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A qualitative exploration of counsellors' experiences of working therapeutically with international students

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Abstract

In recent decades there has been a considerable increase in the number of international students enrolled in British universities, the greatest proportion originating from Asia. Despite the changing nature of the student population, there seems to be a scarcity of counselling research in this field, particularly from counsellors' perspectives. The main focus of this research study is on counsellors' experiences of working therapeutically with international students. It is a qualitative study which uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as its mode of inquiry and analysis. Data was collected via semi-structured interviews, with four counsellors from differing therapeutic orientations, all working in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Three super-ordinate themes and ten sub-ordinate themes emerged from the data which was collected and subsequently analysed. The findings indicate a number of issues, challenges and strategies which are corroborated by the literature on counselling international students. Although specific groups were perceived as being more challenging than others, the findings suggest that first and foremost international students are to be seen by counsellors as unique individuals, regardless of their nationality. In addition awareness of cultural difference, personal biases and knowledge of the students' contexts were considered important. Academic risk, isolation and access to support systems were also identified by most participants as key elements when working therapeutically with international students. This study has highlighted the need for further research to be undertaken among counsellors who are actively involved in management endorsed initiatives aimed at responding more effectively to international students' needs.

Declaration

The work is original and has never been submitted previously in the context of counselling courses.

Signed:

Elisabeth Shannon

November 2014

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List of abbreviations

APA American Psychological Association

BACP British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy

EEA European Economic Area

EU European Union

HEIs Higher Education Institutions

HESA Higher Education Statistics Agency

IPA Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

UK United Kingdom

UKCISA UK Council for International Student Affairs

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Chapter one: Introduction

1.0 Background

Changing demographics in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Britain have considerable implications for university counsellors who have to meet the needs of a more multicultural and diverse student population (Pointon, 2014; Callender et al., 2011; Lago, 2011). Since the recent withdrawal of government funding in Higher Education, British universities have come to rely increasingly on international students to maintain a healthy cash-flow (British Future & Universities UK, 2014; Bailey, 2006; Lees & Vaspe, 1999). As a result, HEIs are under enormous pressure to recruit international students and are 'fiercely marketed' against other institutions within and outside the UK (Barty et al., 2006, p.1). Based on the publication of figures from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2014), the proportion of international undergraduate students in British universities represented 18.2% of the total undergraduate student population in the academic year 2012-2013. However, the proportion of post-graduate students from outside the UK was considerably higher (57.2%). In the academic year 2012-2013, the highest proportion of international undergraduate students was from Asia (42.3%) and the EU (35.1%). The next highest proportion was from Africa (6.3%). Out of the top ten non-EU sending countries in the academic year 2011-2012, six were developing countries: China, India and Nigeria reaching the highest rankings (UKCISA, March 2014). What is noticeable is the increased numbers of Chinese students and the sharp decrease in the number of Indian students. The combination of a growing global competition and visa restrictions imposed by the latest Immigration Act (UKCISA, 2014) has placed international students at the heart of a national and geo-political debate. In response to the tightening of the British immigration policy, a report published by British Future & Universities UK (August 2014) promotes the many economic and educational benefits

brought to Britain by international students as well as the high level of public support. The report strongly recommends that international students be removed from net migration targets and generally made to feel more welcomed.

1.1 Rationale for the research

Recent studies suggest that western-trained counsellors working in HEIs are increasingly under pressure to develop cross-cultural competencies to meet the needs of this internationally diverse student population (Cox, 2013; Barty, 2011; Arthur, 2008; Barletta & Kobalashi, 2007; Khoo, 2002). Although it is still debatable, there is growing evidence (Callender et al., 2011; Barty, November 2011; Okorocha, 2010; Barty, 2006; Mori, 2000; Sandhu, 1995; Pedersen, 1991) that international students have unique needs and that they often face additional pressures and problems compared with 'home' students. While there is more recognition and knowledge of issues relating to international students, a major review on the topic of counselling international students conducted by Leong & Chou (2002) calls for more research focus on counsellor and counselling process variables; the authors of the review stress that it is important for researchers "to develop creative alternative treatment modalities for international students" (p.203). Another fact worth noting is that most counsellors in Britain are white, female, and middle class (Lago, 2011); this raises questions of a socio-political nature, including questions relating to current western counselling approaches and models which are by and large underpinned by secularism, individualism and egalitarianism (Cox, 2013; Moodley, 2011; Sue, 2003).

1.2 About the researcher

As a person-centred trainee counsellor, I have had the opportunity to work with international students in a Higher Education Institution. What struck me is that

international students who attended counselling sessions seemed to represent a small percentage of the university student population; moreover, those who came originated from EU or EEA countries and were of white ethnicity. The fact that I belong to both a majority of white female counsellors and a minority of non-British counsellors led me to reflect upon the cultural dimension in the counselling process, particularly my own values and sense of identity and how they may impact the counselling relationship. I also wanted to find out about other counsellors' experiences and how they may or may not match my own.

1.3 Aims and objectives

It is within this context that I have come to formulate my research question: what are the experiences of counsellors working therapeutically with international students? My general aim was to gain a greater understanding of how university counselling services respond to the needs of international students on an individual and more collective basis. My main focus was on what university counsellors perceive as possible barriers to effective counselling as well as elements that facilitate the counselling process; I hope that this investigation into current counselling practice will be informative to counsellors who work in HEIs and in other cross-cultural settings. Although this research study focuses on international students in Higher Education, it is to be seen within the broader context of multicultural counselling and the on-going debate between counsellors who take a universalist stance and those who argue that a culture-centred approach is essential in order to work effectively with clients from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Leong & Chou, 2002; Laungani, 1999).

1.4 Structure of the dissertation

The Introduction has set the context, the aims and objectives of my research as well as its rationale. Chapter two will introduce the published literature relating to common issues experienced by international students as well as the challenges, competencies and strategies involved in counselling this category of students. Chapter three will explain the method that informed this research study. Chapter four will present the result outcomes from the data analysis. A presentation of the findings in the light of past and current literature will be the focus of chapter five. Chapter six will conclude the dissertation.

Chapter two: Literature review

2.0 Introduction

Contributions to literature and research addressing the general topic of counselling within multicultural settings are relatively new and have tended to focus on culture groups (Brammer, 2012; Lago, 2011; Pedersen, 2008; Lee, 2006; Sue & Sue, 2003). In order to review the existing literature on international students specifically, I have searched the electronic library catalogue of the University of Chester, Google Scholar, the databases ESBOhost, PsycINFO, ERIC, SocINDEX and individual academic journals. To begin with, I used a limited number of key words in order to find lead articles and texts written on the subject of counselling international students: counsel*ing; counsel*ors; international; students; multi-cultural; cross-cultural; Higher Education; universities; colleges. A full list of words can be found in appendix 1. Recent handbooks on multicultural counselling were particularly useful to identify prominent contributors in the field of international students, namely Paul Pedersen, Nancy Arthur, Alison Barty and Colin Lago. A cross-referencing method was then used in order to identify a range of other contributors within the wider context of cross-cultural counselling and Higher Education. Most of the research undertaken on international students is published in academic journals and is of a quantitative nature.

Numerous studies in the area of counselling international students have been carried out in the past two decades, mainly in the United States, Canada and Australia (Tidwell & Hanasssab, 2007; Russel, Thomson & Rosenthal, 2007; Barletta & Kobalashi, 2007; Mori, 2000; Bradley, 2000; Luzio-Lockett, 1998; Arthur, 1997; Pedersen, 1991). The main areas of research include: common mental health issues encountered by international students and challenges faced by counsellors, general competencies for multicultural counselling practice and conceptual models, the use of counselling

services by international students and their effectiveness, attitudes of international students towards seeking counselling and types of service sought, and future provision for culturally sensitive counselling. Although research in the UK seems to be relatively limited, there has been a growing interest in international students in Britain due to the internationalisation of education, changes to the funding of British universities and new immigration regulations.

2.1 Terminology

2.1.1 International students

As Barty (2011) points out, the use of the term 'international students' is somewhat problematic and will depend by and large on contextual factors. Given that there is no official definition at both national and international levels, this can lead to some confusion. In its broader sense, international students are individuals from a wide range of cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds who have come to the UK for the purposes of study. A key characteristic is that international students are in transition and see Britain (and other countries) as their host culture for a few years, with specific goals to achieve (Eleftheriadou, 1999). In British HEIs, the term is most frequently used to refer to students who come from outside the EU (European Union) and EEA (European Economic Area), which equates roughly to those students who pay full-cost fees and require a visa to study in the UK (Merrick, 2010). Some universities, for example Glyndŵr University, make a clear distinction between international students and European students when advertising for courses on their websites. However, the distinction between international and home students is not clearly defined. A student from the European Union, for example, might be perceived as a foreign national by the community at large but will also be categorised by his or her institution as a 'home' student in terms of fee status. To add to the general confusion, the students' own

perceptions of their cultural or national identity might also differ from others' perceptions. In that respect, a culturally competent counsellor will need to be sensitive to both socio-cultural and personal factors likely to impact international students' sense of self and cultural identity. In a journal article of major importance, Pedersen (1991) mentions the negative connotation associated with the term 'foreign' and the controversy about which term is more appropriate to use.

2.1.2 Cross-cultural counselling

Lago (2011) states that all counsellors are faced with the challenge of seeking to develop therapeutic practices that reflect the cultural settings and the needs of their clients. D'Ardenne & Mahtani (1999) describe cross-cultural counselling as a practice-based approach and "a way of thinking about clients where culture is acknowledged and valued" (p. xiv). They contend that the approach is not about acquiring expertise on any specific culture and that it does not follow any particular school of counselling. In an attempt to challenge current western therapeutic practices and to move towards a more culture-centred perspective, a number of frameworks were developed (Collins & Arthur, 2007; Sue et al., 1998; Pope-Davis & Coleman, 1997; Arredondo et al., 1996). Sue et al. (1998) set the standard for cultural competence and provided a basic framework for counsellors which requires a three-fold process: developing an awareness of personal assumptions, values and biases; understanding the worldview of culturally-different clients and their socio-cultural context; and using appropriate strategies and techniques.

