BRIDGING THE GAP: A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY OF COUNSELLORS’ AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES OF WORKING TOGETHER

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Bridging the Gap: A collective case study of counsellors’ and international students’ experiences of working together

This research aimed to explore the dynamics of counsellors working cross-culturally with diverse clients in the context of counselling international students at Higher Education Institutes. A particular emphasis on exploring challenges of working cross-culturally with such a diverse group and the solutions to meet those challenges was investigated. Current trends in globalisation of education and the increasing numbers of foreign students entering universities create both problems and opportunities for how to meet the needs of this growing student population. Higher risk factors for distress and crisis are present for international students due to having additional pressures of adapting to a novel environment, establishing support networks, and overcoming culture shock in addition to the more common academic and financial stressors of college and university.

The methodology of choice is a collective instrumental case study design that operates within a critical theory paradigm to develop an in-depth understanding of how different cases provide insight into working with diverse clients. Five British counsellors and five international students were recruited within the UK using purposeful convenience sampling through adverts and the professional networks of the researcher. Counsellors were interviewed within a single focus group and international students were interviewed individually in order to understand the researched phenomenon from both counsellor and client perspectives. Thematic Analysis was chosen to generate two separate streams of themes from both counsellor and international student groups in relation to identified challenges and solutions of working together. A second level of overarching themes was produced from comparing and contrasting responses across all participants.

The findings highlight a rich heterogeneity within both groups of participants, showcasing the perspectives on both sides of the therapeutic encounter. Counsellors and students held similar and different perspectives on what they identified as challenges of working together – counsellors’ vocalised a higher number of relational challenges and students’ identified greater institutional barriers. Novice international students experienced increased challenges compared with seasoned international students suggesting that development of risk factors within this sub-group is a high priority to take into consideration when addressing international student needs. Viewing diversity as a positive resource was a shared solution discussed in both participant groups that relied on counsellors demonstrating liberal value systems. Both groups identified the need for institutional support to be increased with students requesting a more proactive community outreach. A dominant finding in terms of recommendations for working with diversity included the use of the pluralistic approach noting that there is no one right answer or model to work with diversity within people and that flexibility to adapt to each client was essential.

The findings are not presented as definitive generalisable truths due to the small sample size, but provide contribution to a case-based understanding of how to provide support for diverse groups of students within Higher Education Institutions in order to reduce risk and increase well-being among the international student population.
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Lastly, I am deeply grateful to my family and friends who have witnessed my growth throughout these last few years and who have provided much love, encouragement, and good wishes along the way. To my late grandmother, who provided resources to make this dream happen, I will forever be grateful for her unconditional love and belief in me.
DEDICATION

In memory of my Babcia, Helena Domalik

You have been with me in life at the beginning of this research-

You are now with me in spirit at the end.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

‘The very act of forming stories requires us to create coherence through ordering our experiences, and provides us with an opportunity for reclaiming ourselves and our histories. New selves form within us as we tell and re-tell our stories and when we write them down. When we use our own stories or those of others, for research, we give testimony to what we have witnessed, and that testimony creates a voice’.

(Etherington, 2004, p.9)

1.1 Chapter overview

In this thesis, I examine and explore the consciously present dynamics between counsellors working with international students at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). My ongoing interest in exploring diversity within people, coupled with personal experiences of working with differences and finding commonalities with people from various parts of the world, led me to pursue this topic in the following research. Situating myself within the context of being an international student, being a trainee counselling psychologist at a HEI working with international students, and being a researcher in this field brought me to the point of identifying that this research would be valuable and meaningful both for myself, and for those I had come in contact with, be they international students, counsellors at HEIs, or other staff working with international students. Moreover, in understanding my participants’ experiences, I came to understand my own experiences better, for I could identify with being both the counsellor, and the international student client.
This chapter, therefore, begins with outlining my personal aims for undertaking this study, along with identifying my research and outcome aims of what I had intended to contribute through completing this thesis. I follow with presenting the broad developments within the research literature that highlight the growing problem of risk-factors present within international students and the challenges these present to support services and counsellors who work with such students. This provides the rationale for asking the two research questions presented which examine challenges and ways forward for both counsellors and international students. Thereafter, key terms used within this thesis are explained with a final note on the presenting structure of the thesis.

1.2 The personal

I am having one of those moments within a counselling session with an international student – it is the one where I find myself noticing the ‘otherness’ of my client and I begin asking myself…what does she really need? I’m sitting across from a Korean student who is communicating in English, but I’m not catching every word she is saying as she is talking very fast and her accent is very strong. She also keeps asking me for advice – what should I do? Why am I like this? She is pulling me into the ‘expert’ position where she wants me to tell her what to do and how to do it in order to fix her relationship problems. I also know I only have about six sessions to help this student and see she will need longer term support to help her with self-esteem. I am aware of her expectations and that I might not meet all of them. I also find myself having to adjust and adapt as I learn how best to respond to her. There is a tension I am holding – a part of me feels nervous encountering so much difference in the room and wondering how I will work with it. Another part of me feels curious and excited to be encountering the novelty of working with this difference so I may learn from her while also provide learning to her.
The above example highlights a real case I worked with and my ongoing reflexivity (Finlay, 2002; Watt, 2007) in understanding the various lived experiences of working with diversity in counselling. The subtle dilemmas encountered when working with international students present a rich platform for research studies and one which built upon my previous encounters with difference and diversity. I therefore begin with presenting my personal aims for doing this research.

1.2.1 Personal aims

I am somewhat of a nomadic healer/adventurer. I have been exposed to diversity through the first portion of my life (not by choice), and the second half of my life by my own choice. My attraction to the topic of diversity stems from my own life history of moving from home to home to home. Being born in Poland, my parents and I fled in the mid 1980’s to escape communism when I was three years old. We travelled as refugees to Italy where after a year, we were accepted as immigrants by the Canadian government and sent to the East coast of Canada. After another year my parents and I moved to Central Canada and most of my childhood was spent here, only to be uprooted again at the age of fifteen when my mother and stepfather decided to move to the other side of West Canada. This constant uprooting and moving took its’ toll. However, it also came with added benefits of embracing change and diversity and novel environments.

When I became older, I began to travel on my own to foreign countries in Europe, Central America, and Africa. After completing my Master’s degree in Liverpool, England, in my early twenties, I felt called to serve and learn in foreign contexts that would push me outside my comfort zone. After I spent seven months living and
working in Kenya as a volunteer, I began to really understand the benefits of sharing cultures and celebrating diversity. I learned things in Kenya that influenced my worldview (Ibrahim, 2011) and balanced my previous Euro-American cultural context (Pedersen et. al, 2002) with that of another perspective, focused on collectivism and community.

My worldview and values have therefore shifted many times with increasing exposure to differences and diversity. It is when encountering some of my relatives and friends from Poland, Canada, Kenya, whom have maintained their home culture’s value systems, that I find differences in worldviews emerge between us. Understanding my own cultural identity has therefore been a part of my quest in understanding diversity in others – for I know no other way of seeing myself as that of an individual who has been influenced through the continuous exposure to diverse environments and people within my life. When encountering differences in others, I strive to find the underlying commonalities that unite us as human beings over the perceived differences that can create separation and division. My aim of understanding how best to do this in principle, has shaped the personal aims of this research study. Counselling international students presents the unique context of encountering diversity from all over the world and felt like the right space from which to make the inquiry.

1.2.2 Research aims

According to Pendse and Inman (2016), the international student-focused counselling research over the last 34 years has risen over 127% within mainstream journals related to counselling psychology suggesting that this area of research continues to grow. Trends indicate that:
‘cultural adjustments, psychological health, and help utilization were the most common topics of inquiry. Methodological trends suggested that quantitative methodologies and convenience sampling were used most frequently and the majority of the sample consisted of international students from Asian countries’.

(Pendse & Inman, 2016, p.1)

Despite much research developing in the field of counselling students in higher education (Bell, 1996; 2006; BACP, 2012; Butcher et. al, 1998) and in addressing the needs and risk factors of international students (Yi et. al, 2003; Nilsson et. al, 2004; Hamamura & Laird, 2014), there do remain gaps in synthesizing and creating what Yoon and Portman (2004) describe as a ‘comprehensive theory’ to bridge enough empirical studies together in order to apply the research findings into shaping practical organizational development policies and procedures at university/college campuses. Research engagement that enhances a greater understanding of the issues, strengths, and strategies used to navigate cross-cultural transitions is also needed.

Having conducted a previous systematic review of the literature, I sought to address what Popiaduk and Arthur (2004) discuss as a need to move away from a ‘problem-focused bias’ (p.135) within the literature regarding international students, and move towards a focus upon health promotion and prevention mandates. It was therefore important to me that this research explored not only the challenges of working cross-culturally with students, but also to understand the solutions, benefits, and ways forward. In addition, my desire to use research as a tool that empowers participants and can be applied to improve and change real world contexts, meant that I wanted to cover the topic in depth and understand how both counsellors and international students described the challenges of working together at HEIs, while voicing the solutions they felt would overcome these challenges. Unfortunately there has been a scarce amount of studies done which address the issue of counselling international
students with both service providers and service users. Bridging this gap was an important aim that I develop in later sections of chapter two of the research rationale.

1.2.3 Outcome aims

I adopt an advocacy worldview (Creswell & Clark, 2007) throughout this writing which contains an action agenda for change. Despite small sample size numbers, the case study methodology employed (see chapter three) provides an opportunity to study the topic of multicultural counselling within the context of HEIs, and provides a case-based understanding of working with diversity. A pragmatic approach (Morgan, 2014) has also been adopted which focuses on the outcomes of the research and its consequences. As Popiaduk and Arthur (2004) stress, there is not enough documentation in the literature being done of presenting innovative models and interventions that work with supporting international students. Counsellors therefore do not necessarily have a model framework from which to operate, and HEIs do not necessarily establish holistic support services for international students perhaps due to this lack of empirical documentation (Roberts & Dunworth, 2012).

Prior to embarking on this research, I decided to co-create a support service for international students in partnership with one university counselling service and a non-profit organization aimed at helping foreigners adapt to UK life. This was also my place of work for a period of time during my trainee practicum placements, and served as a perfect avenue to use research to inform my practice and use my practice to inform my research- what Baker and Benjamin (2000) refer to as the ‘scientist-practitioner’ role. It is here where I could see that research had real applicability in shaping innovative services for international students, piloting new interventions and reporting
this within research studies. The innovative outreach model we used was very successful in shaping the service which is now an established part of one university. My outcome aim therefore corresponds with building upon this experience and provides a contribution to knowledge in this field of research which can further support the provision of improved and innovative counselling services for international students.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Diversity within Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) continues to grow amongst the student population and characterises the changing landscape of HEIs moving towards increased efforts to internationalise university and college campuses (Bennel & Pearce, 2003; Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011). With this shifting dynamic the question to ask is – are university support services prepared for this change in student population dynamics? Are HEIs responding effectively to a diversified student population and accommodating the varied needs of its consumers in order to retain a satisfied student population? Leading authors in the field of counselling international students Okorocha (1998; 2010a,b) and Arthur (1997; 2004; 2008; 2016) contend that there remain gaps in support service provision due to lack of understanding the particular needs of international students.

International student enrolment rates have steadily been increasing at UK higher academic institutions since 1955 (Naidoo, 2007). This trend has also been seen in American (Mori, 2000), Canadian (Arthur, 2004), and Australian (AEI, 2001) universities alike. According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (2014), international students (non EU) made up 13% of the UK university student population
in the 2012/13 academic year. Internationalization of higher education has been developing as way to attract greater numbers of foreign students who provide economic benefits to universities (Popiaduk & Arthur, 2004) as well as fostering trends in globalization. The ongoing demand to meet the needs of this unique population group continues to pose a challenge for many university and college campus counselling centres who provide generic counselling services to meet the needs of students. International students make up a very unique group of clients who share similarities in terms of adapting to culture shock and adjustment to a foreign environment, but who also vary extensively in their global differences of bringing very unique worldviews and perspectives that might clash with the host culture status quo norms (Chen, 1999). Working with such a group therefore poses varying levels of complexity for counsellors and counselling services alike, who are not always able to provide such a specialist capacity service for this group of students.

The vulnerability of international students is higher than for local students who retain familiarity with the environment, and have support networks more firmly embedded within their immediate personal relationships (Khoo et. al. 1994). International students often suffer from isolation, confusion, and role diffusion (Arthur, 1997), and usually only access support services when their state of wellbeing reaches a crisis (Bektas, 2008). The acculturative stress, defined as the ‘disorientation that often accompanies cross-cultural transitions’ (Yakunina et. al, 2013, p.216), in addition to the regular academic pressures of being a university student, make this a more at-risk population group, especially when the difference between a student’s home and host culture varies greatly. Within counselling services, it has been reported that there is not enough emphasis on multicultural competence training in counsellor training.
programmes (Arthur, 1997, Jacob & Greggo, 2001). This can lead to potential misunderstandings between counsellors and international students in regards to professional roles and boundaries, expectations of counselling, and understanding the complexity of how international students make sense of their own adaptation process and coping strategies (Ang & Liampittong, 2008; Mori, 2000). In addition, if English is a second language, many international students may lack the capacity to fully express what they are going through if interpreters are not provided at counselling centres.

Research done with international students has focused mostly upon survey and analogue studies of international students views of accessing and receiving support services (Zhu & Degenneffe, 2011; Angelopoulos & Catano, 1993) as well as specific interventions focused for specific cultures of international students (Delgado-Romero & Wu, 2010; Oba & Pope, 2013). As Pederson (1991) points out, there is a lack of a grand theory to tie in all different aspects of research within this area to provide a coherent standardized way of addressing the gaps between current service delivery and low level of satisfaction with services by international students. Yoon and Portman (2004) point out how this ‘lack of a comprehensive theory and systematic research has delayed any changes in the practical application of research findings to counseling’ (p.35). The aim of the current study therefore is to develop a more in-depth understanding of the topic which can contribute to the development of more culturally responsive interventions that support international students and counsellors at HEIs who work with such students.
1.4 Research questions

Understanding the above contextual information situating the issue of counselling international students has led me to choose a collective case study design that explores the topic from both counsellors’ and international students’ perspectives (see chapter three for a thorough rationale). The exploration is met through identifying challenges, solutions, and ways forward and involves asking the following two research questions:

1. What are the potential challenges that can arise in the interaction of diverse counsellor-client experiences in the context of counselling international students?

2. What are the potential solutions in overcoming issues within counselling and between counsellor and client, in order to facilitate mutual understanding and learning for both counsellors and international students?

My approach of choice in understanding and interpreting the following questions from participants includes the adoption of a critical theory epistemology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and a participatory/advocacy stance (Creswell, 2007), along with a pragmatic paradigm (Morgan, 2014) that is focused on the outcomes of the research. This aligns with my beliefs that research can empower participants and involves a co-construction of reality between the researcher and subjects. Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to interpret the findings and is more fully explored in chapter three.
1.5 Key terms used

International students

The term international students has been used throughout this work to refer to students studying in a host country (UK) who are not classified as home students. This includes students coming from European Union countries as well as students outside of Europe. Although technically international, and EU students have been classified into different categories when describing student enrolment status and statistics (HESA, 2014), I have not made this separation in this thesis in order to not homogenise EU and international students into separate categories. In particular, one of my participants was classified as an EU student, however, she had been born in an African country and therefore represented a more heterogeneous cultural background. I therefore did not want to exclude EU students from this study as they equally represent much diversity and can struggle with adaptation into the UK environment (Gil & Katsara, 1999).

Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)

I use the term Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) to describe academic institutions including universities and colleges which offer higher education and formal learning through accredited undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate academic degrees, diplomas, and professional certifications. Other similar terms which have been used to describe HEIs include post-secondary education or higher academic institutes.

Cross-cultural counselling

I will use this term most often throughout the thesis when referring to working with diversity within clients in a therapeutic/counselling context as outlined by Pedersen
(1985) and Marsella and Pedersen (1981). I am aware that related terms of ‘multicultural’ (Pedersen, 1991), and ‘transcultural’ (Lago, 2011) have also been used to describe the nature of counselling diverse clients as have terms such as ‘cross-racial’ therapy (Chang & Yoon, 2011; Chang & Berk, 2009) within the US. I am also aware that this term does not include other factors of diversity including religion, gender, sexual orientation, or socio-economic class. However, for the purpose of this study, the most salient aspect of inquiry relates to working with students from various cultures, and counselling therefore is explored across cultures within this context.

**Counselling services**

Counselling services, as described in this study, pertain to university and college counselling services which serve the HEIs’ student population and contain a team of counsellors and therapists who practice within the profession of counselling and psychotherapy. Wherein the term ‘support services’ is used, these stand to also include the wider spectrum of support services available to international students at HEIs such as international support offices, academic advising services, student support services, and career services.

### 1.6 Structure of the thesis

‘Research writing has to believe in itself, to have a certain amount of omnipotence, even if balanced with the modesty of relating to what has gone before, and to what may come after.’

(Henton, 2016, p.142)

I have aimed to take the reader with me on the journey of this research – from its inception and background conceptualization, through the in-depth analysis process, and out into the awareness and knowledge that has been generated at its conclusion. My hope is that the reader is as engaged with the topic as I have been, perhaps coming
to reflect on their own cultural identity and worldview as it relates to the wider topic of understanding diversity and ourselves in the scope of that spectrum. My writing style aims to be personal and reflexive, encompassing my belief in this research and the relevance of the topic in today’s international climate within higher education. I therefore ascribe to using ‘rigour and resonance’ (Finlay, 2009). I have brought my ideas into being through the writing process itself – a characteristic ‘messy and iterative process’ (Cameron et. al, 2009, p.270) through which the analytic narrative and arguments arise.

The opening chapter introduces the reader to the topic and the aims of the research while providing a broad contextualisation of current issues with counselling international students. Chapter two provides an in-depth review of past and current research literature as it relates to the wider discussion of cross-cultural counselling and diversity within clients, moving into more specific aspects of responding to the diversity within international students at HEIs. A rationale for the current study is presented with proposed contribution to knowledge. Chapter three presents the research methods employed including the chosen theoretical framework, study design, and analysis used. Sampling, research instruments, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations are also described in devising the rationale for implementation of data collection and analysis.

Chapter four is devoted to the research findings moving through each research question and participant group, followed by overarching themes which provide new directions for moving forward in improving service provision for international students. Chapter five discusses the findings in more depth and contextualizes them
within current literature and multicultural theories. A particular devotion is emphasized to the conclusions generated for how to improve support services for international students. Chapter six builds upon the discussion and provides a final overlay of comparisons between both groups of participants in their perspectives of working together. Equal importance is given to implications of the findings and their contribution to knowledge. Final reflections on the research process are outlined with conclusions of how future research studies can build on the current study’s generated insights to develop more in-depth understanding with supporting a diverse student population.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter Overview
In attempting to provide a comprehensive literature review on the topic of culture, diversity, international students, and counselling services, I am aware of the large breadth and scope that this task demands and the limitations that this presents in guiding the reader through this vast array of empirical knowledge. I have therefore chosen to present the literature review in a specific sequence introducing the wider discussion of culture and diversity within psychology and therapeutic settings, moving into more defined, specific and local aspects of the topic as it presents within international students and counselling services. The aim of this structure is as Knopf (2006) describes ‘to summarize the existing state of knowledge about a subject and [...] to frame the proposed research’s expected contribution to knowledge’ (p.128). The following review therefore aims to present a rationale for why the current research of focus is relevant and demonstrates how it bridges a gap within current research studies. Figure 2.1 presents the visual overlay of how this chapter is structured:
The starting point for the review begins with the relationship of diversity as it relates to counselling psychology and its humanistic philosophy. These include branches of pluralistic philosophy and ties to community psychology in the scope of responding to diversity. I then move into presenting relevant theories and recommendations from authorities within the field of multicultural counselling and therapy. Trends in global migration and alternative healing practices are presented in light of how alternative models of distress operate outside conventional Western epistemology and worldviews. The scope of review then narrows to look at a particular group of diverse clients – international students and the role they play in Higher Education Institutions. Thereon, I look at the current reported challenges faced by international students and how counselling services (and counsellors) are responding to assisting students with these challenges. A final look at the current gaps in research and service delivery position the rationale for the current research to take place. Search strategies for the literature review are presented in Appendix 1.
Throughout this chapter I have been guided by the question ‘why is this important?’ as it relates to presented topics, theories, previous research, and empirical evidence. My aim of holding a participatory action agenda for change (McIntyre, 2008) provides the context from which this study emerged and envelops my ongoing motivation to use research evidence to catalyse change and innovation where it is needed and where there is a demand for it. The recent emergence of Community Psychology (Nelson et. al, 2014) - a newly formed section within the British Psychological Society, whose mandate follows that of using research to engage and inform policy makers, demonstrates the growth of psychology’s reach venturing into leadership and policy development agendas. As such, the scope of this chapter orients towards presenting the current literature from this angle – to understand why it is important to pay attention to diversity in the context of how counsellors and therapists respond to diversity both at a personal relational level, and at a larger institutional level.

I understand that the scope of the literature review will not encompass all aspects of diversity and culture issues as this would be an impossible task. I therefore akin the following literature review to that of a scientist aiming to study one particular aspect of a living organism such as a tree. The trunk of the tree represents the large breadth of the topic at hand while each branch of the tree leads to a different and unique aspect of the whole. By looking at diversity in the context of counselling international students at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), I am narrowing the focus of inquiry to that of one particular angle of study (one particular branch of the tree), with an understanding of how it relates and interconnects to all other branches of the inquiry as it stems from the trunk and roots of the topic. As such, the reader is guided to
understand the context of diversity as a whole with further movement and focus into one particular avenue of exploration.

I am aware of having made informed decisions as to which branches I have chosen to explore and the boundaries of those explorations. The represented categories of exploration therefore present some convergence and overlap amongst topics which I have aimed to connect in a fluid and engaging manner.

2.2 Diversity and Counselling Psychology

‘The meaning of culture can be elusive. For as we change, the meaning we attribute to our cultural experiences evolves. But, it is our core, our cultural identity, that determines who and what we are, and what we will become, as we are transformed by our relationships with those who are culturally different’. (Pope-Davis, 2001, p.xi)
When speaking of diversity within psychology and counselling we often find it is most often governed by dialogues referring to ‘culture’. The term ‘culture’ was first introduced in 1871 by the English anthropologist Edward B Tylor (1920), and today there are over 200 different definitions of culture within the social science literature (Vontress, 2002). With the rise of globalisation and increased variability in client demographics within therapy -predominantly clients presenting with varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds, the development of incorporating cultural awareness within counselling and psychotherapy has grown over the last fifty years (Vontress, 1986; Reed, 1964), especially in response to critiques of race-based bias.

Authorities in the field began to create definitions such as ‘multicultural’ (Pedersen, 1991a; Pope-Davis & Coleman, 1997; Rameriz, 1999), ‘transcultural’ (d’Ardenne & Mahtani, 1989; Lago, 2011), and ‘cross-cultural’ (Marsella & Pedersen, 1981; Pedersen, 1987) as it relates to counselling and psychotherapy practice. These terms refer to working effectively with the diversity found within clients accessing therapy, most commonly associated with culture, race and ethnicity. Although ‘culture’ has been the main focus of addressing diversity within service users, it does not encompass things such as diversity through religion, gender, sexual orientation, or socio-economic class. As yet, there is no definition akin to ‘cross-diversity counselling’ or the like. In fact, all these different forms of diversity are relevant even though culture, race, and ethnicity have dominated the discussion when referring to diversity in current research literature.
I am particularly drawn to understand diversity within a larger framework beyond ‘culture’, as even culture can present to be multi-dimensional and represent heterogeneity within the levels of attachment to cultural identity and values. Sue and Sue (1990) point out how research grouping ethnic minority clients into categories of Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, American Indians, etc. creates erroneous beliefs and monolithic views that can promote cultural stereotypes and ‘fail to recognize within-group or individual differences’ (p.93). I concur with authors such as Ivey et. al (2012) who view differences within people as ‘multiple group identities’ (p.93) in order to understand human development in a non-reductionist way. The authors’ RESPECTFUL Counseling and Therapy Model incorporates the interplay of ten different factors in shaping client personal identity, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours and includes the following acronym:

‘R’eligious/spiritual identity

Economic class identity

Sexual identity

Psychological maturity

Ethnic/racial identity

Chronological challenges

Traumatic experiences and other threats to one’s wellbeing

Family identity and history

Unique physical characteristics

Location of residence and language differences’ (Ivey et. al, 2012, p.94).
Incorporating the above factors when describing diversity presents a more realistic view of within-group differences and the multiple factors that can play a role in shaping an individual’s unique characteristics and identity.

Counselling psychology, in particular, as a profession, fosters a humanistic value driven approach that is focused on placing clients at the forefront of service (Cooper, 2009; Hanley et. al, 2013). Its emphasis on phenomenology, humanism, and the therapeutic relationship forms the basis of how counselling psychologists are identified today in Britain (Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2009). That is not to say that counselling psychology as a discipline does not have room to grow. It has, in fact, received critiques from authors such as Moller (2011) who point out that counselling psychology in Britain maintains an ‘overly rigid and often irrelevant identification with phenomenology and humanistic values’ (p. 8), and argues for creating a more solid commitment to diversity and multiculturalism within the profession (such as the United States) which would increase employability in the field, open up a socially relevant research focus, and provide ‘a more promising and socially relevant identity for the discipline’ (p.13). Indeed, there is much scope for counselling psychology to address the above critiques and make efforts to create bridges with other socially relevant and meaningful areas of expertise such as diversity (Pederson, 2002; Ponterotto et. al, 2001; Pederson & Locke, 1996; Laungani, 2004), social justice (Arredondo & Perez, 2003; Arredondo, 1999; Hook & Davis, 2012), and innovative pluralistic practices (Cooper & McLeod, 2007; 2011).
A vast amount of literature is available for counselling psychologists, counsellors, and therapists to develop multicultural counselling competencies (e.g. d’Ardenne & Mahtani, 1989; Laungani, 2004; Palmer & Laungani, 1999; Pederson, 2002; Ponterotto et al., 2001). These crucial competencies are aimed at improving and addressing the issues present within psychological models and Western healing practices such as cultural encapsulation (Vacc, et.al, 2003), culturally biased assessments and measures (Diller, 2004), and domination of Westernised values within most counselling environments (Pederson & Locke, 1996; Rai, 2009). Other authors have pointed out the influence of ethnocentrism (Fish, 2010) within Western psychological models ‘in which people mistakenly view their own shared cultural perspective as reflecting objective reality’ (Fish, 2010, p.92).

The presented challenges reflect on the dilemma of current psychological models originating from a particular Western worldview that dominates most therapeutic settings:

‘Because modern psychology first developed in a Euro-American cultural context, ‘mainstream psychology’ typically reflects Euro-American monocultural assumptions and biases in textbooks, theories, tests, ethical guidelines, methods, and other aspects of this popular discipline’.

(Pedersen et. al, 2002, p.xiv)

Pedersen et. al (2002) point to the very real bias that is present within psychological models and their understandings of distress and healing. When psychological models first developed, there was not as much contact with diversity within clients and so the Euro-American monocultural assumptions worked for Euro-American cultures. In today’s world, however, with increased global migration trends, contact with diverse groups and cultures is becoming the everyday norm. Authors such as Laungani (1997)
have brought much awareness to the flaws in having a client-centred approach for
certain groups of clients such as South Asians, and argues for a more culture-centred
approach within counselling psychology (Rai & Moodley, 2010).

In assessing the varied critiques of multicultural models and theories, one quickly
begins to discern that many issues still remain within the epistemology of psychology
and psychotherapy as it relates to understanding and working with diversity. Moodley
(2007) makes a substantial claim that there is much confusion in counselling and
psychotherapy regarding multiculturalism, and proposes an alternative ‘third space’
which incorporates:

‘The inclusion of white people as clients; the converging of race, gender, sexual
orientation, class and disability issues; and the integration of indigenous and
traditional healing practices. Bringing it all together under the umbrella of diversity
or critical multiculturalism will ensure an ethical and clinical practice commensurate
with our current understanding of the complexity and sophistication within which
clients construct their subjectivity.’ (p. 1)

Moodley’s (2007) suggestion points to the evolving discussions regarding developing
better models to respond effectively to the diversity present within clients which have
been echoed by authorities in the field including West (2011), Laungani (2002),
Palmer (2002), Lago (2006), and Dupont-Joshua (2003). There is still much to learn
according to West (2010):

‘There is much that an individual counsellor could do to learn more about non-
Western culture before non-Western clients cross the threshold of the counselling
room. The quality that seems to be lacking, or perhaps hidden under a blanket of fear,
is the quality of curiosity of wanting to know, of wanting to learn about another
culture. With such a quality to the fore, the counsellor would be better prepared for
their non-Western clients and would communicate a true interest in their client’s
culture.’ (p.198)
I concur with West (2010) that there is room for expansion and growth within Western models of psychotherapy and how those models guide practitioners to work with a global clientele.

An approach that truly has seen to value diversity is the ‘Pluralistic Approach’ (Rescher, 1993) which has more recently been developed into the ‘Pluralistic Framework’ by Cooper and McLeod (2007, 2011). It operates on the assumption that ‘different explanations will be true for different people at different points in time and, therefore, different therapeutic methods will be most helpful for different clients at different moments’ (Cooper & McLeod, 2007, p.137). The premise of this approach is built on acknowledging diverse ways of responding to clients, offering bespoke methods of working together rather than applying a ‘one size fits all’ model. The pluralistic approach has shown much promise as it relates to working with diversity across orientations, clients, and approaches (Cooper & Dryden, 2016), although it does still require further development and satisfactory empirical evidence to showcase how it can effectively respond to diversity within clients (Wilk, 2014; Winter et. al, 2016).

McAteer (2010) describes how the pluralistic epistemology is at the core of counselling psychology research and practice due to its emphasis on valuing a range of diverse perspectives without adhering to a ‘dogmatic prescription of any particular epistemology in explaining our world or the people in it’ (p.6). Adopting a pluralistic stance in counselling psychology practice therefore gives room for diversity to be accepted and welcomed in a way that might differ from other divisions of psychology,
and allow counselling psychology to offer something very unique and meaningful in the helping professions.

A similar stance has been adopted by a newly formed section in the BPS of Community Psychology (Burton et. al, 2016) which ascribes to take a ‘pro-active approach towards key social issues including poverty, racism, and health/illness’ (Mitchell & Lounsbury, 2015, p.249). Community psychology’s development in the 1960’s in the US has been steadily growing although only recently has it been more recognized within the UK. Nelson and Prilleltensky (2010) describe community psychology valuing the importance of ‘cultural relativity and diversity so that people are not judged against one single standard or value’ (p.4) and emphasize its focus on creating social change for marginalised and oppressed groups of individuals. A very progressive arena for psychology which recognises how people are influenced within their social contexts with an emphasis on social justice that may at times challenge the status quo. The appeal of community psychology research methods involves using participatory action research (McIntyre, 2008) that involves participants as co-collaborators, helping to empower and connect communities through changing and influencing current systems.

2.3 Diversity within clients: Culture, spirituality, resiliency

Quite often, a client’s culture and religious background will shape their worldview and identity, and the very issues that they bring to a therapeutic session can be connected to that epistemology and core identity (Smith, 2009; Antone & Hagey, 2009). Sue and Sue (1990) have, for example, outlined how racial and cultural identity develops in a
five stage process that involves 1) Conformity 2) Dissonance 3) Resistance and Immersion 4) Introspection and 5) Integrative Awareness. This model, in particular, points to how ethnic minority cultural identities develop in relationship to dominant White socio-political influences, and the historical roots of oppression and racism that many minority groups have encountered.

In the *Conformity* stage, minority group individuals adhere to dominant White values and ways over their minority culture values and ways. In the *Dissonance* stage, minority group clients begin questioning societal dominant-held views with those of their own cultural minority group, resulting in feelings of dissonance and confusion. In the *Resistance and Immersion* stage, minority group clients attribute their difficulties to oppression and racism and would more likely prefer working with a counsellor from their own cultural group. In the *Introspection* stage, the minority client experiences internal struggle between identifying with the values of his/her cultural minority group while desiring greater personal freedom. They may choose to let go of certain cultural values of their own group while still valuing other aspects of it. And in the *Integrative Awareness* stage minority clients have ‘acquired an inner sense of security as to self-identity. They have pride in their racial/cultural heritage yet can exercise a desired level of personal freedom and autonomy’ (Sue & Sue, 1990, p.112). Counsellor preferences are based on similarity in attitudes and values over cultural group membership.

The Racial/Cultural Identity Development (R/CID) model developed by Sue and Sue (1990) is significant, for it demonstrates the heterogeneity in minority group cultures
with respect to how they understand their cultural identities in relationship to the
dominant Western White identity that has historically influenced and shaped much of
today’s global society. The authors stress how ‘a minority individual’s reaction to
counselling, the counselling process, and to the counsellor is influenced by his/her
cultural/racial identity and not simply linked to minority-group membership’ (Sue &
Sue, 1990, p.94). This might explain why in studies such as Chang and Yoon’s (2011)
and Chang and Berk’s (2009), there are mixed positive and negative results of ethnic
minority clients’ responses to working with White therapists. Of course, cultural
identity is a two-way process, with White therapists moving through equal stages of
how they encounter their own identities of belonging to a dominant culture.

Personal therapist factors were equally important in Chang and Berk’s study (2009) in
relation to therapists ‘adopting an idiographic perspective, conceptualizing the client
as a whole person with multiple intersecting cultural identities (including gender,
family role, immigration history, religion, age, SES, race, and sexual orientation) and
choosing interventions that are tailored yet do not stereotype the client based on
normative assumptions about their cultural group’ (p.19). Understanding how
predominant White cultural values of mainstream society are prevalent within Western
psychological models allows counsellors and therapists to be more aware of how
counselling/therapy in the West can foster cultural encapsulation and potential
ruptures in the alliance if the client does not share those same values (Nadirshaw,
2009; Palmer, 2002).
Western values and models of psychotherapy extend into the debate over other traditional healing methods and sources of coping that clients from other cultures may wish to use to alleviate distress. There has been much attention given to critiquing lack of integration of traditional healing methods into Western psychotherapy and counselling models when working with diverse clients (e.g. Rai & Moodley, 2010; Laungani, 2004; Moodley & Oulanova, 2011; Ray & Moodley, 2006; Smith, 2009). In particular, when clients use spirituality and religion as a source of coping and healing their struggles, denial of this within therapy, can be hurtful to clients according to West (2011). There are however ethical and professional issues that incorporating such avenues in therapy may hold for practitioners (Gubi, 2011; Ersahin, 2013).

