

**Strathclyde University,
Faculty of Education, Counselling Unit**

**An exploratory study to investigate
aspects of the philosophy, method
and practical application of pluralist
evaluation of counselling.**

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Ph.D.

2000

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Abstract

This thesis proposes and explores the theory and application of pluralism in the evaluation of counselling and psychotherapy. Current models of monistic and multi-method research are seen as inadequate as each tends to actively undermine the other(s). Those that attempt to offer a broad range of data types often struggle to maintain adequate 'truth value' for all their statements and findings. A pluralist process and mechanism is proposed to provide a constructive alternative to the essentially destructive models of scientific and epistemological (generally dialectical) progress described by Kuhn, Hegel and others. It also offers an advance on previous alternatives and other pluralist models. The pluralism proposed comprises cycles of structured interaction between differing methods based on a positively framed dialogue. Utility, as variously defined from different perspectives, is seen as a prime consideration. However, the approach is not merely pragmatic as it also protects the idealist epistemological aspirations and needs of the divergent research paradigms that might be applied in evaluating counselling and psychotherapy. The thesis describes a series of studies based on this pluralist model in order to explore its practical application. Three of these studies investigated the effectiveness of counselling services. Overall, their findings were supportive of the counselling interventions studied while successfully meeting a broad range of stakeholder needs. A fourth study explored pluralism in a context dominated by reductionist concerns and produced normative data on a psychometric measure of self / ideal-self discrepancies (equated with self esteem).

'A generation that had the courage to get rid of God, to crush the state and the church, and to overthrow society and morality, still bowed before Science. And in Science, where freedom ought to reign, the order of the day was "believe in the authorities or off with your head".'

Strindberg, *Antibarbarus*, cited in Feyerabend, 1975, p. 21.

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Part 1: Overview and Introduction

Preface

'Excursus ad hominem' occur in reflexive form at least twice in this thesis. It is symptomatic of an important element in the procedure which provides the main focus of this work that the particular, individual and more or less circumscribed view of the author is made as transparent as possible in order to help critics account for its starting point and consequent progress. As I write, inevitably, from a personal and subjective point of view, I consider it a pre-requisite that I make myself available *ad hominem*, at least in so far as my personal background has influenced this work. This preface, then, is a declaration of interest: my own 'way in' to this study stated as clearly as possible.

I am a counsellor and so have a professional interest in seeing counselling proven as adequately effective, in having that proof accepted where it currently is not, and in ensuring that the sum of such proofs should do justice (and no injury) to the values and outcomes appropriate to counselling. Furthermore, I am a counsellor trained in the person centred model (cf. Rogers, 1951; 1959; 1980a and 1986; Mearns and Thorne, 1999 and 2000; Mearns, 1994), in which the subjectivity of the individual is taken as both inescapable and as a starting point which is highly to be prized, possibly leading to a constructivist bias. Mearns (1997) even goes so far as to state that 'reality is "socially constructed"' (p. 158, emphasis added). Although the pluralism presented in this thesis would not take so literal and unqualified a stance, the act of incorporating the subjective into even the most objectivist studies has certainly been influenced by such training and prior views.

Furthermore, much of what follows constitutes a critique of current practice from a distinctly humanistic and constructivist starting point. If some kind of reliable symmetry in the degree of critical analysis imposed on the various schools of thought referred to below was considered necessary, at least one collaborating author would be required.

My earlier grounding in philosophy took the meta-philosophical approach of studying the history of the philosophy of science. It is, perhaps, not surprising that I should draw on the assumption underlying such an approach that there is value in an overview of this highly heterogeneous subject and the implication that using and building on elements from diverse sources might be a useful way forward.

The approaches to knowledge, research and counselling I have been systematically taught have been almost entirely occidental and they generally excluded religious, mystical or theological matters, except as socio-political pressures on thinkers at various times. My knowledge, if not beliefs, are thus from the mould such study produces. There is little in the following pages which is derived from mystic or explicitly 'spiritual' influences, for example. I have not attempted to discuss the merits of such diverse 'ways of seeing' (Berger, 1972) nor have I explicitly incorporated them into the method I put forward or the applications of it which follow. Where appropriate, I have tried to leave space, sometimes explicitly, for others to incorporate their preferred ways of knowing into the kind of pluralism I propose.

It is possible that the fact that the pluralist philosophy and method set out in the following pages conform to such a pattern is a reflection of my intention, prior belief structures or prejudicial assumptions. It is possible that I am creating rationalised justifications of my position, rather than describing actual new ways of approaching and carrying out evaluative research. The subjective expression of beliefs as objective knowledge has been grist to the philosophers' mill for millennia, of course, but the threat to the validity of such arguments must be acknowledged at least and, if possible, compensated for.

However, to recognise the possibility of bias is not to retract or qualify any of the arguments that follow. I have brought to bear on this subject all my personal experience, learning and various degrees of ability. By drawing together many threads left me by my predecessors I hope to offer something different to that which has

gone before. The degree to which it is useful, valid, true or otherwise is best left to the judgement of those not constrained by my personal philosophical blinkers. Were I to suggest otherwise, I would be confounded by my own arguments that follow.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Goals and intention

There are three main objectives for this thesis:

1. to outline one possible distinctively *pluralist* methodology for counselling evaluation research;
2. to explore some of the philosophical and epistemological implications and requirements of this method and, importantly,
3. to explore aspects of the application of this pluralist method through a series of practical examples of, or related to, counselling evaluation.

As it is discussed below, a working definition of pluralism, albeit simplified, might be that it constitutes a disparately composed yet robust, coherent and, above all, systematic approach to research. It must be possible for diverse investigative methods to be applied within its structure without compromising any epistemological or methodological characteristics essential to any of them. This is achievable, it will be argued, through a continually interactive hermeneutic process between the diverse components of current evaluation research. As described, this process comprises cycles of mutual support, validation, criticism, interpretation and reinterpretation. These cycles can occur on different scales: within phases of a single study and across separate studies in a research domain. It may also be possible to link entirely different areas of study, but this lies outwith the scope of this thesis.

Even at this early stage it should be stressed that this coherent, structured interaction between approaches makes this version of pluralism very different from already commonplace practices such as methodological triangulation, in which multiple methods are used concurrently or consecutively for the sake of comparing and contrasting independently obtained results. As will become clear, it is essential to

distinguish between the existence of a disordered plurality of approaches, from which researchers may choose, and *pluralism* as a robust method by which that plurality can be effectively harnessed. It is this step beyond the disorganised chaos of many, often mutually unacceptable, alternatives to the use of a systematic method of utilising those alternatives, that is the essential characteristic of the pluralism explored here. The structure for achieving the pluralist combination of approaches that is proposed may have the potential to allow research to make important progress beyond our current position.

It is suggested that multi-method research designs often ignore or pass over various theoretical and practical difficulties, especially those relating to the robustness of the foundations such designs have in current scientific thought. These fundamental conflicts might be expected to render current practice invalid, when viewed from any established perspective on research methodology.

In the following discussion, pluralism is placed in its historical context by exploring its philosophical and methodological heritage before launching into an investigation of some essential aspects of pluralist theory and method themselves. However, there has been no attempt to provide complete explorations or critiques of these precursors to pluralism. Discussion of each of them has been restricted to those aspects that were considered to be most relevant to the needs of developing the arguments for this distinctive form of pluralism.

The sections which focus most directly on the theory of pluralism and the methodology derived from it then play a pivotal role by developing the basis for the practical applications of pluralism in the evaluation studies that follow in Part 5.

Discussion includes exploration of some conceptual issues thought to be of fundamental importance. A model for their application is then developed. Although considered particularly applicable to evaluative research, especially that regarding counselling and psychotherapy, this model may have many possible uses throughout

the social and health sciences. Some of these are examined and exemplified in the empirical investigations while others are noted in the concluding chapter.

The intention has been to produce a thesis that contributes to current knowledge, understanding and practice of pluralist evaluation of counselling and psychotherapy. Both the theory and the results of its practical application are considered valuable.

1.2 The boundaries of this study

This thesis will, for the most part, restrict itself to an exploration of applied epistemological pluralism and its implications for developing pluralist methodologies for evaluative research into counselling and psychotherapy: consequently, there are a range of pluralisms which cannot be considered (see Appendix C.4).

Detailed discussion of particular methodological tools and practices, such as demographic sampling, questionnaire design or interview techniques has been kept to a minimum. Such issues are generally discussed at length in the existing literature.

References have been included as appropriate, of course. This has permitted Parts 2, 3 and 4 to discuss the background, foundations and mechanisms of pluralism more thoroughly than would otherwise have been possible. Part 5 then provides a suitably practical balance to the theoretical sections preceding it as described below. It should also be noted that the reported empirical studies are presented here primarily for the sake of developing the exploration of pluralism. While they undoubtedly contribute to knowledge regarding the effectiveness of counselling this has been a secondary consideration. Consequently, readers are referred to the appropriate Appendices and research reports for further details on their findings.

1.3 A map of the thesis: the work is outlined, its main arguments and the purpose of each section are summarised

This study is divided into six main parts.

Part one: overview and introduction

The first part, comprising the preface and Chapter 1, is intended to do no more than introduce the following material and lay out the boundaries of the work. The main goals are stated and some terminology is defined.

Part two: the background to pluralism

The second part of the study, comprising Chapters 2 and 3, considers the background to the pluralism explored in the later sections. Chapter 2 introduces the history of conflict between the traditions of reductionist and phenomenological research, especially in relation to counselling evaluation. Both schools of thought are seen as being useful in their own terms. However, the intransigence and dogmatism with which the debate between them has been characterised can be seen as constituting a kind of paradigmatic war. Despite their vehement attacks on each other, neither approach is seen as entirely sufficient in itself. Moreover, neither side can accept the basic tenets of the alternative. The clashes are at such a fundamental level that each side can even be seen as actively undermining the contributions of the other. This is seen as a problem inherent in *all* monistic approaches to research: they can neither utilise nor tolerate their alternatives.

Chapter 3 then considers some approaches to resolving the split between the different research types. In section 3.1 the possibility of reaching consensus between them is seen as being extremely unlikely while its desirability is questioned.

Conversely, diversity is seen as being positively valuable. The problem that remains for pluralism is, of course, in making that diversity work. In 3.2, the option of considering all approaches as equally valuable is also rejected. However, some form

of détente between the warring factions is clearly required. It is suggested that peace between the warring factions will only be sustained by establishing some form of productive, rather than destructive, communication between the paradigms. Sections 3.3 and 3.4 then consider the important contributions to the subsequent debate on pluralism from pragmatic and post-modern approaches to science. However, neither is seen as sufficient in this case. The whole of Part 2 is then summarised.

Part three: the basis of pluralism

The third part then considers the basis for pluralism itself. In Chapter 4, the current state of multi-method research is considered inadequate because of the largely chaotic and unintegrated use of conflicting paradigms. The form of pluralism proposed here is then outlined. It is not amenable to standardisation and the different approaches it seeks to incorporate may have to accept procedures they see as ‘non-standard’. It is noted that the process of developing pluralism must be constructive and that the overall result should be an increase in our knowledge about whatever topic is studied. Maintaining a constant, mutual critique between all the approaches involved at all stages of a study is seen as vital in avoiding the return of either monistic dogmatism or uncontrolled relativism. The pluralism proposed is fundamentally inclusive but seeks to maintain distinct paradigmatic identities. It is seen as inherently reflexive. Finally, the current proposals are differentiated from an earlier, narrower version of pluralism.

Chapter 5 then considers some limitations of the pluralist approach as it is proposed here. It is recognised that some degree of consensus is still required, that pluralism cannot tolerate any absolute monism and that it is possible that this version of pluralism is biased or may even be mistaken as identical to current practices in some circumstances. It is also noted that, in its current form, pluralism cannot support any single ontological position. However, none of these points are seen as fatally undermining the pluralist principles stated in the preceding discussion. A point by

point summary of the pluralist position taken is then provided as a summary of Part 3.

Part four: the methodology of pluralism

Part 4 turns to the practical application of the more fundamental issues considered thus far. Chapter 6 looks at a number of vital issues in developing and sustaining pluralist evaluations. Firstly, the diverse approaches must be brought together and the importance of establishing a real mutuality between them is emphasised. This allows each side to engage the other in what can then develop into a repeating cycle of reciprocal interpretation, critique and counter-critique. Each approach is also required to consider its own position as represented by its alternative. It is also noted that these developmental cycles must be reflexive and maintained at every stage of a pluralist study. Pluralist development can continue into later studies as well or across whole research domains. A further requirement, however, is that every research design must always be adapted to the necessarily different needs of each new context. Moreover, the pluralist processes outlined are seen as being extremely well suited to this.

Chapter 7 has an even more practical orientation and looks at how pluralist studies can be developed. Their ‘shape’ and the interconnectedness of the various parts are considered. It is emphasised that pluralist studies should be developed according to the needs of those with a stake in them, rather than according to *a priori* rules. Part 4 is then also summarised.

Part five: example pluralist studies

Part 5 continues the increasingly practical focus of the thesis. Following some general introductory comments in Chapter 8, a series of pluralist studies is described. These studies are used as tools with which the exploration of pluralism can be extended beyond the theoretical. The first three, presented in Chapters 9, 10 and 11, are evaluations of counselling services in different settings and with different contextual

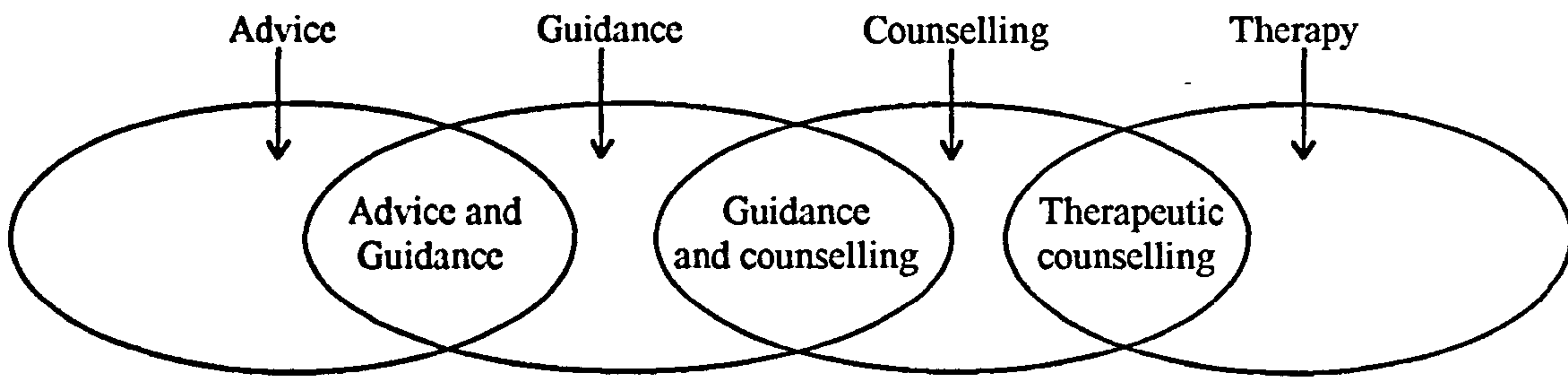


Diagram 1.1 - The spectrum of talking-based helping activities

requirements. Chapter 12, is an exploration of pluralism as applied in a study dominated by concerns from one extreme end of the paradigmatic spectrum and presents the testing of a psychometric measure believed to equate inversely with self esteem.

Part six: conclusions

Part 6 comprises the concluding chapter and postscript. It opens with a brief review of the advances made in this work, especially noting progression beyond both current multi-method and monistic forms of evaluation research. It is noted that the development and application of pluralism in the field of counselling and psychotherapy evaluation may be seen as highly appropriate. Some wider applications of pluralism are also briefly considered. Limitations of this work are noted along with areas that may warrant further investigation. Finally, it is asserted that this thesis has successfully met its original goals as outlined above.

1.4 Note on terminology

Throughout this work the terms ‘counselling’ and ‘psychotherapy’ have frequently been used in conjunction, and sometimes interchangeably, in order to identify a particular range of interventions. The Advice, Guidance and Counselling Lead Body (1993, p. 1) for the development of National Vocational Qualifications (N.V.Q.s) identifies both as forming part of a spectrum of activities shown in Diagram 1.1.

Inevitably, there is a large area in which either term, or the more general terms ‘therapy’ or ‘psychological therapies’, could be used. Sometimes referred to as ‘therapeutic counselling’, this is the type of helping that has been at the forefront of the author’s mind in this study. Following McLeod (1994a), it has been assumed i) that for many such helping relationships the main difference intended by the terms relates to professional context and ii) that both are amenable to similar types of investigation:

'This sense of counselling and psychotherapy being almost indistinguishable from each other in practice is ... reflected in the types of research that have been carried out. For example, an inspection of the titles of articles published in counselling research journals ... and psychotherapy research journals ... reveals a high level of correspondence in topics and methods.'

McLeod (1994a) p. 41.

On the same ground, the terms 'psychotherapist', 'therapist' and 'counsellor' have generally been used as synonyms.

Although the giving of information and advice can sometimes properly be called counselling, and much of what follows could be applied in that context, this work is less directly relevant for such tasks and it is not primarily intended for use in evaluating them. Similarly, uses of the word 'psychotherapy' that have more in common with psychiatry and are clearly not synonymous with counselling are not entirely to be ignored, but neither should they be taken to be indicated by the use of the combined phrase 'counselling and / or psychotherapy' or its equivalents here.

Where a more specific point on the advice - counselling - psychotherapy continuum is intended, the terms have been separated. For example, much of the work undertaken by the services under investigation in Part 5 was deliberately referred to as 'counselling' by the services themselves. This was to emphasise to their client groups that they could be used for a range of difficulties and were neither medically oriented nor appropriate resources to deal with florid mental illness.

Despite occasional references to counselling and psychotherapy in relation to medical contexts, those who seek help from such interventions have generally been referred to as 'clients', rather than as 'patients'. Grafanaki (1997) cites Hoyt (1979) and Hill and Corbett (1993) who suggest that the latter term 'relates more narrowly to a medical model, whereas client seems consistent with the counselling focus on strengths over

pathology' (p. 4). I have followed this convention on the same grounds of not excluding a humanistic emphasis and common practice in the field of counselling generally.

'Evaluation' is a term discussed in more detail later in the text (e.g. see p. 159). However, it should be noted that while it is taken here as being often related to involving the examination of outcomes, it is not synonymous with outcome research. 'Evaluation' research is seen as being concerned with whatever elements of study that are required to assist the process of placing values upon, or of making value judgements about, whatever is under study. As such, where value is placed upon processes, as distinct from outcomes, then these would certainly become legitimate items for investigation. Conversely, where no value, in any sense of the word, is put on a given outcome then study of it would add nothing to an evaluative research programme. Nonetheless, outcomes are frequently of particular concern in evaluating counselling and psychotherapy services. Such research frequently becomes particularly concerned with them. Discussion of the way in which the concern to study different aspects of any given intervention is a major theme in the work that follows. Achieving the most desirable+ balance between the examination of processes and of outcomes is seen as being no different from achieving a similar balance between other competing preferences in research studies.

Finally, it should be noted, perhaps, that while use of the word 'paradigm' has been kept to a minimum, where it is applied it has generally been used according to the dictionary definition of 'a conceptual framework within which scientific theories are constructed' (Kirkpatrick, 1983, p. 920). It has *not* been used to indicate any *specific* basic understanding or conceptual framework that could be contrasted with another. The view taken here has been that any such alternative framework would be extremely likely to qualify for the title 'paradigm' in its own right. Thus distinctions such as that made by Rennie and Toukmanian (1992, pp. 245 – 246) between 'paradigmatic' and, in that instance, 'narrative' approaches to knowledge have not

been applied. It has been assumed for the purposes of this text that 'narrative ways of knowing' rely on a given paradigm in just the same way, albeit of a different type, as in any other way of construing knowledge.

**Part 2: The background to pluralism:
historical and philosophical issues**

Chapter 2 The problem of monism

General introduction to Part 2

The following discussion is intended to provide an overview of the historical context and background of the particular type of pluralism that will be proposed in Parts 3 and 4. Discussion of this heritage has also been used as an opportunity for introducing several fundamental tenets of pluralism so that they are stated in close juxtaposition with the issues to which they relate. Some such points are developed in reaction against their predecessors while others are derived from them or even rely on their careful application within a pluralist framework.

The first area considered is the legacy of conflict offered by most occidental philosophy because of its ultimately monistic goals. To facilitate discussion, these strands are primarily represented by the broad, generalised headings of reductionist positivism, allied with logical empiricism, and naturalistic / humanistic phenomenology. These broad groups are themselves highly heterogeneous with a variety of schisms and alternative paths. They therefore represent something of a false dichotomy that undoubtedly fails to do justice to the range of approaches to evaluative research. However, it is hoped that the result is a more straightforward discussion less reliant than would otherwise be the case on the myriad philosophical distinctions that abound in the history of science. Only the relevant substance of the internal differentiation within each set of approaches is considered below but more specific titles have been used where it has been deemed necessary to identify particular approaches more accurately.

It is asserted in this part of the thesis that no single currently available model of evaluation research is sufficient if applied in isolation, especially in the case of counselling and psychotherapy. Furthermore, in Chapter 3 their unintegrated use in combination is also shown to be inadequate: we can neither ignore incompatibilities

between different schools nor rely on consensus regarding some new monistic paradigm. The eclectic relativism of ignoring incompatibilities is rejected on the ground that fundamental conflicts remain that fatally undermine the claims of whatever purported knowledge is produced. A new consensual monism is then also rejected on the grounds that i) answers to the fundamental conflicts have not yet been found and ii) monistic views are inherently limited and place inhibitions on evaluations of counselling and psychotherapy that are both unhelpful and unwarranted. The valuable contributions of pragmatism and post-modernism are also considered, as are their respective limitations.

2.1 The conflicting heritages of reductionist logical empiricism and naturalistic phenomenology

Almost since the earliest recorded philosophical endeavours, attempts have been made to create a fundamental, generalised all-encompassing investigative method, supported by an equally generally applicable epistemology (McLennan, 1995, p. 26). Being founded on an ambition of complete explanation, such models must necessarily seek to claim exclusive title to forming the basis for scientific progress. It is unsurprising, then, that each should struggle to gain dominance over the other. Some of this combative philosophical heritage will be outlined and critically examined here, particularly as it has been represented in recent decades in the field of counselling and psychotherapy evaluation.

There have been many debates about how best to evaluate the various forms of helping developed since the first talking or psychological interventions gained currency in western society. Thanks partly to the development of such helping in the medical field the questions of how to establish whether or not it is helpful, to what extent and under what conditions, have been ever present and have themselves been controversial from the outset (Postman, 1962).

Despite laying claim to a clear scientific basis for his theories, with some justification, Freud rejected much experimental psychology and even suggested that direct testing of his theories was both impossible and unnecessary:

'I cannot put much value on these confirmations because the wealth of reliable observations on which these [psychoanalytic] assertions rest make them independent of experimental verification. Still, it (experimental verification) can do no harm.'

Freud, (1934), p. 702.

His attitude varied from this extreme indifference towards positivist, experimental reductionism to an increasing conviction, shared by his colleagues, that any alternative to their preferred method of naturalistic observations and deductions was actively damaging to psychoanalysis (MacKinnon and Dukes, 1962, p. 703).

On the other hand, as recently as 1995 Breakwell dismissed Freudian psychoanalysis, like any theory that cannot be tested by standard empirical method, as 'pre-scientific' and only useful to the extent that 'if it pleases you, you can tell it to others' as a 'mere' story (p. 10). This position would deny the validity of any but the most positivist empiricist approach. Not only would religious or spiritual alternatives be outlawed, any observational method would also be necessarily excluded. Unacceptable though such theories might be for empiricism, to dismiss them out of hand denies the possibility of useful information being produced by any approach other than that one, rigidly standardised scientific canon¹. This persistent mutual dismissal ably exemplifies the main problem of all monisms: they necessarily conflict with alternative views.

The debate on how to assess the effectiveness of therapists and counsellors (e.g. Rowland and Goss, 2000) still struggles with the long standing splitting of the predominant western approaches to knowledge which can be seen to share common cultural origins in the ancient Greeks and beyond. Research into people on either an individual or societal scale, and evaluation research in particular, has long reflected these different modes of thought.

The first might be termed the reductionist - positivist (often predominantly quantitatively oriented) school and is based on the logical deductive reasoning of

¹ Of course, long before Freud began his 'talking treatments' the pastoral care offered by many religions was central to their work. Significantly, their acceptance of faith as a basis for their actions has meant that precisely measuring consequent benefits is rarely attempted because the question need not arise. Actions based purely on dogma are acceptable if they accord to the precepts laid down and no other criteria are necessary.

Newtonian physics or Cartesian philosophy. The extreme deterministic version of this approach, proposed by Laplace, was always intended to be applied equally to physical bodies and human behaviour. Hacking (1990, p. 691) cites Laplace's (1795) statement of determinist 'creed': 'All events, even those that ... do not seem to obey the great laws of nature, follow them as necessarily as the revolutions of the sun' (p. 1).

Effects are seen as requiring specific causes and definitive understanding of whatever is under consideration is attempted through minute consideration of its component parts. Once all the characteristics of each aspect of an item or event are understood, little more can be said in these terms. Evaluative decisions must be based on the sum of the resulting accumulated body of consistent acceptable evidence. For example, if counselling is to be used in preference to an alternative course of action, such as psychopharmacology, it must attain a higher level of efficacy. That efficacy will be defined in terms of the units of input and effect associated with each, such as cost, the degree and longevity of measurable change, etc.

The major current alternative, loosely referred to here as the phenomenological - naturalistic approach, is often seen as being predominantly associated with qualitative research. Allied to the discovery oriented thinking of Husserl, among others, it can be related to Heraclitus' reliance on sense perceptions in opposition to the extreme rationalism of his contemporary, Parmenides². This very different style of research advocates setting out to explore the nature of what is going on, rather than taking as a primary goal the task of encapsulating it in finite terms or rendering a thing into finite units. Whereas reductionism is concerned with just such 'definition',

² Empedocles' slightly later solution to the conflict of reason versus experience relied on the acceptance of the world as being composed of more than one basic element. This is not entirely dissimilar to the acceptance of the complexity of knowledge as including more than one 'way of knowing' in pluralism. His philosophy, however, was directed towards understanding the natural world and such physicalist concerns have been excluded here.

phenomenology is more concerned with description of whole phenomena and reduction into their component parts is more likely to be incidental.

What is of much greater importance for phenomenology, however, is that understanding of events is inevitably mediated through the context-influenced subjectivity of the investigator. This is often thought to preclude any possibility of reaching an ultimate, 'objective' statement of what is 'true' in general. What would be called errors, inconsistencies or gaps in the body of evidence in the reductionist approach are frequently considered revealing in their own right (e.g. Erlandson, *et al.*, 1993).

Such models did not originate in counselling or therapy research and are widely recognised in a number of other fields such as anthropology and social psychology, for example in the work of Harré and Secord (1972) and Marsh *et al.* (1978). It is significant, however, that most such research has been developed to meet the needs of studies which focus on human activities. It is when we turn away from the physical sciences towards the less tangible but no less real factors associated with behaviour and experienced emotion that we find the reductionist determinism favoured by Newton, Laplace and others to be least useful. Some would even argue that determinism is rarely useful in any behavioural study regardless of whether humans are the object of study (Rose, 1997) because of excessive reliance on crudely ideological reductionism in investigating radically indeterminate living processes.

It has been suggested that all therapies can be seen as consisting of narratives (e.g. McLeod, 1997a; Lynch, 1997) rather than as sequences of causes with direct, definitive effects. In telling (narrating) stories about experienced reality clients and therapists actively shape the future of those stories, mitigating the effects of previous determining (defining) factors. Most, if not all research into therapy is, by extension, narrative about narrative. It is not surprising, therefore, that narrative, phenomenological approaches have sometimes been favoured.

When this is combined with the very real need to quantify the degree to which counselling and psychotherapy is effective, neither is it surprising that it has been a relatively easy step for some researchers to utilise both models without concerning themselves with the finer points of conflicts between the paradigms.

Increasingly, it is suggested that although both approaches may have a great deal to offer, neither is entirely satisfactory on its own (e.g. Rossman and Wilson, 1985). Kazdin (1994) insists that ‘the breadth of designs is vital to the field and contributes to the advances. The reason is that each particular design strategy alone has its weaknesses’ (p. 33). Bergin and Garfield (1994b) endorse this view noting that ‘it seems that traditional experimental and multivariate methodologies have not consistently or adequately addressed the phenomenon of therapeutic change’ (p. 828).

2.2 The heritage of conflict between the dominant paradigms

The frequently dogmatic debate between the differing styles of enquiry (Howe, 1985) may have hindered developments and clear thinking rather than having assisted them. In the terms of each alternative stance, neither model provides a sure foundation on which to base widely acceptable and meaningful assessments of therapeutic competence or effectiveness.

The rest of Chapter 2 considers the problems associated with each of the received models, their mutual critique and the conflict between them. Chapter 3 will then examine some of the strengths and failings associated with previous approaches to resolving this paradigmatic split. The major task then left to the remainder of this thesis is to explore the proposition that a properly developed pluralist epistemology and methodology can allow evaluative research to meet the expectations of *both* sides of the debate.

2.2.1 *Reductionism applied to the study of therapeutic change*

Critics of reductionism have argued that quantitative results (e.g. from rating scales) can lend a spurious air of accuracy (Oppenheim, 1985) with the numbers being erroneously accepted as facts by others (Smith, 1989). Such ‘mathematecization’ derives directly from what Adorno (1956) called ‘the urge to reduction’ (p. 4) and has been embedded in western thought for many centuries. He points out that:

‘Socrates in Plato’s middle period, already feels it ‘necessary to take refuge in concepts and use them to investigate the true essence of things.’

Plato, *Phaedo*, p. 99 (quoted in Adorno, *op. cit.*, p. 9)

Therapeutic counselling involves extremely varied and variable processes and in an absolutist reductionist methodology, the piles of data would be too vast for there to be any point attempting to detail every morsel. A truly exhaustive account of even a short counselling session, including elucidation of all the processes involved and the multifarious implications of each statement, would run to many thousands of words and would probably still be incomplete even after the best efforts of all involved.

Consequently, researchers have long resorted to positivist approximations of the Laplacian inspired method. This has led to a reliance on standardisation, operationalisation and the regrettable but possibly inevitable concentration on those aspects of therapeutic phenomena predicted to be more or less important *and* that can be made available for study (e.g. Cronbach, 1970).

For example, Mace (1965) states baldly that ‘any explanatory theory must be supported by scientific evidence. [And that] this ... is accepted by all scientific psychologists’ (p. 5). Passing over the tautology of this position, it is the definition of what is to be accepted as constituting evidence that lies at the core of the split between the approaches to research.

Quoting Maxwell (no reference given), Eysenck (1965) argues that ‘in the study of any complex object we must fix our attention on those elements of it which we are able to observe and to cause to vary, and ignore those which we can neither observe nor cause to vary’ (p. 9). The assumption that this can produce an adequate description of *fact* rather than simply being a convenient methodological expediency is itself a misinterpretation of reductionist empiricism. Nonetheless, it is representative of the way in which the reductionist model has been applied.

That model is, perhaps, at its most problematic in investigating counselling and psychotherapeutic processes and outcomes - many things that cannot be measured or varied may be of the greatest importance to those involved. Even Eysenck, partially contradicting his own position, admits that his writings ‘have gone well beyond facts ascertained by careful and patient research’ (*Ibid.*) and quotes Huxley (no reference given) in his defence: ‘those who refuse to go beyond fact seldom get as far as fact’³ (*Ibid.*).

Of course, it cannot be disputed that the positivist, reductionist approach has yielded extremely useful and important results; a vast accretion of data has developed.

Indeed, reductionist positivist empiricism supported the development of perhaps the most humanistic of therapeutic models, the person-centred approach (Rogers, 1957; 1968). Rogers, and his co-workers, attempted to remain consistent to their philosophy *and* step beyond their humanistic frame of reference to enter that of the psychology of the time.

Their detailed investigation of fundamental processes such as empathy (Rogers, 1980b) analysed many of its elements in addition to establishing its significance in relation to counselling effectiveness. However, the resulting focus on elements available for investigation effectively reduced the concept to a simple analysis of

³ It should be noted that it is acting on this position that some mechanisms used in pluralism enter the field of pluralist discourse in order to allow the opposing sides to benefit from views they would, of themselves, exclude, as discussed below.

empathic responses. Mearns and Thorne (1988; 1999) later emphasised that the therapeutic importance of empathy as an ongoing *process* is virtually ignored if one concentrates only on discrete empathic responses.

Counselling is a process composed of many parts which are so mutually interdependent that it is impossible to consider them separately without losing characteristics essential to the therapeutic relationship: the evolving meaning of all its elements and their changing relationship to each other. The 'moment-by-moment process' (Greenberg, *et al.*, 1993) is a continuous one. Even clearly identifiable significant events (Elliott, *et al.*, 1985; Elliott and Shapiro, 1988 and 1992) are rarely discrete units but, rather, form part of the flow of interaction between therapist and client.

Further confounding reductionist ambitions, it has also been argued that in the therapeutic milieu cause and effect relationships are not necessarily simple and direct (e.g. David, 1994). That is to say, any given intervention may cause entirely *unpredictable* effects, depending on the individuals involved, their relationships, context and so on. The 'linear' model of an action leading directly to a predictable result, as in Newtonian physics, may not be applicable, at least in the same way (*Ibid.*).

Consequently, the whole is different from the sum of its parts. Pure reductionism will inevitably tend to provide a simplistic picture. Even when very specific aspects of counselling are studied, it has been reported that statistical tests and analyses have been found to be of merely limited help because they cannot adequately represent the richness of the therapeutic experience (e.g. Grafanaki, 1997).

The problem of uncritically applying reductionist thinking to counselling and therapy is clearly demonstrated by the controversy surrounding the development and introduction of National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (N.V.Q.s and S.V.Q.s respectively) in the U.K. Counsellor competence is to be treated as if it were

composed of a number of discrete units or 'micro - skills' that can be ticked off a list as they are demonstrated, the logic being that overall competence is composed of various discrete lesser competencies. There is, as yet, no evidence that this equates with actual effectiveness of the counsellors concerned.

Within the relatively positivistically oriented and medicalised setting of nursing studies, however, this method has been found to be inadequate (Neighbors *et al.*, 1991; Deering-Floy and Neighbors, 1991). Even when graduates were assessed as possessing the required characteristics, their actual performance was found to be less than expected once they were doing the job for real. If such micro-activity analysis proved insufficient in assessing nursing ability, which relies predominantly on specific tasks being competently completed, it must be doubted that these principles could adequately assess competence in counselling given the much less clear cut activities involved, the scope for appropriate idiosyncratic responses, the added difficulties of unclear cause and effect and so forth.

If inappropriately applied, or taken too far, it has been said that the reductionist approach is not unlike trying to understand the characteristics of water by looking at the properties of oxygen and hydrogen, whereas we might do much better to consider what it is like to be wet (Goss and Mearns, 1997a, p. 191). Quantitative researchers have been accused of inappropriately applying their methods to the extent of being like 'a child who, when first given a hammer, finds that everything needs hammering' (Reichardt and Cook, 1979)⁴ which gives a hint as to the tone of much of the debate between the two predominant approaches. For the sake of not appearing overly biased against reductionism at this point it should be stressed that, from the pluralist

⁴ An earlier version of the same analogy emphasises that not only does such narrowness lead to methodological dogmatism it also has direct effects on the object of study as well. Norcross and Freedheim (1992) quote Maslow: "If you only have a hammer you treat everything like a nail" (p. 890). This often adapted maxim would make an excellent slogan to underline much of what is to follow.

perspective developed below, the same accusation could be levelled at much phenomenologically and humanistically inspired writing on research in psychology.

The critique of many forms of therapy offered by Eysenck (e.g. 1952; 1992) has been said to have stimulated researchers towards ‘more rigorous and objective studies’ (McLeod, 1994b, p. 123). However, it has also demonstrated the inadequacy of applying such an extremely exclusive, rigid and overstated version of determinist thinking and has been strongly criticised by a number of authors (e.g. Bergin, 1971; Garfield, 1981). The same is true of some proponents of the current trend towards evidence based practice in medicine (e.g. N.H.S.E., 1996), despite the increasingly held view that reliance *only* on standardised randomised controlled trials is severely limited (e.g. Aveline, *et al.*, 1995; Black, 1996; Department of Health, 1996; Mellor-Clark and Barkham, 1997; Bower and King, 2000; Barkham and Mellor-Clark, 2000) as is the over reliance on quantitative self-report measures (McLeod, 2000b). Such dogmatic reliance in much published research has led recent critics of counselling to suggest that counselling still has little or no adequate evidence of effectiveness at all.

For example, in primary health care where competition for scarce resources gives such debates added vigour and the medical culture provides an extra reductionist bias, Roth and Fonagy (1996a) report that ‘there are few investigations which demonstrate consistent benefits to patients and no studies which show generic counselling to add to standard practice care’ (p. 151).

Anderson (1994) claims that ‘counselling ... is akin not to medical practice, but to religion or magic. It’s effectiveness cannot be tested ... the real criterion has to be faith.’ (cited in Mellor-Clark, 1995, p. 1). This view ignores the potential contribution of phenomenological approaches more reliant on discovery than ‘testing’. It is an example of the anti-phenomenological dogmatism of the medical definition of ‘science’. However, it is also a demonstration of the failure of alternatives to reductionism to meet the needs of those who require clear evidence in

the competition to justify the allocation of funds and this is considered further in the following section.

2.2.2 Critique of phenomenological approaches

If reductionism can be seen as inadequate in this field, qualitative methods are also criticised for lacking the stringent checks and balances of rigid experimental or even quasi-experimental methods (Stone, 1986; Beehr and O'Hara, 1987). Difficulties such as interpreting symptoms reported in an unstructured way, the lack of clear, quantifiable validity and reliability, the poor generalisability and comparability of qualitative accounts of therapy or affective responses have undermined the credibility of otherwise useful research, at least in the eyes of those from the opposing paradigm, as the views of Eysenck, Anderson and others indicate.

The reason qualitative and phenomenological processes have not been as accepted as evidence of the effectiveness of therapy centres on the way truth values are assigned to the various types of evidence by the main groups with an interest in counselling. This issue is of crucial importance and will be raised again below.

Just as an excessive reliance on quantitative methods can result in a simplistic picture being obtained, the same can be seen to be true when exclusive attention is paid to qualitative methods. Some perspectives may place importance on detailed qualitative examination of a small number of experiences of therapy and these experiences may be highly diverse. That diversity is itself problematic, however, when generalisable principles regarding service purchasing or clinical practice are required.

For example, those phenomenologically oriented evaluations that rely on 'customer' accounts of the experience can offer interesting perspectives, not least in that they give a detailed and vivid insight into how processes and outcomes are perceived and experienced. However, they do not necessarily give even the individual practitioner much concrete, reliable and useful information regarding the most appropriate

practice to be applied across a broad range of future clients. Others, such as policy makers and service purchasers have little need for retrospective accounts of what is possible in a few cases. Their need is to predict what will tend to happen on average and to do so in terms that can have monetary or clinical values assigned with the greatest possible precision.

One problem is that the weight and generalisability that should be given to different parts of non-uniform bodies of evidence cannot be decided by either approach. From the reductionist perspective this is only resolved by the exclusion or downgrading of data which does not match its rigid requirements for constituting an adequate representation of 'the truth'. Phenomenological or humanist methods similarly reject the reductionist approach to definition of 'acceptable evidence', as we have seen.

Foucault's phenomenologically derived 'historiography', for example, argued that because truth is a culturally defined concept, those with the power to define it in any given culture cannot entirely reject those whose voice is incompatible with their imperatives. This is especially so if the perspective of those voices is radically different, as in the case of those who have been considered 'mad' at various times (Foucault, 1965). Whether or not a person is considered to be mentally ill must, according to Foucault, be subjectively defined. In the same way the relative acceptability of different kinds of evidence regarding therapeutic change cannot be stated from any completely objective point of view: one person's 'truth' may not be the same as another's. Even more importantly, the *value* placed upon any 'true' item is also likely to be dependent on one's perspective. It is impossible, then, for one kind of data to be considered equally valuable by all those with an interest in the evaluation of therapy. Consequently, even if a currently preferred system views its alternatives as unacceptable, those alternatives cannot be entirely rejected.

The work of Foucault illustrates the problem of the conflict between the different approaches to research, especially when they are concerned with placing values on the relative worth of the findings produced. So successful have Foucault's arguments

been that authors have continued to ask whether treatment of mental illness is really a form of social control (e.g. Greene, 1995). However, his critics have called him both a charlatan and the sloppiest of historical scholars (*Ibid.*). His entire deconstructive method for criticising reductionist and modernist approaches to the treatment of mental illness has been termed an ‘immature science’ (Hacking, 1979) implying that his assertions were awaiting full development as and when ‘objectivism’ could be returned (Greene, *op. cit.*).

Further evidence for the inadequacies of both reductionist and phenomenological methods is provided by the avowedly arbitrary nature of the grounds on which the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy accredits practitioners. Actual effectiveness is not measured at all. There is no dispute that the focus is exclusively on approximations of the attributes that are expected to be associated with it and that are most easily amenable to either measurement or descriptive support. The following quotation from a leading figure in that system highlights several points regarding the process both of evaluating competence in counselling and the debate that surrounds it:

‘The high level of complex, unquantifiable and even indefinable features of counselling activities leads inexorably to the conclusion that it is impossible to assess and predict effective professional functioning from a single type or set of observations. (That would be like trying to define a complex curve using only a ruler) ...

... We must value the diversity of the inferential base in our system, and protect it against attempts to narrow the range and type of evidence that goes into the assessment of our professional practitioners, because I have seen no evidence that the narrowing of the base will produce more accurate assessments. ... We must ... defend against narrow behavioural reductionism masquerading as the way, the truth and the light.’

Frankland (1995) pp. 55 - 60, emphasis in the original.

It is, perhaps, not surprising that counselling, as one of the less medicalised professions with a central concern to listen to, intimately understand, and even prize the values of those that suffer from mental illnesses, should be most readily inclined towards non-reductionist and non-modernist modes of understanding.

However, when applied to counselling, pure forms of *either* reductionism or phenomenology frequently fail to do justice to the full extent of its effectiveness and neither provides clear, consistent and generally applicable safeguards against bad practice. In short, each appears to be inadequate to the task of evaluating counselling, despite yielding useful results.

The strength of pluralism as proposed in this thesis is that the need to defend against any narrow dogmatism is removed because no one model can present itself as 'the way, the truth and the light'. The usefulness of deductive and reductionist processes are not excluded. However, there is no attempt to complete the descriptions of the world for which logic can provide some essential rules. Neither is it necessary to reduce the phenomena that comprise therapeutic change absolutely to their component parts. An epistemological equivalent of the Aristotelian 'golden mean' of moderation and the avoidance of extremes in all things is necessary to allow harmony between the different forms of knowledge. If many human experiences, including the experienced effects of counselling and psychotherapy, are 'indefinable' (Frankland, *op. cit.*), they are far less often *indescribable*. Description or 'illuminative evaluation' (Stenhouse, 1975; Ruddick and Hopkins, 1985; Parlett and Hamilton, 1972) is a task far more appropriately undertaken by the phenomenological, or naturalistic, school of research. That steps to *evaluate* the achievements of psychiatry, psychotherapy and counselling should require the return of systematising methodologies and quantitative measurement may be an inevitable result of the legitimate quest for accuracy and reliability of findings. The development of pluralism in this field, where both

accuracy and the idiosyncratic diversity of human experience and change meet so directly, is perhaps entirely appropriate. However, the character and effects of the interaction between the main approaches, discussed in the following section, has been far from conducive to acceptance of alternatives.

2.3 The character, function and legacy of opposition between dominant paradigms in therapy research and elsewhere

Although the debate has been deliberately polarised here for the sake of simplifying the current discussion, both the qualitatively oriented phenomenological, descriptive or humanist approaches and the quantitative evidence favoured by reductionist and logical-empiricist modernism appear tainted from the opposing paradigmatic stance. It has been noted that the result has been that the effectiveness of counselling is still sometimes considered not proven or, worse, not provable. The medical profession, in particular, expects greater clarity and more definitive statements of effect before committing precious resources (Corney, 1986 and 1990; Martin, 1988; Pringle and Laverty, 1993).

Many attempts to discuss the apparent dichotomy between the two camps present each position as a dogma (Howe, 1985) in opposition to its alternative (Smith, 1983a and b; Corner, 1991). These so-called ‘paradigm wars’ (Gage, 1989) have been particularly passionately fought from the qualitative / naturalistic side.

Erlanson *et al.* (1993) claim moderation: ‘We will not attack positivism per se’. However, they state baldly that ‘traditional research conventions that are taught in our major Universities have kept researchers of human behaviour from systematically asking and obtaining answers to important questions’ (p. 9).

Like Eysenck’s representation of reductionism, Reason and Rowan (1981) take an extreme position which, while not being an absolutely faithful description of the necessary requirements and implications of their approach, is accurately

representative of the way in which it has been applied in practice. They argue that naturalistic studies are both more human in scale and more humane in their treatment of the 'subjects' under study. Despite their original aim of creating 'a total synthesis of research methodology, including traditional methods', they found that 'being overly diplomatic' was insufficient. In the face of rigid reductionism they felt the need vehemently to defend their freedom as living, wilful and therefore *unpredictable* humanbeings:

'We weren't merely being critical of the dominant place accorded to the standard textbook version of the scientific method - we were actively opposed to it. Through our balanced cool appraisal there comes an undercurrent of hatred and horror about what traditional research does to those it studies ... [it] kills off everything it comes into contact with, so what we are left with is dead knowledge.'

Reason and Rowan (1981) pp. xii - xiii.

Their claim that 'the new paradigm is a synthesis of naive inquiry and orthodox research' is closely followed by the assertion that it is 'a synthesis which is very much opposed to the antithesis it supersedes' (*Ibid.*). In its extreme form, their proposals are antithetical to quantitative and reductionist methods which are thus cast as the enemy of the people under study and counter productive in the quest for knowledge.

The assumption that their version of method does not constitute a 'textbook version' is, of course, erroneous. There has been a tendency lasting several decades for logical-positivist, empirical and reductionist methods to be seen as the 'orthodox' or 'traditional' form by those who advocate any alternative to that undoubtedly dominant paradigm. However, the range of qualitative research and anti-reductionist thinking, and the sheer length of history behind it, clearly constitutes a 'tradition' in its own right, complete with its own version of 'orthodox' procedures. As Russell

has noted elsewhere, ‘it is the fate of rebels to found new orthodoxies’ (cited in Eysenck, 1965, p. 9).

Already referred to above, rejection of alternative paradigms is mirrored by proponents of modernist reductionism as any monistic approach must, by definition, exclude alternatives. There are thus two orthodoxies, each struggling against the other. As Maruyama (1981) points out:

‘a heterogeneous epistemology can accommodate other epistemologies, while a homogeneous epistemology must reject others. ... A heterogeneous epistemology can become a meta-epistemology which includes other epistemologies as itself. But a homogeneous epistemology cannot.’

(p. 229)

Pluralism would certainly lay claim to being a meta-epistemological structure, and heterogeneous in these terms, but it might also be seen to constitute a distinct epistemological position in itself.

Kuhn (1970) has described in detail why the process of paradigmatic change is more often revolutionary than evolutionary, which explains why the debate between the opposing camps is so entrenched. The dogmatism of ‘mature’ science he traces consists of a combination of preconception and an endemic resistance to new ideas permeating whole schools of thought:

‘Preconception and resistance seem the rule rather than the exception in mature scientific development ... they characterize the very best and most creative research as well as the more routine. ... Rather than being characteristics of the aberrant individual, they are community characteristics with deep roots in the procedures through which scientists are trained for their work in their profession.’

Kuhn (1963) pp. 348 - 349.

However, Kuhn emphasises that such dogma is functional⁵ (Cartwright, 1983, Kuhn, 1963; 1970) in that it engenders *commitment* to ‘a particular way of viewing the world’ (Kuhn, 1963) which may be changed but never merely given up. It can also allow identification of those bodies of evidence, or aspects of theory, that are incommensurate with the accepted order. So important does he see such monism that he suggests that

‘strongly held convictions that are prior to the research often seem to be a precondition for success in the sciences ... their omnipresence is ... symptomatic of characteristics upon which the continuing vitality of research depends.’

(Kuhn, *op. cit.*)

There is, he suggests, an ‘essential tension’ between dogmatic traditions on the one hand and alternatives that threaten those traditions on the other (Kuhn, 1959).

The intransigence of monism can be of use, then. It will not be suggested here that either side of the paradigm war give up its arms altogether. Indeed, it is important for the success of pluralism that they do not, for then all the viewpoints would merge into a single, perhaps rather amorphous, mass.

However, it may be that the Kuhnian process of perpetual scientific revolution and counter-revolution is not necessarily a permanent state of affairs. Preston (1987) notes that, “‘dogmatism’ does not add up to monism, and Kuhn has given no argument for theoretical monism itself” (p. 130). Despite the stated intention of the denunciation from Reason and Rowan (1981) quoted above, and other attempts at creating a ‘new paradigm’ for research, such warring is necessarily an anti-pluralistic

⁵ Kuhn’s seminal work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Kuhn, 1970) is reported (Cartwright, 1983) to have begun life as the paper quoted above entitled ‘The *function* of dogma in scientific

step because the fight, let alone the winning of it, perpetuates the paradigmatic totalitarianism they claim to intend to subvert. It was largely the strength Kuhn attributed to monistic clashes that prevented him from endorsing pluralism *per se*. Reason and Rowan themselves, however, have shown that it is possible to retain at least some elements of an opposed perspective: ‘there are some aspects of orthodoxy we would like to hold on to and even to urge more strongly’ (*op. cit.*, p.xiii).

The pluralism advocated below seeks a sustainable solution to the problem of providing an adequately thorough understanding of counselling and psychotherapy, without requiring subversion of any dominant structure of knowledge. A successful ‘heterogeneistic’ pluralism must *replace* the process of endless cycles of paradigmatic subversion. It must retain the respective achievements offered by both sides of the monistically framed debate *and* the strength of the interaction between them while avoiding the exclusion of useful evidence through avoidable dogma.

Without such a mechanism, we are condemned to a legacy of conflicting ways of researching, even of conceiving, the processes and outcomes of therapy. The instability of the status quo renders it unacceptable. Neither side can accept the basis of the other. It has been argued that the current situation constitutes a paradigmatic crisis (Schön, 1992) to the extent that fundamental incompatibilities between the paradigms render a resolution of the conflict impossible (e.g. Bednarz, 1983) or even undesirable (Smith and Hesthusias, 1986). The lack of a clear framework for uniting the traditionally opposing forces has greatly damaged the standing of counselling as a profession by reducing its ability to defend itself against the imposition of either of the only partially adequate research paradigms. What is required, then, is a demonstration of how the warring might cease without one side or another being forced to take on unacceptable epistemological or methodological views. This is the task for which pluralism is proposed below.

research’ (Kuhn, 1963, emphasis added) in which it is these functional aspects that are stressed.

Competition between ideas is itself a positivist philosophical method reflecting the basis of western culture in Aristotelian logic, which cannot cope with the concurrent existence of opposites. It is this legacy of destructive competition in the name of determining the relative value of the various aspects of counselling that we must progress beyond.

Evaluation of interventions expected to effect aspects of the sometimes esoteric and frequently unpredictable factors involved in emotional well-being must allow for at least a minimal degree of indeterminacy just as in quantum physics⁶. Paradoxes do not need to be absolutely resolved before we can make further progress. For example, whereas it was previously assumed that either the ‘wave’ or ‘particle’ model of the electron would eventually exclude the alternative, it is now accepted that both can be usefully applied simultaneously. Also as Hawking (1988) notes, ‘the uncertainty principle signalled an end to Laplace’s dream of a theory of science ... that would be completely deterministic’ (p. 61).

In the field of counselling and psychotherapy evaluation, uncertainty may be generated by, for example, the incompatibility between a quality, such as the emotional experience of sadness, and the quantifiable operationalised version of ‘depression’ measured by a standardised instrument, such as the Beck Depression Inventory. Questions regarding whether this implies an actually inconsistent ontology or merely demonstrates that different systems of measurement offer alternative ways of understanding the same reality may remain unanswered. We do not necessarily have to resolve the debate between incompatible systems of measurement, we need merely to harness it. One possible method for achieving this is outlined in Parts 3 and 4 of this thesis, while Part 5 offers examples of studies based upon these ideas.

⁶ The analogy between the uncertainty of quantum level physics and the unpredictability of human, wilful behaviour is, perhaps, allowable in the light of the fact that quantum theory has been seen to have wider than physicalist implications by some utterly non physicalist thinkers (e.g. Feyerabend,

2.4 A summary of the problem of monism

The problem of monism is primarily the inevitable and inescapable fact that any monistic system must exclude its alternatives. This is so even when such systems are portrayed as being inclusive of their predecessors, as in the case of humanistic phenomenology, or independent of any alternatives, as with deductive reductionism. The limitations of monism require that any such stance must be maintained on dogmatic, ideological grounds, even if there is some evidence that alternatives can also offer useful ways of understanding and analysing the value of counselling and psychotherapy.

However, as has already been suggested, we cannot entirely abandon either side of the debate without losing its potentially valuable contribution. Just as practitioners risk becoming detached from their clients' experience if they become constricted to interacting only via the set of constructs offered by their favoured therapeutic model (Mearns, 1994), those who evaluate their work on the basis of a single model of research risk missing evidence of real importance.

The fact that treating counselling as a series of discrete units of evidence loses the essential aspect of therapeutic change as a whole process, mitigates against ignoring the contribution of more inclusive methodologies and, by implication, the explicative, phenomenologically oriented ways of thinking that underlie them. However, we still cannot eschew reductionist positivism because it is vital in garnering the greatest possible degree of certainty and accuracy from the clear, rigorous application of logical deductive reasoning and quantification.

As demonstrated by other authors, 'objective' science is inevitably partially subjective, at least to the extent that it is subjectively constructed (Polanyi, 1958; Guba, 1990). Furthermore, in more general terms, each of the predominant schools of thought contains elements of the other, as their proponents acknowledge.

Such recognition has generally led away from strict deterministic logical reductionism towards more phenomenological approaches but this need not be an unalloyed generality. For pluralism to be developed it is necessary to recognise not only the essential subjectivity of claims to objectivism, as Foucault highlights, but *also* the necessity for subjective statements to rely on external objects, independent of ourselves, for the sake of achieving at least minimal generalisability.

Chapter 3 Resolving the monistic split and its alternatives

This chapter will consider some previous responses to the paradigmatic split between the dominant schools of evaluation research in counselling and psychotherapy. Some basic components of pluralism are also introduced. Firstly, the problem of achieving a synthesis of the opposing sides into a new unitary approach is considered and the feasibility or even desirability of such consensus is questioned. The alternative, that distinct paradigms remain, requires productive communication between approaches. This may require steps that some will find difficult and a possible solution is proposed. It is then argued that détente between the approaches, while useful, is insufficient as the fundamental differences between them are merely ignored, rather than being properly accommodated, leaving the epistemological foundations for statements of knowledge insecure and continually open to dispute. The problems of eclectic relativism and of abandoning allegiance to any method whatsoever are examined and neither are considered acceptable. As a result, it is suggested that communication between the paradigms must be carefully structured to avoid losing all bases for making evaluative statements. The contributions and limitations of pragmatism and post-modernism are also considered prior to the exploration of aspects of a distinctively pluralist approach in Part 3.

3.1 The inadequacy of attempting synthesis of the opposing sides into a new unitary philosophy: the problem of practical consensus

As noted, the predominant research traditions are, at least in part, incompatible (Bednarz, 1983). One obvious solution is to seek a consensus between the various factions regarding a new approach composed of those aspects upon which they can agree. A new synthesis would be created, in the manner of Hegelian or Aristotelian

dialectic, out of a proposed thesis and the antithesis produced in reaction to it. The new approach would seek to be acceptable to all sides and settle all disputes. In a counselling context this would resolve all disputes regarding how best to understand therapeutic change and the relative value of all the various types of evidence.

Habermas describes consensus not only as a goal but a prerequisite for useful progress. He suggests that,

'when the background consensus is fundamentally called into question - specific forms of problem resolution are required to remove the disturbance and restore the original, or a new, background consensus'

Habermas, 1973, pp. xiii - xiv.

This goal will receive some detailed attention here because where consensus succeeds pluralism is likely to be redundant. The new unitary theory will predominate, its monistic reign secure until further alternatives are proposed to be reacted to once more and a new consensus found.

It should be noted that it will not be suggested here that synthesis and consensus are either impossible or undesirable *if they are achieved*. Indeed, the discovery and confirmation of areas of agreement is an essential component of the method presented below. That is, however, very different from consensus being a prerequisite for assigning value to different kinds of evidence produced in evaluative research, or even recognising them as 'truth', as it is in the reductionist / logical positivist scheme of things. The need for the pluralism advocated here stems from the apparent, historically demonstrated, impossibility of achieving any sustainable general consensus between different approaches to evaluation.

It must be doubted whether the purely deductive Hegelian or Aristotelian structures can successfully resolve the split between the approaches to evaluating counselling and psychotherapy because neither tradition *is* the antithesis of the other. Despite

the reaction against their predecessors, exemplified by Reason and Rowan (1981) above, phenomenological, humanist and naturalistic research designs represent an *alternative* structure, not one that is diametrically opposed: the two are more complimentary than contradictory.

Habermas argues that *under ideal conditions*, ‘no force except that of the better argument is exercised; and ... as a result, all motives except that of the co-operative search for truth are excluded’ (Habermas, 1976, p. 108). However, even if his ideal conditions were attained (which is unlikely in the extreme) we should note that the combative style of deliberation would remain because it is inherent in dialectical rational progress towards truth. Approaches are more or less pitted against each other until ‘the better’ one wins. For Habermas, the survivor of this competition must be the best and only option to be accepted as ‘truth’. That is all well and good if we can guarantee that ‘true’ statements of the relative value of the evidence of therapy outcomes are produced, but we cannot, as argued below.

3.1.1 Is consensus possible?

Consensus is only attainable to the extent that all the participants in the process accept the veracity of the ‘better argument’ and would agree on whether such better arguments have been produced. Yet, just as researchers and therapists disagree on what constitutes the best approach, either to research or to therapy itself, there is little agreement on how to recognise acceptable arguments. Habermas relies almost exclusively on deductive and logical techniques: ‘experiences *support* the truth claim of assertions ... but a truth can only be redeemed through argumentation’ (Habermas, 1973, p. 218). This is in stark contrast with Rescher’s view of ‘experientially validating’ (Rescher, 1993, p. 256) evidence that provides many opportunities for disagreement between those whose experiences leave them with very different, but accurate, views of the same event. Inclusion of their different views then relies on *induction* just as much as *deduction*.

It is only in the case of pure, deductive reason that there is little scope for disagreement about which argumentation is better (i.e. more logical) but, as has long been argued, pure reason does not get us very far towards establishing the truth or falsity of descriptions of our world (e.g. Kant, 1781; Sartre, 1960). In counselling, desirable change is often defined by subjective well-being (Howard *et al.*, 1993; Mellor-Clark, *et al.*, 1996; Connell, *et al.*, 1997) yet it is impossible to record such change without recourse to direct investigation of the experience of the client. It is inevitable, therefore, that we must rely at least partially on induction. Consensus is therefore unlikely.

Kuhn (1970) argued that in ‘debate about paradigm choice, [each paradigm’s] role is necessarily circular’ (p. 94) and is therefore an unreliable critic of its own position because ‘each group uses its own paradigm to argue that paradigm’s defence’ (*Ibid.*). He also suggested that ‘practising in different worlds, the two groups ... see different things when they look from the same point in the same direction.’ (*op. cit.*, p. 150). Taken together, these statements suggest that differing paradigmatic viewpoints are necessarily locked in irresolvable conflict.

Furthermore, Rescher (1993) comprehensively attacks the idealised schema of consensualism on several grounds. If we claim that consensus *has* been reached, we are guilty of ‘megalomania [because of the] implied claim that the currently existing community is omniscient’ (*op. cit.*, pp. 57 - 58). The possibility of valid alternatives ever being found must be absolutely excluded. If we do not lay claim to such omniscience we must accept that alternatives might also be valid and we must then have an epistemology capable of containing such a possibility, that is, a pluralist one. This denies the central role of consensus as goal and arbiter of all enquiry.

If, on the other hand, we suggest that consensus *will* be reached we are guilty of the unfounded optimism that suggests we might reach such a state of grace and omniscience in the future. Rescher dismisses this as derived from Pierce’s ‘millenarian theory that has few visible means of support’ (*Ibid.*). The only remaining alternative,

that consensus is attainable given perfectly rational participants and ideal conditions, is ‘so weak as not to be very interesting’ (*Ibid.*). Such conditions will never be achieved in anything but theoretical situations.

3.1.2 Is consensus desirable?

Habermas asserts that truth cannot be in conflict with itself and argues that ‘the condition of the truth of statements is the potential agreement of *all* others’ (Habermas, 1973, p. 219). In doing so he implies that every successful phase of an enquiry should, ultimately, be unified (i.e. characterised by universal agreement) and that relative truth is established by progress towards this ideal agreement.

However, as we have seen, such levels of agreement have been conspicuously absent, especially in therapy evaluation research. Rescher convincingly demonstrates that variance in possible conceptions of truth can be based on different experiences, biases, preferences, modes of thought and so forth and yet be equally validated for the individuals concerned. In counselling and psychotherapy this is ably exemplified by the different ideas held by different stakeholders regarding the relative value of the various possible effects of therapy and consequently regarding the value of different forms of evaluation.

It is at this fundamental level that the different approaches to evaluation research are in conflict with each other. Indeed, ‘truth’ as defined by consensus might be expected to be in conflict with itself every time one person’s experience is compared with that of another. This is particularly important in counselling evaluation where factors like that of subjective well-being are so often considered to be vitally important.

In his ‘anarchic theory of knowledge’, Feyerabend (1975) suggested that science is, in any case, a fundamentally non-consensual activity progressing more by persuasion than by the dogged pursuit of ‘facts’. Acceptance of prior positions is liable to be actively damaging, he suggests, because of the mental drudgery imposed by strict allegiance to one method. Any demand that ideas should be consistent with accepted

theories, for example, ‘preserves the older theory, and not the better theory’ (Feyerabend, 1975, p. 10).

Feyerabend even suggested that the main arguments in favour of monism (noted above, see Chapter 2.3) were based on Kuhn’s misreading of his own work:

‘Kuhn has not only admitted that multiplicity (sic) of theories changes the style of argumentation. ... He has pointed out more than once ... that refutations are impossible without the help of alternatives. ... He has therefore said, in effect, that scientists create revolutions in [an anarchistic, non-monistic fashion] ... and not by relentlessly pursuing one paradigm.’

Feyerabend (1970) p. 206, emphases in the original.

This bankruptcy of ‘dogmatic uniformitarianism’ (Rescher, 1993, p. 2) follows directly from the basic problems of monism: that it impairs critical power, unreasonably restricts progress along narrow *a priori* channels and condemns the participants to a perpetual competitive struggle for dominance.

Consensus, then, is not necessary; it is not to be expected; it is not probable; it is not even (in many circumstances) desirable.

This is no longer compatible with monistic views of evaluation research and suggests that no single structure, whether deductive reductionism or humanistic phenomenology, can be relied upon alone.

Beyond even these anti-Habermasian arguments, it should be noted that synthesis is not a valid aim for any conflicts caused by fundamental issues which have been validated from within the systems concerned, as is the case with the quantitative and qualitative alternatives in counselling. It barely matters whether this validation is achieved deductively, experientially or in any other way. Once the requirement for consensus is disposed of, *all* approaches validated in their own terms *must* be

allowed to enter the field of discourse to the extent that their terms apply. This is of crucial importance for the version of pluralism developed in Parts 3 and 4.

3.1.3 The value of diversity

Procedures that conform to accepted method may discover a great deal and the preceding discussion should not be taken as disputing their contribution in the field of counselling evaluation. However, in Feyerabend's words, 'who can guarantee that [any given accepted method is] the best way to discover, not just a few isolated "facts", but also some deep-lying secrets of nature?' (*op. cit.*, p. 20). Indeed, the suggestion that dissonance with accepted 'fact' may well be a sign of progress rather than of error is widely accepted, for example in the usefulness of dissonance between results in the accepted form of methodological triangulation. It is on precisely the same ground that dissonance between differing research paradigms is seen as creative in the pluralist frame.

There are cases where the accepted rules of a paradigm simply may not apply and it is then that recourse to alternatives is most useful. Feyerabend argues that this is true of comparisons between myths and science, and it is suggested here that it also applies in the comparison of, for example, psychometric values and the narrative accounts of therapists and clients. A more general example is that reason is demonstrably not the sole, universal criterion by which some elements of evaluative importance can be judged best, such as clients' experience of therapy, of their illness or of their subjective well-being. It follows that unreason *cannot* be entirely excluded (*op. cit.*, p. 14). However, it is important for pluralism that the converse is equally the case.

If we can step out of the straight jacket of our usual approach, we can then make use of the Feyerabendian 'principle of proliferation' (1970, p. 205) which states that 'proliferation of theories is beneficial for science while uniformity impairs its power' (Feyerabend, 1975, pp. 10 - 11). In its extreme form it is even suggested that 'there is no idea, however ancient and absurd, that is not capable of improving our knowledge

... we may use hypotheses that contradict well-confirmed theories and / or well established experimental results. *We may advance science by proceeding counterinductively*' (*Ibid.*, emphasis added).

Significantly for Feyerabend, and for theorists more directly involved with evaluation research such as Reason and Rowan (*op. cit.*) or research into human experience (e.g. Heron, 1996), diversity also allows freedom of expression. Perhaps most crucially of all, it also allows for the inherently idiosyncratic individual *change* and development of which therapy is composed.

Feyerabend's ideas can be seen as liberating the evaluation of therapeutic change from the shackles of methodologically pre-determined 'law-and-order' approaches to gathering knowledge. They allow us to incorporate that which is individual and unique possibly through to methods from outwith our own orthodoxy.

3.1.4 Making diversity work

Stepping outwith our own orthodoxies means that we may need to begin by accepting things that, initially, seem unacceptable. For example, reductionists might have to make use of the merits of qualitative enquiry which, in *their* terms, fails to meet validity and reliability criteria. Conversely, those from the phenomenological / humanist mould might have to give positive consideration to, for example, psychometrics which may seem to produce inadequate representations of experienced emotion. Thus, in order to step between the paradigms, proponents of either may have to begin by making use of what seems to them to be a paralogism. As that term is developed by the post-modernist writer Lyotard⁷, it describes the shifting of our concepts that can occur if we cease to polarise our way of seeing things. A similar step is taken when counsellors use empathy to understand the experience of their client by putting themselves in the client's shoes and seeing

⁷ For Lyotard, paralogy is a technical term and its usage is slightly at variance with its more common and literal meaning of an error made to appear plausible by imitating (i.e. paralleling) logic.

things, temporarily, from their perspective. Although post-modernism itself can be seen as necessarily limited, the Lyotardian vision of deliberate use of paralogy to facilitate productive communication between paradigms is of vital importance for one of the essential tasks of pluralism: establishing the most useful combination of means by which we might evaluate change.

As Shawver (1996) notes, such processes are facilitated by the psychotherapeutic concept of ‘dialogic imagination’ (Bakhtin, 1981; Watkins, 1990) as an evident aspect of human psychological nature (Sampson, 1993). Each of us carries out a continual stream of internal conversations with the imagined voices of others playing each role in turn, sometimes to such an extent that we may even be persuaded by these other points of view. Psychoanalysis has long recognised the importance, even inevitability, of this process in the creation of our ideas (e.g. Lacan, 1977).

Facilitating the dialogic character of productive paralogical discourse is of fundamental importance in tackling the ‘pathology of the modern’ monistic approach to research (Levin, 1987) by reducing rigid categorisation and consequent fragmentation. This is vital if the ‘paradigm wars’ are to end in anything other than a retreat into separate and incompatible epistemological territories.

If consensus is not to create a new attempt at a necessarily inhibiting unitary monism, both strands must be included in some overarching framework. A pluralist structure is therefore necessary for the natural anarchism of diversity in evaluation research to co-exist with, for example, reductionism, which is an anti-anarchism. Within it the various incompatible alternatives can interact in a productive fashion, rather than the purely destructive result of requiring or seeking consensus.

3.2 Uneasy rapprochement and the inadequacy of relativism and the eclectic '*smorgasbord*'

Interaction between paradigms, it is suggested here, is vital for pluralism to harness the value of the very apparent diversity of approaches available to evaluators of counselling and psychotherapy. It is suggested in the following section that, despite their immense contribution, current multi-method approaches are insufficient because they generally fail to progress beyond either awarding each approach distinct but still largely incompatible domains or ignoring conflicts altogether. The problems of the relativism this implies are discussed and it is suggested that the 'anarchic' paralogy of inter-paradigmatic communication recommended above should be carefully structured.

3.2.1 *Establishing détente*

Calls for rapprochement between the warring camps are not new (Ianni and Orr, 1979) and there have been quite a number of attempts to establish some sort of framework within which researchers can make use of either of the dominant paradigms. The most common has been to establish a kind of détente between the approaches by accepting that both can be fruitful, depending on the research question.

Mearns and McLeod, for example, attempt a truce in the 'paradigm war' by offering each side a range of territory for itself:

'We definitely do not regard [the qualitative] approach as the new panacea for all behavioural researchers. There are many research questions for which a positivist, experimental approach is more economical and more effective.'

Mearns and McLeod (1984) p. 384.

They suggest various criteria by which a researcher might choose between alternative approaches. Open, process-oriented research questions are seen as best responded to with qualitative approaches while closed questions call for more positivist methods.

Other authors have offered a greater degree of structure, although often with less detailed exploration of the implications of their suggestions. Most have appealed primarily to practical, not epistemological, considerations. While Mearns and McLeod recommend a sequential design, with qualitative inquiry tending to act as a precursor to the more precise but less vivid and illuminative quantitative methods, concurrent designs have also long been advocated.

Methodological triangulation in various forms (Jick, 1979; Duffy, 1987; Bryman, 1992) has undoubtedly proven to be an extremely useful development. Indeed, such studies have led several authors to suggest that we need go no further and should concentrate solely on developing methods for each kind of inquiry to use independently. Alternate forms of evidence would then simply corroborate or elaborate each other's findings or, when they disagree, generate new research questions (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Different approaches are thus treated as if they were entirely immiscible with results being compared only after the research process has otherwise ended (e.g. Greene and McClintock, 1985; Duffy, 1987). Each side makes whatever contribution it can, without ever having to encroach on, let alone criticise, the other.

The extent to which such approaches have become accepted is demonstrated by the World Health Organisation's recommendation that several investigative methods should be used to assess student performance in health related professions, explicitly in the hope that each will offset the problems inherent in the others (W.H.O., 1981).

It has even been suggested that the *only* differences are in method and that there are few, if any, conflicts of underlying philosophy that need concern the practical researcher (Bryman, 1984). Similar thinking has led to the suggestion that the choice

of techniques should be determined by purely practical considerations (Lynch, 1983) in a kind of pragmatic methodological *smorgasbord* (Rossman and Wilson, 1985).

Carnap suggested that once the different ways of addressing an issue ‘are recognised as nothing but two different languages which express the same state of affairs, several, perhaps most, epistemological disputes become pointless’ (1967, pp. 86 - 87). Earlier, Reichenbach had already suggested that the choice between approaches was entirely ‘a matter of free decision’ although, significantly, he admits that such ‘volitional bifurcation ... will lead to consequences concerning the knowledge obtainable’ (1938, pp. 146 -7). Nonetheless, authors have continued to argue for what Maruyama (1981) termed a ‘polyocular’ view in which all different systems are accepted as equally valid.

Superficially, such arguments appear to remove many of the barriers to evaluating therapy by applying techniques derived from any number of research paradigms. However, the proposal that the paradigms should be able to exist separately leaves a number of practical problems unresolved. What weight should one kind of body of evidence be given in comparison to another? When should one method be preferred over the other? On what grounds should an area of scientific investigation move from induction to deduction to maximise the truth-value of its findings?

Furthermore, multi-methodological approaches (e.g. Angus, 1992), whether or not they rely on the superficially pragmatic demarcation of territory, also suffer from the absence of any adequate resolution of the implicit paradigmatic conflicts. Détente is clearly an improvement on the mutual disdain that was previously the norm (Riste, 1977) but it remains insufficient, satisfying neither side. Ultimately, this kind of thinking leads to eclecticism without limit and an anarchistic doctrine of ‘anything goes’ could be taken quite literally (Feyerabend, 1975, p. 10). It should not be, of course, and this is discussed further in the following section.

3.2.2 *Relativism in evaluative research*

Despite its appeal to those wishing to escape the tyranny of monistic conceptual orders, ‘polyocular’ eclecticism introduces the difficulties of unrestrained relativism⁸ and is subtly *anti*-pluralist. It is asserted here that such thinking cannot be applied in evaluative, as opposed to purely descriptive, research.

For evaluation to take place at all, a firm framework from which to make value judgements is absolutely required. ‘Polyocular’ relativism cannot make value judgements because no system is particularly valued over any other to provide a basis for those judgements.

Rescher (1993) disposes of relativism in two ways, arguing that ‘in modern times ... [it has been] the most common response to doctrinal pluralism⁹’ (p. 100). Firstly, it is not helpful in evaluative matters as just noted. Secondly, it necessitates a denial of the correctness of any one position (including our own, if we have one) in favour of any other *in any circumstance* even when logic dictates that such and such a position is correct and / or another is wrong:

‘The decisive defect of epistemic relativism lies in its flat-out refusal to commit itself to the existence of [any] impersonally cogent standards for our claims to knowledge.’

Rescher (1993) p. 103.

Furthermore, the supposedly comfortable relativist co-existence of each kind of research is confounded by the necessarily implied requirement that neither side applies its own rules to the other. It is illogical to accept an alternative position that

⁸ Relativism is taken here as ‘the denial ... [of] universal truths’ which holds that ‘the world has no intrinsic characteristics, there are just different ways of interpreting it’ (Pojman, 1995, p. 690).

Without any fixed points, the value of evidence produced by any approach can only be stated in terms of its position relative to others.

⁹ Rescher equates doctrinal pluralism with an exclusive preferential rationalism (*op. cit.*, p. 101), but

does not meet the requirements laid down in the basic principles of one's preferred approach.

What should be seen as constituting 'truth' or 'knowledge' provides an excellent and highly relevant example. To move directly from the position that acceptable evidence of therapeutic effects must be derived from replicable experimental method to the phenomenological alternative it is necessary to significantly adjust the basic epistemological structure. If each side were to be allowed to criticise the other with equal truth-values always assigned to their views we would be returned to the paradigmatic conflicts discussed earlier. The spectres of inadequate precision, control and generalisability (from the logical-positivist and quantitative side) and the lack of vivid relevance to human experience (from the phenomenological, naturalistic side) would rear their heads once more.

