

Growth in Counselling: Counsellor Perspectives and Implications for Practice

Julian Galea

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Abstract

Within counselling, the concept of growth is leveraged metaphorically through both images and words, and its prominence and prevalence vary over time and across different professional and cultural contexts. This study aimed to explore how counsellors in Malta understand the concept of growth, what factors they feel have shaped this understanding, and the role that this understanding plays in their work to support clients in achieving increased wellbeing. This qualitative study conducted semi-structured interviews with five warranted counsellors in Malta. The interviews made use of visual and linguistic stimuli to support and enhance the typical interlocution process of the interviews. Collected data were subjected to Thematic Network Analysis (TNA) and Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). Findings indicate that for these counsellors, effecting a process of personal growth involves navigating both intrapsychic and external factors, involves engaging in a cycle of discovery whereby sense-making resources are mobilised and personal limitations are encountered and negotiated, and involves active self-direction through adverse circumstances to shape oneself through the mobilisation of personal agency. Participants identified the important relationship between their personal experiences of growth as individuals, through their own counselling and during their professional work, and the potential and possible outcomes for their clients. Participants acknowledged that their individual experience of growth could support their work with clients by providing a reference point through which to make sense of their clients' experiences but could also pose a potential danger to their work with clients by obscuring the client's experience and journey with their own.

Keywords: counselling, growth, wellbeing, culture, professional development, thematic network analysis

To my wife and children. Thank you for all your love, patience, and support.

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List of Abbreviations

BACP	British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
BT	Basic Theme
CCP	Council for the Counselling Profession
CCPA	Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association
COVID-19	The 2019 Coronavirus Disease Pandemic
EMDR	Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing Therapy
GoM	Government of Malta
GT/GTs	Global Theme/Global Themes
IAC	International Association for Counselling
IACP	Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
LGBTIQ+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or sometimes questioning), intersex, asexual, and others
MACP	Malta Association for the Counselling Profession
MCouns.	Master in Counselling
NSO	National Statistics Office
OT	Organising Theme
TCouns.	Master in Transcultural Counselling
TN	Thematic Network
TNA	Thematic Network Analysis
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
UM	University of Malta
USB	Universal Serial Bus

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

The world of counselling training and practice heavily relies on the concept of growth. Ideas such as growth groups (McMahon & Rodillas, 2020), post-traumatic growth (McLeod, 2019), personal growth (Aafjes-van Doorn et al., 2020), growth mindset (Chen & Liu, 2023), and the growth of a therapeutic alliance (Behn & Errázuriz, 2018) all seem to tap into a framework of analogical reference first prompted by Rogers's (1995) biological metaphor of "potatoes in the basement" (p. 118), as organisms intrinsically driven to strive towards an invisible and unknown goal. Understanding these concepts and their implications for practice is crucial for effective counselling.

Counsellors attempt to assist clients in moving from a state of distress to one of wellbeing, a fundamental underpinning of the profession (McLeod, 2019). Within the humanistic or person-centred discourse, this movement from distress to wellbeing is often referred to as growth (Gillon, 2007; Mearns, 2014; Rogers, 1957).

Obviously, counselling neither makes people taller nor accelerates their physical maturation processes, so such references to growth are entirely metaphorical and analogical constructions associated with personality or behavioural change. Yet, metaphorical constructions do not always translate effectively across cultural boundaries. What happens if counsellors raised and trained within a specific personal and cultural context hold an understanding of growth different from that of colleagues, wider society or even clients sitting across them? (Arthur, 2019)

Preliminary examination of literature through three online academic search engines - the University of Malta's (UM) HyDi, JSTOR and ResearchGate, using the individual and paired combination keywords growth, therapeutic growth, post-traumatic growth, personal growth, counselling, therapy, psychotherapy, evidenced a dearth in the literature which this research aims to address.

Motivation and Research Goals

I originally wanted to explore counsellors' understandings of a wide range of abstract concepts, including growth, grief, love, hate, joy, religion, spirituality, and success. However, I was guided and accompanied by my supervisor to focus my area of study. I focused on the concept of growth as I noticed it was a prominent concept in early discourses around counselling and psychotherapy (Maslow, 1968; 1970; Rogers, 1957; 1967; 1995). Yet, an examination of results in online academic search engines seemed to indicate a falling out of favour of the word growth in recent counselling literature, while it continues to both feature strongly in informal discourse and popular self-help literature and being leveraged metaphorically in promotional and informative material concerned with counselling (Bloom Clinic, 2020; Blossom Foundation, 2015.; Malta Association for the Counselling Profession [MACP], n.d.).

Personal experience during my formative counselling education, namely the UM's Master in Counselling (MCouns.), has prompted me to draw an essential relationship between a sense of personal growth and positive outcomes of therapy, both as a counselling trainee delivering the service and as a client attending it. By facilitating an exploration of local counsellors' personal cultural identity related to the concept of personal growth in therapy and their understanding of its relationship to wellbeing and its formative origins, I hope to elicit themes that may facilitate initiatives from professionals and institutions that foster an increase in professional reflexivity, an improved sense of personal cultural identity and improved service provision among counsellors in Malta. In this way, I hope to contribute to the futureproofing of the counselling profession and the local body of literature on counselling considering shifting cultural trends and social demographics (Abela, 1997; Cutajar & Cassar, 2009; Tonna, 1993:2001).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of my research project is guided by the work of Ravitch and Riggan (2017). By acknowledging my personal interests and goals, as well as the theorists, practitioners, and publications that have inspired and guided the development of this research

project, I hope to present an outline and trajectory for this work. By outlining the epistemological lens through which the research question is approached clearly, I aim to present clear arguments for the research methodology and effectively critique any potential and actual shortcomings.

Positioning - Personal Interests and Goals

For as long as I can remember, I have been interested in ideas surrounding sense-making and the construction of meaning. I have often found myself on a cultural periphery, struggling to make sense of shared cultural experiences. At the same time, the people around me seem to have some unspoken consensus on how to engage with the world. This may have been part of what drove me towards counselling, and I later found out it is a common trait of people who enter this field (McLeod, 2019).

The implicit learned behaviour of observing some uncoded set of rules serves well when functioning within a relatively homogeneous group but weakens when interacting across cultures (Sue et al., 2022). The argument is more frequently being made that all counselling is cross-cultural (Collins & Arthur, 2010a, 2010b; Pederson et al., 2016), a position I am becoming increasingly aligned with as society becomes more multicultural and pluralistic and as collective cultural identities must increasingly negotiate with the increasing presence and importance of personal cultural identities (Collins & Arthur, 2010a). To this end, I am interested in exploring personal and cultural assumptions used to make sense of the world, and what happens when those assumptions are challenged, distorted, questioned, or examined.

Epistemology

When developing the conceptual framework upon which I intended to base my research, it quickly became apparent that two parallel understandings needed to be sufficiently concretised to effectively explore such a somewhat ethereal concept: the epistemological basis through which I believed counsellors' understanding of the concept of client growth in therapy was developed. The process/es through which I believed this understanding and an indication of its various potential origins would be most effectively elicited from them. I wanted to understand how

practising counsellors in Malta have constructed their understanding of the concept of growth as it relates to the counselling process and the potential role it may play in the conferring of wellbeing. To this end, I needed an epistemological basis that would incorporate participants' historical and remembered reality, as well as facilitate the sense- and meaning-making of their contemporary personal and professional behaviour. (McLeod, 2022)

Social Constructivism holds that “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p.24). Meanings they develop are subjective, broad, multi-faceted, and often complex, valuing participants' views to drive the research goals forward. This is an ideal position from which to explore and attempt to understand an abstract concept such as growth, since it acknowledges the varied influences and contributions present in the construction of such understandings (Lincoln et al., 2017; Willig, 2022). For these reasons, this study will adopt an epistemological framework of Social Constructivism. Social Constructionism and the potential leveraging of cultural artefacts by participants will also be acknowledged (Berger, 2011; Moran, 2022). The epistemological underpinnings of this study are further addressed in Chapter 2.

Informing Theories

The term growth appears sporadically throughout the academic literature on counselling, psychology, psychotherapy, and psychiatry, often as part of a compound noun or phrase. Examples include growth groups, growthful, personal growth and growth mindset. (Aafjes-van Doorn et al., 2020; Behn & Errázuriz, 2018; Gillon, 2007; Chen & Liu, 2023; McLeod, 2019; McMahan & Rodillas, 2020; Mearns, 2014).

Person-centred psychotherapy. My starting point for the possible nature, origin, presentation, and effects of growth is informed by the writings of Rogers (1967), who theorises that the growth potential is intrinsic to all human beings and is facilitated through open, genuine, and congruent relationships with others. Rogers, along with Maslow (1968) and several others (Corey, 2021; McLeod, 2019), was one of the first practitioners to adopt an existential approach to psychological wellbeing, positing that the intrinsic nature of the human person and the capacity of

individual agency could be key drivers, if adequately facilitated, in alleviating situations of psychological distress.

It is also informed by the writings of Kottler (2022), who draws links between growth and creativity for practitioners and clients. For him, practitioners assisting clients to discover and create new meanings in their lives is an intrinsically creative act, where the therapist's professional and personal growth is synonymous with increased creative thinking and power. Overcoming the initial deviance with which creative acts, such as novel or unusual interventions in counselling, are often viewed requires a generative energy and an attitude towards risk-taking that entails moving away from norms of format, structure, and context. Kottler identified the source of this energy as growth. He made similar arguments about client growth, noting that an increased ability for clients to solve their problems, face situations that emerge, or approach interpersonal dynamics differently, all desired outcomes of personal counselling, constitute creative acts.

Existential psychotherapy. In chapter 31 of his memoir, Yalom (2017) narrated about his work with a client called Irene and how this work affected him. Irene was grappling with the death of her brother and the upcoming death of her dying husband. Irene challenged the legitimacy of Yalom's position and interventions because he had not actively experienced the pain of loss to the degree that she had. His family was happy and healthy, and they lived close to him. Yalom reflected on this, writing that his being "insulated from hardship" (p. 260) has deprived him of the "growth experience" (p. 260) of adult aloneness.

Although he attempted to justify his position through his work, efforts, contemplation, and imagination, he eventually conceded that there is always a layer of safety and separation between himself and the phenomenon. When Yalom's wife died, and he published *A Matter of Death and Life* (2019), he again reflected on how experience is such a strong driver of growth because of its realness and immediacy. Here, I also notice parallels with Rogers's (1967), namely the high importance of acknowledging personal experience in facilitating growth.

Positive Psychology. Seligman's (2011) work is immediately distinct as it leverages the analogical understanding of growth and takes it a step further, from growing to flourishing. Seligman's Wellbeing Theory positions wellbeing as a personal construct with five contributing elements: positive emotion, engagement, meaning, accomplishment, and positive relationships. Growth is understood in relation to an increased ability to achieve, uncoerced, each of these elements to a degree that fosters an improvement in self-reported personal circumstance.

Seligman described growth as a function of resilience - a positive outcome of successfully navigating a psychologically challenging situation. He and his team have done much work on scaling up resilience training across large populations, including schoolchildren and military personnel. By positioning growth as a positive outcome of resilience, Seligman positioned post-traumatic growth as the counterweight to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). His work demonstrates that, in part, knowledge of the phenomenon is necessary for it to occur. While most soldiers he worked with knew about PTSD, many of them had never heard about post-traumatic growth. Seligman hypothesised that skewed widespread knowledge and incentivisation may create self-fulfilling patterns that drive psychological trends in a particular direction.

Logotherapy. Where Seligman's (2011) choice of the word flourish evokes images of optimal success and ideal environmental conditions - as anyone who has found the perfect spot for their potted plants can attest, Frankl's (2004) work was drawn from his observations of one of the most abject and terrible human environments ever conceived. Under such conditions, the potential and opportunity for growth is quashed and subsumed by an instinct simply to survive. Survival relies on fortune, circumstance, and several factors outside of one's control, but it equally relies on the choices one makes. A choice to exercise one's agency to the degree possible and to find meaning in suffering allows one to endure hardship that would overcome those who adopt a position of hopelessness and meaninglessness (Seligman, 2011).

Emotional self-healing. Eger's (2017) memoir is another harrowing recounting of the horrors of the Holocaust and Auschwitz and the enduring effect such a traumatic experience can

have on a person. She developed a longitudinal reflection on carrying such an experience forward into life - hers and others. This reflection appears to culminate in a belief that it is how one chooses to relate to such experiences and then lives with that choice that determines the direction and degree of growth. Like Frankl's work, an understanding of growth is intertwined with access to personal agency, outlook, and assuming of responsibility for one's life and actions. The degree of personal growth experienced directly relates to one's choice of outlook and degree of comfort and reconciliation with that choice.

Insider Researcher

While acknowledging my limited knowledge, status, and experience as a postgraduate student and counselling trainee, I also challenge the sufficiency of linguistic discourse to provide data that are rich, independent, and deep enough for substantiative analysis of this research subject. I leverage my position as an insider researcher (Bukamal, 2022; Costley et al., 2010; McKenzie & Bartunek, 2023) as well as contemporary developments in the field of qualitative research development (Howitt, 2019; Pauwels, 2015; Willig, 2022;) to justify the use of visual and analogical stimuli as part of the data generation process, seeking to "trigger deeper, more abstract perceptions and values" of my research participants (Pauwels, 2015, p.97).

Research Project Summary

The research question driving this study was: What is therapeutic growth to counsellors in Malta? This question begged a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews to gather research data from warranted counsellors practising in Malta and Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) and Thematic Network Analysis (TNA) to present participants' voices. This question will be expanded upon in the following dimensions:

1. What do counsellors in Malta understand to be growth, as a function of counselling that promotes wellbeing?
2. What do they feel has shaped and shapes this conceptualisation?
3. What role do they feel this conceptualisation of growth plays in their work with clients?

4. What happens when there is cultural dissonance between counsellors' and clients' understanding of growth?

Conclusion

This initial chapter has highlighted the presence of the concept of growth in counselling discourse, how the concept is accessed visually and analogically, and how cultural boundaries can shape access to and use of the concept. It has outlined my motivation and positioning and given a brief overview of the conceptual framework that has informed my approach to designing and implementing this research project. It then presented the research question driving the project forward, the method of data collection and the research participants - namely warranted counsellors practising in Malta.

Chapter 2 presents a literature review on the historical and demographic status of Malta and the profession of counselling, the approaches to inter-/cross-/trans-cultural counselling present in literature and some epistemological dialogues that shape the construction and legitimisation of individual and collective knowledge, both in the broader social field and in the realm of qualitative research. This is important for formulating and implementing an effective research agenda. Chapter 3 outlines, rationalises, and critiques the methodology used in the study, elaborating on recruitment, ethical considerations, and research tools. It also discusses the study's trustworthiness, rigour and limitations (Yardley, 2000). Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study, organised into themes and sub-themes, and examined against contemporary literature. Chapter 5 concludes with a summary of the findings, outlining its implications and providing suggestions for future research, policy, training, practice, and action.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

To effectively explore potential cross-cultural negotiations (Collins & Arthur, 2010a, 2010b; Pederson et al., 2016) occurring in the practice of the counselling profession in Malta, centred in this research project around the concept of growth and its role as a function that promotes wellbeing, I felt that it was important to broadly outline the sociocultural position of contemporary Maltese society as well as the counselling profession. This chapter thus begins with a review of available literature on Malta's demographics, linking this literature with the development and current context of the counselling profession in the country.

It continues by examining epistemological positions relevant to the scope of this research, including theories of individual, collective, and cultural sense- and meaning-making. These theories are connected to the process, functions, and objectives of counselling and are examined considering the informing theories surrounding the nature and development of growth discussed in Chapter 1. The relevance of prevailing international approaches to growth, counselling, and intercultural counselling are also critiqued and explored in their relevance to the local context of counselling.

This chapter concludes with a review of a few seminal works by pre-eminent names in the fields of counselling, psychology, psychotherapy, and psychiatry that inspired or informed elements of the research project's semi-structured interview guide.

A Shifting National Context

The past decade has seen the sharpest- ever population growth recorded in the past century. This has also prompted a shift in Malta's sociocultural demographics: the total population has grown by 16%, and 20% of the resident population is now foreign. Non-Catholic and non-believer populations were registered for the first time ever, totalling 17% of the over-15 population. These numerical changes have been accompanied by a diversification of values in the island's resident population. Within the 2011-2021 decade, the Maltese government introduced legislation that signals a shift away from values drawn from its traditional Catholic identity

towards a more pluralistic social policy. These laws include the introduction of divorce, cohabitation, same-sex marriage, decriminalisation of marijuana, and adoption of children by same-sex couples. A simmering public debate on abortion catalysed by the June 2022 Andrea Prudente case prompted the drafting of a parliamentary bill that has divided opinions across Malta (Agius, 2023; Borg, 2022; Ellul, 2022; Magri, 2022; Monetta, 2022; National Statistics Office [NSO], 2021; Taylor, 2022).

The Historical and Contemporary Counsellor

It is within this emerging pluralism that counsellors in Malta find themselves working. What prompts my particular interest is that effective counselling relies as much, if not more, on counsellors as people and the quality of the therapeutic relationship as it does on the formal training, qualifications, and methodology used (Jennings & Skovholt, 2016; McLeod, 2019).

While the past ten or so years have impacted Maltese society's demographics, they have also been eventful for the profession and practice of counselling in Malta. While the MACP was founded in 2002, it was in 2012 that the first Master in Counselling (MCouns.) cohort graduated from the University of Malta, obtaining a qualification that now gives warranted, legal recognition to the profession and practice of counselling in Malta. The same Department of Counselling now also offers a Master of Arts in Transcultural Counselling (TCouns.), while the original MCouns. also includes a unit on transcultural counselling.

The Department of Counselling has continued to train graduates since 2008 (Cauchi et al., 2017) who now work throughout Malta as warranted counsellors. With local service providers, words like Bloom, Blossom, and Flourish evoke metaphorical connections between counselling processes and horticultural success, while visual material for counselling services will often feature plants and/or flowers (see Figures 1,2,3 below). Building on the metaphor of growth established by Rogers' person-centred psychotherapy, Seligman's positive psychology co-opted the term "Flourish" (2011, p.1) to evoke images not only of simple growth but of growth environmentally and organismically optimised. (Bloom Clinic, 2020; Blossom Foundation, 2015;

MACP n.d). Figures 1 to 4 provide authentic examples of counselling services and entities in the Maltese islands that leverage, both visually and linguistically, the metaphorical connection between counselling and the world of nature.

Figure 1

The Logo of Bloom Psychology Clinic Featuring a Tree



Figure 2

The Landing Page of the Blossom Foundation Website Featuring a Field of Poppies



Figure 3

MACP's About Page Website Uses Verdant Green Leaves and Use of the Word Blooming

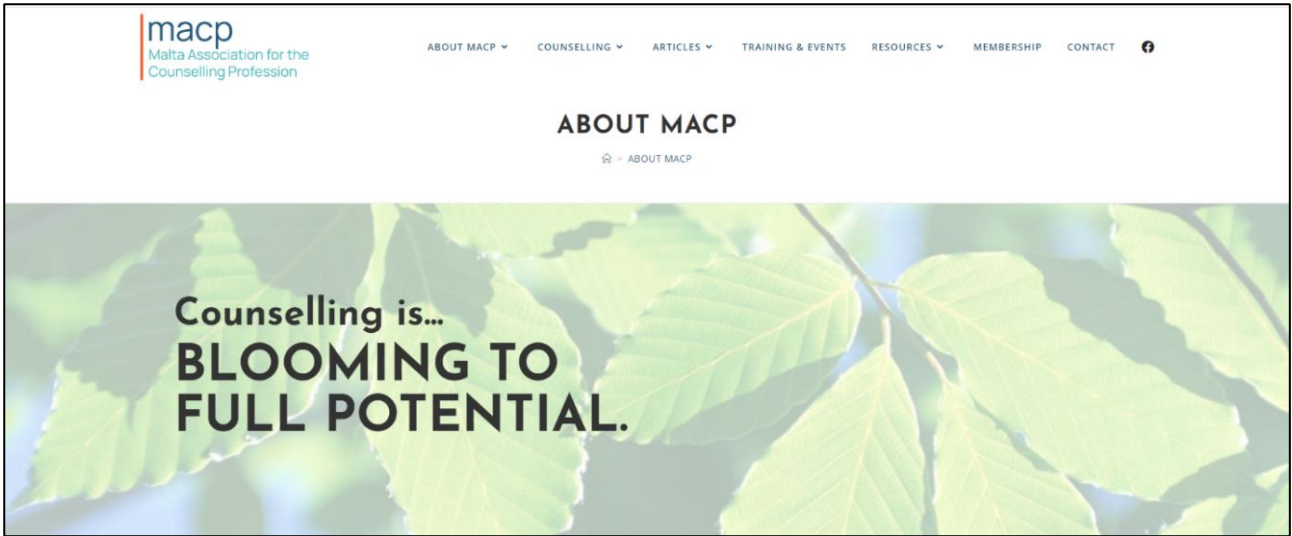
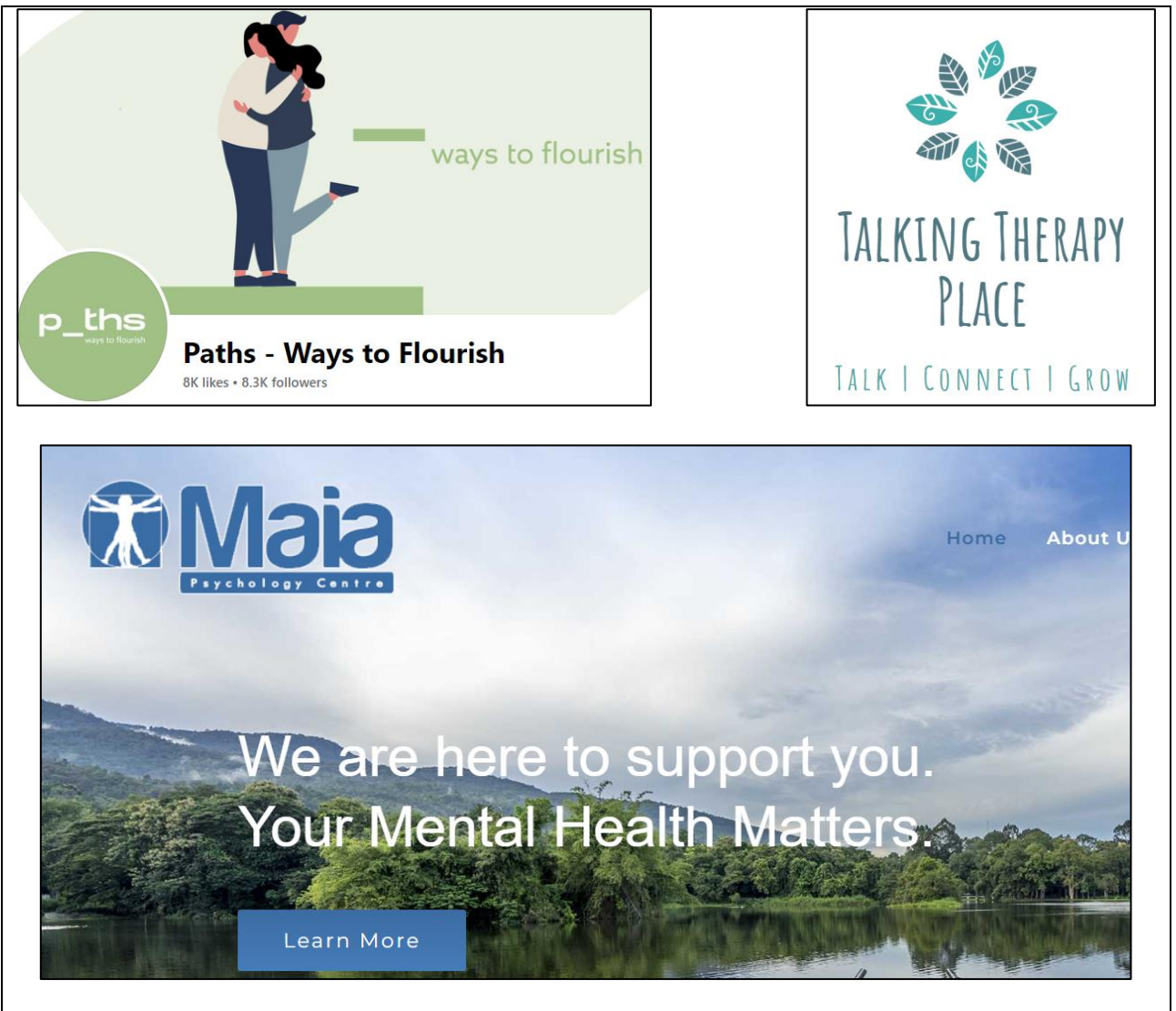


Figure 4

Local Private Therapy Clinic logos & webpages featuring linguistic and/or visual growth metaphors



The counsellor holds an understanding of wellbeing and growth inevitably influenced by social and historical contexts within which they are situated. Intercultural contact also drives development of behaviour. Though the nature of this process is debated, it is at minimum acknowledged that counsellors' understanding of wellbeing and the process of growth is generated within specific cultural contexts and influences various dimensions of that self-same counsellor's competence (McLeod, 2019; Sam & Berry, 2010; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2015).