It is perhaps learning how to become self-aware of these tensions, practicing transparency and meta-communication, whilst remaining open to another’s worldviews, that can reconcile these tensions as they arise. Cooper (2009) describes this in his keynote paper of ‘welcoming the other’ (Levinas, 1969) where one remains open to another’s perspective in a way that aligns with the core identity of what humanistic therapy is all about. For, as Jenkins (2011) argues, ‘precisely because spirituality is at the heart of how people understand themselves in the world, an attack on someone’s spirituality or its denial is an attack on the heart of the person, on their integrity, their wholeness’ (p.29). Even though many ethnic groups value spirituality and religion as a form of healing (Edge & Rogers, 2005; Savage & Armstrong, 2010), the fact that this is not readily used within mainstream Western psychological models prevents many Western oriented therapists from knowing how to use these as potential tools within therapy. Moreover, this can prevent certain cultural groups from accessing mainstream counselling and therapy in the first place, as has been reported with South
Asian populations (Farooq, 2012; Husain, et. al, 2006), African populations (Ojelade et. al, 2014; Parham et al., 2000), and Native Americans (Restoule, 2009; Cervantes, 2003) who tend to value traditional alternative non-Western healing modalities.

The use of prayer (Gubi, 2004; 2011), spiritually oriented interventions (Gubi, 2015; West, 2004; Cervantes & Parham, 2005), and Eastern healing practices incorporating meditation and mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2004; Sorajjakool, 2014; Laungani, 2005; Shonin et. al, 2015) are becoming more recognized within psychotherapeutic settings, acknowledging that psychological models have room to evolve and grow, incorporating more diverse ways of providing healing and connection. This evolution could involve a convergence between traditional and modern practices as West (2010) describes:

‘I have a dream of a form of cross-cultural counselling and healing that is not rooted in a Western model but instead is based on an integrative model that is pan-cultural. A model broad enough, and humble enough, to encompass the time-honoured learnings from traditional healing and the best of modern approaches wherever they are occurring; an approach that profoundly respects the clients’ culture, both macro and micro’ (p.200).

The recognition of spirituality as a relevant aspect of the psyche, and a move away from purely scientific approaches of study, has led to the development of Transpersonal Psychology (Judy, 2011) in the US, and more recently as a section within the British Psychological Society. This highlights the need for incorporating the study of spirituality and deeper states of consciousness within the larger discussion of psychology and well-being. Led by prominent thinkers in the USA, e.g. Abraham Maslow, Anthony Sutich, Stanislav Grof, James Fadiman, Miles Vich, and Sonya Margulies (Grof, 2008), Transpersonal Psychology has been gaining a popular
following of practitioners who are looking to work with the human psyche from a more holistic stance, incorporating mind, body, spirit theories and interventions in substitution of the purely scientific and empirical approaches within mainstream clinical and counselling psychology approaches. The incorporation of both science and spirit in studying the psyche are relevant as are explorations of healing across many modalities beyond Western epistemologies and sociocultural influences. Providing a safe space to explore diversity, spirituality, and consciousness, ‘Transpersonal Theory refers to [...] integrating the insights of the world’s wisdom traditions with the psychological concepts, theories, and methods of the West’ (Boeving, 2010, p.924) – a powerful convergence that transcends any one particular perspective on distress and healing.

For many people who have moved abroad to a foreign country, the elements of culture, spirituality, and resilience can all be interwoven within the same experiences of adversity and struggle (Bhugra, 2004; Miller & Chandler, 2002). When one’s culture and religion do not fit in line with the predominant cultural norm of the environment one is in, then one’s resilience is needed to overcome this adversity (Grandbois & Sanders, 2009; Pipher, 2004). For certain cultures, the coping mechanisms for dealing with adversity, directly lie within the religion - using prayer and spirituality to cope with life’s struggles (Winter et. al, 2009). Religion or spirituality, therefore can build resilience, and there is no separation in the individual between their culture, their spirituality/religion, and their resilience (Cervantes & Parham, 2005). It is all part of their identity.
Current trends in global migration all point to an increasing amount of diversified populations within the future. In Britain, there has been a steady influx of immigrants from European Union countries, Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East (Palmer & Laungani, 1999). The UK’s most recent CENSUS statistics from 2014 (Office for National Statistics, 2015) highlight the growing number of non-British nationals that are living in the UK as highlighted in the following table:

**Table 2.1: Estimate of the resident population of the UK by nationality, 2014**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>British</th>
<th>Non-British</th>
<th>EU27</th>
<th>EU14</th>
<th>EU8</th>
<th>EU2</th>
<th>Non-EU</th>
<th>Asia</th>
<th>Rest of the World</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>58,312</td>
<td>5,344</td>
<td>2,938</td>
<td>1,340</td>
<td>1,336</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>2,406</td>
<td>1,271</td>
<td>977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(91.6%)</td>
<td>(3.4%)</td>
<td>(4.6%)</td>
<td>(2.1%)</td>
<td>(2.1%)</td>
<td>(0.4%)</td>
<td>(3.8%)</td>
<td>(2.0%)</td>
<td>(1.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table source: Office for National Statistics*

*Table notes:*
1. EU27 consists of the countries in the EU14, EU8, EU2, Malta, Cyprus, and Croatia (from 1 July 2013). Those with British nationality are not included in this group.
2. EU14 consists of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Republic of Ireland, Spain and Sweden.
3. EU8 consists of the Eastern European countries that joined the EU in 2004: Czech Republic, Estonia, Poland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia.
4. EU2 consists of the two countries that joined the EU in 2007: Bulgaria and Romania.
5. Non-EU consists of all those countries not in the UK or EU27 groups. This group excludes Croatia from 1 July 2013 when it joined the EU. Estimates for non-EU have also been split geographically to provide estimates for Asia and the Rest of the World.

(Office for National Statistics, 2015, p.4)

In 2014, 1 in 8 (13.0%) of the usual resident population of the UK were born abroad. This compares to 1 in 11 (8.9%) in 2004, which signifies an increase in immigration numbers with trends most likely to continue to grow. As such, it can be expected that healthcare practitioners will be coming into contact with greater numbers of diverse clientele.
Motivations impacting people to migrate to foreign cultures are varied and heterogeneous. They can range from severe situations of escaping war, torture, or famine as is the case with refugees and asylum seekers to less severe motivations of wanting better employment and economic opportunities. Migrating for educational purposes has proved to be common among younger generations (Mori, 2000; Popiaduk & Arthur, 2004; Yin, 2013) and is on the rise. Madison (2006) also describes those groups who choose ‘existential migration’, a type of voluntary migration where individuals are ‘seeking greater possibilities for self-actualising, exploring foreign cultures in order to assess their own identity, and ultimately [grapple] with issues of home and belonging in the world generally’ (p.238). It is no wonder, therefore, that migration brings with it a host of challenges and opportunities for both the migrant and the host culture, and is varied in its own right with respect to the reasons why people choose to migrate (Bhugra, 2004). In the following sections I will be specifically looking at migrants and foreigners who choose to travel abroad for overseas education purposes – the international student.

2.4 International Students and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)

According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (2014), international student enrolment rates at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) within the UK continue to rise. There has been a rise from 8.6% in 2003/04 of international students making up the whole student population to 12.8% in 2012/13 (In Focus, 2014). That’s a rise of 4.2% over 9 years. The proportion of EU students over this same period has risen from 4.2% to 5.4% (In Focus, 2014). The implications of this trend indicate that HEIs need to be prepared for greater enrolment numbers from international and EU students.
continuing to rise with increasing globalisation and the growing appeal of Western foreign education to international students (Bennell & Pearce, 2003; Roberts, 2005).

The financial gains of high international student enrolment are well documented with 12.1% of the UK HEI’s income deriving from international student tuition fees, totalling £3.5 billion per annum (Universities UK, 2014). Moreover, international students bring positive economic benefits to the UK’s GDP through their financial contributions as shown in Table 2.2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of expenditure</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuition fees</td>
<td>£3.24bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation costs</td>
<td>£0.52bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus spend</td>
<td>£3.42bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitors’ spend</td>
<td>£0.10bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research income (non-EU sources)</td>
<td>£0.64bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultancy</td>
<td>£0.26bn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>£8.18bn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Attracting international students to HEIs has included both financial and cultural benefits (Burslem, 2004) and has therefore seen a push for internationalisation of higher education to foreign markets within the UK as well as other countries such as
Canada, the US, and Australia (Bennel & Pearce, 2003; Popiaduk & Arthur, 2004; Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011). Gu et al (2010) claim that ‘broadening and deepening the international and global connectivity of higher education is no longer an option, but a necessity’ (p.8). The implications of this rapid change in student population dynamics therefore present much needed adjustment and adaptability by HEIs to accommodate and provide the right environment and support for a growing international student population.

The push for students to seek an international education can be driven by various factors such as prestigious reputations of Western academic institutions, a desire to receive a global education, and increased job opportunities. In certain Asian countries, as Bhandari and Blumenthal (2011) describe, the increasing demand of higher education enrolments exceeds the available resources:

‘Some rapidly growing Asian countries such as Malaysia and China have recently almost doubled their higher education enrollments. At the same time, these burgeoning higher education populations have put enormous pressure on the higher education systems of many developing countries, especially at the postgraduate level, leading large numbers of their students to seek higher education outside of their home country. India is one such example where the growth of the college- age population has outpaced the capacity of the country’s existing higher education institutions. There remains, thus, an enormous unmet and growing demand for international education and a huge capacity worldwide to absorb more international students.’ (p.2).

As such, students will continue to seek higher education internationally, and HEIs will need to develop plans and policies that can accommodate this burgeoning rate of foreign learners.
In responding to the needs of international students, the UK’s reputation is vital to the growth of attracting foreign applicants in a competitive overseas market of global education. Current trends indicate that ‘international students generally show high levels of satisfaction with their UK higher education experience’ (Universities UK, 2014, p.26). However, according to a 2014 National Union of Students survey of 3100 international students already in the UK, over 50% polled stated they felt unwelcome by the UK government:

‘These numbers are even higher for PhD students (65.8 per cent) and students from Turkey (61.3 percent), Japan (64.5 per cent), Nigeria (62.8 per cent), India (62 per cent) and Pakistan (56.1 per cent). 19 percent of non-EU students would not recommend the UK as a place to study to a friend or relative. This number is higher for PhD students (23.5 per cent) and students from India (34.5 per cent), Nigeria (36.8 per cent), and Pakistan (38.5 per cent).’ (National Union of Students, 2014)

Clearly the above figures and percentages are reflecting a disparaging view of international students’ perceptions which can have a detrimental effect on the UK’s reputation to attract growing numbers of foreign learners. International students become global ambassadors at the HEIs they choose to receive their education from, and will provide positive or negative reviews within their own respective home countries upon returning. As such, HEIs may need to think about implementing a ‘growth/adaptability’ approach that allows them to adapt to the changing environment of a globalised academic economy in order to prevail and thrive within a demand driven system. This includes responding effectively to the needs of a diverse student population who are the consumers of the HEIs, and who determine the demand for provision of services. The debates on improving the ‘student experience’ at HEIs is already at the forefront of discussions regarding changing UK policy proposals of university funding and marketing higher education (Staddon & Standish, 2012).
International students do bring with them various expectations and challenges that HEIs might not be prepared for. Most commonly, differing expectations, based on their home cultural values, often create misunderstandings between international students and their academic faculty and supervisors (Brown, 2016; Nilsson & Anderson, 2004; Cadman, 2000). Adjusting to the UK academic system and relations with authority figures may be vastly different for those students coming from collectivist cultures where relationships with authority figures are more formal – students expect strong direction from their academic tutors without questioning or engaging in critical debates (Watkins & Biggs, 2001; Cortazzi & Jin, 1997). This runs in contrast to the philosophy of developing independent learners at UK HEIs and the ‘questioning, problem-based orientation upon which UK postgraduate curricula are founded’ (Roberts, 2005, p.102). Moreover, the Western concept of individual ownership of ideas runs counterintuitive to the Confucian heritage of collective ownership (Ryan, 2000), resulting in difficulties of developing critical writing skills and creativity. It is not uncommon, therefore, for students from these cultures to report difficulties in essay writing and in adhering to academic criteria of non-plagiarism (Denicolo & Pope, 1999; Todd, 1997).

In addition to adjusting to a novel academic culture, foreign students are faced with the task of adapting to a new societal culture, a new physical environment, and perhaps even new value systems. It is therefore common for this group of sojourners to face adversities when adjusting to a foreign culture and environment in addition to the normal academic pressures of exams and assessment (Gu et. al, 2010; Peelo & Luxon, 2007). Akhtar and Kröner-Herwig (2015) found that different factors such as age, continent of origin, host culture language proficiency, time spent in the host culture,
and prior travelling experience, all affect acculturative stress in international students. Their study measured how different socio-demographic variables and coping styles contribute to acculturative stress for 652 international students in Germany, and found that:

‘being younger, having high levels of self-reported German language proficiency, and prior inter-culture travelling experience significantly predicted a low level of acculturative stress. Coming from a home country in Asia, Africa, or Latin America predicted a higher level of acculturative stress as compared to coming from any European country. Among coping styles, suppressive coping and reactive coping were found to predict significantly a high level of acculturative stress among international students’ (p.803).

Their findings indicate that there are multiple intersecting factors contributing to acculturative stress in international students, with students being more at risk if they are older, lack sufficient language proficiency in the host culture, and are novice travellers. Asian, African, and Latin American countries understandably will have greater cultural disparities in values and worldviews than Western nations, resulting in higher expected adjustment for international students. Other studies indicate that factors such as having a ‘personal growth initiative’, ‘hardiness’, and a ‘universal-diverse orientation’ elicit greater adjustment for international students, thereby reducing acculturative stress (Yakunina et. al, 2013).

Culture shock can be quite severe for students coming from very different cultural, and religious norms and feelings of isolation, and marginalisation, are commonly reported by these students (Bradley, 2000; Sandhu, 1994). Bektas (2008) describes culture shock as ‘the consequence of strain and anxiety resulting from contact with a new culture and the feeling of loss, confusion, and powerlessness resulting from loss
of accustomed cultural cues and social roles’ (p.274). Arthur (1997) describes this as the adjustment process that students need to navigate within, when moving between cultures.

Different models of culture shock have been proposed, including Lysgaard’s (1995) practical U-shaped curve of adjustment, which accounts for stages of initial euphoria, followed by frustration and depression, followed by an upswing towards satisfaction and confidence. This was later followed with Gullahorn and Gullahorn’s (1963) W-curve which further incorporated ‘reverse culture-shock’, accounting for a student’s return to their country of origin, where a second re-acculturation process takes place. Not all writers agree, however, that this is the standard mode of acculturation that students go through (Hofstede, 2001; Arthur 1997; Popiaduk & Arthur, 2004). Both Arthur (1997) and Popiaduk and Arthur (2004) provide recommendations to utilize more appropriate models that incorporate varying levels of adjustment and adaptation over time and that take into account the level of acculturation present. Other models of culture shock have also emerged, including Adler’s (1975, as cited in Thomas & Althen, 1989), Lewthwaite’s (1996), and Andersen’s (1994) variations. In particular, Popiaduk and Arthur (2004) advocate that ‘the need for rapid cultural learning is most apparent at the initial stage of contact with a new culture’ (p.131) for international students rather than seeing culture shock in a negative way. Furthermore, they make an important distinction between ‘acculturation’ and ‘enculturation’, the former relating to cultural group membership, and the latter relating to internalized cultural beliefs, attitudes, and thinking patterns that can account for individualized differences within a cultural group.
The way international students cope with culture shock and acculturative stress has been varied, leading some to look for ways of coping that can rely on seeking support outside their circle of friends and family (Pederson, 1991b), or turning to religion and spirituality (Minn Chai, 2009). Ra and Trusty (2015), for example, found that within Asian international students, task-oriented, and avoidance-oriented coping strategies were positively associated with a reduction in acculturative stress, while emotion-oriented strategies were associated with an increase in acculturative stress. Akhtar and Kroner-Herwig (2015) also found that suppressive coping, and reactive coping, were found to predict significantly higher levels of acculturative stress among international students. Yakunina et. al’s (2013) study found that those international students, who possessed greater levels of personal and multicultural strengths, had less acculturative problems and better adjustment. Not all international students, therefore, utilise coping strategies that are helpful. According to Gu et. al, (2010), who investigated first-year undergraduate international student experiences at UK HEIs, their findings ‘challenge the psychological model of international students linear intercultural adaptation and point to the presence of a complex set of shifting associations between language mastery, social interaction, personal development, and academic outcomes. It is the management of this amalgam which results in intercultural adaptation and the successful reconfiguration of identity’ (p.7)

The rise of increased international student enrolment numbers has influenced a large amount of recent research examining the various stressors international students face as it relates to acculturative stress (Cetinkaya-Yildiz et. al, 2011; Merenkov & Anatova, 2015; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Tung, 2011), language proficiency (Mori, 2000; Sherry et. al, 2010), educational stressors (Chen, 1999; McDonald, 2014; Peelo &
Luxon, 2007), and sociocultural stressors (Constantine et. al, 2004; Lee et. al, 2004; Merenkov & Anatova, 2015). There has also been an emphasis of looking at how international students from more collectivist cultures, such as China and Asia, manage stressors of studying abroad (Ye, 2006; Gonzalez, 2003; Bailey & Dua, 1999; Chen et. al, 2015) with proposed recommendations for support. Arthur (2004) highlights the most common transition issues that international students face. These include achieving academic goals, communication and language difficulties, loss of social support networks, financial strains, dealing with discrimination and racism, adapting to different gender role expectations, and family issues. This has been supported in other research studies as well (Arthur, 1997; Popiaduk & Arthur, 2004; Bektas, 2008; Khoo et. al, 1994; Yoon & Portman, 2004; Sandhu, 1994; Okorocha 2010b). The research literature points to a stark reality that the international student distress phenomenon is very real and tangible and ongoing. Indications show that HEIs have yet to address the rising international student distress prevalence adequately (Zhu & Degeneffe, 2011; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Ramachandran, 2011). As such, if appropriate support mechanisms are not put in place to address the above discussed stressors, more serious mental health issues may continue to rise within the international student population.

International students have been shown to be more vulnerable to mental health issues than local students (Khoo et. al, 1994). Commonly reported mental health issues of international students include depression, anxiety, insomnia, sexual dysfunctions (Ebbin & Balkenship, 1986) as well as sometimes more serious crisis issues such as suicide attempts, health crisis, psychotic breaks, schizophrenia, and anxiety-phobia syndromes (Oropeza, et. al, 1991). Detecting the mental health needs of some
international students can also pose challenges, as Okorocha (2010b) points out, for communication difficulties may make it difficult for international students to express their innermost feelings in a second language. Moreover, it has been well documented that Chinese and East Asian cultures tend to overemphasize psycho-somatic and bodily complaints in expressing psychological discomfort, as physical illness is less stigmatized than psychological illness (Okorocha 2010b; Draguns, 1996; Ots, 1990; Tanaka-Matsumi & Draguns, 1997).

Kono et. al, (2015) found that lack of quality sleep, reduced amount of exercise, and poor housing conditions, all contributed to the risk of developing depressive symptoms in international students. In Bradley’s (2000) study, international students voiced experiences of a range of economic, social and academic pressures, which appear to be different in degree, and often in kind, from those experienced by home students. These factors were seen in extreme cases to potentially trigger and/or exacerbate mental health problems. The research literature uniformly supports the claim that international students are at a greater risk for developing psychological problems due to the additional cross-cultural transition demands that are placed upon them (Mori, 2000; Leong & Chou, 2002; Yoon & Portman, 2004), and the subsequent need for adequate mental health and support services to be established for them (Arthur, 2004; Roberts, 2005; Sandhu, 1994). In Lee et. al’s (2004) study of 74 Korean international students living in the US, acculturative stress was strongly correlated with mental health symptoms. Social support moderated and buffered the effect of this stress on symptoms indicating the strong need for social supports to be in place for international students in order to prevent more serious mental health issues.
2.5 University Counselling Services and Cross-Cultural Therapy

The role of providing social support to international students in order to prevent, or reduce, risk factors for mental health issues, places university and college counselling services at the forefront of service provision. Research literature, however, indicates that accessing university counselling services for many international students has been problematic due to the cultural stigma that can be associated with disclosing personal information and difficulties (Kambouropoulos, 2015; Khan, 2013; Okorocha, 1998; Ang & Liamputong, 2008; Zhang & Dixon 2003). Raunic and Xenos (2008), for example, report that only 2-4% of students access university counselling services, with females being more likely to use them than males. International students underutilise counselling services, preferring help from family and friends.

In certain South Asian cultures, family pressure, ‘Izzat’ (honour), and the stigma attached to mental illness, prevents students from accessing mental health and counselling services (Khan, 2013; University of Nottingham, 2011). Sandhu (1994) points out how, in some cultures, seeking help is overly stigmatized, and students might not want to be labelled ‘mentally ill’. Other research studies claim that the low-uptake of counselling services by international students can be attributed to lack of familiarity with what counselling is (Kilinic & Granello, 2003; Bradley, 2000) as well as lack of language confidence (Carr et. al, 2003). Arthur (1997) makes reference to reasons why international students are more likely to drop out of counselling sessions after a single session. These include misunderstandings occurring between counsellor/client regarding the process of cultural adjustment (Wan et. al, 1992), a perceived invasion of privacy from the counsellor in asking personal questions.
(Dadfar & Friedlander, 1982), or a lack of awareness of available resources on campus (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Sandhu, 1994). It was also reported that international students, most times, feel more comfortable disclosing personal information to their co-national peers (Khoo et. al, 1994; Pedersen, 1991b), and seek help through more informal settings such as public areas, hallways, and chats (Arthur, 1997).

Shannon (2014) interviewed counsellors on their perceptions of working with international students, and found that the main barriers hindering therapeutic alliance and connection included ‘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’ (p.45). Russell et. al (2008), however, found that contrary to commonly reported views in the literature, within-person variables play a stronger role than cultural background in accounting for students help-seeking behaviours at an Australian university. Their results suggest that ‘measures of individuals’ social and psychological well-being (depression, stress, cultural stress and friendship) are, for the most part, better predictors of student help-seeking than broad demographic variables, such as cultural origin, age or gender’ (p.72). This is an important point supported in other literature (Yoon & Portman, 2004; Arthur, 1997) which argues that stereotyping all international students to be the same, could be detrimental and further isolate them from accessing help if inter-cultural variability is not recognized.
It is relevant to note that variabilities amongst different cultures, and *within* different cultures, can create differences in help-seeking attitudes from international students, which requires counsellors to modify their styles and examine their clients’ expectations (Khoo et. al, 1994). The fact that much of the research overgeneralizes findings to all international students, and under-emphasises within-group differences (Yoon & Portman, 2004), points to potential problems of creating underlying assumptions and biases in how counsellors work with international students, thereby providing services that could be lacking in cultural sensitivity and responsiveness.

Cultural differences between counsellors and their clients, can further exacerbate barriers of international students help-seeking behaviours by failing to be familiar with the cultural narratives and influences that shape these clients’ beliefs and behaviours (Anderson & Myer, 1985; Mori, 2000). Cross cultural misinterpretation and misunderstanding, therefore, is possible, and has been reported (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997). Counsellors do not always have the appropriate training available to support international students when it comes to multicultural competence (Sue & Sundberg, 1996), which can lead to provision of services that treat international students as a homogenous group. Popiaduk and Arthur (2004) believe that doing so ‘ignores issues of gender, culture, and power, and places individuals at greater risk for marginalization within our institutions of higher learning’ (p.128). These same authors point out that within any given individual, there could be a range of various beliefs and values ‘that may conform or conflict with their own cultural group norms and values’ (Popiaduk & Arthur, 2004, p.133) which further highlights the importance of assessing each individual’s own acculturation and enculturation process within any new environment.
Multicultural issues in counsellor training continue to exist, as there is not enough emphasis placed upon multicultural competence training in working with international students (Arthur, 1997). More difficult conversations, allowing practitioners to self-reflect on their own potential biases and privileges of the majority host culture, would be very beneficial. Otherwise, as Khoo et. al (1994) point out, cultural stereotyping can occur. Counsellors therefore need to be cognizant of their own stereotypes of foreign students, and find ways of overcoming them. Leong and Chou (2002) note how counsellors’ expectations of their clients may impact the therapeutic relationship. In particular they note that:

‘Training bias rooted in Western-oriented approaches to counselling and psychotherapy influences counsellors’ conceptions of what constitutes “good client” behaviour during counselling. When a therapist imposes such expectations on a client, he or she creates a culturally dystonic experience for that client. International students may perceive such a counsellor expectancies as alienating and offensive’ (p.197).

Popiaduk and Arthur (2004) believe that within training programmes, ‘avoiding some of these deeper issues subverts negative attitudes and does not allow the opportunity for trainees to make significant, meaningful and positive changes through discussion and appropriate facilitation’ (p.139).

Multicultural competence has been reported as one of the key factors influencing how counsellors work with international students (Arthur, 2004; Yoon & Portman, 2004; Leong & Chou, 2002). This relates directly to key competence criteria of self-awareness, and understanding how culture impacts living abroad, knowledge of how culture influences the counselling process and outcomes, and key skills in communication, boundaries, and varied delivery methods (Popiaduk & Arthur, 2004;
Khoo et. al, 1994; Sandhu, 1994). Arthur (1997) reports how a lack of adequate preparation on behalf of counsellors increases the risk of early termination, client dissatisfaction, and isolation amongst international student clients. An important aspect of this, requires self-awareness of one’s own values and biases. Khoo et. al (1994) point out that ‘counsellors who are insensitive to their values, may impose them on their minority clients’ (p.126). Equally important, would be the use of culturally sensitive assessments and outcome measures (Yoon & Portman, 2004), as most measures currently used to measure wellbeing have been developed for Western cultures, such as North America, Australia, and Europe. Popiaduk and Arthur (2004) provide an in-depth description of key multicultural competencies, including a counsellor’s awareness, knowledge, and skills in working with international students. The importance of fostering effective and culturally sensitive training programmes has also been mentioned in other studies and research literature (Arthur, 2016; Bhawuk & Brislin, 2001; Black & Mendenhall, 1990), with efforts at implementation beginning to take place in this domain (Jacob & Greggo, 2001; Arthur & Januszkowski, 2001).

Counselling services at HEIs have also felt the pressure of responding to an increasing demand of students seeking mental health support (Stallman, 2011; Woolfe, 1996) with limited resources being cited as adding further constraints in the delivery of services. Stallman (2011) discusses how limited resources at counselling services lead to very high counsellor/student ratios, lower average number of consultations per student, and lower mental health qualifications of counsellors, and claim that ‘inadequate counselling support can negatively impact on students, universities, and the community through lost potential’ (p.249). The implications of this problem are severe, and according to Storrie et. al, (2010), current research trends indicate that
emotional problems amongst university students are increasing while available help is decreasing. Other studies have equally pointed to gaps in support service funding (Benton et. al, 2003) with implications showing that students were receiving brief therapy despite having a more serious diagnosis and that crisis work was being prioritized over longer-term coping strategies, which might ameliorate chronic, disabling symptoms.

How are counsellors responding to international students? Not many studies have been conducted with counsellors’ views on working with international students. As Leong and Chou (2002) point out, ‘studies on therapist variables, unlike studies on client variables, are just too costly to conduct in terms of time, resources, and samples’ (p.197). According to Coren (2016), the standardised norm at HEIs in the UK, is to use short-term therapies with students, supported by an increasing evidence base showing that they are effective. There is a danger, however, that this can lead to increased standardisation of services, with the assumption that a ‘one size fits all’, along with having a ‘convenient way for managing scarce resources and demand’ (p.42). Other authors, such as Lawton et. al (2010), Mair (2016), and the BACP (2012), have provided general theories and guidelines for counselling services at HEIs, while authors such as Arthur (2004) and Okorocha (2010a,b) provide more specific guidelines to practitioners and staff who work with international students.

Shannon (2014) has explored the experiences and attitudes of counsellors who worked with international students across four different HEIs, and found counsellors expressing general consensus that psychological issues brought by international
students lay more closely with the individual rather than with their country of origin. This suggests that counsellors are more adept at seeing international students as unique individuals, rather than focusing on their cultural background. Further important factors gathered from this study included ‘awareness of cultural difference, personal biases and knowledge of the students’ contexts’ (p. ii) as being important. Counsellors were aware of academic risk factors, social isolation, and access to support systems as key factors within their therapeutic work with international students. Okorocha’s (1998) research also looked at counselling service trends and attitudes within both counsellors and international students at 15 HEIs in the UK, and reported that students from Africa and the Caribbean Islands used the services the least, while students from Europe used the services the most. Perceived cultural differences between counsellors and non-Western students, were seen as the main barriers of low utilization of services.

Responding effectively to the mental health needs of international students is well advocated in the research literature (Bradley, 2000; Okorocha, 2010a; Tidwell & Hanassab, 2007; Arthur, 2004), suggesting that further improvements are still developing at an institutional level for how to meet the needs of this growing at-risk student population. HEIs are now facing larger demands than ever before, with moving beyond traditional counselling protocols in order to be innovative and adapt to a changing demand from international students who showcase different needs and greater challenges associated with acculturative stress and cross-cultural transitions (Tidwell & Hanassab, 2007; Ang & Liamputtong, 2008; Popiaduk & Arthur, 2004; University of Nottingham, 2011). They also bring with them a vast reservoir of untapped resources for cross-cultural learning and present many benefits for HEIs beyond economic and financial gains.
Suggestions for improving services for international students have included taking a proactive approach towards reaching international students. Sandhu (1994) suggests counselling services should be ‘pre-planned, well structured, and offered on the regular basis’ (p.234). Arthur (1997) states that because there are more barriers in place for international students to seek help, acknowledging their efforts and building a positive profile within the international student community is key. Yoon and Portman (2004) suggest having a counsellor available who has a background as an international student, which might make international students feel more at ease, knowing some counsellors have an embodied understanding of their adjustment difficulties. Popiaduk and Arthur (2004) provide a number of proactive strategies which include marketing services, collaboration with international student service staff, incorporating non-traditional counselling strategies, providing group seminars, and fostering cross cultural mentoring between faculty and international students.

Having proper outcome measures, and a large evidence base which captures what works and what does not work, can be useful in standardizing a model way of working with international students, that can be implemented across many academic institutions. Although certain studies, such as Jacob and Greggo’s (2001) model of counsellor training and collaborative programming strategies, are useful in providing ideas about solutions, there is still a dominant focus on problem oriented issues in the literature, and not enough emphasis is placed on international student health promotion (Popiaduk & Arthur, 2004). Dipeolu et. al (2007) describe in their study a successful effort in delivering support group counselling services to international students, as have Carr et. al (2003) with female Asian international students, but such empirical studies are few and far between. Yakunina et. al (2011) have also reported on the
effectiveness of group counselling with international students, however noted a lack of further empirical evidence and the need for practitioners to contribute more knowledge in this area. Other studies have proposed unique interventions for career counselling international students (Arthur & Popiaduk, 2010; Yang et. al, 2002) as well as providing recommendations for supporting international students in counselling and psychotherapy training programmes (Park-Saltzman et. al, 2012; Delgado-Romero & Wu, 2010). More effort at piloting and reporting successful interventions with international students therefore could shift the focus to be more solution oriented than problem focused.

Building a supportive campus environment is also seen to be incredibly important amongst cited recommendations (Barty & Raven, 2003; Arthur, 2008; Barletta & Kobayashi, 2007). This would involve as Arthur (1997) points out, an integration and bridging of both formal and informal support networks that includes partnership with a wide variety of other campus support services. Bektas (2008) in particular suggests collaboration between counselling services and the international student offices since international students seem to prefer having contact with the international student offices over counselling services. Having counsellors be more available and visible in these offices would reduce certain barriers to services and increase accessibility which Arthur (1997) believes will help international students feel at ease about seeking support. Popiaduk and Arthur (2004) and Yoon and Portman (2004) have emphasized even further the need for organizational development to take place at the institutional level, and that counsellors could play a larger role in shaping the policies and procedures affecting international students in order to meet the needs of this group more readily.
Dunstan (2007) conducted a study with staff at universities and schools throughout Australia in assessing the state of international student support services at HEIs and found that 52% of respondents believed the resources for international student support were inadequate, producing limitations in achieving goals, coping with peak periods, conducting research and undertaking projects. Most respondents (65%), believed that more resources would improve programs and services for international students. The services that did exist to support students were ‘centrally delivered through student services and international offices, with key input from student associations, language, learning and other specialist personnel, and sometimes faculties’ (p.8) suggesting that supporting international students requires a multidisciplinary approach from various stakeholders within academic institutions, not just the counselling service per se.

Tidwell and Hanassab’s (2007) survey study with 640 international students equally supports this claim as the needs assessment data based on the geographical region of their country of origin showed that students were most concerned with obtaining information regarding immigration regulations and visa requirements - not something in the remit of counselling service support. Furthermore, students’ needs differed depending on their geographic region, their gender, their study discipline, and whether they were postgraduate or undergraduate. Having information on students according to these factors within HEIs may make it easier to coordinate specific interventions and programmes of support that respond to more specific needs amongst the heterogeneity of international students.

More importantly, the implications of understanding international students and responding to their needs extends outside counselling service relationships and can prove to be very useful for academics and staff who are interacting with them (Mori
et. al, 2009). Okorocha (2010b) claims that ‘the most controversial issue reported by international postgraduate students was that of supervision’ (p.28). Within her research, students’ relationships with their supervisors varied with some reporting good relationships while others complained about the lack of goodwill and trust present within their supervisory relationships. As academic supervisors may have even less self-awareness of potential ethnocentric biases and cross-cultural communication skills than that of counsellors, it is all the more important that cross-cultural responsiveness training extends into the wider academic community within HEIs including academic supervisors and staff working at other university support services (Todd, 1997).

2.6 Research Rational

The complexity of an individual’s enculturation, as well as other environmental factors such as race, religion, gender, age, and class, produce a very diverse array of viewpoints and individual perceptions. It is therefore important to not lose hold of the individual within the cultural background, which Hansen (2010) describes as an ‘intra-individual diversity perspective’ (p.16). By utilizing an individualized approach towards every client in counselling, that takes into account these diverse intra-individual perceptions, counsellors may understand the degree to which a client’s complex background influences their current beliefs, values, and behaviours.

When developing services to meet the needs of diverse clients, targeting the population group through in depth needs assessments is beneficial to avoid assumptions that are
not congruent with the cultural narratives of clients (Ervin, 2002; Sussman, 2001). Often times however, as Popiaduk and Arthur (2004) report:

‘the primary stakeholders who are often left out of discussions and decisions regarding their own needs, perceptions, and desires is the international student group. Gaining increased awareness and insight in regard to international student opinions and beliefs will allow counselors to build appropriate and relevant support systems and counseling interventions together with students’ (p. 133).

It is beneficial therefore to conduct research in this area, with both students’ and counsellors’ feedback on their thoughts, feelings, and suggestions to improve upon the identified challenges that past research has highlighted in supporting diverse students studying in Western nations. This can help to retain a satisfied student population which Arthur (2004) believes is based upon the success of international education markets being linked to the satisfaction of student consumers. She argues that ‘international education is highly dependent upon the degree to which campus personnel are prepared for learners from other countries’ (p.7).

