On the cusp of context and profession: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of identity negotiation and compromise amongst South African psychologists employed in student counselling

BY

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This dissertation is dedicated to my late parents, Phillip and Catherine Constance.

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ABSTRACT

Student counselling services are a recognizable feature of higher education both in South Africa and abroad. The service is globally acknowledged for the role it plays in supporting holistic student development as well as the academic retention and throughput objectives of higher education institutions. However, a review of the relevant literature reveals a lack of enquiry into the identity experiences of student counsellors working in higher education. The present study sought to address this lacuna by conducting a qualitative investigation into the identity experiences of South African psychologists working in the context of a broad and diverse student counselling practice. The study was concerned with how and why these professionals come to perceive their identities in a particular way, as well as the influences impacting on this identity experience. A phenomenological-constructivist framework was adopted and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) selected as the most appropriate methodology with which to explore this specific, localised experience. Convenience sampling was employed to access participants. A total of fourteen psychologists from the clinical, counselling and educational registration categories, participated in the study.

Salient themes emerging from the research findings include the notion of the student counsellor as "wearing many hats"; the student counsellor as developmental specialist; the student counsellor as institutional "stepchild"; student counselling as a 'battleground' between context and profession, as well as the notion of student counselling as a territorial compromise. Research findings reveal a precarious and ambiguous position located in-between the context of higher education and psychology profession. This unique position consequently engenders a great deal of ambivalence and conflict for the student counsellor, whose primary allegiance is to the psychology profession. Participants' experiences indicate that they value their identity as psychologists and seek to maintain a connection to the profession whilst working in student counselling. However, the study also highlights powerful systemic influences unique to higher education and the South African social context, which compel student counsellors to re-evaluate and revise. The research findings further suggest that student counsellors' negotiate an amicable compromise by variously assuming 'Preferred Self' and 'Compliant

Self' identity positions in the context of work activities, power dynamics and relationships with significant professional, community and institutional others. On a broader level, the identity negotiation and reconstruction processes undergone by student counsellors serves as a metaphorical illustration of how a once-divided South African population may be reconciled.

Research findings have important transformative implications for higher education and the profession of psychology in South Africa, with student counsellors' work experiences suggesting a revision of current Eurocentric psychological models of training and practice in the South African context. This study specifically calls for a review of current registration categories and scopes of practice in South Africa, particularly its relevance to the South African student population and broader society. Strong parallels are drawn between student counselling, with its flexible, contextually-relevant approach and the systemically-driven principles and values of community psychology; student counselling therefore appears to bridge the gap between mainstream psychology's narrow, Eurocentric approach and community psychology's systemic understanding of South African realities. The "step-child" status of the student counsellor draws attention to a disjuncture between government legislation designed to promote institutional transformation in post-apartheid South Africa, and the actual policies and practices implemented by higher education institutions themselves. This study highlights, in particular, a perceived conflict between higher education's narrow, traditional academic orientation and student counselling's broader cognizance of the complex socio-historical needs and challenges of a diverse South African student population. The "step-child" status of the student counsellor further highlights areas for potential institutional reform in South Africa, including institutional classification of student counsellors, career development opportunities, remuneration and benefits for professional staff in the support sector.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND

Student counselling services is a familiar feature of higher education both locally and abroad, recognized for the role it plays in promoting holistic student development and facilitating academic retention and throughput. Student counselling has evolved over time into a versatile practice that both responds to and reflects, the changing landscape of higher education and the broader society within which it is embedded. The service today is a well-established, global phenomenon. Its expansion and professionalization over time is evident from the demand for qualified mental health professionals such as psychologists to render a comprehensive service to the student population in higher education.

Student counsellor roles and functions have expanded significantly to include more proactive, preventative and developmental interventions, in line with institutional agendas and contemporary trends in psychology towards a wellness, salutogenic model (van Lingen, 2012). Core services identified by the Southern African Association for Counselling and Development in Higher Education (SAACDHE) include individual and group counselling and psychotherapy, career assessments and counselling, as well as academic and personal skills development (de Jager, 2012). Additional student counsellor functions include student advocacy, faculty consultation, networking, collaboration and professional training and development of interns and staff (de Jager, 2012). Student counselling practice is a complex, multi-facetted service that seems to support Dean and Meadows's (1995) description of student counselling as "the intersection of a professional activity and environment" (p. 139). Diverse student counselling roles and functions suggest that the student counsellor identity is an

ambiguous and complicated experience; this is supported by Grayson and Cauley (1989) in their reference to the specialist and generalist dichotomy posed by this particular work environment:

> College and university psychotherapists are an unusual combination - partly generalists and partly specialists. Like old-fashioned general practitioners, they must respond to every problem that comes up in their community … the problems are diverse, and so are the persons who present them … at the same time, college psychotherapists also must be specialists. Their area of expertise is partly the college student population, which for all its variety has certain distinctive characteristics that require modifications in treatment. College psychotherapists also must be specialists on the college or university setting, because the conditions under which they work have an effect on their practice (p. 1).

The nature of student counsellor identity also links to a broader interest in whether identity is a flexible or relatively stable construct, how it is enacted and transformed in the workplace, and what enhances or constrains identity in this setting (e.g. Altmaier, Johnson & Paulsen, 1998; Chreim, Williams & Hinnings, 2007; Izutsu & Hishinumu, 2005; Mrdjenovich, & Moore, 2004; Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann, 2006; Sank & Shapiro, 1979). Whilst studies have focused on the impact of work context and demands on professional identity (e.g. Bernard, 1992; Good, 1992; Izutsu & Hishinumu, 2005; Mrdjenovich & Moore, 2004; Pratt et al., 2006; Sank & Shapiro, 1979), researchers have tended to neglect the student counselling work environment. The present study seeks to engage with existing discourses around workplace identification and identity flexibility by exploring the experiences and potential challenges around working as a psychologist in higher education. I was interested in how psychologists who work as student counsellors in higher education, experience and make sense of the work

demands and environmental expectations inherent in this setting, and whether these influences affirm or challenge the way they see themselves as professionals.

1.2. RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Professional identity is widely regarded as a complex, dynamic and flexible construct that is shaped by multiple influences, including the work environment and work activities (e.g. Clarke, Hyde & Drennan, 2013; Davey, 2010; Hansen, 2010). Work, in particular, is recognized as an important influence on professional identity construction, with authors such as Davey (2010) and Pratt, Rockman and Kaufmann (2006) highlighting the importance of fit between work and professional identity. Pratt et al. (2006), in particular, assert that work and professional identity are inter-related, with the individual learning about the nature and content of his or her work and in the process, revising their identity perceptions. Given the diverse nature of student counselling work and the fact that very little research has been directed at understanding how student counselling practice informs student counsellor identity, it was felt that such a study was both timely and necessary.

Investigating professional identity is also a worthwhile avenue to explore because as Davey (2010) points out, many studies focus "on the possible influences on a professional identity rather than on the nature of the thing itself" (p.10). Mindful of Davey's (2010) observation, the present study sought to offer a comprehensive experiential account of both the process and content aspects of professional identity from a student counsellor's perspective. Clarke et al. (2013) also maintain that knowledge of professional identity can inform professional training programmes; research into professional identity is therefore necessary for enhancing the quality of professional training programmes in higher education.

Centres for student counselling and development have increasingly become recognized as key institutional role players who are able to assist higher education institutions respond to a diverse student population in post-apartheid South Africa (Africa, 2005; Naidoo, 1997; Naidoo & Thaver, 2008). The evolution of the service is reflected in a holistic student counselling practice that encompasses student wellness, contributions to academic retention and throughput as well as macro-level networking and collaboration with various institutional role players and external communities. However, it appears somewhat ironic that the practitioner responsible for rendering this comprehensive service, has been overlooked by researchers.

Naidoo (1997) asserts that:

> No counsellor can afford the luxury of wearing the psychologist's cap alone. The advocate, the negotiator, the mediator, the social worker, the diversity specialist, the policy-maker, the financial advisor, the health educator, the information giver, the researcher, the career counsellor, and the academic skills counsellor are all caps that have to be worn at different times (p. 62).

