Towards a New Profession: Counselor Professional Identity in Italy. A Delphi Study

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TOWARDS A NEW PROFESSION:

COUNSELOR PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN ITALY.

A DELPHI STUDY

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

COUNSELOR EDUCATION AND SUPERVISION

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
July 2017

Approved by:

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Tim Grothaus (Methodologist)

______________________________
Cirecie A West-Olatunji (Member)
ABSTRACT

TOWARDS A NEW PROFESSION: COUNSELOR PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN ITALY. A DELPHI STUDY

Davide Mariotti
Old Dominion University, 2017
Dissertation Chair: Dr. Garrett J. McAuliffe

Counseling is a young profession compared to other mental health professions in Italy. The lack of agreement about counselor professional identity appears to have a negative impact on counselors. This situation has also led potential clients to confuse counselors with other mental health professionals. Because of this, the future development of counseling in Italy appears closely linked to a stronger counselor professional identity. The purpose of this Delphi study is to establish a consensus list among expert counselors of the distinctive elements that characterize counselor professional identity in Italy.
To my self and to my father Americo.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The course of studies that brought me to accomplish my doctorate was above all a journey. A journey through a language other than my own that allowed me to acquaint myself with culture, ways of thinking and seeing life different from my own; to be confronted with a method of study and an organized way of teaching very different from that which I’m used to. Perhaps due to all of this the doctorate has been the most fascinating voyage of my life, from which I learned so much. For all this I’m thankful to God and the many people who made this journey, which to me seemed like an Odyssey, possible. It is certain that one does not begin or end a unique journey such as this alone. For this I would like to thank both the person who with his visual and organizational ability made this voyage first imaginable and then realizable, Dr. Ted Remley; and the person who, with his open heart and open mind, motivated and inspired me allowing me to finish, Dr. Garrett McAuliffe, my chair.

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The dissertation was the most complex point of my journey and only thanks to the patience of the other member of the research team, Grazia Di Giorgio, and to the support
of the members of the dissertation committee, Dr. Tim Grothaus and Dr. Cirecie West Olatunj, in addition to my Chair, was I able to complete my voyage. Grazia Di Giorgio, a counselor with both Italian and American licenses, was fundamental in the understanding and recodification of the cultural differences during the coding process and the data analysis. Dr. Tim Grothaus, with his precise and attentive participation to the research journey, gave rigor to the methodology with a welcoming and secure presence. He always understood me and accepted me, more than I would have been willing to do towards myself. I want to thank Dr. Cirecie West Olatunji for her generosity and enthusiastic participation in this study, in which she gave an international and multicultural vision of counseling that was particularly useful for this research so dear to me. Finally, I would like to thank Amy Upton, who contributed to this dissertation both through a similar study, that was a continual source of inspiration for me, and as an external auditor of the present research. I conclude thanking my family, my wife Giovanna who found herself in this situation without having sought it out. She supported, without difficulty, me, the weight of this journey, and my son Mattia, to whom I was not always able to give the time that I would have liked and that he deserved. I also want to thank my work partner Federica Garulli and the youth from “Centro educativo Lucignolo”, who supported and tolerated this journey without even realizing it.

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Thank you to Jesus and his presence in spite of myself!
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Counseling is a young profession in Italy (Remley, Bacchini, & Krieg, 2010), with an identity that is still not clearly defined (Fani, 2014). In spite of its youth and its fragile identity, in a short time counseling has occupied a relevant space among the helping professions in Italy, so much so that “it seems that the counseling profession is establishing itself almost on its own” (Perussia, 2007 p. 43). This statement seems to be a consequence of counseling’s superior ability to respond to Italian people’s needs in contemporary society, for example in the areas of family and personal development (Campagnoli, 2015), or in schools and in career development (Soresi, 2013). While demonstrated by its exponential growth, the need for counseling in Italian society cannot hide the limitations that originate from a lack of clearly defined professional parameters.

This uncertainty has caused Italian counselors to suffer from a confused sense of professional identity (Viano, Boveri, & Civillotti, 2007). This situation has also led potential clients to confuse counselors with other mental health professionals (Viano & Verga, 2007). Because of this, the future development of counseling in Italy appears closely linked to the construction of a strong professional identity. The importance of a link between professional identity and counselor’s professional development is also demonstrated by research studies conducted in the United States (Emerson, 2010; Puglia, 2008; Woo, 2013). An unclear foundation of professional identity has been found to affect the distinctiveness of the profession as a whole (Pistole & Roberts, 2002). This can lead to role confusion, and it puts the counseling profession at risk of being confused with
other similar ones such as psychology (Healey & Hays, 2011). Having a strong professional identity can instead, as shown in counseling literature, lead to a counselor’s improved awareness of his or her role and to more ethical behavior, as well as to producing more successful interventions (Hanna & Bemak, 1997; Ponton & Duba, 2009, Remley & Herlihy, 2007; Spurgeon, 2012).

The awareness of the need for a strong and cohesive identity for the counseling profession has also been growing in recent years among Italian professionals, as clearly shown by the number of journal articles and national counseling conferences focusing on counseling identity (Fani, 2014; Montanari, 2015). In the United States, the development of a strong identity for the counseling profession has been widely recognized as fundamental for the development of the field, to the point that a focus on identity development remains to this day a core element of professional membership policy (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011) and of professional advocacy (Myers, Sweeney, & White, 2002).

According to this author’s literature research, in spite of such growing interest on the topic of counselors’ professional identity in the United States, contemporary Italian counseling literature has yet to produce a sizeable body of research studies conducted by counselors or directly involving counselors who work in Italy. This study filled this void by proposing a research study conducted by an Italian counselor utilizing a Delphi methodology. This research is based directly on the experience and the opinions of expert Italian counselors with the intention of understanding the principal elements of counselor professional identity in Italy. The goal of this work was to make the voice of Italian counselors heard and understood as they define themselves, by naming the distinctive
elements that characterize their profession. At the same time, this work also had the goal of consolidating the counseling profession as a whole in Italy.

In the next section, a brief summary of Italian and international literature on this topic is provided, with a specific focus on United States-based counseling literature. The continuing reference in this study to North American counseling literature is a direct consequence of the advanced state of the counseling profession in North America, in contrast with the pioneering nature of the present status of and research on counseling in Italy, where it is difficult to find academic studies and research related to the topic. In Italy, counseling is still not part of the academic enterprise. The present study was inspired by 20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011), an initiative promoted by the American Counseling Association (ACA), and it stemmed from a doctoral research study on the identity of school counselors in America (Upton, 2012). Another reason for the presence of the North American references is that this work is being produced within a North American educational pathway.

**Status of Counseling in Italy**

The origins of counseling in Italy as a well-defined discipline and profession are not clear in the scientific literature. Some Italian authors, for example, consider counseling to be a component of psychotherapeutic intervention (Gemignani & Gilberto, 2005). Others instead identify the roots of counseling in the thinking of Alfred Adler, the founder of individual psychology (Fulcheri & Accomazzo, 1999). However, the predominant sense in the Italian and international literature is that Italian counseling took its first steps in the field of social work (Bellani, 2007; Remley, Mariotti, & Valleri, 2015).
The first Italian counseling professionals were trained in the early 1970s (Di Fabio, 2003). It is during the 1990s (and in particular with the promulgation of Law N. 135 of 1990) (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 1991) regarding the prevention, care and treatment of HIV/AIDS (Bellotti & Bellani, 1997), that counseling began to be known in Italy (Di Fabio & Sirigatti, 2013). Law N. 135 of 1990 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 1991) made counseling sessions mandatory for individuals before and after testing for the presence of HIV antibodies. Furthermore, the Piano Nazionale di Formazione per gli Operatori socio-sanitari per la lotta alle infezioni da HIV [PFH; National Training Plan for Health and Social Operators Combating HIV Infections], which was approved in 1989, instituted counseling-centered courses aimed at helpers with different skillsets such as infectious disease physicians, psychologists, social workers, nurses, and helpers belonging to volunteer associations (Bellotti, Bellani, De Mei, & Greco, 1995).

Another important step for the establishment of the profession in Italy was the creation of the European Association of Counseling (EAC). This organization was born in 1991 (Thomas & Hennings, 2012) with the goal of supporting the development of the counseling profession in Europe through the sharing of information and best practices (Di Fabio, 2003). The early 2000s saw the inclusion of counseling among the new professions in the register of CNEL (Consiglio Nazionale dell'Economia e del Lavoro [CNEL-National Council for Economy and Labor], 2005) as an unregulated profession recognized by the Italian Government (Giusti & Spalletta, 2012b). During those years the first Italian professional counselor associations were developed, counseling training programs and the profession’s areas of intervention were defined for the first time (Remley et al., 2015). Italian counseling training programs must require a minimum
length of three years of study, plus sometimes an additional fourth year of specialization. Classes are generally offered during weekends (Di Francesco, Ruffini, & Sarchielli, 2006). To access a counseling training program in this country one needs to have a high school diploma (Remley et al., 2010). Counselor training in Italy is currently provided by private schools. The following ten years saw an exponential growth in the number of counselor training programs, and in 2008 there were 125 courses provided by counseling schools across the country (Fulcheri & Savini, 2011).

We thus come to the present day, when in Italy there is a need to regulate this emerging counseling profession from a legislative point of view. However, there is great opposition from psychologists to the establishment of counseling as an independent profession (Di Fabio, 2009; Sarchielli, 2016b). The Italian psychologists’ guild has been increasing its pressure against the counseling profession through political lobbying efforts that have recently become particularly intense, such as suing individual counselors and entire professional counseling associations in court (Campanini, 2016).

Italian psychologists utilize the shortcomings and weaknesses of Law N. 4, (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2013), as well as the incongruities and historical delays of the Italian legislative system in the restructuring of the system of professions, to argue that the counseling profession in Italy is substantially an abuse of professional psychology, as Giardina (2016), president of the Italian psychologists’ guild/professional association, pointed out at the last AssoCounseling conference in Milan. Within this context, there were strong reasons for conducting a research study that – by utilizing a rigorous scientific process – aims at strengthening the identity of the counseling profession by
seeking a consensus among Italian counselors on the distinctive elements that characterize their work.

This brief summary of the literature has shown how the counseling profession in Italy is still very young. Its identity is still not completely defined and it is not supported by enough specifically related literature. Furthermore, its development is hindered by the opposition of other more structured and mature professional categories. Consequently, these elements produce an uncertain situation and they make the counseling profession harder to recognize. This situation needs to be confronted for the profession to develop and to take firm roots within Italian culture.

Rationale for the Study

There is a need within the counseling profession in Italy for a unified and strong professional identity that can meet the challenges of current and future times (Fani, 2014). At the moment, there is also no extensive scientific literature on counselor professional identity in Italy (Perussia, 2007). According to this author, what seemed totally absent, both in the literature and in the professional field, was a general agreement on the distinctive elements that characterize counselor professional identity in Italy. Just as various studies have shown for American counselors (Emerson, 2010; Myers, Sweeney, & White, 2002; Woo, 2013), for Italian counselors having a strong identity could mean increasing their efficacy, performing more ethically, and finally, having less difficulties advocating for their profession individually or – even more so – within institutional work environments.

Several authors in the United States have shown that counselors in schools, hospitals, local administrations, and businesses should develop a strong identity not to be
confused with other helping professionals who are more established and well-known, such as teachers, psychologists, social workers, or other wellness operators (Healey & Hays, 2011; Spurgeon, 2012; Upton, 2012). With that imperative in mind, the aim of this study was to address the need for a strong and clear foundation for counselor professional identity in Italy. This project represented a decisive passage for Italian counseling towards the achievement of its full recognition as a clearly identifiable and distinct profession within Italian society. A stronger identity can also help to maintain and improve the current legislative regulation of this profession by the Italian government (Remley, 2013).

As was the case in the United States, the need for a cohesive and strong professional identity for Italian counseling has become an emergency and a *conditio sine qua non*, or an essential condition, to face current challenges (Shalcross, 2013). To address this situation, this study involved Italian counseling experts in the effort to define the distinctive elements that characterize their profession, with the goal of contributing to the construction of a clear and shared identity for Italian counselors.

This research was inspired by the work of *20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling. The New Consensus Definition of Counseling* (Kaplan, Tarvydas, & Gladding, 2014) that was promoted by the ACA. As it happened in the United States with the 20/20 project, this study intended to provide an opportunity for professional leaders to see their perspectives represented in the research process. The Delphi methodology was utilized to reach a consensus on the distinctive elements that characterize counselor professional identity in Italy.
This study meant to provide an opportunity for Italian counselors to communicate clearly around the specifics of their profession and the modalities of their interventions. It is possible and advisable that the work will promote a more cohesive professional identity for counselors in Italy, thus favoring more organic and coherent professional advocacy actions. That, in turn, could improve overall awareness and understanding of counselors’ roles, both within the profession (among Italian counselors themselves) and outside of it (among clients and public institutions).

**Research Question**

The purpose of this study was to reach a consensus among expert Italian counselors regarding the distinctive elements that characterize counselor professional identity in Italy. The research question for such investigation was the following: What are the distinctive elements that characterize counselor professional identity in Italy?

**Definition of Terms**

American Counseling Association (ACA) is the largest United States counseling national professional association. It provides its members with support, a code of ethics, professional journals, education, training, and advocacy for the counseling profession (ACA, n.d).

AssoCounseling is the Italian professional association of counselors that is most representative in terms of its membership and its capacity to act in support of the counseling profession. For example, it provides lobbying, training, informational and cultural events such as meetings and editorial initiatives (e.g., websites and scientific journals). AssoCounseling also provides direct support to individual counselors by
providing them with professional guidelines and standards, insurance policies, as well as legal and administrative consultations (AssoCounseling, n.d.a).

Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) is the organization in the United States that certifies the training standards of counselor training programs (CACREP, n.d.).

Counseling is “a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals” (Kaplan, Tarvydas, & Gladding, 2014, p.366).

Counseling Philosophy is the value system that orients the professional actions of counselors (Puglia, 2008; Remley & Herlihy, 2007).

European Association of Counseling (EAC) is a European counseling organization and has as its main goal the promotion of counseling and of the counseling profession in Europe (EAC, n.d.).

Expert Counselor is a professional counselor with an active registration in the official register of a professional counselor association, who has or has had an influence in the development of the counseling profession in Italy through teaching, practice, the publication of books or journal articles, and participation at national and/or international conferences (Iqbal & Pippon-Young, 2009; Upton, 2012).

Federcounseling is an umbrella organization composed of several Italian professional counseling associations, which has the purpose of providing leadership and advocacy for Italian counselors in Europe (Federcounseling, n.d.b).
Professional Advocacy is defined within the context of counseling professional identity as fostering awareness of the counseling profession in the general public, and the promotion of legislative initiatives that benefit this profession (Myers et al., 2002).

Professional Development is the conservation and betterment of counselors’ competencies throughout the arc of their professional life (McAuliffe, 2005; Moss, Gibson & Dollarhide, 2014).

Professional Identity is an expression that refers to a counselor’s professional identity (composed of both a system of values and specific competencies), that constitute the body of knowledge and the internalized reference frame of the professional for his or her actions (McAuliffe, 2005; Ponton & Duba, 2009; Spurgeon, 2012; Upton, 2012).

Overview of the Methodology

The Delphi method is used in research for several reasons when there is a need to build consensus on a subject, for example in cases of uncertainty and lack of empirical evidence and agreement, to promote intervention strategies and understand possible future scenarios (Gupta & Clarke, 1996; Linstone & Turoff, 2002; Norcross, Hedges, & Prochanska, 2002; Powell, 2003; Upton, 2012). Such is the case with counselor professional identity in Italy. This technique achieves this result with several consecutive stages of data collection, usually working through four rounds of consultation of the experts, who are interviewed individually (Hsu & Sandford, 2007).

However, since recent studies recommend using only two or three rounds of data collection (Hasson, Keeney, & McKenna, 2000), this study employed three rounds with the aim of reaching the widest possible consensus among a group of experts. An important step to assure that a reliable and valuable consensus is reached through the
Delphi method is the search for and selection of the expert participants (Landeta, 2006). To that end, the researcher identified and recruited experts for this study utilizing purposeful sampling (Upton, 2012).

The selection process called for an accurate review of national and international scientific literature on counseling as well as a review of conference and meeting programs, with the purpose of identifying a number of Italian counselor experts who were invited to participate in this research. The search for possible experts included counselors who serve or have served on the boards and commissions of Italy’s major professional counselor associations. Snowball techniques were employed (Habibi, Sarafari, & Izadyar, 2014) to identify other participants who satisfy the criteria of experts. The experts were formally contacted through an e-mail and phone call invitation (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). The invitation included a brief introduction of the researcher, an accurate explanation of the research study, the criteria for expert inclusion, and a link to the online survey.

To qualify as an expert, selected counselors needed to be registered as a professional counselor in an Italian professional counselor association. They also needed to satisfy at least two of the following six criteria (Iqbal & Pippon-Young, 2009; Upton, 2012):

1. Being registered as a supervisor in an Italian professional counselor association.
2. Having worked in Italy as a professional counselor for at least three of the last five years.
3. Having taught at least a year in a master’s degree program for professional counselors during the last five years.
4. Having published a book or an article about counseling in a national or international scientific journal.

5. Having given a presentation on counseling during a national or international conference or convention.

6. Having served in an Italian professional counselor association as a board or commission member.

The expert interviews were analyzed by a research group composed of the author and two other researchers. One of them is an American assistant professor of counselor education in the United States. The other is an Italian-American supervisor counselor and clinical psychologist who trained in the United States and who holds a license for counseling practice in both countries.

The research team met before analyzing the data. In the first meeting the researchers were accurately informed of the purpose of the study, and they received a detailed panoramic of the Delphi methodology. The researchers also discussed as a group their individual biases in relation to the topic of the study, and each team member was supported to explore any personal biases on this subject. As mentioned earlier, the study utilized three rounds of data collection, and all expert answers were collected anonymously in a password-protected file (Skulmoski & Hartman, 2007). In the first round the experts were provided with a survey instrument, an informed consent form, a demographic form, and an open-ended protocol that asked them to write a list of words and/or phrases that they considered as principal and characteristic elements of the counseling profession in Italy (Neuer, 2011).
Particular attention was given to the translation process, which included translation and back-translation. The translation process focused on cross cultural and conceptual issues, rather than on linguistic/literal equivalence (Brislin, Lonner, & Thorndike, 1973). Once round-one responses are collected, the research team employed a data analysis process taken from Creswell (2012) and Hays & Singh (2012) to make the study methodologically more reliable. In round two the experts who participated in the first round were invited to value each item on a Likert (1932) scale, indicating whether the item should be considered as a distinctive element characterizing Italian counselor professional identity (Iqbal & Pippon-Young, 2009).

These responses were examined using descriptive statistics, i.e. means and standard deviations (Hallowell & Gambatese, 2010), and round three was developed with the goal of giving the panel of experts an opportunity to re-evaluate their original responses from round two and to re-rate each item (Iqbal & Pippon-Young, 2009). Upon reception of round three responses, the data were analyzed and descriptive statistics were run to measure central tendency (means) and level of dispersion (standard deviation), to obtain the highest possible consensus on the distinctive elements that characterize the counselor professional identity in Italy (Hsu & Sanford, 2007).

**Summary**

The aim of this research was to provide a list of the distinctive elements characterizing counselor professional identity in Italy to reinforce and establish that identity. This chapter has provided the statement of the problem and a brief summary of the literature. The rationale for the study, definition of key terms, and a general presentation of the methodology utilized in this study were also outlined in this
introduction. The next chapter will develop an accurate literature review on the current status of counseling professional identity in Italy. Chapter Three will provide information related to the Delphi methodology. Chapter Four will present the results of the study, and finally Chapter Five will offer a discussion of those results as well as their implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research. A manuscript to be submitted for publication is included in Chapter Six.
CHAPTER TWO

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter a review of the existing literature related to professional identity in the counseling field will be presented. The development of this specific construct throughout the history of counseling will also be explored. In particular, a discussion of its importance, as well as other current issues related to counseling’s professional status is included. This study will analyze counselor professional identity as a collective process (Gale & Austin, 2003). At the same time, it will also take into account individual variables such as values, attitudes and personal beliefs (Auxier, Hughes, & Kline, 2003; Gibson, Dollarhide & Moss, 2010).

According to several North American authors, counselor professional identity is composed of a system of values and of specific competencies, which constitute the body of knowledge and the internalized reference frame of the counseling professional guiding his or her actions (McAuliffe, 2005; Ponton & Duba, 2009; Spurgeon, 2012; Upton, 2012). This chapter will address how a strong and clear professional identity is important for the growth of the profession (Myers et al., 2002) as well as for the professional quality of the counseling intervention (Remley & Herlihy, 2007). These issues and other challenges to counselors’ professional identity will be explored in this chapter.

Counseling Philosophy in Italy

The uncertainty of the current situation in terms of counselor identity in Italy (Perussia, 2007) has led the counseling community to pay particular attention to the philosophy that underlies the approach to counseling interventions, in other words to the
values that guide counselors in their work. This attention is reflected in the Carta di Assago [Charter of Assago] (AssoCounseling, 2016a), which was produced during the last meeting of AssoCounseling in Milan (AssoCounseling, 2016b). The Carta di Assago is a declaration of the fundamental values of counseling activity that was developed by a large group of the country’s leading professional counselors (Fani, 2016).

According to a perspective that is widely shared in Italy as well as throughout the rest of the world, the philosophy of counseling is based on a humanistic vision of human nature (Campagnoli, 2011). As such, it approaches people’s problems and difficulties in evolutionary terms, that is, as developmental challenges. Furthermore, counseling is oriented towards the promotion of well-being and the enhancement of clients’ resources from a primarily preventative perspective (Di Fabio & Sirigatti, 2013) as well in the United States (Myers & Sweeney, 2008). Another determining characteristic of the philosophy of counseling in Italy, one that is similar to counseling in the America, is the distinction from the medical model of psychotherapy (Carmichael & Erford, 2013).

As described above, this holistic view of counseling intervention focusing on wellness and preventative action leads naturally towards a developmental view of intervention that is centered on an empowerment process and on a positive vision of the individual’s potential (Eriksen & McAuliffe, 2006; McAuliffe & Eriksen, 1999). As we shall see in the following paragraphs, because of the holistic view and of the current Italian laws, counseling in Italy has also created a distinct and different type of intervention from psychology and psychotherapy (Giusti & Spalletta, 2012b).

Another important element in recent years for counseling philosophy in Italy is that a multicultural view of human experience has increased its influence in this field,
although not quite to the levels that it has attained in the America (Anagnostopulos, Germano, & Tumiati, 2008; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). As stated by Cecilia Edelstein (2014) at the AssoCounseling Conference, there is a maturing awareness among professional counselors in Italy that to help and support people in our contemporary society it is necessary to develop new operational tools and new codes for understanding our different and variegated kinds of life experiences. From this point of view, this is similar to what the ACA has defined as “new forces” (Ratts, D’Andrea, & Arredondo, 2004) in the counseling field.

The author has found in Italy awareness of diversity and multicultural issues in counseling. However, he could not find any particular attention to the impact of the social dimension on a person’s growth and development linked to a social justice and advocacy approach, nor could he find any Italian articles or books about it. Advocacy-oriented counseling, which in America holds the assumption that people’s growth and development are conditioned by their living environment (Toporek, 1999), and which is linked to multicultural and social justice issues (Ratts, Singh, Butler, Nassar-McMillan, & Rafferty McCullough, 2016; Ratts & Penderson, 2014; Ratts, Toporek & Lewis, 2010), is still not present in Italy (Mariotti, 2016).