Based on the current literature addressing international students and counsellors who work with such students in HEIs, there exists a larger emphasis on describing the issues and challenges of cross-cultural understanding in academic settings and a lesser emphasis is placed upon potential solutions and ways to create mutual understandings. Popiaduk and Arthur (2004) have identified some potential solutions in Canadian universities which include ‘moving counseling and research agendas from problems to health promotion, increasing the accessibility of counselling, customizing group interventions, and increasing counsellors’ multicultural counselling competencies’ (p. 135). Okorocha (2010b) also provides relevant guidelines for counsellors’ including
acknowledging cultural differences, bracketing off assumptions, broadening their knowledge of other cultures, providing a flexible approach, and modifying communication styles according to students’ English language proficiency.

Despite much literature emerging in the arena of international students at HEIs, there remain a limited amount of empirical studies being done that address the more subtle complexities of facilitating counsellor/client mutual understanding in a way that can help counsellors to provide culturally responsive interventions. Chang and Berk (2009) conducted a study in America with ethnic minority clients receiving therapy from ‘White European American’ therapists and have identified certain facilitative conditions in cross-racial therapy that enhances positive alliance formation. Similar studies done by Pope-Davis et. al, (2002) and Chang and Yoon (2011) in the US also explored cultural issues between clients and counsellors. All of these studies however only focused on the client’s perceptions of the counselling experience and therefore present only one side of the therapeutic relationship narrative.

Studies which have specifically examined international students’ attitudes and preferences for counselling include Yau et. al’s (1992) study which found no preference in international students over client-centred/non-directive approaches in counselling versus problem-solving/directive approaches, suggesting that different approaches will work for different students. Bradley et. al’s (1995) survey study of 120 international students found that international students preferences for help seeking followed the order of: friends, family members, professors, personnel directors, and counsellors. International students sought counsellors with the
following characteristics: honest, genuine, trustworthy, accepting, warm, interpersonally skilled, and empathic.

Shannon’s (2014) qualitative study explored only counsellors’ experiences of working with international students and so too only presents one side of the therapeutic encounter. Okorocha’s (1998) unpublished study is the only one which looked at both counsellors’ and international students’ experiences together through providing surveys to both groups and also conducting interviews with counsellors. Her study however did not take into account more in-depth accounts of international students’ struggles and recommendations by assessing their views through interviews. A thorough in depth-approach of hearing both counsellors’ and international students’ views in person on both the problems and the recommended solutions of overcoming identified problems has not been conducted to date.

This research therefore intends to fill that gap by exploring the potential solutions of what counsellors think would help them understand and work with the diverse phenomenology of international students, and what international students describe they need from counsellors and advisors in order to feel understood and welcomed. By asking the right questions of both parties and obtaining meaningful answers to address the described diversity issues in the literature, this research aims to explore the implications for HEIs in terms of improving support systems for international students. The findings are not presented as definitive generalizable truths due to the small sample size, although they contribute to a case-based understanding of how to enhance support for diverse groups of students within HEIs in order to reduce risk and
increase well being among the international student population. As Creswell et. al (2007) report, case study research provides a ‘broad interpretation of what we learned from studying the [multiple] cases’ (p.248) to inform a problem and enhance practitioners understandings of therapeutic work.

2.7 Summary

This chapter has presented past and current research literature moving through a kaleidoscope of addressing diversity and cultural issues as they arise within Western psychological models, Higher Education Institutions, and counselling services in relation to international students. The rising prevalence of international students and their ongoing challenges as reported in research literature indicate that university support services have yet to fully implement innovative and proactive outreach services aimed at consistently preventing crisis. Although some of the mentioned empirical studies in this chapter have reported results in piloting interventions for reaching international students, they are few and far between. There is also no systematic ‘comprehensive theory’ to bridge the few fragmented empirical studies together in order to apply the research findings into shaping practical organizational development policies and procedures at university/college campuses. Arthur (2004) and Okorocha (2010a, b) have come close in this regard. The overlay of presented research literature therefore sets the foundation for the current research and its expected contribution to knowledge. Chapter three will present the research methodology in depth, and provide an account of how the empirical work was undertaken.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Introduction

The following chapter describes the research methods used within this study, and begins with outlining the conceptual approach to the research, including my own ontological stance, the research design, the theoretical framework from which the analysis took place, the epistemology, and the axiology of the work in the context of the research questions posed. Sampling and recruitment are described in section 3.3, and a more detailed account of the research instruments is reported in section 3.4. Thematic Analysis (TA) methodology is described in section 3.5, and the rationale for the thematic analysis approach is outlined in section 3.6. A detailed account of the study’s validity and credibility with respect to trustworthiness is presented in section 3.7, while ethical considerations are reported in section 3.8. A final section outlining limitations of the research strategy is described in section 3.9, with inclusion of how such limitations have been addressed within the study. Section 3.10 summarizes the overall chapter.
3.2 The Conceptual Approach to the Research

The Theoretical Framework and Paradigm of Inquiry

In assessing a variety of qualitative methods and associated theoretical frameworks from which to analyse my research questions, I have chosen to use a collective instrumental case study design (Creswell et. al, 2007) that operates within a critical theory paradigm (Creswell, 2007; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). In attempting to understand my own ontological stance, worldview, and cultural influences, I began to explore what Guba and Lincoln (1994) outline as ‘paradigms’ or ‘basic belief systems based on ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions’ (p.107). These paradigms arise from three questions of inquiry which include:

‘1. The ontological question – what is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it?

2. The epistemological question – what is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known?

3. The methodological question – how can the inquirer (would-be knower) go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known?’

(Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.108)

These three questions informed my theoretical framework of inquiry alongside my awareness of the ongoing philosophical and methodological issues within qualitative research paradigms in creation of debates around interpretation of findings (Snape & Spencer, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). When comparing the different paradigms of positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, and constructivism (Guba & Lincoln,
1994), as well as addressing my own ontology, I’ve come to understand that I am neither a realist nor a complete relativist (University of Southampton, 2015). My own worldview sits most comfortably as a critical realist – ‘a pre-social reality exists but we can only ever partially know it’ (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.26) and follows the ontology of historical realism that critical theory ascribes to – that ‘virtual reality [is] shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values [which are] crystalized over time’ (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.109).

The epistemology of critical theory is transactional and subjectivist, meaning ‘the values of the investigator [can] inevitably [influence] the inquiry’ (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.110), and the methodology supports a dialogic and dialectical exchange between the investigator and subjects to transform ignorance and inform consciousness. As such, there is an element of advocacy and emancipation for participants’ voices within critical theory that aligns with my aims for completing this research (see chapter one). Being an international student myself, I cannot ignore my own subjective experiences of knowing first-hand some of the struggles and challenges that international students may face. I also have been a trainee counsellor for international students, and have experienced both the joy and challenges of working with international students. I have seen directly the gaps in meeting the psychological needs of this vulnerable group and, as a result, have developed a desire to explore in more depth the challenges and potential solutions that both counsellors and international students describe when working together. I therefore align with what Timulak (2015) describes, in that researchers who follow a critical theory paradigm ‘hope that their values will influence the research and outcomes, and will lead to transformation and empowerment of the participants and the group they represent’.
My ongoing reflexivity in interpreting my findings has been readily included within this research (see Appendix 8) to highlight my own process of becoming and being a ‘transformative intellectual’ (Giroux, 1998, p.213), and to showcase the intertwined nature of holding different roles (researcher, international student, trainee counsellor) and the effects of this in understanding the nature of this particular research inquiry.

The additional paradigms that align with my experiences, and equally inform the theoretical framework of analysis in this study, include pragmatism (Morgan, 2014): a ‘focus on the outcomes of the research – the actions, situations, and consequences of inquiry – rather than antecedent conditions’ (Creswell, 2007, p.22). Different methods, therefore, are used to collect data that best answers the research question(s), and there is a freedom of choice in choosing the methods, techniques, and procedures that best meet the purpose of the research inquiry (James, 1995; Melles, 2008; Creswell, 2007). An advocacy/participatory paradigm is equally held in that as Creswell (2007) points out ‘research should contain an action agenda for reform that may change lives of participants, the institutions in which they live and work, or even the researchers’ lives’ (p.21). As this research aims to understand the issues of working with difference and diversity (in higher education counselling service settings), with the aim of better supporting international students, it follows the advocacy paradigm of helping to create change and make an impact in the real world. As such, this research does provide an ‘action agenda for reform’ within HEIs (Petersen & Gencel, 2013, p.81).
Why Qualitative?

A large majority of quantitative studies have been used to identify the attitudes of international students towards help seeking and support services (Pendse & Inman, 2016; Raunic & Xenos, 2008; Lee et. al, 2014). These have been mostly concerned with gathering information from international students in the form of questionnaires and surveys (Pendse & Inman, 2016; Russel et. al, 2008; Lee et. al; 2014). Although quantitative methodology provides the opportunity to gather information from a large sample of participants, the quality of the information can remain quite limited in terms of its depth. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe qualitative research as:

'[a] multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter...qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studies use and collection of a variety of empirical methods – case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives’ (p.2).

These moments and meanings, gathered from in-depth qualitative research, provide a rich understanding of the subjective experiences of participants’ and how they see the world through their own eyes. The qualitative interview may also be more flexible and fluid, allowing the emergence of novel ideas, meanings, and insights to emerge from the participant throughout the qualitative discussion that the researcher facilitates. Qualitative research provides an avenue of exploration which mirrors Counselling Psychology’s stance towards valuing the subjective experience, feelings, and meanings that clients bring without assuming the automatic superiority of any one particular worldview (Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2003; British Psychological Society, 2000). In being a scientist-practitioner, this approach further synchronizes a similar
process of understanding a client’s process within therapy, and so seems like a natural fit and extension to how I understand my own clients within our therapeutic relationships.

Seeing as this research is concerned with understanding the subjective perspectives of participants from a wide background of cultures and beliefs, a qualitative approach is most relevant in this instance. Quantitative approaches, relying upon survey methods or questionnaires, would not capture the depth of information that is central to understanding the subjective views of international students and counsellors at HEIs in the UK. Moreover, participants do not have the opportunity to clarify the questions posed to them in a quantitative survey, or questionnaire format. The opportunity for this, within a focus group or interview, provides the space for rich dialogue to emerge that facilitates understanding the phenomenon in much greater detail. Many qualitative researchers agree that a more valid, reliable, and true representation of information is gathered within qualitative methodology which represents the views and beliefs of participants more accurately (Silverman, 2000; Hakim, 2000).

Another important distinction of qualitative research designs, is that ‘rather than testing preconceived hypotheses, qualitative and culturally sensitive research aims to generate hypothesis and theories from the data that emerge, in an attempt to avoid the imposition of a previous, and possibly culturally inappropriate frame of reference’ (Stephens, 2009, p.8). Stephens (2009) describes how this involves maintaining a degree of flexibility concerning research design and data collection as well as noting that the analysis process begins simultaneously during the data collection process. This
aspect of avoiding imposing a culturally inappropriate frame of reference from which I interpreted the data, was prevalent throughout my data collection and analysis process. A high degree of reflexivity on my part has been maintained throughout this process to address how my own worldview interacts with processing the information that I am gathering throughout this research (see Appendix 8).

**Why instrumental collective case study?**

According to Creswell et. al (2007), the ‘qualitative researcher faces a baffling array of options for conducting qualitative research’ (p.236). The criteria for choosing the appropriate inquiry strategy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), qualitative approach (Miller & Crabtree, 1992), and design type (Creswell, 2007) has certainly been a long and arduous one for myself. Deciding on the systematic process of evaluating which design best fits in line with my research questions has proved to be of use in my quest to design this research. According to Creswell et. al, (2007), the most widely used qualitative designs within counselling and psychotherapy research include case study and grounded theory, followed closely by phenomenology. Morse and Field (1995) also provide a useful framework for choosing a qualitative design in reference to the type of research questions posed.

My two research questions ask:

1. What are the (potential) challenges that can arise in the interaction of diverse counsellor-client experiences in the context of counselling international students?
2. What are the (potential) solutions in overcoming issues within counselling and between counsellor and client, in order to facilitate mutual understanding and learning for both counsellors and international students?

These two questions aim to understand the particular issue of working with difference and diversity at HEIs which involve supporting a multicultural student body and the associated perceived challenges with this. I am particularly wanting to develop an in-depth understanding of exploring this issue from the perspective of both the counsellor and the international student client. Previous research in this domain has focused mostly upon doing research with international students (Mori, 2000; Raunic & Xenos, 2008; Russell et. al, 2008; Lee at. al, 2014) while less research has been done with counsellors (Shannon, 2014; Woolfe, 1995; Okorocha, 1998) or with academic staff (Bradley, 2000).

A singular perspective, however, can pose limitations in understanding the issue from only one group rather than seeing it from both groups involved in the therapeutic encounter. By using two groups of participants (counsellors and international students) and having multiple participants in each group, I am developing an in-depth understanding about how different cases provide insight into the issue of working with difference and diversity. Understanding both counsellor and international student perspectives on the same issue, provides descriptive information to help develop new directions with respect to meeting the emotional and psychological needs of international students at HEIs. The resulting implication of implementing such new directions may serve to increase the retention, well-being and satisfaction of this
student body population. As such, a case study design which uses different cases to provide insight into the issue is most appropriate (Creswell et. al, 2007).

Baxter and Jack (2008) explain how ‘qualitative case study methodology provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts. When the approach is applied correctly, it becomes a valuable method for health science research to develop theory, evaluate programs, and develop interventions (p.544)’. Following on from choosing a case study design, my second question involved evaluating which type of case study design would be most suitable. Binding the case study within the context of university counselling services was the first step in identifying clearly as Stake (2005) argues the choice of what is to be studied within a bounded system. I chose to look at two groups of participants within this bounded system – counsellors and international students. Yin (2003) and Stake (1995) emphasize the placing of such boundaries on a case study helps to prevent the case analysis from becoming too broad with too many objectives.

Baxter and Jack (2008) provide a useful summary of the definitions and examples of different types of case studies that Yin (2003) and Stake (1995) describe, which includes explanatory, exploratory, or descriptive (Yin, 2003), and intrinsic, instrumental, or collective (Stake, 1995). Yin (2003) also distinguishes between single, holistic, and multiple-case studies. The purpose of the study serves to guide the selection process of case study type and for this research, contained the purpose of comparing between cases -comparing the themes generated between the counsellor and international student groups. Following from this, overarching themes were
constructed from examining the similarities and differences generated between themes in both participant groups in order to further answer the two research questions on a broader scale and provide recommendations of working with difference and diversity at HEIs. As such, an instrumental, collective case study design has been chosen.

Collective case study (Stake, 1995) has been chosen because as Yin (2003) describes, the researcher is exploring differences within and between cases, and the procedures are being replicated for each case (identical or very similar interview questions have been used for all participants). The cases have been chosen to reflect possible similarities within the participant groups (amongst counsellors and separately amongst international students), although care was taken to welcome the larger heterogeneity amongst international student participants and the resulting larger potential for varying responses than perhaps the counsellor participants. It is also one of the reasons why international student participants were interviewed individually while counsellor participants were invited to share their responses within a focus group. Comparing between the two participant groups allowed for an analysis to take place that created space for potential contrasting results to be observed. According to Creswell et al., (2007), in a collective case study, the researcher ‘selects one issue or concern but also selects multiple case studies to illustrate the issue... [in order to] show different perspectives on the issue’ (p.246).

Instrumental was chosen because this case study research ‘provides insight into an issue or helps to refine a theory’ (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p.549). In this context, we are exploring the issue of working with diversity within the therapeutic encounter of
counsellors working with international students. According to Stake (1995), the case is looked at in depth and plays a supportive role to understand a wider issue that is being investigated. Hancock and Algozzine (2011) describe how collective case study research attempts to ‘address an issue while also adding to the literature base that helps us better conceptualize a theory. This design usually involves performing several instrumental case studies in order to enhance our ability to theorize about some larger collection of cases’ (p.37). It is precisely this framework from which the research design is being conducted to understand working with difference and diversity in a therapeutic setting at HEIs.

3.3 Sampling
Participants were recruited through a UK based university counselling service, through a non-profit organization aimed at supporting international students, and through an email list serve for postgraduates at one UK University. One participant was recruited through my academic research network. Recruitment adverts and emails were sent out through these two services. My aim was to recruit a heterogeneous sample of five international student participants covering both genders, and across different cultures, and five counsellor participants who work or have worked with international students. A total of ten participants were recruited for this study. These numbers were chosen because larger numbers of participants would prove to be a challenge in adhering to the prescribed timeline of analysis and would limit the depth of data, while smaller numbers would not provide enough tentative applied generalizations (Creswell et. al, 2007) to answer my research questions adequately. I therefore selected enough representative cases in order to develop an adequate case-based understanding of the researched issue, which supported the provision of
recommendations and new directions for counselling services and HEIs. Inclusion criteria for counsellors included having worked with at least several international students over a series of counselling sessions, over a minimum duration of one year. Exclusion criteria included counsellors who were not formally registered with a professional regulating body, and who had no prior experience of working with international students. The inclusion criteria for international students included having accessed (or tried to access) some form of counselling service in the past at a HEI.

The sampling strategy for counsellor participants involved *convenience sampling* (Braun & Clarke, 2013) due to the challenges in accessibility of finding counsellor participants across a wide range of HEIs who could all meet at the same time for a focus group. As such, counsellors were recruited from a smaller locality that made it convenient for them to meet at the same location and time to engage in the focus group. This smaller locality included four counsellors coming from the same one university counselling service at a HEI. The fifth counsellor had worked in charity based counselling settings with international students within the same city. Self- selection criteria of counsellor participants can involve a varied group of professionals who work within different therapeutic approaches and hold a variety of different levels of experience in counselling international students. This information in heterogeneity of therapeutic approaches and years of experience in the counsellor group was not however gathered due to some counsellors’ presenting with limited availability of time in filling out questionnaires prior to the focus group. Confidentiality issues with disclosing personal information in the presence of fellow colleagues also posed barriers to gather these characteristics during the focus group and have been written
about in more detail in chapter six, section 6.3.1 (study strengths and limitations). I am aware that the dynamics of the focus group may have been influenced by four counsellors knowing one another, which may have affected their experiences differently than the counsellor who did not know the rest of the group.

The sampling strategy for international student participants involved both convenience sampling and stratification (Braun & Clarke, 2013) which refers to ensuring that the sample of participants had a significant range and diversity present – in this case as it related to cultural/ethnic/religious diversity, male/female genders, various ages, and acculturation levels. It was important for me to ensure that diversity was incorporated into the sample of international student participants and reflected a broad range of perspectives. Qualitative research, as Patton (2002) describes, follows sampling procedures which are purposive and aim to provide ‘insight and depth understanding’ (p.230). The cases selected, therefore, are aimed to provide rich data sets for analysis.

Focus Group Participant Characteristics: Counsellors

The focus group participants varied in age and comprised of four females and one male. Four of the participants were working as counsellors at the same HEI counselling service and one participant had previously worked in a counselling role with international students. Some counsellors had varied national/cultural backgrounds and had worked with diverse clients (refugees, asylum seekers) in other work placements. Further counsellor characteristics with respect to age, therapeutic orientation, multicultural competence training, and years of experience were not obtained due to limitations of the focus group format which have been described in
more detail in chapter six, section 6.3.1. I have given pseudonyms to each of these participants when using their quotes to support the findings of the case study analysis.

*Interview Participant Characteristics: International Students*

The interview participants comprised of four females and one male participant. Pseudonyms have been given to each participant when using their quotes to support the findings of the case study analysis. As the interview participants held more heterogeneity amongst the group, I have included brief descriptions of them here:

1) Zara – Postgraduate female student from China who had been studying for three years in the UK.

2) Maria – Postgraduate female student from Portugal who described growing up and living in various parts of the world (Africa, Europe, America).

3) Marco – Postgraduate male student from Mexico who had been studying in UK for four years and described very diverse experiences of being exposed to various cultures when living in different parts of the world (America, Mexico, Europe).

4) Jasmine – Medical female student from Kuwait who grew up in a multicultural family and had been studying in UK for five years.

5) Yolanda – Undergraduate female student from China who was on a one year exchange programme in the UK.

Participants not only varied in gender, age, culture, and length of time spent in England but also on their level of exposure to other cultures having either grown up in multicultural families or having lived in various other countries prior to studying in the UK. These were important factors that were also examined in light of participants’
responses and patterns in themes. In addition, the reasons why participants chose to access university counselling services also varied greatly across the group. These ranged from bereavement, health anxiety, depression/low mood, and academic related anxiety. For further descriptions and characteristics of participants, see Appendix 8 (analysis process reflexivity).

3.4 The Research Instruments

When deciding on which kinds of research instruments to use for a collective case study, I was guided by Yin’s (1994; 2003) notion of case studies relying on ‘multiple sources of evidence’. Deciding, therefore, to use two different data streams to inform the issue under study (interviews, focus group) felt accurate and relevant. I had pondered whether to use interviews for both counsellors and international students or whether to use focus groups for both sets of participants. Both focus groups and interviews have benefits and disadvantages in their use. Interviews provide the personal voice of the participant to be fully heard from their own unique perspective, and provide more in depth information to be outsourced from each participant. Focus groups on the other hand, provide a more collective shared knowledge base to be generated when participants interact with one another in discussing the same topic and perhaps even spawn new ideas in each other which contribute to a rich dialogue from a more shared group perspective. This is what Marks and Yardley (2004) describe as ‘the possibility of analysing how people make collective sense of their individual experiences and beliefs’ (p.50).
After careful consideration of the heterogeneity of both groups, I decided to facilitate a focus group with counsellors and conduct individual semi-structured interviews with international students. My rationale for this stemmed from my previous experiences of counselling international students and noticing the vast heterogeneity present within them, as well as noting how international students are less comfortable talking about their experiences of accessing counselling openly (Bradley, 2000; Lee, 2014). By speaking with them individually, their unique perspective on their experiences of accessing counselling support in a foreign environment could be heard in a confidential and safe environment. In addition, I was not sure whether international students would share similar experiences of receiving support, and therefore wanted to hear their individual stories in more depth than a focus group could provide.

Counsellors, on the other hand, presented less heterogeneity, in that they were all acculturated to British culture and, therefore, were familiar with the cultural and professional environment they were working in. By creating an opportunity for counsellors to discuss their experiences in a semi-structured focus group format, I wanted to hear both their individual and shared perspectives in addition to creating a mutual learning opportunity where the discussion would contribute to their shared understandings of working with international students. For both counsellor and student participants, however, a semi-structured interview process was facilitated that addressed both my research questions. Either identical, or very similar, questions were posed to both groups of participants to inform the context, inform the problem (research question nr. 1), inform the solution (research question nr. 2), followed by two closing questions (see Appendix 4 for interview schedules). In this aspect, I was able
to identify responses from two participant group perspectives on the same topics which provided a rich spectrum of information.

3.4.1 The Focus Group (with counsellors)

‘Being part of research, in a group context, thus potentially results in a different consciousness among participants, and so research can become a tool to foster social change. FGs can also be experienced as empowering – with the sharing of views meaning that people can realise they’re not so isolated in their experience or perspective’. (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.111)

The focus group interview with counsellors lasted 1.5 hours. I facilitated the group discussion around the focus of my two research questions (see Appendix 4 for interview guide). The focus group was audio and video recorded and transcribed for analysis. Video recordings were used to allow for better identification of participants within the group to identify individual participant answers for transcription and analysis.

Marks and Yardley (2004) highlight how the theoretical framework within focus groups can differ from individual interviews, in that ‘meanings are constructed in interaction with others, in specific social contexts, rather than generated by individuals in splendid isolation’ (p. 48). Approaching a focus group therefore requires the researcher to decide on whether the focus is on collective shared meanings generated within the group, or to remain focused on individual responses, and subjective phenomena, through which meaning is generated. A focus group can also ‘[facilitate] the expression of individual ideas, beliefs, opinions, etc. through interaction with others’ (p.48). I chose to focus on the latter, in that I was more interested in individual
participants’ subjective responses. However, I was aware, in my analysis, of how the group environment created shared dialogues and meanings between participants as well. This brought on reflexivity throughout the analysis process (see chapter 4 and Appendix 8), and was further corroborated in my member checking of themes with individual counsellors themselves to ensure validity and trustworthiness as recommended by Baxter and Jack (2008) for case study research. Where participants identified a discrepancy between initial themes, or represented meanings within the findings, they had the opportunity to clarify and provide amendments which were incorporated into subsequent re-writings of the chapter. Reflections on member checking outcomes are provided in Appendix 8.

3.4.2 The Research Interviews (with international students)

*In a qualitative research interview the aim is to discover the interviewee’s own framework of meanings and the research task is to avoid imposing the researcher’s structures and assumptions as far as possible. The researcher needs to remain open to the possibility that the concepts and variables that emerge may be very different from those that might have been predicted at the outset*.

(Britten, 1995, p.251)

The one-to-one interviews with international students followed a semi-structured framework where I asked each participant about their experiences, thoughts, and feelings, in relation to my two research questions (see Appendix 4 for interview schedules). The duration lasted approximately one hour and the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. A semi-structured, or *focused interview* format (Yin, 1994), was chosen in order to provide consistency in obtaining required information for analysis while also remaining flexible and providing an opportunity for participants to respond openly how they wished to the questions posed. This conversational style allowed me to interact with participants in a natural and fluid way,
that tapped into elements of emotional content, not just logic. Marks and Yardley (2004) describe this important aspect of researchers not ‘[imposing] their structure on the story be told, [in which] respondents provide a narrative that is created by way of unconscious, emotive associations rather than conscious logic’ (p.43). My own training in Counselling Psychology aided me in the inquiry of being fully present and open to understanding individual participants’ worldviews while simultaneously holding awareness of my own worldview and critical realist stance during the interview process.

Marks and Yardley (2004) describe skilled interview techniques as involving being a good listener, being empathic and non-judgemental, allowing the respondent’s worldview to come to the fore, and allowing for the exploration of feelings. These techniques were highly important in my research due to the varied experiences of my international student participants. In particular, an exploration of participants’ feelings was encouraged to gain a greater understanding of how participants felt about the issue under investigation. Participants were told of the aim of the research and therefore knew that their responses could contribute to creating an action agenda for change within HEIs to help better meet the psychological needs of international students. This opportunity for a shared advocacy/participatory worldview fostered responses from participants that were rich and innovative in content.

3.5 Thematic Analysis Methodology

Braun and Clarke (2006) define Thematic Analysis (TA) as ‘a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data’ (p.79). Thematic Analysis
(TA) can also provide a straightforward approach to extracting meaning from text that can inform a problem and provide useful insights into its implications for therapeutic practice (McLeod, 2011). Information within collected data sets is grouped into codes which are further developed into larger themes (Guest et. al, 2012). Braun and Clarke (2006, p.87) provide a comprehensive step-by-step guide to doing thematic analysis based on six phases. These include:

1) Familiarizing yourself with your data

2) Generating initial codes

3) Searching for themes

4) Reviewing the themes

5) Defining and naming themes

6) Producing the report

I have chosen to use an inductive approach in my thematic data analysis (Patton, 1990) focused on semantic themes (Boyatzis, 1998), so that findings are strongly grounded in the data itself with the aim of not adhering to any specific preconceptions. Inductive TA aims to generate analysis from the actual data (bottom-up) and is not shaped by pre-existing theory. Braun and Clarke (2013) do however point out that even within inductive TA, ‘the analysis is always shaped to some extent by the researcher’s standpoint, disciplinary knowledge and epistemology’ (p.175). Because of this and to ensure validity, member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the data were completed with interested participants in order to verify their identified core themes and to give them the opportunity to be active agents in the research process. This aligns with my
critical theory epistemology and the participatory/advocacy stance of this research. (See section 3.7 for further details on validity and trustworthiness).

Themes were analysed separately for counsellors (one focus group interview) and international students (five semi-structured interviews), in answering my two research questions, in order to develop a comparison of two group perspectives on the research topic. A comparative thematic map of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) has been generated in Appendix 7 (Phase 5) and three thematic maps are presented in chapter four to illustrate the comparisons between how counsellors and international students both vocalise the issues and solutions of working together in therapy. In producing the final thematic analysis report, similarities and differences were examined across both participant groups in order to generate overarching themes and propose new directions for HEIs and support services to better meet the needs of international students with implications for informing counsellors and academic staff who work with such clients.

The primary analytic purpose for this research is to both explore and compare themes between and within participants and it therefore follows the comparative analysis approach (Guest et. al, 2012). The unit of analysis for purposes of comparison unfolds on three levels: 1) the individual participant, 2) the group of participants, and 3) all participants. As such in the first stage of TA analysis, there is a generation of codes for each participant in the focus group (counsellors) and for each participant in the individual interviews (international students). In the second stage of TA analysis, themes are searched, reviewed, and defined across participants in each of the two groups (counsellors / international students). In the last stage of analysis, codes and
themes between both groups of participants are compared to distinguish any overarching themes across all participants. See Figure 3.1 for this illustration:

Figure 3.1 Flowchart of Thematic Analysis (Comparative Analytic Approach)

Further illustrations of the different TA phases of analysis are presented within Appendices 6 and 7. Although data collection procedures varied in that counsellors views were collected within a focus group, whereas international student views were collected in individual interviews (see section 3.4 for rationale), equal interview questions on the topic were asked of all participants without following a rigid format
of presentation. The consistency of questions posed to each group provided a systematic way of comparing themes between both groups of participants (see Appendix 4 for interview schedules).

3.6 A Rationale for the Thematic Analysis Approach

I chose to use thematic analysis due to its flexibility and theoretical freedom to remain unrestricted in its epistemological and ontological stance, while remaining methodologically sound. Braun and Clarke (2013) highlight how:

‘TA is relatively unique among qualitative analytic methods in that it only provides a method for data analysis; it does not prescribe methods of data collection, theoretical positions, epistemological or ontological frameworks. [...] It can be used to answer almost any type of research questions and used to analyse any kind of data’ (p.178).

This flexibility was important for me given my case study research design of collecting data from multiple data sources and having two different groups of participants.

The three levels of analysis (within groups and between groups) already requires an additional layer of themes, and I, therefore, was seeking an analysis method that would be straightforward and highly flexible. In addition, my TA comparative analysis approach was formed from my desire to find patterns and themes across a data set rather than only look at individual meanings and experiences within a single data item (or case) (Braun & Clarke, 2012). In this aspect, the patterns and themes across data sets aligns with my case study design using TA, and also provides the flexibility to apply my critical theory epistemology within this research more readily than other qualitative approaches such as Grounded Theory (GT) (Glaser, 1992) or Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et. al, 1995) which stem from certain
philosophical assumptions (ex. positivism, hermeneutics, symbolic-interactionism) that influence the ways in which the analysis is completed.

The flexibility and accessibility in TA means that the researcher needs to develop ‘a clear understanding of where [he/she] stands in relation to [the] possible options, a rationale for making the choices they do, and the consistent application of those choices throughout the analysis’ (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p.59). My decisions to use an inductive approach in my data analysis (Patton, 1990) focused on semantic themes (Boyatzis, 1998), with findings that are grounded in the data itself without adhering to specific preconceptions stem from my aim to look at what is in the data rather than bring my own concepts and ideas to the data. I do acknowledge however what Braun and Clarke (2012) claim that ‘it is impossible to be purely inductive, as we always bring something to the data when we analyse it’ (p.58).

3.7 Validity and Trustworthiness

‘Deep personal involvement and passionate commitment to a topic can bring enmeshment, with its risks of distortion, but they can also motivate more thorough investigation and a deeper understanding. Detachment and distance can distort too. Revealing an investigator’s personal involvement and commitments and the process of investigation allows readers to incorporate the investigator’s part in the story into their understanding and to adjust their understanding to compensate for the investigator’s biases.’ (Stiles, 1993, p.614)

As Stiles (1993) points out, to ensure good quality control in qualitative research, the investigator’s ‘personal orientation and personal involvement in the research’ (p.593) needs to be known. I have therefore provided a reflexive component to my analysis (Creswell, 2007) that takes into account my own sociocultural influences which affect the data interpretations through my own worldview. A reflexive representation has been incorporated into my writing in order to acknowledge that my writing is a co-
construction of an interactive process between the researcher and the researched (Gilgun, 2005). This is what Stiles (1993) refers to as ‘Reflexive Validity’ where ‘interpretation is in a dialectical relationship with observation’ (p.612).

A further core component of ensuring quality criteria of my interpretations of data analysis involved the use of member checking (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This involved checking all themes generated within the second stage of analysis with each participant to ensure that participants were in agreement with the generated findings. A written transcription of each participant’s responses (or group of responses for the focus group) along with a draft report of analysed themes was sent. Participants then had the option to respond within two weeks of receiving the analysed themes with their comments and feedback as to the accurateness of themes in relation to their recorded responses. They were informed of this option before taking part in the research. If participants did not agree with generated themes, a reworking of the analysis was completed (see Appendix 8 for more details on the outcomes). Although some authors have pointed to critiques in the use of member checking (Tobin & Begley, 2004; Smith, 1993; Braun & Clarke, 2013), the advocacy/participatory paradigm (Creswell, 2007) throughout my research design played a role in ensuring accurate representation of participants’ individual voices making sure the results were ‘credible and dependable, from the point of view of the participants’ (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.282).

Within critical research paradigms, authors such as Morrow (2005) note that criteria for trustworthiness involves increasing consciousness about ‘sources of inequality and representing the perspectives of those who have been silenced or disempowered’
Research participants therefore are collaborators in the research process and can help to identify potential strategies for change (Patton, 2002). My participants were indeed collaborators in identifying strategies for developing better support systems for international students at HEIs. The implications of their co-created recommendations have been written in more depth in Chapter 6 (section 6.2). This critical research paradigm falls into alignment with Catalytic Validity (Stiles, 1993; Guba & Lincoln, 1989), what Stiles (1993) describes as ‘the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes participants’ (p.611). All international student participants did indeed vocalise their enthusiasm for contributing and for collaborating with me in this research with the aim of helping improve support services for them. In addition, to ensure quality criteria of conducting a good thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke’s (2006) checklist of 15 criteria for a good thematic analysis were followed adequately to ensure a systematic and valid analysis (see Appendix 5).

Assessing the quality of qualitative research is especially important as data is less objective and quantifiable than in quantitative research. Many broad guidelines have therefore evolved over the recent years such as Elliot, et. al’s (1999) guidelines for publication of qualitative research studies, Stiles’ (1993) quality control in qualitative research and Morrow’s (2005) quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counselling psychology guidelines. All these guidelines have influenced the assessment criteria for quality in the following research and have been used readily.
3.8 Ethical Considerations

Given the potentially sensitive nature of collecting data on student participants’ and counsellor participants’ thoughts and feelings of the work they have done together, care was taken to ensure strict confidentiality and encryption of all collected data and anonymity when using participant quotes within the findings. Participants were given pseudonyms in the transcripts however their country of origin was correctly attributed with their understanding and permission. Participants had the opportunity to read information sheets outlining the study, the potential risks of disclosing personal information in interviews, and their right to withdraw at any point during the study without providing a reason (see Appendix 2). Participants also had the opportunity to ask questions regarding all aspects of this research before choosing to participate or not. Signed consent forms were collected from all participants before any data collection took place (see Appendix 3).