To provide effective service across an increasingly diverse client base such as the contemporary population of the Maltese islands, counsellors trained and practising in Malta, therefore, need a measure of "cultural competence and cultural humility" (Sue et al., 2022, p.34). Yet, developing these qualities can be challenging as communication style and personal values are both culture- and class-bound. This holds implications for services with clients who may exist outside these cultural and class boundaries (Sue et al., 2022).

As such, the conscious and unconscious standpoints that counsellors bring to the therapeutic relationship affect both the counsellor's case formulation of their client and the reflective process by which the counsellor deepens their own understanding of their ongoing work with the client. The counsellor's awareness of these dynamics and their efforts to address them play essential roles in their ability to offer an effective service (Rønnestad et al., 2019).

Definitions and Understandings, Presence, and Omission

Since the early work of Rogers (1967) and Maslow (1968), personal, professional, and institutional understandings of the nature and goals of counselling have continued to develop. In *Becoming a Person* (1967), Rogers (1967) seems to freely swap between terms like personal growth and positive personality change.

In relation to the work of developmentalists like Erikson (1965) and Piaget (1978), growth is conceived as a series of biopsychosocial developmental benchmarks which, if successfully navigated, lead to improved cognitive and interpersonal functioning. Such theories were revolutionary in communicating a developmental understanding of human cognition and

psychological functioning and became important in the teaching and practice of fields such as psychology, psychotherapy, and counselling. As outlined earlier, these and other changing understandings of concepts such as growth influence the perspective and practice of those involved with the counselling profession, both as practitioners and as clients. To take the example of Erikson's stages of development, growth may be seen as a specific outcome as defined by each stage, which, if perceived to be reached, may result in a period or feeling of stagnation. On the other hand, if the growth potential is unlimited and without benchmarks or targets, a desire for growth may need to be continually kindled and motivated.

Growth - Legal, Academic and Institutional Presence

The Maltese Counselling Profession Act (2015) defines counselling as:

the observation, description, evaluation, interpretation, research, or assistance given in accordance with accepted principles of the counselling profession, methods, or procedures for the purpose of preventing or eliminating restrictive behaviour and improvement on interpersonal relationships and intrapersonal reflection, personal change at the place of work, in life, personal development and empowerment in learning, physical wellbeing or mental health. (p. 1)

In this case, the word growth is absent, while the words change, development, and empowerment are used. McLeod's (2019) extensive list of the goals and potential outcomes of therapy lists several different kinds of change, including cognitive, behavioural, and systemic, but does not mention the word growth either. Corey (2021), however, cited personal growth as an essential objective for counsellors to pursue to become effective professionals, and an important outcome for clients if the counselling relationship is effectively and authentically established.

I was prompted to facilitate participants' exploration of these converging concepts - within the context of counselling, are growth and change similar? Are they identical? Is there an endpoint at which one can (or should?) stop growing?

The MACP

While the MACP appears to leverage the concept of growth on its website (see Figure 3), as of the time of writing, (May, 2024) the word growth itself does not appear on the website - either regarding the personal or professional growth of its members, or as an outcome of the experience of clients. Whereas on its page “What is Counselling” several outcomes of counselling are mentioned that align with Rogers’s (1967) original person-centred vision or with later understandings of the counselling process (Corey, 2016), the actual word growth is conspicuously absent. The word growth is also absent in any form on the MACP’s statute and code of ethics.

An International Perspective

This absence of the word growth is mirrored in the 2018 ethical framework of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), the code of ethics and practice (2018) of the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP) and the Australian Counselling Association’s Scope of Practice document (2021).

Conversely, the American Counseling Association’s Code of Ethics (2014) speaks about the role of counsellors in collaboratively facilitating client growth “in ways that foster the interest and welfare of clients and promote formation of healthy relationships” (p.4). In the same document, the phenomenon of client growth is also acknowledged regarding practitioners’ advocacy practices, with determination of employment policies under which counsellors should be willing to work, and when designing or implementing programmes of counsellor education.

The Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) also acknowledges the concept of growth in its Code of Ethics (2020) and its Standards of Practice document (2021). Across this context, personal growth is acknowledged as an outcome of self-disclosure for participants of group therapy while clinical supervision is seen as a vehicle for professional growth if conducted in an atmosphere of reciprocal safety, trust, and predictability.

There is an apparent divide between the North American countries and the other professional counselling communities and associations when it comes to acknowledging and

working with the concept of growth - both the personal growth dimension as an outcome of the counselling process, and growth of professional competence as a practitioner's obligation. This may be evidence of a cultural divide in attitudes towards the concept of growth in the different cultural spheres in which counselling takes place and may be an interesting basis for future research.

The Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Professional Counsellors (2023) published by the International Association for Counselling (IAC) acknowledges growth as an outcome of effective counselling processes and as an important objective to be supported by counsellors' advocacy work. (IAC, 2023).

Epistemological Spaghetti - A Theoretical Detangling

The primary hermeneutic process I am aiming to explore is the potential influence of individual understanding on professional action during the counselling process, centred around counsellors' relationship with one abstract, potentially debatable, concept: that of growth. I am specifically interested in how this occurs within the Maltese cultural context. The debate on how "culture becomes mind" (Zittoun, 2015, p. 2) is ongoing, as contributions from towering intellectual and historical figures such as Vico (2020), Vygotsky (1978), and Berger and Luckmann (1967) are continually reflected upon, critiqued, repurposed, reinterpreted and built upon (Pern, 2019), yet a broad consensus has emerged. By some debated mechanism, a process occurs in the interaction of persons with their social contexts that shapes their understanding and construction of reality.

According to Tateo (2020), "the epistemic status of the study of human activities and thinking has always been controversial" (p.1). This reinforces the importance of reflecting upon the epistemological framework upon which a research project is to be based. It also impressed on me the importance of a robust critique of the research project, in that it could never be considered absolute, infallible or beyond reproach. A thorough and thoughtful critique of its peculiarities, position, and shortcomings, however, would help to situate it more congruently

within the epistemological spectrum, in that the knowledge generated through its findings would be transparently respectful of its socio-cultural positioning.

Vygotsky's (1978) argument of social constructivism posits that cognitive functions originate from social interactions and are, therefore, products of the social context from which they emerge. This resonates deeply with me. As a long-time intercultural and transcultural agent in various spheres, I have witnessed many instances where social constructs that are superficially readily assumed to be common grounds of understanding between parties - interactive processes, norms, language - often have varied meanings across contexts that vary socially, politically, culturally, ethnically, professionally, religiously, generationally, or any combination thereof (Sue et al., 2022).

As social interactions shape individual and shared meanings, broader social processes are set in motion whereby entire social realities are constructed and maintained. This epistemological position is social constructionism (Potter & Robles, 2022). In a characteristically small-island society such as Malta, with a limited number of players in any given field and limited access to external resources, the co-construction by participants of any given professional and cultural reality - say, the profession of Counselling - becomes acutely evident. Building upon these unique ecological elements, the practice of and discourse surrounding a profession such as Counselling in Malta takes on a unique identity - and possibly trajectory - of its own (Sultana, 2006).

A Culturally loaded Practical Process

Considering this co-construction of reality is interesting when layered over the counselling process and trajectory. Typically, the counsellor and the client/s meet for the first time. One has sought out or been referred to the other. Each brings a historical self and a self-present in the here and now (Yalom, 2002). There is a linguistic, semiotic, and emotional exchange between them, usually lasting about an hour, and they then separate. They are regularly reunited, usually one hour at a time. Every time, they bring a renewed historical component of themselves, driven by what they have experienced and thought since their last session, as perceived,

understood, and self-narrated by each party, as well as a renewed here and now self. Cultural norms regulate their interactions. However, a continued sense of trust and a strengthening therapeutic relationship also invites and allows a breaching of those cultural norms, for example, expressing feelings or thoughts that may ordinarily be considered taboo (Corey, 2021; McLeod, 2019).

During every counselling session, counsellors and clients access both their historical selves and their here-and-now self to interpret the situation before them and contribute to it (McLeod, 2019; Yalom, 2002). If the selves present within the series of recurring encounters contribute effectively, a “close but professional” (McLeod, 2019, p.5) relationship develops between them from which a desirable effect occurs in the client. Often, the therapeutic process also prompts some form of psychological movement or development in the counsellor. (Cheng, 2019)

Clients may seek out counselling for several reasons. The degree to which a potential client may consider counselling a viable way of addressing an issue in their life is culturally influenced, as are the outcomes they expect. This intersection of client’s cultural history and culturally mediated expectations reinforces the idea that every interaction between a counsellor and a client is a multicultural interaction (Collins & Arthur, 2010b; Corey, 2021; McLeod, 2019; Sue et al., 2022).

Themes, Dialogues, and Shortcomings

As I continued to explore the literature, several themes began to emerge. The first was that the discourse on cross-cultural or transcultural counselling often addresses bridging cultural divides with communities marginalised due to issues of race, indigenous status, or sexual/gender identity. These discourses largely circumambulated the cultural discourses of North America and did not entirely align with the social reality in which I was practising and which I intend to research, as social dialogue, policy, and service provision in Malta does not give as much prominence to the variety and distinction of ethnic, religious and/or sexual and gender identities to the extent and degree that this appears to occur in North America. (Pederson et al., 2016; Stuart & Ward, 2016; Sue et al., 2022).

A second theme was the focus on training, skills development, and competencies to address issues of cultural dissonance (Bailey, 2013; Patterson, 2021). A robust body of literature and training programmes has emerged to support the development of counselling of diverse populations centred around the bridging of different cultural identities such as White, Black, Indigenous, Asian or LGBTIQ+¹. (Ginter et. al., 2019; Pederson et al., 2016; Stuart & Ward, 2016; Sue et al., 2022)

Third, there is an epistemological crisis in the world of psychology, psychotherapy, and counselling (Tateo, 2020). Empirical or positivistic outcomes strongly influence funding and service provision (Corey, 2021), while spiritual, metaphysical, or esoteric concepts struggle to find a place in the academic discourse (Friedman & Hartelius, 2013), designated as cultural elements or differences rather than unique elements of individual's effort to construct an understanding of reality based on their own individual experiences of the world around them.

The divide between academic discourse and contemporary language and the difficulty in reconciling these two spheres can also create intercultural tensions or misunderstandings. Concepts such as love and unconditional positive regard (Cornelius-White, 2017), growth and constructive personality change (Maurer & Daukantaite, 2020), meditation, prayer, and mindfulness (Jankowski & Sandage, 2014; Stratton, 2015) can be collated, divided, bundled together, separated, or operationalised endlessly in a thousand different cultural contexts. The challenge of developing a unified framework of metaphysical understanding appears to co-occur with that of developing a coherent professional lexicon coherent across the different modalities, perspectives, and approaches.

It is here that the idea of cultural-infused counselling caught my eye. Collins and Arthur (2010a) reflected: "Counsellors can accumulate a wide range of therapeutic interventions and

¹ lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or sometimes questioning), intersex, asexual, and others

techniques. However, these processes cannot be engaged effectively outside of the context of active negotiation of their personal and cultural relevance between counsellor and client” (p.208).

I extend this idea beyond mechanical interventions and techniques into the realm of the conceptual, arguing that cultural competence must extend beyond understanding of acculturation (Berry, 2009) and development of skills (Ginter et. al, 2019; Sue et al., 2022), and towards more holistic approaches such as those of Collins and Arthur (2010a) and Berry (2022).

The Verbal and Non-Verbal in Counselling and Research

Throughout the MCouns. instruction and training, counselling trainees are encouraged to make use of innovative but safe, responsible, and theoretically informed practices in our work with clients to complement the verbal process of counselling in assisting clients to reflect on, make sense of, and triumph over distressing situations (UM, 2024). Mirrors, clay, paint, drawings, stories, music, and dolls, among other things, have all been featured at some point during my training, and their use and effect have left a marked impression on me.

I am distinctly aware that research and counselling are two separate things but the idea of facilitating communication and sense-making for research through channels not exclusively dialogical had some merit, so I explored it further to understand the various convergences and divergences. Speech is, by and large, our primary method of communication in everyday life, in counselling, and when conducting research interviews. Yet, the non-verbal elements of communication colour delivery and interpretation of any speech one delivers or receives as interlocutors. Whereas speech was once understood as a simple coding-decoding process, it is now more profoundly constructed as a nuanced activity involving intelligence, inference and the expression and recognition of intentions (Abney et al., 2018; Feniger-Schaal et al., 2018; Wharton, 2009).

Word choice, language, and prosody all play a part in effective verbal communication (Dorland & Fischer, 2001; Lee, 2016; Ross et al., 2012; Schiphorst et al., 2022). However, the nuance of speech and its relationship to the physical and the non-verbal was brought to the fore

by the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the widespread proliferation of mask-wearing, and the increase in the provision of online services and activities, including counselling and research interviews. This increase in online activity brought convenience and challenges to various degrees. It has also prompted an increase in research into what was, until recently, considered a niche phenomenon. It also highlighted the significant, complementary, but distinct roles that verbal and non-verbal communication play in the establishment of rapport and the perceived efficacy of service delivery in both counselling and research interviewing (de Villiers et al., 2022; Foley, 2021; Jarvis & Smith, 2021; Korochentseva, 2022; Lin & Anderson, 2023, Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021).

The Online Dimension

The global and institutional disruption created by COVID-19 has also created space for innovation and progress. I clearly recall the institutional kerfuffle and absolute resistance that occurred at UM when, during my undergraduate degree in 2017, I suggested that we conduct one lecture online over Skype to save on parking woes. The previously unthinkable would take only two years to become normal, natural, and necessary (Brown et. al, 2022; Corcoran et. al, 2022).

The emergence of an alternative paradigm of communication, namely the mass and varied adoption of online communication platforms for formal means in different contexts, has simultaneously created a platform that provides options of accessibility and convenience while creating a counterpoint through which the strengths and shortcomings of both itself and the traditional face-to-face paradigm can be more effectively understood. This provided researchers and practitioners improved opportunities to understand the role and importance in communication of language elements such as word choice, language, prosody and metaphor (Dorland & Fischer, 2001; Lee, 2016; Ross et al., 2012; Schiphorst et al., 2022); and the role and importance of non-verbal elements of communication (de Villiers et al., 2022; Foley, 2021; Jarvis & Smith, 2021; Korochentseva, 2022; Lin & Anderson, 2023), adding the opportunity for increased variety and dimension in both practice and research (Kottler, 2022; Willig, 2022).

Emerging preliminary literature in this new field, however, indicates a difference in neurological outcome between face-to-face and online interactions, potentially impacting novel platforms' potency to support professionals and clients in their goals of facilitating or achieving therapeutic growth. As new social realities drive the tandem development of face-to-face and online counselling provision, research will no doubt continue to investigate overlaps and divergences in degree to which these two platforms support the achievement of various objectives, including the facilitation of therapeutic growth in all its different forms and manifestations (Connolloy, 2023; Corey, 2021; Kottler, 2022).

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the academic literature connected with the different elements of this research project. It covered the sociocultural position of contemporary Malta, and reviewed both historical and contemporary counselling service and training on the island. Some examples of local counselling services that exploit visual and analogical metaphors connected to growth were provided, and international literature surrounding cross-cultural and intercultural counselling was examined. The degree of relevance that this literature had to the local counselling scenario was also looked at.

Several epistemological positions relevant to the research project were outlined, and their relevance to the counselling process was highlighted. The chapter concluded with a review of literature surrounding the use of language and the role of non-verbal communication in counselling. The next chapter will outline how the literature reviewed above was leveraged to construct and implement a research design appropriate for addressing the research topic, covering important topics such as research design, participant recruitment, ethical considerations, and trustworthiness and validity. It also critiques several facets of the research project, including the limitations of the employed methodology and research design, and issues surrounding my own reflexivity and position as a researcher.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

This chapter provides a description of the research question and the research design, including the rationale for adopting a qualitative approach and the use of visual and analogical stimuli as part of the interview process. It also outlines participation, recruitment, and ethical considerations that were factored in and discusses credibility and evaluation strategies. All aspects of the study are then critiqued, and limitations of methodology and design are presented.

Research Question

My research aimed to address the following research question: What is therapeutic growth to counsellors in Malta? This question will be expanded upon in the following dimensions:

1. What do counsellors in Malta understand to be growth, as a function of counselling that promotes wellbeing?
2. What do they feel has shaped and shapes this conceptualisation?
3. What role do they feel this conceptualisation of growth plays in their work with clients?
4. What happens when there is cultural dissonance between counsellors' and client's understanding of growth?

The first and second research questions aimed to explore the disposition counsellors bring to a therapeutic relationship and the various contexts the counsellor feels have consciously informed it. The third research question intended to explore the counsellor's awareness of what role personal disposition and historical influence may play in their work with clients, while the fourth research question explored what happens when there is a clash of cultures inside the therapeutic relationship from the counsellor's perspective.

Elements of this exploration included how counsellors identify this cultural dissonance, the challenges it may prompt within the therapeutic relationship and in their personal and professional lives, the strategies they adopt to ensure continued ethically sensitive, professional, and effective service, and the avenues of recourse they may seek to resolve any emergent personal or professional issues (Bailey, 2013; Creaner, 2013; Patterson, 2021; Sue et al., 2022).

Research Methodology

My research inquiry delved into a complex subject, necessitating a qualitative approach to fully grasp its depth and richness. This exploratory investigation aimed to reveal fresh perspectives and insights that quantitative methods alone couldn't adequately capture. By utilizing qualitative data collection tools, specifically interviews, I aimed to delve into the multifaceted nature of the topic under examination and directly capture the diverse voices and experiences of participants. The adaptability and openness of qualitative research are crucial for navigating the nuance of culture-bound abstract topics, facilitating a thorough exploration of meanings, experiences, and contexts that quantitative approaches might overlook (McLeod, 2022; Willig, 2022).

While qualitative research presents unique opportunities for in-depth exploration, it is not immune to criticism. Concerns about subjectivity and bias underscore the importance of rigorous methodological practices, such as reflexivity and peer debriefing, to mitigate potential biases and bolster the credibility of findings. Additionally, some argue against its generalizability (Lincoln et al., 2017), which Denzin and Lincoln (2017) counter by suggesting that in qualitative research, this aligns with transferability.

Despite these challenges, qualitative research remains invaluable for generating insights specific to the context and providing context-specific insights and a deeper understanding of complex phenomena such as my research objectives (Willig, 2022).

Research Design

My dissertation's research agenda and question situated this study as a professional knowledge study with reflexive and sociocultural elements, making it well-suited to a qualitative approach. I planned to interview six to eight counsellor-participants in a semi-structured manner for around 60 minutes each, utilising visual and analogical props to assist with elicitation. Five participants came forward. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using TNA, all the while considering the reflexive elements present in this work by engaging in Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019; 2021; McLeod, 2022).

The Interview Guide

I created a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix A) as informed by the literature and biographical and autobiographical works of prominent counsellors and psychotherapists that retell and reflect on their own development, formation, and experiences (Eger, 2018; Kottler, 2022; Rogers, 1995; Yalom, 2017). Contemporary understandings of therapeutic growth for both clients and professionals as discussed in academic literature also informed this data-collection tool (Aafjes-van Doorn et al., 2020; Behn et al., 2018; McMahon & Rodillas, 2020; Maurer & Daukantaitė, 2020). While this semi-structured interview scheme was not a binding document, it acted as a helpful checklist to facilitate participants' exploration both in the here and now and chronologically across their personal and professional developmental trajectories.

Semi-structured interviewing is an extremely popular method of data collection in qualitative research, which can provide rich data that drives the creation of knowledge in novel and unexpected directions, but it is also a methodology that may “impose content and structure on people’s thinking” (Willig, 2022, p.69). This drove me to read further into the philosophy, techniques and ethics behind qualitative research and prompted me, with my limited resources, skills and experience, to address this most obvious shortcoming of the data collection tool through the use of supplementary interview stimuli, as outlined later in the chapter (Flick, 2022; Willig, 2022)

From the Horses’ Mouths

Throughout my review of the available literature, I began to understand that counsellors’ understanding of therapeutic growth and the broader research themes upon which I wished to expand, was likely to be influenced both by their personal circumstances and trajectory, and by the continued practice and development of their professional identity. The need to explore these parallel dimensions would need to be reflected in the opportunities presented in the semi-structured interview guide.

To this end, I examined several works by prominent psychotherapists and counsellors that were either autobiographical or explicitly delineated their understanding of the human condition based on personal experience and observations. I did this with a two-fold intention. Primarily, I was looking for first-hand accounts from these prominent figures of the incidences and sources that had shaped their understanding of the human condition, the therapeutic process and what they understood by process of growth. This would later help inform the construction of my semi-structured interview guide and the analogical flashcards that I would use as interview stimuli. Because these authors' work and ideas have also had a profound impact on the development, teaching, and practice of counselling internationally, I also wanted to take note of any themes that emerged during this review to be able to note and develop any similar or contrasting themes that could emerge from analysis of my research data.

Carl Rogers - On Becoming a Person: a therapist's view of psychotherapy (1967). Rogers called personal experience, through which he developed his theories and understanding, "the highest authority" (p.23) which "neither the Bible nor the prophets - neither Freud nor research - neither the revelations of God nor man - can take precedence over my own direct experience" (p.24).

I thus felt it essential to at least provide the opportunity for participants to elaborate upon the experiences - both personal and professional - that they feel have shaped their understanding of growth, and how strongly they value these experiences in relation to their training, their therapeutic approach, their beliefs, and any other factors that may shape their understanding. Counsellors' understanding concerning Rogers' proposition regarding growth's intrinsic nature and the degree to which it is possible also merit provision for exploration.