The argument that we should ignore the conflicts and simply accept the positive contributions of each side is of equally little assistance in assigning relative values to their findings. Hall notes that the rise of approaches that have no fixed methodological allegiance, or that even propose a form of misology¹⁰, are

'not so much due to the failure of individual arguments, as to the undisputed success of which a variety of methods is capable, each within its own sphere of applicability¹¹. The conclusion is the same, however: no single truth is to be won.'

Hall (1994) p. 202

any doctrinal basis might qualify for the title. Alternatives are discussed below.

¹⁰ That is, hatred or rejection of method *per se*.

¹¹ Indeed, the independent development of both paradigms in monistic isolation has led to significant bodies of theoretical and practical literature to support their use. The arguments supporting each paradigm are widely accepted as valid in their own terms so their separate value *must* be allowed by any researcher not allied exclusively to one side or the other.

On this basis we would never be able to judge which method we should accept or reject in any circumstance. The proposal that we somehow step outside all the warring factions and view them from some other over-arching position offers no credible description of what that position might be. We are left with no more than a ‘fluid anchorless sense of reality’ (Lyon, 1994, pp. 7 - 8): there is no reason to prefer a client’s subjective description of their therapy over psychometric measurement, or vice versa, for any purpose.

The anarchy of relativism also lacks any mechanism for achieving so secure a position as to be unthreatened by the existing paradigms that lay claim to definitive and exclusive statements of epistemological validity. For example, the reductionist preference for valuing randomised controlled trials and quantitative, deductive methods could be presented as defeating the relativist multi-methodological *smorgasbord* even more easily than phenomenologically inspired approaches that at least have a clear and internally consistent rationale for valuing their own kind of evidence.

3.2.3 A supportable peace requires sustainable clear communication and, therefore, only strictly limited anarchy

The kind of paralogical dialogue between separate paradigms suggested above should not be thought of as either playing down or blurring the distinctions between them. Anarchic paralogy is no more than a component of the pluralist investigator’s inventory as it is developed below. It is recommended as a minor revolution in thought: a useful tool that may provide a next step. It is not in itself, however, that new country made available following the revolution.

For pluralism, contemplating positions that appear absurd from within our own frame of reference is necessary, as outlined above, but accepting them certainly is not. Alternative voices are merely tried out ‘as if’ they were real for the sake of discovering new ways of making evidence acceptable.

Feyerabend was so concerned that he might be misunderstood as recommending anarchism as a fully competent philosophy of science, that he eventually preferred the title of ‘flippant Dadaist’ over that of ‘serious anarchist’ (Feyerabend, *op. cit.*, p. 21). Within pluralism, then, such playful experiments in anarchic thought offer no more than a ‘breathing space’ which might ‘turn out occasionally to have a positive function’ (*op. cit.*, p. 12).

Neither do we need to collapse into anarchy, merely resigned to it by the failings of Laplacian determinist reductionism in psychology (Hall, 1994, p. 203) or those of any other monism. When faced with an apparent chaos, such as the relativism of accepting many ways of evaluating therapy, no rule obliges the investigator to preclude any action - including that of imposing order. If the imposition of order proves fruitful then it is an acceptable way of moving from disordered plurality towards pluralism.

It can also be argued that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to maintain anything like outright anarchism in research. The very human urge to find order (such as seeing patterns in random dots, as astronomers have done from pre-history onwards) is an urge *against* anarchism¹². We seem to be in revolt against the appearance of random disorder, constantly seeking to defeat the freedom that we may also fight to attain when we find ourselves restricted by forms of order that do not adequately describe our experience or our selves.

A pluralist approach endeavours to harness the dilemma. Pluralism gains its strength from turning into *creative* tension the contradictory needs of differing approaches¹³. Idiosyncratic effects in therapy as valued by individuals interact directly with measures of those effects across whole populations. The wilful paradigmatic shifts

¹² This is not to say that we are condemned to imposing false order on things by our natures. The point here is that to accept that apparent order may disguise a real chaos (and *vice versa*) is to be open to wider possibilities than would otherwise be the case.

¹³ This is explored further in Parts 3 and 4.

required are to some degree both anarchic and, as we shall see in the next section, pragmatic. However, to avoid the problems of relativism they are also limited and carefully structured.

Approaches that allow the use of either qualitative or quantitative designs are accepted here as useful and important contributions to the debate. However, a more complete solution to the problem would be a structure that allowed each paradigm to be applied *throughout* the research endeavour without unnecessarily rejecting *any* useful elements. Far more ‘come and go’ between the approaches would then have to be possible so that *both* quantitative and qualitative research approaches could be applied and interpreted together *at any stage* of an investigation. The worthwhile contributions each approach has to make in all phases of a study should not be lost.

It is suggested here, therefore, that co-existence of the paradigms in a truly pluralist fashion may be more fruitful to scientific inquiry than any alternative achieved so far. That is, pluralism progresses beyond relativism by ensuring that the positive contribution of each approach is preserved while structuring the interaction between them so that the battle between competing monisms does not undermine progress.

The enormity of the epistemological rift, and the difficulty of bridging it, does not imply that further development should not be attempted, and neither does it suggest that it is impossible. However, it does indicate that perhaps we have not yet developed an epistemological and methodological framework that is sufficiently rugged to contain the *full* range of different ways of understanding. Methodological pluralism (Howard, 1983; Rescher, 1977; 1993) requires a system capable of supporting them and these issues are explored further in Parts 3 and 4.

3.3 The importance of pragmatism and its limitations

Various pragmatic approaches to resolving the rift between reductionist logical positivism and naturalistic phenomenology have been referred to above as examples of the problems associated with avoiding fundamental difficulties implied by multi-

method designs. However, this should not be taken as suggesting that pragmatism itself is either unimportant or of no value for pluralist evaluations of therapy. On the contrary, pragmatic flexibility is an inherent and necessary feature of applied pluralism. It is considered here partly because it provides some important mechanisms by which we can avoid being sucked into relativism. However, it has also been suggested that in its relatively sophisticated Rortian form (Hall, 1994; Rorty, 1982; 1989; 1991a and b; 1995) pragmatism may itself be capable of navigating a middle ground. Certainly pragmatists would tend to accept the need to find a way between the disorganised swamp of eclecticism and the contrastingly arid desert of positivist reductionism that can seem so devoid of the teeming vivid images of life offered by humanistic and qualitative studies¹⁴. If pragmatism is sufficient, as well as necessary, pluralism need develop no further, of course.

Consequently, the positive contribution of Rortian pragmatism is introduced here, with the emphasis on a number of concepts that will be pivotal in the following discussion of applied pluralism. Some of the distinguishing features of that pluralism are also set out. Furthermore, it will be suggested that pragmatism is limited for evaluative purposes because, like the positions considered in the preceding section, it offers no framework for making value judgements. It is also suggested that pragmatism risks becoming a dominating, exclusive model itself by rejecting theoretical ideas as a basis for choosing research strategies altogether. It is further suggested that a hybrid form of pragmatic and progressive utilitarianism¹⁵ capable of responding to variable idiosyncratic human needs may provide a better basis for developing a pluralism suitable for evaluating counselling and psychotherapy.

¹⁴ Bernstein, for example, suggests that pragmatism could be a way of controlling the “Cartesian anxiety [that] *either* there is ... a fixed foundation for our knowledge, *or* we cannot escape the forces of darkness that envelop us with madness, with intellectual and moral chaos.” (1983, p. 18, emphasis in the original).

¹⁵ The salient features of such a utilitarianism and its differentiation from pragmatism are considered towards the end of this section.

3.3.1 *The value of pragmatism*

Circumvention of unnecessary conflict

Hall (1994) describes in detail how we are able to circumvent many conflicts, through an appeal to pragmatism. Its primary role in the subsequent discussion of pluralist evaluation is in preventing a study that draws on more than one model being blocked by the details of one or more of the approaches being too rigidly or dogmatically applied. However, the pluralist model outlined below is distinguishable from both mainstream pragmatism and the relativism of ignoring paradigmatic conflicts altogether. Far from ignoring theoretical and epistemic conflicts, as in the relativist model discussed above, or entirely circumventing them *as a matter of routine*, as in pragmatism, pluralism takes detailed account of all such issues. It is simply that they are not allowed to prevent progress *if possible*. Unlike pragmatism, pluralism does not insist that the theoretical basis for an approach be relegated to a lesser importance than practical considerations. In the pluralism set out here, it is whether an aspect of an approach (such as the reductionist requirement that acceptable data be logically sound) is *absolutely necessary in the circumstances concerned* that dictates whether it should be allowed to halt progress down a particular avenue. If it is not a *requirement* that it be applied, a degree of flexibility can be introduced which allows room for manoeuvre for the other models.

A ‘neopragmatic’ (Kvale, 1992) approach to research can choose to resort to pragmatic *or* idealist considerations in deciding how (or whether) to address questions raised by one paradigm regarding another according to their importance for the purposes and interests of the study concerned. Because ‘importance’ is defined by ‘the purposes and interests of the study concerned’ it is possible for researchers to take on an approach contingent on the nature of the subject and its context, the purpose of the inquiry and, in evaluation, those stakeholders with whom it is most

important to communicate, and so on¹⁶. This is the reverse of all monistic approaches to research which require the type of inquiry, the techniques for collection, analysis and interpretation of data, and so forth to be dependent on the paradigm used. Again, this is explored further below.

An example of the way in which pragmatism can be helpful is provided by the positivist preference for deductive, rather than inductive, strength. Logic is, in its own terms, incontrovertible. It follows that no non-logical, non-deductive evidence concerning the effects of therapy can be allowed to remain unchallenged. From a purely logical perspective, then, narrative accounts of subjective well-being will always be considered of doubtful worth and statistical analysis will always be likely to be preferred. Note, however, that ‘remaining unchallenged’ falls just short of stating that alternatives to logic and deduction must be completely disavowed. The rules of logic do not demand that it be applied in every circumstance; such laws are only absolute rulers within their own domain. Consequently, other procedures that do not depend on the application of logic can free the researcher to proceed without resorting to statistics, syllogisms, the correlation of terms and so forth. Qualitative, descriptive or narrative techniques all fall into this latter category of methods that are not ‘illogical’, but do not *necessitate* detailed quantification or deductive, logical methods.

Thus, it is possible that, to the extent that different forms of enquiry are useful, pragmatic choices between those that can achieve a minimal degree of mutual tolerance can be made. To achieve that mutual tolerance, however, a pluralist frame is required within which the different approaches can communicate productively and make progress in dealing with evaluative decisions as explored further below.

Precisely because it is capable of preventing all but essential differences from halting progress, Rortian pragmatism is necessary for differing epistemological points of

¹⁶ This last is a social or political, rather than epistemological, point but one which epistemological

view to be able to communicate with each other effectively and constructively and thus progress beyond mere rapprochement. The different elements of a research method that is pluralist from beginning to end must be able to co-exist without disagreements that prove fatal to one or another alternative viewpoint. On those occasions when it can reduce reliance on idealist dogma, pragmatically waiving, or at least shelving, non-essential issues keeps the channels of communication between the paradigms open.

For example, given that even research based on logic can only be expressed through language, as Wittgenstein (1958) pointed out, Rorty pragmatically accepts the ‘literary’ nature of all science¹⁷ and harnesses it, suggesting that a goal of science is inevitably phenomenological description *as well as* deductive progress whether or not that is recognised (Rorty, 1991a and b).

First rate critique and recontextualisation

Rorty’s (1987) concept of the ‘first rate critic’ (p. 11) gives substance to the congenial style that will be required for pluralist, non-constructive and non-combative communication between paradigms. Unlike critics who attack weaknesses of rhetoric, highlight poor argumentation or defend the status quo for the sake of avoiding the ‘corrupting influences’ (*Ibid.*) of new ideas, the critics of greatest value are those who,

‘attack an optimal version of the [alternative] position ... showing the inability of the [approach] under study, even at [its] best, to do what the critic thinks needs to be done.’

pluralism is no less qualified to meet.

¹⁷ This bears a far from coincidental similarity with Feyerabend’s (1984) concept of “science as art”. Such a view is derived pragmatically from what appears possible among the community of scientists at large. The ideal forms of scientific progress are then largely to be discounted as genuinely achievable models. It is in just this way that pragmatism frees the research endeavour from the

Ibid., emphasis added.

In the congenial dialectic proposed here, this is not simply applicable as a style of critical technique as it was suggested by Rorty. It becomes an extremely practical element of pluralist method. It may be that this should be the *only* type of criticism allowable within a pluralist framework. It helps to ensure that the only aspects of an alternative approach excluded in the process of developing a pluralist study are those that are necessarily and demonstrably wrong in some applicable terms.

Rorty's preferred term for the product of such first rate critics was recontextualisation which provides a specific means by which pluralist studies can harness the post-modernist concept of deconstruction (considered further below) and develop in such a way as to be sufficient to the needs of all the relevant research models.

Hall (1994) interprets Rorty as suggesting that 'the act of recontextualization will involve isolating important themes ... and then placing them in the context of alternative views' (p. 5). For example, a phenomenological critique of reductionism would identify its essential components and examine them from a specifically phenomenological perspective. This constitutes one of the basic tasks required of all points of view in a pluralist methodology. Hall points out that the process of recontextualisation 'advantages the critic by allowing him to set the ground rules for engagement' (*Ibid.*). In pluralism all sides mutually carry out such critiques simultaneously. Each can then be seen as having an *equal* status in relation to the other(s).

Post-modernists and pragmatists alike might, perhaps, agree:

straight-jacket of dogmatic idealism.

'equal opportunity for [approaches to research] might be thought bizarre unless one realises that, on Rorty's terms, there are no privileged [approaches]'

(Hall, 1994, p. 16).

This suggests that we cannot take a position that gives preference to any one approach over another in all contexts and circumstances. Thus hierarchies of evidence types cannot be fixed *a priori*; they can only be considered valid for specific applications and any such model received from another setting would have to be 'recontextualised' before being applied to the evaluation of counselling and psychotherapy.

Strong misreading

A further concept important for Rorty's development of pragmatism (drawn from Bloom, 1973), is that of 'strong misreading' of alternatives. To misread strongly in Rorty's terms is to take the work of one's predecessors, appropriate it and make it one's own. When applying pluralism in evaluative research it is suggested here that alternative paradigms should subject one another to just such treatment. That is, alternative views are reviewed from a position of strength in which the critic can take full advantage of their ability to 'set the ground rules for engagement' (*op. cit.*, p. 5). The approach being considered can thus be entirely re-written in whatever terms the critic prefers.

Given that such strong misreadings can be applied to oneself, just as much as to others, all models come into question and all participants must sustain

'radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary [one] currently uses ... ; [and realise] that argument phrased in the present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve those doubts ...

[Therefore we cannot] think that [our] vocabulary is closer to reality than others'

Rorty (1989) p. 73

The result of combining recontextualisation with the asserted importance of converting miscomprehension (for example through the incompatibility of terms) to 'first rate' strong misreading is that the strongest criticism of an alternative epistemology *cannot* ultimately deal a fatal blow to any internally valid and relevant epistemology. Alternatives are thus much harder to rule out completely and pluralist endeavours can continue.

Each school can doubt every other one, and has a duty to doubt itself. It can do so not least because the threat of domination by alternatives is reduced. The threat of monism resulting from paradigmatic clashes then subsides somewhat¹⁸ if critique is taken as more or less inevitably reliant on misreading. Consequently, if we view alternative perspectives from within the terms of our own frame of reference, as we must, the perspective that is criticised will always require to keep the option of returning to its own *internal* system of self-validation. It will then be able to check the critique by submitting it to the same process for itself. If the system survives this process, it *must* be accepted as a potential part of a pragmatic pluralist system to the extent that it can be of utility to one or more stakeholder group. This is the basis for the pluralist steps outlined in Chapter 6.

3.3.2 The limitations of pragmatism and a possible way forward: pragmatic utilitarianism

Despite its usefulness as a tool for pluralist researchers, pragmatism, even as espoused by Rorty, is not sufficient on its own for pluralism to flourish. Pragmatism offers itself as arbiter and 'court of appeal' in all disputes between research

¹⁸ It subsides, rather than is completely removed, because of the uncertainty pluralism must hold for its future, as noted below.

approaches. However, that role has already been rejected above. As an approach to research, pragmatism can even be seen as a form of dogmatic monism insofar as it excludes the alternative: that our choice of research methods should be based on ideas about the theoretical importance of a procedure. As noted above, pluralism does not *insist* on the denial of a single order on which all else can stand. One of the advantages of not doing so is that the permanent doubting of every position includes a scepticism towards the threat to idealism from domination by pragmatism.

Perhaps the most serious limitation of pragmatism in the context of evaluating counselling and psychotherapy is that circumventing paradigmatic clashes fails to go beyond allowing us to choose from a wider range of methodological options. It does not tell us how the values of these various options should be weighted in relation to each other, nor does it provide a method for deciding which is more or less valid in any given circumstance. Hall points out that ‘what he [Rorty] provides us with is broadly irrelevant to interactive public discourse’ (1994, p. 236) and Rorty himself has recently admitted (Rorty, 1995) that pragmatism offers no particular system for identifying truth because false beliefs sometimes work just as well as true ones and can therefore be equally practicable, (Erwin, 1997, p. 91). Like the pure relativism it steps beyond, it does not offer the frame of reference necessary for generally acceptable evaluative judgements to be made. For that, it is suggested here, a more utilitarian method of pluralist development of research is required.

Pragmatism asks only ‘what is practicable here?’ Utilitarianism, on the other hand, asks ‘what has most utility?’ Practicability is an absolute category, utility is a variable one. Pluralism does require researchers to make pragmatic methodological choices. It simply recognises that pragmatism, like any useful approach, may sometimes be an appropriate way of making progress.

However, for *evaluations* of an intervention to take place research must give the greatest possible clarity for making specific value judgements. To achieve that best possible clarity researchers must have a way to choose between the approaches that

could provide it. The greatest weight, in a pragmatic utilitarianism, should go to those strategies that bear the greatest utility for those with an important stake in the outcomes of the therapy under study. Choices between approaches are made on the basis of their relative utility. Pragmatism only gives us a chance to see what can possibly be done whereas the requirement to maximise the utility of research gives a basis on which to decide what is best fitted to our needs. 'Our needs' will, of course, vary according to the perspective taken. For example, if the most useful data comprises figures related to the cost benefits of therapy then it would be given greater emphasis than qualitative descriptions of the emotional experiences of those involved. Conversely, from some perspectives data on affective responses would carry the greatest utility - such as in aiding clinical practice with specific clients similar to those studied.

However, if stated simply, the concept of maximising utility is also inadequate to the task of evaluating counselling. The variability of individual needs and preferences means that what one person, or stakeholder group, considers to be the most useful kind of evidence cannot be guaranteed to be the same from every other perspective. Some may want increased happiness and freedom from emotional pain while others may place most value on decreased absence from work and enhanced efficiency.

In addition, it is not possible to treat emotional and psychological well-being as units of equivalent value that can be directly compared when trying to decide on the utility of an approach. This is equally the case when comparing the utility of individual therapies or research techniques to evaluate them. We cannot act as if 'quantities of happiness can ... be exactly calculated' (Warnock, 1962, p. 19) because this 'is in effect to deny the relevance of differences between one sort of person and another' (*Ibid.*). This 'felicific calculus' (Bentham, 1789, Ch. 4) was first challenged by Mill on the grounds that any set of procedures that are expected to apply to every case 'maintain ... every part of human nature which ... tends to make a person markedly different in outline' (Mill, 1859, p. 199). Mill's solution was to treat sensitivity to

individual needs as a necessary condition of progress. In common with the pluralism developed here, Mill (1837) took the position that we must account for the fact that people are

'a compound of such innumerable properties, and ... infinity of relations with all other things in the universe that almost every law ... is liable to be set aside or frustrated ... ; no one needs flatter himself that he can lay down propositions sufficiently specific to be available for practice, which he may afterward apply mechanically without any exercise of thought. It is given to no human being to stereotype a set of truths, and walk safely by their guidance with his mind's eye closed'¹⁹ .

cited in Warnock *op. cit.*, p. 24, emphasis added.

Furthermore, because people are capable of change, and this is the issue of most interest in evaluating therapeutic interventions, the concept of utility must be taken 'in the largest sense, grounded on the ... interests of man as a *progressive* being' (Mill, 1859, p. 136, emphasis added). Any theory in this field can only be judged by its ability to be useful to the evolving needs of society and of the individuals who comprise the relevant stakeholder groups (McLeod, 2000a). Utility is the key, but only in the sense of that infinite variety of definitions of what is most useful as might be applied by any number of individuals, each from their unique, progressive, that is, changeable point of view. The degree to which any form of inquiry might be considered useful, then, is not only dependent on the needs of the individuals concerned. The system that decides on how to maximise the utility of an evaluation must also be capable of responding to the fact that those needs may change.

For practical evaluation, pragmatism remains an insufficient, although necessary, element of the pluralist approach advocated below. However, when applied in

¹⁹ This final sentence could hardly be more appropriate as a starting principle for the pluralism developed here. That Mill was simultaneously reacting against his predecessors and building upon

conjunction with the concept of maximising utility, in this distinctively individualisable sense of the word, we can begin to make firm choices about which approaches to research we should value and which will be of most importance in creating a study which is at least ‘good enough’ in the eyes of the stakeholders concerned.

This concept of ‘good enough’ evaluation is also useful in relieving us from the burden of the struggle between reductionist and phenomenological approaches. Neither is accepted by the other as providing *completely* adequate descriptions of any event. However, given a utilitarian approach we need merely provide adequately useful information to make the value judgements required. Whether that information matches the dogmatically stated ideal is secondary.

We then have a much stronger basis for undertaking multi-method evaluations from a position that is fundamentally secure. Individualisable and pragmatic progressive utilitarianism provides the basis for the entire pluralist approach explored below.

3.4 Contributions from post-modernism and its limitations

Like pragmatism, it has been suggested that post-modernism may be capable of providing an adequate response to the monistic split described above. Once again, a specifically pluralist model would then be redundant. A degree of overlap between post-modernism and the position presented here has even led to the suggestion that the current author should be considered ‘as a post modern’ (Shawver, 1997, p. 1). Consequently, the primary purpose of this section is to distinguish the two schools. In doing so, it will also be suggested that post-modernism is inadequate to the task of evaluating counselling and psychotherapy, despite offering some extremely valuable concepts discussed elsewhere in the text.

their ideas is itself an exemplary precursor of pluralist method.

Firstly, it will be argued that post-modernism is ill-defined and its diversity and lack of unity leaves it devoid of clear grounds for legitimating or valuing any approach. Pluralism, on the other hand, allows each approach to define its own value in conjunction with others without recourse to any additional all-encompassing position. It is suggested that post-modernism cannot progress far beyond the current position because it is necessarily locked into permanent revolt against modernist, monistic modes of thought whereas pluralism allows access to a broader range of approaches. Finally, it is also suggested that the possible ontological implications of post-modernism may place further restrictions on its freedom to accept alternatives.

3.4.1 The post-modern lack of unified value systems and the pluralist alternative

Attempting definitions of post-modernism has been seen as necessarily destined to failure on the ground that ‘the very concept of a unitary discipline is at odds with post-modern thought’ (Kvale, 1992, p. 1). Audi (1995) describes it as ‘relating to a complex set of reactions to modern philosophy and its presuppositions, rather than ... any agreement on substantive doctrines’ (p. 634).

Nonetheless, the identifying characteristic of post-modernism will be taken here as ‘an incredulity towards metanarratives’ (Lyotard, 1979, pp. xxiii - xxiv), in contrast to modernism which can be thought of as ‘any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse ... making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative’ (*Ibid.*).

Such post-modern incredulity is, to some degree, shared by pluralism. Furthermore, the diversity of post-modernism is at least superficially appealing for the sake of its potential inclusivity. In post-modernism, however, this diversity engenders a lack of unity that is itself a major limitation. It is the post-modern approach, perhaps more than any other, that has been accused of leading to a ‘fluid anchorless sense of reality’ (Lyon, *op. cit.*, see Chapter 3.2.2). Researchers are left with no guidance as to what

should be accepted as reasonable grounds for believing their position to be legitimate or the value to assign to an approach in any given context.

Pluralism, as set out here attempts to get beyond this state of affairs by constructing specific mechanisms that can be applied in practical research situations. It seeks to recognise and contain diversity but also to harness it with a view to producing research findings of acceptable value to all sides. Pluralism has no *insistence* on scepticism of either the post-modern or the standard scientific kinds. It accepts that there may be circumstances in which sceptical incredulity may risk excluding valuable data or useful ways of making progress. Within a pluralist framework, every approach is able to question and legitimate itself in its own terms; it is *also* able to question and legitimate others in appropriate terms, applicable to them.

It was Lyotard's incredulity towards any overarching explanation that led him to posit a need for different paradigms to communicate. As already noted, this is entirely consistent with pluralism. However, Lyotard suggested that if such communication cannot be sustained it is because we lack the necessary common 'metanarrative'²⁰ to allow us to make sense of each others' discourse. Here, once again, pluralism diverges from post-modernism. Pluralism makes no claim to the status of metanarrative, in Lyotard's sense. It does not claim to explain how other explanations of therapy work, or how they should be valued, because strictly speaking it is no more than an explanation of how other approaches, or 'narratives', about the value of therapy can interact positively and constructively. It is an intention of the pluralist method outlined below to remove the need for a commonly acceptable metanarrative²¹. Without becoming or implying any 'grand theory' in itself, and without requiring recourse to any other such universal explanation,

²⁰ 'Metanarrative', for Lyotard, means any overarching 'grand' theory that seeks to explain a number of other theories.

²¹ The problems of consensualism (above) and would apply to any such overarching system: consensus on any metanarrative is unlikely and the power of the pluralist approach derives from the fact that it may render any such all-encompassing 'grand theory' unnecessary.

pluralism provides a *mechanism* that allows the necessary inter-narrative communication. No additional metanarrative is required because the pluralist mechanism is sufficiently robust to be used by all the different approaches to evaluating counselling and psychotherapy and for communication between them can be directly through it. When differing views can constructively interact directly with one another there is no need for any additional, generally applicable, view to be sought.

3.4.2 The battle against bewitchment

Another distinguishing feature of post-modernism is that its scepticism leads to a sense that we must ‘battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence’ (Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 47) by any one system that claims to give whole and complete answers sufficient for every case. For the same reasons, recontextualisation, paralogy and several other key concepts are used in pluralism to the same ends by allowing us to step outside our original frame of reference sufficiently to see things from a different perspective. Indeed, this is the very essence of the pluralism presented below.

However, some critics of post-modernism have argued that we should move away from aggressive unmasking and perpetual, enforced deconstruction towards a more positive model (e.g. Gergen, 1992). Pluralism concurs insofar as it may seek to *suspend* the ‘battle against ... bewitchment’. It seeks to provide a practical and co-ordinated way of connecting the ‘fluid’ flexibility of post-modernism with the clarity of the objectivist assumptions of positivist and monistic modernism. It admits into the debate the possibility that the modernist, monistic alternatives may also be a sufficiently useful way of making progress for them to be adopted, even if this is only done temporarily. Sometimes, therefore, the scepticism towards metanarratives must be laid aside.

For most post-modernists, however, to step out of *their* frame of reference and take on distinctly modernist ways of understanding is made taboo by the very starting

point of incredulity towards alternatives. Indeed, perhaps the most serious limitation of post-modernism is that it is chained to the movement it fights by the very definition of itself as coming after, avowedly in reaction *against*, modernism. It is primarily defined by what it is not and consequently is incapable of ceasing to be against modernist, monistic approaches without losing its own first principles.

To that extent, post-modernism is dependent on modernism, at least as a foil to give it shape and impetus. However useful the contributions of such a movement may be, it will never be capable of creating an entirely *independent* approach. To move forward it is necessary to relinquish such terminology and embrace a more open, forward looking and positive one. Pluralism is proposed here for precisely this role of developing a ‘post-post-modernist’ approach²² no longer locked in permanent revolt against its predecessors and alternatives.

3.4.3 Ending the chess game

In identifying the source of the conflict between the different ways of understanding our world, Rorty suggests that ‘the wrong turn was taken when Kant’s split between science, morals and art was accepted as a *donnée* ... Once that split is taken seriously ... [we] are condemned to an endless series of reductionist and anti-reductionist moves’ (Rorty, 1991b, p. 170). Post-modernism suffers the same problem because it is itself part of an equally limiting chess game. In pluralism, no split between different ways of approaching research can be accepted completely as a ‘*donnée*’.

Pluralism, it is argued here, is capable of going further than post-modernism because it does not seek to relinquish modernist ideals completely. Unlike post-modernism, it cannot afford to. In counselling evaluation, as elsewhere, we cannot afford to eschew positivist reductionism because of the precision and relatively high degree of

²² Of course, by the same reasoning as that just given, the term ‘post-post-modernism’ could not be used except in a strictly literal and purely descriptive, not definitive or titular, sense. It should certainly not be taken as indicating a reaction against post-modernism but merely a development that has (necessarily) come after it.

certainty, among other things, that are lost in doing so. As we shall see, however, pluralism can also make use of post-modern concepts and methods *when appropriate*. Indeed, they are important in preventing insurmountable impasse between schools of thought when one or another finds its method too enchanting or bewitching to relinquish. The success of such ‘inter-theoretical communication’ is a requirement of the version of pluralist method presented below. The key, of course, is deciding when it is ‘appropriate’ to use one set of concepts or another and the process for achieving this, based on their relative utility as already noted, is presented in Parts 3 and 4 below.

3.4.4 Ontological restrictions and the freedom of non-allegiance

The difference between post-modernism and pluralism is extended further by the absence of any ontological implications that can be drawn from pluralism, as discussed below. A limitation of post-modernism often drawn from the Lyotardian ‘incredulity toward metanarratives’ (*op. cit.*) and, for example, Derrida’s famous phrase that ‘there is nothing outside the text’ (1977, p. 148) is that an ontological position which denies the existence of an objective reality must follow. Leary (1994), for example, argues that ‘for Derrida, the “real” could be shown to be “fictional”’ (p. 438). Some post-modern authors have deliberately denied these ontological implications²³ although others have clearly taken just such a literal constructivist position:

²³ Shawver (1996) notes Geha’s (1993) insistence that ‘fiction’, in post-modernism, is frequently a technical term suggesting no more than that the only reality we can *know* is ‘mind made [for] if any others exist, we would never know of them’ (p. 211). Thus, it ‘does not designate something false or not real or non-existent’ (*op. cit.*, p. 212). Derrida insists that his position is best interpreted as indicating ‘that one cannot refer to this “real” except in an interpretive experience’ (*Ibid.*). Lyotard (1983) also notes that ‘reality plays itself out’ (p. 55) in all our narratives, of whatever type, regardless of whether they be purportedly accurate descriptions of reality or avowedly subjective phenomenological accounts.

'Post-modern thought replaces a conception of a reality independent of the observer with notions of language as actually constituting the structures of a perspectival social reality. The modern dichotomy of an objective reality distinct from subjective images is breaking down.'

Kvale (1992) p. 2.

If this is so, it completely excludes the alternative positions that are the basis for all empirical methods: they rely entirely on the assumption that an objective reality not only exists but is knowable through observation, experimentation and deduction. Pluralism on the other hand is no more than a structure within which alternative positions can operate and this is as true of differing ontological positions as those concerning the acceptability of different types of data or the relative importance of possible therapeutic outcomes.

If it can avoid being trapped in the endless sequence of 'reductionist and anti-reductionist moves', pluralism will be able to provide researchers with legitimate access to data from all points of view. This is possible because pluralism is not irrevocably tied to any one perspective. Overlap with post-modernism, such as it is, primarily comprises the use of post-modernist concepts and methods *within* the pluralist mechanism, as outlined below.

Summary of Part 2

There has been much debate in the literature fuelling the ‘paradigm wars’ between opposing epistemological points of view. However, few practical steps have been taken in resolving the conflict. There have been plenty of calls for such resolution (e.g. Goss and Mearns, 1997a) but practical alternatives to the reductionist / quantitative versus humanist / qualitative split have proven elusive.

Some authors have argued that, for the purposes of practical research, we should ignore philosophical and epistemological issues and continue to gather evidence of any type on a purely pragmatic basis. Others have suggested that a way forward is to use alternative approaches to research as complimentary, but separate, approaches.

It has been suggested here that this undervalues both the unique contributions each side has to make and the difficulties raised by their epistemological incompatibilities. Those approaches in the social sciences that attempt to be similar to the physical sciences by measuring variables as minutely as possible have a great deal to offer. But humanist and phenomenological approaches do to. The task that has remained has been to combine them in a meaningful and productive combination while preserving their separate contributions and potential without fatally undermining one or other stance. Pluralism is proposed here as being able to fulfil this role.

The pluralism presented in this thesis takes a significant step beyond the previous situation of warring or, at best, contiguous alternative paradigms. It is possible to see it as a development of both post-modern *and* empiricist thinking. However, it rejects the term ‘post-modern’ as being necessarily limited by its reaction against modernist reductionism. That stance is seen as progressing only a little beyond the previous (modernist) combative style of advancing knowledge.

Pluralism also recognises the need to avoid the worst aspects of reductionist science (as exemplified by some experimental psychology) that threatens to render scientific

progress insufficiently sensitive to the needs of those involved in research, especially in the field of counselling evaluation. It is vital that the needs of all major stakeholders are adequately addressed.

This position is also seen to progress beyond earlier forms of pluralism by its use of temporary recourse to paralogy or the playful Feyerabendian anarchism that facilitates consideration of alternatives without risking the defeat of one's own stance. Rationalism does not, therefore, have to hold sway at all points in every case. Impasse between alternatives at any point is to be resolved by mutual 'first class' critique and, where necessary, recourse to a pragmatic, but individualised, utilitarianism that is the basis for all that follows.

Part 3 The basis of pluralism

Chapter 4 Developments from the current state of pluralism

General introduction to Part 3

This part of the thesis sets out to explore aspects of the fundamental basis of pluralist evaluation. Part 4 then looks at the more practical application of these concepts and principles before Part 5 describes a number of studies based on them.

As suggested above, the lack of a workable, coherent basis for pluralist evaluation has left current multi-method approaches vulnerable to criticism from either monistic camp, each of which sees itself as having a clearer, more certain footing for their claims of producing accurate, adequate or 'true' statements regarding the effects of therapy.

Part 3 begins with a brief consideration of the current state of multi-method evaluation of counselling and psychotherapy, followed by a review of some aspects of the more robust co-ordinated pluralism which is proposed here as being capable of facilitating further progress. Some points have already been made in Part 2 and these are only mentioned very briefly here for the sake of integrating them into the position as a whole.

It is suggested that a specific mechanism is required to allow the different approaches to co-exist productively and without clashes that threaten to render the entire endeavour invalid. Once productive communication between paradigms is established, pluralist studies should be capable of providing a more complete picture of therapeutic outcomes than is otherwise possible.

In such a schema, *all* relevant and pragmatically useful approaches may be considered and pluralist evaluations can be designed to meet stakeholder needs in preference to conforming with monistic dogma. No method can then be either entirely ruled out *a*

priori or assumed to be superior in general. It is also suggested that a pluralist position must be maintained throughout each study to ensure that coherence and a minimal acceptability of its components are maintained at every stage. This is crucial as it progresses beyond the concurrent application of essentially separate approaches with results merely being compared at the end.

The specific form of pluralism proposed here is then differentiated from current alternative forms, notably that described by Rescher, in that rationalism is not necessarily the only tool and multiple approaches may be deemed appropriate simultaneously.

In Chapter 5, it is acknowledged that pluralism has some serious limitations. Not least is the fact that all approaches involved in a pluralist study must achieve at least minimal consensus regarding pluralism itself. It follows that pluralism cannot tolerate any absolute monism. Pluralism may also be thought biased, unnecessary or even indistinguishable from current multi-method approaches. However, the last of these is only likely if the fundamental clashes between paradigms are ignored as in current multi-method research designs.

Some ontological issues are also very briefly considered but it is recognised that pluralism cannot take on any one ontological position itself. It is concluded that pluralism may be best developed by turning to more practical considerations.

Part 3 then ends with a fairly extensive summary which reviews all the arguments presented and their subsidiary points in preparation for Part 4 which will offer a mechanism by which this can be applied in practical pluralist evaluation settings.

To aid the reader in understanding this section, an overview of the argument is provided in Diagram 4.1. This gives a fairly detailed, although still highly condensed, version of the arguments to be presented. For the sake of clarity, the relevant sections of Diagram 4.1 are repeated at various points below.

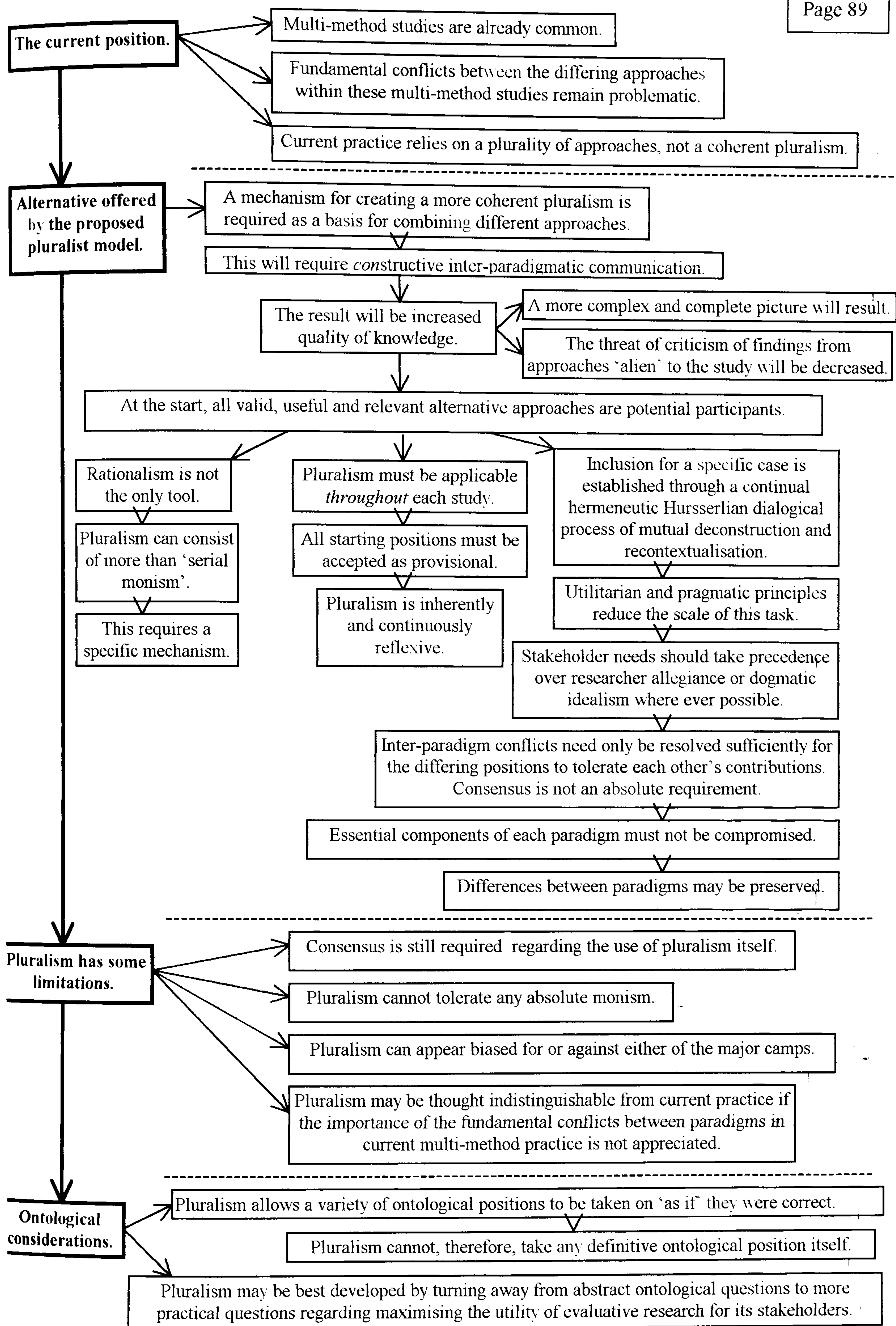


Diagram 4.1 - Outline of pluralism in Part 3 of this thesis

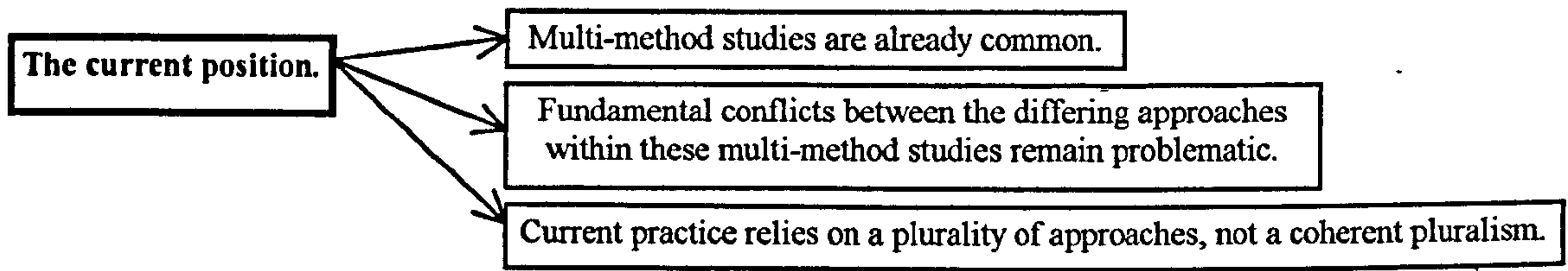


Diagram 4.2 - The current state of pluralist evaluation of therapy

4.1 The current status

Historically, pluralism as a general phenomenon has arisen at various points, described in detail by McLennan (1995). The distinct form of pluralism presented below aims to subsume the useful, pertinent and coherent structures of its predecessors whether they be pluralist, monistic or otherwise, whilst excluding incompatible components in each specific application.

As has been noted, both phenomenological *and* reductionist / modernist approaches each demonstrate some utility in evaluating psychological therapies. Bergin and Garfield (1994b) have already stressed the potential for ‘methodological pluralism’ which ‘seems to be supported by more and more people who are studying clinical phenomena’ (p. 828). They add a specific endorsement for ‘a kind of pluralism that does not throw out the virtues of the traditional approaches to research, but complements those with a variety of more flexible techniques for getting at the complexity of the phenomena we deal with’ (*Ibid.*). The increasingly accepted position, then, is that ‘methodological diversity and pluralism are to be encouraged because different types and levels of analysis provide different insights about the phenomena of interest’ (Kazdin, 1994, p. 66)

That much work remains to be done, however, is stressed by McLeod who notes:

‘The field has been dominated by the positivist-paradigmatic monolith for so long that there is a long way to go before we will know what a truly pluralist methodology will look like, or even whether it is possible.’

McLeod, 1994b, p. 180

It is asserted here that a sure footing for a pluralist *methodology* requires an adequate method for achieving acceptable *epistemological* pluralism. The vehemence of the ‘paradigm wars’ already described bears testament both to the scale of the task and to its importance in preventing the perpetuation of the mutual undermining of contributions from each different form of research.

McLeod (*Ibid.*) also refers to Rennie and Toukmanian (1992) as ‘noting that the assimilation of qualitative methods into therapy research is only beginning’ and that we are not yet ready to resolve,

‘the tension inherent in a pluralist research. It holds the promise of a more ‘complete’ understanding, yet at the same time the very different philosophical assumptions implicit in each approach raise the risk of contradiction or confusion’

op. cit., p. 178.

It is the task of the method laid out in Part 4 to use the various elements presented here in a manner which avoids the risk of this kind of confusion and inter-paradigmatic contradiction within pluralism.

McLeod (1994b, p. 178) also cites Howard’s “‘slippery question’”: “*how* are we to combine the findings from different perspectives into a coherent picture of human action?” (1983, p. 21, emphasis added). Even the most sophisticated response to this question offered to date gets no further than that form of pluralism in which ‘both narrative [phenomenologically derived] and paradigmatic [predominantly monistic] methods could be employed at *different phases* of a programme of research’ (McLeod, 1994b, p. 179, emphasis added). No coherent basis for *combining* different approaches has yet been offered, then, other than merely juxtaposing them in order to ‘fill in the gaps’ (*op. cit.*, p. 180) or the triangulation of methods described elsewhere.

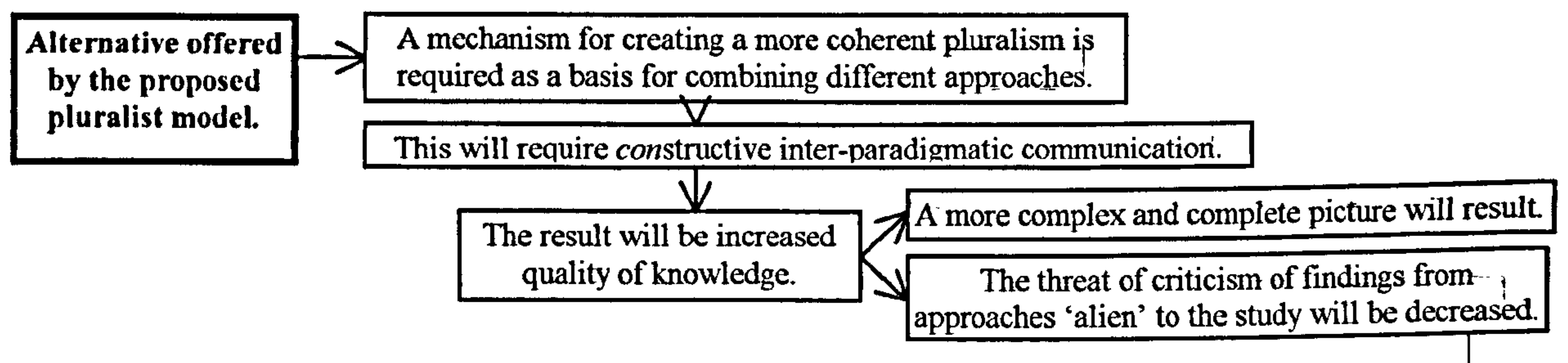


Diagram 4.3 - Developing pluralism # 1

McLennan (1995) suggests that 'pluralism today is probably best regarded not ... as a particular school of thought or coherent body of theory - a proper 'ism' so to speak' (p. ix). A coherent pluralism must progress beyond the separate use of a plurality of approaches. What follows may well constitute just such an 'ism' by offering a coherent pluralist approach to evaluation and by exploring at least some aspects of its appearance.

4.2 Developing the new pluralism

4.2.1 A 'non-standard' study of knowledge

Pluralism, as distinct from a disordered plurality of approaches, must be open to the implications of the separate epistemologies. It must be capable of containing *multiple* frameworks from which value judgements can be made. A clear mechanism for reaching evaluative decisions regarding therapeutic outcomes must then allow each research approach to evaluate the other(s) for the whole system to operate as a cohesive entity. A workable pluralism, then, is an integration of approaches to evaluation into an internally consistent structure within which diverse views are used in a co-ordinated, coherent and systematic way.

Given that both main traditions can be useful, what must be developed to satisfy the demands of evaluating counselling and psychotherapy is a 'phenomenological epistemology'²⁴, neither for nor against traditional epistemological deduction *or* phenomenology (after Adorno, 1956). The intention must be to approach both sides deductively *and* phenomenologically, to discover that which is of value in each.

Both perspectives will then have to accept what they see as 'non-standard' approaches to knowledge. They will then have to participate in the construction of a new approach which may not only include elements that appear 'non-standard' from

²⁴ Strictly speaking, the term 'epistemology' is closely linked with specific views of science (Ferrier, 1854). It may be considered more applicable to the reductionism or logical positivism that has been in such close conflict with phenomenological approaches.

a given perspective, but where the whole new approach may appear similarly ‘non-standard’ in itself.

4.2.2 The interaction between different approaches must be constructive

For the philosophies to work successfully together, it is necessary to establish an Husserlian hermeneutic dialectic between them (Goss and Mearns, 1997a). Husserl’s phenomenology derived from a congenial dialectic in which each party sought to contribute positively to the overall comprehension of the issue at hand. This is, perhaps, closer to a *dialogue* in which contributions complement those that went before, than a *dialectic* in which statements are exchanged each of which virtually constitutes, literally speaking, a reading or lecture presented for the (intended) edification of the other contributors²⁵.

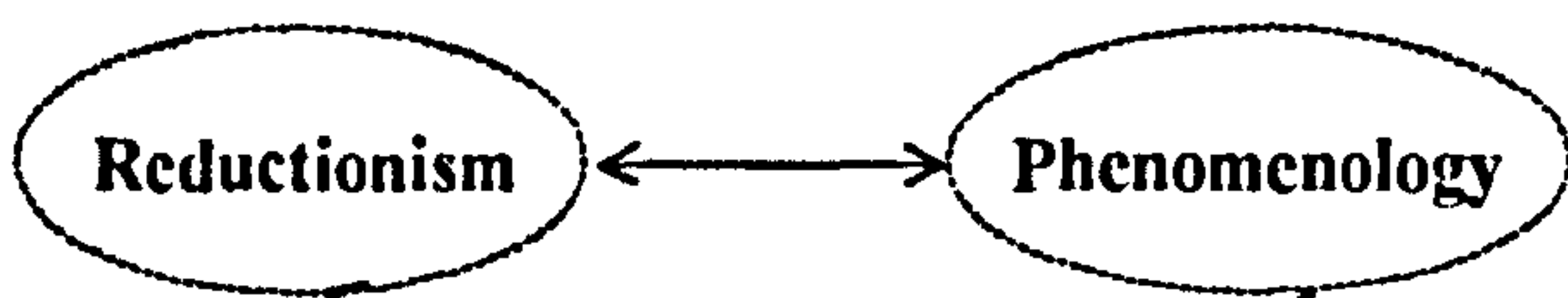
In the pluralist system, the desire for the illusory power of attempts at incontrovertible statements of apparent fact need not be *entirely* relinquished, as some schools of thought would have it²⁶. To exclude such a possibility completely would be anti-pluralist in itself, of course. Nonetheless, we must recognise and accept the futility of actually attempting absolutist definitions, or even complete descriptions, of human experiencing. This is especially the case when trying to judge the efficacy of processes like counselling and psychotherapy in which change and the fluidity of the organismic self, the ‘subject’ under study, is a necessary characteristic.

²⁵ In the pluralism developed here, non-inferential, descriptive and qualitative methods give an important balance to Husserl’s preference for mathematicised expression and the ‘anti-psychologism’ (Bachelard, 1957) the term ‘Husserlian dialectic’ might otherwise be thought to imply. Neither ‘anti-psychologism’ or ‘pro-psychologism’ should be inferred from the term ‘Husserlian dialectic’ as it is used here. In some narrative approaches, psychologism may be highly appropriate; elsewhere the methods and mathematically oriented ‘demonstrative style’ (*op. cit.*, p. xxxiv) preferred by Husserl might (or might not) prevail. For pluralist researchers, the choice is largely a pragmatic one, in the Rortian sense of the word.

²⁶ Examples include those derived from Feyerabend or constructivist and relativist positions which

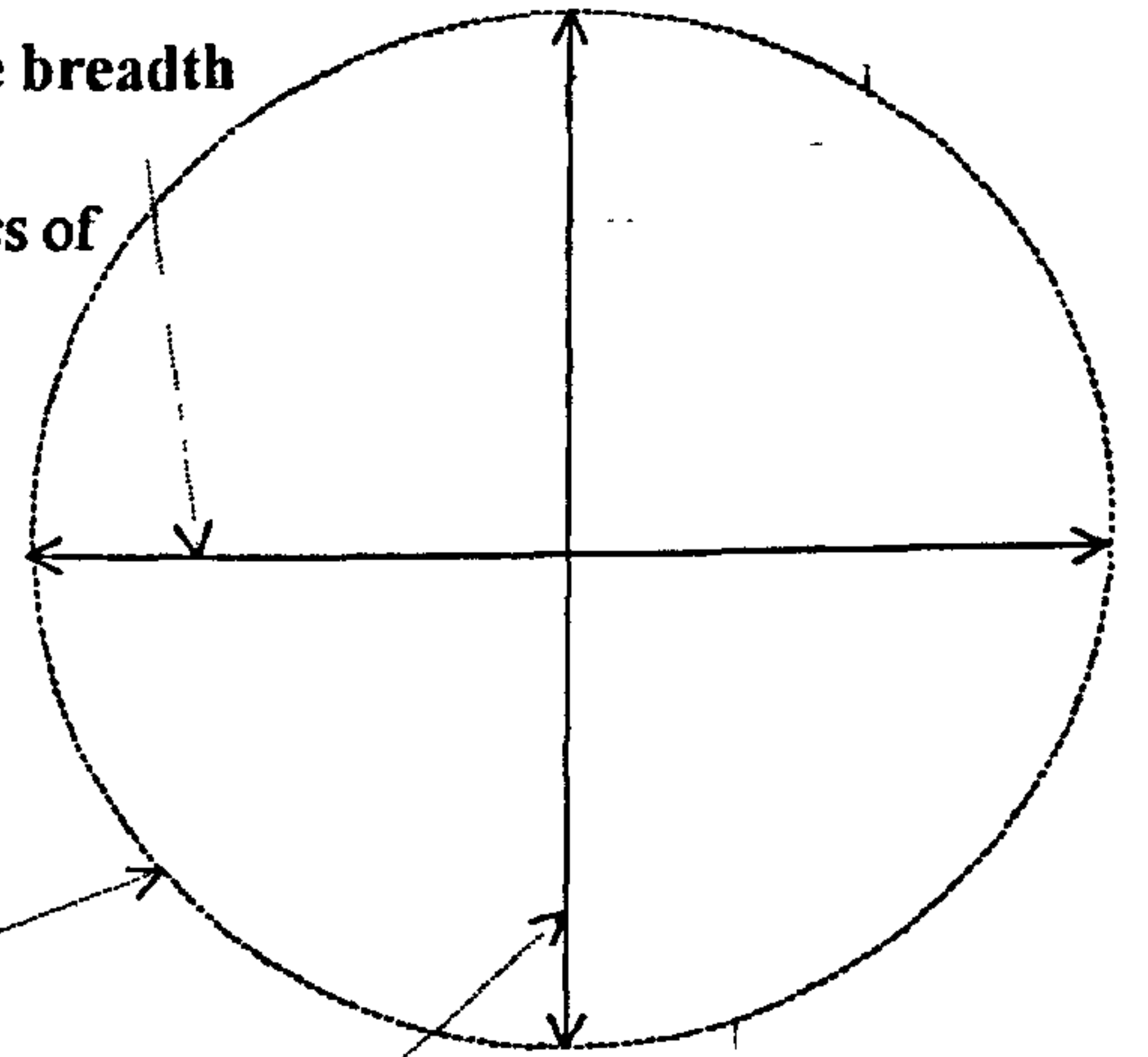
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**4.4a Plurality of approaches
(current multi-method design)**



4.4b Integrated approaches in pluralism

Quantitative breadth
(e.g. normal characteristics of a population)



Qualitative depth
(e.g. detailed accounts of an individual's experience on that point of the quantitatively defined continuum.)

Diagram 4.4 - Multi-method and pluralist epistemological maps

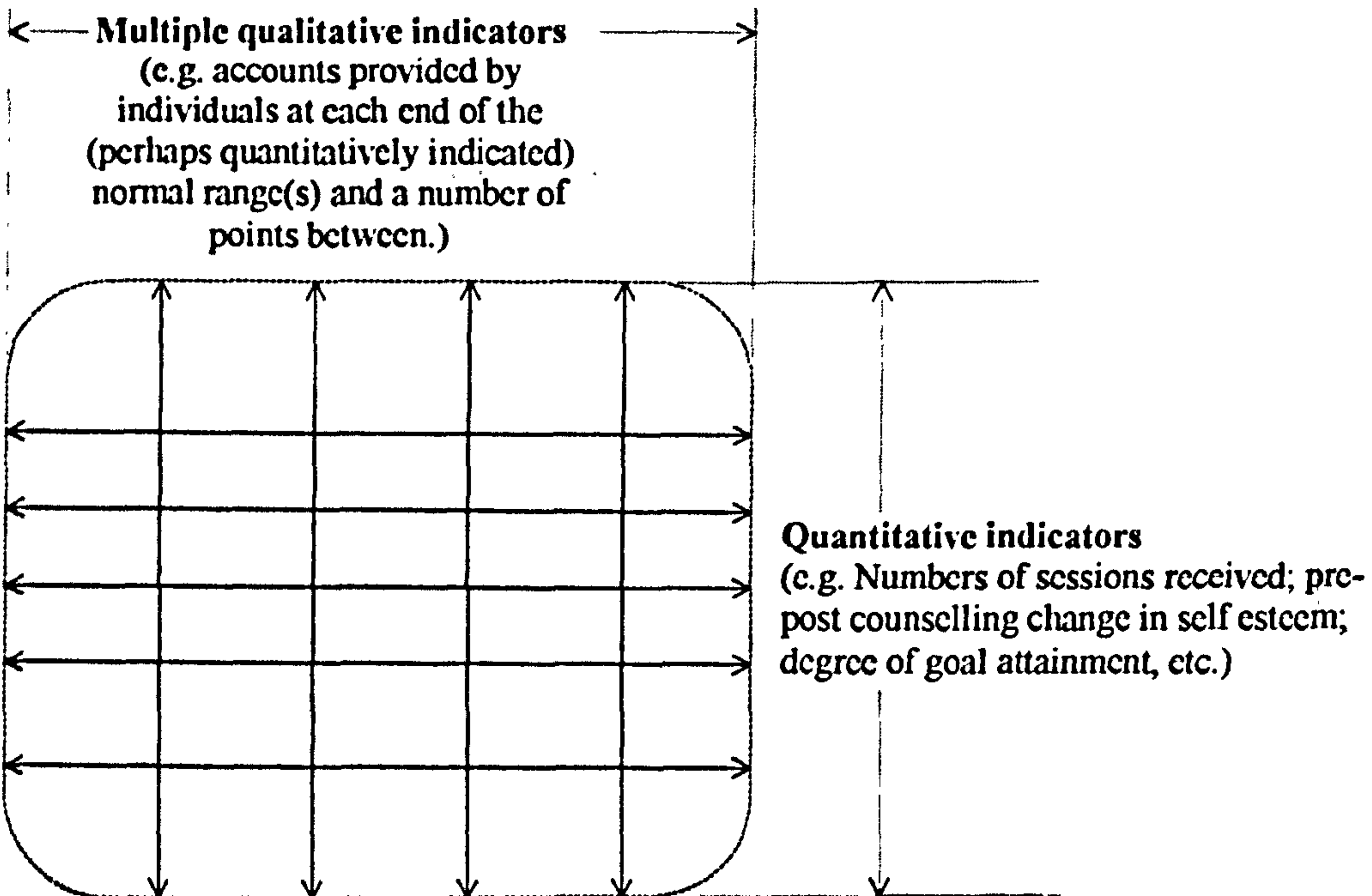


Diagram 4.5 - Maximising detail in the pluralist field of knowledge

While scepticism, such as that derived from Socratic debate, and ‘the power of contradiction’ in Hegelian dialectic (Adorno, 1956) may be used on occasion to establish the validity of a theory, the development of research questions and the production of answers to those questions both require constant *constructive* contributions from both kinds of enquiry. Pluralism must accept both that deduction can guarantee rigor in the narrow range of experience that is amenable to logical structural analysis while induction offers a greater possibility of remaining connected to the unpredictable world of human experiencing.

4.2.3 Pluralism increases our knowledge of the topic studied

From our current state of relative naiveté, a philosophical map might represent reductionism and phenomenology at opposite ends of a line (Diagram 4.4a).

However, proper integration into a pluralist framework capable of containing many forms of understanding requires that the map develop other dimensions not currently present. Quantitative methods, for example, may be seen as providing breadth, indicating the normal range across populations. In contrast, qualitative methods provide depth, demonstrating possible, rather than typical, individual experiences. Moreover, the different dimensions can be seen as components of the same field of knowledge (Diagram 4.4b).

The greatest field of knowledge is achieved if we use a number of quantitative indicators to examine specific aspects of effectiveness while simultaneously using several qualitative accounts of the experience of individuals at each end of the normal range (Diagram 4.5) and possibly at various points in between. Of course, increasing the number of either quantitative or qualitative sources of evidence will increase the detail of the body of knowledge created. The utilitarian principles referred to above suggest that indicators should continue to be added to a study until sufficient data is obtained to meet the needs of the various stakeholders involved.

assert that there are no ultimate truths to be won.

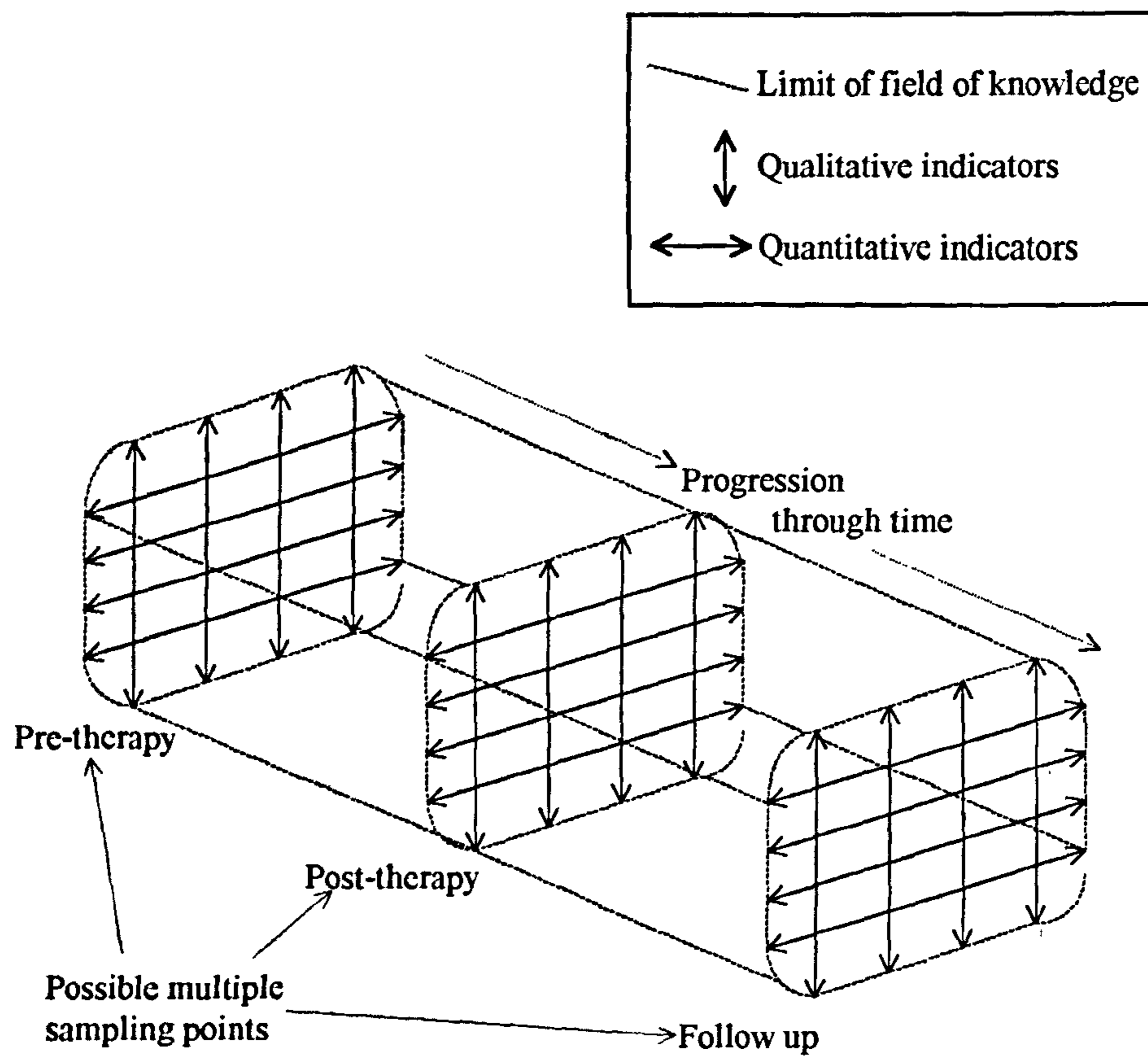


Diagram 4.6 - Isometric representation of the maximal pluralist field

In practice, by investigating multiple indicators and using multiple methods a greater degree of understanding can be achieved. Ensuring that factors not predicted at the outset can inductively enter the field, even during deductively oriented phases of a study, provides additional opportunities for gathering a body of data which combines to offer sufficient utility for making value judgements from the various perspectives to be addressed.

The complexity of the map is taken even further if it is borne in mind that both therapy and most evaluations of it take place over a period time. With breadth, depth and time all being represented in a single study the amount of additional knowledge is even greater (Diagram 4.6) even without taking account of additional paradigms that could be incorporated.

This contrasts with the separate areas of knowledge offered by multiple qualitative or quantitative methods used separately, even over a period of time. In such systems, each indicator would stand isolated by at least a little distance from the others and each element could, at best, provide only 2 dimensional input, even allowing for one dimension being change over time. The units of evidence might crowd closely together but they remain separate until connected by evidence from a different approach that cuts across them. For example, a number of interviews with clients are useful but they are of greater evaluative worth if we know where those clients sit on various quantifiable continua.

Thorough integration of differing approaches also allows the potential conflicts between them to be dealt with as they arise. None are left waiting to ambush the study later on by undermining the validity of its findings. How this is achieved is considered in more detail in Part 4. At this stage, however, it is important to note that the threat of criticism from approaches alien to those in use is diminished by addressing them at an early stage until no relevant approaches are left entirely 'alien' at all.

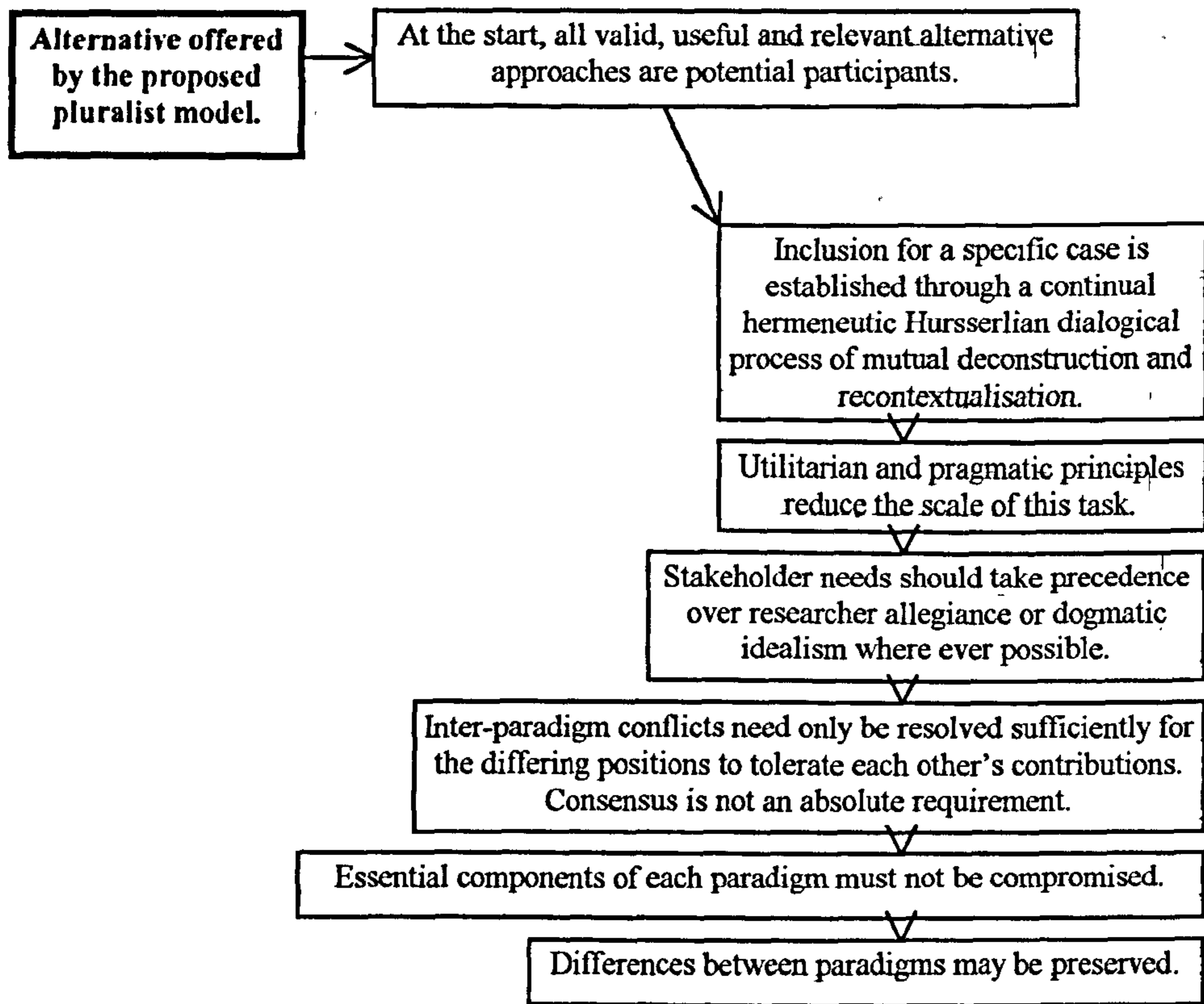


Diagram 4.7 - Developing pluralism # 2

This is already significantly beyond the triangulation of independently derived results by simply laying the contrasting approaches alongside each other and comparing the end products (Diagram 4.4a). Such developments lay the foundation for the new pluralism proposed in this thesis but, importantly, do not constitute it for. Without a method by which these principles can be put into practice they are no more than statements of desiderata.

4.3 Continual critique avoids relativism, dogmatic paradigm allegiance and maintains distinct paradigm identities

4.3.1 Inclusiveness and deconstruction

A pluralist position must accept that, at least at the outset, all alternatives are potential participants or it ceases to be properly ‘pluralist’ at all. Its first principle is to be inclusive rather than being either prescriptive or proscriptive, which are the primary functions of all monisms. For pluralism, if methods are demonstrably valid in terms of meeting the demands from their own perspective they can then be operated as such. It is suggested here that establishing this should begin with each approach conducting its own ‘internal conceptual critique’ (Wheeler, 1995, p. 181).

Similar to the deconstructive process described by Derrida²⁷ (1976; 1981; 1985) and other post-modernists (e.g. Shawver, 1996), the intention is to establish whether the prime prerequisites for an approach to warrant inclusion are met: that is that it can sustain sufficient utility, internal validity and relevance. However, deconstruction

²⁷ Originally from Heidegger (1971), this term has little to do with destruction or nihilism as some authors have suggested (e.g. Finlay, 1989; Leary, 1994) and is intended to connote an entirely benign and constructive process. Shawver (1996) points out that many critics of post-modernism have replaced the technical terminology developed specifically for its purposes with homonyms with quite different meanings from vernacular usage, ‘something like replacing the word “ego” in Freudian writing with the homonym that means “arrogant”’ (p. 371). Similar problems are liable to occur in any entirely external critique as noted below.

also offers the possibility of establishing more detailed and accurate understanding of the basis of each approach and, especially, its relation to alternatives.

At this point pluralism explicitly joins with post-modernism by making such deconstructive self critique a deliberate step. The intention is to join the same ‘battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence’ as that outlined above (Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 47; cf. Chapter 3.4.2) that can result from being overly familiar with the similes and metaphors absorbed into the way one’s preferred approach expresses its findings. A lack of such awareness is liable to lead to unnecessarily narrow and dogmatic representations of the way in which the usefulness of evaluative data is judged. It is easy to become so used to assuming that our preferred form of evidence is the most accurate representation of the truth that we may forget that this is only an assumption. We are liable to be trapped within our original language and ways of expressing both units of evidence and their relative worth. (Wittgenstein describes the problem thus: ‘a picture held us captive. And we could not step outside it for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably’ (*op. cit.*, p. 48). Løvlie (1992) concurs, commenting that ‘we may believe ourselves to be the masters of language. In fact it is more apt to say that language masters us’ (p. 112). By becoming aware of the limitations imposed by our ‘language’, or approach to research, we are better equipped to assess both its own value and the relative value of others.)

The essential point for pluralism is that once the arbitrary and metaphor laden nature of any one way of describing the evaluation of therapy is laid bare, properly pluralist progress is much more likely to be possible. Alternatives that are no more arbitrary or metaphor laden will no longer seem the poorer cousins of our own ‘truth’.

One of the strengths of deconstruction for pluralism is that it relies on the terms and precepts of the perspective that is being deconstructed as the tools of its progress. If a reductionist method is to be deconstructed it is to be done in reductionist terms. It is therefore necessary that ‘the critic implicitly and provisionally adheres to the

position criticized' (Wheeler, *op. cit.*)²⁸. This temporary adoption of alternative views is an essential feature of pluralism and will receive more attention below. Its immediate effect, however, is to allow the metaphorical language of the debate to shift away from that of warfare and strife and instead of being condemned to battle we are on the same side seeking more to test ourselves than others.

4.3.2 Recontextualisation and the avoidance of relativism

If it remains untempered, the suggestion that all internally validated, relevant and useful alternatives should be considered for inclusion in a pluralist study risks leading to an unrestrained relativism. Any method could propose itself and create its own justifications in any way at all. Internal acceptability is, therefore, insufficient to guarantee appropriateness on its own.

However, in a pluralist study, no approach can operate entirely in isolation for long. If it did, it would cease to be properly pluralist and would revert to the mere juxtaposition of different monisms. Adoption of any one point of view is, if pluralism is to be sustained, only temporary and each must then also be 'recontextualised' into the phenomenal field of its alternatives²⁹.

For pluralism to retain a plural character the needs of *all* those perspectives involved must be minimally satisfied: each approach must be able to at least *tolerate* the others. Ensuring that this is achieved is the purpose of introducing the recontextualisation described above (cf. Chapter 3.3.1).

The external 'first rate' critique of recontextualisation checks the deconstructive internal critique from other perspectives. That is, the process is as follows. Each approach examines itself to ensure that it is valid and useful in its own terms. Each

²⁸ Wittgenstein suggests that 'When... [one tries] to grasp the *essence* of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home' (1958, p. 48).

²⁹ This is explored in more detail below.

approach then also ensures that all others are at least minimally acceptable. The relative utility of approaches can also be identified.

Certainly, some things may well be ruled out, at least in some contexts and for some purposes. It is quite possible that some methods will not be capable of being rendered tolerable for some others, for example. Consequently, we avoid the relativist position that ‘all ... seemingly discordant positions are in fact justified’ (Rescher, 1993, p. 80), which would follow from an absence of means to differentiate between helpful or unhelpful methods. Indeed, the problem is rather that there are too many ways of differentiating acceptable and unacceptable methods than that such criteria are unavailable. By constructing a detailed and mutually acceptable method for productive communication between the various points of view, pluralism allows us access to an *array* of systems by which value judgements can be made. We have access to a similarly wide array of means by which we can make evaluative judgements about therapeutic interventions or even about pluralism itself.