In an uncompromising way, Cox (2013) points out that these requirements place a huge responsibility upon us counsellors and that we must be open to identify and question "the unconscious biases inherent in our social conditioning"; the reasons

behind this statement are that biases may act as barriers to empowering clients and fostering their personal development (p.12). By implication, this challenges the ethnocentricity of current western therapeutic practices based on individual autonomy, for instance when counselling clients from collectivist cultures. In an article comparing western and eastern values, Laungani (2010) writes that the philosophy of individualism dominant in western thinking may clash with eastern deterministic ways of thinking and that the goals of the family will often take precedence over individual goals. In that respect, Barrot (2008) advises counsellors "to learn to work between the polarities of individualistic self-help and community-oriented solutions" (p.280).

Based on Sue et al.'s (1998) theoretical framework of multicultural counselling competencies, the American Psychological Association (APA) published further multicultural guidelines for psychologists (Johnson et al., 2008). The aims of these aspirational guidelines are to provide psychologists with "the rationale and needs for addressing multiculturalism and diversity" in their practice but also in the fields of education, training, research and organisational change (p. 3); guidelines 1, 2 and 5 are of particular relevance to clinical practice and encourage psychologists to be aware of their values and beliefs, to develop their knowledge and understanding and to apply skills appropriate for counselling in multicultural settings. Although the BACP ethical framework for good practice (2014) does not outline such detailed guidance, a commitment to the principle of justice "requires the ability to appreciate differences between people and to be committed to equality of opportunity, and avoiding discrimination against people or groups contrary to their legitimate personal or social characteristics" (p. 2). Regular and on-going supervision tied to the principle of self-respect also plays a crucial role in exploring any assumptions, values and biases that might impede the therapeutic process or involuntarily harm clients.

2.2   International students' mental health and well-being

2.2.1 Common issues faced by international students

Issues commonly experienced by international students are well documented (Barty, 2011; Okorocha, 2010; Arthur, 2008; Bradley, 2000); these comprise adjusting to different cultural values, pressures from immediate and extended family and/or sponsoring organisations, gender roles, academic difficulties and language barriers, homesickness, isolation and loneliness, lack of social support systems, loss of status and identity, feeling different, visa problems, discrimination and racism, financial hardships, career concerns and re-entry adjustment. Sandhu (1995) depicts international students as a "silent minority of at-risk students" (p.237) and proposes that the mental health difficulties that international students may experience during their stay at university are caused by both intrapersonal (sense of loss, inferiority, uncertainty) and interpersonal factors (communication problems, culture shock, loss of support systems). He suggests that these factors interact with each other and are often difficult to separate. It is also important to note that some of these difficulties will be shared by all students, some will be common to anyone living in a foreign culture while others will be unique to international students (Brinson & Kotler, 1995). One aspect which seems prevalent among many international students, and particularly non-European students, is their high level of financial commitment towards an overseas education and the unavoidable expectations that accompany it. In a report commissioned by Young Minds, Barty et al. (2006) state that "when a mismatch occurs between expectation and reality, between the dream of success and the pressure of assignments, both individual and institution are at risk of disappointment and failure" (p.1). Another aspect mentioned in the report, because it has the potential to be overlooked in secular settings, is that of religious observance: "the private nature of religious affiliation and the absence of religious practice from daily life may contribute

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to a sense of alienation" (p.1). This might be the case particularly for students from countries where religion is more socially integrated and accepted.

2.2.2 Adjustment to a new culture

One of the major concerns for international students is that of adjusting to a new cultural environment. The term 'culture shock' was first introduced by Oberg (1960 as cited in Pedersen, 1995, p.1) to describe this psychological phenomenon. The online Oxford dictionary gives the following definition: "the feeling of disorientation experienced by someone when they are suddenly subjected to an unfamiliar culture, way of life, or set of attitudes". The effects of culture shock, also called acculturative stress, are not dissimilar from those of other transitional phases and are not confined to international students; homesickness, for example, can be experienced by home students leaving their familiar home environment. However, the wider the gap between the host country culture and the home country culture, the harder the adjustment is (Pedersen, 1991). Barty (2011) also stresses that the adjustment process depends on the strength and the combination of 'pull' factors such as the students' personal and professional motivations as well as 'push' factors such as the lack of Higher Education facilities in their home country or parental pressure to study abroad (p.184).

Recent research suggests that symptoms like depression, feelings of alienation and isolation might be more acutely felt among some international students who have to familiarise themselves with the host culture systems (education, social customs), which might subsequently cause them to feel unsure about what is expected of them and what themselves might expect of others (Pedersen, 1995). Language difficulties are not uncommon either and can create barriers to being heard and understood as well as giving rise to academic concerns. Pedersen (1991) states: "A person's self-esteem

and self-image are validated by significant others, who provide emotional and social support in culturally patterned ways. Moving to a foreign culture suddenly deprives a person of these support systems" (p.12). As a result, they may have fewer resources than home students to cope with their problems. However, Barletta & Kobayashi (2007) remind us that culture shock is "an inevitable process that all international students undergo in their attempt to adjust to a new culture" and that it can also have positive benefits (p. 185). In order to normalise the emotional and psychological effects associated with culture shock but also to emphasise its many positive aspects, the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA), and some university counselling services (the University of Warwick for example), have devoted a whole section of their website to culture shock, including a description of the 5 stage model, known as the W curve (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; UKCISA, 2014); this model includes the process of re-entry which is the process of re-adapting to one's home culture after living in another culture. The phenomenon of re-entry, also called reverse culture shock, is an important element to be taken into consideration in the counselling process. For instance, near the end of their course, some female students might feel anxious about losing a newly acquired sense of independence (Barty et al., 2006). Although induction or orientation programmes are now on offer, international students "are expected to make their own transition and to behave and study as if they were fully assimilated into the dominant culture" (Bell, 1996, p.78).

2.2.3 Culture shock and the acculturation process

The theoretical model of culture shock, originally attributed to Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963), has since been used and adapted by many authors, notably Adler (1975). According to this model, international students may experience feelings of excitement during the initial stage of their stay, called the honeymoon stage; this stage may be

followed by a period of 'disintegration' during which they may experience negative emotions such as feelings of confusion and isolation. Lago & Shipton (1994) refer to the next stage, the re-integration stage, as being particularly crucial. They claim this is the time when counsellors are most likely to be approached by international students with concerns "that may include implicit and explicit criticisms of the host culture" (p.53). These situations might be challenging for the counsellor and they suggest that sharing the model at an appropriate time in the counselling process might help students make sense of their experiences. This model seems to be commonly used but, like any theoretical model, needs to be applied sensitively and discriminately. According to Pedersen (1995), there is a lot of disagreement about culture shock and how it presents itself. In *Five stages of culture shock,* he contends that culture shock is not necessarily a negative process; based on the results of his extensive study, he defines culture shock as a learning process.

Within the context of cultural adjustment, Berry (1997) led a significant investigation on acculturation responses and singled out four types of coping strategies (integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation) around two dimensions of acculturation: maintaining a sense of cultural identity and maintaining contact with other groups. On the continuum of cultural contact and cultural distance, Ward et al. (2001) explain that people in contact with an unfamiliar culture might assimilate it, reject it or change their identity to include both types of cultural identity. Out of the four alternatives, Berry (1997) states that the integration or bi-culturalism strategy was found to be the best predictor of positive psychological adjustment outcomes, as this allows individuals to both retain their cultural identity as well as build relationships with members of other cultural groups. Berry (1997) also makes the important point that it is a two way process: "the availability and success of such a dual adaptation strategy depends on

the willingness of the dominant society to allow it, and the wish of co-ethnics to pursue it" (p.25). This bears much relevance for universities and university counselling services as to how much they are prepared to change and adapt in order to address the needs of international students.

2.3 Challenges in counselling international students

2.3.1 Addressing assumptions and stereotypes

Without denying the uniqueness of international students' needs, Arthur (2008) warns counsellors of the danger of stereotyping international students according to their respective cultural group and seeing them as having homogenous needs; given the cultural diversity of the student population, there are likely to be as many differences between international students as there are among home students. In her authoritative book *Clients around the world,* Arthur (2004) also urges counsellors to familiarise themselves with the myths commonly associated with international students in order to increase their competencies and move away from common pre-conceptions. The misperceptions that international students are "the cream of the crop from their country" or "come from wealthy countries" (p.10-11), for example, are reflected in the following extract posted on the Guardian website (September 2013) by a Nepalese international student:

> Some of the international students who contribute £8bn a year to the UK economy are the well-heeled sons and daughters of elite families. But not all conform to that stereotype: many have poor parents who scrimped and saved to get them to the UK. For them, life is a struggle. Without a family in the country to call on for help, poor international students are vulnerable and overlooked (Paudel, 2013, p.1).

The UKCISA website (August 2014) also lists six common myths and misconceptions about international students which are often spread by the media. The recent governmental investigation into the abuse of student visas (Morgan & Matthews,

2014), for example, might re-reinforce beliefs such as "once students obtain visas, no-one knows where they are" (UKCISA, 2014). These misconceptions might impact cultural groups who are already subject to discrimination and racism, especially at a time when immigration is high on the government agenda. Counsellors also need to develop an awareness of their own potential personal reactions which may interfere with the counselling process (Okorocha, 2010).