My experience as a psychologist working in student counselling confirmed the varied role expectations highlighted by Naidoo (1997), and prompted me to reflect on the meaning and impact thereof, on my identity as a psychologist working in this particular setting. Trained as a counselling psychologist, I had entered the student counselling setting with traditional assumptions and expectations of what it means to be a psychologist in this context. These were quickly challenged by the dynamic complexity of the higher education work environment, with its diverse student population, structures and role players. I felt an increasing need to respond simultaneously to these varied demands and influences, and became increasingly aware of the need to revisit how I understood myself as a professional and how I chose to apply my psychological training in this unique setting. I also started to question whether   other

psychologists working in student counselling had similar experiences and concerns about their identity in this setting, and if, in fact, they still regarded themselves as 'psychologists'.

I was also struck by the dearth of local and international research exploring the identity experiences of psychologists working in student counselling, and therefore had little empirical evidence against which to evaluate my own experiences. The issue of context, and its potential to challenge or support the identity perceptions of student counselling practitioners, had not been critically examined before. In particular, the impact of diverse role expectations on student counsellors' identity integrity had not been directly attended to in existing student counselling literature. Given that the student counselling service is sustained financially by higher education, it is anticipated that student counsellors' practice would be informed by the academic priorities of a dynamic and constantly changing institutional environment (Stein, 1999). I therefore thought it appropriate for researchers to prioritise the impact of institutional dynamics on student counsellors' identity. Unfortunately such a focus has been lacking, and the present study sought to address this research gap.

According to Rossman and Rallis (1998), research serves a variety of functions, including instrumental, enlightenment, symbolic and emancipatory functions. This study aims to address the lack of a current, specialized body of knowledge pertaining to student counsellors' professional identity and working experiences in South African tertiary institutions. An enhanced appreciation of professional identity in specific, localised contexts, is an envisaged outcome of this work. Illuminating student counsellors' experiences through qualitative enquiry is considered a necessary precursor to uncovering how they negotiate and enact their professional roles in the context of organizational demands and influences.

Of particular interest to me, as researcher, are the subjective experiences of a specific group of professionals, namely South African psychologists employed in student counselling settings. This group is deemed worthy of investigation given the identified lack of inquiry into their work experiences and identity from a phenomenological perspective. I had also anticipated psychologists' experiences in student counselling to be particularly complex because of the dual influences of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) and the Southern African Association for Counselling and Development in Higher Education (SAACDHE) on their student counselling practice.

The impact of institutional job titles on psychologists' perceptions and experiences of identity in student counselling, is one focal point of this research. Psychologists are the majority in South African student counselling centres, whilst a 2010 benchmarking study conducted by Cilliers, Pretorius and Van Der Westhuizen revealed that just under half of the student counselling centres surveyed employed social workers. At the time of Cillers et al's (2010) study only one registered counsellor was reportedly employed at one of the local student counselling centres. The term 'student counsellor' is endorsed by SAACDHE and employed in a number of higher education institutions in South Africa. It refers to professionals rendering student counselling and development services in South African tertiary institutions (de Jager, 2012). Variation in the use of the term has been noted, with several student counselling centres officially retaining the title 'psychologist' instead of 'student counsellor'. All research participants were conversant with both titles, despite the institutional variation noted. Of interest to me was the significance and impact of different titles on student counsellor identity.

The need to investigate psychologists' identity experiences in South Africa becomes more pronounced when one considers the HPCSA's introduction of the 'registered counsellor'

category in 2003. This is a category distinct from psychologists, and was introduced with the aim of making primary mental health services available to the South African population (HPCSA, 2013). According to the Professional Board for Psychology (2013), which is a sub-division of the HPCSA:

Registered Counsellors differ from other categories of psychology in that their primary function is to prevent, promote, intervene, and appropriately refer. Their primary role at a preventative and promotional level involves screening and engaging early and appropriate levels of intervention (HPCSA, 2013, p.2).

Registered counsellors are in possession of an accredited 4-year Bachelor of Psychology (B. Psych.) degree, six-month internship experience under the supervision of a registered psychologist, and must have successfully completed the National Board Examination relevant to their respective field (HPCSA, 2013). Specific practice areas approved by the Professional Board for Psychology include career counselling, trauma counselling, HIV/Aids counselling and community mental health (HPCSA, 2013). Psychologists, in contrast, function at a more complex, specialised level, have a Masters' degree in psychology, twelve-month supervised internship experience and successful completion of the National Examination of the Professional Board for Psychology (HPCSA, 2010).

Pretorius (2013) points out that the category of 'registered counsellor' has often been misunderstood, with many registered counsellors being trained "to act as mini-psychologists" (p. 1). Pretorius (2013) argues that registered counsellors need to be understood in terms of their unique contribution to the psychology profession and the South African community at large, especially in terms of their usefulness at a preventative, developmental level, and their accessibility to groups and communities at grassroots level. To this end, greater education and

awareness regarding the distinct role and value of registered counsellors, is needed (Pretorius, 2013). Pretorius's (2013) recommendations seem to be supported by qualitative studies such as that undertaken by Rouillard, Wilson and Weideman (2015). Their findings indicate that whilst counsellors see their role as important in the context of South African mental health, negative perceptions and uncertainty regarding their role and changing scope of practice, exists (Rouillard et al., 2015). Themes and issues highlighted by the study included the vagueness of the profession, uncertainty about where registered counsellors should work as well as professional disregard for registered counsellors amongst other mental health professionals (Rouillard et al., 2015).

The functional implications of the 'student counsellor' title are perhaps more pronounced in institutional contexts that distinguish between the 'psychologist' and 'student counsellor' title on the basis of different roles and functions. Herfs (1997), exploring student counselling services at a Netherlands university, observed that the titles 'student psychologist' and 'student counsellor' denoted different roles and functions, with student counsellors assigned social work functions pertaining to grants, admission and access to studying, whilst the psychologists attended to students' personal problems and provided study-related and personal development group programmes (Herfs, 1997). The implications of classifying psychologists as 'counsellors' in an organizational context is therefore an important area for further enquiry, particularly in the context of potential misperceptions that may arise as a result of title ambiguity.

1.3. ISSUES OF PERSONAL REFLEXIVITY

I wish to highlight issues of personal reflexivity which are important considerations in qualitative research (Finlay & Ballinger, 2006). These include my ambivalence about holding

dual identities as 'psychologist' and 'student counsellor' in higher education, and my concerted attempts at self-definition amidst powerful institutional demands and challenges. I also had to be mindful of the high value I place on my professional title in student counselling, and my own personal views on remuneration because I regard these as a reflection of my professional status and value both within and outside of, higher education. I am a counselling psychologist who sees her work and title as expressions of her professional identity. I also see my 'psychologist' title as an accurate reflection of the profession to which I belong. It affords me professional distinction and reduces the risk of role blurring and confusion with other related disciplines such as social work, registered counselling and lay counselling. I believe that I have an ethical responsibility to accurately represent myself as a professional, and to educate others about my identity and scope of practice as a psychologist. I see the title of 'psychologist' as assisting me in achieving these two objectives.

Having worked previously in the public service sector, I was always aware of emerging trends in this sector that impacted on psychologists' employment conditions and benefits. I was thus able to compare this experience with that of psychologists employed in higher education. I noted with concern that the salaries of psychologists in student counselling were comparatively lower than their counterparts in the public sector. Psychologists in public service were benefitting from the implementation of an Occupation-specific dispensation (OSD) introduced by the South African public service in 2007, in an effort to attract and retain professional staff such as psychologists, nurses, doctors, social workers and educators (Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA), 2007). The OSD for psychologists included revised salary structures that recognized work experience, competency and performance (DPSA, 2007). Upon joining higher education in 2007, I discovered that such recruitment and retention strategies were lacking. This concerned me more, perhaps, because my personal views on remuneration

are related to issues of value. I personally regard remuneration as a reflection of how one's professional contribution is valued by the employing organization, and had difficulty reconciling my salary with the value perceptions I have of myself. I was curious as to how other student counsellors viewed their salary and whether it impacted, in any way, on their identity and value perceptions of themselves in higher education.

