Counselling and Professionalism: A Phenomenological Analysis of Counsellor Experience

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Abstract

In this article, the author discusses findings from an interpretative phenomenological study which explores challenging issues in relation to professionalism for counselling, and illuminates features in need of consideration in relation to organisational contexts. These features include the rapid reconfiguration of professionalism in response to contemporary organisational structures such as policy and managerial driven incentives. Using two individual semi-structured interviews, the meaning of professionalism for counsellors is explored. The author proposes that the rapidly growing disparity between old or occupational professionalism, as opposed to new or organizational professionalism, causes uncertainty for counsellors who may struggle to maintain their professional identity. The counsellor's sense of professionalism is further disempowered if they feel themselves unheard, causing the counsellor to either resist or disengage from organizational obligations. Findings suggest that a counsellor's sense of professionalism is more ably communicated if their place in an organisation is enacted rather than imposed. The author discusses the experiences of two counsellors in relation to the literature on professionalism, with focus upon the emotional reactions which were expressed as to organisational changes.

Keywords: counselling, occupational professionalism, new professionalism, phenomenological

Introduction

The current paper draws on data from a doctoral thesis exploring the lived experience of young people and their counsellors in relation to bullying. Individual interviews with the participant counsellors highlighted the significance of professionalism for them. Therefore, this article explores the experiences of counsellors regarding professionalism which have been conceptualised as three superordinate themes: (a) the impact of the organisation upon the counsellor's sense of professionalism, (b) the relationship between supervision and professionalism, and (c) the impact of ethics upon professionalism.

Over the last two decades, counselling practice has moved from professional autonomy to policy driven state control, reflecting a trend towards a new professionalism that has updated more traditional concepts of professionalism within counselling (Clark, 2005). A policy describes a set of conditions which define what constitutes "the system", how the conditions are determined and measured; hence policy driven professionalism derives from a service level requirement (Perry & Bauer, 2004, p. 1165). Opinions as to policy driven professionalism vary (Clark, 2005). On the one hand, measurable targets and multi-professional teamwork are considered to achieve desired outcomes (Clark, 2005); on the other, that the formulaic nature of policy inhibits individual incentive-taking, thus

repressing professional autonomy (Clark, 2005). Understandably, the counsellor's sense of professional identity is somewhat unclear to them (Gazzola & Smith, 2007).

In this paper, I draw on findings from my Ph.D. to argue that the study of professionalism within counselling is important as it provides a theoretical framework to understand how counsellors appraise their role within an organisation and to explain how they interpret this relationship in practice. I refer to data from counsellors who work with young people who bully. I start by briefly reviewing both occupational professionalism and new professionalism to identify the social and historical factors at play in their development. Central to the debate is that a counsellor's sense of professionalism can neither be realised by them, nor the organisation unless the counsellor makes a meaningful contribution within, and to the organisational structure.

The Concept of Occupational Professionalism

It seems there is little conceptual clarity regarding the definition of professionalism (Fox, 1992; Freidson, 1994; Holroyd, 2000). Debate centres on the unstated assumptions and inconsistent boundaries this term encompasses, since professionalism means "different things to different people" (Fox, 1992, p. 2).

Traditionally, professionalism has been conceptualised as a means of organising work and regulating employees to the benefit of both practitioners and their clients (Evetts, 2011). Freidson (2001) stresses the importance of distinguishing professionalism as a *third logic*; distinctive and different from the market and organisations by implication of its occupational, as opposed to organisational control. Hence, by third logic, Freidson implies that workers with specialised knowledge and the ability to provide society with especially important services organise and control their own work, without directives from management or the influence of free markets. This *from within* approach can lead to substantial return for employees. Day (1999) extrapolates this thinking and postulates that professionalism is delineated by the content of the work carried out and consequently, the skills, knowledge and responsibilities necessary for the profession to function; introducing an attitudinal as opposed to functional interpretation. Whether the relationship between the attitudinal and the functional is unidirectional is questioned by Evans (2002a), suggesting instead a consequential relationship where "the amalgamation of individuals' professionality influences and shapes the collective professionalism which, in turn, stimulates or provokes a response in individuals that determines their professionality orientation" (p. 7).

