

Healing Through Humour: A Space for Laughter in a Historically Heavy Setting

by

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*May this work serve as a reminder that even during the darkest times,
there is space for light.*

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Chapter One: Introduction

Overview of Humour within Therapy

In the realm of counselling, there exists a chasm – a distinct disconnect between the conventional portrayal of therapy as solemn, stoic, impassive, weighty, and the potential for a richer, deeper, multifaceted experience between those involved. This chasm manifests as a gap between the therapist’s training, their lived experience within the therapeutic space, and the expectations held by the client seeking support. While counselling is often depicted as a stoic and neutral environment, the reality presents a vast expanse where humour, lightness, joy, connection, relationships, absurdity, banter, and even sarcasm may flourish. This capstone aims to explore and dissect these divergences, shedding light on the nuances and unexplored territories that exist within the counselling relationship, thereby redefining the boundaries and potential for therapeutic engagement. Additionally, this capstone will explore the ways in which humour, and its many iterations, does/can manifest in a counselling setting, and what our obligations as counsellors are to foster and create space for this. In this paper, the term “humour” and its variations will be employed interchangeably to encompass a spectrum of lightheartedness, wit, playfulness, and comedic elements within the context of therapeutic interactions and counselling settings.

Contextual Information

Is there a space for lightness and joy within counselling? There appears to be space for it in most, if not every, other facet of our lives, including grief or mourning. We as humans have the ability to find light within darkness, and as discussed by Sun et al. laughter releases tension and depression often caused by societal constraints, through the enjoyment of amusing events

(2022). Humour, for one, holds power that often goes undiscussed; having the ability to bring people closer, ease nerves, break the ice, but it also has the potential to separate, harm, and disempower. People may seek counselling at a time when they feel driven to make a change, perhaps after a challenging life event or the realization that their current behaviours are no longer serving them. With that there may come a sombre and weighty energy within the counselling room. I am curious to explore why this is often the case, and if there is the possibility for something different. How as counsellors can we acknowledge that there may be space for joy, lightness, and humour in the counselling setting, and what are our responsibilities as practitioners to foster this environment?

This topic holds significant relevance to me as a novice counsellor who is beginning to establish my presence in the field of mental health. It feels as though there is a noticeable lack in conversation, and adequate training when it comes to incorporating humour and lightness in therapy. As a graduate counselling student, understanding the ingrained preconceived notions of these connections within a mental health setting will allow me, and fellow clinical professionals, to gain a better understanding of our own capacity to integrate humour into our client interactions, allowing us to best support our clients and their well-being.

How this research lands for readers depends greatly on their own view of the world, and how they exist, and thrive, within it. As the author of this capstone, I feel deeply connected to this idea of lightness and wit in counselling, which stems greatly from the fact that I am a naturally joyful and humorous individual. Although the focus of this exploration is uncovering and mitigating how clinicians can (and if they should) implement humour, joy, and even sarcasm into their practice, it's relevance also highlights how counsellors may choose to show up in their practice. Additionally, I hope that this research project may help others who have felt, or been

told, that they should consider lessening parts of themselves to fit within the historic mold of what a counsellor is, a stoic individual. I also hope for this capstone project to reach others, individuals considering starting counselling, allowing them new insight around therapy as a space where joy and hardships can coexist.

Previous Research

Previous research has examined many of the subthemes that I am interested in exploring further. For example, Jiang et al. (2019) explores the cultural differences of humour. The authors discuss the perceived differences in humour between cultures, stating that although humour is a pan-cultural human experience, there are substantial differences across cultures in the manner in which humour is experienced, perceived, felt, and used. Another consideration is the potential for harm if the cultural differences in humour are ignored. Matamoros-Fernández et al. (2022) explores humour's harmful effects through social media. Colonialism has historically placed certain groups in positions of power, while simultaneously erasing marginalized groups. Matamoros-Fernández et al. (2022) highlight that although public discourse has been evolving, the use of humour in everyday life can, and still is, being used to silence and discriminate. For example, although many social media platforms have made strides to improve their moderation, many may "treat all identities as equal without distinguishing between groups that have been historically marginalized from groups that have not" (p. 181), incorrectly treating such things like whiteface parodies as equal to Blackface parodies, dismissing the historic racism and violence linked to the latter (Matamoros-Fernández et al., 2022). This type of behaviour assumes that there are no inherent differences around how humour is perceived between cultures and groups, which can prove to be harmful.

Through exploration, the concept of adultification came up through my research. The

adultification of children comes at the cost of the child's development and well-being; it is when adults implement expectations of emotional regulation, academic accomplishments, and overall adult-like behaviour onto children (Cooke & Halberstadt, 2021). Additionally, there is a disproportionately higher level of child adultification in marginalized groups, children who have historically not fit within the dominant discourse are expected to be autonomous and self-reliant sooner than those who have not experienced colonized violence (Cooke & Halberstadt, 2021; Edwards et al., 2023; Roy et al., 2014; Udagawa, 2023). Through this capstone I will explore this connection, and how by potentially not including humour and playfulness in the therapeutic setting, we as clinicians may contribute to the continual adultification of children.

Research has also explored why counselling and psychotherapy has historically been known as a sombre field. Franzini (2001) states that historically to involve humour in a therapeutic setting, a therapist who may laugh with a client would essentially be giving away some of their power, positioning themselves as an equal. Additionally, Franzini (2001) notes that regardless of any personal partialities toward the use of humour within therapy, novice counsellors will likely adopt ambivalence to humour in therapy simply due to instructors and clinical supervisors having historically ignored humour as part of healing within the therapeutic setting. Buşu and Buşu (2021) consider that although humour is a cross-cultural experience, the issue of teaching humour, per se, is where things may begin to get complicated. An interesting consideration is that although many counsellors may be able to appreciate humour, if they are uninterested in engaging or initiating humour, they will not make the efforts to apply or look out for its use within the therapeutic setting (Buşu & Buşu, 2021).

Lastly, previous research has explored the connection between humour, relations, and the therapeutic relationship. Gladding and Drake Wallace (2016) speak to the benefits of using

humour within therapy as a means of deepening the therapeutic relationship. The authors speak to how humour can allow for the genuineness and true essence of who the counsellor is to be experienced by the client, a feeling of authenticity bolstering the client and therapist's connection. Additionally, the authors mention that the use of humour may ease the sense of nerves and discomfort, especially with clients who may be new to counselling. Gladding and Drake Wallace (2016) essentially highlight that humorous topics should be considered in context, and much of the appropriateness relies on the counsellor's relationship and connection to their client.

Research Problem

The oversight of education around these nuanced connection within therapeutic practices is of significance and warrants attention and further exploration. Humour, when used thoughtfully and respectfully, can serve as a powerful tool for fostering rapport, relieving tension, and enhancing the therapeutic alliance. However, the disconnect between therapist training and expectation, client expectation, and emphasis on these forms of connection within graduate level education can result in missed opportunities for clients to explore their emotions in a more lighthearted and approachable manner. I feel that incorporating areas such as humour, lightness, banter, joy into therapy not only helps create a more comfortable environment but also encourages clients to confront difficult issues with greater ease. Thus, addressing the absence of this type of education in therapy is vital for enriching the therapeutic experience and promoting a more holistic, client centered approach to care (Sun et al., 2022).

I am curious to examine why there appears to be a lack in education, exploration, and implementation of the healing powers of humour, and its many iterations, within the counselling setting. Additionally, there is the potential to explore the preconceived notions of humour,

lightness, banter, joy. This investigation delves into why these characteristics and forms of connection are often seen as unprofessional and defensive, instead of harnessing these aspects of humour to create connection and support healing in the field of mental health.

The absence of education around humour, and its many variations, in counselling has a multifaceted impact that may resonate with both therapists and their clients. Therapists, when not adequately educated in the nuanced use of humour, may miss out on a valuable therapeutic tool to connect with clients and create a more relaxed and empathetic environment. Consequently, therapists may struggle to engage effectively with certain clients, especially those who respond positively to humour as a coping mechanism. On the other hand, clients also bear the brunt of this gap in the counsellor's education, as they might not receive the full spectrum of therapeutic benefits. Those who could benefit from humour and lightness to alleviate anxiety or establish trust may find themselves in sessions that feel more rigid and less personable and client centred (Swaminath, 2006). The authors touch on how the absence of humour education in counseling affects both therapists and clients, limiting the richness and effectiveness of the therapeutic setting.

If education around humour is excluded from counselling education, or deemed not important enough to focus on, there may also be an ethical concern at play. In accordance with the 2020 Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) *Code of Ethics*, counsellors have the ethical responsibility of beneficence, which is to be proactive in the best interest of our clients (CCPA, 2020). Humour can serve as a bridge, helping clients feel more at ease, enhancing and fostering trust in the continual development of the therapeutic language. If education and training for counsellors does not harness humour, or rather ignores its abilities, we as counsellors are not abiding by our ethical obligation to be proactive in the best interest of our

clients. That is not to say that humour will be implemented, or even beneficial to all clients, as that assumption would ignore the intricacies of each client and their mental health concerns. However, by not being educated on all that humour can bring to counselling, novice counsellors are missing out on a fundamental tool that may be conducive to open dialogue, skillful emotional interpretation, and ultimately a crucial key to working collaboratively with clients toward their wellbeing.