Having entered student counselling with certain beliefs and expectations about what it meant to be a psychologist in this setting, I was immediately struck by how challenging this environment was in terms of role expectations and institutional dynamics. Juggling multiple, diverse roles with my HPCSA scope of practice as a counselling psychologist prompted me to revisit how I saw my professional role and identity in student counselling. In responding to the myriad of environmental influences in student counselling, I became concerned that I was losing my identity as a psychologist. I started to question whether other psychologists working in student counselling also felt the same way as I did, and decided to formally redirect my curiosity into a PhD study on student counsellor identity.

An additional factor that fuelled my research interest was the SAACDHE conferences hosted annually by different regions in South African. In the course of interacting with other psychologists who also attended the conference, I became aware of similar but also different experiences to my own. I also noted, with surprise, that student counsellors' work experiences and identity challenges had not been prioritised as a conference theme at SAACDHE's annual conference. This provided the impetus for me to actively pursue this important though neglected area of student counselling.

1.4. RESEARCH AIMS & QUESTIONS

Given the global lack of enquiry into the subjective experiences of professionals working in student counselling, this qualitative study sought to explore how psychologists experience and make sense of their professional identity in this particular work environment. The study was also concerned with how and why these individuals come to perceive their identities in a particular way, and what influences impact on the way they process and understand themselves in this context. The research process was guided by the following key questions:

- How do psychologists, working in student counselling, experience and make sense of their professional identity?
- What factors do student counsellors identify as impacting on their experience of identity in student counselling?

1.5. OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation is divided into eight chapters. The introductory chapter, Chapter One, orientated the reader to the aims and rationale of the study, personal and professional influences underlying my decision to embark on the study, as well as prevailing research trends and gaps in enquiry that render the present study appropriate and timely. Chapter Two foregrounds the study by providing an in-depth historical account of student counselling services globally, with a focus on the evolution of the service, issues of professionalization as well as current challenges in the field. Chapter Two concludes with a series of broad questions and points of enquiry relating to student counselling, which I return to in closing Chapters Seven and Eight.

Chapter Three, the literature review, examines global student counselling research trends, with a particular focus on the extent to which student counsellors' identity experiences are

represented. Chapter Three also evaluates relevant literature pertaining to professional identity in general, and psychologists' identity in particular. Areas of focus include the varying definitions of identity, the nature and composition of the identity construct, the importance of work and identity work processes in the construction of identity, as well as developmental perspectives on identity formation.

Chapter Four discusses the study's philosophical and theoretical foundations, including core paradigmatic principles from postmodernism, phenomenology, constructivism as well as the concepts of identity work and organizational justice. Chapter Five, the methodology chapter, provides a brief historical background to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), discusses the core philosophical approaches and ideas underlying IPA as well as IPA's core features. Chapter Five also discusses practical issues such as sampling, data collection, and statistical reporting of participant patterns and trends. Also included in this chapter is a step-by-step explanation of how the IPA analytical process unfolded in this study.

Chapters Six and Seven form the core of this dissertation. Chapter Six highlights the study's main findings on student counsellor identity. Results are structured thematically according to dominant (superordinate) themes and sub-themes, with selected interview extracts that exemplify these thematic experiences. Chapter Seven integrates research findings into a coherent discussion of South African student counsellor identity, with a focus on the nature and content of this experience as well as the theoretical and research implications thereof, for existing student counselling research and identity research in general. Chapter Eight, the conclusion chapter, reviews the main objectives and findings of this study. It also addresses possible research limitations and suggests directions for future research. Implications for

institutional and professional reform are also discussed, with specific recommendations and

suggestions put forward.

CHAPTER 2
STUDENT COUNSELLING SERVICES:
HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

2.1. INTERNATIONAL ORIGINS
2.1.1. Early development

Internationally, student counselling services has a dynamic and colourful history. The pattern of transformation undergone by student counselling reflects, in many ways, the dynamics of an evolving society within which the service is embedded. Student counselling services has both a long, informal history dating back to medieval times, and more formal roots beginning in the early part of the twenty-first century (Martins, 1997). In the last century, the emergence and professionalization of student counselling services in higher education has been deeply rooted in broader political, social and economic trends, particularly in North America (de Jager, 2012; Lafolette, 2009). Prior to that, student counselling developed informally in the context of supportive interactions and relationships between academic staff and students in medieval universities (Joubert, 1988). This arrangement was facilitated by the close personal contact between academic staff and an elite minority of the population privileged enough to attend such institutions at the time (Martins, 1997). Student counselling thus emerged as a natural, informal extension of academic roles, rather than a separate support service as it exists today.

The development of student counselling as a recognized structure within higher education, is rooted in the North American educational and vocational guidance movement of the 1930s and 1940s (Dean & Meadows, 1995; Lafollette, 2009). This movement aimed to assist youth with life transition challenges such as leaving home and finding employment, and was shaped by events such as the Great Depression, World War II, the civil rights and women's movements,

as well as the Cold War (Dean & Meadows, 1995; Lafollette, 2009). Student counselling in the United States (US) emerged in response to post-war political transformations, economic growth and the eventual expansion of institutions to accommodate increasing numbers of diverse students accessing tertiary education (Lafollette, 2009). The service at the time was driven by an educational and vocational guidance focus offered to soldiers pursuing higher education after returning from World War II (Lafolette, 2009). This vocational trend is seen as the precursor and impetus for the development of counselling psychology as a separate registration category in 1955, facilitated largely by Donald Super (de Jager, 2012). Although psychologists from other categories (for example clinical and educational) are also employed in student counselling settings, student counselling is widely considered to be the domain of counselling psychology (Phelps, 1992).

2.1.2. Growth of student counselling roles and models

The needs of returning war veterans facilitated the expansion of student counselling services to include personal and social issues. This eventually led to the development of a separate professional identity for student counselling within the higher education system (Hodges, 2001). De Jager (2012) draws attention to the holistic perspective adopted even at that early stage in the history of the service, characterised by a recognition of students' vocational, educational and personal needs as "overlapping and interrelated" (p.5). The student counselling movement continued to develop in the post-war period, with a number of professional associations flourishing (de Jager, 2012). These include the American Counseling Association (ACA), American College Counseling Association (ACCA), International Association of Counseling Services (IACS) and the establishment in 1950 of the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors (AUCCCD). Formal accreditation guidelines for university and college counselling centres were first developed in 1970 (Kiracofe et al., 1994),

whilst psychometric, administrative and counselling refinements reflected further advancement in the field of student counselling (de Jager, 2012).

Student counselling is a dynamic and progressive practice, characterised by the flexible expansion of student counsellors' roles and theoretical frameworks in response to broader institutional changes in higher education (Bishop, 1990; Guiffrida, Schwitzer & Choate, 2006). These changes include an increasingly diverse student population with varied presenting problems as well as reduced resource allocation to support the student counselling service in higher education (Cooper, 2000, as cited in Rawls, Johnson & Bartels, 2004). Student counselling's early holistic approach as well as developmental and humanistic models continue to inform student counselling practice today. This includes the recognition of student development and functioning as a complex, multi-dimensional experience, along with a respect for the client's worldview and right to self-determination (Beamish, 2005; Hodges, 2001).

The medical model's increasing influence on student counselling practice, has been noted (e.g. Beamish, 2005; Kadambi, Audet & Knish, 2010; Lafollette, 2009; Stone & Archer, 1990). This model is associated with psychology's propensity to adopt a pathological approach to psychological functioning, viewing it in terms of the presence or absence of psychopathology (Naidoo, 2001). The permeation of this model into student counselling seems related to a perceived increase in severe psychopathology amongst university and college students in the US (e.g. Beamish, 2005; Kadambi et al., 2010; Lafollette, 2009; Stone & Archer, 1990). However, there is a lack of consensus regarding the perceived and *actual* increase in severe psychopathology amongst the student population, with methodological limitations affecting the accuracy of research in this area (Sharkin, 1997, as cited in Sharkin & Coulter, 2005). However, Sharkin and Coulter (2005) contend that there is "… enough anecdotal evidence to

suggest how imperative it is for counselling centers to be as prepared as possible to handle student problems considered more severe, in the future" (p. 170).