The location of the interviews took place within a university setting where four of the international student participants were studying. One of the interviews took place via video conferencing. The location of interviews was agreed with participants prior to the interviews taking place. The focus group took place within a university counselling service setting for ease of accessibility for the focus group participants and a suitable date and time was chosen for all participants. At the start of each interview and focus group, participants were informed of their right to notify me if they did not wish to include any part of their responses within this research. This was also double checked with them at the end of the interview or focus group to ensure participants provided full permission for all responses to be used within the research study.
Participants were also notified that they did not have to answer any questions which they did not feel comfortable with, and that if they didn’t understand a question, to clarify with me openly before responding. All of the research procedures followed the British Psychological Society’s Code of Human Research Ethics (2010) and adhered to the University of Manchester SEED Research Ethics Committee standards. I was ready and prepared to respond to any ethical challenges that may have risen, however no ethical issues emerged and participants fully engaged within the research process.

3.9 Limitations of the Research Strategy

A qualitative approach was chosen for this research using a critical theory paradigm, following a collective instrumental case study design and thematic analysis with the aim to give voice to both international students’ and counsellors’ experiences at HEIs in working together therapeutically. Despite outlining the rationale for the research design and structure, inevitably, there will be some limitations encountered throughout the research process.

Understanding both perspectives of counsellors and international students within the therapeutic encounter raises questions of how to efficiently capture these perspectives equally. I have chosen to use a focus group for counsellors and individual interviews for international students however a more in depth analysis if possible could have included using both individual interviews and focus groups for both sets of participants to collect data both individually and through a shared understanding of the research topic. This would entail a much larger analysis and greater time commitments for the participants both of which pose additional pressures and constraints which were not
feasible in the current research design. As such a more efficient design was conceived to maximise the amount of in-depth data to be collected while managing the time constraints of the research process.

A second limitation which has been noted is acknowledging the differences between both groups of participants. There was significantly more heterogeneity amongst the five international students in terms of cultural differences than there was amongst the five counsellor participants. As such, this created more heterogeneity in international students’ experiences of the interview process than the counsellor group participants. One international student participant for example expressed difficulties, following our interview, with speaking English, which was her second language and not her native language. She described her native Chinese language as her ‘emotional language’ and found it difficult to express her emotions in English as she couldn’t find the right words to convey what she felt. This was something she described within her interview as it pertained to counselling international students. It was noted as an important point within interviewing across difference in that participants who don’t readily use English might be disadvantaged in fully expressing themselves when not using their native tongue. Future research with international students may do well to incorporate the use of interpreters within interviews to account for language difficulties that may be present for some of these students.

Braun and Clarke (2013) make reference to the various issues that may arise when interviewing across difference and the ‘power relationships that shape interviewing’ (p.88). Marks and Yardley (2004) also describe the importance of being aware of how
the interviewer’s own gender, age, culture, and social status affect the interviewee. My dual roles of being both an international student and a trainee counsellor had in my view aided this potential limitation in that I could identify with both groups of participants some commonalities that each group experienced.

There are obstacles to conducting effective thematic analysis which Braun and Clarke (2012) and Boyatzis (1998) describe in depth. Being aware of these potential obstacles prior to my analysis had prepared me better for how to manage these limitations as they arose. I did find challenges on occasion to limit the amount of overlap between themes from both participant groups as they arose in the initial stages of analysis between reviewing themes and defining and naming them. A good amount of time therefore was taken to move back and forth between TA phases 3-5 in order to generate internally coherent and consistent themes for both groups of participants.

Lastly, the issue of generalisability of findings needs to be taken into account with the relative small sample of participants (5 international students, 5 counsellors) in that as much as some tentative conclusions have been drawn from this research, a larger sample size may provide a stronger case for findings being applied to counsellors and international students concerns more generally. The issue of whether qualitative research can produce generalizable results in the first place has readily been debated (Myers, 2000; Benz & Newman, 1998; Stake, 1980), however Falk and Guenther (2006) claim that it is indeed possible, especially if findings from various cases can be reproduced with additional population groups. Replicating this study with additional groups of counsellors and international students may therefore provide additional
information that can support understanding of the phenomenon, and aid generalisability.

Some authors describe qualitative research having different versions of generalisability including *idiographic generalisability* (Sandelowski, 2004) and *vertical generalisability* (Stephens, 1982) which Braun and Clarke (2013) refer to as ‘building and creating deep interpretative analysis from the specifics of the study, which can contribute to wider knowledge’ (p. 281). Another term used in qualitative research is *transferability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) which refers to how readily findings can be applied or transferred to other contexts and groups of people. I have therefore described the current study’s specific context in as much detail as possible with regards to the settings, circumstances of the study and participants themselves so that the reader can decide whether the findings can be applied to other contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

### 3.10 Summary

In this research methods chapter, I have explained the adopted research strategy with respect to the conceptual underpinning of the methodology employed and outlined the full account of the research process. An instrumental collective case study design was used, focused on using multiple data sources including focus group and individual interviews, in order to provide in depth information that would inform the issues of working therapeutically across difference and diversity at HEIs. This data has also been used to suggest new directions and recommendations for how to better meet the psychological needs of international students at HEIs within the UK, and beyond. A
critical theory paradigm provided the framework from which to engage participants collaboratively within the process of contributing information that could create change within higher education support services with implications for reducing risk and crisis within international student groups. Thematic Analysis provided a straightforward and flexible analysis tool that enhanced the different stages of generating themes across two participant groups with the aim of then comparing themes across both groups of participants to inform recommendations of working with difference and diversity. The next chapter presents the findings from the research.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

'I am finding myself becoming fully immersed and absorbed in the data. Like an artist who is obsessed with the ideas that are emerging, I sculpt the lump of data into a coherent story that has meaning and purpose. There is a part of me that wants to rush and just get on with the process, while another part of me wants to enjoy sitting with the data a bit longer, absorbing the truth of what is there. The tension I hold of time restraints pushes me forward to 'just get on with it' and prevents me from fully enjoying the messiness of this analysis'.

(Author’s research journal extract, January 2016)

The above extract highlights my own process of writing this chapter which has been a most fruitful and meaningful part of this research work. In using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six phases of conducting thematic analysis, I found myself holding the tension between reviewing themes and wanting to move on to defining and naming them. This process they state ‘could go on ad infinitum, [and] it is important not to get over-enthusiastic with endless re-coding’ (p.92). The analysis process provided a rich space from which to reflect on the information gathered, further confirming my intentions of why this research is very valuable to me.

I have aimed to present the findings in alignment with my critical theory stance of giving voice to participants’ stories while acknowledging my own values and how they have influenced the interpretation of the findings. I found myself at times aligned
with the identified frustrations of the participants as I recalled how my own life experiences echoed some of theirs. My reflexivity has readily been incorporated into this section and further in Appendix 8 to point out my own inner process throughout the analysis. My additional aim of holding a participatory/advocacy framework to use participants’ contributions to help evoke change within HEIs has fostered the need to represent their voices and views most accurately. Member checking (Braun & Clarke, 2013) of all identified themes was therefore carried out following analysis to ensure participants could review and contribute further to the analysis if they disagreed with what was being presented. Further details on the outcomes of member checking have been described in Appendix 8.
4.2 Thematic Maps of Themes

Figure 4.2a – Challenges of working together (counsellors’ and international students’ perspectives)
Figure 4.2b – Solutions in working together (counsellors’ and international students’ perspectives)

Challenging cultural stereotypes

Bridge building through social work

Counsellors

Difference is a positive resource

The need of acceptance and non-judgement

Proactive community outreach

International Students

Guidelines

Liaison

Group support
Figure 4.2c – Overarching themes (all participants)

- Institutional support
- All Participants
- One size does not fit all: The pluralistic approach
  - Diversity across all people
  - Novice vs. seasoned international students
4.3 Thematic Analysis Themes

4.3.1 Challenges of Working with Diversity

Table 4.3.1a: How counsellors describe the challenges of working with diversity in international students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Group: Counsellors</th>
<th>Research Question 1:</th>
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<td>What are the potential challenges that can arise in the interaction of diverse counsellor-client experiences in the context of counselling international students?</td>
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<th>Group Themes:</th>
<th>Contributors:</th>
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1. ‘A massive mismatch’: The expectations international students bring to counselling | All |

2. Varied patterns of communication | All except Deborah |

3. ‘Don’t rock the boat’: Differences in values | All except Maya |

Theme 1: “A massive mismatch”: The expectations international students bring to counselling

Focus group participants described one of the main challenges that arose in working with international students was the various expectations that they brought to counselling from their diverse worldviews, experiences, and perceptions of mental health, accessing support, the counselling process, and the counsellor. This began with the overall stigma and shame that counsellors reported some international students ascribe to accessing mental health support due to negative cultural stereotypes within their home countries. These negative stereotypes did not foster a positive association
with counselling services which further isolated students to seek it as “a last resort” (Deborah, Sue). The stigma and shame of accessing formal support was described by Andrea:

Andrea: I think they hit that cultural difference thing before they even get here. The stigma attached to seeking psychological help in most parts of the world outside Europe have shame...so I think sometimes people arrive here already shamed just about being here.

Equally relevant was the association that the counselling service was sometimes seen as another ‘education system’ service (Sue) rather than a mental health service and that if students could obtain for example, a mitigating circumstances letter, then it would fulfil their academic service expectation. Sue describes how this difficulty plays out within the counselling relationship:

Sue: They come with a service expectation I think...to service their academic progress in a very particular way, whereas I suppose we like to think of ourselves as wanting to service their academic progress in a relational way, and try to help them manage something that they're finding unmanageable. So the expectations fairly often are quite different.

Seeing the service as an academic service over a counselling service may reduce the stigma and shame of accessing support for international students, but it could also place the counsellor to be seen in a more formal authority position, similar to that of an academic tutor or supervisor. Viewing the counsellor in more of an academic/authority position posed challenges for counsellors who are expecting to work in a relational way with students and who want to foster autonomy through equal collaboration: ‘they might see us more as a type of doctor or authority figure so the collaboration we might look for they might not be on board with at all’ (Andrea).
Placing the counsellor in the same position as that of an authority figure similar to a student’s supervisor can equally create misunderstandings in how students’ may interpret what is being said and why it is being said to them. Sue describes an example of how this happened with one of her client’s:

*Sue: [S]he did sit with her head in her hands one day with me and said ‘I don’t understand how the British think’. And it was only at that point that I went oh, ok, now I see what the difficulty is. It’s that you’re believing that your tutor is telling you what to do and now I’m saying something different. What we’re trying to do is offer you options so you can think it through. But what she thought she was hearing were directions of what she should do.\n
International students who see counsellors as authority, or parent, figures may be less likely to see the therapeutic alliance as one of equal collaboration and would be looking to counsellors to give directions: ‘They’re not seeking equality with us but we might be seeking equality with them and the dilemma can be as therapists do I give them some form of benign parenting?’ (Andrea). Andrea expressed the dilemma of not wanting to be put in a position of authority as she valued collaboration and equality, and discussed trying to resolve this challenge by being upfront with students and telling them ‘I’m not going to tell you what to do’. Despite this transparency however, she vocalized how it is not always effective when working with international students’ expectations: ‘If you’ve got a deep sort of paradigm that adults or authority figures are people who tell you what to do [...], it’s very difficult to shift that just because somebody says I’m not telling you what to do.’ Others in the group dealt with the same dilemma by accepting the expectations of being put into a position of authority. ‘I might not even bother trying to do that [because] I keep going back to that thought they’ve come here to do something’ (Sue). Sue described focusing on helping students to meet their expectations to graduate as a more important priority than trying to change their expectations of her role as a counsellor.
Having certain expectations of a counsellor’s role, extended to also having certain expectations of the counselling process and how psychological models worked in the UK. Noah described this as a ‘massive mismatch’ where different experiences of exposure, knowledge, and assumptions about counselling and therapy played a role in how students perceived what counsellors could offer them: ‘There are differences. There are kind of things to do with culture in the way that psychological help is perceived’ (Noah). Noah also shared that counsellors may not know how international students source help in their own countries. It’s therefore important for counsellors to ask international students about this, with the aim of creating common ground and a common language about psychological issues:

_Noah:_ I think it matters a lot how much they know about our psychological models and the way that we work with psychological difficulties. Speaking for myself I know very little about how people source this kind of help in their home countries.

Not knowing how students source help in their home countries, poses problems in knowing exactly the patterns of expectations brought from different cultures: ‘If you’re going to access psychological help it would be through a psychiatrist in many countries [...]’, so the fact that we’re not psychiatrists can be incredibly disappointing I think’ (Sue).

Working with varied student expectations also meant being prepared for unexpected surprises such as students bringing in family members (Maya), or not being able to tolerate an appointment system (Sue, Noah). Accepting and meeting students’ expectations (especially as it related to providing practical help) was seen as a form of responsiveness that sometimes was necessary and sufficient. ‘They’re then able to manage’ (Noah). This related to the wider depiction that therapeutic boundaries may
change with international students: ‘I can’t have those rigid [...] ideas of the therapy boundaries as I was taught them’ (Noah). Relaxing rigid therapeutic boundaries by engaging in more advocacy work for example (see Theme 8 – ‘Bridge Building’) meant that counsellors’ could thereby win the trust of their clients laying a strong foundation for the development of a therapeutic alliance and conventional therapy to flourish.

Not being able to meet students’ expectations was seen as an additional strain on counsellors’ own psychological wellbeing, one where counsellors where torn between providing a good service but knowing there were limits to what they could actually offer:

*Sue: The expectation is so specific that you will deliver it now. [...] And that’s really quite difficult because of course then it pulls us into a difficult place emotionally doesn’t it? Because at the same time of trying to address that, it also has a personal impact.*

The group discussed the dilemma of whether or not meeting the expectations of international students was the right thing to do. Is it what they actually need or just what they want? ‘It’s like giving them what they want when they want it rather than looking at the process’ (Deborah). Meeting students’ expectations meant that counsellors sometimes would need to compromise on their own desires for what they wanted to do within counselling sessions and be more open to give the student what they were expecting: ‘They might need this, but it isn’t actually what I want right now or what’s necessary’ (Sue). This meant delivering a service that was incorporating the student’s expectations rather than the counsellor’s own expectations and desires, and required a degree of flexibility and openness.
Theme 2: Varied patterns of communication

Counsellors acknowledged the challenges of working with varied patterns of communication in international students. This theme was equally recognised in two of the international students interviewed however it was a larger more predominant topic of interest with counsellors. Counsellors recognized the language barriers international students faced when English was not their first language, yet it was the language used in counselling sessions. These barriers extended to having difficulty with completing routine outcome evaluations measuring a client’s level of distress throughout counselling. Sue described how this impacted one student with using an outcomes measure called CORE:

*Sue: For me it was a real heart sink the other day because a student, an international student was doing CORE and had to get out a translator to do CORE and that, I could feel myself go ughhh...this is going to be really really hard. Yeah the languages. I don’t think the words on CORE are incredibly difficult?*

Recognizing a student’s challenges with both understanding and expressing oneself in English created difficult feelings in the counsellor knowing there may not be the option to work with interpreters or work within the student’s native language. Not being able to use English was also noted to contribute to a student’s barriers towards integration and acculturation in general: ‘[W]hen they don’t have English that’s a huge barrier to them getting any sense of belonging or integrating’ (Andrea).

Language competency has been widely reported as creating barriers and issues for international students (Mori, 2000; Arthur, 2004; Cownie & Addison, 1996). Counsellors who had the advantage of speaking multiple languages could offer this option to their clients which as Maya describes, was readily chosen:
Maya: For me I noticed a significance of language with the clients that I was working with. They happened to be men who had experienced domestic violence by their spouses who were British born and their families. So they came with feelings of isolation of moving away from their families, from the culture that was familiar to them, trying to obtain their degrees. So there was a lot of issues there and Urdu happened to be a first language for them and this is my second language and they actually preferred to speak in Urdu. And some of them quite often referred to me as ‘baji’ which means like an older sister and that was out of respect.

Using the client’s native language allowed Maya to overcome the barrier of having to speak in this client’s second language of English which might create additional difficulties in being able to express themselves in addition to already experiencing distress in other areas of their life. Maya also explained how she felt it was quite ‘natural and accepting’ to accommodate the student in this way and it helped her to ‘enhance the therapeutic connection and engagement’ she had with her client.

Accommodating emotional expression and its variations in presentation was a challenge that was not just limited to linguistic expression. Language was part of it, however non-verbal communication was seen as being equally important to interpret and understand students and what they were wanting to communicate. These non-verbal cues included eye contact (‘[I]t’s important to look at someone when they’re speaking to you,’ Andrea), voice inflections (‘inflections in the voice. Yeah nuances emotional kind of tell-tale signs really,’ Noah), and body language gestures (‘if they’re in front of you, you can see gestures and so on,’ Noah). When these were obstructed through students presenting in face veils (Maya) or having to conduct telephone counselling (Noah), counsellors needed to accommodate the situation and adjust accordingly.
If students lacked showing their distress in counselling sessions, it was more difficult according to Sue to really know what she was working with:

*Sue: If they come very closed down and I can’t see what this is, I can’t get a hold of it in some way or at least understand what the impact is then it’s more difficult. [...] I think I do have more problems with some Asian students. If they’re not very distressed, it’s sometimes difficult for me to read them I think. [...] There’s something about the reticence of showing on your face what’s going on inside that um...if you’ve been brought up in a culture where reading faces all the time is really...hard on occasions.*

Facial cues and gestures were seen as important ways to understand a student’s frame of reference. The varied patterns that international students displayed in expressing emotions (or lack thereof) contributed to the level of challenge with which this understanding took place for counsellors. Noah made reference to ‘there [being] a gap. There is an underlying communication, and we just don’t see it’ implying that communication is not straightforward and encompasses layers of meaning that are not always easily accessible for counsellors to decipher. If students were able to express their emotions clearly, it was easier to understand and connect with the distress of those students which is what counsellors were seeking with their clients. Emotional expression facilitated connection between counsellors and students: ‘It’s like emotional connection is transnational isn’t it? People from...two human beings from opposite sides of the planet can recognize emotion and connect’ (Andrea).

**Theme 3: ‘Don’t rock the boat’: Differences in values**

When counsellors were asked about whether there were challenges that couldn’t necessarily be resolved within the therapeutic frame, the consensus from four of them was that a difference in values at times could create much difficulty:
Andrea: I think the difficult and interesting one can be if you feel that you understand what a client is describing about their family, culture...you understand it but you don’t like it. Like clients who have what I would consider very oppressive and controlling husbands or fathers. And they clearly don’t like it but they’re accepting it and they don’t have many choices as women who don’t. I think that can lead to some very subtle dilemmas.

These dilemmas as Andrea describes create an inner conflict within the counsellor to decide how best to work with the differences in values and worldviews. She describes going through the various options that may be available to her: ‘[Do] you lead someone towards acknowledging how bad they feel and finding a way out or do you lead them in a sort of pseudo religious way to accepting and deferring to these male authority figures and family?’ (Andrea).

All counsellors acknowledged wanting to meet the personal goals of each client in counselling and that meant at times having to just provide understanding and empathy rather than discussing ways to change the situation: ‘not many people say I’ve come here because I want to feel understood. But that’s a lot of what people do want’ (Andrea). This was especially true if the situation could not be changed without the client having to detach from their own cultural or religious practices. A student’s personal goals therefore might reflect the need to just be heard and understood by another, rather than acknowledge and change the situation they’re in: ‘Cause their personal goals maybe needing this. Cause there’s no change I guess. That’s the difference isn’t it? With some international students and some cultures’ (Deborah).
Differences in values were not just attributed to culture but also to religion in how even home students with oppressive religious views could equally pose the same challenge to counsellors as an international student with different cultural values.

Noah: I was thinking it’s not only other cultures as you’ve went on to say because let’s take somebody with very oppressive or what would be to me oppressive religious views. And it’s a religion of this country or something. You’re in a similar dilemma.

Counsellors recognized that in these types of dilemmas, their sphere of influence may not be able to change much in the student’s life if the issue is attached to larger cultural or religious practices that are based on cultural/religious values the student holds as right or wrong. Sue however noted that there is also a fine line where these values and practices come into conflict with human rights issues:

Sue: And I think also cause we’re working for a public body as well, I mean we do come across don’t we...obviously about FGM for example...um you know there are legal and ethical implications for us, safeguarding stuff. I mean thankfully it’s not coming back every week. But some of those are determined by cultural mores. And [...] just on a personal level seem to be about human rights issues but they’re actually also against the law. And threaten the wellbeing of vulnerable people. So they’re always a bit tricky aren’t they?

Such situations as she describes force counsellors into positions of having to make ethical judgements about whether they need to go against a set of values in order to protect and safeguard vulnerable clients at the expense of what the client may believe is right or wrong. Being part of an institution where policies are in place to safeguard clients further reinforces the need to be aware as a counsellor when certain practices are against the law and violate human rights. As such, it is a challenge that holds implications for both the student, the counsellor, and the institution. Evaluating whether there is a need to speak up lays within the ethical judgement of the counsellor and sometimes as Andrea describes, there is a preference to remain silent:
Andrea: I think there are times when I choose not to be fully honest with the client. When I think of what they’re bringing or talking about. Cause there are some issues that they might think or everyone might think is cultural therefore it needs to be respected but I think it’s a human rights issue which is above culture and more important than culture. But I think I opt for the ‘don’t rock the boat’ option because it’s not my job and I don’t get to trouble. [...] Maybe it’s been a good choice [...] to let something go by I suppose. Like if a client is talking about obedience. And obedience for them is a very important thing. To me it sounds like definitely there is a certain pressure and a kind of abuse and... ok I’m thinking that’s my Western values. You know celebrating the individual, everyone is autonomous, and...I do hold those values, I can’t pretend I don’t. But uh, sometimes I have to leave those at the door. If a person want’s to learn to be more obedient than somehow I have to leave my value at the door and help them do that.

Here Andrea is describing the internal struggle of not wanting to ‘rock the boat’ and get into trouble by imposing her set of Western values onto a student who is bringing an issue to counselling that is culturally bound and informed by a value system that is very different to hers. Not being honest with the client is an option that Andrea has adopted in order to resolve the internal dilemma of different value systems and be able to help the client in alignment with their value system and worldview. I can fully resonate with this dilemma having worked with this issue in my own practice with clients and can identify with those moments when our own internal beliefs and worldviews conflict with the beliefs and worldviews of the client we are helping. It is in these moments when the ethical judgements of a practitioner are needed in order to make decisions that serve the client’s wellbeing (Chang & Yoon, 2011; Bergin, 1991). A fuller look at solutions counsellors discussed in relation to this dilemma are presented in the next set of themes in response to the second research question.
4.3.1 Challenges of Working with Diversity

Table 4.3.1b: How international students describe the challenges of receiving counselling in the UK.

<table>
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<th>Participant Group:</th>
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<td>International Students</td>
<td>What are the potential challenges that can arise in the interaction of diverse counsellor-client experiences in the context of counselling international students?</td>
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<th>Sub-Themes:</th>
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<tr>
<td>4. Cultural barriers</td>
<td>All except Marco</td>
<td>4a. Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4b. Cultural stereotypes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4c. Worldview differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Accessibility</td>
<td>Zara, Yolanda, Jasmine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. First level of support only</td>
<td>All except Zara</td>
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Theme 4: Cultural barriers

Certain challenges were more prominent for novice international students over seasoned international students. Cultural barriers was one of those challenges that affected novice international students to a higher degree than seasoned international students. As such, the more seasoned international students Maria and Marco did not face cultural barriers as much as Zara, Jasmine, and Yolanda who tried accessing or accessed counselling for the first time in the UK.
These barriers were particularly strong for Chinese students Zara and Yolanda:

Zara: If it’s my first time to go report, then I will feel it’s very stressful to talk to someone from a very different background.

Yolanda: I think the language and cultural differences would definitely pose some difficulties for the counsellors to help us. I received help from the British counsellors and when I got back to China I went through a really bad period and I received help from a Chinese counsellor. And I felt the difference.

In the above examples, cultural barriers presented difficulties in feeling comfortable accessing counselling support or in being able to provide the kind of help these students were seeking.

For Jasmine who grew up in a multicultural family in Kuwait, accessing counselling in the UK would only create barriers if the issue was culturally bound:

Jasmine: When I compare my experience to my friends, they had issues that were very different. And they were very personal issues that were related to culture. And with their counsellors, they felt that they had to explain like oh yeah in my culture it’s different and that’s why I feel this way. So yeah I do think it’s very dependent on the issue.

Her experience of accessing counselling did not relate to a cultural issue and therefore it was easier to discuss an issue that is recognized more globally such as anxiety. For seasoned international students such as Maria and Marco who were completing their Ph.D’s and had travelled extensively before coming to the UK, cultural background was not an issue in accessing support. Maria felt that ‘diversity doesn’t fit into any one particular box’ and that ‘cultural background does not exist in a vacuum’. Similarly for Marco, he did not identify being attached to his ‘cultural group of friends’ and enjoyed the benefits of living abroad – ‘exploring all these flavours and getting to know the local culture and adapt to that’.
The following theme is now organised into sub-themes of the particular cultural barriers that were reported as posing challenges for international students within counselling, most often for those students that were in the UK for the first time.

**Sub-theme 4a: Language**

Language barriers were prominent for Zara and Yolanda, international students from China whose first language was not English. In particular, Zara who had been doing her Ph.D for three years in the UK, identified that expressing herself in English was difficult as it was not her ‘emotional language’.

*Zara: I’m thinking for many international students especially from...like other language systems which is not like European, Indonesian, um Indian, like this, like from Tibet and Chinese, or like these language systems, it’s not easy for them to articulate their feelings. It’s not easy for them to use English to talk and communicate.*

As counselling relies on the expression of emotions and deeper more vulnerable aspects of the personal narrative from the client, not having the linguistic tools to identify emotions and deeper thought processes would pose challenges for the client as well as for the counsellor to truly understand the clients’ frame of reference. Not having the appropriate language competence meant that the counsellor ‘cannot help with anything’ according to Zara and that those students would need to ‘find a psychological counsellor from the same language background’. If a student’s language competence was not great but comprehensible, then making adjustments to accommodate the student was seen as essential:

*Zara: It’s quite important for the counsellor to be patient and wait you know...(laughs) to let them think and find words! To articulate about themselves. [...]I feel like it’s difficult to understand [counsellors] when they talk too fast or are using too many difficult slangs, and like it’s just not helpful.*

Zara’s point highlights the relatedness with counsellors’ views on the varied patterns of communication that international students bring and the challenge of adapting
linguistically to those different patterns of communication. Having to make such adjustments was an additional skill required of counsellors working cross-culturally and was well received by international students.

In Yolanda’s case, speaking with her counsellor in English gave her courage to speak with her English roommates:

*Yolanda: I had some problems with interacting with British environment because I just didn’t know if I was doing it right, if I was making any friends or if I was active enough in participating after class event. [...] And the counsellor, they advised us to talk to our roommates because our roommates are native British students. And before that I was kind of terrified to talk to them, because I thought those cultural differences are there and my English was really crappy. [...] I didn’t know if they would get annoyed by me? But at that special circumstance I get my courage up and I managed to talk to them, and I had a breakthrough with the relationship of my roommates.*

Counsellors can therefore create powerful bridges for helping international students make contact with other native speakers by facilitating positive interactions within counselling sessions, and also help international students practice and build on their language competencies.

*Sub-theme 4b: Cultural stereotypes*

Cultural stereotypes were seen as barriers when a student’s home country advocated negative stereotypes about mental illness and seeking support. Zara’s example shows how in China psychological counselling ‘is not in their culture’, and that ‘very few people go for psychological counselling’. Growing up with negative stereotypes about mental health and counselling has impacted her own desire to seek counselling support:
Zara: Like I know everyone has stress and things like that but in my culture it’s like if you go to psychological counselling you have serious mental disorders and you are crazy of something like that. Other people don’t trust psychological counsellors too much. It’s something very intangible, and it makes some people from some cultures feel that it’s similar to psyche who...you know deals with those kinds of things. So because we don’t have that culture so we also don’t have that habit to get help from psychological counsellor. And, but it doesn’t mean we don’t have psychological stress and need to get help.

The apprehension as she states of not trusting counsellors and the work being seen as something ‘intangible’ produce ‘barriers and difficulties for international students to get help’. Yolanda, also from China, echoed similar views:

Yolanda: [I]n Chinese culture there is a stereotype about getting counselling only when you’re really seriously mentally ill, then you go to the counsellor. If you’re not, then you don’t go.

Although these stereotypes are persistent and exist, both Yolanda and Zara pointed to the fact that with younger generations of Chinese, this is slowly beginning to change:

Yolanda: It’s because of that Chinese stereotype. I think that’s still true with older Chinese students who are studying in UK right now.

Zara: In Chinese culture we have that [stereotype] but it’s almost absolutely true, like for my parent’s generation, but for my generation we don’t think it’s crazy. We understand that psychological counselling can offer real help. But that thing is still in my culture so [...] we don’t really find it’s a very high demand for us to get psychological counselling.

For Jasmine, negative cultural stereotypes about mental health exist in her home country of Kuwait: ‘It’s getting much disregarded in Kuwait so, there’s no real talk about depression or anxiety or mental health issues’. Accessing counselling was seen as a barrier to her if she would be working with a counsellor from her own home country:
Jasmine: And even if let’s say someone from my cultural background is quite liberal, you automatically have like those pre-set ideas that oh they might judge me or they might think of me that way or this is not appropriate where I’m from. So it does create a bit more barriers. At least I would feel that it would create a bit more barriers if I was talking to someone from my cultural background.

For some international students, negative cultural stereotypes about counselling can create barriers to even access the service in the first place, for others (like Jasmine) it can create barriers towards working with a counsellor from the same cultural background, one who may have culturally very conservative values.

Sub-theme 4c: Worldview differences

This sub-theme relates to how differences in worldviews between counsellors and clients can pose challenges and barriers in provision of counselling services. Worldview pertains to ‘how an individual conceptualizes, perceives, and experiences reality. It is that which is intrinsically valued—how a people give meaning to their experiences and make sense of their world and their place in it’ (Serpell, 2010, p.1043). It can also ‘include natural philosophy; fundamental, existential, and normative postulates; or themes, values, emotions, and ethics’ of a society or individual (Palmer, 1996). This sub-theme was present as a challenge more readily with novice international students like Yolanda who described the differences in working with a British counsellor and with a Chinese counsellor from her home country:
Yolanda: With the British counsellors they were definitely willing to help, but because the cultural differences were there, so they could only help us with the most immediate – with the worst scenario. [...] But after several weeks, when our grief was lessened, and we were just feeling sad, not happy, then their help was not that effective. Because we needed more delicate help. [...] Whereas with the Chinese counsellors, because we have the same cultural background, we growing up in the same environment, so there were some big picture in common with us. So they were able to explain our situation more thoroughly. And that kind of help is definitely more comprehensive rather than just dealing with the strongest feeling. Chinese counsellor has the advantage of dealing with more delicate feelings.

Yolanda’s experience points to the levels of help that counsellors can attend to and the fact that foreign counsellors might only be able to help with more severe crisis levels of distress while more subtle aspects of distress would not be possible due to the cultural differences in worldviews. Understanding the different cultural aspects of distress and how each culture deals with it was something that would be difficult for counsellors to grasp (‘it’s almost impossible,’ Yolanda).

Zara made reference to how worldview was related to acculturation:

Zara: The second thing is the intercultural experience for the patient. Like if they are like for their whole life are communicating with people from the same country, of course they won’t feel comfortable or helpful to talk to another person [from a different country].

Zara’s point reflects that worldviews are fluid not static, and are shaped by environmental influences. Exposure to other environments plays a role in how open a student may be to work with different counsellors. Zara’s own exposure of being abroad for several years from China reflects her changing worldview in relation to communicating with people from other countries:

Zara: But I think now I don’t see...because like since I graduated from high school, I went abroad for like outside of China so I have been abroad like...being internationally around for like around six or seven years. So now I don’t feel it’s a barrier at all, if like he’s from a different culture.
The longer the duration in novel environments, the less the barriers were present to work with counsellors holding different worldviews. Hearing from a very well-travelled international student such as Maria, worldview differences were attributed to political standpoints and how liberal or conservative one was. Her experiences of support within the UK had mixed reviews:

Maria: *I think the only cultural aspect is what I perceive as a certain kind of coldness, or a distance.*[...] *My experience with the NHS was, it was a harsher way of putting things, which I did not have in Portugal, not even in the United States. Here with that person at the NHS I did, it was a certain coldness, or harshness. I interpreted it as harshness, I’m sure that was not her intention. And that might be compensated at the Buddhist centre by the closer political views or the fact that it’s not mainstream. This therapist yesterday is also very formal, but she’s more tactful I think. So she’s more sensitive. So, to what extent these are just personal traits of the people that I’ve seen, I don’t know?*

Maria’s reflection describes the overall pattern that cultural barriers and stereotypes seem to diminish with higher exposure to diverse environments. Differences are then interpreted less so collectively within a whole culture and more so on an individual basis.

**Theme 5: Accessibility**

Accessibility in terms of challenges with accessing the counselling service was a key theme for Zara, Yolanda, and Jasmine. For seasoned international Ph.D students Marco and Maria, this was not a significant barrier. Zara in particular had difficulties with accessing the counselling service on all levels and as a result did not seek formal counselling services but instead sought support from friends who had a background in counselling:
Zara: To me generally I feel like the counselling service given by the university is something which is really hidden there. Like, we all know that there is a counselling service in the university but we don’t know where is it? And we don’t know how to get to it when like, one can be get to the help from the counselling service, and like even wandering around the university we cannot see any sign.

Accessibility was linked with a need for a visible, easy-to-find location that was not hidden from students and was familiar within university campus buildings.

Jasmine: I had to ask someone to find it. [...] I’m running like in the back of a building and pressing like ‘5’ in this old dingy elevator to get to the last floor and then yeah I thought that was uncomfortable...And I feel like when you put it in the back of a building it’s like shameful to go. That you have to like sort of find your way there and it’s like hidden from sight. Something that isn’t talked about that much so I felt like why am I like searching for this tiny office? It should be something that’s open.

Stigma and shame for seeking support was increased when the location of services was not easily visible. Students reported that having an easily visible counselling service location meant that it felt more normalized to seek counselling support, just like seeking other university support services which are more readily visible on campus. This reduced the effort of locating the service and meant there was less hesitation to take the initial step to go there.

Zara: If I need to go to a new place to do the psychological counselling, I feel like I physically need to adapt to a new environment, and it’s something which is feeling insecure about. And I need to be strong in going there you know! (laughs)

For those cultures where negative stereotypes exist about seeking mental health support, reducing accessibility barriers was even more important: ‘none of the Chinese students would be willing to initiate to get that kind of help, so they really need someone else to reach out to them’ (Yolanda). Reaching out was essential and involved good advertising and providing guidance and instructions on how to actually book an appointment with a counsellor. For Jasmine, she equated this partly with luck:
Jasmine: So I knew [the service] was available but I never really got to accessing it. Because I didn’t – I wasn’t sure where to go exactly? And I was a bit embarrassed, really...to like ask people and like try to find out. Um, but then eventually I was lucky, I found like the card that they gave us at the start of the year. It had like all the important numbers. And one of them was the counselling service. So I just called them up and then after that it was really easy to access the services.