It should be stressed that the aim of this process is to establish no more than mutual tolerance. General *consensus* can still be disregarded as discussed above. Provided that the principles of pluralist method do not violate some absolutely required rubric of any of the perspectives involved, and a minimal acceptability is thus maintained, the process of applying pluralist methodologies in particular research studies can begin.

4.3.3 Dogmatic allegiance to theoretical models must not be allowed to interfere with stakeholders’ needs

The essential system for selecting the most appropriate approaches from the vast range pluralism makes available is provided by the pragmatic and utilitarian stance that we should rely on those methods that are most useful in meeting the needs of the most important ‘constituency groups’ or stakeholders (Pulice, 1994). As described elsewhere in this thesis, this offers a further means by which we can assign relative

weight to different value systems within each study. It is equally applicable during the design and implementation of pluralist studies as in the analysis and interpretation of results. An important point is that pluralist studies can then be driven more by stakeholder needs than paradigmatic dogma. This is explored further in Part 4.

In methodological terms, this has led to a very wide range of possible techniques being called for (e.g. Goss and Mearns, 1997a). We may include such diverse methods as clients not only participating in, but undertaking, research; live observation of counselling sessions or their analogues; post-counselling interviews with all relevant stakeholders; *and* randomised controlled trials or the widespread use of rigorously developed and tested psychometrics which can be sensitively applied alongside all the others.

The relative primacy of stakeholder needs over idea driven theoretical allegiances in pluralism implies that researchers must endeavour to be equally open to attempting methods of evaluating therapy that might not ordinarily have been considered. Of course, perfect equanimity may always remain elusive, because of the limitations each researcher brings to their work. It is asking a great deal for researchers to suspend the tyranny of their own values and to accept with equal weight the values of what had been seen as the 'opposing' side. Indeed, it is precisely because of this that the researcher can be seen as one of the defining contextual elements of a study.

True to the commonplace requirement of phenomenological and naturalistic research, such contextual elements must be made sufficiently transparent for the consumer of research to be able to make reasonably accurate interpretations of it. It is essential to acknowledge and then to deliberately facilitate all the elements of a study, and to do so through an explicitly stated, transparent mechanism.

4.3.4 Different approaches may become integrated into a pluralist structure but their essential elements are retained and differences are not eradicated

In a pluralist methodology, conflicts that result from the juxtaposition of alternative paradigms are mostly resolved, for example by the method proposed here and in Part 4. Where they are not resolved they are accommodated to the mutual satisfaction of each approach. To that extent, pluralism offers an integration of previous practices and ways of knowing but it is important that this is achieved without the loss of any *essential* characteristics of the component parts. Consequently, essential differences between the approaches are not eradicated either.

The use of the term ‘integration’ in this context must not be taken to imply a new ‘integrative’ research philosophy, in the way the word has been used to describe the ‘integrative’ school of therapy (e.g. Nelson-Jones, 1984; Culley, 1991; Dryden, 1992). Pluralist progress does require some integration of the alternative philosophical structures, but that cannot be allowed to form a single replacement edifice lest pluralism become a new monism all the more tyrannical because it denies an exclusivity it has inadvertently developed.

Unless this is maintained, we will achieve nothing but the very thing pluralism sets out to avoid. A new unitary theory will emerge unbidden from the heap of philosophies.

But this does not need to be the case. Unitary theories and the unification of pluralist components into monistic systems is only inevitable if competition between differing possible ways of thinking leads to an environment in which ‘the survival of the fittest’ is the strongest law. However, such consensualism has already been rejected (above).

The positively oriented constructive Husserlian dialectic proposed here, as opposed to the competitive Socratic or Hegelian methods, is one means by which we can avoid

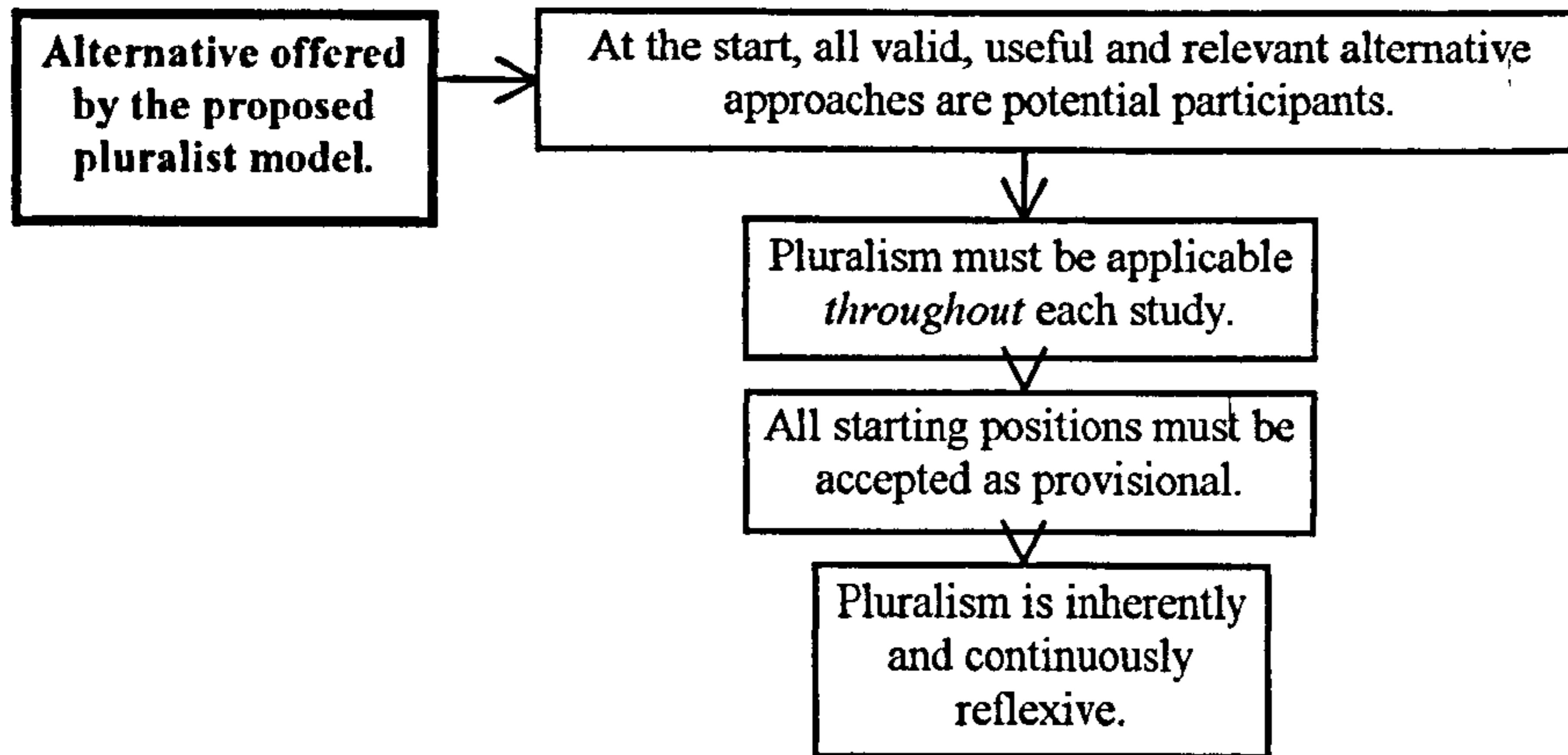


Diagram 4.8 - Developing pluralism # 3

making consensus a necessary condition for further progress so long as other mechanisms allow us to ensure that alternatives can at least co-exist without fatally undermining one another. This is not quite to argue that consensus should be completely disregarded. Where its results would be mutually desirable and acceptable it can still be an additional guide to the generalised usefulness of the progress being made. Rescher (1993) similarly disregards consensus in virtually all circumstances, except insofar as it ‘expands our informational horizons ... [and can act as *one*] positive evidential factor’ (pp. 59 - 60) among many.

4.4 Pluralist endeavours must be pluralist throughout and open to change and development

4.4.1 Pluralism must be applicable at all stages

In order to maintain the pluralist principle that the imperatives of each tradition must not be breached, it is important that the positive, non-combative style of inter-paradigm communication is maintained at every stage, not merely at the point where the individual camps can compare their independently derived results. Once established, mutual tolerance must be sustained.

To achieve this, studies must constantly question proposals, methods, results and their interpretation. Furthermore, they must do so in terms not only of the theoretical basis from which they were originally derived, but also, (through recontextualisation) from the frame of reference of any other applicable model to ensure thorough, and thoroughly pluralist, adequacy.

Qualitative or quantitative methods are not, then, only used to corroborate or disconfirm each other’s findings. It is necessary for them constantly to interact throughout the entire evaluation. In more precise terms, the philosophy of each is applied to itself *and* its alternatives in an active, continuous and developmental hermeneutic process of mutual interpretation and re-interpretation.

All topics subjected to pluralist enquiry would have to be capable of succumbing to the principles of multiple possible valid positions. In the case of evaluations of counselling and psychotherapy, a number of fundamentally different approaches are indeed demonstrably useful, valid and relevant. It follows that all these *possible* positions must be accepted as no more than provisional statements. None of them represents the whole picture. All knowledge changes as it is developed, and the description of pluralism given here suggests that a phenomenological-epistemological 'science' must be aware of and explicitly account for its limited and constantly evolving nature. No theory could, therefore, announce itself to be complete and finished, including the pluralism currently being set out.

Patterns of evaluation would also be required to be flexible and capable of adapting to the changing needs of their contexts in a continual process of heuristic development (Moustakas, 1967). Pluralist studies may, therefore, appear very different from each other as is apparent in Part 5.

In practice, both sides of the debate have already applied elements of this in an inhibited, sometimes haphazard and largely unacknowledged fashion: formulating hypotheses to test is often highly creative and inductive, frequently based on unstructured and phenomenological types of processes³⁰; on the other hand, interpreting qualitative data can be undertaken with the strictest logical and deductive reasoning.

4.4.2 Pluralist principles should be reflexively applied to ensure that changes are acceptable to all sides

Because of the constant interaction and critique between paradigms within any pluralist study, a process prized in naturalistic 'action research' for maintaining adequate standards may become highly relevant: that of the 'reflective practitioner'

³⁰ Polanyi (1958) has demonstrated the dramatic extent to which so-called 'objective' scientific method is, in fact, motivated and fuelled by individual and collective human values.

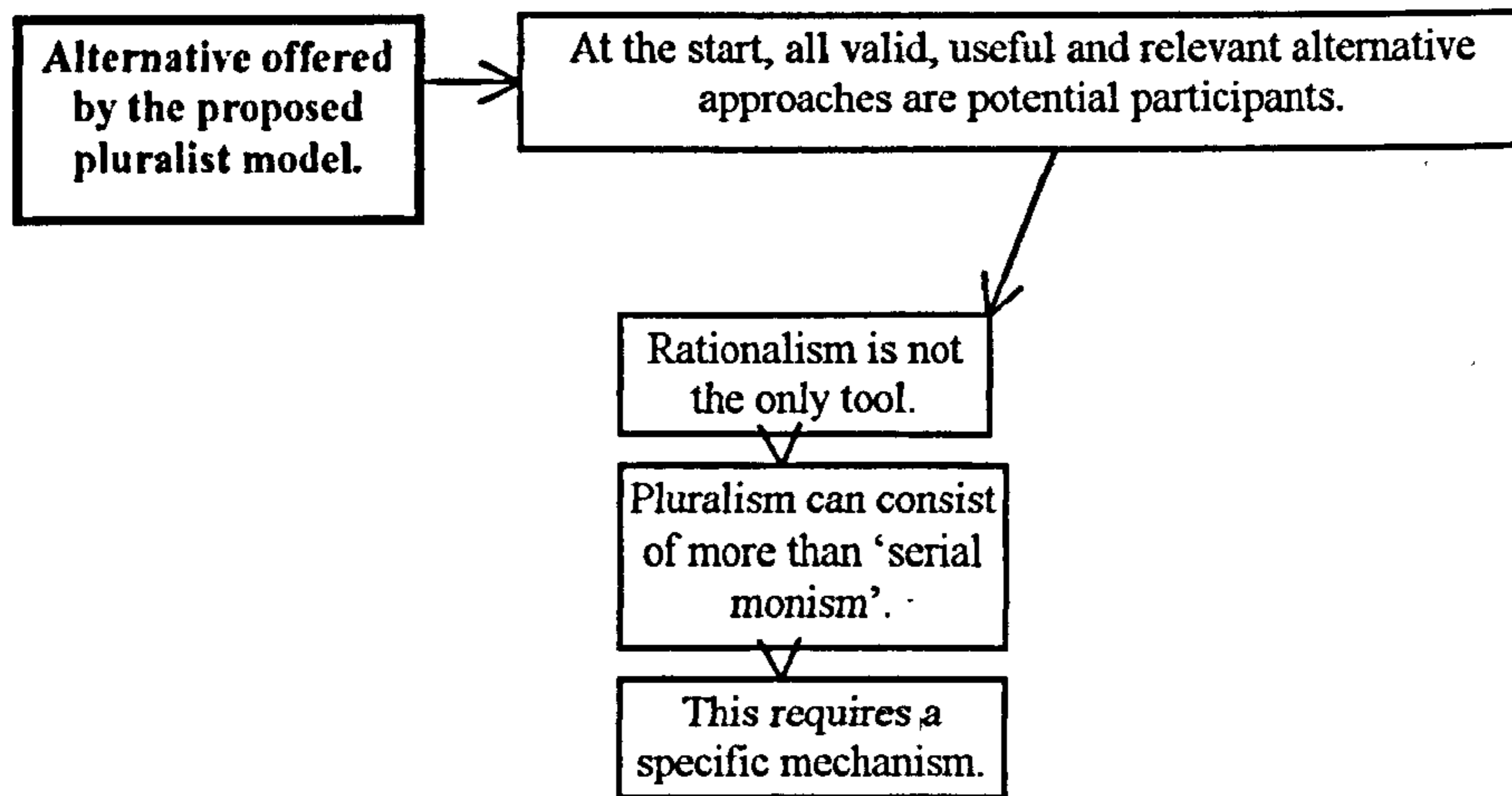


Diagram 4.9 - Differentiation from Rescher's alternative pluralism

(e.g. Irving and Williams, 1995). Indeed, it may be a necessary aspect of pluralist evaluation that it considers its own components so closely that it becomes an inherently reflexive process. That is to say, it is necessary that pluralism submits itself to the same internal and external iterative process of developmental critique in order to allow the widest, most useful, reliable and representative possible phenomenal field of study.

The same is true within any individual pluralist study. The components will be constantly evaluating all the other components and will be open to such evaluation themselves. Every pluralist study may be said, then, to require reflexive pluralist evaluation of itself to establish as much validity as possible. For pluralism, that means at least minimally satisfying the demands of positivistic ‘hard’ evidence *and* the phenomenological values of flexibility, representativeness and humane incorporation of human individuality. Such standards are attainable because utilitarian pragmatism suggests that all such processes should be continued only *as far as necessary* in that context.

As the pluralist method is to be applied throughout a study, to ensure continued mutual acceptability and tolerance between paradigms, *each* phase can then be seen to be capable of generating questions to aid the practice of reflexive evaluation.

4.5 Differentiation from Rescher’s exclusively rational pluralism

Rescher’s version of pluralism is briefly considered here for two reasons. Firstly, it is perhaps the most notable alternative form of pluralism. Consequently, it is necessary to differentiate the pluralism presented here to establish that it is better suited to the evaluation of psychological therapies. Secondly, this discussion also provides an excellent opportunity to clarify some essential distinguishing features of the position being proposed.

4.5.1 *Irrationality is not entirely excluded*

Rescher's version of pluralism is reliant on what he terms 'the primacy of practical reason' (Rescher, 1973, p. 254). It is ruled by the governance that 'only one alternative should be accepted, and this acceptance has a basis of *rational* cogency' (Rescher, 1993, p. 80, emphasis added).

However, Rescher's position ignores an implication of his own argument that 'the ultimate criterion of truth acceptance ... is not *cognitive* at all, but rather *affective*, and the reasoning of the test-procedure ... represents in the final analysis an appeal not to knowledge but to feeling' (Rescher, 1973, p. 255). This is based on the observation that differences of perspective may allow individuals to see as rational some items that would not be recognised as such by others.

My experience of therapy may well be highly irrational and described in irrational terms, especially if irrationally motivated processes such as projection or transference are evident. In any event, rationality is unlikely to be my sole concern if I am attempting to describe that experience. Any such descriptive or narrative approach is likely to place far more weight on the accuracy with which my felt experience is represented, the role of my internal interpretation of it, my affective responses and so forth. It is difficult to see the necessity of excluding non-rational processes in each of these instances. Rescher accepts the 'final goal of experientially validating on pragmatic grounds' (Rescher, 1973, p. 256), but his insistence on relying solely on reason is at odds with this commitment to pragmatism when we are in affectively dominated areas, such as the narrative processes of therapy or, in evaluation, narrative *about* therapy.

Furthermore, it is a necessary implication of insisting on rationalism as an immovable criterion for acceptability that a commonly acceptable definition of 'rational' must be available; Rescher's main arguments, however, are against consensus. We are left with the question, then, of who is to define the version of 'rational' which is to be

applied? Answers to this question have been offered (e.g. Brown, 1988) but there is still no single, overwhelmingly accepted version of rationality - demonstrated by the existence of both classical and alternative forms (c.f. *op. cit.*, Chapters 1 and 5). In the version of pluralism presented here, agreeing operationally satisfactory definitions and uses of rationalism may *or may not* be required in a single application of pluralism. The method considered in detail in Part 4 might be seen as one example of how such negotiation might be carried out. A *generally* acceptable use of 'rational' processes is not required, however. There are exceptions, of course, but they occur only within certain absolute limits and tend to be very narrowly focused (such as that narrow section of experience which is properly the concern of mathematics). The insistence on accepting *only* rational forms can therefore be considered redundant.

4.5.2 The avoidance of serial monism and the need for a mechanism to incorporate alternatives

Another major difference from the Rescherian version of pluralism is even more fundamental. Although arguing strongly that we must accept that many approaches may be valid in general, Rescher suggests that only one alternative should be accepted for any one particular purpose. He proposes, in effect, a pluralism that reverts to monism for all practical applications because he sees the alternative as inevitably synonymous with relativism. However, this position might seem better placed as a description of 'serial monism': one, and only one, approach is to be chosen for each case although it may be replaced by some alternative in another application.

Qualitative and quantitative approaches would be required, under Rescher's rule, to agree which was suitable for any given context. They would also have to agree on what constitutes acceptable data or the minimum level of evidence required for evaluative decisions to be made in any given context. As has been argued above, this appears to be unachievable in the evaluation of counselling and psychotherapy. The different perspectives retain basic incompatibilities that dictate apparently irreconcilable differences regarding such matters. In fact, there is a conspicuous

absence of consensus on important matters such as the relative utility of data types and the minimum evidential levels required. It is in recognition of this that the current proposals are for a more generous form of pluralism than Rescher's strictly limited model. Different approaches may not agree but can still be seen as contributing usefully to the same evidence base.

To meet the need of counselling and psychotherapy evaluation, with all the diverse demands placed upon it from the various stakeholders concerned, pluralism must allow differing preferences to be acted upon simultaneously. If it does not, we will always be left with the same unattainable need for consensus. It is a qualified pluralism indeed for us to accept that we have different philosophic positions (based on our different needs) if we must agree on methods, and it is no better if we accept different methods but insist upon a single outcome. The alternative to Rescher's limited pluralism is, of course, to remove the requirement for only one alternative course of action to be accepted at a time.

Rescher also fails to provide an explanation of how the basic diversity of approaches to research can be accommodated in practice. Given the *raison d'être* of this thesis, to provide a fully practicable pluralism and explore its application in the field, this is clearly insufficient.

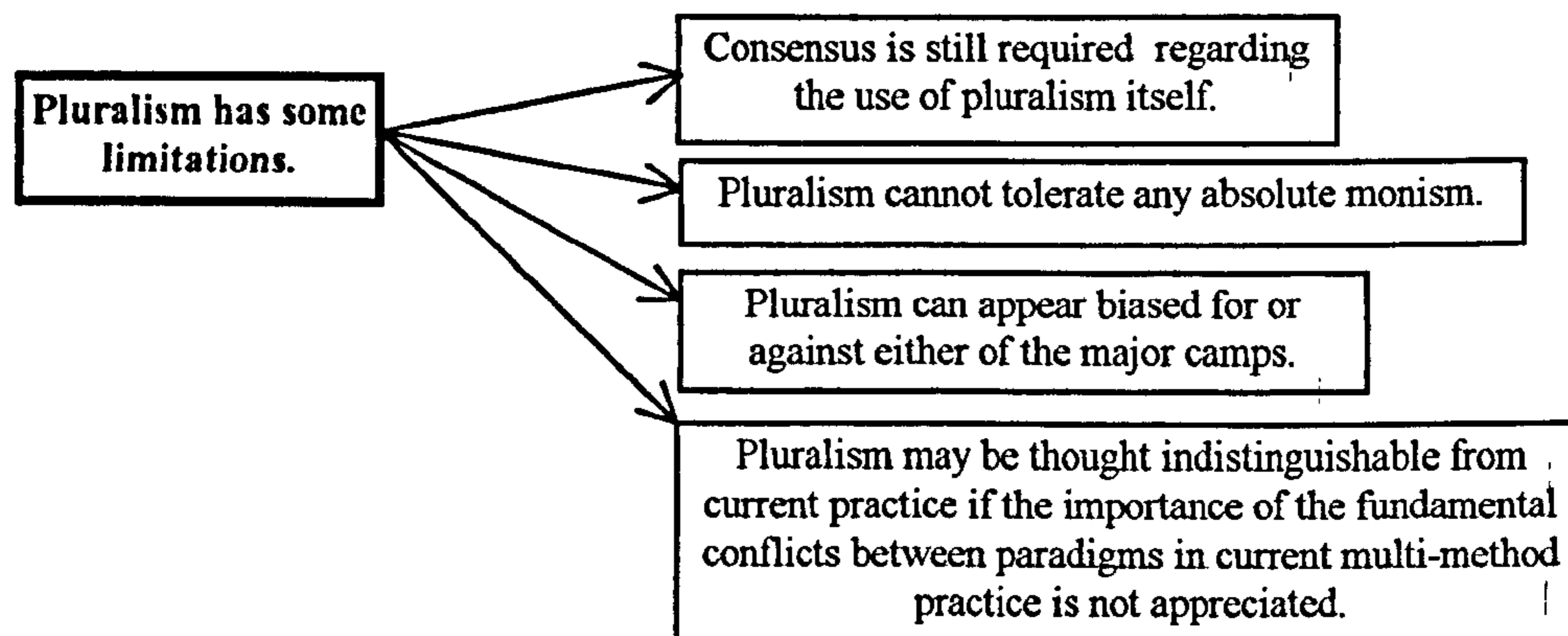


Diagram 5.1 - Limitations of pluralism

Chapter 5 The limitations of pluralism

5.1 The limitations of pluralism

It is recognised that the pluralism presented here does have some limitations. Four of these are noted in the following section. Although it is acknowledged that they may be problematic in some circumstances they do not suggest that the current form of pluralism is unworkable. This is borne out by the studies in Part 5.

5.1.1 Consensus is still required regarding pluralism itself

It has been noted (above) that pluralism disposes of the need for consensus in most circumstances. Where consensus is still necessary, however, is regarding the acceptability of the principles and method of pluralism itself.

It is not possible, however, to guarantee that *all* points of view that could be usefully applied to a given topic, now or in the future, would be able to accept these principles. Such points of view could not participate fully in a pluralist enquiry. This does not suggest that pluralism is bankrupt. It does, however, limit the inclusivity on which pluralism relies and it must be accepted that the method laid out here might not be sufficient in all evaluative research.

5.1.2 The relationship of pluralism with monism

An important limitation of pluralism is that it cannot tolerate absolute monism - especially one that requires that it be applied in all cases and all circumstances.

However, it can and should allow a monistic *style* of inquiry to continue *as if* that monism was valid. That is, a monistic position can be taken up temporarily up to the point at which the conflict between it and other applicable points of view breach an absolute (e.g. logical) or ethical *imperative* requirement of any component.

The important point of the preceding paragraph is that pluralism can *contain* monism, but not *vice versa*: it is not, *and cannot become part of*, an alternative

monism in itself. Where any pluralism, including that advocated by distinctively pluralist authors such as McLennan (1995) or Rescher (1977; 1980; 1993), becomes the thing that it most vehemently argues against, it defeats itself. If pluralism were the only way, it would no longer be pluralism.

For example, the fact that feminism shares the ‘strenuous criticism’ (McLennan, 1995, p. 16) of monistic, male dominated models of science has been seen to make it a ‘natural ally’ (Nicholson, 1990, p. 2) for pluralism. However, some critics (e.g. Harding, 1990) argue that feminism attempts to usurp the cherished role of dominance by merely replacing one exclusive view with another, with little additional justification other than that of previous oppression.

Any monistic position must either relinquish claims to any overarching epistemological standpoint, and thus also any claim to act as a ‘court of appeal’ in itself, or it must take on all those attributes it most detests of that which it seeks to argue against. As McLennan points out, we must give up any ‘claim ... [of] a new singular cognitive superiority, for [that] would once again raise the (illusory) prospect of a high level of objectivism’ (1995, p. 17).

5.1.3 The possibility of apparent bias in pluralism

One of the problems of arguing in favour of pluralism is the attitude the proponents of the main schools of thought may take towards it. There is a danger that it will be rejected by both camps as being too closely allied to the ‘opposition’ or, failing that, as being outwith the realm of acceptable thought. By allowing into the field of discourse elements that would ordinarily be disregarded, pluralism is sometimes seen as naive and too easily accepting of ‘that which should not be accepted’ - whatever that is defined to be by the camp concerned.

Alternatively, pluralist thought can be adopted by both camps as being a product of their own point of view, although this is likely to be in their most extremely liberal or illiberal versions. Post-modernism, for example, suggests that modernism is not dead

because ‘modernism is a part of post-modernism’ (Shawver, 1997, p. 1) despite the claim that it also constitutes ‘the modern enchantment that we fight against’ (*Ibid.*). The implication is that modernism is embedded in post-modern thinking. This is pluralist in itself, in a limited way, but the current pluralism goes further by providing a mechanism for resolving the tensions inherent in such a position and also by allowing researchers to utilise even those aspects of reductionist modernism that post-moderns would otherwise ignore, as outlined elsewhere in this thesis.

Modernists, on the other hand, might also argue that the assumptions implied by the absolutist stand attributed to it are already acknowledged as providing only limited claims to knowledge and that the necessary safeguards to ensure ‘proper’ consideration of alternative views are in place. Indeed, this is implicit in the ‘survival of the fittest’ approach taken by Habermas and others: it is assumed that any sufficiently ‘correct’ idea will eventually hold sway over its predecessors. Modernism is open to change, they might argue. To that extent, it is pluralist.

In practice, however, things are rather different. The methods that are laid out remain insupportably narrow as are the requirements for ‘acceptable’ standards and types of evidence. Alternatives, including humanist phenomenology, still routinely receive scant attention, even in those textbooks written from a reductionist perspective that explicitly seek to criticise their own methods (e.g. Meltzoff, 1998).

The difficulty, as it is tackled by pluralism, is largely that of having opposing camps in the first place. The camp mentality can only be removed by accommodating the essential components of *all* its predecessors. Rescher (1993) ascribes the goal of conjoining diverse alternatives in this kind of ‘attempt to ‘rise above the quarrel’’ (p. 90) to the complete blanket acceptance of all points of view as being equally true (known as syncretism). However, this is not the only alternative. Pluralism is *not* value or ideology free (Guba, 1990, pp. 23 - 25). However, it does actively seek to compensate for its basis in phenomenological and post-modern thinking. If unrestrained syncretist relativism is to be avoided it is, of course, necessary to

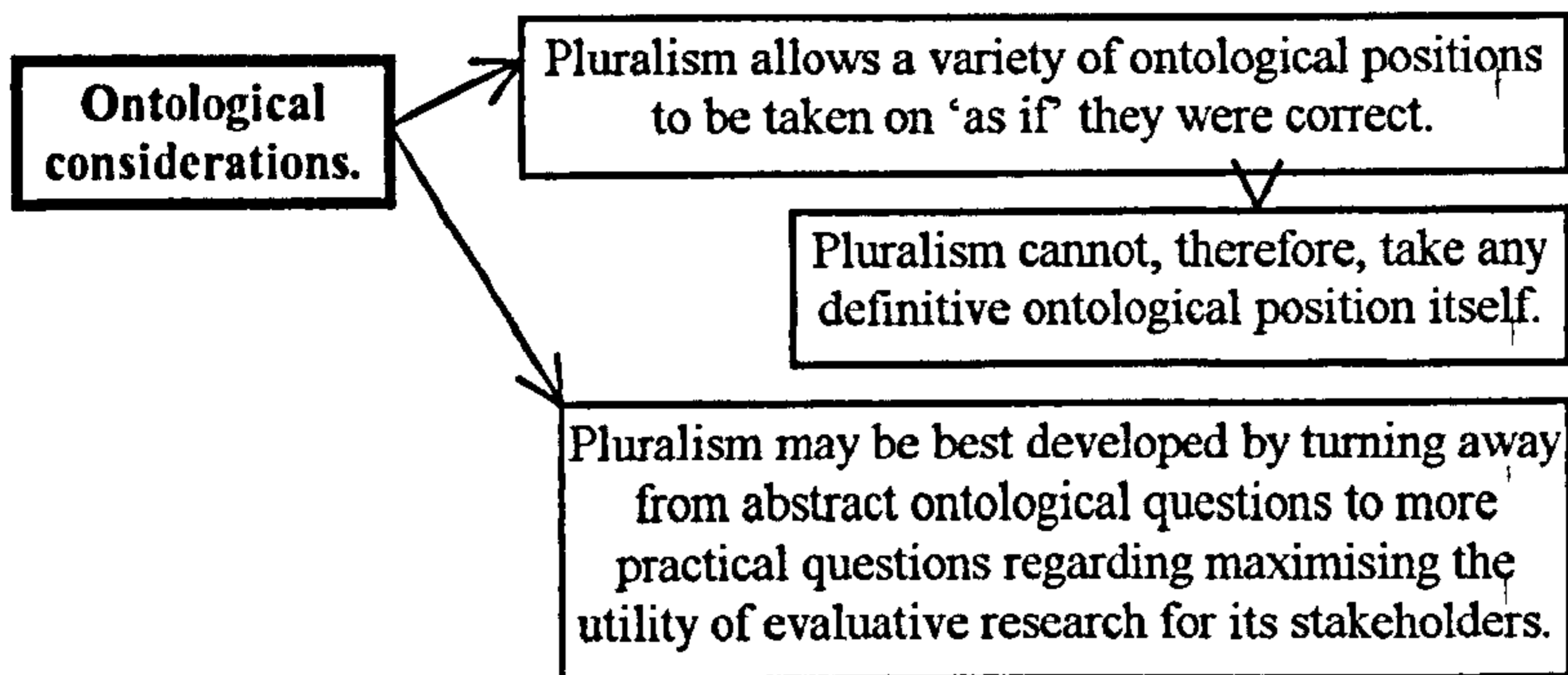


Diagram 5.2 - Ontological issues

construct a method by which a process of elimination of less useful approaches can be applied³¹. Part 4 attempts to provide one example of a response to this issue.

5.1.4 Differentiation from current practice

There is also a danger that pluralism may be thought unnecessary or indistinguishable from current multi-method approaches. This is especially a danger for those who suggest that the only differences between models of research are methodological and that the choices between them are entirely pragmatic. However, as we have seen, these positions are reliant on side stepping, ignoring or underplaying the fundamental conflicts between paradigms. If the history of conflict between the paradigms demonstrates anything, it is that the *status quo* is insufficient.

5.2 Ontological issues: now and in the future

Before leaving this consideration of the foundations for pluralism, it is necessary to consider briefly a few ontological issues because of what are commonly held to be their fundamental implications for our understanding of scientific progress. Our beliefs about the nature of the real world are bound to be influential whenever we try to evaluate causes and effects within it. An example is the question of if, or in what way, reality exists independently of our beliefs about it. If it does exist independently, is it fundamentally plural or unitary in nature?

Like post-modernism, pluralism must accept that it may become useful to consider the *possibility* of the actual existence of multiple realities. This is because our language bound perceptions only poorly represent the external objective world beyond words. However, it does not establish whether reality is *actually* unitary or plural in nature or *actually* socially constructed as some authors have implied (e.g. Kvale, 1992, p. 2;

³¹ Rescher describes syncretism as “seeing goodness on all sides” (*Ibid.*). Pluralism cannot afford such a luxury but, as will become apparent, it is so positively oriented that it can be at least *hopeful* of finding something of worth on all sides. To that extent, but no further, pluralism could be described as taking an essentially optimistic view of epistemologies.

Mearns, 1997, *op. cit.*). All we can say is that it *appears* that many versions of the same thing can be true to different people. Monistic conceptions of reality therefore remain plausible. In trying to establish whether counselling is effective we must accept that different perspectives may lead to differing conclusions. However we cannot entirely rule out the use of methods that presuppose they are measuring actual effects in an objective, independent reality³². Unlike post-modernism, pluralism does not insist that modernists must give up their position that the post-modern stance is wrong.

It is worth noting further that it is a necessary condition of the form of pluralism proposed here that it does not slip into becoming (or implying) any *specific* form of ontology. If any definitive ontological position were to be taken as actually representing reality, and that position excluded all others, as each of them must, the philosophy would have ceased to be pluralist. For example, the realist assumption that we can ‘take for granted’ that events actually exist to be perceived (Holstein and Gubrium, 1994) cannot accommodate, nor be accommodated by, the alternative: that events do not exist in an external reality. Pluralism cannot, therefore, afford to take either view as literally true without losing elements essential to the other. On the face of it, the systems are utterly exclusive which would defeat pluralism entirely.

In all practical matters, however, especially in the psychological sciences, we rarely need to take a really strong ontological stance in order to make progress. Counselling, psychotherapy and pluralism alike can accept the *temporary* adoption of merely hypothetical ontological positions, *as if* they were true. For example, a person can

³² Rorty (1991a) suggests that the difference between our observations and ‘objective reality’ is simply unhelpful and should be disregarded: “We do in fact describe most objects as causally independent of us, and that is *all* that is required to satisfy our realistic intuitions” (p. 101, emphasis in the original). That is to say, objects that are causally independent of us are responsible for causing us to alter or create our beliefs, including our beliefs about them. Of course, this assertion may be as difficult to *prove* as the specific example of *proving* the effectiveness of counselling, however much we may consider it *demonstrable*.

believe themselves to be composed of many different selves, or none at all, and act as if that experience were literally true. A therapist may then temporarily adopt a similar position *as if* it were true for the sake of developing empathy. It is frequently not helpful, nor even important, for either person to be considered more or less sane³³ for therapy to progress. Indeed, it is often recommended that, for the sake of a successful therapeutic outcome, such absolutist positions are rigorously avoided.

The processes required for the success of pluralism outlined in the following section have a great deal in common with the core therapeutic condition of empathy (Rogers, 1980b). The ‘as if’ quality of empathy, when therapists experience their clients feelings ‘as if’ they were their own (Mearns and Thorne, 1988, p. 36; Mearns, 1994, p. 8), also has other uses. Stiles (1993) and Mearns and McLeod (1984) have already urged the use of empathy as a research strategy for qualitative researchers. It is proposed here as a means by which the different types of research can communicate with each other, allowing understanding of an incompatible position without capitulating to it.

It is not suggested here that ontology is redundant; merely that taking a definitive ontological position is not necessary for the sake of the development of pluralism here. To that extent the position outlined here is avowedly incomplete and, perhaps, condemned forever to be so: pluralism is not competent to comment on ontological issues in any definitive way.

This implies two possible futures for pluralism. It is feasible that pluralism may survive as an umbrella structure within which diverse ways of knowing can be encompassed. The alternative is that a universally applicable, necessarily correct, definitive and exclusive ontology will be developed. The pluralist structure would then be no more than a transitional position. However, at present there is serious disagreement about the validity of most absolute ontological statements, even among

³³ ‘Sane’, that is, in the sense of believing in a schema which accurately represents reality.

rationalists. The pluralist position therefore does no harm to the current position of science. Indeed, it has the advantage of being able to access the ontological positions of more than one point of view.

One of the effects of the inability of the pluralism presented here to deal adequately with ontological issues is that it is restricted to answering questions related to *what* a thing is, not *if* it is. We may be able to describe the apparent effectiveness of counselling (i.e. we can say *what* effectiveness we find), but by being unable to state categorically and incontrovertibly that counselling *is* effective (i.e. making statements of the being, or definite existence, of that effectiveness) we remain open to the criticism that cause and effect between counselling and apparent change is still not finally proven. Forever attaching the label 'apparent' to their evidence is, perhaps, a burden pluralists must bear. We can *demonstrate* effectiveness but, ultimately, we cannot *absolutely prove* it.

It may be that the attention of pluralism will be best directed towards more practical issues of application, away from questions of pure philosophy. In relation to evaluating the effectiveness of therapy there is a very real danger that this will result in findings being far less widely accepted than would otherwise be the case. This goes a long way, perhaps, towards explaining the reluctance to abandon approaches to research that imply more certain ontological positions, such as reductionism. However, if pluralism can achieve its goal of satisfying the basic needs of each approach, it may yet prove to be of greater overall utility.

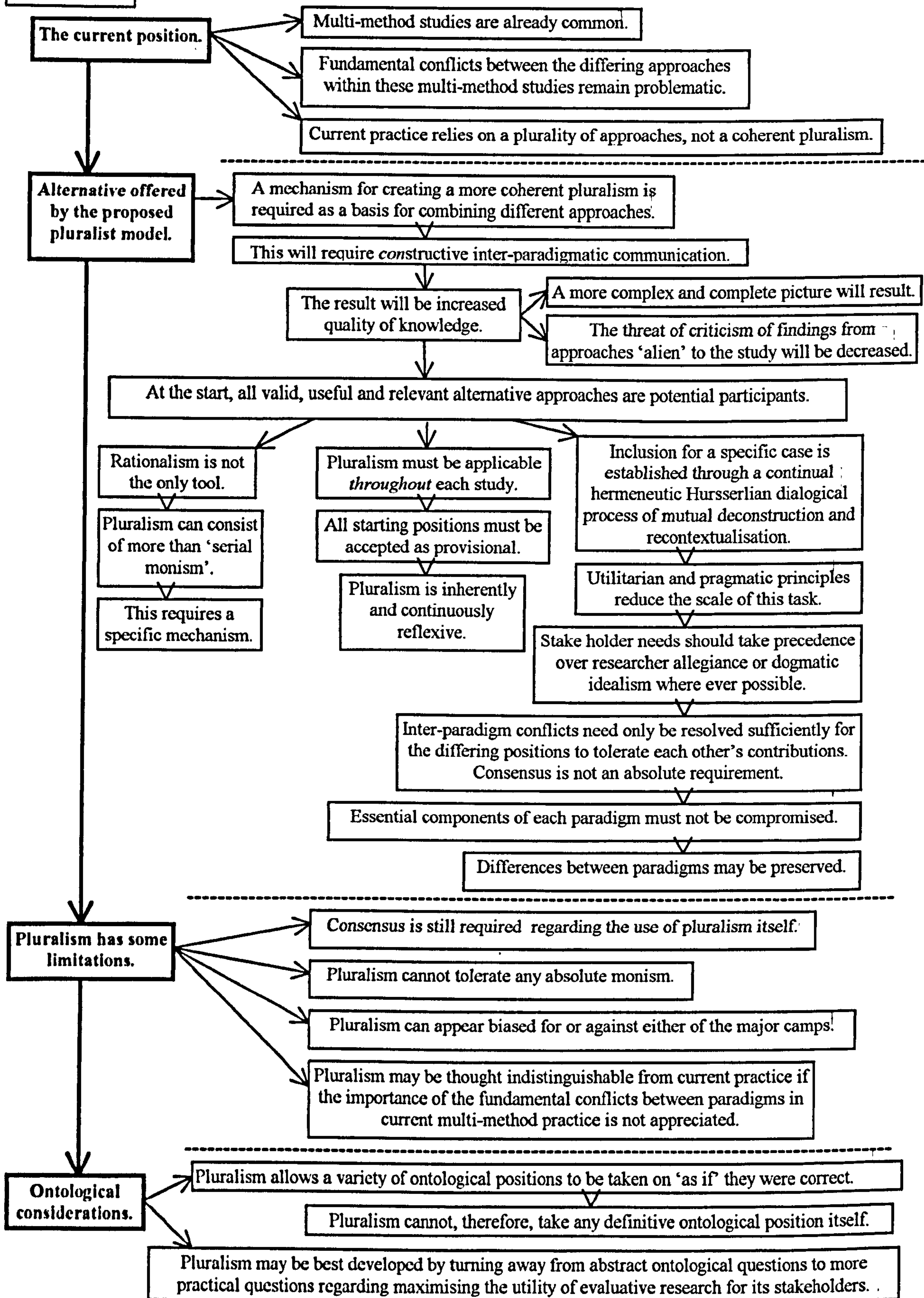


Diagram 4.1 - Outline of pluralism in Part 3 of this thesis (REPEATED)

Summary of pluralism as presented in this thesis

Diagram 4.1 is repeated here as an additional guide to the following review of the position on pluralism taken in this thesis.

The current state of pluralist evaluation

The position taken here is that current use of a disordered plurality of fundamentally conflicting approaches to evaluation is inadequate:

- Methods derived from more than one paradigm are commonly applied in single studies, especially in evaluative research. This is perhaps especially suitable in the evaluation of counselling and psychotherapy.
- It is recognised that much work remains to be done to resolve the tensions between the differing research philosophies.
- The best position achieved so far is that offered by concurrent or sequential multi-method designs with separate domains reserved for each approach. This represents a deliberate use of the plurality of approaches but is not a coherent pluralism.

Alternative offered by the proposed model of pluralism

It is further suggested that current practices can be improved through a thoroughly integrated, coherent pluralist model which is sufficiently robust and flexible to contain the diverse elements that have proven utility in evaluating counselling and psychotherapy. The current proposals are also differentiated from existing pluralist approaches. Elements of this pluralist model as explored thus far can be summarised as:

1. In general terms, pluralism needs to establish a practical way of applying a ‘phenomenological epistemology’ in evaluative research. That is, it requires a

mechanism that can incorporate alternative theories of knowledge from preceding traditions each of which will tend to appear ‘non-standard’ in the eyes of the others.

2. The inter-paradigm communication involved requires the establishment of a positively framed *constructive* ‘Husserlian dialectic’, as opposed to a combative Socratic or Hegelian *destructive* one.
3. The result is an increased quality of knowledge based on the increased complexity of the picture we can build up regarding the topic under investigation.
4. At the outset, *all* alternative approaches to a topic are potential participants. This is equally true if the topic is the evaluation of a specific aspect of therapy or the development of knowledge in general. The number of positions to be considered is reduced to a manageable size by the utilitarian and pragmatic principles discussed in Part 2: we need only seek ‘good enough’ evaluations.
5. This also implies that inter-paradigm conflicts need only be resolved sufficiently for the various components of pluralism to be tolerated by each other. Consensus is thus disregarded as a general requirement although consensualism is not (quite) entirely excluded and may be an element of pluralism on the same terms as all other components.
6. The same utilitarian and pragmatic principles suggest that, if they conflict, stakeholder needs should take precedence over researcher allegiance whenever possible.
7. All *essential* components of each tradition must be included intact. This is possible because, given the preceding statements, the differences between the components of pluralism need not be eradicated. All absolutely imperative components of any pluralist study must therefore be tolerated by all others and be desirable for at least one. All non-imperative elements may be *temporarily*

suspended, however, when considering alternative paradigms in order to preserve the internal validity of both sides.

8. Pluralist studies must be pluralist throughout. This is a further practical step beyond multi-method designs. They have tended to merely compare the findings produced by a plurality of approaches in an unintegrated fashion. Greater interaction between approaches throughout a study, or series of studies, is only possible through the development of a coherent, sustainable pluralism.
9. The openness to change and development implied suggests that pluralist principles of development should be applied to pluralism itself not just its original composite parts. Both the theory in general and specific pluralist studies are therefore engaged in an inherently reflexive process, continually and heuristically developing themselves. This allows far greater dialectical freedom for pluralism and all the traditions in any one study.
10. It is a prerequisite of this that each position must accept that
 - a) it may need to alter its stance regarding any issue and,
 - b) alternative positions may also be applicable, even within its own field of reference.

This implies that all ontological positions must be taken as at least *potentially* contingent. This is briefly considered further under the separate heading of ‘ontological issues’.

11. Rationalism is not the only tool to be used. The irrational is not necessarily excluded. The anarchism of paralogical steps and processes of deconstruction and recontextualisation can be harnessed in the interest of facilitating inter-paradigm communication.

12. 'Serial monism', the acceptance of different forms of enquiry but with one always being identified as best suited for a particular case, is therefore also avoidable because a coherent pluralism is then capable of maintaining the *simultaneous* application of different paradigms, even if this necessitates recourse to apparent paralogisms.
13. Although lacking in Rescher's model because of its exclusive reliance on rationalism, the preservation of differences between paradigms is possible through a generally acceptable practicable pluralist mechanism for inter-paradigmatic communication and mutual development and critique. One such mechanism is presented in Part 4.

Limitations of pluralism

It has also been recognised that this model of pluralism has some potentially serious limitations. None, however, are considered to fatally undermine the current proposals, at least in the specific application of counselling and psychotherapy evaluation.

1. Consensus is sometimes required regarding the use of pluralism although it may not always be sufficiently attainable in every conceivable instance. It would then be necessary to return to monistic models or the uncoordinated plurality of current multi-method designs.
2. Pluralism cannot tolerate absolute monism. It can *contain* monism, as a temporary position paralogically taken up as one of the constituent traditions within a particular study, but cannot *become* a new monism without contravening the principles stated above. Consequently, it may not be the only way forward.
3. Pluralism can appear biased for or against one or more camps or may not appear significantly different from some aspects of them. This is partly due to its reliance on its predecessors to provide the building blocks for pluralist progress but the

problem, if it is one, disappears altogether once pluralism is applied and the ‘camp mentality’ is removed.

Ontological issues

Although there is insufficient space in this thesis to explore them exhaustively, the current proposals for a pluralist science of evaluation do raise the following issues regarding the nature of external reality:

1. Pluralism is distinct from either post-modern or reductionist / modernist ontological positions in that it accepts the possibility that the implications of either might be correct.
2. Consequently, pluralism cannot take any *definitive* ontological position.
3. However, it can (and must) act ‘as if’ various ontological positions are correct.
4. Three possible effects of the absence of any definitive ontological stance are:
 - i) By not being able to respond to ontological questions, this form of pluralism is not a complete philosophy of science. Its evidence may therefore be less widely acceptable than monistic approaches that offer greater *apparent* certainty.
 - ii) Pluralism cannot adequately deal with (or may not be applicable to) issues regarding which absolute ontological positions are either inevitable or necessarily required.
 - iii) Given point 1., pluralism is vulnerable to any generally applicable, incontrovertible and necessary ground for taking any one ontological position to the exclusion of all others.
5. These issues are responded to as follows:

- i) To provide a complete philosophy of science is not necessary for useful progress to be made. It is only necessary that a sufficient preponderance of evidence be made available for us to act pragmatically ‘as if’ demonstrable ‘facts’ are true. This is no worse than, for example, the position of empirical science that all ‘knowledge’ is contingent on being compatible with later evidence. Pluralism thus does no harm to epistemology and extends the current position by allowing use of different types of evidence.
 - ii) Absolute ontological positions are rarely required, especially in psychology and perhaps most of all in the evaluation of psychological therapies. Consequently, pluralism may still be considered helpful in most circumstances.
 - iii) Incontrovertible evidence of necessarily exclusive ontological positions, relevant and applicable in all circumstances, is not yet available. Pluralism may therefore be an acceptable position *at present* although it is possible that this will not always be the case.
6. Given the above, it may be that pluralism is best developed by turning from purely abstract questions of ontology (*if* things, including therapeutic effectiveness, exist) to more practical questions of epistemology: how we can best know the reality we *assume* to exist (e.g. ‘*how* can we best tell if therapy is effective?’)

It is this latter question that is most important for resolving the practical questions that surround the pluralist evaluation of therapy which is the primary focus of this thesis. Consequently, Part 4 deals with such issues in the most practical way: by focusing on the mechanism by which the different paradigms can successfully interact.

Part 4: The methodology of pluralism

Chapter 6 A pluralist methodology for counselling evaluation research

General introduction to Part 4

It has been suggested above that the increasingly widespread use of multi-method evaluation designs has outstripped the capacity of our current understanding of science and knowledge to contain such diverse elements. In response, the pluralist approach to evaluative research proposed here is intended to provide a framework capable of accepting the veracity of all useful contributions.

If it is the aim of pluralism to create a situation whereby these diverse, even partially incompatible, systems of thought can be brought together there must be a method by which such diversity can be prevented from causing the collapse of pluralist attempts at evaluative research in a shower of contradictions.

Following the more theoretical discussion in Parts 2 and 3, there remains the question of *how* the continual and congenial form of dialectic proposed above can be maintained when previous attempts have got little further than establishing uneasy détente or have simply ridden roughshod over the divergent epistemological niceties of the differing schools.

Some further components of the proposed pluralism are provided below. The main purpose of this part of the thesis, however, is to outline one possible method by which pluralism may progress in more practical terms than in the preceding discussion. The steps required for differing approaches to be used in conjunction with each other, and the mechanisms by which this can be achieved are considered, as are the processes involved in applying the same pluralist method throughout evaluative studies as a whole.

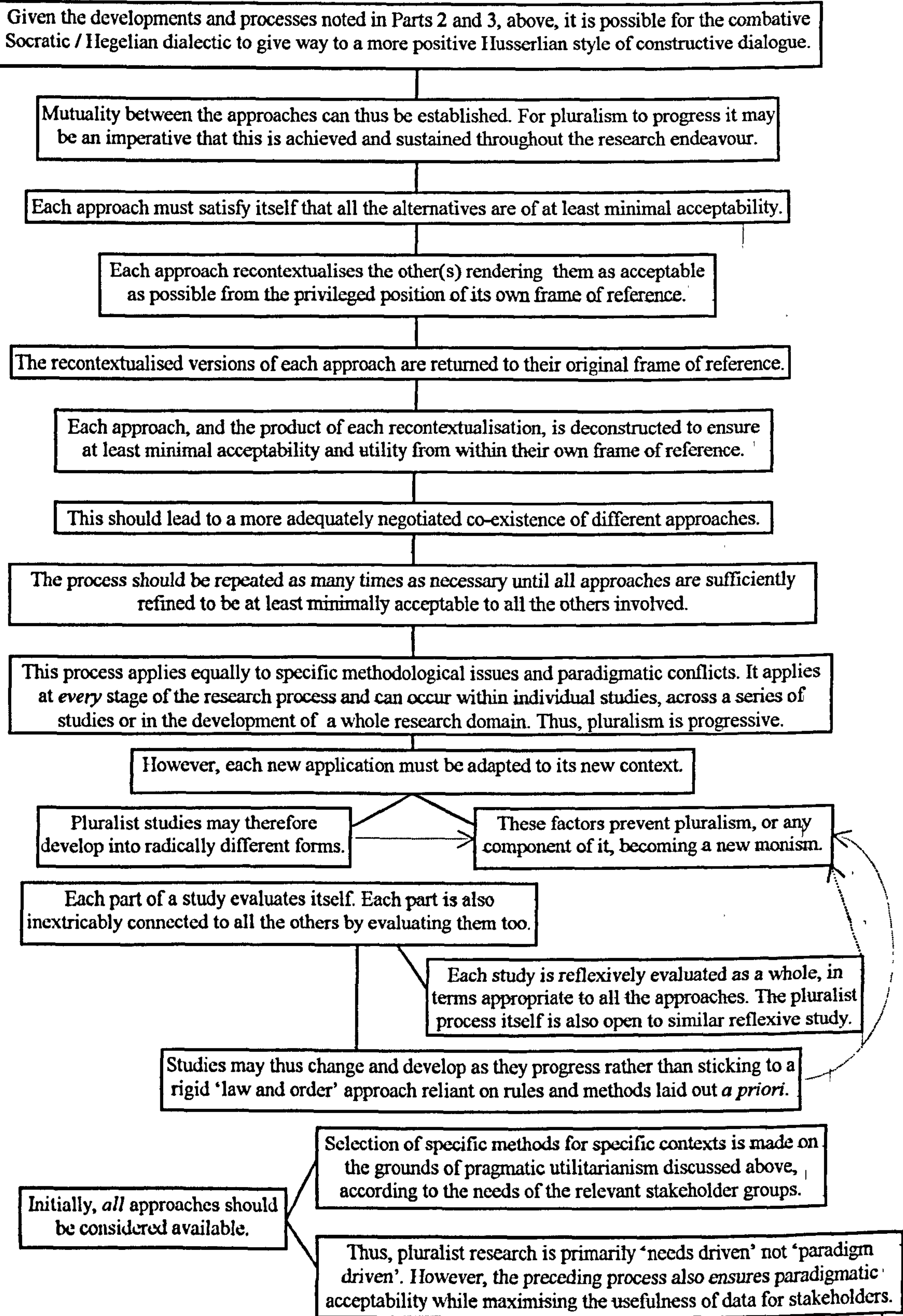


Diagram 6.1 - Outline of the development of pluralist studies

Diagram 6.1 gives a highly abridged map of the following two chapters as a reference guide – it also notes the link between this and the preceding sections.

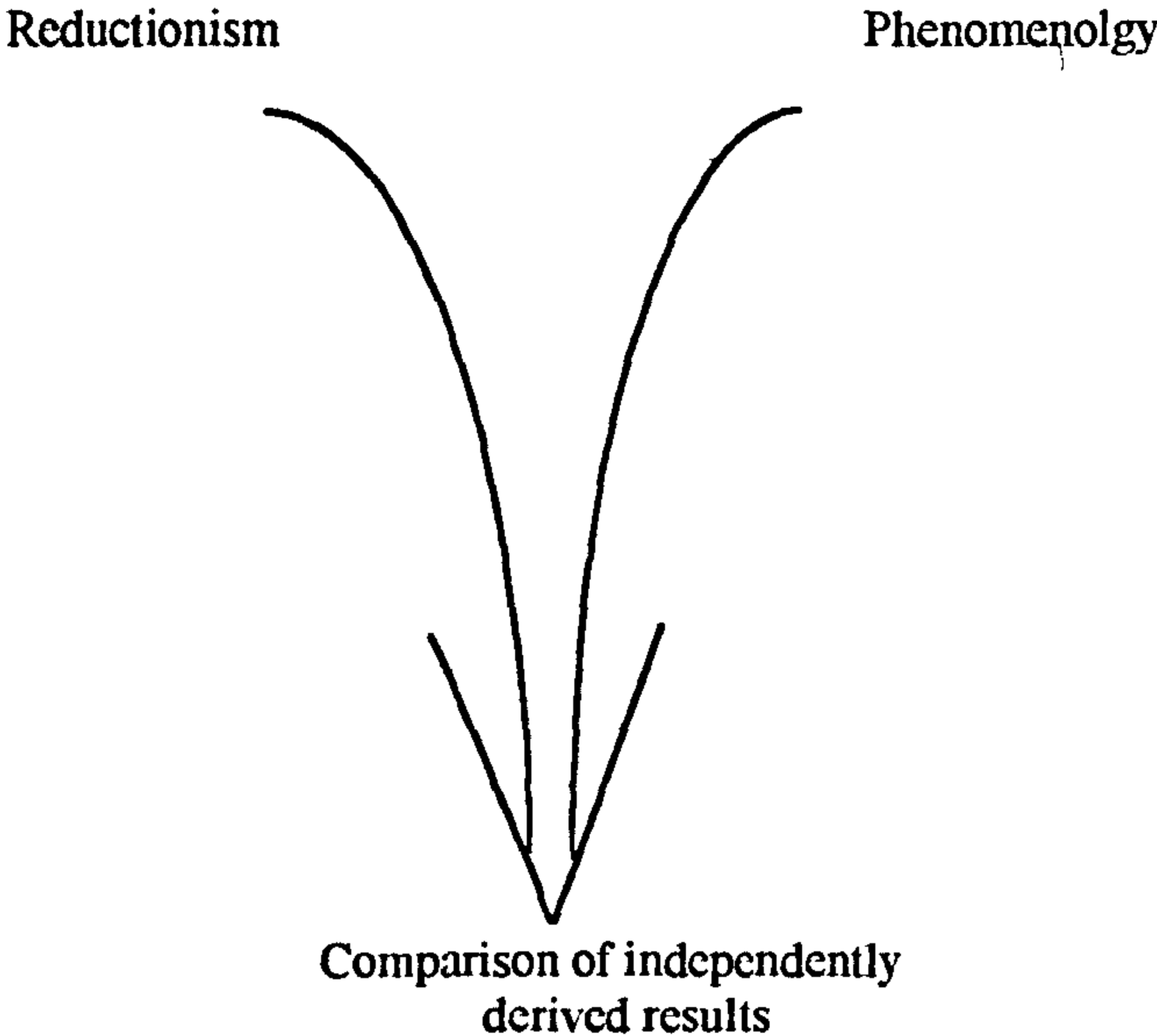


Diagram 6.2 - Concurrent multi-method design

6.1 Bringing the parts together: the role of mutuality

It has been posited (above) that the paradigm wars must cease and, to the extent to which such imperatives can be applied, pluralism may need to be sufficiently prescriptive to *insist* on a more positively oriented dialogue³⁴. It is further suggested above that we should replace the Socratic style of dialectic and the Laplacian (or, latterly, Habermasian) goals of establishing incontrovertible and ontologically certain statements with a congenial, constructive style of dialogue (following Husserl) and the more explicative goal of gathering the most useful range of data possible. The competitive, combative style of thinking which suggests that those ideas that are best fitted to the case shall survive (e.g. Habermas, 1973) will have to be foregone at those points where it ceases to be pragmatically useful³⁵.

The result is that, if pluralism is to succeed in practice, it is necessary for the parts of a pluralist study to be brought together at a far more fundamental level than is the case in the now commonly accepted parallel use of differing research styles (represented by Diagram 6.2³⁶). The first steps beyond rapprochement must be begun and a dialogue between the previously opposing sides must be established.

³⁴ Of course, the development of alternative forms of pluralism, not envisaged by the current author, in which such unpluralist prescriptiveness is not required cannot be ruled out. Indeed, the proposal that many forms of thought can be combined into a plural whole might be taken to imply that there may be many versions of a pluralist methodology, which could themselves be used to inform each other. However, for current purposes it is sufficient that a single version be explicated and it is presented here as used in the studies which follow.

³⁵ Although it is worth noting once again that there may also be occasions when such a combative style is productive and can be applied. The essential point here is that it cannot be allowed to reign supreme and alone.

³⁶ Reductionism and phenomenology are again used only as examples of partially irreconcilable schools of thought as they are appropriate to the evaluation of counselling and psychotherapy. More detailed definition of these very generalised categories, or the inclusion of further alternatives, could allow a more thoroughly inclusive design to be developed, although it would also be more complex. For the sake of simplicity of explanation, the current discussion has been limited to only two perspectives and sets of methods. The use of such examples should not be taken to imply that this

A concept of immense practical value for this process is that of mutuality³⁷. This is characterised by an equality of regard between parties. It is facilitated by the absence of absolute ontological positions already commented upon because the importance of relative truth values then becomes less dominant. It is no longer a question of which model best fits the external ontological reality. Neither side can be said to occupy the more powerful or authoritative position, as a general rule³⁸. A more mutual regard for the (more or less) equal status of different views can begin.

A useful parallel can be drawn from Pokorny (1991) who, in expressing his wish for the various therapy schools to co-exist in a more constructive plurality, insists that ‘no one form ... has any right to dominate the scene or hold itself out to be superior to any other’ (p. 305, cited in Feltham, 1997, p. 4). Each point of view accepts the *status* of the other(s) as equal to their own, if not the claimed *truth* of the content - at least in precisely the way it is claimed.

Writing for a rather different application of the concept, Mearns and Thorne (1999) explain mutuality as,

‘the concept of co-operation and of ‘coming alongside’ in order that the necessary ‘work’ can be undertaken together ... [The participants] will not allow a preoccupation with ... role issues [of relative power and authority] to ride roughshod over ... pressing needs ... The various forms of human defensiveness which characterise everyday relationships are largely absent’

(pp. 101 - 129, emphasis added).

Despite their use of language tailored to the needs of counselling theory, the role of mutuality in facilitating reciprocal empathy, sensitivity and lack of defensiveness

method is appropriate only for such dualist accounts.

³⁷ As elsewhere in this thesis, the use of language borrowed from therapy is not co-incidental.

³⁸ This state of affairs is only a generality, as noted below.

towards views other than one's own, as described by Mearns and Thorne, is equally applicable in pluralist research. So too is their suggestion (*Ibid.*) that mutuality is only possible in the face of 'congruent' (i.e. fully and accurately represented) expression and that progress and development actually thrive on such clarity when mutuality is established.

Views are then no longer 'opposing'; they are alternatives and can progress together. It is partly in this manner that pluralism can hope to subvert the Kuhnian perpetual revolution in any field, mentioned above.

Mutuality must be maintained, however, in the endeavour as a whole. Were we to give insufficient weight to the alternative forms of enquiry at *any* point we would risk losing their contribution and the resultant discoveries would be the poorer as a result. Concurrent or sequential multi-method designs typically lose such richness at all stages except the final interpretation and comparison of results.

However, the reductionist aim of describing external reality as minutely as possible remains incompatible with the alternative positions - such as those that state that all such descriptions are no more than constructions representing, not external reality, but the theorist's self-created world. As we have seen in Part 3, neither side can give up its basic tenets without becoming unacceptably compromised. It is this that led to the principle that differences between approaches should not be eradicated.

Mutuality can only be achieved, then, by each perspective maintaining its position while critically *and congruently* observing the alternatives.

Over the course of an entire research process, each position would then be required to offer a critique of the contributions from all others. If contributions are both tolerable and pragmatically useful they are to be accepted, no matter what their source, for the sake of maximising the evidence base for evaluative decision making. This even handed reciprocity, facilitated by a stance of epistemological mutuality, is a prerequisite of maintaining this style of pluralism.

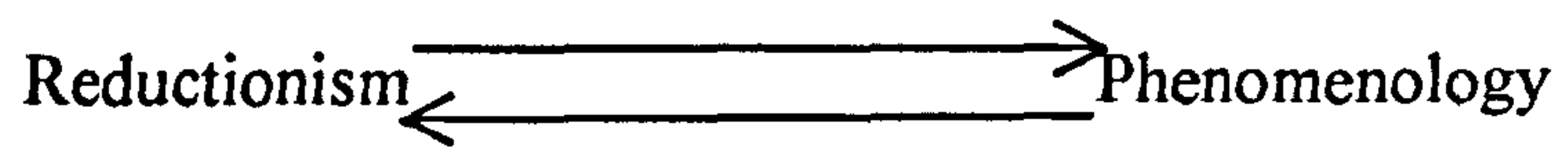


Diagram 6.3 - The first stage of critique

That is not to say, however, that each side must *always* be treated as equal, or be given equal weight under all conditions, regardless of the validity and utility of their contributions. That would plainly be absurd. Reductionist modernism is, for example, better suited than some of its alternatives to certain situations, such as those reliant on the most precise physical sciences (e.g. quantum mechanics or Newtonian physics) and, frequently, in economic analyses.

Throughout the studies in Part 5, the relative usefulness of the differing approaches varies according to the needs of the research and the questions that are of importance to each of the stakeholder groups. Even though only one version of each study is presented here, different stakeholders might have drawn very different things from them, depending on their interests. It is only by maintaining the pluralist approach in these studies that it has been possible to provide a sufficiently broad evidential base for such different needs to be met.

6.2 Critical mutuality within an unending hermeneutic process: the interconnectedness of approaches

As noted above, no side represented in a pluralist endeavour can be expected to give up its internally valid tenets without risking eventual defeat. If such a step were to be required, mutuality could not be maintained. A necessary consequence is that each side must interpret the contributions of all the others from within its own frame of reference (Diagram 6.3). Each approach will need to satisfy itself that the alternatives to be included are of at least minimal worth. Those elements of each alternative that are mutually acceptable can then be retained and progress can continue.

In Diagram 6.3 the reductionist perspective ‘recontextualises’ phenomenology in the manner described above. It interprets the phenomenological view using the privileged position of taking it into reductionism’s own ground. The task at this point is to render the phenomenology as acceptable as possible, maintaining the best possible interpretation of phenomenological terms and propositions in the spirit of Rortian

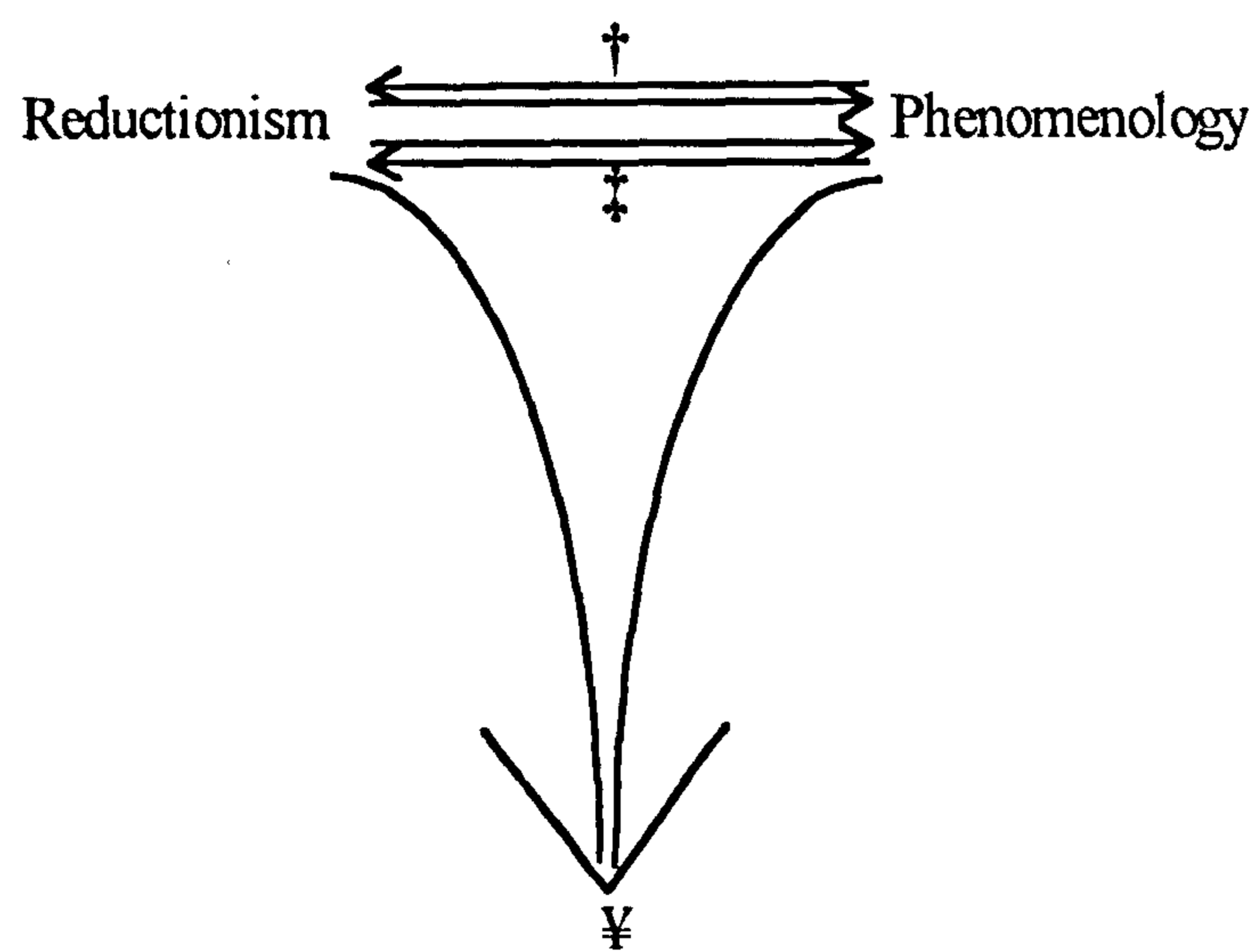


Diagram 6.4 Mutuality of critique

‘first class’ critique (cf. Chapter 3.3.1). The result might be called a reductionist version or description of phenomenology. This positively oriented critique is then returned to the phenomenological frame: the recontextualisation is itself recontextualised in order to check the compatibility of that interpretation with its original source in the same positively oriented spirit.

Of course, the mutual critique must happen in both directions. Thus, ‡ in Diagram 6.4 sees reductionism subjected to a phenomenological critique. In combination this mutual process might be expected to move progressively towards a more adequately negotiated co-existence at ¥. This by no means implies an absence of difference or of conflict. However, it does suggest that areas can be identified in which different starting points can tolerate, or even benefit from, each other.

This may alter the version of each approach to be used in a study, or even in general, in the light of the new critique. Certainly, mutually acceptable areas may be identified, although each side is able to retain its distinct identity and separate ground because of the privilege offered by operating from its own position without having to defer permanently to the truth claims of the other point of view. They should, however, ensure that all the outstanding questions posed by the juxtaposition and interaction of alternative research forms are answered, at least to a minimally acceptable degree. In concurrent multi-method designs it is already conceivable that the use of one method might influence the application of others but this is formalised in the processes of pluralism outlined here.

The same process could also be undertaken between specific methods as well as general philosophic standpoints. For example, on the most localised and practical scale of developing pluralist approaches for specific points of an evaluation, we might ask ‘how can qualitative data best be broken down into quantifiable units?’ The creation of coding frames and resultant analyses may offer an indication of, among other things, the most common types of qualitative data. Such methods are already well established. Returning to the phenomenological frame, however, it is apparent

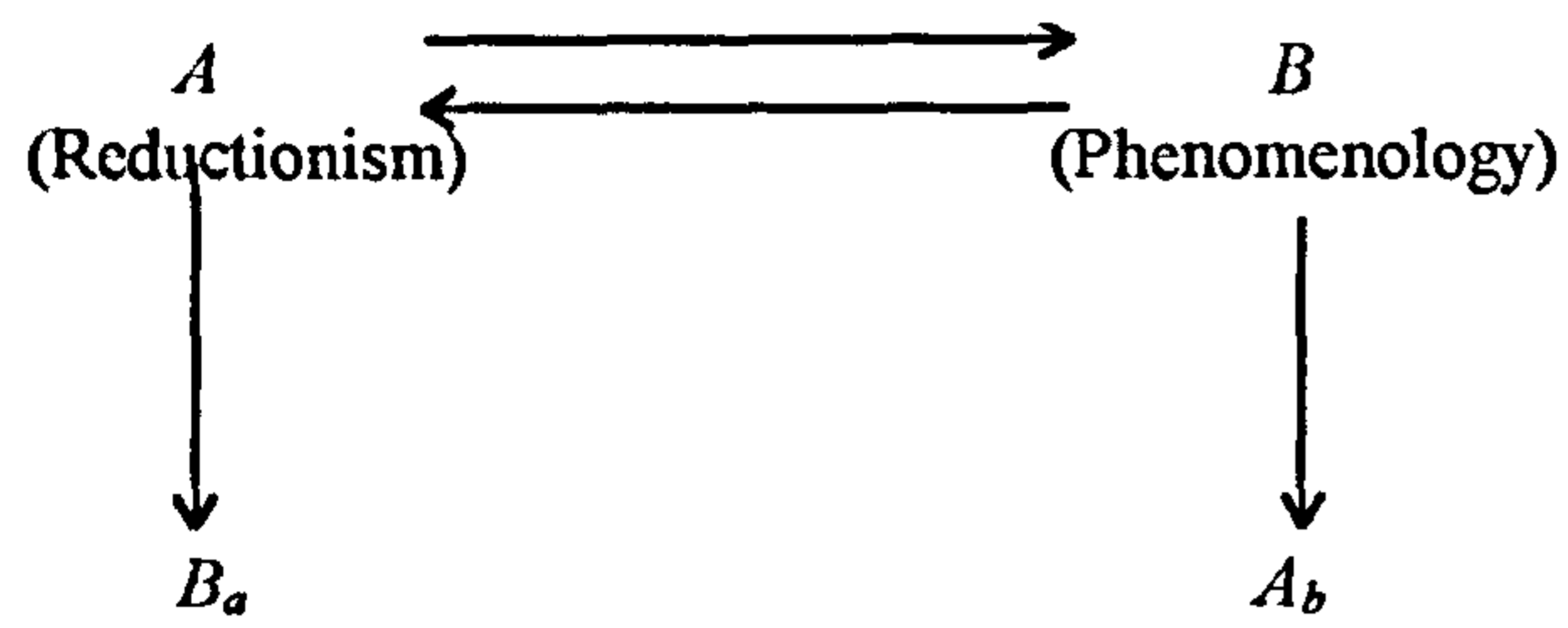


Diagram 6.5 - The product of mutual interpretation

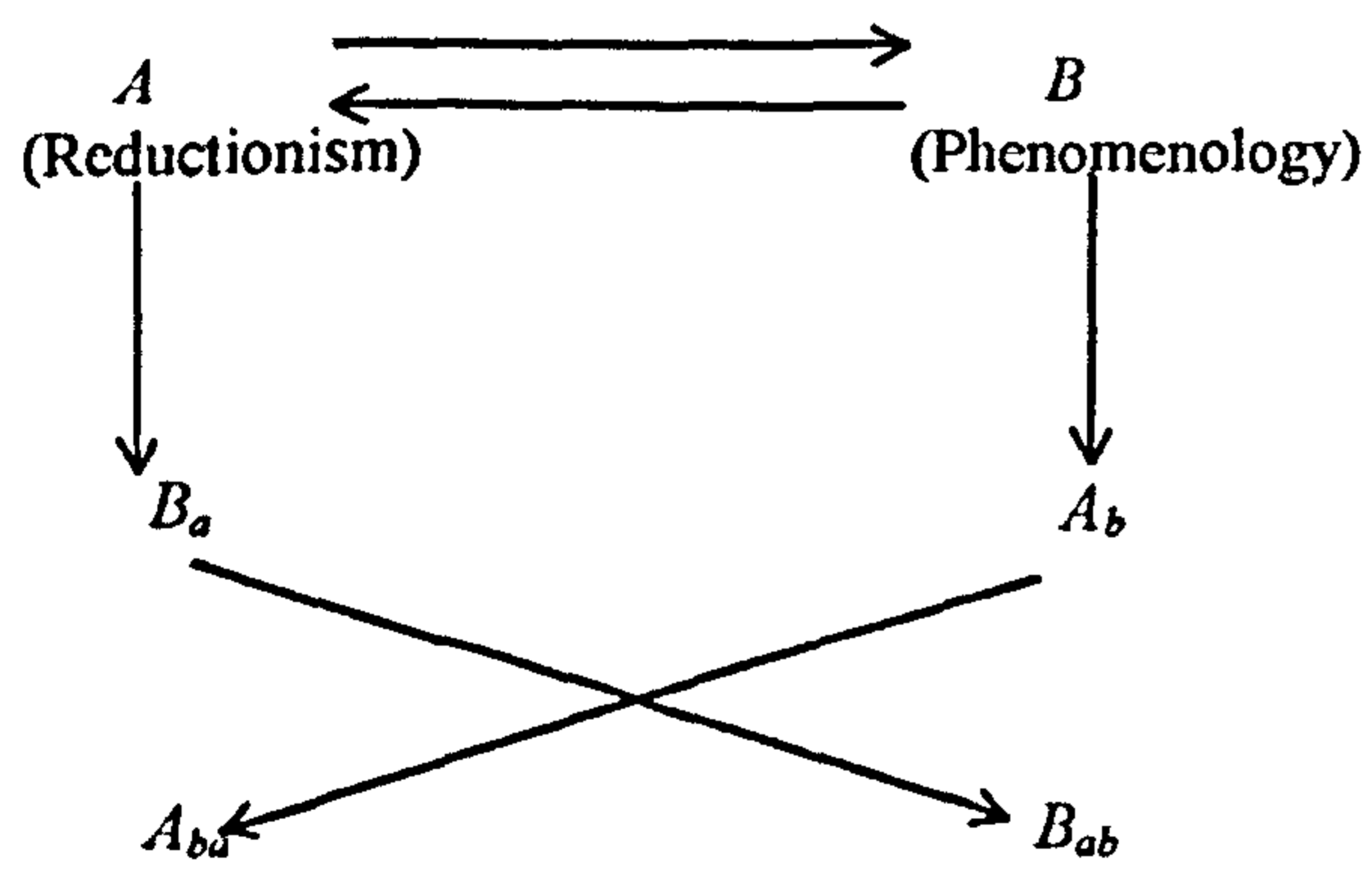


Diagram 6.6 - a single cycle of mutual critique.

that what uniform technique cannot offer is an indication of which data is most cogent, convincing, vivid or, indeed, useful. Selection of the most valued and representative segments of data therefore inevitably relies on *both* reductionist and phenomenological approaches. This is evident in the studies that follow, perhaps most notably in Chapter 10.