Another consideration resolves around the potential risk of inadvertently contributing to the adultification of children if clinicians adopt a more serious demeanour while working with children. This approach may hinder the child's ability to freely express themselves, explore their emotions in an age-appropriate manner, and may obstruct the development of building a therapeutic relationship. By negating the natural essence of lightness, there may develop undue pressure on children to conform to adult expectations, shifting them away from their natural inclination towards playfulness, which is a vital component of development (Stenius et al., 2022)

Purpose Statement

As I begin writing this capstone, and I sit with the feelings that come to me around what drew me to this topic in the first place, I remain curious about what I hope this writing will accomplish. Ultimately, this capstone is an exploration around humour's multifaceted presence. More specifically, an investigation of humour and its many variations within the counselling setting, and the ethical and practical responsibilities of mental health professionals to evaluate the nuances of a situation and determine humour's place in cultivating an environment that embraces the possibility of effectively utilizing humour as a therapeutic tool. By exploring the diverse ways in which lightness and connection manifests in counselling, and in areas outside the therapeutic setting, this capstone aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of where,

when, how, and why humour can enhance the therapeutic process. Additionally, this capstone aims to explore why this even needs to be a question at all; an exploration as to why humour and lightness may be subconsciously felt and interpreted as unprofessional, where that began, and how it still seeps into the threads of the mental health field. Furthermore, this capstone seeks to identify and analyze the ethics around these nuanced relations, and their connections to culture and social location. Counsellors have the responsibility to navigate the niche perspectives that all clients bring, and understand how humour has the potential to benefit, but also the potential to harm, clients.

Research Question

The research question that guides this capstone is: how does/can humour and playfulness manifest in a counselling setting, and what are our obligations as counsellors to foster and create space for this?

The research for the literature review in Chapter Two was chosen because it explores many different areas of guiding interest. Various areas warrant exploration: the diverse experiences of humour, its potential to cause harm, shifts in our relationship with play and playfulness as we age, and the significance of humour and playfulness in adult relationships and their connection to adult wellbeing. Additionally, this involves examining the historical perception of humour as unprofessional and acknowledging the limited education of incorporating humour in counselling, despite research showcasing its benefits for wellbeing and health. Moreover, it is crucial to understand how the absence of education may heighten the potential impact on adultification of children, while considering how counsellors can uphold the equilibrium of a therapeutic relationship while incorporating humour when working with clients is an essential aspect to explore.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

When considering the theoretical lenses that I would use to inform the upcoming research in this capstone, there are various approaches that have significantly influenced, and continue to influence, my understanding and location within the field of mental health. However, for the purpose of this capstone, there were a handful of frameworks that felt naturally deserving of place within this exploration: Multicultural theory, Constructionism, and Person Centred.

Multicultural Theory

To understand the subjective experience, we must understand the background and influences that have shaped that experience. Multicultural theory, a practice in which one acknowledges, and seeks to understand, how the various aspects of the client and therapist's identities (such as race, identity, social location, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, and socioeconomic background) influences their experience within mental health and counselling itself (Lantz et al., 2020). Multicultural theory underscores the importance of cultural awareness, lived experience, and the diverse nuances of individuals as part of a collective whole. Using this lens in guiding my analysis moving forward, a multicultural framework will allow for a rich understanding of the diversity in client's backgrounds, and the profound impact that culture and upbringing has on each person's experience and perception of humour. Multicultural competence embodies the capacity to recognize and address the enduring impact of historical and contemporary societal oppression on the mental health and wellbeing of marginalized individuals (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). It encompasses the acknowledgment and understanding of these influences to effectively engage and support diverse populations within therapeutic contexts (Lantz et al., 2020). Through a multicultural lens, this encourages myself, and readers, to consider the nuances of humour; to question our general perception of humour, where we have

learned it, what we consider humorous and playful, and why. We can explore humour's roots and its ties to culture through a multicultural lens. Additionally, through a multicultural lens, we can see how humour has the potential to harm individuals as well.

Constructionism and Narrative Therapy

Humour and its variations in a counselling can be viewed through a constructionist lens, a theoretical perspective that emphasizes the influence of social and cultural factors on an individuals' experiences, and their constructions of reality and its meaning, shaping their understanding of self (Papavlasopoulou et al., 2019). By using this theoretical framework as a guiding lens in my research, readers can understand how humour, lightness, wit are developed and constructed tools in which to reframe and comprehend their perceptions of potential challenging situations or emotions. Viewing humour within the historically heavy setting of mental health counselling through a constructionist lens shifts the criteria of client's feeling that they need their world view to match a certain type of criteria, and instead encourages and bolsters an environment where there is no absolute truth, but rather only a reality that has been constructed by the individual (Ravella, 1988).

In the same vein, narrative therapy is a unique and insightful approach in which to examine humour in counselling through. Narrative therapy posits that individuals are the authors of their own stories, and are active participants in constructing and deconstructing the narratives that have defined their identities (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018). Through the connection of narrative therapy and humour in counselling, stories and their constructions can be used a powerful tool that may assist in enabling clients to challenge oppressive narratives, discover new interpretations, and develop ways to weave humour and playfulness into these new and developing narratives.

Person Centred

The personal nature of these types of relations connects naturally to a person centred approached within counselling, a field of thought within therapy that prioritizes a client's autonomy, self-exploration, and growth through an empathetic and non-directive therapeutic relationship (Renger et al., 2020). Considering the research through a person centred lens reveals that while the findings might emphasize certain directions, a genuine person centred approach necessitates prioritizing and aligning with the unique needs and perspectives of the client. At its core, person centred therapy emphasizes the creation and ongoing development of safe space that can nurture the therapeutic relationship (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018). Using this framework in analyzing the research undoubtedly brings attention to a certain amount of attentiveness being paid toward the therapeutic relationship discussed within different research, as Carl Rogers placed great emphasis on the relationship between counsellor and client as a significant catalyst for change (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018).

Additionally, there is the consideration of viewing person centred therapy within the context of humour within counselling education. Utilizing this framework can allow us to better understand the potential lack, or ignorance, around humour in counselling education, by promoting a student centred approach within higher education, that prioritizes empowerment and adaptability. By questioning how humour has been brought into counselling, and counselling education in the past, we can begin to highlight areas of lack, and ensure that future mental health professionals are equipped to connect with and walk alongside their clients effectively, which may include the incorporation of humour through an appropriate and client centred approach.

Contribution to the Field

Understanding the nuances of humour, joy, connection, sarcasm, and playfulness (among others), and what the obligations are for counsellors in fostering a space for this is paramount to the field of counselling psychology, as it has the power to unlock a wealth of therapeutic potential (Kanbur & Baştumur, 2023). The authors highlight that humour and playfulness serve as tools to develop trust, express feelings in natural ways, release emotional tension, and for both clients and therapists to view a client's chief concern from a different perspective. Additionally, as highlighted previously, cultural awareness must be at the forefront when considering humour's place in the counselling setting (Lantz et al., 2020). However, it is indisputable that laughter and joy may be part of our universal human language, a natural physiological response that fills the body as intrinsically as breathing. Delving into this area of research allows for the ongoing occurrence of client centred care, acknowledging and understanding the uniqueness of our clients through all types of connection, tailoring interventions to meet the diverse needs of our clients.

Another area where this research will continue to contribute to the field of counselling is to unpack and appreciate the evolving nature of counselling psychology. Recognizing the historical perception of counselling as a stoic and often clinical field will allow for the dismantling of this observation, and bolster movement in the opposite direction. Much of the challenge that comes with studying humour and playfulness within the counselling setting comes from the translational difficulty in humour itself (which has been touched upon and will be explored in Chapter Two). According to Ford et al. (2016, p. 1),

People often scoff at scholarly attempts to study humor [*sic*] because the production and experience of humor are themselves playful and frivolous. Thus, it seems that humour must naturally elude explanation by “serious” scientific methods. By putting

humor under the “scientific microscope”, the humorless scholar misses the point and fails to appreciate its essence.

Clients seeking counselling after attempting other treatments or coping strategies might inadvertently place mental health professionals at a disadvantage, possibly shaping the therapeutic environment to be perceived as more serious from the onset (Swaminath, 2006). Dismantling this perception is crucial for several reasons. This outlook may create barriers to seeking mental health services, as individuals may feel intimidated or hesitant to engage in a field that appears overly clinical. By unravelling this perception within this capstone, it allows for the essential reminder that the right counsellor, the right therapeutic relationship, can be a compassionate, empathetic, and holistically inviting environment. Through contradicting the notion that counselling is a serious and rigid endeavour, the options for adaptability expand insurmountably, by fostering an effective and inclusive practice that addresses the nuances and complexities of human nature and emotional wellbeing. In deconstructing a narrative that may essentially alienate some individuals who may feel apprehensive about counselling, this allows counsellors to embrace a wider range of therapeutic approaches and develop from a client centered approach, involving humour, play, and creativity. Deconstructing historical views creates space for holistic and collaborative work to be achieved between client and counsellor.