However for Zara, her initial attempts to find out how to access the counselling service failed:

Zara: I asked someone back then from GP. [...]Some staffs from GP was like just handing out some application forms, so I assumed that she might understood? Like she might know how to access the counselling service? I asked her, and she also don’t know so I feel like [...] like most people my age just want to try for the help once or twice and if they cannot get it, they won’t try anymore.

In Yolanda’s case, it was a teacher who led her to an informal counselling group for Chinese students:

Yolanda: And that teacher she led us to the tea service so that’s a first time. That without her I’m not sure if we would be willing to get that kind of help.

For international students Zara, Yolanda, and Jasmine, there existed a clear gap in knowing where to find the counselling service although they knew that it did exist somewhere. The barrier of location, and clear guidance on how to book an appointment created difficulties in accessing it readily. Some of these students overcame the barriers (Yolanda, Jasmine), while others didn’t (Zara). This points to the fact that there are gaps in accessibility for international students which could be improved:

Yolanda: I think making that accessible is definitely important element for students, international students. To let them be able to get help, to know where to get help, and to know that it’s ok to get help.

Theme 6: First level of support only

All international student participants excluding Zara who accessed counselling services within the UK reported some dissatisfaction with the level of support given. This had less to do with the quality of the counselling sessions and more to do with
the limitations that the counselling service experienced. Marco for example thoroughly enjoyed counselling but realized it could only help with the first line of support:

Marco: Counselling is now something I just do because I need to talk to someone but it’s not really something that is helping me [...] to channel in a right way all the problems I have. [...] It’s very good up to a certain level. When the counsellors cannot find any further help I think then it becomes kind of like a grey area. Because um, there’s nothing else they can do you know to channel you or to help you.

More in-depth support such as providing longer term sessions and dealing with more complex long-standing issues was not available to students. They each felt that the sessions were a good starting place for support however counsellors were not able to provide more in depth guidance or help that extended to a student’s greater needs.

There is currently a widening gap of service demand and adequate service provision with many counselling services often reporting limited resources (Stallman, 2012; Storrie et. al, 2010; Woolfe, 1996).

Providing limited sessions was attributed to a lack of time and an overcapacity to see a large quantity of students. In Jasmine’s experience she had received only three counselling sessions for her health anxiety:

Jasmine: So then I went to her and had two sessions with the other [counsellor]. Um, and she just directed me to towards contacting the NHS for like getting my own therapist somewhere else...because time is limited. [...] I didn’t feel it was enough. I felt that they were so stretched with time or like they were so busy [...] that they didn’t really have time to really delve into my issues.

Students wanted to receive more sessions within counselling, however were frequently advised to seek further support through their GP’s and the NHS. Limited sessions provided limited capacity for students to really understand psychological models and practice given strategies within such a short period of time. In Maria’s case, she
described her encounter with the counselling service as an abrupt and confusing experience:

*Maria:* My first encounter with the counselling service was a bit abrupt because I was very depressed and I didn’t quite know how they worked. Someone who saw me there said ‘oh no no no, you’re too depressed, you have to go see a GP. And in the meantime here are some- go attend the meditation classes and here are some recordings for you to listen to, to help you fall asleep’. I was like what? What is mindfulness meditation? And self-acceptance? And compassion towards yourself? It took me some time to understand it because if you are depressed you’re trying to change your condition.

An ability to know how to use the concepts provided within counselling was essential, and this required time to discuss in depth and allow students to practice and provide feedback. When time limitations prevented counsellors from offering this to students they felt it wasn’t any better than finding self-help resources online:

*Jasmine:* [I’d] like to have more sessions and to feel that rather than just giving me some pieces of paper with techniques on them, I would of liked it more that we discussed the techniques in more depth. Because that’s the same thing as me going online and finding those resources if that makes sense?

Due to the limited capacity of the counselling service to only offer a first level of support to students, much confusion and further stress resulted in having to seek alternative ways of coping and finding support. Students expressed frustration with having to wait extended periods of time to access support within the NHS: ‘I know that the NHS can take ages to like finally get it. It’s like six months and I felt I can’t suffer for six months and not get anything!’ (Jasmine). Marco in particular felt that counsellors should have more ability to advocate on behalf of students to access alternative support services faster:
Marco: You have no next level in the counselling services. But when you’re referred to the NHS, you face like this waiting list...and sometimes one might find a way to cope with the stress and just like try to survive. But, if I think of others, they had to go seek private therapists, they’re paying like a lot of money and stuff. It’s just something not everybody can do. [...] It could perhaps provide this next level...the counselling service should be more connected or entitled to provide this referral.

Other students dissatisfied with waiting months for NHS access resorted to seeking self-help material (‘I just went, found my own book and it helped me’, Jasmine) or turned to private therapy (‘I decided to start seeing a therapist privately’, Maria). Maria had tried all forms of support- counselling, NHS, private therapy, and even a Buddhist centre service. Because students could only access a limited amount of support from academic counselling services, and because not all of them felt they could wait 4-6 months to access NHS services, and because not all could afford private therapy given their academic fees and lack of full time income, this created a ‘gap of support’ for them where they felt stuck and not able to move forward. Maria comments how this delay in services impacted her studies and her wellbeing:

Maria: So it has had an impact on when to return to my studies. [...] It puts a strain on me psychologically because at the time when I’m trying to cope with the stress I’m...it gives me less hope that I will, that I can overcome the problems as soon. And also puts a strain financially. And I’m also just very opposed to the trend of nudging people to go privately. So for all sorts of reasons I don’t like it.

Maria, like Jasmine was able to find alternative sources of help however this came with personal costs of finances, time, and psychological stress. For students who are not as skilled in finding alternative sources of support, increased risk factors exist: ‘There’s like this big gap between the next level and the public services. The student might get lost there,’ (Marco). In particular, for first time international students or students who are not acculturated into the UK environment, attempts to seek support may be limited: ‘If it will create more problem for international students then like we might not make so much effort to get to the help,’ (Zara).
These concerns can equally be present within home students, however as home students are more likely to be familiar with UK support services, seeking alternative sources of support may be easier for them. In relation to the previous themes of cultural barriers and accessibility issues arising for international students, the additional challenge of a limited amount of support being available within counselling services may further exacerbate the risk factors commonly reported in international students (Ebbin & Blackenship, 1986; Popiaduk & Arthur, 2004; Lin & Yi, 1997).

4.3.2 Solutions of Working with Diversity

Table 4.3.2a: How counsellors describe solutions of working with diversity in international students

<table>
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<th>Participant Group: Counsellors</th>
<th>Research Question 2: What are the potential solutions in overcoming issues within counselling and between counsellor and client, in order to facilitate mutual understanding and learning for both counsellors and international students?</th>
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Theme 7: Challenging cultural stereotypes: Home and foreign

Counsellors responded to meeting the challenges of working with diversity in students by challenging cultural (or religious) stereotypes through ongoing awareness within their therapeutic work. One of the core ways of doing so was to not make assumptions about other cultures, their own culture, or how other cultures may perceive the counsellors own cultural context and worldview. Sue describes how asking the student questions aids her in the process of understanding the student’s frame of reference in this regard:

Sue: I think I learned quite early on to try and not make assumptions talking about the same thing. So I will ask quite often tell me about that, tell me how you’re finding you understand that. Particularly if it you know involves a religious belief or I don’t know, relational practice of some kind. If I’m not confident I understand it at all, I think I do ask quite often just explain that to me, tell me about that.

Building self-awareness of recognizing biases or assumptions about home and international students can take time and experience. Deborah describes how it took her ‘a while to really realize how much this shame of not achieving academically really can impact somebody from another culture, surely’. Her view points to the truth of international students often experiencing pressures to achieve academically (Bradley, 2000) due to greater financial and relocation investments, and the immense disappointment when this endeavour fails - something that wasn’t apparent initially but became very evident and important to understand as she began working with this group of clients.

Noah described a similar incident in learning from mistakes about assuming that a client from his culture and background might be more similar than one from a different culture:
Noah: The mistakes that I’ve made that I can think of relating to this point when I’ve got somebody from the same country and cultural background, and then I think I know something more than say one of my colleagues would, and get it completely wrong. Because it’s not that – you can’t make those assumptions. You need to check everything out. And I think that’s just good practice with everyone no matter where they come from.

Noah’s experience highlights the fact that culture and diversity is a complex phenomenon and assuming that some clients will be more alike to their counsellors due to shared national/religious/cultural background is a false conception. Andrea described how she made this same assumption with an American student whom she thought would be similar to her due to their shared English language:

Andrea: I’m remembering an experience I had with a [...] postgraduate student and it was a real awakening. [...] He was a client who spoke English and I think because of that I made a sort of tacit assumption that we were ‘the same’ someway. He was about 6’4”, Black guy from Southern States of America, South Carolina I think. And, when he came in the room and in the whole session I don’t think I’ve had a sense of being with such a different person. Different...than with anyone from any parts of Asia, or Africa or really anywhere in the world. He felt so ‘other’ to me. His background and his manner and his style [...]he spoke English so I had this assumption that we’re sort of vaguely the same and we’ll understand each other. [...]But I had a real sense that he was very, very much a foreigner to me.

Andrea describes how biases and assumptions about national/cultural background can be false and lead to surprises in the counselling room. Her description highlights how cultural identity is not necessarily the best predictor of social cohesion, understanding, or shared values (Werbner, 2005).

Challenging stereotypes of one’s own culture and foreign cultures through questioning, not making assumptions, and obtaining feedback on how both counsellor and client understand a particular issue were seen as key elements in aiding counsellors to work with diversity. An ability to challenge certain cultural practices and rituals
was seen by Andrea as an equally valid and needed intervention, especially as it related to encountering differences in values where the student’s wellbeing was at risk:

*Andrea: The other thing of course to remember is I challenge my own culture all the time. Little and big ways. So if I can challenge my culture hopefully, we’re all able to challenge all cultures. […] All cultural values are just sets of conventions that people adhere to. Some of them are really really bad for some people. So just because something’s cultural it’s easy to say we must respect it but you know I don’t respect everything about my culture so…it has to be okay to challenge things about all other cultures as well. Not that I’m brave enough to do so I have to say…but in theory.*

Andrea’s remark that she’s not brave enough to actually challenge all other cultural values even though she does so with her own culture, reflects the vulnerability and courage that doing so would entail. As counsellors are keen to develop strong therapeutic alliances with their clients as it relates to the philosophy of counselling and counselling psychology (Bugental, 1964; Cooper, 2009), challenging cultural, religious, or relational practices in this way may be a risk to the therapeutic alliance. The international students interviewed in this research strongly vocalised acceptance and non-judgement by the counsellor (see Theme 11) as a very helpful aspect of overcoming barriers to seeking help. Challenging different value systems students bring may therefore be in conflict with this need of acceptance and non-judgement, however the counsellor would need to decide *when* it may also become a barrier *not* to vocalise such differences. Discussing differences between counsellor and client as it relates to their culture, nationality, social class, or value systems is a risk as Sue points out that in some cases may be necessary:
Sue: I think sometimes you just take a risk don’t you? Cause you can’t always be sure about whether it’s going to be helpful or not. I can think about a young British man of Caribbean origin who...the narrative was about being oppressed by his managers and the local staff here, who was a white middle aged woman [...] And I can remember at one point thinking – I have to say something about this because here I am as a white older middle aged woman with some authority, because he’s come for help. So I felt I had to say something about that to acknowledge that situation. [I]t’s very hard to know whether that was the right thing to do or the wrong thing to do.

Sue’s comment that it’s difficult to know when to take such risks with students reflects the uncertain nature of working with diversity in clients. Counsellors make decisions based on their own ethical judgements of a situation as it arises with each client and this may vary from person to person reflecting how there is no ‘model’ way of working with diversity.

**Theme 8: “Bridge building”: Social work\(^1\) acts as a bridge for psychological work**

This theme was an important part of the focus group discussion and was based on counsellors sharing their experiences of how they’ve used social work skills to help international students on a practical level in many instances, thus resulting in enough rapport being developed to then introduce psychological work. Noah initiated this topic with his own experiences of how he utilizes this within counselling practice:

*Noah: [A] lot of the things that I try and do is bridge building. So they start off coming for very practical things […] they might come for a letter or they might come for some practical thing about their course […] So my starting point is yes I’ll do all this practical stuff, and my agenda in doing that is to build enough rapport that we can then do some psychological work.*

\(^1\)Social Work as defined by counsellors in this study pertains to practical work that has been undertaken with international students in the form of writing mitigating circumstances letters, providing guidance on transition issues, and liaising on behalf of students with other support services.
Taken from his previous experiences of working with asylum seekers on trauma, Noah reported that initiating trauma work required trust, safety, and alliance, something that had to be developed initially through showing care and concern. Practical work was a vehicle to show this care and concern to a client:

*Andrea:* It says you were communicating your kindness to them.

*Noah:* Yeah and to show that somebody cares. Without that how are they going to ever tell me about what they've experienced?

*KW:* Yes I’m hearing that that rapport building...

*Noah:* Is absolutely essential.

Practical work or ‘social work’ as counsellors referred to it, was an essential element in how they began working with many international students. It served many purposes including: meeting students’ expectations of receiving help in many different forms, which developed enough trust and safety for them to then be able to discuss more vulnerable topics, showing care and concern, developing rapport and a good therapeutic alliance, reducing the stigma of counselling being seen as only a place to deal with mental illness, and helping students meet their academic goals for graduation.

For Maya, the social and practical work took particular priority over psychological work when her client’s safety was at risk:

*Maya:* I felt where a lot of work was done on my part was helping them to find places of safety because they [...] didn’t know how the system worked here. And in terms of how to contact the police or welfare services. How to change their mobile numbers. And so all of this additional work came which I suppose is what was talked across about looking at the histories of the individual and having to prioritise what is more urgent here? That person’s safety? And then therapy came secondary to that.

Prioritising a student’s safety over psychological work involved reducing risk for students, and was seen as an important element for how counsellors worked with international students. Andrea discussed the important factor of ‘separation’ and how
international students are “all experiencing separation. It’s one of the uniting things they must be struggling with’. Awareness of these potential risk factors was prominent in counsellors’ assessment and formulation stages of counselling which as Sue describes, began from the moment she met her client:

*Sue: I think I’m more aware of the context – you know the physical context they’re in. You know they’re in this university, in the city, away from their families. Um, so probably more aware of that then I’m sure I am for some like you pointed out, some home students. But I think it’s much more present from the off, from the minute they walk in or probably from the minute I collect them from reception and go, ok.*

As international students may present with additional risk factors than many home students including culture shock, homesickness, social isolation, and lack of developed social networks (Mori, 2000; Arthur, 2003), counsellors reported being aware of these additional factors and the additional pressures these students face. They equally were aware that some students ‘come with a very limited repertoire of skills, and knowledge, and ability’ (Sue) which required some of them getting ‘skilled up’ (Sue). Sue in particular talked about her increased obligation to help international students through provision of social work:

*Sue: [T]hey’ve come here to do something very specific which is get their degree, and international students have done it at a huge personal or family cost. [...] And I feel a real obligation to do whatever we can to help them with that. Even if we can’t address psychological problems in any depth but it’s making sure the GP is reviewing, it’s making sure that their accommodation stuff is sorted out, it’s making sure the whole tutor is aware. You know if that’s all done, then their chances of doing what they came to do go up.*

Knowing that provision of practical work would lead students to accomplish their academic goals thereby increasing their wellbeing was a key motivating factor for counsellors like Sue to provide the social work and not think she was ‘wasting her time or think it was inappropriate’. Such forms of responsiveness helped to meet
students expectations which was identified as a challenge counsellors frequently encountered with this student group (see Theme 1). This level of responsiveness to be flexible and adapt to what international students were asking for was seen as an essential component to create attachment within therapy:

Andrea: It’s what as you’re saying, creates a rapport, creates an attachment through which the therapy can happen. But that responsiveness ideally has to be tuned to the kind of responsiveness they’re looking for. They might not want empathy, when they might actually want a letter, or re-direction or responsiveness asking to tune into what they’re seeking.

Counsellors therefore frequently needed to be flexible and adaptable with international students more so than home students because as discussed their wide variety of expectations and varying levels of acculturation required different forms of responsiveness. Other mentioned ways counsellors supported international students practically involved ‘mapping them in the academic/social system’ (Sue), helping them maintain their support networks at home through Skype (Andrea), and learning about their background and culture through questions in initial sessions (Sue).

**Theme 9: Difference as a positive resource: Liberal vs. conservative values**

Seeing differences as a positive resource captures the solution of embracing the benefits of working cross-culturally across all forms of diversity. This theme was prominent with both counsellors and students and was readily discussed in relation to the values within individuals and how these are shaped by exposure to cultural values throughout life. Andrea made reference that on many occasions, international students prefer working with counsellors from a different culture to their own:

Andrea: I think it’s quite common for a lot of international students and clients to want a therapist who is not from their culture. That’s very common. [...] They want someone who has a different frame of reference.
This in effect was a little surprising for me to hear as there is much research which supports the notion that a shared cultural or religious background creates more cohesion and understanding amongst clients and therapists (Lee et. al, 2014; Helms & Carter, 1991; Lopez et. al, 1991; Farsimadan et. al, 2007; West, 2011). Having said this however, there is a very important factor that counsellors reported which was also reflected further in students’ views. This had to do with the cultural values that many international students felt they had to adopt:

Andrea: They sort of feel like they have to fall into these cultural values that they might not want or like. Whether it’s someone from the same culture.

Noah: Absolutely. Well they’re going to be pigeon holed. That this person from my culture will pigeon hole me. They know about me so I’d rather not...(laughs).

What Noah and Andrea reflect here is the judgement that can come from certain conservative cultures when a student’s issues or values are not in alignment with the values of their home country. Working with a counsellor from the same culture may be problematic if that counsellor would stereotype the student’s values as having to follow that of their home culture or more so would adopt those cultural values within advising or assessing the student’s issues. Students therefore may feel embarrassed or ashamed to talk about certain issues with such a counsellor:

Deborah: [It’s] a shame thing I suppose. They come from the same culture, what are they going to think of me if I tell them this?

Andrea: Or will they gossip about me? If it’s a very small culture where they come from.

Seeing a counsellor with a different frame of reference, would therefore be more advantageous for the international student than one who adopted the worldview of the student’s home culture.

Not being attached to any preconceived ideas about cultural or religious values meant that the counsellor could see the client first as a unique individual:
Sue: I used to do a lot of work with Catholic nuns and priests and they – I’m not Catholic, but they wanted, they didn’t want to work with a Catholic. They wanted to work with someone who I think would see them first as people. And secondly as Catholics, you know. [...] Some very basic need to be seen as you first.

This statement highlights the importance of clients wanting to be understood within their own personal narrative of meaning and individuality. Sharing a religion or culture therefore does not necessarily mean that two people will have equal values. A client’s deep desire to be seen for who they really are rather than what their culture or religion says they should be highlights the mismatch of people not always accepting and agreeing with the environmental values that they are born into. Counsellors therefore have the unique opportunity to see clients for who they really and to reflect that understanding with the clients they work with. This can be summed up in Maya’s point:

Maya: [Y]ou stay with the client’s frame of reference – that really applies to all clients regardless of whether they’re international students or not. But about, getting to know them as unique individual beings. And developing that therapeutic relationship.

Maya’s point about staying with the client’s frame of reference signifies the need for counsellors to readily step into the worldview of their client and operate from that perspective rather than solely from one’s own frame of reference. The professional values and ethical principles of counselling and psychotherapy readily train counsellors to adopt such practices when working with all clients (Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2003; Joseph, 2008; British Psychological Society, 2000). This can be especially significant when working with diverse clients who are operating from a different frame of reference to the counsellor’s. The counselling relationship therefore can be for many the first relationship that acknowledges a client’s unique individuality and frame of reference within the context of feeling safe, accepted, and valued.
4.3.2 Solutions of Working with Diversity

Table 4.3.2b: How international students describe solutions of working with diversity in receiving counselling support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Group:</th>
<th>Research Question 2:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International Students</td>
<td>What are the potential solutions in overcoming issues within counselling and between counsellor and client, in order to facilitate mutual understanding and learning for both counsellors and international students?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Themes:</th>
<th>Contributors:</th>
<th>Sub-Themes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10. Difference as a positive resource: Liberal vs. conservative values</td>
<td>All</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. ‘I do better when I feel empathy’: The need for acceptance and non-judgement</td>
<td>All</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 12. Proactive community outreach | All | 12a. Guidelines  
12b. Liaison  
12c. Group support |

Theme 10: Difference as a positive resource: Liberal vs. conservative values

This theme continues within the international student participant group and was shared between both counsellors and students. Students reflected equally similar views as counsellors in relation to liberal and conservative values, and discussed the importance of working with a counsellor who espoused liberal values. The term ‘liberal’ here refers to respecting or accepting behaviour or opinions different to one’s own and being ‘open to the reception of new ideas or proposals of reform’ (Oxford English
Dictionary, a. 4.b). For first time international student Yolanda who was doing an exchange year, working with British counsellors within group counselling meant feeling accepted within the country of UK:

_Yolanda: We were homesick and it’s only two month that we are in the UK so we were not sure if the UK people, if this new environment was accepting us? That was still doubt existing there. So when we were receiving help from Native English speakers we felt like we were being...at least I felt like I was being accepted by the English culture. [...] And that made the exchange period [...] really easy to get through. Because we were having a leap interacting with British cultures. And we felt better with the fact that we’re in the UK._

Such experiences are not uncommon (Yoon & Portman, 2004; Merenkov & Antonova, 2015) for expats and foreigners who are seeking to integrate into a new environment. Connecting with locals who are supportive, accepting, and can offer guidance provides better integration and acculturation for foreigners (Sandhu, 1994; Pederson, 1991). Such advantages were seen to be preferable over seeking support from a counsellor from the student’s home country: ‘if we only accept help from the Chinese speaking side, it will alienate us from the UK environment. I think that might happen’ (Yolanda).

Seeking guidance from local counsellors helped increase a sense of belonging and adaptation for international students and reduced social isolation, homesickness, and culture shock:

_Marco: From my perspective I think it’s useful that [my counsellor] is not from my background. Because that also helped me to cope with the local kind of culture and the way of seeing personal problems or academic problems within the university culture. [...] She has helped me to understand how the UK culture perceives when you have like personal struggle. Cause culturally for me it’s hard to accept that I’m struggling._
Marco’s statement reflects the liberal values within England of accepting struggle as normal, whereas within his home country of Mexico, struggle is not as readily accepted: ‘my background is just like – forget about the struggle and keep moving you know?’ The importance of Western liberal values fostering autonomy, acceptance, and normalizing mental health issues were a primary reason why international students sought support of counsellors who were English and who they associated with having liberal value systems:

Jasmine: Like in Kuwait, if I was having a personal issue, I wouldn’t want someone from my cultural background to talk to. Because like I have this idea in my mind that like people here are more liberal, more understanding. And I’m not like putting my culture down but like they tend to be more conservative. And I’d be a bit more embarrassed to talk about the things that would be worrying me. So yeah. I felt quite fine having someone from this cultural background.

What students were describing had less to do with diversity in culture and more to do with diversity of value systems and how these are shaped by cultural environments. Those international students who experienced more exposure to diversity through their own travels and contact with foreign cultures espoused more liberal value systems that were accepting of different perspectives. They sought these same value systems from their counsellors and peer relationships:

Maria: Probably it depends more on the political views, and how conservative you are. How interested you are in travelling, even if you might be rooted in one place. My sister and my brother when I first left thought ‘How can you do it? [...] How can you possibly move elsewhere?[...] And I have friends who are also very rooted and would not be able to live anywhere else. And they’re not very open to different cultures, different foods even. And I have friends who have travelled a lot more and are more interested. I felt that a lot depends on you know the acceptance of others. A lot depends on how conservative or to the left they are.

Both students and counsellors therefore recognized the positive aspects of working together across differences. They were aware of how cultural values can either limit or liberate someone depending on how conservative those values were and how
attached they were to them. Exposure to diversity and different perspectives was seen as a positive resource for both students and counsellors as it expanded acceptance of a wide variety of perspectives and worldviews.

In addition, mutual learning can take place as Zara describes in her experiences of seeking support from her multicultural counsellor friends:

Zara: *Because sometimes they can really give a different perspective. And, if you are talking to a person from the same culture, then you might look at the same thing from the same angle. [...] Like for example if we’re friends in my culture and if you have any kind of thing you say to me, I will just absolutely support you no matter if it’s good or bad (laughs).*

Although Zara did not access formal counselling within the UK, she was open to working with a counsellor from a different background realizing she might need some adjustment time: ‘if it’s someone from a very unfamiliar cultural background for me, then I will still feel a little bit...I need a little bit of time to adjust and adapt to connect to that person’.

**Theme 11: ‘I do better when I feel empathy’: The need for acceptance and non-judgement**

All international students interviewed felt it was important to be received by their counsellors with acceptance and non-judgement. This was valued as being more important than the cultural background of whomever they were working with:

Zara: *I will choose a nice person instead of depending on the background. [...] Like if that person is very friendly, nice, and non-judgemental, then I would just – like if I feel good about that person I would just go for it. And I really don’t reject to go for someone from a different country or culture. [...] Being judgemental is like the most unhelpful for me.*
Acceptance and non-judgement was associated with students being able to freely discuss their issues and have these issues be received with understanding and empathy:

Jasmine: Um, I found it really helpful to talk to them. Because um, even though I talked to my friends about it, it’s different. So like, having a professional to talk to, I felt that they were really non-judgemental. So like if I say something and I feel stupid saying it, they’d be completely accepting of it. They wouldn’t like give me like looks. You know when you talk to your friends sometimes they’re like ‘no that doesn’t make sense’. But for them, I just felt comfortable telling them about how I felt and what I was going through. Um, and yeah they seemed to care – that’s the good thing.

Jasmine’s point reflects the essential ingredients within the formation of a good therapeutic alliance (Safran & Muran, 2000; Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003; Horvath & Luborsky, 1993) and the non-verbal cues that counsellors utilize to show acceptance, care, and empathy including eye contact, facial expressions, body language, and empathic listening. Showing kindness was equally important: ‘it’s good to have someone that is listening and is attentive and is objective in what she says’ (Marco). These reflections provide examples of the deep need to feel understood and to be accepted as a unique individual by the helper: ‘it’s more of a feeling that they understand, or they can relate to what I’m trying to say in a non-judgemental way. In a way that’s not too harsh or cold’ (Maria).

Maria, who had experienced receiving help from several different professionals throughout her life equated empathy as a key ingredient for positive outcomes in her therapy. She examines the experiences of receiving help through an NHS psychologist when empathy was not felt:

Maria: My experience at that time with the NHS psychologist...it was somewhat helpful, it was not very helpful. [...] People can feel everything and I didn’t feel a lot of compassion, empathy, on the part of the psychologist. [...] It felt a bit theoretical. She was speaking to me from the principles, the theory behind it, which I knew for the most part, not all of it. I mean there were some insights that I gained. But maybe it’s my personality? I do better when I feel empathy.
Empathy and what Rogers labels as ‘unconditional positive regard’ (Raskin & Rogers, 1989) was seen as more important than theoretical concepts or principles. Maria questioned whether empathy was supposed to be provided within the therapeutic relationship (‘I’m not sure if it is supposed to be part of counselling or psychotherapy or psychological support to actually provide an emotional support? Maybe it’s not and maybe [it’s] my perception’) indicating that clients are not always aware of what role the helper is supposed to adopt and whether their expectations of counselling/therapy are realistic. Maria’s previous experiences of receiving empathy and acceptance from other counsellors and therapists however validated her need for it and the safety that it provided as she described in her encounters within a Buddhist centre:

*Maria: He’s extremely empathetic and his role is to from what I’ve understood which I think the first couple of times I knew it was working but I didn’t know how. And because I’m used to the analytical understanding of things, it was difficult to grasp what was working, how it was working. And from what I understand is, when you talk about what is bothering you or you know so it’s discomfort or pain or anger or whatever it is, and you sit with it, and during that time he provides a safe environment for you to do it.*

**Theme 12: Proactive community outreach**

A proactive community outreach was rated as one of the most significant themes from all international student participants. This theme resolved the challenges of cultural barriers preventing some international students seeking support in the first place as well as helping students to transition into other forms of support within the community. The term ‘proactive’ signifies the need for initiation from support services to meet students in the community and not wait for them to come to the counselling service. This was especially true for first time international students who were not familiar with the host country environment or students whose cultures stigmatized accessing mental health support:
Yolanda: In Chinese culture there is a stereotype about getting counselling only when you’re really seriously mentally ill, then you go to the counsellor. If you’re not, then you don’t go. [...] Almost none of the Chinese students would be willing to initiate that kind of help, so they really need someone else to reach out to them.

By taking the initiation to focus on prevention of crisis and familiarise students with the available support services on campus, students reported being less likely to fall prey to mental distress:

Yolanda: Tell them we have this [service] and there’s nothing wrong to come to talk to us if you have any trouble, anything you feel sad about you can just book our service and come talk to us. It’s really okay. And I think that will really benefit Chinese or even all the Asian students because the Asian students are really not working with the counselling service.

The term ‘community’ signifies the need for academic and support services to work together in liaison rather than in separation. Participants spoke of there being a lack of communication amongst academic supervisors and the counselling service and that this form of liaison would help international students alleviate the impact that their distress was having within their supervisory relationships and within their respective school departments:

Marco: Yeah there’s also this part where I think that counselling should be able to raise some issues with the university about particular problems with students. [...] I’d like to see for example a follow up with the counsellors and supervisors for example. [...] And I think that there is an area of opportunity with the counselling service. If they can talk to each other regarding particular cases, I think they would team up in a very strategic area of improving the overall process of Ph.D student’s wellbeing.

Equally important was liaising with other support services on campus (‘there’s not enough connection between the different services,’ Marco) as well as provision of advocacy on the student’s behalf to make referrals to the NHS or other charity support services (‘the main factor for me at this particular point would be to make the services more accessible. More than making them more culturally accessible’, Maria).
When students were faced with the task of seeking further support on their own, they reported this to be taxing on their already distressed state (‘it puts a strain on me psychologically when I’m trying to cope with the stress, Maria) or were confused as to where to find it (‘we all know it’s existing there but we all don’t know where it is?’, Zara). The obvious choices of NHS or private therapy as reported in Theme 6 (First Level of Support Only) were not always viable due to waiting times (‘I couldn’t wait any longer!’, Jasmine) or costs associated with provision of service (‘it’s like something not everybody can do’, Marco). As such, students either: 1) turned to friends to resolve their difficulties - ‘I have friends who are also psychological counsellors, so sometimes like when I have problems, I just find it’s easier to ask her directly’ (Zara), 2) turned to self-help resources – ‘I found this one book that was like basically CBT. And I just followed that rather than going through actual counselling’ (Jasmine), 3) sought further counselling help from a home country counsellor – ‘with Chinese counsellor [...] they have all their questions structured and they know how to pose questions to me, and really guide me to express my feelings, and to process all these feelings’ (Yolanda), 4) waited for the NHS – ‘My , counsellor referred me to the GP, the GP referred to go to the self-help services...and I’ve been waiting for that referral since September’ (Marco), or 5) looked for charity support options – ‘while I’m waiting I actually went to see someone at the Buddhist centre. They also have therapists there’, (Maria).

This theme has been further divided into sub-themes of 1) Guidelines 2) Liaison and 3) Group Support to highlight the specific interventions and recommendations participants discussed that would facilitate a proactive community outreach.
Sub-theme 12a: Guidelines

Participants expressed the need for clear guidelines to be given ranging from preparation of international students for the challenges they will need to overcome studying abroad, to how counselling works and how to access the available services. Guidelines were seen as cornerstones to prevent psychological distress and crisis in the first place. Maria for example highlights how students need to be informed about potential challenges and how the education system works in the UK:

Maria: I just wish that departments, academic departments would involve lots of international students [...] that they would be more aware of and more prepared to deal with the challenges that are in Britain, [...] It's prior to people seeking psychological support. You know some of these could be dealt with more...proactively. And could actually prevent [that] amount of stress.

KW: What would be more proactive?

Maria: Have more guidelines in place.

Maria’s recommendation indicates that not all guidelines are the responsibility of the counselling service per se. Dissemination of guidelines about what to expect studying in UK can equally be allocated to academic departments to share with students.

Informing international students of potential challenges such as culture shock were seen as being very important:

Yolanda: I was struck really hard by this second culture shock because I didn’t know it was there. I’m not sure if it’s part of your responsibility to inform those international students about the second culture shock? I think it would definitely help them if you let them know what they have to deal with. [...] When I look back I thought it would be really easier if there were somebody to guide me. [...] I went through that culture shock with a lot of difficulties and maybe even did something wrong.

Culture shock is an especially high risk factor for distress in first time international students such as Yolanda who are arriving from countries that are very different
culturally than the UK and then having to return home where they often face reverse culture shock (Bradley, 2000; Thomas & Althen, 1989).

It was clear from several students’ responses that better guidelines on accessing the counselling service were needed:

*Zara:* And like in the first week or something like that just inform every student, like if you need help just go to that office. We have this office in our building and there could be some systematic process that you need to go through like appointment and things like that. But at least, let us see where it is. Rather than just say, oh we have it. If you need help, find us please.

Students felt embarrassed asking for information on the counselling service themselves (‘I was a bit embarrassed…to like ask people and like try to find out’, Jasmine) and some like Zara therefore gave up in trying to find it: ‘[if] going to find a psychological counsellor is going to create more problems to our life then, you know we just try to adjust by ourselves’.

Guidelines were also seen as necessary for helping students within counselling and with relapse prevention. Jasmine in particular felt that more comprehensive guidelines would have been useful both within the counselling sessions of how to apply CBT interventions, and following her sessions which she had to find in a CBT book:

*Jasmine:* Like the book really gave me a comprehensive approach to like tackling anxiety. So it said everything the counsellor said, but it just gave me tables to follow. […] So I felt like finally I can organise my recovery rather than having someone telling me things that like my mom would tell me. […] very helpful advice but difficult to follow through with I think.

The need for counsellors to provide more in-depth guidelines on how students can build on what was discussed in counselling sessions and point them to specific resources to do that following counselling was seen as a necessary duty of care to follow through:
Jasmine: If they get more resources than I think it should be fine cause then they can go into more depth. And maybe having like more of a comprehensive guide to treating yourself after the therapy. Because the therapy just gives you that motivation I think, but ultimately no one can solve your problems except yourself. So just giving people the resources, so knowing what books to look at rather than saying ‘oh yeah there’s a book on health anxiety, you can find it’. It’s better saying like yes there is this book and that book that you can look at.

KW: So very specific kind of guides.

Jasmine: Just even being more specific would help.

Sub-theme 12b: Liaison

Liaison and interconnectedness between different support services within higher academic institutions was expressed as being helpful by participants which included academic staff, counsellors, and administrative staff working together cohesively to support international students. Marco for example felt strongly about counsellors and academic supervisors working more closely together to support student’s wellbeing:

Marco: If you team up counselling with the supervisory committee that would make a lot of sense. And in terms of not just managing all the academic issues but also the professional development of the student. [...] [The counsellor] should be able to communicate, of course in a very confidential way, with the academic branch and be able to like channel all these problems in order to team up and help the student.