2.3.2 Students' attitudes to counselling and their expectations

Despite some acknowledgement that international students may experience more psychological distress than UK students, there is increasing evidence that they are less likely to seek help from counselling services than home students (Onabule & Boes, 2013; Hyun et al., 2007; Grant, 2002; Leong & Chou, 2002). One of the reasons mentioned is the potential loss of status that may be incurred. Another aspect mentioned is that, when some international students do seek help, they may be at crisis point, after other ways of dealing with their issues have been tried. The anecdotal evidence that international students from collectivist cultures are reluctant to use counselling services was explored by Snider (2009); he found that the reluctance was partly due to a clash of values but also the fear of being seen by friends, and this was particularly noticeable among Chinese students. The study emphasises that there is a general lack of awareness of university counselling services among international students and that there seems to be some confusion about the role of counsellors and the notion of 'talking therapy'. Here is another extract from the report compiled by Young Minds (Barty et al., 2006):

> In some systems, including within Europe, a psychotherapist or counsellor will, of necessity, have already qualified as a psychologist or psychiatrist. This can have two effects: a university counsellor who is not a psychologist or psychiatrist may be seen as less 'professional'. Alternatively, students may assume that a university counsellor is a psychologist or a psychiatrist, and this can inhibit a

student from making contact because of the perceived association with mental illness or 'madness' (p.2).

International students' lack of familiarity with the concept of counselling may lead them to have negative or inappropriate expectations of counselling (Mori, 2000) or to end sessions prematurely (Pedersen, 1991). In order to avoid misunderstandings, D'Ardenne & Mahtani (1989) recommend that the counsellor clarifies the counselling process, his or her role as well as the client's role in the counselling relationship.

Given the nature of the pressures and expectations associated with studying overseas, the impact of failure may also be felt more significantly by some international students. According to Sheu & Fukuyama (2006), the non-western concepts of 'loss of face' and family 'honour' are of particular relevance for East Asian students and must be understood by counsellors; they stress that counsellors must help them "protect their dignity and self-esteem through saving face" (p.179). Mori (2000) & Laungani (2010) also suggest that students with cultural norms based on hierarchical relationships may express a preference for a counsellor who can be regarded as an expert or authority. However, some research studies have also shown that international students favour a non-directive style of counselling (D'Rozario & Romano, 2000; Yau, Sue & Hayden, 1992).

2.3.3 Barriers to communication and seeking support

A recent investigation into the needs of international students conducted by the University of Nottingham (2011) supports the hypothesis that international students have greater support needs in comparison to UK students and that differences in culture and language are major concerns for Chinese and Malaysian students in particular. A key finding of this study is that, for many international students, the stigma attached to mental health acts as a major barrier to seeking help from counsellors. The

report also suggests that some international students tend to rely on the tutor and academic staff support system in preference to other support services. Pedersen (1991) also points out that Chinese international students, for example, may not seek formal assistance and may be reluctant to discuss personal problems. According to Khoo et al. (2002), international students are more likely to seek help with problems that they would normally discuss with people outside their family and circle of friends. Idowu (1985 as cited in Khoo et al., 2002) observes that in African societies such as Nigeria, for example, disclosing personal problems to a stranger may be perceived as divulging personal and family secrets; he makes the point that self-disclosure as a means of building a relationship may be limited. Another aspect specific to some Asian cultures is emotional restraint, this being regarded as a sign of maturity and wisdom (Khoo et al, 2002); in these cases solution-focused, cognitive and behavioural approaches are generally favoured because their emphasis is not on the exploration of internal conflicts which may awaken feelings of shame and guilt (Sheu and Fukuyama, 2006; Khoo et al, 2002). Moreover, Asian students are often said to have a tendency to somatise their psychological issues as a way of retaining the family honour (Zhan & Dixon, 2003; Mori, 2000; Lin & Yi, 1997). However, this hypothesis has not been strongly supported (Leon & Chou, 2002).

2.4 Strategies and recommendations

2.4.1 Competencies and Knowledge

Hull (1985) singled out four significant factors to be taken into consideration when counselling international students: international students as learners in transition who will be expected to return home at the end of their period of study; the international students' goals for the duration of their studies; the international students' expectations of the therapeutic process; and institutional issues that might impact the therapy. A

recent report by Puukari (2012) also argues for more specific knowledge when counselling international students. Lin & Pedersen (2006) reinforce this stance and define international students as a unique group of individuals, 'a minority among minorities' (p.286). They portray the process of counselling with international students "as a journey that should be embarked on like any physical journey: with an open mind, an appreciative attitude and an eagerness to learn new ways of looking at the world" (p.285). They strongly encourage counsellors to adopt 'a humble attitude' in order to become multinationally competent as well as multiculturally competent. With the aim of addressing the need for multinational competence, they offer further theoretical guidelines based on Sue and Sue's (1998; 2003) framework. These guidelines are embedded in 3 levels of awareness:

a) The individual level of awareness and appreciation of cultures in the process of psychotherapy

b) The sociocultural and socio-political level of awareness for the life of international students

c) The universal level of awareness for individual uniqueness in a cultural context

Pedersen (1991) points out that, owing to the cultural dimension, it may be difficult for the counsellor to identify norms and "to know when a behaviour relates to the culture, as distinguished from the person belonging to that culture" (p.43).

2.4.2 Counselling approaches and the counsellor's role

In the conclusion of a recent academic paper on international students, Barty (2011) makes this powerful statement:

> International students, in their diversity, are both like and unlike other students – culturally different but with cultural overlaps. The culturally informed counsellor

of any international student will aim to step skilfully and sensitively without losing sight of either 'in between' similarities or differences (p.193).

For example, having an understanding of subgroups from Asian, African, European cultures will help to communicate empathy, respect and understanding on the part of the counsellor. In a study comparing attitudes to depression among African students and Western postgraduate students, Fleet (2009) found that culture plays a central role and that a 'researcher' approach to counselling is preferable (p.1). Barty's (2011) main recommendations are that the counsellor should have a high level of attunement and start "from a stand of not knowing" (p.189). Okorocha (2010) reflects Barty's stance and advocates a flexible approach depending on the problem and the context; this may include a change in communication style to accommodate students for whom English is a foreign or second language for example. She also points out the importance of building a trusting and workable relationship right from the beginning. However, Sheu & Yukuyama (2006) caution that it may take longer to build trust with students from East Asia as most of their social relationships are developed slowly. They recommend that cultural differences be openly discussed and suggest practical ways of doing this, for instance by asking how their East Asian clients would solve their particular issue in their own country or by explaining the cultural differences in specific circumstances, such as the making of friendships. It is also suggested that some international students may be more responsive to an active and directive approach (Liu, 2009; Cox 2013). For example, this might involve providing information about careers, local language courses or about resources that may increase international students' contact with the host culture or teaching students coping skills to help them adapt to their new environment.

Based on research undertaken on conducive elements within the cross-cultural therapeutic relationship, Christodoulidi & Lago (2010) give these broad but challenging

guidelines: "the counsellor needs to have the capacity to communicate creatively and effectively within the boundaries of good therapeutic practice, he or she needs to be committed to understanding their cross-cultural therapeutic relationships"; perhaps more importantly, they suggest that counsellors need to have a heightened sense of who they are as persons "within themselves" and within the socio-cultural context they interact with (p.239). Cox (2013) also expresses the view that "no single approach to helping is equally applicable across all situations and populations" (p.13). On the general topic of culture and diversity in counselling, Barrot (2008) argues that "culture is always present in sessions" and that "there is enough difference between us to justify working in this way all the time" (p.280). With reference to the inadequacy of many counselling courses in the field of multicultural counselling, Palmer (1999) writes that "counsellors are sometimes faced with having to reflect on their own practice by themselves, with interested colleagues or their supervisors, who may not be adequately trained in this area" (p. 162). This statement is reinforced by Lago (2011) who sees long-term personal and professional development as a prerequisite to effective cross-cultural counselling.

2.4.3 The role of the institution and counselling services

Recent research tends to suggest that the type of support that international students need and seek extends beyond one-to-one conventional counselling (Cox 2013; Liu, 2009; Lago, 2005). Puukari (2012) stresses the importance of a holistic counselling approach and supports the creation of "a guidance-based culture in which all related fields of counselling (career, personal, educational) are covered" (p.6). Developing an awareness of what other support is available outside counselling, for example through student unions and international student advisers, seems to be particularly crucial in providing an appropriate service, particularly for those international students who are

underrepresented (Barty, 2011). Most HEIs, if not all, have now set up international student offices and put in place culturally sensitive outreach programs (also called orientation programmes) to increase international students' awareness relating to the availability of resources, and to enable them to cope with issues associated with the acculturation process (Wei et al., 2007; Johnson & Sandhu, 2006). Brinson & Kotler (1995) suggest that increasing cultural diversity among the counselling staff may help international students feel that their problems will be better understood. It has also been suggested that counselling services should be located close to medical centres or student international offices to reduce the potential stigma that students may feel when seeking help (Liu, 2009). In order to reach out to international students, but also to any students who are less likely to make use of counselling services, HEIs have set up personal development groups or well-being workshops to help students deal with issues such as time-management, anxiety or assertiveness (Barty, November 2011; Barty & Raven, 2003). Groups which are run for all students and have focused agendas seem to have had a more positive uptake by international students (Barty, 2006). While there has been an increase of outreach efforts by HEIs through induction programmes and internet facilities in recent years, Lago (2005) calls for counsellors to step out of the counselling room and engage more actively with preventive and developmental initiatives designed to serve a wider student population. To that effect Yoon & Portman (2004) claim that institutional change and environmental support may be more effective than helping international students at the individual level.