If it were present, advocacy counseling intervention in Italy would ideally promote systemic change as well as it has done in the America (Toporek, Lewis & Crethar, 2009). To do so, it would require an active and responsible participation not only from counselors but also from the people, groups, and family systems to whom the advocacy intervention is directed, as an integral part of the counseling process. According to this approach, the philosophy of counseling intervention includes a kind of social
action that aims at uprooting elements of unfairness (Lee & Walz, 1998) and this becomes an important goal and object of the overall counseling process (Lee, Smith & Ryan, 2013).

**Importance of Counseling Professional Identity**

Before presenting an analysis of the available literature on Italian counseling it seems appropriate to discuss the importance of counseling professional identity as a whole, because this identity is what allows counselors to clearly define the goal as well as the modalities of their professional interventions (Spurgeon, 2012). The need to establish a clear professional identity is, however, not limited to the counseling world, since other helping professions in Italy and across the world - such as social work, nursing and psychology - have also faced the challenge of defining their own professional identity, and still continue to do so (Golczyńska-Grondas, 2011; Johnson, Cowin & Young, 2012; Ross & Crow, 2010; Samaniego & Cárcamo, 2013; Sarchielli & Fraccaroli, 2002).

Unlike what happened in the United States (Hanna & Bemak, 1997), or more generally what took place on an international level (Hohenshil, Amundson, & Niles, 2015) including other European countries such as England (Pugh & Coyle, 2000), professional identity is not a recurring theme in Italian counseling literature (Perussia, 2007). In the past, this has also not been regarded as a particularly relevant research topic even by sociologists in the Italian labor field (Alacevich, 2014).

The current study fills this gap, at least within Italian counseling literature, since it identifies a list of the distinctive elements that characterize counselor professional identity in Italy. The findings that emerge from this research can serve as a basis for
future research efforts aiming at the ongoing development and strengthening of the counseling profession in Italy.

Let us now approach the importance of professional identity starting from the meaning of the word *profession*. This term derives from the Medieval Latin word *professiō*; it means “public acknowledgment” and it was originally used to refer to the taking of religious vows ("Profession", n.d., para C13). In this study, profession (“Professione”, n.d. para. 2. b.) is defined as an intellectual occupation that is practiced continually, and which requires, according to Gardner and Schulman (2005):

> A commitment to service in the interest of clients in particular and the welfare of society in general; a body of theory or special knowledge . . . a specialized set of skills, practices, and performances, unique to the profession; the developed capacity to render judgments with integrity under conditions of both technical and ethical uncertainty; an organized approach to learning from experience, both individually and collectively and thus growing new knowledge from the context of practice; and the development of a professional community responsible for the oversight and monitoring of quality in both practice and professional education. (p. 14)

Finally, another important aspect of identity for all health professionals is to be able to act *pro bono publico* to respond through their competencies and skills in a trustworthy and reliable manner to the call of society (Ponton & Duba, 2009). For the counseling profession the internalized aspect of identity (self-conceptualization) is an important point, because it is what allows the professional to develop a theoretical
framework for the assumption of one's role and for choice and decision-making (Skovholt & Ronnestad 1992; Gibson et al., 2010).

Professional identity is therefore fundamental for counselors to develop attitudes that are conducive to the efficacy of their roles, since it leads to the internalization of the ethical standards of this professional category and to the development of the appropriate learning styles and the enhanced emotional awareness and autonomy that are necessary for their professional activities (Auxier, Hughes, & Kline, 2003). Professional identity, then, defines the boundaries of professional action, that is, whether something should or should not be done (Puglia, 2008). It also provides a sense of satisfaction and pride for the professional choice one has made (Upton, 2012).

All advocacy (Myers et al., 2002) activities in support of the profession benefit qualitatively from a clearer sense of identity, while in turn all supervision activities contribute to defining counseling professional identity and to improving its quality, by rendering it in the process clearer and stronger (Moss, Gibson, & Dollarhide, 2014). In a more general sense, the complex process of development of a specific professional identity was and still remains a central theme of debate in the counseling field of the United States (Hanna & Bemak, 1997; Pistole & Roberts, 2002). This theme has maintained the attention of American counselors (Shallcross, 2012; Shalcross, 2013). The benefits of a strong and solid professional identity, both on the level of individual counselors and for the profession as a whole, have been repeatedly highlighted by several research studies, as by Spurgeon (2012).

Many American authors emphasize how professional counseling has been empowered and will continue to be strengthened by an increase in the perception of a
strong, collective, and cohesive identity among counselors (Daniels, 2002). A collective identity can facilitate and stimulate the sharing of goals, resources, and aspirations for the profession, which puts the entire category in a better position to offer its unique contribution to the life of society (Gale & Austin, 2003). In the United States, the development of a collective unified effort for professional identity is of fundamental importance for counselors who want to produce professional advocacy actions to convince institutions and the general public of the quality and the uniqueness of their interventions (Reiner, Dobmeier, & Hernández, 2013). This is true in the United States as well as in Italy, as stated by Remley (2013).

Several American research studies (Emerson, 2010; Puglia, 2008; Woo, 2013) also highlight how a clearly defined professional identity represents a decisive factor in gaining public and institutional recognition for the counseling profession. Lack of a clear identity can have a negative impact on the future of counselors, as well as on the quality of their work and the image that counseling offers to society. For this reason it is also important to clarify and develop counseling professional identity starting from the training programs (Gibson et al., 2010). While the topic of counseling professional identity has not yet been studied in Italy, the need for a clearer professional identity for Italian counseling is also keenly felt and valued by the president of AssoCounseling, the largest Italian counseling association (Fani, 2014).

**The History of the Counseling Profession in Italy**

To better understand the current state of counseling professional identity in Italy a brief overview of the history of counseling in this country will be provided. To contextualize what happened in Italy, some information about counseling in Europe is
also provided. Counseling first developed in Europe, initially in Great Britain, around the 1950s (Di Fabio & Sirigatti, 2013). It then continued to develop in a more structured way with the establishment of the British Association for Counseling & Psychotherapy (BACP) in the 1970’s (Di Francesco et al., 2006). In general, counseling is present in some form today throughout almost all of Europe (Hohenshil, Amundson, & Niles, 2015).

This presence is part of the worldwide development process of the counseling profession (Alvarez & Lee, 2012). Counseling is present in various forms and levels of organization in numerous European countries. In Greece, for example, in spite of the lack of a precise professional identity, two graduate programs in counseling and counseling psychology were established in 2012 (Malikiosi-Loizos & Ivey, 2012). In August of the same year a counseling department was opened within the Faculty for Social Well-Being of the University of Malta (University of Malta, 2016). Counseling is also present in central Europe, for example in Switzerland, where it has unique characteristics that are tied to the cultural and political uniqueness of this country, which is divided into states called “cantons”, and where different languages are spoken (Thomas & Henning, 2012). In Denmark, counseling has its roots in philosophy (Dixon & Hansen, 2010), while in Romania it developed initially in the educational field and career counseling services (Szilagyi & Paredes, 2010).

As for the origins of counseling in Italy, as stated by Remley, Mariotti & Valleri (2015), these origins can be traced back to assistenza sociale [social care] rather than to psychology. In fact, the first counseling-related activities were reported in Italy during the early history of its social assistance programs, which started in the 1920s (Margarone,
1994). Italian counseling then saw a significant development in the 1970’s, with several important counseling-related events taking place on a national scale, such as the birth of the first counselor training programs (Di Fabio, 2003). Since its origins, Italian counseling developed and grew through contributions that were taken mostly from English-speaking countries such as those of Carl Rogers and Rollo May (Di Fabio & Sirigatti, 2013). The 1990s brought to Italy the first professional associations and the first national counseling activities with the Piano Nazionale di Formazione per gli Operatori socio-sanitari per la lotta alle infezioni da HIV [PFH; National Training Plan for Health and Social Operators Combating HIV Infections] (Bellotti et al., 1995).

The 1990s also represent the period during which the term counseling first became widely known and commonly used in the Italian language (Fulcheri & Savini, 2011). Only since the early 1990s have Italian people started to use the term counseling to refer to an activity of support and help for individuals and groups that is meant to promote well-being (Di Fabio, 1999). The counseling profession is, therefore, still very new in Italy when compared to other mental health related professions (Remley et al., 2010), and there are currently no extensive scientific studies about it (Perussia, 2007).

In the 2000s, credentialing was first established for Italian mental health counselors by the national Law n° 4/2013 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2013), concerning the recognition of intellectual professions including counseling (Remley, 2013; Trentin, 2013). The original goal of this law was to promote voluntary self-regulation, but by including counseling among its list of “intellectual professions” the Italian government also implicitly recognized its legitimacy. This achievement was a fundamental step in the development of the counseling profession in Europe and throughout the world. In 2008,
there were 125 courses designed to train professional counselors in Italy (Fulcheri & Savini, 2011), and there are now more than 100 counseling private schools, based on the census conducted by AssoCounseling in 2016 (AssoCounseling, n.d.b). The following paragraphs will address in more detail the consequences of Law n° 4/2013 for Italian counselors, who numbered about 2,500 in 2011, according to Tommaso Valleri (Battista, 2011), AssoCounseling’s general secretary at that time.

**Cultural Context**

To gain a good understanding of counseling in Italy it is also important to have a basic overview of the main aspects of Italian culture. Italy is a unified nation in which important differences have persisted since its origins (Hom, 2013) to the present day (Longobardi, 2016), regarding different ways of thinking, living, and consequently administering public affairs in the different Italian regions. Even the welfare system has been regionalized and - consequently – diversified in several ways across Italian regions (Di Nicola & Pavesi, 2012). An important cultural element in this country is the significant role of the welfare state, thanks to public insurances and the simultaneous presence of many public and private services such as schools, orphanages, educational centers, and hospitals (Armando, 2014).

The historical presence of the Catholic Church has contributed in a decisive manner to rendering Italy a highly protected society through the development of the welfare system in this country. This happened both through the diffusion of a “charitable” culture that is oriented towards welcoming and supporting those who are weaker, as well as through more concrete initiatives such as the building of hospitals and orphanages (Bassi & Pfau-Effinger, 2012). Another example of the importance of the Catholic
Church for the Italian welfare system is how the Church has also played a decisive role in the development of the nursing profession (Bezze, Manzoni, & Di Mauro, 2013).

Italian is the official language of the country and everyone in Italy is expected to speak it, but despite this in every town there are different dialects (De Mauro, 2016), and almost all religions of the world can be found represented within this small geographic area (Eurispes, 2016; Introvine & Zocatelli, 2016). Thus, multicultural counseling should be a natural subject of reflection among Italian counselors. Conversely, intercultural issues are rarely represented or discussed in counseling, usually only in connection with the migration process and without involving other diversity issues, such as religion or ethnicity (Edelstein, 2014). There is also a general lack of sensitivity in Italian society around gender diversity (Donà, 2006) and LGBT issues (Gemignani & Gilberto, 2005). Correspondingly, despite the fact that all genders have a constitutionally granted egalitarian active and/or passive access to public activity, in reality there are still inequalities in the respective number of men and women occupying positions of political, economic, and social power in Italy, which is a sign of sexist discrimination against women (Giuditta, 2006).

**Current Issues in Counseling in Italy**

The professional guild of Italian psychologists and psychotherapists has recently undertaken legal action to stop the growth and development of the counseling profession in Italy (AssoCounseling, 2015b). In general, the accusation claimed by Italian psychologists in court as well as in their professional blogs is that the counseling profession does not exist and that its practice represents an abuse of the psychological profession (AltraPsicologia, 2010). As written in the open letter to counselors that was
issued by the professional counselor associations belonging to Federcounseling as a response to the abovementioned accusation, “the challenge now is to define in ever more precise and unmistakable ways ‘who is a counselor,’ ‘what does a counselor do,’ ‘how does s/he do it,’ and ‘who does s/he serve,’ and this in order to safeguard our clients, ourselves as professionals, our profession, and its identity” (Federcounseling, 2015).

The legal challenge undertaken by the psychologists’ guild against the counseling profession in Italy was generated because counseling is a young profession in its earliest stages of development in this country (Remley et al., 2010). This would determine a not yet clearly defined identity in terms of both the actions and the elements that characterize it and that distinguish it from other similar professions. In an attempt to better understand current issues that are relevant for Italian counseling, a brief examination of some of those challenges, such as clinical issues, counselor professional certification, licensure, and training, will be provided next.

**Clinical Issues in Counseling in Italy**

Counseling developed in Italy as a health-promoting intervention (Campagnoli, 2011) with the goal of improving the clients’ well-being and more generally their quality of life (Di Fabio & Sirigatti, 2013). Counseling in Italy has to be distinct and different from psychotherapy because by law any therapeutic or psychological intervention is reserved exclusively for psychotherapists and psychologists (Giusti & Spalletta, 2012b). Given this legislative context, Italian counseling only embraces areas of intervention that cannot be described as “therapeutic”. As regulated by the national Law n° 56/1989 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 1989), these areas must fall outside the purview of the medical model or of psychological intervention (Valleri, 2009).
For this reason, AssoCounseling, the largest Italian professional counseling association, has defined in an official document the proper actions of the counseling profession. This document was written by the Scientific Committee of AssoCounseling in accordance with the National President's Council on 28 March 2012, and it was presented to all counselors during AssoCounseling’s third national conference on 15 April 2012 (AssoCounseling, 2012).

Furthermore, AssoCounseling also defined in an official document eleven intervention areas and thirty-two specialties (AssoCounseling, 2015a). Some of these eleven intervention areas - or “macro areas” are: personal and relational well-being, educational - school based, emergency forensic, health, social, spiritual, and sport. Beside these intervention areas, some of the thirty-two specialties are: addiction counseling, art counseling, group counseling, intercultural counseling, marriage and couples counseling, mental health counseling, pastoral counseling, and vocational counseling.

As far as this author is aware, there is currently no research available within the Italian scientific counseling literature on the main areas of counseling intervention in Italy. However, one study by Campagnoli (2011) in the Regione Lombardia (Lombardy Region), which is the most populated region of Italy (Istat, 2016) with more than 10 million people, provides some insight. According to Campagnoli (2011) the sample is statistically representative. One hundred eighty-one people were interviewed from an initial sample of 839 people who declared themselves counselors. Ninety five point six percent of the counselors in the sample received a three-year long training (which will be described in the next paragraph), while the remaining 4.4% received a shorter training. The counselors interviewed were between 26 and 75 years old. Their average age is 47.6
years. 76.8% of the people interviewed were females and 23.2% were males. The majority of the people interviewed (64%) had a university degree, and the remaining 36% had a high school diploma.

The largest group of those with a university degree graduated in psychology, with a percentage of 13.8%. According to the results of this study, the most common intervention areas were, in order of prevalence, private practice, education, social, medical, and business. The predominant type of intervention was individual (58.8%), followed by groups (25.8%), then couples (9.9%), and finally families (5.5%). Client age was mostly adult (72%), 17% were teenagers, 8% were children, and 3% were defined as elderly (Campagnoli, 2011).

Training

Counselors in Italy are trained in private schools rather than in universities (Remley et al., 2010). Currently, a clear definition of counselor training programs that distinguishes them from other therapeutic or psychological training programs - such as psychotherapeutic training - is still a work-in-progress (Giusti & Spalletta, 2012a). With the aim of improving and unifying their standards, some Italian counseling schools came together in January 2016 and founded a new association named ASCO Associazione Scuole di Counseling (Association of Counseling Schools, n.d.). The birth of this association, which aims for the development of a shared curriculum, appears to represent a milestone in the establishment of a strong identity for Italian counseling.

It seems evident that the professional identity of Italian counselors has come to represent a salient topic in the country not only among practicing counselors but also among counselor educators. Some American counseling authors argue that the
development of counseling professional identity is linked to training programs (Calley & Hawley, 2008), and above all to the accreditation of counselor education programs (Foster, 2012). Hoskins and Thompson (2009), who studied counseling identity from an international perspective, confirm that a clear sense of professional identity is rooted in the training program. Furthermore, Stanard (2013) stated the importance of establishing an international registry of counselor education programs. As for Italy, it is not possible to find a generally accepted set of standards for the training of counselors that can be compared to the standards issued in the United States by the Council on Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Professions (CACREP) (Remley, 2013).

Despite the fact that there are no unified standards as in America, all Italian professional counseling associations that are affiliated with the large umbrella association Federcounseling follow the Standards of the European Association for Counseling (EAC) (Federcounseling, n.d.c). This organization was founded in 1991 with the aim of promoting the development and recognition of counseling at the European level, for sharing ideas and establishing a common definition of counseling, as well as sharing training standards among various counseling associations from different countries (Di Fabio, 2003).

Training programs in Italy, including the private schools, are usually identified with a counseling specialization that is theoretically based, such as gestalt or systemic counseling. (Remley et al. 2010). To enroll in almost any master program in Italy (Fulcheri & Savini, 201; Remley et. al, 2010) students need to have at least the equivalent of an American high-school diploma but not necessarily a university degree.
Federcounseling, the largest counseling umbrella association in Italy, requires that all counseling schools train counselors in accordance with clear and defined training standards (Federcounseling, n.d.c). To uphold these standards, each private counseling school in Italy should apply for accreditation with a professional counselor association and only adopt curricula that have been approved by this association. The school should also demonstrate that it meets this association’s required standards. Once a professional counseling association has accredited an Italian counseling school, the school must continue to comply with this association’s standards, such as AssoCounseling training standards (AssoCounseling, n.d.c). As shown above, there are a multiplicity of training sites and standards in Italy. This represents a further reason for the weak identity of Italian counselors.

To illustrate the typical training process of an Italian counselor, as described above, the training standards that have been adopted by AssoCounseling will be used. These standards are in full compliance with the counselor preparation guidelines that have been issued by the EAC and by Federcounseling. According to AssoCounseling’s standards a training program must have a minimum duration of three years, during which students explore their personal issues and learn about the theories and techniques of counseling, for a minimum range of hours between 650 and 700 (AssoCounseling, n.d.c). For clarity purposes, the overall training requirements for Italian professional counseling students are compared with the 2016 CACREP standards in Table 1.1 (Appendix E) and Table 1.2 (Appendix F).
Licensure and Certification

On January 14, 2013, the Italian Parliament approved Law n° 4/2013 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2013), *Disposizioni in materia di professioni non organizzate* [Provisions on the topic of unregulated professions], which allows intellectual professionals to obtain a certificate of quality and professional proficiency from a professional association. This certificate does not represent a license and therefore it is not a necessary requisite to practice one of those unregulated professions. Unlike what happens in Italy for the license of so-called regulated professions (such as architect, doctor, engineer, psychologist, notary public), the goal of this law is not to regulate licensure on a national level but to promote voluntary self-regulation to qualify the unregulated professional activity (Bisazza, 2013).

While being unregulated, these professionals are encouraged to obtain an official statement conferred by one of the professional associations accredited by the Italian Government. For counselors, this would be a certificate of professional qualification issued by a professional counseling association such as AssoCounseling (Valleri, 2013). Within AssoCounseling, for example, each candidate for certification has to have obtained a diploma in counseling from an Italian school that is approved by AssoCounseling (AssoCounseling, n.d.b). Candidates who meet these standards can register for AssoCounseling’s professional evaluation exam. Once they have passed the exam they obtain their certification (AssoCounseling, n.d.d).

Consequently, in the near future counselors should be certified to provide services. A certification represents an important guarantee for consumer protection, for more transparency in the professional counseling services market, and in particular it
supports a clearer distinction between counseling and other similar professions (Trentin, 2013). The official statement redacted by these accredited associations is more than a professional certification but less than a license. It allows for new professions in the area of professional psychology, such as counselors, but also coaches and educational psychologists, to offer their new and different services to today's clients (Ciofi, 2012). This kind of certification is an important step in identifying the different counseling specialties and preserving the counseling profession’s characteristic body of knowledge, as well an important step towards the growth and the success of the counseling profession in Italy, just as happened in United States (Remley, 1995; Remley, 2013).

With the same goal of preserving counseling’s specific body of knowledge and building upon it, all Italian professional counseling associations belonging to Federcounseling have also established specific professional and educational requirements for the certification of Italian counselors. Appendix G offers an example of AssoCounseling’s supervisor requirements.

**Professional Associations**

As it is impossible to list here all of Italy’s counseling associations, I will limit myself to mentioning the associations that currently belong to Federcounseling, although I will also mention some others among the oldest and largest in Italy. Federcounseling is composed of Associazione Italiana di Counseling [Italian Counseling Association] (AICo), Associazione Nazionale Counselor Relazionali [National Association of Relational Counselors] (ANCoRe), Associazione Professionale Counselling [Counseling Professional Association] (AProCo), AssoCounseling, FAIP Counseling, REICO, and
Among the oldest counseling associations in the country is the Società Italiana di Counseling [Italian Counseling Association] (SICO), while among the largest and most historical ones there is also the Coordinamento Nazionale Counselors Professionisti [National Coordination of Professional Counselors] (CNCP) (Di Fabio & Sirigatti, 2013).

AssoCounseling, created in July 2009, is the largest Italian counseling association and it has some aspects that render it unique within the Italian associative panorama of counseling. For example, only counselors can be members of this association and only counselors who are not members of other mental health professions can be elected to its executive committee (Remley et al., 2015).

This diversity of organizations is a problem. According to Remley (2013), counselors in Italy should be organized into one professional association to address consistently the challenges that they all face in contemporary society, since the presence in Italy of different professional counseling associations and private schools, all with their various state and regional affiliates, contributes to generate a lack of agreement around what counseling professional identity is. Researchers in the United States have shown that a lack of unity (Gale & Austin, 2003) and common identity (Myers, Sweeney, & White, 2002) among counselors can lead to an inconsistent public view of their profession, which could be confused with other similar helping professions. It is difficult for an individual counselor to address these challenges. For this reason, it is necessary to promote a shared sense of strong professional identity among the Italian counseling community like in the United States. Also, counselors in Italy are often mistakenly
viewed as psychotherapists or as a blend of psychologist and educator (Perussia, 2007). Given such uncertain identity, clients could also be unsure of the efficacy and the value of counseling interventions. Reaching a consensus on the distinctive elements that characterize counselor professional identity in Italy – as this study aims to do – could support this collective process and foster a unified professional identity (Upton, 2012).

A Vision for the Future of Counseling in Italy: Applying the Model of the 20/20 Commission

The question of coming to a consensus around a shared common definition of counseling identity is a challenge in Italy. However, this is a worldwide phenomenon, and a continuing issue also in the United States (Myers, Sweeney, & White, 2002). This topic has received so much attention in the United States that to respond to the need for an agreement on a clearly defined professional identity the ACA, which is the first and largest association of professional counselors in the world, has recently led to the process for an updating of the definition of counseling (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011). To this end, the ACA promoted a Delphi study that was eventually endorsed by 29 major counseling organizations in the United States (Kaplan, Tarvydas & Gladding, 2014). The study was named 20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011) and it had the goal of finding a new definition of counseling among all the organizations belonging to the ACA. An ad-hoc national committee was created to conduct the study. The committee was composed of delegates from each division of the ACA.

The study’s conclusions, presented by Kaplan and Gladding (2011), address the importance of a commonality among the various specialties. The 20/20 study offered an opportunity for leaders representing various perspectives within the counseling
profession to identify and examine the similarities and discrepancies among their perspectives, and come to a consensus around the counseling profession’s identity in the United States. However, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), the largest division of the ACA, took part in the initial stages of the study but then chose not to participate in its later stages and did not adopt the final 20/20 definition (Kaplan, Tarvydas, & Gladding, 2014).

In spite of these efforts, a fully inclusive definition of counseling has not yet been established even in the United States. This shows that even under better circumstances the process of building a shared counseling identity is not simple. The purpose of this study, which will utilize a panel of Italian professional counselor experts, is to initiate a step toward the establishment of a unified professional identity for counselors in Italy. If a consensus can emerge around the identity of counseling as a whole, this sense of identity may then spread within the counseling profession in Italy.