My hope is that this capstone will make valuable contributions to the existing literature through multifaceted exploration of humour, lightness, joy, wit, banter, and playfulness’s existence in counselling, and potentially pave new routes in the evolving nature of counselling and its scope of therapeutic interventions. By examining the nuances of this topic, practitioners may be able to provide a more comprehensive framework for education and practice that reflects the importance of meeting the client where they are, through cultural awareness and appreciation

of one's own social location. I hope for this capstone to provide fresh insights into our capacity as humans to find lightness, laughter, and joy even in the face of hardship. The ability to walk alongside our clients, share in the human joy of connection, allowing us to see and meet our clients in this constantly changing world.

Reflexivity and Positionality Statement

My draw to explore this topic is interwoven with who I am as a person, and how I show up in this world. In my own experience with counselling, I think about how heavy and hard it can feel at times. However, through the pain of it, I thought about when it feels, to me, the most healing. For me, this happens when there is space for laughter, joy, humour, and playfulness. Additionally, in my time outside the therapeutic setting, the times that life feels the most robust and fulfilling is when I am sharing a moment of connection with someone, through a shared moment of joy. I feel immensely grateful to exist in a world where I can share laughter with those I care for deeply, or a smile with a stranger I pass on the street. The human experience of joy has always been intriguing to me, and I feel honoured to be able to use this capstone, an amalgamation of the learning from my graduate studies, to explore this topic.

Through my exploration of this topic and ongoing research, I remain cognizant of my location and potential personal biases and predispositions within the context of my research. As a white, cisgender, able bodied, heterosexual, settler woman, who comes from a middle-class upbringing with inherent privilege, I am aware that I have not historically been the brunt of harmful humour. My social location within this culture and dominant discourse privileges me with a protective barrier, and this is something I will continue to be conscious of as I move forward with my capstone. I am also aware that as a white woman living in an overtly Eurocentric world, I cannot assume that my type of humour will be, or should be, understood by

individuals of different cultures, histories, and experiences. Moreover, I remain mindful of my position as an individual who has the means and privilege to pursue levels of higher education, and the opportunities this grants me in being able to explore areas of research and practice that are of personal interest to me. I acknowledge my capacity and privilege to be able to actively participate and delve into a subject pertinent to my present and future practice as a Registered Clinical Counsellor.

Additionally, although I love humour, and these types of connections, and feel their benefits in all areas of my life, I am conscious that this positioning of humour in healing may not be applicable to everyone. Some people may not feel that humour has a place in counselling, and they are completely entitled to that opinion. I am aware that there are differences among us, and just because I feel deeply about something, does not mean that it is right for everyone that I work with, or within my social circle. As a graduate student counsellor, my overall goal is to tend to, and care for my client's wellbeing, and because of this I understand that humour, joy, wit, and playfulness may not be applicable for all. I am still incredibly curious around this topic but am aware that my strong feelings toward the benefits of humour in therapy has the potential of leading to biases within my research. I will continue to be conscious of this, and I will be cognizant of including an array of resources in my research.

Definition of Terms

For this capstone, the terms below are relevant and seen throughout the research. These defined terms come up continually throughout my review and exploration of the research. Each term below connects to the research question informing this capstone (how does/can humour and playfulness manifest in a counselling setting, and what are our obligations as counsellors to

foster and create space for this?) and is part of the nuance that explores the outcome of this curiosity.

Adultification

Adultification is a phenomena most often applied to children from marginalized groups who are viewed as older than they really are as a result of being given adult responsibilities through means such as systemic racism – there is an expectation of these children to have increased emotional regulation, academic achievements, and adult like behaviours (Cooke & Halberstadt, 2021; Edwards et al., 2023; Roy et al., 2014; Udagawa, 2023). In context with humour and play/playfulness in a therapeutic setting, the adultification of children may influence the manifestation of lightness within counselling.

Coping

As a preface for this definition, the term coping (or, to cope) comes up throughout much of the research as a mechanism that humour and laughter create in the face of adversity. In a general sense, coping can be defined as thoughts and behaviours that are mobilized to manage stressful or challenging situations, internal or external (Algorani & Gupta, 2023). Additionally, in context of humour, one can cope by using humour to “bear the burden of suffering or misfortune. This is done by recognizing the incongruity of believing that one is the only person suffering, thus creating one’s shared sense of humanity” (Kahn, 1989, as cited in Swaminath, 2006).

Humour

Scholars argue that there is not one single definition of humour that is accepted in the academic realm, due to humour’s variations and nuances (Ford et al., 2016). However, for the purpose of this capstone, humour is defined as an intrinsic part of human nature, an experience that permeates nearly every type of interpersonal relationship and impacts individuals on a daily

basis, the human capacity to appreciate and derive some type of pleasure from an “incongruous, ludicrous, ridiculous, absurd, or unexpected” situation (Ford et al., 2016; Abrami, 2009, as cited in Gladding & Drake Wallace, 2016). While acknowledging that humour is multifaceted, personal, and an ever-evolving experience, recognizing its subjectivity allows for a comprehensive understanding of how humour is perceived and depicted within this capstone.

Laughing/Laughter

Like the term humour, the expression of laughing and laughter is nuanced and personal. However, for the purpose of this capstone, laughing/laughter is considered the showing of emotion, through amusement or pleasure, with a “chuckle or explosive vocal sound” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a). The experience of laughter, according to Sun et al. releases tension and depression often caused by societal constraints, through the enjoyment of amusing events (2022).

Manifest

In relation to humour and play/playfulness in counselling, we must understand how these principles become evident, through showing or displaying, in that particular setting (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b). Understanding how humour and play/playfulness manifest in a counselling setting is to understand how they show up or arise.

Play/Playfulness

Often when we think about play or playfulness, we think about children, or sometimes we think about recreational activities. Although these are not incorrect considerations of play/playfulness, for the purpose of this capstone the consideration is less around the specific action of play and playing, but rather the behaviours and experiences governing the action; the feelings and lightness that coincide with the action. Play, in regard to lightness within the therapeutic setting, can be considered an action, behaviour, or expression that is conveyed with

the absence of serious or harmful intent, often arousing laughter and/or gaiety without an ulterior motive (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-c). The general feeling of play and playfulness within counselling may bring a less intimidating or scary perspective to a client or concern (Jiang et al., 2019).

Outline for Upcoming Chapters

Following Chapter One, there are two more additional chapters. In Chapter Two, a comprehensive literature review will be explored. Within this chapter, I will explore and examine themes relating to different experiences of humour, wit, banter, joy, connection; how humour and it's many iterations may cause harm, why our relationship to play and playfulness changes as we age, the role of humour and playfulness in adult relationships and it's connection to adult wellbeing, the history of humour being perceived as unprofessional, lack of education in involving these forms of connection in a counselling setting despite research showing the benefits of humour on wellbeing and health. Additionally, I will explore how the lack of education may influence the risk of further adultification of children, and how counsellors can maintain the equilibrium of a therapeutic relationship while including humour when working with clients. Chapter Two will conclude with a discussion around how the highlighted literature will provide a base for Chapter Three's discussion and application.

Chapter Three, as noted, is a culmination of the exploration of my proposed research question, and the findings that have emerged from the literature review in Chapter Two. In this chapter, I will revisit the intended purpose of this capstone, and highlight the appreciations pulled from the wealth of current knowledge around this topic. Within this chapter, limits and gaps will be acknowledged and discussed. Additionally, within Chapter Three, the learnings that have emerged will be applied to current and future practice, highlighting proposals for future

exploration. Lastly, as this topic is part of who I am, as an individual inside and outside of the counselling setting, there will be a section for reflection and personal learning.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

We are defenceless without humour. If we fail to see the irony in our circumstances, the situation may appear dispiriting. Laughter is a way of ‘thumbing one’s nose’ at the inescapable and incomprehensible vagaries of existence and declaring, ‘I choose to rise above this. I choose to meet life head on.’ Laughter is freedom. (Swaminath, 2006, para. 2)

In the intricate tapestry of therapeutic interactions and connections, the manifestation of humour, lightness, wit, levity, banter, and laughter stand as captivating, yet often misunderstood, aspects within the historically solemn and stoic setting of counselling (Franzini, 2001, 2012). The theoretical frameworks that are used to guide this literature review are Multicultural Constructionism, and Person Centred theories. Through this approach, the literature review embarks on a journey that celebrates the potential for profound understanding, change and growth within the therapeutic landscape, embracing the notion that there is the capacity to undergo great exploration and understanding in behaviour, thinking, and overall well-being. Grounded in the belief that understanding humour, and its many variations, can serve as a catalyst for transformative experiences, this literature review aims to critically assess existing research, while navigating the interplay between the traditionally weighty perception of counselling and the infusion of lightness. By utilizing these theoretical frameworks, this literature review seeks to unravel and investigate themes such as the conventional portrayal of therapy as solemn, stoic, impassive, weighty, the nuanced intersection of cultural considerations within humour and its many iterations, and the potential for humour’s existence and benefit within the therapeutic relationship. Within these themes, this literature review will continue to

unearth additional subthemes that allow for a more collective, holistic understanding of the potential in embracing humour and lightness, and perspectives on the evolving nature of the therapeutic process.

