, even though he holds religious knowledge which he can offer his clients:

If religious problems arise [in counselling], it is advised to use only the basic [counselling] techniques until the clients find their own way figuring out the solution to religious problems. It sounds ridiculous, even now. I have the [religious] knowledge but could not make use of it even though I want to. It feels uncertain how to put religious ideas into counselling.

Mohammad speaks the experience of uncertainty that he encounters in practice – “It feels uncertain how to put religious ideas into counselling”. Often the feeling of uncertainty is distressing for counsellors who are committed to a counselling approach (Hughes, 1997). One of the problems that derive from secular counselling practices or strictly religious ideas is that counsellors tend to retreat to certainty when they meet with uncertainty. Griffith explains that there are two possible factors which might invite counsellors to a certainty position. Griffith (1995) calls these factors proscriptive and prescriptive constraints. Proscriptive constraint occurs when the counsellors are shaped by secular training orientations to not talk about religion and spirituality in therapeutic sessions, and prescriptive constraint is when counsellors are influenced by religious counselling culture to talk about religion and spirituality only in a particular way. In Mohammad’s situation, the former appears to be an option for him when he meets with uncertainty in practice:

If the client wants more information about religious ideas or teachings, I would refer him to someone who holds the position to do so. This is the person whom the client could pose a question to.

On these terms, in order not to overstep the bounds of professional competence in attempting to work with religious questions, matters of religion are thought better assigned to clergy and theologians, people who are the expert in religious realms. The approach taken is not surprising, since therapists, according to the value-neutral stance tradition, are not accredited in these realms (Helminiak, 2001; Tjeltveit, 1999). Furthermore, to suggest or offer clients with religious solutions is perceived as not appropriate and unethical within the neutral tradition's standpoint (Fulford, 1997; Gonsiorek, 2009). Therefore, clients with religious questions are assumed to receive good spiritual treatment if they work with such spiritual/religious advisors, although to some degree the therapist also might have the similar knowledge and experiences.

The secular training that seems to keep Mohammad from incorporating his own values with professional knowledge is presented in his next example. Here, he talks about the fear that one might promote one's values if religious ideas are discussed in the counselling conversation. Mohammad says:

Often clients who ask religious questions expect to get straight answers. So, it is like taking risks if direct responses are given without doing the process [counselling] first, because the client might consider it [the response] as conclusive.

However, the splitting of spiritual from the psychological in counsellor education courses may increase the feeling of compartmentalization that Mohammad mentioned earlier, "I have to be a different person in each of this knowledge", and may heighten the conflict that he is experiencing.

The counselling practice makes me hold back my own ideas in order to be ethical. But at the same time it doesn't feel right because I cannot share the things I know, especially when clients consider it as significant.

The conflict occurs when he has to choose between the need to meet the requirements of the secular counsellor training model, and the possibility of responding to clients from the counsellor's own value, experience and knowledge (M. M. Miller, Korinek, & Ivey, 2006).

The examples Mohammad offers show how the secular counselling programmes did not provide space to raise or discuss religious and spiritual values in therapy. Thus, they did not help him to understand ways to negotiate those values in his counselling practice. As he speaks about the programme, Mohammad is positioned by two separate domains that constitute practice; secular approaches, and religious recommendations. These two domains appear to shape the steps that he takes when meeting with clients' religious questions. The former, through value-neutral practices, appears to provide for both Mohammad's and clients' safety. On the basis of this position, clients are protected from the imposition of counsellors' values, and thereby counsellors would not be accused of being unethical. As the latter is seen as incompatible within the dominant principle within the value-neutral stance, therefore it is recommended not to engage with religious questions even though such recommendations may not be coherent with the values which counsellors might hold.

Sue: “If I am too obedient with the available counselling discourse [the practice of value-neutral stance], I might lose what I have”

In Chapter Six, Sue, the only woman counsellor who participated in the research interview phase of the study, emphasises the importance of religious and spiritual knowledge in her practice. Working in an institution which prescribes Islamic teaching, and directly has to deal with Islamic courts and laws, Sue is positioned to work with these values almost invariably. With regard to her daily practices, particularly where she has to work with the Islamic Family Law Act, Sue questions the exclusion or avoidance of spirituality and religious aspects in traditional counselling models. She contends that ignoring these values in counsellor education programmes would invite dilemmas and conflicts for practitioners like her, who want to proceed tentatively in respect of these issues. Just as Mohammad spoke of his counsellor education as “hazy and vague”, Sue reports that her counsellor programme

in some ways touched on religious aspects, but with little exploration and education on this matter.

I don't deny that this knowledge [spiritual and religious values] is raised in the course but it seems to be taken lightly. Not much is explained around this area as if it is trivial. I am not surprised if there are other counsellors who have the same problem as me in terms of having confusion working with spiritual problems. Because we had not received sufficient training within this perspective, conflict happens. In my case, if there are matters that I think I have to say, for instance matters concerning religion, I would highlight it to the client.

According to Sue, the traditional training paradigm does not include skills, or knowledge, regarding religious and spiritual education. The training does not establish competence in the area of spiritually integrated therapy. Thus, without having appropriate skills and knowledge about how to work with religion and spirituality, counselling in respect of religious values may cause confusion. Furthermore, when there is a gap between counselling, and counsellors' own values, culture and knowledge, extra tensions might be experienced by practitioners (Martinez & Baker, 2000; M. E. Miller, 2000). In hearing Sue's comment about training gaps, I ask her if questions of values arise in counselling conversation, what she would do, and what would be her response to the kind of teaching, at this point of her practice. Sue replies:

Well, when I was in my counsellor training, there were times I got fixed answers on questions like this. For example, if a client questions her own actions which are against the religion, as a professional the counsellor's values should be put aside...but I wonder how am I going to put aside these values since these values are part of me, and my life. When my career started, I did follow this guideline but the work atmosphere here, and the clients' problems seem not to allow me to do so [put the values aside]. In the end, I did what I thought was best for the practice, the clients and this institution.

Sue is questioning the practice of neutrality that seems to be the preference of the counsellor programme. She is arguing that counselling is a value-laden practice. She also appears to criticise the counsellor programme, suggesting that it needs to take much more account of people's religious and spiritual values.

If I am too obedient with the available counselling discourse [the practice of value-neutral stance] and too extreme following this view, I might lose what I have, what I can offer, apart from what has been taught. I will forget that I also have certain experiences that can make me feel what the clients feel. I might forget that I also have my own world where my world might be similar to the clients' world because we share the same faith and language. I think the courses in the training should include all of this.

Sue is inviting a more reflective place on how she is positioned by the dominant counselling discourse and training. The reflexivity leads her to examine this discourse to understand how it shapes her practice. In this context, the challenge for her would be to deconstruct the 'truth' around strong modernist explanations of a value-neutral stance, and to position herself in an alternative and enabling resolution. She is contesting the territory of truths and facts in relation to dominant counselling training, and tries to frame the possibility of opening other landscapes. Sue's preferred landscape is one that does not distance her values and experiences from the clients. It seems that if her own values and experiences do not become part of the counselling process, Sue might experience the situation Andrews and Kotzé (2000) described thus: "connectedness becomes impossible and spirituality becomes sterility" (p. 334). Rather, she perceives that the presence of her values and experiences in counselling relationships would be useful in some way. At the very least, through these values, she would understand clients' experiences, and could relate more to what has been going on in their world. Lines (2002) writes:

If spiritual counselors have had such personal experiences, then this would form for them a backcloth and range of valuable perspectives for interpreting similar such phenomena in their clients' lives (p. 110).

Hence, having genuine religious experiences and values, although not essential, can be a useful grounding for Sue to forming a therapeutic alliance.

In looking back over the conversations, I am aware that Sue is making a tremendous, yet difficult, effort to trouble counselling knowledge production particularly around the modernist neutrality standpoint. In respect to Sue's examples, modernist mainstream requires Sue to practice neutrality in order to avoid possible risks of dual positions; religious cohort, and psychotherapy traditions and standards, or what Barlow and Bergin (2001) represent as a blurring boundary between religious, and professional roles. According to Gonsiorek (2009), maintaining psychotherapy standards, and at the same time taking up a religious role can be ethically risky because "the appropriate and expected boundaries differ between these roles" (p. 387). Therefore, holding counselling traditions and standards closer is advised. This point of view, about avoiding the dual positions, appears to resonate with Mohammad's example of his secular-based counsellor programme. However, neutrality sometimes can position counsellors to remain silent on an issue (McLeod & Wright, 2001). By taking a value-neutral stance, counsellors might refrain from discussing religious matters with their clients, and such practice might silence both counsellor and client who might find religious talk healing.

In the following example, Sue shows how she has struggled to find meaningful ways to attend to the spiritual values within the Act. She talks about the training gap which appears to position her in complex situations working with such values, and how she is trying to weave both counselling, and Islamic teaching in her practice.

Since religion is explained in a general fashion. I have to do my own research regarding this topic. As if there is a gap between counselling knowledge and Islam. In training, I was taught on counselling matters. Then, I would pick up topics about people in psychology and human development courses. Meanwhile, matters relating to religion come from my own Islamic knowledge, and other advanced courses in the institution. I picked it up from talks or discussions with other counsellors who have been here longer than

me, and matched the counselling knowledge with the working environment. There was no single course that was directed at an approach which discusses both of these topics well. It is up to me to weave and match them.

As described earlier, counselling as a value-laden exercise is not yet accepted within Sue's training. The preferred counselling models aspire towards objective, value-neutral, scientific methods and approaches (Tjeltveit, 1989; Vachon & Agresti, 1992a). However, such a premise becomes "a source of difficulty in articulating a coherent framework for the inclusion of religion and spirituality in clinical work" (Northcut, 2000, p. 155). Without a sounding conceptual framework that can inform Sue's practice working with religious values, conflicts arise. The lack of guidelines as how to articulate and work with religious values implicit in the counselling process leaves Sue to "weave and match" estranged conflicting views between the two fields. Her dilemma is how to conceptualize counselling approaches in a way that offer clients insights of therapeutic counselling while opening the door for value systems such as the Act, and other religious teachings. Therefore, a comprehensive counselling training that fits with local values and knowledge seems to be her hope. She says:

If asked, I'd like a continuous training around these values, not just basic training on basic techniques. A course that can help me to understand cultural matters including religion and spirituality. A course that can teach counsellors to understand, and explore holistic issues which cannot be seen by the naked eye but have a huge impact on counsellors' and clients' lives. On how we live within a society that follows religion as a guideline and follows the local customs. If counsellors have enough training on this topic, it is a credit particularly in my setting. Even though not all problems are characterised with these values, but it is very vital to know.

The training must not be supplementary where everything is thrown in half heartedly and not serious. Just as we want counsellors to be well-versed in other fields such as psychology, human development and so forth. We should also give undivided interest in religious and spiritual values because people's lives are filled with these values,

not just Islam but other religions too. This is a challenge for the counsellor education programmes.

This example shows how Sue is anticipating a counselling programme that can guide counsellors to become fully informed of these values. She is hoping that the training can offer ways of helping counsellors to become acquainted with religious values in such way that the discussion about these values can become part of her professional skill repertoire. Sue repeatedly emphasises that the requirement to incorporate religion and spirituality as part of counselling training are fundamental because this particular training might meet a need of clients. “People’s lives are filled with these values”, she says. Sue is asking counsellor education programmes to open up space for infusing religion and spirituality into counselling through the development of training materials, and curriculum guides. For Sue, this incorporation would be really meaningful in giving permission to counsellors, as well as skills, and knowledge, to work on these values in practice.

When I ask Sue to describe the kind of training models or courses that she is looking for, at length Sue explains:

I think it would be something that helps to understand the world of clients. What makes their world the way it is from the perspective of concepts, and philosophy. It is not only the techniques on how to approach the clients but also the skills to understand how their world was formed. I think without this kind of understanding, it would be difficult to make sense of what happens in their lives. And, it would be great if the training can provide knowledge that is relevant to this particular setting [which based on religious teaching and values] so that I won't get lost, and ask myself what I need to do when I meet with difficult religious problems.

Sue talks about possible counselling theoretical frames that can recognize individual clients “in-a-context rather than simply as an intrapsychic entity” (Lax, 1992, p. 70). She addresses herself to a training model that can make her “understand the world of clients the way it is...not only the techniques but the skills to understand how their world was formed”. This comment shows how she is looking for approaches that can

provide explanations of the construction of the clients' world and their problems. She seems to ponder on theoretical ideas that sound like the possibilities for social constructionist ideas and orientations.

In hearing Sue's desiring, emerging perspective, I wonder what it would be like for her to be able to talk differently about religion and spirituality with clients. To allow the expression of these values in counselling practices, and comfortably earn a space on communicating the values without being restricted by the deterministic approaches. In the following section, Sue seems to describe her expression about this question.