Psychological challenges which student counsellors' have increasingly had to address in the last few decades include depression and anxiety (Soet & Sevig, 2006), psychosis, suicidal ideation and intent (Rockland-Miller & Eels, 2008), personality disorders and self-injurious behaviour; exposure to physical and sexual violence and related trauma; and substance abuse and dependence (Beamish, 2005; Murray & Kardatzke, 2007). Other issues typically addressed by student counsellors include first-year social and academic adjustment challenges; relationship, identity and self-esteem issues as well as academic-related matters pertaining to time management, study skills, stress management, motivation, procrastination and exam anxiety (Phippen, 2012).

Increased student diversity in the context of sexual orientation, ethnicity and culture, necessitate that student counsellors adapt their worldviews and expand their multicultural competencies (Lafollette, 2009). Student counselling practice in the Western world has increasingly been informed by a multicultural model of practice that is also mindful of the social context, injustices and inequalities within which human experience is embedded. One such approach is a social justice approach to counselling, which seeks to raise awareness and eradicate all forms of oppression including racism and sexism (Smith, Baluch, Bernabei, Robohm & Sheehy, 2003). Examples of student counselling activities informed by a social justice approach include sexual orientation and gender sensitivity awareness programmes as well as programmes on domestic violence and abuse. Such initiatives aim to educate students and target the underlying attitudes, beliefs and value systems that perpetuate or reinforce oppression of groups such as women (Lee, Caruso, Goins & Southerland, 2003).

Crisis intervention models have also gained prominence in North American student counselling centres following the September 11th terror attack of 2001 and campus shootings such as the Virginia Tech University incident (Lafollette, 2009). Disaster and emergency contingency guidelines and plans also form a compulsory component for university and college counselling centre accreditation in the US (Lafollette, 2009).

2.1.3. Student counselling services today

Although student counselling services is still in its infancy in some regions such as Eastern Europe (de Jager, 2012), the service globally has expanded and evolved significantly from its original, narrow focus on educational and vocational guidance. University student counselling services today are well-established in countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Australia, Israel, Germany, Hong Kong, and South Africa (Israelashvili, 1997; Martin, 1997). The demand for mental health professionals with a Masters-level qualification in counselling or clinical psychology, psychiatry and social work, reinforces the image of a professional and legitimate service provider in higher education (Bishop, 2006; Boyd et al., 2003; Watson & Schwitzer, 2010; Widseth, Webb & John, 1997). In addition, the active utilisation of, and contribution to, professional journals such as the *International Journal of College Student Psychotherapy* and *Journal of College Counseling*, reflects the growth of student counselling and development as a recognized area of scholarly enquiry and professional practice.

Increased global demand for student counselling services in higher education has been widely documented (e.g. Bishop, Gallagher & Cohn, 2000; Lacour & Carter, 2002). The service is now recognized as a key role player in promoting student retention and throughput whilst also maintaining a specialized and distinct identity from that of other service providers (Lafollette, 2009). According to Boyd et al. (2003), "counselling services are an integral part of the

educational mission of the institution and support the mission in a variety of ways, such as consultation, teaching, preventative and developmental interventions, and treatment" (p.168). Widseth et al (1997) refer to the service as "college mental health", defining it as a:

> specialized field with professional staff who are both knowledgeable about the developmental issues of late adolescence, college life, and the psychological problems inherent in such settings and with such an age group and are also keenly attuned to the specific college culture in which they work (p.1).

Dole (1981) offers an alternative title, "college psychology", describing it as a distinctly contextual, subspeciality of psychology, rather than a new profession, with the college psychologist applying common roles and knowledge from a generic psychology model. Dole (1981) further describes it as a "mixed rather than a pure breed", and asserts that he prefers to use the specific term "college psychologists" because this title "denotes a narrowing of professional setting and a broadening of possible practices, topic areas, roles and clients" which include teaching, counselling and therapy, consultation, research and evaluation (pp. 295-296).

Student counsellor roles and functions have been legitimized as part of the accreditation standards used by the [1]IACS to accredit university and college counselling centres in the United States, Canada and Australia. Recognised functions include individual and group counselling and psychotherapy, psychometric assessments, crisis intervention, outreach programmes that enhance total growth and potential, research, training and programme evaluation, and professional development (Boyd et al., 2003; IACS, 2011). The development and evolution of South African student counselling services is addressed in a subsequent section of this chapter.

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[1] International Association of Counseling Services

2.1.4. Institutional challenges to student counselling

Global transformation trends in higher education have challenged student counsellor roles and identities. Yalof (1997) predicted the need for psychology training programmes to reflect the evolving nature of professional roles, learning paradigms and alternative models of practice, particularly for those graduates who would eventually seek employment in the student counselling context. Student counsellors have been tasked with effectively managing an increasing student population with complex, multi-layered problems. Budgetary, resource and staff constraints arising from conservative fiscal trends in higher education, have also posed specific challenges to student counselling roles and practice (de Jager, 2012; Hodges, 2001; Lacour & Carter, 2002; Lafollette, 2009), with short-term therapeutic modalities seen as more feasible options in the context of such challenges (Bishop, 1990; Gallagher, 1988, as cited in Lacour & Carter, 2002; Much, Wagenar & Hellenbrand, 2009; Williams & Edwardson, 2000).

Williams and Edwardson (2000) explore the impact of managed care and increased demands for accountability and efficiency, on student counselling services, with a specific focus on professional training implications for the twenty-first century. The study emphasises the importance of training psychologists to be multi-skilled, 'flexible generalists', competent in team-work, multiculturalism and diversity, short-term therapeutic models and crisis intervention (Williams & Edwardson, 2000). However, authors such as Bishop (1990) and Gilbert (1992, as cited in Lacour & Carter, 2002) draw attention to important ethical and practical considerations when opting for short-term models. These include the range of clients suitable for such approaches and how to appropriately manage those clients deemed unsuitable. Lafollette (2009) also draws attention to the pressures of efficacy and accountability on university counselling centres, and recommends prioritising funding for the appointment of additional staff to manage the increasing workload. Also suggested is an increased focus on

preventative initiatives that promote and enhance student mental health and emotional wellbeing (Lafollette, 2009). For Lafollette (2009), this proactive approach can help reduce the need for reactive responses to emergent and existing psychopathology amongst the student population.

In an effort to survive and remain relevant, it is envisaged that student counselling will continue to evolve and adapt in response to ongoing environmental and institutional changes in higher education. Adaptive strategies would entail broadening and diversifying the student counsellor's scope of practice. In so doing, questions arise as to how student counsellors feel about such adaptation and whether they perceive any threat or challenge to their identity integrity and salience as psychologists working in student counselling. Such questions warrant further in-depth exploration, which the present study seeks to respond to.

2.2. STUDENT COUNSELLING IN SOUTH AFRICA

2.2.1. The early years: A reactive approach

The origins and evolution of student counselling in South Africa followed a similar developmental path to the US in terms of being shaped by historical, political and socio-economic factors over the past seventy years. De Jager (2012) draws attention to three distinct phases in the history of South African student counselling and development: a reactive phase (1940s – 1960s), a proactive phase (1970s – early 1990s) and the current integrative phase from the mid-1990s to the present. The first student counselling service, based on the Pietermaritzburg campus of the former University of Natal, was known as a 'Student Advisory Service' at the time of its inception in 1948 (Joubert, 1988). Student counsellors were originally referred to as 'student advisors' with backgrounds in fields such as teaching and psychology (Joubert, 1988; Naidoo, 1997).