Counselling, A Conventionally Stoic Setting

While exploring the research and discussions on the gaps between the potential for a diverse experience in counselling, and the disparity in how counselling is portrayed, how therapists are trained, and the clients' expectations, a multidimensional theme emerged. The results of my research revolved around the historical perception of counselling and psychotherapy as inherently stoic, weighty, cold, and impassive (Franzini, 2001, 2012). The traditional image of the therapist as an impassive, serious figure has persisted, influencing both public perceptions and professional norms within the field. The somber portrayal appears to come from a longstanding belief that the therapeutic process demands a formal and reserved demeanor to maintain a sense of professionalism. The literature indicates that this perception may be perpetuated by media representation, societal expectations, and historical depictions in literature and from the history of the profession (Franzini, 2001, 2012). Moreover, humour and its many variations, a key facet of the human connection and emotional expression, has historically been viewed as incompatible with the seriousness of counselling, often labelled or perceived as unprofessional or inappropriate. An emergence around the stigmatization of humour and lightness as unprofessional has guided the subtheme explored below. This complex landscape merits a closer examination on the evolving nature of therapeutic interactions, and the transformative potential of embracing a more multifaceted approach within the field.

Humour as Unprofessional

Through research on the conventional perceptions of humour, lightness, wit, banter, sarcasm, and its other many iterations, in the context of mental health professions, a prevailing theme emerges – a theme depicting humour as traditionally unprofessional. This discernment is deeply rooted in the general societal association between seriousness and professionalism. This unfounded connection projects the concern that the use of humour by health professionals may compromise the perceived ability to provide adequate and serious care. The belief that health is a serious business is reinforced by the training of health professionals (which will be discussed later in this literature review), wherein a formal, stoic, and reserved demeanor is often emphasized and encouraged (Swaminath, 2006). This philosophy is encapsulated in Ravella's assertion that "people's problems were, after all, serious business, and this was neither the time nor place for being funny" (1988, pp. 35-36).

The reluctance to embrace and integrate humour and its various forms in the therapeutic context extends even further, with authors noting that the study of humour is often met with skepticism. Ford et al. (2016) convey this sentiment, highlighting how individuals and academics frequently dismiss scholarly efforts to investigate and study humour, viewing the creation and engagement with humour as inherently lighthearted and trivial, simply due to the nature of the work being studied. This statement emphasizes a ubiquitous societal belief that the gravity and expectations inherent in therapeutic work act as a deterrent toward the inclusion of humour in mental health work and scholarly inquiries. The notion that humour, seen as playful, may clash with the seriousness of the therapeutic work contributes to the reluctance in recognizing its diverse roles and potential benefits in broadening the scope of acceptable behaviours in therapy (Ford et al., 2016).

Additionally, although notably dated in its publication, Ravella (1988) does an incredible job at highlighting the discrepancy in the consideration of humour and its variations between therapist and client, with many mental health professionals cautiously approaching its use within the therapeutic environment. The author investigates the use of these relational connections within therapy and examines why clinicians may be under the assumption that by employing humour they are risking a rupture in the therapeutic alliance. Historically, healing has been perceived as inherently serious (Franzini, 2001, 2012; Ravella, 1988). Uncovering the preconceived notions of the gap that exists within the therapeutic realm between the therapist's training, their lived experience within the therapeutic space, and the expectations held by the client seeking support, a nuanced approach appears. The author highlights that while acknowledging the serious elements within the therapeutic space, clinicians could also provide a platform for clients to inadvertently confront and understand their own perceptions of seriousness, challenging the traditional paradigm surrounding the use of these intricate connections within the therapeutic setting.

Cultural Considerations in Humour

Through research, and untangling the richness of this topic, cultural considerations surrounding humour within the context of counselling offers an array of diverse perspectives and considerations. Through exploration, I adopted a multicultural therapeutic approach while navigating the intricacies of the research. Multicultural theory is a guiding theory in understanding how individual's identities and social locations influence their experiences, and how the client and counsellor both show up within mental health and the therapeutic setting (Lantz et al., 2020). This approach was fundamentally important as I waded through research and examined how, unsurprisingly, one's experiences within their own culture are significant in their

perception, expression, and reception of humour. Throughout the research around culture, and humour, the different variations of humour presented itself as a subtheme. This subtheme highlights the significance of recognizing and respecting the diversity in comedic energy, norms, and being cognizant of taboos across cultures. Additionally, while exploring humour and culture's interconnectedness, the conversation also leans in the direction of humour's potential to harm while considered within multicultural contexts. Through this examination, we must acknowledge that what may be perceived as humorous and bring joy in one cultural setting, could be hurtful, offensive, or inappropriate in another. Remaining cognizant of the potential harm that humour carries is a crucial piece to ensuring a culturally competent and ethical therapeutic practice.

Further, the exploration of cultural awareness around the intersection of humour and its variations, and where it belongs in a therapeutic setting, the concept of adultification arose. While adultification is not inherently linked to culture as the other subthemes, it is a concept that is generally applied to and experienced by children of marginalized groups (Cooke & Halberstadt, 2021; Edwards et al., 2023; Roy et al., 2014; Udagawa, 2023). Exploring adultification is crucial to grasping how this experience varies across cultures and helps mental health professionals understand how cultural differences influence the way maturity and appropriate behaviours are perceived in children. This subtheme underscores the importance for therapists to acutely navigate cultural considerations in humour and its many iterations, recognizing the potential for both positive and challenging impacts on individuals with diverse lived experiences.

Cultural Variations in Humour

While examining research that led to this subtheme, it became apparent that within cultural contexts, humour and its variations, takes on many diverse forms, reflecting the distinctions of traditions, societies, and individual experiences. This subtheme arose as relevant due to its connection to constructionism, emphasising that both individual and shared understandings of humour are socially constructed within and through specific cultural contexts. Constructionism, therefore, highlights that the experience of humour, lightness, joy, are not inherent qualities, but rather, socially constructed experiences that are reflected and reinforced through cultural perspectives.

The exploration around cultural variations in humour highlights interesting comparisons, most prominently between Eastern and Western cultures, and how groups across these dichotomy's experience humour, lightness, joy, and other forms of this relational connection. It should be mentioned that these are broad assumptions and based on limited studies. However, despite these limitations, the literature provides important insight into the expansive nature of humour. Both Yue et al. (2016) and Jiang et al. (2019) examine the multifaceted approach to understanding the cultural variations in humour, delving into the contrasting perceptions and experiences between Eastern cultures and Western cultures. The authors highlight that generally, Eastern cultures tend to have less positive attitudes and perceptions towards humour compared to their Western counterparts. Interestingly, these two studies also underline the distinctions in how humour is perceived within social relationships. Individuals within Western cultures often perceive those within proximity to them, such as friends and relatives, to be humorous and relational. Whereas individuals within Eastern cultures tend to perceive external figures, such as comedians, actors, and other entertainers through the lens of humour and joy. The notion that

Eastern cultures, particularly Chinese, hold lower perceptions toward humour is linked to the cultural phenomenon of Confucianism, which focuses on personal ethics and morality, and tends to devalue humour by accentuating seriousness and restriction (Jiang et al., 2019). The same authors go on to expand that for many Eastern cultures, to be perceived as humorous would be jeopardizing to their social status. Oppositely, many Western societies, such as Canadian, highlight the chasm between cultural perceptions of humour, with Western cultures most often regarding humour as a desirable trait, regularly associated with positivity and viewed as an extension of the essential aspect of interpersonal relationships (Jiang et al., 2019; X. Yue et al., 2016).

In another noteworthy exploration, the research points towards a transcendent aspect of humour – pretend play (Lillard et al., 2013). The element of play and playfulness, which is considered as one of humours various forms for the purpose of this capstone, appears to blur across cultural boundaries. Similarly to the previous research, a study by Farver et al. (2000) compares Korean American and European American’s experiences of pretend play in preschoolers. The authors highlight that despite differences in the perception of humour between these cultures, the experience of pretend play among children remains as a common thread. This may suggest that there is a shared element of human experience at a young age that transcends cultural influences (Farver et al., 2000). This finding is interesting when considering Constructionism...if play is a shared experience across cultures for children, is there a certain age or experience that shifts it from a universal experience to a constructed one?

The Potential for Humour to Harm

Humour, lightness, joy, wit, banter, all often celebrated for their positive and uplifting qualities also may hold the potential to illicit harm, which in a field focused on well-being, the

possible infliction of harm warrants careful examination. This subtheme arose while looking at the literature around humour and its many variations, and how the nuanced nature of humour, intentionally or inadvertently, may become a source of discomfort. While humour can play a powerful role in connection and expressions, the potential for harm lies in its subjective nature (Benatar, 2014; Bitterly et al., 2017; Hale, 2018; Hussong & Micucci, 2021; Hylton, 2018; Matamoros-Fernández et al., 2022). To unravel the complexities surrounding the potential for humour to harm, it is imperative to examine its impact on individuals, communities, and broader socio-cultural communities. From hurtful language, potential for misinterpretation or misunderstanding, and the possibility of reinforcing harmful stereotypes, humour's nuanced ability to harm is an important piece in understanding the many possible experiences of these types of relations.