Sue's response to the DVD role-play

Before the research conversations take place, Sue is invited to view and respond to a DVD counselling role-play on the theme of religion and spirituality. Of three participants who agree to participate in the interview meetings, only Sue gives responses to and feedback on the DVD counselling session. In her response, Sue gives appreciative interpretations about the therapeutic work that she sees in the role-play. She expresses having a strong interest on how the counsellor in the DVD listens and responds to the client, Hayati. Sue talks about one piece of the counselling conversation that captures her attention:

Counsellor: When you ask these questions – about it perhaps being a test,...that perhaps it was too easy before – what are the effects of these questions for you?

Hayati: I guess that this huge experience...could mean...that I have to prepare when things could be more difficult in future. I have learnt so much from this pain, and along the journey I think a lot of my mother, what she taught me, and what I still need to learn.

Counsellor: What is your mother's voice strong about?

Hayati: I could almost hear her saying to me, "You hold on to what you believe...because I have seen you grow up into a strong

woman...I can see your heart...and the care you took with this decision. You meant no harm, Hayati”

Counsellor: How is it for you...to hear your mother says, “You meant no harm, Hayati”?

Hayati: I guess... I feel some relief. In some way, the heavy burdens I carried all this while are lifted. I remembered one verse in Quran that says, “You will experience the forgiveness when you’re forgiven”.

When I ask Sue what is the particular style of the counsellor’s work that she likes, Sue replies in poetic language:

*I’m not sure
She sounds like Rogerian
But...she doesn’t actually resemble his way of doing things.
I like the way she does it
The way she pleases her client...her story
She entertains her concerns
Working hard to help her...
...In the most pleasant way.
I like that.
I love the way she focused the client to her mother's voice
To me
It is a strength that the client can hold on to
Like a talisman of life.
To me
Words like these can touch the client's heart.
It touches my heart.
I can’t imagine how she is able to hear that
...and simply bring it out.*

The language that Sue uses is very different when she is referring to the DVD counselling practice. Her language in a poetic form shows how she is moved by the counselling conversation. This poetic language does not appear in Sue’s other speaking throughout the interview conversations. Perhaps being positioned as an audience and witnessing the role-play has transported her into a space of generating

new ways of thinking of working with religion and spirituality that she might not have possessed before. White (1995; 1997; 2007), on the audience position and outsider-witness in narrative therapy practice, writes that these positions can trigger personal resonance in ways that people are inevitably moved by others' stories, text or conversations. The experience of movement, according to White (2004) might take people to another place in their lives that are important to them. On witnessing the DVD, Sue might experience the movement to think differently, to have a new perspective of her own counselling practices, and to newly engage with ideas or beliefs about how she might proceed in working with values in ways that are more harmony with her own experiences. The significance of narrative therapy practice that she witnesses through the DVD might provide a point of entry to position herself differently in terms of options for action to address religious ideas in counselling. Sue's poetic expression somehow represents the commitment that has been sitting with her to work with clients in respectful and honourable ways. For Sue to step into a space that allows her to hold on to her own values and at the same time valuing clients' rights in making their own decision is important, as she said many times before.

In her comments on her counsellor training, Sue shows that the training has not provided her with the kind of language and practice that she needs in her counselling – and she notices the particular language and practice which the counsellor in the role-play has. On one hand, the only language that she seems to have is the language of providing guidance and direction, and on the other, she holds to Rogers' client-centered skills of responding and building counselling relationships. The counselling training that Sue receives does not provide the vocabulary on how to navigate the silence between neutrality and advice giving. Not having relevant vocabulary of action or practice (Gergen, 2003; Gergen & Gergen, 2008) makes it not feasible for Sue to actually representing religious narratives in therapy setting. Perhaps, through the role-play counselling conversation, Sue is offered the possible strategy and alternative to work with religious and spiritual values. The DVD in some way may have shown Sue a sense that there could be a vocabulary of action or language to

make the speaking of religion and spirituality in counselling possible. It may show her how counsellors can have ways of storying Islamic knowledge without engaging in the imposition of meaning upon clients. Perhaps, if Sue has the kind of language similar to the DVD she might not have highlighted the *haq* as discussed in Chapter Six. She might prefer to counsel differently, and her use of religious language might shift.

Abas: “The concept of counselling is aligned with Islam”

When I ask Abas about the kind of preparation that his counsellor programme might have offered with regard to religious and spiritual values, Abas replies:

I would have to say that the training didn't offer me much. Most of my experience working with religious problems is owed to my daily practice in this institution. The training didn't give much help to me in terms of working with religiosity. But, the counselling knowledge is useful. It helps me to connect with clients.

Like Mohammad and Sue's narratives about their counsellor education, Abas brings forth the lack of interest given to religious and spiritual matters in the training. However, Abas does not further explain about this view, but he goes on to say:

I believe that the concept of counselling is aligned with Islam because some of the scriptures in Quran, and the Prophet's examples clearly show the importance of a helping relationship which is similar to counselling, even though such a term [the word counselling] does not exist in this text.

Counselling, as a helping profession, is viewed as congruent with Islamic principles that place great emphasis on people helping each other in matters of goodness. This act of helping is not only an important virtue that is urged by Islam, but it is also a profound act of worship to God (S. Abdullah, 2007). Thus, the values embedded within the act of helping appear to be resonant with Abas' personal values.

God has given me the opportunity to learn counselling. It is for me to beautify my ways working with clients. The counselling knowledge has served as a guide for me to understand the client's well-being.

Although in his earlier response, Abas indicates that his counsellor programme “did not offer much” in helping him working with religious problems, yet, in this extract, Abas appears to positively position himself with the counsellor training paradigm. However, from his speaking, the counselling model appears to be just an approach in guiding him to understand clients' well-being. It seems that this model provides Abas with the counselling skills but does not address religious and cultural matters in a distinct, precise way.

In Abas' examples, he does not directly speak about the gap in training, however, there are perhaps some gaps for him beyond what he has identified about his counsellor preparation when dealing with religious matters. In the previous Chapters Seven and Eight, Abas has shown some examples on how he works with two women clients. The first example is G, who is seeking the dissolution of her marriage, and within the process, she is questioning the injustices against women by the law and court system. The second example presents B, who comes to the institution with an unusual dress code. This dress appears to be outside the religious norms and the institution's value system, and the conversation which Abas brings into the research meeting about his dialogue with B, addresses the ways he traffics when encountering complex religious ideas such as the dress code. In presenting both counselling conversations with G and B, Abas shows how his counsellor education did not offer him the full range of knowledge and skill on how to work with critical questions around gender, power-knowledge relations, and religion and spirituality. The analysis suggests that these topics were not well explored in his conversations with G and B. The counsellor education which he received seems to focus more on traditional counselling models, skills and approaches where courses on gender, race, religion and culture are treated as ancillary and not an integral part of a counselling programme. Therefore, it is up to Abas to incorporate this cultural dimension in his practices.

In Chapter Seven, with respect to G's problem, the counsellor training enables Abas to hear the pain that G experiences dealing with the court, and Islamic law. However, the training does not provide Abas a clear and particular approach on how to understand, and use the counselling responses within religious discourse, and has not offered him a way forward to respond to the pain that he hears. Therefore, Abas is limited to calling on religious ideas according to his own familiar frame. In this situation, Abas is positioned within these discourses that his discursive practices are shaped by the idea of religious role towards G.

In Chapter Eight, when describing his meetings with B, Abas engages with humanistic approaches, and *hikmah* which is associated with hospitable Islamic practices. Within the humanistic approach, particularly client-centered therapy, the training orientation invites counsellors having the ability and skill in showing respect, care and trust to clients. A counsellor's personal characteristics of genuine care, acceptance, respect, understanding, as well as nonjudgmental attitude, are tailored within this counselling model in order to help clients to build trust, and to make personality change (Rogers, 1995). With respect to Abas' reported dialogue with B, when he chooses to remain silent about the institution's unwritten dress code, the silence might be a strategy for him to concentrate on matters that are more helpful to her, at that early phase of the counselling. At that particular moment, Abas is communicating the value of unconditional positive regard which is provided by the counsellor education programme. By remaining available and nonjudgmental to B regardless of her dress, Abas is accepting B as she is. On the contrary, if Abas chooses to focus his attention on the dress code rather than the care for B, Abas' intention to care might be minimized or jeopardized by the hidden judgments, and evaluation of the way she dressed. Thus, building trust with B in this initial relationship would be less successful.

However, when Abas names this unwritten dress code to me, in our research interview conversation, by saying, "no one walks in here with that style", he shows how the counsellor training which inform his practice has not offered a strong

conceptual framework that link to specific counselling competencies in relation to this religious practice. These competencies might be around how religious practices or Islamic texts can be read in a non-authoritarian and gender-friendly way. On this matter, there have been some arguments from Islamic scholars, particularly women scholars who claim that Islamic texts specifically the Quran do not advocate any patriarchal readings (Barlas, 2002; Hassan, 2001; Wadud, 2009). They argue that God is supremely just, therefore, it is impossible for God's speech to teach injustice. Hassan (2001) writes:

The Quran, as God's words, cannot be made the source of human injustice, and the injustice to which Muslim women have been subjected cannot be regarded as God-derived. (p. 63)

According to Wadud (1999), historically, in many Muslim society, most of the Quran exegeses are interpreted by male religious scholars, where "men and men's experiences were included while women and women's experiences were either excluded or interpreted through the male *version*, vision, perspective, desire or needs of woman" (p. 2). Therefore, when B enters the counselling conversation in the strap dress, Abas might be positioned in a restrictive version on account of the dominant classical interpretation of the dress code for women. In this position, Abas might not see how the dominant discourses of gender, religion and power relations are shaping the counselling conversation, and how he contributes to these gender-power practices when communicating with B. The interpretation of this religious practice which might carry patriarchal readings thus positions Abas to not work skillfully with B as he skillfully works with E, Abas' male client, who presented a concern in terms of sexuality discourses. In E's scenario, the sexual concern that he brought into counselling also might be criticized or judged in ways similar to B's strap dress; as homosexuality also is read as not in accord with Islamic teachings, but no biased description is made towards E. Maturana and Varela (1992), in speaking about 'knowing how we know' write:

We do not see what we do not see, and what we do not see does not exist. Only when some interaction dislodges us – such as being

suddenly relocated to a different cultural environment – and we reflect upon it, do we bring forth new constellations of relation that we explain by saying that we were not aware of them, or that we took them for granted. (p. 242)

With respect to Abas' counsellor education programme, the training positions Abas to do counselling, and *hikmah* in ways that he has available, and this limits what he can offer his clients. Such positioning opens up the possibility for him to participate in a practice where meanings of action are only allocated to certain categories, and not others (Davies, 1991). The discussion of gender, and *hikmah* as a hospitable practice perhaps was not discussed within a more critical orientation in his counsellor education courses. Therefore, Abas is not well exposed on how to carefully position his Islamic knowledge so that it would not produce biased outcomes against women. Within my own religious education, the illustrations of *hikmah* were often been highlighted with male examples. Although in Islamic teaching there are *hikmah*'s examples for women, these examples have often been overlooked. As I see it, *hikmah* is taught in a general manner with unclear guidelines about its practice for women. This practice has not been explained well enough for counsellors who have to work with women. Thus, in such a training, it is difficult for Abas to be aware of the discursive practice of *hikmah*, when he is not being invited to investigate or see *hikmah* through hospitality as either an ethics or a politics, as pointed out by Derrida (Raffoul, 1998). Therefore, as a counsellor, Abas could not position himself differently since there is no space offered in training for him to step into that kind of positioning and reflexivity.

Referring to both Abas' counselling examples, heightening of counsellors' attention via training would bring forth knowledge and practice that would refine values, practices working alongside people across gender, as well as religion and spirituality matters. Through this knowledge, counsellors perhaps would be invited to pay more attention to the power-gender relation in their practices. I wonder, if this happens, what might have been different for G and B, if Abas had attended to their experiences, or had asked some questions about the meaning of these experiences for

them as women, and for him as a male counsellor? Or, how these experiences have affected those women lives?

This chapter has shown how each of the participant counsellors chooses ways to bridge counselling and Islamic religious knowledge. The approaches taken are speaking to the gaps that are present in the counsellor education models in relation to religious and spiritual values in counselling. The ways participant counsellors weave these knowledges depend on how they are positioned in each of these discourses, and how counselling and religion are employed when speaking with clients.

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION?

Introduction

What we call the beginning is often the end. And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from.