**Summary**

This chapter has provided a review of the counseling literature addressing the present professional status of counseling in Italy and of the ongoing process aimed at defining its professional identity. Italian and international books, articles and conferences (AssoCounseling, 2014; Di Fabio & Sirigatti, 2013; Perussia, 2007; Remley et al., 2010) have all stated that professional identity is a critical topic in the field of counseling in Italy. The need to address the issue of counselor identity and to clearly articulate a shared and comprehensive definition of professional identity emerged with clarity from this literature review.
A recommended methodology to achieve this goal, similar to what was done for the ACA’s 20/20 study (Kaplan et al., 2014), is to look for consensus among a select group of experts counselors using the Delphi method (Upton, 2012; Wester & Borders, 2014). Utilizing the Delphi technique could help expert counselors to identify a list of the distinctive elements that characterize counselor professional identity in Italy. The purpose of this study was to reach a consensus within this professional field, and it could represent a useful step in unifying the profession.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The present chapter will illustrate the rationale for utilizing the Delphi methodology, as well as the research design and the research question. Specific details will be provided regarding expert selection procedures and the roles of the researcher and of the research team. Processes of data collection and analysis will then be described in depth. Finally, the criteria of rigor, credibility, and trustworthiness will be made explicit, as well as the present study’s limitations.

Rationale for the Study

As stated in the previous chapter, a lack of clarity affects the professional identity of counselors in Italy (Viano, Boveri & Civillotti, 2007; Viano & Verga, 2007). Some recent initiatives (promoted in particular by a few Italian professional counseling associations) have lately contributed to the overall development of the profession, as well as to the clarification of counselors’ characteristic roles and functions (AssoCounseling, 2014; AssoCounseling, 2015c; Montanari, 2015; Sarchielli, 2016a). Despite this, counselor professional identity still remains a challenging issue in Italy (Sarchielli, 2016b). A review of the literature suggests that there is a lack of scientific contributions in Italy on counselor professional identity (Perussia, 2007).

The present study takes up the challenge of contributing to the process of defining counselor professional identity by trying to determine a consensus among professional counselors around their profession’s most distinctive elements.
The Need for Strong Professional Identity

A weak counselor professional identity compromises the process of defining counseling’s professional role (Moss et al., 2014; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992), as well as the quality of its interventions (Remley & Herlihy, 2007). This renders counseling easier to confuse with other similar professions and vulnerable to their attacks (Healey & Hays, 2011). By contrast, a strong identity is fundamental for the growth of the profession (Spurgeon, 2012). Building a strong identity is not only an individual duty but also a responsibility for the entire profession (Gale & Austin, 2003; Myers, Sweeney, & White, 2002).

This research begins to fill the void currently existing on this topic in the Italian literature. Hopefully, this work contributed to the construction of a clearer, more cohesive, and overall stronger counselor identity in Italy. Such result was achieved through the establishment of a consensus list of the distinctive elements that characterize counselor professional identity in Italy.

Research Question

The purpose of this study was to reach a consensus among expert Italian counselors regarding the elements that characterize the identity of the counseling profession. The research question for the investigation was the following: What are the distinctive elements that characterize counselor professional identity in Italy?

Research Design

In light of the awareness that the development of any profession, and specifically that of the counseling profession, is produced by a shared process (Gale & Austin 2003; Ponton & Duba, 2009), achieving a consensus list of the distinctive elements of that
professional identity should foster a clear and shared vision of the professional identity of counselors. Given the importance of finding a consensus list among counseling experts for establishing a clear counselor identity, a Delphi study was used. Looking for a consensus among key counselors to update the definition of counseling was also done by the American Counseling Association with its study called *20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling* (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011). The research methodology utilized for that study was also a Delphi method (Kaplan et al., 2014), which aims to develop a qualified consensus among a group of selected experts (i.e., panel) through the construction of a structured communication process (Linstone & Turoff, 2002; Pacinelli, 2008). That research method was paralleled here.

**The Delphi Method**

The Delphi method was introduced for the first time by RAND Corporation around 1948 in the military field (Gupta & Clarke, 1996). Because of this, the method was initially classified as secret and then officially made public a few years later (Gupta & Clarke, 1996) by Dalkey and Helmer (1963). The name Delphi comes from the famous ancient Oracle of Delphi (Dalkey, 1969). The term oracle (latin: *oraculum*; Collins English Dictionary, n.d.) refers to a person who foresees the future or a location at which that event occurs. The most famous oracle in ancient Greece was the Pythia from Apollo’s temple in Delphi, who was called Delphi’s Oracle (Scott, 2015).

The Delphi method has several distinctive characteristics. First, it can lead to hypothesizing future scenarios and/or provide forecasts. It can also identify possible solutions and verify the level of feasibility of strategic action plans. In addition, a Delphi study can also help to define objectives. Finally, it can be used to discover agreement on
specific themes (Habibi, Sarafrazi, & Izadyar, 2014). Each of these eventualities would be desirable in the case of counselor professional identity.

The Delphi method involves the sequenced repetition of various rounds of interviews or questionnaires with open and/or closed questions, proposed to a panel of experts who are considered proficient in the theme that is being discussed (Hasson et al., 2000). These experts are asked to express their opinions on a subject matter either through mailed or electronic communication. This has the advantage of allowing a comparison between experts who could live a great distance apart from each other, at a very low cost (Iqbal & Pippon-Young, 2009). This technique ensures that all participants can express their opinions anonymously, therefore guaranteeing optimal freedom in the communication process (Powell, 2003).

Also, anonymity mitigates the influence of possible opinion leaders, who can influence other people’s opinions in a face-to-face discussion (Hsu & Sanford, 2007). The Delphi method has been widely employed in counseling research on various themes. Two examples of counseling applications are a study on supervision competencies for counselor education doctoral graduates (Neuer, 2011) and a study on classroom management competencies for school counselors (Runyan, 2012).

Especially relevant to the present study, a Delphi study was conducted on the future of cross-cultural counseling (Heath, Neimeyer, & Pederson, 1988), and another on the possible developments of counseling psychology in the United States (Neimeyer & Diamond, 2001). Two Delphi studies, similar to this one, explored the identity of the counseling profession. One of those studies (Upton, 2012) was on school counselor
identity, while the other was by Kaplan et al., (2014) on the update of the definition of counseling for the American Counseling Association.

Participants

Participant selection is a delicate and important stage of the research process, one which impacts the quality of the study itself (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). Two factors must be considered, one regarding selection and one regarding numbers. The participants will be defined as experts. However, there are no unanimously established criteria for the meaning of the term expert, nor for the construction of adequate criteria for expert selection. In addition, there are no clearly established criteria for the correct number of experts to select for a Delphi study (Hasson et al., 2000).

Selection of Experts

The selection of an expert panel, whose members are guaranteed anonymity, cannot be guided by personal preferences, but rather by explicit criteria that aim at the identification of the most qualified and adequate number of experts as possible for the purposes of the research (Linstone & Turoff, 2002). For this research study, despite the lack of established criteria, an expert was defined as a professional counselor with an active registration in the official register of an Italian professional counselor association, and who has or had an influence in the development of the counseling profession in Italy through teaching, practice, the publication of books or journal articles, and participation at national and/or international conferences (Iqbal & Pippon-Young, 2009; Upton, 2012).

The assumption is that the counseling profession is unique and different from other helping professions (Spurgeon, 2012), in spite of shared objectives and similar intervention modalities with other professions, with which sometimes it risks overlapping
or being confused (Giusti & Spalletta, 2012b; Healey & Hays, 2011). This assumption does not intend to negate the contributions that counseling has received and receives from other disciplines such as psychology, psychotherapy, education and sociology (Di Fabio & Sirigatti, 2013; Fulcheri & Accomazzo, 1999), but it intends to highlight the difference between counselors and non-counselors.

An active registration as a professional counselor in the official register of a professional counselor association is the criterion that was utilized to access participant selection for this study’s panel of experts. To increase the representativeness of different professional counselor positions in Italy, members from any professional counselor association were considered potential participants.

To qualify as an expert, selected counselors had to be registered as a professional counselor in an Italian professional counselor association. They also had to satisfy at least two of the following six criteria (Iqbal & Pippon-Young, 2009; Upton, 2012):

1. Being registered as a supervisor in an Italian professional counselor association.
2. Having worked in Italy as a professional counselor for at least three of the last five years.
3. Having taught at least a year in a master’s degree program for professional counselors during the last five years.
4. Having published a book or an article about counseling in a national or international scientific journal.
5. Having given a presentation on counseling during a national or international conference or convention.
6. Having served in an Italian professional counselor association as a board or commission member.

The panel of experts were recruited using a purposive snowball sampling method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2012; Hasson et al., 2000). A snowball sampling technique was also utilized to elicit suggestions for the identification of additional experts (Iqbal & Pipon-Young, 2009; Skulmoski & Hartman, 2007). The experts were identified in different ways to include as much as possible counselors belonging to different Italian professional counseling associations. These recruitment methods included:

- using lists from the registers of all Italian professional counselor associations belonging to Federcounseling;
- through an analysis of specific literature, such as the *Rivista Italiana di Counseling* [Journal of Italian Counseling] and the international scientific journal *Counseling*;
- during national counseling-related conferences, such as AssoCounseling’s, Federcounseling’s and ASCO’s (Association of Counseling Schools, n.d.) National Conferences;
- social networks such as Linked-In and Facebook were utilized.

Furthermore, experts were specifically asked to identify potential participants for the study belonging to professional and associative contexts that were different from their own, to include as many diverse sensitivities and experiences as possible in the study.

**Selection of the Number of Experts.**

There are no precise or unanimous indications in the literature regarding the adequate number of experts to recruit for a Delphi study (Iqbal & Pipon-Young, 2009;
Skulmoski & Hartman, 2007). A total number of experts ranging from 10 to 50 is usually recommended, and considered adequate to produce scientifically trustworthy results (Linstone & Turoff, 2002). Because attrition could be a problem, recruitment for this study aimed for a sufficient number of experts to complete the third and final round. According to Neuer (2011), who examined the most recently published Delphi studies, a 26.75% attrition rate is to be expected. Upton (2012) reports during the research process it is necessary to consider a “mortality” rate among the experts that varies between 13% and 47% (Jenkins & Smith, 1994).

The final goal was to identify and select the largest possible number of experts, with the intention of acquiring between 45 and 60 experts to compensate for attrition (Neuer, 2011, Runyan, 2012). For this reason, strategies were implemented to motivate the experts to participate until the end of the research. For example, the primary researcher shared with them the objectives of the study, presenting it also as an opportunity to enhance their professional identity as experts in the Italian counseling field. To that end, they were given the option to have their name appear as participants in this study, while also guaranteeing the confidentiality of their answers. Additionally, to safeguard the completeness of research data, anonymity, and process security, the experts received an invitation with a Qualtrics link to the online questionnaire, as well as an informed consent document (Appendix B) and a research demographic form (Appendix C).

**Role of the Researcher and the Research Team**

Given the important role that the researcher and the research team have in attributing meaning to the data (Hays & Singh, 2012), a qualitative research study must
be rigorous. The researcher’s biases, values and experiences, as well as those of the research team, may unintentionally impact the study, and therefore are needed to be known and managed before and during the research process (Patton, 2015). Below are the researcher and research team biases, thoughts, experiences, and values that needed to be acknowledged in this study.

The primary researcher graduated from an Italian master’s degree program in clinical counseling and has worked as a counselor in Italy for over ten years. After a few years of practice, he founded, along with some colleagues, a counseling school named Komidè, which is primarily focused on clinical mental health counseling. He acquired experience related to professional development training working in his counseling school and is currently completing a PhD in counselor education from a CACREP-accredited doctoral program in the United States. His personal biases are related to his beliefs: that counseling promotes personal wellbeing and that counselors should also be advocates. In other words, he believes that beyond any specific approach or specialty, a defining characteristic for every counselor is that of being an advocate for people who have a vulnerable or marginal type of experience, whether transitionally or permanently. Therefore, he also believes that both of these components (promoting wellbeing and advocacy) are extremely important to support clients effectively.

The primary researcher belongs to several national and international professional counseling associations, including ACA, ACES and AssoCounseling in Italy. He has also attended and/or presented at numerous national and international professional association conferences. According to his personal experience, membership and participation in professional associations is important for professional growth.
Research Team

To ensure adequate rigor for the study and to reduce the influence of researcher bias, the primary researcher recruited a research team to assist in conducting the qualitative data analysis phase of the research project. An external auditor also participated in the research process (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2004; Patton, 2015).

The research team consisted of two members, one from Old Dominion University’s doctoral program, a recent graduate student with experience in qualitative analysis who is now an assistant professor of Counseling at a university in the southern region of the United States. The other member of the research team was an Italian Counselor also licensed in the United States who has a professional background in psychological science and post-graduate experience with qualitative and quantitative research. The external auditor was an assistant professor of counseling in another American university, with specific experience using the Delphi research method.

The research team met prior to beginning the data analysis process to better understand the goals of the study and to proceed with a detailed presentation of the Delphi methodology. During this phase, the research team also learned how to execute the same basic open coding steps utilized by Hays & Singh (2012). Furthermore, team members were invited to share their personal biases regarding the contents of the proposed research. The research team analyzed the panelists’ answers and developed a consensus codebook to determine the list of elements that were used for the second round.

The external auditor and the research team triangulated their findings in the present study, which increased their consistency (Patton, 2015). The external auditor re-
examined all documents, research protocols, notes, and codebooks with the intent of limiting and containing possible bias effects in the research process (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2004). Research team member personal data was collected and was compiled in a data sheet (Appendix H).

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Searching for a consensus with the Delphi methodology was particularly complex both in terms of determining the adequate number of rounds and in terms of data analysis and statistical elaboration (Habibi, Sarafari, & Izayar, 2014). In this study, the primary researcher chose to consider as adequate to reach consensus the same parameters that, according to specialized literature, are the most widely adopted. Specifically, these include use of three rounds of data collection (Hallowell & Gambatese, 2010) and the combined use of qualitative and quantitative analysis (Hsu & Sandford, 2007).

This research included an accurate process of translation and back translation in the different stages of data collection and analysis (Appendix M), according to relevant international literature (Van de Vijver, 2001; Brislin, Lonner, & Thorndike, 1973). This was also very important to ensure reliability to this study (Twinn, 1997). A proven method to reach this goal is to have a translation and a back-translation of the materials (Brilsin, 1968). The translation process gave particular attention to cross cultural and conceptual issues, rather than to linguistic/literal equivalence (Larkin, Dierckx de Casterlé, & Schotsmans, 2007; Sekaran, 1983)

The following paragraphs will present in detail the method for data collection and analysis. According to the Delphi method used for this study, data analysis was conducted in two phases. The first phase was qualitative, it can be defined as exploratory,
and it characterized the first round of data collection. The second phase was quantitative, it can be defined as evaluative, and it was articulated in the two final rounds. To diminish the risk of participant attrition, which increases with each round (Hasson et al., 2000), it is of fundamental importance that in both phases all experts are motivated and informed on the Delphi method.

To this end, specific initiatives were activated in the preliminary phase to instruct selected experts on the Delphi technique and to provide them in advance with adequate informational material (Whitman, 1990). It was very important to reassure selected experts who were unfamiliar with the technique that they would be able to complete the requested task. It was also important for the experts to understand the purpose underlying the application of the Delphi technique so that they could respond to the poll in an adequate manner and maintain their interest throughout the process (Hasson et al., 2000).

**Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis**

In the first round the primary researcher collected qualitative information. For this reason, particular care was given to the question submitted to the experts and to its formulation (Rowe & Wright, 2011). The beginning question should be open enough not to influence the answers that the experts would provide, but clear and precise enough not to cause interpretive difficulties which would heavily influence the rest of the research process (Skulmoski & Hartman, 2007).

The results produced in the first round were collected and analyzed according to the modalities suggested by qualitative methodology (Creswell 2012; Hays and Singh, 2012). The resulting list of counselor professional identity elements was utilized to
produce the Likert (1932) scale instrument for the second round, in which the experts were again invited to express themselves.

Participants were invited to follow a rigorously anonymous protocol that was placed on the online survey service Qualtrics. The initial protocol consisted of a letter of invitation to the research project (Appendix A) and an informed consent (Appendix B) document that the experts compiled to participate in the study. The informed consent form also included a clear explanation of possible risks connected to participation (Appendix B). Only participants who gave their informed consent could access the next part of the protocol, which asked them to complete the demographic questionnaire (Appendix C). The demographic questionnaire (Appendix C) asked participants to provide precise information to be identified as an expert for our study. In addition, it collected data regarding gender, race, age, and level of instruction in counseling. In the final stage of this protocol, the experts were also asked to provide an answer to the question proposed by the study, within a maximum response time of five days, and on the third day they were sent an email reminder (Appendix D) that stated:

The specific open-ended question of this study for each expert was:

Professional identity can be described as the totality of the internalized values, competencies, and abilities of the professional, which provide the foundation for his or her professional intervention (McAuliffe, 2006; Ponton & Duba, 2009; Spurgeon, 2012; Upton, 2012). Please list and/or describe all of the distinctive elements that characterize, according to you, counselor professional identity. Please share as many ideas as you can.
In addition to being asked the proposed question, the experts were provided with another opportunity to clarify and explain their thoughts, since they were also asked to provide, if appropriate, a description of their emotions, thoughts, or possible motivations for the choice of using certain words or phrases when answering the proposed question about counselor professional identity.

The collected data were analyzed qualitatively according to the indications of specialized literature on the subject, which suggests that when data collection is conducted in a combined manner - that is using both qualitative and quantitative methods - it is advisable to employ a generic data analysis procedure (Creswell, 2012; Hays and Singh, 2012).

This study called for three main phases of qualitative data analysis:

1. The first stage consisted of the collection and organization of the materials that were then analyzed. Said material was in Italian, and it was comprised of all expert panelists’ responses to the protocol in round one and any additional information they volunteered. The anonymity of all participants was guaranteed.

2. The second stage consisted of data analysis and it started when all research team members received their professionally translated copy of the response materials. Before team members started the coding process, the translator met with the first researcher to address possible cross-cultural discrepancies in the definition of Italian counseling terms, (Larkin, Dierckx de Casterlè, & Schotsmans, 2007; Sekaran 1982). Research team members followed basic open coding steps (Creswell, 2012; Hays & Singh, 2012). Before the coding process started each member of the research team proceeded with a reading of the material, trying to
give a general meaning to the experts’ answers. Once the coding process started every member of the research team began to underline the text (e.g., phrases), and produced codes using the panelists’ words as much as possible. Subsequently, the codes were reviewed and organized by combining them with similar codes and by creating appropriate sub codes where needed. Team members then continued working individually taking note of their impressions and reactions related to the coding process. Once the codes were developed and combined, team members reached a definition or clarification of the meaning of the code where necessary. The research team met again after completion of the individual coding process to reach consensus, through the reviewing of similarities and differences, on the codes that identified the characteristic elements of the counseling profession (see Appendix, L). The final codes have been translated in to Italian and then back translated in to English.

3. The goal of the third stage was to ensure that the list of distinctive elements that characterize the professional counselor identity that was obtained in the coding process is representative of the experts’ answers. This goal was accomplished through an accurate analysis of the final codebook by the research team members and the external auditor.

Due to the results obtained at the end of this first round it was possible to elaborate a Likert (1932) scale instrument for the second round of data collection. Before starting the second round, the research team evaluated whether any imbalance in the sample might endanger the reliability of the study. In that case, there would be another effort to recruit new experts.
Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

The quantitative phase consisted of a process of statistical evaluation of the experts’ viewpoints (also contrasting ones), with the goal of reaching a consensus. However, the question must be answered here as to how consensus is reached. Collected data were statistically elaborated according to the modalities used in most Delphi studies. As stated by Hsu & Sandford (2007), “the major statistics used in Delphi studies are measures of central tendency (means, median, and mode) and level of dispersion (standard deviation and inter-quartile range…;” p.4). A consensus among experts was reached once the dispersion measures were applied and verified that the variance was statistically acceptable (Neuer, 2011).

The second phase of data analysis was of an ordinal or metric character and it was conducted through statistic synthesis calculation. For this reason, the questionnaires were closed questions. This is a phase whose mechanism is most similar to a voting operation in which the evaluations can be given in different ways. In this study the experts were asked to express their judgments using a Likert (1932) scale, as suggested by the literature (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). In this second phase, panel members were asked to evaluate the distinctive elements that characterize counselor professional identity, as they were developed in the final codebook of the first round. Panel members found the items in the questionnaire, representing the elements that they were asked to evaluate using a six-point Likert scale that includes strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), somewhat disagree (SWD), somewhat agree (SWA), agree (A), and strongly Agree (SA).

The midpoint in the scale was eliminated to contain as much as possible the risk of social desirability bias (Garland, 1991). Instead, the six proposed levels of the Likert
(1932) scale (three agreeing and three disagreeing) facilitated an identification of the distinctive elements that characterize professional counselor identity in Italy (Upton, 2012).

The specific request was:

Please evaluate the characterizing elements proposed in the items using the following Likert scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Agree, and Strongly Agree. If you wish, once you have completed the questionnaire feel free to add your comments, questions or further specifications.

The questionnaire was distributed in an email that was sent to panel members with a link to Qualtrics, completion instructions, and a thank you note for their participation in the survey.

The experts were given five days to complete the survey and on the third day they were sent an email reminder. Once all data were collected, Qualtrics was used to calculate means and standard deviation for answers. Once the means and standard deviation were calculated for each item of the Likert (1932) scale (Upton, 2012), a new questionnaire was produced and sent to the experts to complete the third round.

The new questionnaire contained all items from round two with the addition of the mean and standard deviation of each item. The revised Likert (1932) scale was made available through Qualtrics so it could be rated by the experts in the third round. Again, the questionnaire was distributed with an email that was sent to panel members which also provided a link to connect with Qualtrics, completion instructions, and a thank you
note for their participation to the survey. The experts were given five days to complete the survey, again, and on the third day they were sent an email reminder.

Once the third round was completed, all the answers were entered in Qualtrics and a descriptive statistical analysis was produced to determine which distinctive elements characterize counselor identity in Italy. A mean equal to or higher than 4.8 and a maximum standard deviation of 0.85 (Neuer, 2011; Runyan 2012; Upton, 2012) was considered as characterizing the professional identity of counselors in Italy. Thresholds for mean and standard deviation have been set arbitrarily by the first researcher, since the literature does not recommend any specific criteria for their determination (Moorehouse, 2008). It is however strongly advised that these thresholds be established before data collection (Upton, 2012) and this suggestion was followed in the present study. Both thresholds have been chosen after a careful review of recent studies which confirmed the findings of Neuer (2011), Runyan (2012), and Upton (2012) regarding the most adequate threshold values for determining consensus in a Delphi study. Both values have been chosen to increase the study’s rigor, without excessively limiting the elements that were included in the definitive list of characterizing elements. A descriptive statistical analysis of collected data, and any element that obtained a mean value equal or greater than 4.8 and whose standard deviation is up to 0.85 (Neuer, 2011; Runyan 2012 Upton, 2012), was included in the consensus list of the characterizing elements of counselor professional identity in Italy.

**Trustworthiness**

It is very difficult to evaluate reliability and validity of a research project that utilizes the Delphi methodology (Woudenberg, 1991). Hasson et al. (2000) stated that
“there is no evidence of the reliability of the Delphi method” (p. 1,012). According to Lincon and Guba (1985) and Upton (2012) establishing truthfulness or trustworthiness could be the better choice to ensure rigor of the study.

To establish trustworthiness, the primary researcher provided translation and back translation for this research study. He also analyzed his own and the research team’s biases, both before beginning the study and during the coding process. An audit trail was used to keep a physical trace of the procedures utilized during the research process (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2004). An external auditor provided a review of the coding process and more in general of the whole research process of the study (Patton, 2015).