Englund (1996) divides professionalism into two distinct terms: professionalism and professionalisation. Professionalism describes the internal qualities of employees, their values and attitudes, whereas, professionalisation encompasses the status and authority of a profession; a distinction Evans (2008) attributes to locus of control. Evans does not consider a *top down* approach as inevitably signifying professionalism. In organisations, top down approaches describe executive decision making disseminated to those lower in the authoritative hierarchy (Fox, 1992) and which Clark (2005) considers a cause of deprofessionalisation. With deprofessionalism, the power inherent in managerialism introduces elitism that "reduces workers' professional discretion and autonomy, and thus their capacity to act in the best interests of their client" (Clark, 2005, p. 183). According to O'Neill (2002), such measures are in place to ensure accountability and transparency, meaning "professional codes define professional responsibilities with ever greater precision" (p. 7). She considers these as unobtainable demands that not only damage a profession's "real work" but also introduce consumer distrust as it is attainment of professional goals that the public use as measures of professional success (O'Neill, 2002, p. 49). Conversely, Evans (2008) maintains that an employee has the capacity to define their work by exerting the values they accord their role in keeping with personal ideologies, hence influencing a professional culture (Freidson, 1994; Sachs, 1999).

The definition of professional culture refers to the collective values and viewpoints which express the quality and character of people's actions within an occupation (Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996) and are considered a key feature of professionalism (Johnson, 1972). Opponents of this view (Allen, 1995; Rolin, 2009) argue that such a classification suggests professional culture signifies a uniformity in which all exist in the same way, regardless of social power or minority representatives; a situation exemplified by some ethnic minorities who underplayed their cultural heritage so as to assimilate into existing culture (Allen, 1995), and homogenise with the values of the dominant workforce (Rolin, 2009). Importantly, the marginalised are not monolithic; hence professional culture may not be experienced identically because of inequality. However, Allen (1989) considers authoritativeness as having the potential to constrain individual or group choice, a self-fulfilling cycle, as the more authority an individual possesses, the more power they have when implementing their viewpoints (p. 33). Therefore, inevitable tension exists, for although professional culture relies on the premise of professionalism as internally formulated, external regulation safeguards professionalism from internal formulation by imposing occupational control (Ozga, 1995). Therefore, debate returns to deprofessionalisation and the power inferred the elite; in other words, how the knowledge of authority figures is used in shaping policy, organisations, and thus, professionalism (Freidson, 1986).

It is the concept of the employee as a recognisable and significant contributor that gives rise to a conceptualisation of new professionalism as both a discourse of attitudinal values and functional values (Evetts, 2003; Fournier, 1999). Accordingly, focus now shifts to new professionalism.

New Professionalism

It is the concept of what Quicke (2000) terms "epistemological reawakening" (p. 303), which is considered to underpin new professionalism (Evetts, 2003; Pfadenhauer, 2006; Svensson, 2006). This new attitude embraces the logic of managerialism and commercialism (Evetts, 2003), challenging Freidson's (2001) concept of professionalism as a third logic, since out-sourcing to external companies, political influence and policy have introduced a paradigm shift from occupational to organisational thinking.

To facilitate this thinking within an organisation, a consequential shift is inevitable; from notions of collegiality and trust intrinsic to occupational professionalism, to a managerial, bureaucratic and assessment-based method consistent with organisational or new professionalism (Evetts, 2003). However, a conundrum is introduced as current emphasis upon multi-facetted team work, for example within the National Health Service (NHS), calls for collaborative methods. The interdepartmental cooperation needed to provide patients with holistic care (National Health Service England, 2014), emphasises the tenets of collegial working resonant of occupational professionalism and yet multi-faceted team working is inextricably linked to organisational professionalism.

Evetts (2011) proposes, that unlike occupational professionalism, applied from within, new professionalism is subject to a "from above" mandate, a seductive ploy, since the autonomous decision-making of managers and employers is supposedly used to improve both collective and individual rewards (p. 408). Evetts (2011) considers the outcome at variance with the intention however, as externally imposed targets, often with a political incentive, define employer/employee relations rather than afford workers occupational control, hence professionals are passive victims. Therefore, Evetts argues new professionalism as a threat to the third logic of professionalism. Clark (2005) suggests that when authority is used indiscriminately, employees are reduced to mere functionaries such that they mislay their sense of personal accountability.

Noordegraaf (2000) suggests that resistance to change on behalf of professionals has met with tactics to promote them to managerial positions, skilfully combining enterprise with professionalism, and tempting professionals by offering empowerment and innovation. According to Noordegraaf (2000) the individual is lured by the opportunity to extrapolate their professional knowledge of "real life" (p. 322) behaviour, (consistent with appropriateness and feelings), to the managerial setting. In reality, they are confined by the rule bound logic of managerialism, where their professionalism becomes "interpretative" rather than "informational" (p. 322). In this way, Noordegraaf (2000) contests that executive demands for quality control, outcome and performance review become reinterpreted as the promotion of professionalism.