(Eliot, 1943, p. 54)

Any research has limits and I have reached the point in this study where the next step is to consider what the study might offer to an account of the ongoing development of counselling in relation to religious and spiritual values, in a Malaysian, Islamic context. When I started this study, I envisioned possible definitive conclusions, but the study has taught me that the idea of one ultimate truth is not part of a postmodern praxis. More than one conclusion is always possible. Therefore, this chapter is not a conclusion, but rather my hope is “to make a beginning” by bringing forward a discussion of how the study has moved me at this stage in my professional life. I therefore write this chapter focussing on the possibilities of how this research has shaped the ways I understand myself to be practising, and of the ways it contributes to my teaching work with student counsellors. To locate myself in this account is to witness self (Weingarten, 2000) as I witness the contributions of others. Locating myself in this account is consistent with a postmodern approach in research (Lather, 1997; Weedon, 1997) and in therapy (Weingarten, 2000; White, 1997). I offer some central ideas about the topic studied and its relation to counsellor education, particularly about the complex work with religious problems, power relations, counsellors’ positioning, and reflexive practices. I believe that these notions can open up awareness of the privileged positions a counsellor might hold when speaking with clients in counselling. I find useful the perspective Ballard (1996) offers when he writes about self-critical reflection in a professional domain.

Critical self-reflection requires that we rigorously challenge our motivations, ideas, and assumptions from alternative perspectives. But it does not require the pretense that we believe in nothing, that our work is independent of our values...[It] opens to a range of interpretations, constructions, and reconstructions, and confronting problems of ideology, power and purpose. (p. 30)

I join with Ballard when thinking about the ways I wish to practise as a counsellor, and how I would like to invite students to join me in this way of thinking and practising. I do not know to what degree student counsellors will make meanings of this learning, but I believe that this learning would provide opportunities for us to explore unique and creative approaches in understanding our own professional selves, and working with those who come to us for counselling.

In the findings chapters, I described how participant counsellors are positioned between competing practices – the value-neutral position they are currently taught in counsellor education, and their own commitments to religious and spiritual values. It seems that when working with religious matters, these counsellors are not supported to make sense of the two competing values together – each of them is left to make their own meaning of these competing positions. In relation to my study, the possible conclusions that I will draw also might produce some complexity for student counsellors around competing positions. Therefore, my question is: how can I work with students in ways which may help them to deal with these competing positions, that is, between the value-neutral and value-investigating positions that I will suggest in this chapter, and how will I work with students to avoid calling them into yet another “unnamed” set of competing practices and ideas. In the later section of this chapter, I will describe possible approaches that I intend to take in working with such questions.

I begin this chapter by putting forward a brief overview of Malaysian counselling practices and the values embedded in these counselling theories and models when they arrived in Malaysia. I weave some of the summarised examples of participants’ difficulties working with religious and spiritual values, and the approaches they have

taken to deal with competing ideas between those values and the counselling theoretical paradigm. In this section, I also argue for a counsellor education programme that can provide a therapeutic framework for working in religiously sensitive ways that uses a value-investigating practice. In doing so, I offer my teaching practice as a starting point to introduce some notions of poststructuralist ideas. In doing this, I make use of the DVD counselling role-play that I used to generate data for this study. I turn to the DVD on the basis that the discussions offered in the results chapters added to my sense of both the difficulties and the importance of bringing together professional knowledge and religious and spiritual knowledge. But these chapters did not provide satisfying answers to my practice questions, for counselling or for counsellor education. Therefore, I show in what follows how I intend to use the examples via the DVD counselling role-play that I used to generate data for this study. The examples of the counselling dialogue, on the DVD, are employed to invite students to consider the effects of discourses, and how deconstructive approaches might help clients to find alternative possibilities with respect to their problems.

Counselling discourse, theory and practice in Malaysia: A critical perspective

The development of professional counselling discourse, theory and practice in Malaysia has followed the path of counselling in Euro-American contexts, where modernist counselling frameworks have been given preference. Along with this approach, is the notion of objective, value-neutral stance that holds some element of protecting clients from the imposition of counsellors' personal values (Tjeltveit, 2004; G. Watson, 1958). This is perhaps true for counselling orientations which place significant emphasis on objective solutions in order to work with clients' problems. However, in this study, it appears that the coming together of the notion of value-neutrality with religious and spiritual values in counselling present conceptual contradictions for counsellors, and that they have been largely left to consider their own ways to craft individual solutions as to how to best interpret and enact these conflicting discourses in order to help clients with religious problems that are hard to deal with.

As shown in Sue's, Abas' and Mohammad's examples of their counselling practice, including accounts of conversations with particular clients, there were no easy responses when meeting with such complex situations. These counsellors have to use their own judgment – weighing the ideas of religious and professional knowledge to respond appropriately to clients and at the same time considering the potential consequences of the responding for both themselves and clients. Mohammad felt that it was acceptable to refer a client to another person, with particular religious knowledge and authority, when the referral, in his judgement, was for the client's benefit. In this way a clear distinction is set up between counselling, and concerns involving religious and spiritual matters. On the other hand, Sue and Abas chose to stay and work with clients in regard to their religious problems. What differs between Sue and Abas in their counselling action was the specific ways of trafficking between religious ideas and counselling discourses. In Sue's situation, she built therapeutic relationships with clients and then called on the religious Act, so that clients could see what options were available for them. Counselling was a background skill for building rapport, rather than a rigorously applied practice throughout the counselling session, in Sue's approach to the dilemma of how to counsel in the face of religious and spiritual questions and difficulties. The analysis I offered suggested that this can be interpreted as more guidance and advice-giving, than of counselling. Abas offered my study a number of detailed examples of his counselling practice, demonstrating his intention to connect religious and spiritual matters with his counselling orientation. The analysis this study offers, of his examples of re-told counselling conversations, suggests that religious discourses have at times positioned him more strongly than he intended in the counselling conversations.

It appeared that Sue, Abas and Mohammad were relying on their personal, religious, and professional knowledges to help them to think about the possible responses they might convey in relation to religious matters. The knowledge might suggest different positions for them to consider: a value-neutral position, a religious-related position,

and/or a position that might move counsellors to locate both religious and professional ideas side by side. Each had worked out their own preferred positions, in response to meeting these dilemmas in practice. They all reported that the counsellor education that they had received had not offered the kinds of training that could open up space for considering how their religious and counselling knowledge could be in dialogue with the counselling knowledges and skills they were learning. A discussion of how to negotiate religious values in an ethical manner was not included in the programme, and values were not recognised as inescapable, as well as pervasive. However, as Beutler and Bergen (1991), Kelly (1990) and Mahalik (1995) have argued, values are inescapable in counselling context, and as Richards and Bergin suggested (2000), religious and spiritual values are particularly relevant in counselling. Therefore, how much more important then, when Islamic discourses and the religious Act guide the daily life and practice of Malaysian Muslim men and women that counsellors in Malaysia have some familiarity and skill at working between these two sets of knowledge - counselling and religion and spirituality.

When I began this study, it was my concern that counsellor education and training have contributed to the ways these participant counsellors and I have been positioned relating to religious and spiritual values. The Euro-American counselling models have shaped and conceptualised our practice of counselling and the positions of counsellor and client. The experience of working within this discursive frame whilst employing Islamic religious framework was not a comfortable adventure. We sat uneasily between the two discourses, where professional counselling worked as a specialist activity where, in my experience, little attention was given to clients' religious knowledge, values and culture, as how we, the counsellors, can work with our own values when meeting with clients. Rather, the models position counsellors as specialists to recognise and validate what is characterised as healthy selfhood, illness, normality and abnormality, and concurrently what is significant to clients' reality seems to be pushed aside (see H. Anderson, 1997; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Kaye, 1999). When counsellors are positioned as experts, specialists about human nature, there is less space for power sharing between the counsellor and the client in

the counselling conversation, and little attention is paid to how counselling shapes people's lives. As Kaye (1999) describes:

It is beguiling easy for therapists to create via their questioning the version they think they perceive. At their best, if treated as possible hypotheses, where these versions fit for the client, they allow for the drawing of new distinctions or punctuations of experience which enables the client to generate new, less problematic possibilities for him or herself. At their worst, they represent a circular activity in which the therapists finds the patterns they hypothesize to be there and attempts to impose these – a form of intellectual colonialism. This can lead to a fixity or stereotypy of both thinking and discourse which can potentially limit the [clients'] opportunity to forge alternative meanings, solutions and narratives for themselves. (p. 27)

Thus, the dominant positioning of the Euro-American and modernist counselling frameworks for over 30 years in Malaysia has had significant colonising and ideological effects on local counselling practice. These effects have not been widely discussed, particularly in the local literatures, and they have been visible only at the micro level of Malaysian counselling practices such as those described in this study. This study has taken me towards consideration of the effects of what might be called neo-colonialism, as Euro-American counselling practice engages with Islamic Malaysian peoples. Memmi (2003) claims that “intelligent members” of a colony understood that the essence of colonisation was about cultural expansion, governmental supervision, and economic advantages from the colonised country. Embedded in this colonial process is the creation of “privilege” amongst the colonised, where the mindset of the privileged is the desire to gain special rights and to exercise the exclusion of others. Memmi (2003) writes:

...if he (the coloniser) can easily obtain administrative positions, it is because they are reserved for him and the colonized are excluded from them; the more the colonised are excluded from them; the more freely he breathes, the more the colonised are choked. (p. 8)

The Euro-American counselling approaches which have been significant to Malaysian counselling practices appear to invite counsellors to take up the position of

“privilege”. This position produces expert counsellors in the relationships of counselling, where insufficient attention is given to the needs of the particular clients, and their cultural and local context. What seems to emerge from the construction of “privilege” is that clients’ voices are not heard but remain silent. In this research, the imported modernist frames of counselling appear not to invite critical conversations between the significant values embedded in religion and spirituality, and Islam, and counselling professional knowledge. However, as the examples in this study illustrate and my own experience suggest, a therapeutic framework for working in religiously sensitive ways is needed.

Towards religiously sensitive counselling practice

A first critical aspect that this study would offer such a framework is the notion of the power relations implicit in the process of knowledge production; for example, questions about what we know about religion and spirituality, how we know these things, and on whose terms we come to know, and how we consider these matters when meeting with them in counselling. I also argue that counsellor education and training is an important means and site for developing and promoting critical reflection about counselling practice because it offers an opportunity to review and potentially to disrupt taken for granted ways of knowing. I am aware that engaging in the explication of power associated with religion and spirituality can be challenging but I see this process as an important part of creating a religiously sensitive counselling practice. While more recent developments in Euro-American counselling practice have addressed questions of cultural appropriateness (Monk, Winslade, & Sinclair, 2007; Robinson, 1999), and some attention has been paid to more culturally appropriate indigenous approaches (Durie & Hermansson, 1990; Waldegrave, 1990; Wingard & Lester, 2001), this task has not yet received a great deal of attention in Malaysia (Mey et al., 2009; Sumari & Jalal, 2008). This attention would seem timely, given both the colonial history of our country, and the more recent importation of Euro-American models of counselling practice. In my view, it would be timely for counsellor education and training to consider the possibilities that might be offered by a critical review of the effects of traditional, value-neutral counselling

frames for our culture, and particularly in the context of Islamic religious and spiritual values. This task of critical review might be seen on deconstructing (Derrida, 1984; Derrida & Caputo, 1997) as discussed in Chapter Three, or decolonising terms (Fanon, 2004; Hallward, 2001; Said, 1991).

Fanon (2004) speaks of decolonisation as mostly associated with the undoing of colonisation; to trouble the common order, which is, to trouble the power and control of the dominant colonial order. The decolonisation process seems to be parallel with my interest to position both my counselling and teaching practice. However, the process of decolonisation which I intend to call in my practice would rest more on the use of deconstructive approaches within poststructuralist frameworks. My intention is to work in a way that Said (1991), another postcolonial writer suggests as “the production of knowledge [that] best serves communal, as opposed to sectarian [interests], ...[a knowledge] that is non-dominative and non-coercive in a setting that is deeply inscribed with the politics, the considerations, and the strategies of power” (p. 36). In considering what these postcolonial questions might offer counselling, I also want my practice to be informed by “an insistence on the multiple, particular, heterogeneous nature of contexts and subject-positions” (Hallward, 2001, p. 21). However, the poststructuralist theoretical foundations that I have called on in this thesis are not to impose another domination of Western knowledge on Malaysian counselling practices. Instead, these ideas provide a particular approach, a potential answer for me as a practitioner and counsellor educator on how to invite reflections with clients around religious and spiritual problems, and how to offer students the kind of learning that values people’s religious knowledge and reflexive practices.