In instances where such a liaison was applied as in the experience of Yolanda, who received group counselling for Chinese undergraduate students, the results were very effective. A collaboration between university counsellors, academic teachers working with Chinese students, and the students themselves provided a safe space for Chinese students to share their struggles and interact with academic and counselling professionals in one place:
Yolanda: They have a room booked beside the library – it’s a regular meeting spot for the language students. So we went there and there were tea and cakes already and teachers were waiting for us and their faculties from counselling services were there as well. [...] The teachers and faculties will initiate the question ‘How do you feel?’ ‘Are you sad?’ That’s quite direct questions to really get us started. Once we started talking, we will keep talking.

Yolanda’s experience may have been unique and not all universities can offer such an in-depth approach that involved teachers, counsellors, an informal safe environment, and a proactive approach of reaching out to groups of students. Nonetheless, it was effective in her feeling accepted and understood: ‘and we see them helping like that, not only help us with the fact that we lost a very close friend, but also help us feel that we were being accepted in British culture’.

Involving academic staff in liaisons with counselling services may help to also train supervisors and lecturers how to better interact with their diverse student population. Maria spoke of there being a lack of cultural awareness and sensitivity within her academic department:

Maria: Departments like mine where...I mean we don’t have undergraduate students but the masters students are overwhelmingly from an international background. [...] And sometimes there are many, there are some staff that make quite insensitive, culturally insensitive comments as well. [...] It comes from the culturally different background but it’s like ‘well he can’t write, he can’t write English’. [...] I mean it didn’t happen to me but it happens a lot with Southeast Asian students.

The implications of this liaison could therefore provide a greater opportunity for international students to be supported not just within their counselling relationship but also within their supervisory relationships. The supervisory relationship for graduate and postgraduate international students can equally pose challenges if cultural awareness is missing from supervisors which may result in misunderstandings and miscommunications (Bradley, 2000; Cortazzi & Jin 1997; Cadman, 2000).
Sub-theme 12c: Group Support

Group support was discussed by Yolanda and Zara indicating that for less seasoned international students or students who are experiencing culture shock, group support is beneficial for helping with adaptation and integration:

Yolanda: And in [group counselling] environment it’s easier for us to open up and talk about things we don’t understand. And we feel more comfortable to ask those questions and show our naivness in a British environment. And it’s really good opportunity for us to get to know the British environment and it helped us with other problems as well...

In Yolanda’s case a group approach was even more appropriate as there was a shared crisis amongst the group of exchange students she was within:

Yolanda: I felt that the group service could help more because you’re not the only one talking. [...] It’s always easier to get through something like that with friends, with someone who shares the feeling rather than yourself.

Group counselling has been used with international students (Dipeolu et. al, 2007; Carr et. al, 2003) and has been shown to be quite successful (Yakunina et. al, 2010). My own experiences of running workshops with groups of international students on culture shock and adaptation challenges echoes the fact that international students benefit greatly knowing that they are not alone in their acculturation struggles and that they can find others within a group who are going through similar difficulties. This was equally reflected by Zara who described interacting with other international students:

Zara: It’s really a good feeling that you talk to a person from far far away, like a very different place and... that person also have similar feelings or experience and you feel ok so we are trying to like make sense of these kind of things together. We all are trying so it’s really good.
Zara’s reflection illustrates how counselling, especially in a group setting may benefit international students to learn about different perspectives and embrace diversity and different points of view while recognizing shared values and experiences amongst each other.

### 4.3.3 Overarching Themes

This next section describes the two overarching themes that were developed from comparing and contrasting themes and codes across both counsellor and international student group participants (see Figure 3.1 & Figure 4.3). The overarching themes address the two research questions from a larger more expanded viewpoint and propose conclusions and recommendations for how to better support both counsellors and international students at HEIs.

#### Table 4.3.3: Overarching Themes

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching Themes:</th>
<th>Contributors:</th>
<th>Sub-Themes:</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| 13. One size does not fit all: The pluralistic approach | Counsellors and International Students | 13a. Diversity across all people  
13b. Novice vs. seasoned international students |
| 14. Institutional support | Counsellors and International Students |  |
Theme 13: One size does not fit all: The pluralistic approach

This theme relates to the notion that working with diversity requires an approach which is equally diverse and accommodates multiple perspectives and flexibility when working with clients. Cooper and McLeod (2011) have been advocating for a ‘pluralistic approach’ within counselling and psychotherapy practices and define it as ‘the assumption that different clients are likely to benefit from different therapeutic methods at different points in time, and that therapists should work collaboratively with clients to help them identify what they want from therapy and how they might achieve it’ (p.7-8). Indeed, the pluralistic approach was described by both counsellors and international student participants as helpful, noting that there is no one right answer or model to working with diversity within people, and that flexibility to adapt to each client was essential: ‘It’s like thinking on my feet all the time...you know where are we? Where are we up to? So it’s very...I suppose flexible and responsive, probably’ (Sue talking about working with international students).

Counsellors discussed instances of being pluralistic in deciding for example when to discuss differences (worldviews, values, cultures, beliefs, etc.) between them and their clients in sessions:

Sue: That’s a hard one I think...but if I know it’s – if I’m aware that it’s getting in the way of me, what I think I’m understanding, then I will say something quite actively about it. Um, but that assumes an awareness doesn’t it?

Andrea: It’s not always appropriate to say the thing I think, it might get in the way, or declare to cover something else.

Noah: I can’t see that being much different than in any question you’d have about counter-transference really? Sometimes it’s going to be useful and sometimes it will not.

Deborah: I suppose it’s like you were saying how much does it get in the way of understanding? Is this a barrier here? When to bring it in when it's appropriate?

Andrea: Hmmm and when to leave it?
The fact that there were a variety of responses from counsellors indicates that counsellors trust their own judgements to be flexible and adapt to the student’s needs and their own views of what is appropriate at different points in time. This very same topic of discussing differences in sessions created an equal amount of varied and pluralistic responses from international student participants demonstrating how different students respond differently to the same intervention:

Zara: I’m happy if they learn about my background, but if they really say out something which I can see they’re judging me then I don’t feel comfortable anymore.

Yolanda: I think it might be helpful if these differences, acknowledgement of differences was brought up in an effective way. Like if it’s brought up with the intention of making us feel better, and if it’s phrased properly, that might help.

Maria: In my mind it would trigger a lot of questions. Of why are you bringing this up? [...] And I’m afraid it could become a topic of discussion in itself as this person might have a problem relating to other people who don’t have those...so adding to my psychological profile.

Jasmine: Well I found it important that they understand that I came from a different background. And that I’m coming to a completely new country and it’s a bit confusing and scary for me. So as long as they acknowledged that I felt it was fine. But anything else I didn’t feel was really necessary.

International students had different responses of what interventions would be helpful for them depending on their own values, the issues they brought to therapy, and their own expectations. As such, a pluralistic approach to working with diversity was regarded to be the best fit for how to meet the needs of these diverse clients (Cooper & McLeod, 2011).

This theme is now further divided into sub-themes of 1) Diversity across all people and 2) Novice vs. seasoned international students to further account for these two distinctions within the pluralistic approach of working with diversity.
Sub-theme 13a: Diversity across all people

For counsellors, diversity existed as a spectrum spanning across all students they worked with - both home and international students. They frequently commented on how challenges with international students could equally show up in the same way with home students:

Andrea: I think also one of the big differences is not necessarily nationality or race. It can be levels of privilege or not. So if you get someone from the Congo who’s had an extremely privileged life travelling around their fathers and their diplomatic service who be less other than someone from working class Bolton. To me personally. Less different in a way so money is a big factor. You know, race and nationality not necessarily the biggest ones in creating a sense of difference.

Diversity was therefore seen beyond the scope of cultural or religious differences and included as both Andrea and Noah mentioned levels of privilege:

Noah: I worked with people who have been in mining communities and generations of poverty basically. It’s exactly the same there. They have as much an idea of what counselling is as someone from the Congo.

Levels of privilege were seen to create different expectations within home students that brought similar challenges to counsellors for how to work with those expectations:

‘we struggle with it sometimes with very privileged young people here too don’t we? [...] There’s something about the expectation that they will be attended to in a very particular way’ (Sue).

A student’s own level of exposure to diversity and novel environments was also a key factor such that certain home students coming from small towns in the UK might struggle more with adaptation in a bigger city than international students who had experienced more cosmopolitan lifestyles prior to arriving in the UK:
Noah: The same story with an English student who comes from the widening participation and hasn’t been seen for a whole year. [...] He was so socially anxious...no way of relating to people around him.

Andrea: He was probably less at home here than say someone from Singapore might be?

Noah: Might be. Yeah, according to how much exposure they have to different cultures here.

Issues and challenges that were commonly faced with international students could equally be faced with home students according to counsellors: ‘the same issues appear in all sorts of ways in other groups’, (Andrea). These included ‘attachment issues’ (Andrea) that students may struggle with and bring to counselling as well as ‘communication issues’ (Sue) within the therapeutic alliance that create barriers in understanding.

Sub-theme 13b: Novice vs. seasoned international students

Throughout this chapter, it has been noted that international student needs and risk factors varied according to the heterogeneity within international students. Although common patterns were identified across the entire sample, student responses varied to some degree in accordance with the levels of their own exposures to diversity and novel environments.

Those students within the sample who had a higher level of exposure to diversity and difference (including previous life experiences of living in foreign countries), had less acculturation stress and barriers to accessing counselling (Marco and Maria). Novice international students such as Yolanda, and to a lesser extent Jasmine, who had never lived abroad prior to studying in the UK, had higher risk factors associated with culture shock, and adaptation:
Jasmine: Because even though I came from a multicultural background, it was still a shock to come to University. I did a foundation year before, but it was international students. So I always felt comfortable, like always 100% comfortable. They were in the same boat as me. But then when I came to University, and everyone knows Britain (laughs). You know like they are British, they know how the culture works here. They know where to go eat, they know how to manage their daily living. And I just came to University and it was a bit of a shock for me, as an international student. Um, and since I think that was like one of the causes of my anxiety, it definitely came up like during the discussion.

Accessibility barriers were present for students who had not accessed counselling services prior to being in the UK (Jasmine, Zara, Yolanda) as it was a novel experience for them (See Theme 5). These barriers further increased if students came from cultures were counselling was stigmatized:

Zara: And you can see there are certain kinds of beliefs or like cultures for international students. For some groups of international students, and when there are still difficulties to get access, like to find the psychological counselling in the university, so nobody going to go there.

It is important to note the interplay of different factors that can increase risk for international students such as: previous exposure to diversity and counselling services, cultural values associated with mental health support, and levels of acculturation (Ang & Liamputtong, 2008; Akhtar & Kroner-Herwig, 2015), for they highlight how novice or first-time international students may need a greater degree of support and proactive outreach targeted at prevention of crisis and preparation for the challenges of studying and living abroad.

**Theme 14: Institutional support**

The final theme relates to a comprehensive solution of needing support at the institutional level for both counsellors and students. Counsellors and students both agreed that provision of resources to support services including financial resources
would benefit the services in a multiple of ways including an increase in emergency funds to support students with unexpected crisis:

Noah: There is an emergency fund but it’s very small and it’s very hard and it’s not terribly...it doesn’t respond all that quickly. [...] So just very basic things like you know funds to support people through [crisis] and respond very quickly I think would go a long way.

Increased financial resources could also provide expansion of service locations to be more accessible and visible to students, as well as be able to hire more staff to see more students:

Jasmine: I feel it’s a good service but it needs more resources. Like it’s a huge university, why do they have this tiny office in the back of a building? [...] Like it’s so tiny, they only have like 10 counsellors or like 12 counsellors from what I’ve seen. I felt like how can they manage do you know what I mean? Like the counsellors themselves were probably feeling stressed! So I felt like they—it’s a really good service but it needs to have more resources.

Provision of increased financial resources to the counselling service and expansion to a higher staff –student ratio could provide opportunities for longer term support if it was needed, something that many students expressed was a challenge (see Theme 6):

Maria: Here at the university, it’s a very helpful service. But understandably they cannot provide long term support so they try to direct people in the right direction. [...] They say themselves that they can only see you about every 3 weeks and not for a long period of time. So just for a few months because they have to see so many people.

Besides financial resources, better liaison with other support services was needed. The academic services responsible for managing an international student’s transitions into university were often not fulfilling their requirements which created gaps in proper orientation and preparation for international students as counsellors reported:

Sue: Why aren’t students who arrive here late, international students because of Visa problems, why aren’t they dealt with? And given a proper induction? Rather than just – here’s your timetable and off you go. So there are a lot of stuff like that which really irritates me that could be managed so much better.
Sue’s comment points to the many instances of counsellors having to step in and provide the ‘social work’ that should have been managed through other academic departments to ensure a smooth transition for students. This was undoubtedly frustrating for counsellors as they were taking on work not necessarily in their remit of counselling:

*Sue:* I find that a lot of the things that come to us at the minute should never have got to us. Because they’re about...they’re about managing the transition. Lots of things that we do are about the transition not being managed well. And I think there are other places at university who can much better deal with that.

Instances of counsellors having to take on advising or advocacy roles on behalf of students meant that they were not always being supported at the institutional level to ease the varied amount of practical problems that could have been dealt with through other academic support services. The proactive community outreach that international students requested as a solution to the varied challenges they experienced involved a focus on prevention of crisis and a multidisciplinary approach that involved various stakeholders. There were significant gaps reported within certain British universities of academic and support services not working cohesively. Counsellors therefore were limited to some extent as to the kind of support they could provide to international students which as Ph.D student Marco explains created roadblocks:

*Marco:* Because uh, the way I see, it’s just like they’re struggling with the student together and uh...yeah it’s just like a straight line. And they cannot bend to the academics or bend to the social, to the NHS or...they’re just following and they’re completely alone and disconnected.

Helping international students throughout their whole journey – preparation before they arrive, thorough orientation when they arrive in the host country of how to prevent crisis, connection with local community support, and adequate help with transition to
other mental health services would help to bridge the gaps that are currently present within higher academic institutions as reported by participants here.

4.4 Summary

In alignment with my critical theory stance, I have aimed to give voice to my participants’ stories truthfully and coherently while acknowledging how my own values, personal experiences, and worldviews may have influenced the inquiry. Member checking (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 282) has provided participants the opportunity to be co-collaborators with me ensuring that their respective experiences are represented accordingly. My ongoing reflexivity throughout this thesis has been included to further validate the transparency through which the analysis took place. The analysis has gone through the six stages of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with repeated cycles of searching and reviewing themes before moving on to defining and naming them. The overarching themes capture the larger salient aspects of understanding how to move forward with supporting international students and counsellors alike within HEIs. In the following chapter I move on to a more conceptual synthesis and integration of the findings in order to discuss the implications of identified themes and how they fit into current research literature. Taking into account the smaller scale of the research study, findings are not generalizable to develop substantive theory or conclusions however potential new directions are discussed in light of developing recommendations for addressing the current gaps in supporting international students within counselling services which draw upon case study research applicability in real world contexts (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell et. al, 2007).
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I move into summarizing and integrating conceptually the implications of the findings and how they contextualize within current research literature. I have organised this chapter according to my two research questions and thematic analysis maps to present comparisons and contrasts between both participant group responses on identified challenges and voiced solutions. This chapter, therefore, begins with presenting challenges of working cross-culturally from both counsellor and student perspectives, followed by participants’ own views of how to overcome these challenges to foster solutions. The last section of this chapter follows the aims set out at the beginning of this project in providing recommendations and new directions for HEIs with respect to enhancing the international student learning experience, and meeting their specific needs within counselling and support services.

Unlike many theoretical and empirical papers which present only challenges of working with international students, followed by the author’s own recommendations (Chen, 1999; Sandhu, 1994; Arthur, 1997; Ramachandran, 2011), I have set out to give voice to the participants’ own views as they align with my critical theory.
epistemology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), and advocacy/participatory stance (Creswell, 2007). The proposed recommendations are therefore co-constructed with my participants as their voices and views have been included within generating these new directions from the research findings. Moreover, member checking (Braun & Clarke, 2013) has further allowed participants to provide confirmation on the basis that they agree with the presentation of the themes. If there were discrepancies, they were able to voice and clarify their original meanings which were accounted and amended into the final chapter presentation (as described in Appendix 8). As such, this chapter builds upon the dialectical exchange between the investigator and subjects as it presents within critical theory epistemology. My reflexivity throughout this chapter has been incorporated to account for how my own values and worldview have also shaped the interpretation of the inquiry.

5.2 Counsellors’ identified challenges of working with international students

The challenges that counsellors identified in working with international students echoed much of what has been reported in the literature in terms of international students bringing diverse expectations to counselling (Shannon, 2014; Snider, 2001; Arthur, 2004), having varied communications patterns that counsellors need to adjust to (Carr et. al, 2003; Arasaratnama & Doerfel, 2005), and clashing value systems (Shannon, 2014; Okorocha 2010b; Snider 2001). I will elaborate on each one separately and contextualise this within the current research literature.
5.2.1 Diverse expectations

The heterogeneity within international students meant that counsellors were having to work with very diverse expectations that international students brought regarding the counsellor’s role, the counselling process, and the desired outcomes of counselling. These expectations began with acknowledging the stigma and shame that some international students placed upon accepting the fact that they needed counselling support and the effects this had on their level of accessibility and engagement within the counselling process. This challenge has been widely reported in previous research findings (Ang & Liamputtong, 2008; Bektas, 2008; Hechenova-Alampay et. al, 2002; Pederson et. al, 2002) and has been a key factor with international students experiencing social isolation, homesickness, and crisis situations before they decide to access help (Arthur, 1997; Oropeza, et. al, 1991). The role of the counsellor varied in the eyes of some students who came from more traditional Confucian worldviews of counsellors embodying authority in providing guidance and direction over fostering autonomy and equal collaboration. This was apparent with some international students placing the counsellor in an ‘expert’ position of authority which some counsellors described as being uncomfortable for them. Essandoh (1995) describes this commonality within African students, for example, and the expectations of authority that African students have of counsellors as experts due to the hierarchical structure of African societies.

Counsellors voiced students bringing different expectations towards the counselling process including how they understood psychological models according to the Western paradigm of help-seeking. Not necessarily knowing how they sourced help
in their home countries meant that counsellors had to equally learn from their clients in order to find a shared understanding of psychological issues. Arthur (2004) points out how it is important for counsellors to develop culture-specific knowledge of international students including the utilization of community resources and learning directly from international students themselves. This especially is important as it relates to the differences between individualist Western cultures and collectivist cultures such as African and Asian cultures (Baily & Dua, 1999; University of Nottingham, 2011; Essandoh, 1995).

Responding to the varied expectations of international students, posed dilemmas for counsellors in terms of meeting those expectations. They questioned whether this was appropriate and had mixed personal reactions as to how to make these decisions. They also acknowledged the notion that not all expectations could be met and that there were limits as to what they could actually provide for students within the service model. Most importantly, there was consensus within the group that a degree of flexibility was important in terms of how to work with international student expectations and knowing what boundaries needed to be in place to foster a healthy alliance and good service provision. Similar views have been voiced in other studies by counsellors working with international students (Shannon, 2014; Siegel, 1991).

5.2.2 Varied communication patterns

Language barriers have readily been reported to create difficulties with integration and adjustment for international students (Arthur, 1997; Shannon, 2014; Popiaduk & Arthur, 2004; Ang & Liamputtong, 2008). From the counsellors’ perspectives,
language differences meant that international students equally struggled within counselling sessions to fully understand and express themselves. As most counselling services in the UK use standard outcome measures in the English language to measure distress, this posed challenges for how counsellors delivered these outcomes measures to those students who were challenged with understanding the rhetoric and semantics of the measures. One counsellor (Maya) was able to offer her services in another language and found that this helped to strengthen the alliance and foster more engagement on the part of her client. These aspects support the findings of Spencer-Rodgers and McGovern (2002) who discuss the role that intercultural communication competence can play in reducing prejudicial attitudes and discrimination towards international students.

Counsellors needed to accommodate varying levels of English language proficiency in international students as well as varied presentations of non-verbal communication. Looking at non-verbal communication within their international clients provided additional sources of information they could use to help them understand their client’s frame of reference and interpretations. These included eye contact, tone of voice, voice inflections, and body language. Challenges with understanding varied patterns of emotional expression arose, as well as difficulties, when emotional expression was withheld. Understanding varied emotional expression can be problematic as Okorocha (2010b) for example highlights that ‘African and Asian students, (especially new arrivals) will avoid looking at someone they consider older or professionally superior straight in the eye during a conversation’ (p.48). The reticence to show emotion in some Asian cultures has also been documented by counselling scholars who ascribe
this to collectivist values of restraining emotional expression to maintain group
harmony (Oyserman et al., 2002; Chang, 2001).

5.2.3 Value differences

Value differences presented the most difficult challenges for counsellors to work with, especially if it encroached onto human rights issues that jeopardized the safety and wellbeing of the student. Counsellors discussed internal conflicts as to how to respond in situations where students were asking for help that went against a counsellor’s own value systems, such as learning how to be more obedient which Andrea described as a form of oppression in her worldview. The duty of care that is required of counsellors to safeguard against risk, meant knowing when boundaries have been crossed and when a counsellor needs to protect a client over accepting their practices and values. Snider (2001) also expressed this same dilemma of ‘value-conflict stress’ (p. 81) arising for interviewed counsellors, as did Wong et.al, (2013), suggesting that this is a serious dilemma that counsellors continue to be faced with. As this ties into the larger discussion of Western psychological models adhering to a particular Western worldview that values individualism and personal autonomy (Rai, 2009; Fish, 2010), it may be difficult for counsellors to operate from a completely different model of helping as it would require a different kind of psychological approach altogether.

It is surprising that the challenge of ‘value-differences’ has not been more readily present within research literature. Current research refers to differing value systems between counsellors and international student clients (Arthur, 2004; Leong & Chou, 2002; Shannon, 2014), predominately within a surface level, and negates diving into
deeper and more serious dilemmas that value differences may present to counsellors who work with more extreme cases. One study that has looked at this dilemma more seriously, as it presents within provision of patient-centred care within the US, is Fiester (2012) who explored cultural conflict—'when the values and priorities of the patient and his or her family are in direct opposition to those of the clinical team’ (p.20). Searching for common values that might provide a bridge between patients and providers who are in deep cultural conflict was seen as a potential way forward. Further research which explores these dilemmas in real world clinical and counselling contexts (with the aim of finding resolutions) is deeply needed.

5.3 International students’ identified challenges of accessing and using counselling services

International students presented challenges for accessing and using counselling services that mirrored much of what counsellors reported. For example, the noted challenges that counsellors discussed of managing varied international student expectations, adjusting to different communication patterns, and working with value differences – these were echoed by international students within reported challenges of cultural barriers that included stereotypes of counselling and mental health, language barriers, and worldview differences. These challenges were more prominent for novice international students who had not been as exposed to diversity as seasoned international students, as well as those students who came from cultures with traditional conservative value systems. These themes are supported within existing research literature (Akhtar & Kroner-Herwig, 2015; Yakunina et. al, 2013; Popiaduk & Arthur, 2004; Chen et. al, 2015; Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002). In addition to
challenges with cultural barriers, international students also reported institutional
barriers such as issues with accessibility of counselling services, and the limitations of
counselling services only being able to provide a ‘first level’ of support only. The
above challenges are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

5.3.1 Cultural barriers

Cultural barriers, as mentioned above, were more prominent for three of the
participants who were less seasoned in terms of travelling abroad and in accessing
previous support services prior to counselling in the UK. For Jasmine, cultural barriers
were more prominent when the issue brought to counselling was culturally bound and
the counsellor would not have cultural knowledge about how the issue was perceived
in the student’s home culture. Counsellors therefore, need to be aware of culture-
specific knowledge as Arthur (2004) points out, especially when students bring issues
to counselling that are directly related to their culture. This can pose some subtle
dilemmas, however, as written in previous identified challenges from counsellors
perspectives, when value differences get in the way of understanding. Nonetheless,
counsellors who can provide a ‘culturally consistent’ approach according to Sodowsky
(1991) are rated as being higher in expertness and trustworthiness by international
students.

The issue of language was prominent for both Yolanda and Zara, two Chinese students
who felt challenged in fully expressing themselves in English, and supports previously
cited research literature on the topic (Lee, 2008; Carr et. al, 2003; Sherry et. al, 2010).
This extended not only to speaking with counsellors in the UK, but also to their peers
and academic tutors. In particular for Zara, who expressed the disadvantage of not being able to articulate her feelings in English, meant that counsellors would not necessarily know what she felt. This could pose problems in creating mutual understanding and in developing a connected alliance. As most research literature argues that a positive therapeutic alliance is the strongest predictor of positive therapy outcomes (Bohart, 2000; Hill & Knox, 2009; Norcross, 2002), not being able to fully understand a client can most definitely have implications for creating more barriers in alliance formation. Counselling centres, therefore, would do well to provide multilingual services and recruit multi-lingual staff who can speak in various languages. Being able to use outcomes measures translated into different languages can also provide additional benefits for obtaining more accurate information on students who may not understand fully the English versions. I can recall many instances myself of having to clarify questions for international students in my counselling service placement, where CORE outcome measures were used in only English. In some instances, the English clarification took much time away from the counselling session and provided less value to the student who was seeking support.

Cultural stereotypes regarding mental illness and counselling services were reported by novice international students as creating barriers towards accessibility and utilization of counselling services. This has been readily reported within current research literature (Okorocha 1998; Johnson & Sandhu, 2007; Ibrahim & Ingram, 2007) and points to differences in how people source help in different cultures. In Asian and African cultures, for example, help seeking is sought through traditional healers (Essandoh, 1995; Rai & Moodley, 2010) who rely on supernatural, metaphysical, and spiritual aspects of healing (Laungani 2002) that may include dream
interpretation, music therapy, exorcism, and sacrifices (Vontress, 1991) or Ayurveda, Yoga, and Vedic Astrology as part of therapy (Rai & Moodley, 2010). As both Yolanda and Zara reported, older generations of Chinese adopt a negative view of Western mental health approaches and tend to not trust psychological models of treatment. Understandably, when international students are in a foreign environment, they may lose access to traditional healing methods, as the methods of sourcing help in the host culture can vary greatly. They may face a dilemma of uncertainty, not knowing what kind of help is available in the host country, what it entails, and if it is in alignment with their values. This suggests why many international students are reported to only access counselling services when reaching a crisis (Bektas, 2008; Oropeza et. al, 1991), as they might prefer to seek support on their own, or within networks of peers and family that are more familiar. They often resort to counselling when they are ‘seriously mentally ill’, as Zara and Yolanda reported is the norm in Chinese culture.

Worldview differences between international students and counsellors were also reported as creating potential barriers. Worldview has been defined by Serpell (2010) as:

‘[How an individual conceptualizes, perceives and experiences reality. It is that which is intrinsically valued—how a people give meaning to their experiences and make sense of their world and their place in it. Manifestations of worldview are found in language, traditions, behavioral patterns, inclinations and receptiveness to different environmental inputs and contexts. All cultures have a worldview and create socialization practices and contexts that reflect and support their worldview. As a result, all individuals develop within culturally structured environments that teach them how to know, experience and interact with the world in particular ways. In this way, worldviews are passed from generation to generation and thus are preserved, often transcending local circumstances and enduring historical and environmental changes’ (p.1043).
Most commonly worldviews have been described in comparison to the Eurocentric Western worldview (Serpell, 2015; Kilbourn, 1980; Kearney, 1975) through which other worldviews are compared and contrasted. Worldview differences, therefore, were more prominent for participants coming from non-Eurocentric Western cultures such as China, which most notably holds Confucian collective worldviews that differ greatly, and therefore portray mental health and wellbeing in a different way (Sodowsky et.al, 1994; Cheng et. al, 1995; Ihle et. al, 1996). This might explain why Yolanda could not address her less severe emotional distress with a British counsellor, attributing the cultural differences as being too great for the counsellor to understand the Chinese worldview and their understanding of mental distress.

More importantly, participants like Zara acknowledged that worldviews can be shifted with increasing exposure to novel environments and perceptions in the way one interprets nature, things, and people suggesting that longer durations of exposure to different cultures may increase international students’ flexibility in working with counsellors of different worldviews. This suggestion has also been supported in other research studies which explored the correlations between acculturation levels and attitudes towards seeking psychological help in international students (Zhang & Dixon, 2003; Russell et. al, 2008).

### 5.3.2 Accessibility issues

Accessibility issues with counselling services came up for less seasoned international students Yolanda, Zara, and Jasmine, who were accessing counselling services for the first time abroad. The three participants reported that they knew counselling /support
services existed, but they did not know how to access them. In all three cases, students felt they needed information or guidance, and when it fell through (Zara), they chose to seek alternative options of support from peers. This points to the need to provide adequate information upon arrival and during orientation week of the kinds of support available to novice international students who may find it more challenging to know where to find support and how to access it. This is in accordance with other cited literature recommendations (Kambouropoulos, 2015; Mori, 2000; Okorocha, 1998; Zhang & Dixon, 2003; Ang & Liamputtong, 2008; Arthur, 2004) on the topic.

The location of counselling services was also seen to enhance or create barriers to accessibility. Zara and Jasmine, in particular, felt that counselling services should be easily visible on campus and close to other major student buildings such as student support services, students union, or the libraries. This would provide greater visibility of knowing where the service was located and, as Jasmine reported, would reduce the stigma and shame of accessing it. ‘I feel like when you put it in the back of a building, it’s like shameful to go’ (Jasmine). Current research literature recommendations support visibility of counselling service offices (Mori, 2000; Roberts & Dunworth, 2012). However, other studies (Khan, 2011; 2013) indicate that some students, especially those who perceive counselling services with increased stigma, would prefer services to be more hidden so as not to be seen entering or leaving the area. What might be a better alternative is to combine counselling services with other student support services within one easily visible office/building where students may go to as a ‘one stop shop’ for different kinds of support services rather than have these services spread out in many locations across the campus. This would provide easier visibility and accessibility while also providing neutrality as to the reasons for entering
the building hence reducing the stigma/shame that some students might feel of being seen. In addition, having these offices closer together in one building would enhance liaison amongst the different agencies and managements for each service so as to better streamline support with the various kinds of issues that students have. Both Bektas (2008) and Arthur (1997) emphasise the benefits of increased collaboration between various university student support services.

5.3.3 First level of support only

All of the international student participants who accessed university counselling services reported issues with the amount of support that was given. This was a prominent theme that has not been readily described in previous research literature apart from Stallman, (2011); Storrie et. al, (2010); Benton et. al, (2003); and Woolfe, (1996). Providing a limited amount of support included mostly a lack of providing longer term support with students reporting limited sessions being available due to the overwhelming capacity for counsellors to see a large number of students. This was seen as a ‘first level of support’ where students could be introduced to concepts such as mindfulness, CBT, self-compassion, coping strategies, and have an opportunity to be heard, however the needed follow-through of helping students apply discussed strategies and interventions was not always given.

Students reported that counsellors advised them to seek further support through their GP’s or the National Health Service (NHS). However, this created further psychological strain for students to seek these services out independently. Moreover, the long waiting times to access NHS services meant that students were waiting for
months to access psychological/counselling services. Some of the participants therefore resorted to seeking self-help books (Jasmine), seeking therapists privately (Maria), or seeking non-conventional forms of support such as a Buddhist centre (Maria). Students reported that having to find these independent routes further created financial, and psychological strain on their already distressed state. Khan (2013) and Boone et. al (2010) equally point out that when there are additional steps for seeking support, this can prevent individuals from taking action due to feeling overwhelmed.

Marco reported that counsellors should have more power to advocate on behalf of students in order to help with transitioning them to other relevant psychological and support services, rather than have them figure this out on their own. Currently counsellors do not have the capacity to refer students, which means students need to make an appointment to see their GP who then can refer them to the NHS. For international students who already face issues with accessing counselling in the first place, having additional steps of making appointments through their GP, only to have to wait several months to see a counsellor does indeed create a significant gap of support provision that can have serious consequences for their academic progress and mental health. Some studies have therefore recommended provision of peer mentoring and having a ‘buddy system’ for international students where they can be matched to a home student who can help with introducing them to the local culture and in guiding on potential avenues to seek support if needed (Okorocha 2010b; Brinson & Kottler, 1995; Jacob, 2001; Chen, 1999). If international students can be helped from the moment they arrive in a host country with developing support networks, and with learning about the host culture, they will be less likely to suffer from social isolation and mental distress according to Furnham, (1997).
5.4 Counsellors’ voiced solutions for working cross-culturally with international students

5.4.1 Challenging cultural stereotypes

In accordance with Sue and Sue, (1990) and Hanassab, (2006), counsellors voiced solutions of challenging cultural/religious stereotypes when working with international students. This meant understanding the heterogeneity between international students and within cultural/religious groups. Authors like Ivey et al. (2012) also argue for understanding people as unique human beings with multiple group identities, rather than products of our cultural backgrounds. Although it has been helpful to recognize cultural or religious values ascribed to particular groups of people (Maki & Kitano, 2002; Trimble & Thurman, 2002; Khan, 2011; Cervantes & Parham, 2005; Casas et. al, 2002), it can be a double edged sword when those assumptions are projected onto everyone from that background. I can ascribe my own values as that of venturing outside both my Polish and Canadian cultural upbringings as well as the Catholic religion I was brought up in. The fact that I have rejected some of these traditional values and chosen my own, confirms what Popiaduk and Arthur (2004) describe in how ‘the range of beliefs and values within any given individual [...] may conform or conflict with their own cultural group norms and values’ (p.133). This may also explain why research studies with international students continue to show heterogeneity in responses when it comes to counsellor ethnic matching (Chang & Yoon, 2011; Chang & Berk, 2009), or counselling style preference (Yakunina, 2012).

Counsellors therefore reported ongoing awareness within their therapeutic work of not making assumptions about students as they recalled instances when they did, and
discovered they were wrong in those assumptions. This was particularly prominent when some counsellors assumed they would hold a more similar worldview with students from certain cultures or felt they would know more about certain cultures, and then as Noah puts it ‘get it completely wrong’. These findings are in alignment with reported views by counsellors in previous research (Shannon, 2014) and support the recommendations cited in Okorocha (2010a,b) and Ivey et. al, (2012) with respect to developing multicultural counselling competencies. In today’s world, where globalization is becoming more widespread, predictors of shared values and worldviews may be growing beyond the remit of where we were born or grew up (Palmer & Laungani, 1999; McGoldrick & Ashton, 2012). My own experiences of being born in Poland, growing up in Canada, and living in England for five years flood my mind in agreement on this point raised in the research. My travels have also led me to finding similar values with people met in Kenya, Costa Rica, and America, suggesting that I may have moved into the ‘integrative awareness’ stage of Sue and Sue’s (1990) Racial/Cultural Identity Development (R/CID) model where similarity in attitudes and values takes precedence over cultural group membership when forming connections.