Jeffrey Kottler - On Being a Therapist (2022). Kottler discussed the connection between increased creativity and growth. In part, I felt as if I were also exploring this creativity-growth paradigm myself through my desire to use stimuli in my data gathering. In a way, it became a reflexive meta-practice that, through experience, reflection, and research, shaped my own

understanding of the phenomenon as I underwent a broader effort to understand it through the formal framework of a research project. Noting this, I felt more prepared to facilitate an exploration of the connection between creativity and growth whenever it emerged during data collection, and provided opportunity to access this understanding when I created the analogical flashcard stimuli.

Irvin Yalom - *Becoming Myself* (2017). Yalom's narrated experience with Irene develops a theme around growth emerging from the navigation of difficult personal experience or life circumstance. It also explores the idea that a distance is created between those who have grown through an experience and those who have yet to navigate it. To this end, I included points in the semi-structured interview guide that touch upon personal experience to allow both an exploration of if, how, when, and why personal experience may have driven therapeutic growth for either counsellors or their clients and whether counsellors feel that lack of experience, or lack of opportunity to experience may hold back the therapeutic growth of themselves or their clients.

Martin Seligman - *Flourish* (2011). Seligman's work looks at growth as a positive outcome of the interaction of an adverse circumstance and personal resilience. He underlined the importance of education and skills development in creating the ability within client populations to conceptualise a positive alternative to the more publicised and spoken-about negative consequences of suffering through adverse effects. This prompted me to be alert for opportunities to explore themes related to psychoeducation, skills development, and the role of the professional in accompanying the client to reflect on learning opportunities that present themselves during adverse circumstances.

Viktor Frankl - *Man's Search for Meaning* (2004). Frankl's (2004) observations, experiences, and reflections of the horrors of Auschwitz contributed greatly to his understanding of the human condition and his development of the technique of logotherapy. In such an incredibly adverse environment, Frankl acknowledged the role that luck and circumstance play a role in defining one's prospects, while the adverse circumstances oblige one to find and create

meaning in them to continue living effectively. I was thus prompted to inquire into the possible relationship or connection between individual and collective suffering, meaning making and growth.

Edith Eger 'The Ballerina of Auschwitz' - The Choice (2017). Eger's narrative prompted me to inquire counsellors' understanding of the relationship between growth, choice and agency; for example, whether agency prompts growth, whether growth prompts agency, whether a client's reluctance to choose or to exercise their agency necessarily or potentially inhibits growth. It also prompted, where pertinent, an exploration of the relationship between choices and professional growth - whether clients feel conscious choices taken regarding professional employment, training, or development have been critical drivers of personal and/or professional growth.

Use of Interview Stimuli

Within the broader and more holistic approach to intercultural counselling, I chose to focus on a personal and cultural examination of the concept of growth as a function of the counselling process that promotes wellbeing, aiming to look into counsellors' potential awareness of their own personal cultural identity and their social, cultural identity, as well as the potential personal and cultural identities of various clients they may have worked with,- examining the degree to which counsellors acknowledge the presence and influence of culture on their work. I wanted to do this by examining an abstract concept that is present within both the academic discourse and the everyday lives of both counsellors and clients.

Though a qualitative approach immediately presented itself as superior to any quantitative approach to facilitate of rich and multifaceted data, the idea of relying exclusively on a typical, dialogical, semi-structured interview for data collection initially did not sit entirely right with me. As outlined in Chapter 1, the concept of therapeutic growth is accessed by participants of the counselling process in both visual and analogical forms (Bloom Clinic, 2020; Blossom Foundation, 2015; MACP (n.d); Seligman, 2011). To this end, I provided two sets of interview stimuli - one visual and one analogical, to facilitate research participants' multifaceted exploration of the topic.

The use of visual data in qualitative research is becoming increasingly popular (Spencer, 2023). This can take the form of visual data generated by participants (McCloy et al., 2016; Padgett et al., 2013) or visual stimuli presented during interviews (Page et al., 2022; Pauwels, 2015). In my research interviews, I used visual elicitation methods (Pauwels, 2015) to support the more conventional use of a semi-structured interview scheme (See Appendix A). Visual elicitation can draw out conscious and unconscious thoughts, can balance asymmetries of power in the interview dyad, facilitate the coproduction of knowledge through the articulation of multiple views, perspectives, and meanings, can act as a concrete object to facilitate exploration and contribute to rapport and trustworthiness between the interviewer and the research participant (Ozdemir, 2020; Page et al., 2022).

Creating material for visual elicitation is complex, time-consuming, and potentially expensive (Crilly et al., 2006; Margolis & Pauwels, 2020). I thus used OH cards (OH Publishing, 1981), an established and well-known collection of cards featuring purpose-made paintings used in various contexts (see Figure 5), including counselling and interpersonal exploration (France, 1993; Jiang et al., 2023).

Figure 5

OH Cards (OH Publishing, 1981)

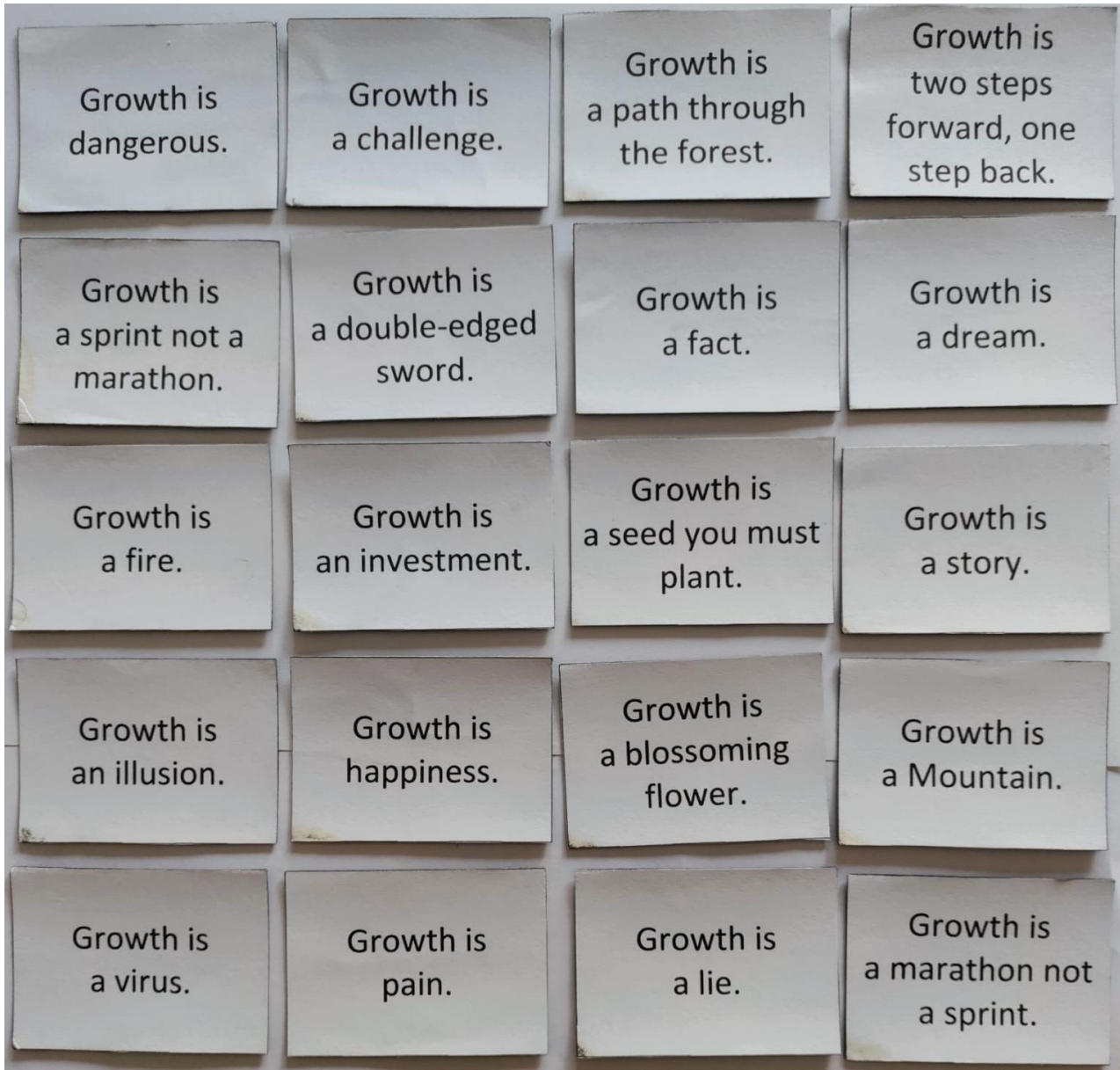


A prominent and experienced practitioner introduced me to these cards during my studies (see Appendix B). During the one-hour interview, participants were invited to examine a selection of cards with paintings and sort them according to each card's relevance to their understanding of therapeutic growth. Using novel visual stimuli encouraged introspection within participants while shifting towards a collaborative paradigm of knowledge production (Pauwels, 2015).

I did not use the second set of OH cards with single words on them (see Appendix C) because the single word present on each card would not facilitate an exploration of the research question as effectively as a metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). It is also curious to note that in such a renowned and well-established therapeutic tool, there are 88 cards featuring words such as love, pain, dream, go, change, and more, but the word grow/growth is noticeably absent. To complement the OH Cards, I also created 20 flashcards with a variety of simple linguistic metaphors describing growth (Figure 6 overleaf).

These metaphors were built in the style of the simple metaphorical statements used throughout Lakoff and Johnson's work (2008). I sought to provide a variety of metaphors embodying a range of phenomena and experience such as the natural world, human experience, abstract concepts, human activity, and social constructs to create varied starting points from which to stimulate the research participants.

I wanted to cover the themes I found in the literature review, including the conceptualisations of growth addressed by including Rogers (1967), Kottler (2022), Yalom (2017), Seligman (2011), Frankl (2004) and Eger (2017). To do this, I also referred to the symbolic and metaphorical dictionaries of Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), Cirlot (1995), Sommer and Weiss (2001), and Vries (2009), to identify appropriate and evocative metaphorical images. I also included several intuitively negative metaphors - growth is a lie, growth is a virus, growth is an illusion - to provide a suitable counterpoint upon which participants may choose to reflect.

Figure 6*Interview Flashcards*

The choice to develop 20 flashcards was something of a personal judgement call. I felt that 10 was too few to provide enough variety in stimulatory starting points, and 30 would have taken too long to develop. Finding the Goldilocks factor when developing such processes is an important factor that influences the quality and nature of research outcomes (Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020; Wakita et. al, 2012 Appendix D presents a selection of the wider possibility of themes and concepts that can be evoked by each flashcard.

According to Lakoff and Johnson (2008), metaphors are structures through which meaning is discoverable but not imposed, making their use as interview stimuli ideally placed for

collaborative knowledge generation (Margolis & Pauwels, 2020). Use of metaphors as interview stimuli have been used successfully with children, helping them to access and express a non-intellectual world (Clark 2004; McCloy et al., 2016; Warming et al., 2023) as well as with adult professionals (Kirk, 2023). The inclusion of both visual and linguistic metaphors in my interview plan aimed to stimulate as comprehensive and multifaceted an exploration of the topic as possible, facilitating access to personal, instinctive, emotional, and embodied sources of knowledge, aiming to mitigate the risk of the interview as a strictly intellectual exercise (Margolis & Pauwels, 2020).

The varied elements upon which participants may draw during the discourse and the potentially complex nature of their responses meant that Thematic Networks (TNs) would be an effective hermeneutical tool to analyse, interpret and systematise the collected data, under the broader TA umbrella (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2016; McLeod, 2022).

The systemisation enabled by a Thematic Network Analysis (TNA) is a necessarily subjective process, whereby meaning can only be understood within a social context. However, this is not a threat to my research project as the social context is acknowledged as a critical factor in my investigations. By acknowledging the subjective and exploratory nature of the participants' contributions, the research design and the context within which they meet, TNA can bring to light the meaning, complexity and richness of the participant's subjective experience of personal and professional life (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

Pilot Interview

To ensure my own effective participation in the interview process, I conducted one pilot interview with a volunteer fulfilling the participant criteria. This interview was not recorded, and the participant was invited to give feedback about the interview, which was integrated into the conducting of the formal research interviews. The use of a pilot interview as both an opportunity for practice and as an opportunity to receive preliminary feedback was driven by relevant literature (Bryman, 2012; Willig 2022). Appendix E presents the feedback questions.

Participation and Recruitment

MACP accepted to disseminate (See Appendix F), thus ensuring an informed opt-in process for prospective participants. MACP's willingness to participate as gatekeeper was secured before commencing the research, as part of the ethical clearance process.

For considerations of both clarity and ethical conduct, exclusion and inclusion criteria for research participation need to be delineated (Lincoln et. al, 2017; Willig, 2022). An exclusion criterion was counsellors with whom I have/had a professional or personal relationship. Participants had to be warranted counsellors practising regularly in Malta for at least three years. This ensured that participants could draw upon a significant body of professional work experience beyond their formative practicum (McLeod, 2022). An information letter (see Appendix G) and a consent form (see Appendix H) were emailed to participants who emailed me with an interest in participating. These were also available prior to the interview. Given the research aims and the possibility of potential upset, at the start of the interview, I referred to the information sheet and consent form. I informed participants that I had a list of support services available for them should they feel the need to address any issues they reflected upon during the interview. This was provided as a hard copy during the interview and was offered via email after the interview (see Appendix I).

Ethical Considerations

The relatively small body of 176 warranted counsellors (Government of Malta, 2023) operating within a small-island society has ethical implications for research participant recruitment. Participants must opt in without pressure or coercion, which is why MACP was used as a gatekeeper. I did not directly approach potential participants for recruitment.

Before commencing any contact with research participants, an application was submitted to UM's Faculty for Social Wellbeing Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) that included a rationale for the research, a research question, confirmation of institutional gatekeeper participation, a research risk assessment and proposed recruitment, interviewing and debriefing

procedures. Only once any requested amendments were completed and approval from FREC granted did recruitment commence. (See Appendix J).

Pseudonymity was employed, and participants' identifiable personal data or incidents narrated were either omitted or identifying elements were changed and disguised, with the consent and consultation of the interviewee. This includes using gender-neutral language since gender is not a participation criterion. Thus, pseudonyms used were gender-neutral, where participants could choose their own pseudonyms, and the pronouns they/their used throughout the work. This was of particular relevance in the local context since the female gender heavily dominates this profession. Details of a participant's personal or professional life that were too uniquely identifiable emerged were effectively addressed. This included very particular techniques or modalities of practice.

Interviews were held face-to-face. Audio-recordings used an internet-free device to prevent remote hacking, and recordings were stored on an encrypted Universal Serial Bus (USB) drive. Transcripts were similarly stored on an encrypted USB drive that only I could access. The participants were aware that, if needed, my supervision team and the dissertation's examiners would also have access to this USB, which was stored in a locked cabinet only I could access and then destroyed when the dissertation process was complete, namely March 2025.

Individual transcriptions were emailed to each participant for review and amendment before processing and coding. This ensured an opportunity for them to revisit their voice and revise any communications and phrasings in a manner that accurately reflects their position and understanding (Cresswell & Poth, 2016).

Research Rigour

The trustworthiness of this research was maintained following strategies proposed by Creswell and Poth (2016). These support the generation and analysis of data from three perspectives - the researcher's, the participant's, and the reader's lenses. These authors suggested engaging in at least two of the validation strategies described. Fortunately, the support

provided by the Department of Counselling and the UM means that engaging with a larger number of strategies is feasible.

These include reflexivity, participant feedback, participant collaboration, rich descriptions, and debriefing of data and research process - supported through regular contact with a dissertation supervisor and keeping a dissertation diary/logbook. The assessment of this dissertation can also be considered an “external audit” (Creswell & Poth, 2016 p. 126), while the rigour and context of the research work is supported by the work of Yardley (2000).

Trustworthiness

According to Gunawan (2015) and Denzin and Lincoln (2017), the degree of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1986) presented by a research project working within a constructivist paradigm is related to the extent to which the researcher makes their practices visible and transparent, and therefore auditable. The four elements of trustworthiness are credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

Credibility

The credibility of my study is maintained through the use of a well-established research method, with references to recent academic literature acknowledging both established practices in the field as well as recent developments in academic rigour and best practices. Credibility could have been further improved with additional prior training and/or practice in visual and/or metaphorical research methods. According to Patton (2002), a researcher’s qualifications and experience can also be a source of value to the study’s credibility. In this regard, I feel that my experiences in intercultural communication have enabled me to execute research that sees past presupposed social norms and navigates towards and effectively unpack unspoken cultural assumptions.

Dependability

The study’s dependability is supported by a transparent, consistent, and thought-out approach to data collection and interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017, Willig, 2022). Every step of

the process from the underlying conceptual framework to the research design and execution is documented and critiqued. Rationales and academic references underpinning the research methodology and interview stimuli are established to demonstrate that the necessary levels of academic rigour have been followed (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Transferability

Transferability refers to how the research findings can be applicable to other contexts. In other words, can they be transferred to theory, policy development and further research (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Howitt, 2019). The particular position of this research project is acknowledged, and its objective of exploring a particular cultural, social and temporal phenomenon is documented regarding the context in which it took place. The transferable elements, and consequently the non-transferable elements, are discussed in Chapter 5.

Confirmability

The final category of Guba and Lincoln's (1985) measure of trustworthiness is confirmability: the degree to which a study can be audited, including the audit trail established and presented as part of the project (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Appendix K presents my coding process and Appendices L - P a one-page transcript of each participant's interview with my accompanying notes is presented to demonstrate that the findings presented in Chapter 4 are based on data generated from the research interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Research Critiques, Limitations, and Potential Shortcomings

This section presents critiques on elements of the research project, as well as a summary of the reflexive practices I adopted throughout the research project.

Participation

Five respondents fit the research participant criteria and an interview was set up with each. Although I initially aimed for six to eight participants, following the successful completion of five rich interviews and consultation with my dissertation supervisor, I decided to focus on the analysis of these five interviews rather than launch a second recruitment effort (McLeod, 2022).

Reflecting on the recruitment process during the period in which I was conducting the interviews, it occurred to me that recruitment respondents may generally be those more interested in the concept or process of therapeutic growth itself, further filtering the potential recruitment pool of 176 warranted counsellors for the research topic. This may have excluded the research project's ability to access and explore the views and experiences of counsellors who were not interested in therapeutic growth or perhaps maintained an understanding of counselling that excluded therapeutic growth (Bergen & Labonté, 2020; Galdas, 2017).

Answers, The Interview, and Prop Limitations

As an insider researcher (Costley et al. 2010), I am aware of many of the theoretical underpinnings and practical elements presented during counselling training and in the general habitus of the sector. I thus acknowledged the risk that participants' replies to the interview scheme might consciously or unconsciously align with conventionally accepted theories and ideas around professional identity and conduct, especially concerning dissonance between client and counsellor. Responses in the vein of "My training as a counsellor taught me" or "When something like that happens, I always take it to supervision", were expected and acknowledged as valid, but the interview needed to move beyond such mechanical responses towards facilitating a more authentic, reflexive, and congruent exploration of the phenomenon, even if it does so obliquely.

The employment of visual and linguistic metaphors as interview props was an attempt to achieve such an exploration, though the effectiveness of such props is limited by my ability as a researcher and interviewer to develop and implement them effectively (Crilly et al., 2006; Margolis & Pauwels, 2020, Pauwels, 2015).

Early in each research interview, after a brief introduction, the OH Image cards were handed over to each participant as a deck. They were invited to select any number of cards that they felt reflected their understanding of the concept of growth. There was no limit on the number of cards each participant could select or the time to look through the deck.

Participants were then invited to unpack and reflect on their choices. Participants either focused on a particular card, further refining their selection down to a single image, or spent time unpacking and reflecting on each image from their selection. Charlie, Dre, and Elliot chose to group their selections into sub-groups or themes or connect them through related ideas.

Once the selected OH cards had been sufficiently developed, participants were supplied with the 20 metaphor cards and invited to engage in a similar process, reflecting on the metaphorical relationship between the statement and their understanding of the concept of growth. Ben and Elliot did not use the metaphor cards due to time constraints. Ben's interview contained an extended verbal autobiography. It ran at over 90 minutes, while Elliot had booked a room in a counselling clinic, and we had to ensure we finished in a timely fashion because the room was booked for the following hour. Despite these unfortunate logistical constraints, the interviews still generated immensely rich data for analysis.

Conceptual/Modality Drift

The concept of growth is most present within Rogers' work (1967) and the person-centred approaches to therapy that variously build upon his work (Merry & Haugh, 2020; Mearns, 2014; Cornelius-White, 2017). Rogers (1967) explained that "ingredients in a relationship which promote personal growth" (p.60), as well as the characteristics of a client engaged in a therapeutic relationship, promote growth:

He changes his perception of himself, becoming more realistic in his views of self. He becomes more like the person he wishes to be. He values himself more highly. He is more self-confident and self-directing. He has a better understanding of himself, becomes more open to his experience, denies or represses less of his experience. He becomes more accepting in his attitudes toward others, seeing others as more similar to himself.

In his behavior he shows similar changes. He is less frustrated by stress, and recovers from stress more quickly. He becomes more mature in his everyday behavior as this is observed

by friends. He is less defensive, more adaptive, more able to meet situations creatively.
(Rogers (1967), p.36)

My research agenda and formulation implicitly supposed that counsellors practise a modality or adopt a conceptualisation of the person founded on or at least influenced by the person-centred approach: one that sees people as inherently capable of self-directed growth under the right conditions. I was concerned that participants would regurgitate much theory or make sense of their experiences predominantly or exclusively through the lens of a person-centred framework (Bergen & Labonté, 2020; Galdas, 2017).

By providing a selection of stimuli during the interview, I sought to provide opportunities for participants to access “experiential gestalts” (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008, p. 81) that assisted them in communicating their understanding of the “structured whole” (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008, p. 81) of their understanding, even if their understanding of therapeutic growth has been shaped by a particularly unique personal or professional trajectory. This was, however, predicated on the assumption that either the research participants would be consciously able to access, reflect on and share that trajectory, or that the data generated would allow me to generate a coherent analysis around a central idea or concept (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Throughout the research interviews, participants made few conscious references to theoretical conceptualisations or modalities, focusing instead on explorations driven by personal and professional experiences. In this regard, I successfully got research participants to access and communicate their “experiential gestalts” (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008, p. 81). In the few instances where participants referred to theoretical conceptualisations or psychotherapeutic modalities, it was often as waypoints or footnotes in a broader, experiential communication of their understanding.

Limitations of Methodology and Design

This study used TNA (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify common threads of meaning, group these into categories and then cluster them into higher-order themes.

The reflexive and involved nature of the research design and implementation also supported incorporating an RTA approach (Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2021). TNA is not a new methodology or an alternative to conventional Thematic Analysis, but an effective and organised way of conducting a Thematic Analysis of a body of data (Attride-Stirling, 2001). By organising themes into Basic Themes and then Organising Themes, a researcher can then effectively organise the analysed data under one or more Global Themes (GT) that each 'present an argument, or a position or an assertion about a given issue or reality. (Attride-Stirling, 2001 p. 389).

This process can be a rich source of knowledge generation but is highly reliant on researchers' skills during the interview and in identifying and extracting themes (Willig, 2022). TA has also been called "essentially independent of theory and epistemology" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.5), which means that a researcher must identify and select their own epistemological standpoints for the study, adding another dimension of researcher skill and competence to the quality of the knowledge generated as an end-product (Terry et al., 2017; Willig, 2022).

Another limitation was inherent in the adoption of the semi-structured interview as a data collection tool. Suggested alternatives such as free associations to the topic under study or the independent construction of subject maps are very interesting. However, I did not feel that I had the skills and experience necessary to implement them effectively. I thus chose to incorporate interview stimuli as a mediation between the risk of imposing an interview agenda and the provision of a platform to stimulate and access larger and less obvious sources of data elicitation (Spencer, 2023).