In the counsellor education programme, I would like to invite students to consider the many faces of religious discourses and the effects of these discourses on clients’ lives. In doing so, I believe that poststructural conceptual tools - the notion of power, positioning theory, deconstructive approaches, and the idea of discourse and its constitutive effects - can help student counsellors to understand the complexity of religious and spiritual matters. I suggest that these poststructural knowledges have

the potential to assist student counsellors to deconstruct dominant aspects which may present in the deep structure of grand religious narratives. For example, deconstruction may ask how religious discourses have the potential to be both healing and restrictive in their application on people's lives. Grand narratives of religion and spirituality often produce binaries, and it is my experience that these binaries can become restrictive and thus produce problems in people's lives. The term 'sacred', as an example, exists as an opposition to 'sinful', and 'moral' is defined as opposite of 'immoral' or 'evil'. The binary oppositions are constructed to be inherent to human thought and life as part of the social narratives, and they are expressed through the use of language. However, the meanings embedded in these binary oppositions are seldom equal in power because grand discourses are likely to empower one meaning over the other; bestowing privilege on one element of the binary only (Scott, 1994). On these binaries terms, any apparent transgressions of the sacred can be constructed as sinful; or any transgressions of moral can be constructed as evil. When only a description of self as sinful or evil becomes available, religious and spiritual guidelines and values can work in restrictive and problematic ways in people's lives. My struggle to find counselling practices that would satisfactorily meet with people experiencing themselves, and the problematic positions produce by these binary oppositions was central to the origin of this study. It seems to me that values were so caught up in producing these problematic oppositional binaries that a value-neutral approach to counselling was not effective. The value-investigating practice to which this study has led me offers me the opportunity for flexible responses. Social constructionist and poststructuralist theories open up the possibility for deconstructing a healing-restrictive binary opposition. Poststructural approaches also might help students to explore the dialogic spaces between, as my experience, and the analyses presented in this study suggest, a religious-values and a professional-counselling binary.

Reflexivity for teaching and learning

In this section, I bring the notion of reflexivity in the teaching and learning context of counselling meeting with religious and spiritual values. I argue that reflexivity

(Davies et al., 2004) is an important element for teacher counsellors to think about for the practice of counselling in Malaysia, and for the practice of religiously sensitive counselling.

The imposition of dominant Euro-American counselling models in Malaysia has produced in what Kaye (1999) claims as “reproductive knowledge”. On the basis of this knowledge, the therapeutic practices “unreflectively reproduce dominant discourses and mechanisms of control while masking inegalitarian regimes of truth...it thereby exercises limiting, subjugating and iatrogenic effects” (Kaye, 1999, p. 28). As a result, counsellors are invited into the reproduction of knowledge such as offering objective solutions for clients, and/or taking a value-neutral stance which this study has discussed. In the context of this study, it appears that not only counselling practice is a reproduction of modernist counselling models but religious knowledge as well is a reproductive practice. Both knowledges position counsellors as experts.

Therefore, through this study, and in the spirit of religiously sensitive counselling approach, I am proposing a counselling teaching and learning practice that is reflexive and generative (H. Anderson, 2005; Davies et al., 2004). I bring forward the DVD counselling role-play to the teaching-learning context. The DVD is an example of teaching that I would use to teach students to work for generative knowledge within the counsellor education programme. The conversations between the counsellor and the client in the DVD show how knowledge can be generated. The generational of knowledge for client’s life has produced a position where the client can resist the imposition of her brothers’ dominant view around religious matters. By using the DVD as an example, I am hoping that student counsellors can explore how generative inquiry may prompt the process of meaning-making, which could forge new understandings about clients’ religious values and local needs.

However, in order to produce counselling practice that is generative rather than reproductive, counsellor education needs reflexivity in its programme. It needs to offer students knowledge about power relations and an understanding of discourses that produce and shape people’s lives, and to engage with deconstruction. The

practice of reflexivity as noted in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, helps students to be aware of the effects of their personal and professional values that might have on clients and the shaping of these values on their counselling practices. I believe that reflexivity should start first with individual teachers so then the teacher can invite and support students to be reflexive about their own practice, knowledge and values. In Weingarten (2000) terms, this practice is called the process of witnessing the self. From here, I go on to further describe reflexivity for teaching and learning.

A central argument that I make in this chapter that counsellor education is a critical platform to enhance the possibilities of extending the dialogical and collaborative elements that have been the foundation of poststructuralist counselling paradigms. Within this intended training context, I want to support student counsellors to build meaningful connections between their religious knowledges and their developing counselling skills, using poststructuralist ideas and practices. However, my aim is not to ultimately provide solutions, or to tell students what they should be doing in therapy, or in their approach to life. Instead my intention is to offer spaces for us to be in conversations about what it is important to think about when working with complex religious problems, and what are the unintended effects of our professional practice for clients when we are not fully informed of the discursive practices/repertoires that work around us. At the same time I am aware that any teaching process will shape and be shaped in relations of power (Davies, 1996). Downing (2000) writes:

...it is no doubt crucial that therapists [as well as counsellor educators] teach clients [students] to interiorise some implicit or explicit theoretical rationale and philosophical framework, just as they themselves have interiorised it. (p. 250)

This process will represent a way for students to gain access to a set of meanings – meanings which are not only limited to the intellectual discourse, but they also will learn how to see, feel and take actions within the terms of the philosophical frameworks, or a set of methods that are offered and demonstrated in practice by me, the person who teaches.

Writing about the reflexivity they bring to counsellor education, Crocket, Kotzé and Flintoff (2007) consider what is required of counsellor educators in this respect when they enter the teaching process:

There is the risk that in reaching for “high ideals” [the reference is to Morss and Nichterlein (1999)] - as we teach - we may be seen to locate ourselves on some moral high ground apart from students or other practitioners. At the same time, “high ideals” might also mean that in our ordinary practices we are vulnerable to being found wanting, by ourselves, students, or others in our professional communities. In the face of both possibilities – apparently setting ourselves apart, or being found wanting – caring solidarity reminds us to offer generosity toward ourselves and others. Reaching for the practices we describe does not protect us from mistakes, from producing disturbances in relationship, or from failing to notice the effects for others of our speaking positions. What the practices we reach for do offer, however, is a dialogic and relational ethos. We have a commitment to supporting each other in generosity to ourselves and others so that we might enact an ethic of care in our teaching and collegial practice and relationships. (p. 31)

Thus, caring solidarity, and a dialogic, and relational ethos is the kind of ethics that I commit to foreground in my teaching practice, as well as in my counselling work with clients. I am hoping that students, too, will carry these ethics in their professional work, and personal lives. Following Crocket, Kotzé and Flintoff (2007), my preferred stance in teaching is “to offer knowledges in ways that are tentative and recognise how teacher and student are both positioned”, and “to invite students to make meaning in the light of their contexts and knowledges” (p. 33).

My intention is to invite students into territories they might negotiate when working with religious and spiritual values. By using examples from the DVD counselling conversation, I would like to invite students to consider the idea of discourse production, and the effect of this discourse on the life of the client and her well-being. However, before I ask students to join me, I intend to navigate a dialogue where students can share how they might see the shaping effects of religious and spiritual

values on their own lives. This position call might be accepted, resisted or refused (Davies, 1991), but what I hope to make available through this call is to produce ways of being and relating in the teaching and learning context (Crocket et al., 2007, p. 33). Within the process, I expect students to use all opportunities for self reflection and learning with what they have spoken with me, and with what they have witnessed in the DVD.

Self-reflexiveness becomes not just possible but necessary, since one of the central implications of post-structuralist perspectives is that there is no privileged position from which one can speak without one's own discourse being itself put into question. (Elbaz & Elbaz, 1988, pp. 127-128)

The idea is to put the personal and professional selves into question so that movement and professional growth may become possible. On this basis, Britzman's (1992) ideas about teacher identity development can also be applied to counsellor identity development.

Research methodology has evolved to enable students to study their biographies and practices. If we can extend this idea to the murky world of identity, and provide spaces for students to rethink how their constructions of the [counsellor's self] make for lived experiences, then I think students...will be better able to politically theorize about the terrible problem of knowing thyself...Students may come to understand knowing thyself as a construction and eventually, as socially empowering. (p. 43)

The "problem of knowing thyself" or what Weingarten (2000) suggests is the task and privilege of witnessing self is not an essential part of the work for students only. As a counsellor and counsellor educator, I have the problem of asking and teaching myself what I need to know and be able to do when working with clients, or teaching students about religion and spirituality. Most of what I remember from my early years of teaching and counselling practice is that the partial knowledge of counselling was handed to me in my professional training but the rest - how to work with values,

for instance - I had to initially come up with the answers myself, or had to find my own ways in order to help clients.

The process of studying the construction of oneself (professional and personal selves) may produce both the experience of discomfort and exhilaration because students, including teachers are stepping into territories that might be unfamiliar. Working in this way requires students and teachers to investigate or witness the self, the motives and intentions, the thought and actions that speak to us of who we are (Weingarten, 2000). It is a notion of reflection that means tapping into a more articulated intuitive awareness (Loughran, 2002). Davies et al. (2004) write:

...reflexivity opens new ways of addressing old-long standing questions of how and what we can legitimately take ourselves to know and what the limitations of our knowledge are.

Reflexivity helps us to consider the social and cultural aspects of the learner/the teacher in relation to positionality and the difficult values and perspectives that learners/teachers bring to their experiences of learning. In this process, reflexivity explores “which discursive policy [practice] is followed, which regimes of truth the work is located within, and which masks of methodology are assumed [to be legitimate]” (Davies et al., 2004, p. 364). It is an active process that questions one’s interpretation and understanding about how the world, knowledge appears to be. Lather (1993) emphasises:

It is not a matter of looking harder or more closely, but of seeing what frames our seeing – spaces of constructed visibility and incitements to see which constitute power/knowledge. (p. 675)

From this basis, I call forward the notion of reflexivity as a tool of deconstruction within the field of counsellor education, particularly in matters of religion and spirituality. Most importantly, reflexivity enables those in the privileged positions, the counsellors, to understand that their identity is relational and intermeshed with wider power relations. This emphasises the need to investigate the values,

judgements and subjectivities students and teachers (we) might bring to meaning-making as a result of our social, cultural and professional positioning.

Although, I put forward that reflexivity can be useful to unpack particular knowledge held by the individual in the counsellor programme, I do not wish students to perceive that the employment of this notion is to disregard the familiar grounds of their own knowledge. My intention is for us to keep spaces open for new ways of seeing and understanding, and to support students' development to achieve new meanings about what they have learned about religion, spirituality and counselling. I want to encourage students to revisit taken for granted ideas regarding professional practices so that we can identify the effects that their (our) particular way of thinking about religious values may have for clients. I believe that this practice has an important role to play in the shaping of the continuous development of counsellors' professional identity, because if there is a space/way to ask about values that informed counsellors' (our) knowledge, this will position us well to notice and acknowledge the shaping effects of this knowledge for counselling practice.

However, the question that arises then; are we really willing to embark on this journey?; to place ourselves in honesty, and to be open to the kind of transformation that would make the investigation of self and knowledge constructions possible?; and, to discover the dynamics and tensions that might be produced and reproduced by the activities of teaching and learning? There will always be some questions for us (students and me) to consider when speaking about religious and spiritual values in counselling. Such questions might be:

- How prepared are we to investigate, unpack or deconstruct difficult religious questions, ideas, teachings and discourses in our professional and personal selves, and lives?
- How prepared are we to hold back our own preference about religion and spirituality, and/or professional knowledge so that the dialogical space can be invited in student-teacher conversations, and to be able to investigate values?

- How prepared are we to make and/or invite new meanings into learning conversations when we talk about religion and spirituality, and our professional practice?
- How prepared are we to endure the discomfort of seeing and understanding religious and spiritual values in different ways?

These questions will continue to be an ongoing challenge to the possibilities for learning, for us both, the student and teacher. Simultaneously, within these questions there are also positions available for us to foster collaborative dialogues. Through this kind of learning, we might find opportunities to construct and reconstruct, shape and reshape the different range of religious and spiritual stories via dialogical encounters. For the development of professional identity, this learning might assist with situating ourselves in relation to the phenomenon that will be explored, where questions can be asked and meanings can be contested. I hope this process would change how counsellors (we) might view religious and spiritual matters, and the practice of counselling. Lorde (1984) describes:

Change means growth, and growth can be painful. But we sharpen self-definition by exposing the self in work and struggle together with those whom we define as different from ourselves, although sharing the same goals. (p. 123)

The different and reflexive way of understanding religious and spiritual stories, and the profession of counselling, therefore, might heighten the growth of student counsellors' (our) identity, because positions can be taken to revise their (our) own actions, thoughts and decisions when meeting with clients' religious and spiritual problems. The discursive work of reflexivity and deconstruction could produce the space for students to make choices about how to use collaborative, decolonized language and ideas in counselling meetings. Thus, when counsellors are alerted to the shaping effects of language, ideas, cultural stories, and religious and spiritual values, they can stay aware of the influence of their personal and professional values in counselling practice.

The DVD: Journeying with religious story

At this point in the chapter, I turn to a teaching example to illustrate these ideas in practice. This was the DVD that I sent out to participants in this research. In the section that follows, I draw on the story presented in the DVD to highlight the ways in which it is shaped by gendered, classed and religious discourses. I draw on poststructuralist narrative counselling practices that work towards unpacking what in this situation turn out to be punitive ideas that were positioning the client and her life. This idea had been offered to her in the performance of Islamic religious beliefs, and the DVD shows how this idea got reconsidered.

The DVD counselling conversation is a role play; therefore, the therapeutic dialogue was constructed in consultation and collaboration with my supervisors. Nonetheless, its content is based on real life counselling from my previous meetings with clients, with details and identifying information changed.