Counsellors’ views of challenging cultural stereotypes within their own and foreign cultures included at times having to take risks and challenge certain cultural values that posed ethical dilemmas for the client’s personal safety or wellbeing (see section 5.2.3). Counsellors did not report equal consensus on how they implemented this aspect of their work. Some preferred to not be honest with their clients fully about value conflicts (Andrea), while others felt that taking these kinds of risks with clients was part of their role as a counsellor (Sue). Both Snider (2001), and Arthur and
Januszkowski (2001) describe ‘value conflict stress’ contributing to burnout and overwhelm in counsellors, suggesting that counsellors need to be supported within training and supervision on how to manage value differences within therapeutic relationships, especially when they become a barrier to effective alliances and positive therapeutic outcomes. The implications of this are discussed further in chapter 6, section 6.2.

5.4.2 Bridge building through social work\(^1\) (practical work acts as a bridge for psychological work)

Provision of social work within counselling which included helping international students with practical tasks such as accommodation, academic support, liaison with supervisors, guidance on accessing GP’s, etc. has been reported to occur more commonly with international students (Khoo et. al, 1994; Bradley, 2000) and was seen as an essential ingredient in developing rapport with them according to counsellor in this study. Sue felt obligated to help international students in whatever way she could with the task of successfully graduating and practical help was therefore a necessary component for her. Noah felt that social work was a necessary precursor to develop trust and safety for international students to then open up about more personal problems and begin psychological work. Providing practical help, therefore, demonstrated care and concern to students who otherwise might not trust the intentions of the counsellor.

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1 *Social Work* as defined by counsellors in this study pertains to practical work that has been undertaken with international students in the form of writing mitigating circumstances letters, providing guidance on transition issues, and liaising on behalf of students with other support services.
This may be a particularly important intervention for students who have negative stereotypes about counselling and therefore may be more apprehensive to fully discuss their problems (University of Nottingham, 2011; Khan, 2013; Snider, 2001).

Many research authors also recommend moving beyond traditional counselling protocols when working with international students (Arthur, 1997; Popiaduk & Arthur, 2004; Khoo et. al, 1994; Yoon & Portman, 2004; Sandhu, 1994), thereby acknowledging the need to be innovative. Practical work can therefore reduce stigma and shame associated with counselling and provide an avenue for students to see counselling as a multi-faceted place of support. Other studies have also reported how international students may only feel comfortable accessing counselling for academic related help or practical assistance (Khan, 2013; Dickson et. al, 2012). Providing practical help also requires liaison with other student support services which can assist international students with feeling that they are part of a supportive campus environment – something that Arthur (1997; 2004) and others (Chen, 1999; Yoon & Portman, 2004; Bektas, 2008) consistently report is needed. Cho and Yu (2015) in particular stress the critical role that university-wide support for international students plays in regulating their psychological well-being. As such, this can be seen as an essential ingredient in overcoming the challenges of connecting with international students and responding to their varied expectations of counselling.

Practical/social work likewise included teaching international students various skills to manage their time abroad. Sue reported that many overseas students are not equipped with skills to manage their overseas period successfully, so counselling can
be a space to teach students how to develop those skills of independence, time management, assertiveness, communication, and other psychoeducational tools. Offering these kinds of tools within workshops and seminars during induction and the orientation weeks that foreign students are required to attend provide an ideal space from which to introduce counselling/support services while simultaneously aiding international students to succeed during their time abroad. Arthur (2004) describes multicultural competency incorporating ‘multiple counsellor roles’ which include teaching, advising, consulting, and advocacy on behalf of international students. These roles therefore include social work and strengthen the reputation of counselling services as key contributors in the provision of a supportive campus environment.

5.4.3 Difference as a positive resource

Seeing difference as a positive aspect of counselling aided counsellors in how they worked with international students. They reflected comments that were supported by international student participants in that differences in culture or worldviews could actually be beneficial within counselling as encountering a different frame of reference offered new opportunities for growth and learning for both students and counsellors. Although much research supports the value of matching counsellors with clients who hold similar worldviews based on culture or religion (Khan, 2013; West, 2011; Farsimadan et. al, 2007), this research offers the opposite point of view in that differences can be used positively within counselling, which aligns with the work of Macdonald (2015) who ascribes cultural differences as positive aspects that can be used both diagnostically and therapeutically within counselling and therapy. Where differences could be problematic as reported by students in this study was when
language issues arose and students could not express themselves accurately in English, or when they were dealing with more subtle aspects of feelings and issues that related to their cultural worldviews and therefore required a counsellor who was familiar with that particular worldview and epistemology (see section 5.3.1).

Counsellors reflected how clients coming from conservative cultures or religions often preferred to be working with someone who did not espouse those same conservative values for fear of judgement, embarrassment, and shame when disclosing personal difficulties. In my own experience I recall such an instance of working with a student from Eastern Europe who identified as gay and was struggling with coming out about his sexuality openly. His home cultural values did not accept homosexuality as being normal and he therefore reported feeling more comfortable working through this issue in England with counsellors who espoused more liberal and accepting value systems. Such examples highlight what Andrea refers to with students who ‘sort of feel like they have to fall into these cultural values that they might not want or like’. It is therefore worth exploring whether a client adheres to and accepts the cultural or religious values of their home background.

Counsellors need to also be aware of their own value systems and the ethical values of their profession. Counselling psychology promotes humanistic values that emphasise the therapeutic relationship, and the subjective experiences of clients (Woolfe, 2016; Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2003; Hanley et. al, 2013) which will be a part of the training curriculum for new practitioners. As such, these value systems may need to be examined in relationship to how they enhance working with diversity in
clients, for many authors argue that Western psychological models do not support understanding worldviews outside the Euro-American cultural context (Pedersen et. al, 2002; Laungani, 1997; Rai & Moodley, 2010; Fish, 2010). Incorporating indigenous healing methods or understanding the spiritual dimensions of distress are avenues of exploration for Western psychological paradigms that have implications for training and application within counselling paradigms (McLennan et. al, 2001; Laungani, 2004; 2005; Savage & Armstrong, 2010).

The counselling relationship can also be a safe space for diversity to be welcomed through focusing on the core human values that everyone shares, thereby acknowledging the unity amongst people as a whole. Acceptance by another person of different values and culture can equally reinforce the lessening of stereotypes and judgements that so often separate and divide people within the world (Coleman et al., 1995; Pope-Davis et. al, 2002). I am reflecting on my own travels and experiences of being accepted and welcomed by other cultures which has influenced my beliefs of moving towards a global perspective of valuing diversity within all people while respecting differences and worldviews which are not necessarily in alignment with my own.

5.5 International students’ voiced solutions for accessing and using counselling services

There existed resonance between counsellors and international students in seeing difference as a positive resource in therapy. Students strongly advocated for acceptance and non-judgement from counsellors as the primary factor that facilitated
positive alliance formation and engagement within therapy. Student participants also reported institutional solutions for helping with accessibility issues and service delivery options, which fell under the umbrella of providing a proactive community outreach agenda at HEIs which included increased provision of guidelines for students, improving liaison with other support services and the academic faculty, and provision of group support.

5.5.1 Difference as a positive resource (with embodied liberal values in counsellors)

Having a counsellor from a different cultural background was welcomed by students as a positive resource in therapy. Although this is not readily supported in certain studies where students prefer sharing their personal problems with family and friends or with a counsellor of the same background (Khan, 2011; 2013; Raunic & Xenos, 2008; Snider, 2001), other studies report that within-person variables are better predictors of help seeking behaviour over cultural background (Russel et. al, 2008; Shannon, 2014). Students’ reported reasons for seeing difference in cultural background as a positive resource in therapy included various aspects.

The first aspect involved making contact with the host culture through the counsellor who by showing acceptance and care, facilitated a positive welcoming experience for the international student. Counsellors therefore were seen to represent the host culture and provide students with connection to the host culture. For first-time international student Yolanda, being accepted by her counsellors meant ‘being accepted by the English culture’. For seasoned international student Marco, having an English
counsellor meant understanding the local culture better and the English values and worldviews associated with personal struggle. These positive aspects of difference between counsellors and international students support the significant need for international students to connect with locals to help them integrate and acculturate within the host culture. A ‘peer mentoring’ system with local students to facilitate the acculturation and integration process may therefore be helpful as suggested by Chen (1999), Okorocha (2010b), and Brinson and Kottler (1995). The quicker international students can make contact with locals, the faster they can adapt and overcome social isolation in the host culture (Merenkov & Antonova, 2015; Sandhu, 1994).

Working with a culturally different counsellor was seen positively when the counsellor demonstrated liberal value systems that fostered acceptance and non-judgement. Students who came from more conservative cultures said they would feel embarrassed talking about personal issues with a counsellor from their own cultural background due to shame, embarrassment, and potential judgement. This echoes what counsellors reported in their responses that students do not want to be pigeon-holed or feel judged according to their own cultures conservative value systems. Research literature in this domain presents mixed reviews (Khan 2011; 2013; Dasgupta, 2000; Chang & Yoon, 2011; Chang & Berk, 2009) suggesting that further investigation into an individual’s attachment to home cultural/religious values and the implications of this within counselling can be more fully evaluated with further research (as explained in section 5.6.3).
Finally, international students voiced welcoming a different frame of reference from the culturally different counsellor as this could provide a different perspective on the issue and therefore enhance learning for the student. These findings suggest that both counsellors and international students can benefit from mutual learning when encountering each other’s differences, however they need to both be open and welcoming towards these differences. There is much research within multicultural counselling and therapy that stresses the negative aspects of counsellors inadvertently imposing their Western values (Rai, 2009; Nadirshaw, 2009; Pederson & Locke, 1996), or avoiding discussing cultural material out of discomfort (Vasquez 2007; Norton et. al, 2006). A counsellor’s own curiosity to learn about other cultures through their clients however can enhance positive interventions that simultaneously facilitate learning about the host culture for the international client. Counselling can therefore be a place for mutual learning of diversity that benefits both counsellors and international students.

5.5.2 Acceptance and non-judgement

Student participants all discussed the importance of counsellors demonstrating acceptance and non-judgement within counselling. This was seen as more important than a shared cultural background and has been supported through other research literature that emphasises counsellor personal qualities over shared ethnic background (Scheele et. al, 2008; Bradley et. al, 1995; Chang & Berk, 2009). The strong human desire to be understood and accepted has been shown to span across all forms of diversity (Chang & Berk, 2009; Vasquez, 2007) and is most fragile when one feels vulnerable. Counsellors therefore have the opportunity to meet this need of their
international student clients when they are feeling vulnerable. For many international students, counselling may be the first place they have their needs met for unconditional acceptance and understanding, which is why the role of the helper is very important in facilitating growth and personal evolution (Horvath, 2001).

Receiving acceptance, non-judgement, and kindness from counsellors facilitated positive therapeutic alliance formation (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003; Safran & Muran, 2000) which has been shown to be the most robust predictor of positive therapeutic outcomes (Bachelor & Horvath, 1999; Norcross, 2002). Even for first time international student Yolanda, a friendliness and warmth from her counsellors’ was a key factor in feeling safe enough to talk about difficult feelings:

Yolanda: Because we were really having a delicate dealing back then so when someone show friendliness to us, it’s easier for us to just open up and talk about stuff. Even though we had all those confusion about British culture and our position in the British environment, we didn’t talk about it with other people. Even with our Chinese classmates. But once the counsellor they initiate the conversation and once we started talking, we just talked about all the troubles that we’ve had.

The fact that acceptance, non-judgement, and empathy were valued as being more important than the cultural background of the counsellor emphasizes the positive aspect that diversity challenges can be overcome with the right therapeutic conditions that the counsellor provides. For this reason, self-awareness within counsellors is important in order to be able to facilitate those conditions (Khoo et. al, 1994; Yoon & Portman, 2004; Robinson & Ginter, 1999).
5.5.3 *Proactive community outreach*

Much of the research literature supports recommendations for provision of a proactive community outreach for international students (Sandhu, 1994; Popiaduk & Arthur, 2004; Bektas, 2008; Yoon & Portman, 2004) due to their increased risk factors (Gu et al., 2010; Yakunina et al., 2013; Gonzalez, 2003) and reported barriers to utilization of counselling and support services (Russell et al., 2008; Chen et al., 2015; Ang & Liamputtong, 2008). This research readily confirms those findings as participants directly talked about the institutional barriers that could be enhanced in this regard to reach international students. They spoke of the need for provision of accurate guidelines regarding culture shock, the UK educational system, and the counselling process. They also discussed enhancing liaison between various university support services, and providing group support for less seasoned international students who may experience higher levels of isolation and homesickness.

As international students have been shown to be less likely to utilize counselling support than home students mostly due to a lack of awareness regarding campus support services (Bradley, 2000; Kilinic & Granello, 2003), language barriers (Carr et al., 2003) and perceived stigma of disclosing difficulties (University of Nottingham, 2011; Khan, 2013), reaching out to them in the community setting would be very advantageous. Not only would this allow international students to feel welcomed and supported on campus, they would also be more aware of support services and how to access them. The key as Popiaduk and Arthur (2004) point out, is to be proactive and innovative, moving beyond traditional counselling protocols, and working in partnership with other support services. One good example of this is Boone et al.’s
(2011) study which describes the positive outcomes of an innovative counselling service outreach programme called ‘Let’s Talk’ where ‘counsellors hold walk in hours across campus to engage students who might not otherwise seek counselling. Locations are chosen to reach underserved communities. Counsellors offer informal consultation, a less formal alternative to traditional counselling’ (p. 194).

Student participants reported the need for more specific guidelines to be available to them which supports the recommendations of Bradley (2000) and Okorocha (2010b). Guideline provision details varied in student responses and included: information on how the UK education system works (Maria) (McDonald, 2014), preparation for culture shock and how to manage it (Yolanda) (Arthur, 2004), information on how to access the counselling service (Zara) (Mori, 2000), and follow up guidelines for relapse prevention after counselling (Jasmine). Although the previous three cited recommendations by Maria, Yolanda, and Zara are discussed in current research literature, Jasmine’s recommendations have not been cited in research concerning international students. This suggests further research may well need to look at gaps in service provision once international students have already accessed counselling and need further long-term support. Participants also discussed the need to have access to guidelines prior to arrival or shortly after arrival in the host country to be better prepared for what to expect and how to manage the cross-cultural transition. Many HEIs do aim to provide information to students during their orientation week, however some students report feeling overwhelmed with this information (Snider, 2001), therefore if HEIs can provide this information electronically prior to a student’s arrival in the host country, they can be better prepared to process the information before potential culture shock sets in.
Improved liaison amongst various support services at HEIs was requested by the international student participants and it was similarly voiced by counsellors (see sec. 5.6.2), which links into the larger theme of creating cohesion amongst HEIs through improved service delivery. As international students will be making contact with their academic tutors/supervisors and administrative staff more frequently than with counselling staff, liaison would serve to provide a better overall student experience (Staddon & Standish, 2012) through fostering a supportive campus environment (Arthur, 2008; Barletta & Kobayashi, 2007; Barty & Raven, 2003). In particular, partnership between the academic supervisory team and the counselling service was seen as a very helpful intervention according to Marco and has been equally advocated for by Okorocha (2010b) and others (Brown, 2016; Wu, 2012; Hyun et. al, 2007). These findings also align with the recommendations of Arthur (1997) and Bektas (2008) who suggest stronger collaboration between informal support networks such as the international student offices and formal support networks such as the university counselling service.

Offering group support was voiced from both Yolanda and Zara as part of a proactive community outreach to help international students overcome isolation and feel that they are not alone in their struggles. This was seen to be more important for novice international students who may face higher risk factors of culture shock, acculturation stress, and homesickness. Research studies have reported effectiveness in delivering group interventions with international students (Dipelou et. al, 2007; Carr et. al, 2003; Yakunina et. al, 2011; Naeeni et. al, 2015), however according to Lee (2014), who examined Asian international students attitudes towards group counselling, barriers for joining were evident when international students had to self-disclose in the
presence of co-national peers. This thesis research however supports group interventions as Yolanda indicated ‘I felt the group service could help more because you’re not the only one talking’. Her case highlighted a shared crisis amongst the group of Chinese students and perhaps therefore served a unique purpose. Further research piloting group interventions and reporting on their effectiveness would therefore present more empirical evidence for the use of group counselling with international students.

5.6 Recommendations and new directions for counselling services and HEIs

The two overarching themes that this research generated, when comparing and contrasting both counsellors’ and international students’ responses, correspond with the aims that this research laid out in chapters one and two, which is providing recommendations and new directions for counselling services and HEIs. This section, therefore, elaborates on these two generated themes of ‘the pluralistic approach’ and ‘institutional support’. A final recommendation has been added of ‘the importance of value systems’ as this topic has readily been voiced throughout this research from participants, myself, and previous research studies. It has significant implications for understanding the complexity of diversity, counsellor training programmes, and providing responsive interventions. These recommendations are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

5.6.1 The pluralistic approach

The pluralistic approach (Cooper & McLeod, 2007; Cooper & McLeod, 2011; Cooper & Dryden, 2016) was seen as the best way of responding and working with the
diversity present within international students according to counsellors. Rescher (1993) defines pluralism as ‘any substantial question admits of a variety of plausible but mutually conflicting responses’ (p.79). Cooper and Dryden (2016) note that the pluralistic approach ‘is an ethical commitment to valuing diversity; and a wariness towards monolithic, all-consuming ‘truths’, because of the way that they can suppress individuality and difference’ (p.3). It follows a flexible approach of tailoring therapy to meet the needs of each unique client rather than following a ‘one size fits all’ model. The pluralistic approach equally follows principles of social justice and recognizes both individual and group differences as it relates to working with diversity (Winter et. al, 2016). Similar approaches that value flexibility have also been proposed by other authors in terms of how to work with international students and diverse clients (Siegel, 1991; Liu, 2009). These include Khan’s (2013) suggested use of the ‘Transtheoretical Model’ (Prochaska & Norcross, 2010) Ivey et. al’s (2012) ‘Metatheoretical’ integrative approach, and Asnaani and Hofman’s (2012) focus on collaboration and development of a strong therapeutic alliance in multicultural therapy.

These findings are equally supported within the heterogeneity of student participants’ views, highlighting the within-group differences and multitude of intersecting variables that can shape a client’s expectations, worldviews, and approaches towards help-seeking and distress. In particular, counsellors’ described diversity issues spanning across all students and noted that diversity issues were not ascribed to just culture and religion, but equally to levels of privilege and acculturation within novel environments. They reported therefore that some home students could struggle more than some international students based on these factors. These aspects are supported within research by Shannon (2014) and Okorocha (2010a,b) who stress the importance
of using cultural generalizations creatively as long as they do not become stereotypes which distort incoming information and can be destructive in relationships.

One pattern that did arise amongst both participant group responses was that novice international students (those travelling for the first time) tend to present with higher risk factors and barriers to utilizing counselling help than more seasoned international students who have previously travelled and been more exposed to diversity. It therefore would be helpful for counselling services to provide a higher degree of outreach based services to those students who are travelling abroad for the first time and who may not have developed appropriate coping strategies for managing cross-cultural transitions (Arthur, 2004). Roberts (2005) in particular stresses how important this is for international students on one year Master’s programmes who have a short timeframe in which to adjust to a novel environment and attain all their educational goals. These findings are further supported in studies done by Ang and Liamputtong (2008), and Akhtar and Kroner-Herwig (2015).

Particular recommendations for how to use the pluralistic approach in working with diversity are beginning to emerge within current research literature and provide a good starting point for application (Winter et. al, 2016). Cooper and McLeod (2011) do adhere to stating that the pluralistic approach holds a set core of underlying values that encompass ‘a humanistic appreciation of Others and of difference’ (p.158), however they also advise that ‘it is essential to hold the theory of pluralism lightly, and not to assume that it is a given or unquestionable truth’ (p.158). Further empirical evidence in piloting pluralistic interventions with diverse clients is still very much needed.
(Wilk, 2014), which opens up much opportunity for future research to be developed in this area.

5.6.2 Institutional support

In accordance with cited recommendations by Barty and Young Minds (2006) and Shannon (2014), the need for improved institutional support was reported from both international student and counsellor participants. Counsellors felt as much frustration with institutional support issues as did international students, noting that support of international students requires a multi-faceted approach from different stakeholders at HEIs. The specific recommendations cited for improvement included greater financial resources that could expand counselling services to hire more staff, increase visibility of locations, and offer longer term support for students who may need this. Such changes may go a long way towards reducing barriers of accessibility, and the limitations of only offering short-term support. It would allow greater opportunities for proactive outreach to be implemented in the community as requested by student participants. Increased financial resources were also seen to provide better access to services such as emergency funds for students facing crisis or hardship according to counsellors.

The request for improved institutional support from participants included wanting stronger liaison amongst various support services on and off campus which has been recommended by other authors (Shannon, 2014; Barty et. al, 2006; Ramachandran, 2011; Bartram, 2008) and points to the need for having a supportive campus environment that works in cohesion to aid its student population. Counsellors reported
instances of transition issues not being managed properly through other campus offices resulting in them having to take on advocacy and advising roles that could be outsourced to other student support services.

The importance of helping international students integrate and settle into their academic environment early on is essential (Popiaduk & Arthur, 2004) so they know where to go for which kind of support, being aware that there are multiple avenues of help available on campus. Most HEIs do have orientation programmes for international students that should be providing this information along with campus tours in the early weeks of arrival. This may then free counsellors to focus more on therapeutic work and the counselling service may function more efficiently with reduced waiting lists. Creating a supportive campus environment may however require that counsellors take on more leadership roles within HEIs to create improved referral pathways, provide psychoeducation on cross-cultural responsiveness to academic and administrative staff working with international students, and help shape university policies regarding safeguarding student wellbeing (Yoon & Portman, 2004). Shannon’s (2014) research with counsellors recommends that:

‘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’ (p.45).

Building upon a holistic view of supporting international students’ wellbeing through harnessing multiple support services both formal and informal at the institutional level may therefore reduce the risk of students falling into the ‘gap’ of inadequate
knowledge and awareness regarding what kind of help is available and how they can access it.

5.6.3 The importance of value systems
A surprising aspect of this research emerged towards the end of the writing when the implications of value systems became very clear to me. In addition to the above discussed overarching themes, the importance of value systems kept surfacing implicitly within participants’ noted answers and it therefore felt important to include this aspect as part of the recommendations and new directions for counselling services and HEIs. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a value system can be defined as ‘any set of connected or interdependent values’. Value systems have also been mentioned in previous literature relating to value-conflict stress and the value differences between counsellors and diverse clients (Fiester, 2012; Arthur & Januszkowski, 2001; Yakunina, 2012; Snider, 2001). What became clear to me both in reflection upon my own worldviews and value systems and in those of my participants is this: when working with diversity, understanding a person’s value systems is far more important than understanding their cultural/religious background per se. Our value systems are shaped by our environment (including cultural, religious, political, socio-economic influences), however they are fluid and may change according to how much exposure we have to other perspectives, worldviews, and differences in the world.

Two of the international student participants – Maria, and Marco had been exposed to much diversity throughout their lives by living, studying, and travelling to other countries. Jasmine and Zara had also some exposure to diversity prior to coming to
the UK within their families or with travelling, while Yolanda had no previous reported exposure prior to coming to the UK. Within this spectrum, participants’ value systems ranged from more liberal to conservative in accordance with how much exposure to diversity they had which influenced how attached they were to their home culture values. This then shaped their expectations and attitudes towards counselling, mental health, and working with counsellors of diverse backgrounds. Those participants who were more attached to their home country value systems, had greater difficulties with accessibility and reported greater cultural barriers in counselling. Four of the student participants were also arriving from countries whom they reported as having more conservative value systems than the UK (ex. China, Kuwait, Mexico). This suggests that with increased exposure to diversity, there can be less attachment to home cultural values with an increasing development of liberal value systems that accept and appreciate diverse perspectives.

My own life story of being born in the conservative Catholic country of Poland with very traditional value systems would mean that my worldview may be more conservative had my family not moved to Canada where I grew up being exposed to multiculturalism and liberal values that celebrate all forms of diversity. The clash between my conservative Catholic Polish roots and the liberal Canadian experiences I grew up with coupled with my experiences of travelling to various locations all over the world and living in England, Italy, and Kenya for longer periods means that my own value systems are very different from my relatives in Poland. Mine are very liberal and unconventional in comparison to the cultural norms in Poland which are far more conservative and rigid in accordance to what is accepted as ‘right’ and ‘wrong’.
The implications of paying attention to value systems in my view are far-reaching for it may explain why so many empirical research studies with international students continue to show varied findings in relation to their attitudes towards help seeking, ethnic matching of counsellors, and expectations of the counselling process (Kambouropoulos, 2016; Tang et. al, 2012; Kenney, 1994; Scheel et, al, 2008; Chang & Yoon, 2011), with some studies reporting distinct differences between international students and home students (Roberts, 2005; Brown, 2016; Bradley, 2000) while others show no significant differences (Yakunina, 2012; Russel et. al, 2008; Yau et. al, 1992). Many authors also stress the importance of within-group variability and in not generalizing across cultural groups (Ivey et. al, 2012; Russel et. al, 2008; Shannon, 2014; Yakunina, 2012), while others report there are common patterns that are evident amongst certain cultural groups who espouse more collectivist worldviews and values (Okorocha 2010b; Laungani, 1997; Khan, 2013; Farooq, 2012; Essandoh, 1995). As a result, the literature can present much confusion in terms of how to provide responsive counselling to all types of clients. I would suggest based on the findings of the current study, that there be a greater emphasis on exploring an individual’s value systems over treating all clients the same or making assumptions based on culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or levels of privilege. This follows upon Popiaduk and Arthur’s (2004) argument of understanding how within any given individual there could be a range of various beliefs and values ‘that may conform or conflict with their own cultural group norms and values’ (p.133).
Exploring value systems as part of the counselling assessment process can incorporate understanding whether a client is attached to their home country values or not. In addition, counsellors can also assess where a student may lie on the spectrum of conservative to liberal values and which aspects of a person’s life are most influential in this construction:

![Spectrum of value systems](image)

Figure 5.1 Spectrum of value systems

Counsellors can then make the distinction as noted by Popiaduk and Arthur (2004) between an individual’s ‘acculturation’ and ‘enculturation’ - the former relating to cultural group membership and the latter relating to internalized cultural beliefs, attitudes, and thinking patterns that can account for individualized differences within a cultural group.

Sue and Sue’s (1990) Racial/Cultural Identity Development (R/CID) model points to relevant aspects of cultural identity developing along five stages of Conformity, Dissonance, Resistance and Immersion, Introspection, and Integrative Awareness. This model explains the process of how individuals may move through various stages of attachment and rejection of their home culture values when in contact with other
value systems. Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Theory (1980; 2001) also points to six dimensions of values that are present in various cultures (power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, pragmatic/normative, indulgence/restraint) which has been used to explain value differences in organizational behaviours and can equally be helpful to apply within psychotherapeutic contexts. Other models for measuring values and value systems amongst people are discussed by Kamakura and Mazzon (1991) suggesting that these tools may be applied within organisations who wish to understand their consumers better.

Arthur and Januszkowski (2001) highlight the importance of counsellors understanding their own value systems first in order to help their clients understand theirs and how they are shaped by life experiences and cultural upbringing. Value systems exist on many levels – for example an international student may come in contact with: the values of an individual counsellor, the values of the counselling profession and service, the values of the HEI, and the values of the host country. At each level there may be a clash of value systems that the international student must navigate within. Counsellors may therefore develop better responsiveness to each international student by asking questions such as:

Is this client coming from a culture with conservative value systems?

How attached are they to these value systems?

How will I interact/respond if there is a mismatch between our value systems?
International student participants indicated wanting to work with counsellors who showed liberal value systems that were accepting and non-judgemental of difference and diversity. Arthur and Januszkowski (2001) argue that ‘value conflicts have the potential to lead to new understandings that can be instructive for both clients and counsellors’ (p.45). Incorporating strategies and interventions for the resolution of value conflict stress within counselling and psychotherapy training programs would therefore be very beneficial.

5.7 Summary

In presenting a discussion of the findings, this chapter has met the aims set out for this research in chapters one and two and has answered my two research questions of understanding both the challenges and solutions of working cross-culturally with international students. The discussion has incorporated both my own voice and those of my participants’ in co-constructing a shared understanding of how counsellors and international students work together, as well as understanding what they each need to enhance the cross-cultural therapeutic encounter. New directions and recommendations have been put forth through a collective case study based understanding of participants’ responses which provide counselling services and HEIs guidelines for improving services for international students. Chapter six will draw a final conclusion to this research indicating the implications of the findings, and providing further reflections on the research process and its contribution to knowledge. The chapter will offer observations on strengths and limitations, avenues for future research, and reflections for how this research has impacted my understanding of the topic and my own cultural identity.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I present a final concluding discussion of the findings in comparing both groups of participant responses. Implications are identified with my sense of the study’s unique contribution to knowledge in what it offers HEIs and counselling services who support international students. I provide reflections on the different stages of the research process and how it has shaped my own understanding of the topic as it relates to my own cultural identity and value systems. I summarize and conclude the chapter with further avenues for future research.

6.1 Final Discussion

In coming to the closure of this research, a comparison of counsellor and international student perspectives within the current study provides a dual understanding of how to navigate the cross-cultural therapeutic encounter. Counsellors and international students had both similar and different perspectives when it came to understanding the challenges and solutions of working together. The identified challenges vocalised by counsellors (adapting to varied student expectations, patterns of communication, and differences in values) were similarly voiced as cultural barriers for international students (issues with language, stereotypes of counselling, and worldview differences). In addition, students also reported challenges with accessibility and
service provision, something which counsellors did not address. It was interesting to see both counsellors and students discuss their shared diversity as a positive resource in counselling, something which has been echoed by other authors (Macdonald, 2015; Pedersen, 1987) and challenges the argument that ethnic matching is the best option (Khan, 2013; Atkinson et. al, 2009). This approach of valuing differences within counselling rather than fearing them and utilizing the opportunity to learn from diverse perspectives points the way towards the benefits that can arise within cross-cultural therapeutic relationships. When applied on a macro-level in the world, it may resolve the conflict that so often underlies the ‘us vs. them’ mentality of separation and division amongst humanity which can foster a path of peace and shared understanding (Werbner, 2005). I resonate on this point with the words of Reynolds (2001) who argues that ‘multiculturalism cannot exist if we are not willing to change our minds, our hearts, our lives. We must build alliances with those who are different from us and not be tempted to surround ourselves in sameness’ (p.104).

Students’ need for feeling accepted by their counsellors had implications for counsellors to respect differences, and was voiced as being more important than having cultural similarity. For counsellors, this points to an important distinction in how to deal with worldview and value differences. Although counsellors’ voiced challenging cultural stereotypes as an important solution, challenging cultural values was seen as a dilemma that did not have an identifiable solution. By challenging another’s value systems, essentially challenging what is important to them – it may be seen as challenging who they are, which may not necessarily lead to cohesion and a strong alliance.
Collins and Arthur (2010) suggest using ‘culture-infused counselling’ as a model to develop multicultural competence when these dilemmas present within counselling sessions. The model is based on the premise that ‘cultural, personal, contextual, and universal factors integrate to form the personal cultural identities of both the counsellor and the client...[which] may have a dramatic impact on the success of the counselling process and must be taken into account in both theory and practice’ (p.217). Through understanding how our own personal cultural identities develop according to Collins and Arthur (2010), multicultural competence can be enhanced ‘for optimizing therapeutic outcomes with a wide range of clientele’ (p.217). This model is organized according to three core competency domains:

1. Cultural awareness – Self: Active awareness of personal assumptions, values, and biases;
2. Cultural awareness – Other: Understanding of the worldview of the client; and
3. Culturally sensitive working alliance.

(Collins & Arthur, 2010, p.220)

Models like these which bring an awareness of personal identities between helper and helped stand to make counselling a deeply aware process between two people.

Counsellors’ voiced solutions of doing more practical work with international students as a bridge towards psychological work, could be paralleled in students’ requests for proactive community outreach that went beyond psychological work per se. Popiaduk and Arthur (2004) emphasise a need for more research studies documenting ‘how counsellors are beginning to move beyond their traditional office settings and appointment styles to using alternative, creative and non-traditional approaches and outreach to develop positive and meaningful relationships with international students’
Students discussed such things as having better guidelines in preparation for overseas study, better liaison amongst different support services on and off campus, and group support as ways forward in this domain.

The overarching themes that stand out in light of more specific voiced interventions by participants include the need for institutional support to be further developed, and the need to remain flexible and pluralistic in how work with overseas students is conducted. More in-depth support for novice international students was observed, due to increased risk factors presenting with less acculturation and exposure to diversity. Counsellors’ stressed that diversity does not need to be limited to just culture and includes many intersecting and influential factors as voiced by Ivey et. al (2012) and Collins and Arthur (2010) which presents counsellors with opportunities to use their multicultural competencies with all clients and presentations of diversity.

6.2 Implications of the research / Contribution to knowledge

The current research study’s main contribution to knowledge includes the following:

- An equal and balanced perspective of understanding the challenges of working with diversity within international students from both counselling service users and service providers.
- Inclusion of counselling service users and providers in voicing their ideas to create solutions to the above mentioned challenges.
The wider implications for practice of the above contributions include the following:

- The need for multicultural competence training programmes to include models such as the ‘Pluralistic Approach’ within their training schemes.
- The relevance for counsellors to know their value systems, and understand the value systems of their clients, in relation to working with and resolving value conflicts if they arise.
- The need for HEIs to invest resources into creation of supportive campus environments for a multicultural student population that includes a multi-faceted approach to provision of support services and proactive community outreach.

I will now elaborate on each of these points in more depth as I am drawn back to the beginning of conceptualizing this study and asking if it has met the personal, research, and outcome aims which I had set out to address in chapter one. The personal aims of understanding how to work with diverse clients has been met to some extent although I am drawn into what Stratton et. al (2015) refer to as ‘the end of the [research] journey is the beginning of a new one’ (p.272). I am left with both personal insights as well as even deeper questions as to the multi-layered nature of diversity. I want to conquer it, and master the elusiveness of stepping into another’s worldview yet am understanding this is by no means an easy task. For how can we possibly ever see the world through another’s eyes? Perhaps the best we can do is develop competencies to build collaborative therapeutic alliances as Asnaani and Hofmann (2012) point out that foster the acceptance and non-judgement that my international student participants voiced they needed. It is on this proposition that I suspect research literature in developing these competencies will continue to grow, paralleling my own process of
wanting to find the ‘golden nuggets’ of wisdom for how to connect and understand each other’s humanity.

In meeting the research aims, the study’s findings provide valuable contributions for counselling services and HEIs to take into account the voiced issues and recommended solutions by participants along with my own interpretations. As stressed in earlier sections of this study, generalisability of findings to the wider counsellor and international student population has not been the purpose due to the small sample size, although one could argue it has met the criteria for vertical generalisability (Braun & Clarke, 2013) through building in-depth interpretative analysis within case study methodology. The research also provides potential transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by confirming many findings from previous cited literature on counselling international students (Arthur, 2004; Okorocha, 2010a,b; Shannon, 2014; Popiaduk & Arthur, 2004; Mori, 2000). Ultimately, in my view it is the reader who decides the assessment of transferability (Smith et. al, 2009) based on the study’s relevance and its co-constructed narrative between researcher and participants. Developing a ‘comprehensive theory’ in working with international students as Yoon and Portman (2004) allude to has not been the aim of the current research, although findings do point to avenues for further research to build upon presented tentative recommendations in order to create more conclusive theories that can shape practical organizational development policies and procedures at university/college campuses.