2.5 Conclusion

It is clear, from the literature, that international students experience unique issues and present a number of challenges for counsellors. Tidwell & Hanassad (2007) stress that counsellors have to bear in mind that international students have first and foremost

come to study overseas in order to get a higher education. According to Zhang & Dixon (2001), it is therefore important that counsellors be knowledgeable about their adjustment issues as well as their academic needs. However, Arthur (2008) states that "it is impossible to address all the issues experienced by international students and all the strategies available for designing and delivering multicultural counselling" (p. 286). She therefore encourages counsellors to share their professional experiences in counselling international students through contributing to research and professional development forums. The research gaps identified by Pedersen (1991) also include counsellors' values, informal methods and contexts. In keeping with Pedersen's research, it is the intended aim of this study to address some of these gaps in order to extend the knowledge base with regard to counselling international students.

Chapter three: Methodology

3.1 Research design

As highlighted by the literature review, there is a need for more research related to counsellors' professional experiences. I have therefore decided to use Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the mode of inquiry and analysis for my research. Unlike quantitative methods, which involve large amounts of data and lead to generalisations, IPA is an idiographic approach to data which focuses on participants' understandings of their lived experiences. The process involves an initial immersion in the data and a series of steps which lead to the emergence of themes for each participant and across the data. The aim is "to examine convergence and divergence in some detail" within a relatively homogeneous sample and to extract the essence of the phenomenon under investigation (Smith et al., 2009, p.3).

3.2 Sample

Consistent with the study's phenomenological design, I chose a purposive sampling strategy. Its purpose was to select participants according to criteria relevant to the topic under investigation. My main criteria were that counsellors had to be either in training or qualified to at least diploma level, had worked with international students in a Higher Education Institution for at least a year and were receiving regular supervision.

3.3 Recruitment of participants

With the help of a colleague, my research advert (appendix 2) was circulated to heads of counselling services in the UK. Eight participants expressed an initial interest and contacted me via the email address provided on the research advert. I then contacted all parties and sent out further details related to the research procedure (appendix 3).

Out of the eight participants who initially responded, four participants were available for face-to-face interviews, which was my preferred method of data collection. This gave me sufficient scope to conduct a study using IPA as my research method (Smith et al., 2009). Subsequently, interviews were arranged and scheduled within a two week timeframe (appendix 6). Prior to conducting the interviews, I emailed a short questionnaire to all research participants (appendix 4) in order to collate biographical and contextual data (appendix 5). All four participants were female, British, white and aged between 41 and 60. They were practising and experienced therapists from differing therapeutic orientations who had worked a minimum of 3 years with international students in Higher Education settings.

3.4 Data collection

I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions; in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, this is considered the most appropriate way of generating rich and substantial experiential data as outlined by Smith et al (2009). Prior to the interviews, I conducted a pilot interview with one of my colleagues. The interview was an hour long and was audio-digitally recorded; this helped me to refine my questions and ensure they were adequately phrased (appendix 7). The pilot interview was also crucial in bringing to my awareness some of my biases related to my research study and generally prepared me well for the subsequent interviews with my research participants.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Participants were sent an information sheet prior to the interview to ensure that they had a clear understanding of what the research would entail (appendix 3). The information provided an overview of the procedure and outlined the potential benefits

and risks, how confidentiality would be maintained and how the data would be protected. It also ascertained participants' autonomy and rights to stop the interview, withdraw from the research or complain should they had needed to. Each interview lasted about 50-60 minutes, were arranged at a mutually convenient time and in settings where confidentiality could be assured. These were audio digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim and copies were sent to my participants for approval and potential corrections. Informed consent was obtained to record the data and to use excerpts from the interviews (appendices 8 and 9). Rather than allocating a pseudonym for each participant, I decided to give each participant a number according to the order in which each interview had taken place (appendix 6). This ensured that participants' identity was kept confidential and this avoided any potential confusion with names.

3.6 Data analysis

After an initial period of immersion in the data through listening and transcribing the interviews, I started analysing the data for each participant following the steps described by Smith et al. (2009). The first stage of analysis consisted in reading the transcripts line by line and noting down my initial reactions. This was followed by a more exploratory process of analysis (step 2) which involved re-reading the transcripts and adding comments with particular attention to the three levels of analysis described by Smith et al. (2009): descriptive, linguistic and conceptual. The next stages (steps 3 and 4) were more interpretative and required examining my comments with the aim of identifying sub-themes. I chose to use a colour-coded system to connect themes which had elements in common. With the intention of extracting material from each participant transcript, I also colour-coded sections within the body of each transcript which bore relevance to the emergent sub-themes and underlined key elements. This facilitated the emergence of super-ordinate themes for the group of participants (step

5) and the search for patterns across the four case studies (step 6). A detailed account of the stages of analysis can be found in appendices 10 and 11.

3.7 Validity

While US based research literature is valuable to inform good practice in other countries, Lago (2011) warns that the sociocultural factors of this work ought to be taken into consideration when applied to other societies. McLeod (2003) describes the relationship between counselling and society as "one in which therapy is continually reconstructed in response to changes in culture and society" (p.17) and argues that, in future, qualitative research will increasingly play an important role in its reconstruction. My research therefore responds to a need for more contextual counselling research.

3.8 Reflexive statement

My interest in carrying out this research study arose from my experiences of growing up in a multicultural environment as well as working and studying in a culture which is not my home culture. Given my personal background and also my person-centred training, I was aware of the need to 'bracket off' my potential biases and pre-conceptions (Ethrington, 2004) while conducting my research. In phenomenological investigation, the suspension of the researcher's own judgment is seen as critical in order "to see the experience for itself" and gain an understanding of the essence of the phenomena (Katz, 1987 as cited in Maycut & Morehouse, 1994, p.123). Equally, understanding the meaning of the participants' lived experience requires a process of interpretation which is necessarily influenced by the researcher's 'fore-conception' as suggested by Heidegger (Smith et al., 2009, p. 23). I addressed this challenge through an on-going process of self-reflection and regular supervision.

Chapter four: Findings

4.0 Overview: table of emergent themes

Three super-ordinate themes and ten sub-ordinate themes emerged from the data which was collected via semi-structured interviews with four research participants.

Theme number	Super-ordinate themes	Sub-ordinate themes
1	Systems	The institution
		Risk management
		Support
2	Communication	Language difficulties
		Culture and country-specific attitudes
		Expectations
		Outreach
3	Culture and difference	Awareness and understanding
		Cross-cultural knowledge and competencies
		Counselling approach

4.1 Theme 1: Systems

International students' adjustment to new systems, lack of familiar support, potential isolation but also their goals and motivation were considered as important elements to be taken in consideration.

4.1.1 The institution

The institutional context and the students' profiles were seen as significant factors

when working therapeutically with international students:

> *in my experience, international students, you know, all the students really, they're all super intelligent and they're all super motivated, so they bring those two attributes towards their own therapy (participant 1)*

> *generally speaking, they come here specifically to get a British degree from a well-known university so that will stand them in good stead within the international market or globally […] so if they feel that they are going to be losing the opportunity, I think they are more willing to come (participant 2)*

> *it's all about kind of building a relationship and knowing the institution, and knowing the profile of the student and knowing the wider context […] somehow I think the institution stands for something, for international students it becomes their home in a way (participant 4)*

> *We don't get a huge amount here […] Most of them do really really well (participant 3)*

4.1.2 Risk management

Two participants experienced risk management as being very intense at times when

counselling international students:

> *you could well imagine if something went wrong in an international student's life, the first place they might call if they needed help in the UK might be the institution because they see it as somehow in a position of authority, so that's quite stressful (participant 4)*

> *if you have a suicidal international student because…, and this doesn't just stay with oriental students, this can be, the shame-based, you know, the honour …, the number of times I've heard 'it's better to die than fail my parents', so the risk management can be quite scary […] they're more of an unknown quantity in that they are more isolated, I mean with any risk assessment it would be about their isolation here (participant 2)*

Participants 2, 4 and 3 felt a greater weight of responsibility when international students

were struggling with their studies:

> *we are an educational establishment so it's not just physical risk, there is academic risk as well, a student paying how many thousand pounds, you know,*

and suffering all the traumas of moving away from home and going to go home with nothing, that to me is a crisis and I will step in (participant 2)

it's a kind of once in a life time opportunity […] the potential to fail kind of represents something much worse for a student in that kind of situation, I mean the shame of going home, I think some students probably go home and never tell anybody (participant 4)

We had a Chinese student […] I recognised the fact that her English wasn't good enough really […] so I found out about language classes for her and supported her getting into those […] to me if it's going to get them through their college course and it needs doing, nobody else is going to do it, I'm going to do it (participant 3)

4.1.3 Support

Participants 2, 4 and 3 felt it was crucial to adopt a more proactive and supportive role

when counselling international students:

I'm very mindful of the fact that they are away from home and perhaps away from their usual support systems […] We get a lot of Chinese students […] they're not used to the independent ways of learning we're expected to carry out when studying here in this country, so that's often one of the reasons why they turn up or they just feel they're not doing as well as they'd expected and they're distressed and they need some support (participant 2)

I suppose, when it's an international student, you perhaps have a greater feeling of being somehow responsible for providing something that they may not have, they do sometimes seem to be that much more vulnerable […] I think if you go and you're only doing counselling and you don't understand anything about the other kind of context that they might need support for, then it's not necessarily helpful (participant 4)

understanding the British health system and…sometimes being able to guide them through some of that stuff. Although it's not strictly counselling, it's sort of… it's still support and care (participant 3)

The limitations of the counsellor's role were mentioned by three participants:

I would work with like faculty staff and try and get extra support but ultimately there is a difficult tension, we need to maintain standards, we can't let people pass if they're not up to it (participant 4)

if we had unlimited funds, maybe we would encroach on other people's territory but with six sessions you've kind of got to stick to the knitting really (participant 1)

she was a published writer in her own country and that was causing her a huge amount of upset and crisis of confidence … she wasn't even passing first year work. I organised some support for her but it was mainly online support (participant 3)

4.2 Theme 2: Communication

Generally communication was not seen as problematic; references were made to language difficulties, clash of cultural values, attitudes to mental illness and expectations of therapy as occasional barriers to communication. All participants referred to their involvement in reaching out initiatives such as workshops or orientation programmes.