In this role-played counselling conversation, Hayati, a 33-year old woman who is divorced met the counsellor, complaining of several psychological problems. In their initial talk, Hayati told the counsellor that she was a teacher and was working in a secondary religious school. She also told her that she came from a ‘Syed’²³ family. In her story, Hayati spoke one incident of a particular life experience that made her extremely horrific. She said that about two years ago her mother died because of her - when Hayati told her mother that she was going to ask for a divorce from her husband, Ali.

Ali and Hayati had an arranged marriage, which was not what Hayati had wanted. Like Hayati, Ali too was a ‘Syed’ – which is the reason he was chosen to be Hayati’s husband. Hayati’s brothers, Ahmad and Rahman, blamed her for their mother’s sudden death. In Ahmad’s and Rahman’s assumption her request for a divorce had brought shame to the family and the shame had killed their mother. Hayati then was

²³ It is a title that denotes the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad through his grandsons. In Malaysia, most Syeds are of Arab origin. It is believed that there is a tradition in a Syed family where the preference for a husband or wife is from the same descendant. It is to continue to carry the honorific title within the family.

judged to be a disloyal and sinful daughter, and because of the incident she was rejected by her own family.

When meeting with the counsellor, Hayati continued to be haunted by responsibility for her mother's sudden death. She spoke of often finding herself lethargic, angry, irritable, crying, and unable to make simple decisions. She questioned whether the misery she was experiencing was some punishment from Allah for what she had done to her mother through telling her about her divorce.

In what follows, I present some of the counselling conversation with Hayati after several weeks of meetings.

Counsellor: Hayati, we have been talking...about the struggles you have been experiencing... and how much your mother's love helped you to stay strong and to look to the future.

Hayati: Yes...(pause and then sadly says) but now my life is going nowhere.... My life has so changed from that moment I told my mother I wanted a divorce. Ahmad and Rahman blame me for not being a good and obedient wife...maybe if I'd stayed in the marriage... my mother would still be alive.

Counsellor: Hayati, if you had been the kind of...“good and obedient wife” that Ahmad and Rahman think of,...what would have been expected of you?

Hayati:If I would have stayed in the marriage,...and been a good wife to Ali...(pause for several seconds)... Ali was a good man....There was nothing wrong with him. But there was just no love in the marriage...and I did not want both of us to suffer because of it.

Counsellor: Hayati, you have said that you did not want both of you to suffer...because of there was no love in the marriage...Is there any connection...between this idea and about being a good wife?

Hayati: I think there is a connection. In religious teaching, it says that if there is no love in one's marriage, and the wife is not willing to

give herself in love, ... then she can think twice about the marriage. It was not a sudden decision for me to want the divorce.

Counsellor: It wasn't sudden?

Hayati: No...not at all. While people can believe many things about this, what I understand is that Islam supports women, in certain circumstances, to ask for a divorce from their husbands...and I know that divorce is more supported when the husband has behaved badly...not responsible...and that's what my brothers keep telling me – but if I had had a child that I'd not love, that would also be a sin which I would bring on our family. But now that I feel so miserable, perhaps I was wrong. Perhaps they (referring to her brothers) are right...perhaps the divorce is my sin that caused my mother to die.

Counsellor: It seems that the pain returns. Would you like us to stay with this story of pain? Or, would it be alright if I ask you about how Islam supporting women?

Hayati: I believe Islam supports me with the decision I've made. Women and men sit and stand equally within Allah's eyes. But why did Allah take my mother at the very time I made this decision? (sigh). Sometimes I wonder if there is something that Allah wants me to see.

Counsellor: Are there any other meanings that you wish to understand when you said that "there is something that Allah wants me to see"?

Hayati: Yes, about the punishment, the test that Allah gives to me right now. My life was so steady before, with not very much problems. I had so much love from my family, I did so well in learning, and I had a wonderful job. Suddenly this happens...the sadness...the failure and this misery, I have never experienced anything like this before. Was it too easy for me?

Counsellor: When you ask these questions – about it perhaps being a test,...that perhaps it was too easy before – what are the effects of these questions for you?

Hayati: I guess that this huge experience...could mean...that I have to prepare when things could be more difficult in future. I have learnt

so much from this pain and along the journey I think a lot of my mother, what she taught me, and what I still need to learn.

Counsellor: What is your mother's voice strong about?

Hayati: I could almost hear her saying to me, "You hold on to what you believe...because I have seen you grow up into a strong woman...I can see your heart...and the care you took with this decision. You meant no harm, Hayati"

Counsellor: How is it for you...to hear your mother says, "You meant no harm, Hayati"?

Hayati: I can feel her loves. Her loves support me to believe that her death was not a punishment...but it is our fate that we all die.

Counsellor: Hayati, what happens for you...when you hold your mother's words close to your heart?

Hayati: I guess... I feel some relief. In some way, the heavy burdens I carried all this while are lifted. I remembered one verse in Quran that says, "You will experience the forgiveness when you're forgiven".

Counsellor: Hayati, do you think...there has been any movement for you...towards experiencing forgiveness?

Hayati: I think we should not lose hope in our lives. I believe my mother wants me to hold to that [hope].

Counsellor: How is it for you, Hayati, ... for your hope for yourself... and your mother's hope for you... to be joined in this way?

The story of Hayati illustrates the shaping of religious and gender discourses on the life of the client and on her well-being. Her story is filled with problem-saturated narratives and language dictated by problems; emotional disturbance, rejection, powerlessness, hopelessness, and fear of the future. In this story, the religious discourse of 'divorce is against the will of God' shaped Ahmad's and Rahman's point of view when they put the blame on Hayati in regard to their mother's sudden death.

Imbued with such discourse, Ahmad and Rahman might expect that as a good Muslim woman Hayati should behave according to Islamic values - being a loyal and respectful wife - which could be a truer mark of her religiosity to Islam, as well as, bringing honour to their family. Instead, Hayati believes a divorce can help her to leave the unhappy marriage and, in her perspective, the decision is supported by Islam. Between Hayati and her brothers, they took different views of Islamic teaching on divorce. The former seems to ask Hayati to find acceptance within the restrictive discourses of Islam and God, while the latter finds divorce as healing. In these different talks, there was no dialogical space between them. It seems that an interpretation through traditional male lens has obscured possibilities for healing because Hayati has become constructed as sinful and is blamed. Her mother's sudden death was used by Ahmad and Rahman to further punish Hayati for what they saw as her sin.

Although in Malaysia, women have been given equal power to men in public and political spheres by means of the constitution, it is still in the realm of intimate relationships where women experience powerlessness (Anwar, 2001; Chandrakirana, 2009). From a feminist theological Christian faith-based, McBride (1996) writes that patriarchal power supports discourses of authority, which might control, force, and dominate people, particularly women. Patriarchal power discourses often are strengthened by religious faith, as it has:

...been used against women to tyrannize and terrorize, to rape and to kill, to alienate and to silence, to obliterate their history and to deny their experience, to limit women's horizons and to thwart their ambition. Women have been, and in most cultures continue to be, excluded from power. (McBride, 1996, p. 182).

Discourses of patriarchy via religion as described in Hayati's narrative, shows how interpretations of religious teachings - women are prohibited from leaving their husbands; and the discourse of "good and obedient wife" - are still used to disempower women, enforcing moral guilt, and submitting them into patriarchal ways of behaving.

In the DVD counselling conversation, between the counsellor and Hayati, the dominant patriarchal power, which is claimed to be supported by divine power, is deconstructed. Deconstructive questions such as “If you had been the kind of “good and obedient wife”, what would have been expected of you?” are brought forward to deconstruct the tradition of patriarchy, and so provide an understanding of the manner by which Hayati is constituted in this social and linguistic practice that requires her to live as a good and obedient wife. This question explores the effects of such discourse on the client, and how she might see these effects on her life. It is also an attempt to trace how power is exercised through the use of such discourse. White and Epston (1990) write that a therapist’s questions act to open space for alternative explanations that had previously been restrained. In this manner, questions act to circulate alternative knowledge, and preferred acts of meaning. When Hayati mentions, “It was not a sudden decision for me to want a divorce”, and “Islam supports women to ask for a divorce from their husbands”, this speaking is an opening to an alternative discursive position that expresses her resistance to being position as a “good and obedient wife”- a position where she could not find happiness. The counsellor then picks up on this expression, and by asking Hayati, “How Islam is supporting women?”, the counsellor offers her the space to participate in a conversation where she could thicken the healing role of an enabling spirituality in Hayati’s alternative story. Andrews and Kotzé (2000) describes that spirituality can thicken a person’s life story when she or he engages in different ways of viewing the divine relationship, and the interpretation of God’s words. Therefore, the problem-saturated story can be transformed when the scriptures are read in a personally meaningful and life-related journey. The explorations of these questions bring forward Hayati’s mother’s voice into the counselling conversation. This voice seems to be the strong audience in Hayati’s life – the other/alternative version of who she might be, versions of herself which she clearly prefers. Her mother’s voice says, “You hold on to what you believe, because I have seen you grow up into a strong woman. I can see your heart and the care you took with this decision”. As these alternative and preferred versions emerge through Hayati and the counsellor’s conversation, they become more

available to Hayati to enter her life into. Through this particular means of questions, the punitive discourse of divorce – women should not leave their husbands - is disrupted and deconstructed. Hayati become increasingly distanced from it when she says, “The heavy burdens I carried all this while are lifted”. The previously taken for granted ideas of divorce within a male patriarchal discourse no longer speaks to her of the truth of who she is as a person. In this particular moment, she has no hesitation in stating that it is time for her to experience forgiveness.

The counselling conversation that Hayati had with her counsellor, about a punitive discourse of divorce, shows an example how a religiously sensitive counselling approach is practised. By entering into dialogue with Hayati about values on the terms of this particular discourse, the counsellor is taking a value-investigating position. Through deconstructive inquiries, the counsellor is carefully unpacking and investigating with Hayati the meaning of divorce and its relation to the idea of a “good and obedient wife”. These value investigations offer Hayati an agentic position to express her preferred understandings and meanings of these values in her own terms, and in the terms of others with whom she is in community, particularly her mother. Hence, it is this approach – a religiously sensitive counselling which uses a value-investigating practice – that I would like to invite students to consider when they meet with religious and spiritual problems in their counselling practice. I suggest that value investigations can help students to understand more adequately the various dimensions of values in counselling relationships.

What I have learned?: A personal note on the final chapter

At the beginning of Chapter One, I included a personal note that articulated my positioning of myself in this study. In that note, I highlighted my personal interest in religious and spiritual values in counselling, and the struggle both my clients (mostly women), and I experienced in negotiating those values. I noticed that my clients, and I struggled with notions of voice, power, domination, resistance and agency in our counselling meetings when religious and spiritual values were interpreted in restrictive domains.

In undertaking this study, these five notions have given certain implications for me as a researcher, and most importantly as a human being. Having engaged with poststructuralist ideas, these notions – voice, power, domination, resistance and agency – have opened up and shaped my particular ways of thinking and understanding, or coming to make sense about how to work with competing discourses of religious and spiritual values, and professional counselling knowledge.

When speaking with participant counsellors in this study and having analysed the research qualitative findings, I was shown by research participants that dominant counselling approaches which emphasise on an objective practice and a value-neutral stance did not position them well to work with religious matters. Similar to my own experience, they also have to find their own ways about how to negotiate with both discourses – religious and spiritual values and professional power alike. I was awed by my participants' contributions of their stories. The stories of their struggle and the efforts they made when meeting with religious and spiritual values in practice, have touched me and are ones that I cannot ignore, either in my professional or personal life.

Referring to research, Reinharz (1992) writes about the “hope that our research will clarify our vision and improve our decision” (p. 195), and this is certainly true for me in this study. This study, through the words of Sue, Mohammad and Abas in particular, has helped me to be more aware that modernist counsellor educations do not pay attention to the effects of discourses in counselling, for counsellors, and for clients. When counsellors are not offered a paradigm that investigates discourses and discursive practices, this study suggests that they may be positioned to re(produce) a counselling and teaching practice that might close down alternative possibilities for action in students' and clients' lives. From Sue's, Mohammad's and Abas' speaking of their counselling practice, I am more alert to the ways clients can become objects of knowledge, or even be subjected to the knowledge that is held by counsellors, or by the institutions working for women. In my own practice, I too

have been captured and positioned by the subtle processes of regulative gaze and praxis that occur in therapy. Being trained in a framework dominated by mainstream counselling ideology with its emphasis on truths about human nature, healing and so on, I was positioned to mainly see clients' problems in a pathologising way. Therefore, as now I have gained different ways of understanding, it is important to me to engage in a practice that does not decenter clients' experiences. I intend to take this value into both my counselling and teaching practices.