To improve the trustworthiness of the study and to ensure content validity of the items, the choice of panel members followed criteria that guarantee a wide and deep knowledge of themes pertaining to professional counselor identity (Goodman, 1987). Finally, the number of iterations - three in this case - ensured concurrent validity (Hasson et al., 2000). The different strategies presented in here aimed at establishing credibility and trustworthiness for this study, with the final goal of producing reliability and validity for the entire research process.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

Among its advantages, Delphi is a flexible methodology (Iqbal & Pippon-Young, 2009). However, this flexibility is also its greatest limit since it produces an unclear theoretical frame of reference for its use (Habibi, Sarafari, & Izadyar, 2014). According to Landeta (2006), there are no established criteria for expert selection and data analysis and interpretation in a Delphi study.
There is also no shared definition for consensus (Powell, 2003). This implies that the Delphi method’s research process is substantially a construction that is very dependent upon the researcher’s choices (Skulmoski & Hartman, 2007) and the first researcher is aware of this. As shown in the literature, it is factually impossible to ensure rigor and reliability for a study conducted with the Delphi methodology (Woudenberg, 1991) unless trustworthiness strategies are implemented (Rowe & Wright, 2011).

**Limits to this Study**

The first evident limit of this Delphi study is the need of translation and back translation. Forming the panel of experts is the other evident limit of this study, in particular because of the difficulty to include a proportional sample of counselors belonging to Italy’s many different professional associations. Furthermore, another researcher might have chosen different criteria for the definition of an expert, which would have factually changed the results of this study (Powell, 2003). Because of this, Iqbal & Pippon-Young (2009) mention as a limit of this type of study the impossibility to produce generalizations from its results. Thus, the limit of this study appears already quite evident as the expert panel was limited to professional counselors.

Another important limit of this study is the possibility of attrition, which is highly likely considering the different rounds proposed by this research (Hasson et al., 2000). Attrition is a serious limit in that it can produce a false consensus (Vasquez-Ramos & Leahy, & Hernandez, 2007). It was also in consideration of this issue that the primary researcher selected only professional counselors, who may be more motivated to complete the entire research process (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). Given the various limits of this study, the first researcher tried to produce rigor and reliability within the entire
research process by ensuring the implementation of several trustworthiness strategies, as recommended by specific literature (Lincoln & Guba's, 1985; Rowe & Wright, 2011).

Summary

The beginning of this chapter described the Delphi methodology used in this proposed study to establish a consensus on the distinctive elements that characterize counselor professional identity in Italy. Then the rationale for the research and the researcher question were next shared followed by explanation of the research design and the underlying reasons for choosing the Delphi Method and how this methodology was adequate to the objectives of the proposed research. Care was given to describe the choices pertaining to participant selection criteria and their number, as well as the modalities of data collection, since these are all particularly important choices in Delphi methodology. The importance of the researcher’s role, and the research team, were then described and then the modalities for data processing both in terms of data collection and in terms of qualitative and quantitative data analysis. Finally, the proposed strategies utilized for trustworthiness and the limits and limitations of the present study were addressed. The next chapter will present the findings of this study.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Counseling is a new and rather unknown profession in Italy (Remley, Bacchini, & Krieg, 2010). Only recently, an initial attempt at its regulation took place with National Law n° 4/2013 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2013). The profession’s youth is matched by an identity that is not clearly defined and by a scarcity of scientific literature on this topic (Perussia, 2007). The following study intended to contribute to the acquisition of an ever-clearer identity for the counseling profession. As the experience in the United States seems to suggest, this increased clarity facilitates the establishment of the counseling profession (Hanna & Bemak, 1997; Pistole & Roberts, 2002; Spurgeon, 2012).

There are at least three advantages to establishing a strong counselor identity. According to literature in the United Stated, a stronger professional counseling identity can lead to obtaining full regulation for the profession (Myers, Sweeney, & White, 2002; Remley, 1995). In addition, it can allow Italian professional counselors to face more successfully the competition with similar professions (Remley, 2013), such as clinical psychology. Finally, a clearer identity would allow counselors to meet the challenges that Italian society poses to them on various levels (Fani, 2014) such as in new intervention areas that call for new contents and new practical approaches in the areas of family and personal development (Campagnoli, 2015) or in schools and in career development (Soresi, 2013).

The goal of moving toward a clearer description of counselor professional identity has been attempted in this study, through the Delphi methodology, by reaching a consensus among expert counselors on a list of the characteristic elements of the
counseling profession in Italy. The Delphi methodology employed in this research was chosen after a review of scientific literature as the most suitable technique for the identification of the characteristic elements of the counseling profession in Italy, as this technique allows for a consensus to be reached among experts on a given topic (Linstone & Turoff, 2002; Kaplan & Gladding, 2011; Norcross, Hedges, & Prochanska, 2002; Upton, 2012).

The research question for this investigation was the following: What are the distinctive elements characterizing counselor professional identity in Italy?

The following paragraphs will present the results of the three rounds of this study and an accurate description of the expert panel, including their demographic information.

**Participants**

According to Delphi literature, the selection and recruitment of experts, as well as their motivation to participate in all stages of the study, represent key elements of quality in Delphi methodology (Linstone & Turoff, 2002; Nworie, 2011). Not paying enough attention to the abovementioned elements can compromise the success of any Delphi study (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). In this study the researchers employed very selective criteria for the recruitment of the experts (Iqbal & Pippon-Young, 2009), while taking into consideration that counseling has become widely known in Italy only since the beginning of the 1990s (Di Fabio & Sirigatti, 2013). Criteria for the selection of the expert panel were set by the primary researcher. They then were shared and approved by his dissertation committee.

To ensure the inclusion of a plurality of perspectives in this study, a number of actions have been undertaken to recruit experts belonging to different professional
associations. The experts have been identified through three methods, namely, through stakeholder referrals, participation in congresses attended by the primary researcher, and the public directories of all of the biggest national professional counselor associations.

Whenever possible, the experts were individually contacted by phone to explain the study. The recruitment of the experts also included an intervention by the primary researcher during a national meeting of counselor educators. The intervention introduced all meeting participants to the study and to the possibility of participating in this research experience.

During the polling process, two emails were sent for each round with an invitation and a reminder (see appendices A, I, N, O, P, & Q). Both emails were personalized with the name of the expert, and they were written in a formal but friendly style. The goal was to build a professional but amicable relationship with each expert. Furthermore, the day before the conclusion of each round, a message was sent to the experts’ smartphones reminding them to complete the poll.

One hundred fifty-eight counselors were invited to participate in the study, 20 of them were referred by stakeholders and about 20 more were recruited during the primary researcher’s attendance at one of the yearly meetings of counseling trainers of the ASSOSCUOLE counselor association. The remaining were recruited through the public directories of Italy’s biggest professional counselors’ associations, targeting members whose characteristics matched the study’s selection criteria (e.g., supervisors, trainers).

One third of the experts for whom a telephone number was available were personally contacted to request their participation in the study and to provide them with the necessary information to understand both the study’s goals and the Delphi
methodology. In all, 64 experts accepted the initial invitation by giving their informed consent to participate in the study. Fifty-four out of 64 - that is 84.37% - accepted to make their participation to the expert panel known (Appendix S), which was an option allowed by the present study’s research participant demographic form (Appendix C).

In the recruitment of the experts, particular importance was attributed to the idea that they should not belong to only one association. Rather, the widest possible associative representation was sought to guarantee a plurality of perspectives on the topic of counselor professional identity.

The chart below shows that the expert panel was representative of the diverse panorama of Italy’s professional associations. The chart that follows presents the professional quality of the experts who participated in the present study.

Table 4.1
*Professional counselors’ associations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counseling associations</th>
<th>Experts (N= 64)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACP Associazione counselor professionisti</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AICo Associazione Italiana di counseling</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AncoRe Associazione counselors relazionali</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.Pro.Co Associazione professionale counseling</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AssoCounseling</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.N.C.P. Coordinamento nazionale counsellor professionisti</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAIP Counseling</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REICO Associazione professionale di counseling</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.I.Co Società Italiana di Counseling</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2
*Expert Criteria for Selection of panel of experts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being registered as a supervisor in an Italian professional counselor association</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>59.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having worked in Italy as a professional counselor for at least three of the last five years</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>95.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having taught at least a year in a master’s degree program for professional counselors during the last five years.</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>78.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having published a book or an article about counseling in a national or international scientific journal.</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>48.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having given a presentation on counseling during a national or international conference or convention.</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>78.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having served in an Italian professional counselor association as a board or commission member.</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>62.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted that the data presented here refer to the entire expert panel, since almost 90% of the 64 experts who initially accepted to participate took part in all rounds. The attrition level in this study was insignificant from a statistical perspective. Fifty-seven experts out of a total of 64 (or 89%) completed the first round.

In agreement with the members of the dissertation committee, the number of participating experts was deemed sufficient to proceed to the next round, even though further recruiting actions were considered in case of necessity. The level of attrition for
the second round was very low, as in the first round, as 84% (48 out of 57), responded to the second round of the poll.

Once again, in agreement with the dissertation committee, it was decided to include in the third round not only the 48 experts who answered the second round, but also all those who answered only to the first round. This was decided because several experts who participated in the first round but not in the second had expressed directly via email messages or telephone calls to the primary researcher their wish to participate in the third round, arguing that their missed participation had been due to personal or contingent reasons. The participation in the third round was still very high, at 79%, with 45 participants out of 57 completing this round.

**Expert Panel Demographics**

Each expert was asked to compile a demographic form together with their informed consent to collect precise information on the professional quality of the expert panel members. The information requested concerned, for example, the experts’ gender, age, and level of instruction.

The experts were between 45 and 55 years old, 64.06% of them identified as female, and 35.94% as male (see Table 4.3). All of them, except for one, identified as white.

Table 4.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>64.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the following table the experts were allowed multiple choices.

As for the level of education, the majority of the experts held a Professional course in counseling that in Italy is called “Master”, but which is not a University degree.

Table 4.4

*Level of Education of the panel’s experts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of instruction</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>45.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional course in counseling</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>71.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate degree</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>54.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate degree</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>37.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, a summary chart showing the experts’ different areas of professional interest is included below:

Table 4.5

*Professional Specializations of the panel’s experts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional specializations</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counseling in business organizations</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Counselor professional identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialization</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Couples counseling</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>31.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health counseling</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School counseling</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>65.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the table it is possible to infer that 65.62% of the participants did not completely recognize themselves in the specializations proposed by the lead researcher, but wanted to define their specializations independently. Following is a complete list of specializations declared by the experts: Orientamento psicosociale [Psychosocial orientation], Counseling rogersiano [Rogerian Counseling], Counseling in gruppo [Group Counseling], Counseling pedagogico relazionale [pedagogical-relational Counseling], Benessere personale [Personal wellbeing], Counseling individuale e di gruppo [Individual and Group Counseling], Counseling motivazionale [Motivational Counseling], Benessere e salute [Wellness and health], Benessere [Wellness], Counseling privato e sociale [Private and social Counseling], Benessere personale e relazionale [Personal and relational wellbeing], Counselor formatore [Counselor educator], Armonizzatore familiare [Family harmonizer], Esperto nelle relazioni [Relationship expert], Relazionale (ambito educativo / scolastico / salute / aziendale) [Relational (educational/school/health/business areas)], Relazione di aiuto [Helping relationship], Relazionale [Relational], Counseling in area della riabilitazione e della formazione [Rehabilitation – Educational Counseling], Formazione [Training], EcoCounseling, Formatrice in ambito scolastico e sanitario sulle tecniche dell’ascolto attivo [Scolastic and healthcare trainer on active listening techniques], Medicina e chirurgia – specializzazione in psichiatria [Medicine and surgery - specialization in psychiatry].
Counseling sessuologico [Sexological Counseling], Privato artistico approccio corporeo [Private artistic somatic approach], Counseling nelle dipendenze [Addiction counseling], Educativo – relazionale [Educational – Relational], Counseling esistenziale e sociale [Existential and social Counseling], Counseling artistico [Art Counseling], Counseling sanitario [Healthcare counseling], Counseling Artistico Espressivo [Expressive Art Counseling], Mediatore familiare [Family mediator], Counseling a indirizzo teatrale [Theatrical Counseling], Counseling interculturale (espressivo, Lgbt) [Intercultural Counseling, Expressive Counseling, Lgbt Counseling], Counseling comunitario [Community Counseling], Counseling educativo – familiare [Educational and family Counseling], Counseling sociale [Social Counseling], Counseling sportivo artistico e di comunità, Lavoro [Sport Counseling, Art Counseling, Community Counseling, Career Counseling]. Finally, two experts declared the following specializations: Counseling sistemico per l’individuo la coppia e la famiglia [Systemic Counseling for individuals, couples, and family]; three other experts declared the following specialization: Counseling relazionale [Relational Counseling].

Forty-three out of sixty-four experts did not completely identify in the specializations proposed in the survey and recognized by AssoCounseling (AssoCounseling, 2015a). As is possible to deduce from reading how the experts identified themselves, we can see that many of these categories cannot truly be defined as specializations even according to the common usage of the term in the Italian language (Garzanti Italian Dictionary, n.d.). Based on specific counseling literature in the United States this could be both a good and a bad thing (Myers, 1995). It seems that the definition of specializations in the counseling profession, and the contextual construct of
training programs to acquire specific skills, are elements that define the development and the growth of the profession as a whole (Remley, 1995), even though some trainers and professional counselors maintain that the development of specializations in the profession could possibly create fragmentation in the profession (Gale & Austin, 2003) and limit the effectiveness of counseling interventions (Foster, 2012).

Finally, the lead researcher wants to underline how creativity, and sometimes the creative definition of specializations, can be assumed as a typically Italian historical/cultural element where identity is often defined through the underlining of differences, instead of the sharing of values (Natale, 2011). This behavior, which is discernible in Italy even through the excessive number of professional counseling associations, and which is not productive for the growth of counseling in Italy (Remley, 2013), is defined by the Italian word “campanilismo”. The word “campanilismo”, that does not have an equivalent in English, originates from the word “campanile” and means: excessive attachment (often partial and partisan) for the customs and traditions of one’s own country or town (Garzanti Italian Dictionary, n.d.). In other words, this attitude makes absolute one’s own point of view, one’s personal experiences and/or those of the group one belongs to.

**Delphi Poll Results**

Sixty-four experts accepted the invitation to participate in this study, which was conducted in three rounds of data collection and analysis. The first round was completed by 57 experts. The experts were also given an opportunity to add further comments to clarify their thoughts on counselor professional identity. The 57 experts produced 14,410 words, with each answer containing an average of 250 words.
Before proceeding coding by the researchers, the answers were translated from Italian to English by a bilingual Italian-American counselor. The members of the research team then individually coded the answers in English according to the general directives proposed by Creswell (2012) and Hays and Singh (2012). Also, in preparation for the consensus coding meeting, all research team members individually collapsed and categorized similar codes.

The team of researchers then discussed the totality of the results of their coding processes and came to a consensus on the final list of codes after three video conferencing (using Skype) encounters that lasted about two hours each. The external auditor reviewed the codebook to verify that the elements that emerged from the coding process were truly representative of the expert opinions expressed in round one. The codebook elements were translated and back-translated by two bilingual Italian-American counselors (see Appendix M).

At the end of the translation process, with the intention of making the poll more usable by the Italian experts, the lead researcher, in agreement with the research team, modified the codebook by adding new operationalized definitions for some of the codes, and by eliminating and modifying some codes because they were redundant (they were elements already present within other codes) and/or confusing for Italian language and culture. For example, in Italy the terms advocacy or professional advocacy do not exist in the counseling field (Mariotti, 2016). For this reason the Italian code was translated literally from Italian to English: “promotion of the counseling profession”; that means professional advocacy. Another example is the term therapy, which in the Italian counseling field doesn’t have always a strict connection with the medical prospective as
stated by some expert comments during round two. After this final revision, the total number of elements that should have been entered in the survey became 128.

However, the experts were required to rate 131 items, because some of these codes were replicated in the poll due to a typing error. Such repetition however did not influence in any way the poll’s results, as shown by the fact that the experts’ evaluations remained almost identical for each of the replicated items. All items with their descriptive statistic results are listed in table 4.6 (see Appendix R). From now on, 128 is the number that will be used in the study as the total number of codes submitted to the experts’ evaluation.

To further enhance its usability, the final codebook was also divided in the following five categories:

1. Scope of Practice/General Purpose of Counseling
2. Specialization/Different Theoretical Approaches
3. Basic Counseling Skills
4. Personal Attitudes
5. Counselor Professional Role

The second round poll was sent via Qualtrics with a personalized invitation to the 57 experts who answered the first round. The invitation included a personal link embedded in the email (see Appendix, A). As mentioned earlier, 84% of the experts (48 out of 57) answered the second-round poll, which had been designed on the basis of the first round of answers once they had been coded according to qualitative research criteria. The second-round poll asked experts to assign a personal degree of agreement with the elements that had been identified as characterizing the counseling profession in
Italy. The poll utilized a Likert scale and asked the experts to choose among six possible answers, from completely disagreeing to completely agreeing.

The experts also had the opportunity to add any comments, thoughts, or questions about the poll and they were encouraged to clarify their answers if they deemed that necessary. Data collection for the second round lasted five days. A reminder was sent via email after three days. All the answers that had been collected at the end of the second round were then analyzed using descriptive statistical criteria. The medians and standard deviations were calculated through Qualtrics for each element.

Optional comments, which had been given specific space for expression, were collected and read with the intent of gleaning further information that could allow for a more accurate and in-depth understanding of the experts’ opinions. Seventeen participants included an optional response in their second round answers. Some of these experts used the comments to explain their evaluations: an expert for example wrote that the items were not sufficiently clear for him in order to answer the poll. Another expert wanted to specify that he did not know some of the theoretical approaches, and therefore he did not express an opinion on them. Finally, another expert wrote on the same topic that he did not understand well enough how to determine his evaluations in the poll.

Other experts instead delved on the content of the items. Some appreciated the work, even though they highlighted that in some cases the items were too similar to each other. Other experts instead underlined how the items did not include fundamental elements for the counseling profession, such as, for example, the need for a mandatory path of personal psychotherapy for counselors, or the principle of organic self-regulation.
In the third round, the same items from the second round were submitted again to the experts but the median and standard deviation that had been calculated based on the experts’ evaluations in the second round were added next to each element. With these data, the experts could consider in their new evaluation the degree of agreement present among their colleagues on each of the elements. The experts were then asked to indicate again their personal degree of agreement on the elements that had been identified as characterizing the counseling profession in Italy. The experts could choose to confirm their opinion or not, while being aware of its conformity or disagreement with that of the rest of the expert panel.

This poll again utilized a Likert scale, with six possible choices ranging from completely disagreeing to completely agreeing. Data collection lasted five days. An email reminder was sent three days after the first invitation. Forty-five of the 57 experts responded to the third and last round. In the final round, polls were only included for data analysis if they had been compiled for at least 90% of the survey (Upton, 2012). Means and standard deviations were calculated for each item using Qualtrics, and any item meeting the pre-established thresholds (for consensus, above or equal to 4.8 for the median, and below or equal to 0.85 for the standard deviation) was included in the final list of elements characterizing counselor professional identity in Italy.

The optional answers that had been collected in the third round were useful for the data analysis to provide a more in-depth understanding of the expert panel’s opinion. “There were four participants who included an optional response in their third round answers. Two experts appreciated and thanked for the research and the other two ones made comments about the items. Of the last two, one expert commented on the meaning
of “experiential intervention” in counseling practice and the other one commented again about theoretical approaches, precisely about psychodynamics theories.

Seventy-six elements met or exceeded the threshold for consensus, as determined by a mean of 4.8 or higher and a standard deviation of 0.85 or lower. The five summary charts list all 76 elements chosen by the experts. They were subdivided into five categories that were determined by the research team, namely scope of practice/general purpose of counseling, specialization/different theoretical approaches, basic counseling skills, personal attitudes, and counselor professional role. This served to render the elements more accessible and comprehensible for the experts.

Table 4.7
Distinctive Elements that Meet the Thresholds that Characterize Counselor Professional Identity in Italy

**Q1 - Scope of Practice/General Purpose of Counseling (n= 2)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating clients’ expression and self-exploration</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existential pain and existential problems (Counseling deals with problems and suffering connected to existential issues such as evolutionary passages, couples crises, work change, existential crises, etc.)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q2 - Specialization/Different Theoretical Approaches (n= 3)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person centered approach</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenological approach</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanist approach</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q3 - Basic Counseling Skills (n= 33)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.84</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill</td>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediation skills</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural skills</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming (inviting and open attitude to clients)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accompanying clients through change process</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client/centered approach</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5.86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful attitude</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending behavior</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client resource-centered</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rogers’s core conditions</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Empathy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Unconditional positive regard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Congruence/genuineness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration with client</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective verbal communication</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective non-verbal communication</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness in relational pattern (triangulation, power of the relations, alliance)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationship</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting definition and management</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy (phenomenological approach)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking questions (closed/open)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person focused</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body language</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraphrasing</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attentive to client</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Here-and-now</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### COUNSELOR PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Profile</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summarization</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reframing</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reformulation</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirroring</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional regulation</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapport</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing the client’s awareness</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspending judgment</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Q4 - Personal Attitudes (n = 24)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Profile</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accessible</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity, honesty</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congruence</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor self-awareness</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathic</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical attitude</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in the potential of human being</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genuinely caring for others</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egalitarian/non-biased</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional intelligence</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open mind</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Q5 - Counselor Professional Role (n= 14)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lifelong learning (continuing professional education on the contents of interventions, e.g., theory or techniques, as well as personal growth of the counselor)</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurial</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed consent</td>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor personal growth</td>
<td>5.84</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional identity (need of awareness of the fundamental elements of the profession: objectives, methodologies, limits, borders)</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to deontological code</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of professional training</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity (the counselor must have in his/her private life behaviors that are congruent with the values of the profession)</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of a professional counselors’ association</td>
<td>5.32</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional advocacy (understood as the capacity to promote the profession of counseling)</td>
<td>5.04</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural perspective</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Professional networking & 45 & 5.33 & 0.73 \\
Professional referrals (refer between like professional colleagues including psychologists and psychotherapists when needed) & 45 & 5.51 & 0.72 \\
Peer Supervision & 45 & 5.51 & 0.69 \\

*Note. N= 76. n= number of elements each category.*

The final results of the third round of the present Delphi study did not confirm the evaluations expressed by the experts in the second round. The number of elements in the third round is 76, in the second round instead 73 elements were selected. Between the second and the third round there was a total of 31 different elements. By “different” we mean elements that were confirmed in the second round but not in the third, as well as items that had not been selected in the second round but instead were present in the third.

The list of elements characterizing counselor professional identity that resulted from this final round contains 29 new items compared to those that had been selected by the experts in the second round. Of those 29 characterizing elements, 11 which had been selected in the second round were again not confirmed in the third, while the other 18 that did not pass the threshold in the second round but they did in the third round.

The elements that were not confirmed in the third round were: *wellness, different contexts, defined client objectives and goals, counseling is carried out through the clear definition of objectives and goals, counseling differs from psychology/psychotherapy, counseling is oriented towards developing the potential of the person, enhancing free-choice, non-disease model, decision making, counseling helps to take decisions, helping profession, existential approach,* and *non-directive.*
The new elements that found consensus among the experts in the third round were: attending behavior, *setting definition and management, empathy, paraphrasing, reformulation, emotional regulations, rapport, developing the client’s awareness, accessible, authenticity/honest, kindness, egalitarian/non biased, patience, critical thinking, rationale, entrepreneurial, integrity/coherence, and member of a professional counselor association.*

A summary chart with all the 76 elements that, according to the experts in the panel, characterize counselor professional identity in Italy is included below, together with the change in means and standard deviations from round two to round three.