The focus on health promotion and prevention mandates (Popiaduk & Arthur, 2004) has been achieved through my two research questions that asked participants to not
only think about challenges, but to also discuss and provide solutions to those challenges, in order to create opportunities for service improvement and crisis prevention for foreign students. The contribution of addressing the topic from both participant groups has provided a balanced perspective that takes into account a co-constructed narrative from multiple participant worldviews including my own. It mirrors a parallel process of what happens in the counselling room, when both counsellor and client create shared understandings of discussed topics with a view to reach consensus and connection.

Following the ontology of critical realism (Braun & Clarke, 2013), this research presents the topic of diversity as one that can only ever partially be known, due to the varied perspectives and worldviews of all involved parties. The importance of research addressing all parties involved in service provision for international students follows what Roberts and Dunworth (2012) argue, in that ‘providers of services for international students need to be more aligned to students’ expectations of service provision, and more centred on students’ actual needs, if they are to increase students’ levels of satisfaction with their international experience’ (p.517). This they claimed was necessary following findings that international students and support service providers had differing views about service delivery at HEIs.

The outcomes of this research contain implications for counsellors, counselling services, HEIs, counselling training programmes, and international students. The voiced solutions by participants address the needs of both service providers and users at HEIs. Counsellors and counselling training programmes would do well to look at
the pluralistic approach (Cooper & McLeod, 2011; Winter et. al, 2016) in provision of responsive services that work for a diverse clientele. Building upon Ivey et. al’s (2012) RESPECTFUL counselling and therapy model, Collins and Arthur’s (2010) Culture-infused counselling model, and Sue and Sue’s (1990) Racial/Cultural Identity Development model, the pluralistic approach can provide an alternative way of working with diversity that values a range of different perspectives as being equally valid (McAteer, 2010). It also creates opportunities for counsellors to utilise different therapeutic methods for different clients at different moments (Cooper & McLeod, 2007; 2011), thereby encouraging flexibility and openness. Equally important, as previously mentioned is the relevance of exploring the value systems of clients and addressing ways to navigate value conflict stress (Arthur & Januszkowski, 2001) when it arises for counsellors.

Implications for HEIs are most relevant in terms of needing to create cohesive supportive campus environments that can adapt to the growing international student population. A multi-faceted approach to support services that draw on formal and informal stakeholders who work in liaison amongst each other is key when developing proactive community outreach interventions and crisis prevention strategies. When the student populations’ wellbeing is thriving, then the HEI thrives as well. It is therefore time that HEIs paid more attention in their financial agendas and resource allocation towards student satisfaction and wellbeing in balance with research outputs and internationalisation agendas, as echoed in the recommendations from other cited authors (Roberts, 2005; Arthur, 2004; 2008; 2016; Okorocha, 1998; 2010; Ramachandran, 2011; Cho & Yu, 2011).
6.3 Reflections on the research process

In this section I provide my own reflections on the research process and how it has shaped my understanding of the topic within carrying multiple roles of researcher, counsellor, and international student. I discuss the strengths and limitations of the study’s quality in light of my own decisions for the rationale behind the design and analysis and close with how this research had developed myself both personally and professionally.

6.3.1 Study strengths and limitations

One great strength of the research has been holding the role of both researcher and participant. I say this knowing that I could have been a participant in this research myself – either sharing my own challenges and solutions in working with international students, or expressing my own difficulties in adapting to a foreign environment as an international student. I have become ‘an insider’ (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) that has experienced what my participants have experienced to some extent. I therefore felt closer to the topic at hand through being a member of the groups I have studied. There are critiques positioned towards being an insider researcher including the potential role confusion that may develop (Asselin, 2003), or the danger of having one’s own experiences of the topic cloud perceptions between participants’ views and the researcher’s own views (Watson, 1999). Being aware of these limitations has influenced my choice of using member checks (Braun & Clarke, 2013) with participants while also incorporating reflexivity throughout my writing. The benefits of being an insider as Dwyer and Buckle (2009) point out is acceptance: ‘One's membership automatically provides a level of trust and openness in your participants...
that would likely not have been present otherwise’ (p.58). Indeed my participants’ reflected an appreciation for the work being undertaken seeing the commonalities present within our experiences which further strengthened their desire to take part and share honestly.

In addition, my involvement with co-developing a pilot counselling/support service specifically for international students at one university and working at this service with these students provided the space to adopt a scientist/practitioner role (Woolfe, 2016) that enhanced my knowledge of the topic through having practice-based evidence (Stratton et. al., 2015). It is here where I completed a small-scale case study research project using thematic analysis prior to the current thesis research being undertaken which increased my confidence in designing the methodology and structure of the current research project.

A further strength of the study includes developing a shared co-constructed narrative of the topic that reflects the multi-faceted nature of diversity in how we engage with professional issues within counselling and psychotherapy. Just as my narrative with participants followed a critical research paradigm (Morrow, 2005) that involved a dialectical exchange and co-collaboration of identifying potential strategies for change (Patton, 2002), the research participants themselves were engaging in a shared dialogue that involved studying the topic from multiple perspectives. This is important as Morrow (2005) points out to ‘[represent] the perspectives of those who have been silenced or disempowered’ (p.253) and therefore follows my desires to have international students’ voices alongside counsellors’ voices being represented equally.
to transform ignorance and inform consciousness (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). To date, there are very few studies within this niche of research which take into account both counsellor and client perspectives on issues simultaneously (see chapter two literature review), a contributing strength of this research.

The study’s limitations with respect to the research strategy employed have been outlined in chapter three (research methods). In addition to the research strategy limitations, I am aware of the boundaries of this study and therefore the boundaries of what has been accessed in both the wider and more narrow aspects of understanding cross-cultural counselling work. As outlined in chapter two (literature review), I have held the metaphor of the tree and have chosen to narrow down the inquiry onto one particular branch of the tree in relation to understanding diversity in the context of counselling international students. Even in this narrowed mode of focus, there were many decisions made as to which aspects of focus felt most relevant to my research aims and questions. I found myself pulled on occasion into wanting to diverge into related but not relevant aspects of information such as counselling at Higher Education Institutes in general (BACP, 2012; Bell, 2006; Lawton et. al, 2010), exploring integration of more traditional healing practices (Moodley & Oulanova, 2011; Smith, 2009; Laungani, 2005), or understanding the broader depth of cross-cultural therapy dyads (Chang & Berk, 2009; Vasquez, 2007; Norton et. al, 2006) and alliance enhancing strategies (Cooper, 2009; Bedi et. al, 2005; Asnaani & Hofmann, 2012). I made decisions to let certain related aspects of the wider diversity/cross-cultural topic go, in order to create a particular lens through which this topic is studied within my writing. I suspect, however, that the reader, just like myself, may have newly formed
questions as to further avenues of exploration of the topic which were not met within this particular lens of study.

Time limitations were present in the current study which created constraints in research design and accounted for the range of depth which could be achieved in contact with both groups of research participants. In particular, many of the counsellor participants had large time limitations in their busy schedules and I was therefore aware of not asking too much of them. Member checking already added an additional layer of time commitment for them to double check analysed themes. As such, I did not ask counsellors to fill out pre-interview questionnaires gathering more specific information on their personal characteristics of age, cultural background, therapeutic orientation, multicultural competence training, and years of experience of working with international students. Within the focus group itself, this information was equally challenging to gather due to time constraints and more importantly due to confidentiality issues of disclosing personal information within a group of colleagues. In order to protect participants’ anonymity, I did not ask them to disclose personal characteristic information within the group, and instead allowed participants to share these characteristics about themselves within the group discussion if they chose to. Looking back I would say this posed a limitation in identifying counsellor characteristics that may have provided more in depth knowledge about the participant group beyond inclusion criteria. As such, preparing in advance of how to overcome the challenges of the focus group format and participants’ time limitations would be useful in future research designs.
6.3.2 Researcher development

‘The qualitative researcher’s perspective is perhaps a paradoxical one: it is to be acutely tuned-in to the experiences and meaning systems of others—to indwell—and at the same time to be aware of how one’s own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand’.

(Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 123)

The above reflection by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) captures accurately the tension I held throughout the research process. The choice of adopting a critical theory paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) therefore aligned with my worldview of being a critical realist (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and meant I could embrace the paradoxical role of the qualitative researcher, one which acknowledges the transactional and subjectivist interpretation of the inquiry. In addition, I have made efforts to hold the dialectical relationship between interpretation and observation in order to display reflexive validity (Stiles, 1993; 1999), taking the reader with me on the journey to understand the subject together, sharing my own reflexivity throughout the inquiry.

I took an expanded length of time (six months) to transcribe, code, and analyse the findings of this study, ensuring that each step along the way was carefully met with consistency and thoroughness. I akin this to having felt some reservations in rushing through this process as it seemed that this was the most important part of the research work, one which I wanted to ‘get right’. Coupled with my other therapeutic work commitments, this extended length of sitting with the data allowed me to process the information multiple times before engaging in the last steps of thematic analysis and writing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were being processed in my mind prior to actually searching for them, and keeping a research journal alongside the
process helped to capture ideas and insights that accompanied me throughout the journey. In the last three phases of Thematic Analysis (TA) (Appendix 7), the process moved from linear and straightforward coding, to a more chaotic and messy immersion of pulling the various strands together. As I was conducting TA for two groups of participants, and then comparing themes and codes across all participants to generate overarching themes, the various layers upon layers of analysis did indeed add dimensions that required my full engagement and adequate time to process and stay with each stage of analysis as long as necessary (see Appendices 6-8 for the analysis stages and reflections on the process).

I can attest to the reflexive and recursive nature of the research process (Stratton et al., 2015) which continually shapes and develops both the researcher identity and the outcomes of the research. Writing at such length on one topic and overcoming various challenges of writer’s block, time constraints, and some methodological challenges (as listed in chapter three), has indeed shaped my confidence in becoming a ‘transformative intellectual’ (Giroux, 1998, p.213), having moved through each one with a determination to resolve and not be defeated by the weight of the task at hand.

Understanding that just as my own values may be influencing the inquiry, the research has reciprocated and influenced me both professionally and personally. Personally I have come to understand how my own value systems have been shaped through my diverse life experiences, seeing parallels in some of my international student participants’, whose value systems have equally been influenced through exposure to novel diverse environments and people. This particular finding of needing to
understand and know our value systems and that of our clients in the context of working cross-culturally with international students was a ‘golden nugget’ of wisdom whose relevance became more evident once findings had become crystallized and written. It has given me an in-depth understanding of knowing that my own confusion of developing a cultural identity in between Polish-Canadian environments, between conservative and liberal traditions is one that is shared by others, and so I feel comforted to know that I am not alone in facing some of the existential challenges that this kind of uprooting can create in the self.

Professionally, I could relate to counsellors to a certain extent, having been in their shoes and facing similar challenges. As a practitioner, I therefore feel better equipped to understand the dilemmas of working cross-culturally and the institutional constraints of working within the HEI landscape. The notion of learning from our clients and appreciating the difference encountered, responding flexibly and pluralistically has confirmed some of my previous understandings of the topic. A novel insight I am left with is that there is still much to understand and improve upon. There are still dilemmas for which a coherent singular ‘theory’ has not yet been established and perhaps might not be developed (Yoon & Portman, 2004). I am even more aware of the relevance of culture and diversity within the therapeutic encounter than I have been previously. Indeed this is what Dalal (2006) refers to in his argument that ‘it is not enough to simply respect cultural differences; rather what is required is a critical engagement with the differences, and in the process risk the transformation of both other and self’ (p.44).
6.4 Avenues for future research

This research paves the way for future studies which build on the central concepts discussed herein. Studies which replicate focus groups and interviews with HEI support service providers and international student consumers can enhance potentials for generalisability which can further inform creation of policies within HEIs that are responsive in meeting the emotional and mental health needs of international students.

One particular avenue for further exploration is the relevance of understanding and responding to varied value systems in clients in relation to a counsellors’ own value systems. Further research exploring the role of value systems within the context of counselling international students could provide more strategies on development of multicultural competence, which Arthur and Januszkowski (2001) express needs to include the management of value-conflict stress as it arises between counsellors and clients who hold different worldviews. Studies which delve into exploring value conflicts as they arise within therapeutic encounters and how they can be managed or resolved are scant within the niche of current counselling literature. Although it is mentioned as a barrier to positive alliance formation and therapeutic outcomes (Kambouropoulos, 2015; Fiester 2012; Yakunina, 2012; Snider, 2001), there is lack of coherent guidance on resolution of value conflicts, which if existed, could provide counsellors with potent multicultural competency skills. Furthermore, research exploring the influence of prolonged exposure to novel environments and the effects of this on an individual’s value systems and worldviews may equally inform cross-cultural counselling work as it relates to assessing and understanding value systems within therapeutic relationships.
Documentation in piloting creative outreach interventions with international students from support services at HEIs requires further attention as noted by Popiaduk and Arthur (2004). It calls upon scientist-practitioner (Woolfe, 2016) interventions of counsellors and therapists documenting what innovative strategies they have been using. These may include previously mentioned group interventions (Yakunina et. al, 2010; Dipelou et. al, 2007; Carr et. al, 2003), designing informal proactive outreach support services and workshops (Sandhu, 1994; Popiaduk & Arthur, 2004; Bektas, 2008; Yoon & Portman, 2004), and perhaps even exploring integration of more traditional healing methods within standard counselling models (Rai & Moodley, 2010; Laungani, 2004; Moodley & Oulanova, 2011; Ray & Moodley, 2006). Having outcome measures that capture a large evidence base of what works and what does not work, can be helpful in guiding counselling services towards effectively working with international students, which can be implemented throughout many academic institutions. A constructive way of doing this involves piloting and documenting through empirical research how different models and strategies are being used and what effect they are having on international students’ accessibility rates and mental health outcomes.

The above avenue of exploration calls upon the usefulness of the participatory action research agenda (McIntyre, 2008) that underlies community psychology (Mitchell & Lounsbury, 2015) and prevails within community counselling theory (CCT) (Lewis & Lewis, 1977; Lewis et. al, 2011). CCT emphasizes the importance of ‘implementing a multifaceted approach when working with different client populations’ (Ivey et. al, 2012, p.119). Such theories call on practitioners to attend to clients’ multidimensionality through developing treatment plans that involve both client and
community services and ‘require active participation by the counsellor and/or client in situations outside the immediate counselling setting’ (Ivey et. al, 2012, p.119). HEIs provide a great environment from which to explore this multifaceted approach of support through engaging different departments and involving various stakeholders which come into contact with international students.

6.5 Closing
In closing, I have come full circle in understanding the interconnected nature between myself, my participants’, and the research process itself. My participants have left me with a stronger conviction that working with each other’s complex diverse identities, worldviews, and value systems is the way forward both on a micro personal level and a macro global level. We can each influence one another as well as be influenced by each other, thereby enhancing mutual learning through our interconnectedness. And so it is with the words of John F. Kennedy’s 1962 speech that I finish on this grand closing thought (as quoted in Sachs, 2007):

‘The world is inter-connected in unprecedented ways that require unprecedented strategies for global co-operation...Our problems are manmade-therefore, they can be solved by man. And man can be as big as he wants. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings. Man’s reason and spirit have often solved the seemingly unsolvable-and we believe they can do it again...For in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children’s future. And we are all mortal.’

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### Appendix 1: Search strategies for literature review

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Words</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Foreign students</td>
<td>CINAHL</td>
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<td>Overseas students</td>
<td>PsycInfo</td>
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<td>Counselling/Counseling</td>
<td>Science Direct</td>
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<td>Counsellors</td>
<td>SCOPUS</td>
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<td>Therapy</td>
<td>Web of Science</td>
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<td>Cross-cultural/transcultural/multicultural</td>
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<td>International Education Research Database</td>
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<td>Higher Education Academy Website</td>
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In addition to the above, further search strategies included:

- Emailing leading authors in the field for relevant references
- Obtaining further references cited within key research papers
Appendix 2: Participant information sheet (Counsellors)

Bridging the Gap: A collective case study of counsellors' and international students' experiences of working together

Participant Information Sheet - Counsellors

You are being invited to take part in a research study as part of a Doctorate Thesis in Counselling Psychology. The aim of the research is to explore the dynamic of therapeutic counselling sessions where counsellor/client may hold diverse worldviews in University academic settings of counselling international students who come to study in the United Kingdom.

Before you decide to take part it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research?

Researcher: Katarzyna (Kasia) Wilk

School of Education
Ellen Wilkinson Building
The University of Manchester
Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL

Title of the Research

Bridging the Gap: A collective case study of counsellors’ and international students’ experiences of working together

What is the aim of the research?

The aim of this research is to explore the potential solutions of what counsellors’ think would help them understand the diverse phenomenology of international students, and what international students’ describe they need from counsellors and advisors in order to feel understood and welcomed in British Universities.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been invited to participate because you are a counsellor who has worked with international students in a counselling/advising role. There will be four other counselling participants involved in addition to yourself.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

If you decide to take part, you will be invited to take part in a focus group discussion involving four other counsellors who have worked with international students. The
focus group will be facilitated by the researcher and will last approximately 1.5 hours. The researcher will ask questions to the group regarding their experiences, thoughts, and feelings of working with international students and what role do cultural/racial/religious differences play in the counselling process. The focus group will be audio and video recorded, and this footage will be destroyed once the interview is transcribed. There are no foreseeable risks to take part in this research, and there is no obligation to answer questions that you do not want to answer.

What happens to the data collected?

The focus group discussion will be audio and video recorded and will be transcribed by the researcher. The audio and video recorded material will then be destroyed following transcription. The data will be analysed using thematic analysis to look for themes and participants will have the option of reviewing the themes as part of member checking to ensure the validity of the analysed data.

How is confidentiality maintained?

Confidentiality will be maintained through data encryption and secure storage procedures. Focus group participants will be contracted before signing consent forms of the requirement to ensure strict confidentiality of all disclosed information during the focus group discussion. ID numbers will be allocated to participants to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. All collected data will be encrypted and stored securely in a file that is password protected and only the researcher will have access to this file. Once collected data from audio and video recording is transferred securely to the encrypted file, it will be destroyed from the audio and video electronic devices. Videos taken of research participants in the focus group will be stored in accordance with the School policy on Video Recording and Still Image Capture.

Transcribed interviews and data analysis documents will be stored using the same procedures. Any hard copies of transcribed or analysed data will be locked securely in a storage device which only the researcher will have access to. Collected data will not be shared with anyone else other than the researcher. Participant anonymity will be ensured in all aspects of data collection, analysis, and dissemination. Pseudonyms will be used when using participant quotes in the report writings and will only be used with prior consent from each participant. No identifiable information for participants will be used at any point in the research process. All collected data will be destroyed five years after dissemination of the findings.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

Will I be paid for participating in the research?

There is no payment for taking part in this research.

What is the duration of the research?
The duration of this research will involve a one-time focus group discussion which will last for approximately 1.5 hours.

**Where will the research be conducted?**

The focus group interview will take place at the University of Manchester at a day and time that is convenient for all participants.

**Will the outcomes of the research be published?**

Findings from the study will be published in a thesis seminar paper to the University of Manchester and possibly published in scientific journals.

**Contact for further information**

Researcher Contact Information:
Katarzyna (Kasia) Wilk: Katarzyna.wilk@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

Research Supervisor Contact Information:
Dr Terry Hanley: Terry.hanley@manchester.ac.uk

**What if something goes wrong?**

Please contact the research supervisor if you need help or have any questions:

Dr Terry Hanley: Terry.hanley@manchester.ac.uk
School of Education
0161 275 3511

If there are any issues regarding this research that you would prefer not to discuss with members of the research team, please contact the Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator by either writing to 'The Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL', by emailing: Research-Governance@manchester.ac.uk, or by telephoning 0161 275 7583 or 275 8093
Participant information sheet (International students)

*Bridging the Gap: A collective case study of counsellors' and international students' experiences of working together*

Participant Information Sheet – International Students

You are being invited to take part in a research study as part of a Doctorate Thesis in Counselling Psychology. The aim of the research is to explore the dynamic of therapeutic counselling sessions where counsellor/client may hold diverse worldviews in University academic settings of counselling international students who come to study in the United Kingdom.

Before you decide to take part it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

**Who will conduct the research?**

Researcher: Katarzyna (Kasia) Wilk

School of Education
Ellen Wilkinson Building
The University of Manchester
Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL

**Title of the Research**

Bridging the Gap: A collective case study of counsellors’ and international students’ experiences of working together

**What is the aim of the research?**

The aim of this research is to explore the potential solutions of what international students’ describe they need from counsellors and advisors in order to feel understood and welcomed in British Universities, and what counsellors’ think would help them understand the diverse phenomenology of international students.

**Why have I been chosen?**

You have been invited to participate because you are an international student who has worked with a counsellor in a counselling/advising role or has attempted to access counselling services.
What would I be asked to do if I took part?

If you decide to take part, you will be invited to participate in a semi-structured interview with the researcher which will last approximately one hour. The interview will take place at the University of Manchester at a day and time that is convenient for you. The researcher will ask you questions regarding your experiences, thoughts, and feelings of working with a counsellor in the UK and what role might cultural/racial/religious differences play in the counselling process. The interview will be audio recorded, and this footage will be destroyed once the interview is transcribed. There are no foreseeable risks to take part in this research, and there is no obligation to answer any questions in the interview that you do not want to answer.

What happens to the data collected?

The interview will be audio recorded and will be transcribed by the researcher. The audio recorded material will then be destroyed following transcription. The data will be analysed using thematic analysis to look for themes and participants will have the option of reviewing the themes as part of member checking to ensure the validity of the analysed data.

How is confidentiality maintained?

Confidentiality will be maintained through data encryption and secure storage procedures. Interview participants will be contracted before signing consent forms of the strict confidentiality of all disclosed information during the semi-structured interview with the researcher. ID numbers will be allocated to participants to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. All collected data will be encrypted and stored securely in a file that is password protected and only the researcher will have access to this file. Once collected data from audio recording is transferred securely to the encrypted file, it will be destroyed from the audio electronic device.

Transcribed interviews and data analysis documents will be stored using the same procedures. Any hard copies of transcribed or analysed data will be locked securely in a storage device which only the researcher will have access to. Collected data will not be shared with anyone else other than the researcher and research supervisor. Participant anonymity will be ensured in all aspects of data collection, analysis, and dissemination. Pseudonyms will be used when using participant quotes in the report writings and will only be used with prior consent from each participant. No identifiable information for participants will be used at any point in the research process. All collected data will be destroyed five years after dissemination of the findings.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

Will I be paid for participating in the research?

There is no payment for taking part in this research although refreshments will be provided.
What is the duration of the research?

The duration of this research will involve a one-time semi-structured interview with the researcher which will last for approximately 1 hour.

Where will the research be conducted?

The interview will take place at the University of Manchester at a day and time that is convenient for the participant.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?

Findings from the study will be published in a thesis seminar paper to the University of Manchester and possibly published in scientific journals.

Contact for further information

Researcher Contact Information:

Katarzyna (Kasia) Wilk:  Katarzyna.wilk@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

Research Supervisor Contact Information:

Dr Terry Hanley:  Terry.hanley@manchester.ac.uk

What if something goes wrong?

Please contact the research supervisor if you need help or have any questions:

Dr Terry Hanley:  Terry.hanley@manchester.ac.uk

School of Education

0161 275 8815

If there are any issues regarding this research that you would prefer not to discuss with members of the research team, please contact the Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator by either writing to 'The Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL', by emailing: Research-Governance@manchester.ac.uk, or by telephoning 0161 275 7583 or 275 8093
Appendix 3: Consent forms

Bridging the Gap: A collective case study of counsellors and international students experiences of working together

CONSENT FORM

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 study 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.

3. I understand that the interviews will be audio/video-recorded

4. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes

5. I agree that any data collected may be passed to the research supervisor

6. I agree that any data collected may be published in anonymous form in academic books or journal

I agree to take part in the above project

Name of participant __________________________ Date __________ Signature __________

Name of person taking consent __________________________ Date __________ Signature __________

________________________ __________________________ __________________________
Appendix 4: Interview and focus group schedules

Focus Group Discussion Guide
*facilitate further questions describing these experiences

Informing the Context

1. Would you like to start by telling me how many international students have you worked with over the course of your career as a counsellor?
2. What were those experiences like?
3. Did you feel very different from these clients in relation to their culture, or religion?
4. (If yes): Do you feel that this impacted the work you did with these clients?
5. What other feelings did you have in relation to counselling international students?

Informing the Problem: Research Question #1 (What are the potential challenges that can arise in the interaction of diverse counsellor-client experiences in the context of counselling international students?)

1. Do you recall any instances in counselling international students when there were any challenges?
2. (If yes): Can you describe what they were?
3. Did you feel that you were able to understand the worldview of the client in relation to their presenting problem?*
4. Did you have a different worldview than some of the international students you worked with?*
5. How did the differences, challenges, issues, you describe affect the formation of a therapeutic alliance with the client?

Informing the Solution: Research Question #2 (What are the potential solutions in overcoming issues within counselling and between counsellor and client, in order to facilitate mutual understanding and learning for both counsellors and international students?)

1. Do you recall instances in counselling international students when you felt connected and were able to overcome your differences?
2. Can you describe what those instances were like?
3. Were there times you were able to understand your client even if they came from a different culture/religion/worldview?*
4. What interventions did you use to overcome the potential challenges of working with international students?
5. What things did you find helpful to form a good therapeutic alliance with your international client and create mutual understanding?
Closing Questions

1. Do you think it is helpful to discuss racial/cultural/spiritual differences with your clients in therapy?
2. What do you think counsellors need in order to better meet the needs of international student client groups? (training, multicultural competence, etc.)

Interview Discussion Guide

Informing the Context

1. Would you like to start by telling me generally about your experiences in counselling from your first session till the end of your last session?
2. What made you decide to utilize the counselling service?
3. How did you feel about the counselling you received?
4. Tell me a bit about the counsellor you worked with.
5. Did you feel that your counsellor was able to understand your concern or issue fully? (Why/why not?)

Informing the Problem: Research Question #1 (What are the potential challenges that can arise in the interaction of diverse counsellor-client experiences in the context of counselling international students?)

1. During the course of your counselling sessions, where there any instances of misunderstanding between you and your counsellor?
2. (If yes) Can you tell me about those instances?
3. Did any racial/cultural/spiritual differences between you and your counsellor affect your sessions together?
4. Did you ever discuss with your counsellor your differences in race/culture/spirituality?
5. Would you have felt more comfortable receiving counselling from a counsellor with the same cultural/religious background as you? (Why/Why not?)

Informing the Solution: Research Question #2 (What are the potential solutions in overcoming issues within counselling and between counsellor and client, in order to facilitate mutual understanding and learning for both counsellors and international students?)

1. Do you recall any instances in your counselling sessions when you felt your counsellor really understood you?
2. (If yes) Can you tell me more about those instances?
3. In aiming to meet your needs, what kinds of things did the counsellor do that were helpful?
4. What kinds of things did the counsellor do that were unhelpful?
5. Do you think it is possible to have a good therapeutic relationship with a counsellor from a different cultural/religious background than yourself? (Why/Why not?)
**Closing Questions**

1. Do you think it is helpful for counsellors to discuss racial/cultural/spiritual differences with their clients?

2. What kinds of suggestions do you have for counsellors to better meet the needs of international students?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transcription</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for 'accuracy'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coding</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach), but instead the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>All relevant extracts for all each theme have been collated.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Data have been analysed – interpreted, made sense of – rather than just paraphrased or described.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Analysis and data match each other – the extracts illustrate the analytic claims.</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Analysis tells a convincing and well-organized story about the data and topic.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided.</td>
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<td>Overall</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over-lightly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written report</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis are clearly explicated.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>There is a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done – ie, described method and reported analysis are consistent.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>The researcher is positioned as active in the research process; themes do not just ‘emerge’.</td>
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</tbody>
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Appendix 6: Coded interview transcript (excerpt)

Thematic Analysis Phase 2: Generating initial codes

| J: Yeah, alright. So I remember like **I had some anxiety**. So I was quite worried and constantly feeling worried. And I couldn’t understand why? And I just let it keep going. Um, and then I heard that there was a counselling service in the University. Um, I’ve heard it like from several lectures, and they’d always mention it. Especially like medical school you’ll find that they always press the point that we have counselling services. We have – the University can help you because they know that **Medicine can be a stressful course** and a lot of medical students do tend to have anxiety or depression, problems like that.

Um, so I knew it was available but I **never really got to accessing it**. Because I didn’t – I wasn’t sure where to go exactly? And I was a bit embarrassed, really...to like ask people and like try to find out, Um, but then eventually like I was lucky, I found like the card that they gave us at the start of the year. It had like all the important numbers. So, and **one of them was the counselling service**. So I just called them up and then after that it was really easy to access the services. Like, they just told me to go online, fill out some questionnaires and then come to them, which was good.

F: Mhmmm, okay. So initially, kind of **getting to that first step was a bit...**

J: **Yes...that was difficult.***

F: It was a bit difficult but then once you actually found them it was really...

J: **Easy**

F: Easy ok. And did you have quite a large number of sessions? Or was it just a few times that you went?

J: Just a few times. Like, I **had one session which was just like where they got information out of me**. So like, they try to find out what the problem was. Um, and it was someone who had just a general background. Like she wasn’t specialized in CBT or anything like that. She was just talking to me. Um, so yeah we just talked and **she found out that like the anxiety was big enough for me to get like some other sessions with another counsellor**. Um, so then **I went to her and had two sessions with the other one**. Um, and she just directed me towards the NHS because time was limited. |

| Anxiety issues led to seeking counselling. |
| Heard about counselling service from lectures. |
| Common in medical school to inform students of counselling support due to stress of course. |
| Took some time to access service – felt embarrassed to ask. Not sure where to go. |
| Found card with information and was able to call and make appointment online. |
| Difficult to make initial contact, thereafter accessibility was easy. |
| Following 2 sessions was directed to NHS due to limitations on time at counselling service. |
Appendix 7: Coding/analysis stages (excerpts)

Due to my preferences of writing out themes by hand and having different colours to categorize themes from international students, counsellors, and overarching themes, I chose to use coloured cue cards for phases 3-5 of the thematic analysis.

Phase 3: Searching for themes – international students

- Two excerpts presented from participant 4 (top) and participant 2 (bottom) with categories corresponding to my two research questions (challenges/solutions) and other codes which do not fit into the previous two categories. Numbers correspond to numbered paragraphs within interview transcript that support each theme.
Phase 4: Reviewing themes – counsellors

• Generating an initial thematic map of themes for counsellors corresponding to research question 1 (challenges) on left and research question 2 (solutions) on right of photo. Checking if themes work in relation to coded extracts and entire data set. Numbers correspond to numbered paragraphs within focus group transcript that support each theme.
Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

- Refining specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells. Thematic map presents themes for counsellors, international students, in relation to both research questions as well as overarching themes (across all participants).
Appendix 8: Analysis process reflexivity

The following section highlights my reflexivity throughout the analysis process in noting key information that felt relevant and important to include herein.

Three participants participated in the member checking process – one counsellor and two international students. Both international students reported no discrepancies within themes and in presentation of their responses. The counsellor participant reported no discrepancies within themes and clarified two points regarding two of his presented quotes which were amended and incorporated into subsequent versions of the research findings. The member checking did not therefore present any dilemmas for having to re-work the analysis and provided participants the opportunity to be co-collaborators with me which has been my aim for this research. This is especially important I believe when research provides recommendations for services to be improved for the participants themselves. As such, the element of social justice is present within participatory action research frameworks, as was the case in this project. Since participants were identifying their own challenges and solutions, it was important for me to represent their views accurately.

What quickly became apparent within the TA analysis process is the levels of heterogeneity within both counsellor and international student groups. The international student participant group had a higher degree of heterogeneity than the counsellor group which was part of my aim in recruitment so as to have a rich and diverse representation of perspectives within the data. In addition, having counsellors discuss their views in a focus group format further facilitated more cohesiveness in
agreement with each other. International students on the other hand presented their views individually in interviews and not surprisingly held more varied responses in relation to the research questions. As such, theme generation within the counsellor group was a more straightforward process than with the student group. International student participants also presented slightly different responses based on whether they were novice international students or seasoned international students. Seasoned international students were those students who had been exposed to diverse environments throughout their lives either through having a multicultural family, travelling, or living abroad in other countries before studying in the UK. Novice international students were those who had never been exposed to a different environment prior to coming to the UK. The amount of time a student had been living in the UK also made a difference in the level of challenges they described.

To account for the heterogeneity described above, within the international student group there were four females and one male, two novice international students, two seasoned international students, and one that was placed in between these two categories. In addition, the diversity was further divided into Ph.D students (3), undergraduate students (1), and medical students (1). Some students had previous experiences of counselling and therapy prior to counselling in the UK (2), for others it was their first time (2), and for another they did not access university counselling services due to accessibility barriers. Some students had also been seeking other support services in the UK such as the NHS, private therapy, or counselling through charity organisations (2), while others only had contact with the UK university counselling service (2). This level of diversity has been elaborated on throughout chapter three and highlights the various factors that have shaped participants responses.
in terms of their exposure and engagement with counselling services. Despite these diverse factors within international students, I have presented the most significant themes that were articulated across all international student participants to represent their views on the challenges and solutions of working cross-culturally with counsellors and therapists at higher academic institutions.

Counsellor heterogeneity was less predominant although still present. Some counsellors had varied national/cultural backgrounds and had worked with diverse clients (refugees, asylum seekers) in other work placements. The counsellor group varied in age and included four females and one male. Further counsellor characteristics were not obtained due to various limitations of the focus group format which have been described in more detail in chapter six, section 6.3.1.

This analysis as described in chapter three encompassed two phases. Each participant group (counsellor/international student) underwent TA procedures of analysis which were conducted following Braun and Clarke’s Six Phase Guide (2006, 2012) across all five participants within each group. A Thematic Map and table of themes from each group has been generated (Figures 4.1, 4.2) and a further comparison of themes across both participant groups in the second stage of analysis has generated two further overarching themes (Figure 4.3). Where some themes included sub-themes, these have been presented as such. I have presented the order of themes according to the order of my research questions whilst showcasing counsellors’ followed by international students’ views in relation to each.
Braun and Clarke (2013) point out how identifying themes is an active process and needs to involve selecting ‘the different elements that are most meaningful for answering [the] research question’ (p.223) which means that not all data necessarily are included in theme generation. This ability to tell ‘a particular story about the data’ (p.228) involves selecting relevant accounts in alignment with answering the research questions rather than representing everything that was vocalised by participants. As such, the presented themes align with answering my research questions as well as contribute to the larger aims and objectives of providing recommendations for how to better meet the needs of international students and counsellors who work together.