By providing evocative stimuli, I sought to supplement the traditional reliance on linguistic epistemology with an opportunity to "elicit or trigger deeper, more abstract perceptions and values [of the research participants]" (Pauwels, 2015, p.2). I did this at the risk of adding another dimension of researcher competence to the process of knowledge generation, and with the understanding that "what [I] see in the data (to some extent) reflects who [I am]" (Terry et al., 2017, p.25).

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were analysed using the work of Attride-Stirling (2001) and Braun and Clarke (2006). TNA not only helped my analysis be more organised but also allowed me to orient it towards effectively responding to the primary research question and its four expanded dimensions.

I read the interview transcripts several times until I felt that I had begun to develop a familiarity with the texts. Following Attride-Stirling (2001) I then derived a total of 25 codes based on specific theoretical interests that emerged during my literature review such as choice (Eger, 2017) and pain (Frankl, 2004) as well as recurrent issues that emerged in more than one interview - such as biology and caregiving. I then coded the transcripts accordingly using the free online corpus management platform Taguette.

Attride-Stirling (2001) recommended using a digital system for coding because it allows more efficient analysis of coded pieces of text. While Taguette was useful in creating and referencing a body of coded data elements, I used a parallel analog system of pen and paper to translate the codes into a series of themes as I find the tactile nature of writing more stimulating than computer work. Appendix K documents this process as part of the audit trail.

The 25 codes derived at the start of the analysis process allowed me to develop 22 Basic Themes, from which, following a process of reflection, reference to reviewed literature and to the project's research goals, I elicited eight organising themes. As advised by Attride-Stirling (2001) I then derived three GTs. To support the integrity of my analysis, I then worked backwards, ensuring that my thematic structure made sense in light of the data and codes (Flick, 2022; Willig, 2022).

Reflexivity

Factoring in my own experiences and reflections during and of the research process was important in ensuring that they are not overlooked (Clarke, 2009). To this end, I kept a research journal throughout the process, starting from my initial brainstorming sessions to the process of

finding a supervisor, revising the research question, and beyond. I will probably continue to write in this diary after submitting this dissertation to continue to process this mammoth undertaking.

Appendix Q presents sample scans of this handwritten journal.

Clarke (2009) and Nadin and Cassell (2006) underscored the effectiveness of keeping a research diary both as a tool for developing one's understanding and transparency, and for generating the skill and habit of reflexive practice. This dissertation has been quite an undertaking. Keeping a research diary has helped me keep my thoughts organised; keep track of ideas and avenues I wanted to develop further; chart my own development as a researcher, a practitioner, and a person; and understand and deepen my appreciation of my own position in the practical, intellectual, and social ecologies in which I function.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the primary research question of the project, as well as dimensions on which the research question is to be expanded. It has explained the research design, including incorporating visual and analogical stimuli, and argued for their use through references to appropriate academic literature. This chapter covered issues surrounding participant recruitment and participation, ethical considerations that must be factored in, and several dimensions of the study's validation and evaluation. The chapter critiqued: the research process's actual and potential shortcomings. Where attempts to anticipate or mitigate these shortcomings were possible, these are also covered.

Chapter 4- Findings and Analysis

This chapter first presents the research participants. It describes, explores, and discusses the developed TNAs with the literature. Where relevant, quotes are presented first in their original Maltese, or code-switching English and Maltese, and then as a complete English translation. Figures 12, 13, and 14 below present the three generated themes whilst Appendices M, N and O support these themes with additional quotes.

Participants' Profiles

Each profile contains a brief outline of the participant's current professional situation, previous experience, and some areas in which they have pursued further training and education. Participants' visual and/or linguistic interview stimuli during the interview process are presented. These are provided as part of the data collected to give context for the reader and ease of reference when verbatim quotes are used later in the chapter.

Andi

Andi works full-time as a counsellor in a secondary school and conducts part-time private practice in a private clinic.

Figure 7

Andi's OH Cards



Andi has previous experience working with children and victims of addiction. After graduating as a counsellor, Andi supported their professional development by attending short, non-certified courses on different counselling techniques and theories. Andi's linguistic metaphors were:

Growth is a Fact, and Growth is a Lie, which they chose because they especially do not agree that growth is a lie.

Ben

Ben works exclusively with minors in a private practice setting. They work largely with children, and only sometimes with teenagers and adolescents. Ben previously worked in school settings and has been formally trained as both a counsellor and a play therapist. Ben did not choose any metaphor cards as their interview had run over time due to an extended personal biography and I felt that they had already provided a lot of rich experiential data through recounting their biography and a rich engagement with the OH cards.

Figure 8

Ben's OH Cards



Charlie

Charlie works with the state services in a trauma-informed setting, with a variety of clients - children, adolescents, and adults. Charlie does not conduct private practice. They have pursued further training after graduation in techniques and theories including Jungian dream analysis. Charlie's metaphors regarded growth as a story, a double-edged sword, pain, a challenge, and an investment.

Figure 9*Charlie's OH Cards***Dre**

Dre works exclusively in private practice and has previous experience in the disability and teletherapy sectors. Dre works with a variety of clients but primarily adults. After graduating, Dre attended several short courses in topics such as drama therapy, eating disorders and family constellations. They are currently pursuing extended post-graduate training in a specific psychotherapeutic modality. Dre chose six metaphoric cards, expressing that growth is a story, two steps forward and one step back, pain, happiness, and a challenge. They also chose the metaphor a sprint, not a marathon, to discuss their avid disagreement with this card.

Figure 10*Dre's OH Cards*

Elliot

Elliot works exclusively in private practice with adults, having previous experience in the disability sector. Elliot attended short-course training in Dialectical Behaviour Therapy, family constellations, narrative therapy, and psychosomatic therapy, among others. I did not present their linguistic metaphor cards as we had exactly an hour and were running short on time. Elliot engaged particularly richly with the OH cards, and they appeared to stimulate their “experiential gestalt” (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008, p. 81) such that I felt that it was OK to pass over the metaphorical cards in the interests of time management and respecting Elliot’s needs.

Figure 11

Elliot’s OH Cards



Analysis of Themes

The elicited 25 initial codes supported the development of 22 Basic Themes, which I then grouped into eight OTs within three GTs, namely *Between Two Worlds*, *A Cycle of Discovery*, and *Choosing Challenges Shaping Self*. Figures 12, 13 and 14 present each global theme. This process was supported by continuous reflexive reference to the coded data elements, supporting literature and my own reflexive process as detailed in my research journal (Appendix R).

Figure 12

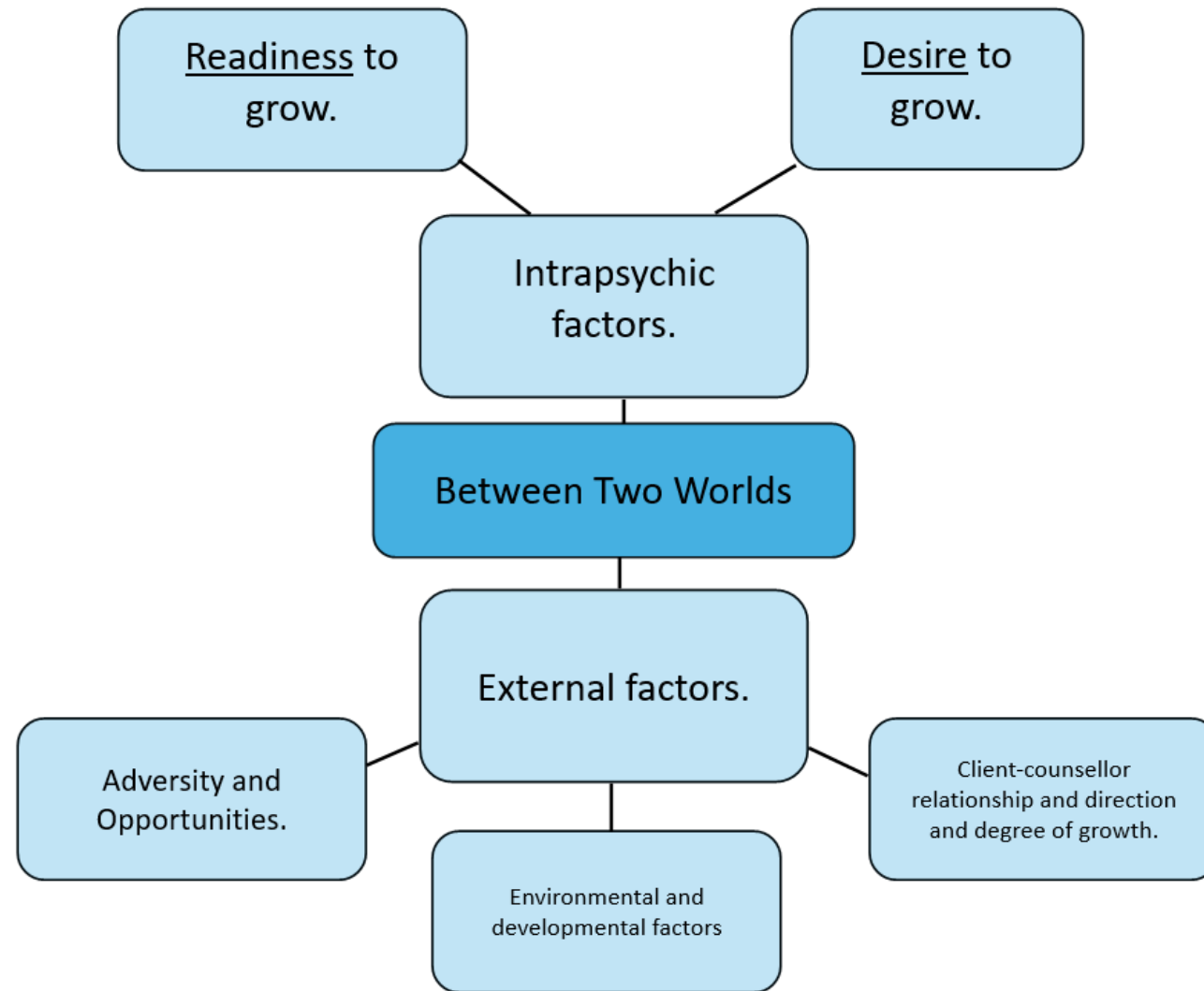
GT1: Between Two Worlds

Figure 13

GT2: A Cycle of Discovery

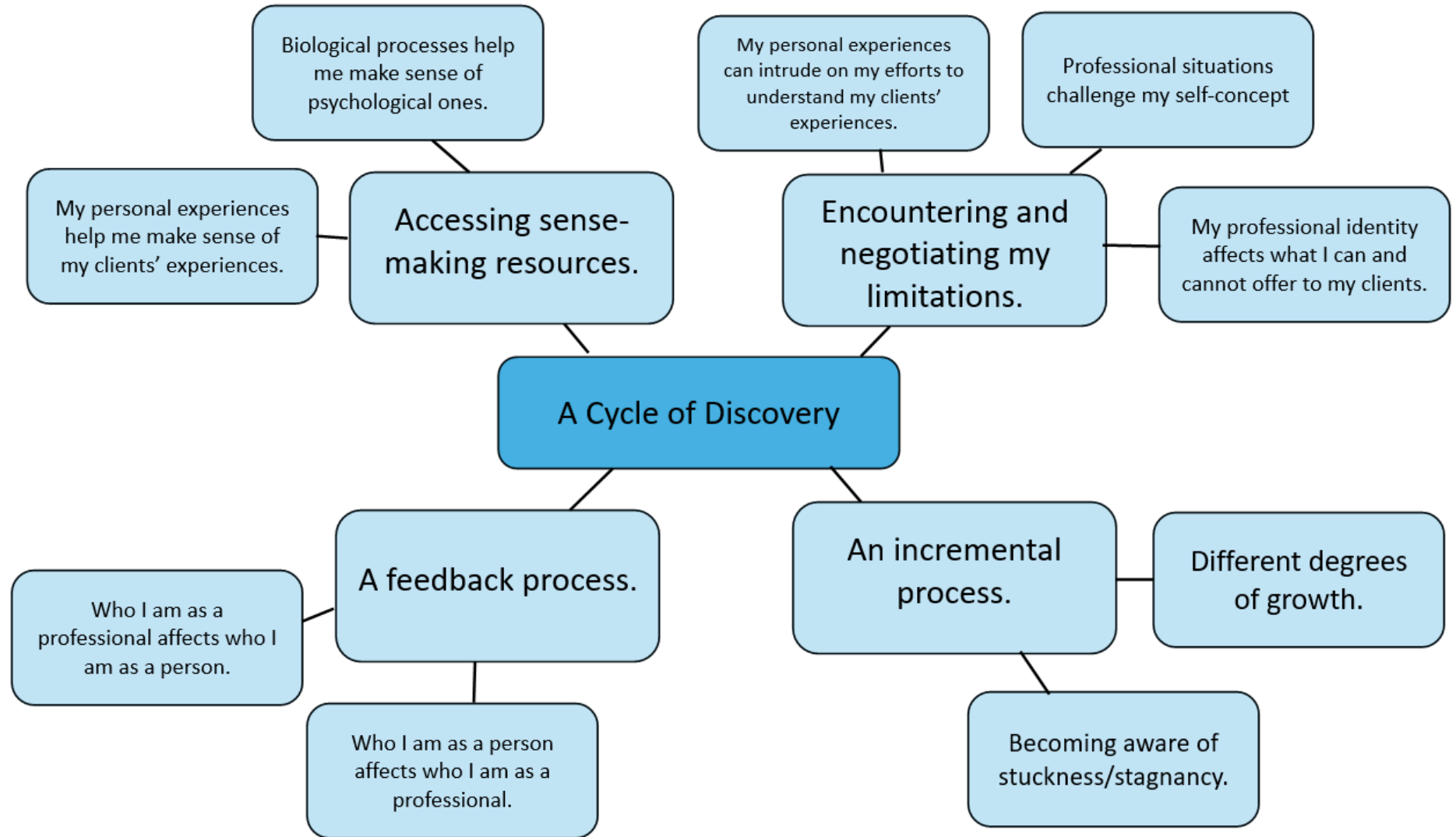
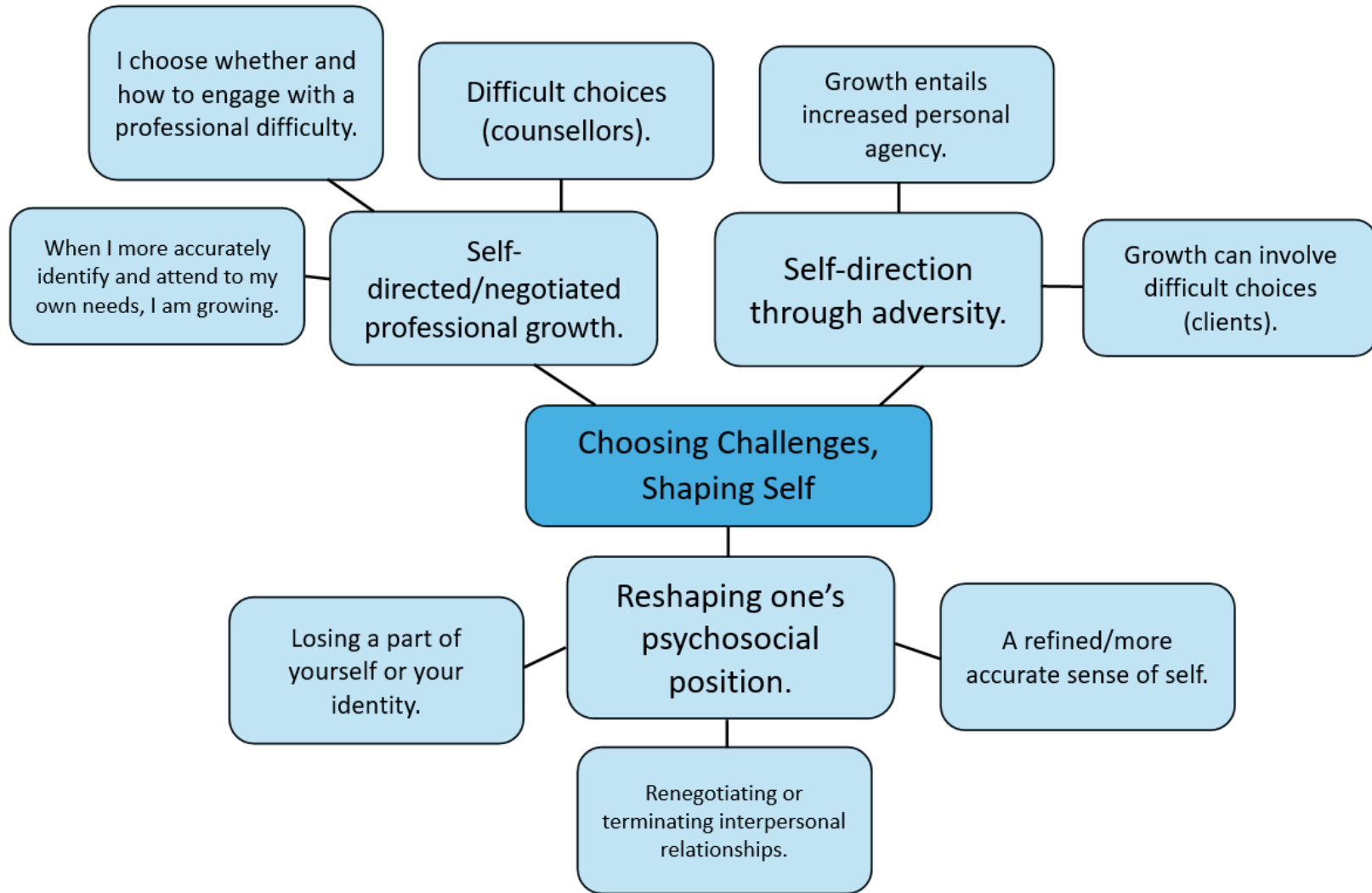


Figure 14

GT3: Choosing Challenges, Shaping Self



Global Theme 1 (GT1): Between Two Worlds

Consistent with contemporary psychosocial understandings of human development (Newman & Newman, 2018), participants were conscious of the interplay between internal and external factors when mobilising a process of psychological development. While participants agreed that intrinsic motivation and personal effort are critical factors in determining whether therapeutic growth takes place, they admitted to the influence of external factors in determining the possibility, potential and degree of growth possible as an outcome of the counselling process. This GT underscores this reality and highlights participants' efforts to understand and navigate their clients' internal and external worlds.

Intrapsychic Factors

Participant reflected that the two intrapsychic factors driving growth are psychological readiness and the volition to engage in a process of growth. Of these, volition was a relatively straightforward concept: growth happens when a person is intrinsically motivated to grow. Andi contrasted the counselling process against the metaphor of the breastfeeding mother to emphasise the importance of the client's volition mobilising them to seek out and access the service, in contrast to an image of breastfeeding, where the mother must physically advance the infant to her breast because they cannot do so themselves. Andi believed that the externally expressed act of seeking out the counselling service, driven by internal motivation, creates fertile ground to initiate a growth process:

I feel that it creates a certain measure where people know they can be vulnerable, they know they can *not* (emphasis) be vulnerable, they understand that this person, is not doing this out of obligation, or something like that, you know? It leads to a lot of growth because ultimately you are the person...the child isn't going him or herself to the breast, it is the mother who grabs the child and attaches them. The client comes to you; you don't grab the client and take him into therapy.

Ben and Elliot expressed similar understandings, through the retelling of narratives. Ben retold a personal narrative, and Elliot reflected on work with a client.

<p>Jiena nemmen li growth occurs when the wish, or il-volja for change comes from within. #a ntik eżempju. Fi tfuliti, il-ġenituri kienu #eġġuni biex nie#u sehem f'kompetizzjoni prestigġjuża, b'premju mill-isba#. Imma jien ma ridtx nie#u sehem. Dakinhar, mort u m'g#amilt xejn, g#ax ma ridtx nkun hemm</p>	<p>I believe growth occurs when the wish or will for change comes from within. For example, during my childhood, my parents encouraged me to participate in a prestigious competition with a very impressive prize. But I didn't want to participate. On the day, I went and did nothing because I didn't want to be there. (Ben)</p>
<p>Kelli klijenta qatt tiġi fil-#in. Dejjem kwarta tard. Dejjem. So eventually, bdiet tiġi fil-#in, imma it-took na#seb two years u t#hid xi #aġa, vera, forsi xi #aġa zġhira ... we talked about it, jiena ma kontx pushing fuqha, I was patient with her, and we'd talk about what made her come late, and eventually riedet hi li ma tibqax tiġi tard, mhux g#ax jien ridhta ma tibqax tiġi tard.</p>	<p>One client never arrived on time, always 15 minutes late. Always. So eventually, after around two years, she started arriving on time. You might say it's a small thing. ... We talked about it. I didn't push her. I was patient with her. We'd talk about what made her come late, and eventually, she did not want to continue arriving late; and not because I wanted her not to keep arriving late. (Elliot)</p>

Complementary to the idea of volition was the concept of readiness to grow, a sense that a person's internal resources - among others their reflective capacity, curiosity, general psychological orientation - were sufficiently mobilised to engage in a growth process. While Dre succinctly reflected "There are some who are more primed, some who are more ready or more curious about the process," Charlie understood readiness to grow in terms of the degree to which it facilitates access to a person's intrinsic potential:

It's a constant debate I have with myself, where I feel like at the core, I do believe that everybody has potential for growth, and everybody has potential, in general. Uhm, at the same time I think...from experiences both personally and professionally I feel that the readiness is a huge factor in that ... readiness for, sort of...you know...to look inwards and to...to be perhaps a bit more...erm...ready to develop yourself in that way. (Charlie)

Learning to accompany clients to facilitate an exploration of, and to come to terms with, the degree of their own readiness to engage in a process of growth and simultaneously supporting them to understand the degree of their internal volition to do more clearly so were essential elements of all participants' practice.

Andi really underscored the role of the counsellor in driving the evolution of this relationship: "Sometimes it's a natural thing. Sometimes yes, the person clicks, sometimes. But I think for the most part the counsellor has to put in input for this growth."

External Factors

Participants were conscious of the external factors that affect the potential for growth and the ability to mobilise the growth process, presenting three basic themes.

Client-counsellor relationship and direction and degree of client growth. The participants freely admitted that the phenomenon of growth is not exclusive to the counselling process but if it is to be mobilised within the counselling space, then the nature of the relationship developed by the client and the counsellor is a strong factor in determining the therapeutic outcomes of the engagement. Elliot spoke about a relational dimension of growth that needs the engagement of another person to happen effectively:

Hemm dik il-parti, cos to me this is the relational part ... that helps us go through this growth. Allavolja hemm growth individwali, li I can do it by myself, introspectively, this is

There is that part, because to me this is the relational part ... that helps us go through this growth. Although there is individual growth that I can do by myself, introspectively, this is

another kind of growth li mingħajr persuna oħra - issa jekk hux it-terapista, jekk hux ħabiba, jekk hux l-instructor, jekk hux il-partner, whatever, that growth is very hard to achieve. ... It's very hard...this type of growth, the relational growth, tipo hija parti li ma tistax tagħmilha waħdek, so bil-fors hemm bżonn xi ħadd ieħor biex tagħmilha.

another kind of growth that without another person - whether it's the therapist, a friend, an instructor, a partner, whatever, that growth is very hard to achieve. ... It's very hard, this type of growth, the relational growth is a part that you can't do on your own, so you definitely need someone else to get it done.