**Table 4.8**

*Changes in Mean and Standard Deviations from Second Round to Third Round*

**Q1 - Scope of Practice/General Purpose of Counseling (n= 2)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>MΔ</th>
<th>S.D Δ</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating clients' expression and self-exploration <em>(M= 5.72, SD= 0.53)</em></td>
<td>- 0.19</td>
<td>+ 0.22</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existential pain and existential problems <em>(M= 5.36, SD= 0.78)</em></td>
<td>- 0.12</td>
<td>+0.07</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q2 - Specialization/Different Theoretical Approaches (n= 3)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>MΔ</th>
<th>S.D Δ</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person centered approach <em>(M= 5.58, SD= 0.65)</em></td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>+0.07</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenological approach <em>(M= 5.46, SD= 0.75)</em></td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>+0.10</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanist approach <em>(M= 5.59, SD= 0.58)</em></td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>+0.07</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q3 - Basic Counseling Skills (n= 33)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>MΔ</th>
<th>S.D Δ</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills <em>(M= 5.89, SD= 0.31)</em></td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediation skills <em>(M= 5.21, SD= 0.77)</em></td>
<td>+0.06</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural skills <em>(M= 5.09, SD= 0.75)</em></td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>+0.08</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill</td>
<td>Mean (M)</td>
<td>Standard Deviation (SD)</td>
<td>Change Score (Last Year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accompanying clients through change process</td>
<td>5.74</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client-centered approach</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>+0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful attitude</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending behavior</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>+0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client/resource-centered</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rogers’s core conditions</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>+0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration with client</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective verbal communication</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>+0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective non-verbal communication</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>+0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness in relational pattern</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationship</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting definition and management</td>
<td>5.32</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>+0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating</td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>+0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking questions</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>+0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person focused</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body language</td>
<td>5.37</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>+0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraphrasing</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>+0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attentive to client</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>+0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Here-and-now</td>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>+0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarization</td>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>+0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reframing</td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>+0.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### COUNSELOR PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Mean (M)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation (SD)</th>
<th>Reformulation (M= 5.60, SD= 0.87)</th>
<th>Mirroring (M= 5.52, SD= 0.65)</th>
<th>Emotional regulation (M= 5.00, SD= 0.96)</th>
<th>Rapport (M= 5.35, SD= 1.05)</th>
<th>Developing the client’s awareness (M= 5.57, SD= 0.87)</th>
<th>Suspending judgment (M= 5.72, SD= 0.57)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reformulation</td>
<td>+0.06</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirroring</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>+0.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional regulation</td>
<td>+0.13</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapport</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing the client’s awareness</td>
<td>+0.03</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspending judgment</td>
<td>+0.02</td>
<td>+0.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Q4 - Personal Attitudes (n= 24)

<p>| Skill                                           | Mean (M) | Standard Deviation (SD) | Reformulation (M= 5.27, SD= 1.00) | Mirroring (M= 5.85, SD= 0.36) | Acceptance (M= 5.71, SD= 0.58) | Authenticity, honesty (M= 5.64, SD= 0.86) | Congruence (M= 5.76, SD= 0.52) | Counselor self-awareness (M= 5.87, SD= 0.33) | Creative (M= 5.48, SD= 0.33) | Available (M= 5.53, SD= 0.65) | Empathic (M= 5.76, SD= 0.43) | Ethical attitude (M= 5.91, SD= 0.28) | Belief in the potential of human being (M= 5.77, SD= 0.47) | Flexible (M= 5.57, SD= 0.57) | Genuinely caring for others (M= 5.51, SD= 0.65) | Kindness (M= 5.11, SD= 0.99) | Egalitarian/non-biased (M= 5.34, SD= 1.06) | Emotional intelligence (M= 5.61, SD= 0.61) | Open mind (M= 5.72, SD= 0.61) |
|------------------------------------------------|----------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Accessible                                   | -0.14    | -0.25                    |                                   |                               |                                          |                                             |                             |                                                    |                                          |
| Welcoming                                    | +0.08    | --                       |                                   |                               |                                          |                                             |                             |                                                    |                                          |
| Acceptance                                   | -0.07    | -0.02                    |                                   |                               |                                          |                                             |                             |                                                    |                                          |
| Authenticity, honesty                        | +0.11    | -0.38                    |                                   |                               |                                          |                                             |                             |                                                    |                                          |
| Congruence                                   | -0.15    | +0.13                    |                                   |                               |                                          |                                             |                             |                                                    |                                          |
| Counselor self-awareness                     | -0.07    | +0.17                    |                                   |                               |                                          |                                             |                             |                                                    |                                          |
| Creative                                     | +0.08    | --                       |                                   |                               |                                          |                                             |                             |                                                    |                                          |
| Available                                    | -0.02    | --                       |                                   |                               |                                          |                                             |                             |                                                    |                                          |
| Empathic                                     | -0.03    | +0.06                    |                                   |                               |                                          |                                             |                             |                                                    |                                          |
| Ethical attitude                             | -0.02    | 0.03                     |                                   |                               |                                          |                                             |                             |                                                    |                                          |
| Belief in the potential of human being       | +0.01    | --                       |                                   |                               |                                          |                                             |                             |                                                    |                                          |
| Flexible                                     | +0.07    | -0.09                    |                                   |                               |                                          |                                             |                             |                                                    |                                          |
| Genuinely caring for others                  | +0.11    | -0.12                    |                                   |                               |                                          |                                             |                             |                                                    |                                          |
| Kindness                                     | +0.05    | -0.22                    |                                   |                               |                                          |                                             |                             |                                                    |                                          |
| Egalitarian/non-biased                       | +0.13    | -0.34                    |                                   |                               |                                          |                                             |                             |                                                    |                                          |
| Emotional intelligence                       | +0.01    | +0.07                    |                                   |                               |                                          |                                             |                             |                                                    |                                          |
| Open mind                                    | +0.10    | -0.09                    |                                   |                               |                                          |                                             |                             |                                                    |                                          |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNSELOR PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY</th>
<th>80</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonjudgmental ($M= 5.72$, $SD= 0.98$)</td>
<td>+0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patience ($M= 5.11$, $SD= 0.98$)</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking ($M= 5.31$, $SD= 0.91$)</td>
<td>+ 0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive approach ($M= 5.35$, $SD= 0.73$)</td>
<td>+0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale ($M= 4.85$, $SD= 0.95$)</td>
<td>+0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale ($M= 4.85$, $SD= 0.95$)</td>
<td>+0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexive ($M= 5.41$, $SD= 0.68$)</td>
<td>+0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful attitude ($M= 5.76$, $SD= 0.77$)</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilient ($M= 5.48$, $SD= 0.77$)</td>
<td>+0.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q5 - Counselor Professional Role ($n= 14$)**

| Lifelong learning ($M= 5.74$, $SD= 0.48$) | -0.13 | +0.09 | 44 |
| Entrepreneurial ($M= 4.87$, $SD= 0.89$) | +0.04 | 0.10 | 44 |
| Informed consent ($M= 5.72$, $SD= 0.61$) | -0.10 | -0.04 | 45 |
| Counselor personal growth ($M= 5.85$, $SD= 0.50$) | -0.01 | -0.08 | 45 |
| Professional identity ($M= 5.87$, $SD= 0.33$) | -0.09 | -0.22 | 45 |
| Commitment to deontological code ($M= 5.83$, $SD= 0.43$) | -0.01 | +0.01 | 45 |
| Importance of professional training ($M= 5.83$, $SD= 0.43$) | +0.01 | -0.04 | 44 |
| Integrity ($M= 5.22$, $SD= 0.89$) | -- | -0.05 | 45 |
| Member of a professional counselors association ($M= 5.19$, $SD= 0.89$) | +0.13 | -0.24 | 44 |
| Professional advocacy ($M= 5.11$, $SD= 0.81$) | -0.07 | -0.11 | 45 |
| Multicultural perspective ($M= 5.18$, $SD= 0.77$) | -0.07 | +0.08 | 45 |
| Professional networking ($M= 5.37$, $SD= 0.70$) | -0.04 | +0.03 | 45 |
| Professional referrals ($M= 5.63$, $SD= 0.57$) | -0.12 | +0.15 | 45 |
| Peer Supervision ($M= 5.55$, $SD= 0.65$) | -0.04 | +0.04 | 45 |
Note. N= 76. n= number of elements each category.

Summary

This chapter has described the results of the Delphi study that produced a list of 76 elements characterizing counselor professional identity in Italy, according to the opinion of the experts who were interviewed. The chapter also described the expert panel, as well as expert demographics, showing the high experience and engagement levels of the experts who participated in this study. The next chapter will reflect on the results produced by the Delphi study, including implications for the development of the counseling profession in Italy, future research, and limitations of the study.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this study was to look for a consensus among the expert counselors on the panel around the elements that characterize counselor professional identity in Italy. This was done with the explicit intention to strengthen this identity, and with the final aim to further promote the establishment of counseling in Italy and perhaps beyond.

Research studies conducted in the United States on the topic of counselor professional identity support the idea that a strong and clear identity facilitates the establishment of the profession (Hanna & Bemak, 1997, Ponton & Duba, 2009, Remley & Herlihy, 2007; Spurgeon, 2012). In spite of a strong interest in counselor professional identity in Italy, there is currently no specific literature available on this topic, and until the completion of this study there was no research available on the essential elements characterizing counselor identity.

Current interest in the present theme is demonstrated by the Consensus Conference on Counseling (Valleri, 2017) which has been organized by the guild of Italian psychologists and psychotherapists and will include the main Italian associations of professional counselors. This initiative also demonstrates the usefulness of the present study, which augmented current Italian literature regarding counselor professional identity.

The present Delphi study identified a list of 76 elements which were identified through expert consensus as essential for counselor professional identity in Italy. This list of elements could serve counselor associations and training schools by providing some useful suggestions for the construction of a stronger identity. Counseling schools in
particular could gain from it some interesting indications for the further development of their master counseling training programs. This chapter will provide an in-depth analysis of the abovementioned themes and a discussion of the results of the study, with some comparisons between American and Italian literature on counselor professional identity. Additionally, the limitations of this study will be addressed in a specific section, along with its implications for the profession and for professional training. In the conclusion, suggestions for future research will be provided.

**Summary of Findings**

The goal of the present study was to develop a list of elements that characterize the counseling profession in Italy. The specific research question that the study utilized is: What are the distinctive elements that characterize counselor professional identity in Italy?

In the first round, the 64 experts who gave their informed consent to participate in the research answered a qualitative survey consisting of one question, which was then analyzed and coded by the research team. The research team’s work produced 128 elements, which were used in the second survey round via expert response using a six point Likert scale. The experts were then invited to express their level of agreement on the proposed elements. The results were processed through the software Qualtrics in order to obtain the mean and standard deviation, which were embedded in every item of the third-round survey.

In the third round, the experts were asked again to express their level of agreement with the proposed items. The mean and standard deviation for each item was also made available, so that the experts were also able to rely on their colleagues’
evaluations. The experts were invited either to maintain their initial response or to change it.

The final list of items that was produced by the experts after the third round contained 76 elements, which will be discussed in depth in the following paragraphs. Several elements of the final 76 elements were changed by the experts between the second and the third round. This likely means that since the panel remained substantially stable throughout the study, the experts used the comparison with other colleagues in order to reorient their choices between the first and the second rounds of the study.

It should be noted that this study’s attrition rate is significantly lower than other similar studies conducted in the United States (Neuer, 2010; Runyan, 2011; Upton, 2012). Attrition in the first round of this study amounted to 14.933% (7 out 64), in the second round to 15.78% (9 out of 57) and in the third round, with 45 experts responding out of 57, it amounted to 21.05%. Therefore, attrition had only a slight impact on the composition of the expert panel.

As already mentioned, the primary researcher, in agreement with the research team, subdivided the elements that characterize the counseling profession in Italy into five categories. This served to facilitate the coding process and to render the elements more accessible and comprehensible for the experts.

Below are the five categories:

1. Scope of Practice/General Purpose of Counseling. This category contains all of the elements that, according to the research team, described an aspect related to counseling’s general objectives such as increasing emotional
awareness, developing better coping skills, providing opportunities to face existential issues, or achieving personal goals.

2. Specialization/Different Theoretical Approaches. This category contains all of the elements that, according to the research team, described different specializations within the counseling profession. It should be noted that in Italy theoretical approaches are also classified as specializations.

3. Basic Counseling Skills. This category contains all the elements that, according to the research team, are related to basic counseling competencies.

4. Personal Attitudes. This category contains all the elements that, according to the research team, described individual characteristics that a counselor should have as a person.

5. Counselor Professional Role. This category contains all the elements that, according to the research team, identified a counselor’s professional role.

This same subdivision of elements into categories will be utilized in the following paragraphs of this chapter, in order to analyze more in-depth the results of the Delphi pool.

**General Overview of the Data**

Before sharing the analysis from this study, it is necessary to note once again that no similar studies have been conducted in Italy on this research topic. This has limited, and in some cases prevented, an interesting comparison that would have surely provided more useful information. We have rectified this problem by using, wherever possible, readings from other countries on this topic. In particular, for this purpose, scientific U.S.
literature has been used. An initial overview of the data immediately revealed an interesting piece of information.

Among the five abovementioned categories, the first two (Scope of Practice/General Purpose of Counseling - with 2 elements out of 23 that made it into the final list, and Specialization/Different Theoretical Approaches - with 3 elements confirmed out of 24) found scarce consensus among the experts. The remaining three categories instead (Basic Counseling Skills - with 33 elements out of 38, Personal Attitudes - with 24 elements out 30, and Counselor Professional Role - with 14 elements out of 16) found almost complete consensus in our panel. Thus the data clearly show more agreement among expert Italian counselors on the elements that define their basic competencies and their professional role, rather than on the more philosophical aspects of their profession.

According to the lead researcher, these findings are meaningful, since they establish with clarity that for Italian expert counselors there are some generally shared aspects that are primarily related to actual professional practice. For the interviewed experts the identity of counseling seems to be essentially outlined through the dimensions associated with professional practice. In particular, on this point, it would have been useful to compare these results with other Italian scientific articles (or resources), in order to understand if this information contradicted earlier analysis, and how. This was not possible, given the absolute groundbreaking nature of this research.

A second meaningful piece of information gleaned from the data is the relevance attributed by the expert panel to ethics, which found the highest level of consensus, with a mean of 5.89 and lowest standard deviation of 0.31. This could show that counselors in
Italy are particularly aware of the importance of their professional acts on the lives of their clients, which bodes well for a profession that in Italy is still at the very beginning of its history. This is very encouraging, since according to Klatt (1967, as cited in Foster, 2012), the development of an ethical code is a fundamental part of the evolutionary process of the counseling profession. Professional ethics are also one of the more agreed-upon core elements of professional identity within American literature (Emerson, 2010; Puglia, 2008). This data is also important because it shows that the expert Italian counselors who participated in this study are similar to their colleagues in the American professional community, since both perceive ethics as a fundamental element of their profession (Foster, 2012; Remley & Herlihy, 2007). The previous reflections, as well as others, will be further developed in the following paragraphs, which will connect the study’s results to the literature.

**Scope of Practice/General Purpose of Counseling**

Within the present category, which contains the elements that - according to the research team - define the general objectives of counseling interventions, the experts found consensus on only two of the 23 elements that emerged from the first round. The two elements which found consensus were: (1) *facilitating clients’ expression and self-exploration* and (2) *existential pain and existential problems*. While the first one of these two elements (*facilitating clients’ expression and self-exploration*) found large agreement among the experts, with a 5.53 mean and 0.75 standard deviation, the second (*existential pain and existential problems*) barely reached the standard deviation threshold at 0.85.

The list of elements in this category was modified between rounds, based on the experts’ choices. In particular, some meaningful elements were eliminated in the third
round that exceeded the threshold set for the mean but barely missed the standard deviation threshold. These elements were: **wellness** \((M = 5.24, SD = 0.90)\), **helping profession** \((M = 5.60, SD = 0.88)\); **decision making** \((M = 5.33, SD = 0.87)\); **non-disease model** \((M = 5.69, SD = 0.88)\); **enhancing free-choice** \((M = 5.56, SD = 0.88)\).

These data indicate a persistent difficulty among the panel of experts to find consensus on the purpose of counseling interventions. Opinions on the subject differ, even in profound ways, within Italian counseling literature (Perussia, 2007), based on the theoretical frame of reference (Fulcheri & Accomazzo, 1999) and/or the application context within which the counseling intervention is introduced.

At the same time, it seemed clear from the experts’ choices that a generally accepted definition of the purpose of counseling interventions involved supporting the clients’ possibility to realize themselves through a realization of their potential. For this reason it’s possible to affirm that this study confirms the four components in Puglia’s Counseling Philosophy scale (2008): developmental orientation, wellness, prevention, and empowerment. In general, U.S. counseling literature also confirms that the problems clients experience are often developmental in nature, and that empowerment of clients and wellness are goals of the profession (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 1999; Myers, 1992; Pistole & Roberts, 2002; Puglia, 2008).

Within U.S. literature it has substantially become clear that the main goal of counseling intervention is oriented to wellbeing and mental health (Burk, Brunea, Baker, & Ellison, 2014; Hanna & Bemak, 1997; Fetter & Koch, 2009; Myers & Sweeney, 2008). This clarity of intents was also well delineated by the 20/20 committee “Vision for the Future of Counseling”, which was established by the American Counseling Association,
and which proposed the following definition of counseling: "Counseling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals" (Kaplan, Tarvydas, & Gladding, 2014, p.366).

Specialization/Different Theoretical Approaches

Before proceeding with an analysis of the second category, it is noted that a counselor’s theoretical frame of reference is called a specialization in Italy. It is important to specify that this category not only contains possible intervention specializations of counseling, such as school counseling in the United States, but also theoretical approaches, for example constructivist or psychoanalytic.

As for the analysis of the second round results, only three elements out of 24 were agreed upon among the experts. Those elements were: person-centered approach ($M=5.53$, $SD=0.72$); phenomenological approach ($M=5.46$, $SD=0.75$); and humanistic approach ($M=5.59$, $SD=0.58$). All three of these elements plus one more, empowerment (which almost reached the threshold of standard deviation), confirm a clear humanistic/Rogerian imprint on the central elements of counselor professional identity in Italy.

Within this category of elements, the experts remained substantially consistent from one round to the next. In fact, only one element, existential approach, barely missed being confirmed by the experts. In conclusion, the panel’s position seems well-summarized by one of the experts, who in a note clarified his thought as such:

As for Q2, I specified the theoretical perspectives and approaches that I integrate in my professional practice. I believe that a humanistic, phenomenological, and
existential background can represent that ‘ideal’ frame of reference for counseling, but I do not exclude that other orientations can also effectively define the counseling relationship.

The abovementioned humanistic elements are widely present within Italian counseling literature (Di Fabio & Sirigatti, 2013), as well as in literature from the United States (Nassar-McMillan & Niles, 2010). The impact of Rogers’ work on the development of the counseling profession in the U.S. was fundamental (Brown and Srebalus, 1996). The centrality of the Rogerian approach in defining counseling interventions is reflected by Italian literature (Di Fabio, 1999; Di Francesco, Ruffini, & Sarchielli, 2006), as well as by literature in the U.S. (Aubrey, 1977, Carmichael & Erford, 2013), Great Britain (Broadbent, 1985), Canada (Gazzolla & Smith, 2010), and by other international sources (Perron, Tollerud, & Fisher, 2016).

**Basic Counseling Skills**

This category contains all the elements that, according to the research team, were related to basic counseling competencies. This third category of elements submitted to the expert panel’s judgment was the largest, comprising of 38 elements. Out of those 38, almost all (33) found agreement among the experts. The agreement increased in the third round where, in the face of only one element not being confirmed, eight more that had not been present in the second round were again included.

The elements that were chosen by the Italian expert panel substantially coincide with the same “micro skills” that are presented in a large body of American and European, as well as specifically Italian, contemporary literature on basic counseling
skills (Di Fabio, 1999; Hough, 1999; Malikiosi-Loizos & Ivey, 2012, Mucchielli, 2016; Young, 2013). Once again, the basic skills that emerged from our study coincide with those that are identified within North-American literature and are mainly of a rogerian matrix (Ivey, Ivey, Zalaquett & Quirk, 2012). I am referring here in particular to the basic counseling skills that are identified in our poll as being characterizing elements of the profession such as, for example: paraphrasing, reframing, mirroring, summarizing, attending behavior, focus of the counseling intervention in the here-and-now, and multicultural competencies. This result also confirms international literature which describes similar basic counseling skills throughout the globe (Perron, Tollerud, & Fisher, 2016; Alvarez & Lee, 2012).

Ultimately, according to the primary researcher, the fact that Italian expert professional counselors found such a high level of consensus is highly indicative of the relevance of this category of elements for a definition of counselor professional identity in Italy.

**Personal Attitudes**

This category contains all the elements that, according to the research team, described the individual characteristics that a counselor should have as a person. Expert panel consensus increased in the third round also for the elements in this category, where the experts reached consensus on 24 out of 30 elements. These data tell us that, for the experts, there is an almost complete agreement on the personal requirements that are tied to the behaviors and attitudes that a professional counselor needs to adopt.

Despite the fact there are no specific researches in Italy about counselor personal attitudes, there is a general tendency in counseling literature to indicate the rogerian core
condition as essential elements of the personal attitudes of Italian counselors (Di Fabio, 1999; Di Fabio & Sirigatti, 2013; Di Francesco, Ruffini, & Sarchielli, 2006; Moselli, 2007). In the United States there is instead a sizeable amount of available literature on the personal attitudes that can favor a counseling intervention which confirm this research’s findings. Rogers was among the first to describe the same personal abilities of counselors that emerged, in their various declinations, in our study (Rogers, 1957, 1997).

The present study’s result also find confirmation in the work of Halinski & Holden (2009), who individuated 47 sources (research studies, theoretical texts, unpublished dissertations) on counselor personality traits within North-American literature. Based on this research, Halinski & Holden (2009) then individuated some characteristics of counselor personality that are repeated among the authors. The top five counselor personal attitudes mentioned in their study were: warm and accepting (27 sources), empathic (26 sources), flexible (23 sources), self-aware (24 sources), and genuine (23 sources). These elements are also present among the characterizing elements individuated by the expert panel in the present study.

**Counselor Professional Role**

The tendency towards consensus on counselors’ role within this expert panel grew stronger in this particular category, where as many as 14 out of 15 elements found consensus. This finding supports the limited Italian literature available on this topic (Di Francesco, Ruffini, & Sarchielli, 2006; Moselli, 2007) in its assertion of the importance of professional role for establishing a counseling identity. US literature (Emerson, 2010; Upton, 2012; Woo, 2013) suggests the same. In particular, the results confirm part of the
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Professional Engagement scale (Puglia, 2008), precisely in its components: professional membership, conference attendance, and advocacy.

In the survey the only element that did not meet threshold requirements for both values in this category (mean and standard deviation), in the second as well as the third round, was the item dedicated to clinical supervision. Instead, another item regarding peer supervision was accepted by the panel with a large consensus, reaching a low standard deviation ($SD=0.69$). This contradiction is understandable, according to the analysis of first round answers and to the primary researcher’s personal experience, since clinical supervision is generally understood by counselors in Italy as supervision by a psychotherapist, and therefore it is not accepted much by counselors as a matter of professional identity.

This interpretation is unequivocally supported by North-American literature on counseling supervision, which recognizes its fundamental role in counselor training and professional identity development (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Dollarhide & Miller, 2006; Skovholt & Ronnestad; 1992 Neuer, 2011). This idea has not been explored by the scarce literature available in Italy on the topic, which only states that “the elements of supervision are inherent to the relationship, the evaluative function, development, enhancement, and protection of professionalism” (Montanari, 2007, p. 42). In general, however, an understanding of the importance of supervision is present in our literature, and this element of professional quality is also highlighted by our results (Di Francesco, Ruffini, & Sarchielli, 2006; Fulcheri & Acomazzo, 1999; Perussia, 2007).