6.3 Continuing the hermeneutic cycle

Each side of the dialogue will also need to be satisfied that the result of this mutual interpretation is valid in its own terms, so the product of the first exchange must also be subjected to the same process. Reductionists and phenomenologists might emphasise different parts of a pluralist analysis of evaluative data, for example. Each perspective would draw an at least slightly different picture with the whole being acceptable to each side.

The beginning phase of this interaction (shown in Diagrams 6.3 and 6.4) could be represented in more detail thus: *A* is recontextualised by *B* to produce A_b and *vice versa* as in Diagram 6.5.

The reciprocity consistent with maintaining mutuality is attempted by the whole process being undertaken, perhaps concurrently, from both perspectives. B_a is the version of *B* created as it is recontextualised by *A*, reinterpreting it from within *A*'s frame of reference. This is one step in what eventually becomes a repeating cycle, as *each* side 'strongly misreads' the other (cf. Chapter 3.3.1). The appropriation of alternatives into one's own phenomenal field is repeated by the subject for criticism criticising the critique and so on. *B* thus interprets B_a in its own terms resulting in B_{ab} (Diagram 6.6) and *vice versa*. It could be said that this represents one cycle of the mutual hermeneutic process essential to pluralism.

Of course, it may also be desirable to repeat this with *A* interpreting B_{ab} to give B_{aba} and so forth (Diagram 6.7). Each repetition of the process should provide increasingly refined versions of the respective approaches.

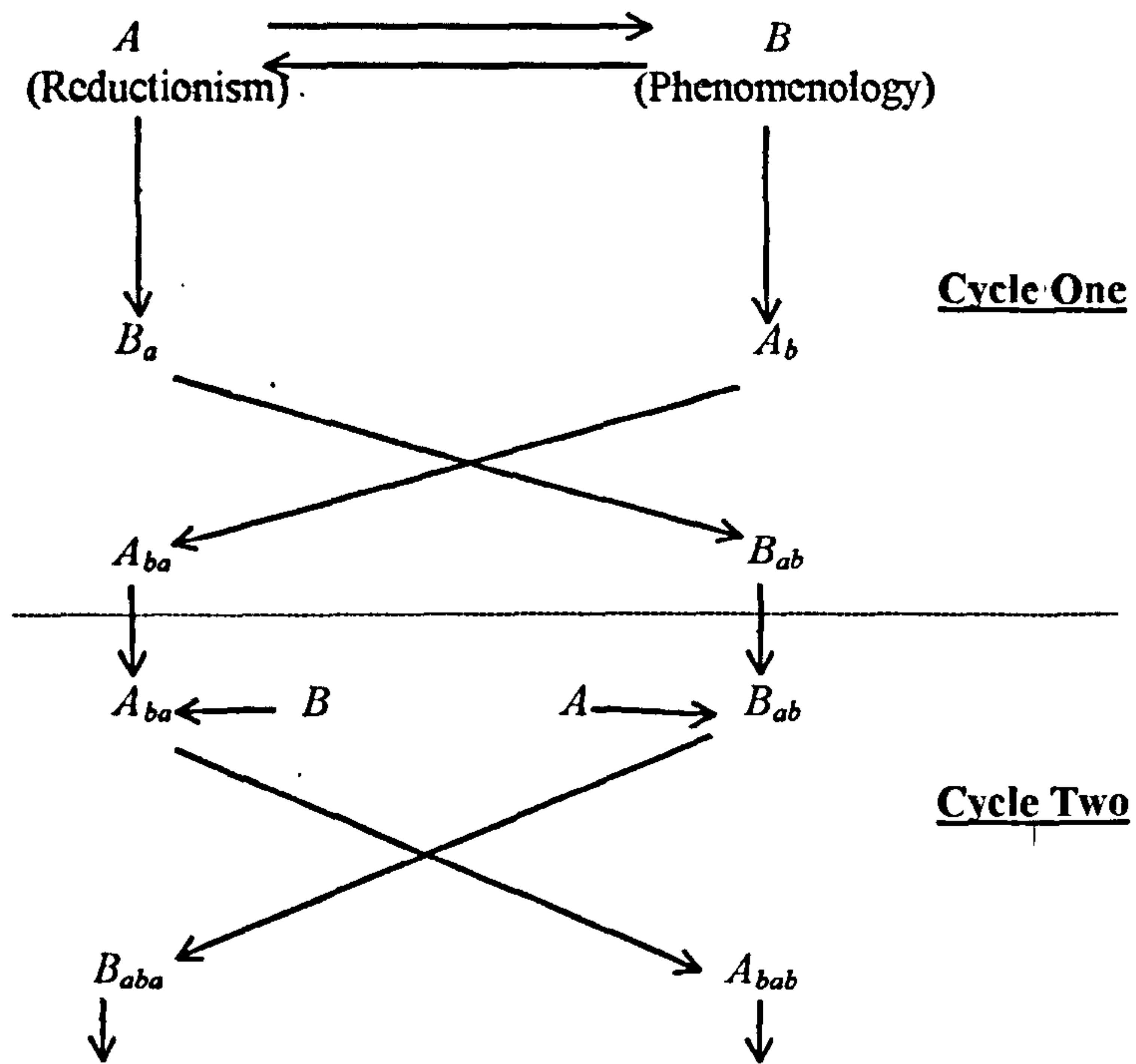


Diagram 6.7 - Two phases of the mutual critique

Repetition of the cycle might be unending if either monism or Laplacian infinitesimal description and explication were sought. However, for pluralism's more utilitarian goals it merely needs to continue until the paralogy inherent in such a process (cf. Chapter 3.1) is sufficiently resolved for the sides to co-exist in a productive and mutually acceptable fashion.

It is important to note that such dialogue is intended to provide greater clarity of understanding and of acceptance between the different sides of a debate as opposed to increasing the similarities between them. Indeed, it may not take any significant steps in the direction of consensus, but that has been lost as a prerequisite for admission to the hallowed ground of 'accepted knowledge' by the abandonment of the quest for a single, perfected ontological position, and the recognition of the difficulties associated with such a goal explored elsewhere. However, the increased interconnectedness of methods may create such an intimate relationship between them that there may even be occasions when the original distinctions, such as those between quantitative and qualitative approaches, cease to be (as) important.

The concept of hermeneutic mutuality implies that within a pluralist framework phenomenological conceptualisations of data can be applied to reductionist methods or quantitative data sets and *vice versa*. For example, reductionist scientific method typically attempts to control as many variables as possible. As discussed in Parts 2 and 3, this is not always either sufficiently attainable or useful in the evaluation of counselling because the number of possible intervening variables confound attempts to definitively control all of them or because of the problems of deconstructing an essentially continuous process into enforced, unrepresentative units. Pluralist research, however, also has access to phenomenological principles and is not forced to suffer the same fate.

Thus, in pluralism, *explication* of a variable can be an adequate replacement for *control* of it in some (perhaps many) circumstances *even within predominantly reductionist or quantitative studies*. It is adequate not because it meets the

reductionist ideal of producing definitive measurement of effects but because it has the potential to move the inquiry further into the wider realm of knowledge about the subject. For the version of pluralism proposed here, the arbitrating rule for defining the acceptability of evidence, in all such cases, rests entirely on its utility, albeit the progressive and individualised version of utility derived from Mill (cf. Chapter 3.3.2).

A practical example of this is offered in the second study of an employee counselling service in Chapter 10 in which the small numbers of respondents made statistically reliable interpretation of some numeric data impossible. The limited information offered was not only corroborated by *comparison* with the qualitative data; it was extended because of the aid the qualitative data offered in *interpreting* the numeric responses. The numbers were more meaningful because they could be seen as part of the same type of expression as the words: both constituted useful evaluative data. The experience of problems that led clients to seek counselling, and change in those problems concurrent with the experience of counselling, could be recorded in several ways simultaneously. The resulting combination of data was sufficiently rich to provide the basis for the evaluative decisions desired by all parties.

6.4 Reflexivity and the role of deconstruction

The complexity of the process described above is taken a step further by the introduction of reflexive self evaluation, or 'evaluation squared'. Such reflexivity is a vital aspect of the pluralist approach. Its practical effects will become especially apparent in the empirical studies in Part 5 and are also further explored in Chapter 7.1. Because each contributing paradigm is taken only as a provisionally acceptable starting point (see Chapter 4.3), any pluralist project *must* check the *continuing* acceptability of all its elements as it proceeds. Initially, this is achieved by each perspective ensuring that it is internally supportable and that it remains so throughout the process of pluralist development and change.

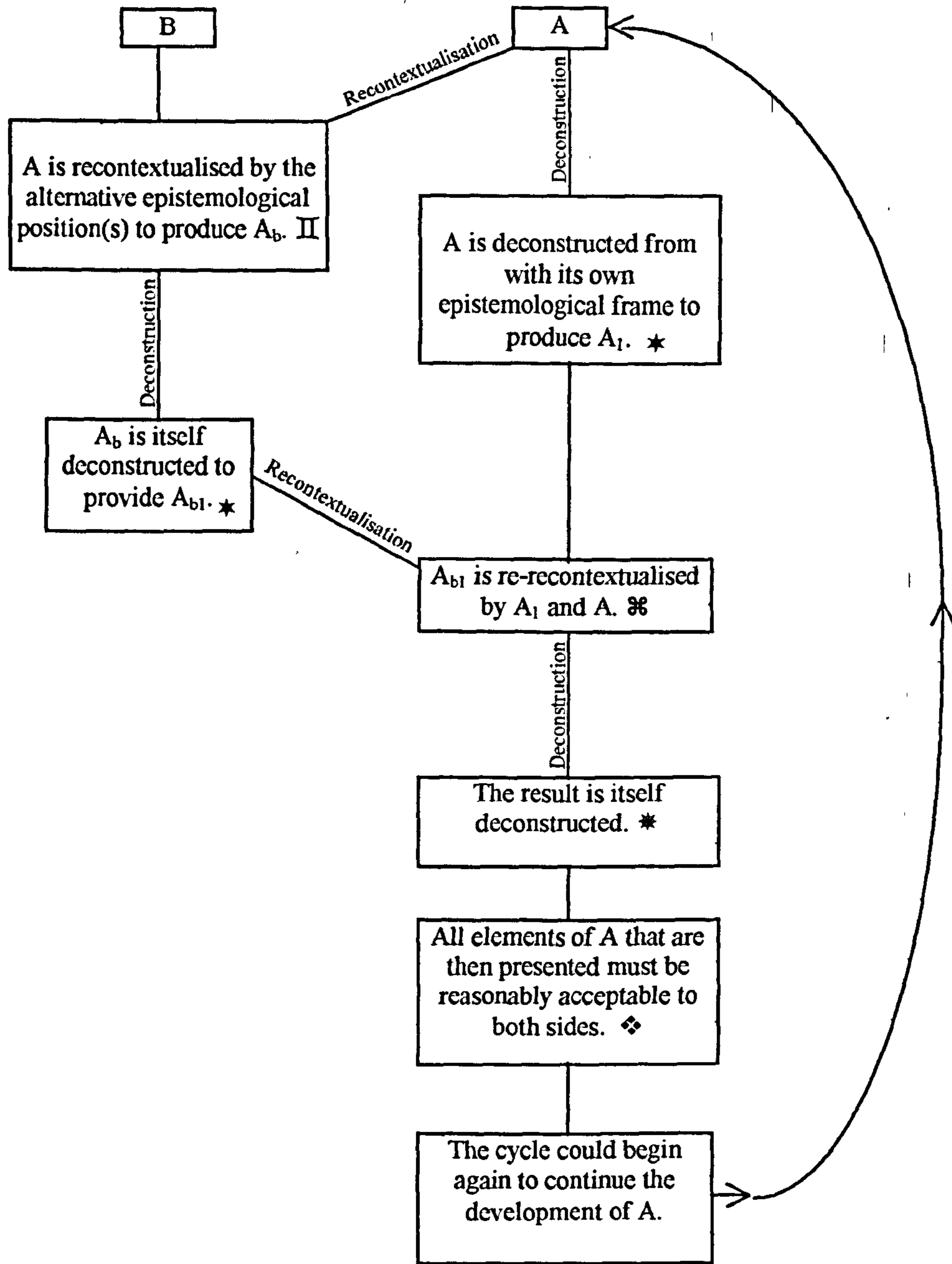


Diagram 6.8 - Deconstruction in pluralism

In post-modernist terms, in addition to the mutual ‘strong misreading’ of recontextualisation, each side also deconstructs itself and its view of other approaches (e.g. at ★ in Diagram 6.8). That is, it submits itself to the same level of critique as that carried out by the alternative stance. As it is represented in Diagram 6.8, approach A would thus produce a re-examined version of itself, A₁.

In pluralism, of course, approaches do not develop themselves in isolation. Consequently, they must also ‘re-recontextualise’ the version of themselves produced by their alternatives in the manner described above.

To break this complex process down into its component parts, one approach (represented by A in Diagram 6.8³⁹) can be recontextualised by another (approach B) to produce what might be labelled A_b. (shown at II). Approach B then reflexively examines (deconstructs) this new version of A (producing A_{b1} at ★) to ensure that it has retained at least minimal acceptability and utility in the terms then recognised as most applicable. A then re-recontextualises the product of that process (i.e. A_{b1}). That is, it returns the recontextualised version of itself produced by B to its original frame of reference (shown at ☿). To ensure that minimal acceptability and utility are preserved in its own terms, A then deconstructs this recontextualisation of B’s recontextualisation of itself. (shown at ✱).

The products of this complex of mutual critiques ensure that each element of a study and the enterprise as a whole, is tolerable by all sides and useful to at least one (shown at ❖ in Diagram 6.8). This ends the first cycle of fully pluralist development. If considered desirable, the process could be begun again, repeating the cycle.

To render the preceding somewhat ‘mathematicised’ discussion in more familiar terms, the process shown in Diagram 6.8 could also be described as follows. We might begin with a reductionist tool (in the role of, say, approach A) such as a

³⁹ Diagram 4.8 only shows the examination of one approach (A). Of course, the whole cycle should also be carried out simultaneously on approach B with the roles reversed.

psychometric measure of symptomology. A phenomenological (approach B) recontextualisation of that tool (shown at Π) might well result in some modifications (A_b). For example, it might be thought desirable to add non-psychometric free response items to avoid entirely reducing respondents' experiences to the *a priori*, standardised metric offered. The result would be likely to be a hybrid tool.

Deconstructing that hybrid tool within the phenomenological frame might produce further modifications (A_{b1}). That is, other qualitative techniques might also be called for, perhaps even recruiting respondents as co-authors of the research and encouraging them to identify some of the variables in terms that were most meaningful and useful to them.

The original tool would also have been deconstructed from the originating, reductionist frame of reference (i.e. producing A_1 - both phases of deconstruction are marked \star in Diagram 6.8). This would ensure that the assumptions on which it was based were brought fully into awareness, possibly leading to improvements, say, to the tool's construct validity. The phenomenological version of the original measure (A_{b1}) would then be 're-recontextualised' by the reductionist frame (at \otimes). That is, the phenomenologically derived modifications would be critiqued and, possibly, further modified from the reductionist perspective. The accessibility and utility of the resulting hybrid would then be checked (i.e. deconstructed, at \ast) from the reductionist perspective to ensure that no essential rules had been broken thus far and that the result was both sustainable and useful. All aspects of the tool, whether phenomenologically or reductionistically derived would have to conform to any *required* aspects of the reductionist school. Respondent-defined constructs and free response items would have to retain at least acceptable levels of internal and external validity, for example. All the elements of the original tool that then remained, albeit in more or less modified form, *must* be acceptable to *both* schools of thought (shown at \diamond). The findings produced by it would thus be less vulnerable to being undermined from either perspective.

Each approach firstly gains the awareness of its own structures, limitations and metaphor-laden assumptions (cf. Chapter 3.3 and 3.4). That is, each side knows the value and arbitrariness of its own basis and is therefore more open to critique and change. This is the practical result of alternatives no longer seeming ‘the poorer cousins of our ‘truth’’ (see Chapter 4.2). Each approach is then better able to ensure that all external critiques - and its recontextualised version of those critiques - are also acceptable in its own terms. Thus, reflexivity provides an additional level of quality control in the development of pluralist evaluative studies.

Deconstruction is particularly important because values in any sphere are frequently self referent. That is, they define themselves and their relative importance in terms drawn from their own frame of reference. As a result, it is necessary that all critique of those terms is considered from their *own* philosophical base. Thus, it is possible for the different elements of an enquiry to be utilised to greater or lesser effect depending, at least partially, on their self-defined ability to meet the demands made of them in a particular context.

The same reflexivity requires pluralist studies as a whole to evaluate themselves pluralistically. They would then pluralistically re-evaluate the combination of all the preceding stages as it progresses. This is exemplified in the development of the studies described in Part 5.

6.5 Pluralism on different scales throughout a research program

Much of the preceding discussion of pluralism best represents its gross level of application in the relatively esoteric, abstract task of reconciling epistemological positions and their broad methodological implications. However, it should be stressed that the development of specific evaluative studies and research strategies could be expected to be even more detailed with the entire process carried out on a far more localised scale.

Indeed, it may be most desirable for all the processes described above to be applied during every phase of a study. How this might be done is described in Table 6.1 below. Furthermore, it may be desirable at every stage and on every scale throughout a research program. The processes just described can be used to facilitate constructive inter-paradigmatic communication in each step, phase, study and series of studies in the same way as between paradigmatic bases for research. The selection of methods during the design phase of a study is described below in Chapter 7.2. As the design is implemented, several very different ways of researching a topic may be undertaken simultaneously. *Within* this or any phase it would be very easy to relapse into the concurrent but separate use of multiple methods already commonplace elsewhere. However, as has been emphasised, such multiplicity is not the same as the pluralism proposed here. It is necessary that the differing approaches *continue* to interact for pluralism to be sustained.

Table 6.1 - Pluralism throughout the research endeavour	
Stage	Example
Philosophical basis	Ensuring that philosophical and epistemological conflicts are adequately resolved to the extent that they do not threaten the truth-values assigned to the findings.
Design	Each method considered for use should not have been ruled out by any of the relevant approaches; the resulting versions of each method should then be accepted as enhancing the utility of the findings as a whole.
Implementation	The needs of each research style must be met. Data of various types may be gathered according to the utility each type offers as predicted in the preceding stage or heuristically developed in this one.
Analysis	Reductionist (e.g. statistical) and phenomenological (e.g. qualitative) analyses are used <i>wher applicable</i> , regardless of data source or type or overall nature of enquiry ⁴⁰ .
Interpretation	Logical and empathic interpretative strategies can both be utilised as and where applicable.

At the simplest level, preliminary data from, say, qualitative evaluation of a counselling service might alter the focus of later sections of the study as new areas of interest become identified. A more complex interaction is also possible in which each approach used in the study *continually* informs the other(s) regarding, to name but two areas, the application of methods or the treatment of research participants. How questions are asked, even *what* questions are asked *and* how they are answered may be influenced by models quite different to those that gave rise to the need to ask questions in the first place. For example, a classically reductionist question regarding

⁴⁰ This is applicable only insofar as such analyses can be legitimately and usefully applied.

the cost-effectiveness of an intervention may be required to incorporate phenomenologically derived issues such as affective responses to counselling in terms meaningful to both models.

Humanistic approaches which involve research participants as co-researchers might be applied to quantitatively oriented studies in which the reductionist requirement to account for threats to validity could be fully recognised and, as far as possible, responded to without threatening the principles on which *both* approaches are based. The reductionist side has to accept the loss of the confidence that would have been conferred by objective administration of the research. It may, however, also recognise the value of greater detail in reporting and sensitivity to participants' needs. It may even be that from the phenomenological / humanistic side recognition of the utility of objective measurement leads to both objective and subjective evaluative methods being selected, as seen in the studies in Part 5. Continuation of this style of interaction at such practical levels is also applicable in the analysis and interpretation phases of a study. The detailed attention to the development of evaluative studies and the continued sensitivity to a very broad range of issues is not only rendered possible by this version of pluralist method but it also suggests that it is highly desirable for the sake of maximising the utility and acceptability of the findings produced.

6.6 Continuation of the pluralist process across studies and contextual sensitivity

The point of the preceding section is further developed by the fact that the cycles of pluralist development within each phase of a single study need not stop at the end of each individual study, or even series of studies. Indeed, they can continue across an entire research domain. Indeed, it is virtually a requirement of the pluralist approach that they do so.

It has already been stated that all evidence in a pluralist framework should be considered as no more than statements of *apparent* fact as opposed to ontological certainties (cf. Chapter 5.2). It follows that we must check the applicability of all previously successful positions to each new context. In pluralism, of course, this should be done from as many perspectives as are usefully applicable.

The need to continue the heuristic cycles described above throughout studies and then beyond them into others as well, and its compatibility with traditional research was exemplified in Rosenfeld's (1967) description of Niels Bohr's approach to the development of knowledge:

'he would never try to outline any finished picture ... he never regarded achieved results in any other light than as starting points for further exploration. In speculating about the prospects of some line of investigation, he would dismiss the usual consideration of simplicity, elegance or even consistency.'

(p. 117, emphasis added.)

This is completely in accordance with logical empiricism, of course, and merely represents exceptional good practice in those terms. The openness of such an attitude is significant, however, as is the fact that it was sufficiently unusual for Rosenfeld to comment upon. The way in which empiricism has been practised has not always involved such openness by any means, as we have already seen.

It is a basic tenet of this approach to science that we can *only* progress beyond the bounds of current practice by adding a caveat at each step that our current position is no more than a 'possible starting point' for that which follows - even if it contradicts our present position or is drawn from an entirely different beginning. That open acknowledgement of the limited and, at best, incomplete usefulness of any kind of approach allows us to incorporate whatever alternative views may also become

applicable elsewhere⁴¹. That is, the precedents set in one study do not *necessarily* apply in others.

Unlike the traditional conception of scientific progress, the need for *continual* development in pluralism referred to above suggests that precise replication will rarely be possible⁴². For example, while the second employee counselling evaluation presented in Part 5 could make use of much that had been developed for the first, to have applied precisely the same system would have risked potentially disastrous consequences for a client group who were even more sensitive to threats to their anonymity than those in the first study. The utility of the data would also have been damaged because the previous methodology could not have met the needs of the new set of stakeholders in the same way or to the same extent.

In this way, pluralism is prevented from regarding itself as moving towards some as yet undefined goal of ultimate and universally applicable philosophy, design or methodology. The rise of pluralism as a new monism is then prevented. Furthermore, the particular, distinctive and irreducible features of each approach are preserved as each is applied afresh in each new context.

This is not quite to suggest that all studies must always develop every aspect entirely from scratch. Where contexts have enough in common direct parallels can be drawn. Earlier steps need only be recontextualised to ensure their applicability to the circumstances of the new study. It is quite possible for evaluations to continue to develop in this manner with each study pluralistically reviewing its predecessors, whether they were pluralist or not, and seeking to incorporate those items that are of utility for the new study.

⁴¹ It also facilitates integration of hermeneutic mutuality into the heuristic cycle, on whatever scale it is being carried out.

⁴² The only exception is if the principle of maximising utility of data suggests that the value of comparability between studies outweighs all other considerations.

Where there are sufficient similarities in their contexts and purposes, the general outlines of studies may have much in common, as demonstrated in all three evaluations of counselling services in Part 5. Where they were applied to similar groups for similar purposes, some elements of the questionnaires used were repeated, for example. Furthermore, components of those questionnaires, techniques for eliciting and analysing qualitative and quantitative data and so forth were themselves derived from earlier, predominantly non-pluralist, studies in their turn. To some extent, then, the lessons of one study need not be learned each time and to that extent pluralism is, like empiricist reductionism, progressive.

Chapter 7 Developing an applied pluralism in therapy evaluation research

Just as the preceding Chapter explored the mechanics of applying the earlier discussion, this Chapter will put these processes further into the context of actual research studies, especially those intended to evaluate counselling and psychotherapy. All the concepts explored in the preceding discussion provide the foundations for the practical steps outlined here, even if they are not *explicitly* referred to. Chapter 7.1 describes the adaptability of pluralist studies. The complex iterative reflexive cycles that can be built up form the basic building blocks of pluralist progress. These cycles may be repeated several times within a single phase of a study in addition to being requisite in ensuring that any given evaluation model is rendered suitable for each new context. Chapter 7.2 then further examines the primacy of stakeholder needs over *a priori* theoretical rules in developing pluralist research.

7.1 Developing pluralist studies

7.1.1 The shape of pluralist studies

Because of the ample opportunities they offer for development and adaptation, pluralist studies are capable of being extremely context-sensitive. Indeed, if a mutual critique of research types is not to produce a new monistic framework, it is necessary that each study be developed from a more basic stage than is common practice elsewhere. This is to ensure that it satisfies the needs of all sides of the debate at all levels throughout the various critiques and counter critiques involved in the developmental processes described in the previous chapter. Without the safeguard of ensuring that all elements of a study remain acceptable for all the perspectives involved, the dominant parts of one research study could hold sway over other influences, such as those produced by a new context or a new application of the

earlier work, inhibiting the plurality of inputs to the developmental dialectic. It is important to avoid even successful models of evaluation research being simply inherited whole and unexamined by their successors. This suggests that pluralist development of any one research study must, at least, ensure that any previous work is suitably adapted in order to ensure its suitability and maximise its utility. This implies an unending process of iterative developmental cycles.

It also implies that pluralist studies may take on very different apparent forms and make use of widely differing techniques - not only within a single study, but also allowing separate studies to be very different from each other, as exemplified by those presented in Part 5. If we were to put the flow diagrams of those studies side by side it would be immediately apparent that, despite their points of similarity, they are very different. This is so even though three are evaluations of counselling and all share the same basic stance towards research. The range of variety within pluralism is, literally, incalculable.

However, it is not the range of techniques applied or the sequence of data collecting and analysing tasks carried out which distinguishes a pluralist study. What does distinguish pluralist studies from others, as proposed here, is that the process by which they are designed, implemented and interpreted is itself pluralist. The flow diagrams outlining the studies in Part 5 show only the tasks. What unifies them, and ties them into the main theme of this thesis, is that they share the common pluralist development and application presented here.

The articulation of any particular exemplar pluralist method for the development of evaluative studies is open to misinterpretation. Each pluralist method must remain open to post-modern strong misreading just as all the elements of a pluralist study remain open to further critique and development as they proceed. It is not suggested that the processes described in this thesis are the only way of developing research studies in a pluralist manner. They are, however, the procedures that were adopted in the development of the subsequent studies and represent one successful method

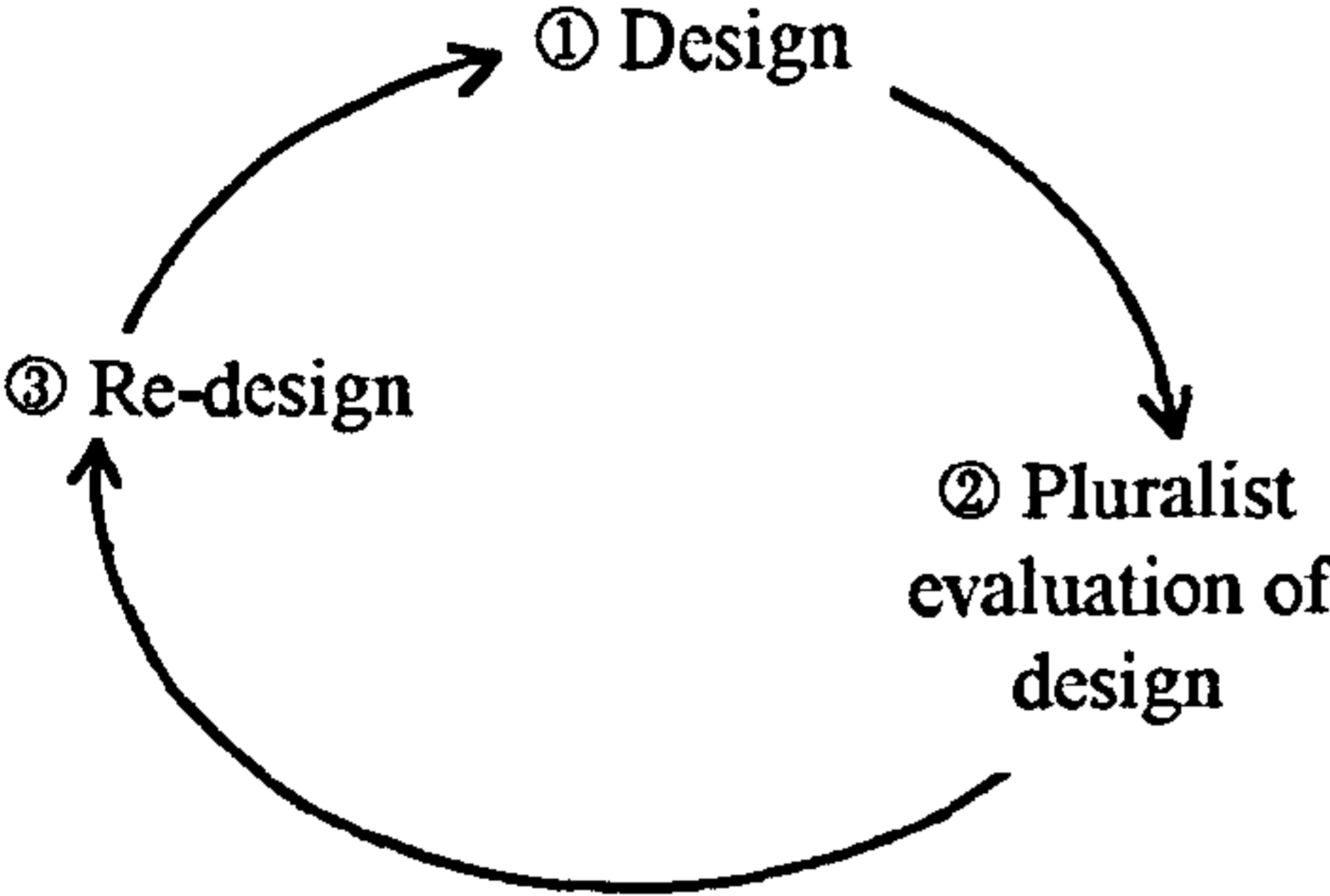


Diagram 7.1 - The hermeneutic reflexive cycle

which embeds the requirements of maintaining an adequately rigorous, pragmatic and productive dialectic throughout the research process.

7.1.2 Building interconnectedness: the hermeneutics of the reflexive developmental cycle.

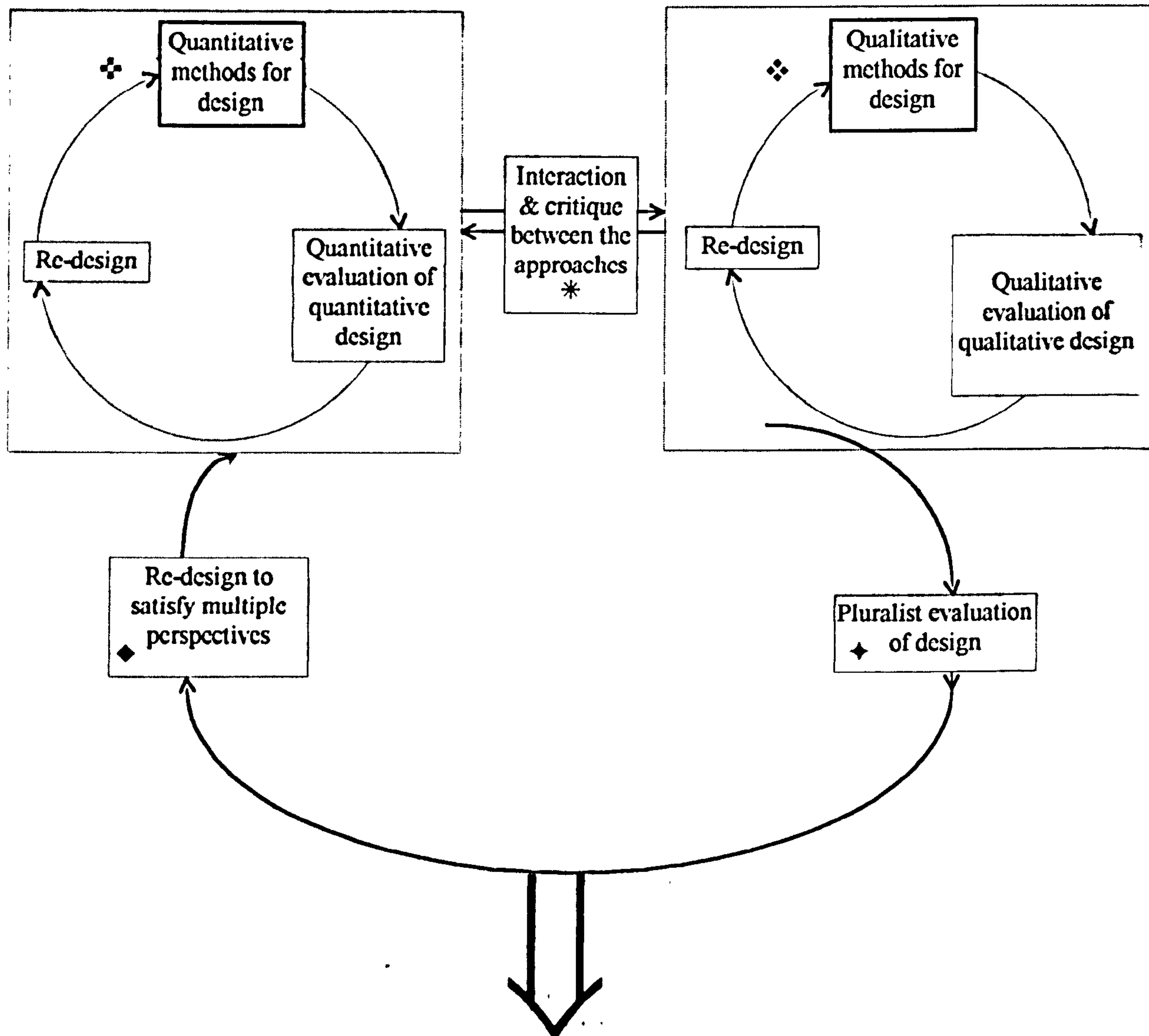
As just noted, it is possible to think of pluralist studies as developing in a series of cycles. These comprise the hermeneutic processes described in the previous chapters and constitute the basic building blocks of the pluralist studies described in Part 5.

It has already been stressed that a pluralist study can create links between approaches. Each can ‘feed back’ to the others. The diverse aspects of a single study can thus become inextricably linked in the cause of creating a more useful and un-self-contradictory whole. The reflexivity of evaluation methods, also noted previously, is all the more complex because of this ‘interconnectedness’.

The requirement for pluralist research to develop in an unending iterative process, noted in Chapter 7.1.1, can also be described as follows. The cyclical nature of the pluralist development of any study arises from the requirement, presumed to be brought by each approach, that all the other approaches involved should be rendered acceptable *before* proceeding at any given point. This contrasts with the problematic approach common in current multi-method research in which differing paradigms typically critique each other’s findings only in retrospect. In basic terms, each stage of a study is evaluated in the manner appropriate to *each* of the approaches involved. Only then can all the approaches agree that it is at least tolerable to proceed to the next stage. A simplified version of this process is shown in Diagram 7.1, once again using the design phase of a study as an example.

A pluralist study would identify the components of this stage that should be applied in the study itself as ‘all those forms of evaluation that are useful in their own terms and in the terms of the alternatives included in that study’. Each study would

Pluralist design phase



▼ Process moves on to next phase when no further contributions can be deemed sufficiently useful on pragmatic utilitarian grounds

Diagram 7.2 - Complex reflexive and mutual evaluative hermeneutics within and between research types and phases of a study

therefore have to complete at least one cycle of the above diagram before the implementation stage could begin.

As this pluralist reflexive process is applied within each section of a study, between methods and on every scale within and between phases of the research process (as described above), a complex series of reflexive cycles is established. This is represented in more detail in Diagram 7.2⁴³. At ✚, quantitative methods are evaluated in the terms from which they were derived and suitably revised if necessary. Qualitative methods are similarly deconstructed in their own terms at ✚. Each approach critiques the proposed application of the other (at ✚) and the result is itself evaluated in terms of all applicable approaches (at ✚) and redesigned accordingly so far as is likely to be useful (at ✚). Once the utility of this process is exhausted, the next stage of the study can begin (▼).

Within any phase some components of the methods used might be altered. For example, the reductionist process of setting hypotheses to be tested by examining specific effects (usually by quantitatively measuring them) may be revised to prioritise those factors most valued in qualitative research. Thus, we may set out to look at affective responses before and after therapy rather than more abstract, but more easily quantified, measures of symptomology. Further qualitative critique may also insist on description of the clients' experience. This can be achieved within the reductionist framework of reducing experiences to their component parts. Pluralist evaluation of later stages of the design might suggest that analysis of quantitative measures of symptomology, such as numbers of depression free days indicated by psychometric tests, should, if they are also included, be interpreted in the light of clients' descriptions of their mood. By the same token, interpretation of descriptive comment of clients' experiences may be radically altered if there is strong psychometric evidence of positive or negative change for the same individuals.

⁴³ Diagram 7.2 is an applied version of the processes described above and in Diagram 6.8.

Further adaptations might also be made, for example, as a result of piloting the provisional design as was done in all the studies presented in Part 5.

As the design phase of any study is implemented, the process described in Diagram 7.2 would be repeated, possibly resulting in pluralistic adaptation of that implementation. Studies may thus change and develop whilst in progress rather than sticking to the ‘law and order’ approach of, for example, strict experimental method. Similar diagrams could also be drawn for the implementation, interpretation and reporting phases. In the empirical studies in Part 5 it is evident that each of the different elements could only be properly interpreted in the light of all the others.

In addition to connecting methods, pluralism also brings opportunities for connecting different *stages* of a research study. Just as diverse methods may affect each other, each phase of a study can also be expected to influence all subsequent phases.

The complexity of this set of connections between phases of pluralist studies is an essential feature for developing the rich data that is, perhaps, its greatest strength. Moreover, it ensures that the evidence provided is solidly grounded in the best (i.e. most useful) practice available for any particular study.

7.2 ‘Needs driven’ development of tools and ‘tool kits’

A logical extension of a pluralist approach to developing counselling evaluations is the creation of ‘tool kits’ in which a number of specific, possibly applicable techniques are collected.

At the start of a study, the pluralist researcher has a *carte blanche*. It is suggested above that all methods, without exception, should be seen as potentially available. The pluralist principles of pragmatic utilitarianism, suggest that the selection of tools from the vast array available to evaluators of therapy should be carried out in the light of the needs being addressed by that particular study. The extent to which any particular stakeholder need is addressed by a method dictates its selection or

7.3a. Pluralist studies ('needs driven')

Identification of needs to be addressed



Selection of methods to meet stakeholder needs



Examination of philosophical issues prior to implementation and interpretation

7.3b. monistic studies ('paradigm driven')

Statement of paradigmatically defined requirements for acceptable evidence



Selection of methods best fitted to the requirements of advancing knowledge according to that paradigm



Interpretation of findings insofar as they meet research priorities (which may be set in the light of stakeholder needs)

Diagram 7.3 - Needs vs. paradigm driven development of research studies

rejection; the inevitable differences in stakeholder needs, and potential competition between possibly appropriate tools are addressed by recourse to the pluralist method outlined above.

An implication of this position is that the development of research studies is ‘needs driven’ (Diagram 7.3a) as opposed to being derived from philosophical dogmas as in most ‘paradigm driven’ research (Diagram 7.3b).

The process begins with identification of stakeholder groups and of their various needs. It is then necessary to (pluralistically) identify priorities among these needs. For example, phenomenologists might have to address the needs of service purchasers and managers for whom the paramount concerns are likely to be the most accurate possible indications (i.e. measurements) of cost implications, effect sizes, the significance of change and the generalisability of findings. Furthermore, in evaluation, such perspectives will inevitably reduce all the evidence, in whatever form, to a very simple choice as to whether the benefit of any given counselling service justifies its existence. From the opposing perspective, we must also avoid what humanists would call the inhumane treatment of subjects by the narrowness of the reductionist tendency to focus on measurability or questions decided by the researchers - who constitute only one stakeholder group among several, of course.

In more detail, the pluralist approach to the ‘needs driven’ development of a study might be represented as shown in Diagram 7.4.

The process moves from identification of needs to the selection of methods suited to meeting them. The cycles of pluralist debate are used to reconcile their use in as unified a way as possible. The selection of methods and, therefore, the needs that any one study can address, may require to be adapted in the light of the results of the pluralist developments outlined above. Of course, some methods may be considered particularly important even though they meet the needs of only one group of stakeholders. However, so long as they are not absolutely outlawed by an alternative

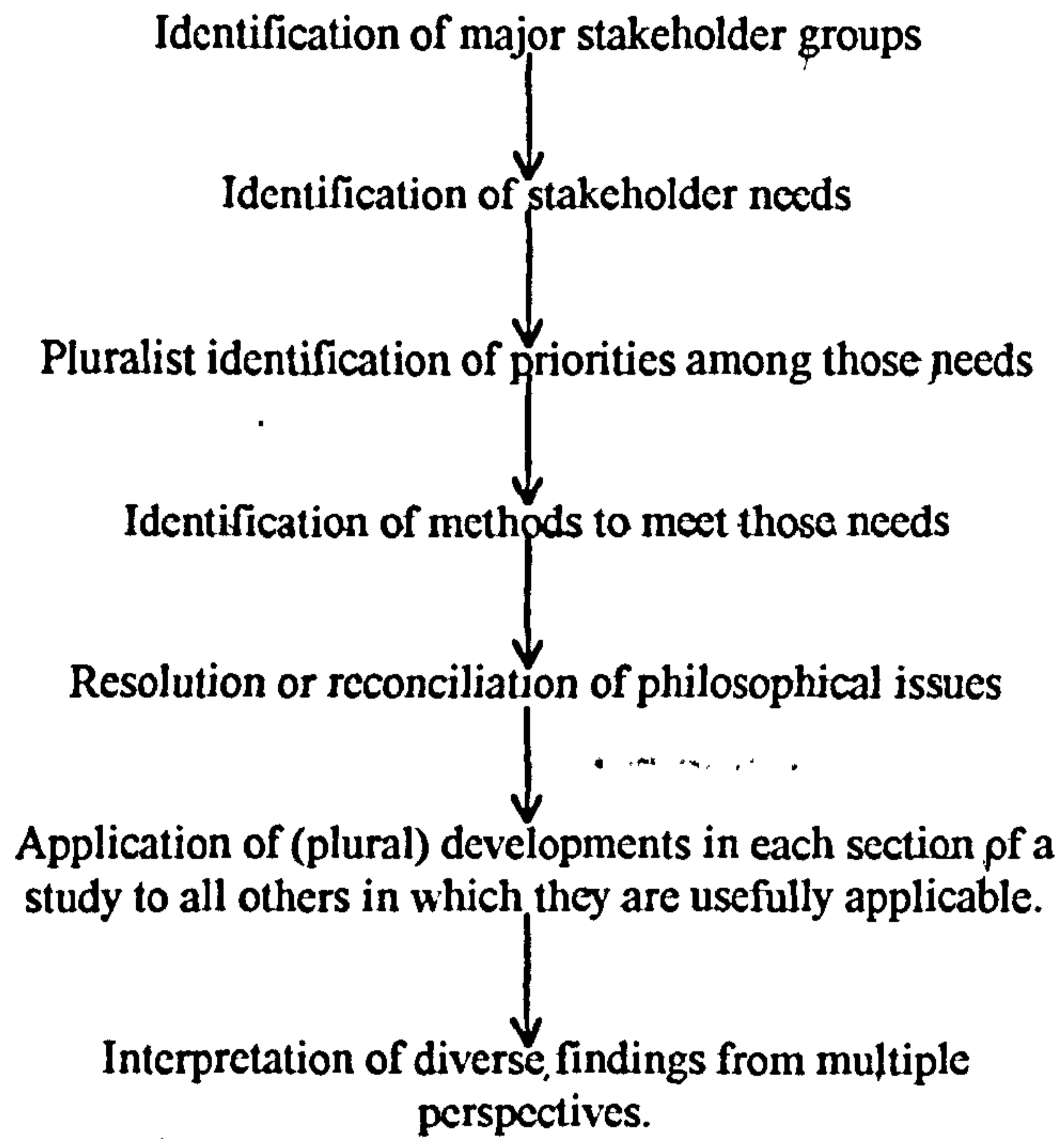


Diagram 7.4 - pluralist development of research studies in more detail

approach already selected to meet other relevant needs they can be allowed to remain. Their inclusion is warranted for the sake of their contribution to the evidential basis for evaluation.

The research tools used must be as nearly developed to the standards required by *all* the main epistemological standpoints as can be achieved. A pluralist tool kit might, then, consist of pluralistically developed evaluation strategies, methods and measures, albeit that some (or even all) were originally developed in non-pluralist theoretical frameworks.

The study intended to provide normative data for the measure of Self / Ideal-Self Discrepancies (presented in Part 5) is one example of the kind of development of a tool required for a thoroughly pluralist tool kit. Even within those highly quantitatively oriented research needs it was impossible to ignore the more phenomenologically oriented elements of one of the stakeholder groups: the participants. Qualitative methods had to be employed to ensure that their needs were adequately addressed. That is, pluralist development of the study suggested that it was desirable to discover whether the experience of completing the measure caused any significant degree of distress. In addition to the ethical requirement of avoiding harm to research participants this would also have had important implications regarding i) the measure's suitability for use, especially with counselling clients, and ii) the interpretation of responses from both clinical and non-clinical groups. Indeed, a criticism of the study is that *greater* use could have been made of qualitative techniques despite the reductionist nature of its primary aims. The lower resistance to this measure reported by some clients had already provided a partial answer to these issues and the importance of extending such data was underestimated. Had greater emphasis been placed on phenomenological issues when the study was planned this would have been minimised.

It is only by achieving a balance between stakeholder needs and between the differing approaches to research that fully adequate evaluations can be made. Pluralism seeks

to achieve precisely that balance. The application of this mechanism in the context of practical evaluative research is explored in Part 5 through a series of pluralist studies.

Summary of Part 4

This summary outlines the mechanism by which diverse approaches to evaluative research can be brought together in practice in pluralist fashion. The key points in that process are as follows:

1. Each side engages the other in the kind of positively framed developmental discourse previously proposed.
2. All perspectives are assumed to carry equal status although none is forced to accept the truth claims of alternatives, either to the extent, or in the precise manner, that is claimed. Each perspective can therefore draw from any pluralist study the evidence it finds most useful and acceptable.
3. This equality allows a co-operative mutuality and reciprocity to be maintained throughout the development of pluralist studies.
4. Each perspective recontextualises the alternatives to produce a positively framed critique of them. Such critiques are then returned to the frames of reference to which they refer in order to undergo the same process themselves. This mutual hermeneutic cycle is repeated as far as necessary to meet the demands of each side.
5. Similar developmental processes are reflexively applied to pluralism itself. On the same grounds, individual studies and elements of them can reflexively investigate themselves in their own terms. Thus, the evaluation produces 'evaluation squared'.
6. Each perspective simultaneously undertakes deconstructive heuristic cycles of self-development.

7. These processes are carried out within each step, phase, study and research domain. Each phase of a study builds on its predecessors. Pluralist research is thus progressive. Similarly, each pluralist study can also draw on preceding work of any relevant type. Indeed, they are required to contextualise themselves by doing so as is evident below.
8. Pluralism can allow studies to be extremely context sensitive. Indeed, it is an implication of the perpetual heuristic inherent in pluralism that no position is regarded as a final and complete statement of fact. This accords with the absence of a definitive ontological position for pluralism as a whole.
9. Each pluralist study is designed to meet the needs of its stakeholders rather than the dogma of any single theory of research. A shared pluralist approach to research may consequently result in studies that appear very different to one another.
10. An aid to pluralist research might be the development of 'tool kits' consisting of a wide array of possible evaluative strategies, methods and measures developed in such a way that they can be pluralistically incorporated into any suitable research setting.

Part 5: Example pluralist studies

Chapter 8 Introduction to applied pluralist evaluation

8.1 The empirical studies

After some general preliminary comments, this Part of the thesis is intended to explore the practical application of the more theoretical preceding discussion and to test the proposals presented in real research settings. Those proposals may be considered more or less useful in evaluating counselling in themselves but, thus far, they have contained no demonstration of their practical feasibility. Consequently, it was considered important to test those proposals in the spirit of this investigative study and to carry out a series of exploratory, rather than definitive, pluralist studies. Theoretical proposals always beg questions regarding how that theory translates into practice: does it work? what are its limitations? how widely can it be applied? how useful are the contributions of that knowledge in comparison to its predecessors and alternatives? A return to the practical needs of field research was, therefore, requisite in order to defend against the accusation that the principles outlined above were untried, remote from the every day concerns of researchers or simply that their implications had not been properly explored.

Only some of the possibilities of pluralist evaluation of counselling and psychotherapy have been tested here, of course. It can never be expected that the possibilities and variations of pluralist method will be exhaustively and finally documented because that is precluded by the theory of pluralism itself. A complete taxonomy is, theoretically, impossible. It may be necessary to talk not of pluralist method, but of pluralist methods. The fundamental basis and justifications may remain constant for any research carried out in this way, but the studies themselves can *look* very different and may place very different emphases on the various possible methods they might draw upon.

It is also worth noting that this part of the thesis has two, unequal foci. Firstly, and most importantly, the studies serve as a vehicle for exploring pluralist theory. Their primary purpose is to act as exemplars of applied pluralism. However, they also have real value as original contributions to knowledge. Each provides new data and insights on the topic concerned. However, this is very much a secondary intention here and the only details of the findings given are, in the main, those required to support discussion of pluralism. However, further details of all the varied types of data are provided in the Appendices as appropriate.

Three of the studies presented in this section evaluated counselling services. The first (Chapter 9) looked at the Advice Support and Counselling Unit (A.S.C.U.) which provided counselling and related services to the 18,000 staff of a large local authority education department. The intention in this study, which is reported in rather more detail than the subsequent ones, was to begin to explore the application of pluralist evaluation and its utility in meeting the very varied needs of those with a stake in its findings.

The second study (Chapter 10) looked at another employee counselling service operating in an, at least superficially, very similar context: that of another large organisation, this time a major financial institution. The pluralist model used in the first study was tested and further developed in the light of what proved to be very different stakeholder needs and contextual constraints. While there are direct links from one study to the next and obvious similarities between some aspects of their designs and the methods used, differences in the research context and the emerging data necessitated significant changes to the design used in the first evaluation. The same pluralist model as that used to develop and carry out the A.S.C.U. study facilitated the process of re-developing the protocol. This represented a second cycle of pluralistic development, as outlined above (see Chapter 6 and Diagrams 6.6 to 7.10), on the larger scale of a research domain as opposed to the intra-investigation

developmental cycles undertaken within each study (see Chapter 6 and Diagrams 9.1 and 10.1).

The third study (Chapter 11) was intended to explore the utility of the same pluralist evaluation model when used in a very different counselling service context. This service was community based and targeted the needs of a varied client group with significant levels of poverty and multiple deprivation. The study built on the developments of the first two and provided evidence of maximal utility for the main stakeholder groups. Furthermore, it demonstrated the ability of pluralist evaluations to be sensitive to specific criticisms of a generally successful counselling service that might not otherwise be recorded, especially by purely reductionist or quantitative methods. Even more significantly, however, it also exemplified the importance of the heuristic cycles within a study as those criticisms became the tools for a positive developmental phase for the service which changed its approach significantly in the light of the preliminary evidence generated. This was reflected not only in the final results but also in changes the development prompted in the study's design. This provided an unpredicted opportunity to explore the adaptability of the pluralist model itself.

The fourth study (Chapter 12) was somewhat different. It deliberately set out to explore the application of pluralist principles at one extreme end of the spectrum of possible research styles: a proposed psychometric measure previously designed for use in counselling evaluations was tested. In most situations, the primary tasks required would have rested on purely reductionist quantitative methods to provide data on validity, reliability and, most importantly in this case, normative responses from various population groups. However, *pluralist* development of the study suggested that a more thorough evaluation of the measure could be carried out by combining purely quantitative methods with a qualitative element to address some of the needs of stakeholder groups who might otherwise be neglected. These included the respondents involved in the study; those who might be required to complete the

measure in future; and those who might administer it. It is suggested that the process of pluralist development could have been continued further in this case. However, the usefulness of the pluralist approach was established, even in a study that would otherwise have been run on exclusively monistic lines. The study also provided original normative and other data relating to the validity, reliability and acceptability of the measure as predicted. It revealed unexpected differences between groups of respondents, which could be investigated further, possibly by inductively incorporating them in repeated pluralist cycles of research development. The construct the test was purported to measure, initially thought to equate with self esteem, was also refined somewhat and this deductively achieved conclusion could also be inductively returned to the same process for further consideration.

The varied data produced in all these studies was of use to a wide range of stakeholders in each case - wider than that typically offered by monistic studies. Each is, therefore, considered valuable in its own right, in *addition* to firmly grounding the previous theoretical discussion in practical experience. It should be noted again, however, that none of the studies was intended to go further than providing an opportunity to explore aspects of the application of pluralist evaluation and they should be considered in that light. Consequently, as noted above, extraneous analysis and discussion are generally excluded just as aspects of the studies not germane to the aims of this thesis were not fully developed as they were executed. Further details of all the studies, as they were reported to the stakeholder groups concerned, are provided in the appropriate appendices and research reports as indicated.

8.2 Preliminary comments on applied pluralist evaluation

The following comments apply to all the subsequent studies equally and are included here to avoid repetition.

8.2.1 Differentiation from current multi-method designs

As proposed in the preceding theoretical discussion, the intertwining of superficially very different methodologies attempted here went beyond the accepted practices of triangulation or other forms of either sequential or concurrent multi-method designs. However, it should be stressed at this point too that, even where there are surface similarities, the pluralist development and execution of each of the studies lends somewhat more certain epistemological grounds for their findings.

It has been noted in Chapter 5.1 that one of the potential problems for pluralism may be that it could be considered indistinguishable from current practice. If their epistemological conflicts, limitations and inconsistencies were ignored, either monistic camp, or even the arbitrary relativist '*smorgasbord*' of eclectically mixed methods, could mistakenly appropriate the claim of having laid out a pattern for maximally evaluating counselling. The monistic camps have generally failed adequately to incorporate the valuable contributions of their alternatives, while relativism has ridden roughshod over their basic differences.

This is not quite to say that conflicts between approaches used in the following studies have all been entirely resolved in these experimental and purely investigative studies. They are, after all, no more than early attempts to apply the new form of pluralism mapped out above. However, they do demonstrate the greater utility that can be achieved by use of a coherent pluralist approach. If the epistemological foundations on which their findings rest are more secure it would suggest that these studies succeed, at least to some degree, in the pluralist aim of achieving a mutual accommodation of the usefulness of diverse methods.

It is impossible in the space available to describe in detail all of the interaction between the approaches that went into developing and implementing these studies. Consequently, the details of all the pluralist processes, with their entire critique and counter-critique etc., are not always exhaustively described. Further consideration of

the processes and the issues they raise is contained in the preceding parts of this thesis. What is made clear in the following studies, however, is that those processes formed the building blocks of all that follows and reference is made to them as appropriate. Furthermore, the pluralist processes necessarily sometimes led to consideration of what, in retrospect, turned out to be blind alleys. In general, it has only been possible to mention these very briefly (e.g. as at p. 169). However, the fruits of the processes required and facilitated by pluralism are apparent throughout the following reports, as are their benefits.

8.2.2 General note on counselling evaluation

It is widely recognised, of course, that counselling and psychotherapy is an enormously difficult thing to evaluate with many sensitive issues. This is especially so if clients are asked to participate directly in evaluation procedures as here. The process in which client and therapist engage is extremely delicate and not essentially concerned with making itself available for investigation. A client never comes to counselling for the purpose of improving the counsellor, the service or the profession as a whole. Many of the issues clients bring to counselling are highly sensitive and personal in nature. Recognising a wish to see a counsellor, plucking up the courage to do so, and then embarking on what may be difficult or painful journeys of self development is difficult enough without then being asked to carry out tasks for the benefit of the service provider.

Fears concerning confidentiality, impartiality and the use to which results will be put, all make responding a potentially hazardous thing for clients to do. Such concerns are likely to be particularly acute in a study in which value judgements based on one's progress will be made, even if they are intended to be applied only to other people or to a service in general. It was hoped that such felt risks were minimised in the evaluations presented below by the use of an independent, external evaluator whose lack of connection with any part of the services or their management structure, except through the evaluations themselves, was made clear to all respondents.

However, in recognition of the potential problems for clients that could have been caused by the evaluation, their right not to participate was also made clear. This probably reduced the response rates. It may also be thought to have introduced what, in positivist terms would be referred to as a selection effect (e.g. Cronbach, 1970) although it applies to both the quantitative and qualitative forms of data recording alike⁴⁴. For example, clients with the most personally embarrassing issues may have been less likely to respond than those presenting with more superficial or ‘socially acceptable’ issues. Nonetheless, it was ethically requisite that the spirit of ‘both altruistic and operational’ (Ross, 1992, p. 2) concern for clients’ welfare was maintained, and that their needs were put first (British Association for Counselling, 1995).

Moreover, other than in some cognitive / behavioural or solution focused models (e.g. Trower, *et al*, 1988; De Shazer, 1985; Saunders, 1998), counselling is often not primarily focused upon the *outcome* but on the *process* in which the client is engaged. While finding solutions to specific problems may be all that some clients are looking for, others may have less clearly defined reasons for seeking counselling. The results may not be tangible, let alone sufficiently predictable to be identified and operationalised as variables to be measured, despite their importance for an individual client. Add to this the immense difficulties in appreciating the differences in interpretation different people place on events, issues, and even the words used to describe them, and the scale of the task begins to become apparent. It might be wondered that if counsellors have to spend a great deal of time, following extensive training, to appreciate sufficiently the significance of what a client is telling them, what chance do we, who are removed from that process, have of understanding what has gone on? Nonetheless, that it is possible for third parties to gain at least some limited measure of insight into those processes and their results *is* demonstrably the

⁴⁴ This is an example of the legitimate application of one type of thinking across the boundaries of different epistemologies. That such cross-application of paradigms is actually a commonplace occurrence lends additional credence to the pluralist processes and studies presented here.

case from both positivistically and phenomenologically oriented studies. As a result, the following evaluative studies undertook to explore some of the possibilities offered by a pluralist combination of the two and provided examples of the enhanced richness of data that can be produced while accommodating a wide range of diverse and possibly unpredicted or unpredictable subjects regardless of how specific and concrete or vague and esoteric they may be. Where ever possible this was done in a descriptive as well as a clearly quantifiable manner.

Absolute accuracy and reliability or complete exhaustive description of outcomes in the evaluation of counselling seems impossible. However, to seek it exclusively would be to miss the point of carrying out this kind of investigation. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (O.E.D., 1989) takes a relatively positivistic stance in defining evaluation as ‘determining the value of ... [or] estimating the force of’ (p. 447). More freely, Rossi and Freeman (1993) suggest that ‘evaluation research is the systematic application of social research procedures for assessing the conceptualisation, design, implementation, and utility of social intervention programs’ (p. 5). In the studies that follow it was the quantitative and qualitative relation between the actual and the desired effect of counselling that was used to determine its worth in each specific context. If the value of its effect reached or surpassed the value required by each stakeholder group then, for the purposes of evaluation, counselling could be said to have satisfactorily achieved its goals. ‘Value’, of course, may be construed in very different ways according to the different perspectives of the stakeholder groups and this is evident below.

As a result, the following studies were not *primarily* concerned with measurement, as a positivist / reductionist study might be. Neither could the studies afford to take a phenomenological stance or to treat all events and ways of understanding them as necessarily important in their own right, giving equal weight to each. The overriding concern was with making decisions about the value of the effects of counselling. If investigating the effectiveness of counselling were to ask ‘What does this achieve?’

evaluating that effectiveness would ask ‘to what extent are those achievements of value?’ introducing a very human element of value judgement. In colloquial terms, ‘(How) does counselling help?’ might become ‘Does this counselling help enough?’ Given the *raison d’être* for the evaluations that follow, the latter question was perhaps the most important to address.

All data that follow, both qualitative and quantitative, assisted this process only insofar as they provided accurate, relevant information to aid the kinds of evaluative judgements required, whether they were from the point of view of the client, counsellor or the service provider.

Nonetheless, the following studies comprised relatively detailed and thorough evaluations. This was partly because of the pluralist intention to ensure the widest and best possible utility of the findings. As described above, the studies deliberately set out to take into account the limitations of each of their parts; the qualitative and quantitative aspects balanced the problems associated with each type of enquiry, with the different approaches being applied with constant reference to each other. From the development of research questions, to the application of methods and derivation of conclusions, the different ways of studying ‘effectiveness’ were treated as parts of an essentially unified, but pluralist, world view (see above, and Goss and Mearns, 1997a).

It is not suggested here that all evaluations need to contain such a wide range of measures, or that they must contain as many checks and balances from alternative research strategies as incorporated into these studies. Indeed, the later studies are all somewhat less complex than the first, yet remain acceptably pluralist in nature.

It may be useful to note at this stage that each of the evaluative studies was designed to investigate the *effectiveness* of the counselling provided in quite general terms. There was no attempt to measure efficacy (as the terms are currently differentiated in the literature: cf. Roth and Fonagy, 1996b) or to meet all the needs of all the

stakeholder groups. In order to minimise the problems caused by the complexity inherent in pluralist evaluation, each study consisted of a number of stages. All of these were related directly to all the others, as opposed to concentrating primarily on single indicators such as goal attainment of client satisfaction rates, the particular problems of which are discussed below.

8.2.3 Use of client satisfaction measures: an example of pluralist attitudes to evaluation

Satisfaction has frequently been included in evaluative studies. While a few items did refer to clients' satisfaction in each evaluative study that follows, and these can have some utility in evaluating counselling services (Berger, 1983; Sloboda *et al.*, 1993), it was considered here that they should not be relied upon to give a truly representative picture of what had been achieved. Indeed, the limitations of client satisfaction scores exemplify the problems associated with narrowly targeting specific concerns and indicators. Simple general satisfaction scores taken at the end of counselling almost always show high ratings from clients, counsellors and referrers alike (e.g. Corney and Jenkins, 1993) resulting in an almost universally positive but possibly misleading response. Not only do a positive bias and halo effects distort the scores (Cronbach, 1970), there are theoretical problems in relating counselling outcomes solely or primarily to satisfaction. In employee counselling, for example, a person may have a great many problems which interfere with their work, but hold very little hope that things will change or, perhaps, lack the motivation required to make change happen. Such a person might be thoroughly satisfied with a service that left them as unable to work as before, on the grounds that they considered the counsellor to have done everything possible and to have provided a little comfort. However, it is quite possible that a different counsellor, or even a different type of intervention, might have resulted in a dramatic improvement in their situation, greatly exceeding their expectations.

From the point of view of both client and the funding body, the latter is almost certainly vastly preferable. However, it may not be reflected in any difference in reported client satisfaction as they would have expressed themselves to be very satisfied in both cases. Indeed, it would be difficult to judge whether positive or negative scores were indicators of any change at all. In positivist terms, satisfaction ratings lack sensitivity and lack deductive power. However, a humanistic approach might place value on subjective accounts of the degree to which expectations have been met. At the very least, client satisfaction certainly carries a degree of political impact and a persuasive weight with all the major stakeholder groups because of the importance they place upon it. A pluralist approach must integrate the whole diversity of views. Incorporating satisfaction scores does little to interfere with positivist / reductionist data that could then be used to assist in their interpretation, as could much phenomenologically oriented information. To come to a tolerable accommodation, the reductionist point of view must only be assured that satisfaction scores will not be given undue weight. Ensuring that each data type is interpreted with full reference to all others continues the pluralist process. That is, in accordance with the pluralist principles above, reductionism can tolerate use of a construct phenomenologically established to be of value, albeit with some strong and important caveats. Thus, by simultaneously looking at the wider effects counselling has had, it may be possible to distinguish to a greater extent between excellent, poor or indifferent interventions.

Consequently, client satisfaction was used here as only one of many indicators on which overall evaluative decisions could be based.

Chapter 9 Evaluation of the Advice Support and Counselling Unit (A.S.C.U.) of Lothian Regional Council's Education Department

9.1 Summary

This study set out to investigate the effectiveness of the counselling provision of the Advice, Support and Counselling Unit (A.S.C.U.) of Lothian Region Education Department. Open to all staff of the Department, the service also offered in-service training and limited conflict conciliation work, which was not directly included in the study.

Possibly the most complex of the pluralist studies presented in this thesis, it included three distinct cycles of pluralist development (see Diagram 9.1 below) which are briefly described as are the tools and methods used. Reductionist and phenomenological perspectives were used to critique and contribute to the process throughout. The study covered 22 months, beginning soon after the service was established in September 1993:

1. Initially, a period of preliminary development considered the fullest possible range of methods to examine the counselling offered and the context in which the service operated.
2. A pilot of the evaluation protocol gave valuable quantitative and qualitative data. Both data sets aided the understanding of the alternative type and the development of all the sections of the evaluation as it was finally put into practice.
3. The third phase applied the products of the previous two and constituted the full study. Questionnaire based measures included severity of presenting and

secondary issues, ratings of counsellor characteristics, overall effectiveness, psychometric self esteem measures, qualitative data and changes in absenteeism. Questionnaires were issued after the first and final counselling sessions and at a follow up point towards the end of the study. A series of semi-structured interviews with a selection of clients and all the counsellors, provided further, more vivid insights into the experience of counselling offered and the levels and consequences of stress among the work force.

High levels of reported satisfaction were expected and obtained. All the other measures indicated significant improvements, whether they were psychometrically or phenomenologically derived. The data from each source and of each type confirmed the findings of the others as well as aiding their mutual interpretation. Changes in absenteeism that coincided with the counselling period suggested the possibility of very substantial revenue savings of an even greater magnitude than those reported in other studies.

In accordance with pluralist theory, an important aspect of the study was that it was partly reflexive throughout, seeking to evaluate itself as well as the service. While some counsellors did have reservations in the early stages of development, in retrospect there seemed to be general agreement among clients and counsellors that damaging effects from the evaluation had either been minimised or avoided. As far as could be ascertained, clients were supportive of the study although selection effects may have excluded those least well disposed towards it.

9.2 Introduction: background and context

Although only a small selection of the information regarding the background and context within which the service operated can be presented here, pluralist studies must pay close attention the contexts in which they operate. It is noted above that pluralist studies must review their predecessors regardless of whether they were themselves pluralist, 'seeking to incorporate those items that are of utility for the

new study' (see Chapter 6, p. 139). The following indicates the type of background information and previous research which was 'recontextualised' in the light of the concerns of the present study and contributed to its pluralist development.

Significant relevant reports on employee stress in the education sector at that time included Kyriacou, 1987; Cox *et al.*, 1988, 1989; Johnstone, 1989; Cabinet Office, 1987; Health and Safety Commission 1990 and the findings of a 'Working Party on Stress' which was commissioned by Lothian Region Education Dept. (L.R.E.D., 1993). More recently, Travers and Cooper (1996) have provided further information.

Stress among teachers was widely reported to have increased dramatically at that time. Travers and Cooper (1993) reported that

'when compared to the normative population and other comparable 'client-centred' occupational groups such as Doctors, dentists and nurses, teachers exhibit greater levels of stress manifestations (e.g. high mental ill-health)'

p. 215

Teachers in Scotland and Wales appeared to suffer most (Travers and Cooper, 1989).

The L.R.E.D. Working Party report confirmed an earlier mixed-method study (Roberts, 1991) which indicated that 'there are a majority of teachers who appreciate the need for a [confidential counselling] service ... [and] 30% identify they would make use of this service' (p. ii). Significant cost and other benefits were anticipated such as a 50% reduction in absenteeism (L.R.E.D., 1993, p. 4), a threefold saving over expenditure (*Ibid.*), improved quality of educational provisions (Roberts, *op. cit.*) and morale (*Ibid.*).

The aims of A.S.C.U. were to provide a combination of support, advice on professional issues and counselling for people 'who need support and assistance in

resolving their particular problems' (L.R.E.D., 1993, p. 5). It was also stated that 'after the pilot has been in operation for some time, an evaluation will take place with a view to establishing the Service on a permanent basis' (*Ibid.*)

Other activities the service was to undertake were identified as:

- 1) addressing personal and institutional stress factors (*Ibid.*) and,
- 2) compiling and disseminating information on stress (*Ibid.*).

These secondary activities were a constant, and relevant, backdrop to the counselling provision which this study placed in the foreground. Their importance is further commented on below (and see Appendices C.3 and D.1). That it was impossible to evaluate the counselling provision without reference to A.S.C.U.'s other activities not only bore testament to their value but also demonstrated the importance of allowing the nature and context of the service to be inductively reflected in the study as it progressed. In a more narrowly focused and more rigidly predetermined study, such as espoused by reductionist approaches for example, these variations in context may not have appeared at all, no matter how great their relevance. In other words, the pluralist combination of methods offered a degree of flexible contextual sensitivity.

A.S.C.U. was a highly innovatory project for its time and raised some controversy, exemplified by the debate in *The Times Educational Supplement Scotland* at its launch (MacColl, 1993; Munro, 1993a and b; Roberts, 1993). Despite the wealth of evidence in recent years on stress *levels* among teachers (e.g. Cox *et al*, 1988, 1989; Dunham, 1984; Johnstone, 1989; Kyriacou, 1987; Mearns and MacBeath, 1983) far less had been produced on interventions intended to improve matters prior to the study reported here.

9.3 Study outline

The following section outlines the methodology used in the study of A.S.C.U., beginning with its pluralist development. It discusses a number of topics of

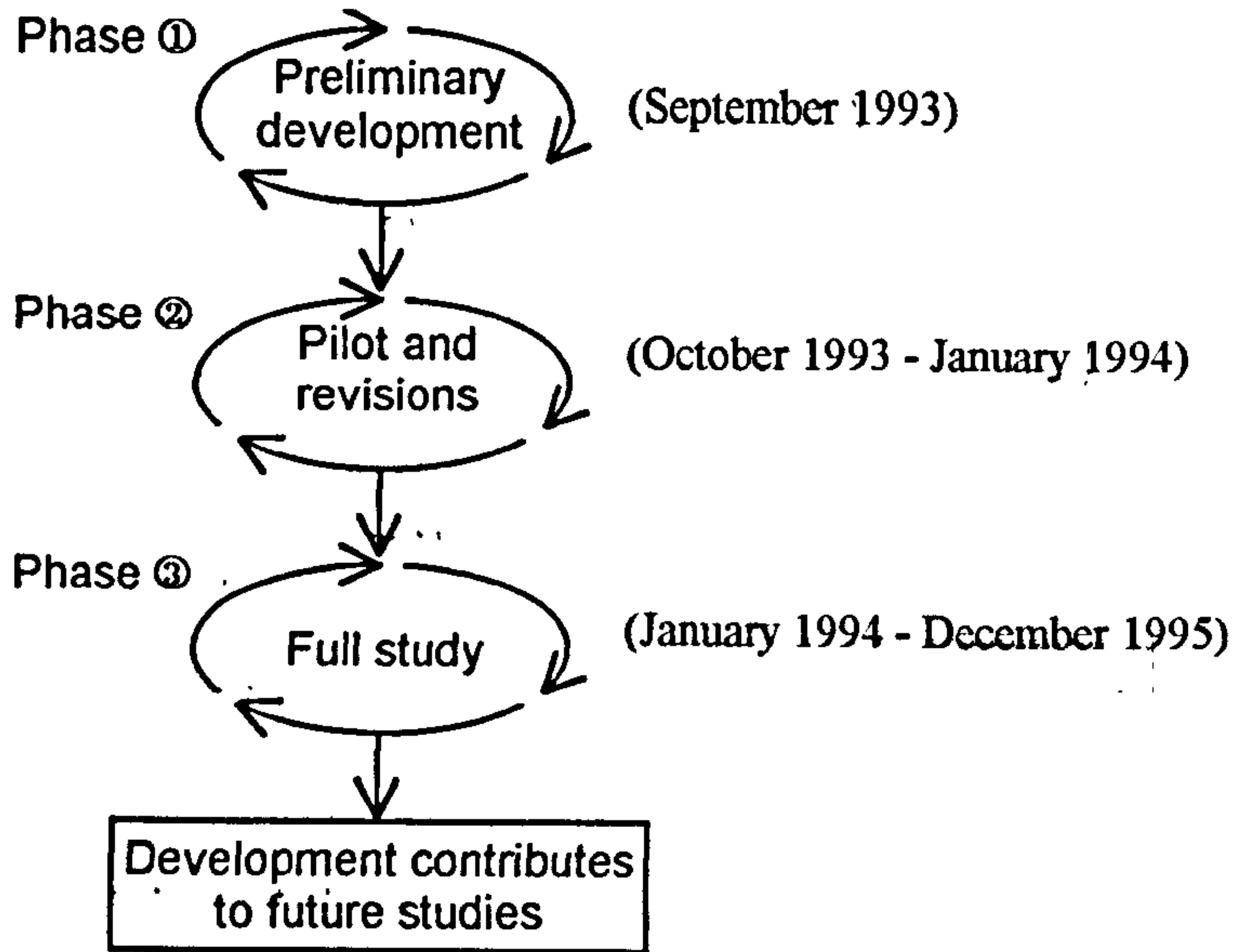


Diagram 9.1 - Three cycles of development in the A.S.C.U. study

importance as exemplars of issues that may need to be considered in applied pluralist research.