As in the US, student counselling's 'reactive phase' was characterized by a focus on academic performance and vocational guidance. This phase emerged in response to concerns about academic failure rates at South African universities and the adjustment needs of white youth returning from World War II and entering higher education (de Jager, 2012; Naidoo, 1997). As the range of services broadened to include career and curriculum planning, academic support and personal counselling, the professionalization of student counselling as a specialized service gradually occurred, with social workers and psychologists occupying positions in student counselling (Naidoo, 1997). Student counselling and development services extended to the Durban campus of the University of Natal, with the University of Pretoria establishing the second such unit, called a Student Counselling Bureau, in 1957 (de Jager, 2012). The service continued to expand to other South African institutions in the 1950s and 1960s (de Jager, 2012).

2.2.2. Proactive Phase

According to de Jager (2012), student counselling's 'proactive' phase was facilitated largely by the findings of the 1974 Van Wyk – de Vries Commission of Enquiry into Universities, which explicitly acknowledged the importance of student counselling and development to student success in higher educaiton. This facilitated the shift in student counsellor roles and functions from a narrow remedial focus to a more comprehensive approach that encompassed preventative and developmental interventions as well (de Jager, 2012). A holistic, multidimensional model of practice was adopted, with interventions targeting not only prospective students in the context of career guidance and counselling, but also the career, personal, emotional and social needs of registered students (de Jager, 2012). Reinforcing the need for a holistic, contextually-relevant model of student counseling were broader socio-political changes in the 1980s and early 1990's, which accelerated higher education transformation in South Africa. Most notable was the eradication of apartheid in the early 1990s

and the findings and recommendations of the National Commission on Higher Education in 1996 (de Jager, 2012).

In the new democratic South Africa, large numbers of previously-disadvantaged black youth began seizing the opportunity to access tertiary education. The result was an increase in student diversity, with students emanating from diverse socio-economic, educational, language, and cultural backgrounds. This necessitated a more holistic approach to student counselling practice, one that was cognizant of student diversity and able to accommodate multiple worldviews and perspectives (de Jager & van Lingen, 2012). It was also during this time that the holistic *wellness* approach gained prominence in South African student counselling (de Jager, 2012). Developed by Dunn (1961), the wellness approach is underpinned by a salutogenic philosophy that emphasizes personal strengths and development over deficits and disease (van Lingen, 2012). According to van Lingen (2012), salutogensis is therefore "the antithesis of pathogenesis, commonly known as the Western medical model" (p. 110). Wellness interventions are typically proactive and developmental, rather than reactive, (de Jager & van Lingen, 201; van Lingen, 2012) and include lifeskills training. In the context of such proactive shifts, Van Heerden (2012) aptly points out that "the role of the counsellor has been subtly redefined from that of therapist and counsellor to that of mentor and life coach, in addition to the therapeutic and counselling work" (p. 213). Although this approach reflects a decreased reliance on pathogenic Western models in student counselling, van Lingen (2012) cautions that the salutogenic paradigm should not be construed as a substitute for, but rather a complementary approach to, the pathogenic paradigm.

The incorporation of life-skills as an important aspect of student counselling services globally, reinforces the dynamic nature of the service. This shift occurred in response to government and

industrial demands for higher education institutions to equip students with knowledge and skills that reflect contemporary trends in the global market, as well as to render students more employable in the job market (Fallows & Stevens, 2000; Härkonnen, 2008; Heitor, 2008; Maharosa & Hay, 2001). Life-skills encompasses areas of self-management, personal development and academic skills, and includes time management, goal-setting, critical thinking and problem-solving, study skills and communication skills (Abraham, 2006; Cook, 2006; Davis & Mannion, 2005; Johnston & Watson, 2004; Fallows & Steven, 2000; Härkonnen, 2008; Laybourn, Falchikov, Goldfinch & Westwood, 2000; O'Brien, 2000).

The proactive phase in student counselling's history saw an increased appreciation of the individual in context. Emphasis was on an integrated model of student development that focused on the macro- and micro-level influences on the individual (van Lingen & de Jager, 2002, as cited in de Jager, 2012). According to De Jager (2012), this observed trend was associated with the increased ownership of a distinctly African model of student counselling and development, one that is informed by the prevailing cultures, communities and alternative systems of thought characterizing this diverse country and continent.

2.2.3. Current position: Student counselling as integrated stakeholder

According to de Jager (2012), the current 'integrative' phase of South African student counselling reflects its current status and position "as an imbedded stakeholder in the core business of HE" (higher education) (p. 11). Botha et al. (2005) assert, based on local and international literature, that "there is not only a strong need for student counselling and development, but that tertiary institutions in South Africa cannot function without the service" (p. 84). Morrison, Brand and Cilliers (2006) describe student counselling as a strategic partner of higher education, whose main role is to support institutional objectives and stakeholders.

The incorporation of student counselling into institutional policies, structures and missions is seen as evidence in support of this view (de Jager, 2012). Student counsellors have sought to integrate and sustain themselves as a viable institutional partner by aligning their roles and functions with the institution's academic ethos and objectives of retention and throughput (de Jager, 2012). Student counsellor activities and portfolios have expanded to include not only personal and career counselling but also academic development (Motsabi & van Zyl, 2012) and life-skills training (van Heerden, 2012). In addition, peer helper training (de Jager, 2012) and support for students with disabilities (Beekman & Scholtemeyer, 2012) also forms part of the holistic student counselling and development service in South African higher education.

Increasing the research capacity of student counselling staff may be seen as both enhancing student counselling's position in higher education and aligning itself with the academic ethos of this work setting. According to de Jager and van Lingen (2012), the positioning of student counselling and development services "as an equal and professional partner within the academic context is greatly enhanced by research outputs such as conference presentations and articles published in professional journals" (p. 54). Thus, while student counselling's focus during its formative years may have been on establishing a distant identity for itself within higher education, the evolution of the service in recent years suggests a dual attempt at both professional distinction and institutional integration. The present study sought to verify whether student counsellors' experiences actually support or challenge the notion of student counselling as a well-received and integrated service in higher education. Chapter Seven, the discussion chapter, also considers the research findings in the context of its transformative implications for institutional change and compliance with government legislature and policies in South Africa, such as The National Plan for Higher Education (Department of Education (DoE), 2001).

South African student counselling centres are currently well-developed. The service has also expanded into other African countries such as Botswana, Swaziland, Lesotho and Namibia (Naidoo, 2012). The service varies somewhat from context to context, depending on factors such as geographical location, student population size and demographics (SAACDHE, 2007). Funding for the service, staff complement and qualifications, as well as material resources at the student counsellor's disposal, also influence the nature and range of services on offer (de Jager, 2012; SAACDHE, 2007). However, student counselling services globally share common objectives of providing a holistic service that is responsive and relevant to student needs, enhances student retention and throughout and promotes optimal student functioning (Bishop, 2006; SAACDHE, 2007). Core services include the following:

- Individual and group counselling and psychotherapy. Typical student problems include adjustment difficulties, family and relationship problems, bereavement, HIV/Aids, anxiety and depression.

- Career assessments and counselling

- Skills development workshops such as assertiveness training, diversity appreciation, gender awareness, stress management and leadership training

- Academic skills development in areas such as problem-solving, critical thinking, study skills and effective group work

- Disability support units to address the needs of, and advocate for, disabled students

- Student advocacy in instances where adverse personal circumstances may have impacted negatively on academic performance

- Faculty consultation and advisory roles to enhance teaching and learning

- Research that informs and enhances service delivery

- Professional training and development of staff and interns

- Community outreach

According to de Jager (2012), the evolution and formalization of student counselling and development services in South Africa overlaps significantly with the development of the Southern African Association for Counselling and Development in Higher Education (SAACDHE) in 1978. Originally known as the Society for University Student Counseling in Southern Africa, SAACDHE is credited with helping to develop, refine and legitimize student counselling's image in higher education (de Jager, 2012). According to de Jager (2012), SAACDHE "has consistently provided a dynamic forum for vigorous debate in the process of establishing a professional platform for [2]SCD and for its growth as a discipline with unique Southern African characteristics" (p.18). SAACDHE is currently recognized by various institutional and professional bodies, including Higher Education South Africa (HESA), as a legitimate community of practice (de Jager & van Lingen, 2012). According to De Jager and van Lingen (2012), SAACDHE is also affiliated with the Psychological Society of Southern Africa (PsySSA) as a sub-discipline.