The experience of research has been a theoretical shift and learning for me, which Ellsworth (2005) describes as:

...that moment of letting go of a former sense of self in order to re-identify with an emerging and different self that is still in transition. It is that moment in which what will emerge from transition is still in the making and as yet unclear. In [this] learning, I am suspended in the space between losing myself and finding myself caught up with different knowledges and other people. In the moment of learning, I am simultaneously me and not me. (p. 89)

This study has left a smile on my face but also at times eyes filled with tears as I learned to let go of the objective safety position and so to experience research through embodiment. Writing the research, working with words, wondering and investigating their meanings, and finding ways in which I could describe the rich narratives to the best of my abilities, often felt like riding a roller-coaster – the preparation before the free fall, and experiencing the highs and lows with the texts. I went through times when the pace was so fast that I was not even aware if I was still strapped in the research. There were times when I felt more lost, without any answers/words, wondering if the research would make any sense. And even in the process of completing this project, I wonder if I could (not) read more, research more, experience more, and, if it could be possible to add more ideas and experiences. Yet, the journey also had the ability to teach me. It opened up new experiences and possibilities. It challenged my own ideas, narratives, ethics and discourses. The possibility to leap from one thought to another is widely opened, thus, it provided me opportunities to

play with ideas that I found through reading, experience and speaking, in the study, with research participants who are also passionate about counselling practice.

Therefore, I end this study by thanking Sue, Mohammad and Abas, and all participants who have generously shared their (your) stories with me. I have been humbled by what I have experienced. Writing your stories has been a very moving adventure because the interconnectedness, the relationship with you and your stories has given me invaluable experiences and learnings. Being with you in the moments, although the moments sometimes are filled with silence, has connected us with special understandings. The moments “when the self and the other (are) seen as belonging to the same consciousness, all living becomes moral” (Heshusius, 1996, p. 133). I have been gifted by your words. I again thank you.

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Participant's name
Address

Date

Dear Sir/Madam,

Invitation to participate in Doctor of Philosophy research project: Counselling and Religious and Spiritual Values: A Malaysian Study

I am writing to you because I am currently involved in a research project that forms my Doctor of Philosophy degree at Waikato University. I would like to invite you to participate in this project.

My area of interest is the relationship between counselling knowledge and religious and spiritual values. As part of my research I want to speak with counsellors, who personally identify with a Muslim position, about any integrative challenge they may have encountered dealing with this aspect of practice.

I enclose an information sheet and the research questions with this letter, which introduces the project and what will be involved. You do not have to make a decision straight away whether or not you would like to participate in the project. Please take your time to read the sheet.

I will contact you by phone or email within two weeks to ask if you are prepared to consider taking part or not. During the conversation, I will give you the opportunity to ask me any questions about the project.

It is perfectly fine with me if you decide that you would prefer not to take part. Thanks for taking time to consider this and if you want to talk things over further, please give me a call or you can email me. My contact number is (insert no.) and my emails are ybm2@waikato.ac.nz or yusmini@um.edu.my. You also can contact my supervisors, Dr. K. Crocket and Dr. E. Kotzé, or Associate Professor R. Moltzen at the School of Education, University of Waikato if you have any queries regarding this project or about the decision you have made to decline or to take part.

I will leave a consent form with you to complete and return to me in the envelope provided. Please return this form by (insert date).

Best wishes,

Yusmini Md. Yusoff

**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND COUNSELLING
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
NEW ZEALAND**

INFORMATION FOR POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

**Researcher:
Yusmini Md. Yusoff**

**Title:
Counselling and Religious and Spiritual Values: A Malaysian Study**

This doctoral study explores the relationship between counselling knowledge and religious and spiritual values. As part of my research I want to speak with counsellors, who personally identify with a Muslim position, about any integrative challenge they may have encountered dealing with this aspect of practice.

I am particularly interested in conversation about the things you may have found challenging in working with and thinking about professional knowledge from a religious and spiritual perspective. I am also interested in hearing about any practices you may have developed as a result. My goal is not only to understand your stories but to unfold gradually with you the ideas and theory that will emerge within our conversations.

The research aims are:

1. to understand the first-hand experiences Malaysian Muslim counsellors step into when embarking in counselling session involving religion and spirituality.
2. to understand any concerns professional therapy knowledge may have presented counsellors so that they might have been challenged in some way to consider the relationships between this knowledge and religious and spiritual values.
3. to explore counsellors' responses, beliefs and attitudes they may have made or considered towards religion and spirituality in counselling, and to gain their view on ways those values manifested in counselling practices.
4. to bring counsellors' voices to the centre of dialogue surrounding current counselling reform, counsellor education, and research on counsellors' knowledge and their relationship with religious and spiritual values.

5. to provide a clearer view of counsellors' perspectives about this topic and to offer a better understanding of counsellors' challenges and professional development in Malaysia, in order that counsellor education can better prepare them for this kind of matter.

How the research works?

If you are happy with the purpose of this research, and agree to participate, I will send you a 15 to 20 minute role playing counselling session in DVD version. This session will be in English language and on the theme of religion and spirituality. A Malay language transcript will be attached. You will see this text in your own personal time and availability. A time frame for the process of viewing the DVD, reading the transcript and responding to the questionnaire will be approximately **2 months**. These materials will be posted to you once the consent form has been returned to me.

I am inviting you to respond to this text based on your professional counselling knowledge and experiences dealing with this theme. To assist you in giving your response, you will fill in a questionnaire. The purpose of this questionnaire is to understand your experiences of and ideas about working with religious and spiritual values, and your counselling approaches.

This quantitative and qualitative data will be analyzed. If you wish, I will send this initial analysis to you. This initial analysis will also help me to form the basis of semi-structured interviews which will be generated through later face to face conversations in which you are invited to participate. These interviews will involve only a small number, randomly selected from those who offer to participate.

In this optional and supplementary interview meeting, I will use qualitative interviewing as a tool to explore with you the connections between your personal religious and spiritual values and your professional world. I would like to understand your ideas about counselling in this context and I want to learn about your stories, values and beliefs through exploring your professional experiences. The questions I will ask are open-ended and dependent on the flow of conversation between us.

For those who participate in the interviews, there will be interviews on up to two occasions. If you wish, the interviews will be conducted in Malay language. Each interview will probably take about one to one and half hours. The first will revolve around topics on the initial analysis you have viewed and which give rise to questions that focus on your own professional stories and experiences. The follow up interviews will cover other aspects which we both are interested to explore. This may include topics that you have not yet mention in the first interview and would like to express in this follow up interview.

Throughout the process, either in responding to the questionnaire or interview sessions, you can refuse to answer any questions. I would also like to inform you that there is no wrong or right answer. Thus, all answers given are valuable to the research as they represent your stories, ideas and thoughts.

The interview session will be audio-taped and the recordings will be transcribed in Malay if that is the language of the interview. I will send you a copy of your

transcript. You may add your comments or modify any information produced in the transcript and remove details that you do not want others to read, as long as this modification does not change the whole meaning of our research conversations. At this time you will also be asked to confirm your authorization for the use of your material in the thesis, other publications, and professional and academic presentations.

To ensure that there is no information that would identify you; a different name (pseudonym) can be chosen to go in the transcripts. Further information such as institution location and your personal details will be changed.

If there any changes you want to make, you can do so within **one month** after you receive the final transcript. This transcript will then be translated into English language. At this point I will have already removed or changed any identifying material. I also will send these excerpts (both in Malay and English version) to you as you can give me feedback to ensure that I have represented you accurately.

I imagine that not all information gained in interview sessions will be transcribed. Information which is not required for the purpose of this research will not be disclosed.

Other important information:

A conflict of interests can occur in our 'research relationship' because I might have had personal and/or professional contact with you in the past. If you think providing information for this research might disadvantage you in any relationship we have or might have in the future you are welcome to decline to participate. Thus, your non-participation will not jeopardize any ongoing professional or personal relationship we might have, or the achievement of this project.

As the material - the DVD, attached transcript and questionnaire - is owned by the University of Waikato, I ask you to return them back to the University. The address is provided at the end of this sheet.

Throughout the project, all research materials will be kept securely in my locked cabinets at my office. Only I and my supervisors have the access to the materials. The materials will be used for my PhD research, for publication and for other appropriate ethical professional purposes. Tapes will be destroyed once my thesis has been examined and the coded transcripts will be kept for further reference, as the university requires.

If you have any questions, complains or concerns related to this project, you can directly contact me or my supervisors. I am sure that they will support you and talk to me on your behalf if necessary.

What are your rights as research participants?

If you decide to take part in the study, you have the right:

1. to withdraw your full or part of participation up until **three weeks** after receiving the interview transcripts but not after that time. You can do this either by contacting me or by informing my supervisors, Dr. K. Crocket and Dr. E. Kotzé, or Associate Professor R. Moltzen. They will then pass that decision to me. You will not be expected to provide any explanation for your decision.
2. that the information you provide will only be used for the purposes of research.
3. to decline to participate if you think that your involvement in this project will jeopardize you in any way.
4. to refuse to answer any questions both in the questionnaire or interview sessions.
5. to ask any questions that occur to you during your participation in the project.
6. provide information on the understanding that it is completely confidential to me and my supervisors. Therefore, all records are seen and discussed only by me and my supervisors. I will do my best to respect the confidentiality of all information and discussion that I am privilege to receive. You are welcome to contact me about any of the procedures I have in place to ensure confidentiality.
7. to use a pseudonym (another name which is not your real name) to maintain your privacy.
8. not to disclose any particular aspects of your clients' information or accounts in interview conversations that does not fit within ethical guidelines..
9. to have the opportunity to make changes to the transcript throughout the process. If there any changes you want to make, you can do so within **one month** after you receive the final transcript.
10. to receive a copy on the discussion material from the project when it is concluded. You will be welcome to give me feedback to ensure that I have represented you accordingly and accurately.
11. to have access to all research materials we produce together.

More important information

After the thesis has been marked, all tapes recording will be destroyed. The coded transcription will be archived and the completed thesis will be made available for you to read. A copy of the thesis will be kept in the library at Waikato University and in the library at University Malaya. The results in the thesis also may be published or used in a conference presentation.

If you find yourself interested in contributing in my research and like to know more please feel free to contact me for more details. I will gladly give the information you needed and answer any questions you have.

Should you wish to contact my supervisors, or Associate Professor R. Moltzen (rim@waikato.ac.nz), for this research project, their contact are:

Dr. K. Crocket and Dr. E. Kotzé
Department of Human Development and Counselling
University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand
kcrocket@waikato.ac.nz
elmariek@waikato.ac.nz

Phone 0800 Waikato (07 838 4176)

My contact details are:

Yusmini Md. Yusoff
9b, Gadsby Place
Hillcrest, Hamilton 2001
New Zealand, or

No. 149, Jalan 8/3 Seksyen 8
43650 Bandar Baru Bangi
Selangor, Malaysia

Phone numbers: (will be inserted)

Email: ybm2@waikato.ac.nz or yusmini@um.edu.my

Please return the materials provided to:

Linda Joe
Administrative Secretary
Department of Human Development and Counselling
University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

CONSENT FORM

(Please post this form in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope.)

I have read and understand the letter of information and had an opportunity to ask Yusmini questions about this project. All the details have been explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions as they occur to me at any time.

I agree to view and read the counselling session text. In addition, I agree to respond to the questionnaire attached with this text. I also understand that those texts (DVD, role playing transcript and a filled questionnaire) have to be returned to Waikato University as they have the ownership to it.

I understand that I will receive a copy of compiled data from the questionnaire, if requested.

I understand that I will not use the data in any public way until after the examination of Yusmini's doctoral thesis.

I understand that my name and other identifying material such as institution location and my personal information will not be used at any time where this research is discussed and will be kept private.

I understand that I may refuse to answer any particular question in the questionnaire.

I understand that not all of the material will be used in the thesis.

I understand that this data will be accessible to Yusmini's supervisor in terms of academic purposes.

I also understand that the quotations and results in the thesis may be published or used in a final report and in presentations that may be made public.

Therefore, **I agree/do not agree** to participate in this research project.

(Please cross out the word(s) that do not apply)

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Researcher: YUSMINI MD. YUSOFF

If any, please specify additions to this consent below and signed. Thank you.

Please make a copy of this consent form for you to keep.

CONSENT FORM
(Taking up invitation to participate in interview sessions)

(Please put this form in the enclosed addressed **white** envelope and sealed, and post it with the DVD, transcript of the role-play and questionnaire in the stamped addressed **brown** envelope.)

I agree to participate in two research interviews.

I understand that I may refuse to answer any particular question during the interview and I have the right not to disclose any information of my clients' account that does not fit within ethical guidelines.

I understand that my name and other identifying material such as institution location and my personal information will not be used at any time where this research is discussed and will be kept private.

I understand that the interviews will be audio taped and then transcribed. I also understand that the information I provide will be used only for the purposes of research and I can add or delete any information after receiving the transcribed interview before sending back to Yusmini to use in her report. I will not make modifications to the transcripts which will make it different from the original tape.