9.3.1 Development of evaluation

The iterative process of development incorporated three distinct cycles, shown in Diagram 9.1. Precise details of the developmental process are outlined in Parts 3 and 4 of this thesis. The first stage included a preliminary investigation and developed a tentative protocol. The second stage piloted this protocol and refined it and provided further information on the cultural context. The third stage constituted the application of the refined protocol in the full study. The first two are only briefly described here as space precludes more in depth analysis. The output of the third phase is described in more detail in the subsequent sections of this Chapter.

The intra-study process of mutual recontextualisation of methods, critique and re-recontextualisation described above began, on a localised scale, the process of repeating cyclical development (see Chapter 7.1). It was continued by extending these pluralist developmental cycles across the entire sequence of studies presented in this thesis, as suggested in Chapter 6.

Each phase shown in Diagram 9.1 constituted at least one cycle of the process outlined in Diagrams 7.1 and 7.2 (see Chapter 7.1). A more detailed diagram of the timetable of events in this study is provided in Appendix C.2.

The preliminary phase

The first phase of development comprised: a review of the relevant literature regarding employee assistance programmes, education staff experience of stress and its effects and counselling interventions (an indicative selection is noted above and in Goss and Mearns, 1997b); a preliminary investigation of the regional context and Departmental staff culture in which the service was then beginning to operate; identification of and consultation with the major stakeholder groups; preliminary

identification of possible methods to address their needs and interests; and the development of a tentative protocol to be piloted in the second phase. All these tasks were carried out in the light of the pluralist principles laid out in the previous sections and with a view to meeting stakeholder needs by using a combination of methods that could be sustained by their respective paradigms.

Exploration of the context drew on the Working Party report; conventional literature searching; consultations with the project co-ordinator, members of the counselling team and the original L.R.E.D. Working Party; Departmental management; the main unions; and other members of Education Department staff.

The main stakeholder groups were identified as L.R.E.D. who funded the service; the service management; its counsellors; clients; and other staff of the education department. Other stakeholder groups were also identified including education departments elsewhere; their staff; other E.A.P. providers; the wider counselling profession; and the general public.

Possible methods were, initially, assessed on the grounds of their utility (see Chapter 3.3.2), as established from both reductionist and phenomenological perspectives, their mutual compatibility and their likely impact on the service and its clients. Identification even of potential psychometric measures was based on both quantitative evidence regarding their validity and reliability, the availability of normative data and so forth, *and* on qualitative evidence from experts in the field and representatives of the stakeholder groups.

Consideration was given to many items later excluded. On the pluralist principle that nothing should be ruled out *a priori* (see Chapter 4.3) these were, initially, extremely diverse and the process began by being as inclusive as possible. For example, possibilities ultimately rejected through cycles of pluralist critique included recording clients' catecholamine secretion rates through blood samples; the subjective well-being and recordable views of their peers, families, managers and others; the use of

detailed diaries of clients' experiences in counselling, at work and elsewhere; and specific performance indicators such as assessment of changes in pupil attainment. All these were considered overly intrusive relative to their evaluative utility for the stakeholders in this study. Other contexts might have produced a different combination of methods to those used here, of course, as is apparent in the following two chapters.

To give a little more detail on one psychometric test that was considered in this early phase, the Occupational Stress Indicator (O.S.I.) (Cooper, *et al.*, 1988b), had excellent psychometric properties and initial apparent relevance. However, it was ultimately rejected. In qualitative interview, its author suggested that substantial re-factoring would be necessary. There was also some doubt over its usefulness in this context and its relevance to concepts of importance in assessing counselling outcomes. These are unlikely to focus exclusively on stress despite the origins of the service as an initiative to tackle precisely that problem. That is, qualitative evidence, in conjunction with review from reductionist perspectives led to the conclusion that, in reductionist terms, the measure would lack sensitivity to important variables. It was also considered unlikely that clients would be as concerned with their stress level as with the deleterious *effects* of stress in more personal terms. The O.S.I. was also rejected on the ethical ground that it was too long and complex to be sufficiently unobtrusive. In a pluralist study, stakeholder needs and interests must take precedence over concerns derived from research dogma (see Chapter 4.3). Consequently, despite the fact that the O.S.I. was undoubtedly an excellent tool from a research perspective, offering a wealth of interesting, detailed quantitative data which would build on a number of previous studies (e.g. Travers and Cooper, 1989, 1991, 1993; Cox *et al.*, 1988, 1989; Kyriacou, 1987), it could not be included. However, in order to at least partly answer the reductionist need to avoid over reliance on subjective data alternative objective indicators with greater direct relevance to stakeholder needs (e.g. absenteeism and self esteem) were included. The methods actually used are noted in Chapter 9.3.2 below.

Pilot and revisions

The counsellors and project co-ordinator were extensively consulted regarding the suitability of all the measures involved through a series of qualitative written responses and completed early versions of the questionnaires that provided both quantitative and qualitative data. They also participated in personal interviews and focus groups facilitated by the researcher during which both forms of information were subjected to scrutiny in accordance with the pattern of repeated critique on the basis of differing approaches noted above (see Chapter 6). Once the initial evaluation design had been sufficiently developed, the entire process was piloted in full with nine clients who had received counselling during the first few months of A.S.C.U.'s operation. This period was not included in the main evaluation, in order to allow adequate time for the development noted here and for A.S.C.U.'s routines and systems to become thoroughly established.

Comments below are taken from contemporaneous records of discussions with counsellor and clients; their influence is evident throughout the rest of the development of the protocol, its application, analysis and interpretation. As elsewhere, they are intended to be more an indicative record than an exhaustive account.

Some counsellors expressed concern regarding the possibility of evaluation procedures having an undesirable effect on vulnerable clients. They suggested that no client would be both able and willing to complete questionnaires prior to counselling on the grounds that people 'in crisis' would be unable to do so and that 'it will create at least some apprehension - varying in proportion to the level of ego strength of the client.'

There was concern that the wording used also might have a negative effect: 'Words like 'severe' might make the client even more anxious than they probably already are'. Exemplifying the interconnectedness of data sources, counsellors objected to the

word 'problem' to describe the reason why a client sought counselling because it was felt to carry a pejorative air and to suggest that counselling should be focused on highly specific areas of concern. On the other hand, clients reported that the counsellors' preferred term, 'issue', was insufficiently precise and encouraged vague responses. They spontaneously (and without prior knowledge) suggested the return of the original wording. The result was a not entirely satisfactory combination of both terms⁴⁵ (see p. 177 and note).

Confidentiality was also an issue: 'I believe that there is a lot of suspicion about record keeping, form filling, etc. due to other issues [e.g. staff appraisal] ... I would definitely want to make it very clear to clients that I was not, and the evaluation was not, connected to other forms of assessment.' It was clear that counsellors expected the culture of the Education Department to be particularly sensitised to the possibility of information given in good faith being used in ways the informant would not wish. This factor was referred to at a later stage in the pluralist developmental cycles, especially during the reflexive evaluation of the study. Steps were taken to ensure that consenting to participate could be as fully informed and unthreatening as possible for all concerned.

Even after the evaluation process had been adapted and agreed in response to counsellor comments, it was clear that the use of this kind of evaluation meant a 'change of style' for some of the counsellors and they expressed a variety of personal reservations from feeling 'reluctant, but willing' or 'diffident' to an acceptance 'that for research purposes it needs to be done.' It was also clear that counsellors felt the

⁴⁵ Further pluralist development might have resolved this difference (a more appropriate term than difference in this instance). By calling upon the post-modern model of constructive dialogue (see Chapter 3.4) that coined that term: the dispute might have been converted into what Lyotard (1988) refers to as a 'differend': a situation 'that cannot be equitably resolved for the lack of a rule of judgement applicable to both sides' (p. xi). Both clients and counsellors held seemingly valid points of view. This dispute could not be advanced by either side contradicting the other, implying that a mutually tolerable accommodation may be reached - as in this case.

need to retain the right not to mention the evaluation at all, if this seemed appropriate, in addition to the client's absolute right to choose not to take part. Both options were, in any case, available as requirements of ethical research practice (British Association for Counselling, 1995).

Although counsellors' reservations had changed dramatically by the end of the study, it was apparent that such initial feelings would have an effect on both the quality and quantity of results. This largely qualitative data had already had an impact on both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the research and could also be used to improve accurate interpretation of the results of whatever type. The interaction between data types, and between phases of the investigation was typical of the process of permanent critique and development throughout the study. Specific changes to the study's design and implementation evident at this stage included shortening the questionnaires and delaying administration of the initial client's questionnaire until after the first session despite the positivist research ideal being against both of these steps, especially in regard to the qualitative data.

Criticisms of the evaluation tended to be from a more humanistic or phenomenological, than reductionist, point of view, as most of the counsellors were trained in person-centred or other humanistic traditions. As a result, mutuality of interpretation (see Chapter 6) was, at this point, not entirely established. It was considered necessary to compensate for what might have been an unwarranted phenomenological bias that, from a pluralist perspective, could be expected to undermine the overall veracity and utility of the findings.

Consequently, input was required from a more objective perspective. This led to consultations, albeit of a phenomenological nature, with a number of expert researchers in the field. These included the originator of the main questionnaires used as a basis for the forms developed for use here (Davis, 1992). Other experienced researchers were also selected for their backgrounds in psychometric, quantitative or statistically oriented methodologies. These consultations led to further alterations to

the questionnaires, particularly with regard to the measurement of self esteem via established psychometric testing methods and minor adjustments to the wording of Likert scale anchors to refine construct validity.

The Departmental management and relevant Unions were then consulted once more to ensure that the protocol was acceptable and likely to reflect their needs as representatives of major stakeholder groups.

Clients' responses to the evaluation process, as it was piloted, were markedly more positive than the counsellors' views: they had far fewer reservations. Inevitably, the stark contrast noted will have been partly because clients selected for the pilot stage had already indicated their willingness to meet with the researcher, probably excluding those more vulnerable clients the counsellors had been most concerned to protect. In addition to this, the process had already undergone extensive modification following preliminary discussions with the counsellors, service providers and others.

Nonetheless, all clients, without exception, indicated that they would have been willing to complete brief questionnaires either before or at the start of their first session with the counsellor. In general, they felt that they had had a clear enough idea of why they had approached the service for the content and process of the sessions not to have been affected; this possibility had been a particular anxiety expressed by the counsellors.

The main reservation among clients was that their post-counselling questionnaire was rather long, which might have put one respondent off completing it at all, and others suspected that, while they would be willing to spend the time required for the task, others might not. The questionnaire was subsequently further reduced in length in the light of these qualitative comments. However, continuing the mutual critique between approaches, it was found that the needs of adequately rigorous quantitative testing meant that several elements had to remain, despite the loss of sensitivity to respondents' preferences implied. As a result, the response rate was, predictably,

lower than for the other forms (see table 9.1). Nonetheless, responses were sufficiently representative for valuable data and reasonably secure interpretations to be derived from them. That is, the needs of each type of data had to be taken into account until a position could be found in which neither was *fatally* flawed. The result was intended to be that neither would be so compromised that the product would not be useful in its own terms, in accordance with the pluralist principles discussed above (see Chapter 4.3).

It was clear from the interviews with clients during the pilot phase that one of their primary reasons for wishing to take part in the evaluation was to be able to ‘give something back’ for the help they had received, e.g.: ‘I wanted to be able to tell someone how good it had been, what [the counsellor] had done for me - and other people at the school.’ It was very apparent, however, in this very small sample of clients, that the opposite of this powerful selection effect was virtually negligible. That is, clients did not put themselves forward for interviews in order to have the opportunity to make negative comments. It was reasonable to assume, therefore, that the resulting positive bias may also have operated, albeit to a lesser degree, in all the results that follow.

To minimise this, counsellors were asked to stress the importance of honest responses to clients and that replies would be helpful for the service in aiding its development by providing accurate feedback on their experience, as opposed to ensuring its survival by providing evidence of ‘success’ or ‘good value for money’. Nonetheless, it was expected that some of the same effect would remain and so had to be taken into account in interpreting all the data that follows.

The information given by clients during these pilot interviews informed both the design and interpretation of all the subsequent stages of the evaluation. The combination of numeric data from their completed questionnaires and semi-structured interviews confirmed the importance of the qualitative stage of evaluation in allowing accurate interpretation of both. The qualitative and quantitative information also later

informed the researcher's use of semi-structured interviews at stage six noted below. It is worth noting again that this kind of continual interpretation and iterative heuristic development from multiple types and sources of data was typical of the pluralist approach.

Other information yielded by the pilot interviews with clients included the importance of the work carried out by A.S.C.U. staff, particularly the co-ordinator, with groups of staff in schools. This emphasised the importance of the context within which the counselling was provided. Several interviewees confirmed that this work not only introduced them to A.S.C.U. and its personnel, but it also helped to resolve significant issues in the workplace which would otherwise have been likely to lead them to need personal counselling. It was thus reasonable to suppose at the outset that such work actually reduced the amount of counselling required by easing the causes of stress and difficulties among staff, as well as stress related symptoms.

9.3.2 Outline of methodology for the main study

As in the preceding section, slightly more detail is provided than would be required only to discuss pluralism. However, the information is useful in demonstrating the breadth and diversity of items that can be expected in pluralist studies (see Chapters 4.2 and 4.3).

Ideally, according to pluralism, the evaluation process should consist of as many measures, utilising as many different forms of data and data collection, based on as wide a range of epistemologies as is both possible and usefully applicable in order to produce a thorough basis for evaluative decisions. In practice, of course, the demands of the context, the resources available, stakeholder needs and preferences and even the experience, knowledge, aptitudes and cultural breadth of the researcher(s), may prohibit some otherwise desirable aspects of evaluation as we have seen. However, the continual interaction of psychometrically valid questionnaires with qualitative interviews and objective criteria were expected to produce more powerful evidence of

a project's success, or otherwise, than the application of any single type of inquiry, or even their use in parallel but separate lines of investigation.

The main bulk of the data in this study was generated by questionnaires (examples are provided in Appendix A) and a series of in depth semi-structured interviews with clients and counsellors. A flow diagram of the various stages as applied in this evaluation for A.S.C.U. is given in Diagram 9.2, after which they are described in more detail.

The questionnaires were originally based on a system designed specifically for evaluating counselling by Davis and Rowland of the British Association for Counselling (B.A.C.) Research and Evaluation Subcommittee (Davis, 1992). However, they were extensively adapted and reduced in length in order to take account of the context within which A.S.C.U. operated, the wishes of the counsellors and clients expressed during the pilot phase and the need to maximise the evaluative utility of the data (see Chapters 3.3.2 and 8.3.1). Continuing the pluralist commitment to reflexive self-evaluation (see Chapters 4.4 and 6) begun in the two earlier phases of development, the changes also reflected the need to test that utility.

The series of interviews was carried out in a semi-structured style, common to qualitative investigations of counselling. A prepared schedule (see Appendix A) served as a guide to the questions that were to be asked. A small number of areas were identified to be covered in all interviews and secondary follow-up questions were prepared which might or might not be asked. The topics were derived from information provided in the pilot phase and from those questionnaires from the main study available at the time of writing. However, it was anticipated that the interviews would be equally concerned to follow the concerns, interests and needs of the respondents. The interviews are discussed further under stages six (p. 184) and eight (p. 188) below, while a more complete description of the methods applied can be found in several text books on the subject (e.g. McLeod, 1994b; Patton, 1980).

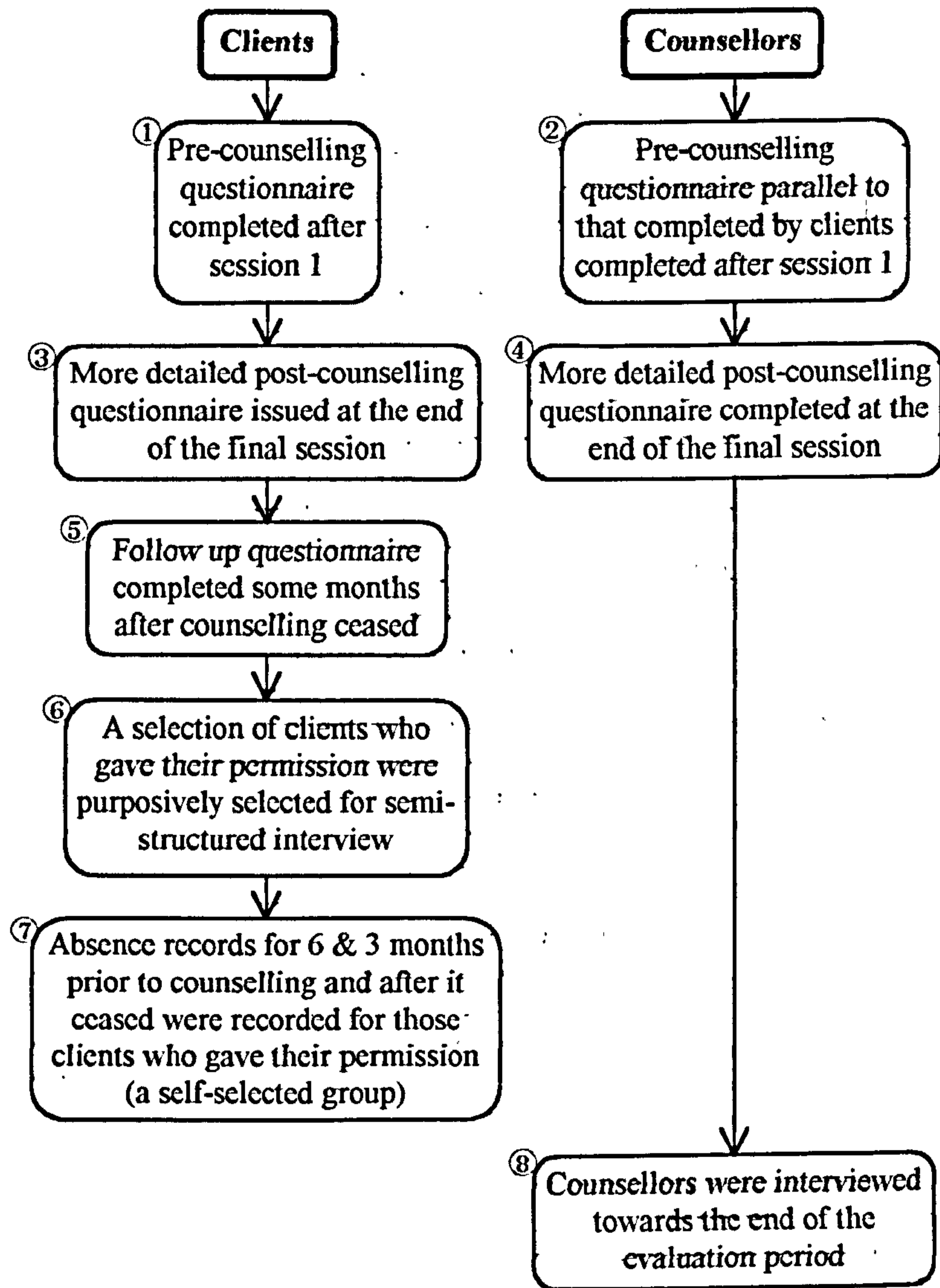


Diagram 9.2 - Outline of A.S.C.U. evaluation.

The study comprised eight pluralistically developed stages, thus:

Stage One: Clients' initial questionnaire

In the first stage, clients completed a questionnaire issued by the counsellor at the end of their first session. This was a somewhat less satisfactory alternative to completing the form prior to their first session, which was felt by the counsellors during the pilot phase to be overly intrusive and to risk influencing client expectations of counselling to the extent that some might not attend at all. A substitute was the instruction to clients that they should 'think back to before [their] first session ... and, as far as [they] can, try to answer the questions as [they] felt then.' It must be accepted, however, that there was a significant risk of all the responses in these questionnaires having been affected by contact with the counsellor and changes in perception and insight caused by the beginning of the counselling process. Of course, this breached the research ideal in reductionist-experimental terms but was indicative of the very proper ethical concern shown by all those involved in the project that the needs of clients were put first (B.A.C., 1995): the needs of one major stakeholder group thus, once again, took precedence over research ideals.

Items in this questionnaire included free response descriptions of both presenting and secondary 'issue[s] (or problem[s])'⁴⁶ for which help was sought. Each of these was followed by anchored 'Likert' scales on which clients were asked to indicate the degree of 'distress' and 'difficulty' caused and how long each problem had been a concern. Qualitative problem descriptions were deliberately selected in preference to the reductionist style of using predetermined problem categories on the grounds that they were likely to be more sensitive to the varying needs of clients and counsellors while retaining a sound epistemological and methodological foundation. The Likert scales offered the possibility of combining that descriptive data with clearly

⁴⁶ This slightly clumsy phraseology was a direct result of the consultations with counsellors and clients during the pilot phase (see above).

quantifiable indications of their severity for quantitative comparison with equivalent questions asked at later stages.

Phenomenological and reductionist critique of the decision to issue this questionnaire after the first session led to the conclusion that the (reductionistically recorded) degree to which clients expected to be helped was likely to be especially effected. One result of this recontextualising of the protocol from one paradigm to another was that a question about the degree to which clients were hopeful of being helped by the counselling was revised. Instead, two questions attempted to explore both the expectation of help and the degree to which the first session had indeed altered the respondent's views by asking for an indication of the degree to which they *had* been hopeful of being helped before the session and how hopeful they were at the time of responding.

A highly reductionist aspect of the study, derived in part from phenomenological data in conjunction with reductionist critique in the pilot phase (see p. 169 and p. 173 in this chapter) was the use of the Rosenberg Self esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) in all the client questionnaires. Self esteem was chosen because of its accessibility, ease of use, good construct validity and relevance to many of the issues in which counselling may be involved (Coopersmith, 1981).

However, from a phenomenological perspective, the Rosenberg Self esteem Scale was considered unlikely to represent fully the complex and unpredictable changes in self concept expected to be associated with counselling. It did, however, have the advantages of being a widely used, well established and rigorously developed test in reductionist psychometric terms (Wylie, 1989; Shelvin *et al*, 1995 and see Chapter 12) which would provide a benchmark for the relatively new measure of Self / Ideal-Self Discrepancy⁴⁷ (S/I-SD) used alongside it in stages three and five. Although lengthy and undoubtedly more complex for respondents to complete, the S/I-SD had

⁴⁷ At the time of writing, the measure is still undergoing some further development and during the

been developed specifically for evaluating counselling (Davis, 1992) and was sufficiently sophisticated to allow more detailed analysis in the event of equivocal results. Unlike the Rosenberg scale, length and complexity precluded its inclusion in the questionnaires at the start of counselling. The two measures were used in a pluralist fashion to support each other by compensating for the deficiencies of each.

In the interests of brevity, only one other question was asked, giving an opportunity for further qualitative comments to be given if the respondent wished.

Counsellors were asked not to issue this form if no further sessions were arranged. Clients for whom this was the case received only the more detailed post-counselling questionnaires.

Stage Two: Counsellors' initial questionnaire

Counsellors also completed an equivalent questionnaire for each client after the first session. This maximised the quantity of baseline data available at the start of counselling to counter the selection effects noted in the pilot phase. It also gave the opportunity to triangulate counsellor and client responses.

Measures included similar phenomenologically derived qualitative questions to those used in stage one, regarding presenting and secondary issues and quantitatively oriented Likert scale ratings for distress and difficulty. A single further question regarding the degree of hopefulness that the counsellor would be of help provided a quantified estimation of prognosis.

Stage Three: Clients' end of counselling questionnaire

In the third stage, clients completed a more extensive questionnaire after their last session with the counsellor (see Appendix A.1). Basic demographic details were

evaluation reported in this chapter even the baseline data available in Chapter 12 was not available.

recorded⁴⁸. Clients were asked to participate in the later stages of the evaluation regarding absenteeism, which required clients to waive anonymity, and involving the follow up questionnaires and / or interviews, both of which also required them to provide a contact address.

The questionnaire also indicated the clients' views of the counselling by several methods, as follows.

Clients were asked to rate their counsellor on a continuum between diametrically opposed poles such as 'warm' versus 'cold' and 'respectful' versus 'disrespectful'. Positive and negative poles were randomly reversed. The constructs used were commonly considered important in counselling, although it was acknowledged that the value placed on each was likely to vary between clients, counsellors and the models of counselling used. The question could probably have been improved with further development. A reductionist strategy might have been to add a second rating scale for each construct dyad similar to 'how important was this to you?' Results could then have been interpreted by multiplying the degree of importance by the degree to which the response was biased towards the negative or positive poles. However, this was considered prohibitively complex. A more phenomenological alternative with equivalent utility might have been for respondents to define the construct pairs themselves but this would also have been burdensome and, from a reductionist stance, might be criticised for lacking generalisability. Ultimately, pluralist development might have been capable of finding a way of meeting the demands of both sides but this was not achieved here. Viewed in isolation, it was expected that this grid would have been insufficient to evaluate the counselling as it tended to select only a few predetermined characteristics. In this study, however, its

⁴⁸ This was the earliest opportunity to collect such details given the importance of keeping the first questionnaire to clients as brief as possible and of not alarming any clients who might assume that even such basic information could be used to identify them, despite assurances to the contrary in the accompanying literature. The counselling team felt such issues to be less important at the end of counselling, as the degree of harm that could be done to that delicate process was minimised.

results contributed to the pluralist combination of many measures, which could partially compensate for its shortcomings.

A series of inter-related satisfaction questions was used, to improve on the commonplace finding of positive satisfaction from all major stakeholders from simple satisfaction surveys (Berger, 1983; Corney and Jenkins, 1993 and see Chapter 8.2.3).

Clients were also asked if there had been any issues they had been unable to discuss with their counsellor, who had decided that the counselling should finish and the reason for finishing.

Qualitative questions then looked at particularly useful or unhelpful aspects of the counselling and asked for suggestions for improvements as well as giving a less directed opportunity for further comments.

Overall helpfulness of the counselling, expected to be an indicator of perceived value as opposed to a measure of actual change, was recorded by use of an anchored Likert scale. Some studies have considered such general measures to be the primary indicators of success. Even following a complex multi-method study, Sloboda *et al.* suggest that despite the difficulties of maintaining adequate statistical validity in analysis,

'the most important rating [of an employee counselling service] was probably the overall rating of the service on a six point scale. ...with 92 per cent of clients rating the service as good or very good.

Sloboda. (1993) p. 11.

In accordance with the pluralist approach, however, results from this general quantitative question were considered only as part of the mass of more specific data of both types.

The next question consisted of fifteen items and asked clients to indicate whether counselling had helped them in a number of predetermined ways. These quantifiable responses were interpreted only in the light of the more openly framed process oriented questions, however, and the data generated suffered from being restricted to those kinds of help expected to be relevant in advance.

A series of questions then repeated the descriptions and Likert scales regarding presenting and secondary issues and the Rosenberg Self esteem Scale, noted under stage one. These were repeated to allow objective comparison with the earlier questionnaires, indicating the degree of change over the period of counselling.

Three other questions measured change in the discrepancy between client self perceptions pre- and post-counselling and their 'ideal self' on a series of 21, 7 point continua between diametrically opposed and randomised poles. Further details of this measure (the S/I-SD measure referred to above) are provided in Chapter 12.

Retrospective estimation of self perception prior to counselling was expected to be somewhat unreliable and has since been found to have a somewhat exaggerating effect on the discrepancy size (Bennett and Goss, 1996; Goss, 1997) in the order of 23% - this finding being the result of reductionist critique of a reductionistically derived measure (see Chapters 3.4.2 and 4.4).

In a few instances, this questionnaire was not issued to clients by the counsellor at the end of the last session - generally out of ethical concern for clients' welfare, such as those who were too distressed or were unwilling to participate in the research. Clients who did not turn up for a number of sessions, or whose counselling contract ended in an otherwise unplanned or disrupted manner, were sent this form by post at the point when the counsellor considered the contract to be formally closed.

Stage Four: Counsellors' end of counselling questionnaire

The fourth stage was completed concurrently with the third: counsellors also completed a questionnaire after the final session with each client. This related pluralistically to all three previous stages and provided the counsellors' views of the counselling process as well as allowing objectified estimation of differences in reported scores.

Measures comprised an overall helpfulness rating and items regarding ways in which counselling might have been of help equivalent to those asked to clients in stage three. Similar presenting and secondary problem descriptions and rating scales were also included. The length of time the client had to wait before counselling started, the number of sessions received, the average length of sessions and whether there appeared to have been issues the client had been unable to discuss were recorded.

Qualitative questions then asked for suggested improvements to the counselling and provided a final opportunity for further comment.

A grid equivalent to that used for clients in describing their current self (as used in estimation of clients' Self / Ideal-Self Discrepancy) was also included to maximise the proportion of clients regarding whom at least some data of this type was available. This question was included primarily as a safeguard against unusably low response rates from clients after counselling although it was recognised that counsellors' answers on behalf of their clients would probably be a poor substitute for clients' own responses.

Stage Five: Clients' follow-up questionnaire

A fifth stage was a final set of questionnaires (similar to stage 3) for clients to complete some months after their last counselling session. This follow up stage facilitated estimation of possible positive bias, expected to be strongest immediately after the counselling relationship ended. Issues such as the power imbalance between

counsellor and client, unresolved transference, feelings of loss regarding the therapeutic relationship and any sense of obligation clients may have felt towards their counsellor, would have had an opportunity to lessen. Consequently, it was expected that responses to these questionnaires could provide an indication of how sustained any change or other effect noted during the counselling period may have been.

The only mechanism available for issuing these forms was for the researcher to post them directly to clients. Consequently, clients had to divulge their name and address if they were to join this stage of the evaluation, destroying their hitherto carefully preserved anonymity. It had been expected, especially by the counsellors, that very few people would put themselves forward. Given the nature of the issues which brought them to counselling (see below), it was both surprising and gratifying that as many as 73% of clients who returned the end-of-counselling questionnaire were willing to do so, and that many of them offered to participate in the next stage of face to face interviews as well.

These follow up forms were all issued simultaneously towards the end of the evaluation period. This produced the widest possible range of elapsed times since the counselling had ended in order to improve the utility of the data provided by what was expected to be a small sample. The sustainability, or longevity, of such change could thus be more clearly estimated via a case by case analysis than by a standardised follow up period for each client.

Stage Six: Client interviews

The sixth stage provided the bulk of the qualitative information as selected clients who were willing to do so met with the independent researcher several months after counselling had ended. These interviews were tape recorded and transcribed⁴⁹ and

⁴⁹ A full description of the notation used is provided in appendix A.1. The aim was to render the quoted speech in a form which appears to the eye as close as possible to the way it sounds to the ear

provided extremely valuable detailed information: the depth required to understand fully the broader but less detailed view provided by the questionnaire results (see Diagrams 4.5 and 4.6, Chapter 5.2).

Participants for this part of the study were selected in two distinct phases. Firstly, clients were invited to indicate their willingness to participate in in-depth interviews at stage 3. 73% of clients who responded to stage 3 offered to take part in the interviews, equal to the proportion willing to waive anonymity in order to enter stage 5. Secondly, for the sake of increased rigour, of the resulting pool of 61 potential interviewees, 22 were then purposively selected in such a way as to give equal, rather than proportional, weighting to those who had given either negative or equivocal responses in the questionnaires. This was intended to reduce the influence of the bias noted in the pilot interviews. Two secondary criteria for selecting clients were used:

a) that clients of each counsellor should be represented,

and

b) that this sample of clients should be as representative of the whole population as possible⁵⁰.

Although, of course, 22 clients could not represent A.S.C.U.'s whole client population, most categories of client were present. The small numbers render statistical analysis unreliable, but it is worth noting that none of the variables examined as part of the pluralist analysis of data, including time elapsed since counselling finished, appeared to make *any* significant difference to either the types of responses given or the strength of feeling expressed on any issue. The views expressed were, of course, highly idiographic.

(Jefferson, 1978). Some quotes have been slightly edited to improve their readability.

⁵⁰ Factors used were the number of sessions received; the length of time since counselling ended; age; employment setting (primary, secondary, etc.); grade of post; length of service.

The use of a prepared schedule notwithstanding, the interviews were not strictly governed either by pre-set questions or by the researcher's intentions in the semi-structured approach common in qualitative research (e.g. Patton, 1982, 1987; McLeod, 1994b; Sanders and Liptrot, 1994).

Mearns and McLeod (1984) outline a person-centred approach to research and as the researcher in this study was also a counsellor trained in the person-centred approach, empathic understanding and warm acceptance of the individual were important attributes of the interview style used here. Elliott (1988) suggests that such responses can result in the researcher leading the interviewee. However, his injunctions that interviewers should keep activity to a minimum (Elliott, 1984 and 1986) were only followed insofar as was compatible with the aims of entering as fully as possible into the clients' experiencing. It was also considered important to limit the possibility of harm coming to clients by raising painful issues, and the relationship between researcher and respondent was therefore a tool for ethical care taking of clients, as emphasised by McLeod (1994b) and Hart and Crawford-Wright (1999). Clients' needs in discussing the often painful and not always resolved issues involved in counselling were paramount.

Some methods to minimise researcher bias were not applicable or, as in the case of using more than one data analyst (Riley, 1990), were precluded by the requirement for strict confidentiality to be maintained. It is acknowledged, however, that even from a phenomenological point of view the quality of the findings could have been improved (Stiles, 1993). However, problems such as researcher bias or the possibility of the researcher leading the interviewee were resolved primarily by pluralistic comparison with both reductionistically and phenomenologically derived data regarding each interviewee provided in the preceding sections. That is, each stage and type of data continued to be involved in the on-going process of mutual critique and development. No significant discrepancies between responses in interview and other data were found.

All the interviews began with similar information being given to clients regarding the purpose of the interview, its confidentiality and what was expected of them. No clients objected to being tape recorded, given equivalent confidentiality to that of the counselling setting, and all strongly expressed their willingness to take part. Each interview ended with thanks for taking part and an invitation to add to what had already been said either then or by post and an offer of further support if appropriate.

Stage Seven: Investigation of cost-related effects

Stage seven completed the triangulation of data types. Objective criteria to measure change will inevitably depend on the aims of the funding bodies and other stakeholders and the availability of data. Criteria used elsewhere have included absenteeism, staff turnover (Cooper, *et al.*, 1990), psychoactive drug prescription or frequency of attendance at G.P. surgeries (Corney, 1990; Corney and Jenkins, 1993; Fletcher *et al.*, 1995; Sibbald, *et al.*, 1996). From a phenomenological perspective, most objective criteria can be criticised on the ground that counselling can rarely be directed solely towards change in these cost-related factors. While funding bodies may seek, and get, a reduction in costs elsewhere in their activities, it is possible to argue that this can be merely a desirable side effect of counselling as far as clients and counsellors are concerned. Pluralism therefore suggests that such objective, reductionist criteria should not be used alone, but that neither should they be excluded if specific objectives are intended by one or more major stakeholder in the project such as, in this instance, the employer - so long as they are compatible with the needs and concerns of the other interested groups, such as clients and counsellors.

In this case, the most appropriate objective criteria were considered to be changes in absenteeism and quality of work. The former was collected from the records of the personnel office of the Education Department for all clients who gave their permission.

The latter criterion, however, could only be investigated with reference to the client's workplace. Attendance at work while performing at a very low level, sometimes referred to as 'presenteeism' (e.g. Roberts, 1991; Goss and Roberts, 1995), could only then be investigated. However, the methods available (see above) would have seriously jeopardised client anonymity, such as recording pupil attainment or asking colleagues to provide estimations of change (e.g. Roberts, 1996), or would have involved clients in a great deal more work for the sake of the evaluation, such as asking clients to maintain diaries of work effectiveness.

Nonetheless, work performance was confirmed to be significantly affected by counselling by subjective data from clients interviewed during the evaluation pilot - an example of allowing interpretation of data across phases of studies, and across inquiry types. Furthermore, the importance of 'presenteeism' was stressed further by the suggestion from the same source that absenteeism alone might not be the best indicator of any impact counselling might have on work because respondents, and teachers in general, tried to attend work even under the most difficult circumstances. In order to compensate for the absence of more rigorous methods to investigate this factor, clients were specifically asked about effects on work performance during the interviews at stage six - explicitly a use of phenomenological methods to support reductionist investigation at those points when it is inadequate to the task in hand.

Stage Eight: Counsellors' interviews

All seven counsellors were also interviewed about their experiences of counselling with A.S.C.U. The interviews were carried out in the same semi-structured style as that used with clients under a separate interview schedule (see Appendix A.1).

The information generated could not be correlated with the client interviews described at stage six, of course, except in the most general terms, as the counsellors could not disclose information about specific confidential relationships. However, data were expected on counsellors' professional opinions of the project, details of their

experience of the effectiveness of their counselling and other common themes they had noticed.

9.4 Thematic presentation of results

The following section presents only a selection of the main results. Exhaustive processing of the results was not the aim of the study nor is it necessary to the main thrust of this thesis to present all the data that was generated. To emphasise the exploration of pluralism in this study the findings are organised into various themes. The evidence of various types on each topic is thus presented together, demonstrating the ways in which the different approaches interacted while contributing to the overall findings, in accordance with pluralist theory. Indeed, this is representative of the way in which the data were originally treated with all eight data collection stages noted above being related directly to all the others as and where appropriate. This interconnectedness of the different elements is typical of pluralist studies as noted in Part 4.

After briefly noting some preliminary statistics regarding the study the themes considered are: i) take up rates, the degree to which the service was seen to be accessible and the nature of the issues presented; ii) outcomes associated with counselling; iii) the processes and characteristics of the counselling, limitations and other issues; and iv) reflexive evaluation of the evaluation itself. As noted above, the emphasis throughout is on illustrating the kinds of products a pluralist study can yield and discussing its application. However, greater detail, especially regarding topics such as the characteristics of the counselling and counsellors, is provided in Appendices B.1, C.3 and D.1.

Note on questionnaire labelling and response rates

The initial client questionnaire is referred to below as ‘Form 1’, and the questions were simply numbered, while the other questionnaires were: ‘Form A’, the

counsellors initial questionnaire; 'Form B', the counsellors end of counselling questionnaire; 'Form C', the clients end of counselling questionnaire; 'Form D' the clients follow up questionnaire. The questions were labelled 'A1', 'A2', etc..

Over the 22 months of data collection, information on 241 clients was recorded, and although feedback to individual counsellors was made available on request, all the results that follow refer to the project as a whole to preserve anonymity.

Survey research suggests that postal returns on sensitive issues can be as low as 30% while still providing statistically useful results (Nunnally, 1978; DeVellis, 1991). The response rates in this study, as shown in Table 9.1, must be considered satisfactory.

<i>Table 9.1 - Response rates in the A.S.C.U. study</i>	<u>Response rate</u>	
	<u>N.</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Stage</u>		
Stage 1: Clients' pre-counselling questionnaire (Form 1)	237	65
Stage 2: Counsellors' pre-counselling questionnaire (Form A)	238	93
Stage 3: Clients' post-counselling questionnaire (Form B)	235	41
Stage 4: Counsellors' post-counselling questionnaire (Form C)	227	85
Stage 5: Clients' follow up questionnaire (Form D) issued to those who waived anonymity by providing an address at stage 4	64	61

However, the diminishing numbers of returns meant that powerful selection effects may have applied to all the evidence that follows. Indeed, the two subsequent studies suffered from the same problem to varying degrees. This had its biggest impact on the reductionist evidence, of course, and while the phenomenological data could also have been altered if, for example, clients with negative experiences had consistently failed

to return their post-counselling questionnaires, the illuminative value of the descriptive evidence was less vulnerable to this kind of problem. Unlike the numerical data, its purpose was to show what *could* happen in counselling, not what *tends* to happen and this could still be achieved albeit with slightly diminished evaluative utility. The possibility of selection effects was specifically targeted during the later interviews with clients. That this could be done exemplifies not only the value of the pluralist continual reflexive critique within a study *while it is in progress*, it also shows how phenomenological and reductionist forms of enquiry can interact to improve the quality of both.

9.4.1 Take up rates, service accessibility, image, presenting issues and initial severity

Data were gathered on take up rates, service accessibility, image and the nature of issues presented. Although the take up rate of 2.7% fell far short of the 30% predicted by Roberts (1991) there were only insignificant discrepancies between the client group and the target population.

Consistently high Likert scale scores were supported by qualitative data to give a clear indication that clients and counsellors expected a great deal of the service, suggesting that it was held in high esteem among its prospective clients.

What none of the quantitative data regarding the composition of the client group could reveal, however, was qualitatively recorded comment on the physical accessibility of the Unit's offices. One client reported in interview that

'The only criticism of the whole thing I've got is the lousy premises (laugh) - on the top floor ... I mean, if there's people with mobility problems, forget it'

Direct reductionistic investigation of the attitudes of staff who did not approach the service was precluded by the resources required for such a large scale survey and the

difficulties of identifying a suitably matched sample. However, it was possible to pluralistically utilise data from the interviews with clients. The final picture was somewhat more complex than that suggested by the data above. The interaction between types and sources of information meant that each data type could augment interpretation of the other and extend our understanding beyond what either could offer alone (see Diagram 4.5 and Chapter 4.2). Views were revealed as varying from enthusiastic confidence that this was a good service and simply ‘knowing it was there was actually quite - - reassuring.’, to the more diffident (and common) position that it was all very well, but probably only useful for *other* people.

Data regarding presenting and secondary issues varied a great deal in type and content demonstrating a strength of pluralism when applied to the most diverse and idiographic of arenas: the personal problems of a large group of individuals. Qualitative descriptions of problems were recorded in each questionnaire alongside quantitative Likert scale ratings on severity.

Pluralism does not assume that the melding of data types is always possible or desirable. In the case of the free response problem descriptions and the Likert ratings of severity, the epistemologies behind phenomenological and reductionist inquiry could not entirely accommodate each other without one or both becoming unacceptably flawed. It was not possible to assume that the constructs used by respondents in describing their problems were consistently recorded, even when similar terms were used. Clients initially presenting because of a bereavement, for example, may have discovered during counselling that they had much wider issues to tackle concerning other kinds of loss and change in general. It is even harder to be sure that precisely consistent concepts are indicated by many other terms, such as ‘stress’, ‘depression’ or ‘work problems’. It was necessary to allow for the ‘paralogical’ shifts in the constructs indicated even when the same phrases were used by the same person⁵¹. If problem descriptions post-counselling signified something

⁵¹ The ability to cope with such paralogies (see Chapter 3.1), even when they effect quantitative rating

other than those recorded at the start, it would be nonsensical to attempt comparisons between *quantities* of those divergent constructs.

Consequently, it was assumed that the quantitative severity ratings referred to the non-specific constructs of 'major issue' and 'secondary issue', to allow the Likert scale based questions to retain the consistency necessary to allow valid comparisons and statistical treatment. Only with this deliberate separation of the data analysis stages in mind could the quantitatively recorded change in ratings given to the diverse problem descriptions be treated as collated responses while retaining sound construct validity. The pluralist methodology was sufficiently flexible, however, to allow the simultaneous development of both types of question, and their use in conjunction with each other. The temporary resort to separating the approaches, representing only a *brief* lapse into monism⁵², is itself pluralist: we cannot exclude monistic study, for such things are the very building blocks of pluralism (see Chapter 4.3). Pluralism was further maintained by the return to mutual hermeneutic critique at the earliest opportunity. By contrast, a relativist approach would have had no problem in treating the data types as identical, of course, but would then lose any force that could be derived from maintaining strong construct validity in quantitative analysis, and thus interpretation, of the numeric data.

Major themes among the issues presented did tend to emerge, however, and were roughly consistent throughout the evaluation period (for example, see table 9.2). Phenomenological critique of the quantitative treatment of these free responses was carried out as part of the perpetual heuristic and reflexive focus required to maintain the pluralist process. It was recognised that such reduction could not fully do justice to the vivid, frequently highly personal and disturbing nature of some of the issues disclosed. As far as possible, this loss of detail was recovered by considering the original responses in full when developing the interpretation of results and the

scales, is typical of the pluralist approach.

⁵² Or, more accurately, dualism.

conclusions drawn. Few of these vivid and evocative responses can be reproduced here as they tended to be highly identifiable. However, the combination of data types in the following discussion demonstrated that not only did both have insights to offer on their own, it was their interpretation as part of a pluralistic whole that offered the fullest possible understanding (see Chapter 4.2).

Table 9.2 - Categorisation of free response descriptions of presenting issues.

Problem categories and tallies for presenting issues												
	Form 1		Form A		Form B		Form C		Form D		Totals	
	Question 5	Question A4	Question B8	Question C25	Question D16							
	<i>n.</i> = 137		230		122		57		34		580	
	<i>n.</i>	%	<i>n.</i>	%	<i>n.</i>	%	<i>n.</i>	%	<i>n.</i>	%	<i>n.</i>	%
Clearly work related issues	75	54.74	10	46.52	67	54.92	14	24.56	16	47.06	27	48.1
Probably work related	9	6.57	11	4.78	11	9.02	2	3.51	2	5.88	35	6.03
Total of above	85	62.04	11	51.3	78	63.93	16	28.07	18	52.94	31	54.31
Other Categories												
Stress	52	37.96	39	16.96	23	18.85	7	12.28	11	32.35	13	22.76
Relationships outwith work	29	21.17	46	20	27	22.13	10	17.54	7	20.59	11	20.52
Low self esteem	4	2.92	22	9.57	20	16.39	3	5.26	2	5.88	51	8.79
Depression	9	6.57	8	3.48	12	9.84	3	5.26	1	2.94	34	5.86
Bereavement / loss	3	2.19	10	4.35	6	4.92	4	7.02	2	5.88	25	4.31
Illness - Self	4	2.92	8	3.48	4	3.28	1	1.75	0	0	17	2.93
Illness - Other	4	2.92	4	1.74	1	0.82	2	3.51	1	2.94	12	2.07
Total illness	8	5.84	12	5.22	5	4.1	3	5.26	1	2.94	29	5
Alcohol / Addiction	2	1.46	6	2.61	4	3.28	1	1.75	0	0	13	2.24
Problems not specified above.	3	2.19	6	2.61	6	4.92	3	5.26	1	2.94	19	3.28

N.B. Some responses fall into more than one category so totals may = >100%

For example, 'Stress of break up of marriage leading to inability to function at work', may fall into categories 1, 9 and 11.
n. = actual number of responses to that question.

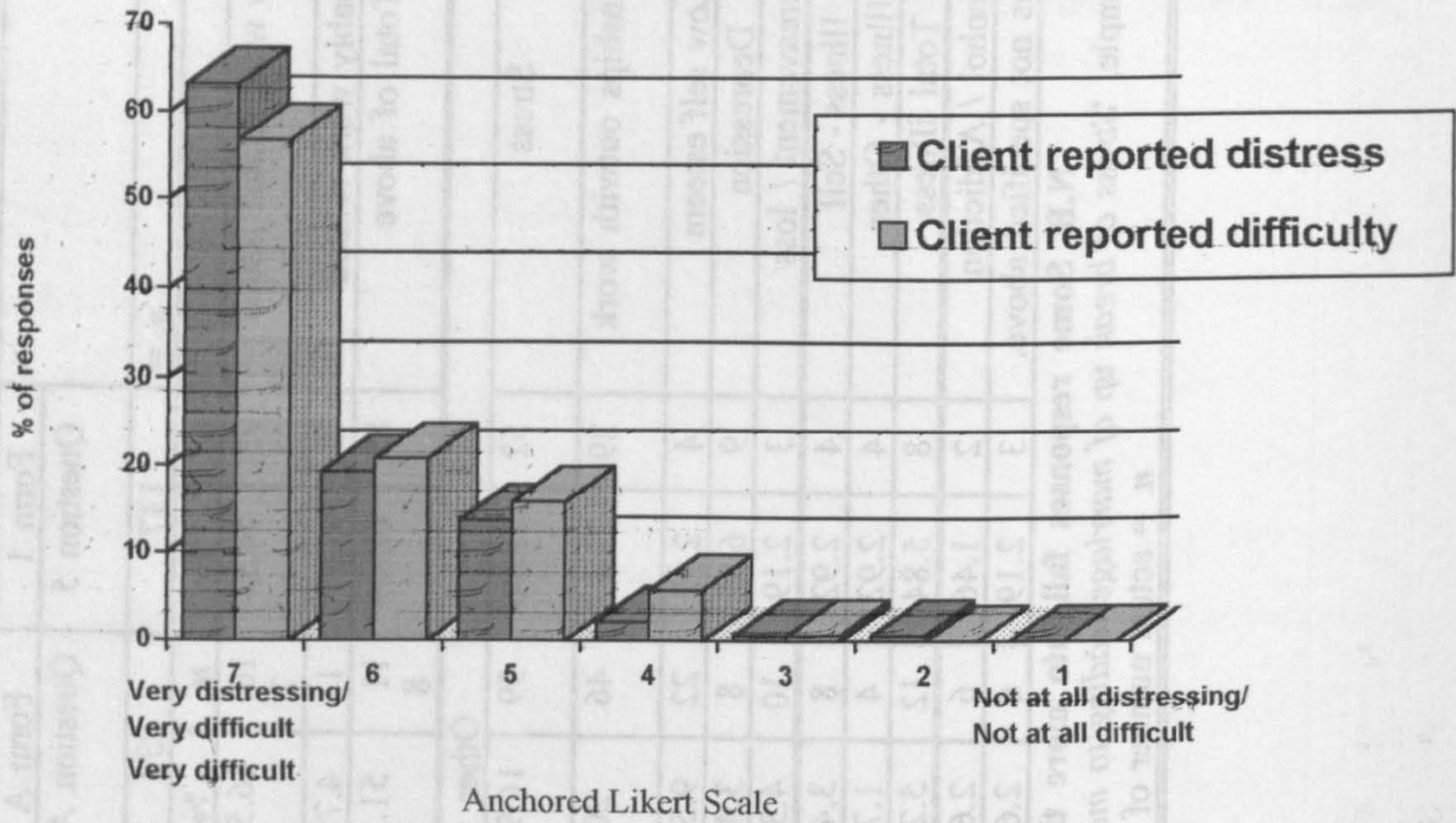


Diagram 9.3 - Initial distress and difficulty scores reported by clients for presenting issues (n.=139)

The quantitative scores for the distress and difficulty caused by presenting and secondary problems at the start of counselling unequivocally indicated that clients saw their problems as being very severe. Diagram 9.3 shows the responses for presenting issues reported by clients.

All the responses were clearly skewed strongly to the very distressing / very difficult end of the scales with no responses at all at the opposite end.

Confirmed by this reductionist analysis of the Likert scale ratings (but not revealed in the quantitative treatment involved in categorising and tabulating the qualitative, free response problem descriptions referred to above) was that many of those descriptions indicated a similarly acute need for counselling. Some referred to very serious problems indeed, including eating disorders, childhood sexual abuse, sexual harassment and physical violence. Again, it was the pluralist combination of data types that provided the most complete picture.

It is worth noting that several other qualitative comments from elsewhere in the client questionnaires and in interviews further underlined the desperate state many clients felt themselves to be in, emphasising the initial severity of problems in more vivid and specific terms than could be derived from any of the data just noted. For example:

'I had reached a point where I couldn't walk through the school doors ever again - I thought. Which is a terrible situation ... You know, and it was a, it was earth shattering, you know, and for [the counsellor] to help me to get back to the stage where I could start to think of ways of maybe achieving it even was quite something. ... I was off school for nearly six months - But I might never have gone back.'

Towards the end of counselling, this client returned to work and confirmed that, some 14 months later, at the time of the interview, they were still coping well.

It would have been impossible to provide anything like the depth of understanding offered by this quotation by relying exclusively on quantitative methods. Conversely, the reductionist perspective could have criticised the qualitative data for lacking generalisability if it were not for the pluralistic step of relating it directly to the Likert scale ratings.

Thus, it was the pluralist body of evidence as a whole that carried the greatest utility for the various divergent perspectives that might have been taken on this point. For example, while quantification of severity allowed management to assess accurately trends of high stress levels among the work force, it became far easier for all the stakeholder groups, including those managers, to understand what the numerical scores meant when given the vivid insights afforded by the qualitative responses which retained their affective weight. The combination of data types thus increased the specificity of the evaluation in two quite different ways: the specific details of the experience of individuals gave depth while the requisite numerical precision, comparability and generalisability was also available.

9.4.2 Outcomes

As noted above, the outcome data presented here is merely indicative of what can be generated by a pluralist study. Further detail is given in Appendices C.3 and D.1. Outcome data gathered included information regarding the overall perceived helpfulness of the counselling; changes in problem severity; changes in self concept; effects on work performance / absenteeism; and attribution of cause and effect between counselling and the outcomes recorded.

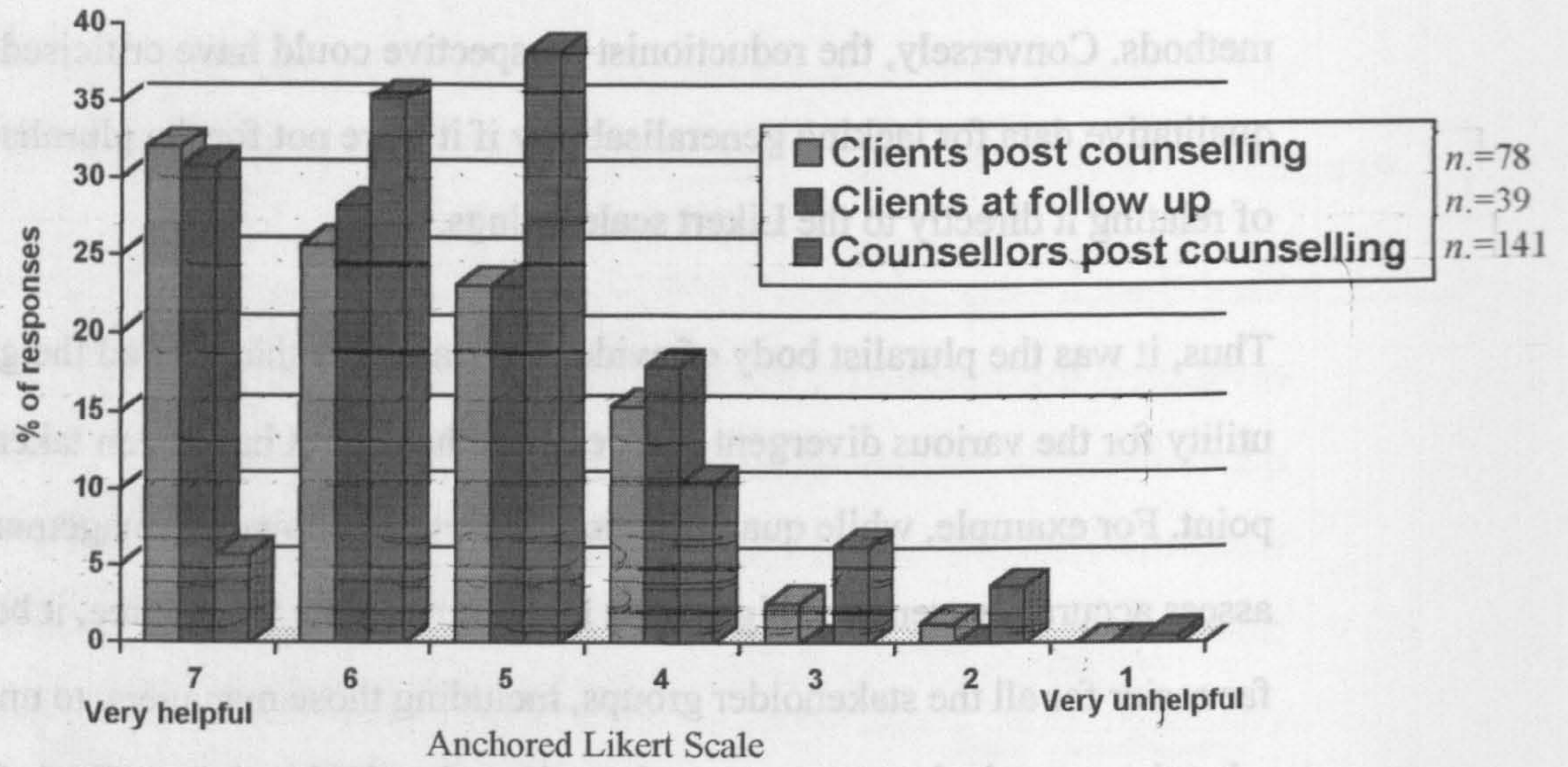


Diagram 9.4 - Overall counselling helpfulness tallies

Overall perceived helpfulness of counselling

The quantitative data gathered on this topic gave precise detail capable of being submitted to statistical analysis which could then be used to interact with the qualitative data. It should be noted that each informed the use and understanding of the other: the mutuality of their relationship was maintained even at this interpretive phase of the study. They both also influenced the subsequent implementation of the client interviews.

The strength of the quantitative data was that it could reveal findings such as that at the end of counselling, and at follow up, the vast majority of clients and counsellors reported that the counselling had been helpful 'overall'. 32% (30% at follow up) of clients considered it to be at the extreme top end of the 7 point scale. 61% used one of the two most positive points (59% at follow up). Equally noticeable were the very small numbers of responses at the bottom end of the scale, or even below the equivocal mid-point (Diagram 9.4)

Reductionist techniques were also used to show that the perceived helpfulness was extremely durable. This was later confirmed by qualitative evidence from interviews with clients who also subjectively reported lasting effects.

In this instance, quantitative results were able to influence the interpretation of later qualitative data from both follow up questionnaires and interviews. If the emphasis on overall ratings cited above (Sloboda, 1993 and see p. 181 above) were to be applied here the project would be counted a success on this evidence from the Likert scales of overall helpfulness alone. In a pluralist study, of course, this would have appeared insupportably narrow.

The vast majority of outcome related qualitative comments in all sections of the questionnaires were very positive. Moreover, a similar picture emerged from the quantitative data. For example, a combination of all the satisfaction scores

indicated that almost 86% of clients reported themselves to be either very satisfied or only one Likert scale point below that rating.

Each type of evidence should only be interpreted in the light of the other, of course, and the following quotations should certainly be seen more as evidence for the conclusions drawn (see Chapter 9.5 and Appendix D.1.b) than as mere illustrative examples. Many clients commented that the service had been ‘extremely useful’, with typical sentiments being ‘I found the counselling sessions helpful and don’t think they could have been improved’ and ‘It’s marvellous to have someone to talk to’.

Descriptions of perceived benefits for clients were among the most vivid and frequent of all the comments made by counsellors during their interviews. It is worth noting that a valuable role A.S.C.U. was seen to fulfil was *only* recorded during the interview stages and would have been missed entirely by purely reductionist methods. The service was seen as being ‘a caring part of a fairly harsh system’. The Working Party report that recommended establishing A.S.C.U. (L.R.E.D., 1993) had predicted that the service would serve to enhance the Department's image as a ‘caring employer’, and it could certainly be demonstrated that these hopes were at least partially fulfilled:

‘It’s a kind of halo effect of, you know, some sort of caring. ... you often experience a great relief that people feel ‘Oh, they’re prepared to let me have counselling, how wonderful!’’

As elsewhere, the pluralist combination of data types proved to be required for the whole picture to emerge.

Change in problem severity

Quantitative measures following each descriptive response asked clients and counsellors to rate the degrees of distress and difficulty caused by that issue

and general improvement on 7 point Likert scales similar to those used in other parts of the questionnaires. These scales were especially useful in revealing clear apparent results. The general question of whether the particular issues had improved recorded clearly positive results: 65% of clients indicated that they had; 5% reported deterioration. At follow up they were even more enthusiastic with over 77% reporting improvement. Responses for secondary issues at both reporting stages were only slightly less positive.

While change during counselling generally proved to be very significant in statistical terms (t-test of scores pre- and post-counselling revealed $p < 0.0001$ for both presenting and secondary issues) scores tended to be maintained at follow up, (e.g. $p > 0.69$, by t-test indicating no statistically significant change). What observed changes there were between the end of counselling and follow up indicated further *improvements*, suggesting that far from the effects of counselling diminishing over time, things tended to continue to improve further, corroborating the quantitative and qualitative data reported elsewhere in this study.

However, the pluralist critique of these data emphasises some limitations and helped to delineate its undoubted and reductionistically supportable utility. Even if we were to disregard the paralogical variations in problem descriptions noted above (see p. 192), pre- and post-counselling change in the distress and difficulty scores could not be assumed to represent the degree to which counselling had affected the issue. The breadth of perceived possible distress or difficulty may have changed as clients' understanding of the terms used to anchor the scales was likely to have altered unpredictably during counselling (cf. McLeod, 2000b). As a result the degrees of change in these scales were, once again, merely partially successful as indicators of success or failure of the counselling. The risk of the numeric data lending the 'spurious air of accuracy' noted previously (Oppenheim, 1985; see Chapter 2.2) meant that it was only when they were seen in conjunction with the other evidence that these scales gained greater force in this study. The test / re-test format of these scales might be argued to have held greater construct

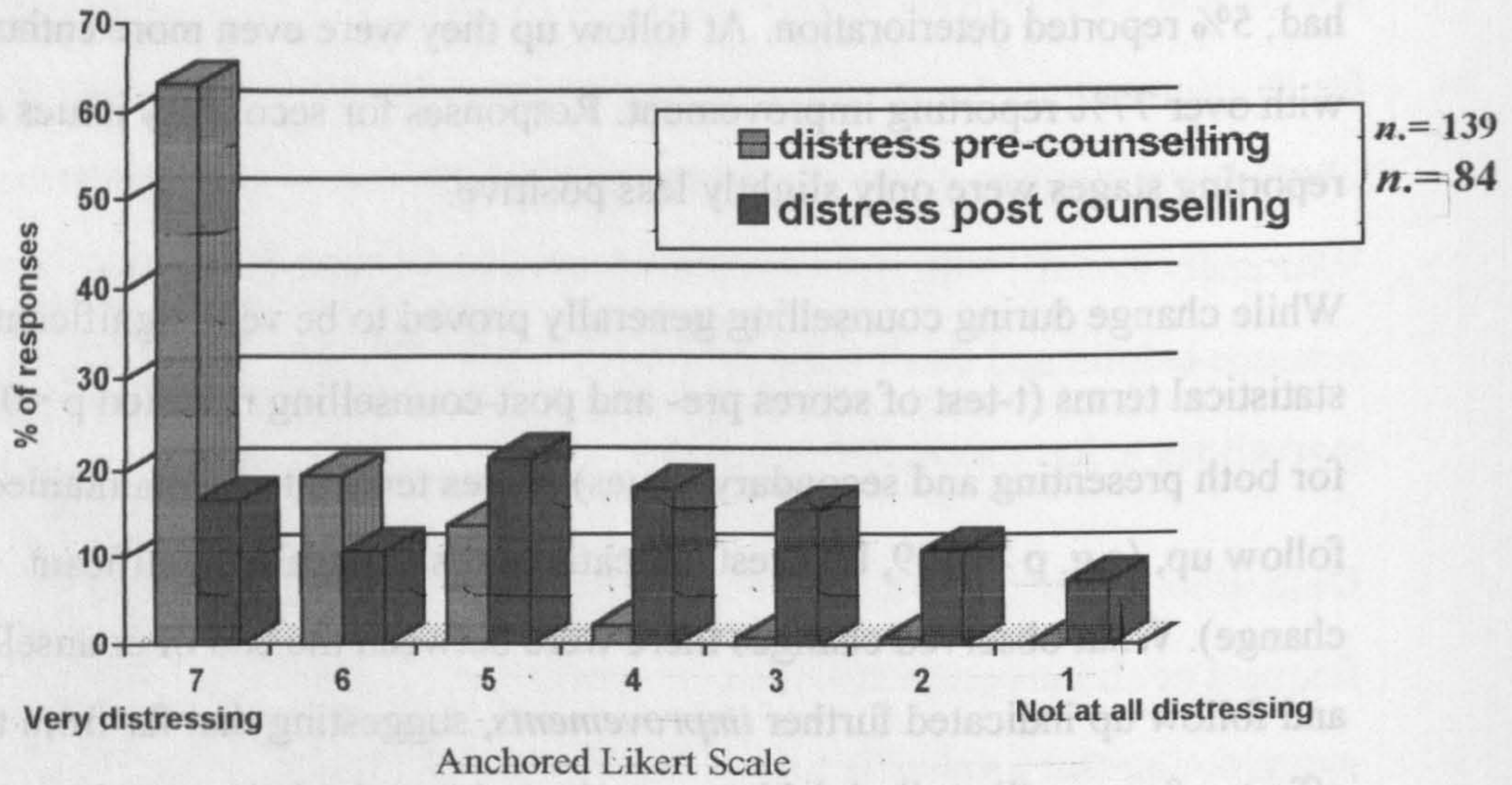


Diagram 9.5 - Pre- and post-counselling scores for 'distress' caused by presenting issues as reported by clients

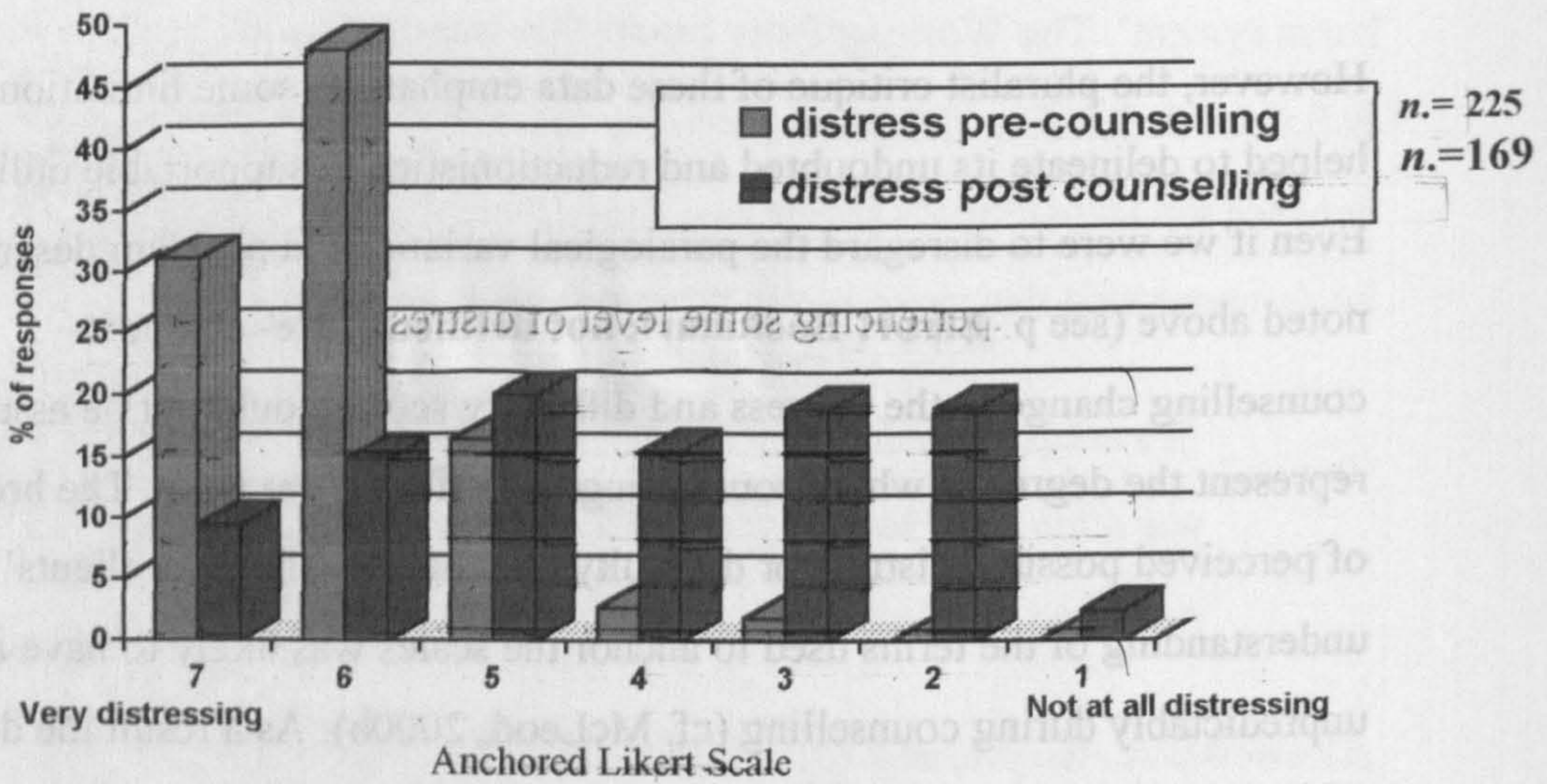


Diagram 9.6 - Pre- and post-counselling scores for 'distress' caused by presenting issues as reported by counsellors

validity than the retrospectively quantified degree of overall help or the qualitative data, however, as it offered less chance of respondents introducing bias - unintentionally or otherwise.

Diagrams 9.6 and 9.7 show responses typical of the distress and difficulty scales from clients and counsellors respectively.

Results for presenting and secondary issues showed very similar patterns of responses and, for the most part, are considered together in this discussion.

Some people *appear* to have been helped more than others with the best improvements being an 85.7% reduction in distress⁵³ and difficulty caused by the problems indicating the maximum possible change of 6 points on the scale. Others were clearly not helped so much and a small number of clients reported slight deterioration (i.e. a small rise in the Likert scale scores) in the levels of distress and difficulty they were suffering and responses from such clients were subjected to closer scrutiny, noted below. Despite the problems with reducing the complex experience of personal problems to Likert scale ratings, these small changes were, perhaps, more easily identifiable through this method than with any phenomenological alternative.

It was also apparent that at the end of counselling a significant number of clients were still experiencing some level of distress or difficulty relating to particular issues. The figures in these cases were also pluralistically interpreted in relation to both qualitative and quantitative data. The later interviews with counsellors and clients suggested that for those individuals, who were purposively targeted for inclusion, this was largely because even when counselling deliberately sets out to solve problems, complete 'cures' are rarely achievable. Furthermore, many of the situations noted in the free response questions by these clients would normally be expected to be outwith the scope of the best possible counselling to resolve entirely. Harassment at work may be difficult to stop; a bereavement will always have happened. Nonetheless,

⁵³ This is, of course, an excellent example of the potential for offering a 'spurious air of accuracy' just noted. The figures should only be interpreted impressionistically.

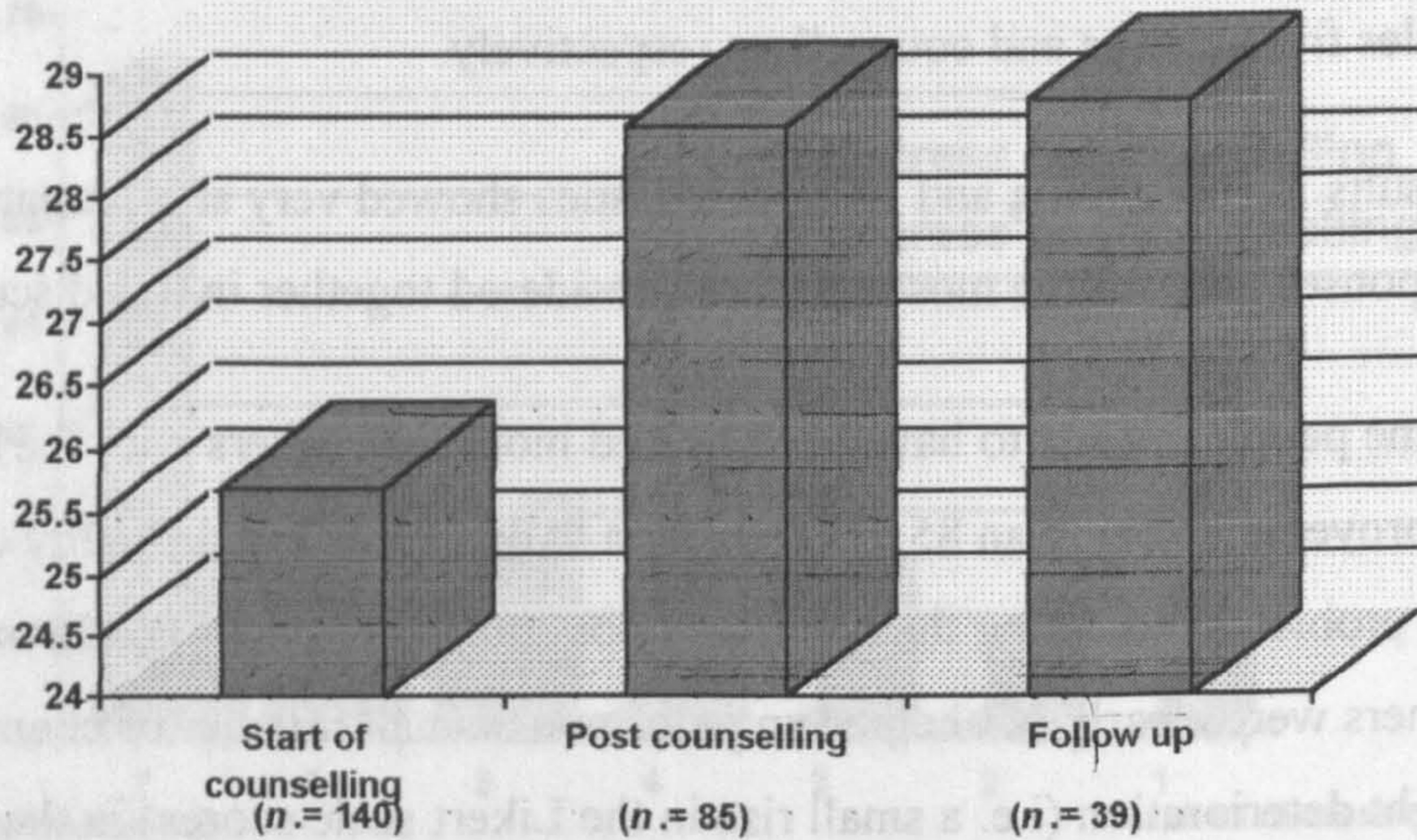


Diagram 9.7 - Mean Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale scores

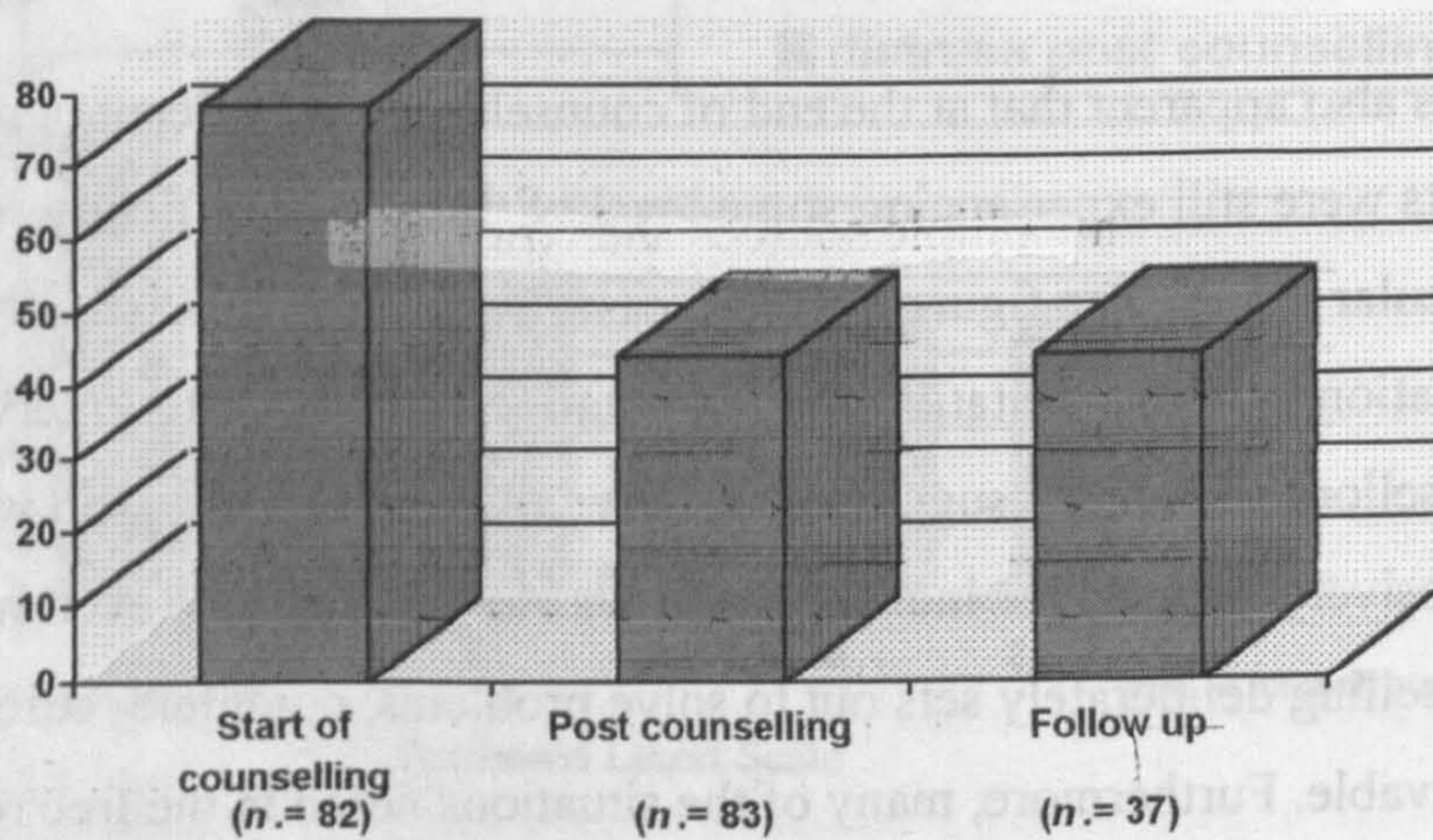


Diagram 9.8 - Mean S/I-SD scores

reference to other qualitative data for such clients suggests that, in general, they tended to become better able to deal with their problems than they had been prior to counselling. Such specific detail could not have been provided by quantitative rating scales.