Here Elliot did not insist on the need for a therapist to affect change, but that a relationship with another person needs to be present for certain dimensions of growth to be activated and worked upon. If the counsellor/therapist is to take up this role then the counsellor's participation within the relationship shapes the direction and degree of client growth. Andi recounting their work with a client:

I'm thinking of a case, I'm seeing this child on the spectrum and nobody would communicate with this child, and they're really into Super Mario, so I used to read a bit about Super Mario, and get to know all about Super Mario...for them it was a big thing, and one day they told me...'Why can't you be my parent?'

Andi then recounts how this instance was a foundation for reflection and reality-testing and how it led to the client's emotional growth. By actively and genuinely investing into the relationship with this client, Andi was able to contribute to the client's eventual emotional growth actively. For Dre:

I think the relationship in itself allows the client to model...what a healthy flow might look like. So the relationship I think becomes the core of where I can work from any angle. Cos you need to understand what is happening in the field around you or the client to move forward. ... so if they might be projecting a mother on the me, I'm not going to react like their mother, but we may process on what I might be feeling or what I might be feeling

projected with, and see what the need of the client is in that moment, so hopefully then they can, if it happens outside, they can say 'Ah, ok, maybe this part of me needs this from me right now. Maybe I'm, I dunno, projecting the need to be saved, or something. (Dre)

Environmental and Developmental Factors & Adversity and Opportunities. While Adversity may be considered an environmental factor or an outcome of other environmental factors, Adversity occupies its own basic theme both due to its unique historical and theoretical connection to the counselling process (Eger, 2017; Frankl, 2004) as well as to the singular prominence in which it featured during the data collection process. Participants explored the role of environmental factors in the pursuit of therapeutic growth. Andi conceptualised growth as an outcome of facing a challenging situation. When reflecting on the same client for whom they learnt about Super Mario, Andi said:

The child grew in a way that they began to see that it's possible to have a parent, because they didn't connect with their parent. They grew, emotionally. ... That's big growth. And in reality, kind of in the counselling they'd be saying 'Wow, you're doing really good work', stuff like that, but then it's followed by 'No, I can't be your parent', and 'why would you like me to be your parent?'...but there's a huge heartbreak, so that growth, it's not like a tree, you know? A tree grows, and you see it growing.

Andi's understanding that there is a connection between growth and adversity was not limited to clients' realities. It extended to their own growth as individuals and professionals.

Participants also accessed a similar understanding of their own negotiation of environmental factors and adversity when exploring the nature and direction of their own personal growth and their growth in capacity as professionals. These similarities not only facilitated participants' work with clients but allowed the creation of TNs that reflect the complementary processes experienced by participants when both making sense of their work with clients and their own trajectories as people, professionals, and clients of counselling themselves.

Charlie developed this idea:

You're human to human, when you're with clients. So...by acknowledging the difficulty in growth for yourself, you're more able to empathise with how difficult it is for them to be doing the same. ... It sort of puts things into a perspective of deep understanding. And also, in acknowledging your limitations, you're more able to acknowledge theirs. And to help them do the same. But also in acknowledging your strengths you also help them do the same. So it's very much in sync, and it helps you, perhaps, keep an open, what's the word...openness to experience.

Counsellors' efforts to facilitate a process of growth in both themselves and their clients involved a constant negotiation of the internal and external realities of the parties involved. Whether they were working on themselves as individuals, growing in their professional capacity or attempting to exercise that professional capacity in the service of their clients, counsellors appeared to be cognisant of, reflective upon and navigating through two parallel worlds. I feel that this quote from Charlie perfectly sums up the dyadic tension that the research participants appeared to regularly navigate in the course of their work with clients:

Sometimes I used to feel like it [the potential for growth] is unlimited, and that everybody can [grow], erm...but at the same time...I'm not always as sure, umm...because then there are lots of factors like, so this...you know there could be...immense challenges as, you know on a personal level, for example, or there could be cognitive difficulties which would sort of...hinder that process a little bit, um...developmental things which come into play too. ... What's coming to mind is that it [growth] is unlimited however certain limitations might either be imposed externally or self-imposed, right?

Global Theme 2 (GT2): A Cycle of Discovery

A Cycle of Discovery collects and examines temporal and process-related themes that emerged during data collection, through four organising themes. Just as every human life begins at one point in time and comes to an end at another, each therapeutic relationship proceeds temporally forward, developing throughout the course of the therapeutic hour as well as through

the sequential holding of counselling sessions. Throughout this trajectory, counsellors and clients go through a process of discovery that drives their growth.

Accessing Sense-Making Resources.

As counsellors strive to understand what their clients are going through, they inevitably access the sense-making resources available to them. Intuitively, we speak about linguistic ability and the ability to notice and interpret non-verbal communication. We listen to the words spoken by our clients and observe their body language, and we use this information to construct an understanding of the client's predicament. Two further sense-making resources emerged. Counsellors made use of and reflected upon their own personal experiences to help them make sense of their clients' experiences, including embodied experiences or experiences grounded in biological or natural processes. Andi remarked: "I feel that my experience as a parent has really shaped my practice", reflecting on the difference between emotionally caring for their young child and emotionally caring for their client, to understand and maintain the boundaries necessary for effective therapeutic work more clearly. Towards the end of their research interview, Andi also used a metaphor from the natural world to explain and explore their role in facilitating a client's growth, or how sometimes, growth entails learning to hold or stay with one's current predicament:

I sort of allowed the client to grow in a non-optimal way, but at least there was movement. Imagine this, you're letting a tree grow *la ġenba* [sideways] but then once it grows a bit *la ġenba* you put a stick, and...but at least the growth. ... The plant will have the tendency to push the stick down, and you really have to dig the stick down, and tie it well with the branch, and point the plant to the sun, different directions, stuff like that.

Sometimes wellbeing is settling in with, appreciating what you have ... I just had a child right now, and if I think of myself as growing like, if I grow my business ... that would go against my wellbeing, so right now my wellbeing and my growth, in a way, is...staying. ...

Very different to a plant, you know? I look at this plant in front of me and if it doesn't get new leaves and it doesn't extend its branches, then it's not growing.

Participants often and naturally accessed their own experiences and their understanding of the natural world to facilitate communicating their understanding of the phenomenon of growth. Somewhat humorously, Dre explained laughingly that:

Growth is pain. To some effect, I think it's biological, cos really if you think of...you know a baby, when they start to teethe, they cry, or when you're growing up, erm, growing pains, you know it's...even as I grow older now (laughter) growth is pain, physically.

Participants also used their own life experiences to support them as they worked with their clients. Charlie used writing practices, where their own personal experience and engagement with the practice shaped their understanding of potential application in clients' lives:

I always felt like journaling and stream of consciousness always helped me in this department, and then when I started studying, I felt that it was even more useful ... because it helps you be more in touch with your inner process and it helps you develop reflexivity ... and I feel like it can also be very cathartic and therapeutic, not just for you but for your clients if they should be inclined to write, as well.

While for Elliot, reflection on their personal efforts to effect a change within their own life bore an influence on their work with clients:

<p>Jien ġieli kont nkun naf li qed nagħmel xi ħaġa mhux ideali imma xorta bqajt nagħmilha sakemm wasalt f'punt fejn ngħid 'Orrajt, issa lest/a' so I see that in my clients as well, li ngħid meta jkunu lesti, they will bring it up. Meta jkunu lesti, they will change. Meta jkunu lesti, they will challenge it.</p>	<p>I would often be aware that my behaviours were far from ideal, but kept doing them until I got to a point where I'd say "OK, now I'm ready". So, I also see that in my clients. So, I can say, when they're ready, they will bring it up. When they're ready, they'll change. When they're ready, they will challenge it.</p>
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Charlie agreed that, “By acknowledging the difficulty in growth for yourself, you’re more able to empathise with how difficult it is for them to be doing the same”. This reflection on personal experience accompanied participants’ understandings of biological processes and constructions to supplement the traditional sense-making arsenal of language use and observation of non-verbals.

Encountering and negotiating my limitations.

As participants accessed their sense-making resources to understand the trajectory of their work with clients, it inevitably brought them into contact with their own personal and professional limitations. How they negotiated these limitations affected the client populations they felt comfortable working with, the way they tackled issues that emerged during their therapeutic work with clients. An interaction with Ben illustrates this:

Ben	Jien kelli problema...	I had a problem...
Interviewer:	Kellek problema biex...	You had a problem with...
Ben:	Biex nieqaf ngħallem. During my sessions mat-tfal that was something I really had to work hard on, illi not to tell them what to do, not to show them how to do it.	To stop teaching. During my sessions with children, that was something I really had to work hard on, to not tell them what to do, not show them how to do it.
Interviewer:	And how does that tie into growth?	And how does that tie into growth?
Ben:	Because...learning to undo, in that specific thing... got me where I wanted to get.	Because...learning to undo, in that specific thing ... got me where I wanted to get.

Here, Ben encountered a limitation in how they engaged with a specific client population. Addressing this challenge was necessary for them to make an adjustment in their self-concept and begin to see themselves more and more confidently as a counsellor and not a teacher (their

previous profession). For Dre, encountering challenges throughout the course of their work was an important part of understanding where and how they can most effectively offer a service.

The more you immerse yourself into it, the more you realise who you are as a counsellor, which I think is such a broad question to ask yourself. I think that's how you can measure growth in your career, when you say, "Who am I as a counsellor, and what do I bring to the table"

Similarly, Elliot's work with clients prompted them to encounter and negotiate their own limitations.

<p>Naħseb meta bdejt naħdem mal-klijenti bdejt nikber. L-iktar because I had to challenge a lot of ideas, way of thinking, way of being. ... Hemm dik l-idea li sometimes it's hard not to have, that feeling tal-impostor F'moħhi it's like still breaking the idea li just għax jiena counsellor jfisser li dejjem rrid nkun contained u kollox, and so the clients have ... so li nisma l-klijenti u narohom on par has allowed me to be a bit more human ukoll, in terms of ... "It's OK". Naħseb jiena hija kumplessa biex nispjegaha.</p>	<p>I think that I started growing when I started working with clients. Mostly because I had to challenge a lot of ideas, my way of thinking, my way of being. ... There's this idea, that sometimes it's hard not to have, that feeling of being an impostor In my head it's still breaking the idea that just because I'm a counsellor, I have to always be contained, and so the clients have ... so the fact that I can listen to clients and see them on par has allowed me to be a bit more human too, in terms of ... "It's OK". I think it's a complex thing to explain</p>
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Participants, meanwhile, had to grow to challenging feelings towards a difficult client:

For example, this client once was ... saying some very sexist things, and I challenged him, so he challenged me on my sexuality. And obviously in that moment I could have gone like "Fuck you, I'm not the one beating my wife", but I had to understand, sort of ... what really had happened in his life for him to reach this point of such limiting views. ... I had to grow to find ... I think ... the humanity, then. ... But moments like these I enjoy the growth

because for me I say this is something where I can still learn how I can be with someone who might not have the same views, and that could also be a way for them to grow ... so kind of, the enemy, in his eyes, is still moving with him. (Dre)

Participants stressed the importance of the experience encountering and negotiating their limitations, biases, and professional challenges in driving their ability to discover their own potential to develop as professionals and people, and ultimately offer a better and more effective service to the populations they served.

An Incremental Process.

An important element of participants' reflection on the growth process was understanding the degree and trajectory of growth that took place inside the counselling space. Accessing their sense-making resources, participants compared to babies' developmental milestones, reflected upon how their own experiences could both assist and hinder them to understand the growth progress of their clients, and reflected on what this process outlined about their own limitations.

What emerged was a picture that growth is non-standard, unique to every individual, amorphous and dynamic, subject among other things to the point in the counselling process and the client's development at which it occurs, and that it was a process that occurred in stops and starts, manifested differently across cases from levels of direct, sweeping action, to small but meaningful gestures, and even to simply levels of conscious awareness. When asked about what the outcome of growth looked like, Elliot was very clear about their own expectations:

Rationally, I expect change. I expect to see a change in the person to know that therapy is working. But my idea of change, sometimes it's not realistic, because sometimes I assume that the way I grew, or the way I made a change in my life, I assume that maybe somebody else can make a change in the same way, so I have to...I have to check in with that. Ng'hid [I say] it's not just because I did this thing in a year, it means that everybody can make the same change in a year. ... Growth is so varied, li semplicitment [that simply] it could be that

a client commits to coming to therapy, or that a client doesn't feel anxious coming to therapy anymore, or that a client comes to therapy on time.

Participants were aware of the challenge inherent in understanding a client's current situation and what growth might constitute for them at this point in their process:

I do think that everybody has the capacity ... to grow, definitely. Because, you know...I mean nothing's ever stagnant and things happen to people all the time, and at baseline, people are always going to learn from something, right? Qisu [Sort of], that happens for them, so the way they learn from it could be, I think there are multiple levels to it, kind of thing. So, it doesn't have to mean self-actualisation but it might just mean...refining certain skills, for example, or anything like that. ... Perhaps I took it to the far end initially (complete self-actualisation), cos that's how I look at it maybe, but no, I would say that every step counts. (Charlie)

For Andi, growth signified the client's progress towards autonomous operation, even if they were not yet at the stage where they could make decisions independently.

Andi: The process of going from non-autonomous to autonomous is a growth in itself. As long as it's heading towards that direction. Not heading from 0.5 autonomous to 0 autonomous.

Interviewer: Ok, but to 0.6 would count as growth? Even though 1 would be the stage where they start making choices?

Andi: Yeah!

Charlie furthered: "if it gets stagnant at some point, and there's an element of stuckness, you can also take meaning from that and see what's going on, take it from supervision and you'll grow from that as well", exploring the idea that even becoming aware of a sense of stuckness and figuring out how to work with it was a form of growth in itself.

A Feedback Process.

Participants showed a keen understanding that their work with clients was part of a wider process that affected their professional identity, personal identity, and the relationship between them. Accompanying clients through a growth process sometimes precipitated a complementary growth process within the participants that prompted an increased understanding of their personal position or their professional abilities (and, subsequently, their professional limitations). It was also the case that an increased understanding of one's personal position improved one's perspective on what one could and couldn't bring to the table as a professional.

In contrast, their development as professionals shaped their daily outlook and behaviour as people beyond their professional engagement with clients. "I feel that my experience as a parent has really shaped my practice", remarked Andi when exploring the difference that emerged in their understanding between unconditional positive regard for their own child and the unconditional positive regard that they strove to manifest towards clients in their counselling practice.

Referring to their own experience of time management as reflected in the journey of a client they worked with, Elliot reflected:

<p>Jiena il-counselling bidlitni, in terms tal-panic (laughing). "Oh my God, hemm client qed jistennieni, ma nistax nħallih jistenna", so that changed the way I approach time.</p>	<p>Counselling changed me, in terms of panic (laughing). "Oh my God, there's a client waiting for me, I can't leave him waiting", so that changed the way I approach time.</p>
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Charlie essentially outlined the theme verbatim: "The growth you do as a person really does translate into how you are as a professional." Dre touched on the continuousness of the process:

You yourself, as the tool, is really everything. So, I can't take my client, erm, if I'm not self-aware of where I am and where I might still be growing, so...I think I'm still growing. I will always be a student, in some ways, of counselling.

Global Theme 3 (GT3): Choosing Challenges, Shaping Self

A broad trajectory emerged when developing the GTs of this data analysis: from navigating two worlds in seeming counterpoints to a cycle that drives forward through time and process, finally manifesting in the conscious exercise of one's agency to mobilise and direct that process in a self-determined manner. Global Theme 3 explores participants' understanding of agency, its role in professional development, and therapeutic growth and how it acutely contributes towards any effort to reshape one's psycho-social orientation.

Self-Directed/Negotiated Professional Growth.

Throughout their career as counsellors, participants encountered professional situations that challenged their ability and outlook. Whether it was working with an unfamiliar issue or client group, an unsuspecting issue of transference or countertransference that emerged out of nowhere, or any one of several other issues, participants who became conscious of some personal or professional shortcoming found themselves at a crossroads.

As independent, autonomous professionals, they were expected to mobilise the relevant resources and navigate through such turning points. In varying situations, participants chose to address a skills- or knowledge-deficit by integrating new techniques into their practice or furthering their education. In other situations, they focused on their reflexive process and/or sought professional supervision.

Sometimes the outcome of this self-directed professional growth was the resolution of a therapeutic impasse through a renewed or refreshed perspective, while at other times it was the increased professional knowledge that drives their therapeutic work forward:

The clients bring about the need to look into certain things. ... There was the first time that I worked with an eating disorder, the first time that I worked with a fostered client. ... You can say a million times that you've read before but the need to grow comes from ... you know. (Andi)

At times, the participants' professional growth came by way of a realisation that they were not quite ready to deal with a particular issue, client, or client group, and that both they and the client were best served by referring the case onwards. Though such realisations did not necessarily advance the participants' therapeutic work with the clients concerned, they felt that this new understanding of their own limitations constituted a form of professional growth that allowed them to provide a more effective service to their clients or more accurately attend to the direction and trajectory of their ongoing professional development:

If it's a big no-no, if it's unbearable, it might be harmful to stay working with the person, but if it's something which you can work with, together, then I might address it in a respectful way. ... And then you're still technically growing, because you noticed what your no-nos are, or you noticed how to explain that diplomatically, in a way that's, you know ... respectful. It's still an experience you learn from. (Charlie)

Self-Direction Through Adversity.

Metaphorical stimuli related to this theme featured as common choices by participants through choice of linguistic metaphors, including Growth is Pain and Growth is a Double-edged Sword, or images such as a person about to be stabbed, or a hand being cut off. Participants held an understanding that navigating oneself through significant, adverse, or painful circumstances was a common and important element of therapeutic growth:

When you go through major events, ... that can really reshape your understanding of things, and sometimes can catapult you forwards in ways you wouldn't have expected. ... Like loss, and hardship in general ... You know, you can take lots of meaning from suffering. ... If you can take a lesson from something that happened and make it meaningful, that's an immense source of growth. (Charlie)

They also underscored the importance of the self-directed nature of overcoming this adversity, referring to the chosen metaphors or using their own:

The cutting off of the arm I think, which is very graphic, is maybe reflected back into the birds flying, so that...maybe...removing parts of you that...might be harming you or might...not serve you at that time. ... Also, understanding that, ... this might be what you've chosen, ... because sometimes they feel like, for example in an abusive relationship, they're losing part of themselves by leaving. ... I see the client doing the action [cutting off the hand]. There are so many people who tell you you need to do this ..., but until you're ready to face that pain, ... it's pointless. So, they have to be ready ... to face reality...that I'm gonna be armless for some time. It's very painful. (Dre)

Participants' navigation of their own personal and professional growth framed their outlook of clients' relationship with adversity. Their belief in the net positive gain in supporting clients to reflect on and work through the challenges in their lives was underscored by the participants' experiences of enduring and directing themselves through adverse circumstances:

Despite the pain it can bring with its challenges and suffering, it's also...worth it, 100% worth it, because eventually you feel ... there's nothing better than growth and continuous growth. ... personally, I feel like ... it's something which informs my whole way of being, I would say. ... I have personally felt the benefits. (Charlie).

Reshaping One's Psychosocial Position.

For both themselves and their clients, participants held the reshaping of one's psychosocial position as an important result of the counselling process. This reshaping took place on various levels, depending on individual's goals, the intensity with which it was pursued, the degree of reflectivity present, and a myriad of other factors. Sometimes, the result of these efforts was fuzzy, unexpected, or interpreted negatively by the various agents within the client's orbit. Andi recalled an experience with a particular client:

This client was very disempowered and very quiet and closed off ..., very bullied. Everyone in the school was worried. ... We worked on their self-esteem, and stuff like that and he ended up getting into much more trouble at school, he was getting reports, and I

wondered ... OK, I helped with the self-esteem and he's much more autonomous and empowered, but it turned out quite detrimental in terms of fitting in the system.

Andi ascribed these unexpected results to the fact that the "product" being sold by counsellors is often unknown or misunderstood by the people who seek it, so the results of the therapeutic trajectory are hard to predict, quantify or communicate to those outside the process. This change in outward behaviour manifests differently because it is shaped by a changed internal experience that is unique to every process. When reflecting on the long-term effects of engaging in a process of therapeutic growth, Charlie recounted:

You recognise certain ... multi-generational family patterns, ... you're more aware of the interplay of that with yourself, how you are within the family system, ... how you are in other systems, in the workplace, with friendships or relationships, ... you are able to make much healthier relationships, your self-worth is increased, you're able to understand people more deeply.

Participants understood this reshaped psychosocial position as the driving force behind the increased wellbeing that was an outcome of the growth process, both for themselves and for their clients. The reshaped psychosocial position drove changes in outlook and behaviour - pursuing new goals, renegotiating social relationships, developing different narratives and structures of meaning around their lives - that generated, according to a new paradigm, an increased sense of wellbeing in those who underwent a process of growth.

Answering the Research Question

This dissertation originally set out to answer the research question What is therapeutic growth to counsellors in Malta? It aimed to expand upon this question through the following four sub-questions discussed in this section. Based on the analysis undertaken in this chapter, participants understood therapeutic growth to be the process whereby a person engages in a bounded relationship to navigate their internal and external environments, refine their self-concept, and facilitate the exercise of increased personal agency to actively reorganise their

psychosocial position in a manner that more actively promotes their wellbeing (GT2 and GT3) more effectively. It was the development of skills and attitudes that were supported by the work done during counselling but that could be transposed into life beyond the counselling space, in a manner that promoted improved communication, reflexivity and autonomy. This aligns with the work of Rogers (1967) work and the aims of contemporary person-centred counselling and psychotherapy (Merry & Haugh, 2020; Mearns, 2014; Cornelius-White, 2017).

At the deepest or highest level of therapeutic work - depending on the metaphorical orientation (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008) -, participants associated growth with increased capacity to derive and extract meaning from one's existence in the vein of Frankl (2004), to reflect deeply on their origin and historical self, and use this newfound perspective as a catalyst to create a more fulfilling and self-actualised life for themselves (Maslow, 1968; Seligman, 2011). Contemporary literature understands this as one of the key components of an overall sense of wellbeing (Demarco & Willig, 2022; Layard & De Neve, 2023, McMahon in Eid & Larsen, 2008).

Growth and Wellbeing

Regarding the first research subquestion - What do counsellors in Malta understand growth to be, as a function of counselling that promotes wellbeing? - participants understood growth as occurring along a continuum, possibly and potentially leading to this eventual goal. Along the way, growth could manifest in seemingly more minor or unexpected ways, where the therapeutic work prompted a change in outlook or behaviour that drove a seemingly minor but overall positive improvement in wellbeing. It could also reach an impasse, obstructed by internal or external factors (GT1). Such an impasse could be resolved through action on the client's part, such as attempting a new behaviour, or by the counsellor, through seeking supervision or additional training. An impasse could also be resolved collaboratively by the client and counsellor through actions such as renegotiating the therapeutic relationship (GT2). At other times, the impasse could not be resolved, and the growth process would halt.