4.2.1 Language difficulties

Participants 4 and 3 acknowledged that some students may struggle with a process which requires a good command of the English language:

> *I've had Japanese clients […] I kind of feel they're immediately, in a way, at a disadvantage or I have something and they don't and they struggle to express themselves and apologise […] It can be difficult yeah, perhaps they're already feeling a bit isolated or homesick or kind of like a fish out of water and then the process by which they get help in a sense is part of that* (participant 4)

> *there are some students I've seen that I felt the language difference is, knowing the kind of subtleties in each other's language, you know, sort of them knowing the subtleties in English I think sometimes… I feel that's a disadvantage for them* (participant 3)

Participant 1 took a pragmatic stand and also pointed out that most students at her institution were able to cope with the therapeutic process:

> *although sometimes you do get language difficulties, you're not dealing with people you've got to explain in enormous detail because they get it*

4.2.2 Culture and country-specific attitudes

All four therapists had experienced some difficulties related to cultural difference in various ways. Participant 4 referred to cultural taboos and how they can sometimes create dilemmas for both the student and the counsellor:

> *I've had an African client who was gay […] because he was talking about going back to his own country or not and if you're gay where he comes from, the consequences […] could involve imprisonment, and, you know, as a western counsellor […] I could feel that my agenda for him was 'stay in this country' where he could be gay […] That was quite an eye-opener, a difficult experience*

She added that sometimes the cultural context gets in the way of understanding the students:

> *and maybe sometimes just understanding the context of where they live. […] I'm just thinking about one particular client where there was a kind of confusion between not knowing whether I was misunderstanding him or misunderstanding his kind of context, it felt difficult to separate the two*

Three participants mentioned difficulties due to the stigma attached to mental illness:

> *in China, it is possible that, if you are diagnosed with depression, this is tantamount to being suitable for incarceration in a long-term mental institution […] but that's not an international student problem, that's a one particular cultural country and even then it may not be every single person from that part of the world* (participant 1)

> *I had a few encounters with African students where I felt so like 'I do not know what I'm doing', 'I can't help this person' 'I can see they're struggling but they're not letting me in' so there's a big culture around the family, 'keep it in the family always' […] And also there's also a lot of shame, a lot of stigma, because there are very few mental health professionals in those settings* (participant 4)

> *[Chinese students] often they don't see mental health issues as if it's something wrong with them, not something they can be supported and helped with. So if they feel they have mental health issues it's a source of shame* (participant 2)

Participant 4 also described challenges associated with cultural difference as a positive experience:

> *I've had amazing experiences with clients who had no idea what counselling is and they just come along, I love that kind of encounter, where it's just almost as alien for me as it is for them and we kind of feel our way around and eventually find a meeting in the middle […] I can find that really precious*

4.2.3 Expectations

Participant 3 referred to the students' expectations as getting in the way of therapy:

> *sometimes they want to be told what to do, some people from other cultures […] that a counsellor is going to be somebody that sort of tell them what to do rather than help them explore what's going on* (participant 3)

Participant 2 and participant 4 talked about their use of supervision to explore their reactions to clients' expectations as well as their own expectations:

> *in earlier days there was often a difficulty about working with some Muslim men and their expectation of women […] I don't mean to generalise, it is just one or two […] they would speak quite disrespectfully, shall we say, of women, which jars very much with my own ethos of equality […] I needed a lot of supervision at the time to manage my own anxieties and discomfort around that* (participant 2)

> *We had this interesting conversation about North Americans and something I struggle with […] I'm more used to kind of European repressed type of presentation, that's me […] that sort of thing can be quite difficult, this American slant… yeah just a different way of presenting and perhaps also different expectations of what therapy is for different cultures* (participant 4)

Participant 1 lowers her expectations in order to adapt to her clients' different abilities to engage with therapy:

> *if they get it quickly you work quickly, if they get it slowly you'd be describing things in more detail […] in 6 sessions you can't do very much anyway but maybe you only teach them one or two techniques*

Participant 2 establishes clear boundaries when dealing with differences in expectations:

> *I would always clarify that it wasn't my role to make decisions for them or tell them what to do so I would reiterate, you know, the limitations of counselling and say this is a place where they can explore what they feel they need to do and another person's perspective as well* (participant 2)

With regard to differences in male students' attitudes towards female counsellors, participant 4 and participant 1 also made the following comments:

because they can see I am a white woman, I'm not wearing a headscarf or whatever that particular culture… you know, that in itself permits a different kind of relationship but again it's something I might name and say 'I wonder what it feels like for you etc. etc. that I am a woman' (participant 4)

if the therapy doesn't seem to be going in the direction that you want it to go in, you know, then you can start asking questions, you know, 'maybe it's difficult to hear a woman talking in this way' but you kind of do that all the time anyway (participant 1)

Participants 1 and 4 also recognised that in their respective institutions there is a selection bias:

they come to the UK which maybe nobody in their family has ever done […] that is a kind of a driving force to get out in the world even if they're struggling with something, so they're kind of predisposed to make the most of their therapy […] I think it would be different if you were working perhaps in an NHS situation where perhaps people might have been sent (participant 1)

what you have to remember about our students is that they're working all over the world […] I don't think that by itself, adjusting to British culture, is necessarily, you know, a lot of people take it in their stride and relish the kind of change and the challenge and really enjoy that (participant 4)

4.2.4 Outreach

Most participants were involved with programmes and workshops which aim to address the needs of students who might not want to access help through the counselling service, including international students:

it's very important […] that the counselling service is present and is involved in kind of new tutor training and talk about how to facilitate that […] We do have a big international student orientation […] I've got presentations that list […] basic things that people will recognise […] That does seem to work (participant 4)

we have what we call an academic well-being programme which is actually delivered by the NHS […] now what we're trying to do is have workshops and attend them to try and get them [international students] in when they need it. It is about casting it as "this is supporting your learning", if you sell it as mental health issues or whatever, forget it (participant 2)

they can self-refer, they can be referred by academic staff, they can be referred by friends, they can be referred by GPs, we have a good relationship with the university practice […] I should also say that we run workshops aimed at specific topics: depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, exam anxiety… (participant 1)

Participant 3 expressed her current lack of involvement with international students as well as her lack of control due to changes in her institution:

> *I used to do a little talk at the international student day but they stopped asking me to do it recently […] when you've got only so many hours and you're discouraged from doing things that you feel would be helpful when you haven't got very many hours anyway, you think alright then*

4.3 Theme 3: Culture and Difference

All participants started from the premise that the cultural dimension in counselling is a sub-category of difference when counselling international students. They thought that it was useful to be able to call upon a good cultural knowledge base but most importantly, they thought that individual differences accounted for more than cultural differences.

4.3.1 Awareness and understanding

Participants were wary of making assumptions about international students:

> *it would be a little bit prejudicial to assume that international students, you know, have a different set of difficulties because then you'd be predisposing yourself to look for those rather than allow them to tell you their story. I don't really think it's necessarily a function of being an international student ok, because a student could have been born and bred in England and still finds therapy hard to engage with* (participant 1)

> *I wouldn't say they are quite apart […] We do have all nationalities here […] I think they integrate generally quite well but, you know, you can get home students who are quite apart because of the person they are, so I don't get a sense that it's to do with their culture but more about how they are experiencing their world, you know, or maybe it's how they are all the time* (participant 2)

> *I think their issues can be made worse but fundamentally people bring what they bring and that's often to do with much deeper stuff, I would say it's because of my psychodynamic background […] it could be that the separation or the isolation triggers something that exacerbates what's already going on* (participant 4)

Participant 4 also pointed out that too much racial awareness can be detrimental:

> *I know that there are imbalances of power and I think sometimes it's appropriate to address it but I think you can get really debilitated or paralysed as a therapist if you start to become overly conscious of race and the fact that you're white and they're black* (participant 4)

4.3.2 Cross-cultural knowledge and competencies

Two out of the four participants had undergone cross-cultural training as part of their course and one participant had chosen to attend a workshop on specific multi-cultural issues:

> *I mean the thing that helped most for me was […] extra CPD on death for international students because […] I seemed to have a series of Nigerian men coming having lost their father […] I really felt I wanted to understand […] because obviously I just have, you know, an anglicised Christian view of what we do* (participant 2)

> *At several points along the way, in terms of my diplomas, we were given specific modules on cross-cultural differences, so although none of us are likely necessarily to have had that as a separate training, it's part and parcel of our professional training but it's just really, from my mind, it's a subset of the fact that everyone who comes into my room is as different from the next person* (participant 1)

Participants 3 and 4 described the relevance of other aspects of their personal or professional experience in their work with international students:

> *I know her job [the advisor's job], so I can sort of think of what else might be required outside of the counselling relationship (participant 4)*

> *I've always been interested in other cultures and I've read quite a bit. I trained as a careers officer before I worked as a counsellor* (participant 3)

All participants described cross-cultural knowledge as helpful but not essential in their work with international students:

> *it's not been the central thing but it's been part of the mix and knowing what sort of limitations in their lives, the sort of behaviours that would be expected of them at home, I'm interested in that, and I think they quite like the fact that you are interested in that, and they're interested in bringing that into the conversation* (participant 3)

it is good to have some knowledge, so you don't have to be totally alien but again, I think it is just about being respectful and open and willing to listen and explore and support (participant 2)