The formalization of student counselling as a distinct practice in higher education, has been further contextualized within a discourse of professionalization (de Jager & van Lingen, 2012). De Jager and van Lingen (2012) discuss the main features and characteristics of a profession, which include established professional association(s) and an ethical code that guides practice; professional registration and development of members, and a scholarly foundation from which practice is developed and evaluated through professional journals. In this context, South African student counselling and development is regarded as having made significant strides towards defining itself as a legitimate profession (de Jager & van Lingen, 2012). Mindful of this assertion, the present research was interested in whether psychologists, working in student

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[2] Student counselling and development services

counselling, see their practice as a distinct profession or as an extension of the psychology profession.

2.3. CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES IN SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENT COUNSELLING

2.3.1. Paucity of local research

A review of student counselling literature globally revealed discrepancies between local and international research activity. The extensive body of student counselling literature abroad contrasted with the limited number of South African publications available on this topic when I first initiated the study in 2010. At the time, I found much of the available publications dated and sporadic. The reader will thus observe discrepancies in the amount of discussion devoted to South African student counselling issues as compared to the previous section's international perspective. The challenges associated with working in student counselling and the subjective experiences of South African student counselling practitioners in particular, were noticeably neglected areas of enquiry. This prompted me to address this research lacuna in the form of a PhD study. Since 2011, however, South African student counselling publications have been gradually increasing, with the emergence of the *Journal of Counselling and Development in Higher Education Southern Africa*, first published in 2011, and the *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* (JSAA), first published in 2013. It is hoped that these publications will stimulate more research interest in the area of student counselling, particularly the experiences of student counselling practitioners, as well as reaffirm student counselling as a relevant and legitimate professional practice in South African higher education. Another significant development in the area of student counselling literature was the 2012 publication of the seminal text, *Student counselling and development: Contemporary issues in the Southern African context* (Beekman, Cilliers & de Jager (Eds.), 2012), from which much of this chapter is drawn. This particular

text provided me with a comprehensive historical overview of the development and evolution of student counselling in Southern Africa, the current status and position of the service in Southern Africa, as well as contemporary issues and challenges facing South African student counselling practitioners.

2.3.2. Social and contextual challenges

De Jager and van Lingen (2012) draw attention to the challenges facing South African student counsellors as they attempt to negotiate their professional practice in a way that is cognizant of the social, political, economic, cultural and historical context from which their clients come. The most salient and pressing challenges relate to the retention and throughput of historically disadvantaged, first-generation students accessing higher education (de Jager & van Lingen, 2012). De Jager and van Lingen (2012) also highlight student diversity in the context of cultural and language differences, special learning needs, sexual orientation issues, as well as trauma and HIV/Aids.

The South African population is composed of four diverse groups and sub-groups, each having their own unique language, religious and cultural practices that one needs to be mindful of when working in the student counselling context (Naidoo, 2012). The 'African' group includes groups such as the Zulus, Xhosas, Vendas and Sothos, whilst the local 'Indian' community includes Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, Urdu and Gujaratis (Naidoo, 2012). Both the African' and 'Indian' groups display differences in language, religious and cultural practices between its sub-groups (Naidoo, 2012). The 'White' population group in South Africa is composed of predominantly English- and Afrikaans-speaking individuals, with minority sub-groups such as Jews, Greeks, Portuguese and Germans representing greater variation in terms of language and cultural practices (Naidoo, 2012). 'Coloureds' are also composed of different sub-cultures such

as Cape Malays, Cape Coloureds and Griquas, distinguished primarily by language (Afrikaans) and religion, with Christians being in the majority (Naidoo, 2012). Beekman (2012) also asserts that diversity encompasses "culture, ethnicity, language, and rural versus city, extremely poor versus rich, disadvantaged versus advantaged, technologically literate versus illiterate, as well as immigrant students and staff from all over Africa and to a lesser extent, the rest of the world" (p. 72). Individual students present with diverse profiles reflecting all or most of the dimensions referred to by Beekman (2012). This can, for example, translate into a historically disadvantaged, first-generation Black student from a rural community with limited technological exposure and limited English proficiency (English as a second language), having to integrate into an English-medium institution. South African student counsellors thus encounter diversity on multiple levels and it is required of them to not only be mindful of these various "diversity dimensions" (de Jager & van Lingen, 2012, p. 46), but to also respond in a manner consistent with each student's unique profile and circumstances.

2.3.3. The challenge of relevance and responsiveness

The relevance of student counselling theoretical frameworks, the position of student counselling services within higher education and the need for collaborative partnerships with institutional stakeholders, are identified as important considerations for South African student counsellors (de Jager & van Lingen, 2012). Beekman (2012), in particular, highlights the relevance of a systems-based theoretical framework for student counselling, whilst Naidoo (2012) draws attention to diverse student presentations in the South African context that go beyond a Western medical (pathogenic) model. These include academic and psychosocial challenges as well as 'culture-bound syndromes' that require the intervention of an African traditional healer in collaboration with the student counsellor (Naidoo, 2012). South African student counsellors therefore have to be conversant with an African explanatory model of

human experience when working in this particular context. An African (*abaNguni)* explanatory model of human experience places great emphasis on the relationship between the living and the deceased (Naidoo, 2012). In the local African culture, deceased family members, typically referred to as ancestors or *abangasekho,* are perceived as having an enduring link with the living, and are believed to have a significant influence over their lives (Naidoo (2012).

From a traditional African perspective, physical ailments, social disharmony and psychological distress are variously interpreted as signs of bewitchment (*ubuthakathi*) or displeasure from the ancestors, often for perceived ancestral neglect when significant events or milestones have been achieved (Crawford & Lipsedge, 2004; Naidoo, 2012). African traditional healers are regarded as the medium through which communication with the spirit world can take place, performing relevant ceremonies and rituals in order to appease the ancestors and restore harmony between the living and the spirit worlds (Crawford & Lipsedge, 2004; Naidoo, 2012). The terminology for traditional healers varies according to the different African sub-cultures. In the Zulu culture, for example, traditional healers are referred to as either sangomas (diviners) or inyangas (herbalists) (Crawford & Lipsedge, 2004). Sangomas communicate with the ancestors through bone-throwing, interpretation of dreams or ancestral channeling; interventions to appease the ancestors can include burning of incense and ritual sacrifice (Crawford & Lipsedge, 2004). Inyangas are typically male and specialize in the use of traditional African medicine ('muthi') for healing purposes. 'Muthi' consists of local African herbs used in purification rituals including bathing and steaming.

Whilst student counsellors need to be mindful of traditional African belief systems when working in the context of South African student counselling, Naidoo (2012) makes the important distinction between "traditional", "acculturating" and "acculturated" categories   of

African clients which student counselling practitioners also need to bear in mind. According to Naidoo (2012), "all three categories … exist on a relationism-individualism continuum" (p. 157). Those subscribing to a traditional African perspective require holistic interventions aimed at harmonizing the relationship between the physical and spiritual realms, whilst the acculturating individual would, in addition to a culturally-relevant response to their problem, require individual therapy (Naidoo, 2012). Acculturated clients are those amenable to Western individualistic therapeutic models as well as a focus on relational aspects (Naidoo, 2012).

Naidoo (2012) also makes an important distinction between a "culturally unique" syndrome and a "uniquely interpreted syndrome" (p. 161). A "culturally unique syndrome" such as *ukuthwasa*, refers to the calling to become a traditional healer (Naidoo, 2012, p. 161). Depending on symptom presentation, it is often perceived as a form of psychosis by those employing a Western biomedical model. However, the apparent resistance of *ukuthwasa* to Western psychological and psychiatric forms of intervention highlights the relevance of a culturally appropriate response from a traditional healer (Naidoo, 2012). "Uniquely interpreted syndromes" are those which can be understood from both a Western biomedical model as well as an indigenous African model. An example of this would be depression. Depending on client amenability, effective treatment could involve student counselling and traditional healing interventions, with both parties working collaboratively (Naidoo, 2012).