It was then also possible to return to the reductionist frame which could reveal that of the small number of clients who showed no change or a deterioration in their scores *all* recorded very high satisfaction rates. Moreover, where it did occur, deterioration tended to be slight. Furthermore, most of these same clients showed improvement on the Rosenberg Self esteem Scales and either an improvement or no change at all in the Self / Ideal-Self Discrepancy scores. The pluralist interaction of data types was continued by reference to their qualitative questionnaire responses. None of these clients reported any unhelpful aspects, or suggested ways in which the counselling could have been improved, or that there had been issues they had been unable to discuss. Their stated reasons for finishing the counselling gave further reassurance. One stated that they 'had been helped to reach conclusions', while another replied, 'I felt I was back on track'. For one of the clients, their counsellor commented: 'problems not resolved, but views changed and [the client] talked about how much it had helped to have had the two sessions'. Indications of negative, or even lack of, change were thus mitigated *and more fully explicated* by pluralist interaction between multiple sources and types of data, at least in the results shown by this section of the evaluation.

Change in self concept

The two quantitative measures of self concept used in this evaluation (the Rosenberg self esteem scale and the S/I-SD measure discussed further in Chapter 12) dominated this part of the study, even with the pluralist combination of data types. Both gave clearly positive results as shown in Diagrams 9.7 and 9.8⁵⁴. This kind of data were especially useful for those, such

⁵⁴ N.B. For the Rosenberg Scale higher scores indicate higher self esteem, while for the S/ISD measure the direction of positive change is reversed with reducing scores indicating progress

as the service management, whose primary interest was in the general trends of change across the client population.

At the end of counselling most scores showed considerable improvements. The advantage of this quantitative data over the qualitative elements of the study was exemplified by the fact that it allowed the calculation of effect sizes⁵⁵. The improvement on the Rosenberg scale provided an effect size of 0.58. The change in the data from the S/I-SD measure, which had been designed with sensitivity to the effects of counselling in mind, was more dramatic with the effect size being calculated at 1.47. Both these effect sizes were clearly positive and neither they nor the clear difference between them could have been derived from most qualitative or phenomenologically oriented data.

However, even in this highly psychometrically oriented area, the pluralist process of data interpretation meant that qualitative data were still referred to where it bore sufficient utility. For example, changes in clients' self image and self esteem were particularly noted in interviews with counsellors:

'People get to be more able to receive praise as well as blame, more balanced I suppose in their interactions, and you know, hopefully not always problem focused ... one client in particular all the time went on about the different difficulties that happened in the classroom and misbehaving kids and this and that, - and then you discover clearly she was really a good teacher who's really popular (laugh). You know, and, and obviously communicated very well and a sort of reassessment that there

towards the clients' ideal self.

⁵⁵ The changes in score were evaluated by contrasting them to the variability of the scores. The formula used (as described by Glass, *et al*, 1981; Wood, 1995) was:

$$\text{Magnitude of change} = \frac{\text{Difference in scores}}{\text{S.D of starting (i.e. pre-therapy) scores}}$$

This index is intuitively appropriate: its use requires confirmation by validation studies, however, which were beyond the scope of the current work.

was good as well as bad was tremendously useful. ... This woman was actually off work and when she came back there was a spontaneous cheer raised in the playground.'

The vivid, complex insight such evidence offers contrasts with the statistical evidence on this topic, which offered a rather different kind of utility. As noted above, the two forms of evidence continually interacted in a pluralist manner and here each informed the interpretation of the other.

Effects on work performance, absenteeism and cost implications

Arguably the most objective measure of significant change, the absenteeism information gathered from the employment records of the education department, formed the third point of reference which made possible true triangulation of all the data. However, even here both phenomenological and reductionist forms of evidence were still important, further demonstrating the utility of pluralist bodies of data. A positivist reductionist approach might have seen the 'hard' quantitative absenteeism data as more reliable than the relative subjectivity of self or observer reports, relied upon in the preceding questionnaire and interview data. In this study, however, it was treated as no more than an alternative source of evidence: another item to be weighed along with all the others.

Both perspectives recognised absenteeism as a criterion of great importance to two of the major stakeholders (employer and employees alike) although, from a phenomenological point of view it could not do justice to the vast array of effects counselling could have. For example, it not only excluded the important effects on 'presenteeism' and quality of work mentioned elsewhere but also more esoteric, but no less important, possible indices of change such as happiness and well-being. There were, however, important advantages in including reductionistically validated information as it exhibited entirely different kinds of weaknesses and strengths compared to the alternatives already reported: explicitly, each mode of enquiry balanced and informed the other.

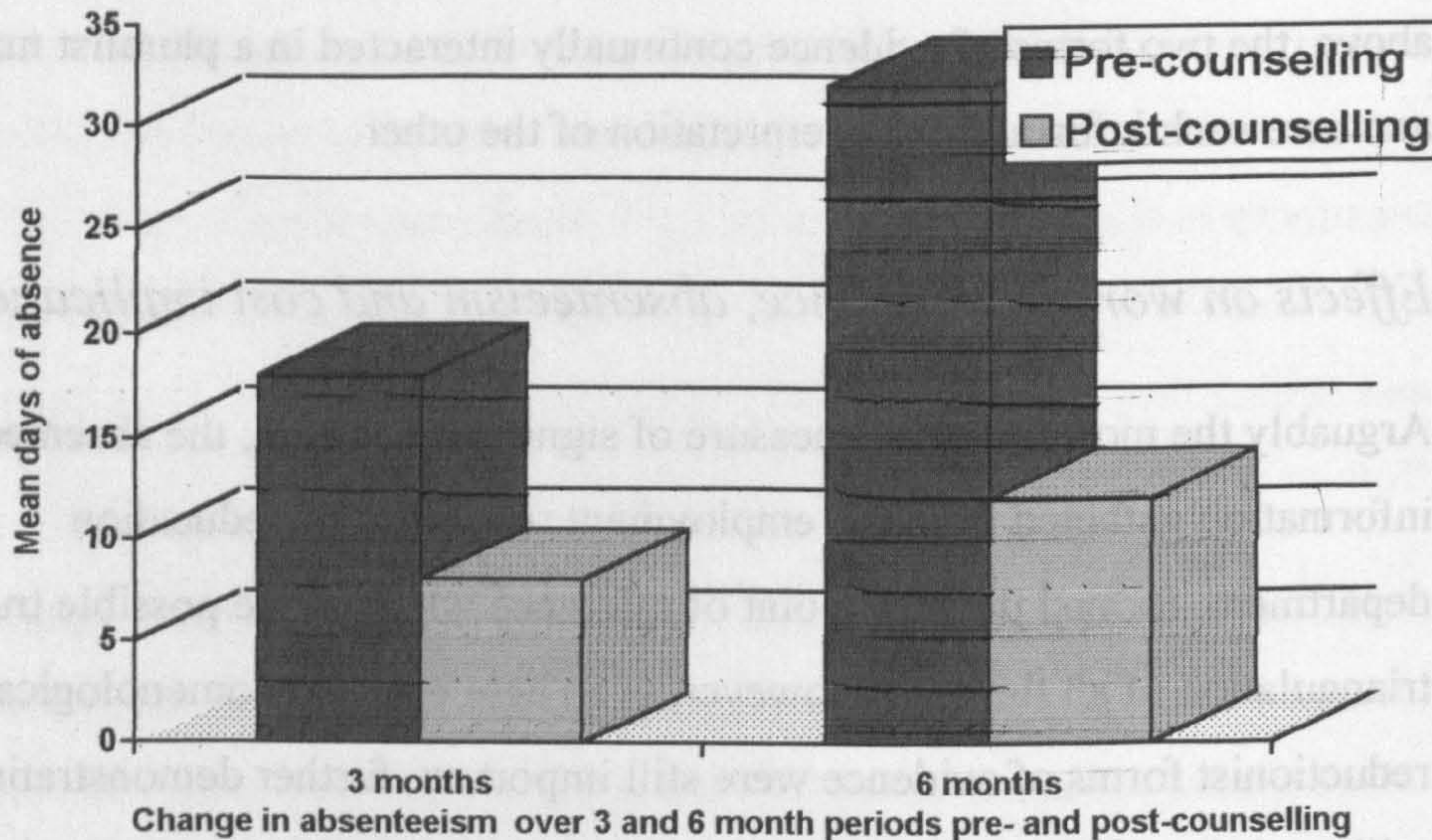


Diagram 9.9 - Change in absenteeism

52 (59%) of the 88 clients who returned the end of counselling questionnaire gave the ethically requisite permission to abstract absenteeism information from their records. This was done without risk of their being identified to any third party as clients of the counselling service. Records could not be traced for 5 clients, giving a final sample size of 47.

As is illustrated in Diagram 9.9, there was a dramatic change in the pattern of absences before and after counselling. Data were collected for both three- and six-month periods to test its stability and consistency⁵⁶.

The numerical clarity of these findings stands in contrast to the more vivid qualitative data - which offered its own different kind of emotional clarity. From a reductionist critique, phenomenological descriptions of change suffer from their wealth of personal, that is poorly generalisable, detail. That each camp actually considers as strengths what the other construes as weaknesses emphasises the importance of the *pluralist* processes of mutual critique which can recognise each kind of utility the different data types bear. Consider the following: days of absence during the three months after counselling compared to the three months preceding counselling showed a mean reduction of 55% from a mean of 17.8 days to 8.15 days. Mean change over the six-month period increased to 62%, falling from a mean of 30.1 days prior to counselling to 12 days after it. As with other quantitative measures in this study, the trend for change to continue post-counselling could be demonstrated. None of this would have been rendered visible by phenomenological methods

Furthermore, despite the lack of information absenteeism data provided regarding the *experience* of counselling, it did offer the possibility of calculating generalised costs to changes associated with counselling. Although cost-benefit, -effectiveness or -utility analyses were not attempted here⁵⁷, an

⁵⁶ This strategy also pragmatically guarded against the possibility of data being unavailable for the longer period.

⁵⁷ The Education Department was unable to provide figures for costs of absence from work, either for specific grades or as an approximate average across the Department. Although collecting such information would have been theoretically feasible, and certainly desirable (cf.

approximate figure of £2,000 additional cost for every ten days of absence in a local authority educational setting (Kirkman, 1995) was used as an indicator of the scale of the financial implications. On this very approximate basis, change in absenteeism over three months suggested a saving of £2,000 per employee counselled. Over six months, the figure rose to £4,000. Significantly for this exploration of pluralism, the stability of these data was supported by both quantitative and qualitative sources. Consequently, it was possible to conclude that a longer time-scale would have given even higher figures.

Despite not being explicitly sought in the questionnaires, some clients' responses did refer to cost-related factors, including absenteeism:

'Thank goodness the facility existed. I couldn't have coped without the support. I was off work for 6 months but I feel it would have been longer (or possibly never!) before I managed to return.'

From a reductionist perspective, in comparison with the preceding data, these responses might appear imprecise and to lack utility - for example in calculating monetary outcomes. However, the utility of induction, especially when used in conjunction with those deductive methods, was ably demonstrated by the fact that qualitative data were capable of providing evidence on the predicted improvements in quality of work in addition to the combined evidence on absenteeism already quoted, whereas this had been impossible with purely quantitative methods. When seen in *pluralist conjunction* with the absenteeism figures, the qualitative evidence, from counsellors in particular, expanded the utility of the data set overall and was able to confirm the suggestion that counselling could effect both absenteeism and 'presenteeism'. Clients were seen as becoming more 'committed to work, rather than buried in it.'

Furthermore, despite the lack of numerical precision, the qualitative data

Tolley and Rowland, 1995), the time and resource constraints on the study precluded such

contributed to the overall body of evidence on financial benefits to the Education Department, especially for 'clients who've been off [work] or nearly off and the, the work they've done with [the counsellor] has enabled them to go back again much faster'. A client commented, 'in the long term this [service] could save the Region a lot of money paid out for absence at work ... it makes for better work output if one is happier within the workplace'. The counsellors unanimously expressed the firm conviction that 'without a doubt' the Department got value for money.

steps.

9.4.3 Evaluation squared: reflexive evaluation of the study

Reflexivity is an important attribute of properly pluralist research (see Chapter 6) and this study was partly reflexive throughout.

Some of the effects of this continual critique from both phenomenological and reductionist perspectives are briefly noted in the preceding discussion, juxtaposed with the data to which they relate. Overall, in this study it appeared that the range of data were able to address the needs of the diverse stakeholder groups concerned. For example, L.R.E.D. had some indications of cost related benefits; counsellors received information regarding the ways in which they helped and to what degree; clients also appeared to benefit from their involvement in the provision of data. They also benefited in terms of having a chance to 'see inside' the counselling experience of those who had been clients before them.

However, a further step was for the research to deliberately examine the views of clients and counsellors regarding the study. It may be that phenomenological, qualitative methods are better suited than their alternatives to discovering problems in counselling and psychotherapy (McLeod, 2000b) and this may also be true in investigating aspects of evaluative research. Indeed, there is a logic to using more open, inductively oriented approaches for this. By their more inclusive nature they are able to be more sensitive to things not predicted at the outset than their reductionist alternatives - after all, if problems were predictable they would usually be avoided or minimised. Here, the primary means of reflexive evaluation were, therefore, phenomenological. This is an example of the complex iterative interplay between approaches leading to an unequal emphasis. The differing approaches were not assumed to be equally valuable, as would be implied by a relativist rather than pluralist position (see Chapter 3.2). In post-modernist terms, the difference (see footnote in section 9.3.1) between approaches meant that one pattern, or way of seeing, was

allowed to recede behind another, albeit temporarily. This is not to say that reductionist influences on the reflexive evaluation of the evaluation were entirely absent. Neither was this mere 'serial monism' as proposed by Rescher (see Chapter 4.5). Although a temporary return to monism is not entirely ruled out by the current version of pluralism (see Chapter 4.3 and summary of Part 3) in this instance some reductionistically derived concepts were still applicable despite the emphasis on phenomenological methods in investigating them.

For example, it was considered especially important to investigate the possible influence of any observation effects on all phases of the study (Cronbach, 1970). Evaluating the evaluation also gave the opportunity to raise an ethical question of importance in both phenomenological and reductionist approaches: whether collecting such large quantities of data had intruded unhelpfully onto the counselling process, despite the assurances gained during the pilot phase. As noted above, in the preliminary and pilot phases of development the counsellors had been very concerned that some clients might be harmed by having the evaluation, and all it entailed, pushed rudely upon them. It was thought that there was a possibility of getting in the way of building a free and constructive relationship, or directing the 'agenda' of what was addressed in counselling.

Where clients specifically mentioned that they wanted to help the Unit survive, or that their participation was motivated by 'repaying ... what had been given', implying a positive bias in the sample, clients were asked whether they felt they would have been any more reluctant to take part if their experience of A.S.C.U. had not been so positive. This was used as a limited method of assessing the degree of influence selection effects might have introduced if only those with a positive message to send put themselves forward for interview.

Only one of the 22 interviewed said that they might have been less inclined to participate. All the others reported that they would have been just as willing to complain as to praise:

Researcher: *'If for some reason you had had a bad experience of counselling ... would you still have returned the forms and even offered to do the interview?...'*

Client: *'I think I would yes ... I think I would have been just as inclined to fill up the forms, even if I was blazing mad and think it was disgusting and terrible (laugh)'*

[

Researcher: *'It might have been written very angrily, (laugh) but it would have been written?'*

[

Client: *'Yes (laugh), Uhuh, no I, I don't think it would have made any difference in my attitude to being involved ... even including the interview as well.'*

Clients were also asked whether the evaluation had had any impact on them, their problems or the counselling process itself. Most said that, in addition to having been very willing to take part, 'it really didn't make any difference'.

One client mentioned a salient point for pluralist evaluative methodology, well known to the critics of psychometric tests, that

'I mean I know the evaluation sheets have to be as they are ... I just hate these boxes because things - never really fit in. It's like doing these box report cards. Nobody ever fits into a box.'

It was precisely because the quantitative sections of this study only recorded an extremely narrow segment of any person's experience of counselling, let alone the enormous variety of experiences among the entire client group of 241 people who participated in the study, that the qualitative sections were included.

Four clients said that, far from being damaging or overly intrusive, the evaluation process had actually added to the help they derived from counselling. For example,

'going over what the counsellor had, and what I had said, and I could think - yeah, I have managed to do this, I have been able to move on and this is how. - and perhaps that helps me move on again, you know, see how to move again in the situation I'm in - as it is now.'

As far as could be ascertained, therefore, the evaluation did not appear to have had the deleterious effects predicted by some counsellors at the outset.

Confirming the results of the pilot study, clients appeared to have been either very willing to participate, or able to choose not to as they preferred, although little data were available on the latter group, of course.

Most counsellors stated that with a little experience of the procedures they had become satisfied that it was a useful, even necessary, part of providing an adequate service. They especially noted the importance of the consultation process and alterations that had been made as a result of the thorough pluralist development of the study in its early stages. In practice, little or no risk of harm to clients had remained.

Comments included the following:

'now that its stopped I'm saying okay how am I going to know whether what I've been doing is effective, appropriate or anything else. To know that we were going to give them an evaluation form, was knowing that if there's anything major wrong, it'll be picked up. ... it's been good to have the evaluation as a check back ... Effectiveness is a long word, I suppose but at least data which people can look at and, em, yes, so I didn't make a very good job of five, ten, fifteen, twenty percent, or fifty percent, or sixty percent and you know, if I didn't make a very good job of sixty percent, then should I be in the job? ... There is such a lot of abuse potential, in a counselling situation that I think it's very important to have some sort of way of ensuring that abuse is not taking place.'

Counsellors also expressed some doubt about the reliability of clients' reports at the end of counselling. This phenomenologically supported the reductionistically derived expectation of selection effects and consequent bias also noted in the preliminary and pilot phases.

9.5 Discussion

Contribution to exploration of pluralism

This study considered a large body of evidence from an unusually wide variety of sources. A principle of the pluralist approach was that all units of evidence be weighed alongside all others, the sum of which would create the basis for decisions on the relative value of the service as a whole. The complex interaction of the various methods was intended to minimise the problems with each one. In this instance, the interaction between approaches proved to be

highly influential in all three phases of the study from its initial development, through its piloting and implementation to the interpretation of the findings.

Pluralism is also intended to resolve, or at least reduce to an acceptable level, the limitations inherent in both quantitative and qualitative evaluations. Relying solely on change to numerical data would have failed to communicate the vital importance of the service in human terms. Equally, stories of therapy cannot tell us the clearly quantifiable value of the service required to decide the appropriate level of investment. For sufficiently useful evaluations, based on a picture complete enough to satisfy all the stakeholders, both schools of thought had to be combined. That is, both types of data were necessary in this example to compensate for the weaknesses of the other. Moreover, their use in combination bore greater utility because of the constant interaction between the approaches and the modes of thought that underlie them. Again, concurrent use of the approaches in isolation would have been unlikely to have offered the same degree of understanding, either of the counselling or of the strengths and weaknesses of the different elements of the evaluation.

Fortunately, we do not need to look for complete understandings of what goes on in therapy in order to present competent evaluations of it. We need merely achieve sufficiently *useful* understandings to make evaluative judgements.

Stakeholder groups may require very different things from an evaluation (Worrall, 1996). Exhibiting a characteristic trait of pluralist studies, each major stakeholder group could take from this study what they wished. Management, in this instance acting as service purchaser, could make informed funding decisions. The service co-ordinator could ensure sensitive development according to documented need. Counsellors had the opportunity to gain vivid, specific and detailed insight into the effectiveness of the project and of their clients' experiences. Clients could also benefit from the improved service and even those who had not yet made contact with it could get an understanding of

what it was like to be a client, particularly via improved and more focused publicity.

Although not presented here, the evaluation was even found to be sufficiently detailed to be able to provide specific feedback to *individual* counsellors, albeit with the caveat that sufficient numbers of clients had to have been seen to ensure that client confidentiality was maintained. That such personalised evaluative evidence could be made available may even suggest that the related area of *counsellor* assessment as opposed to service-wide evaluation, both for counsellors in training and as an element of professional accreditation, might benefit from a properly developed, context sensitive pluralist approach.

In this study, it is possible for the dramatic figures on absenteeism to overshadow the detail in human terms from the wide variety of other measures. From some points of view this is certainly unfortunate. Employees want management to understand their suffering in human terms; counsellors want everyone to know how useful they are and so forth. Mere concurrent use of the various measures would have allowed important elements to be missed: it was only when all the elements were applied and interpreted in the light of all the others that a full understanding could be reached.

The reflexive evaluation of the evaluation led to some important findings. Most importantly, from a pluralist perspective, the utility of the evaluation was confirmed. It is also worth noting that, as it progressed, the evaluation process itself became an integral part of the service, and despite initial hesitance, several counsellors expressed the desire to see it continue. It was evident that there were several advantages to both clients and counsellors, not least in terms of offering quality assurance, useful opportunities for reflection and, for counsellors, specific feedback on current practices. The very few negative effects of intruding into this most personal and private of relationships

appeared to be mitigated by careful and sensitive development and presentation.

Furthermore, throughout the study it was possible to protect the essential requirements of both the phenomenological and the reductionist models, despite the intimate mutual critique and interaction between them. Consequently, the study may be thought to have successfully demonstrated the viability of the pluralist approach and to have explored some its used and aspects of its application.

Chapter 10 Evaluation of an employee counselling service in a large financial services organisation

10.1 Summary

This section extends the exploration of pluralist evaluation begun in the preceding study. Their contexts might initially have been thought very similar. Both were counselling services offering time limited one to one counselling and telephone support funded by a large employer and they shared similar aims and working practices. They also shared a distinctive management structure that lay on the border between being an in-house and out of house operation being run from within the workplace but using external counsellors to provide much of the actual counselling.

Nonetheless, as the evaluation progressed it became increasingly apparent that the influences of context and stakeholder interests necessitated significant alterations to the protocol that had been used in the previous study and the relative weight given to the different types and sources of data. What might have appeared to be superficial contextual differences at a preliminary examination became sound reasons for some major alterations in study design. Some elements of the previous evaluation system remained similar, but all had to be re-assessed in the light of the different conditions, demonstrating the contextual sensitivity generated by the pluralist requirement for constant critique and recontextualisation of all components of an evaluation.

This study is presented in summary form with an emphasis on its exemplification and exploration of pluralist methodology rather than for its

evaluative results. A more complete account is presented in the research report (Goss, 1996b) and Appendices A.2, B.2 and D.2.

Carried out over a 28 month period, the study reported significant improvements in all the measures used. These included severity of presenting and secondary issues, ratings of counsellor characteristics, overall effectiveness, psychometric evidence of change in self esteem and qualitative information recorded via an interrelated set of questionnaires. A survey of the whole population eligible to use the service indicated that carefully planned publicity was required and provided clear evidence of the acute and continuing need for counselling provision supporting evidence from clients. The findings were entirely in keeping with those of a very different type of study, exclusively based on psychometric principles, which had precipitated a major attempt to alter the corporate culture (Maven Gattorna Chorn, 1993). The present study added further vivid evidence for the need for such change to continue. It should be noted that the highly positivistically oriented methods of the Maven Gattorna Chorn study were not inconsistent with the pluralist methods employed here. Rather, they tended to complement each other in a way that would not have been possible had this study been from an entirely incompatible epistemological structure, such as purist phenomenology, which would have rejected the reduction of complex human beliefs into discrete units altogether.

10.2 Description of context and service

Contextualisation and re-contextualisation are important elements of pluralist studies (see Chapters 4.3, 6 and 7.1) derived primarily from phenomenological perspectives but entirely compatible with the needs identified by 'first rate' (see Chapter 3.3.1) critique by reductionist research.

This is an example of the pluralist integration of differing paradigmatic research needs. Phenomenology demands contextualisation and it would contravene basic phenomenological principles to disregard it. Reductionism typically places far less value on such details. However, pluralist 'first rate' critique led to the conclusion that reductionism can do more than merely tolerate the inclusion and influence of contextualising data. Interpretation of reductionist data may even be enhanced by phenomenological reference to that contextual information, as was the case in this study.

This large multi-national financial services company had gone through a period of rapid change, as had the education department considered above. This included several phases of 'downsizing' and moves to flatten the hierarchical management structure. The company had succeeded in surviving several years of deep recession and had managed to convert losses of a million pounds a day to profits of a similar order. Attributed in large part to this period, during which the harsh rules of a shrinking marketplace had taken a severe toll on morale, the corporate culture had become distinctly unbalanced (Maven Gattorna Chorn, 1993) with values of aggression and competition being most highly prized. Meanwhile, support and co-operation had become seen as less important assets in the fight for survival. The perceived harsh, isolating and uncaring culture led to high stress levels among employees.

Partly in order to redress the reported cultural imbalance in the company, in October 1992 an Employee Assistance Programme (E.A.P.) was proposed (Ross, 1992) and a pilot was established in 1994. The pilot phase would target certain sections of the company's staff and offer up to eight sessions of face to face counselling for those 'with acute difficulties' (*Ibid.*). Counselling would be provided by a nation-wide network of fully trained and qualified counsellors. As in the case of A.S.C.U., these independent counsellors were managed by a member of the company's staff. On first contacting the service, employees

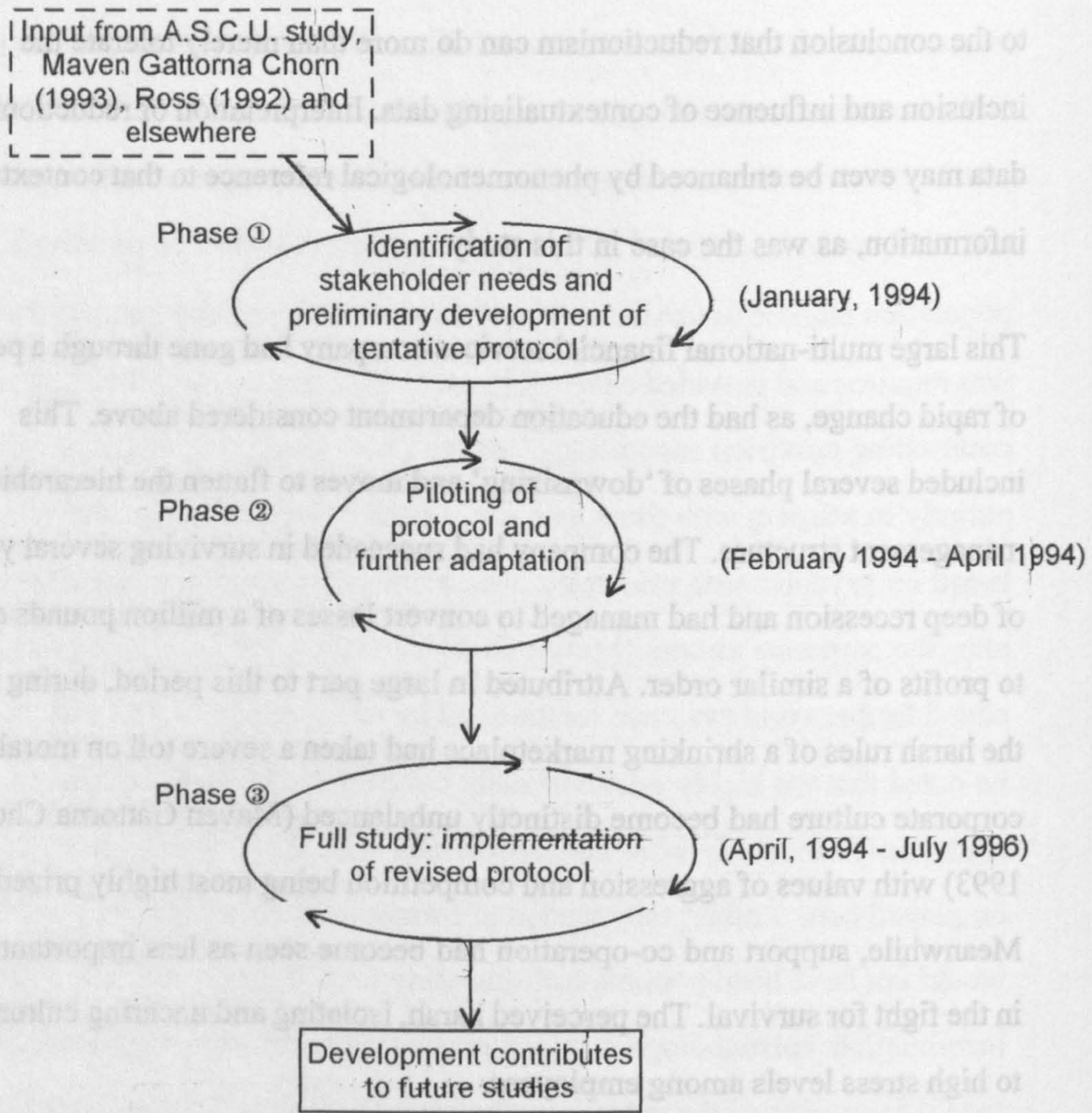


Diagram 10.1 - Outline of the development of the study of counselling in a large financial services company

would receive support from specially trained company staff over the telephone (via a Freephone number). This would offer opportunities for assessment and, if it were deemed necessary and appropriate, face to face sessions with the possibility of referral to external agencies at any point.

In this instance, specific criteria for success were stated as:

'(i) [that] the pilot ran within budget;

(ii) a take up rate of at least 4% of the pilot population ... ;

(iii) the findings of a research project by the University of Strathclyde provided support for the hypothesis that there was a positive and significant correlation between the counselling provided and improved behavioural outcomes at work.'

(Ibid.)

This evaluation was the research referred to in item iii). Other items were outwith the remit of the study, although item ii) was also addressed as a by-product of monitoring the success of counselling referrals.

10.3 Development of evaluation: pilot and revisions

The whole developmental process undertaken for the A.S.C.U. study (see Chapter 9.3) was not required but it was incumbent on the research to ensure that it was sufficiently adapted to the new context to be applicable, in accordance with the principles of pluralism (see Chapters 6 and 7.1). An outline of the development of the study is given in Diagram 10.1.

In this instance, the main stakeholders were identified as the employer, the service managers and staff, the clients and target client group and the counsellors themselves. Other stakeholder groups were also recognised, as in the preceding study. Also as in the preceding study, and described in the

theoretical sections above (see Chapters 4.3 and 7.2), the diversity of the legitimate needs of different stakeholders effectively demanded a pluralist approach. No monistic study could have avoided ignoring some of their concerns.

In the early stages of the evaluation process, the counsellors and project staff were extensively consulted regarding the suitability of all the measures involved. The questionnaires were sent to all the counsellors for written (qualitative) comment and a 50% sample of convenience was interviewed by telephone regarding the suitability of the whole evaluation process. Further interviews were held with key informants from different levels of the company's staff.

As in the previous study, concern was expressed by some counsellors regarding the possibility of evaluation methods having an undesirable effect on especially vulnerable clients at the start of counselling. Once again, it was expected that this culture would be particularly sensitised to issues of confidentiality and the possibility of information given to a researcher in good faith being used in ways the informant would not wish. Here, however, this impression was later confirmed by the target client group as reported below (see Chapter 10.4.1).

In the light of these potential difficulties, the evaluation process was carefully tailored to meet the needs of all those involved. For example, a questionnaire to clients prior to counselling would have given a baseline from which to measure change and would have been highly desirable from a reductionist perspective. Introducing *any* evaluative process prior to counselling was considered to be overly intrusive, however, and none was used in this evaluation to avoid raising the fears regarding confidentiality noted below and, possibly, putting clients off making full use of the service. The result of this phenomenologically gathered evidence from counsellors, echoed by service management, on such reductionist research needs was, of course, that the perceived need to protect the welfare of

a major stakeholder group, the clients, came first (see Chapters 4.3 and 7.2). In partial compensation, it was expected that the quality of post-counselling data would be greater. Pluralistically returning to the reductionist frame of reference, it can be noted that it would at least suffer less from ‘observation effects’ introduced at the start of counselling.

Following application of the detailed pluralist processes outlined in Parts 3 and 4 (above) from January to March, 1994, data collection was ready to begin in April 1994, and the service began in May of that year. A more detailed diagram of the sequence of events and their dates is given in Appendix C.5.

10.3.1 Outline of methodology in this case

As in the previous study, a pluralist assumption was made that, ideally, the evaluation process should consist of as many measures as could be applied sensitively and usefully in the given context, to produce the most thorough possible basis for evaluative decisions. In this instance it was possible to continue the cycles of pluralist development begun in the previous study.

While the demands of the context prohibited some desirable aspects, additional features were also required. This was partly to adapt the evaluation process to the needs of the new context but also on the basis of the continued cyclical development of pluralist studies: critique from multiple perspectives continued to have a fresh and important impact across these related studies (see Chapter 6).

Being directly evolved from the preceding study some sections consisted of questionnaires that could remain very similar in content, despite the separate piloting and development of all the stages. Where this was the case only the briefest of details are given below to avoid excessive repetition. However, more significant were the alterations made to the previous evaluation process as a whole - these were only possible because of the flexibility inherent in the

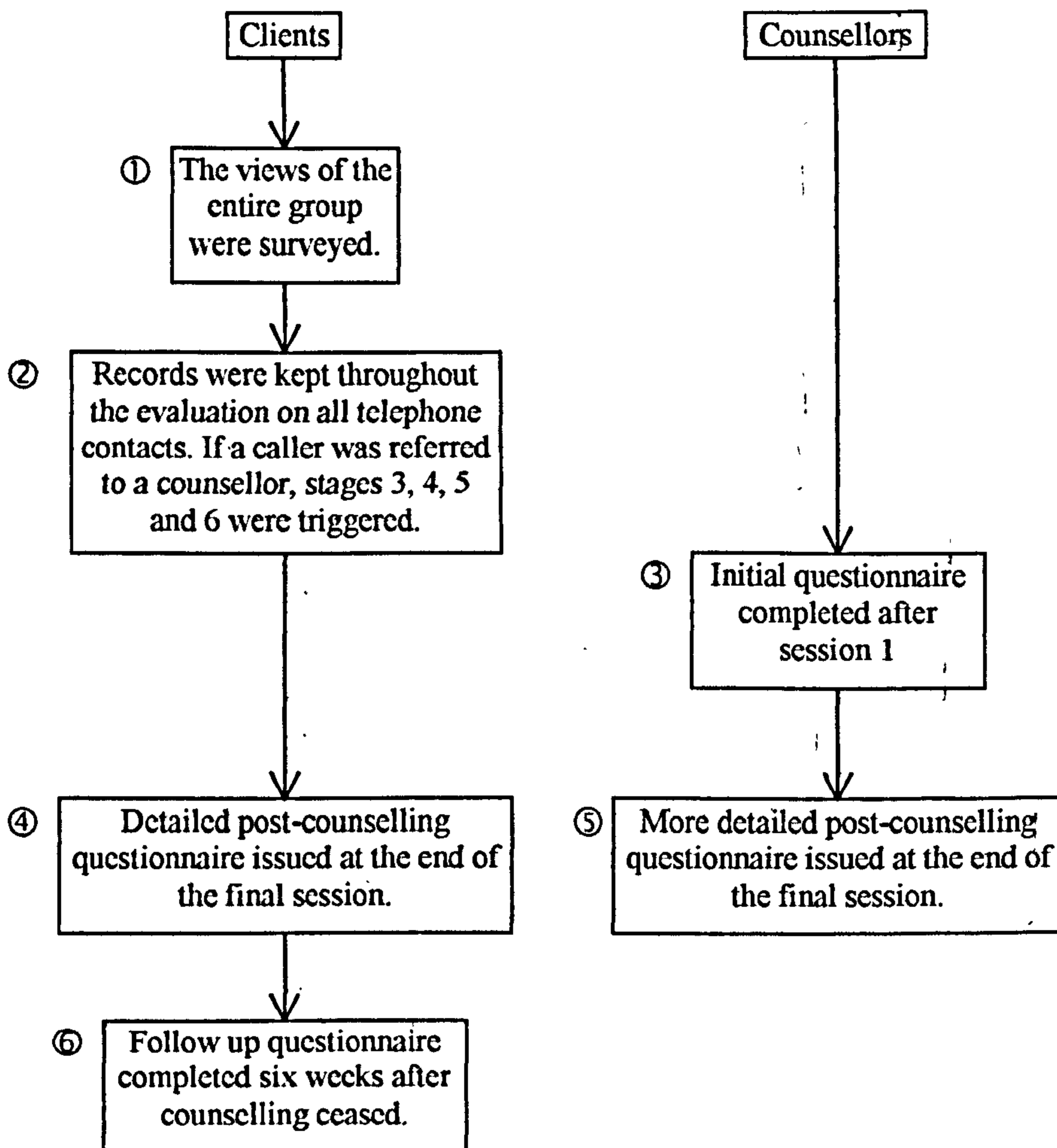


Diagram 10.2 - Outline of the study of counselling in a large financial services organisation

pluralist approach. One example was the early scrapping of the pre-counselling client questionnaire, as noted above. Conversely, additions included quantitative and qualitative recording of the views of the entire target population via an additional questionnaire. The absence of such information on this important stakeholder group in the A.S.C.U. study had limited the utility of the results, especially for the service providers who had to meet the needs of potential users as well as the necessarily select group who were already willing to become clients. Also, the developing importance of the telephone support provided by the service was such that another additional questionnaire was devised specifically to monitor its impact. An outline of the study is provided in Diagram 10.2.

Stage one: Survey of eligible client group

The first stage was an extensive survey of all those eligible to use the service carried out to establish the attitudes and beliefs of the target staff group. The fairly brief questionnaire gathered both quantitative and qualitative data on stress levels, responses to stress and the image the service had among its potential clients. This questionnaire was issued to all those entitled to use the service and was returned directly to the researcher using a Freepost address.

Stage two: Records of telephone contacts

A second stage looked at the records from the telephone support work. The A.S.C.U. study had not directly investigated its non-counselling activities, which had, in any case, been of a rather different nature. However, in this instance it was possible to build on that earlier study, which had found that the focus on the face to face counselling was only part of the story; the other activities had formed a constant backdrop to the counselling provision. The importance of the telephone work by this service became increasingly apparent during the evaluation period. As a result of the constant mutual critique of

methods, even while the study was in progress, a revised method of recording telephone contacts was introduced some time after the main evaluation had begun. Although such heuristic development and perpetual reflexive evaluation could be criticised from a reductionist perspective in that it deviated from the experimental norm, in this instance the value of remaining open to the emerging importance of this element of the service *as it developed* outweighed the arguments in favour of consistency: development of the service necessitated development of the evaluation. Thus, phenomenological, discovery oriented values allowed the study to improve the quality of both the quantitative and qualitative data and the sensitivity of the evaluation as a whole. However, data recorded before the instrument was redesigned was entirely compatible with the more extensive information gathered from then on.

Stage three: Counsellors' questionnaire post session 1

In the third stage counsellors completed a questionnaire regarding each client after their first session. This meant that at the earliest opportunity, a minimum of data were gathered regarding clients of the counselling part of the service to give a basic test-retest format. It was also possible to gain some indications of the nature of experiences of clients who did not return their questionnaires. If a client attended for only one session this stage was ignored and the evaluation began with stage 4.

The questionnaire comprised the free response descriptions of presenting and secondary problems and severity ratings used in the A.S.C.U. study. It also incorporated an adapted version of the Self / Ideal-Self Discrepancy (S/I-SD) measure. Use of the S/I-SD measure in the A.S.C.U. study had indicated that a small number of clients find being faced with so many rating scales all at once a daunting task⁵⁸. Furthermore, it was felt that the need to keep the

⁵⁸ Another example of the heuristic cycle operating across studies, with each evaluation being

questionnaires for clients as short as possible was paramount, and the fairly lengthy questions (involving 21 items in each) were considered too off putting to be included.

The nearest available analogue was for counsellors to report on their client's feelings, as far as they were able, at the start and end of counselling. A theoretical ideal self (maximum positive ratings on all scales) was then used to calculate the discrepancies at each point. Inevitably counsellors could not be expected to know how their clients felt on all the items used, and were offered a 'don't know' option in addition to the 7 possible ratings in each scale. 'Don't know' or unused scales were then disregarded, and the theoretical ideal self was adjusted before calculating the discrepancy. To allow comparison between responses which used differing numbers of scales, each discrepancy score was then divided by the number of items used in that instance, as described elsewhere (see Chapter 12). This kind of adaptation of data collection techniques to suit the detailed needs of the context is perhaps more typical of phenomenological studies than the type of psychometrically oriented measure used in this section. However, the pluralistic application of qualitative data from the earlier piloting phase to the full evaluation stage enabled this more sensitive procedure to be developed. It was 'sensitive' in two quite different but, in this instance, complementary ways. Firstly, it was sensitive in the every day sense of humanely avoiding harm to clients by removing the need to approach them for data at this stage. Secondly, it was also 'sensitive' in the reductionistic sense of being capable of recording and quantifying what change in self concept there may have been. The deterioration in the quality of the data caused by counsellors responding on their clients' behalf was expected to be partially compensated for, in reductionist terms, by increased response rates,

reflexively concerned with evaluating itself for the benefit of subsequent studies. Those later studies were also required to evaluate their predecessors and adapt them as necessary.

and in phenomenological terms from the possibility of increasing the qualitative data recorded while maintaining reasonably brief questionnaires.

Stage four: Clients' questionnaire post-counselling

In the fourth stage, clients completed a more extensive questionnaire after their last session with the counsellor. This recorded demographic information; the expected and actual (perceived) overall helpfulness of counselling; multiple outcome measures for presenting and secondary issues (including degrees of distress, difficulty, improvement and the relatedness of that improvement to the counselling); characteristics of the counsellor; client satisfaction and client self esteem. Limited qualitative information was also gathered, which was expected to allow a clearer and more in-depth understanding of the meaning of the more quantitative sections. The questionnaire was issued by the counsellor with a covering letter from the researcher and a labelled envelope to be returned directly to a Freepost address, which had no connection with the company. This step had not been thought necessary in the A.S.C.U. study but was considered requisite here in order to ease fears regarding possible abuses of confidentiality.

Stage five: Counsellors' questionnaire post-counselling

The fifth stage was completed concurrently with the fourth; counsellors also completed a questionnaire after the final session with each client. This related to all of the previous questionnaires and provided the counsellors' view of the counselling process, and an objectified measure of any change apparent to them.

Stage six: Clients' follow up questionnaire six weeks post-counselling

The sixth and final stage was a questionnaire (similar to stage 4) for clients to complete six weeks after their last counselling session. These were issued to the client by the counsellor concerned, and then returned directly to the researcher via the same Freepost address to preserve anonymity. This follow up stage was essential to allow estimation of the positive bias, selection and other effects mentioned above, which were expected to be at their strongest immediately after the counselling relationship has ended.

This stage also provided an indication of how sustained any change or other effect noted during the counselling period may have been. The follow up forms were issued a fixed number of weeks after counselling had ended to ensure uniform opportunity for responses.

10.4 Overview of results

Although the principle findings are précised here, greater detail is provided in Appendices B.2 and D.2 which better reflect the information made available to the staff and management of the service. As noted above, priority has been given here to emphasising the role and utility of pluralism.

10.4.1 General survey of the target population eligible to use the service

This entire phase was introduced as a result of heuristic development within this evaluation which found that the low numbers of referrals to counselling (and take up rate following referral) necessitated some form of data gathering from those who chose not to use the service.

Because of the role it held in the evaluation as a whole, the questionnaire was dominated by simple quantitative questions. However, phenomenological

considerations prompted the inclusion of two qualitative sections to support and extend the reductionist data.

Issued to all 1515 members of staff who could use the service in its pilot phase, 1078 (>71%) of the anonymous questionnaires were returned. Providing a relatively commonplace example of interaction between approaches, the content analysis of the qualitative responses provided a quantitative breakdown offered in table 10.1. Thirteen categories of response were identified, which were then grouped into four main types.

Of course, such quantitative expression can improve our interpretation of these qualitative results. For example, no negative comments were made by people who had used the service and its image came under less criticism than that of counselling in general. The table also demonstrates that the target client group wanted the service to promote itself better and some lacked information. The frequency of comments regarding stress and management was also revealing.

Table 10.1 - Categorisation of general survey qualitative responses⁵⁹.

	<i>n.</i>		<i>n.</i>
<u>Type A</u> Evaluative Comments	58	<u>Type B</u> Practical improvements to the service	202
A.1 Positive comment re the service	48	B.1 Better advertising / promotion needed	70
A.2 Have used the service - positive comment	10	B.2 Need for extended hours	26
A.3 Have used the service - negative comment	0	B.3 Separate service from employer	14
		B.4 Additional services	28
		B.5 Cannot comment (not used service or insufficient information).	64
<u>Type C</u> Issues related to the perception of counselling in the workplace	48	<u>Type D</u> Other cultural and work related factors	64
C.1 Poor image of the service	8	D.1 Comments regarding company or management	26
C.2 Poor image of counselling	24	D.2 Work environment is stressful	30
C.3 Fears regarding confidentiality	18	D.3 Difficulties talking about problems	8

The contrast between this and the richness of thorough analysis of the vivid responses quoted below, however, gives an excellent demonstration of the benefits of combining the forms of investigation. Either on its own would have been inadequate. The quantitative and qualitative data is considered together in most of the following discussion, organised into themes as in the previous chapter, to emphasise their contrasting and complementary natures. Their different kinds of sensitivity and utility borne by each data type is evident throughout.

Firstly, basic demographic details were quantitatively recorded to ensure the representativeness of the returns which was satisfactory.

⁵⁹ It should be noted that the low percentage of respondents represented in any one category of table 10.1 is less important than the relative numbers of responses in each group.

Experience of stress

A series of highly quantitatively oriented results was initially processed in the reductionist manner appropriate to them and indicated that 81% of respondents experienced stress at work. Interpreting this strong but perhaps rather bland statement in the light of the qualitative data indicated widespread and sometimes acute effects of stress at all levels of the organisation. Returning once again to the quantitative frame, this stress often appeared to be suffered without recourse to positive coping strategies, increasing the likelihood of consequent problems. For example, 68% of respondents said that they never or only occasionally practised positive stress management techniques while 46% reported using damaging solutions to stress at least occasionally.

Perhaps the most important figures derived from this part of the general questionnaire were that the 104 respondents (11%) who had taken days off in the last year due to stress had meant a total of 1457 working days had been lost. However, the *number* of days off due to stress varied greatly (from 0.5 to 240), while the mean figure was 14 days lost. Precise calculation of the costs associated with this level of stress related absenteeism lay outwith the remit of this study. However, it was expected that they would inevitably be quite considerable. Thus, even relatively low numbers of people presenting for counselling could have a significant impact on reducing absenteeism costs if it were both well targeted and effective. It should be stressed that this finding could not have been produced in such a clear cut manner by qualitative methods.

Further research would be required to establish the degree of stress, its source and level of impact on staff more reliably and accurately. However, more complex measures such as the Occupational Stress Indicator (Cooper *et al.*, 1988b) were not considered appropriate here. In the absence of such detailed quantitative data, the qualitative questions compensated with their different

type of more vivid, if less generalisable, insight. A number of comments suggested that lack of staff and ‘cascading responsibility down to front-line people’ was felt to be a major problem resulting in heavy workloads, with little control over the situation:

*‘stress that is work induced is the problem created by employers
- if cutbacks were not as severe counselling would not be
necessary’*

There was also ‘concern about the continuing increased workloads ... imposed on senior staff, especially managers’, confirming the quantitatively derived suggestion that stress could be a problem at any point in the hierarchy.

Attitudes towards the service and towards counselling in general

A clear majority of staff (65%) said that they would consider using the counselling service. Qualitative responses concurred indicating that the initiative was seen as a ‘very worthwhile service’ and ‘a positive step’ in tackling some of the problems faced by staff. These attitudes were in stark contrast with several comments regarding the company management in general. It may be that a clear act of managerial concern such as the provision of an employee assistance programme directly contributed to the desired shift in organisational culture. This qualitative data were thus able to relate back to the previous quantitative study (Maven Gattorna Chorn, 1993).

The richness of the qualitative data also expanded on the relatively simplistic information that 45% of respondents would *not* use the service. Here, the qualitative data revealed what the quantitative evidence could not: there appeared to be a fairly poor understanding of how counselling can work, and of what it is able to offer. Interestingly, there were very few negative images

associated explicitly with the service as distinct from the general image of counselling:

'I do not really see how counselling could solve most people's problems - i.e. money, bills, illness, family troubles - what can they do?'

'how can you actually resolve the problem issue, e.g. say my boss was a poor manager, difficult to get on with, did not listen ... how could you resolve this if it was giving the problems?'

Certainly, it would be unreasonable to expect counselling to solve all a person's problems. Its strength, of course, would lie in helping people to *cope* with those problems. Several respondents reported that they, and others, would only be likely to consider counselling as 'a safety net' or 'the step before "breakdown" as opposed to providing help when problems arise'. It is arguable, however, that counselling is most cost-effective when applied 'at the pinch rather than at the crunch' (L.R.E.D., 1993), preventing more serious problems from developing. 70 responses indicated a need for 'more information'. Several people asked for 'examples - test cases' or 'case study type details of what [the service] can do'. This pointed to a need for the service to educate its target client group further about the possibilities on offer. The quantitative evidence could not have offered so precise and, especially for the service providers, so useful a conclusion. Indeed, another quantitative item had indicated that 70% of the sample felt they were fully informed about the services on offer. The importance of the remaining 30% was only indicated confirmed by the qualitative responses at the end of the questionnaire. If the qualitative approach had been removed there would have been no guarantee that this element, crucial to one of the stakeholders, the service providers, would have been revealed at all. As it was, this topic became a recurring theme throughout this part of the study.

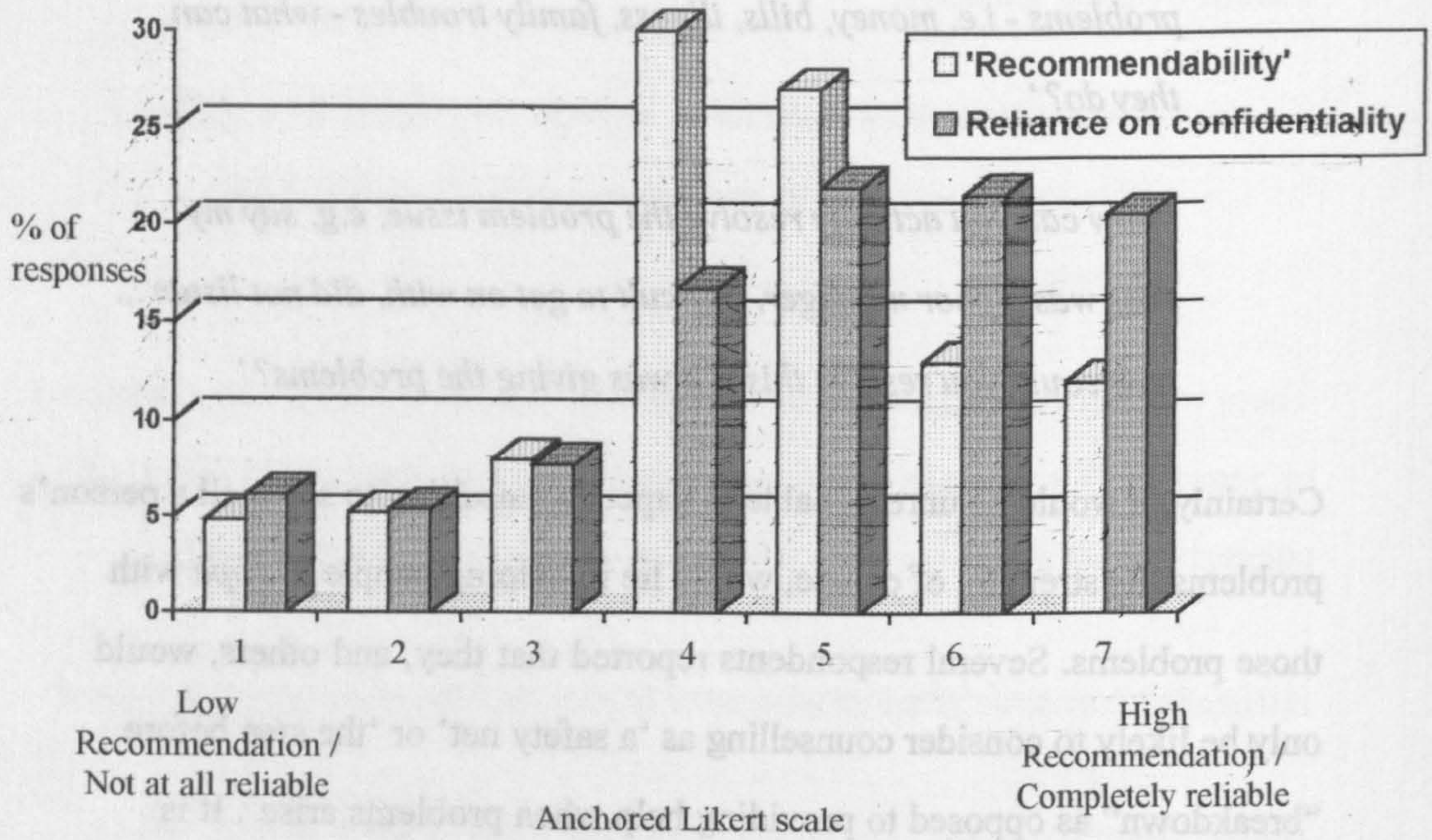


Diagram 10.3 - Confidence in, and 'recommendability' of, the service

Confidence in the service

Responses to two quantitative questions regarding the degree to which the respondent had confidence in the confidentiality of the service or would recommend it to 'a close friend who was having difficulties' were both distinctly skewed towards the positive end of the scale (see Diagram 10.3). That the most common responses regarding the 'recommendability' of the service were not at the extreme positive end, however, might have been thought to pluralistically confirm the phenomenologically indicated residual hesitance surrounding the service just noted.

Those who had previously indicated that they felt fully informed about the service were more likely to give it a higher recommendation than others. Furthermore, use of the extreme positive end of the scale correlated closely with actual experience of the service when spontaneously indicated in the qualitative evidence. It was *only* through this pluralist combination of data during the interpretation phase that could reveal that those who had used the service in some way, had a much higher opinion of it.

Furthermore, the phenomenological evidence did not just expand on the quantitative. The hermeneutic relationship was entirely mutual (see Chapter 6). The weight that should be given to the important qualitative data was best understood by setting it in the broader perspective offered by some further reductionistically oriented data. It is worth noting again that this interaction between data types was a constant feature, even during interpretation. Furthermore, they were not simply being treated as separate data sets being compared in retrospect - their interaction had been continual throughout the earlier phases of the study as well.

The complementary nature of data types was further exemplified by the following. 81% of responses regarding the extent to which respondents felt able

to rely on the confidentiality of the service were at or above the equivocal mid point of the scale used (see Diagram 10.3). The remaining 19% were frequently among those who expressed concerns in the qualitative questions. The pluralist combination of data types allowed each to temper the findings of the other. In this instance, the data is possibly best interpreted as suggesting that lack of trust in the confidentiality of the service (or in counselling in general) was a serious barrier for the significant minority of potential clients who felt strongly about it. High standards regarding client anonymity, counsellor competence and so forth did not appear to have been universally recognised or accepted. The service providers could thus take specific appropriate action to address this now clearly, and pluralistically, identified issue.

10.4.2 Records of telephone contacts

It was not originally planned that telephone counselling would be a significant function of the service. It had been anticipated that the majority of counselling would be undertaken by counsellors contracted for the purpose in face to face meetings, following relatively brief telephone contacts. In recognition of the need for the service to provide sensitive support, from initial contact, to onward referral and beyond, those answering the telephones were trained in counselling skills. It was then possible for them to discuss matters with callers to a greater depth than the relatively straightforward information giving and referral service first envisaged. This led to the extension of the data gathering at this point noted above (see p. 223). That evidence of both types bore evaluative utility for the service emphasised the practical value of the ability of pluralist studies to adapt to their contexts - both in their initial design and as they progress.

Not only were previous methods recontextualised according to the initial needs of the study, the importance of *on-going* reflexive developmental cycles was also demonstrated. In the period after the expanded recording instrument was

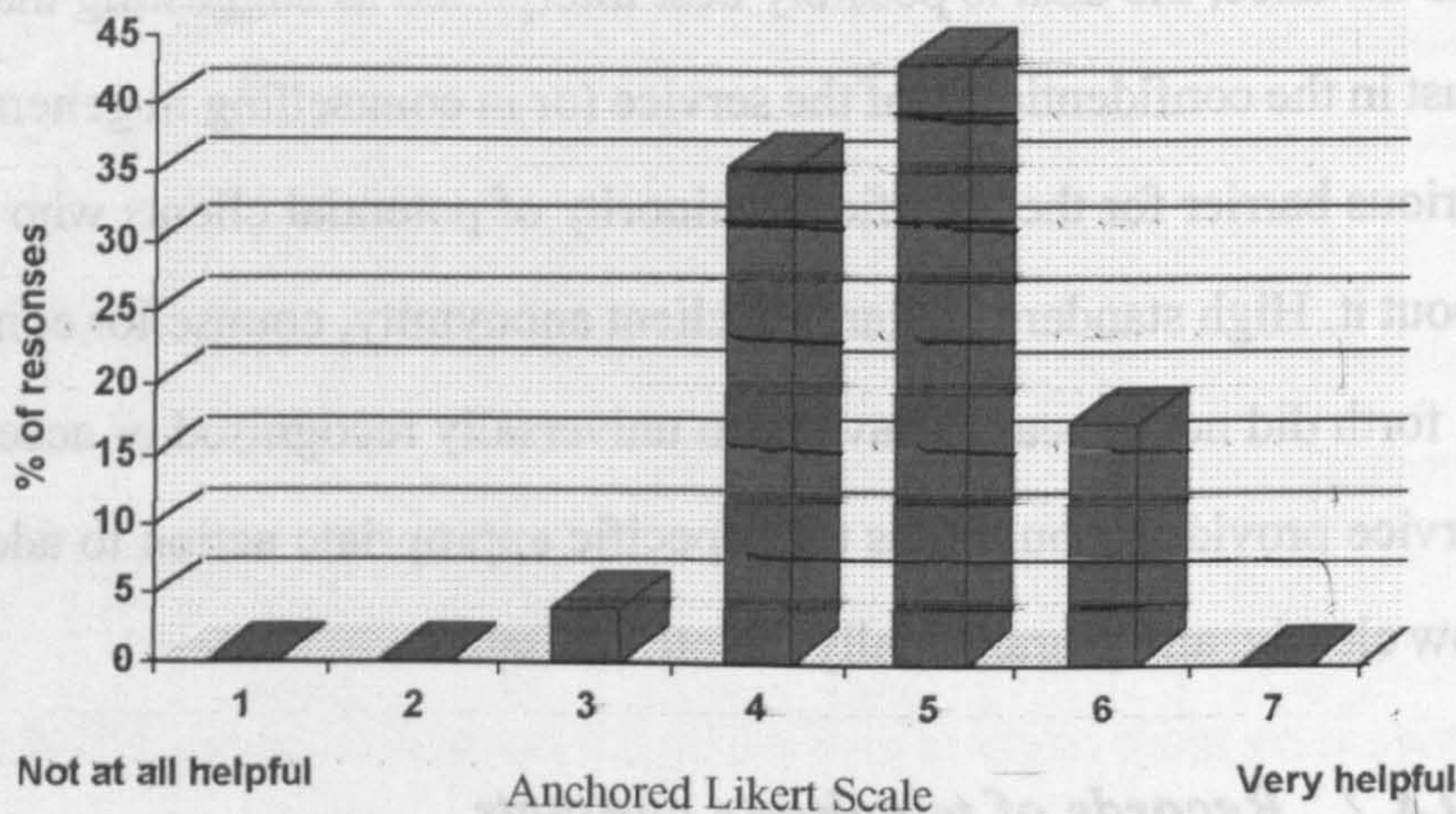


Diagram 10.4 - Overall helpfulness of telephone contacts (n. = 28)

to rely on the confidentiality of the service were at or above the equivocal mid point of the scale used (see Diagram 10.3). The remaining 19% were responses among those who expressed concerns in the qualitative questions. The combination of data types allowed each to temper the findings of the other. In this instance, the data is possibly best interpreted as suggesting that lack of trust in the service was a serious concern. About 11% of respondents were so concerned that they did not address this service. However, the service was not originally planned for this purpose. It had been anticipated that the majority of contacting would be undertaken by counsellors contacted for the purpose of case meetings, following relatively brief telephone contacts. In recognition of the need for the service to provide sensitive support, from initial contact, to onward referral and beyond, those answering the telephones were trained in counselling skills. It was then possible for them to discuss matters with clients to a greater depth than the relatively straightforward information giving and referral service first envisaged. This led to the extension of the data gathering at this point noted above (see p. 223). That evidence of both types of evaluative utility for the service emphasised the practical value of the ability of pluralist studies to adapt to their contexts - both in their initial design and as they progress.

Not only were previous methods reconceptualised according to the initial needs of the study, the importance of on-going reflexive developmental cycles was also demonstrated. In the period after the expanded recording instrument was

introduced, which recognised the additional category of ‘telephone counselling’, 17% of responses fell into that category and revealed the importance of the telephone support.

Overall helpfulness of these calls was quantitatively recorded and results were distinctly positive, as shown in Diagram 10.4.

Limited qualitative data were also collected and again this interacted with the quantitative evidence adding important insights that would not otherwise have been revealed. Expanding on the evidence regarding the usefulness of the telephone counselling, greater use of face to face sessions was also indicated. Other items that could only be derived from the qualitative elements of this phase included the need for more rapid responses to requests for counselling and the value callers placed on the opportunity to express their feelings without risking negative effects on their work prospects. A number of responses noted that callers had explicitly indicated that the call had been ‘very helpful’ or had helped them ‘gain some strength’. A direct impact on work performance was expected to follow, as their stress levels, and the sources of their stress, would probably be somewhat more effectively managed.

10.4.3 Questionnaire returns from counsellors and counselling clients

The results given in this section are from data given by clients and counsellors in the questionnaires that constituted stages three to six (see pp. 223 to 226). As in the previous study, the questions are referred to in groups of topic, rather than in strict sequential order. The precise wording can be seen in Appendix A. For the sake of increased rigour, special note was taken of answers in cases where the quantitative measures (such as scores for distress and difficulty or self esteem) showed negative change. This continual purposive interaction of

data types and research styles was typical of the approach taken throughout the study.

Monitoring Statistics

Given that only 26 clients were referred to counselling, exhaustive statistical analysis of the data would not have been useful. Consequently, the focus remained on those aspects that could offer greatest utility in evaluating the service. This meant that greater emphasis had to be placed on the qualitative elements of the questionnaires in interpreting the results. With small numbers of participants, the qualitative responses were better suited to exemplifying experiences, rather than demonstrating the typical experience that might be expected across clients of the service in general. If there had not been the possibility of qualitative data aiding the interpretation of the quantitative evidence in this way, the value of the questionnaire would have been severely impaired. In this study, however, the pluralist principles applied throughout achieved far more useful results than would have been possible from either type of inquiry alone. For example, the weight given to the differing research paradigms could shift at the interpretation phase when their actual quality and utility could be assessed. This contrasts with the dogmatic position of monistic studies that would decide on the relative value of data on *a priori* theoretical grounds.

It should be emphasised that low absolute numbers of clients referred to counselling does not equate with low impact of the service, especially given that the general survey of the target group had already shown significant levels of absenteeism concentrated among a very small proportion of the work force.

As in the A.S.C.U. study, the length of the second two questionnaires for clients, and the different methods of distribution meant that response rates could be expected to vary a great deal, and were close to the levels expected:

<i>Table 10.2 - Response rates in the financial services company E.A.P evaluation</i>	<u>Response rate</u>	
	Stage	N.
Stage 3: completed by counsellors after the first session (Form A)	25	96.2%
Stage 4: issued to clients after the last session (Form C)	15	57.7%
Stage 5: completed by counsellors after the last session (Form B)	19	73.1%
Stage 6: issued to clients at the follow up stage (Form D)	7	26.9%

Details of gender, age and employment category were sought at the end of counselling and at follow up. The small imbalances reported were virtually inevitable when dealing with small numbers of clients and the proportions became closer to the population norm as the study progressed. Precise statistical comparison with the target population was impossible because of the small numbers of clients. Consequently, all the results demonstrating trends could only be interpreted with pluralist reference to the illuminative details given by the qualitative responses.

Numbers of sessions

While 26% of clients used all 8 free sessions available to them, the average remained below 6 sessions per person, possibly confirming the premise, suggested in the original reports from the A.S.C.U. study (see Appendix D.1 and Goss and Mearns, 1997b), that regardless of the number of sessions available, people tend to use what they need and little more. Only two clients received more than 8 sessions.

The utility of the quantitative evidence on satisfaction was emphasised by the relatively low levels of satisfaction recorded for the number of sessions available in comparison with the other satisfaction related scales. A significant minority of clients (33.3%) was at or below the middle of the scale for satisfaction with the number of sessions at the end of counselling. This deteriorated further at follow up with 43% of the very small number of respondents actually using the lowest two possible ratings. Despite the flaws

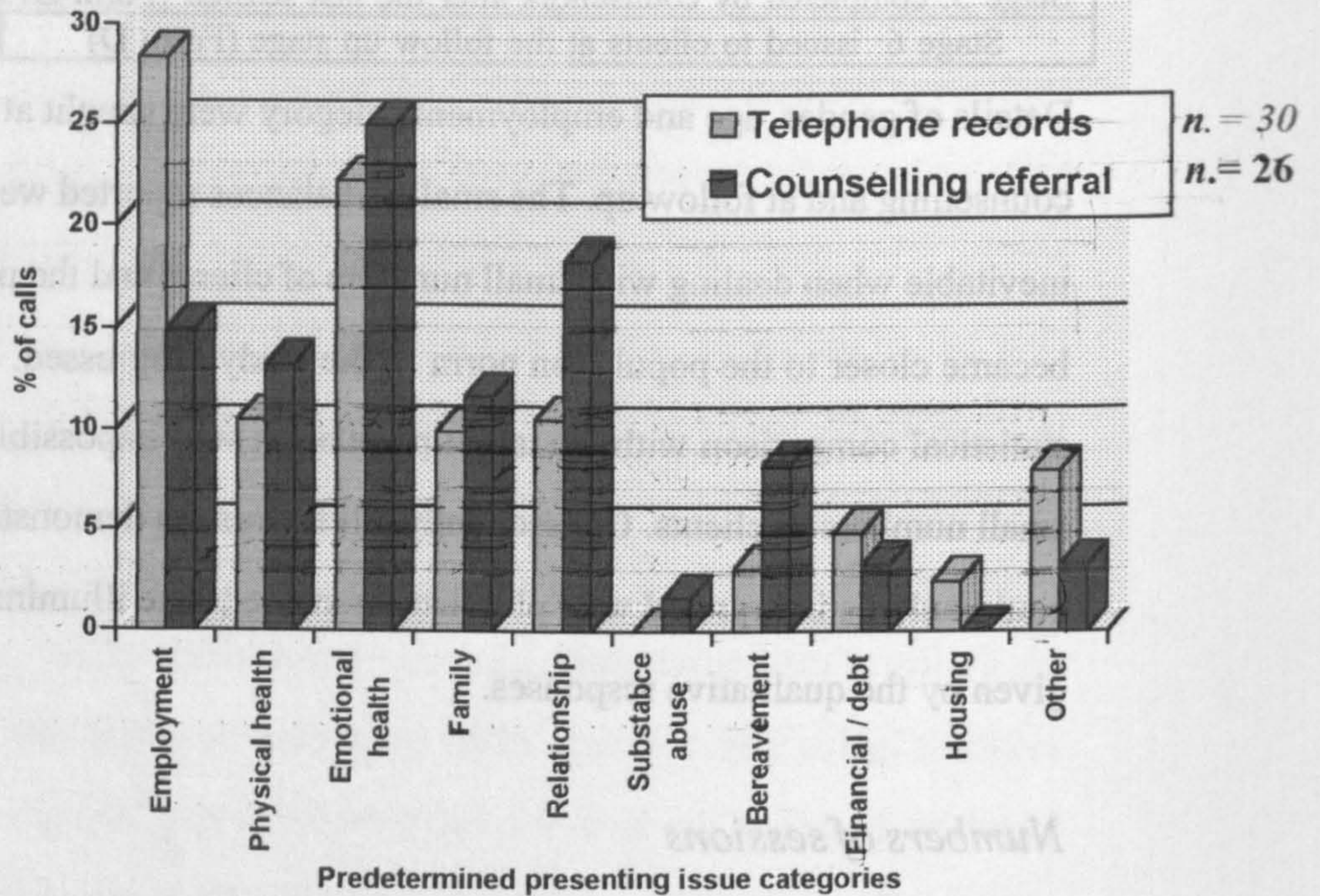


Diagram 10.5 - Presenting issues by predetermined categories

recognised by each approach in using satisfaction rating scales, these data did highlight an issue that might otherwise have been under-reported. Their utility was maximised by interpreting them in relation to the qualitative evidence from both counsellors and clients. A significant proportion of their comments implied a need for '*an open time limit*' confirming the apparent need for '*more sessions under the scheme*'. While most clients may receive the help they need in a small number of sessions, for some the 'guillotine' the service was forced to impose on the counselling process after eight sessions appeared to be an important problem.

This built on the findings from the A.S.C.U. study, again exemplifying the ability of pluralist studies to be 'progressive' (see Chapter 6.6) in the sense that studies can develop general points of interest which contribute to an increasingly widely applicable, certain and useful body of knowledge. In this instance, we might suggest that flexibility regarding the number of sessions offered can be both clinically important and cost effective. This point was further developed in the subsequent study reported in Chapter 11.

Nature of presenting issues

In addition to the main evaluation questionnaires described above, counsellors were also required to return a brief form regarding their work directly to the service's office. Although primarily intended for invoicing purposes, some monitoring statistics were also recorded and this was a useful additional source of data. Counsellors were asked to indicate which problem(s) had been presented from ten pre-defined categories. The tally of responses to each of these is presented in Diagram 10.5, along with the problems presented in telephone calls to the service. (N.B. Sum = >100% as multiple categories were sometimes used for a single client.)

The types of presenting and secondary issues reported in the free response descriptions were very varied. The sample was considered too small for the usual content analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) which would produce discrete categories that could be compared with the quantitative data above. In this instance, the qualitative data could offer the greatest utility in understanding the overall picture of what clients brought to counselling for most purposes by providing an illustrative flavour of the kinds of reported reasons for seeking counselling, e.g.:

'Sexual harassment at work';

'Cycle of anxiety and depression which have kept her off work for many months';

'Depression, poor self esteem and difficulties with peer relationships'.

Perceived helpfulness of counselling

As in the previous study, both quantitative and qualitative data on the perceived helpfulness of the counselling was gathered. Several quantitative elements were interpreted in relation to each other and are summarised in table 10.3.

Table 10.3 - Expected and actual perceived helpfulness reported by counsellors and clients

Likert scale		Expected helpfulness post session 1 (clients)	Helpfulness reported post counselling (counsellors)	Helpfulness reported post counselling (clients)	Helpfulness reported at follow up (clients)
Not at all hopeful/helpful	1	0(0%)	1(5.56%)	1 (7.69%)	0 (0%)
	2	0(0%)	2(11.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	3	1(4.35%)	0(0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	4	4(17.3%)	0(0%)	1 (7.69%)	1 (16.7%)
	5	6(26.1%)	9(50%)	1 (7.69%)	0 (0%)
	6	11(47.8%)	5(27.8%)	5 (38.5%)	1 (16.7%)
Very hopeful/helpful	7	1(4.35%)	1(5.56%)	5 (38.5%)	4 (66.6%)

The low numbers of responses, especially from clients, however, made pluralistic reliance on the other data vital. As noted previously, if perceived overall helpfulness had been considered a primary indicator of success, as in some studies (e.g. Sloboda *et al*, 1993), the service could already be counted a great success. For present purposes, however, even had much greater numbers of responses been available these results would still have been considered only as part of the mass of alternative data of different types, and from different sources, to corroborate them.