Hoggett (1996) sees the rule bound logic of managerialism merely as competition, a necessary condition for exercising control. However, Broadbent, Jacobs, and Laughlin (1999) consider such practices as advancing individualism, undermining the cohesion of team-working and collegial support. They interpret such tactics as an ideology of autonomy where individual performance is allied to success or failure of the organisation, arguably destabilising Evans' (1997) notion of professional culture by undermining the collective influence of the workforce. By contrast, Adler, Kwon, and Heckscher (2008) refute the decline of cooperative working, arguing that market pressure generates more community-based practices such as inter-disciplinary teams, an outcome they consider as consistent with occupational professionalism as it is mutually supportive of both market hierarchies and the community.

The discourse of enactment of professionalism has seemingly been forced to undergo significant change in pursuit of commercial and organisational goals which Hanlon (1998) describes as a shift from the concept of trusteeship to that of expertise. For example, medicine started out as an occupation grounded in "honour" (Cohen, 1997, p. 7) which, for 50 years, placed emphasis upon the biological and technical aspects of treatment. Contemporary evaluations of medicine claim such attitudes as outdated by negating humanistic qualities, calling for more reflective processes, accountability and integrity (Wear & Castellani, 2000). Consequent upon these conditions, new professionalism appears "more client-focused, more accountable to external agencies, more accepting of public scrutiny, more conscious of the impact of market forces and more adaptable to the demands imposed by the pursuit of excellence" (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 2).

It seems that new professionalism introduces organisational control that potentially undermines the employer as professional. However, the advent of multi-team cooperation within larger organisations such as the NHS would suggest that collegial working is inevitably allied to professionalism. Nonetheless, there are elements of continuity and opportunity within new professionalism which debatably bears similarity to occupational professionalism, since it has also generated more centralised and community based practice.

According to Clarkson (1995), the socio-economic, political and cultural forces affecting the helping professions since 1995, have re-shaped the concept of counselling as a profession. Clarkson conceptualised a twofold impact of such new professionalism upon counselling. On the one hand, that professional status would promote the use of counselling as a validated treatment, whilst on the other hand, that counselling would become a goal orientated profession where targets superseded quality.

Recent legislative changes in the NHS have called for such reasoning to be operationalised since a change from opinion and experience based practice towards an evidenced-based approach has necessitated that therapeutic services embrace research to inform their work. This change has instigated challenges to the identity of counselling, where to define professionalism calls for a clearly articulated framework. In other words, counselling can no longer

arguably be separated from the economics, politics and social contexts that underscore professionalism (Corrie & Callahan, 2000).

Attempts to address the evolution of new professionalism in counselling are not confined to the United Kingdom. In the last twenty years, counsellors and mental health workers have established international forums and undertaken initiatives to inaugurate professional networks with colleagues from around the world (Baron, 2003). Such forums provide an outlet for the exchange of ideas and research as to how counselling can meaningfully respond to the contemporary metamorphism of professionalism (Baron, 2003). According to Lee (1997) such a cross cultural perspective of professionalism in counselling *can* transcend existing political barriers. For example, in recent years, significant steps have been taken to internationalise mental health interventions for substance use disorders (World Health Organisation, 2015). Such action has resulted in a universally recognised paradigm for promoting social action in the field of mental health.

Key amongst the proponents of global counselling professionalism are the American Counselling Association, whose work explores, amongst other things, the diverse issues that confront professional counselling organizations and how best to address the development of counsellors. Seemingly, such active and collaborative relationships seek to promote professionalism in counselling world-wide.

Re-characterising counselling requires a novel type of therapeutic self-awareness. Where once counselling rested purely upon a foundation of respect for personal subjectivity and the phenomenological understanding of human experience, therapeutic outcomes and quality assurance initiatives imply the need for a marriage between research and practice (Corrie & Callahan, 2000), a union which, according to McLeod (2001) is responsible for "significant periods within the evolution of counselling and psychotherapy" (p. 3). Hence, by placing this paper within the context of counselling psychology, the intention is to extend and support the experience of therapists through research and consequently to foster dialogue with practitioners that engenders reflection and developments within the world of counselling.

Method

Using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) counsellors' experiences of professionalism were explored. IPA is committed to the exploration of meaning and sense-making (Smith & Osborn, 2003), placing great emphasis upon the structure of experience. The focus is upon idiographic interpretation, therefore IPA favours small samples such as those used in the current study and exploratory work, where there is a paucity of literature into professionalism in counselling.

Participants

Several counselling organisations in South East England who provided counselling to young people who bullied were contacted to recruit participants, however, all but one declined. This was either because they were too busy to accommodate research within their schedule, or because financial uncertainty threatened their continued survival such that they felt it irresponsible to commit. Participants were invited to take part in the study if they had counselled young people who bully for more than three years. Given the interview based approach, participants were excluded if they did not speak fluent English or had language problems. Participants were sent personal information sheets outlining the research purpose, an invitation to participate explaining what their involvement would entail, and

consent forms. Two female counsellors consented to take part who had between them four and eight years of experience and shared similar backgrounds.