To participants, growth in counselling was a process mobilised on an individual level. However, the extent of its strength and efficacy rested on several external factors, including the strength of the therapeutic relationship developed with the counsellor and a person's physical or mental health, or socio-economic situation (GT1). This interaction of client agency, counsellor intervention and environmental circumstance drove, in circumstances unique to each therapeutic relationship, an overall increase in subjective wellbeing (GT3) (Lucas, 2008; Seligman, 2011)

Counselling Theory and Counselling Culture

Throughout the data collection process, participants made little direct reference to theoretical constructs. Andi referenced their challenge in relating to the concept of unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1967). Ben briefly mentioned Rogers (1967) and non-directional therapy, Oaklander (2001) and Axline (1975). Charlie once referenced the Jungian concept of water being healing (2014). Dre mentioned Husserl (1999), Heidigger (Heidigger, 2002; Moran, 2002) and the Gestalt concept of Field (Berry, 2022; Francesetti & Roubal, 2020), while Elliot made brief reference to the Shadow, the Shadow self, and relational growth (Jung, 2014; Rogers, 1970).

With regard to the second subquestion -What do they (counsellors) feel has shaped and shapes this conceptualisation?, a sense that the personal experience of the counselling culture was what shaped each participant's understanding of the counselling process, its potential benefits, and the way they could best approach it as professionals was more acutely prominent in each interview (GT2). Here I recall the words of Rogers (1967), whom I first encountered in my preliminary readings and literature review:

Experience is, for me, the highest authority. The touchstone of validity is my own experience. No other person's ideas, and none of my own ideas, are as authoritative as my experience. It is to experience that I must return again and again, to discover a closer approximation to truth as it is in the process of becoming in me ... Neither the Bible nor the prophets - neither Freud nor research - neither the revelations of God nor man - can take precedence over my own direct experience. (p. 23-24)

The experience of being trained as counsellors, undergoing personal counselling, and conducting themselves as professional counsellors appears to engender a form of acculturation (Sam & Berry, 2010) into a broad culture of counselling and psychotherapy that is nonetheless modulated by each participant's individual experiences as a student, client, and practitioner:

Sometimes I feel like it's a cult, you know? Your therapist has a therapist, who has a therapist ... You learn from your supervisor, you learn from your therapist, you learn from your peers, you learn from the knowledge...I think you learn from the clients as well. (Dre)

Such experiential and socially constructed knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1967) seems to take precedence over formal reliance on theory and training in driving both participants' overall understanding of the counselling process and their moment-to-moment decision-making when working with individual clients. Their own experience overwhelmingly and directly informs counsellors' understanding of growth of such growth happening in themselves and others.

Experience Drives Expression

The apparent prominence of experientially generated knowledge over strict theoretical training held implications for participants' expression of their counselling practice. Addressing the third subquestion - What role do counsellors feel their conceptualisation of growth plays in their work with clients?, counsellors worked with a conceptualisation of growth that was formed more strongly by their own experiences inside the counselling culture than by any strict theoretical understanding. This generated a feedback process (GT2) that shaped their professional practice. Their understanding of their clients' therapeutic trajectories, potential, opportunities, and challenges was influenced by their own acculturation of the counselling process during training, practice, and their experience as clients.

Supervision and reflection served to modulate this understanding, seeking to ensure that the participants' own experiential understanding of the growth process did not become a limiting factor in their clients' therapeutic potential (GT2). Counsellors, therefore, understand and work towards client growth in a manner that is directly informed by their own subjective experience of

the phenomenon but that also uses the professional tools of supervision and self-reflection to allow client trajectories to unfold in a manner that respects their individual ability, potential and environment.

An Unexpected Clash of Cultures

My initial literature review and supervisor consultations inclined me to believe that I would encounter experiences of one or more sociocultural groups that were, perhaps, more challenging to work with. Offhand, I was inclined to believe that participants would identify acutely distinct groups such as, for example, men, religious people or Manchester United fans as being particularly difficult to work with or as precipitating cultural dissonance due to a component element of their broader cultural identity that conflicted with the counselling approach.

What emerged, however, was that cultural dissonance mostly occurred when a particular client's outlook, understanding and goals differed greatly from the relevant participant's acculturation and implementation of the counselling culture. Thus, with regard to the fourth and last research sub-question: What happens when there is cultural dissonance between counsellors' and clients' understanding of growth?, examples that emerged during data collection included school authorities getting "angry" at Andi because their client became more outspoken and self-assured, the parents of one of Ben's clients trying to get a statement for use in legal proceedings, and one of Dre's clients trying to get Dre to sanction the idea that all the client's harmful and destructive behaviours were the fault of their romantic partner. In such circumstances, participants maintained cultural dissonance because the vastly different goals for the counselling process held by the counsellor and the other involved party (the school administration, the parents, and the client) could not be reconciled.

In such cases, participants engaged in supervision and reflection to understand how best to mobilise the available resources and navigate the impasse created by the cultural dissonance (GT2, GT3). At times, this was seen as an opportunity to develop one's skills or broaden one's

outlook while at other times it was deemed a safer or more effective course of action for the therapeutic relationship to be ended.

Reflexivity

During the data analysis process, I consistently found myself reflecting on my own beliefs, perspectives, and experiences as both a trainee counsellor and an insider researcher. Having spent the last four years thoroughly immersed in the realm of counselling, I acknowledged how my theoretical background and professional history shaped my interpretation of the data. I encountered moments of resonance, where participants' stories mirrored my own understanding of personal development, as well as instances of dissonance, where their viewpoints challenged or expanded my existing ideas.

Maintaining reflexivity throughout the research journey, including in my research journal and through supervision and feedback, enabled me to navigate these tensions and remain receptive to the diverse array of experiences and interpretations expressed by participants. As I delved into the tapestry of narratives, I inevitably confronted my own vulnerabilities and areas for growth. These experiences served as powerful reminders of the interconnected nature of personal and professional development, reinforcing my belief in the significance of humility, curiosity, and ongoing self-reflection in my capacity as a future counsellor and researcher in the field, always prioritizing the well-being of clients and the provision of an ever more effective service.

Conclusion

This chapter provided pseudonymised profiles of the research participants and the interview stimuli with which they engaged throughout the data collection process. It continued by presenting the research findings via visual maps of the three global themes developed through Thematic Network Analysis and presenting each Global Theme and its organising themes, supported by participants' verbatim quotes.

An analysis of the global themes was processed considering the original research question, referencing contemporary academic literature to support any claims made to effectively answer the dissertation's research agenda. The implications of these findings are discussed in the final chapter.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

This research presented counsellors' perspectives on therapeutic growth in Malta. The chosen methodology helped me retrieve, understand, analyse, and present the participants' understandings, the origins of those understandings and the implications that such understandings may have for their work with clients. The TNs that I developed and presented within this dissertation helped me understand the intersection between the personal and the social, the internal and the external processes that are initiated and resolved throughout the counselling process. The research has also been of immense personal benefit as I now move to adopt the profession, identity, and practice of a counsellor, helping me to reflect on my relationship with and position within these processes in my search to offer a more effective service to future clients.

Summary of Findings

In exploring the research question, this study aimed to delve deeply into the nuances of the concept of growth. Participants articulated their understanding of therapeutic growth as a process involving the development of skills and attitudes that extend beyond the counselling space, fostering improved communication, reflexivity, and autonomy. Moreover, they associated growth with a deeper capacity to derive meaning from existence and reflect on personal history, aligning with broader notions of self-actualisation and wellbeing in contemporary literature (Frankl, 2004; Seligman, 2011).

Participants described growth as occurring along a continuum, influenced by the strength of the therapeutic relationship and various external factors, ultimately contributing to subjective well-being. While theoretical constructs were mentioned sparingly, counsellors' conceptualizations of growth were largely shaped by their experiential immersion within the counselling culture, emphasizing the importance of personal experience in shaping professional practice (Eger, 2018; Kottler, 2018; Rogers, 1967).

Implications

One implication of this study is that a significant source of cultural dissonance in counselling - at least in the Maltese context - originates from clients or their families who do not understand the purpose of counselling, as opposed to originating from any sociocultural, ethnic, or religious group as in the American model (Sue et al., 2022). In spaces where persons are referred to counselling, such as schools, social welfare services, voluntary organisations, or healthcare settings, it may be important to reflect on, analyse and clearly outline the scope and intention of counselling services to avoid misunderstanding or to avoid wrongly using counselling as a replacement service for a potentially more effective service such as psychiatry, social work or occupational therapy services (Blaehr & Søggaard 2021; Debaisieux, 2021).

A second implication of this study underscores counsellors' roles as advocates of their profession. By more acutely understanding and communicating the purpose, nature, and boundaries of their profession within the social and institutional spaces in which they operate, counsellors can ensure a more effective service provision for people experiencing distress. It is up to counsellors to communicate the culture of counselling (Kottler, 2018).

Recommendations for Training and Education

The fact that essentially the participants, irrespective of their years of experience, so strongly emphasised their experiential understanding of the research question in contrast to any formal theoretical grounding, may hold implications for the formal training and accreditation of counsellors provided at UM. It may be of institutional relevance and interest for the UM, specifically the Department of Counselling, to explore the role and relevance of training in or education on the different modalities covered in the Mcouns. And Tcouns. Courses, the reflexive and experiential components of training, or to support the further development of the experiential dimension of the counselling process through supplementary post-graduate training.

Recommendations for Practice

Feedback from participants after the data collection process was very positive, and reflecting on their own understanding of such a fundamental concept within the counselling profession was fruitful, novel, and stimulating. “I grew a bit during that interview”, remarked Dre as we wrapped things up. The fact that the data collection process was of value to the participants was an essential element of contemporary research ethics (Howitt, 2019; Willig, 2022). There may be scope to develop such a practice further, refining and formalising the approach, looking at additional concepts such as grief or love, or adopting the practice on an institutional or collective level (Kottler, 2018).

Recommendations for Future Research

As Malta’s demographic landscape continues to develop, it may be fruitful to revisit this research in a decade or so, considering the predicted or actual change in the future social fabric - both in the general population and, perhaps, in the population of those who pursue training as counsellors. It may also be worthwhile to explore counsellor perspectives on growth in other countries or areas that are moving out of relative social homogeneity into a more heterogeneous social landscape, and it may also be pertinent to explore client perspectives and trainers’ perspectives on this and other similar concepts.

Reflections

I set out to understand a vague, loosely defined term that emerged at the naissance of the counselling profession and has gone in and out of favour across time and cultural contexts. I aimed to explore the implications of this vagueness and the consequences of striving to define it.

Throughout this research journey, I gained insight into the psychosocial forces that exert themselves upon both counsellors and their clients as counsellors strive to provide a service to their clients. Providing such a service to others can often leave unexpected and indelible marks upon the counsellors as both professionals and as people, in turn shaping both who they are and the service they offer to others.

The challenge of incorporating novel elements into my research methodology and the support I received for doing so are immensely valuable experiences for me. The themes that emerged during the research surprised me, teaching me more about myself, my personal and professional trajectory and the development and conduct of the counselling profession than I could have imagined. This dissertation represents the culmination of four years of personal, academic, and professional growth that have definitively reshaped my own psychosocial position and will have implications for my own life and those around me for a long, long time. Only time will reveal the exact nature of those implications. As things stand, I look forward to graduating, resting, and taking refuge in the words of Frodo Baggins (1991) on the slopes of Mount Doom: “The quest is achieved, and now all is over” (p. 926).

Final Comment

Counsellors are expected to be reflective practitioners (McLeod, 2019). When counsellors reflect on the factors and processes that influence their own understanding of the growth process and their personal and professional relationship with that process, it allows them to provide a more effective service to their clients. This enables them to gain further insight into themselves as persons and professionals. As Dre poignantly reflected at the end of our hour together, “I even grew a little bit during this interview.”

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Appendix A - Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Semi-Structured Interview Guide:

Growth in Counselling: Practitioner Perspectives and Implications for Practice

This research aims to explore: How do counsellors in Malta conceptualise client growth, as a potential outcome of the counselling process? Sub questions include:

1. What do counsellors in Malta understand to be growth, as a function of counselling that promotes wellbeing?
2. What do they feel has shaped and shapes this conceptualization?
3. What role do they feel this conceptualization of growth plays in their work with clients?
4. What happens when there is cultural dissonance between counsellors' and clients' understanding of growth?

A) Introduction and taking of professional history.

- a. How long have you been practicing? Which contexts?
- b. What prompted commencement of training as a counsellor?
- c. Additional training/education undertaken since graduation?
- d. Main client populations worked with?

B) **Present OH Cards.** 'When considering the idea of growth in relation to counselling, which of these cards do you feel resonates with your understanding? You can select as many as you like.

Discuss and unpack - How does each card connect to growth? Is there an experience/story/anecdote connected with the card? Does it refer to the counsellor, to the client? Both? Something else?

Elements from lit review:

What does the outcome of growth look like?

Under what conditions does it occur?

Growth as an outcome of resilience?

Growth as facilitated by a relationship.

Growth as a choice? Potential growth? Unlimited? Inevitable?

C) Do any of the following statements resonate with you? If so, which? And why?

Present flashcards

Discuss and unpack in a similar manner to cards. Pick up on parallels and contrasts.

If not covered during the discussion and unpacking of stimuli:

D) What is the connection between the counselling process and growth? What does this growth look like?

- a. Client Growth?
- b. Counsellor Growth?
- c. Growth of the therapeutic relationship?

E) How do you understand wellbeing?

F) Are there any other experiences/memories/persons you feel have influenced your understanding of the concept of growth?

G) Is there a relationship between wellbeing as an outcome of counselling, and growth?

H) In which ways do you feel you've grown as a person/professional since commencing training?

I) How do you feel these understandings (G and H) influence your work with clients?

J) Have you ever witnessed a client grow during your work together? How do you know that what you witnessed constitutes growth?

K) Have you ever witnessed client growth that you didn't agree with, that didn't sit well with you or that concerned you somehow? Expand (potentially prompt with vignette from personal experience/practice)

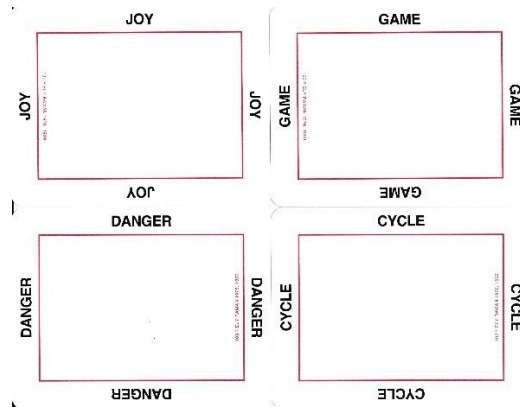
L) How did you tackle this dissonance?

M) Did this dissonance affect your work with the client?

Appendix B - Scan of Sample of OH Cards









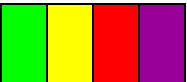
Appendix C - Sample Scan of OH Word Cards and list of featured words

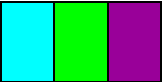
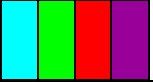
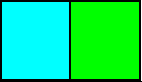
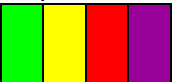



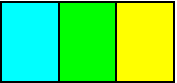

AFFECTION	BOSS	DISGRACE	GAME	HOMO-SEXUAL	NAKED	SELF-DEFEATING	THREAT
ALONE	CHANGE	DISLIKE	GIVE	HOPE	OWE	SHAME	UGLY
ANGER	CHILD	DREAM	GO	HUMILIATE	PAIN	SHARE	VICTIM
ANXIETY	COMIC	ELIMINATE	GRIEF	INTIMIDATE	POSTURE	SHOULD	VIOLATE
APOLOGY	COMPULSION	EMBARRASS	GUILT	JOY	POWER-PLAY	SLAVE	WAIT
APPEARANCE	CONFORM	EROTIC	HABIT	LAUGHTER	RESENT	STOP	WEARY
ATTACK	CONFUSION	EXPERT	HATE	LETTING GO	RESIST	STRANGERS	WISE
ATTRACTIVE	CYCLE	FAIL	HESITATION	LIE	RETREAT	STUPID	WOMEN
BEGINNING	DANGER	FASCINATION	HIDE	LOVE	RIGID	SUCCESS	WONDERFUL
BOAST	DEPEND	FATHER	HOLDING ON	MEN	RIVAL	SUPPRESS	WRONG
BOREDOM	DESTROY	FEAR	HOME	MOTHER	ROT	TAKE	THREAT

Appendix D - Flashcard Stimuli Reference

Key: Evocative of	 the natural world and natural (biological and geological) phenomena  human experience  human activity  social constructs  abstract concept
--------------------------	--


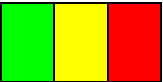
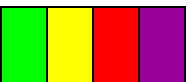
Growth is...	Rogers (1967): the absolute validity of human experience	Rogers (1967): an intrinsic natural process	Kottler (2022): a creative act	Kottler (2022): an approach to problem-solving	Yalom (2017): a distinction and demarcation of experience	Seligman (2011): a positive outcome of resilience and adversity	Frankl (2004): creating meaning from suffering and hardship	Eger (2017): an exercise of personal agency.	Symbolic References
... a story. 			✓				✓	✓	
... an illusion. 	✓				✓		✓		

Growth is...	Rogers (1967): the absolute validity of human experience	Rogers (1967): an intrinsic natural process	Kottler (2022): a creative act	Kottler (2022): an approach to problem-solving	Yalom (2017): a distinction and demarcation of experience	Seligman (2011): a positive outcome of resilience and adversity	Frankl (2004): creating meaning from suffering and hardship	Eger (2017): an exercise of personal agency.	Symbolic References
...pain. 		✓			✓	✓	✓		
... dangerous. 					✓	✓	✓		
... a blossoming flower. 		✓	✓			✓			Chevalier & Gheerbrant (1996), Vries (2009)
...two steps forward, one step back. 	✓				✓			✓	

Growth is...	Rogers (1967): the absolute validity of human experience	Rogers (1967): an intrinsic natural process	Kottler (2022): a creative act	Kottler (2022): an approach to problem-solving	Yalom (2017): a distinction and demarcation of experience	Seligman (2011): a positive outcome of resilience and adversity	Frankl (2004): creating meaning from suffering and hardship	Eger (2017): an exercise of personal agency.	Symbolic References
... a virus. 	✓	✓							
... a mountain. 		✓			✓		✓	✓	Chevalier & Gheerbrant (1996), Vries (2009)
... a path through the forest. 			✓		✓	✓		✓	Chevalier & Gheerbrant (1996)

Growth is...	Rogers (1967): the absolute validity of human experience	Rogers (1967): an intrinsic natural process	Kottler (2022): a creative act	Kottler (2022): an approach to problem-solving	Yalom (2017): a distinction and demarcation of experience	Seligman (2011): a positive outcome of resilience and adversity	Frankl (2004): creating meaning from suffering and hardship	Eger (2017): an exercise of personal agency.	Symbolic References
... a marathon not a sprint. 					✓		✓	✓	
... a fire. 		✓	✓	✓					Chevalier & Gheerbrant (1996)
... a dream. 	✓			✓			✓		Chevalier & Gheerbrant (1996)
... a fact. 	✓	✓			✓				

Growth is...	Rogers (1967): the absolute validity of human experience	Rogers (1967): an intrinsic natural process	Kottler (2022): a creative act	Kottler (2022): an approach to problem-solving	Yalom (2017): a distinction and demarcation of experience	Seligman (2011): a positive outcome of resilience and adversity	Frankl (2004): creating meaning from suffering and hardship	Eger (2017): an exercise of personal agency.	Symbolic References
... happiness. 	✓					✓	✓		
... a challenge. 					✓	✓	✓		
... an investment. 			✓	✓			✓	✓	
... a sprint not a marathon. 					✓		✓	✓	

Growth is...	Rogers (1967): the absolute validity of human experience	Rogers (1967): an intrinsic natural process	Kottler (2022): a creative act	Kottler (2022): an approach to problem-solving	Yalom (2017): a distinction and demarcation of experience	Seligman (2011): a positive outcome of resilience and adversity	Frankl (2004): creating meaning from suffering and hardship	Eger (2017): an exercise of personal agency.	Symbolic References
... a seed you must plant. 		✓					✓	✓	Chevalier & Gheerbrant (1996), Cirlot 1995)
... a double-edged sword. 				✓		✓	✓		Chevalier & Gheerbrant (1996), Cirlot (1995)
... a lie. 	✓		✓	✓	0				

Appendix E - Feedback Questions asked to Pilot Interview Participant

- 1) How did you find the interview, in general?
- 2) Did you find the number of questions and length of the interview suitable to the subject material?
- 3) How did you feel about the use of the interview stimuli?
 - a. Invite separate feedback on both the OH cards and the metaphor flashcards
- 4) If the interview stimuli were omitted, do you feel the interview questions would have been more effective, the same, or less effective?
- 5) Did you learn something new about yourself or your professional practice through your participation in this interview?
- 6) What, if anything, would you change about the structure of this interview?
- 7) Any other feedback?

Appendix F - MACP Proof of Willingness to Disseminate



Julian Galea <[redacted]>

MCouns Dissertation

Information MACP <info@macpmalta.org>

27 March 2023 at 17:38

To: Julian Galea <[redacted]>

Dear Julian,

MACP would be happy to disseminate once you get ethical clearance. Good luck with your research.

Kind regards,

Estela

On Mon, 27 Mar 2023 at 09:34, Julian Galea <[redacted]> wrote:

Dear MACP,

I am currently reading for a Master in Counselling at the University of Malta. As part of my course requirements, I am conducting a research study entitled, Growth in Counselling: Practitioner Perspectives and Implications for Practice under the supervision of my dissertation supervisor Prof. Ruth Falzon. The aim of this study is to explore how counsellors conceptualise the process of growth in therapy and the subsequent implications.

My intention is to interview six to eight counsellors who have at least three years' experience and ask them questions related to the theme of the research through a one-time basis, audio-recorded, individual, semi-structured interview lasting around an hour, and held either online or face-to-face at a venue and a time most convenient to them).

This study will hopefully contribute to the local body of literature.

I am querying if you would be willing to disseminate the information about my research, namely the information letter and the consent form (both attached), with all your members for their perusal so that they may take an informed opt-in decision-making process, once I have obtained ethical clearance.

Kind Regards,
Julian Galea

MACP EC 2022-2024

Should you not wish to receive information about courses organised by private entities, kindly reply to this email to inform us.

Please note that any views, opinions or information contained in this electronic message and in any attachments to this message are solely those of the author and may not represent those of MACP or bind The Association. This message has been scanned for viruses and dangerous content by Mail Scanner, and is believed to be clean.

Appendix G - Information Letter for Participants

Dear Prospective Participant,

I am currently reading for Master in Counselling at the University of Malta. As part of my course requirements, I am conducting a research study entitled, **Growth in Counselling: Practitioner Perspectives and Implications for Practice** under the supervision of Prof. Ruth Falzon and Prof. Gordon Sammut. The aim of this study is to explore how counsellors understand the concept of growth in therapy. Your participation in this study would help towards development of cultural competence and intercultural communication within the profession. Furthermore, all data collected from this research shall be used solely for the purpose of this study.

You are being invited to participate in a one-time, audio-recorded, individual, semi-structured interview exploring your understanding of the concept of growth in therapy and what you feel informs this understanding. The interview will take approximately one hour and will be held online or face-to-face at a venue and a time most convenient for you. You are not obliged to answer all the questions and may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. Furthermore, withdrawal from the study will not have any negative repercussions on you and any data collected will be erased immediately.