2.3.4. Resource challenges

According to De Jager (2012), an ideal student counselling and development service should consist of "multidisciplinary cross-functional teams" that include psychologists, social workers, educators, researchers and administrative staff, each bringing specialized competencies and making a unique contribution to the service (p. 12). This is necessary because

certain functions are discipline-specific and therefore require the specialized expertise of a particular discipline (de Jager, 2012). However, in reality, the student counsellor as overworked and under-resourced is a universal challenge in the student counseling setting (de Jager, 2012; Kiracofe, 1993; Phelps, 1992; Renjilian & Stites, 2002). Student counselling centres have been identified as high-risk areas for burnout amongst professional staff because the nature of work demands often exceed available material and human resources (de Jager & van Lingen, 2012; Kiracofe, 1993; Renjilian & Stites, 2002). De Jager and van Lingen (2012) draw attention to several ways of managing these challenges, including extending staffing potential through peer helpers and interns, and engaging in departmental income-generation activities. In line with student counselling's underlying salutogenic approach, practitioner self-care is also emphasised with a focus on staff wellness and work-life balance practices (de Jager & van Lingen, 2012).

2.4. CONCLUSION

This chapter explored the origins and evolution of student counselling services both locally and abroad. Transformation of the service was highlighted, with special emphasis on the professionalization and diversification of student counselling services in response to institutional and broader social change. South Africa's turbulent past and current transformation agenda in a new democracy, raises questions as to how South African student counsellors experience their roles and identity in the face of such change. The study's key research questions, as outlined in chapter one, are concerned with how psychologists, working in student counselling, experience and make sense of their professional identity, as well as the factors that impact on this identity experience. The follow considerations were deemed important in answering these key questions:

- Do participants' experiences support documented accounts of a dynamic and evolving student counselling service (e.g. De Jager, 2012; Lafolette, 2009)?

- Do participants' experiences of work and identity reflect broader systemic influences of a socio-historical, economic and cultural nature? If so, how?

- The impact of budgetary and resource constraints on student counselling services, is well-documented. I am interested in whether student counsellors see institutional funding and resource constraints as impacting on their roles, status and position in higher education.

- This study also seeks to understand the dual significance and impact of the HPCSA and higher education context, on student counsellors' experiences of identity, given that participants are qualified psychologists employed by higher education.

- SAACDHE is credited with helping to professionalize student counselling and development in South African higher education. This study hopes to ascertain whether student counsellors also perceive SAACDHE to be a significant influence on their student counselling practice.

- Diversity is a characteristic feature of South African society and higher education in particular. As researcher, I am interested in participants' experiences of and responses to, diversity in student counselling.

CHAPTER 3
LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of examining professional identity, particularly in organizational contexts, is acknowledged in the literature (e.g. Chreim, Williams & Hinings, 2007; Pratt et al., 2006). Role clarity is highlighted in the literature as an important aspect of professional identity influencing workers' experiences; role clarity is said to significantly influence job satisfaction (e.g. Bedeian & Armenakis, 1981; Fisher & Gitelson, 1982, as cited in Rabin & Zelner, 1992), work adjustment (e.g. Cherniss, 1980), employee turnover and burnout (e.g. Jayaratne & Chess, 1983) as well as interpersonal relationships at work (French & Caplan, 1972). In particular, lack of role clarity is said to contribute to tension and conflict between workers (Workplace Health & Safety QLD, 2014). Britt (2003) also draws attention to the significant relationship between identity, work engagement and motivation. The need for continued research into professional identity is therefore warranted when one considers the wide-ranging impact of identity on workplace functioning. Unfortunately, contemporary research on psychologists' identity, particularly in the student counselling context, is limited. More specifically, how psychologists' construct and understand their roles and identities in the context of student counselling practice, and the influences on this process, is seriously lacking both locally and abroad. Under-representation in this area is especially marked in South Africa, pointing to a timely need to investigate and illuminate this neglected area of professional enquiry.

The concept of '*professional identity*' has been described as elusive and ill-defined (Davey, 2010), with a review of the literature revealing a lack of consensus on the nature and   content

of this construct (Fagermoen, 1997). Transdisciplinary influences from fields such as psychology, philosophy, social anthropology and sociology, are seen as contributing to the varied interpretations and ambiguity of the terms 'identity' and 'professional identity' (Davey, 2010). Frijhoff (1993, as cited in Duits, 2008) asserts that "identity unites the psychic and the social, and thus allows there to be a productive cross-pollination across the social sciences" (p.32). Davey (2010) makes the valid observation that many studies focus "on the possible influences on a professional identity rather than on the nature of the thing itself" (p.10). Mindful of Davey's (2010) observation, the present study sought to offer a comprehensive experiential account of both the process and content aspects of professional identity from a student counsellor's perspective. Given the limited range of qualitative work available on psychologists' identity experiences, this study drew on existing qualitative research that has focused on other professional groups such as teachers, nurses and counsellors. Such studies yielded relevant insights which were deemed appropriate for inclusion in the current discussion below.

3.2. IDENTITY FROM A STUDENT COUNSELLING PERSPECTIVE

A review of the relevant student counselling literature suggests that student counsellors' identity experiences are seriously under-represented in research, with available work reflecting a predominantly *student-centred* orientation. Literary debates and discussions have tended to focus on the specific needs and challenges of the student population as well as what student counselling services and practitioners should be doing and offering to best meet student needs (e.g. Botha et al., 2005; Cilliers et al., 2010; de Jager & van Lingen, 2012). Notable discussions include the relevance of models and theoretical frameworks for student counselling and development practice in South Africa (Beekman, 2012; van Lingen, 2012), the structural positioning of the service in higher education as well as the establishment of collaborative

partnerships with institutional stakeholders (de Jager and van Lingen, 2012). The relevance of a holistic, systems-based theoretical framework, has been emphasized (Beekman, 2012). In addition, socially-driven student development theories and college impact models feature prominently in student counselling and development discussions (van Lingen, 2012). These include Astin's (1975, 1996, 1999) theory of student involvement, Tinto's (1975, 1993, 1997) model of student attrition/persistence, and van Lingen and de Jager's (2002, as cited in van Lingen, 2012)) integrated model of student development. These holistic, systemically-driven theories and models are all cognizant of individual and environmental factors, and the interaction thereof, on student development. However, my concern is whether these models and theories can be deemed entirely comprehensive if the subjective experiences and challenges of those responsible for rendering the student counselling service, i.e. the student counsellor, has been omitted.

When the student counsellor has received research attention, it has been in the context of service delivery priorities and institutional trends impacting on the service and student population. Research foci have included the diversity and complexity of student counsellor roles in response to changing student needs and institutional dynamics (e.g. Cilliers et al., 2010; de Jager & van Lingen, 2012; Naidoo, 1997; Sokol, 2009). Cilliers et al. (2010), in their national benchmarking study on South African student counselling centres and units, make reference to concerns and challenges raised by survey respondents. These include budget constraints, remuneration concerns, staff shortages and staff burnout. Whilst these identified concerns could have important implications for student counsellors' experiences of work and identity, the quantitative nature of the study and its benchmarking research focus does not allow for an in-depth, subjective exploration of respondents' issues. Furthermore, Cilliers et al.'s (2010) finding that seventy-three percent of the units and centres felt valued by senior

management, was obtained using the Student Counselling Benchmarking Questionnaire (Cilliers et al., 2010). Using in-depth, qualitative interviews, I hoped to ascertain whether student counsellors' subjective reports actually support or challenge this quantitative finding.