Data Collection

To gather data each counsellor took part in a 45-75 minute individual semi-structured interview which was audio recorded. The interview questions were based upon a schedule derived from a comprehensive literature review and key concerns articulated during previous focus groups (Tapson, 2015). Smith (2004) highlights the need for flexibility when developing an interview guide underlining that, as IPA is not concerned with verifying or negating a specific hypothesis, broader questions should be used leading to the collection of expansive material. Consequently, the participants were asked open ended questions as opposed to researcher led discussion. Sample questions included:

1. What do you consider to be the key elements of professional counselling?

2. How about the part the organisation plays?

3. In what ways does your sense of professionalism unite with that of the organisation?

This method of data gathering was sufficiently flexible to flow in cooperation with the participants.

Data Analysis

The focus groups and interviews were manually transcribed verbatim with interview notes used to supplement data, but not represent it. Initially, the transcripts were read many times with comments placed in a left hand margin noting preliminary associations and interpretations. The text was revisited and scrutinised more closely to identify a first group of themes representative of the participant's concerns. Each group was allocated a code, and these codes given an identifier, and then placed under the transcript excerpt relating to the code. Transcripts were analysed on a case by case basis and as advised by Smith and Osborn (2003). I created new themes for each transcript, ultimately gathering these into superordinate themes which encapsulated the participants' key experiences. During analysis, I did not attempt to *bracket* previous knowledge and experience as this process is not supported by IPA. Rather, in keeping with the epistemological frame of critical realism, previous knowledge and experience were used to inform interpretation.

To ensure credibility, the coding and the thematic structure of the data were examined by university supervisors throughout the analytical process. Moreover, interpretation has been made explicit by the use of participant quotes in this article. Lastly, I kept a reflective journal throughout the research process that enabled exploration as to how previous knowledge from literature or experience may have impacted data collection or analysis.

Research Ethics

Participation in the current study was voluntary and signed consent was obtained. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were used for both the participants and those to whom they referred, which prevented identification. The audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored. The study received favourable ethical opinion from the University Ethics Committee at which the 1* author was a Ph.D. student.

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Results

The two participants completed the interviews between April 2013 and May 2013. The three superordinate themes: (a) the impact of the organisation upon the counsellor's sense of professionalism, (b) the relationship between supervision and professionalism, and (c) the impact of ethics upon professionalism, were embedded in the core theme of professionalism. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the superordinate themes and professionalism.
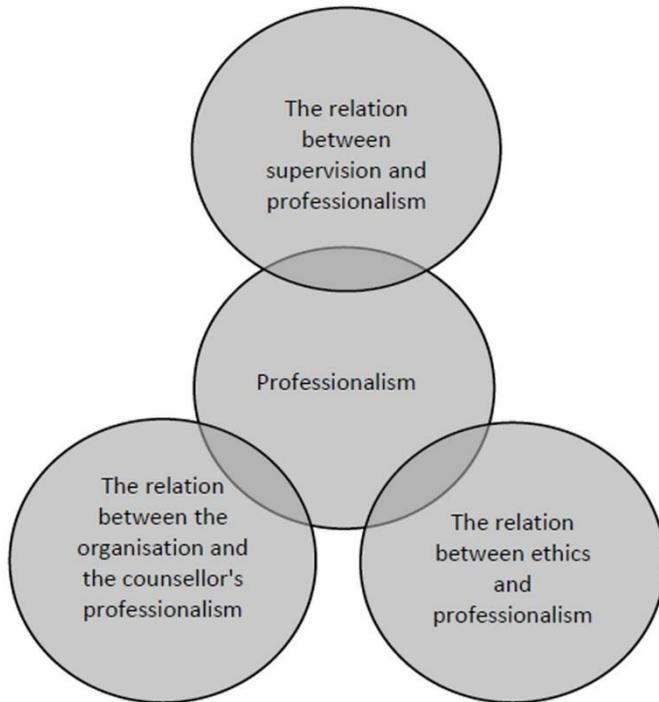

Figure 1. The relationship between professionalism and the super-ordinate themes.