Now that the five major themes from the study have been discussed, the next section will discuss overall implications of these findings for the counseling profession.
In particular, the issue of counselor identity as distinct or parallel to psychological and psychotherapeutic work will be discussed.

**Counselor as Distinct or Similar to Other Psychological Professions**

A current theme which is also widely present in the Italian counseling literature (Fulcheri & Accomazzo, 1999; Gemignani & Gilberto, 2005; Perussia, 2007) revolves around the question of whether counseling can be considered to be an integral part of the overall work of professional psychology and/or psychotherapy. This topic addresses the question of whether counseling can be assimilated as a technique or as an intervention typology into general psychotherapy or is it a distinct profession that is different from psychology and therefore that cannot be considered to be a therapeutic intervention. One quote from the experts will clarify the distinction. Expert 1 discussed this by saying:

> the question whether counseling is therapeutic leaves an area of ambiguity because, since counseling promotes personal evolution and wellbeing, it cannot be other than therapeutic; in Rogers’ words, counseling is therapeutic (and it should be), insofar as it involves contact between one person, the counselor, who hopefully is more congruent and harmonious, and another person who is less congruent and less in harmony with him or herself. It is certainly therapeutic on a spiritual level, in terms of development and personal growth, while it cannot be considered therapeutic in the traditional sense of the word (within a medically-derived model), because it does not propose nor does it try to eliminate disturbances, but rather to give them full expression, space, listening and understanding, and to integrate in a developmental way the underlying needs.
Psychological and psychotherapeutic interventions, as well as the necessary requirements to practice these professions, are regulated by the national Law n° 56/1989 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 1989). That same law created the professional guild of psychologists and psychotherapists, which has the power to issue licenses, as well as power of control over those professional categories. This law is important because in order to practice any form of psychotherapy in Italy one has to be a licensed member of the psychologists’ guild. As amply described in the second chapter of this study, and specifically in the paragraph on clinical issues in counseling in Italy, Italian counselor professional associations have maintained that counseling is an autonomous profession that does not employ psychological techniques, while the guild of psychologists and psychotherapists believes exactly the opposite. These two positions have clashed not only on an intellectual level but often also in the court of law.

Recently, this disagreement has found a space for discussion in the previously mentioned consensus conference that is currently being attended by representatives of the main Italian professional counselor associations, as well as from the national guild of psychologists and psychotherapists (Valleri, 2017). The purpose of this consensus conference was to arrive at a new perspective on counseling that satisfies the different points of view represented at its table.

The goal of the consensus conference and its follow-up actions is to create an opportunity for the participating professionals to compare amongst themselves their definitions of counseling’s intervention fields (school, mental health, career) and professional services. The participants are representatives of universities, professional
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guilds related to counseling (psychologists, social workers, MDs), and professional counseling associations (e.g., AssoCounseling, Federcounseling, CNCP; Fani, 2017).

Related to this debate are the items that did not reach consensus on the topic. They were: counseling differing from psychology/psychotherapy, with a mean value of 5.49 which meets the set threshold and a standard deviation value of 1.05 that does not; counseling not a ‘therapeutic intervention’ with an acceptable mean value of 5.11 and an insufficient standard deviation value of 1.18; and non-disease model (counseling interventions are based on a non-medical model), with a mean value of 5.79 which meets the threshold and a standard deviation value that misses the threshold by only 0.03, that is 0.88 instead of 0.85.

Unexpectedly, our panel of expert counselors did not come to a definitive consensus on this topic. As shown above, the set threshold for standard deviation was not met but the mean threshold was amply reached. The data show that a substantial majority of the experts agreed that counseling is different from psychology and psychotherapy, and that it also differs from the medical model. However, while the experts widely recognized this as an aspect of their professional identity, they did not seem to identify it as a characterizing element.

The panel’s lack of agreement might reveal the ambiguous meaning that the term “therapy” has for Italian counselors, as shown in part by the quotes presented at the beginning of the paragraph, as well as by an in-depth reading of the panel’s first round answers. In the primary researcher’s opinion, and from an optimistic perspective, this conflictual situation could lead to the possibility of a regulated cohabitation of two different identities and orientations within the counseling profession, one which is
psychological and one which is not. The possibility of such cohabitation is shown in Unites States literature (Hanna & Bemak, 1997; Remley, 1995). This possibility could favor the regulation process in Italy, in ways that are not foreseeable at the moment as pertains to licences. This has important consequences related to the profession’s credibility, and its chances of success, as North-American literature on this topic confirms (Gails Daniel, 2002; Remley 1995). This could favor the establishment of possible and auspicable university level training courses, and to a clearer definition of counseling’s areas of intervention. Right now, the chance to imagine and draw the future is in the hands of the Consensus Conference on Counseling, which among many difficulties is trying to concretely build this common path between psychologists and counselors (Ciofi, 2017).

**Limitations**

This study, like all studies, has limitations that affect the evaluation of its results. Even though it was particularly apropos for this beginning research, the use of the Delphi methodology as an investigative tool (Hasson, Keeney, & McKenna, 2000; Neuer, 2010, Upton, 2012) has been an object of criticism for its lack of scientific procedures (Sackman, 1974). In particular, criteria for inclusion on panels of expertise have been criticized (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). The same criticism is relevant for this study, as for every other Delphi study, since its protocol calls for an independent set of criteria for inclusion in its expert panel (Landeta, 2006). If different criteria were set than the ones that we constructed for this study, the composition of the expert panel would have likely been different, and thus the results would also have been different. Therefore, it is evident that the final list of elements that characterize the counseling profession in Italy
represents the perspectives of this study’s expert panel, and it might not represent the perspective of other Italian professional counselors. Furthermore, if there had been enough Italian literature available on the characteristic elements of the counseling profession, a different Delphi study might have been developed based on that literature, which might have produced a different list of elements.

Another limitation that has to be considered is attrition. Even though attrition was low in this study, it still modified the expert panel’s composition during the research. Due to reasons connected with the kind of software employed, it was not possible to analyze expert panel mutation during the rounds.

The choice of items selected for the survey represented another element that has to be taken into account when evaluating the study’s results. The coding process at the end of the first round might have limited the original thoughts expressed by the experts (Keeney et al., 2001; Powell, 2003).

Additionally, the research team coded in English and all research team members received a professionally translated and back-translated (Brislin, 1969) copy of the response materials, which were originally in Italian. Thus, the final codes were translated in English, then again into Italian, and then back-translated into English. This translation process has certainly influenced the quality of the content that was then proposed as items. It could represent a limitation if errors in translation were made. In order to contain this limitation, the research team tried to represent as precisely as possible the experts’ thoughts, avoiding ambiguity. This, however, led to the development of 128 elements, which might have been excessive, and in some cases redundant, as some experts’ comments highlighted. Such a substantial number of elements to evaluate might also
have influenced the quality of the evaluations, as well as expert attrition (Upton, 2012). The experts’ comments also suggested that some of them might not have understood or might have somewhat incorrectly interpreted the items.

Even though the selection of thresholds for mean (4.8) and standard deviation (0.85) is amply motivated by the goal of finding a “meaningful” agreement, as well as by ample literature (Neuer, 2011; Upton, 2012), these thresholds profoundly affected the results. High thresholds have the advantage of selecting the elements, but at the same time they reduce the possibility of variety of those same elements.

Another important consideration regards the composition of the research team that coded the expert opinions between the first and the second round. Despite the composition of the research team satisfying the need for an in-depth knowledge of the contents and the praxis of Italian and American professional counseling for the majority of its members, one of the researchers did not have any doctoral-level training in terms of qualitative research. Also, there were multiple relationships among the research team members prior to participation on this research team, which might have created a subtle power differential among the members of the research team. All of this might have affected the final results of the coding process. It should also be noted that even though conducting a Delphi study in three rounds is considered as the best possible option (Upton, 2012), the choice is absolutely questionable according to specific literature. For example, Hasson, Keeney, & McKenna (2000) stated: “Knowing when to stop is crucial, too soon will provide results that may not be meaningful, not soon enough may cause sample fatigue and may tax resource” (p.1011). But according to Stone Fish & Busby, (2005) as cited by Iqbal & Pippon-Young, (2009): “When exploring consensus, rounds
may continue until consensus is reached. However, this approach can quickly compromise panelists’ response rates and enthusiasm. Three rounds, which would typically take four months, often suffice” (p.599). In conclusion, a fourth round would not have guaranteed better quality in the information, but it would have surely been more costly in terms of time and money.

**Implications and Suggestions**

This study produced, through the agreement of a panel of experts, a list of 78 elements characterizing counselor professional identity in Italy. In spite of this research project’s various limitations, its results simultaneously suggest a number of implications and suggestions for the development of the counseling profession, for counselor educators, and for the improvement of counselor training programs. Finally, these results also offer interesting possibilities for future research, which will be explored.

**Implications for the Profession**

North American literature on professional counseling identity (Hanna & Bemak, 1997, Pistole & Roberts, 2002; Ponton & Duba, 2009, Remley & Herlihy, 2007; Spurgeon, 2012), as well as Italian and other international literature on related professions (Golczyńska-Grondas, 2011; Johnson, Cowin, & Young, 2012; Ross & Crow, 2010; Samaniego & Cárcamo, 2013; Sarchielli & Fraccaroli, 2002), all confirm the benefits of a clear professional identity. From this perspective, this final result of a list of elements characterizing the profession of counseling in Italy is useful to the profession, because the identified elements can also be used by counselors themselves and by professional counselor associations to develop a common analysis and a more strategic reading of the profession’s identity. This study could serve as an instrument for building,
among the divided and variegated universe of professional counselor associations present in this country, a common basis for reflection on the identity of the counseling profession in Italy.

The results of this study could be used by the above mentioned professional associations to produce initiatives aimed at the promotion of the profession among members as well as non-members, and to better promote an understanding of professional counselors’ identity. In particular, counselor associations could use the results that emerged in the category “professional role” to produce initiatives that are coherent with those results, since at the moment they represent the only scientifically objective reference on the opinion of expert Italian counselors on this topic.

Furthermore, an increased understanding of the elements characterizing the professional identity of Italian counselors can improve the profession’s advocacy actions, enriching and at the same time streamlining the elements that are useful to present to stakeholders and legislators in order to better promote this profession. A better understanding of professional identity based on the list of elements identified by the present study can define and strengthen counselor professional identity, reducing its chances of being confused with other similar professions. This lessening of ambiguity around counselor professional identity in Italy is in fact useful not only to professional counselors but also, and most of all, to potential clients who can in this way have a clearer idea of the answers and the guarantees that this particular professional can provide (Healey & Hays, 2011).
Implications for Training Programs and Counselor Educators

Training programs and counselor educators have a duty to increase their students’ knowledge about professional counselor identity. This identity begins to take shape during their master’s-level training process, as witnessed by North American counseling literature on the topic (Auxier, Hughes & Kline, 2003; Dollarhide, Gibson & Moss, 2013). The list of elements that was produced by this study provides some important suggestions for counseling educators, who could use this study’s results as discussion points in their lessons. It also can provide a frame of reference for the further development of counselor training programs, such as for example by eliciting from them more attention to the ethical implications of counseling interventions, or the introduction of new contents, such as for example professional advocacy. Both of these themes were particularly meaningful for the expert panel in the present study.

Among the elements of this study that most seem to characterize counselor identity and that can be best utilized in a training setting are those that belong to the professional role and to the basic counseling skills categories. The first category can be helpful as a reference point for the development of specific courses on professional identity, while the third category can represent an inspiration for specific courses on micro counseling skills.

Finally, if utilized as a reference within a training context, the elements produced by this study can support the development of a clearer and more shared professional identity among future professional counselors. As amply documented in the first part of this dissertation, such process on one hand increases the efficacy of counseling
interventions and on the other it strengthens and renders more identifiable the profession as a whole, especially within the larger context of different kinds of helping professions.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

The list proposed by this study can be considered as a starting point for further investigations on the elements characterizing counselor professional identity in Italy. In spite of the study’s limited number of participants in relation to the entire population of Italian counselors, based on the number of emails received and the personal expressions of interest in this study, its theme seems to be particularly important for Italian counselors, especially within the context of the present moment in Italian history and the aforementioned consensus conference (Valleri, 2017). Further research might include different groups of participants, different methodologies, and different research questions. Each will be explored next.

Further research involving a different group of participants could be conducted to validate the study.

Other studies could analyze if the inclusion of courses related to professional identity in Italian counselor training programs might increase trainees’ professional success. Based on the primary researcher’s knowledge, as the director of a counseling school and member of the newborn and first Italian association of counseling schools (i.e., ASCO), no specific courses related to professional advocacy are offered as part of any Italian counseling training program.

Other research studies using quantitative methodologies could develop measuring instruments of professional identity such as scales and subscales to measure professional identity, as has been done in the United States (Puglia 2008; Emerson, 2010; Woo, 2013).
This could help to free the professional quality of the counselor in Italy from subjective criteria, through the definition of impartial and measurable parameters. Taking into consideration that the body of specific literature in counseling in Italy could be insufficient for the development of measuring instruments, it might be equally useful but more feasible to conduct an exploratory factorial analysis and to develop a survey to administer to a large number of counselors.

**Summary and Conclusions**

This chapter examined the results of this research in light of current Italian and American literature on counseling. The implications of this study for the development of the profession and for the training of future counselors have been discussed and explored, together with its limitations. In spite of the limitations that were discussed in this chapter, based on the consensus that emerged from its expert panel, this Delphi study produced a total list of 76 elements characterizing the counseling profession in Italy. The list can be helpful as a first step towards a clearer vision of the profession, which can certainly reduce its gray and ambiguous areas, and restore more of its strength within the field of the helping professions. The elements that emerged from the study appear to suggest useful indications not only for an understanding of the profession, but also for the development of its identity. In particular, the elements gleaned from this study can be useful in a training setting, for the development of professional counseling courses.

Finally, even though the 76 elements produced by the study do not represent, in themselves, the identity of counselors in Italy, nonetheless they provide a clear description through the consensus that was reached by the group of experts who participated in this research. The list is the product of a consensus among experts who
have different points of view both because of the association to which they belong, and because of their professional specialization, as one can glean from chart 4.1 and 4.5. The method utilized and the results produced by this study can certainly be a good foundation and an auspicious moment for an upcoming clear definition of the counseling profession in Italy. This can be done in order to clarify counseling’s intervention typologies and to develop training programs that are ever more suitable and coherent with the goals of the counseling profession.
CHAPTER SIX

MANUSCRIPT

Towards A New Profession: Counselor Professional Identity in Italy: A Delphi Study

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Abstract

Counseling is a profession that started existing only recently in Italy, when compared to the other mental health related professions. A lack of consensus on professional counselor identity seems to represent a limiting factor in the growth of the profession, since it negatively impacts its efficacy, and it can lead to counselors being confused with other mental health professionals. Because of this the future establishment of the counseling profession in Italy is closely linked to a stronger and clearer sense of professional identity. The purpose of this Delphi study is to identify a list of essential elements characterizing counselor professional identity, through the opinions of a panel of expert counselors who represent diverse perspectives within the Italian counseling profession.

*Keywords: Counselor; Professional Identity, Delphi, Italy, Internationalization*
Counseling is a young profession that was established only recently in Italy (Remley, Bacchini, & Krieg, 2010). However, in spite of precarious regulation and a fragile identity “it seems that the counseling profession is establishing itself almost on its own” (Perussia, 2017 p. 43). Historically, counseling began its development as a profession in Italy with the promulgation of Law N. 135 of 1990 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 1991) regarding the prevention, care and treatment of HIV/AIDS (Bellotti & Bellani, 1997; Di Fabio & Sirigatti, 2013). Law N. 135 of 1990 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 1991) made counseling sessions mandatory for individuals before and after testing for the presence of HIV antibodies. Counseling is therefore a young profession when we compare it with other professions in the mental health field (Remley, Bacchini, & Krieg, 2010). Consequently, its identity still has to be built (Fani, 2014). Even though its origins in Italian literature are debated, the prevalent idea is that Italian counseling took its first steps within the realm of social work (Bellani, 2007; Remley, Mariotti, & Valleri, 2015).

**Current Issues in Counseling in Italy**

Counselors in Italy are facing the challenges of contemporary society in terms of new problems brought by their clients, for example in the areas of family and personal development (Campagnoli, 2015) or in schools and career development (Soresi, 2013). Only recently, in 2013, credentialing was first established for Italian mental health counselors by the national Law n° 4/2013 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2013), which allows intellectual professionals including counselors (Trentin, 2013) to obtain a certificate of quality and professional proficiency from a professional association. This certificate does not represent a license to practice, and therefore it is not a necessary requisite to practice one of the many unregulated professions in Italy (Bisazza, 2013). However, the courts
have been reviewing practice regulations and certificates, such as in ruling n° 13020/2015 of Lazio’s TAR (Tribunale Amministrativo Regionale - Administrative Regional Courthouse) and some are challenging the practice of counseling.

The results of these ongoing judicial cases may shape the future of Italian counseling. Presently, Italian professional counselors are waiting for the outcome of this controversy (i.e., regulations needed for independent licensure), and thus the theme of professional counselor identity is a focus of specific attention in Italy right now. This is also confirmed by the recent start of the first Italian consensus conference on counseling, which is being hosted by the Italian psychologists’ guild and is also attended by representatives of the most important Italian professional counselor associations (Valleri, 2017).

Despite the importance of this issue, there are no existing specific studies dedicated to the professional identity of counselors in Italy that identify its essential and characterizing elements. Because of this, the present study will mainly reference North American literature on the topic, since the development and strengthening of professional identity are still central elements in the debate that is ongoing in the United States about the growth of the counseling profession as a whole (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011; Spurgeon, 2012).

**Importance of Professional Counseling Identity**

Given the confusing situation of Italian counseling, a clear frame of reference is necessary, especially in the shape of a set of essential elements characterizing the professional identity of Italian counselors. A strengthening of their identity would allow Italian counselors to better understand their role, and it would be important for the growth
of the counseling profession (Spurgeon, 2012) and for the improved quality of counseling interventions in Italy (Remley & Herlihy, 2007). Finally, a stronger identity could also help to maintain and improve the current legislative regulation of this profession by the Italian government (Remley, 2013). Before we look specifically at this issue in Italy we must first explore what counseling professional identity looks like in other contexts.

According to several North American authors (Brott & Myers, 1999; Gibson, Dollarhide & Moss, 2010; McAuliffe, 2005; Ponton & Duba, 2009; Skovholt & Ronnestad 1992), professional identity is composed of a system of values and of specific competencies that constitute the body of knowledge and the internalized frame of reference for counselors’ professional actions. As it already happened in the United States, a lack of clarity around professional identity can lead the practice of Italian counselors to be confused with that of other similar professions, such as psychology (Healey & Hays, 2011). On the other hand, a clear and strong counseling professional identity defines and supports the appropriate implementation of the activity, and it is therefore decisive for the growth and the establishment of the profession as a whole (Spurgeon, 2012). Because of this, it is important for counselors to be educated on this subject, starting from their training programs (Gibson et al., 2010). It is also equally important for counselors to build a collective identity (Gale & Austin, 2003; Reiner, Dobmeier, & Hernández, 2013) which can provide a foundation for the advocacy action of professional counseling associations on behalf, and in support of, the counseling profession (Myers, Sweeney, & White, 2002).

This is true in America as well as in Italy (Remley, 2013). As indicated by all the North American literature available on the topic (Hanna & Bemak, 1997; Pistole &
Italian counselors would benefit from having a strong identity. This could increase counselor efficacy, assist with ethical practice, and reduce Italian counselors’ difficulties in advocating for their profession individually and across institutional work environments. Also, as various American studies have shown, without a consensus around professional identity (Shalcross, 2013; Kaplan, Tarvydas, & Gladding, 2014) and a general agreement on the distinctive elements that characterize counselor professional identity (Upton, 2012), counselors risk facing negative personal and professional consequences from the ambiguity of their professional role. Based on the available North American counseling literature, what seems useful for the construction of a clear and strong professional counseling identity is the identification of the elements that characterize it (Emerson, 2010; Remley & Herlinhy, 2007; Upton, 2012).

An awareness of the need for a strong and cohesive professional identity has been growing rapidly among Italian professionals, as shown by the number of national conferences dedicated to this theme (AssoCounseling, 2016a). In spite of this increased awareness of the importance of identity for professional counselors, with few exceptions the author has found no mention of this topic within existing Italian literature on counseling. Among the exceptions, Viano, Boveri, & Civillotti (2007) found a general sense of uncertainty on the identity of the counseling profession. Another recent study has shown a sense of disorientation in Italian counselors as well as in clients, who are uncertain about how to differentiate counselors from other competing helping professionals (Viano & Verga, 2007).
This current study intended to address the need for a strong and clear foundation for counselor professional identity in Italy through the Delphi methodology (Linstone & Turoff, 2002). Its purpose was to reach a consensus among expert Italian counselors regarding the distinctive elements that characterize counselor professional identity in Italy. The research question for this investigation was: What are the distinctive elements that characterize counselor professional identity in Italy?

**Method**

The Delphi method utilizes qualitative and quantitative strategies together (Iqbal & Pipon-Young, 2009). This method of research was developed by the RAND Corporation in a military setting around 1948, and was initially used for classified research (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963; Gupta & Clarke, 1996). The Delphi technique can be used in research for different reasons, such as to build consensus on a topic in a situation of uncertainty or a lack of empirical evidence, to make predictions in order to better understand possible future scenarios, and to choose strategies for action, such as military interventions or marketing campaigns (Gupta & Clarke, 1996; Linstone & Turoff, 2002; Norcross, Hedges, & Prochanska, 2002; Powell, 2003).

Given that currently there is no consensus behind counselor professional identity in Italy, and that its creation would allow for future advocacy action strategies on behalf of Italian professional counseling to be developed, this was an appropriate research method for this study. The Delphi technique also allows for the best management of group dynamics by reaching an agreement among experts while avoiding at the same time possible difficulties in maintaining focus, and possible conflicts between dominant personalities (Delbecq, Van der Ven, & Gustafason, 1975). This technique achieves
results through several consecutive stages of data collection, usually working through three rounds of expert consultation (Hsu & Sandford, 2007).

A research team was utilized in this study consisting of the primary author, who is an Italian professional counselor and doctoral student at a large, urban American university, and two additional team members. One of the team members was an Italian counselor who was trained and works in Italy and the United States, and the third team member was an American counselor educator with experience with international counseling students and issues. Each team member had experience with qualitative and quantitative research.

**Participants**

In order to ensure that a reliable and valuable consensus is obtained through the Delphi method, special attention must be given to the number of participants and the determination of criteria for expert selection (Landeta, 2006). However, for both of those important steps in the construction of a Delphi research only some generic indications and no well-established criteria exist within specialized literature (Hasson, Keeney, & McKenna, 2000).

Expert selection criteria for this study was determined based on the assumption that counseling is a unique and different profession from others in the helping field (Spurgeon, 2012), although counseling can share objectives and similar intervention modalities with other professions with which sometimes it risks overlapping or being confused (Giusti & Spalletta, 2012b; Healey & Hays, 2011). The experts in this study were professional counselors who had an influence in the development of the profession in Italy, presently or in the past, through teaching, practice, the publication of books or
journal articles, and participation at national and/or international conferences (Iqbal & Pippon-Young, 2009). To qualify as experts, counselors needed to be registered with an Italian professional counselor association. They also needed to satisfy at least two more of the following six criteria (a) being registered as a supervisor in an Italian professional counselor association; (b) having worked in Italy as a professional counselor for at least three of the last five years; (c) having taught at least a year in a master’s degree program for professional counselors during the last five years; (d) having published a book or an article about counseling in a national or international scientific journal; (e) having given a presentation on counseling during a national or international conference or convention; (f) having served in an Italian professional counselor association as a board or commission member.