I think it's absolutely, incredibly useful to be informed […] Could you be a good therapist without having cross-cultural training? Yes because, if you're a good therapist, you're going to be asking these questions, which will inform you about the cultural background of that particular client anyway (participant 1)

It's not necessarily crucial to have a background knowledge of all cultures because then you start to get, you might have a superficial knowledge […] again what I found […], a really useful concept, is the idea that you have to understand the functions of culture rather than the culture per se
(participant 4)

4.3.3 Counselling approach

Participants seemed to adopt similar attitudes to cultural difference regardless of their

therapeutic modality:

I would say the CBT model lends itself to kind of all these difficulties that international students have, because they are the same difficulties as we all have, they just have a particular slant to them […] we're about opening their minds to the facts there might be ways of helping them that they're perhaps unaware of in their cultures (participant 1)

What I am trying to do is offer a different perspective 'this is my understanding, I don't quite relate to what you're saying because I'm coming from a different place'. That's my approach rather try to understand all cultures and make out that I do because I can't (participant 4)

Participants favoured a flexible approach depending on the students' issues and ability

to engage with therapy:

I think I have probably used a bit more CBT with the Swedish students. I found that a lot of them were perfectionists and if they didn't do like top marks in everything they were absolutely distraught and their self-esteem was all over the place (participant 3)

you try something out and if it doesn't go then perhaps, you know, I might kind of focus more on a more humanistic way of being with the person and being much more relational with them and not be too interpretative (participant 4)

the whole time when I work, I believe, I'm offering choice to the client or the student, such as they can perhaps play with things that they haven't considered playing with before, so I think that's kind of person-centred (participant 1)

I'm very mindful of the fact that they are away from home and perhaps away from their usual support systems, so I am perhaps, hmm, what's the word, I'd say a bit more caring but I hope I'm caring for all my clients (participant 2)

Participants 2 and 4 described their approach when dealing with issues of cultural adjustment:

I try just a little bit of psycho-education, cultural information, you know, 'this is how we learn here or expected to learn here', and it may seem difficult and how are they going to cope with that?, you know, and try and find ways for them to get the support they need but perhaps not in the way they would have at home, you know, what other resources may be available for them (participant 2)

how much do you challenge homophobia? I did say something like 'I hear what you're saying, you know, I'm just saying 'that's probably not something that people would be ok with here' […] you need to let people know that they can't go round saying that, because it could have got them locked… (participant 4)

With regard to counselling international students from collectivist cultures, participants 1 and 4 made the following statements:

if a client presents a less individuated idea of self, because that's what they are used to in Japan or wherever, you work with that, and you're constantly working at the limit of the client's knowledge, so it's incumbent on you to find out what they understand and where they can shift to (participant 1)

What's why you need to almost be like an anthropologist, when you're doing your counselling […] I have got to suspend some of that individualist, itemised value system, I think, which is so intrinsic or ingrained
(participant 4)

There was a high degree of convergence in the participants' responses with regard to their individual approach:

what I find really helpful is to kind of say to students 'this is weird isn't it for you?' and to be quite open with them and allow them to say 'yes I feel really uncomfortable here' and I also kind of try, in a way, model my own model kind of being uncertain for them […] so try not to be the expert who knows everything but to kind of display some kind of vulnerability, humility, curiosity
(participant 4)

you've to go underneath the stereotypes and find what happened to your client, what meaning did your client make of these events and what is he continuing to make […] I think it's more important to be curious about this person right now
(participant 1)

I suppose I try and be as friendly and approachable as I can be, you know, 'if you cannot find what you're looking for come and ask me and I'll try and find out for you', sort of try and be as human and real as much as possible really (participant 3)

it's about respect, it is about openness and willingness to explore and ask, not make assumptions that you know their culture, the chances are I wouldn't know, we have a big range of students here, I wouldn't know the culture of a very wealthy student because it would be beyond my experience (participant 2)

4.4 Summary of findings

All four participants took a universalist stance and advocated a client-centred rather than a culture-centred approach when counselling international students, regardless of their therapeutic training. In terms of the counselling process, an awareness of stresses specific to international students and a knowledge of the support available, within and outside the institution, were seen as essential by most participants. All participants have experienced some difficulties with particular groups but were very wary of making generalisations. The study found that academic risk, isolation and access to support systems were key factors taken into consideration when working therapeutically with international students. While participants recognised the usefulness of cross-cultural knowledge and competencies, they felt it was more important to be non-judgemental, open, humble, curious, real and human. Given the stigma and shame attached to mental illness, most participants' institutions have systems in place to offer alternative ways of responding to international students' mental health needs.

Chapter five: Discussion

The findings suggest both convergence with and divergence from previous studies on facilitative and hindering elements in the context of counselling international students. Overall, the participants' experiences challenged the culture-centred stance taken by some writers (Cox, 2013; Lago, 2011; Laungani, 2010; Pedersen, 2008) and equally my own assumptions about the centrality of culture in multicultural settings.

5.1 Cross-cultural counselling and training

Given the cultural diversity of the students' population in at least three participants' institutions, it was surprising that cross-cultural models were not specifically referred to or used by my research participants. This corroborates Barty's (2011) reference to training programmes on counselling international students as being generally aimed at other staff working with this particular type of student population. Although all participants considered it useful to have an awareness of cross-cultural differences, they did not think that an extensive cultural knowledge was essential when counselling international students. This view falls within D'Ardenne & Mahtani's (1999) definition of cross-cultural counselling as an approach which neither relies on expertise about any specific culture nor follows any particular counselling model. Individual differences were perceived as the most significant factors impacting on therapy, with both home and international students. In that regard, participants were very aware of not making sweeping generalisations throughout the interview process, particularly when talking about difficulties they had experienced with specific cultural groups. All participants alluded to the danger of superficial knowledge, assumptions and stereotypes which by and large resonates with Sue et al.'s (1998) general guidelines on multicultural competencies referred to in the literature review. When cultural differences acted as barriers to communication, participants were comfortable with clarifying their role,

stating their lack of understanding and asking clients directly about certain aspects of their culture they were unsure about. Without denying the relevance of culture, participants generally thought that the psychological issues that international students brought lay with the individual rather than their country of origin. However, as Sandhu's (1995) study highlighted, intrapersonal factors are often difficult to separate from interpersonal factors. With reference to a specific case, participant 3 made a clear distinction between the two different types of factor:

> *I don't think it was to do with the language […] that sort of 6 or 7 sessions with me it was a drop in the ocean, this was an issue she'd had since she was quite young*

However, participant 4 and participant 2 found that being informed about specific cultural aspects such as attitudes to mental illness or death rituals had been useful in dealing with African students, for example; differing attitudes to seeking help, stigma and expectations of therapy were also experienced by participants as barriers to communication, particularly among African and Asian students. This is in line with the research published among these groups of students (University of Nottingham, 2011; Snider, 2009; Fleet, 2009; Sheu and Fukuyama, 2006; Barty et al, 2006; Khoo, 2002; Idowu, 1985). Yet participants 1 and 4 were also keen to mention that they had found international students to be highly motivated, global in outlook and not necessarily representative of their specific cultural groups. These attributes were perceived as facilitative in terms of the students' psychological ability to engage with therapy. As stated by participant 2, international students have come for a specific goal, that of getting a British degree from an institution with a world-wide reputation. Consequently, the combination of international students' motivation and added pressures on them puts these students in a different category from home students in terms of the issues that they may experience during their stay in Britain, as is suggested by most of the literature on counselling international students. Consistently with Lin & Pedersen's

(2006) guidelines, participants showed awareness of different dimensional levels when counselling international students; that is the individual, group and universal dimensions. Generally, they did not feel there was a need to use specific strategies or techniques outside their respective therapeutic approach.

5.2 Adjustment and culture shock

Although only one participant referred specifically to culture shock, most participants showed sensitivity to the fact that international students are away from home, that English is not their first language and that they have to navigate and adjust to systems which are, in some cases, radically different from those in their home country; they referred particularly to the educational, health and legal systems. Participant 4 talked about the loss of status that may be incurred by studying abroad:

> *they [international students] will have worked in a situation where they're competent working in a culture that they know, they come back to school and they're suddenly having to learn [...] I think if you've lost your culture and your status, coming back into education can be very difficult, and into a new educational culture*

However, generally participants did not perceive the acculturation process described by Berry (1997) as an issue in itself; rather, they referred to issues associated with specific cultural groups. Participant 2 described Chinese students as 'going en masse' and perhaps not feeling the need to integrate; she also mentioned the case of a suicidal Chinese student who had kept herself isolated from her community. In this particular case, the determinant factor seemed to have more to do with the student's marginalisation within her own cultural group than her adjustment to British culture.

The issue of re-entry described in the W curve (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963) was mentioned by participant 4 as a difficult process to manage both by the client and counsellor, particularly in cases when there are differences in human rights legislation

between the client's home country and Britain. This can raise difficult dilemmas for western counsellors who come from cultures where freedom of expression and free will are the norm. References were also made to administrative visa issues which can be perceived as persecutory by some international students, the difficulties they experience when looking for affordable accommodation, language proficiency and adapting to an academic culture which favours autonomy rather than dependence on lecturers. The last-mentioned factor has implications in terms of the power dynamic in the counselling process, particularly for person-centred counsellors; participant 2 stated the example of Chinese students who tend "to sit at the foot of the master" and were more likely to perceive the counsellor as the expert. This concurs with research articles written on counselling international students and multicultural counselling (Laungani, 2010; Mori 2000; Khoo, 2002).