The Impact of the Organisation Upon the Counsellor's Sense of Professionalism

The first theme described participants' attitudes to the strategies used by their organisation to encourage collaborative and professional working. The two counsellors expressed conflicting opinions which possibly reflected their perceived status. For example, in addition to her role as counsellor, Counsellor A is also a senior board member for her organisation and this appears to afford her a more collective interpretation of herself as professional counsellor. As she commented,

> *I am part of the organisation. I am not the organisation. So I work within the management structure if you like. And that can be challenging sometimes. Because I might not always…from a counsellor point of view, I might not always agree with management, but if they explain to me their reasons why, I usually, I'll understand it and then I can work with it. But that, I could see, could be conflict for some people* (Counsellor A. Interview, Lines 285-289).

The participative stance of Counsellor A, as part of, not *the* organisation, seemed to afford her an opportunity to discuss decision making with fellow managers that empowered her. She felt her position provoked *"conflict"*

amongst the counsellors arising from a *them and us* perspective. Evidently, this was Counsellor B's experience, for she said:

> *It* [organisational change] *compromises my ability to cope with the bloody organisation if I don't feel that they're performing optimally, or they haven't got their ducks in a row.*
>
> Researcher: *Because you feel under-supported?*
>
> *Because I feel partially under-supported, partially totally confused, because they keep changing the rules. And I don't think that that's tenable long term. If I'm doing a job in a room which I consider to be a good job, I need to know when I leave the room, that it* [the organisation]*, is working in an acceptable way and I think it's confused at the moment* (Counsellor B. Interview. Lines 515-525).

Counsellor B expressed dissatisfaction with the changes imposed upon her, which affected how she perceived herself in relation to the organisation, that compromised her ability to cope with them. She felt under supported as the good job she performed was not valued equally with the procedural changes she endured. Counsellor B described the system as *"confused"*, a measure perhaps of her uncertainty at not knowing where or how she fitted within the organisation. In order to regain her sense of professionalism and to heal the gulf between her and the organisation, Counsellor B expressed that the organisation would benefit from a representative counsellor:

> *Well I…as I say, I'm hoping that the new head of counselling, who actually is a counsellor, which I think makes a huge difference…um…will get his head together with the new supervisor and they'll come up with procedures that are easy to implement and will actually work, but up till now the people running the counselling, although they're very experienced in other ways haven't been very experienced counsellors* (Counsellor B. Interview. Lines 529-534).

Counsellor B hinted at collegial working as a solution to the problem. The alliance was improved as the new head of counselling *"actually* [was] *a counsellor"* so may have proven a more informed ambassador for change. However, she also voiced disempowerment regarding the regulations by which the organisation must abide, as this too seemed to stifle expression of her professionalism:

> *I think they've spent, in this organisation, they have spent so long running around, trying to safeguard absolutely everything and tie everything in red tape so that nothing could ever possibly go wrong for which they are accused of doing anything, that we're all sitting here thinking, and what the* [word omitted] *are we allowed to do? … I'm the one who has to make the call. And yet, the minute I get out of the room, the organisation is treating me like an idiot* (Counsellor B. Interview. Lines 482-489).

With her reference to safeguarding Counsellor B hinted at the policy driven management complicit with new professionalism. She experienced discord between herself and the organisation feeling her professionalism and her locus of control compromised and was resentful that her skills must be defined by bureaucracy. As she said, *"Um…if it doesn't settle down, I'll leave. Because I will not allow my professional counselling to be compromised. That would be unethical"* (Counsellor B. Interview. Lines 510-511).

This situation was untenable for Counsellor B. She could not and would not continue her practice at the organisation, for, at the mercy of managerial decision making, her professionalism could not be enacted.

The Relationship Between Supervision and Professionalism

The significance of supervision for professionalism was made clear when the participant counsellors spoke of their experiences. Here too, Counsellor A's perception of supervision differed markedly from Counsellor B's. As she observed, "*When I write my notes .... I ask myself loads of questions. And, if ever I am doubtful, that will be the point I will take to supervision*" (Counsellor A. Interview. Lines.117-119).

Counsellor A unequivocally expressed her attitude to supervision. If she was doubtful after reflecting upon her clients, supervision represented a harbour for further exploration. Notably, confining supervision to doubtful concerns could leave general practice unexamined. However, following organisational change, Counsellor B was provided a new supervisor, strongly voicing her resistance to the decision foisted upon her:

> *I've always chosen my supervisors and I have chosen if I've changed …. But it wasn't my choice and I'm used to making my own choices about things that would appear to be important. I'm not used to having them dumped on me* [by the organisation] (Counsellor B. Interview. Lines 165-166 & 175-177).

Despite recognised British guidelines determining that every counsellor is allocated a supervisor (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy [BACP], 2013), Counsellor B felt she had not been consulted by her organisation but had the new supervisor *"dumped"* on her, increasing her sense of powerlessness. For the new relationship with her supervisor to mature Counsellor B explained that an initiation process was necessary:

> *…Oh God, I've got to break him in, teach him how I do things and then he can teach me how he does things and then we'll somehow get to a place where we work together. And it just feels like quite a mountain to climb at the moment.* (Counsellor B. Interview. Lines 178-181).