The recruiting process included a review of national and international scientific literature on counseling, as well as a review of conference and meeting programs, with the purpose of identifying a number of Italian counselor experts who were then invited to participate in this research via purposeful sampling (Upton, 2012). An invitation was sent to 156 counselors who were identified as experts according to the criteria. The invitation included a brief note about the primary researcher, a detailed explanation of the study, inclusion criteria to be considered an expert, and a link to the online survey.

Forty-five out of the initial 64 experts who began the study completed all three rounds. Panel members completing all three rounds had the actual opportunity to compare their perspectives through a process of structured communication and to mature a consensus, as the literature suggests (Linstone & Turoff, 2002).
The panel of experts included representatives from all the major Italian counseling professional associations, such as AssoCounseling, National Coordination of Professional Counselors (CNCP), Italian Counseling Association (SICO), and the Italian Professional Association of Counseling (REICO). As for their levels of education, the majority of the experts had a degree and a Master in Counseling. The majority of the experts identified as being white and between 45 and 55 years old. Sixty-four point six percent of them identified as female, and 35.94% as male.

**Instruments and Procedures**

Recent studies recommend using only two or three rounds of data collection in a Delphi study (Hasson, Keeney, & McKenna, 2000). In this case, three rounds were utilized in order to reach the widest possible consensus among the group of Italian counselor experts. Particular care and attention was given to the translation of the instruments, codes, and other study materials, which were translated by a bilingual Italian-American counselor who was a member of the research team. The initial round included a qualitative stage which consisted of the answers of a panel of experts to an open question asking them to list the elements that characterize the counseling profession in Italy. The answers were then translated from Italian to English by the research team member, in order to enhance reliability and trustworthiness. Once all round-one responses were translated into English, the research team utilized a qualitative data analysis process taken from Creswell (2012) and Hays & Singh (2012). Next, the answers were individually coded in English by the research team.

After completing this phase of individual coding, research team members came to a consensus that led to the development of a codebook in English. In order to increase the
reliability of the study the translation and back-translation process focused on cross cultural and conceptual issues, rather than on linguistic/literal equivalence (Brislin, Lonner, & Thorndike, 1973). For this reason, with the intention of making the poll more usable by the Italian experts, at the end of the translation process the lead researcher, in agreement with the rest of the research team, modified the codebook. He did it by adding new operationalized definitions for some of the codes, and by eliminating and modifying some codes because they were redundant (i.e. elements already present within other codes) and/or confusing for Italian language and culture.

The experts who participated to the first round were invited to participate to the second. In that next round they evaluated each item on a Likert scale, indicating to what extent the item should be considered as a distinctive element that characterizes Italian counselor professional identity (Iqbal & Pippon-Young, 2009). Their answers were then analyzed using descriptive statistics, i.e. means and standard deviations (Hallowell & Gambatese, 2010). The mean and standard deviation for each element was then added to the Likert scale for round three of data collection. The third round had the goal of giving the experts an opportunity to re-evaluate their original responses from round two and to re-rate each item (Iqbal & Pippon-Young, 2009). At the end of this last round, the mean and standard deviation were calculated again for each item, in order to obtain the highest possible consensus on the distinctive elements that characterize counselor professional identity in Italy by the expert participants (Hsu & Sanford, 2007).

Results

At the end of the three rounds the experts produced a list of 78 elements. Consensus was determined for the elements that reached or surpassed a mean value of 4.8
and a standard deviation of 0.85 or less. Results were analyzed through Qualtrics to obtain mean and standard deviation scores. It should be noted that the attrition level of this study was very low when compared to other similar studies (Neuer, 2010; Runyan, 2011; Upton, 2012). Attrition in the first round of this study amounted to 10.93% (57 out of 64), in the second round to 15.78% (48 out of 57) and in the third round, with 45 experts responding out of 57, the final attrition amounted to only 21.05%.

The first researcher, in agreement with the research team, subdivided the initial list of elements into five categories. This was done to facilitate the coding process as well as the evaluation of the elements in the quantitative phase of the study. Below are the five categories with their definitions:

1. **Scope of Practice/General Purpose of Counseling**: This category contains all the elements that according to the research team described an aspect related to counseling’s general objectives such as increase emotional awareness, develop better coping skills, and provide an opportunity to face existential issues or achieve personal goals.

2. **Specialization/Different Theoretical Approaches**: This category contains all the elements that according to the research team described different specializations within the counseling profession. Note: in Italy theoretical approaches are incorrectly classified as specializations.

3. **Basic Counseling Skills**: This category contained all the elements that according to the research team are related to basic counseling competencies.
4. Personal Attitudes: This category contained all the elements that according to the research team describe individual characteristics that a counselor should have as a person.

5. Counselor Professional Role: This category contains all the elements that according to the research team identify a counselor’s professional role.

Below, the list of distinctive elements characterizing the counseling profession identity in Italy take from the analysis of results is provided. This table represents the primary results of the study.

Table 6
Distinctive Elements that Meet the Thresholds that Characterize Counselor Professional Identity in Italy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q1 - Scope of Practice/General Purpose of Counseling (n= 2)</th>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating clients' expression and self-exploration</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existential pain and existential problems</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Counseling deals with problems and suffering connected to existential issues such as evolutionary passages, couples crises, work change, existential crises, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q2 - Specialization/Different Theoretical Approaches (n= 3)</th>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person centered approach</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenological approach</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanist approach</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q3 - Basic Counseling Skills (n= 33)</th>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.84</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediation skills</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural skills</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming (inviting and open attitude to clients)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accompanying clients through change process</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients-centered approach</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5.86</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful attitude</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending behavior</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource-centered</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rogers’s core conditions</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Empathy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Unconditional positive regard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Congruence/genuineness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration with client</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective verbal communication</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective non-verbal communication</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness in relational pattern (triangulation, power of the relations, alliance)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationship</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting definition and management</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy (phenomenological approach)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking questions (closed/open)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person focused</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body language</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraphrasing</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attentive to client</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Here-and-now</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Q4 - Personal Attitudes \((n = 24)\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accessible</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity, honesty</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congruence</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor self-awareness</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathic</td>
<td>5.73</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical attitude</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in the potential of human being</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genuinely caring for others</td>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egalitarian/non-biased</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional intelligence</td>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open mind</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonjudgmental</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive approach</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexive</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful attitude</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilient</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q5 - Counselor Professional Role (n=14)**

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lifelong learning</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurial</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed consent</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor personal growth</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.84</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional identity</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to deontological code</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of professional training</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of a professional counselors association</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5.32</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional advocacy</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.04</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural perspective</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional networking</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional referrals (refer between like professional colleagues including psychologists and psychotherapists when needed)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Supervision</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* $N=76.$ $n=$ number of elements each category.

**Discussion**

In general, an overview of the data shows a large consensus within the expert panel around the elements that characterize the identity of professional counseling in Italy. These elements pertain to counseling’s basic skills, the personal attitudes that a counselor should possess, and the specific competencies of a professional counselor role in Italy. A lack of consensus manifested instead among the experts on the characterization of the elements of the counseling profession that pertain to the finalities of the counseling intervention (which were formulated by the research team as its general goals), as well as on the elements related to counseling’s specializations (formulated by the research team as the theoretical frame of reference for counseling interventions).

A final, meaningful piece of information that can be extracted from a general overview of the data is the fact that the expert panel did not reach consensus on the question of whether counseling is different from psychology and psychotherapy or from the medical model. The items related to this debate that did not reach consensus were: *counseling differing from psychology/psychotherapy*, with a mean value of 5.49 which meets the set threshold and a standard deviation value of 1.05 that instead does not; *counseling not a ‘therapeutic intervention’* with an acceptable mean value of 5.11 and an
insufficient standard deviation value of 1.18; *non-disease model (counseling interventions are based on a non-medical model)*, with a mean value of 5.79 which meets the threshold and a standard deviation value that misses the threshold by only 0.03, that is 0.88 instead of 0.85.

While the experts widely recognized these items as aspects of their professional identity, they did not seem to assign them a highly characterizing value. The experts’ lack of agreement might stem from the equivocal meaning that the term “therapy” has for different Italian counselors, as shown by their comments in the survey. In the optimistic perspective of the primary researcher, this conflictual situation can actually lead to the possibility of a regulated cohabitation of two different identities and orientations within the counseling profession, one which is psychological and one which is not, as amply described in related Unites States literature (Hanna & Bemak, 1997; Remley, 1995). Next and examination of the data will be done in a more detailed fashion, by using the same categories of the survey as a logical frame of reference for these reflections.

**Scope of Practice/General Purpose of Counseling**

Within this category, only two elements out of 23 found consensus. They were:

1. facilitating clients’ expression and self-exploration, and
2. existential pain and existential problems. The first one of these two elements (facilitating clients' expression and self-exploration) found a high level of consensus among the experts, with a 5.53 mean and 0.75 standard deviation. The second (existential pain and existential problems) barely reached the standard deviation threshold at 0.85.

These data indicate a persistent difficulty among the panel of experts in reaching a consensus around the goals of their counseling interventions. In a similar way, opinions
on this subject differ, even profoundly, within the larger panorama of Italian counseling literature (Perussia, 2007). These differences are based on the counselors’ theoretical frame of reference (Fulcheri & Accomazzo, 1999) and/or the application context within which their counseling interventions take place.

Finally, it seemed evident that the only generally accepted definition for the purpose of a counseling intervention involved supporting the clients’ possibility to realize themselves through an actualization of their own potential. Once again, the same centrality of a basic humanistic and Rogerian approach when defining the purpose of counseling interventions is also reflected in the Italian literature (Di Fabio, 1999; Di Francesco, Ruffini, & Sarchielli, 2006).

**Specialization/Different Theoretical Approaches**

It is important to specify that this category not only contained different types of counseling interventions, such as school counseling in the United States, but also different theoretical approaches, for example constructivist or psychoanalytic. The experts found consensus on only three of a total of 24 elements originally listed under this category. Those elements were, *person-centered approach* \((M=5.53, SD=0.72)\), *phenomenological approach* \((M=5.46, SD=0.75)\), and *humanistic approach* \((M=5.59, SD=0.58)\). All three of these elements, plus *empowerment*, which almost reached the standard deviation threshold, clearly demonstrated the shared humanistic/Rogerian imprint in the experts’ description of the central elements of counselor professional identity in Italy. The same abovementioned humanistic elements are also widely present within Italian counseling literature (Di Fabio & Sirigatti, 2013), as well as in the literature
from the United States (Nassar-McMillan & Niles, 2010), although with less emphasis than in Italian literature.

**Basic Counseling Skills**

The third category of elements was the largest, originally comprising of 38 elements. Of the 38, almost all (33) found agreement among the experts. The elements that were chosen by the expert panel substantially coincided with the same “micro skills” that are presented in a large body of American and European (as well as specifically Italian) contemporary literature on basic counseling skills (Di Fabio, 2003; Hough, 1999; Ivey, Ivey, Zalaquett & Quirk, 2012; Mucchielli, 2016). This data also confirmed the indications of existing literature that describe counseling as being similar, in its basic skills, throughout the globe (Perron, Tollerud, & Fisher, 2016).

**Personal Attitudes**

The experts reached consensus on 24 of the 30 elements originally present in this category. These data suggest an almost complete agreement among the experts in the panel around the personal characteristics that support the appropriate behaviors and attitudes of a professional counselor. These data also appear to be in general agreement with existing United States literature (Puglia, 2008; Remley & Herlihy, 2007).

Another meaningful piece of information that emerges from this category is the relevance attributed by the experts to *ethics*, which found the absolute highest level of consensus with a mean of 5.89 and lowest standard deviation of 0.31. This could suggest that counselors in Italy are particularly aware of the ethical aspects of their professional actions on the lives of their clients, which bodes well for the future development of a profession that in Italy is still at the very beginning of its history. Professional ethics are
also one of the more agreed-upon core elements of professional identity within United States counseling literature (Emerson, 2010; Remley & Herlihy, 2007).

**Counselor Professional Role**

The tendency towards complete agreement within the expert panel was strongest in this category, where as many as 14 out of 16 elements found consensus. These items are also in general agreement with the findings of related United States counseling research (Emerson, 2010; Woo, 2013). The only element that did not meet threshold requirements for mean and standard deviation in this category, both in the second and in the third round, was the item dedicated to *clinical supervision*. Another, similar item regarding *peer supervision* was instead accepted by the panel with a large consensus, reaching a very low standard deviation value of 0.69. Based on the analysis of all first round answers and on the primary researcher’s personal experience, this contradiction is understandable when one considers that clinical supervision is generally understood by counselors in Italy as supervision by a psychotherapist. Therefore, it is not perceived by counselors as a characterizing element of their professional identity.

**Limitations**

It is necessary to consider several limitations for this study. The most critical aspect of this study, as for every Delphi study, is the selection of criteria for inclusion in the expert panel (Landeta, 2006). Had another set of criteria been chosen for the make-up of the expert panel, this study’s results may have been different. Therefore, the final list of elements characterizing counselor identity represents the perspective of this study’s expert panel, and it may not represent the perspective of other professional counselors in Italy. Also, had more Italian literature on this topic been available about the elements
characterizing the counseling profession, a modified Delphi study based on such literature could have produced a different list of elements.

Another possible limitation of this study was the attrition rate. Although overall attrition remained low in this study, it did modify the panel’s composition during the research.

Also, the selection of methods for expert recruitment and the composition of the research team have likely influenced the results (Keeney, Hasson & McKenna, 2001; Powell, 2003).

Another important limiting factor was the choice to conduct a study in three rounds. Even though this is considered as the best available option, it could have influenced the number of initial participants, as well as the study’s attrition percentages.

Finally, another consideration related to the limitations of this study concerns the process of translation and back-translation. The research team coded in English and all research team members received their professionally translated and back translated (Brislin, 1969) copy of the response materials, which were originally in Italian. The final codes were translated again into Italian and then back translated into English. Due to this process it is possible that some meaning was lost in translation.

**Implications**

The present study has produced various possible implications for the development of the counseling profession, as well as for counselor educators and for the improvement of counselor training programs in Italy. Its final list of 76 elements can be helpful by providing a frame of meaningful reference that can guide counselors’ choices in their
professional practice, as well as counselor educators in the development of their training programs in order to help to establish a strong professional identity (Gibson, Dollarhide & Moss 2010).

With this list of elements, it is possible to begin to build a unified perspective on counseling identity which reduce the difficulties that Italian counselors face regarding the roles, tasks, functions, and purpose of their profession. Furthermore, this “unified perspective” can help counselor educators by providing them with a frame of reference for the production of training interventions on counseling professional identity within Professional training course (Remley, 2013). Such perspective could also help counseling educators to better prepare their trainees to address the real world outside their schools.

Such as for example by providing more attention within training programs to the ethical implications of counseling interventions, and to the introduction of new training contents, such as for example professional advocacy. Both of these elements have been identified as essential by the study's expert panel.

Additionally, these elements may foster the development of more unified training programs among the various counseling schools that exist in Italy. It is important to note that the training of counselors in Italy is provided by private schools rather than by universities or colleges as in the United States (Remley, Bacchini, & Krieg, 2010). The agreed upon elements identified by the experts could serve to enhance professional advocacy efforts by the many Italian professional associations that support counselors, helping to strengthen a unified professional identity and to better focus counselor training efforts in Italy. This, in turn, will help to distinguish counseling from other similar professions (Healey & Hays, 2011).
Other research studies using quantitative methodologies could develop measuring instruments of professional identity, such as scales and subscales, to measure professional identity, as has been done in the United States (Puglia 2008; Emerson, 2010; Woo, 2013). This could help to free an assessment of the professional quality of a counselor in Italy from subjective criteria, through the definition of impartial and measurable parameters.

Taking into consideration that the body of specific counseling literature in Italy could be insufficient for the development of measuring instruments, it might be equally useful but more feasible to conduct an exploratory factorial analysis, and to develop a survey and administer it to a large number of counselors.

**Conclusion and Summary**

The goal of this study was to develop a list of distinctive elements characterizing the counseling profession in Italy, and its results produced a final list of 76 elements. This list can be useful as a first step towards a deeper understanding of the profession, by reducing its gray and ambiguous areas and simultaneously by strengthening its identity, and in this way by giving it more power in the Italian helping professions market. In particular, the elements gleaned from the study can be utilized in a training setting within counseling training programs to help unify and focus counseling training experience across Italy. The elements identified can also provide stimulus for further research efforts on the professional identity of Italian counselors.
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APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INVITATION TO THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Dear…,

My name is Davide Mariotti, I am an Italian counselor and doctorate student in “Counselor Education and Supervision” at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, VA, U.S.A.

I am conducting my doctorate research on professional counselor identity in Italy. I am contacting you to ask you to participate in this study, because based on the fact that you are part of a specialized organization, a server list, or an interested network, you have been identified as possibly being counseling expert in Italy. I am very interested in your ideas and your experiences on this research topic and I would appreciate if you would take part in this study as a counseling expert.

Your participation in this study will contribute to the strengthening of professional counselor identity in Italy. Offering to participate in this study you will have the opportunity to make a concrete contribution to the construction and foundation of professional counselor identity in Italy. Furthermore, if you decide to participate, you will be mentioned as one of the experts who took place in the study, while maintaining complete anonymity as to the contents of your answers. Compiling this online tool requires 10-15 minutes.

In order to be considered as an expert, you must be registered as a professional member in a professional Italian counseling association. Furthermore, you must satisfy at least two of the following six criteria (Iqbal & Pippon-Young, 2009; Upton, 2012)

1. Being registered as a supervisor in an Italian professional counselor association.
2. Having worked in Italy as a professional counselor for at least three of the last five years.

3. Having taught at least a year in a master’s degree program for professional counselors during the last five years.

4. Having published a book or an article about counseling in a national or international scientific journal.

5. Having given a presentation on counseling during a national or international conference or convention.

6. Having served in an Italian professional counselor association as a board or commission member.

If you are eligible and willing to participate in this study, please proceed by clicking on the provided link:

https://odu.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_85NBZbal6AZ37tH that will direct you to the informed consent form, the demographic form and the study’s round one inquiry.

You will have 5 days to respond to each of the three rounds of the survey.

Additionally, if you know of anyone else who you believe meets the criteria and may be willing to participate, please have them contact me or send me their contact information at: dmari005@odu.edu. Your participation would be very much appreciated.

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact me

Best regards

Davide Mariotti

Doctoral Candidate in Counselor Education and Supervision
Graduate Teaching Assistant
dmari005@odu.edu <mailto:dmari005@odu.edu>
329 2275569

Department of Counseling and Human Services
Old Dominion University
110 Education Building
Norfolk, VA 23529
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

Title:

Towards a new Profession: Counselor Professional Identity in Italy. A Delphi Study.

Introduction:

My name is Davide Mariotti, and I am the primary investigator for this research. I am a counselor, I work as the director of the Center for At-Risk Adolescents in Pesaro, Italy, and I am currently a doctoral candidate at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, USA. My supervisor in this project is Garrett Mcauliffe, Ed.D., professor in the Department of Counseling and Human Services at Old Dominion University. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information that can support your decision to participate in this study.

Description of the study:

The purpose of this Delphi study is to find a consensus list of the distinctive elements that characterize the counselor professional identity in Italy. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to do the following:

First round:

☐ Complete a demographics form

☐ Send your Curriculum Vitae to the following address: dmari005@odu.edu

☐ Respond to an open-ended questionnaire about elements of counselor professional
identity.

Second round:

1. Rate items generated during the open-ended questions process on a Likert scale

Third round:

1. Re-rate items on the Likert survey after reviewing the means and standard deviations for each item.

Potential Risks and Benefits:

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study.

Withdrawal Privilege:

Your participation in this research is strictly voluntary. You may decide to withdraw at any time without penalty or consequence. There will be no compensation provided.

Confidentiality:

Your identity will be treated confidentially and you will not be informed of others who are participating. This research may be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but no individually identifiable information will be presented. At the end of the study you will be given the option of having your name listed as a research participant.

Institutional Review Board Approval:

This study has been deemed exempt from IRB review by the Human Subjects Review Committee of the Darden College of Education (#1003988-1).

Consent:

When the Informed Consent section of the survey is filled out you are indicating that you understand the contents of this document and are familiar with the purpose, risks and
benefits of this research. You are also indicating that you would like to participate in the
current study and that you are aware of what is being expected of you as a research
participant. If you have any questions about this research you may contact Davide
Mariotti at dmari005@odu.edu. If you have questions about your rights or this form, you
should contact the Old Dominion University IRB Chair, Petros Katsioloudis at this
e.mail address e.mail pkatsiol@odu.edu.

By accepting to participate in this research you are indicating that you are older than 18,
and that you have read and understood this informed consent.

X Yes, I give my informed consent to participate in this research

Davide Mariotti

Doctoral Candidate in Counselor Education and Supervision
Graduate Teaching Assistant
dmari005@odu.edu <mailto:dmari005@odu.edu>
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110 Education Building
Norfolk, VA 23529
APPENDIX C

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Complete the following information

Name Surname

Born in __________________________

on ___/___/____.

Residing in ______________________ (___) in _________________________________ n°

State

e.mail

Italian Fiscal Code ____________________________

Gender Identity

Female, Male,

Race/Ethnicity:

African, Asian, Hispanic, White/European , Other not specified: _____________

Level of Instruction

High school diploma (specify).................................................................

Professional course in counseling (specify)..........................................

Undergraduate degree (specify) ............................................................

Graduate degree (specify) ......................................................................

In order to qualify as an expert, selected counselors will need to be registered as a professional counselor in an Italian professional counselor association.
Professional Association Memberships: ______________

Membership number (specify) .................................................................

Expert Criteria

(please check all that apply - at least two are needed for inclusion on Delphi Panel.)

1. Being registered as a supervisor in an Italian professional counselor association.

2. Having worked in Italy as a professional counselor for at least three of the last five years.

3. Having taught at least a year in a master’s degree program for professional counselors during the last five years.

4. Having published a book or an article about counseling in a national or international scientific journal.

5. Having given a presentation on counseling during a national or international conference or convention.

6. Having served in an Italian professional counselor association as a board or commission member.

Professional Specialization:

Counseling in business organizations, School Counseling, Family and Couples Counseling, Mental Health Counseling, Other: ______________

I wish to be named in the dissertation as one of the counseling experts who participated to this study

YES … NO…
Being aware that anyone who releases false statements is punishable under the Penal Code and special laws on this subject, pursuant to art. 46 of Presidential Decree n. 445/2000, declares that all the informations provided in this declarations are true.

Pursuant to Article 10 of Law 675/1996 and subsequent amendments, the information contained in this statement will be used only for the purposes for which it was acquired.

Accept

Davide Mariotti

Doctoral Candidate in Counselor Education and Supervision
Graduate Teaching Assistant
dmari005@odu.edu <mailto:dmari005@odu.edu>
329 2275569

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110 Education Building
Norfolk, VA 23529
APPENDIX D

OPEN ENDED QUESTION FOR ROUND ONE

1. Professional identity can be described as the totality of the internalized values, competences and abilities of the professional, which provide the foundation for his or her professional intervention. (McAuliffe, 2006; Ponton & Duba, 2009; Spurgeon, 2012; Upton, 2012). Please list and/or describe all of the distinctive elements that characterize, according to you, counselor professional identity. Please share as many ideas as you can.