5.3 The counsellor's role in the institutional context

Key elements that emerged from this study are the importance of the institutional context and the notion of academic risk when assessing and counselling international students. In accordance with the study by the University of Nottingham (2011), most participants perceived international students as needing more support than home students when struggling with mental health issues; the reasons given were the lack of support systems, their huge financial commitments and/or the pressures put on them by their families or government. There was a feeling of increased responsibility from most participants, who were prepared to 'step in' and access support on behalf of the students; this included finding out about language courses, liaising with a medical team, tutors or an international adviser. Participants 2 and 4 expressed concerns about counselling students from cultures where academic failure would be perceived as deeply shameful; these students were perceived as being at particular risk, as

highlighted in the report by Young Minds (Barty et al., 2006). In addition, the issue of the 'silent minority at risk' described by Sandhu (1995) was flagged up by the same participants who feel that they are still categories of students who are under-represented:

> *I think, fundamentally, some clients are never going to come and there's nothing you can do about that, and that's ok, but I think you need to kind of think about how they might get help if they were in crisis* (participant 4)

> *I think, for the amount of students we have in the university, I still don't think we get the percentage, you know, the ratio of students that we should if it's in line with the home students* (participant 2)

There was a view held by most participants that some international students were not always offered the support they needed; this was due to system constraints such as the counselling service provision, the type of support on offer within the institution or educational expectations. As a result, an ability to at least direct and guide students to adequate sources of support and at most access support on their behalf was considered to be part of the counsellor's role by participants. This of course would apply to any student, and one could argue that international students get additional support through the international student office; however, participants felt that, on the whole, some international students were at a disadvantage, particularly those struggling with expressing themselves through the medium of English. As participant 1 put it:

> *I was struck by how difficult it must be for some of these students just to function on a day to day basis but that's part of a bigger problem, that's part of a geopolitical 'we want your money, thank you very much, you've got lots of money country A function'*

This has implications in terms of the limitations of therapeutic work, not only for international students who are not sufficiently proficient in English but also those who are performing poorly academically, as mentioned by participant 4. These types of challenge place counsellors in a position of responsibility, which can be both stressful

and questionable. In a recent article on the changing role of the university counselling service, Ruth Caleb (as cited in Pointon, 2014) states that "Counselling services are not the owners of responsibility for mental health in an institution, that has to be owned by everybody" (p.15).

Chapter six: Conclusion

6.1 Limitations of the study

The small scale of my study was one of the main limitations to my research. However, its main purpose was to explore participants' experiences and to provide an insight into existing practice rather than drawing general conclusions based on a large sample of participants. Another considerable limitation was the lack of diversity in my participants' backgrounds in terms of gender, age range, nationality and ethnicity. Three out of the four institutions had also a high academic status in the UK. My lack of familiarity with remote methods of communication such as Skype also meant that I selected my participants exclusively on the basis of their availability for face-to-face interviews. Moreover, I acknowledge that a phenomenological approach to my research is restricting as it places emphasis on the individual worldview of participants, not the nature of the world itself. As Willig (2008) put it "such research does not tend to further our understanding of why these experiences take place and why there may be differences between individuals' phenomenological representations" (p.94).

6.2 Implications for practice

Although this study has been conducted using a small sample of participants, it further contributes to the current literature on international students in the sense that it challenges the importance that some literature attributes to cross-cultural training and competencies. The participants in this study came from differing therapeutic modalities; they were experienced and well qualified therapists who, above all, perceived international students as human beings with their own individualities. The cultural dimension was thought to be relevant but not necessarily central to the counselling process. The study also draws attention to the fact that there are elements which are beyond student counsellors' control such as funding and role restrictions,

stigma regarding mental illness, and students' lack of familiarity with talking therapies and lack of support systems. This suggests that perhaps counsellors' therapeutic variables such as their approach and western value system are less significant in such HEI settings. The therapists' motivation to get involved in institutional initiatives and step out of their traditional counselling role, combined with the institutions' readiness to listen and provide counsellors with adequate resources, may therefore be a more effective and forward-looking way of responding to international students' mental health needs. The building up of professional networks was identified as an important feature too, which might involve counsellors meeting in groups to share best practice.

6.3 Concluding comments

This study explored counsellors' experiences of working therapeutically with international students. The findings suggest that the main hindering elements in the therapeutic relationship are: the stigma attached to mental illness among students from specific regions or countries; the students' proficiency in English; their expectations of therapy and attitudes to seeking help; a clash of value systems between counsellors and students; and counsellors' understanding of the students' cultural contexts. The institutional setting was seen as a key factor to be taken into account in the facilitation of the counselling process; across cultures, international students were perceived as able individuals who are motivated to engage with therapy, due partly to their huge investment in an overseas higher education. While this had positive aspects, it also added considerable pressure on students and counsellors alike. International students were seen by most participants as more vulnerable, due to added pressures put on them and their sense of isolation. Compared to home students, the potential to fail seems to take a different dimension, particularly for international students originating from cultures where it would be seen as shameful to go home without a degree, not

only for the individual but also for their families. Visa complications, adjustment to an educational system which encourages students to be autonomous and financial difficulties were also mentioned as common issues experienced by international students. This seemed to impact considerably on the counsellors' perceptions of their role and responsibilities towards international students. Most participants felt they had to take on a more pro-active and flexible role as suggested by the literature (Puukari 2012; Barty, 2011; Okorocha, 2010; Liu, 2009), in terms of helping students access various types of support other than one-to-one conventional counselling. Generally speaking, counsellors' strategies with regard to counselling international students did not differ greatly from those used with home students; however, participants seemed to demonstrate a high level of awareness of their own potential cultural biases, the students' contexts and the difficulties they may experience. Participants also referred to the usefulness of their past and current involvement in preventative well-being programmes, workshops on specific issues, such as exam anxiety and orientation events. In that regard, further research among student counsellors involved in management-endorsed initiatives may contribute to the implementation of holistic institutional policies aimed at building effective links between institutional departments such as chaplaincies, students' unions, international students' offices, learning support, academic and careers departments.

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List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Search strategy

Key words	Databases/ journals/ websites
Anti-discrimination/anti-oppression practice Adjustment Competencies Counselling Counsellors Cross-cultural/transcultural/multicultural Culture shock Diversity Ethics Ethnicity Guidelines Higher education Universities Colleges Immigration International students Foreign students Overseas students Mental health Students Services Support mechanisms/ systems (Psycho)therapists Therapy Use of counselling services Well-being	University of Chester Library Catalogue ESBOhost PsycINFO SocINDEX ERIC Google Scholar BACP website UKCISA website The Association for Universities and College Counselling (AUCC) journal The British Journal of Guidance and Counselling Counselling Psychology Quarterly

Appendix 2: Research advert

COUNSELLING RESEARCH – INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

I am a postgraduate student at the University of Chester currently carrying out research on counsellors' experiences of working therapeutically with international students. I am looking for participants who would be willing to take part in an hour-long interview. My inclusion criteria for research participants are as follows:

- Counsellors who are qualified to at least diploma level
- Counsellors who are currently training at diploma level or above
- Counsellors and counsellors in training who have worked with international students in a higher education setting for at least one year
- Counsellors and counsellors in training who receive regular supervision in line with the requirements of their governing body

If you think you could contribute to my research or would like further details please contact me, Elisabeth, at the following email address:

Appendix 3: Research Information Sheet

Research title

A qualitative exploration of counsellors' experiences of working therapeutically with international students

The researcher

I am a third year postgraduate student at Chester University studying for an MA in Clinical Counselling. My main counselling placement is in a Higher Education Institution where I have had the opportunity to work with international students. I have also had the opportunity to study in Britain as a postgraduate EU student.

The research

In recent decades there has been a considerable increase in the number of international students enrolled in British universities, the greatest proportion originating from Asia. Despite the changing nature of the student population there seems to be a scarcity of counselling research in this field, particularly from counsellors' perspectives. My main aim is to gain a greater understanding of the key issues that counsellors have experienced in their work with international students and how they have made sense of these experiences.

The invitation

I am inviting you to talk about how you have experienced cultural differences in your work with international students, what elements you perceive as facilitating or hindering the counselling process and what strategies, models or approach(es) you have used when counselling this type of clients.

What does participating in this research involve?

I will send you a short questionnaire prior to the interview to obtain some information about your personal and professional background. If you meet the inclusion criteria the process will involve an hour long audio digitally recorded interview held at a mutually convenient location suitable for private and confidential interviews such as a counselling room or a personal office. After the interview, I will transcribe the recording and this data will form the basis of my analysis. I will send you a copy of the transcript

for your approval. Your data will be analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis methods. Once the analysis has been completed you may wish to see the results to ensure that they truly reflect your experience.

What are the potential benefits of taking part?

My research will offer an opportunity to share your experience in an area which has been given more attention in recent years. Through the interview process you may gain a greater awareness of how culture (your own and your clients') may impact on the counselling relationship.

What are the potential risks?

Although I do not anticipate any risk, you may wish to use the support of your supervisor should you need to. In addition I will provide a list of BACP approved counsellors.

Confidentiality

Throughout the research I will maintain your anonymity by allocating you a pseudonym. I will also ensure that contextual information does not disclose your identity nor that of your clients. The collected data will be stored on my personal laptop which is protected by a password. Any printed or hand-written material will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at home.

Participants' rights

You will be free to stop the interview or withdraw at any time during the research. Formal complaints about the research is to be made to the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences.

What will happen to the results?

The results of my research will form part of my MA dissertation which will be submitted to the University of Chester. With your prior consent, verbatim sections of the interview will be used in the final dissertation.

A copy of the dissertation will be kept by the University of Chester.