Counsellor B described a laborious process requiring considerable effort, like climbing a *"mountain"*. It was felt that her weary words were also iconic of the disillusionment she felt regarding her lack of impact upon organisational decision-making. When asked of the key characteristics Counsellor B hoped to find in her new supervisor, her words were powerful:

> *It's intelligence … In other words, someone who's quick on the uptake, who's prepared to put in some extra reading, some extra learning. […] Someone who can think on their feet. Someone who's available, on the end of a phone if I need them, … I need them to be my intellectual equal, because I need them to meet me… challenging me sometimes and support me* (Counsellor B. Interview, Lines 186-190 & 196-198).

On the one hand, Counsellor B seemed disheartened by the effort she must make to establish a relationship with her supervisor but on the other hand, she was assertive about her needs. It was interpreted that Counsellor B's demands represented a way of communicating power which she used to balance the lack of control articulated by her in relation to the managerial change.

The Impact of Ethics Upon Professionalism

The theme, the *impact of ethics upon professionalism* encompassed the participants' ideas about working professionally with vulnerable young people, as this represented the core of their work, and also their ability to reflect upon their performance as a result of their training. Counsellor A for example articulated that:

> *The most important thing is that the client is in the centre of everything I do, especially if they are young, which most of mine are. So, their safety is the most important thing. Boundaries. Absolute. Especially*

with this age group … are very, very important. … I have a lot of training. I do a lot of…um…personal development over the year. Um…I discuss work openly, so it's open, not secret.… Well, I…I do work within the ethical framework of the BACP and I take that incredibly seriously (Counsellor A. Interview. Lines 275-283).

In this extract, Counsellor A presented a certain type of professionalism both via her attitude and her behaviour, providing evidence of her commitment to the BACP Ethical Framework (BACP, 2013). She was accountable, seen through her willingness to discuss her work; ethical, as she set boundaries and was committed to a profes- sional framework; the client was central to outcome, and she strove for excellence as a result of her training. She implied this was a concrete base informing her work.

Counsellor A felt that training also facilitated self-reflection as a recent course encouraged her to consider aspects of her character which may otherwise have remained unchallenged. As she said, "*Like the course I went on yesterday, I gathered two things about myself which I think I knew were there but didn't want to look at them. I have now looked at them*" (Counsellor A. Focus group 2. Lines 662-664).

This participant explained that such insight was important as it helped separate her own lived experience from that of her clients, consequently upholding the client-centred philosophy consistent with therapeutic work. From an ethical perspective, training also featured prominently for Counsellor B who also emphasised the importance of personal therapy, "*Getting a damn good training to start with. Um…sorting out your supervision. Going to therapy yourself. Gotta do that. Um…on-going training I think is critical. I think you get very stale very fast*" (Counsellor B. Interview. Lines 471-474).

It was felt that the participants used an ethical framework; for example, setting boundaries, training, supervision and personal therapy, to provide a secure base that grounded them in their work with their clients. When it came to her organisation's ethical culture however, Counsellor B expressed discord, considering her practice compromised without ethical cohesion on their part:

> Researcher: *Are there any ways in which your sense of professionalism unites with that of the organisation?*

> Counsellor B: *I'm hoping so because I'm prepared to give it a go because I have been told very firmly that it's in a state of flux between being run by the counsellors, being run as a charity and it's in a state of flux between this, that and the other and they're still re-writing a safeguarding policy and all the rest of it, so I'm prepared to hang on in there and find out if it settles down. Um… and now that we have a new supervisor and a new head of counselling services, I'm hoping that it…they will get their heads together, make some decisions and it will settle down* (Counsellor B. Interview. Lines 500-509).

Although Counsellor B was told of the organisational restructuring, she was not part of the changes. She implied a sense of powerlessness, waiting whilst *"they"* [the managers] made the decisions that would affect an outcome. In the mean time she could only *"hang on"*.

Discussion

The current study supported previous findings (Freidson, 1994; Sachs, 1999), that *the impact of the organisation upon the counsellor's sense of professionalism* varied according to how they were able to rationalise this influence. It is interesting to note that the first two superordinate themes are supported primarily by extracts from the individ-

ual interview with counsellor B as opposed to few extracts from Counsellor A. This disparity may mirror the perceived influence each counsellor exerts over the organisation.

This first superordinate theme illustrated how a counsellor's position in the organisation influenced their sense of power and their perception of professionalism, resonating with the tenets of new professionalism (Noordegraaf, 2000). This was illustrated by one participant whose role as counsellor and as senior governor was interpreted as empowering her.