Optional:

• Please indicate any reasons, thoughts or feelings, for any of your elements listed above.
APPENDIX E

Table 1.1

Comparison of AssoCounseling Standards 2016 Section 7 with CACREP Standards 2016 Section 2

| AssoCounseling standards 2016 section 7 | CACREP standard 2016 section 2 |
Insegnamenti obbligatori
[Mandatory Requirements]

Fondamenti del counseling
[Counseling Foundations]

Storia del counseling
[History of Counseling]

Comunicazione, scelte e cambiamento
[Communication, Choices and Change]

Psicologie
[Psychologies]

Altre scienze umane
[Other human sciences]

Le professioni della relazione di aiuto: confini ed elementi di psicopatologia
[The helping professions: boundaries and elements of psychopathology]

Etica e deontologia
[Ethics and Deontology]

Promozione della professione:
[Professional advocacy]

________________________________________________________________________

APPENDIX F

Table 1.2

Comparison of AssoCounseling Standards 2016 Section 4 and Section 5 with CACREP Standards 2016 Section 3
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AssoCounseling standards 2016</th>
<th>CACREP standards 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hours 222 Professional Practice</td>
<td>CACREP standard section 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hours 72 Didactic Supervision section 4</td>
<td>hours 100 Practicum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didactic supervision is to be understood as related to classroom didactic activities such as role-play, and it should not be confused with professional supervision.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hours 150 Internship section 5</td>
<td>600 hour Internship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>direct service</td>
<td>240 hours of direct service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AssoCounseling does not specify that these should be clock hours. Furthermore, supervision must be provided during the internship with a qualified supervisor but there is no specified number of required hours. A tutor is also provided by the public or private agencies where the internship takes place.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**APPENDIX G**

**Table 3.1**

*Supervisors AssoCounseling’s requirements*

| SUPERVISOR COUNSELOR |
75 credits of continuing education every three years

50 hours of professional supervision

160 hours of supervision training or 300 hours of assisting a Supervisor Counselor or a Psychotherapist in a group supervision training program.

100 hours of professional supervision (once enrolled, 50 hours every three years)

professional liability insurance

over 35 years of age

practicing counseling in a prevalent or ongoing manner (no less that 450 hours of professional practice within the previous three years)

---

APPENDIX H

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBER DATA SHEET

Name: Maria Grazia Di Giorgio
Date: Jan. 23, 2017

Gender: Female
Age: 49
Ethnicity: Mediterranean

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Months</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Counseling</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>LPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training in qualitative research</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>graduate school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in Qualitative Research</td>
<td>ca. 10</td>
<td></td>
<td>graduate post-graduation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent in Master program</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent in doctoral program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In your opinion, what are the 3 most important elements that you think characterize counselor professional identity in Italy?

**Multiculturalism/pragmatic approach/focus on wellness**

**********************************************************************

Name: Kevin C. Snow
Date: 1/23/17

Gender: Male
Age: 41

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Months</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ethnicity: European American

In your opinion, what are the 3 most important elements that you think characterize counselor professional identity in Italy?

This is difficult for me to say being an American who has not practiced in Italy, but my guess is counselor training, scope of practice of counseling, and client perception/opinions of the role of counselors are 3 important things that characterize counselor professional identity in Italy.

Bias: That there are specific differences between counselors in Italy and those in America (or other countries) based on training differences and the scope of practice of counselors in each country. That may also impact how clients in Italy see their counselors and what types of issues they bring to them. For example, Italian counselors- as I understand- are not supposed to practice clinical mental health counseling, but are they trained to do this or not? I’m not sure. My bias/concern is that we may not be comparing apples to apples, but apples to oranges, but my hope is that we can be as similar as possible in the near future. Also, with CACREP and different accreditation standards in the U.S., is that Italian counselors may not have as clearly developed or as similar a professional identity than to their U.S. or other counselors abroad, but my hope is that counselors are counselors and that we all share a core set of beliefs, expectations, and ideas about how counseling should be done. Maybe we share more training in common too and that as counselors we are all practicing in similar ways, despite the difference from country to country. A bias I have is that the globalization of counseling is a good thing and I support building bridges to counselors abroad and working on unifying our training and scope of practice, but not only doing so in the “American” way or saying “we know best” but that, instead, as we globalize counseling we will learn from other countries and work for what is best within each place as well as finding those things that work best for all counselors across the globe. My bias is that Italian counselors’ experience is different, in some ways,
than American counselors and that they have lessons to teach us as well as American counselors having lessons to share with them— that it goes two ways (or many ways when we include other countries too).

Name: Davide Mariotti
Date: 01/23/17
Gender: Male
Age: 50

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Months</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Counseling</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>Master’s/Doctoral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training in qualitative research</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in Qualitative Research</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent in Master program</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent in doctoral program</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethnicity: Mediterranean

In your opinion, what are the 3 most important elements that you think characterize counselor professional identity in Italy?

**Brief therapy/humanistic approach/focus on wellness**
Dear…,

I wanted to remind you to participate in the research on counselor identity that I am conducting in the doctoral field of Counseling and Supervision in the United States. Your opinion is very important and significant for the definition of the characterizing elements for the profession of counselor in Italy.

You can even fill out the survey on your cell phone. It won’t take you more than 10 minutes. I thank you in advance for your collaboration.

You can continue by clicking on the link:

https://odu.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_85NBZbal6AZ37tH that will direct you to the survey.

Best Regards

Davide Mariotti

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CONSENSUS CODEBOOK IN ENGLISH

BEFORE THE TRANSLATION AND BACK TRANSLATION PROCESS

1. Scope of Practice /General Purpose of the Counseling Practice
   Wellness
   Non-Disease Model
   Counseling differs from Psychology/Psychotherapy
   Different contexts (Group, individual, families, couples, organizations)
   Social relevance (social justice)
   Helping profession
   Defined Client objectives and goals
   Brief term
   Experiential,
   Existential pain and existential problems,
   Decision-making
   Life span development
   Educational
   Developmental orientation
   Development of the client’s personal potential
   Manage/Overcome conflicts
   Prevention
   Facilitating clients' expression and self-exploration,
   Enhancing free-choice,
   Foster self – esteem
   Solution oriented
   Specific problems and concrete solutions,

2. Specialization / Different Theoretical Approach
   Multicultural approach
   Social justice oriented/
   Mediation & Negotiation
   Art counseling
   Bioenergetic
   Body work
   Directive Counseling Approach
   Existential approach
   Ecological approach
   Empowerment
   Humanist approach
   Maieutic/Socratic philosophy
   Integrative approach
   Person centered approach
   Phenomenological approach
   Problem-solving
   Social constructionism approach
3. Basic Skills of Counseling
Accompany clients though change process
Person focused
Influenced by Anglo-Saxon culture
Holistic
Core conditions

- Empathy
- Unconditional positive regard
- Congruence/genuineness

Empathy (Phenomenological Approach)
Rapport
Facilitating
Attentive to client
Respectful attitude
Suspend judgment
Body language
Develop Awareness
Building relationship
Attending behavior
Mirroring
Welcoming – (Inviting and Open Attitude to Clients)
Setting definition and management
Effective verbal/non-verbal communication,
Empathy – Empathize
Management of Countertransference
Effective non-verbal communication,
Intervention plan /
Awareness in relational pattern: triangulation, power of the relations, alliance
Listening
Communication skills
Self disclosure
Ask questions – close/open
Client empowerment
Collaboration with Client
Paraphrasing
Client-centered or Client-Focused
Non directive approach
Here-and-now
Reformulation
Refraining
Summarization
Multicultural skills
Resource-centered
Mediation skills
Emotional regulations

4. **Personal attitudes**
Genuinely caring for others/respect,
Positive attitude
Welcoming/
Acceptance
Availability
Congruence,
Flexibility,
Counselor self-awareness,
Empathic
associative/collaborative,
Authenticity, honest
Availability
Welcoming
Accessibility
Believe in the potential of Human being
Compassionate
Gratitude
Flexibility
Curious
Creativity
Open mind
Commitment to help others
Egalitarian / non biases
Non Judgmental
Respect
Acceptance
Reflexive
Critical thinking
Emotional intelligence
Ethical attitude
Patience
Rationale
Resilient
Kindly
5. **Professional Role of Counselor**

Importance of Professional Training  
Lifelong learning  
Clinical Supervision  
Peer Supervision  
Integrity  
Professional Networking  
Member of a professional Counselors Association  
Professional Advocacy  
Professional identity  
Clear professional identity  
Professional referrals  
Counselor personal growth  
Leadership skills  
Informed Consent  
Entrepreneurial  
Commitment to Deontological code  
Multicultural prospective
APPENDIX M

TRANSLATION AND BACK TRANSLATION PROCESS

Instruments
Translated letter of the study presentation, informed consent, demographic questionnaire and the first round question from English to Italian made by an Italian/American Counselor and research team member Grazia Di Giorgio.

First Round
Translated first round’s responses from Italian to English for the coding process, made by an Italian American Counselor bilingual Paola Salvioni.

Translation Peer Review:
Davide Mariotti (first researcher)
Grazia Di Giorgio (research team member)

CODING PROCESS IN ENGLISH

Third Round
No translation needed. The first researcher will use the same elements from the second round with media and standard deviation for each element.

Second Round
Translated the resulting elements from the coding process into Italian made by an Italian American Counselor (research team member) Grazia Di Giorgio

Back Translation from Italian to English for the same elements made by an Italian American Counselor Bilingual Paola Salvioni to verify the translation accuracy.

At the end of the translation and back translation process, with the intention of making the poll more usable by the Italian experts, the lead researcher, in agreement with the research team, made operationalized definition of the codes and eliminated and modified some codes because
APPENDIX N

ROUND TWO INVITATION

Dear …,

Thank you for your participation in the first round and for having contributed to its success. Almost 100 expert professional counselors gave their consent to participate in this Delphi study, which has the objective of identifying the characterizing elements of the profession of counselor in Italy. With this email I invite you to continue to participate in the study by sending you the second round link. The second round was formed from your responses and based on the criteria of qualitative research. The survey will ask you to indicate your personal agreement on the identified elements as characteristics of the profession of counselor in Italy. The survey uses the Likert scale, therefore you will have to choose among 6 options ranging from complete disagreement to complete agreement.

It should take approximately 15 minutes to complete the survey, and it needs to be completed by Monday February 27th. It can be done from your cell phone as well. Please do not forward this message to anyone else as the link is exclusive to this investigation and to your email. If you have any questions or need more information regarding the survey and/or the study as a whole, please don’t hesitate to contact me, I am at your disposal.

Thank you again for your participation. This study will conclude itself with the next and final delivery of the last link for the completion of the third round in one week. The link will be sent after the statistical elaboration of the current round’s data.

Finally thank you for the important contribution that you are making to the building of our profession.
Follow the hypertext link to the survey:
Completa il sondaggio Complete the survey
Or copy and past the following URL in your internet browser:
https://odu.co1.qualtrics.com/SE?Q_DL=0ojDuERl445xVT7_3yOjxIzT6IbLZIN_MLRP_9peJ6Wj0asaRuNT&Q_CHL=email
Follow the hypertext link to refuse future emails
Fare clic qui per cancellare l'iscrizione Click here to cancel your subscription

Best Regards

Davide Mariotti

Doctoral Candidate in Counselor Education and Supervision
Graduate Teaching Assistant
dmari005@odu.edu <mailto:dmari005@odu.edu>
329 2275569

Department of Counseling and Human Services
Old Dominion University
110 Education Building
Norfolk, VA 23529
APPENDIX O

ROUND TWO INVITATION REMINDER

Dear…,

I wanted to remind you to participate in the research on counselor identity that I am conducting in the doctoral field of Counseling and Supervision in the United States. Your opinion is important and significant for the definition of the characterizing elements of the profession of counselor in Italy.

You can even fill out the survey from your cell phone. It will not take more than 10 minutes. Thank you in advance for your collaboration.

Best regards

Davide Mariotti

Doctoral Candidate in Counselor Education and Supervision
Graduate Teaching Assistant
dmari005@odu.edu <mailto: dmari005@odu.edu>
329 2275569

Department of Counseling and Human Services
Old Dominion University
110 Education Building
Norfolk, VA 23529
APPENDIX P

ROUND THREE INVITATION

Dear…,

Thank you for your participation. Almost 90% of the professional counselors in our expert panel participated to the second round of this Delphi study, which has the goal of identifying the characterizing elements of the profession of counselor in Italy. With this email, I invite you to continue to participate in the study, by sending you the link to the third round survey, which was formed from your responses according to descriptive statistics criteria.

You will find next to each element from the previous second round both the mean and the standard deviation. If the mean is higher than 4.8 and the standard deviation is less than 0.85 the agreement between experts on that particular element is high. This data allows you to compare your choice to those of other experts. The survey will ask you again to indicate your personal agreement on the identified elements as characteristics of the profession of counselor in Italy. You can confirm your ideas even if they are not in agreement with the majority of the experts. The survey uses the Likert scale, therefore you will have to choose among 6 options ranging from complete disagreement to complete agreement.

It should take approximately 15 minutes to complete the survey, and it needs to be completed by Thursday March 9th. It can be done from your cell phone as well. Please do not forward this message to anyone else as the link is exclusive to this investigation and to your email.

If you have any questions or need more information regarding the survey and/or
the study as a whole, please don’t hesitate to contact me, I am at your disposal.

Thank you again for your participation in this study, which will end with this current round. You are asked to inform me via email if you are interested in knowing the results of the study in which your participation was of great importance.

Thank you again for the important contribution that you are making to the building of our counseling profession.

Follow the hypertext link to the survey:
Take the Survey
<https://odu.co1.qualtrics.com/SE?Q_DL=3KH6XI7xO9n4Vil_6hATbaO5NpuaUqF_MLRP_9EpvwKAU0ESh1rv&Q_CHL=email>

Or copy and past the following URL in your internet browser

https://odu.co1.qualtrics.com/SE?Q_DL=3KH6XI7xO9n4Vil_6hATbaO5NpuaUqF_MLRP_9EpvwKAU0ESh1rv&Q_CHL=email

Follow the hypertext link to refuse future emails
Click here to cancel your subscription
<https://odu.co1.qualtrics.com/CP/Register.php?OptOut=true&RID=MLRP_9EpvwKAU0ESh1rv&LID=UR_9RGipdET0dRp5VX&BT=b2R1%250D%250A&_=1>

Best regards,

Davide Mariotti

Doctoral Candidate in Counselor Education and Supervision
Graduate Teaching Assistant
dmari005@odu.edu <mailto:dmari005@odu.edu>
329 2275569

Department of Counseling and Human Services
Old Dominion University
APPENDIX Q

ROUND THREE INVITATION REMINDER

Dear…,

I wanted to remind you to fill out the third and final survey for the research on counselor identity that I am conducting in the doctoral field of Counseling and Supervision in the United States. Your opinion is fundamental for the definition of the characterizing elements of the profession of counselor in Italy.

You can even fill out the survey using the last link sent even from your cell phone. It will not take more than 10 minutes. Thank you one more time for your collaboration.

Best regards,

Davide Mariotti

Doctoral Candidate in Counselor Education and Supervision
Graduate Teaching Assistant
dmari005@odu.edu
329 2275569

Department of Counseling and Human Services
Old Dominion University
110 Education Building
Norfolk, VA 23529
## APPENDIX R

Table 4.6

*All items with descriptive statistic results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q1 – Scope of Practice /General Purpose of Counseling (23 elements)</th>
<th>Round 2</th>
<th>Round 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Items</td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating clients’ expression and self-exploration</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellness</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life spam development (Counseling deals with the challenges that can emerge in the various stages of the life cycle)</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different contexts (Group, individual, families, couples, organizations)</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defined Client objectives and goals (Counseling is carried out through the clear definition of objectives and goals)</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling is carried out through the clear definition of objectives and goals</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existential pain and existential problems (Counseling deals with problems and suffering connected to existential issues such as evolutionary passages, couples crises, work change, existential crises, etc.)</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational (Counseling has an educational direction)</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Experiential (Counseling is an experiential intervention)  | 5.11  | 1.06  | 4.89  | 1.00  
Foster self-esteem           | 5.17  | 0.87  | 5.09  | 1.03  
Manage/overcome conflict     | 5.02  | 1.01  | 4.98  | 0.95  
Counseling differs from Psychology/Psychotherapy | 5.50  | 0.83  | 5.49  | 1.05  
Social relevance (social justice) | 5.17  | 0.92  | 4.96  | 0.92  
Counseling is not a therapeutic intervention | 5.17  | 1.13  | 5.11  | 1.18  
Counseling is oriented towards developing the potential of the person | 5.81  | 0.39  | 5.40  | 1.00  
Enhancing free-choice        | 5.77  | 0.42  | 5.56  | 0.88  
Non-Disease Model (Counseling interventions are based on a non-medical model) | 5.79  | 0.50  | 5.62  | 0.88  
Solution Oriented            | 4.62  | 0.98  | 4.57  | 1.05  
Decision making (Counseling helps make decisions) | 5.45  | 0.71  | 5.41  | 0.89  
Counseling helps make decisions | 5.51  | 0.58  | 5.53  | 0.87  
Prevention                   | 5.04  | 0.97  | 4.91  | 1.11  
Specific problem and concrete solutions | 4.98  | 0.91  | 5.09  | 0.96  
Helping profession (Counseling is a helping profession) | 5.70  | 0.80  | 5.60  | 0.88  

**Q2. Specialization/Different Theoretical Approaches (24 elements)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Round 2</th>
<th>Round 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bateson approach</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bioenergetic approach</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person centered approach</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecological approach</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Ermeneutic approach: 4.54 1.20 4.63 0.93
- Existential approach: 5.45 0.66 5.29 0.88
- Phenomenological approach: 5.46 0.75 5.30 0.85
- Gestalt approach: 4.83 1.23 4.69 1.23
- Integrative approach: 5.28 1.00 4.91 1.24
- Multicultural approach: 4.95 1.19 4.53 1.13
- Personology approach: 4.09 1.34 3.97 1.21
- Systemic approach: 4.95 1.02 4.62 1.21
- Humanistic approach: 5.59 0.58 5.47 0.65
- Art Counseling: 4.70 1.23 4.45 1.30
- Social constructionism approach: 4.46 1.23 4.13 1.17
- Directive Counseling: 3.24 1.51 3.39 1.27
- Empowerment: 4.95 0.93 5.00 0.88
- Maieutic/Socratic philosophy: 4.92 1.07 4.76 1.00
- Body work: 4.72 1.20 4.33 1.19
- Mediation & Negotiation: 4.47 1.02 4.35 0.86
- Neuroscience approach: 3.92 1.51 3.79 1.34
- Social justice oriented: 4.47 1.14 4.36 1.24
- Problem solving: 4.81 1.09 4.82 1.03
- Psychodynamic theories: 3.42 1.66 3.55 1.47

**Q3. Basic Counseling Skills (38 elements)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Round 2</th>
<th>Round 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediation skills</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Median</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural skills</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming - (Inviting and Open Attitude to clients)</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accompanying clients through change process</td>
<td>5.74</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client centered approach</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-directive</td>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful attitude</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending behavior</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client-resource-centered</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rogers core conditions : empathy - unconditional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive regard - Congruence/genuineness</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration with client</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective verbal communication</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective non-verbal communication</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness in relational pattern (triangulation,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>power in relationship, alliance)</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationship</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting definition and management</td>
<td>5.32</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy (Phenomelogical approach)</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating</td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask questions – closed/open</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person focused</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing transference contro/tranference</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Language</td>
<td>5.37</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic (holistic vision of the counseling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intervention)</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraphrasing</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Round 2</td>
<td>Round 3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention plan</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attentive to client</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Here-and-now</td>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarization</td>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reframing</td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reformulation</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirroring</td>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>0.65</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional regulations</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapport</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client self-disclosure</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developping the client’s awareness</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspend judgement</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Q4. Personal attitudes (30 elements)**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Items</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accesible</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity, honest</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassionate</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congruence</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor self-awareness</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curious</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Items</td>
<td>Round 2</td>
<td>Round 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphatic</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical attitude</td>
<td>5.91</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe in the potential of human being</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genuinely caring for others</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gratitude</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to help others</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egalitarian / non biased</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional intelligence</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open mind</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non judgmental</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open mind</td>
<td>5.70</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking</td>
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<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
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<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale</td>
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<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexive</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful attitude</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilient</td>
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<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q5. Counselor professional role (16 elements)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Round 2</th>
<th>Round 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lifelong learning  (Continuing professional education on the contents of interventions, new theories and new techniques, as well as personal growth of the counselor)  

Entrepreneurial  

Informed Consent (Inform the client of the type of work and what it consists)  

Counselor personal growth (Recognizing the importance of one’s personal growth, that allows not only to learn to be more flexible, open and disciplined, but also to know oneself and one’s limits, one’s potentials, emotions and personal experiences)  

Professional identity (Need of awareness of the fundamental elements of the profession: objectives, methodologies, limits, borders)  

Commitment to respect deontological code  

Importance of Professional Training  (Professional training that transmits the theoretical, technical and experiential competencies of a professional counselor)  

Integrity/Coherence (The counselor must have in his/her private life behaviors that are congruent with the values of the profession)  

Member of a professional Counselor’s association  

Professional Advocacy (Understood as the capacity to promote the profession of counseling)  

Multicultural prospective  

Professional Networking (Professional network between counseling colleagues for the possibility of exchanging information, experiences, work)
Professional referrals (Network between like professional colleagues including psychologists and psychotherapists to be able to refer out)  

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**APPENDIX S**

**PANEL OF EXPERTS**

(Panel experts who expressed their willingness to make their participation to the study public)

1. Amoroso Giovanni
2. Bacchini Eugenio
3. Battista Elisabetta
4. Balduzzi Fabbri Veronique
5. Barbagli Lorenzo
6. Bimbo Antonio
7. Bonsante Francesco
8. Bolongaro Giuseppe
9. Callegari Alessandra
10. Canaccini Lisa
11. Caporale Alessandra
12. Casati Simona
13. Cassinelli Giovanna
14. Cecchetto Mauro
15. Cericola Alberto Walter
16. Cini Carmen
17. D’Agnolo Vallan Anita
18. Danon Marcella
19. De Sanctis Stefano
20. Dragotto Elena
21. De Santis Chiara
22. Doglio Mauro
23. Edelstein Cecilia
24. Erba Gabriella
25. Errani Franca
26. Furletti Carlangelo
27. Garrone Arianna
28. Garulli Federica
29. Gilda Maria Grego
30. Infante Angela
31. Lissi Cinzia Giovanna
32. La musta fiorella bruna
33. Mallamo Antonello D.
34. Marchetti Emanuela
35. Marcolongo Fabrizio
36. Moretti Alessandra
37. Naccari Manuela
38. Parisi Giuseppina
39. Polo Francesca
40. Suvieri Elisabetta
41. Taddei Gianluca
42. Petronilli Alessandra
43. Piccinino Giorgio
44. Piras Elisabetta
45. Pontremoli Pietro
46. Rinaldi Alessandro
47. Scarselli Alessandra
48. Scopinich Pascale
49. Sensale Nicola
50. Toneguzzi Danilo
51. Valleri Tommaso
52. Veneri Chiara
53. Kluge Paola
54. Koch Maria Cristina
VITA

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EDUCATION

M.S. in Counseling, A.S.P.I.C. European School of Professional Counseling, Rome Italy Summer 2004.
B.A. in Sociology, Carlo Bò University of Urbino, Urbino Italy, Spring 1996.

EXPERIENCE

Director, Center for At-Risk Adolescents “Lucignolo” Pesaro, Italy, 2002-Present
Director, Komidè School of Counseling Pesaro, Italy, 2006-Present

PUBLICATIONS


CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Mariotti, D. & Kuzmina, M., McAulliffe, G. (October 2015). Broaching International
Boundaries: Italian, Russian and American Counselor Educators’ Insights from their International Teaching Experiences. ACES annual conference, Philadelphia, PA.