Data will be stored pseudonymously if it is impossible to delete. I can assure you that confidentiality with regard to your personal data will be maintained throughout the study, and will not be revealed in any publications, reports or presentations arising from this research. All data collected will be pseudonymised and you will have the opportunity to choose your own pseudonym. Your personal data will be stored securely and separately and only I will have

access to this data. My academic supervisors, and in exceptional circumstances and if necessary, the examiners, may have access to the pseudonymised raw data. The pseudonymised audio-recordings, and verbatim transcripts will be stored on my personal computer that is password protected and in an encrypted format. Any material in hard-copy form will be placed in a locked cupboard which only I will have access to.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary is on a first come first served basis and you are free to accept or refuse to take part without giving a reason. A copy of the information sheet and consent form will be provided for future reference. As a participant, you have the right, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation that implements and further specifies the relevant provisions of said regulation, to access, rectify and where applicable ask for the data concerning you to be erased. Personally identifiable data will be deleted when it is no longer necessary, around December 2024. Any subsequent anonymised data may be kept indefinitely.

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty for Social Wellbeing at the University of Malta.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Should you have any questions or concerns do not hesitate to contact me on 79327546 or by e-mail julian.galea.16@um.edu.mt or my supervisor Prof. Ruth Falzon on ruth.falzon@um.edu.mt.

Yours Sincerely,

Julian Galea
Student

Prof. Ruth Falzon
Dissertation Supervisor
E ruth.falzon@um.edu.mt

Appendix H - Consent Form for Participants

Growth in Counselling: Practitioner Perspectives and Implications for Practice

I, the undersigned, give my consent to take part in the study conducted by Julian Galea. This consent form specifies the terms of my participation in this research study.

1. I have been given written and/or verbal information about the purpose of the study; I have had the opportunity to ask questions and any questions that I had were answered fully and to my satisfaction.
2. I also understand that I am free to accept to participate, or to refuse or stop participation at any time without giving any reason and without any penalty. Should I choose to participate, I may choose to decline to answer any questions asked. In the event that I choose to withdraw from the study, any data collected from me will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is anonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.
3. I understand that recruitment was based on the inclusion criteria for participation and a first-come-first-served basis, namely the first eight participants who had contacted Mr. Galea
4. I understand that I have been invited to participate in a one-time, individual semi-structured audio-recorded interview, in which the researcher will ask interview questions to participants, to explore my understanding of growth as a potential outcome of the counselling process. I am aware that the semi-structured audio-recorded interview will take approximately an hour. I understand that the semi-structured audio-recorded interview is to be conducted in a place and at a time that is convenient for me.
5. I am aware that, if I choose to hold the interview online, or if it is not possible to hold the interview face-to-face due to health conditions, Mr. Galea will use Zoom and activate the Require Encryption for 3rd party endpoints SIP/H-323 function. Mr. Galea will also only audio-record the ZOOM session
6. I understand that whilst my participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks and all efforts will be made to ensure the questions posed do not cause any psychological distress, notwithstanding, if I feel that the semi-structured interview has distressed me in any way, I am aware that I may make use of the support services information sheet that Mr. Galea will give me at the beginning of the interview. I am aware that this document comprises a list of free services. The document also includes fee-paying services which I understand I will have to pay for should I decide not to use free services.
7. I understand that there are no direct benefits to me from participating in this study. I also understand that this research may benefit others by exploring dimensions of cultural competence within the counselling profession.
8. I understand that, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, I have the right to access, rectify and, where applicable, ask for the data concerning me to be erased.

9. I understand that all data collected will be stored in an anonymised form on completion of the study, around December 2024.
10. I have been provided with a copy of the information letter and understand that I will also be given a copy of this consent form.
11. I am aware that, by marking the first-tick box below, I am giving my consent for this semi-structured interview to be audio-recorded and converted to text as it has been recorded (transcribed verbatim). **MARK ONLY IF AND AS APPLICABLE**
 I agree to this semi-structured interview being audio recorded.
 I do not agree to this semi-structured being audio recorded.
12. With respect to the Zoom audio recording, I am aware that, even though Mr. Galea will not be video-recording, I will keep my camera on. I am also aware that Mr. Galea will instruct me how to change my Zoom name to only display and orally use my pseudonym, so that the audio-recordings as well as the transcripts are pseudonymised.
13. I am aware that after the interview, Mr. Galea will send me my verbatim transcripts for review and that I will have a 15-day window from receipt of transcript to give my feedback. I am aware that Mr. Galea will only use a pseudonym instead of my name in the Verbatim transcript I will receive, which pseudonym I will have the option to choose myself. I am aware that, during the interview, I will inform Mr. Galea if I prefer that the transcript would be e-mailed or snail-mailed to me
14. I am aware that extracts from my interview may be reproduced in these outputs, either in anonymous form, or using a pseudonym [a made-up name] which I will have the opportunity to choose myself.
15. I am aware that my data will be pseudonymised; i.e., my identity will not be noted on transcripts or notes from my interview, but instead, a pseudonym will be assigned. The pseudonyms that link my data to my identity will be stored securely and separately from the data, in an encrypted file on the researcher's password-protected computer, and only Mr. Galea, Prof. Ruth Falzon, and, if necessary, the examiners of this study, will have access to this information. Any hard-copy materials will be placed in a locked cabinet/drawer, which only Mr. Galea can access. Any material that identifies me as a participant in this study will be stored securely until the dissertation has been completed and submitted, approximately by December 2024.
16. I am aware that my identity and personal information will not be revealed in any publications, reports or presentations arising from this research.

I have read and understood the above statements and agree to participate in this study.

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Mr Julian Galea

Prof. Ruth Falzon

Appendix I - List of Support Services

Dear Participant,

I hope this email finds you well.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your participation in this study. I appreciate your involvement and cooperation throughout this entire process.

I would like to remind you of the aims of this study; to explore how counsellors conceptualise the process of growth in therapy and the subsequent implications.

This study was not anticipated to cause distress and the interview questions were formatted in as sensitive a manner as possible. However, if your participation has led you to experience any distress or discomfort for whatever reason, then overleaf I have included some information about services that offer free and fee-paying professional support that you might find helpful.

Kindly do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries.

If you require any additional information or wish to report any concerns about this study, please do not hesitate to contact both myself, on [REDACTED] or my research supervisor on [REDACTED]

Kind regards,

Name of student researcher: Julian Galea

Course: Master in Counselling

Student's contact email: [REDACTED]

Student's contact number: [REDACTED]

Research supervisor: Professor Ruth Falzon

Supervisor's email: ruth.falzon@um.edu.mt

Supervisor's phone number: [REDACTED]

Growth in Counselling: Practitioner Perspectives and Implications for Practice

FREE SERVICES



Richmond Foundation

info@richmond.org.mt +356 21 224580/ 21 482336/ 21 480045

Supports both individuals who are experiencing mental health problems as well as those around them. Apart from supporting individuals by offering therapeutic help, Richmond Foundation also guides individuals by teaching the necessary skills to live and work independently. Their services include support groups, assisted living solutions, educational programmes, as well as counselling services.

Supportline 179 (24/7 access)

fsws.gov.mt

This is Malta's national helpline acting to provide support, information about local social welfare and other agencies, as well as a referral service to individuals who require support. It is also a national service to individuals facing difficult times or a crisis. Their primary mission is to provide immediate and unbiased help to whoever requires it.



Kellimni .com (24/7 access) <http://kellimni.com/21244123/21335097>

kellimni.com is an online support service in which trained staff and volunteers are available for support 24/7 via email, chat and smart messaging. This service is managed by SOS Malta.

Crisis Resolution Malta [crisismalta@gmail.com/](mailto:crisismalta@gmail.com) +356 9933 9966

Offers immediate care. Crisis resolution 24/7. The team of volunteers which answer the phone are all professionals, and the consultation service is free.

Crisis intervention Mater Dei +356 2545 3950

Supports in various crisis situations related to mental health. Monday to Friday 7am - 5.30pm.

PAID PROFESSIONALS

Counsellors: Malta Association for the Counselling Profession (MACP) www.macpmalta.org

Council for the Counselling Profession (CCP) ccp.msfc@gov.mt

Family Therapists: Malta Association of Family Therapy and Systemic Practice (MAFT-SP)

maft.systemicpractice@gmail.com>

Psychologists: Malta Chamber of Psychologists

mcp.org.mt

Malta Psychology Profession Board mppb.msfc@gov.mt

Psychiatrists Malta Association of Psychiatrists: map.org.mt

Psychotherapists: www.facebook.com/MaltaAssociationForPsychotherapy

Appendix J - FREC Approval



Ruth Falzon <ruth.falzon@um.edu.mt>

Research Ethics Application - Approved by FREC, no UREC decision needed

1 message

SWB FREC <research-ethics.fsw@um.edu.mt>

26 April 2023 at 10:54

To: Julian Galea

Cc: "Prof. Ruth Falzon", Dr Roberta Attard

REDP Application ID: SWB-2023-00386

Dear Julian Galea,

Your ethics application regarding your research titled *Growth in Counselling: Practitioner Perspectives and Implications for Practice* has been **approved**.

Attached find a **copy of the feedback sheet** containing FREC's feedback and approval. Kindly check the sheet in case of any comments from FREC.

Faculty Research Ethics Committees are authorised to review and approve research ethics applications on behalf of the University of Malta, except in the case of sensitive personal data. In this regard, your ethics proposal **does not need to be sent to UREC-DP**. Hence, **you may now start your research**.

Disclaimer: *The research team should note that only the English versions of the documents submitted have been reviewed by FREC. It is the duty of the research team to ensure that all documents in Maltese (or any other language) are faithful translations of the English version.*

Regards,



Faculty Research Ethics Committee

Faculty for Social Wellbeing
Room 113, Humanities A Building
+356 2340 2237/3220

um.edu.mt/socialwellbeing/students/researchethics



[SWB-2023-00386 - Feedback Sheet 1].pdf
113K

Appendix K -Developing Themes

Figure 15

Developing Preliminary Codes

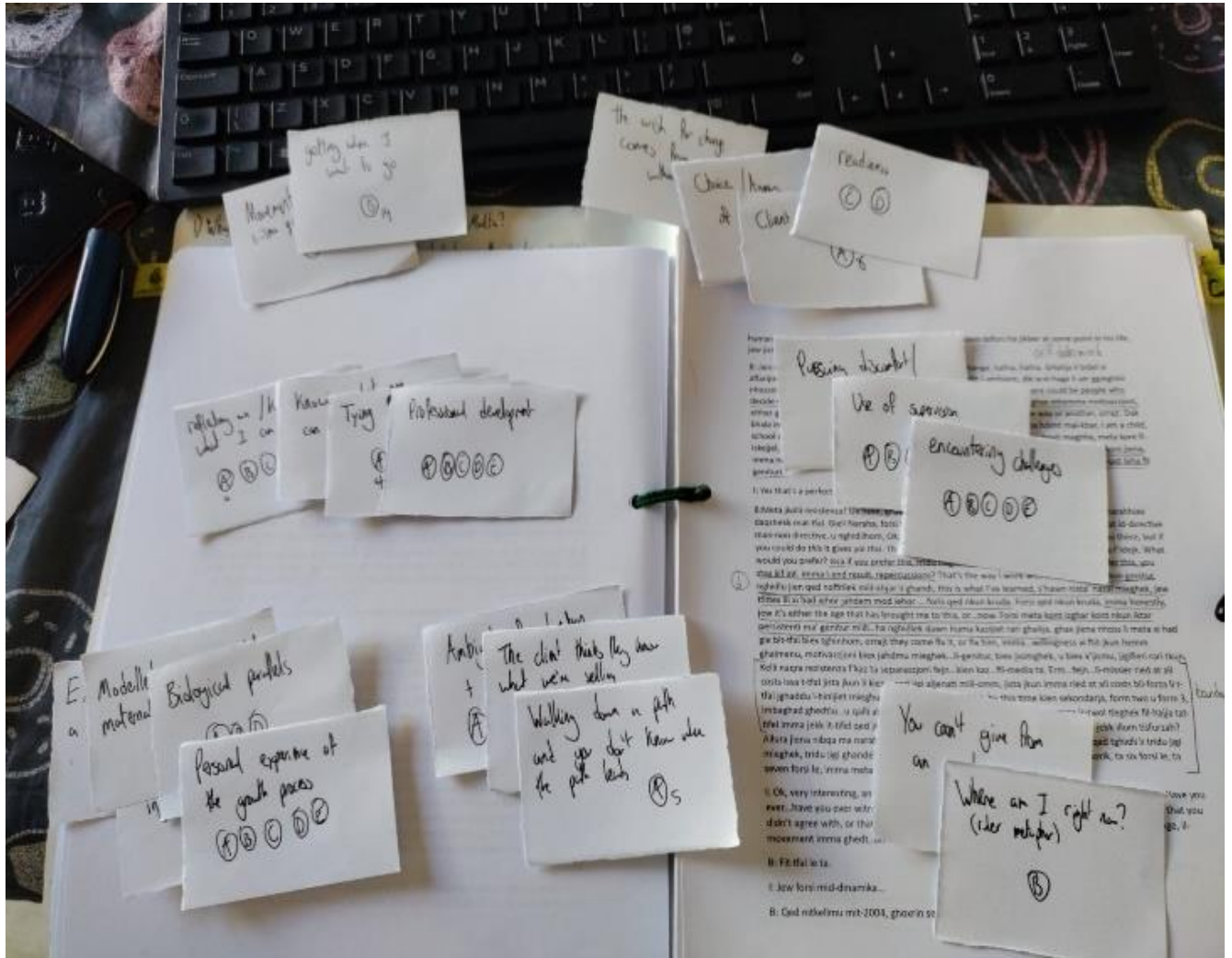


Figure 16

Creating Themes



Appendix L - Excerpt from Andi's Interview

A: Yeah, I feel that there's a lot of lack of boundaries, for instance, in breastfeeding, like even for the mother, and...in counselling kind of, I feel what is most pivotal for growth...is...the boundary.

I: So the boundary is the most pivotal for growth...OK

A: One of the things which is most pivotal, you know? Erm, so...

I: How so?

A: Because I feel that, erm, it creates a certain measure where people know when they can ^{be} vulnerable, they know when they can not be vulnerable, they understand that this person, erm...is not doing this out of obligation, or something like that, you know? So...nhooss li it leads to a lot of growth because ultimately you are the person...the child isn't going him or herself towards the breast, it is the mother who grabs the child and attach...so it's...the client comes to you, you don't grab the client and take him into therapy.

I: Ok, so even though...as a society we construct our idea of care and nurturing from parenting, and more acutely from mothering...mothering is sort of...the dissolution of boundaries, whereas counselling is...the maintaining of boundaries...

A: Mhm

I: Ok, is there any particular experience or story or anecdote from your life or from your professional practice that you would draw up on particularly strongly, to...

A: Towards this part?

I: To construct this understanding, sort of.

A: No I mean right now I'm going through just had a child [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] And I feel this a lot, you know? It's like...this child is very much dependent on me.

I: Mhm

A: And...there is a degree to...to which I enjoy this dependency myself, when this child smiles at me, it gives me pleasure, it gives me a certain sense of importance...it inflates me...and as a counsellor I have to be very careful that this doesn't happen to me, you know?

I: Mm, OK.

A: So...it's taking me to this student that I am seeing right now, and...she's in her...last years here, and at a point she told me...oh my God, when I'm going to leave I'm going to cry so much because I'm not gonna see you anymore and you're like the most...the best thing that happened in school to me. And I was ...happy about this happening, in a way, and I felt really bad when I thought about it, because I felt very important to this person, I wanted her to miss me, in a way. And that's the kind of thing I like...put rings my supervision bells, you know, um, I don't think it should be like that. I don't think it should be like that. I don't think my confidence as a therapist should stem from when my clients tell me 'I'm gonna miss you so much', whereas I expect my child to tell me he's gonna miss me.

② self-reflection
④ caregiving
⑩ boundaries

⑤ biology
⑩ agency
⑫ choice
⑬ desire

growth > agency

⑥ training
⑩ boundaries

⑤ supervision
⑨ discomfort
① personal experience

⑦ professional challenge

Appendix M - Excerpt from Ben's Interview

Erm, hemm il-forza tan-natura li ma tridx tibqa fejn hi, imma trid tohrog imma mhux talli tohrog imma terga tipproduci biex terga tipproduci, so it's the sharing in teaching...jiena kelli problema fil-play therapy, iktar milli hassejta fil-counselling, meta trenjajt ta counsellor, jew ma hargitx dak iz-zmien. Ma hargitx ghalkemm kien non-directive, ahna Rogerian, u l-pla therapy l-istess, Oaklander, Rogerian u Axline, kelli problema biex nieqaf nghallem.

⑥ family
⑦ professional
challenge

I: Kellek problema biex...

B: Biex nieqaf nghallem. During my sessions mat-tfal that was something I really had to work hard on, illi not to tell them what to do, not to show them how to do it.

I: And how does that tie into growth?

B: Because...learning to undo, in that specific thing, ghax il-bqija nghallem il-hin kollu, orrajt, in that specific thing, got me where I wanted to get/

Color: 10-100-100-100

I: So it was a growing point?

B: It was a growing point, in that specific instance, oK?

I: And how did you find out that that was where you needed to grow? Or wanted to >

B: Through supervision, kelli [redacted], u ghad ghandi [redacted] jien. Ghalija guru, ghalhemm hi tghidli jien mhux xoghol naghmel mieghek, anyway, iktar nghaddu l-hin nitkellmu, but anyway. And the other one hija rainbow, there's a bridge and there's a stream. The bridge gets me on the other side, gets me where I want to go, trying to get. Ahna l-bridge huwa simbolu fil-play therapy, hafna, so there needs, you need to see a creation of a bridge so that you know that the change is happening. Anke meta naraw in the sand, meta naraw...it-tlieta huma xi haga li jiena...ghalhekk hallejtha ghall-ahhar, meta naraw il-bridge, eureka, wasalna. Orrajt, Meta nara l-bridge, something is happening. Ghax fil-play therapy ma tkunx taf ezatt x'inhum jigri, you just trust the process bl-amment. Orrajt? Erm, l-istream l-istess, cos it's a flowing thing, it's alive, it's never static, sakemm xi had ma jaghmilix xi dam, orrajt, u joqtolha. U r-rainbow, sign of better whatever.

Supervision

Parity

I: Sign of hope?

B: Change, hope, change...se nerqa...se nerqa nixghel...

I: Ok, so for you growth is a very qisu...there's...there must always be movement

B: Movement, movement, movement. If you don't move you get static, l-ilma qieghed jinten. So...no. Jien l'm a hurricane, l'm known as a hurricane, ili known as a hurricane mindu kelli hdx il sena. Chatterbox and a jack in the box.

I: And where does this, where do you...so, just a second

B: lbzax

I: Erm...Ok, talking about growth, jigifieri what strikes you, growth of the client, growth of the counsellor.

B: Ok issa, ahna tkellimna s'issa on my own, on my own growth. Issa imma bhalma nhoss daqshekk is-sens of growth qawwi go fija, ukoll irrid nara, nkun nixtieq nara growth e...mhux fil-counselling jew...jiena

Appendix N - Excerpt from Charlie's Interview

think that can come with moments of grief as well, when you feel like perhaps certain things you've changed in the process, right?

I: OK, so grieving...there's a loss...

C: A sense of identity which you once held which now has shifted slightly.

I: Ok, so there's...can growth be tied to a sense of loss?

C: Yeah, definitely. 100%. And I think that goes like, for both professional and client, very much so.

I: Cool, very interesting. OK, so...to sort of...start tying them a bit together, with this in mind, what does...to you, what does the outcome of growth look like? We started by saying growth is reflexive, it's latent, there's an element of, of agency, erm...it's sort of...temp, temporal, it happens over time, there's a sense of...like...renewal and loss...but what does...the outcome of growth actually look like?

C: For me it's just...the term self-actualisation comes to mind very much, and perhaps if I could narrow it down more specifically, maybe the idea of being a more well-rounded person. Where you would...erm...have tapped into multiple aspects of...your identity, and multiple roles that, that seem to sync up together in such a way that make you feel a little bit more complete and serene.

growth:
syncing
tapping into:

I: Ok, they make you feel...syncing up the different parts of your identity in a way that makes you feel more complete and serene...as determined by each individual person?

C: Yeah.

I: Ok, interesting. Good. So under what conditions does this self-actualisation occur? According to you.

C: Well definitely I think it's a privilege in a way, so it's not something which...comes easy. I think other needs like, you know, the typical maslow pyramid and all that, so the other needs need to be met, so if you have clients or yourself, if you're battling with the most basic needs, this is going to be the last thing on your mind, in a way, so definitely you need to have support.

I: Ok, so support...

C: Social support...basic needs...support in that way, erm...you know, the mental readiness as well, to, sort of...go through that, in a way.

validation, prepare cross, readiness

I: Mhm, ok.

C: And also...erm...what was the original question, actually?

I: So, under what conditions...

a choice: how to respond. Risk in the road

C: Aah, what conditions, yeah. Also but I think when you go through major events, you know? That can really reshape your understanding of things, and sometimes can catapult you forward in ways you wouldn't have expected...

I: Major events like...

C: Like loss itself, I would say. Loss, you know...just...I dunno, hardship in general, and, there's, you know you can take lots of meaning from suffering.

Appendix O - Excerpt from Dre's Interview

I: What does it look like? What does the outcome of growth look like, to you?

D: Depends on the context. Erm...the outcome ideally would be that they no longer need therapy. So...that they manage to...see...with awareness, what they are contributing to their behaviours or their patterns or their life, and be able to say that...I choose to do this right now and...and I'm ok with it but at least I have the awareness of I can change it if I want to.

I: Ok, so like a self-concept which is, sort of centred around an understanding of my own actions, where they're coming from.

D: Yes, yes. So I don't try to say you need to eliminate this and do this, but that maybe the way that you are right now served a purpose, for a time, and it's ok to revert back to these processes from time to time, as long as you do it with the awareness of what it leads you to.

I: Ok, so putting your own actions in context, being ok with that context, or...

D: Aha, gha I think it's part of that non-judgement, of accepting that this is a part of you and that...this might come back out in the future, so rather than going into this 'I'm never going to change' or my life is so shit and, I keep changing yourself, or going back to drinking, or...but rather....

I: This sort of self-flagellation of I'm never gonna change...

D: Rather that I remember that Roberta used to say every dysfunction has a function. Erm...aha, so maybe growth is in that sense is learning how these parts serve you. Erm...Maybe shedding them to fly eventually...

I: Maybe shedding them...ok

D: Erm, maybe this..the donkey carrying baggage I think could be, perhaps the before and after

I: Ok, so first you're a donkey carrying baggage then you shed it and you're flying into... *pan*

D: Maybe, and then you could go back to it, and see how...Erm. I think this...this for me is a bit...of the painful process of therapy, that...so there's one, a hand grabbing another wrist and another hand cutting off a hand, which I interpret as your own hand...

I: Ok

D: I think this is perhaps...the hand holding the wrist is when we have to intervene...

I: As therapists...

D: Yes, when we might have to report certain case of, you know abuse or...suicidal ideation, or...

I: The breaking confidentiality...

D: Yes, or maybe when they might need more help from another professional. So in that sense I think growth comes as well with protection.

I: Growth for the counsellor or the client...

D: For the client. We haven't actually touched on growth of the counsellor..

Appendix P - Excerpt from Elliot's Interview

I: Ok, cool. Let me run through my notes to make sure...Ok, so...you've spoken a lot about, aha, sort of, client growth and you've touched a little bit on counsellor growth as well. These concepts...erm, did you have more in mind client growth...

E: Jew personal?

I: Personal growth, erm...professional growth...