The other participant seemed undermined by her lack of authority and utilised a resistant attitude to change within the organisation, for example, threatening an ultimatum should her professionalism be compromised. Using self-preservation strategies in this way is recognised in the literature by Vasco, Garcia-Marques, and Dryden (1993), who consider that when faced with "revision or enlargement of one's paradigm … prevalent career crisis or abandonment of one's career" may ensue (p. 21). Evetts (2011) added that successfully effecting change required input from within, in other words a perspective of the worker that informed change. This was considered important (Clark, 2005) if professionals were to take responsibility for and enact the systems and policies in place. Such views are more closely allied to the literature of occupational professionalism which recognises that an employee's professional culture is defined according to the ideological values they exert (Freidson, 1994; Sachs, 1999). However, this is untenable if, like Counsellor B, they are not afforded a place in defining the organisation. Clark (2005) related such dissatisfaction amongst professionals in organisations to deprofessionalisation, urging them to "reclaim the agent perspective against the one-eyed scientism of the new managerialism" (p. 185). Notably, this meant accountability no longer rested with a profession but was shared equally by the professional, even during disagreement (Clark, 2005). For example, Counsellor B would share responsibility with her organisation for the discord she outlined.

Crocket (2007) proposed, that when faced with such dissonance individuals responded to the presence of conflicting cognitions by modifying attitudes and beliefs to align with behaviour. For example, the lack of agency experienced by Counsellor B when her supervisor was dumped on her by the organisation was replayed as resistance towards him. This is significant as communicating collective goals using collaborative strategies is considered crucial for managing team effectiveness (Blase & Blase, 1996; Boyle, Boyle, & Brown, 1999; Conley & Bacharach, 1990), increasing the quality of decisions by implicating employees (Koopman & Wierdsma, 1998) and consequently helping to shape collective professionalism (Evans, 2008). Hoyle (1975) relates this debate to occupational professionalism, suggesting that if professional development centres on the advancement of individuals then it is professionality, rather than professionalism that represents the *foci* for change.

The second superordinate theme, *the relationship between supervision and professionalism,* is supported by previous research which suggests that supervision is a valuable outlet that enables counsellors to evaluate their performance (Erskine, Moursund, & Trautmann, 1999), particularly with emotionally charged and challenging clients (Harris, Clarke, & Cowland, 2012), such as those seen by the participant counsellors. However, Counsellor B made little reference to collegial working within supervision, stipulating instead her personal needs. I suggested one interpretation, namely that she may consider her professional development from a self-fulfilling perspective.

This notion is supported by previous literature (Evans, 2008) regarding individualisation, where persons fulfil their obligations to society through attempts to fulfil themselves. However, along with Stolte (1988), I offer an alternative explanation; that individualisation may represent an attempt to balance powerlessness in relation to managerial change. For example, by resisting her supervisor, Counsellor B also communicated her desire for control at the

expense of another (Blau, 1964, p. 117). Hence, in keeping with occupational professionalism, the extract high-lighted how those with less power can still exert effect by disrupting organisational control through their behaviour and attitude. Such thinking resonates with Ozga's (1995) theory regarding professional culture where the nature of professionalism is defined from within.

Crocket (2007) considers the predicament from a different perspective: "Supervision promotes inspection, account-ability, and self- awareness and counsellors become ethical and effective practitioners and autonomous profes-sionals. Thus, counsellors are caught up in the self-managing and self-policing practices of the wider culture" (p. 12). Possibly, Counsellor B's insistence about her supervisor's intellectual ability reflected the demands of new professionalism for personal accountability; in other words, she relied upon her supervisor to challenge her. Crocket agrees, seeing it the responsibility of supervisors to reflect carefully on the culture of supervision, most particularly, in the way an organisation constructs supervision as a professional practice. According to the BACP (2013), supervision is in place to address such personal and professional *doubts* as those experienced by the participant counsellors, however, supervision has been found fallible to this presumption (Erskine et al., 1999).

The final superordinate theme *the impact of ethics upon professionalism,* illustrated how an ethical framework (such as that founded by the BACP and used by both participant counsellors) establishes guidelines for profes-sionalism, and these were interpreted similarly by both Counsellor A and B. For example, the participants were united in their view that setting boundaries, training, supervision and personal therapy were essential requisites to support their therapy with vulnerable young people. Where possible, they recognised and enacted the ethical requirements consistent with the BACP framework to which they adhered. Sachs (1999) considers that by asserting knowledge in this way, professionals are proactive in determining their own development as well as that of their profession. For instance, as a profession, the demands and uncertainty of mental health care necessitate under-standing of the key ethical issues that impact decision making; this influences development however as it equips the individual to avoid professional misconduct (Harris et al., 2012).