I understand that the interview material will be accessible to Yusmini's supervisor in terms of academic purposes and to hold her accountable to academic standards and professional ethics.

I understand that I can access to this material at any time and all tapes recording will be destroyed after the thesis has been marked. The coded transcripts will be kept.

I understand that I will be sent a copy of transcript, and I will not use them in any public way until after the examination of Yusmini's doctoral thesis.

I understand that I am free to withdraw partly or completely from the project up until **3 weeks** after receiving the interview transcripts but not after the preparation of the final report. I know that I do not need to state reasons for this decision and that I can convey the decision directly to Yusmini or through Dr. K. Crocket and Dr. E. Kotzé at the School of Education, University of Waikato.

I also understand that the quotations and results in the thesis may be published or used in a final report and in presentations that may be made public.

Therefore, **I agree/do not agree** to participate in these interview sessions.
(Please cross out the word(s) that do not apply)

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Researcher: YUSMINI MD. YUSOFF

If any, please specify additions to this consent below and signed. Thank you.

Please make a copy of this consent form for you to keep.

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Sila lengkapkan BAHAGIAN A sebelum menonton DVD yang disertakan.
Please complete SECTION A before viewing the DVD.

BAHAGIAN A:
SECTION A:

Bagi setiap kenyataan berikut, sila **tanda (x)** pada kotak yang disediakan untuk mewakili pandangan terbaik anda:

*For each of the following statements, please **tick(x)** the box which best describes your opinion:*

(Sila nyatakan pandangan anda dengan menanda pada kotak yang bersesuaian menggunakan skala di bawah.)

(Please rate your agreement or disagreement by ticking the appropriate box using the following scale.)

1 = Sangat setuju
 2 = Setuju
 3 = Neutral
 4 = Tidak setuju
 5 = Sangat tidak setuju

1 = Strongly agree
 2 = Agree
 3 = Neutral
 4 = Disagree
 5 = Strongly disagree

Projek ini mengkaji perkaitan di antara hubungan amalan kaunseling dengan nilai-nilai agama dan spiritualiti. Sila berikan komen bersesuaian dengan situasi anda berdasarkan kenyataan-kenyataan berikut:

This project investigates the possible relationships between counselling and religious and spiritual values. Please comment on your position in respect of the following items:

Saya percaya bahawa:

I believe that:

1. Kaunselor seharusnya mengambil pendirian yang berkecuali dalam perbualan kaunseling.

Counsellors should take a neutral position in counselling conversations.

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
1	2	3	4	5

2. Amalan berkecuali adalah lebih penting daripada amalan belas kasihan dalam kaunseling.
The practice of neutrality is more important than the practice of compassion in counselling.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

1 2 3 4 5

3. Kaunselor seharusnya mampu berhadapan dengan nilai-nilai klien yang berbeza dengan nilai-nilai kaunselor sendiri.
Counsellors should be able to work with clients whose values are different from their own.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

1 2 3 4 5

4. Apabila nilai-nilai klien berbeza daripada nilai-nilai kaunselor, kaunselor tersebut seharusnya merujuk klien kepada kaunselor lain yang mempunyai nilai yang sama dengan klien berkenaan.
When a client's values are different from a counsellor's values, the counsellor should refer the client to a counsellor with similar values.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

1 2 3 4 5

5. Adalah wajar jika kaunselor memaklumkan kepada klien tentang nilai-nilai yang dipegang olehnya.
It is appropriate for a counsellor to inform a client of their values.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

1 2 3 4 5

6. Kaunselor seharusnya menggabungkan nilai-nilai klien dalam model terapeutik kaunseling sebagai usaha untuk meningkatkan hasil kaunseling yang positif.
Counsellors should incorporate client values in therapeutic models in order to enhance the positive counselling outcomes.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

1 2 3 4 5

7. Nilai-nilai yang dipegang oleh kaunselor disampaikan kepada klien melalui kefahaman mereka tentang konsep kesihatan mental dan pendekatan-pendekatan kaunseling.

Counsellors values are communicated to client through their concepts of mental health and counselling approaches.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

8. Apabila klien hendak mengikut suruhan agama, kaunselor seharusnya berada dalam kedudukan berkecuali.

When a client wants to follow religious prescriptions, a counsellor should stay neutral.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

9. Kaunselor seharusnya menyokong klien untuk berpegang kepada suruhan dan garis panduan agama.

Counsellors should support a client to uphold religious prescriptions and guidelines.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

10. Nilai-nilai spiritual dan agama menyediakan kerangka rujuk moral dalam kaunseling.

Spiritual and religious values provide a moral frame of reference in counselling.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

11. Nilai-nilai spiritual dan agama penting sebagai gaya hidup sihat.

Spiritual and religious values are important for a healthy life style.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

Berdasarkan pengalaman saya:
Within my own experience:

12. Saya berhadapan dengan idea-idea yang bertentangan di antara nilai-nilai agama dan spiritual dengan pengetahuan kaunseling dalam praktik.
I encounter competing ideas between religious and spiritual values and counselling in practice.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

13. Saya mengalami kesukaran untuk membantu klien apabila berhadapan dengan nilai-nilai yang bertentangan ini.
I experience difficulties in helping client with competing values.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

14. Pengetahuan kaunseling membantu saya untuk memahami nilai-nilai agama dan spiritual serta masalah-masalah yang berkaitan dengannya.
Counselling knowledge helps me to understand religious and spiritual values and problems.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

15. Nilai-nilai agama dan spiritual membantu saya memahami masalah-masalah yang dibawa oleh klien ke dalam sesi kaunseling.
Religious and spiritual values help me understand the problems people bring to counselling.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

16. Saya merasa tidak selesa dengan matlamat terapuetik yang membolehkan klien membuat keputusan sendiri yang mungkin janggal dengan kehendak Islam.
I experience concern that the therapeutic aim of developing personal choice may be at odds with the Islamic culture.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

17. Sebahagian daripada pendekatan agama Islam membawa pendekatan-pendekatan yang tidak disokong oleh ilmu-ilmu kaunseling.
Some areas of the Islamic faculty advocate approaches that are not supported by counselling knowledge.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

18. Nilai-nilai agama dan spiritual yang saya pegang mempengaruhi dan menyumbang kepada aktiviti professional seharian saya.
My own religious and spiritual values influence and contribute to my professional life.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

19. Saya merasa tidak selesa dengan amalan berkecuali dalam kaunseling yang tidak mengambilkira nilai-nilai agama dan spiritual.
I experience discomfort about neutral counselling practices that do not acknowledge religious and spiritual values.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

20. Saya mengalami masalah untuk mengelak daripada mempengaruhi klien dengan nilai-nilai agama dan spiritual.
I experience difficulties to avoid influencing client with religious and spiritual values.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

BAHAGIAN B:
SECTION B:

Sekarang sila tonton DVD sebelum memberi maklumbalas kepada BAHAGIAN B. Berikan pendapat anda berdasarkan DVD yang telah ditonton atau transkrip dialog yang telah dibaca.

Please now view the DVD before responding to SECTION B. Please complete your opinion based on the DVD or the provided transcript you just viewed or read.

Bagi setiap kenyataan berikut, sila **tanda(x)** pada kotak bersesuaian yang mewakili pendapat terbaik anda:

For each of the following statements, please **tick(x)** the box which best describes your opinion:

(Sila nyatakan pandangan anda dengan menanda pada kotak yang bersesuaian menggunakan skala di bawah.)

(Please rate your agreement or disagreement by ticking the appropriate box using the following scale.)

- 1 = Sangat setuju
- 2 = Setuju
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Tidak setuju
- 5 = Sangat tidak setuju

- 1 = Strongly agree
- 2 = Agree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Disagree
- 5 = Strongly disagree

Saya berpendapat bahawa:
I think that:

1. Kaunselor tersebut telah memberi respon yang berkesan kepada situasi klien.
The counsellor responded to the client's situation effectively.

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

Sila nyatakan komen anda berkaitan pilihan jawapan ini:
Please comment on the reasons for this choice:

2. Kaunselor tersebut kelihatan mampu untuk memahami dan menghargai nilai-nilai klien atau pendapat yang telah disampaikan.
The counsellor seemed able to understand and appreciate the client's values or point of view.

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

Sila nyatakan komen anda berkaitan pilihan jawapan ini:
Please comment on the reasons for this choice:

3. Pendekatan yang diambil oleh kaunselor tersebut berbeza dengan pendekatan yang biasa diamalkan oleh saya.
The approach the counselor takes is different to my practice.

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

Sila nyatakan komen anda berkaitan pilihan jawapan ini:
Please comment on the reasons for this choice:

4. Melihat kepada perbualan kaunseling ini telah membantu saya memikirkan bagaimana cara untuk berhadapan dengan nilai-nilai agama dan spiritual klien.
Watching the DVD conversation has helped me thinking about how I work with client's religious and spiritual values.

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

Sila nyatakan komen anda berkaitan pilihan jawapan ini:
Please comment on the reasons for this choice:

5. Adakah kerunsingan klien dalam main peranan ini lebih kurang sama dengan masalah yang dibawa oleh klien kepada anda ketika menjalankan sesi kaunseling?
Was the client's concern in this role play similar to problems clients have brought to you in your counselling practice?

(Sila tanda pada kotak yang berkaitan.)
(Please tick one box.)

Tidak / No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sila ke soalan 7 / Go to question 7
Ya / Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Sila nyatakan sebarang persamaan berkaitan kerunsingan atau masalah yang dibawa oleh klien dalam sesi kaunseling anda:

Please list any similar client concerns or difficulties you have encountered in your practice:

6. Adakah terdapat bahagian-bahagian tertentu dalam main peranan ini yang menarik perhatian anda?

Are there any specific parts of the role play you are particularly interested in?

(Sila tanda pada kotak yang berkaitan.)

(Please tick one box.)

Tidak
/ No

Sila ke soalan 8 /
Go to question 8

Ya /
Yes

Sila berikan nombor dialog di dalam transkrip dan nyatakan apakah yang menarik minat anda berkaitan bahagian ini?

Please give the line number(s) in transcript and say what interests you:

7. Adakah terdapat aspek tertentu dalam praktik yang anda ingin pertimbangkan selepas menonton main peranan ini bagi membantu anda berhadapan dengan nilai-nilai klien dalam kaunseling?

Are there any specific aspects of practice that you want to consider further after watching the role playing in order to work with client values in counselling?

(Sila tanda pada kotak yang berkaitan.)
(Please tick one box.)

Tidak / No Sila ke soalan 9 / Go to question 9

Ya / Yes

Sila nyatakan:
Please describe:

8. Adakah terdapat komen lain yang anda ingin nyatakan berkaitan DVD tersebut?
Is there any other comment you would like to make about the DVD?

(Sila tanda pada kotak berkaitan.)
(Please tick one box.)

Tidak / No Sila ke soalan 10 / Go to question 10

Ya / Yes

Sila nyatakan:
Please describe:

10. Setelah anda menonton DVD tersebut, adakah terdapat sebarang respon di dalam **BAHAGIAN A** yang anda ingin ubah?

*Now that you have viewed the DVD, are there any responses in **SECTION A** that you want to change?*

Tidak

Ya

Sila nyatakan komen anda berkaitan pilihan jawapan ini:

Please describe on the reasons for this choice:

BAHAGIAN C: Maklumat-maklumat demografik
SECTION C: Demographic Details

Sila **tanda(x)** pada kotak berkaitan yang mewakili pendapat anda:

*Please **tick(x)** one box which represents you:*

1. Jantina anda?
What is your gender?

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | a. Perempuan/ <i>Female</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | b. Lelaki/ <i>Male</i> |

2. Apakah peringkat umur anda?
What is your age-range?

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | a. Kurang dari 30 tahun / <i>Less than 30 years old</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | b. 30-35 tahun / <i>30-35 years old</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | c. 35-40 tahun / <i>35-40 years old</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | d. 40-50 tahun / <i>40-50 years old</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | e. Lebih dari 50 tahun / <i>More than 50 years old</i> |

3. Sudah berapa lama anda menjadi pengamal kaunseling?
How long have you been a counselling practitioner?

- | | | |
|--------------------------|----|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | a. | Kurang dari 2 tahun / <i>Less than 2 years</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | b. | 2 hingga 5 tahun / <i>2 to 5 years</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | c. | 5 hingga 10 tahun / <i>5 to 10 years</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | d. | 10 hingga 15 tahun / <i>10 to 15 years</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | e. | Lebih dari 15 tahun / <i>More than 15 years</i> |

4. Apakah status anda sebagai seorang kaunselor?
What is your status as a counsellor?

- | | | |
|--------------------------|----|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | a. | Berlesen / <i>Licensed</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | b. | Berdaftar / <i>Registered</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | c. | Tidak berdaftar / <i>Non-registered</i> |

5. Di antara kenyataan berikut yang manakah kerangka kerja kaunseling yang lebih anda guna sebagai seorang kaunselor?

Which of the following describe your preferred theoretical framework as a counsellor?