Humour, while a positive and connective force, carries an inherent potential to harm. This potential arose as initial research for this capstone begun, an apparent and worth exploring topic. There are many considerations, situations, or experiences that can influence the reception of humour. In a therapeutic setting, Hussong and Micucci (2021) highlight through their study that clients with what would be considered more rigid or serious personalities, the use of humour has the potential to make these clients feel anxious, defensive, or feel that the therapist is not taking them seriously, and ultimately not connect with the therapeutic use of humour or one of its variations. Additionally, when working with individuals with cognitive impairments of thought disorders, as there is the potential for a gap in understanding which could potentially leave the individual feeling misunderstood, laughed at, or taunted (Hussong & Micucci, 2021; Schweikart, 2020). The timing of the introduction of humour is pivotal, with the risk of offending or disrupting potential connections. Hussong and Micucci (2021) highlight that in a therapeutic

setting, if humour is employed before there is a strong therapeutic alliance established, this can cause a rupture, or create strain and inadvertently place barriers between creating the connection. Similarly, Bitterly et al. (2017) explore humour regarding interpersonal dynamics, exploring how the incorrect, or ill timed, use of humour may harm an individual's status within their social or professional contexts. The authors delve into the notion that unsuccessful humour (humour that is employed and received with no, or very little reaction from those around) and inappropriate jokes may signal to others that this individual has low competence coupled with high confidence, a mismatch that results in a lower sense of status, causing harm and ruptures in interpersonal relationships. Understanding the delicate balance between humour, timing, and competence is crucial, as humour should ideally enhance rather than diminish one's standing within a given context (Bitterly et al., 2017; Hussong & Micucci, 2021).

The literature also points to how gaps in communication, or misunderstanding of humour can also result in unintended harm (Benatar, 2014; Hale, 2018). This may happen when there is a language barrier, gap in contextual information, or when an individual understands the intended humour, but simply does not find it amusing. This discrepancy risks creating a divide between individuals, potentially disrupting the potential positive intention behind the employment of humour. Another dimension of humour causing harm lies in the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes, or racism disguised as humour (Hylton, 2018; Matamoros-Fernández et al., 2022). Matamoros-Fernández et al. (2022) underscores how humour, banter, relational connections, are all integral to online interactions, however; they have the potential to carelessly harm members of marginalized groups through harmful stereotypes being coded as humour or communication. Therein lies the challenge of internet moderation, which evidently exacerbates the issue by treating many different forms of so-called humour similarly. The authors highlight, as mentioned

in Chapter One, that when treating humour aimed at people of colour the same as humour aimed at white people, this dismisses the historical violence and racism linked to members of marginalized groups, perpetrating further violence and harm.

Through the exploration of humours potential to harm, there exists notable limitations within this phenomenon. A significant drawback is the overarching lack of academic exploration into the nature of failed humour. Much of the existing literature focuses predominantly on the success of humour, overlooking the nuanced instances where humour may fall flat (Hale, 2018). Another limitation that stands out in this literature, is the considerable gap that persists between the interaction of racism and humour, as highlighted by Hylton (2018) and Matamoros-Fernández et al. (2022), wherein there exists a deficiency in literature addressing the humours use in resistance to racism and the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes. Moreover, when examining humour in the therapeutic setting, limitations may arise from researchers potential bias in their desire to implement humour, and a lack of comprehensive research on humour with diverse client populations (Hussong & Micucci, 2021). This leads to the potential gap in understanding the intricate dynamics at play in varied therapeutic relationships. Additionally, the complex and multifaceted nature of the relationship between online humour, or harmful humour, and tangible consequences poses a challenge in drawing cause and effect connections (Matamoros-Fernández et al., 2022). Lastly, findings by Bitterly et al. (2017) caution against the potential misattribution of perceived humour, highlighting the nuanced grey area in coding and understanding humour for the purpose of research. Collectively, these limitations in academic exploration underscore the need for a more comprehensive and varied exploration of humour, recognizing its failures, considering therapeutic dynamics, and addressing racial implications.

The multifaceted potential for harm through humour lies in the nuanced understanding of its use, considering things such as client characteristics, communication dynamics, the delicate balance between humour and social status, and the potential for perpetuating negative and harmful stereotypes. As with much of this exploration, critically examining these dimensions can strive to harness humours positive aspects while mitigating the risk of unintended, or ill planned, harm.

Adultification

The concept of adultification, which involves imposing adult-like expectations on children in areas such as emotional regulation, academic accomplishments, and overall behaviour, is closely linked to cultural considerations of humour, particularly to those within marginalized groups (Cooke & Halberstadt, 2021; Edwards et al., 2023). The relationship between adultification and humour is two-fold. On one side, in cultures where adultification is more pronounced, such as in historically marginalized communities, there tends to be an accelerated expectation for children to adopt autonomy, self-reliance, and maturity, intersecting and influencing the way these adultified children engage with and express humour (Cooke & Halberstadt, 2021; Edwards et al., 2023; Roy et al., 2014; Udagawa, 2023). On the other side, mental health professionals run the potential risk of further adultification by not including humour and its many iterations in the therapeutic setting.

As highlighted by Cooke and Halberstadt (2021), Edwards et al. (2023), Roy et al. (2014) and Udagawa (2023) in cultures and historically marginalized groups, adultification is more pronounced. Within the dance of adultification and culture, there exists an impact on children's expectations and expressions of humour. This accelerated maturation intersects with and likely significantly influences the way adultified children interact with expressions of joy, humour,

lightness, and its many other iterations (Cooke & Halberstadt, 2021; Edwards et al., 2023; Stenius et al., 2022). As a result of adultification, these children's expressions and experiences of humour may lean towards those deemed as more adult, or culturally appropriate, potentially limiting the exploration of a more diverse and childlike sense of humour and play, which is vital to development (Lillard et al., 2013; McEntire, 2009; Sherman, 2014; Stanton-Chapman & Schmidt, 2021). This impact brings to attention the intricate relationship between expectations rooted in culture, the development of a child's humorous and playful identity, and how adultification may impact this.

On the other side of the relationship between adultification, humour, and culture, lies the consideration for mental health professionals (Cooke & Halberstadt, 2021; Edwards et al., 2023). One may deduce that the omission of humour and its various iterations within the therapeutic setting poses the potential risk of further adultification of children, especially those navigating heightened expectations. Within the therapeutic setting, humour and its many variations may serve as a valuable tool for building rapport, developing trust, strengthening the therapeutic relationship, and providing space for emotional expressions (Amici, 2019; Ayisire et al., 2022; Bennett & Lengacher, 2006; Berg et al., 2009; Buşu & Buşu, 2021; Ford et al., 2016; Goldin & Bordan, 1999; Gonot-Schoupinsky & Garip, 2018; Hussong & Micucci, 2021; Kanbur & Baştemur, 2023; Martens, 2004; Mooney, 2000; Sclavi, 2008). Mental health professionals must recognize the importance of integrating humour within therapeutic practices, to best ensure that the therapeutic space remains developmentally appropriate and attuned to the unique needs of each individual client, proactively mitigating the risks associated with further adultification.

Healing Powers of Humour

The healing powers of humour are undeniable, making it an invaluable component within the therapeutic setting. Humour, encompassing various forms such as lightness, joy, wit, sarcasm, and banter, serves as a powerful tool in building and strengthening the therapeutic relationship. By infusing moments of levity and shared laughter or joy, mental health professionals can establish rapport, develop and hold space for clients to explore their emotions and unique experiences, all while fostering trust. Due to the humour's multifaceted nature, there is the opportunity to incorporate a nuanced approach in addressing challenging and sensitive topics. Utilizing the many variations of humour can allow for clients to navigate difficult experiences or emotions from a lighter, different lens, which facilitates a more accessible and potentially less daunting exploration of emotions. This approach, while also enhancing the therapeutic relationship, promotes resiliency by incorporating humour into the therapeutic setting. By including lightness, joy, wit, connections into therapeutic interventions, this bolsters the ability to create a holistic style of healing, recognizing the significance of levity and joy in the transformative journey toward well-being and healing.