The two counsellors were divided as to how they experienced their organisation however; the counsellor allied to management seemingly enjoying a more positive interpretation of her organisation's professional culture than the other. In the literature, Freidson (1994) recognised that ethical practice involved engagement with the professional and organisational values which defined its virtuosity, suggesting a link between the ethical framework and the organisation. Since professional culture implies uniformity, the two counsellors' divided experience therefore sig-nifies a dilemma for the organisation, as the collective values that determined its professional culture were not mutually enacted. Counsellor B appeared resistant, suggesting this culture as foist upon her without personal consultation or communication. Hence, as recognised by Allen (1995), she implied that the professional culture, rather than representing shared values, was perceived by her as a managerial construct that constrained her practice.

Moreover, differences in participant reports illustrated the individuality of their personal ethics. For example, Bauman (1991) argued that unlike occupational professionalism where the philosophy of collegial working spawns familiar and strictly binding values, the emphasis upon individualisation inherent in new professionalism re-person-alised morals. Certainly, when resisting her supervisor, one of the counsellors communicated her own ethical agenda. Although this was interpreted as her attempt to balance powerlessness, it is important to consider the effect this focus may have upon professionalism. According to Onnismaa (2004), disengagement from collective morals provokes an experience of isolation as moral and ethical integrity are considered communal in nature. In

other words, the ability to form an individual moral identity is dependent on the history of a community. This concern has been recognised, for Rose (2000) believes that as individuals are now expected to fulfil their obligations to society through attempts to fulfil themselves, (a philosophy consistent with new professionalism) (Evans, 2008), then self-actualisation could interfere with caring for others.

Given the different interpretations of professional guidelines suggested by the findings, the importance of ethical development is crucial. In order to fulfil their ethical obligations counsellors may require further training aligning such principles with new professionalism. In addition, an organisation where the ethical climate is shared could be encouraged by leaders who facilitate ethical discourse and practice, prioritising ethical considerations over targets.

Strengths and Limitations

The current study is the first in the United Kingdom to explore the experience of professionalism amongst counsellors using IPA. This extends understanding of existing literature with relation to ethics and supervision in counselling as well as emphasising the importance of professionalism within this context.

A key limitation of the current study has been the small sample size due to the specialised inclusion criteria and possibly explains instances where the participants' views and previous literature diversify.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed how ethics, supervision and a coherent organizational structure influence a counsellor's sense of professionalism, thereby aiding an understanding of counsellors' experiences. My analysis of professionalism offers different interpretations, which primarily differentiate between the autonomous philosophy underpinning occupational professionalism (Freidson, 2001) and the policy driven culture of new, or organizational professionalism and thus, an attitudinal as opposed to a functional interpretation (Day, 1999). Accordingly, professionalism is conceived as a value laden philosophy as opposed to an authoritative philosophy, the two distinguished by locus of control (Evans, 2008).

The findings from my study suggest that confusion about professionalism does not rest solely with definition of the term but with its application, for example, as an aspiration, an attribute or an attitude. Thus stated, new professionalism can only be realised if it is enacted, meaning something that professionals actually do. In other words, counsellors aspire to be equal advocates and participants in the organizational structures which guide them, so that their sense of professionalism can be realised through the work with their clients. Otherwise, it remains an unfulfilled vision. Certainly such distinction appeared to divide the two participant counsellors where, as a board member Counsellor A articulated an empowered sense of professionalism, whereas, Counsellor B described a compromised professionalism as a result of managerial constraints. Hence, Counsellor B felt unable to respond to her clients according to the professional standards she afforded her practice. Consequently, although, a sense of authority does engender a more distinct profile of professionalism that defines a counsellor's position in the workplace, new professionalism does not currently appear representative of a willing collective.

If counselling psychology is to further develop its role within the NHS it must, therefore, advance an orientation towards this new ideology through creating effective channels of communication with commissioners about the nature of counselling practice, psychological research, value systems and the relationship between all three, so as to facilitate an effective union. Such changes may necessitate reconsideration of its training assumptions,

methods and ethics with a new vision, vigour and commitment. Responding to such modifications is challenging, as focus upon the functional elements of change rather than the attitudinal (Evans, 2002b) could obscure the worker as agentic.

Generating research that focusses upon perceptions of professionalism within counselling warrants further investigation and I suggest that future research should explore the use of coping strategies for counsellors facing organisational change. Such evidence could potentially improve understanding as to how a counsellor's locus of control is affected by such managerial modifications. Awareness as to these implications may facilitate positive change for counsellors in the future.

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