In this study, these quantitative ratings of overall help could be related directly to qualitative accounts from both clients and from counsellors. The comment from a counsellor that, 'The feedback from the client at the end of the final session was extremely positive ... She initially suggested she had felt sceptical about consulting a counsellor but acknowledged she had benefited greatly from the experience' added weight to the suggestion that the scepticism recorded in the survey of those eligible to use the service might be counteracted by experience and also exemplified the benefit of relating different parts of a study to each other (see Chapter 7.1).

Other qualitative comments from clients offered outstanding affirmations of the effectiveness of the service in their lives, allowing all the stakeholder groups to

gain an insight into what it could achieve in a way that would not have been possible from quantitative data at all:

'It is impossible to say the extent of the benefit I received. When a person transforms your life from total fog and complete confusion to clarity and daylight and gives you back the strength and control which had disappeared you cannot rate it highly enough.'

'I think the helpline is an excellent idea. The lady I spoke to on the first occasion was very helpful and understanding. I was feeling very low and depressed when I first made contact. There is no doubt this was effecting my work ... The counselling has helped me pull myself together and get on with it. Thank you.'

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the qualitative comments, apart from the absence of criticism, was the strength with which the positive statements were made. It can be difficult to judge just how much difference counselling has made to a person's life simply from the numeric data in the preceding section, but these responses allowed a vivid and dramatic insight into the extent to which the counselling offered by the service had benefited the company's staff.

Many comments also indicated that it was the counselling that had been the important factor in the improvements reported. Just as the *benefits* were not only made very apparent from the descriptive material while *the same effectiveness* was quantifiable in the positivistically oriented sections, so the Likert scale ratings of the relevance of counselling were used to support the phenomenologically derived suggestion of a causal relationship. A similar 7 point scale was used (7 = change was completely related to counselling; 1 = not at all related to counselling). Although counsellors were relatively modest, giving a mean response of 4.75, clients' mean score was 5.2 at the end of

counselling rising to 6 at follow up. Very few clients changed their score in the intervening period and it is likely that the increase in clients' responses are the result of a selection effect, in that clients who had found counselling to be more important to them were more likely to return the questionnaire.

Throughout the study, returns regarding clients who appeared to show negative, or even equivocal, results whether recorded in quantitative or qualitative terms, were purposively selected (Erlandson *et al.*, 1993) to be subjected to closer scrutiny. As in the A.S.C.U. study, this method of enhancing the usefulness of data was drawn from naturalistic studies, but applied here regardless of the type of data. This is not to say that such a course of action would always be possible without violating the rules of validity and reliability: that would be to take the Feyerabendian 'anything goes' slogan literally, advocating complete, anarchic relativism as a result. Pluralist method, however, first asks whether the combination of techniques is acceptable in the terms of each of the approaches concerned, including in cases such as this kind of application of one method to data of a type derived from methods that belong to an entirely different school of thought.

For example, one client included in the average figures quoted above indicated that counselling had been 'not at all' relevant to change in their condition. However, examination of their qualitative responses revealed that they considered counselling to have been inappropriate for them because of the severity of their mental disorder. This was then independently confirmed by their counsellor. The client reported that they had actually required psychiatric inpatient treatment, and a change in medication, but stressed that 'this does not mean that counselling could not be of benefit to others'. Indeed, in some research styles it would be entirely legitimate to have excluded this client from the study altogether, improving the overall figures. However, this would have led to a loss of qualitative information, in this instance on the need for ensuring

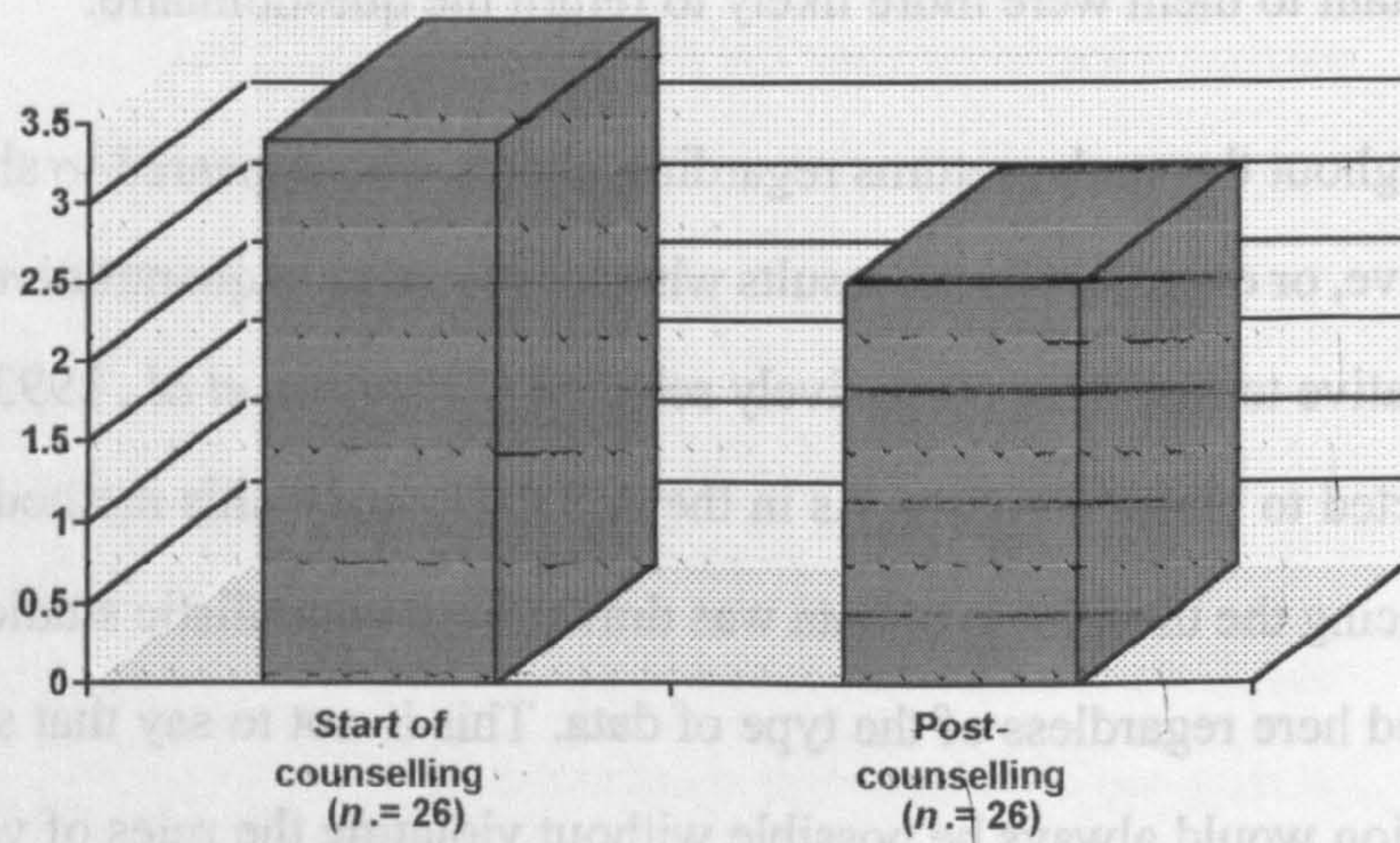


Diagram 10.6 - Mean S/I-SD scores

accurate referral and the boundaries appropriately kept by the service. The pluralist combination of data was thus more powerful than could be achieved by any monistic approach in isolation. The complex interaction between approaches and data types exemplified here also progressed beyond mere triangulation of conclusions derived from separately applied paradigms. Neither concurrent nor sequential use of phenomenological and reductionist methods would have revealed as much. Here, it was possible to interpret the average figures more fully and more accurately *and* gain evidence suggesting that the service was operating professionally, keeping within its remit and liaising with other services as required.

Self concept

In this study, evidence on change in self concept was almost exclusively quantitative and the expected corroboration from qualitative data did not emerge except in general terms. Any free response comments which did relate to changes in self concept tended to do so only obliquely and were better considered under the heading of perceived overall helpfulness of counselling. Importantly, from a pluralist perspective, the self concept data were only one element to be weighted along with the whole, pluralist, body of data, as above.

The Self / Ideal-Self Discrepancy measure (S/I-SD) results showed highly significant mean improvement during the counselling period (Diagram 10.6). Of a theoretical range of 0 to 6, the mean discrepancy at the start of counselling was calculated as 3.8 (S.D. = 0.694). At the end of counselling this was reduced to 2.5 (S.D. = 0.959). This compares with the normative score from an unmatched non-clinical population of 2.66 (S.D. = 1.34) noted in the study reported in Chapter 12. The overall effect size for the client group was 1.87. That such a large effect size was reported was significant. That effect size calculations could retain their powerful utility suggests that the pluralist

approach had done little harm to the reductionist values, which were to the fore at this point. The reductionist perspective would, of course, have seen even greater utility in these data in comparison to a control group. The strictly limited resources available and the particular sensitivity within the population precluded such a strategy but the quantitative evidence on self concept, and the other data generated, could all be related to the evidence on attributed cause and effect noted below. Subjectively reported attribution of causal relationships was a phenomenologically derived approach which used both quantitative and qualitative data and can be seen as a pluralist way of partially mitigating the problems caused by the absence of a formal control group.

10.5 Discussion

The pluralist combination of methods produced remarkably clear findings in this study, with virtually all the evaluative data pointing in the same direction. Different types of data from multiple sources corroborated most of the findings and it is argued here that this provided a basis on which to make at least moderately confident evaluative decisions. Some of the data, such as that regarding satisfaction or the perceived overall helpfulness of counselling was revealed as compromised by the mutual critique from both reductionist and phenomenological perspectives. However, the checks and balances typical of the pluralist approach ensured that none of these difficulties could entirely remove the utility of the findings overall. This study not only contributed to evidence regarding outcomes associated with counselling in the workplace, it also contributed to the exploration of pluralism, which is the primary aim of this thesis. Only the second of these is discussed below.

Contribution to exploration of pluralism

Throughout the study, the interaction between reductionist and phenomenological approaches was able to ensure that weaknesses in one were.

so far as possible, addressed by strengths in the other. This was exemplified at numerous points such as regarding the prevalence of stress among the work force and their coping strategies (which were quantitatively recorded) and the causes and effects of stress (which were better dealt with qualitatively). The same questionnaire also quantitatively recorded some residual resistance towards the service while the qualitative data were vital in revealing the importance and nature of that resistance: for a minority it was important for the service to provide further information detailing the possibilities on offer. The pluralist combination of approaches was especially useful in compensating for the absence of a control group. From a reductionist perspective this restricted the ability of the study to attribute a causal relationship between the counselling provided and change recorded. While not addressing the reductionist concerns, which were beyond the means of this study in any case, the subjective reports from both counsellors and clients did provide some phenomenologically legitimate evidence. From a reductionist perspective it would also have been desirable to have included a pre-counselling questionnaire for clients. In this instance, the phenomenological aspects of the pluralist developmental cycles carried out during the design phase prevented this because of the perceived sensitivity of the client group. In this study, it appeared that this was justified and prevented possible harm by not raising possible client fears regarding confidentiality which were such a noticeable feature of the survey of the eligible population. Thus, the pluralist approach could be seen as preserving the sensitivity to participants' needs demanded by Reason and Rowan (1981) while not abandoning the utility of reductionist methods: people were treated as whole beings while the widest possible range of knowledge about them was recorded.

This study also offered a greater degree of integration between the approaches than would have been potential with existing relativistic, post-modern or pragmatic multi-method approaches. The different approaches did not just

produce results independent of one another for comparison. Their involvement with, and influence on, each other was much more intimate and influential. They interacted in the pluralist manner described above at the design phase, while the study was implemented *and* during both the analysis and interpretation of the data. The difference between pragmatic and pluralist approaches is further noted below.

The pluralist approach also offered more certain epistemological foundations for its findings than would have been available for either monistic or multi-method studies because the different forms of evidence could turn to the originating frames of reference for such support and legitimation.

The qualitative data significantly extended the utility of the positive findings of all the quantitative measures and it is the overall utility of pluralist evidence that is its strongest arbiter of value (see Chapter 3.3.2). For example, due to the small numbers of counselling clients involved, the quantitative evidence would have proven less reliable than might have been wished, if they had been interpreted in isolation. The vivid descriptions of clients' experiences provided unambiguous evidence of the potential benefits the counselling had to offer. However, it is worth noting that the power of this evidence would have been much less if the phenomenological paradigm had been applied alone. The numeric data, flawed though it was, added a more generalisable type of specificity, such as the calculation of effect sizes regarding the same, but differently recorded, effects. Constant interaction between the approaches ensured that the data could be cross-checked at numerous points. It also ensured that the method with greatest utility could be given precedence.

It is also worth noting that a purely reductionist experimental approach to testing the effectiveness of the service might have considered several sections of the study irrelevant, such as the survey of the general eligible population and records of telephone support provided. Standard evaluative procedures would

have been likely to concentrate on quantifying change in the client group. It must be accepted that a phenomenological approach might have been similarly open to the importance of contextual detail and of facilitating service development. However, a monistic phenomenology would have been unlikely to incorporate the quantitative, reductionist elements of the study. These gave clear indications of both the prevalence of stress and its effects and of the fact that while some clients viewed counselling and the service in a negative light this could not be generalised across the whole target group.

The study offered an opportunity to explore the possibilities of variation in the development and application of pluralist methodology. Despite superficial similarities with the evaluation of the A.S.C.U. service, and between the aims and designs of the services, mere replication of the earlier study would not only have been inappropriate, it would have been inadequate to the demands of thorough evaluation. For example, the different needs of the even more sensitive client group may not have been taken into account. Also, the importance of the work carried out by telephone would have been ignored, as would the views of the general eligible population which were essential for accurate interpretation of the other data, such as that from clients and counsellors.

The use of the development, results and interpretation of the earlier study exemplified the application of the pluralist cycle even beyond the bounds of a single study, applying pluralist ideals to the development of evaluation methods for counselling generally.

None of the elements of this study would have been precluded from a purely pragmatic approach to evaluating counselling, if seen in isolation. However, as discussed above, pragmatism alone is not capable of incorporating the superficially highly divergent elements into an integrated whole. The very different forms of enquiry could only have been applied without reference to each other except, perhaps, *after* their results were produced in the manner their

originating schools of thought intended. The evaluation would then have consisted of several entirely separate strands of investigation to be drawn together and interpreted in one single step by the researcher. This interpretation would have necessarily relied on purely pragmatic, relativist principles - which are rejected by reductionist approaches to evaluative research, thus undermining the findings. In this study, however, despite the different approaches to research employed, each was pluralistically related to all the others at every stage of its development, application and interpretation. Furthermore, the hermeneutic cycle was extended by relating each of the elements of each section to each other *and* each element of each section to all the others from other parts of the study. For example, the general survey not only informed the interpretation of results from the questionnaires, interpretation of it was itself enhanced by that other data. The result was a cohesive and coherent body of data which, despite its diversity, could be considered to produce results mutually acceptable to both the main approaches.

Chapter 11 Evaluation of the Renfrewshire Association for Mental Health (R.A.M.H.) counselling service

11.1 Summary

A number of elements of this study are sufficiently similar to the preceding two for it to be reported somewhat more briefly. Further details are provided in Appendices A.3, B.3 and D.3. As with all the other studies presented in this thesis, however, it provides interesting new insights into some aspects of the counselling provided. In this instance, this comprised information both on the effectiveness of the counselling and on aspects of the specific model used: the solution focused therapy approach developed by De Shazer (1985) and others (e.g. Saunders, 1998).

In furthering the discussion of applied pluralism, the study extended the exploration of the flexibility of the approach begun with the adaptation of the A.S.C.U. study to the needs of the financial services company E.A.P. The entire protocol was re-assessed once more in the light of the differing context and stakeholder interests by repeating the iterative pluralist developmental cycle. Again, while there are parallels with the methods used previously, additional elements were required while others were considered to be less appropriate and were revised or dropped altogether. Also, the utility of pluralist research was being tested in a rather different context: that of a community based general counselling service with a highly diverse client group as opposed to the largely professional clientele and work orientation of the employee counselling settings discussed above.

The study also gave an unforeseen opportunity to demonstrate the sensitivity of the pluralist approach to criticism of a service. Crucially, negative feedback could then be set in the context of more general data on effectiveness. Thus, while specific criticisms from a small number of clients could be clearly and powerfully heard, it was possible to ensure that no more than the appropriate weight was given to them in the light of the trend of responses overall. That is, the particular could be contextualised by the general - thus, the generalisability of specific evidence could be approximately assessed while preserving its vividness and potential impact. This is seen as exemplifying a strength unique to pluralism: what appears to be a limitation of each form of data from the alternative perspective is addressed by recourse to multiple methods in direct and continuous interaction with each other.

Early evidence of criticisms from a minority of clients led to significant changes in the counselling offered⁶⁰. The study itself was further developed in the light of these changes in service provision and the developing interest of the counsellors in the way the model of counselling offered was perceived by clients and by their colleagues. This shift in stakeholder needs also altered the relative utility of the different elements of the study and thus their role in the evaluation as a whole. As a result, the study also afforded the opportunity to demonstrate the ability of pluralist data to be simultaneously summative *and*

⁶⁰ In addition to the statements about the authors background in the Preface and Postscript to this work, it is worth noting, perhaps, that this study produced more criticism of the dominant (solution-focused) model of counselling than was evident in the preceding studies. It is possible, of course, that this was so as a result of, or exaggerated by, my own position, which was, and remains, more in accordance with the (person-centred) approach most commonly used in the *other* services studied in chapters 9 and 10. Had it been possible to recruit research collaborators with different prior allegiances it may have been possible to address this issue more directly than was achieved here. In this study, the relatively high level of involvement in the research of the counsellors themselves was seen as only partially mitigating the problems of prior allegiance, as was the deconstructive, reflective and self-critical methods inherent in the pluralist mechanisms used.

formative as well as the ability of pluralist studies to respond flexibly to developing contexts and varying stakeholder needs.

11.2 Description of context and service

This counselling service differed from those in the preceding two studies in terms of its context, its clientele, the relevant stakeholders, its scale and style of organisation and the model of counselling used.

Firstly, the context was a community setting, rather than the employee counselling context studied above. Its catchment included areas with significant levels of multiple deprivation as well as a few that were relatively more affluent. Consequently, clients tended to be from a much broader range of backgrounds and any narrow set of interests, such as those of an employer regarding work performance, absenteeism etc., were less appropriate as criteria for success.

In place of the combined role of employer / service purchaser as a major stakeholder group these functions were effectively split. Service purchasing was delegated by the Scottish Office to the community mental health association responsible for the service (R.A.M.H.). Clients' employers were no more than one element of the wider community that might have a stake in the outcomes of their counselling: their families, friends, colleagues, the community as a whole and other mental health services would also have an interest. Thus the stakeholders, like the clientele, were a more diverse group and consequently had broader interests. It may have been possible to select a few indices of change from their widely ranging concerns, such as referral rates to other services and quality of familial or collegiate relationships. However, any feasible combination of the more or less narrow, monistically defined available selection of indices would either have been unlikely to represent the range of interests present in such a disparate group or would have required greater

resources than were available to cover all the varied possibilities. Consequently, it was felt that the study should focus on the more clearly defined remaining stakeholder groups which comprised the clients, the counsellors and the service management.

This service was run on a smaller scale than those studied above and was more traditionally organised. In place of a network of independent counsellors employed on a sessional basis, and co-ordinated by a single in-house employee, the service employed one full time counsellor / service manager and two part time counsellors. While the two part time counsellors had a background in person-centred counselling, the service was deliberately oriented towards the brief, solution focused methods advocated by De Shazer and others (e.g. De Shazer, 1985; Saunders, 1998).

The study was intended to investigate and evaluate the work of the counselling service in general, with particular attention to the interests of three major stakeholder groups identified above.

The service management and its funding bodies were primarily interested in the overall effectiveness of the counselling provision. The former focused on their needs to promote and develop the service - the latter on the relatively simple and straightforward needs of decision making regarding the continuation or otherwise of the service. Clients and counsellors were also concerned with such information but had much greater interest in the detail of how the service worked and those elements of it that were of most value. Consequently, it was considered that the study should consider pertinent issues of process as well as outcomes. This was reflected in its design, the analysis of the data and its interpretation in the reports generated.

11.3 Development of evaluation

The pluralist theory discussed above emphasises the importance of continuing the developmental process of constant critique between methods across a series of studies (see Chapter 6). The entire evaluation process used in the preceding studies was reviewed in the light of the differing contextual and stakeholder needs just noted. As in the last chapter, while the work bore a direct relationship to its predecessors with some elements remaining identical, their relative utility was completely re-evaluated. Different emphases were placed on different areas.

The study design was also re-evaluated on a broader scale. For example, critique of both quantitative and qualitative sections of the questionnaires used in the earlier studies, especially from a reductionist perspective, had noted that the data would be improved by gathering baseline data directly from clients prior to their first counselling session. Previously, this had been precluded by the perceived sensitivity of the counselling process, confidentiality and related issues. In this instance, however, the counsellors did not consider it necessary to protect clients to the same degree. Consequently, the quality of data provided could be improved by reducing the degree to which early contact with the counsellor coloured responses by collecting *pre-counselling* data.

As before, the adapted protocol was piloted in full with the counsellors and a small selection of clients. It was then adapted again and their views were reflected in the design of the questionnaires as well as during the data analysis and interpretation phases.

The pluralist proposals above were thus reflected in the initial development of the study and in its adaptation to the new context and stakeholder needs, much as explored in the adaptation of the original evaluation of A.S.C.U. (Chapter 9) to the different demands of the second study (Chapter 10). However, in this

instance the need for continued inter-paradigmatic critique *within* the study was especially emphasised by the need to adapt the design further as it went along. From a phenomenological point of view, it became apparent that the data provided by the questionnaires described below gave insufficient qualitative data on topics that were emerging as crucial to the development of the service - which was itself responding to the early indications from the study. Consequently an additional stage was added comprising the use of written reflective commentaries from all the counsellors involved. This is discussed in more detail below.

11.4 Outline of methodology in this case

In its final form, the evaluation consisted of six distinct stages, excluding the development and piloting phases (see Diagram 11.1 below) which were as described above. The first five stages of the study as it was implemented were used to produce a preliminary report which offered the opportunity for important findings to influence the further development of the service. Each of these stages was associated with a questionnaire for either the client or counsellor to complete (see Appendix A.3), very much in the style of the preceding studies. Their contents are very briefly noted below. Each questionnaire contained multiple measures and gathered both quantitative and qualitative data.

The sixth stage required the counsellors to provide reflective commentaries and was introduced shortly after the preliminary report. Counsellors included both their perceptions of the service they provided *and* of the evaluation process itself. This phase was begun because reflexive evaluation and development of the study had become of central concern to the counsellors, as well as from the point of view of the research itself. As a major stakeholder group it was considered appropriate that their developing need for further descriptive, phenomenologically oriented data were reflected in the study design. This

followed from the primacy of stakeholder needs over theoretical ideas of what constitutes an adequate study in the pluralism discussed above (see Chapters 4.3 and 7.2).

The adaptability of pluralism in responding to the changing stakeholder interests was facilitated by its ability to access more than one research paradigm. The increase in phenomenologically oriented data did no harm to the more quantitative data. Reference to both the quantitative and qualitative elements of the data that had been generated enhanced the interpretation of each. The body of knowledge produced was capable of being simultaneously accurate and vivid, precise and illuminative, quantifying and descriptive.

This confirmed the findings from the preceding studies and theoretical discussion that pluralist studies are capable of providing both depth and breadth of understanding regarding the value of counselling thus maximising the body of knowledge created (See Diagram 4.5 and Chapter 4.2). This can be contrasted with the relatively narrow focus of any monistic form of enquiry which would have been unable to provide either such a wide range of information or to have used the different types of data to enhance the utility of the others. Monistic studies might have successfully addressed the needs of the service purchasers *or* of the counsellors, for example. However, they would have been unlikely to have been able to address both. Furthermore, neither monistic nor non-pluralist multi-method designs would have been able to develop their methods with the same level of epistemological confidence as that offered by the pluralist foundations of this study and the preceding two (see Chapters 2.4, 3.2, and 4.4).

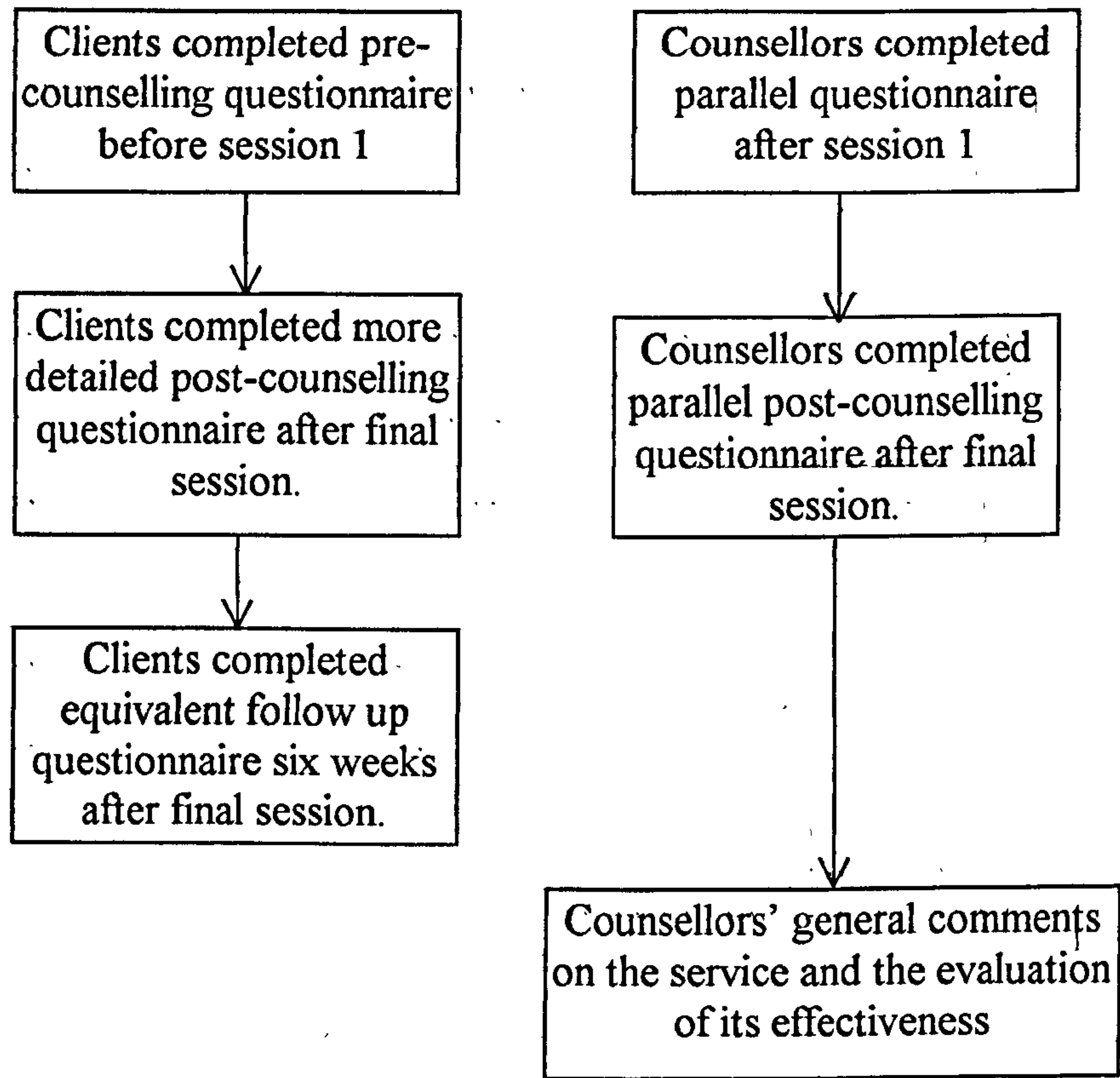


Diagram 11.1 - Outline of R.A.M.H. evaluation

In order of application, the stages were as follows (see also Diagram 11.1):

Stage 1: Client's pre-counselling form.

This questionnaire was issued to clients by post with the notification of their first appointment. An accompanying letter to explain the evaluation and a Freepost envelope addressed to the researcher was also enclosed. If the form was not completed by their first appointment a replacement was issued by the receptionist to be completed while the client was waiting to see their counsellor.

This form combined a range of measures to gather baseline data from which change could be calculated over the period during which counselling took place. Clients already being seen at the start of the evaluation period were issued with the end of counselling form only (see stage 3 below).

The measures used at this stage included free response (qualitative) descriptions of main and secondary problems, followed by Likert scale based scores for the degrees of distress and difficulty caused by each of those problems and the length of time for which they had affected the client.

Clients were also asked how hopeful they were that counselling would be of help, followed by a series of psychometrically validated items from the Medical Outcomes Study 36-item Short-Form health survey (SF-36) (Medical Outcomes Trust, 1993; U.K. Clearing House on Medical Outcomes, 1994).

These were the five item general mental health scale (M.H.I.-5), three items to assess role limitations and two further questions on social functioning.

These precisely quantifiable items stood in contrast to the final free response qualitative question that simply asked for further comments.

Stage 2: Counsellors' form completed post session 1

This was returned to the researcher immediately to minimise 'halo effects' on subsequent questionnaire replies, which had become a potential threat to the validity of the small number of delayed initial counsellor questionnaires in the preceding studies.

This brief questionnaire asked for descriptions of presenting and secondary problems, again followed by Likert scale scores for the distress and difficulty caused to the client. The counsellor's hopefulness of their ability to help was also recorded and further (free response) comments were invited. If a client attended for only one session, this stage was skipped entirely and the counsellor progressed to stage 4 and completed only the post-counselling form.

Stage 3: Clients' end of counselling form.

This was issued by the counsellor with an accompanying letter at the end of the final session and returned directly to the independent researcher via the same Freepost address as before.

If a client terminated counselling by not arriving for an arranged session, stages 3 and 4 were carried out when the counsellor considered the counselling contract to be closed. In these cases the client's questionnaire was posted to their contact address. For example, it could be enclosed with a routine letter from the counsellor offering the opportunity to return, if they wished, and asking them to complete and return the form only if they did *not* intend to continue counselling.

This questionnaire was slightly longer than that used in stage 1. It included all the same measures with several additions: as in the previous studies the question regarding hopefulness was replaced by one regarding the perceived overall helpfulness of counselling. Two general satisfaction questions were

added, as was a sequence of qualitative questions enquiring about helpful and unhelpful aspects of the counselling and possible improvements. Clients were also asked whether there had been issues they had felt unable to discuss with their counsellor.

Stage 4: Counsellors' end of counselling form completed after the final session.

This questionnaire followed up stage 2. As before, the question on hopefulness was replaced with an equivalent one on perceived actual overall helpfulness. Counsellors were asked to give additional qualitative comments on possible improvements to the counselling offered, and were invited to give further comments. They were also asked to provide basic monitoring information such as waiting time prior to first consultation, number of sessions, whether there appeared to have been any issues the client was unable to discuss and demographic details of age, gender, marital status, employment status and the name of the referrer.

Stage 5: Clients' follow up form

This last questionnaire was issued by post 6 weeks after the end of counselling with a prepaid return envelope and was identical to the one used at Stage 3, other than question labelling. The response rate after this lapse of time was predicted to be low, but the quality of the information was expected to partially compensate by being less influenced by halo effects associated with the end of the counselling relationship.

Stage 6: 'Reflective commentaries'

In response to their developing concerns and increasing 'research mindedness', the counsellors were recruited as 'co-researchers' to provide their perspective on the service and on the evaluation process as a whole. In the preparation of the preliminary report counsellors were given the opportunity for direct, but

entirely unstructured, qualitative input into the evaluation. Following the production of that report it was felt that this could be extended and formalised somewhat and the counsellors were asked to provide written comments regarding both the effectiveness of the counselling provided by the service and on their experience of participating in the evaluation process. In lieu of live interviews, which were not an option in this study, counsellors were provided with a structured series of topic headings and questions. As Heron (1996) emphasises,

'persons as autonomous beings have a moral right to participate in the research decision-making process that claims to generate knowledge about them. This includes the design of the research, its management and conclusions drawn from it.' (p. 207)

In the spirit of co-operative enquiry, rather than being required to respond strictly as directed by the items provided, they were encouraged to view themselves as collaborators in the research endeavour and provide the information *they* considered to be most useful in evaluating the project in the manner they considered most appropriate.

11.5 Main findings regarding the role and development of pluralism

As in the previous two chapters, the following is more a discussion of the contribution this study made to the exploration of pluralist theory than a presentation of the findings produced. Thus, only a selection of the data generated is actually presented here and attention is paid primarily to specific points particularly evident in this study.

11.5.1 Contextualisation: maximising utility for diverse needs

The first aim of this study was to explore further the adaptability and utility of the pluralist model. It was felt that this community setting would provide a more exacting opportunity to extend the exploration of the extent to which pluralism can meet the needs of diverse research settings as well as providing an opportunity to highlight some pertinent strengths of the pluralist approach.

The major question was whether the adapted protocol was appropriate and able to produce data with real utility for the main stakeholders. As before, from a pluralist perspective it was considered necessary to meet their diverse interests through the use of, and interaction between, diverse forms of data.

Equity of access and client characteristics

One basic question was the extent to which the service reached its target client group equitably. This is of importance to all counselling or psychotherapy services (Baker and Kleijnen, 2000; Parry, 2000.). Demographic data gave *prima facie* evidence that the client group matched the local population sufficiently well to suggest that the service did not in itself present significant barriers to any of the specific categories recorded. Quantitative data were crucial in providing the detailed breakdown of client characteristics required to provide evidence of whether problematic imbalances existed - and especially whether those problems were comparable with services elsewhere or suggested difficulties with this service in particular. For example, female clients outnumbered men by approximately two to one. However, this could be expected from studies of other community counselling services (e.g. Bennett, 1995) and was thus considered more indicative of cultural barriers inhibiting men from approaching counselling services of any kind rather than suggesting that this service was particularly deficient.

The quantitative data were of interest to all three major stakeholder groups, especially the counsellors and service management, confirming that the service appeared to have reasonable equity of access - despite the desirability of improving access for men. Any prospective client's interest in such data, however, was expected to be more focused on whether people with similar characteristics to *themselves* could access the service rather than the bare figures on demographic representativeness. The management and counsellors were also interested in being able to characterise the client group in vivid terms, especially when promoting the service elsewhere. Qualitative responses from both counsellors and clients were better suited to this purpose. However, they could have been potentially misleading if they had been relied on as the sole form of evidence given their inherently poor generalisability. Consequently, it was the pluralist combination of the *whole* data set, with each type interpretable by the other, that was most useful.

In practice, the study would have benefited from directly addressing the issue of equity of access from a client perspective. Had a further cycle of pluralist development been possible it may have been better able to do so. However, even in the absence of qualitative evidence specifically introduced to meet this need, it was still possible to derive some useful data on the characteristics of the client group to add to the quantitatively derived picture. For example, descriptions of presenting and secondary problems consistently indicated that depression was the most common reason for attending counselling, followed by anxiety, stress, bereavement and relationship difficulties; furthermore approximately 33% of clients had relationship difficulties in addition to their main presenting problem. Such a simplistic, quantitative breakdown does little justice to the richness of the qualitative data, however. It was important to note that many of the problems described were very serious, including bereavement through murder, violent childhood sexual abuse and terminal illness. This not only gave vivid insight into characteristics of the client group, it also suggested

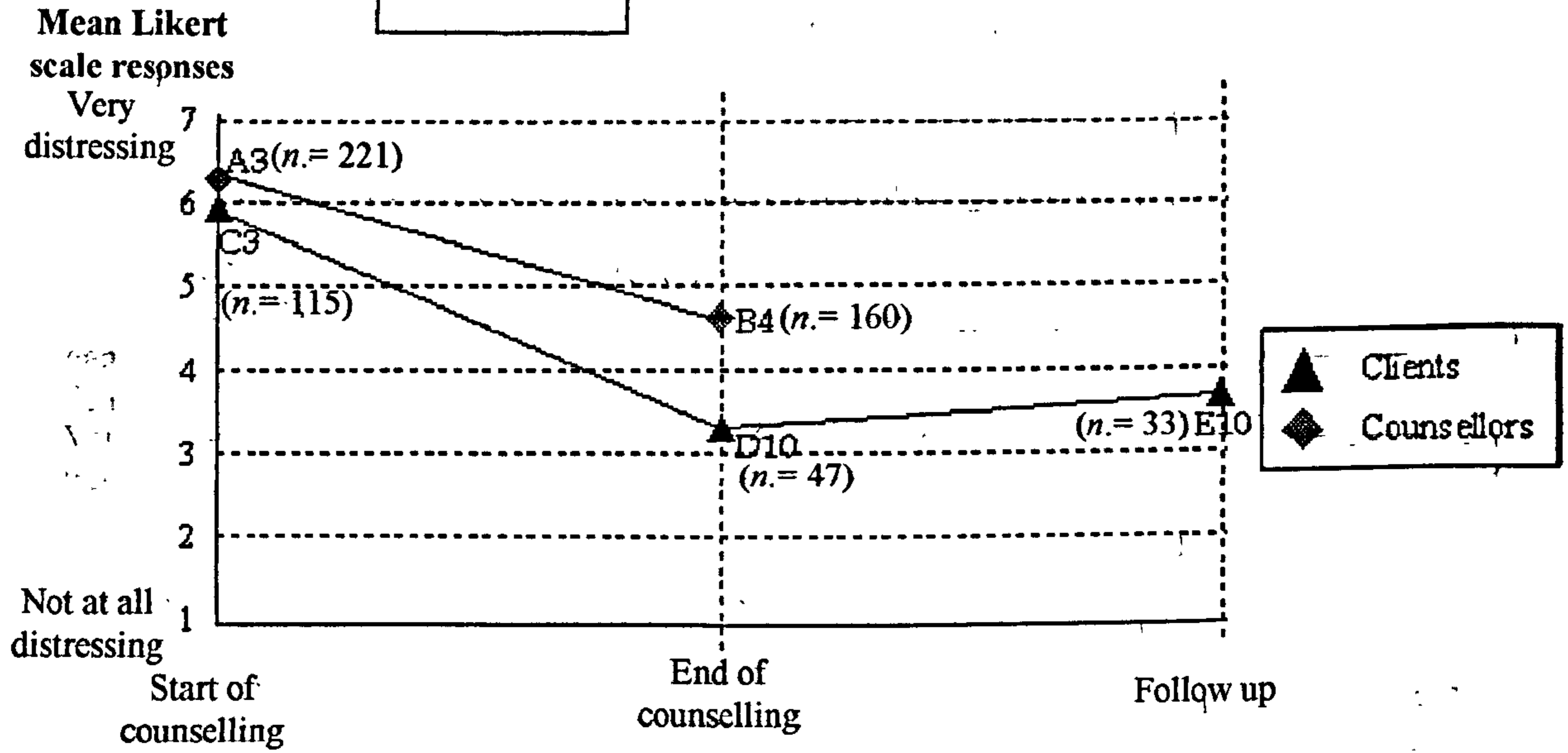


Diagram 11.2 - Change in mean responses for difficulty of presenting issues

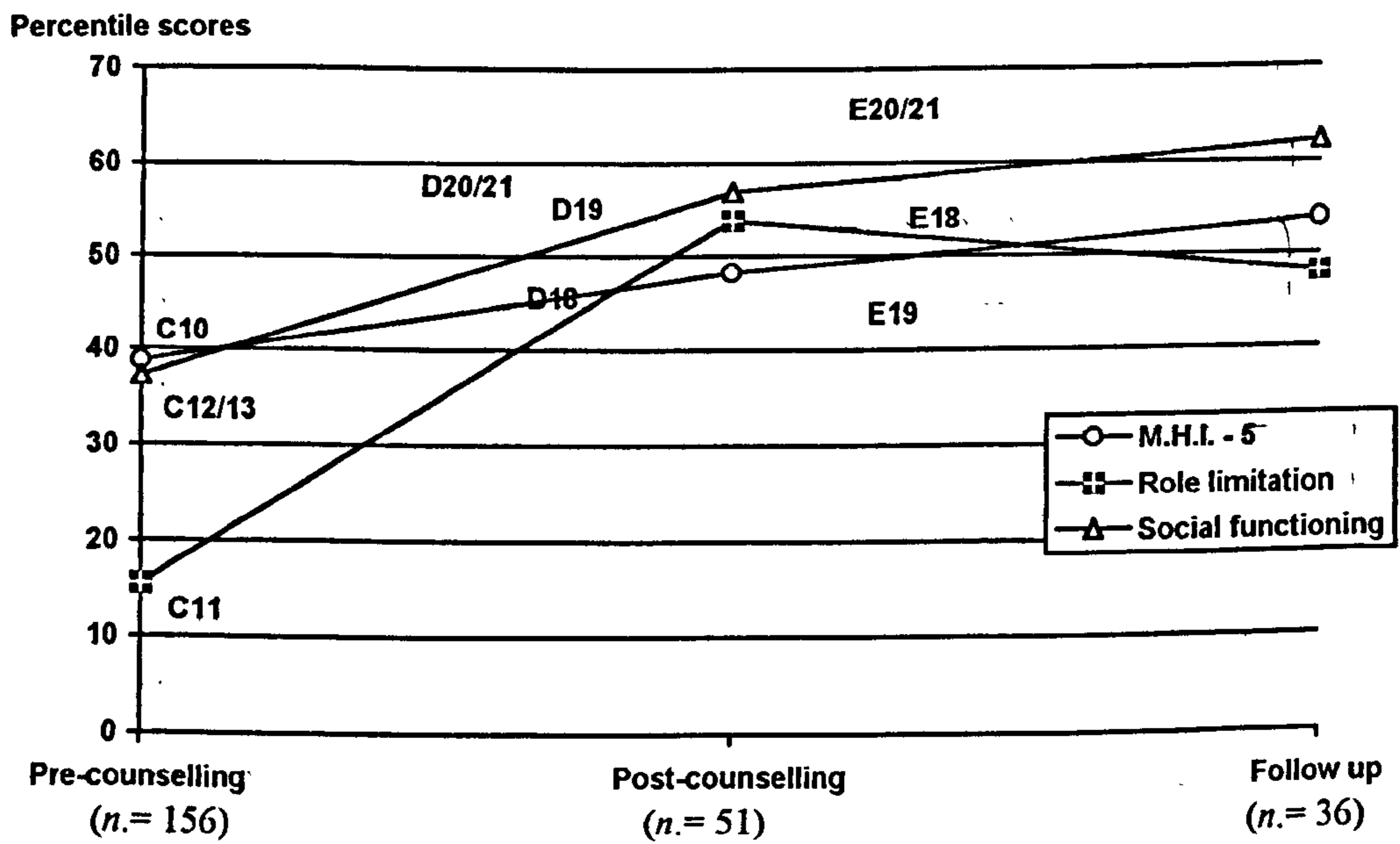


Diagram 11.3 - Change in mean percentile scores for the M.H.I.- 5, role limitation and social functioning

that the service was at least sufficiently well targeted to be dealing with those in real need.

Outcome data

The diverse forms of outcome data also proved to be both appropriate for, and of real utility to, the main stakeholder groups although they tended to take different things from them. All the stakeholders had at least some interest in all the forms of data, but the degree of weight each kind carried varied enormously between the different groups.

Service management

Firstly, the service management was able to get clear indications of the typical outcomes associated with counselling and a demonstration of the general trends across the whole client group. Their primary need was to maximise clarity and to have the most reliable possible evidence on which to base the relatively clear cut decisions they had to make about the continuation of the service, its working patterns, development needs, promotional opportunities and so forth.

Likert scale ratings for the severity of presenting and secondary problems showed consistent and clearly quantified improvement on the degrees both of distress and of the difficulty they caused, exemplified in Diagram 11.2.

Even more precise indications could be derived from the better psychometric properties of the elements taken from the 'SF-36' scale. For example, as Diagram 11.3 shows, consistent improvement was evident among those clients who responded.

Clients' mean responses on the M.H.I.-5 scales prior to counselling were half the expected norm for a non-clinical population. They had improved by the end of counselling with an effect size of 0.412. They had risen further at follow up,

giving an effect size for change over the whole period of 0.665. The effect size for change in 'role limitation' (another metric from the SF-36, see Appendix A.3) during counselling was 1.29, falling back slightly at follow up. Pre-counselling social functioning scores were only 43% of the non-clinical norm but had also improved by the end of counselling with an acceptable effect size of 0.876, rising to 1.11 for change over the whole period. This kind of quantitative detail was precisely the kind of clear cut, unambiguous and consistent evidence on trends of highly significant improvement that was most useful to the service management.

Seen in conjunction with the qualitative data, the 'SF-36' sub-scales confirmed the conclusion that many clients were suffering from acute difficulties. They also suggested that significant progress tended to be made during counselling and that this continued after counselling had ended, with the exception of the scores for role limitation. Of course, comparison with a 'normal' response is unlikely to be possible with most forms of qualitative data; nor would qualitative methods have been able to provide the kind of detail and precise indication of the general, average effects in the client group provided by these numeric data.

Management also had a direct interest in the qualitative data although it was of lesser importance to them. The vivid insight into the experience of the counselling it offered was useful in giving those outwith the project a clear understanding of what counselling was like. This was especially useful in promotional activities, fund-raising and so forth. That is, from the management perspective the utility of the qualitative data lay more in its political power than its scientific rigor.

Atypically, some quantitative data bore a similar kind of utility: the data regarding how satisfied clients were with the service they received. Although such information was compromised from a scientific point of view, as noted

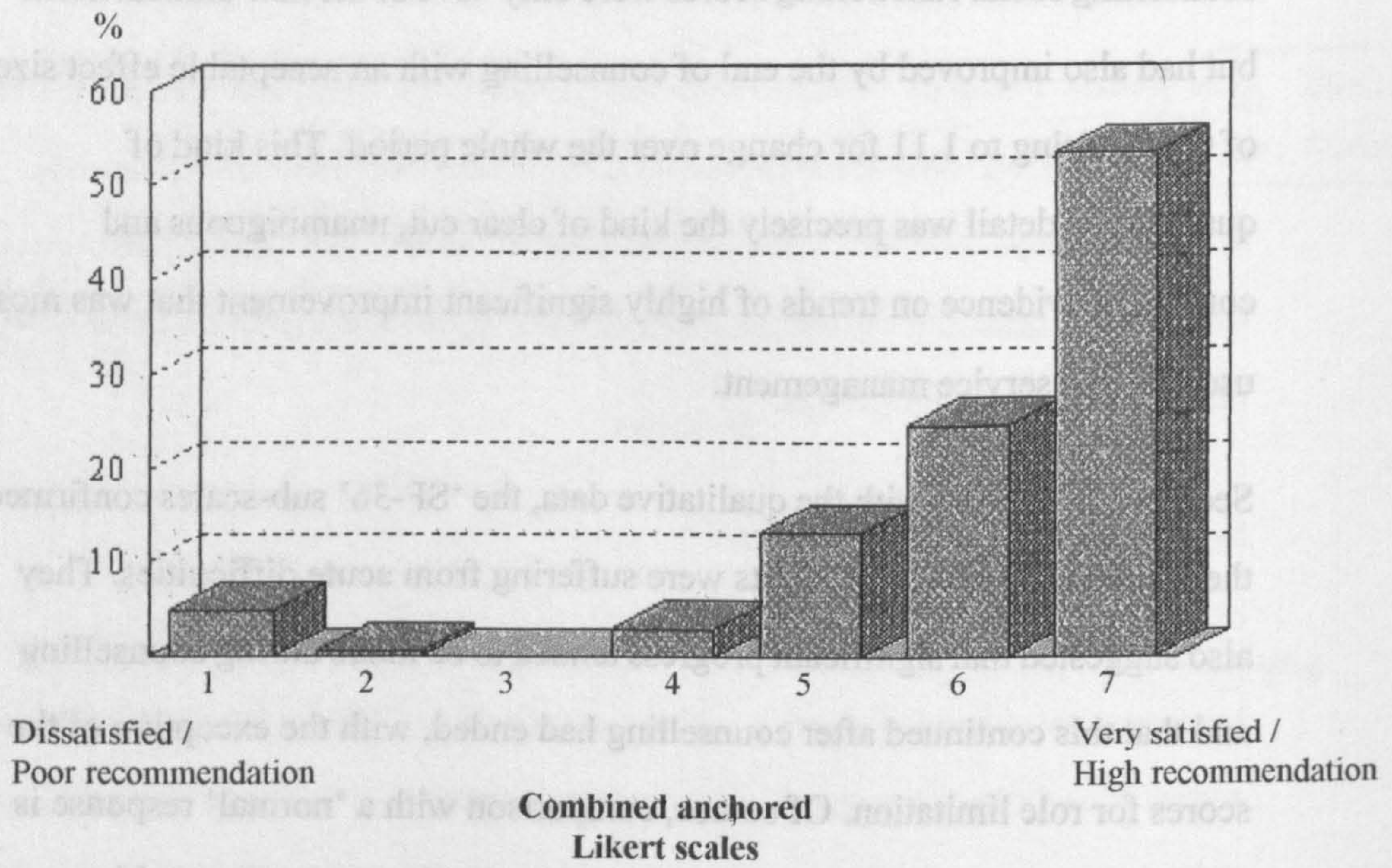


Diagram 11.4 - Overall client satisfaction ratings (n. = 48)

above, it too was useful more in a political or promotional sense. In this study, as expected, client satisfaction ratings were so high as to provide some reassurance of quality of their own, rather limited, kind. If all the satisfaction related measures were taken as a whole, 78% of clients used the top two Likert scale points (of 7) indicating that the vast majority were very satisfied with the service (Diagram 11.4)

Another use of the satisfaction related data was in combining with the other quantitative data to give a context from within which the critical findings reported below could be more usefully interpreted. The trends shown in Diagram 11.4 clearly suggest that general satisfaction with the level of service was high. The small number of clients who reported lower satisfaction were purposively studied further and their responses are discussed in more detail in the following section.

Clients

In contrast to the service management, clients and prospective clients alike were interested more in the *experience* of counselling and its outcomes in individual cases that they could identify as being more or less related to their own position. Their interest in the reductionistically indicated trends of general effectiveness would therefore be primarily useful in answering the fundamental question of ‘does this work?’ which was expected to be rather less important to them than the more specific questions of ‘will it work for me?’ and ‘what is it like?’ Thus, the technicalities of demonstrating precise degrees of psychometric effect or outcomes averaged across the whole client population bore lesser utility than descriptive evidence such as the ways in which counselling was helpful, e.g.:

'They took you seriously and listened but also helped you to fully understand your problem and although advice was given you worked your problem out for yourself.'

'She ... didn't judge me, she seems to understand me. I felt I could tell her anything.'

Both at the end of counselling and at follow up, clients frequently indicated that the 'overall effect of the counselling was beneficial', or such things as 'the counselling I received was of great help in pulling me out of a deep hole I had dug for myself.... I now find that I am able to rationalise my thoughts and stop them from taking over.' The general trend of qualitative responses was overwhelmingly positive - although this was not the whole story, as discussed below.

Counsellors

The counsellors had interests that were both more complex and more evenly spread than either the service management or their clients and prospective clients. It was, perhaps, for the counsellors that the varied data provided was most rich and for whom its pluralist combination proved to be most useful. Certainly, they had an interest in the general trends and typical outcomes provided by the quantitative, reductionistically derived data. However, the counsellors also needed insight on a specific individual level to be able to apply that general knowledge with particular clients. In other words, the numbers had to have a human face to render them useful in clinical situations.

Not only could counsellors triangulate between the different data types, they could also triangulate their own views with the (anonymised) views of their clients. A notable example was the sometimes excessive length of the waiting

list, which featured more frequently among clients' comments and tended to be more vehemently put.

Where clients and counsellors concurred was in the view that change prior to the start of counselling could be significant:

'Client had already reported significant change [prior to] our first sessions and reported that although things had stayed the same that she felt things were good enough and that at her age she was happy to accept this!';

'While accepting that there must be a waiting list due to demand - the period prior to 1st meeting was so long I through circumstances had almost sorted out my own problem'.

However, clients extended this evidence by reporting directly iatrogenic effects of the long waiting list in typically vivid and unmistakable terms:

'The length of time I have to wait for my appointment (it was March that I first requested this form of help and it is ... September when my first appointment is) is not helping me at all, ... I have become more uptight and nervous (visibly) to a worrying degree recently'.

It is worth noting that the waiting list problems were first highlighted in the quantitative data, which recorded waiting times of up to 32 weeks and an average of 12.5 weeks. The standard deviation of 9 weeks reflected the wide fluctuations in waiting times. The figures, however, were of little use in understanding the impact of such lengthy waiting times. Their importance was best understood by pluralistically viewing it in conjunction with the qualitative evidence just quoted. The service had already been aware of the number of days and weeks that clients had had to wait. However, it was when they were able to

combine quantification of the problem with this vivid descriptive evidence that they took steps to address it.

Counsellors were also able to identify other themes they needed to address to make the service more efficient. An example was the number of possibly inappropriate referrals which exacerbated the waiting list problems by using valuable counselling time for clients who did not require, or were not suitable for, counselling. One client was even thought to have been better suited to inpatient psychiatric care. In such cases the problems were most frequently evident in qualitative responses which could offer detailed understanding of the difficulties and, sometimes, of their source:

'Client stated when phoned by counsellor that he did not want to attend for counselling. GP suggested, but he did not feel it was necessary -I suspect this kind of inappropriate referral occurs frequently';

'Client has attended because social worker suggested. Has tried 'talking' about problems before, doesn't see how it will help. Unsure how willing she is to engage in counselling'.

More fundamental insight into the ways in which clients perceived their counselling differently to the impression gained from the counsellors' vantage point also proved to be of vital importance to the development of the counselling they offered. This is discussed further below (see pp. 267-270 and pp. 272-275).

Utility for the participants

It is worth noting briefly that the pluralist approach had benefits for respondents as they gave the data, as well as for the other stakeholders in

terms of the information they could take out of it. That is, its advantages were not limited to the output of the study, but had an impact on the inputs too.

In addition to the various stakeholder groups being able to take from the study those elements that were best suited to their needs, the variety of types of data being recorded also meant that respondents were able to provide the kind of evidence that they felt was most important or was the most appropriate form in which to express what they wanted to have recorded about their experiences. This was especially important in the context of this study because of the varied levels of educational attainment in the client group. Some people clearly wanted to give only minimal responses and ignored the qualitative sections of the questionnaires. Conversely, if the apparent complexity (or narrowness) of the numerically based questions was too great, they could make use of the free response opportunities to give full expression to their feelings.

Thus respondents benefited by being considered as wilful people actively choosing to participate in the manner they preferred, without being reduced to 'mere' numbers - unless being no more than the anonymous mass of data was what they chose. They had the opportunity to record any issues they wished, while still retaining the option of responding briefly but with sufficient utility to make their input worthwhile.

11.5.2 Criticism and reflexivity

Criticism of the counselling service

This was the only study presented in this thesis that reported significant criticism of the counselling provided. This was highlighted primarily by the qualitative evidence which, it is suggested, may be more able to provide negative evidence than other forms of research (e.g. McLeod, 2000b). Initially, however, the critical findings were uncovered through a typically pluralist step: the application of a procedure developed in phenomenological research to

quantitative data. The three clients who gave low satisfaction ratings at any point were 'purposively' selected for closer examination of all their responses. Although this inter-weaving of approaches had also been used in the preceding studies, the great utility of doing so was especially demonstrated by the findings produced here.

In the preliminary evaluation report, it was highlighted that one of these three clients reported that they had found nothing either particularly helpful or unhelpful about the counselling, but commented that 'The counsellor should ... speak about the real world and not miracles'. In the solution focused approach, the 'miracle question' is a basic and frequently used technique in which the client is asked to imagine a picture of how life will be when the problem is resolved (Saunders, 1998). This client clearly found this method unhelpful. They also gave the worst possible ratings on all the measures used. This comment was one of those that led to significant changes in the working practices of the counsellors discussed in following section.

Of the other two clients who gave low satisfaction scores one considered 'the counselling ... an absolute waste of time' and reported that there had been no helpful aspects of the experience. They did suggest, however, that an older and more experienced counsellor would have been able to help. This client ended their comments by asking,

'who is [the service] benefiting? Do you have statistics of satisfied clients? It would be interesting to find out if this service justified its existence. In theory it is an excellent service but in practice, in my experience, a big disappointment.'

Perhaps the general trends of very positive findings generated by this study would have offered this client some reassurance but it was clear that they received no benefit personally. The counsellor's responses in this instance were

frank in admitting an error in the way the possibility of therapeutic change had been presented. Other quantitative data for this client showed either only marginal improvements or no change.

The third client whose responses were investigated gave equivocal satisfaction scores and suggested that the most helpful aspect of the service had been plucking up the courage to go but that the counselling itself was of no help. They also suggested that ‘the counsellor could have spent more time finding out why I [suffer from my problems] ... instead after one and a half sessions I felt I was wasting [their] and my time.’ This comment added further fuel to the developments in working practice noted in the following section. Quantitatively recorded data regarding this client was also equivocal.

It is unlikely that this kind of information could have been recorded by purely quantitative methods. Indeed, most psychometric outcome measures would have revealed little but that these clients had not responded to the counselling as well as most on those indices that provided their focus. Conversely, a purely qualitative approach would have been equally unable to record the low levels of change shown with these three clients. They served to inform the descriptive responses and to clearly demonstrate that the expressions of frustration and disappointment were not merely the result of the own prejudice, misperception or some component of therapy that might be construed as, ultimately, leading to positive outcomes. If they were expressing unresolved transference issues, for example, the counsellors had not been able to work through them: there were no positive outcomes for these clients.

Perhaps more important for the current discussion, however, was that the pluralist combination of the detailed criticisms was made available because of the use of evidence in conjunction with the overall evidence both from other qualitative sources (counsellors and other clients) and from the quantitative evidence regarding the service as a whole.

Only by interpreting these criticisms in the context of the otherwise positive findings referred to above it was possible for the counsellors, the service management and others who might read the report to give them the weight that was due: they could neither dominate the findings nor be hidden among the plethora of other responses. Neither quantitative nor, perhaps, traditional qualitative analysis could have achieved this.

These criticisms gave clear indications of specific areas for improvement. However, the pluralist body of evidence as a whole made it clear that they did nothing to condemn the service or its methods overall. This ability to set negative findings in a larger context was crucial in allowing the counsellors, especially, to see this feedback in a positive light and to look at providing creative responses to the issues raised. The final evaluation report emphasised that they had avoided reacting defensively, and that they had felt enabled to respond to the criticisms in a productive manner. This is discussed further in the section below on the formative and summative possibilities of pluralist evaluation.

Reflexive criticism of the evaluation

Of course, the qualitative elements of the study also provided clients and counsellors with an opportunity to comment on the experience of being asked to respond in so many different ways. Given the importance of reflexivity in the continual process of iterative development of pluralist studies such comments were especially noted. Indeed, a secondary purpose of introducing the counsellors' reflective commentaries was to expand the opportunities for providing such data and to enhance the reflexivity of the research.

One of the findings of this aspect of the study highlighted a drawback of the pluralist emphasis on collecting so many forms of evidence at once. One client

in particular felt that the burden of being asked to undertake the level of introspection required had been unhelpful:

'I found it very difficult to complete the form. After reading the questionnaire I felt very distressed and waited a week to complete it. I believe what upset me so much was having to face up to the reasons for my depression, and having to evaluate how it affected me.'

A response from another client emphasised the importance of the follow up data some weeks after counselling had ended in minimising halo effects that could be evident at the end of counselling. Their comments also suggested a level of unreliability in the data implying that all self reported or counsellor reported data should be treated with some caution whether it formed part of a complex pluralist combination of data or not. They also supported the pluralist preference for incorporating more objective indices of change. It is significant that the need for caution was recorded so unambiguously and highlighted in this interpretation of the data because of the pluralist requirement that research is at least partially reflexive:

'In retrospect, I may have been on my best behaviour! I wanted to please my counsellor with the progress I had made. After counselling I realised that I had sometimes been deceiving both of us.'

The counsellors' responses occasionally concurred:

'clients can feel they have to report positive changes and make counsellor happy unless enough time is devoted to acknowledging clients distress'. (emphasis added).

11.5.3 Ability of pluralism to be both summative and formative

It is perhaps inevitable that the primary purpose of most evaluative research is summative. Whatever influence it has on its subject typically occurs after it has been completed: that is, only its findings are formative and change is, generally, entirely *post hoc*. However, the pluralist ability to incorporate the sensitivity and detailed commentary of qualitative research into the context of general trends from other sources and types of data means that it can not only cope with providing significant formative influence whilst a study is in progress, it positively encourages it. Those formative effects can then be recorded and studied as part of the same research as its developmental cycles continue throughout its life.

In this study, there was a preliminary reporting stage which was already able to report on the major criticisms of the service noted above. Steps could then be taken at an early stage to address the various issues raised. A relatively straightforward example was the sometimes excessive waiting list. The overall average length of waiting times prior to an initial appointment remained high but did reduce noticeably. More fundamental, however, was the direct impact the study's early findings had on the core model of counselling used.

Counsellors and service management were able to respond positively to the negative data regarding the solution focused methods that had been most commonly used in the service - at least in its early stages.

In the early development of the project the solution focused approach had been applied in a more or less text book fashion and as a matter of routine. This had a number of important advantages, not least of which was the speed with which clients could complete their counselling. For example, the average number of sessions was recorded as less than 2 in the preliminary report generated by this study. This very rapid turnover of clients suggested that whatever benefits were indicated were achieved in a very short space of time indeed. The average

number of sessions rose to 2.6 over the whole life of the study. By the time of the final report, however, the standard deviation of 2.6 indicated some significant variation in that average; the highest number of sessions received by any one person was 16. The increased average length of counselling reflected, at least in part, actions taken in response to the preliminary findings that some of the techniques used to focus exclusively on solutions should be altered in favour of building a strong therapeutic alliance. The received form of solution focused therapy was adapted as it came to be seen as less effective by counsellors if it was rigidly followed in every case, despite producing very brief therapy.

In the light of the problems with a continually lengthy waiting list brevity was undoubtedly appealing but the evidence from clients contrasted strongly with the original opinions of the counsellors who had placed great value on the approach *a priori*, believing that it would be effective as well as quick.

However, while the general trend of the findings supported their view, a highly noticeable minority of clients quite spontaneously raised issues that implied criticisms of some basic elements of the solution focused approach which appeared to have been counter productive for those individuals.

They also requested 'more time' with the counsellor and some reported that they felt they had only a short amount of time allowed for their counselling. Reported unhelpful attributes of the counselling also included:

'Time factor';

'The scale of 1 - 10 questioning';

'Always looking for positives, not interested in negatives.'

All of these are common aspects of the received solution focused approach.

Significantly, counsellors too had begun to note things like,

'I think I worked too hard to try and provide solutions for the client. I wonder whether I spent enough time listening to her story and clarifying what she wanted as opposed to what I thought she wanted and needed';

They also reported that the counselling could have been improved by the counsellor having 'spent more time building relationship' and so forth.

Because of this developing body of evidence the counsellors began to re-examine their work. This began to involve them in a much greater degree of self-evaluation than had been the case hitherto. This theme is explored further below (see Chapter 11.5.4). The result was that the counsellors began to modify their approach significantly.

The solution focused approach remained appropriate in some circumstances. A counsellor noted in their questionnaire response regarding one client that 'talking about "miracles" fitted with her [the client's] personal beliefs.' However, perhaps most important was that the counsellors began to put more emphasis on tailoring the counselling to the needs of each individual client. This adjusting to the needs of the client and attending to the centrality of the therapeutic relationship became increasingly important for the counsellors with some clear changes in the data recorded.

The final report on the service noted,

'The solution focused model is being actively adapted by the staff of the R.A.M.H. service, including allowing some methods to take a less central role such as the technique of asking clients to focus on how their situation would be different if some miracle could let them alter anything in any way (cf. Saunders, 1998 and others).

Such change is underlined by the data from counsellors at the end of counselling [which] listed among their perceived strengths an ability to be 'self critical, willing to change practice in light of evaluation / research about good practice ... not ideologically bound...' These subjective opinions are supported by the absence of such comments from clients attending after the preliminary report was submitted.'

It is important to emphasise again that the counsellors were able to adjust their work on the basis of the rich pluralist data without having to react defensively. The report set the criticisms within a clear context of generally successful work - furthermore, the counsellors had become increasingly co-opted into the study as co-researchers (this is further explored below). It is argued here that no monistic approach could have achieved both of these things and provided such a range of detailed, formative information in addition to meeting the more commonplace summative needs of evaluative research. It was by combining the different forms of utility of the different kinds of data that the pluralism of the study could provide the counsellors with the range of information they needed.

11.5.4 Ability of pluralism to reflect developing contexts and stakeholder needs

It has already been noted briefly that in this study the protocol was developed as it progressed to reflect the developing interests of one of the major stakeholder groups. That development was a direct result of the continuation of the developmental heuristic cycles within this one study. The counsellors became increasingly involved in the process of the research and increasingly saw themselves as co-researchers. The counsellors increasingly 'bought into' the research by taking on the early criticisms of their work. The effect of their positive involvement in the research on their ability to develop their own work

rather than merely react defensively to external critique is itself an example of the benefits of pluralist inclusion of differing perspectives, as noted above.

However, this same formative, developmental process was extended by the effect their development had on the development of the study. As they became more personally involved in how the changes in working practices were reflected in the findings, it was necessary to take account of this shift in the needs and interests of such a major stakeholder group. The formative influence worked in both directions: the counsellors' desire for greater self-examination and greater participation was reflected in the addition of the reflective commentaries each counsellor provided towards the end of the study. Thus, their increased stake in the findings led to increased investigation of the topics of most interest to them. The changes focused primarily on the effectiveness of the service, the development of the solution focused model noted above and their experience of being involved in the study which had become their main areas of interest.

The change to the protocols was only possible because an exploratory, phenomenological and reflexive critique of the study had been maintained throughout its progress and applied to all its strands (see Chapter 4.4) - whether they were reductionist or phenomenological in nature. Crucially, however, the addition of the reflective commentaries did not contravene any essential rubric of the existing methods already being used (see Chapter 4.3). It did no harm to the reductionistically derived psychometric data, for example, because it was merely interpreted alongside the reflective descriptive accounts. Thus, there are several points at which the final evaluation report referred to one type of enquiry in isolation, although each shed light on the other.

Continuation of the pluralist critique and counter critique was able to remind us that the needs of other stakeholder groups could not be allowed to recede - the counsellors' interest could not be allowed to dominate. The end result was that

they formed no more than a part of the whole tapestry of evidence as it was finally presented. While a monistic phenomenological approach might have been able to welcome the developmental approach taken it is perhaps unlikely that it would have been able to support the needs of those whose interests lay primarily in the quantitative data produced by reductionist means.

Continuation of the reductionist approach did no harm to the increased phenomenological investigation not least because the counsellors retained a strong interest in its findings. The complexity of the pluralist approach allowed it to meet these complex stakeholder needs.

It could be argued, then, that the pluralist combination of stakeholder needs, rather than any one methodological dogma, was what defined the design of the study (see Chapters 4.3 and 7.2). The flexibility of the pluralist approach was crucial in ensuring that the different approaches were able to continue to combine in maximising the utility of the overall findings despite the shifting contextual needs.

At the outset of the study it had not been intended that the flexibility of pluralist approaches should be a particular topic. Indeed, the reflective commentaries could have been further developed to explore this issue in more detail and other developments may also have been appropriate. The data actually produced was somewhat limited and a greater degree of structure would have been likely to increase its utility further. However, the study was able to demonstrate that pluralist research is capable of maintaining its development whilst in progress. The lesson to take forward to other studies was that that development may have to be more rigorous and that standards of all kinds of data collection and analysis must always be high.

11.6 Discussion

This study contributed a number of things to the current exploration of pluralist evaluation. The pluralist methodology inherited from the previous two studies adapted well to the more varied demands of the different context and client group. It produced data of use to all the different major stakeholder groups, and successfully addressing the needs of the service management, the counsellors and the clientele alike.

By accepting the combination of phenomenological input as part of the same process as the reductionistically inspired quantitative methods it was possible to achieve a more accurate and useful description of the counselling and its effectiveness than either could have achieved on its own. By maximising the utility of the data from the perspective of the main stakeholders it was possible to produce the most thorough possible description of the counselling and its effectiveness - in fact getting closer to the Laplacian reductionist ideals than any monistic, idea-driven approach could have achieved.

The clientele was somewhat more diverse than the largely professional groups involved in the earlier studies but, in general, seemed to respond well to the opportunity to contribute to the development of the project. Salutary warnings of the inherent possibilities of bias in self-report questionnaires and other limitations of the study were noted, however.

The study was particularly successful in offering the opportunity to demonstrate the ability of pluralist methods to be sensitive to criticisms of counselling through the use of qualitative methods and the importance of its ability to present those criticisms against a context of broader quantitative data. This allowed the counsellors to see the indications from clients in a positive light, despite the fact that they appeared to be directed against some of the central tenets of their preferred core model of counselling. The counsellors then

had the opportunity to respond to these criticisms while the study was underway.

Furthermore, their developing working practices and involvement in the study could both be reflected in changes to the protocol. These were only possible because of the adaptability offered by the pluralist approach. The formative processes for both the service and the research could be recorded without the reductionist need to hold all variables under study at a constant level. The range of methods used ensured that while outcomes continued to be measured in ways appropriate to each of the stakeholder groups, the changes in approach were recorded and could be accounted for. Far from the reductionistically inspired desire to 'manualise' treatments - which is in any case highly problematic - it was possible to allow the counsellors to vary their methods as indicated by the early findings of the research. Indeed, this was positively facilitated by the continuous heuristic developmental cycles inherent in pluralism.

The reflexive elements of the study gave the unpredicted benefit of exploring the ability of pluralism to be formative in addition to providing summative data and then of its ability to adapt to the changes in conditions it had itself prompted. Thus, what might in other contexts be seen as undesirable observation effects could be construed as potential benefits of the approach. So long as the impact of the study and other changes could be clearly accounted for, in this instance through deliberate tracking of the changes in counselling and the counsellors' reflective commentaries, this need not be seen as undermining the validity of the findings from a reductionist perspective either, because no essential tenet of that approach was contravened.

It is readily assumed that clients may face change in addressing the difficulties and concerns that bring them to therapy. The idea that counsellors should also change and develop in reaction to evidence from and about their clients is,

perhaps, less frequently acted upon but is routinely assumed to be a desirable result of evaluative research. That the research that provides counsellors with that evidence should also be subject to equivalent mutative forces, however, is a distinctive feature of the pluralist approach described here.

Chapter 12 Self / Ideal-Self Discrepancy

Normative Data Study

12.1 Summary

This study was somewhat different to those discussed above in that it was not an evaluation of a counselling service. It is only reported here insofar as it served to test the pluralist principles outlined in this thesis at one extreme end of the spectrum of methodological needs.

Data were collected using the measure of Self / Ideal-Self Discrepancy (S/I-SD), which was initially thought to equate inversely with self esteem, from a national (UK) sample (N. = 3250) in order to provide normative scores for the general (non-clinical) population and a number of sub-groups in addition to information regarding the test's concurrent validity. The results were expected to be a useful aid in interpreting such discrepancy scores used, for example, in evaluating the effect of counselling and psychotherapy interventions.

Unpredicted at the outset, the construct the test was purported to measure was also refined. This deductively achieved conclusion could be returned for further pluralist examination.

The primary task of examining the psychometric properties of psychological tests has generally been seen to be a reductionist one requiring exclusively reductionist methods. However, this investigation suggested that a more thorough evaluation of the measure could be provided by a combination of the usual purely quantitative methods with qualitative elements. Indeed, it proved unacceptable, from a phenomenological perspective (see Chapter 4.3), to exclude qualitative methods. These were crucial in addressing the needs of the respondents themselves: a stakeholder group that might otherwise have been under valued. The views of respondents were recorded to explore the nature of

the experience of completing the test. There had been some indications from the studies reported above that involvement in this level of introspection could itself be distressing while other responses in the same series of studies had suggested that other respondents found the experience positively beneficial. Consequently, in a continuation of the development of research across a number of studies (see Chapter 6) it was considered important to examine this possibility in greater detail. Further development of the study would have been possible and the utility of the study may have been enhanced had even greater emphasis been placed on the phenomenological elements.

12.2 Context and background to this study

Pluralism is sometimes accused of being inherently biased in favour of humanistic and phenomenological ways of approaching understanding and knowledge (e.g. Connolly, 1969). It is argued that by accepting a non-monistic epistemology it is necessary for reductionism or authoritarian and anti-anarchic models of science to take second place, if not to be excluded altogether.

However, an aim of the form of pluralism advocated here is to prevent such exclusion becoming so rigid as to prevent acceptance of the approach by any one side of the debate. If reductionist methods could not thrive within pluralism, it would have failed. This fourth study allowed an exploration of a highly quantitatively oriented research task from a pluralist perspective. The mutual critique of approaches was carried out in just the same way as before, but the different topic led to a research design that stood in stark contrast to the preceding evaluative studies.

This study could be said to lie towards one extreme end of the spectrum of pluralist possibilities. It was heavily dominated by logical-positivist and reductionist thinking, all of which was used in a way not incompatible with phenomenological methods, however different they may have been. That is, phenomenology alone would have been unlikely to design a study of this type.

and could not have provided the kind of data generated while, conversely, the reductionist data avoided breaches of fundamental phenomenological tenets. This was only possible, it is argued here, through the pluralist developmental processes involved. The mutuality established between the approaches, even in this study, and the continual, heuristic cycles of development were especially important. For example, the wider needs of respondents were accounted for, ensuring that they were not treated as mere providers of numbers, of no more importance than, and synonymous with, the data their answers generated. Despite the possibilities for further development along these lines left unexplored here, the study was, perhaps, most important for the current discussion precisely because it demonstrated that each style of enquiry was found to be both useful and necessary.

The discrepancy between perceived self image and the individual's ideal self image has been used in a number of studies as a method of measuring self esteem⁶¹ (e.g. Davis *et al*, 1989; Davis and Rushton, 1991; Norton *et al.*, 1995; Goss, in this volume). The Research Committee of the then British Association for Counselling (B.A.C., now B.A.C.P.) had developed a series of questionnaires and psychometric tests for counselling services to use in evaluating their work (Davis, 1992) including one such S/I-SD measure. These had been developed further in the preceding series of evaluative studies and others carried out by researchers at the Bloomfield Centre at Guy's Hospital in London. Initial results indicated very encouraging concurrent validity with a number of other well established tests, such as the Rosenberg Self esteem Scale

⁶¹ Kitano (1989) found over 6,500 articles that explicitly used the term self esteem in their titles. The theoretical centrality of self esteem (Coopersmith, 1981) has been seen as rendering it an ideal indicator for changes in both general well-being and specific behavioural change (Rosenberg *et al*, 1995) for many years (e.g. James, 1890; Brockner, 1988). It has even been seen as central for such relatively esoteric concepts as happiness (Myers and Diener, 1995) as well as for items such as levels of achievement, anxiety and depression (Rosenberg, 1979; Harter, 1983; Carr *et al*, 1991; Jones and Frazier, 1994).