(Sila tanda sebanyak mana yang mungkin.)
(Tick as many as is applicable.)

- | | | |
|--------------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | a. | Client-centered |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | b. | Cognitive behavioral therapy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | c. | Eclectic or integrated approaches |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | d. | Solution focused therapies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | e. | Systemic therapies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | f. | Marriage guidance |

Lain-lain/Sila nyatakan:
Other/Please specify:

Sumbangan anda dalam memberi maklumbalas terhadap soal selidik ini amat dihargai.

Sila kembalikan soal selidik ini dengan menggunakan sampul berselem yang disertakan. Jika sampul tersebut hilang, sila hantar soal selidik kepada:

Your contribution to this questionnaire is very greatly appreciated.

Please return your questionnaire in reply paid envelope provided.

If the envelope has been mislaid, please forward to:

Department of Human Development and Counselling
University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

Satu salinan laporan soal selidik akan dihantar kepada responden jika diminta.
A copy of the report compiled from this questionnaire will be sent to participants upon request.

RESEARCH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (INDICATIVE)

Themes	Questions
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ What interest you about this project? ✓ Is there anything else that you want to say about counselling knowledge and religious and spiritual values that you have been thinking about during our conversation? About how working with these values? ✓ Are there any other things we have not discussed that you feel play a significant part in your work? ✓ What changes are you hoping to produce in your practice as a result of taking part in this project? ✓ How come you agree to participate in this research project? ✓ What are your expectations from this project?
Counsellors' view about the relationship between spirituality and religion, and professional counselling.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ What kind of questions do you have in your practice particularly in working with religious and spiritual values ✓ Have you ever experienced or heard people speak about any conflict or tension between Islamic faith and counselling knowledge? If so, what has this been? ✓ What do you consider may produce any concerns that may exist in working with these values? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Particular ideas about Islamic faith • Counselling philosophy • Specific therapeutic practices • Other ✓ What the most challenging for you in working with religious and spiritual values? ✓ How have you become aware of these challenges? ✓ I'm interested in hearing more of your thoughts about the relationship between being the secular counsellor and being from Muslim background?
Counsellors' view about how they position themselves in this relationship between spirituality and religion and their professional counselling practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ What your training teach you to do when encounter with religious and spiritual values? ✓ Do you have any other ideas besides the knowledge gained in training? ✓ In practice, how do you position yourself in this relationship? ✓ What do you have to offer client when you encounter this idea in practice? ✓ How do you think your training has influenced your practice/understanding relating to religious and spiritual values? ✓ How much do you think the training influences your thinking about religious and spiritual values? ✓ What kind of counselling practices would you find helpful in working with religious and spiritual values? ✓ Between those ideas, what do you think is being most influential in terms of thinking the matter of religious and

	<p>spiritual values?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ What do you see as the most important ideas in your training when meeting with these values in practice? ✓ Does that fit for you? ✓ Does this idea resonate with you? Is its presence helpful? ✓ What shapes you the most? ✓ What enables and/or constrains you in taking that idea or position? ✓ I wonder how you came to view that idea was right/wrong? ✓ What kind of teaching that your training tell you to do when meeting with these values? ✓ What kind of teaching that your training ask you to teach client about these values?
<p>Counsellors' view about how they are positioned when spiritual knowledge and values and counselling knowledge and values compete.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ How are you positioned when spiritual knowledge and values and counselling knowledge and values compete? ✓ In meeting with clients, how do you respond when you encounter competing values and knowledge between religion and counselling? ✓ What have you noticed about any particular approaches to Islam that find counselling knowledge problematic? ✓ What effects have these conflicts had on your relationship with your client, your professional knowledge and/or with Islam? ✓ Have you noticed any particular areas about Islam that close down counselling ability to produce more productive ways of living? ✓ What specific aspects of counselling practices or philosophy do you think potentially be problematic for someone within an Islamic position? ✓ Are you aware of any, or have you developed any therapeutic practices that might address any integrative challenges you may have recognised? If so, what are these?
<p>Meaning counsellors make when clients centre religious and spiritual values in understanding and addressing problems.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Could you give an example of your practice or a dilemma/difficulty that you had experienced relating to these values? ✓ Looking back on your relationship with your client, can you remember how the intersection happens? ✓ Could you think of a time when the intersection between these values and counselling knowledge did dominate/influence/take place in your practice? How do you work with it? ✓ Could you describe what was happening when this intersection started to become central? ✓ Can you tell me when you first started to notice this issue? Has it changed over time? Have you noticed what might be happening at those times? ✓ I am wondering how were you able to resist/work with the intersection when you are in session? ✓ How this affected different aspects of your practice? ✓ What is you client's reaction when you took certain steps to work with it?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ What influences has this had on the way that you see your practice? ✓ What effects does it have on your relationship with your client? ✓ What do you think about this?
Counsellors' view of what clients would say about how they want counsellors to respond to clients' expression of spiritual and religious values.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ What do you think clients would say about how they want counsellors to respond to their expression of spiritual and religious values? ✓ Why is it important to client and /or you for religious and spiritual values to be discussed in session? ✓ What happens to you when you hear that, being said? ✓ How does your religious and spiritual values help contribute to your counselling work?
Meaning counsellors make from the counselling session in order to reflect on their practice.	<p>What does this knowledge say about some of your practices, values and beliefs that are important for you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ How did you come to this? ✓ Is it a response you want to develop further? ✓ Have you any ideas about what it might lead you to do? ✓ What are your aims when you take this line of action? What is important for you? ✓ What is it that you hold precious and values about your practice in working with these values? ✓ What suggestions do you have for changes to be made in the training? ✓ How do they need to change to suit your needs? ✓ How do you think those changes would contribute to realising the hopes that you had in working with spiritual and religious values? ✓ Could you naming this of what you have said? And how this is important to your practice and for you as a Muslim counsellor? ✓ If there anything else that you want to talk about counselling training in working with religious and spiritual values?

The DVD Role-Play Counselling Transcript

Client: Hayati
 Counsellor: Rohani
 Ex-husband: Ali
 Brothers: Ahmad and Rahman

The Story:

Hayati is 33 years old and a divorcee with no children. She works as secondary religious teacher and from a 'Syed' family.

Hayati's mother died two years earlier – when Hayati told her mother that she was going to ask for a divorce from her husband, Ali. Ali and Hayati had an arranged marriage, which was not what Hayati had wanted.

Ali too is a Syed. Hayati's brothers, Ahmad and Rahman, blamed her for her mother's sudden death when she heard from Hayati about the divorce that would bring shame on her family. They told Hayati that she is a disloyal and sinful daughter.

Hayati comes to counselling as she continues to be haunted by responsibility for her mother's sudden death. She finds herself lethargic, angry, irritable, crying, and unable to make decisions. She questions whether the misery she is experiencing is punishment from Allah for what she had done to her mother.

We have been meeting for some weeks....

Counsellor: Hayati, we have been talking...about the struggles you have been experiencing... and how much your mother's love helped you to stay strong and to look to the future.

Hayati: Yes..yes, but now my life is going nowhere.... My life has so changed from that moment I told my mother I wanted a divorce. Ahmad and Rahman blame me for not being a good and obedient wife...maybe if I'd stayed in the marriage... my mother would still be alive.

Counsellor: If you had been the kind of...“good and obedient wife” that Ahmad and Rahman think of,...what would have been expected of you?

Hayati: I would have stayed in the marriage,...and been a good wife to Ali. You know...he..he is a good man....There is nothing wrong with him. But there was just no love in the marriage...and I did not want Ali to suffer because of it.

Counsellor: Hayati,...you are speaking about ideas about being a good wife,...and you have said that you did not want Ali to suffer...because of there being no love in the marriage...Is there any connection...between those two ideas?

Hayati: You know...you know...that the religious teaching... is that if there is no love in the marriage, and a woman is not willing to give herself in love,... then she would think twice about the marriage... It was not a sudden decision...to want the divorce.

Counsellor:...It wasn't sudden?

Hayati: No..no..no..no, while people believe many things about this, what I understand is that Islam supports women, in certain circumstances, to ask for a divorce from their husbands...and I know that divorce is more supported when the husband has behaved badly...not responsible...and that's what my brothers keep telling me – but if I had had a child that I did not love, that would also be a sin...that I would bring on our family. But now that I feel so miserable,...maybe I was wrong. Maybe my brothers are right...maybe they are right about the divorce... and the divorce is the sin that caused my mother to die.

Counsellor: We talked about this pain last time, Hayati. And it seems to return...Would you like us to stay with this story of pain, or do you feel ready to/would it be alright if I were to ask you a little more about...what you have just said about Islam supporting women to...

Hayati: I know...I know... Islam supports me with this decision. I even know I made the right decision. But at the same time, why did Allah take my mother at the very time I made the right decision?...*(sigh)*...Is there something that I'm not seeing that Allah wanted to open my eyes to?

Counsellor: You said you made a right decision, and at the same time... there is maybe some other meaning that you want to understand?

Hayati: Sometime...somehow..., I ask, is this a punishment,...or a test, or something to add some colour in my life? My life was so steady before, with no tribulations. I had so much love from my family, I did so well in learning,...and I had a career – and then...now this happens to me. This sadness...failure and this misery, I have never experienced anything like this before. Is this the time for me to experience what other people experience?...Was it too easy for me before?

Counsellor: When you ask these questions – about it perhaps being a test,...that perhaps it was too easy before – what are the effects of these questions for you?

Hayati: Well...sometimes it is ok, but sometimes it is not...If Allah wants me to do something with my life...or to revisit what I have done before,...what...what if it is too hard for me?...*(sigh)*...I don't know...

Counsellor: Well...that's one effect of the questions; they ask if it might get too hard for you. What other effects do these questions have?

Hayati: (pause)...mmmm...well, I guess that this huge experience...that could mean...that I could be prepared when things are difficult in the future. Although it is hard...I have already learned so much from what I have been through.... And I do think of my mother,...and what she taught me, and then... what I still need to learn.

Counsellor: The questions are to do with learning. You have already learned,...and the learning is for the future...And the learning connects you with your mother...Is there anything else that the questions...connect you with?

Hayati: Yes...yes...It is working through these difficult questions... I come to know that Islamic learning is supporting me....and in someway...this learning is like a ladder...that I could climb up to reach God...to get his mercy and forgiveness. This learning is the ladder...I want to find the light, the light to my life...And the voice of my mother is...is...is just as strong.

Counsellor: What is your mother's voice strong about?

Hayati: I could almost hear her...imagine she says to me...“You hold on to what you believe...because I have seen you grow up into a strong woman...I can see your heart... and the care you took with this decision...You meant no harm, Hayati”

Counsellor: How is it for you...to hear your mother say...you meant no harm, Hayati?

Hayati: (pause....) I hear it...I hear it...aaah...But Rahman and Ahmad... they don't see it that way – they say...they say...I am to blame for my mother's death.

Counsellor: And when this happens,... what does your mother's strong voice...speak of?

Hayati: I don't know...I don't know...I keep hearing what my brothers say. There is so much confusion...

Counsellor: (pause)...Would it be worthwhile for us to spend some time thinking about your mother... and her love for you... and her hopes for your life?

Hayati: I don't know...I don't know...In Islamic teaching there are punishments.

Counsellor: Yes...yes...there are punishments...And at the same time...what would be your mother's teaching about this?

Hayati: She would say...that her death is not a punishment...but it is our fate that we all die.

Counsellor: She would say that her death is not a punishment... but it is our fate that we all die.

Hayati: Yes, that is what she would say.

Counsellor: Hayati, what happens for you...when you hold your mother's words close to your heart?

Hayati: I guess... I feel some relief. Yes, I believe that we all will die...But why...why did she die when I phoned her to give her this news? Why did she not die in some other way?

Counsellor: Has this question...been sitting with you for a long time?

Hayati: Oooh...yes – it has been eating me all the time.

Counsellor: On one hand you have your mother's voice...that says that her death is not a punishment... and it is our fate that we all die,... and now on the other hand this question... of why she died at the time of your phone call...has been eating you all the time?

Hayati: Yes...yes... it's like the verses say...you know...that we will be forgiven,...and the other verses that say that you are not forgiven...until you experience the forgiveness.

Counsellor: Hayati, do you think...there has been any movement for you...towards experiencing forgiveness?

Hayati: I would do anything to experience forgiveness. That's why I have been so busy teaching other people... and helping people in the Centre.

Counsellor: In teaching people,... and helping people in the Centre,...and hearing your mother's voice,...have these things you have been doing...been giving you any small hopes towards experiencing forgiveness?

Hayati: Yes, yes, that is my hope. I...I haven't given up hope yet.

Counsellor: Hope for?

Hayati: Forgiveness...I do...I do hope to experience forgiveness...and I believe my mother wants that.

Counsellor: How is it for you, Hayati,... for your hope for yourself... and your mother's hope for you... to be joined in this way?

END