The results may also form part of other works which are put forward for publication.

Data Protection

My data will consist of the recordings and transcriptions of interviews with my research participants. The interviews will be recorded onto a digital recorder which will be kept in a locked filing cabinet when not in use. Recordings will be transferred onto my personal laptop and files will be named anonymously. Files will be saved under a pseudonym so that individuals may not be recognised from the file name. These pseudonyms will be used throughout the research to protect the participants' anonymity. A back up copy of the files will be held on a memory stick which will be kept in a locked filing cabinet.

Ethics

It is my intention to conduct my research in line with the BACP *Ethical Guidelines for Researching Counselling and Psychotherapy* as well as the University of Chester's guidelines as outlined in the *Research Governance Handbook.*

Contact details

Please do not hesitate to contact me via email if you have any further queries:

Appendix 4: Pre-interview questionnaire

Personal details and qualifications

Age group: 21-30 □   31-40 □   41-50 □   51-60 □   60+ □

Nationality:

Ethnicity:

Email:

Phone number (s):

Name of institution where you are currently working:

Current professional status:

Qualified to at least diploma level □   How long? _____year(s)

In training at diploma level or above □ How long? _____year(s)

Counselling qualifications:

Supervision: yes □

Profile

What is your counselling orientation?

How long have you been working in a Higher Education setting?

How much experience do you have working with international students?

What proportion of the totality of your clients do international students roughly represent on a yearly basis?

Have you received any training with regard to cross-cultural counselling and/or counselling international students? Please specify.

Appendix 5: Characteristics of participants

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4
Age group	41-60	41-60	41-60	41-60
Gender	F	F	F	F
Ethnicity/ nationality	White British	White British	White British	White British
Counselling orientation	CBT	Integrative	Integrative/ Person-centred	Integrative/ psychodynamic
Qualified to at least diploma level	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Experience counselling international students	3 years +	3 years +	3 years +	3 years +
Cross-cultural training	Yes	Yes	No	No

Appendix 6: Schedule of interviews

Participant number	Date of the interview
1	10th July
2	14th July
3	17th July
4	21st July

Appendix 7: Interview questions

❖ Can you tell me a little bit about your work with international students?

❖ What aspects have you found particularly challenging?

❖ What elements have helped you meet these challenges?

❖ Are there any issues that you would perceive as specific to international students?

❖ How important is it for you to have background knowledge of your clients' cultures?

❖ What approach or model do you use when counselling international students?

❖ What recommendations would you give your fellow counsellors?

❖ Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience of counselling international students?

Appendix 8: Research consent form

M. A. in Clinical Counselling Research
University of Chester

Consent Form: Audio/Digital Recording of Interview

Title of Study:…………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………..

I ………………………………….hereby give consent for the details of a written transcript based on an audio/digital recorded interview with me and………………………………….. .. to be used in preparation and as part of a research dissertation for the M.A. in Clinical Counselling at the University of Chester. I understand that my identity will remain anonymous and that all personally identifiable information will remain confidential and separate from the research data. I further understand that the transcript may be seen by Counselling Tutors and the External Examiner for the purpose of assessment and moderation. I also understand that all these individuals are bound by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy.

I understand that I will have access to the transcribed material and would be able to delete or amend any part of it. I am aware that I can stop the interview at any time or ultimately withdraw the interview, without giving a reason or explanation, at any point before the submission of the dissertation. Upon satisfactory completion of the M.A. in Clinical Counselling the recording will be securely destroyed. The transcripts and related data will be securely stored for a period of five years, by me, the researcher, and then destroyed.

Excerpts from the transcript will be included in the dissertation. A copy of the dissertation will be held in the Department of Social Studies and Counselling and may be made available electronically through Chester Rep, the University's online research repository.

Without my further consent some of the material may be used for publication and/or presentations at conferences and seminars. Every effort will be made to ensure complete anonymity.

Finally I confirm I have read and understood the attached Information Sheet and was given the opportunity for further explanation by the researcher. I believe I have been given sufficient information about the nature of this research, including any possible risks, to give my informed consent to participate.

Signed [Participant]…………………………………………………………………………………

Name- Please Print…………………………………………………………………………………..

Date …………………………………………………………………………………………………

Signed [Researcher] …………………………………………………………………………………..

Name - Please Print………………………………………………………………………………….

Date……………………………………………………………………………

Appendix 9: Research consent form (2)

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Title of Study:…………………………………………………………………

Name of Researcher:………………………………………………………..

Name of Participant:…………………………………………………………

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below.

Please Initial Box

1. **I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.**

2. **I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to myself.**

3. **I understand that the interviews will be audio recorded.**

4. **I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.**

5. **I agree that any data collected may be passed to other researchers.**

   I agree to take part in the above project

…………………………………… …………………… ………….…………………
Name of participant   **Date**   **Signature**

…………………………………… …………………… ....…………………………………
Name of Person taking Consent **Date**   **Signature**

Appendix 10: Example of steps 2 to 4 of analysis for participant 4

Sub-ordinate themes	Transcript	Initial comments
	R 15: And how do you see this interfering with the counselling process? In what way do you feel it would affect the counselling process, not understanding where they're coming from, their values?	
Cultural context Understanding Difference	I 15: I guess <u>it might affect the client feeling heard if a lot of energy is going into me trying to pin down the sort of detail, the context you can miss, what is actually going on for that person</u> but, like I said, I think I'm just thinking about one particular client where there was <u>a kind of confusion</u> between not knowing whether I was misunderstanding him or misunderstanding his kind of context, it felt difficult to separate the two, I suppose, but that's perhaps more…well I don't know maybe it's also true for students from the countryside or even the US where we kind of in a way feel so similar but perhaps we are not that similar	*Aware that the client might not feel heard Counsellor confused between not knowing whether she was misunderstanding him or his context Couldn't separate the two Feels this confusion might also applies to students who come from a similar culture but live in a different context*
	R 16: So we can make assumptions sometimes	
Awareness of own cultural background and bias Use of supervision/challenges	I 16: My supervisor […]. We had this interesting conversation about North Americans, and something I struggle with is my feeling that they can be quite hysterical whereas I'm more used to kind of European repressed	*Use of supervision to discuss issues of cultural difference Aware of the influence of her European background*

Students' expectations and attitudes	type of presentation, that's me, […], that sort of thing can be quite difficult, this American slant… yeah just a different way of presenting and perhaps also different expectations of what therapy is for different cultures. Sorry I'm rambling about a lot of things	*Cultural slant in students' ways of presenting* *Different cultural expectations of what therapy is*
	R 17: Not at all, it does make sense what you're saying. Can you see a difference then when you counsel American students who perhaps have had more experience of therapy or perhaps they come from a country where there's less stigma compared to a student from South East Asia […] where perhaps the notion of counselling does not really exist?	
Difference Expectations Relational depth Communication	I 17: I suppose there's a huge difference but I guess it's difficult just to categorise difference as being black versus white or whatever it is, I don't mean that in racial terms by the way, you know, I mean it as a metaphor. <u>Sometimes working with clients who have no experience of counselling is really rewarding</u> because <u>it's almost like being in a Foreign country</u>, <u>for them it gives them permission to try something completely different</u> and I've had <u>amazing experiences</u> with clients who had no idea what counselling is and they just come along, <u>I love that kind</u>	*Wary of putting students into categories* *Finds counselling students who have no experience of counselling really rewarding* *Being in a Foreign country gives students permission to try something different, to experiment*

	of encounter, <u>where it's just almost as alien for me as it is for them and we kind of feel our way around and eventually find a meeting in the middle</u> and I really really enjoy that and at the end of it they're like 'Cor! I never thought I would do this but it's been an amazing experience, <u>I can find that really precious</u> whereas may be for… <u>I've had experiences of other students who were much more conversant with counselling, perhaps who had a string of therapies and you just become another therapist in a long line of people where you just become almost a kind of object in a sense</u> but again this is kind of very individual	*Enjoys the novelty/discovery aspect of the encounter* *Embraces the challenge – describes the experience as amazing* *Has had less rewarding experiences with students who are more familiar with counselling* *Personal experiences*
	R 18: That's just your experience	
Communication Challenges Relationship Relational depth	I 18: I'm just talking about individual clients where I've had that experience and that's <u>a little bit harder</u> because you don't have that kind of <u>relational exploration</u> I guess	*Finds the process more difficult*
	R 19: Are there any particular groups of students, again without putting them in a category, who show similar characteristics? You've already mentioned that you don't see that many students from South East Asia but the ones who come are they usually quite motivated?	

Selection bias Use of counselling service	I 19: In the way the fact that they've come in the first place there's a kind of selection bias, do you know what I mean? That the students who present are probably going to be quite … or the ones who stay, so you might get some people who come for one session because they're curious and then they don't really…they get a feel	*Selection bias* *Students who come and stay are usually motivated*
Globalisation The institutional context	for it in their assessment and they don't continue. I don't know it's difficult to say cause, you know, I've had South East Asian Students who aren't kind of closed off to the possibility of counselling but also what you have to remember about our students is that they're working all over the world, they're very global	*Stresses that not all students from South East Asia will be closed off to counselling and that a lot of students have lived in different parts of the world*

Appendix 11: Table of super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes for all participants

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4
Systems				
Institution	yes	yes	yes	yes
Risk management		yes		yes
Support		yes	yes	yes
Communication				
Language	yes		yes	yes
Attitudes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Expectations	yes	yes	yes	yes
Outreach	yes	yes		yes
Difference				
Awareness and understanding	yes	yes	yes	yes
Cross-cultural knowledge and competencies	Yes Training	Yes CPD	Yes No specific training	Yes No specific training
Approach	CBT	Integrative	Integrative/ person-centred	Integrative/ Psychodynamic