(Rosenberg, 1965) and M.H.I. 5 (Medical Outcomes Trust, 1993; U.K. Clearing House on Health Outcomes, 1994).

It was anticipated that meaningful interpretation of responses from clients would be significantly enhanced by establishing normative scores for this measure. By providing a baseline to which responses among clinical groups could be compared, estimations of both the starting variation from the norm, and the degree of change that should be sought, could be made.

12.3 Aims and objectives

In reductionist terms, this study intended to establish the following:

1. Normal responses to the S/I-SD measure noted above (Davis, 1992), using a representative sample of the U.K. population;
2. The degree of concurrent validity with well established, psychometrically validated measures of self esteem. Although the original proposal suggested use of the M.H.I.-5 (Medical Outcomes Trust, 1993; U.K. Clearing House on Medical Outcomes, 1994), the Rosenberg Self esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) was used in its place on the grounds that it is much more widely used in the current literature⁶² and has a greater quantity of alternative data sources to act as reference points. That the relative acceptance in the scientific community of the M.H.I.-5 and Rosenberg scales was such an influential factor is itself an

⁶² Blascovich and Tomaka (1991) report it to be the most commonly used measure of global self esteem. It was ranked 4th in a review of self esteem scales (Robinson and Shaver, 1973) and was chosen for this study over those ranked higher as they were all less appropriate for one reason or another (in accordance with Jalajas, 1994). One was too long, another was designed for use with children and the third was based on a theoretically less compatible model of self esteem.

example of the degree to which apparently reductionist issues involve elements that are clearly socio-political in nature.

3. The degree of variation in responses from sub-groups of the overall sample and specific populations to be identified later.

As an exploration of applied pluralism, it was intended to examine the degree to which the pluralist model could productively operate in a study that was so dominated by reductionist concerns. Indeed, the findings generated in order to address the 3 reductionist aims noted above are only reported so far as necessary to exemplify the ability of pluralist studies to successfully meet such needs.

12.4 Description of the Self / Ideal-Self Discrepancy tests

Specifically designed for counselling evaluation (Davis, 1992), the grids used to calculate values for self esteem (see Appendix A.4) were based directly on personal construct theory and the person-centred model of counselling in which self perception is considered an important part of the way in which the person functions.

Twenty-one diametrically opposed construct pairs were predefined (e.g. worried - not worried; happy - sad; purposeful - purposeless; tolerant - irritable). The order and direction of the construct pairs was randomised and respondents were asked to present their assessments in terms of a seven point bipolar scale for each construct. It has been suggested that these kinds of grids are most accurate and useful when individuals define the variables as those constructs most important to themselves (e.g. Norton *et al.*, 1995). However, the measure under development here was to be used with a large number of individuals in a wide variety of settings, and it was clear that responses would

have been rendered less comparable by that approach. The normative data generated here was therefore also seen as more generalisable on the same ground.

One question asked the respondent to rate how he or she usually felt 'in the last few days' on each of the scales (question 6), and the following question asked how they remembered feeling 8 weeks previously (question 7). The next question asked how the respondent would ideally like to feel, again using a separate, but identical, grid (question 8). Higher total adjusted discrepancies could be used to indicate lower global self esteem. The formula developed here for calculating the S/I-SD scores is given in Appendix C.7.

From the outset, there was some doubt regarding the validity of question 7, on the ground that individuals may not be able to accurately assess their feelings several weeks later, although there is conflicting empirical evidence on this point (Mone *et al.*, 1995; and see Chapters 9 and 10). With further pluralist development of the study, it may well have been possible to investigate this topic qualitatively.

To ensure an adequately representative sample of the general (non-clinical) population, basic demographic details were recorded (age, gender, employment status, level of educational qualification attained and place of residence). Finally, the Rosenberg Self esteem Scale, as mentioned above, was also administered.

Mean responses, and change in responses given for S/I-SD 8 weeks previously, were calculated and concurrent validity with Rosenberg Self esteem Scale scores was tested.

12.5 Pilot and revisions

In addition to ensuring the best possible study in accordance with reductionist requirements, phenomenological data were also recorded. This deliberately addressed both reductionist and phenomenological aspects of the study. The questionnaire, complete with instructions and questions to collect demographic data, was initially piloted by circulating it to a number of academics with experience in this field. Reviewers were deliberately selected to include those with known allegiances to different research types. Included in this period was the anonymous peer review process of the Nuffield Foundation (co-funders of the research), although no alterations were recommended as a result of that procedure.

The strongest reservations about the questionnaire were, consistently, the validity of question 7, regarding self image some 8 weeks prior to interview. The response from the original author of the grids in the form intended for evaluating counselling, Hilton Davis⁶³, was typical. He wrote that ‘if you ask someone for retrospective self perception, then “before counselling began” is probably fine’ (Davis, 1996, p. 1) but he felt that a less meaningful result would be obtained from the less clearly placed wording used here on the ground that ‘I think it would be impossible to know when eight weeks ago was unless there was a clear focus for that point in time’ (*Ibid.*).

Few alternative wordings were available for a questionnaire that was to be used with such a large number of people, deliberately selected to be from a wide variety of backgrounds. As a poor substitute for the clear focus of some easily identifiable earlier event, the phrase ‘think back to what was happening in your life 8 weeks ago’ was used. However, it was accepted that these responses would probably have less construct validity than would otherwise have been

⁶³ Reader in Child and Adolescent Psychology at Guy’s Hospital in London.

the case, and rather less weight could be attached to them. Although stability over time was a secondary consideration to the main focus of gathering normative data, the question was retained on the grounds that it would offer some assessment of change for a non-clinical population, albeit flawed. This could then be used to draw comparisons with the clinical groups that did show change over this kind of period. To assist interpretation of retrospective use of the S/I-SD measure a study, not reported in detail here, but carried out concurrently (Bennett and Goss, 1996; Goss, 1997), was used to explore the change between S/I-SD scores recorded before counselling and those for the same period but reported post-counselling. As in the current study, retrospective responses were found to show consistently higher S/I-SD scores, representing lower perceived self esteem.

Other changes to the questionnaires introduced as a result of this phase of the pilot were relatively minor adjustments to the wording and layout of questions, and the adoption of employment status as an indicator of socio-economic group (replacing the more problematic categories associated with 'social class') as recommended by the Office of Population, Census and Surveys (Wort, 1996).

A second, less theoretically oriented and rather more naturalistic style of pilot was also carried out, with the questionnaire in its revised form being completed by 57 undergraduates attending a Scottish University. 22 of these were studying psychology, sociology or related disciplines and had experience of demographic sampling techniques. Their responses were analysed for any anomalies. A significant result of the pluralist development of this phase of the study was that written free responses were invited regarding the experience of completing the measures.

No respondents reported any serious difficulties with the questionnaire, although some took rather longer than others to complete it, and the estimated

time for completion stated on the questionnaire as used in the study itself was amended. A small number of respondents (n. = 5; 8.8%) reported that they considered a few of the items in the grids potentially upsetting for respondents due to the personal nature of such an introspective task, although none reported any negative response themselves. The importance of the qualitative, interview based aspects of the main part of the research was thus confirmed among this relatively small and possibly atypical group.

Further piloting of the study was carried out to test the ability of this kind of pluralist research to adapt to a different cultural context, that of the U.S.A. Although not implemented as an equivalent full study this did suggest that such an approach would have been acceptable in that setting. The importance of re-contextualisation to account for certain cultural factors, such as the interpretation of particular words and phrases, was confirmed. This included the need to remain sensitive to the acceptability of testing procedures such as the recording of racial and ethnic categories.

12.6 Outline of methodology

Very briefly, the study consisted of 5 phases following the piloting and development noted above. These are outlined below:

1. The Self / Ideal-Self discrepancy measures were produced in a revised form suitable for use with the general public, alongside information on age, gender, occupational status, level of qualification attained and usual place of residence (countries within the U.K. or 'other').
2. A team of research assistants was recruited and trained specifically for this project. This included training in demographic sampling and interview techniques with particular attention to ethical issues such as ensuring that respondents were not left upset or distressed by being

asked questions that required them to consider their feelings towards themselves. Most assistants had prior university training in psychology, sociology, counselling research or related disciplines, including practical experience of interviewing and demographic sampling techniques. They were recruited throughout the U.K.

3. This team of research assistants administered the questionnaires at locations throughout the U.K. which were selected to ensure an approximately representative sample of inner-city, town and rural areas.
4. The resulting quantitative sections of the data were processed and analysed with some assistance from an experienced researcher, specialised in advanced demographic statistical analysis (Dr. A. Khan, of Napier and Dhaka Universities). Given the phenomenological bias of the current author, noted in the Preface to this thesis, use of a second researcher with a clear allegiance to reductionist and quantitative methods was considered an important element in the continuing mutual critique between the methods, in accordance with the pluralist model set out in Parts 3 and 4 above.
5. The qualitative responses were also analysed. Although it had been intended that they should be subjected to detailed content analysis, as in the preceding studies, they were too infrequent and poorly recorded for this to be worthwhile. In the absence of recording equipment, transcription of comments had relied entirely on contemporaneous notes by the interviewer. As a consequence, the responses were used as illustrative impressionistic records of the opinions of a small proportion of respondents only.

12.7 Overview of results and analysis

12.7.1 Normative data and concurrent validity

The main purpose of the study, as it was reported outwith this thesis, was to establish normative scores for responses to the S/I-SD measure and this was indeed possible. The mean score for current S/I-SD was calculated as 2.66 ($n = 3181$; S.D. = 1.34) for the responding population as a whole. Scores for various sub-groups could also be calculated, as exemplified in table 12.1.

Typical of the strengths of reductive research, such analyses allowed direct comparison with other quantitative data using the same measure, already quoted in the context of the preceding sections, which provided mean scores of 2.04 for 'mothers of children with emotional difficulties' and 1.36 for 'women without emotional problems' (Davis and Rushton, 1991; Davis *et al.*, 1989). The variations between the sub-groups shown in table 12.1 were, broadly, as expected when compared with the numerous studies which have examined self-esteem and related constructs in each area (e.g. Eysenck *et al.*, 1995; Hong *et al.*, 1993; Oyefeso and Zacheaus, 1990; Hoare *et al.*, 1993; Bartley, 1994; Winefield and Tiggeman, 1989; 1990; Ackah, 1993; Woodard and Suddick, 1992; Pramanick, 1991; Verkuyten and Kwa, 1994).

Table 12.1 - Distribution of S/I - SD and Rosenberg scores by specific demographic sub-groups.

Variable	Sample		S/I - SD		Rosenberg score	
	n.	%	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Age						
16 - 19	641	19.82	3.144	1.3768	28.534	4.753
20 - 24	551	17.04	2.7258	1.3208	29.872	5.108
25 - 29	426	13.17	2.5922	1.173	30.528	4.669
30 - 34	320	9.89	2.8652	1.4199	29.777	5.81
35 - 39	286	8.84	2.5024	1.3379	30.696	5.615
40 - 44	235	7.27	2.5398	1.3033	30.509	5.089
45 - 49	293	9.06	2.3834	1.3431	30.758	5.363
50 - 54	158	4.89	2.3607	1.2521	30.439	4.787
55 - 59	119	3.68	2.136	1.151	31.042	5.198
60 +	205	6.34	2.0567	1.2687	30.358	5.178
TOTAL	3234	100				
Gender						
Female	1677	56.45	2.8146	1.3605	29.26	5.139
Male	1294	43.55	2.4312	1.2833	30.915	4.986
TOTAL	2971	100				
Employment group						
Employee (or trainee)	1007	30.98	2.6157	1.2666	29.819	4.924
Supervisor / foreman	143	4.4	2.5275	1.1374	30.935	4.412
Manager / professional	646	19.88	2.4447	1.3261	31.346	5.17
Self employed (employing others)	67	2.06	2.04	1.445	30.242	5.826
Self employed (not employing others)	97	2.98	2.196	1.015	31.663	5.238
Unemployed	1269	39.05	2.8732	1.4091	29.174	5.235
Other	21	0.65	3.257	1.113	27.952	3.442
TOTAL	3250	100				
FE/HE Qualifications						
Yes	1666	52.21	2.4622	1.2856	30.782	4.906
No	1525	47.79	2.8949	1.3783	29.089	5.335
TOTAL	3191	100				
Normal place of residence						
England	1183	36.4	2.8081	1.3862	29.387	5.143
Scotland	1943	59.78	2.5839	1.3243	30.273	5.199
Wales	8	0.25	2.153	1.265	26.25	2.121
Northern Ireland	26	0.8	2.483	1.245	30.885	3.724
Other	90	2.77	2.462	1.143	30.742	4.896
TOTAL	3250	100				

Mean reported S/I-SD 8 weeks prior to completion of the tests was calculated as 2.78 ($n. = 3167$; S.D. = 1.55). This was 0.12 (4.5%; S.D. 0.978) higher than at the time of completing the tests, representing a *perceived* slight decrease in

self esteem (an effect size of 0.09). The implication may be that people tend to perceive their self image as slightly deteriorating over short periods.

Concurrent validity could also be calculated. S/I-SD scores correlated with summed responses to the Rosenberg Self esteem Scale at -0.558. This inverse correlation was expected as one test (Rosenberg) is of self esteem, with higher scores representing higher self esteem, while the other (S/I-SD) is of negative self esteem, with *lower* scores representing higher self esteem. This represents a moderate, though not intimate, relationship between the measures.

12.7.4 Results of Qualitative Investigation

The qualitative elements of the research focused on two elements, neither of which could be tackled by the reductionist methods used above. Interviewers were asked to ensure that respondents were not left with any unresolved difficulties as a result of filling in the questionnaire. This was considered an ethically important step, especially in the light of responses during the pilot phase of the study and the conflicting reports from respondents in the previous studies noted above.

Although a small number of cases (<0.1%) did require interviewers to discuss with respondents the negative affective response raised by completing the questionnaire, their reports indicated that such concerns were generally very minor and appeared to be satisfactorily resolved in all instances.

Respondents' experiences of filling in the measure were also recorded, although only in note form. Interviewers reported that, most frequently, respondents preferred not to comment further, given that most had been approached in public places and, presumably, wished not to prolong the interruption to their lives. Of those who did give further information, the most common response

⁶⁵ No comparison groups were offered in this study.

was that there had been no problems. Some respondents even indicated that they had enjoyed the task as it gave an interesting opportunity for structured introspection.

The next most frequently made response was that the grids were somewhat complex, required some care to complete or took some time to understand, as had been found in the counselling evaluations themselves. It may be advisable, therefore for the S/I-SD measure to be used with client groups who might be expected to be both literate and familiar with structured exercises of this kind such as the professional groups studied in the two evaluative reports in which the measure was used above (Chapters 9 and 10). It may also be advisable that guidance should be made available from an interviewer or that clearer instructions should be developed. An even smaller number of respondents suggested that the grids took too long to complete and they either found it difficult to maintain concentration, or would have preferred to spend less time on the task. It should be emphasised, however, that even these minor difficulties were mentioned by less than 1% of respondents and may not represent serious difficulties in the development of the test.

12.8 Discussion

The S/I-SD measure was found to correlate only moderately with the Rosenberg Self esteem Scale suggesting that the construct being measured may require some refinement. It may be that a broader construct such as 'self concept' would be more appropriate although this would have to be tested separately.

However, so few difficulties were found in administering the test, even across such a diverse population, that it may be suitable for use in circumstances in which briefer tests are less appropriate. For example, it is not surprising, perhaps, that having been designed specifically for counselling evaluations, the

test should have met with less resistance and negative comments than the Rosenberg test which was felt, in the preceding studies, to ask questions that were less relevant to clients' particular circumstances and concerns.

Further application of the developmental cycles described above (see Chapters 6 and 7) would clearly be required to establish the S/I-SD measure more fully in both reductionist and phenomenological terms. Correlation with other measures of self esteem, self concept and related constructs, are clearly warranted.

Further examination of the variations among the various sub-groups identified would also provide further fruitful contributions to the literature on self esteem, especially with regard to the difference found between respondents living in England and Scotland. This last point is likely to be due to the effects of acculturation and cultural self-identification, both of which may be especially well suited to further investigation in which phenomenological methods were supported by additional psychometric measures. The phenomenology would facilitate deepening our understanding of the meaning of this intriguing result for the individuals concerned, while the psychometrics would offer the possibilities both of confirming it and expanding upon it by seeing if a similar pattern were repeated with other constructs. Their pluralist combination could offer the possibility of each type of data assisting in the full interpretation of the other, of course, as described above.

This study also served as a demonstration of the importance of introducing qualitative, phenomenologically derived research tools even in this most reductionistically oriented of settings. There would have been no safeguards against possible harm to respondents, other than a written offer of support via a postal address or phone number, had the questionnaires not been administered in person by trained interviewers.

Furthermore, the lack of widespread problems with the grids demonstrated that the issues concerning their complexity and length may be of less significance

than could otherwise have been indicated. The qualitative evidence was flawed in this study and certainly provided no general indication of the types of experiences of respondents in completing the questionnaire. Their illustrative value, however, remained unchanged, at least in phenomenological terms: they still provided first hand descriptions of lived experience which no amount of quantitative data could undermine.

Nonetheless, it is possible that the limited influence of the qualitative sections of the study suggest a limitation of the pluralist approach as it was applied in this instance. That these inquiries had so little influence on the outcome and progress of the study might be interpreted as suggesting that, although their inclusion was clearly warranted from the development process of mutual critique of methodologies, the influence of the reductionist focus of the study as a whole may have served to push these aside somewhat, to the extent that they were not fully developed. In retrospect, it may have been more appropriate for a formal interview protocol to have been drawn up to record such matters in more detail. Rather more data would then have been available regarding the ease of completion of the S/I-SD measure, any resistance or apparent bias in responding and so forth. Such a view, it should be noted, was derived from a pluralist critique of the methods used here in terms applicable to them.

Both phenomenological and reductionist stances would suggest that the data would gain greater veracity from increased methodological rigour. However, each must accept that the other had a valuable role to play in this study. Neither could have generated the data presented here if applied in exclusive isolation without making some very dubious, and possible ethically unacceptable, assumptions, such as that respondents were left unmoved by their task or, from the other perspective, that normative levels of self esteem can be accurately recorded across a large group without resort to quantitative methods which can then be subjected to statistical tests of significance.

Part 6: Conclusions

This concluding part of the thesis opens with a brief commentary on the main advances made in the discussion and presentation of data thus far. It is suggested that these comprise: i) outlining the fundamental principles on which a new pluralist approach to the evaluation of the psychological therapies can be based; ii) developing a practicable method by which those principles can be applied; iii) extending previous approaches to evaluation, going beyond either monistic or unintegrated multi-method approaches; iv) exploring in practice the theoretical proposals in a number of settings, and v) deriving useful new evidence regarding the topics studied in those exploratory studies.

Before considering the 'next steps' in the development of the pluralism explored here and alternative applications of it, it is noted that this distinctive model may be seen as being especially relevant to the needs of evaluating counselling and psychotherapy and its development in this field is, perhaps, particularly appropriate. The affinity between pluralism and counselling research may suggest that both can be extended further with mutual advantages. Some practical implications of this work are then considered. The steps required for developing pluralist 'tool kits' are reviewed and some possible elements of such kits are noted. Some other practical implications of pluralist research, such as for collaborative and inter-disciplinary research, are also briefly explored. Practitioner research is seen as being especially important in the current research climate and in the context of evidence based health care (cf. Rowland and Goss, 2000)

Other areas in which a pluralist approach might be useful are also briefly noted and include non-evaluative research into the psychological therapies and other aspects of the social sciences including education, anthropology, ethnology and social policy. It seems likely that it would also be applicable in several aspects of health studies and medical evaluation. There may also be scope for adapting this work to the needs of the philosophy of science or, perhaps, even to

politics, theology and ethics. This discussion is necessarily speculative, however, and remains largely tentative.

Some of the limitations of this work are then considered. It is suggested that there is a risk that it is biased in favour of post-modern or phenomenological approaches. This has been addressed in the development and structure of pluralist method above, however. The question of whether some issues are not amenable to pluralist study is raised. This is considered unlikely to be common, at least in evaluative research in the social sciences. A number of other limitations and areas that warrant further study are also acknowledged.

Finally, it is asserted that this thesis has achieved the three main aims stated in Part 1: it has outlined a distinct pluralist methodology; it has explored some of the philosophical and epistemological implications raised; and it has explored its application in practice through specific examples of, or related to, the evaluation of psychological therapies.

Chapter 13 Conclusions

13.1 The current proposals and their context

13.1.1 Review of advances made in this thesis

This section will not attempt to review the entire preceding body of work. The precise details of the arguments are provided above and are best viewed in their respective contexts. Although the main aspects of the thesis are briefly noted, the main purpose here is to provide some commentary on the new contributions to knowledge they may be considered to have constituted.

It was stated at the outset that this thesis was intended to be an *exploratory* investigation. It was not an attempt to provide a definitive or exhaustive account of pluralism in the evaluation of counselling and psychotherapy. It is argued here that this exploratory approach has, perhaps, achieved five main things.

- i) Firstly, it has explored and described a new approach to methodological pluralism. Furthermore, this has required the development of new insights into the epistemological position required to sustain this distinctive stance. After giving an account of the history and legacy of competition and conflict between the alternative paradigms which have long dominated the field, the need for, and several aspects of, methodological pluralism as it pertains to evaluation research in counselling and psychotherapy were examined. The epistemological exploration resulted in the identification of the major components of the stance required to provide a sure basis for whatever new knowledge pluralist studies might produce. It is hoped that the examination of the basis on which a workable pluralism can rest has at least cleared the way for us to progress to more practical matters. It must be acknowledged that there are clearly a great many avenues that could not be fully explored

in the space available and a number of issues left outstanding or left to be addressed in a setting more appropriate for purely philosophical endeavours. These are generally noted in the text above but a few are addressed further in Chapter 13.3 below. However, it is argued here that this version of pluralism, no matter where it might be applied, is more robust, sustainable and flexible than its pluralist predecessors or any of the other, non-pluralist approaches that have been considered.

ii) This work has also outlined a practical method by which it may be possible to implement those more fundamental issues. Just such a specific, practicable and successfully inclusive method is seen as necessary for ending the previous chess game of paradigmatic revolution and reaction. Sufficient details of its use have also been outlined for it to be applied in real research settings. Briefly, these comprise:

- Harnessing the value of a diversity of approaches as a positive force;
- Accepting that no approach is ‘the poorer cousin of our truth’ through deliberate use of paralogy, that is, the provisional acceptance of what may at first appear to be ‘non-standard’ approaches from any given perspective;
- A position of mutuality between the approaches then allows iterative cycles of mutual deconstruction and recontextualisation between them;
- This complex process is also partly reflexive and so can ensure that no fundamental rubric of any approach is breached and that their essential differences (or differances) thus remain.

The primary aim of pluralist evaluation studies also seems clear: to ensure maximal acceptability and utility of methods and findings for those with a

stake in the evidence they generate. This requires an important shift in the source of the values that dictate the methods and goals of research with stakeholder interests taking precedence over research dogma.

- iii) This emphasises the importance of the third step, which has been to extend the value and utility of evaluation research practice beyond that commonly offered by previous models. It is suggested that neither of the main monistic camps is capable of offering the rich variety of data that can be produced by pluralist studies. The multi-method approaches already widely recognised as useful are generally based on the pragmatic view that paradigmatic clashes can be safely ignored. As a result, they have risked the problems of relativism which serve to undermine the ‘truth value’ of their findings; their component parts appear unable to reconcile their differing views on what defines the acceptability or relative value of evidence and these conflicts are left unresolved. The pluralism outlined here, it is suggested, provides a mechanism by which such conflict can be turned into creative tension and, by harnessing that tension, improves the usefulness, relevance and quality of research findings. The pluralist approach is thus an advance of real practical value because its findings will be more secure, more generally acceptable and will carry utility for a wider range of perspectives.
- iv) Fourthly, this thesis has provided four explorations of the practical development, application, benefits and limitations of the pluralist method discussed in theory in the early sections:
 - a) The A.S.C.U. study (Chapter 9) provided an initial application of pluralist ideas. Despite its flaws, it demonstrated that pluralist studies are capable of providing information that addresses the primary concerns of highly divergent stakeholder groups. For example, the pluralist body of data simultaneously offered vivid insights into the lived experience of counselling *and* ‘hard’ evidence of

psychometrically recordable and significant change, as well as approximate indications of cost effects and so forth. It also gave an opportunity to explore the influence of different approaches to evaluation on each other, in accordance with the principles of perpetual heuristic interaction outlined previously. The different approaches did a great deal more than just offer alternative data sets. The entire study was designed, tested, implemented and interpreted with full reference to *both* main schools of thought. Furthermore, the different approaches interacted with each other throughout the study. This led to, for example, phenomenological testing of the initial design having a direct impact on both phenomenological and reductionist elements of the study. Also, the different forms of data were interpreted *together* and interacted during that process influencing the findings; they were not merely compared in retrospect.

- b) The evaluation of counselling in a large private sector company (Chapter 10) tested the utility of pluralist evaluation in a different but closely related situation. This extended the testing and exploration of pluralism begun in the previous study. In further exploring the role of pluralist cyclical development the study demonstrated the ability of pluralism to provide a sure basis for progress from one study to another. Repetition of all the processes undergone to develop the first was not necessary for the second to be acceptable. The general outline of the studies, their starting principles and pluralist philosophy were very similar. The details of the systems used for evaluating the services also had much in common. However, pluralist studies are highly sensitive to the precise needs of their contexts and can adapt accordingly. They have much of the flexibility and sensitivity of heuristic and phenomenological approaches while retaining the ability to use reductive tools and methods as appropriate. While the second

employee counselling service evaluation could indeed make use of much that had been developed for the first, to have applied precisely the same system without making any adaptations would have had potentially disastrous consequences for the client group. The corporate culture was extremely sensitised to issues relating to the use of personal information. During the design phase it was deemed likely that a significant minority of clients would have been prevented from contacting the service at all if, for example, they had been asked to waive their otherwise carefully preserved anonymity in order that they could be interviewed or have their personnel files checked to examine changes in absenteeism, no matter how carefully, sensitively and ethically such requests were made. Nonetheless, sufficient reductive tools remained to allow the evaluation to proceed and usefully address the needs of the employers. This demonstrated the value of the primacy of stakeholder needs and the need for an absence of any fixed or pre-determined ideological allegiance as well as the importance of the ability of pluralist studies to access both schools of thought and their products.

- c) The study of a community based counselling service (Chapter 11) further explored the utility of similar pluralist methods but in a very different context. Recontextualisation of the methods used in the previous studies led to important changes in the protocols applied. The study also established that pluralist research can be simultaneously summative *and* formative as exemplified by the handling of criticism of the service. Importantly, negative feedback could be set in the broader context offered by the mass of other pluralist data generated. It was noted in Chapter 11.1 that an important feature of pluralism was thus that 'the particular could be contextualised by the general'. The criticism of the solution focused

method was restricted to a small, though for those individuals clinically significant, number of cases. As it was clearly successful for other clients it was suggested at an early stage that its use should be adapted to account for each individual's responses. The criticisms were not allowed to dominate: they had the impact that was due but no more. Also, the usual barriers between research and the object of study were reduced and the early output of the study actually became a vital part of the development of the project. This led to changes in the service, which could then be reflected in the study because of its constant pluralist, reflexive development. The ability of pluralist studies to be open to the needs not only of new environments but to contexts that are themselves changeable was also clearly demonstrated. This is in contrast with more dogmatic approaches to research, which would have been likely to set out a fixed protocol in advance, according to their *a priori* rules.

- d) The study to develop the S/I-SD measure (Chapter 12) examined the response of the pluralist approach to one extreme end of the possible spectrum of research types in counselling evaluation. Despite the overwhelmingly reductionist needs of much of the study, pluralist dialogue between approaches led to the introduction of the more phenomenologically oriented elements of qualitatively recording respondents' experience of being part of the study. Their value was such that it was concluded that this element of the study could usefully have been extended. Had resources allowed repeated application of the pluralist developmental cycles, the study might also have employed a 'split-half' methodology in that noticeable elements of the data could have become foci for more intensive study in whatever manner was appropriate. Thus, the noticeable difference in mean scores between those resident in England and Scotland could

have been further investigated in phenomenological terms while simultaneously extending the collection of reductionistically oriented normative data.

- v) Finally, although it has not been the main focus of this thesis, it is also argued that the data generated by these studies has offered new, useful information regarding the topics considered. The three studies that focused on evaluating counselling services provided fresh insights into their characteristics and effectiveness. Importantly, this included the reductionist perspective as well as offering the detailed, vivid insight required to understand the significance of the bare numeric data in individual, human terms. It was thus possible to contribute to the developing body of knowledge regarding outcomes associated with counselling and to make statements regarding its effectiveness of real utility for a number of stakeholder groups. For example, the studies presented in Chapters 9 and 10 suggested that a flexible and pragmatic approach to limits set on the numbers of sessions available to clients may actually increase effectiveness without significantly increasing costs, as the average number of sessions remained more or less static. The study described in Chapter 11 contributed new insights into the application of the solution focused approach as well as offering other information regarding counsellors' response to, and role in implementing, evaluative findings. The data generated by all three studies included generally positive data on, for example, cost related items, change in psychometric and other quantitative measures and qualitative data of various types from multiple sources. The findings of each of these studies gave positive support for the effectiveness of counselling and assisted in focusing its delivery according to the needs and preferences of clients. The S/I-SD study provided new information regarding the validity of that measure and normative data regarding the general population in the UK and specific demographic and national groups. The findings broadly concurred with

previous studies on self esteem for similar groups but also provided evidence to support some revision of the construct being recorded in this instance.

13.1.2 Pluralism in a pluralist field

It should be noted that this work may also contribute to the wider field of psychotherapy and counselling research. Certainly, its development here may not be co-incidental.

It might even be argued that perhaps all psychology and the social sciences should be considered necessarily and inherently pluralistic and that this study has articulated some possible responses to their very apparent diversity.

Feltham (1997) suggests outright that 'psychotherapy is a pluralistic endeavour' (p. 3). Furthermore, a number of authors have argued in different ways that people, as well as psychology, can be seen as being pluralistic by nature (e.g. Bakan, 1966; Browning, 1980; Samuels, 1989; 1993; Rowan and Cooper, 1998; Hermans, 1998; Mearns and Thorne, 2000).

There are many complex interrelations between different models of the helping professions and ideas about how it should be formed (e.g. Young, 1996; Hill and Grand, 1996; House and Totton, 1998). Already referred to above, McLeod, (1994b) notes that 'there are many competing theories of therapy: the field is far from achieving a unified paradigm' (p. 7). Caro (1996), in reviewing literature on counselling and psychotherapy in the 1990's, argues strongly that variety is the watchword throughout the field and quotes Karasu (1986) who found more than 400 types of therapeutic change. Furthermore, such diversity is far from new having been observed by Jung in 1933 as an already commonplace fact of life in psychological enquiry (Jung, 1933).

There are also a number of specific factors that may make it particularly appropriate that the developments laid out in this thesis should have arisen in a

field related to counselling and psychotherapy. Such activities may be thought to have a natural affinity with some of the processes described here. An example is provided by Wilkinson, (1999), citing Slunecko (1999), who recognises that ‘in psychotherapy the factor of reflexivity ... [means that] we reflect on our methods and processes as part of their very form of activity’ (p. 318). This alone suggests that it may be a particularly suitable host for approaches, such as pluralism, that require a high level of reflexivity and self-critique of their participants.

The psychological therapies are also a field in which dealing with conflicts in a productive manner is valued, as opposed to attempting first to confound those with whom we differ. Consequently, it might be expected that we can make significant progress towards creating a widely applicable pluralist theory for the study of therapy in general. The history of conflict between therapeutic schools (e.g. Young, 1996; New, 1996) might suggest that this is somewhat difficult to achieve in practice but it cannot be ruled out, at least as a laudable aim.

Psychological helping also requires practitioners to draw on very different kinds of skills. It can be seen as being closer to art than science (Storr, 1980) and yet Freud believed art to be, at least sometimes, symptomatic of mental instability, rather than typical of its treatment, and quite unlike the rational creative processes of empirical science (e.g. Freud, 1921).. Later writers have emphasised that, ‘the “science” of objective measurement and the “art” of clinical proficiency and judgement’ (Greenhalgh, 1999, p. 323) can be seen as inextricably inter-reliant on each other (e.g. *op. cit.*; Hunter, 1996)⁶⁶. Moreover, Barker *et al* (1994) note that ‘there is a long-standing debate over whether

⁶⁶ This is acknowledged, even by proponents of the most formalised and structured approaches to evaluation (e.g. Sackett *et al.*, 1996; N.H.S. Centre for Reviews and Dissemination, 1996; Clarke and Oxman, 1999).

evaluation is an art or a science' (p. 197, emphasis added) with differing perspectives giving different answers (Cook and Campbell, 1979; Cronbach, 1982). This both indicates the need for pluralism and suggests that its application in this field may prove especially fruitful. An epistemologically sound pluralism can offer both a philosophical framework and method by which the art and the science of psychological therapies and the evaluation of them can be drawn together, avoiding the pitfalls of eclecticism and the potential for a loss of identity, or of utility, of any individual approach.

Cape and Parry (2000), among others, have also noted that, perhaps paradoxically, practitioners typically hold strong allegiances to their widely divergent models. As we have seen, this 'utter non-consensus' between 'sincerely held views' is mirrored in the research world. A field in which there is both apparently irreconcilable diversity *and* strongly held convictions is in great need of a way forward. That way must either accommodate or supersede its diversity while simultaneously protecting against the difficulties enforced uniformity would bring. The current pluralist proposals, it is argued, are capable of providing the necessary accommodation for, and protection of, the diversity apparent in this area.

Following on from his statements regarding the current absence of any unifying paradigm McLeod (*op. cit.*) also stressed that,

'some commentators have proposed that psychology as a whole, and therapy as part of that, are at a pre-paradigmatic stage ... it could be that the field is not yet sufficiently mature to enter this land of promise.'

(p. 7)

However, the theory of pluralism laid out here suggests that while a generally acceptable paradigm for evaluating counselling and psychotherapy may yet

come to the fore, this image of a unified promised land is itself a positivist ideal which may be incompatible with the diversity which currently appears to be demonstrably valid. The many competing models of therapy and of evaluation might equally be seen to indicate a more or less permanent state of chaotic, Feyerabendian epistemological anarchy (Laungani, 1995). Feltham (*op. cit.*) notes that 'Goldfried (1982) argued that paradigm strain was naturally and perhaps inexorably leading to forms of eclecticism and integration but years later, there is no sign that the number of [approaches] is declining' (p. 7).

Psychology, and especially the psychological therapies, might be best described as being in a *multi*-paradigmatic, rather than a *pre*-paradigmatic, state. The competition between theories may simply be a distraction, borne of the habits of modernist science described by Kuhn (1970). The fact that so many alternative theories co-exist, that they have done so for some time and that many appear to be successful suggests that this may be a stable, perhaps even desirable, condition. It may not be necessary to subvert our current uneasy *status quo*. We may even be able to use pluralism to progress beyond the state of affairs described by Kuhn to a new, sustainable practice of scientific development.

It might also be noted that the field of *evaluative* research as a whole can be seen as being a similarly appropriate, and potentially fertile, setting for the development of pluralist approaches. It is essentially concerned with supporting value judgements. To do so it must normally compare measured effects with given benchmarks for success. But measurement is only a tool in this process, never an end in itself. Many qualities of the thing under study may also need to be taken into account before adequate information is available to facilitate 'good enough' evaluative decisions. At the other end of the spectrum, evaluation cannot be entirely phenomenological either: evaluation is *only* concerned with supporting the discriminatory process of supporting value

judgements. Consequently, it cannot be purely discovery oriented. To describe a thing is not the same as assessing its value - neither does it necessarily give others the guidance to do so. As a result, many forms of evaluation are likely to benefit from both quantifying processes to measure outcomes *and* qualitative methods to describe them. Both can then support the broader decision making process.

13.2 Practical implications of this work

Some points raised in, or implied by, the previous work are noted here. Given that there is insufficient space to explore all their many facets exhaustively the intention has been to provide sufficient information and comment to serve as a springboard for further work. Other areas which may warrant further attention are also noted in Chapters 13.3 and 13.4.3.

13.2.1 Pluralist toolkits

It is neither possible nor appropriate to lay out all the processes that might go into the development of pluralist toolkits for evaluation of counselling and psychotherapy services, let alone to attempt to list all the elements such toolkits might comprise. However, it is at least possible and, perhaps, useful to note some of the processes and specific items that the experience of the research reported above has indicated as likely contenders for inclusion.

The development of pluralist toolkits would certainly require detailed reference to exemplars of the multi-method research studies and theories that have acted as precursors to the current thesis. While it has not been possible to examine the history and contribution of all such work, even merely within the realm of counselling and psychotherapy research, there will, inevitably, be many valuable contributions from these, and useful lessons that could be learned. Areas where combining methods has been either notably successful or, alternatively, notably problematic might both provide useful foci for such

secondary study. Inductively incorporating material derived from this wealth of existing research into the development of pluralist tool kits would, of course, be entirely consistent with the processes laid out above, despite the tendency for them to rely on the relatively unco-ordinated plurality of methods rather than a robust, coherent pluralism.

One of the striking features of the studies reported in Part 5, above, was that the pluralist researcher's 'armoury' is as reliant on the developmental processes of the pluralist mechanism as on specific strategies or techniques. Thus, the term 'tool kit' need not comprise only the measures and instruments that would be more recognisable as research 'tools' in most other approaches.

Perhaps the most obvious, and important, element of a pluralist research tool kit might in fact not be an instrument at all, but a principle. For research to be considered pluralist at all, it must make full, detailed and continual reference to the principles, processes and methods of at least two research models.

Furthermore, while the headings of reductionism and phenomenology have generally been used in the current discussion, other titles, or more specific ones, might well be equally appropriate in given contexts. For example, for some research it may be important to include reference to models derived from, say, socio-political or even religious doctrines.

Perhaps the next most valuable 'tools' are the processes noted above of recontextualisation (see Chapters 4 and 6) and perpetual heuristic reflexivity (see Chapter 6.4). When applied as *routine* elements of the researcher's craft these become the vital means by which it is possible to assure that the findings eventually produced by the study in question retain adequate 'truth value' in the eyes of all concerned. Recontextualisation would mean each proposed element of a study being appropriated and re-interpreted from a position of strength, by each of the models involved. Each element would thus be re-configured in order to maximise its utility according to each model. As described

above, continuation of this process leads to each strategy being passed back and forth between the different models until its utility and acceptability are assured. Reflexivity as part of the pluralist process joins with recontextualisation as a further means of quality control. The relevance, utility and acceptability of each element of a tool kit, or of a study, is thus continually checked against multiple factors.

This leads on to the next important, and distinctive, process that should form part of any pluralist tool kit: detailed analysis of stakeholder needs. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.2. Once the general issues relating to a research topic have been sufficiently developed, in pluralist terms, such analyses might commonly form the starting point for specific studies, each in its given context. The adaptation to context this implies necessarily incorporates the processes of recontextualisation and reflexivity in itself, of course.

Once the different stakeholder groups have been identified and their competing needs have been prioritised it is then necessary to turn away from the *processes* that might be part of a pluralist tool kit to selecting and developing the *strategies* or methods that are best suited to providing the types of information required. It is evident from the preceding studies that pluralist development of a study is likely to lead to a diverse range of methods being of value. Thus, researchers may need to be equipped to carry out a significantly wider range of strategies than is typically the case with most monistic approaches. Candidates for inclusion in this array of tools that should be considered are listed in table 13.1. While all are drawn from non-pluralist research models, they would, in the course of the development of a pluralist study, be subjected to the combined internal (deconstructive) and external (recontextualising) scrutiny of multiple models. Furthermore, it seems likely from the experience of the studies reported above that many, if not all, would

benefit from pluralist development in themselves prior to being applied in, and possibly adapted for, any given research context. For example, such development may result in psychometric measures gaining enhanced utility from information on how respondents typically feel about completing them, about how they explain the meaning behind their quantified responses and about the breadth of interpretations that can be placed on the items used. Conversely, routine use of control groups as elements of qualitative strategies may also have distinct benefits as might be the correlation of distinct types of qualitative, descriptive responses with the psychometric and demographic characteristics of the respondents. It may be, for example, that qualitative data from men and women, or from distinct cultural groups, should *only* be interpreted in the light of information about the meanings ascribed by those groups to superficially identical modes of expression. Laughter, for example, can carry very different meanings from culture to culture. In Japan it is a natural response to embarrassment, such as to witnessing someone else's discomfort, while in much of western Europe such a response might be likely to be misunderstood.

It is not, of course, possible to suggest that any list of items for inclusion in a pluralist researcher's tool kit is complete and the items in table 13.1 should be seen as no more than illustrative examples. The divergent needs of differing research studies, contexts and stakeholder needs means that there will always be circumstances in which additional methods may be required. Furthermore, the use of elements drawn from such a tool kit must always be selective and contingent on the context concerned.

Nonetheless, it is asserted here that the development of tool kits for specific purposes, such as the evaluation of counselling and psychotherapy considered here, is likely to be a valuable addition to the literature and of practical use for those wishing to carry out such research.

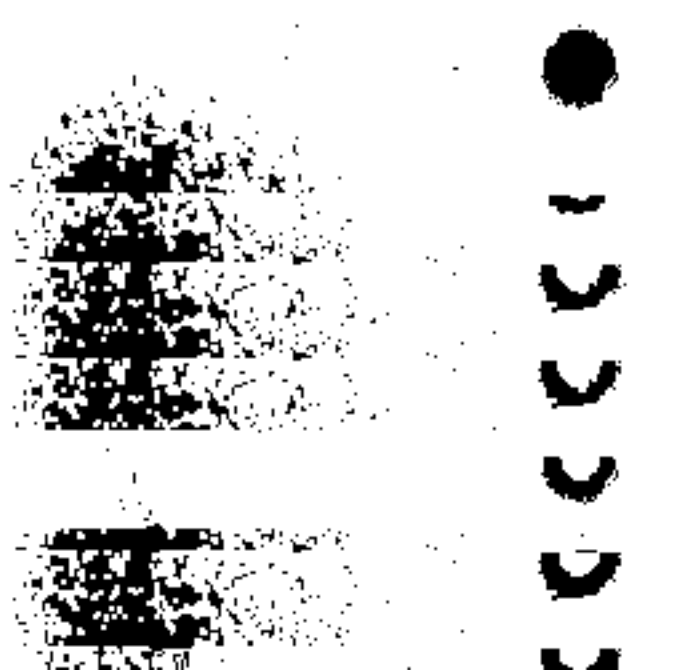
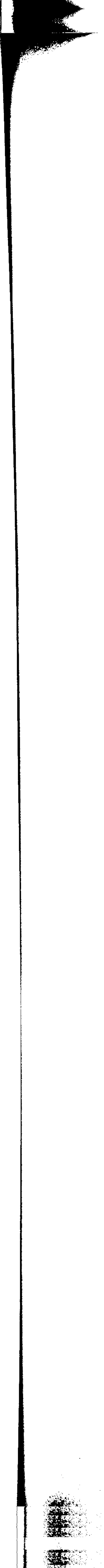


Table 13.1 - Examples of possible elements for a pluralist 'tool kit' for evaluation research

Processes	Reference to 2 or more research models
	Recontextualisation
	Reflexivity and deconstruction
	Identification of major and other stakeholder groups, analysis of their needs and relative priority for research
Specific strategies and methods	Psychometric measures (especially if pluralistically developed)
	Interviews with stakeholders
	Informal quantitative scales (such as those developed in terms of constructs of special relevance to major stakeholders)
	Goal attainment scaling
	Quantitative and qualitative methods to allow attribution of cause and effect
	Objective measures of change (e.g. behavioural indicators; utilisation rates of alternative services; job performance; physiological tests)
	Qualitative questionnaire items (e.g. regarding most and least helpful/hindering elements of the intervention)
	Construct / repertory grid methodologies (especially where respondents can define or co-define the constructs used)
	Satisfaction scales (esp. relating to specific aspects of service delivery / efficiency and <i>only</i> in the context of additional evidence)

13.2.2 collaborative and inter-disciplinary research

Further possibilities for research in, and between, different research domains are noted below (see Chapter 13.3). These will not be repeated here. However, it is worth noting that one of the practical implications of the pluralist model for research is the promise it may be thought to hold for enhanced collaborative and inter-disciplinary research.

In the discussion above, the processes and mechanisms that comprise pluralist research have been presented with only the briefest of references to the

involvement of the proponents of each point of view. Indeed, many concepts, such as that of the 'dialogic imagination' (see page 58), may be thought of as purely intra-psychic processes not *necessarily* requiring co-operation with others at all. However, as has been noted elsewhere, one of the limitations of this thesis has been that it is required to be written by a single author. One of the lessons that can be drawn from it is that actual active collaboration between researchers who come to a study from differing perspectives might be highly beneficial.

Firstly, an important test of the pluralist mechanisms discussed above would be whether the inter-paradigmatic communication proposed could be productively and usefully sustained when the different perspectives are represented by different people. This might be especially difficult if the participants inflexibly applied the strong methodological and paradigmatic allegiances typical throughout scientific research and especially within the psychological therapies. The valuable functions of scientific dogma, recognised by Kuhn (see p. 45 and Kuhn, 1963), would have to compete with the values of reciprocal paralogy, mutuality and constructive dialogue in pluralist development. It may be that given the frailties of human nature constructive dialogue may not be sufficiently sustainable and the process would revert to a more Aristotelian or Hegelian style of dialectic. However, it is believed that the mechanism described above contains sufficient checks and balances to guard against this, at least in general.

Secondly, it is worth noting that if the positively framed communication can be sustained in collaborative teams, their widespread use would seem likely to have the potential for enormous benefits. The use of what is sometimes referred to in qualitative research as a research opponent (Stiles, 1993) to represent fully the needs and views of alternative positions to one's own could become routine and could be extended. It may be that it would be necessary for such

collaboration to begin at the very start of a research project to avoid one school of thought (perhaps unconsciously) defining the culture and aims of the project in their own terms. However, the power of maximising utility to the greatest possible degree, according to the most accurate possible interpretations of the different approaches can be predicted, according to pluralist theory, to be great. The strengths that each type of research can bring to a study could be fully represented with all their attendant benefits.

The same might be expected of inter-disciplinary research, with the differing values, assumptions and mind sets typical of different areas of study all contributing to the eventual result. The problems of sustaining full, productive communication are, of course, liable to arise once more to the extent that differing expectations lead to conflicts between dogmatically held positions. The application of pluralism in other fields is considered further in Chapter 13.3.

13.2.3 Practitioner involvement in research and secondary review

A further practical implication of this work may be that the involvement of practitioners in research is likely to be enhanced by pluralist approaches as their wishes will be very likely to figure in any assessment of stake holder needs. Their role can, as in the study reported in Chapter 11, even develop to straddle the divide between researcher and subject. Practitioner involvement in, as well as application of, the evidence base for counselling and psychotherapy has become increasingly important over recent years (Rowland and Goss, 2000) and this is likely to continue. It is hoped that their involvement as a matter of routine in pluralist studies may contribute to this process.

While the simultaneous application of a very wide range of research methods may be even further beyond the practical reach of many practitioners than the narrower range of methods involved in monistic approaches, pluralist thinking

does at least allow access to a greater *choice* of approaches. Utility is, inevitably, defined in part by the resources available. In much practitioner led research, where time and resources are typically scarce, the option of focusing research effort on those items that are likely to produce the greatest benefit, regardless of idealist research dogma, may be as attractive as it is useful.

The pluralist ability to combine divergent types of data also implies that it may be possible to make greater use of small scale studies by combining their findings into larger, more powerful data sets than would be possible if only one type of data could be included. The concept of Practice Research Networks can thus be extended to include contributions of diverse types that are then pluralistically combined. This might represent a step on from the usual intention of such networks to contribute data of a single type from multiple sources. Of course, pluralist compilation of study findings would have to take into account the differences between evidence types and it would not be acceptable to treat quantitative and qualitative evidence as entirely similar. However, this is already accounted for in the method proposed above. In just the same way, pluralist *reviews* of research are also possible (McLeod, forthcoming) and may serve to more accurately reflect the whole evidence base. As noted above, one of the persistent problems with some secondary research is that it tends to be either too narrowly systematic, excluding evidence that appears to offer useful information, or insufficiently rigorous, accepting evidence of dubious quality (cf. Rowland and Goss, 2000). The pluralist approach, over and above the other alternatives of monism or relativism, may be able to resolve such difficulties.

13.3 Wider applications of pluralism

Notwithstanding the exclusions noted in Part 1, other areas may also be open to the influence of pluralist thinking and methodologies. The wider social, medico-scientific, philosophical and even political, theological or ethical arenas may

also find them of some interest. Consideration of these possibilities here is, necessarily, speculative and restricted to merely flagging up a few points.

It would certainly be possible to explore the implications of this work in non-evaluative research into many aspects of therapy. Largely the same processes could be used to construct pluralist investigations of many topics which have hitherto generally been studied by one kind of approach at a time more or less in isolation or, at best, in concurrent or sequential multi-method designs. For example, we might go beyond comparing the evidence regarding empathy derived from qualitative and quantitative sources. Narrative accounts (e.g. McLeod, 1999) could be combined with more objective quantification of empathic processes by pluralistically incorporating reductionist or experimental methods into the same study.

While pluralism is not entirely new in the social sciences (e.g. Roth, 1987), it is believed that the current version constitutes a distinct advance on previous work and may have applications throughout this varied field. These might include pluralist approaches to a single field such as educational research, anthropology, ethnology or social policy (e.g. Basil, 1989). Alternatively, the differing disciplines preferred by different areas within the social sciences might also be usefully integrated in a pluralist fashion. For example, we might look to combining the influences and methods of economics or epidemiology with formal sociology, narrative accounts or even historical research. More specifically, much educational research, for example, might also benefit from greater integration of methods. Researchers might consider ways of more thoroughly integrating testing pupil (and / or teacher) performance *and* the social organisation and impact of schools. The current vogue for crude league tables of school performance are frequently criticised for providing misleading simplifications of the complex human processes that comprise quality education and yet there is a clear need for interested parties to be able to assess

the relative performance of particular educational establishments. A direct parallel can be drawn with the tension between the need for specific, quantifiable, comparable and generalisable evidence of outcomes and recognition of the personal and emotional needs of individuals that exists in therapy evaluation.

It should be noted that this pluralist approach to carrying out research is very different from the already commonplace use of the term 'pluralism' to refer to a multi-cultural, that is, 'plural' society (e.g. Forbes, 1977; Gollnick and Chinn, 1986; Verma, 1989; Reiss, 1993). Nonetheless, it is also worth noting that similar processes to those described above might also be adapted to the study of multi-culturalism itself - as well as other aspects of social geography and ethnology (Newman, 1973; King, 1976; Ayabe, 1978; Craft, 1984; Clarke *et al.*, 1984; Otite, 1990).

Health sciences may also benefit from the pluralist ideas in this thesis, although here some adaptation may be required. The fundamental pluralist principles, however, may be able to remain more or less intact. Geddes (2000) notes a growing tension between potentially conflicting perspectives: 'some have expressed concern that, in our current preoccupation with quantitative evidence, the central importance of the relationship between the clinician and patient and their therapeutic alliance may be overlooked' (p. 1). The value of combining narrative approaches with more objectivist systems is already being debated (e.g. Greenhalgh, 1999; Greenhalgh and Hurwitz, 1998; Sackett *et al.*, 1996). Outright pluralism itself has been proposed for the medical field in general (e.g. Cant and Sharma, 1999) although this has tended to remain somewhat on the fringes of the subject. There is clearly some way to go before the tensions the debate centres around will be resolved. Policy makers and clinicians (and their patients) are thus likely to come into conflict (Asch, 1995) as long as the clinical 'art' of caring for individual patients remains not entirely

compatible with the economic 'science' of maximising health gains on a population-wide scale (Maynard, 2000). The problems of these tensions are obvious in much of the recent literature on the problems of misused evidence and empirical validation in the U.S.A. (e.g. Grimley Evans, 1995; Bohart *et al.*, 1998).

Politics, theology, ethics and moral values are all fields in which pluralist ideas have flourished for some time (e.g. Hick, 1980; 1985; 1995; Rouner, 1984; Hamnett, 1990; Cooper, 1993; Hinman, 1994; Dean, 1995; MacIvor, 1997; Mullan, 1998), although they have generally been excluded from this thesis. There has been a widespread concern to find common ground between an all too apparent multiplicity of beliefs (e.g. D'Costa, 1986; Singh, 1986; Hamnet, 1990; Stetson, 1994). Few, however, have offered any clear mechanism for achieving their ends and often appear to comprise statements of desired outcomes, such as mutual tolerance, rather than practical approaches for resolving differences (e.g. Wilkinson, 1999; Boadella, 1998; Barth, 1936). None have offered a coherent and organised system (e.g. Smock and Smock, 1975; Lijphart, 1975; 1980; Dahl, 1982; Lele, 1982; Kauppi, 1987; Hirst, 1997; MacIvor, 1997) and none have been synonymous with the use of the term here. Consequently, the kind of pluralist dialogue envisaged here might, with suitable adaptation, have some applications in the much more complex and seemingly intractable situations that comprise the ways we arrange our society and relations with others. However, it would certainly be dangerous to generalise too widely from the specific context studied here. To assume that the frequent use of language drawn from political conflicts or warfare in discussion of paradigmatic conflicts is more than mere imagery is likely to be unreliable. Finally, although the wider ramifications cannot be explored here, it should also be noted that philosophical pluralism is increasingly receiving attention (e.g.

Hermand, 1995; Achard, 1993; Lynch, 1998) and there may well be scope for further progress to which the proposals above may eventually contribute.

Whether application in any of these fields will lead to approaches that are similar or are very different from those described here will be a matter that must be dealt with elsewhere. It has already been noted that pluralism may not ever be capable of producing a 'finished' and complete version of itself. As a result, this deliberately exploratory study must bear the possibility that the developments undertaken here may never quite end. It has also been noted that adding this kind of caveat to any examination of any topic may be a perpetual burden of pluralist researchers. McLeod (1997b) has even suggested that an inability to "prove" anything to be "true" (pp. 489 - 490) is typical of all social and psychological research. Certainly, the entire pluralist endeavour, including the process of development from its very philosophical and methodological foundations is, and must be, open to constant evolution from informed, positive, 'first rate' criticism from and by each of its component parts. If it is to be applied outwith the area most closely studied here, that process must continue. Necessarily, the results cannot be precisely predicted here.

13.4 Limitations of this work

While there are many benefits to pluralist studies, some limitations must also be noted. This section acknowledges the risk of authorial bias and limitations inherent in the pluralist position taken. It then briefly notes some specific aspects that may warrant further exploration.

13.4.1 The potential for bias in pluralism

It has been suggested that any form of pluralism may be inherently biased (e.g. Connolly, 1969) and therefore may not facilitate an entirely even handed integration of alternative views. Schuster, (1999, p. 1) has noted that the

arguments in favour of the version of pluralism contained here are ‘well presented, and well sustained from the post-modern perspective ... [and in] philosophical and psychological’ terms. It is suggested here that, unlike some other versions (e.g. Wilkinson, 1999), the position taken above is equally sustainable from other perspectives as well. However, Schuster goes on to suggest that the pluralism outlined above can be seen as a ‘post-modern variant’ of existing pluralist approaches (*Ibid.*) implying that it is inherently rooted in post-modern thinking. If this is correct, claims to being a true pluralism would be severely weakened.

Although only occasionally couched in first person terms, I have already acknowledged that as an author I have come to this project with my own biases. These *do* include a sympathy with post-modern and social constructionist ideas. However, I also brought with me a frustration at their lack of objective utility when called upon to provide sufficiently precise information to support evaluative decisions on the future of specific interventions and services. Furthermore, this frustration has led me to argue explicitly *against* post-modernism (see Chapter 3.4). Whether such personal biases are balanced and effectively serve to cancel each other out is not something that I can state with any precision, at least at present⁶⁷. It may be that, out of my awareness, I have indeed given greater weight to constructionist / post-modern concerns than others. Conversely, it may be that in trying to compensate for this the opposite is true. Nonetheless, Schuster’s (1999) general comments regarding this work are highly supportive of its overall position as well as the details of the processes described.

⁶⁷ I would speculate, however, that they have probably carried different weights at different points. In any case, their influence is unpredictable at best. Certainly, it would be plausible to expect a researcher who leant away from modernism to be more responsive to stakeholder interests which also went against reductionistic concerns. It is thus conceivable that this may have led to bias in the development of the studies in Part 5 as well as in the general pluralist

Furthermore, difficulties inherent in the position outlined here cannot be ruled out either. Firstly, it is possible that the pluralist development of evaluation studies, as set out here, might be biased towards giving too much weight to the possibility of unfounded concerns put forward by stakeholders. For example, counsellors may be overly protective of their clients, as appeared to be the case in the A.S.C.U. study (Chapter 9). This may then unnecessarily inhibit otherwise useful methods, such as issuing pre-counselling measures. Pluralist studies may be prone to relying too heavily on the perhaps poor perceptions of the utility of specific procedures when set against their, perhaps also poorly perceived, intrusiveness. Of course, idea-driven perspectives on research are also stakeholders in any study and it may be that greater emphasis should be given to them. However, the pluralist processes outlined in Parts 3 and 4 are, of course, intended to minimise these kinds of problems by insisting that each element of a study, and the study as a whole, remains acceptable to their originating perspectives. The only remaining problem, and it may be significant in some circumstances, is that an 'acceptable practice' can differ from 'best practice'.

Secondly, some approaches are more readily able to accept the value of combining multiple perspectives than others. Consequently, *post*-modern, constructivist or pragmatic approaches are always going to be seen as more readily accepting of pluralist ideas (e.g. Rappoport, *et al*, 1999). However, it is emphatically not the case that the current work represents a 'post-modern variant' (Schuster, *op. cit.*) of existing ideas. As has been noted above (Chapter 3.4), from a pluralist perspective, post-modernism can be seen as an inherently limited set of ideas which also lack sufficient coherence to carry the requisite breadth of utility for most purposes in the evaluative sciences. In their own way, they are as exclusive as their main alternatives and yet are tied irrevocably

theory put forward.

to them. This work has deliberately developed a method by which it may be possible to progress further. It is the primary purpose of the mechanism outlined above to allow even the most modernist or reductive approaches to operate with reasonable freedom. That is, no approach should be so fettered as to find itself unable to meet its essential requirements. Whatever the origins of the current position, if any approach were to find its application to be significantly curtailed it would have reason to doubt the claim of these proposals to constitute a proper pluralism. However, the safeguards against this eventuality already contained in the complex interactions of the positively oriented, developmental dialogue between perspectives should prevent such problems being insurmountable, at least in any but the most extreme cases.

This might be considered unfounded optimism if it had not been explored in a number of settings through the empirical studies presented in Part 5. It must be acknowledged that these were all carried out by the same researcher and a better level of testing of the pluralist ideas presented here might be achieved by their application by others who could bring a different 'mind set' to the tasks involved. It is quite possible that such further application might also result in significant further development of the nature of pluralism, but that lies outwith the scope of this thesis. However, so far as it has been possible to ascertain here, the highly divergent mainstream approaches to evaluating counselling and psychotherapy have been consistently and successfully combined.

It has already been noted that no pluralism is compatible with any absolute monism (Chapter 5.1.2). For those positions that allow no room whatsoever for alternatives the current propositions *must* prove unacceptable. The question is then necessarily one of in what circumstances such an absolute monistic position is necessarily and exclusively correct. It has already been suggested (Chapter 4.5) that if any such position were to exclude *all* further progress of any sort at any time it would indeed be guilty of unfounded optimism. The

history of multiple, successful but conflicting perspectives in many aspects of scientific endeavour, not least the psychological therapies, would appear to confirm the poverty of all extreme monisms.

Finally, in view of the generally favourable findings of the three evaluative studies discussed in Part 5 it might be asked whether pluralism inherently favours positive findings. This, however, is only likely to be so to the extent that the component parts of the study are prone to such bias. Indeed, pluralist methods should generally be expected to act in the opposite direction of *reducing* bias introduced by any one element through reference to its alternatives. This was particularly evident in Chapter 11.

13.4.2 What cannot be evaluated pluralistically?

Schuster (*op. cit.*) has raised the question of what *cannot* be evaluated pluralistically or evaluated at all. It is worth noting again, perhaps, that such questions must lie outwith the main thrust of this work as it deliberately set out to explore the *possibilities* of pluralist evaluation, rather than to define its boundaries in any exact manner.

Nonetheless, it is possible to speculate that the pluralist approach might not be able to address issues that lie entirely in the realm of one type of research or another without any features that are amenable to any alternative approach. However, it is difficult to imagine how this might be true of any evaluative research, at least in the social sciences. Evaluation necessarily implies the assigning of values. It seems unlikely that there are many settings in which *no* stakeholder might have an interest in quantifying those values for the sake of gaining the precision or the generalisability such procedures typically offer. Conversely, any social science is necessarily concerned with people and is thus likely to be dealing with matters that are difficult or impossible to represent fully as quantities. Quantification is generally an approximation of the whole

experience of each individual. Steps to represent the qualities of those experiences are therefore likely to enlarge upon quantification, despite the utility of such processes for certain groups.

Phenomenologists such as Heron (1996, p. 207) and others might consider it immoral to prevent human respondents in a study having a significant role in its design, implementation and reporting. Indeed, they would consider it wrong to treat them as quantities or units of ‘outcome’ at all (e.g. Rowan, 1998). This effectively insists upon the inclusion of phenomenological approaches, even where it does not outlaw purist reductionism altogether. Within the current pluralist approach, the S/I-SD measure demonstrated that phenomenological methods can be of importance even when the primary tasks are purely reductionist. If reductionism or positivism and phenomenology are both essential elements of evaluative research in this field it might seem that we are left with little alternative but to develop a pluralism capable of supporting both.

13.4.3 Areas which may warrant further consideration

Other areas have been left unexplored or incompletely resolved above. These can only be briefly noted here as constituting the ‘unfinished business’ which will have to be left for more detailed consideration elsewhere:

- ◆ None of the empirical studies described in Part 5 made use of either randomisation or, more importantly, control groups - despite their desirability from a reductionist or positivist perspective. Unlike reductionist logical positivism, pluralism cannot ally itself entirely with the view that the randomised controlled trial (R.C.T.) is to be regarded as the fixed ‘gold standard’ of scientific evidence (cf. Sackett *et al*, 1996; Rowland and Goss, 2000). It does, however, recognise the utility of the logical strength R.C.T.s

can offer. Practicalities aside⁶⁸, there is no reason *in principle* why a pluralist study should not take on elements of the classic R.C.T. design or why a formal R.C.T. should not form part of a wider pluralist study. Conversely, there is nothing to prevent qualitative, phenomenological methods being applied to experimental and control groups as part of a single study, despite such strategies being so rarely attempted. Indeed, from a pluralist perspective, it might be argued that an ideal study would be pluralistically developed to incorporate every check and balance offered by every applicable method, including control groups, randomisation and the kinds of quality controls recommended for qualitative research (e.g. Stiles, 1993). If taken to extremes this could lead to highly complex study designs. In practice, however, pluralist studies can often be simplified, as in the current work. In accordance with its utilitarian principles, when there is sufficient evidence for each stakeholder group to be able to meet its needs additional data becomes increasingly less important (i.e. less useful). Eventually, the diminishing returns offered by some methods are simply not worth the proportion of available resources they require.

- ◆ The precise role of different stakeholder groups in developing pluralist evaluations in a wide variety of situations could be considered further. It seems likely that merely ascertaining the interests and values of all the various stakeholder groups might constitute a significant series of studies in itself. Estimating the degree and nature of stakeholder involvement in, and impact from, different elements of pluralist studies would be even more

⁶⁸ In the studies reported in this thesis, it was the immense practical difficulties of rigorously applying techniques from R.C.T. methodology that led to their being dropped. Not only are many ideal factors such as the use of double blind allocation and believable but inactive placebos virtually unachievable (especially in naturalistic clinical settings), all the studies were carried out with very small budgets. Their pluralist development indicated that the strictly limited resources were more usefully focused on addressing other needs given higher priority by the various stakeholder groups.

complex. It would also seem a natural extension of the current study. We might, for example, compare the findings of studies designed and / or implemented by different stakeholder groups. We might ask whether counsellors would find greatest utility in studies designed by clients, researchers, their managers or themselves. Similar questions could also be asked from each of the other perspectives, of course, perhaps with quite different answers.

- ◆ Full consideration of the ontological implications of the pluralism proposed was deliberately excluded because of the essentially practical intention of developing a method that could be applied in real research settings and the focus on the specific field of evaluating psychological therapies. However, it may be possible for the existence of multiple paradigmatic perspectives to be reconciled with consideration of the nature of external reality. Whether this would be through an acceptance of actual multiple ‘realities’, or whether it would be through a more thorough application of pluralist methods to ontological issues or, indeed, by some other means is not possible to foresee at present.
- ◆ The concept of pluralist ‘tool kits’ for research - and their contents - could certainly be developed further. The production of such tool kits might be a very useful contribution to the practice of evaluations of counselling and psychotherapy. Their contents would not only be applicable in a great many evaluation settings, they would also offer the possibility of each element being pluralistically developed and validated. Such a process was partially undertaken in the study of the S/I-SD measure above. Such ‘tool kits’ might be especially valuable in facilitating the widespread evaluation of counselling and other psychological therapies as a matter of routine for practitioners. Current tools intended for routine use have generally tended to be biased in favour of reductionist approaches with much less emphasis

given to their alternatives (e.g. Connell *et al*, 1997; Clifford, 1998, 1999; Wing *et al*, 1994, 1996, 1998).

- ◆ If pluralist approaches were successful, as here, they might be thought likely to have implications for the burgeoning evidence based health care debate (c.f. Rowland and Goss, 2000). At the very least, if accepted, they might prove to be a basis for widening the kinds of evidence that are considered worthy of attention or for adjusting the relative weighting given to different forms of study. For example, it may not be appropriate to place qualitative methods below others in a more or less rigid hierarchy of evidence types. Furthermore, pluralism would certainly support the development of 'practice based evidence' (Barkham and Mellor-Clark, 2000) as a vital part of evidence based practice. It might also be capable of facilitating greater integration between these concepts than has been possible hitherto.
- ◆ It has not been possible here to explore fully the implications of the pluralist stance for the *existing* body of research. For example, we might consider what our knowledge about counselling and psychotherapy would be like if all its developers had taken a pluralist stance, as opposed to the relatively narrow positions exemplified by Freud, Eysenck and others. At the very least, we might expect the evidence to be more broadly acceptable and, in theory, better able to represent human psychology, psychopathology and the relative effectiveness of psychological interventions and treatments.
- ◆ Ethical issues relating to monistic and pluralist modes of study have not been addressed in this work, except to note certain issues as they arose, such as sensitivity to respondents' needs. However, the ethical issues associated with pluralist research will certainly need to be explored. While the overarching ethical principles such as beneficence, honesty and the avoidance of harm, will remain constant, some areas, such as the relative

complexity of pluralist studies, may prove problematic, at least in some circumstances. For example, it may be especially important to ensure that the benefits accruing from the research continue to warrant the additional burden on respondents when many, perhaps all, aspects of a study are routinely investigated through more than one method.

- ◆ Finally, it may also be worth giving further consideration to the view a number of different approaches would take of pluralism. Social Constructionism, for example, (e.g. Gergen, 1985; McLeod, 1997a; Neimeyer, 1998) might be able to offer greater clarity to the processes involved in achieving pluralism. Other approaches may also have a great deal to offer in the further development of pluralist methodologies - in addition to being challenged by it themselves.

13.5 Closing statement

This thesis has contributed information of real utility to researchers and all those who have a stake in their work. Its process of development has tended to match the principles it proposes. That is, it has been both reductionist and deductive *and* phenomenological and heuristic. This has meant that it has been necessary to consider the needs of a greater number of perspectives than might otherwise have been the case. If this has led, as the author believes, to a greater rigor, breadth and depth as well as greater utility for the full range of perspectives on evaluative research in counselling and psychotherapy then it has, perhaps, been able to demonstrate the validity of its own central tenets.

Also, the process of the development of this work has exemplified the perpetual mutability of pluralist ideas. That the development, implementation and interpretation of the practical evaluations all further influenced the pluralist philosophy on which they were themselves based is an example of the iterative

interplay between the various aspects of pluralist reflexive method and its cyclical nature.

It is suggested here that this study has achieved its three primary aims. It has outlined a practicable pluralist methodology for evaluating counselling and psychotherapy. It has explored some of the philosophical and epistemological implications such a methodology raises. It has also examined aspects of the practical application of that method. Being an investigative study, it was not intended to address any of these issues exhaustively. However, its exploration has been sufficient to demonstrate success, both in theory and in practice, for the principles of pluralist research.

More specifically, this work has:

- ◆ successfully developed the theoretical and philosophical underpinning of counselling and psychotherapy evaluation;
- ◆ provided a means by which the positive features of currently available methodologies can be retained;
- ◆ offered an alternative to previous views of scientific progress such as the Kuhnian description of perpetual scientific revolutions;
- ◆ tested this pluralist approach in different contexts and found it workable;
- ◆ found pluralist evaluations to be more thorough and more effective in meeting a diverse range of stakeholder needs than any currently available monistic or unintegrated multi-method approach, and
- ◆ opened the way for further development of pluralist approaches in the field of counselling and psychotherapy evaluation and, possibly, beyond.

It is hoped that, at the very least, this thesis will provide a platform on which further progress may be based.

Postscript

This postscript, which balances the prefatory declaration of perspective, is included in the interest of increasing the transparency of the researcher's experience and attitudes in order to facilitate interpretation and accurate criticism of it by others.

As Jung noted,

'To be sure, when we deal in ideas we inevitably make a confession, for they bring to the light of day not only the best that in us lies, but our worst insufficiencies and personal shortcomings as well.'

Jung (1933), p. 132.

This represents my experience of writing this thesis well, both on an emotional level and in the sense that I must note again that I may simply be reflecting a pluralist bias I brought to the work. It may be no more than an expression of my personal 'psychopathology of everyday life' (Freud, 1914) that I began this work by approaching the practical task of evaluating counselling by attempting to minimise conflict and to avoid unjustifiably denigrating any possibility.

A deceptively straightforward slogan expresses another of the experiences of creating this thesis: I see the foundations of pluralism everywhere. No matter which philosophical source I have read or methodological critique I have applied I have found at least some seeds of the pluralism that has been developed here. I have also found attitudes and dictums that are clearly anti-pluralist but looking elsewhere in even the most monistic schema there are

elements that are not only acceptable within a pluralist philosophy and method but also those which appear to me actively to suggest it.

Furthermore, I cannot tell to what extent I am merely expressing the ideas that have become ripe for expression in my present time and culture. Jung (*op. cit.*) also notes that ‘ideas spring from a source that is not contained within one man’s personal life. We do not create them; they create us.’ Certainly, others have been exploring related concerns during the writing of this thesis, although none have undertaken the task on this scale and with this specific application (e.g. Samuels, 1989; MacIntyre, 1990; Slunecko, 1999; Wilkinson, 1999). All I can say for sure is that the ideas I have included seemed to me to be worth exploring. Their objective value must be decided by others who can avoid my personal form of subjectivity, with all its attendant ‘Freudian slips’, by applying their own. I can, however, take at least some comfort in the suggestion that ‘the subject is also an objective fact, a piece of the world’ (Jung, *op. cit.*, p. 133) and that all subjects, even the current author, can be treated as such. Consequently, any errors or omissions may yet be rescued.

It is worth noting, perhaps, that my view of the worst possible fate for the proposals developed in this work would be that it prompt the development of a system which begins to be treated as a fixed school of thought in itself. It may be that there will be further developments that will see pluralism legitimately take on such a role but, of course, the creation of a new orthodoxy would confound the proposals that form the basis of the current version of pluralism. However, there can be no guarantees against future events. The history of the ‘paradigm wars’ warns us that the protagonists on each side tend to be liable to adhere to their positions with a vehemence and rigidity not originally intended. As Huxley noted as long ago as 1881: ‘it is the customary fate of new truths to begin as heresies and to end as superstitions’ (p. xii).

However, the future does not need to be so bleak. A more optimistic view would be that this work constitutes a step in what may grow to become a 'pluralist project', perhaps with greater and wider implications than those envisaged here. It is to be hoped that an even more robust, reliable and generally acceptable pluralism may yet be developed. The paradigm wars must be either won or ended in some other productive fashion.

The important thing is not even that the development of pluralism continues or that its possibilities be explored any further, desirable though that may appear from my current perspective. Far more important is that the best ways of producing knowledge are available and that we maximise the utility of that knowledge.

Jung (*op. cit.*) also noted:

'Our world is so exceedingly rich in delusions that a truth is priceless. Whoever doubts this truth is of course looked upon as a faithless reprobate, while a note of fanaticism and intolerance creeps in from all sides. And yet each of us can carry the torch of knowledge but a part of the way ... Could we but accept this in an impersonal way ... then much of the poison and bitterness might be spared and we should be able to perceive the profound and super-personal continuity of the human mind.'
pp. 53 - 54.

A better moral for pluralism would be hard to find.

Acknowledgements

No work of this kind can be completed without the support of a great many people and organisations. There is only space to mention a few here. First and foremost are the clients and counsellors who gave up their time, and often their privacy, so willingly. The A.S.C.U. study reported in Chapter 9 was made possibly by a studentship from the Strathclyde University Counselling Unit which also supported the other work reported here for several years. The study reported in Chapter 10 was partly supported by the major financial services company concerned, especially in terms of logistical provision. The R.A.M.H. study reported in Chapter 11 was part funded by R.A.M.H. The study reported in Chapter 12 was supported by the Nuffield Foundation, the University of Strathclyde Counselling Unit and Faculty of Education Research Committee.

I owe a great debt and many thanks to Professor Dave Mearns and Dr. Peter Martin for their years of tolerant patience, encouragement and support. I would also like to acknowledge the valuable assistance I have received from numerous others, including: Peter Clarke of Strathclyde University and the staff of the Counselling Unit there; Hilton Davis; Nancy Rowland; Alec McGuire and staff of the B.A.C.; Peter Roberts and the staff of A.S.C.U.; Joe Armstrong and the staff at R.A.M.H.; Debbie Butler and the staff and management of the financial services company discussed in Chapter 10; Lois Shawver; Shlomit Schuster; Agnes Reid; Samantha Kelly; Evelyn Calder; and, most especially, my family who have put up with all the time and energy I put into this work and provided welcome distractions: Catriona, Andrew and Lynn.

Part 7: Bibliography

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