Developing the Therapeutic Relationship

Humour, when skillfully incorporated into the therapeutic setting, holds significant potential to develop and strengthen the therapeutic relationship. Research underscores the importance of therapists attuning to their individual client's needs, including their receptivity to humour and its various manifestations (Franzini, 2001; Wu & Levitt, 2022). By attuning to clients characteristics, attachment styles, and cultural nuances, therapists may be able to better gauge their potential use of establishing rapport through humour, or one of its many iterations (Wu & Levitt, 2022). An approach like this may allow the novice counsellor to develop their

own responsiveness, bolstering the development of a more personalized and considerate therapeutic environment which can foster a deeper connection between therapists and their clients. Moreover, humour serves as an essential communication tool within, and outside of, the therapeutic relationship (Buşu & Buşu, 2021; De Koning & Weiss, 2002; Talbot, 2021). This is particularly evident in Talbot's (2021) research, that highlights the relationship dynamics within couples counselling, and how humour is used between partners. By attuning to the couple's use of humour, sarcasm, wit, banter, or other relational connectors, the therapist can gain insightful and valuable information into the dynamics of communication within the relationship. This understanding then enables the therapist to navigate therapeutic interventions more specifically and effectively, facilitating meaningful dialogue, levity, and connection within the therapeutic space (Talbot, 2021).

Another facet that comes up, is humour's role in easing tension, and providing a safe outlet for emotional expression (Amici, 2019; Gladding & Drake Wallace, 2016; Sultanoff, 2013; Wu & Levitt, 2022; Wu et al., 2021). Authors emphasize that humour can facilitate a deeper emotional connection between client and therapist, ultimately enhancing the therapeutic bond, allowing clients to see and experience a more nuanced and holistic therapeutic approach than they may have originally expected. As therapists hone their skills and integrate therapeutic humour and its many various forms into their clinical practice, they expand their repertoire of skills and interventions, enriching the therapeutic experience for clients. Sultanoff speaks of how the use of these relational connections are based on the therapist's clinical judgment, past experienced, and theoretical orientation (2013).

It is essential to acknowledge the limitations and caveats associated with the use of humour as a tool in developing the therapeutic relationship. Improper use of humour may run the

risk of humiliating or undermining the client's self-esteem or well-being, highlighting the need for therapists to exercise discernment, sensitivity, and attunement to their client's individual needs (Franzini, 2001). Gladding and Drake Wallace (2016) discuss how humour and its many variations, can be a valuable tool within the therapeutic setting, however, it is not the end goal, but rather one of many options for facilitating safety within the therapeutic relationship and setting. Additionally, the authors note that despite its potential benefits, there is a lack of resources in professional and academic literature about the integration of humour into the therapeutic process, which poses a challenge to a holistic understanding. This emphasizes the need for further exploration and guidance within this area. By navigating these complexities with thoughtful intention, therapists may be able to harness the power of wit, joy, humour, connection, and levity, to enhance the therapeutic relationship and promote growth and healing among clients.

Exploring Challenging Topics Through Humour

Within the therapeutic context, humour, levity, joy, and various other forms of humour emerge as crucial elements that assist in client's ability to delve into challenging topics. Humour can serve to normalize difficult experience, framing them in relatable or lighter contexts, which may prove easier for clients to digest (Sanders, 2004; Wu et al., 2021). By creating a space where experiences can be viewed through and felt with sense of lightness or humour, clients may feel less isolated in their challenges and more empowered to confront them openly. Additionally, humour has a remarkable ability to encourage shifts in perspective, creating new and alternative lenses for clients to view their situations through, developing cognitive flexibility, especially within younger demographics where their capacity for cognitive restructuring is higher (Erickson & Feldstein, 2007). Embracing humour within therapy also extends to emotional expression, as

highlighted previously. Within a safe, warm, and empathetic therapeutic environment, humour can provide a safe and non-threatening avenue for clients to explore and articulate their complex emotions. To provide insight into the broader context, a study by Sanders (2004) explored humour as a coping strategy within the sex work industry, and found that within this context, humour was used to also protect one's own emotions in situations where exploration may be too challenging.

Furthermore, the use of humour and its many variations may play a pivotal role in the building of resilience and is a means of pursuing well-being, by promoting creativity and playfulness. Burgin and Ray (2022) explore the benefits of child-centred play therapy for children experiencing depression. The authors find that play, a variation of humour, serves as a dynamic and engaging practice in which children can process and express their difficult emotions and experiences. Through play and playfulness, children with symptoms of depression, in regard to those within this study, are afforded the opportunity to explore their inner worlds, communicate feelings, and develop coping strategies within a safe and supportive environment with mental health professionals who can act as a container for the children's emotions. The study found that child-centred play therapy is effective across social and cultural demographics for those within the study, demonstrating its universality. However, the study's small sample size is worth noting, potentially limiting the power of the findings (Burgin & Ray, 2022)

Conclusion

This literature review has examined the intricate landscape of humour within the therapeutic setting, exploring its multidimensional roles, nuanced intersections with culture, and the potential impacts it plays within therapeutic dynamics. By highlighting Multicultural, Constructionism, and Person Centred frameworks, the review has highlighted the historically stoic

and weighty perception of counselling, and the stigmatization that humour gets within the mental health profession, highlighting the need for a more nuanced and inclusive approach to therapeutic interactions. Cultural considerations around humour emphasize the significance of understanding humour within cultural variations and its potential to both connect and harm. Within this, the concept of adultification emerged as a significant influence within humour and culture, accentuating the need for mental health professionals to navigate these nuances with sensitivity and awareness. Despite the potential for harm, the healing powers of humour have been celebrated for its ability to develop and strengthen the therapeutic relationship, bolster resilience, and facilitate a safe environment that allows for the exploration of challenging topics.

With moving forward, it is imperative for mental health professionals to remain cognizant of humour's place within the therapeutic setting. This practice requires mental health professionals to be reflective, attuned to their clients' needs, aware of their own cultural competence and ethics to ensure that humour and levity are used in responsible and sensitive manners. Furthermore, additional research is needed to expand the understanding within academics and clinician practice of the complexities surrounding humour in therapy, including its potential benefits, cultural implications, and limitations. By embracing the healing nature of humour as a therapeutic tool and approaching its use with awareness, intentionality, and sensitivity, mental health professionals can create a more inclusive, effective, and engaging therapeutic experience for clients that ultimately contributes to their holistic healing and well-being.

Chapter Three: Discussion and Applications to Clinical Practice

Highlighting Research Findings: An Introduction to Current Insights

In the first two chapters of this capstone, I explored the different realms and nuances of understanding how humour, lightness, joy, and its many other iterations can play a significant role in the context of mental health, specifically counselling. Through Multicultural theory, Constructionism, and a Person Centred approach, the literature review delved into the potential for understanding change and growth within therapeutic interactions, challenging the historically solemn and often stoic perception of mental health care. Within the research exploration, I have uncovered the importance and significance of acknowledging and recognizing the diverse experiences and facets of humour, its potential for harm, and the many cultural factors that may impact and influence the expression of humour, lightness, joy, and the many other ways it can arise. From my perspective, this capstone emphasizes the importance of practitioners' abilities to thoughtfully integrate humour into their practice, considering its implications on various client populations within the wider societal and ethical contextual landscape. By synthesizing findings from current and longstanding literature, the research that I focused on highlights the benefits of incorporating humour and playfulness into therapy, shedding light on how these elements can enrich the therapeutic journey and contribute to the client's overall growth, comfort, and well-being.

This upcoming chapter is meaningful as I will delve into the practical implications around the insights garnered from the preceding chapters. I will explore practitioners' positionality in exploring and implementing strategies effective in clinical practice. The focus extends to examining how counsellors can build and enhance their support for clients by embracing a more inclusive and approachable therapeutic environment, while showing that

lightness, humour and joy can coexist with professionalism. Through the learnings of Chapters One and Two, this capstone aims to challenge the historical perception of counselling as stoic and formal, instead fostering an atmosphere that promotes openness, connection, engagement, and laughter. My goal is to open the dialogue around cultivating a space where individuals feel empowered to seek counselling with greater ease and confidence, and ultimately contributing to a more accessible and supportive mental health landscape. In this chapter, I will take a personal approach, integrating my insights to deepen the understanding of the capstone through my unique experiences and reflections.

Working with Children and Implications of Adulthood

One of the crucial implications within this research is how practitioners work with children and youth in mental health. As someone who works predominantly with children and youth, I plainly see, and feel, the overtly ignored gaps in our education. My experience sheds light on the concerning lack of training and guidance that novice counsellors receive when it comes to working with younger demographics (Savage et al., 2017; Sun et al., 2022). The absence of education and specific training on how we effectively engage and work with young clients presents not only a challenging hurdle for emerging counsellors, but also brings with it possible risks concerning modalities and therapeutic approaches being implemented in the therapeutic setting. When therapeutic modalities and techniques tailored for adults are arbitrarily applied to children and youth in therapy without proper adjustments, the risk of adulthood looms heavily. Adulthood, a phenomenon that I am constantly aware of, can inadvertently be implemented by mental health professionals, burdening children with adult like expectations beyond their developmental stage, ultimately impeding their natural growth processes and denying them of natural and age-appropriate expressions of play, laughter, and joy (Lillard et al.,

2013; McEntire, 2009; Roy et al., 2014). Children possess distinct emotional and cognitive requirements and considerations that diverge greatly from those of adults (Edwards et al., 2023; Lillard et al., 2013), underscoring the importance for clinicians to educate, honour, and acknowledge these distinctions in order to establish a nurturing, inclusive, and secure therapeutic relationship.