E: Erm...nahseb in the beginning I think I would see myself as different from my clients, in terms of yes, jiena ghamilt course, I'm trained, ghandi knowledge, ghandi awareness, I'm contained... *Erased*

I: I have the paper on the wall... *both laugh*

E: Ezatt, ezatt, u jiena differenti mill-klijenti tieghi. Xi haga ghandi differenti, u nahseb, in the beginning it was ok for me to have, cos I had to establish my, my persona as a counsellor, għax meta nohorgu minn studenti għall counselling nkunu ghadna...ftit...filli kont student u issa mghadnix, you know, how to deal with that, so I think we need to transition to that, from student to counsellor, to professional. Eimma nahseb imbagħad hemm transition oħra, li tigi wara...from counsellor to person *laughs* allura nhoss li dis-sena partikolarment has challenged me to see that I'm not very different from my clients, avolja li rationally kont nafha, you'd know this because we've been told this, u taf li mhemm xejn, imma peress li il-posizzjoni tagħna bhala professional tpoġġina li we have more training, li we've been doing more work on ourselves so somehow I should be different from my clients. So meta ssaqsini jekk hux għall klijent jew għalija, in terms that, I think we help our clients in the way that we also help ourselves, in how we approach our own selves or our process, so jien, għalija hija diffiċli li naghmel dik id-distinzjoni. Hemm boundaries, yes, but I think it's hard to have very clear, very different and distinct ways of seeing it. Għax mingħajr ma nahdem fuqi nnifis bhala persuna AND bhala professional, they're very had to separate. And the work forsi, that comes to separate. Il counsellor nhalliha x-xogħol u l-persuna...you try to be a person outside. Erm, so...bhala professional, erm...I still have to look at myself as a professional if I'm being ethical, jekk qed niehu supervision bizzejjed, so hemm l-affarijiet tas-suppost, erm...but there's a bit more, imma xorta l-istess kuncett, għalija, that relationally, irrid nahdem mal-kollegi, and with my supervisors, or other people in the professional, u kemm nara li jiena counsellor tajba, again, what is tajba għax I'm sure jekk jigi xi had josservani mhux necessarjament I'm a typical, textbook therapist, so erm... I have to check with myself.

I: And that involves...

E: Ezatt, dik il-parti li nara anke fejn naghmel l-izbalji, fejn rrid nkun onesta fis-supervision, li tipo, per eżempju dalghodu kelli supervision kont qed nesplora kif nhossni bored ma certu klijenti, again there's an element of shame hux, li nhossni bored. I shouldn't be bored!

I: Someone's paying me fifty euros to be bored at him, tipo? *both laugh*

E: Ezatt, ezatt. Jew ghandi klijenti oħrajn li meta nara isimhom ngħid Madonna xi dwejjaja! And this has to be part of...it's hard to admit quddiem supervisor li din qed ticcekkja jekk intx qed tagħmel xogħlok tajjeb jew le, so it's...exploring why do I feel bored, u parti minnha harget li it's countertransference għalija, so then it's like, illa, countertransference, so jien x'qed naghmel in my personal life, so that's why I said it becomes avolja I'm a professional, xorta I'm a person. Does that make sense?

*to separate between professional knowledge/skills =
personal experience*

Appendix Q - Research Journal Scans

The Metaphors that Make us Healers:
 an investigation into the self-concept of psychotherapeutic professionals through metaphor.

1) How does the p.p. perceive the established set of concepts? Is there a compatibility? (central group?)
 abstract common that?

2) How does the p.p. perceive their own role? What is the self-concept of the p.p. with regards to their professional role and relative personal identity, as established through metaphor.

3) How, if at all, do these metaphorical constructions influence their work with clients?

1) LOVE is... 2) I am...

LOSS ... A counsellor is...

DEATH ... A healer is...

GRIEF ... A helper is

GROWTH ... ?? PRIDE is...

JOY ... SKILL is...

! SUFFERING ... ER

PAIN ... Counselling is...

HAPPINESS ...

FAMILY

GOD is

RELIGION .. Metaphor matrix?

SPIRITUALITY ...

LUCK, FORTUNE ...

SUCCESS

FAILURE

Recent interviews - reflections

1) introduction and faculty of professional history - 10 mins more!
 - how long? which contexts - training + employed?
 - what prompted commencement of training?
 - additional training/education undertaken since graduation?
 - main client populations worked with.

2) Present Of cards
 when considering the idea of growth in relation to counselling, which of these cards resonates with your understanding?
 select as many as you like - discuss + explain.
 is there an experience/story/anecdote connected
 does it refer to the counsellor or client? something else? ←


lit review

- what does the outcome of growth look like?
 - under what conditions does it occur?
 - growth as an outcome of resistance?
 facilitated by a relationship p?

growth as a chance? potential for? unlimited? negotiable?

3) Do any of the following statements resonate with you? - which? why?
 parallels + contrasts w/ cards?

4) What is the connection between counselling + growth?
 what does it look like? client growth, counsellor growth?
 growth of therapeutic relationship?



will inevitably
 Started at the social crossroads, the counsellor is bound to
 within a frame of the private sector, however those
 whose are fundamental personal and social values differ
 from her own.

In this emerging pluralistic landscape, is a meaningful
 contribution of wellness and human development
 feasible?

- * How do counsellors conceptualize conceptual
 values of growth? ^{symbolic resources}
- * What cultural contexts (memory, value, identity,
 religion) do they draw on to construct their
 understanding?
- * In the way we work, by the construction of
 counselling clients of... different cultural contexts
 how do they feel, how construction seem
 them with counselling the contemporary
 social justice society?

1. What do counsellors understand to be growth as
 a function of counselling that ^{promotes} well-being?
2. What symbolic resources do they draw on to
 construct this understanding?
 to what extent?
3. How does this understanding ^{interact with}
 they feel this understanding ^{interact with}
 their work with clients?

24/10/22 meeting - Gordon transferred her blue notebook
 + social constructional process
 + shared objectives
 + agency in therapeutic fields
 + co-creation of meaning?

- + How do you know that your counselling is actually working?
 (check with client, talk to supervisor)
- + you offer a service to promote growth?
- + how do you know that you are promoting growth?

• intersubjective exchange

- + What do wellness additively to be growth as a
 function of counselling?

growth: emotional → experiencing negative emotion
 containment vs. repression
 [possible incident]

Counsellor lit on
 Moral dilemmas

DESERIATION ^{Cash et al.}

Development of
 Counselling in Africa

↓ infant, created
 within Church + voluntary sector

↓ NCAS introduced - formal
 standards monitored by
 counselling act

↓ counsellors + counsellors in training
 draw on previous realities +
 perceived things to make sense
 of their work + professional identity

↓ counsellors who pose direct
 training → EMOR, medicine +
 drama therapy, spirituality, etc.
 + psychoanalytic

↓ counsellors work in the
 private sector

rise of feminism →
 female participation
 language issues?

Development of Multicultural
 Counselling

largely happens relying on
 (cultural identity) + culture to make sense
 of the world (cultural identity)
 repeated + defended to

↓ push to improve educational standards,
 qualification + training of labor force +
 growth of population leads to
 increasing diversity of culture, bringing
 national identity on identity,
 social strain, reliance on identity
 to feel to society needs + shift
 to training by professionals

↓ explosion of diversity (25% of
 workforce is foreign, severely
 decreased adherence to culture,
 liberalization of social values)

Counsellors' client base is diverse.
 Needs, values, perspectives, all
 different. How do counsellors
 negotiate the shifting socio-economic landscape
 conceptualization of wellness + promote
 growth and well-being

31/05/23 conceptual framework

Construction → process under
 Culture → mind → practice
 Zittoun Gilgole 2005
 Introduction - Vigotsky three functions

- operation that repeats external activity is reworked internal
- intersubject process → intersubject on
- internalization of cultural forms of behavior →
 reconstitution of psychological activity on basis of
 sign operation

What cultural artefacts created which experienced
 that have shaped their understanding

Integration → Jorison 2009 p 488
 new sense making?

Terrence, ruptures + Gegenstand?

Vigotsky + Bronck de Leno 2016
 perception is inflected with the cultural patterns through the subjective
 processes of attention + interpretive activity in it

Marcus - cultural... that social relationships

Appendix R - Supporting Quotes - Global Theme 1

I: Realising the potential. Ok so that's sort of like the first step of growth.

A: Yes.

I: Ok, under what sort of conditions do you feel this occurs with clients?

A: I think it has to do a lot with...organized coincidence, kind of. (Andi)

Sometimes it's a natural thing. Sometimes yes, the person clicks, sometimes. But I think for the most part the counsellor has to put in input for this growth. (Andi)

Whenever I feel that it's something that I'm afraid of doing or something that I'm uncomfortable doing, or there's something I'm not OK with...that's what I should be doing. Cos that's my idea of growth, as a professional. ... If I feel a certain discomfort when a client speaks, and I catch myself not addressing it, so that's my idea of growth. Going through that discomfort. (Andi)

Let me give you an example. I come in...I get a child who needs to be referred to child protection. I start to panic, my instinct is to call for help from my supervisor, my area of growth there is like...why are you panicking...working through this panic and filling in the form alone is your growth. (Andi)

And working with their environment. Working with their environment. Ghax with their environment I don't need to be non-directive. With their environment I'm directive, jien qed

nara din...Illum. Illum insomma, dan l-ahhar snin, jien ma niehux it-tfal mill-ewwel, a kaz ta hemm affarijiet xi nbiddu fil-parental skills. (Ben)

Illum b'wiċċi minn quddiem il-ġenituri ngħidilhom, 'Jien m'għandi l-ebda magic wand, jekk taħdmu miegħi naslu'. Għaliex kif għedtlek, nemmen li l-problemi tat-tfal mhux tagħhom. Jiena nara tfal anke sa 11, 12, 13. Minn hemm jibda imbagħad daqsxejn fejn tista' 129impani responsabbilta' fuqhom, for the change. Allura, you address them, and you query their actions, and you query their behaviours, and you explore, u tfettaq magħhom u tista' tasal xi mkien. Before, no. You need to do that with the parents. Or the carers, or the system.

Jien nahseb, Naraha illi gejjja from within. Jien nhobb ic-change, hafna, hafna. Għaliha li bidel xi affarijiet go kamra from time to time, ukoll, għaliex...ghax bdilt l-ambjent, dik ix-xi haga li ser ggieghlni nhossni ahjar, ghax kont qieghda statika. Nara li gejjja mill-persuna. I think there could be people who decide the status quo. Għalihom, u ccaqlaqnix. Either because they're lazy, ghax mhemmx motivazzjoni, either għaliex li ticcaqlaq ser ggieghlek tahdem, it's going to tax you in some way or another, orrajt. (Ben)

Like loss itself, I would say. Loss, you know...just...I dunno, hardship in general, and, there's, you know you can take lots of meaning from suffering. (Charlie)

I would say definitely losses are a big one...or...losses in the sense of...relationships, in any capacity, even certain...maybe loss of...material things, so people who have gone through sudden poverty, for example...you know...or have found themselves to become homeless, almost...those type of examples are really coming to mind right now. (Charlie)

To, sort of...maybe I was thinking more in terms of...being introspective, and, and wanting to grow as a person, maybe, that's what I meant by readiness, cos, you know naturally you're not going to change perhaps certain patterns of your relationships for example, if you're not ready to do so, or ready to figure out what's going on behind the scenes for you, perhaps. That also comes with a sense of responsibility that perhaps sometimes can be a little bit too much unbearable or scary for some. (Charlie)

It's a sort of flourishing of a meaningful interaction, and that's how effective change comes about in my opinion. So growth in the sense of on the one hand it's um, you know...sort of like, if we look at it like a timeline you've gone from being strangers to being in a very meaningful therapeutic bond, right? So that's growth ... they're growing through that interaction, and so are you, because you're...every session is a new experience, for you and for them. So every new experience, you're taking something from it. (Charlie)

if I think about clients dawh li ilhom jigu iktar, they get more in touch eventually with this, but sometimes it becomes harder, ghax kulhadd, mhux kulhadd sorry, certu clients li ilhom jigu jahsbu li ghax jiena...jiena ukoll mill-esperjenza tieghi ghax jiena mmur terapija allura nahseb li I'm ok imbaghad jigri xi haga u nibda sejra hekk *wrings hands* erm, and you get in touch with this even more, this part that you thought was resolved but in reality another situation, another context, another person might trigger it, ghalhekk hemm dik il-parti imbaghad... (Elliot)

Appendix S - Supporting Quotes - Global Theme 2

I think rather than in terms of thinking in terms of thinking of things as binary, I feel that my experience as a parent has really shaped my practice. (Andi)

I think we grow whether we go to counselling or not. So, growth is not something that is exclusive to therapy. Erm...People perhaps come to us because they want to grow in a different way, or in a particular way that perhaps they're not even aware of. Erm...Because sometimes they're afraid that if they continue growing in one way over the other, that growth might be erm...damaging to themselves. (Andi)

Jekk ser naghmel xi haga hazina, naghmilha billi ma mmexxix il-quddiem, ma nisfurzax, qed tifhem, iktar milli ha naghmel kif irrid jien. Qed tifhem, iktar milli ha naghmel kif rrid jien, inkella niggi li qed ngħallem. Jekk dan nzommlu, ser niggi qisni t-teacher nerga, it-teacher zzommlu, in-nanna zzommlu, imma jiena t-terapista, u t-terapista I need to bring change from within, mhux minn barra. (Ben)

Mhux facli ta, mhix facli I mean, illum nghida hekk qisi m'jien nghix xejn, imma mhix facli, when you start with, inti you would like to bring change, inti thoss responsabbilta, imma illum għarajt illi di kir-responsabilta hija imposta fuqha imposta jew mis-sistema. Illum mghadnix nhossha. Kont nhossa li hija responsabilta imposta mis-sistema, jew is Sistema edukattiva fis-sens ghaliex it-teachers qed jgħorru, il-klassi qed tgerger, disrupting, etc. Jew inkella mill-familji, gibtu għandek għal xejn... (Ben)

Exactly, exactly. And they can even be thoughts...they don't have to be meaningful moments or interactions, where sometimes you would have a thought or, you know, an inner process and perhaps it's not the right time to go into it and eventually...you...experience things through the counselling field or in general then eventually you see that it's the right time to water it a bit more, sort of thing. So I think that's why that one stood out. And then in the process of that, this one, unlocking...using a key to unlock a door....I would say certain blind spots maybe, might be unlocked, in the process? Uhm...or maybe you realise that you have accessed the key yourself, kind of thing. So I would say your sense of autonomy is strengthened, eventually... (Charlie)

Yeah I think it's a continuous process, and I think that you can say that as a person or as the profession at large, there's always stuff to work on or to improve, it's a contextual journey as well, so you have to keep moving with what's being presented to you at the time, and I think there's never really a deadline for that, it's continuous. (Charlie)

Constantly working on self-growth, erm. I think it's extremely important, I feel like I have personally felt the benefits, in the sense like you end up feeling more...more well-rounded, more serene, more aware of certain things and patterns, in your own life, and it helps inform you. The more you're aware of your own, it helps you be with others, the more you're aware of others, it helps you be with yourself, so in turn it helps be with clients, but it helps clients be with themselves, and it helps them be with others, if that makes sense. So I think it's...it's a story...it's a collective story, actually. So it's individual and it's relationship with the collective.

Um...and definitely and investment because you can see the...rewards, you know. Even with clients, you see the, the outcomes. You see how their lives are enriched, in ways which maybe they weren't expecting, and yourself maybe in that process, by seeing them grow, you're also enriched. And it helps you grow as well and sometimes clients can help you more than you would have realized. (Charlie)

I think the first, of this mother nurturing...breastfeeding her child, and father holding the hand of a child, or in my mind a father. Erm...I think...there's always this element of...erm...at least for me, I sometimes do feel like clients, erm...project paternal image onto their therapist. Erm...and in terms of growth, I do feel a sense of responsibility sometimes, in terms of how, erm..I pass on certain nourishment, let's say, or the way that I hold my client's hands through their process, so, although I don't...I know it's not my responsibility for the way that they grow, but to be able to erm...carry, carry them through a part of their journey I think is the beauty of why we do the work. (Dre)

I chose this mirror, reflection, sometimes you have to...hold a mirror to the clients, in terms of...certain behaviours or certain actions that they might be taking, so...erm...I think growth can also come in reflecting back what, er...they are doing, in terms of...how they might not be growing. Or how they might be repeating certain patterns. (Dre)

No because I think it takes courage for the professional to take the steps of immediacy, so...I definitely, erm, was not the counsellor I was when I started, and I would think twice about reporting or what am I going to do if I have to go to court or if I have to take a politically

exposed client? So I see it as growth in the risks that the profession entails, erm...but that also enables or gives the space for the client to further explore and work on some stuff... (Dre)

The more you immerse yourself into it the more you realise who you are as a counsellor, which I think it's such a broad question to ask yourself, I think that's how you can measure growth in your career, when you say who am I as a counsellor and what do I bring to the table, erm, I think it's such a difficult question especially early on I used to struggle with it so much, like, who do I like to work with or where do I want to go next? And I used to feel like I ...No, I don't know who I am as a counsellor, I just have to be this blank canvas and anything that comes I'm gonna be...super ok, enlightened and I know the answer to everything. But you yourself as the tool is really everything, so I can't take my client erm, if I'm not self-aware of where I am and where I might still be growing, so it's, I think I'm still growing, I will always be a student, in some ways, of counselling. (Dre)

Maybe Nista nghid the highest but I don't know where that would be in terms of, ghax jien...so jien nahseb li ghandi hafna awareness fuqi nnifsi but also, things come up for me xorta, so avolja nahseb ghandi dik l-awareness, il-mument li tinqala xi haga nghid mm, basta *laughs*, you know so, so allavolja jiena nahseb li forsi wasalt dal-punt, gieli niskopri li ok avolja li wasalt f'dal punt, then it becomes questionable what is the highest form, imma li hemm different levels, ghalija mhemmx dubju. I see it from my clients, il-klijenti li Nista nasal magghom to the outside, and we cannot do more, because of level of intelligence, sometimes because of

barriers li jkunu kkreaw, the different reasons, but aha I like the concept of the shadow self, li hemm partijiet minna li we project onto others that maybe we don't realise... (Elliot)

So hemm partijiet minnhekk li ma tistax tara, because even though we are very self-aware, we might be self-aware, we might also niggannaw naqa nfusna, but then when we are faced with someone else who brings up things, like. (Elliot)

Erm...nahseb in the beginning I think I would see myself as different from my clients, in terms of yes, jiena ghamilt course, I'm trained, ghandi knowledge, ghandi awareness, I'm contained... (Elliot)

Ezatt, ezatt, u jiena differenti mill-klijenti tieghi. Xi haga ghandi differenti, u nahseb, in the beginning it was ok for me to have, cos I had to establish my, my persona as a counsellor, ghax meta nohorgu minn studenti ghall cousselling nkunu ghadna...ftit...filli kont student u issa mghadnix, you know, how to deal with that, so I think we need to transition to that, from student to counsellor, to professional. Eimma nahseb imbaghad hemm transition ohra, li tigi wara...from counsellor to person *laughs* allura nhoss li dis-sena partikolarment has challenged me to see that I'm not very different from my clients, avolja li rationally kont nafha, you'd know this because we've been told this, u taf li mhemm xejn, imma peress li il-posizzjoni taghna bhala professional tpoggina li we have more training, li we've been doing more work on ourselves so somehow I *should* be different from my clients. So meta ssaqsini jekk hux ghall klijent jew ghalija, in terms that, I think we help our clients in the way that we also help

ourselves, in how we approach our own selves or our process, so jien, ghalija hija diffiqli li naghmel dik id-distinzjoni. Hemm boundaries, yes, but I think it's hard to have very clear, very different and distinct ways of seeing it. Ghax minghajr ma nahdem fuqi nnifis bhala persuna AND bhala professional, they're very hard to separate. And the work forsi, that comes to separate. Il counsellor nhalliha x-xoghol u l-persuna...you try to be a person outside. Erm, so...bhala professional, erm...I still have to look at myself as a professional if I'm being ethical, jekk qed niehu supervision bizzejjed, so hemm l-affarijiet tas-suppost, erm...but there's a bit more, imma xorta l-istess kuncett, ghalija, that relationally, irrid nahdem mal-kollegi, and with my supervisors, or other people in the professional, u kemm nara li jiena counsellor tajba, again, what is tajba ghax I'm sure jekk jigi xi had josservani mhux necessarjament I'm a typical, textbook therapist, so erm... I have to check with myself. (Elliot)

Appendix T - Supporting Quotes - Global Theme 3

It's like walking down a path with a client and you don't know where that path leads. The idea is that this path gets the client to somewhere a bit better than the things is right now, but you know I have a much clearer idea ...do I? (Andi)

Because sometimes clients would come in because they're missing, for instance a father figure and they would be looking for a father figure but I know as a therapist I cannot provide that father figure, or I can, I can model it but I can't provide it, I'm not gonna be their father. (Andi)

I feel that at least in my practice, in practice, not my practice, the goal is that the client doesn't need your or depend on you. That one day, the client doesn't need to come to counselling. (Andi)

Because it helps you, I would say, grow as a person when you're an active agent in your own process and that of the client, so in a way by empowering them to have their own keys to their own growth or yourself as a professional, does that make sense? Illi, sort of...sometimes maybe we...we don't realise how we are...actively participating in our own growth as professionals, and in, in the profession at large, kind of thing. (Charlie)

For me it's just...the term self-actualisation comes to mind very much, and perhaps if I could narrow it down more specifically, maybe the idea of being a more well-rounded person. Where you would...erm...have tapped into multiple aspects of...your identity, and multiple roles that,

that seem to sync up together in such a way that make you feel a little bit more complete and serene. (Charlie)

Erm...I think so, because I think...everyone has their own agency at the end of the day. So especially I think early on in my counselling days I used to feel like if my client isn't progressing then I'm not being a good enough therapist or counsellor. Erm, but I knew that I couldn't expect them to...change to the rate that I wanted to just because I see them for an hour, an hour a week or every two weeks, erm, so I learnt maybe to...reposition myself around the expectations of growth. (Dre)

So...that they manage to...see....with awareness, what they are contributing to their behaviours or their patterns or their life, and be able to say that...I choose to do this right now and...and I'm ok with it but at least I have the awareness of I can change it if I want to. (Dre)

The cutting off of the arm I think which is very graphic, is maybe reflected back into the birds flying, so that...maybe...removing parts of you that...might be harming you, or might...not serve you at that time. Erm...But also understanding that, you know, this might be...what you've chosen no. (Dre)

Yes, it might be challenging a script that they never had the power to do, and growth can be...jien naf...journaling for an hour, or refusing to send a text to a person that triggered you, taking a time out, erm... (Dre)

Aha, so being seen, seeing ourselves, so jekk hemm xi haga li we struggle with, erm...mhux kulhadd, it's being seen, and seeing others, so ehe il-kuncett ta sight, nahseb li huwa importanti hafna, with the type of clients I work with, and if it makes sense qisu hafna mill-klijenti tieghi and maybe it reflects my experience as well, erm...li mhumix what we'd call the major traumas, so huma, what we'd call minor traumas, so huma klijenti li jigu jghiduli imma ma grail xejn hazin... (Elliot)

You're trying to dive on it, erm, so that, they would minimize what would have happened to them, so jkolli hafna klijenti jhossu hom depressed u ma jafux ghaliex jhossu hom depressed ghax jien kollox ghandi, and dak huwa l-process of seeing them, of seeing what has happened to them, and helping them see, li jirreflettu li jistghu jharsu lejnhom nfushom u jghidu 'iva din very gratli, u allavolja forsi gratli xi haga I'm still ok but something has happened to me' so nahseb f'dak is-sens dik hija l-approach ta sight.

(Elliot)

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NAME AND SURNAME Julian Galea ID/STD# 255691M

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