Failure to recognize, and amplify, the significance of preserving a child-centric approach in therapy inadvertently limits the potential (and importance) of genuine healing, development, and growth by curtailing children's opportunities to just be children (VanFleet et al., 2010). The significance of this awareness has become apparent as a new clinician starting to navigate this territory. My hope is that by encouraging and embracing play, joy, humour, and not implementing adult expectations onto children, as a new therapist, I can foster a sense of comfort and trust that enables children to process their experiences in a developmentally appropriate manner (Edwards et al., 2023; Lillard et al., 2013). The onus lies on clinicians in their ability to understand the unique, often non-verbal modes of communication and interactions exhibited by children, and attuning to their clients to nurture their emotional well-being (Cooke & Halberstadt, 2021; Franzini, 2001; McEntire, 2009; Sherman, 2014).

Thus, it is imperative for practitioners to understand development, and if possible, place a level of importance on investing in continuing education and training focused on working with children and adolescents, to effectively and ethically care for, and respect the distinct needs and circumstances of young clients, and to avoid adultification. Additionally, it is imperative for practitioners who do not feel drawn to working with the younger demographic to understand when something is not in their wheelhouse and possess the agency to be able to refer young clients out to someone who has the desire, education, and training, to best support this young person.

Recognizing the Importance of Humour: Moving Beyond Teaching to Embrace Its Value

In the first two chapters of this capstone, humour, and its many variations, have been examined through Multicultural, Constructionism, and Person Centred lenses, exploring how humour, lightness, and levity can belong in a historically stoic profession. In my writing, I was intrigued at the opportunity to delve into the significance of humour in therapy, letting go of the notion that it is a teachable skill. Instead, exploring how humour can, and does, naturally unfold in therapy and the inherent value it brings. This allows for clinicians to lean into, and honour, who they are as a therapist and create genuine space for humour in their work. Rather than viewing humour as a learned technique, it is recognized as an innate human experience, woven into the intricate fabric of existence. Through a constructionist lens, this perspective invites a deeper understanding of the role of humour in therapeutic settings, moving toward the notion of embracing its organic presence and inherent value (Amici, 2019). By moving beyond the challenging notion of humour as a teachable skill, we can embrace it as a natural interaction in human connection. This opens and encourages the potential for a richer, more authentic therapeutic experience that honours the spontaneity and complexity of human emotions.

Research shows us that humour, predictably, varies greatly across cultures, ages, and demographics (Jiang et al., 2019; Yue et al., 2016; Yue & Hui, 2015). However, with this in mind, it is essential for us as counsellors to make a conscious effort not to avoid incorporating humour, joy, banter, or one of its many other iterations, into counselling. Instead of attempting to teach humour within graduate programs, or continuing education, the hope of this capstone is to encourage practitioners to lean into the lightness and joy that may be inherently present within sessions, embracing its diversity, and bolstering the substantial benefits that research has shown when humour is wholeheartedly integrated into therapeutic interactions. By acknowledging the

multifaceted nature of humour and the potential it holds in enhancing the therapeutic relationship, we as clinicians can strive to create a more inclusive, heart-led, and engaging environment for all types of clients.

In a world that, through the dominant discourse, often operates within binaries, the exploration of humour in therapy invites a shift towards embracing a spectrum of realities and experiences. Embracing a constructionist lens empowers counsellors to understand the diverse influences, such as cultural and social dynamics, that shape individual meaning, perceptions, and interpretations of humour (Papavlasopoulou et al., 2019). What arises for me through this exploration is the deep-rooted importance of appreciating the intricate and fluid nature of humour. By embracing the fluidity of humour, practitioners can ebb and flow with the nuances of incorporating humour into sessions with sensitivity and awareness, placing their client's overall well-being at the highest level of consideration. I trust that this approach can encourage clinicians to continually question, redefine, and expand their understanding of humour, fostering and nurturing a more vibrant and adaptable therapeutic atmosphere that honours the diversity of clients lived experiences.

Learning to embrace the lightness that humour brings can create a space where joy and hardships can coexist, challenging traditional notions of professionalism within counselling (more on this later). By not shying away from humour, and its many variations, within the therapeutic setting, counsellors have the burgeoning opportunity to rethink what it can mean to engage with clients in an authentic, person centered, supportive, manner. This reconsideration acknowledges and embraces the importance of cultivating a safe, welcoming, and inclusive space where clients feel comfortable exploring challenging areas while also sharing genuine moments of lightness and connection (M. B. Wu & Levitt, 2022). From my own personal experience,

finding the balance between lightness and depth in therapeutic settings has led to a redefinition of what professionalism within therapy means to me, and has resulted in a more profound and impactful counselling experience for both myself as a practitioner and clients alike.

Going Forward: What Now?

As I delved into the applications of the research, and the insights garnered from the two previous chapters of this capstone, it became evident to me that there is a compelling opportunity in the hands of novice counsellors. There is the undeniable potential to challenge the traditional views of counselling, ones that view therapy and the mental health field as heavy, stoic, and solemn (Franzini, 2001, 2012; Ravella, 1988). My exploration of humour, and its many iterations, within counselling, has illuminated the transformative prospect of wholeheartedly embracing lightness, joy, and playfulness in therapeutic interactions and relationships. By understanding humour's place in mental health, outdated perceptions of professionalism can be dismantled, and rebuilt through a more dynamic and inclusive approach that integrates humour. Through this dismantling, clinicians can create a space that is not only conducive to healing, but also fosters genuine authenticity and connection. By shifting this paradigm, practitioners may better acknowledge the role of humour in counselling and its capacity to enrich the therapeutic process and encourage the full spectrum of human emotions and experiences to be present in the journey of healing. For myself and other novice counsellors, this new framework offers a valuable roadmap for understanding and navigating the complexities of the therapeutic relationship with empathy, creativity, and a willingness to meet clients exactly where they are at through a Person Centred approach and engage in a more holistic manner.

Reshaping the Perception of Humour as Unprofessional: A Job for New Practitioners

One of the significant take aways from this capstone is how we as professionals can challenge the traditional views of stoicism and professionalism in counselling (Franzini, 2001, 2012; Ravella, 1988; Swaminath, 2006). The notion that counselling must adhere to a rigid and solemn demeanor solely based on how it has historically been portrayed is being activity questioned through this capstone. Through my experience on this journey, it was crucial for me to recognize and acknowledge that just because something has been traditionally practiced in a particular manner does not necessarily mean that it is the sole or ideal approach. By examining and challenging these entrenched narratives and working to adopt a more dynamic and inclusive approach to counselling, I have had the opportunity create a new path forward where laughter, joy, banter, and humour can harmoniously coexist with professionalism.

This active effort in dismantling current narratives to begin developing new ones can be understood through the lens of Constructionism. Through a constructionist lens, individuals construct their own realities and meaning, shaping their experiences and perceptions of the world (Byrne et al., 2021; Papavlasopoulou et al., 2019). As clinicians, we can play an active role in deconstructing entrenched traditions and beliefs that label humour and lightness as unprofessional in mental health, developing and constructing new realities where these elements are valued, appreciated, and integrated into a holistic form of healing. For me, this process of breaking down and reconstructing involves fully embracing my authentic self in the therapy room. By showing up as I am – joyful, humorous, quirky – while also demonstrating professionalism through my education, training, experience, and client outcomes, I am challenging historical perceptions, and writing new narratives. This approach demonstrates that by embodying change, we can deconstruct these longstanding notions. This process of

challenging the predominant narratives and embracing a more inclusive approach to therapy allowed me to create and establish a therapeutic environment with my clients that is not only effective, but also nurturing, genuine, and authentic.

Through this conceptualization of how to implement change, new, and experienced practitioners may aim to actively integrate joy, lightness, wit, banter, playfulness, and many other variations of humour into their practice. However, ultimately, how they choose to show up lies in who they feel they are in the counselling room. This capstone is not implying that all clinicians must embody humour and lightness in their work, but instead, encouraging a world moving forward where we do not shy away from this side of the spectrum of human emotion. By infusing sessions with elements of this new narrative of playfulness and levity, while still maintaining strong therapeutic relationships and fostering holistic growth in clients, we as counsellors are demonstrating that humour can coexist with professionalism in a meaningful and impactful manner; a notion staunchly challenged by Franzini (2001; 2012) and Ravella (1988). This intentional blending of therapeutic work and humour serves as a powerful means of challenging outdated beliefs and traditions within the field of mental health care, creating new realities and paving the way for a more person centred, inclusive, and holistic approach to therapeutic work.

By daring to do things differently, to respect the old but move toward the new, practitioners have the opportunity to redefine the boundaries of professionalism and create a space that honours how each individual client experiences the world, and shows up in counselling, and how we as therapists create an authentic space. Embracing the transformative and healing power of humour and lightness in counselling begins creating new narratives around what professionalism is, and how individuals can authentically thrive and grow through

connection. This shift towards a more integrated and nuanced approach to therapy not only challenges traditional stoic and solemn views of counselling, but also creates new possibilities for practitioners to engage with clients in a manner that embraces and honours the full spectrum of human experiences and emotions. In this ever-changing landscape, the merging of professionalism with joy and humour becomes a catalyst for positive change and growth within mental health care.

As budding clinicians entering the field of mental health during a time of radical growth and acceptance, we hold a level of power to be the change we wish to see. This growth and change can occur through challenging the status quo and embracing an inclusive and compassionate approach. We have the opportunity to shape the future of professionalism in therapy in a profound way. As the creators of a new era in mental health care and support, there is the chance to lead by example, demonstrating that professionalism does not have to be synonymous with seriousness and stoicism, but that joy and laughter can be the catalyst for therapeutic change. By personifying this transformative mindset by either actively working to incorporating humour, and its many iterations, into our interactions and relationships with clients, or making a conscious effort not to shy away from humour and levity, we challenge traditional views of counselling, constructing a new, holistic, and inclusive therapeutic landscape.

Reflections and Personal Learnings

Embarking on this capstone journey allowed me to explore the intersection between humour, playfulness, joy, and counselling, and where/how these nuanced interactions fit within the mental health field. This journey has been a deeply introspective and enlightening experience. The curiosity that sparked my interest in this area of exploration is rooted in a blend

of personal experiences, societal expectations, and a genuine passion for spreading, and experiencing joy. My reflections and personal learnings have been shaped by an interest to understand the transformative potential of humour, in its many variations, in therapeutic settings. This exploration serves as a guiding light forward, illuminating the path towards a deeper understanding of the obligations and opportunities counsellors hold for fostering holistic and inclusive mental health care.

Reflections and Research Question Revisited

As I now reflect back and sit with the learnings that have arisen over this capstone journey, I find myself wanting this research to provide something to the greater mental health community. To do this, I feel as though situating myself is the first step. Throughout the literature review in Chapter Two, the findings regarding the benefits of incorporating lightness, joy, and humour into therapeutic interactions continues to resonate deeply with me. The affirmations highlighted throughout the research of humour's capacity to create a holistic environment for healing did not come as a surprise, but rather served as a validation of my own innate beliefs and experiences. I spent much of my young life with the belief that my energy and bubbly demeanor did not fit within the greater context of professionalism, often deemed "too much". However, as I delved into the research on humour's role in counselling, there was an uncovering of these innate qualities and their invaluable place within therapeutic settings; that the natural inclination towards levity, laughter, and joy are not hindrances to professionalism, but rather, are undeniable catalysts for connection and healing (Gladding & Drake Wallace, 2016; Talbot, 2021; M. B. Wu & Levitt, 2022). The insights gained from this capstone reinforce the significance of fostering connections through means that may have historically been believed not to fit in a therapeutic

setting, and to address these means of connection through culturally sensitive and mindful practices, promoting emotional well-being and facilitating authentic therapeutic relationships.

Reflecting on my original research question that guided this capstone – “How does/can humour and playfulness manifest in a counselling setting, and what are our obligations as counsellors to foster and create space for this?” – I find myself revisiting the core essence of my inquiry. The journey through this capstone has not only provided answers but has also sparked further curiosities on the role of humour, levity, and its other variations, within the field of mental health. I felt compelled to explore how these insights could be translated into tangible strategies for creating inclusive and supportive spaces where our humanness, playful energies, and overall well-being can thrive.

Personal Learnings and Where I Am Now

This capstone journey, which happened to coincide with my practicum experience, has been a transformative experience, marrying self-discovery and professional growth. By being able to embrace my natural inclination towards humour, banter, and levity, I have begun the unpacking and dismantling of societal and professional expectations that have often stifled my authenticity. Through this exploration and personal reflection, I have embraced, and continue to lean into the fact that humour can coexist with professionalism and hardships within counselling, challenging the conventional belief that counselling is a stoic, solemn, and heavy environment (Franzini, 2001, 2012; Ravella, 1988). I have discovered a newfound confidence in my ability to ethically, effectively, and with a greater cultural awareness, integrate humour and its nuances into my counselling approach. The knowledge that this journey has garnered empowers me to stand secure in my identity as a practitioner who values the healing power of humour and its many

variations, reshaping my approach to counselling with a renewed sense of authenticity and purpose.

Continuing the journey of growth, I feel that I have learned, or at least am beginning to learn, to navigate the delicate balance between authenticity and conformity in the field of mental health. By embracing my unique style and resisting the pressure to conform to the historically stoic standards of professionalism, I have found a sense of relief in being able to express my genuine self in my therapeutic work. This process of acceptance has not only deepened my connection with the clients I work with but has enriched the therapeutic experience by fostering a sense of trust, openness, and genuine human connection. As I continue to evolve as a counsellor, I feel deep pride in the notion of uplifting the values of authenticity through joy and humour in my practice, recognizing that true healing begins with the freedom to be oneself fully, unapologetically, and being held in that space with genuine care (Amici, 2019; Goldin & Bordan, 1999; Hussong & Micucci, 2021; Kanbur & Baştumur, 2023; Mooney, 2000).

Current and Future Work

Working predominantly with children and youth in my clinical practice has provided me with a profound opportunity to integrate humour, lightness, and joy into these therapeutic relationships. By creating a space where laughter is welcomed and embraced as a vital component of the therapeutic process, I have had the joy of witnessing the transformative impact it can have. Building deep connections with my young clients by embodying a Person Centred approach, fostering connection through shared moments of humour, levity, and overall attunement to their unique expressions of joy, there has been a cultivation of growth and healing. This exploration has reinforced my belief in the importance of meeting our clients where they are at. This occurs through authentically expressing our range of human emotions, not shying away

from incorporating humour into counselling practices, and when working with younger populations, not placing adult expectations of healing on their developing minds (Cooke & Halberstadt, 2021; McEntire, 2009)

Looking ahead, I envision my future role as a supervisor to other new and learning counsellors. I feel compelled and committed to nurturing and celebrating the diverse styles and personalities of emerging practitioners. Recognizing and uplifting the value of individual uniqueness, joy, and vibrancy in a field that has historically been seen as solemn and weighty (Franzini, 2001, 2012; Ravello, 1988). I aspire to create and hold space for authenticity, cultivating a safety within mental health that recognizes the healing possibilities of humour. I seek to challenge the misconception that humour and its many variations are incompatible with professionalism. Instead, holding space for multiple truths to coexist, acknowledging the complexities of the human experience, recognizing that culture, upbringing, and life experiences shape individuals perceptions of the world, the potential for humour to harm, and the transformative power of joy and lightness and its potential for therapeutic growth.

Limitations

I would be remiss to not mention limitations as this capstone journey comes to a close. Generalizability is something I must consider when reflecting on the insights, reflections, and recommendations I have presented in this chapter. While this capstone is deeply personal, and sharing my own experiences and perspectives offers valuable insights into integrating humour and its many variations into therapy, I recognize the limitations in applying these findings universally. Factors such as cultural background, therapeutic approach, and client demographics can significantly influence the effectiveness and appropriateness of incorporating levity into therapeutic interactions. Additionally, my personal bias and social location inevitably shapes the

interpretation and presentation of research findings. While my experiences may resonate with some practitioners, it is important for me to approach these insights with a critical lens and consider how differences in life experience, training, and therapeutic style may impact the application of humour in clinical practice. Acknowledging these imitations allows for a more nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in integrating humour into therapy and empathizes the need for ongoing dialogue and exploration within the field.

Final Overview and Closing Thoughts

My desire to understand humour's place within counselling was pivotal in guiding this capstone. This project was motivated by gaps in graduate level education, and a curiosity surrounding practitioners' responsibility to create and foster an environment conducive of individual expressions of humour, taking into consideration many factors that may affect how humour is expressed, interpreted, and experienced. The research I explored affirmed the profound impact of humour on creating a nurturing environment for emotional expression, growth, and well-being. This capstone also explored the notion of counselling as a conventionally stoic setting, highlighting the unfounded societal association between seriousness and professionalism. Cultural considerations regarding humour were also expanded upon and investigated, emphasising areas such as humour's potential to cause harm. Through my research, I was interested in exploring how we as a society have historically viewed humour, and how we can foster more inclusivity moving forward. The applications of this learning underscored the significance of practitioners' obligation to foster an environment where humour and its many variations may exist, while considering implications for each unique client and the broader societal context. While synthesizing and interpreting insights from current research, I am grateful that I was able to delve into the benefits of incorporating humour and playfulness into therapy,

how it can be done, and its ability enrich the therapeutic journey and contributing to clients overall well-being.

This capstone journey has been extremely impactful for me, illuminating the power of humour, and its many variations, as a healing tool within therapeutic relationships, challenging traditional perceptions of mental health care, and moving toward a more inclusive and holistic world of healing and growth. By embracing humour, lightness, playfulness, banter, levity, and joy in therapeutic interactions, counsellors create an approachable space for inclusivity and comfort. As this capstone project draws to a close, I carry with me a profoundly optimistic outlook for the future of mental health care, where humour is recognized as a valuable resource, intertwining seamlessly with professionalism, shaping a world of healing and growth infused with compassion and joy.

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