Context-specific work demands, challenges and skills required in student counselling, have been highlighted in the literature (e.g. Bishop, 2006; Burrall, 1991; de Jager & van Lingen, 2012; Naidoo, 2012). Whilst Naidoo (1997) draws attention to the complex and ambiguous profile of the student counsellor in South African higher education the subjective realities of actually assuming such diverse roles has, until now, not been adequately investigated. Exceptions include Wheeler and Hewitt (2004), who conducted a qualitative investigation into the experiences of student counsellors working in isolated circumstances, or as part of a small team. One of the main differences between the present study and Wheeler and Hewitt's (2004) work is that the latter was conducted on student counsellors who, by virtue of their lone placement, were also required to manage the service. My study, in contrast, focuses exclusively on student counsellors rendering a student counselling service and not on individuals functioning in the dual capacity of student counsellor and manager. However, Wheeler and Hewitt's (2004) research offers valuable insights into the complicated nature of student counselling practice as participants negotiate dual responsibilities to both their profession and higher education institutions who employ them. Their reference to "the interface between the service and the institution" (Wheeler & Hewitt, 2004, p. 538), in particular, highlights the professional and ethical challenges encountered by student counsellors as a result of conflicting institutional values and perceptions of the service. Notable ethical challenges highlighted by the study include the maintenance of professional boundaries and confidentiality in the context of institutional demands and expectations (Wheeler & Hewitt, 2004). Participants also highlighted an increase in the number and severity of cases in student counselling. This,

coupled with staffing constraints, resulted in student counsellors feeling ineffective and dissatisfied with their role, as if they were "scraping the surface of a problem" and providing "a lack of 'nourishment for clients" (Wheeler & Hewitt, 2004, p. 541). This finding suggests that student counselling demands have a significant impact on student counsellors' sense of efficacy and job satisfaction, and is therefore a pertinent area for investigation. Student counsellors working in isolation found their work demanding and stressful because they were required to work not only with clients, but also to manage the operational functioning of the service as a whole. This management aspect included not only basic administrative tasks central to management, but also committee membership and networking (Wheeler & Hewitt, 2004). Some student counsellors saw committee membership as adversely impacting on their student counselling practice because it decreased the amount of time available for clients. Others saw committee membership and networking as a strategic way of increasing the visibility of the student counselling service. Wheeler and Hewitt's (2004) findings have important implication for professional training; they note that professional training courses tend to concentrate on the therapeutic relationship whilst failing to prepare counsellors for the organizational demands inherent in contexts such as higher education. This reinforces the need for ongoing research into student counselling work demands and its impact on professional identity and work experience. Wheeler and Hewitt's (2004) findings pose important considerations for the present study, given that research participants also have dual membership to both higher education, who employs them, and the HPCSA, who regulates the psychology profession in South Africa. Important areas for consideration include the impact of multiple work demands and staffing on South African student counsellors' understanding of their roles and sense of efficacy in higher education.

When studies have focused on issues of subjective relevance to the student counsellor, this has been from the perspective of student counselling directors and managers, and not student counselling practitioners themselves (e.g. Bishop, 2010; Brown, Perez & Reeder, 2007). . Areas of focus have included the impact of departmental restructuring on service delivery, efficacy and staff concerns (e.g. Brown et al., 2007) and creative ways to elevate student counselling's value in the institution (e.g. Bishop, 2010). Although Brown et al.'s (2007) discussion paper is based on the conference reflections of counselling centre directors, points highlighted by participants have relevant implications for student counsellors as well. These include the impact of restructuring on staff morale, job satisfaction, and recruitment and attrition trends as well as the need to consider the ethical implications of restructuring on student counsellors' practice. Further highlighted by Brown et al.'s work (2007) is the need to consider the identity implications of merging units such as health and student counselling, given that these units have different philosophies and approaches to practice.

The challenge of doing more with less resources and funding, features prominently in student counselling literature both locally and abroad (e.g. Bishop, 2010; Brown et al., 2007; Cilliers et al., 2010; De Jager & van Lingen, 2012). This has been discussed in previously in Chapter Two. However, research has tended to neglect the subjective impact of budgetary and resource constraints, on student counsellors' experiences of work and identity in this context. This research lacuna points to a timely need to redirect the focus onto the student counselling practitioner in higher education.

The complex and context-specific nature of student counselling practice has been further contextualised within varying discourses of specialization (Dole, 1981; Widseth, et al., 1997) and professionalization (de Jager & van Lingen, 2012). These aspects were also explored in

detail in Chapter Two. However, the trend has been towards third-person reflections and interpretations of student counselling, with little research directed at how student counsellors themselves, experience and interpret their practice. According to van Lingen (2012), student counselling and development has been formally recognized as a distinct professional field abroad, particularly in the US, with postgraduate qualifications and training specifically provided in the field of student counselling (de Jager, 2012). De Jager and van Lingen (2012) contextualize South African student counselling in terms of its emerging status as a legitimate profession, highlighting the theoretical foundations of student counselling practice in South Africa, its research-driven features, the professional membership and affiliation of student counselling practitioners to SAACDHE and the important role which SAACDE has played in helping to establish, promote and regulate the practice locally. De Jager and van Lingen (2012) assert that in doing so, student counselling and development services has made significant strides towards getting recognized as a legitimate profession in the local context (de Jager & van Lingen, 2012). In focusing on the identity perceptions and experiences of student counsellors, I advance the view that any professionalization discussions need to be cognizant of the way in which the service and practitioners are classified and structurally positioned in higher education institutions in South Africa. In particular, the issue of whether institutional titles serve to promote or undermine the service, needs to be interrogated.

The impact of titles on psychologists' identity and work experiences, has not been adequately explored both locally and abroad. Whilst research in the area is limited and dated, noteworthy investigations include the impact of title on client perceptions and help-seeking behaviour (e.g. Brown & Chambers, 1986; Gale & Austin, 2003; McKitrick, 1977). McKitrick (1977) discusses the perceptual implications of the title 'counselling psychologist', pointing out that whilst 'counselling' is an accurate reflection of one aspect of the psychologists work, it is

narrow and fails to capture the full range of the counselling psychologist's competencies in areas such as training and consultancy. McKitrick (1977) also draws attention to the ambiguous nature of the title, given that many people refer to themselves as counsellors in the context of school guidance counselling, drug rehabilitation counselling and marriage counselling amongst other practice areas. Herfs (1997) observed a functional relationship between title and role, with "student psychologist" and "student counsellor" titles denoting different functions in the student counselling context. The student counsellor title was associated with social work functions relating to grants, admission and access to studying, whilst psychologists focused on personal counselling and development issues (Herfs, 1997). The significance of institutional titles and the functional implications thereof, are more pronounced when one considers Herfs' (1997) reasons for utilising the term "student counsellor" instead of "student adviser". These are clarified in the endnotes of the article and include the need to "differentiate between the work of a central counselling service (student counsellor) and a faculty counselling service (student adviser)" (Herfs, 1997, p. 273). The titles of counselling centres were also found to influence student and staff perceptions and utilisation of the service, reinforcing the significance of titles in how individuals' perceive a service and the service providers (Brown & Chambers, 1986; Salisbury, 1972).

Kadambi, Audet and Knish's (2010) mixed-method study offers an insightful glimpse into the subjective realities of student counsellors abroad. In so doing, their work brings a refreshing balance to the student counselling and development field already saturated with a student-centred focus. Extrinsic, work-related factors found to have a positive impact on student counsellors work experiences included support and recognition from peers, colleagues and supervisors within student counselling, as well as remuneration, professional autonomy and development opportunities (Kadambi et al. 2010). Intrinsic factors included a   positive

therapeutic relationship and perceptions of one's work as meaningful and effective (Kadambi et al., 2010). The work of Kadambi et al. (2010) provides the researcher with important issues to consider when undertaking the present research, in particular the notion of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that contribute to a positive work experience in student counselling.

Much et al (2010) offer a concise and timely review of some of the major misconceptions surrounding student counselling, including the assumption that the student counsellor performs a psychic-like function and is able to conclusively predict student outcomes (Gilbert & Sheiman, 1995, as cited in Much et al., 2010). Whilst such misconceptions may have a relevant impact on the student counsellor's experience in higher education, this has not been adequately explored, particularly in the South African context. The present study therefore hoped to address this research gap by exploring the impact of environmental perceptions on student counsellors' subjective work experiences.

Schwartz (2013) describes the student counselling service as an under-valued and marginalized resource in higher education. Although Schwarz's (2013) article does not directly explore the impact of this marginalization on student counsellors' identity experiences, it is one of the few that attend to the subjective realities of a group widely neglected in both student counselling and broader psychological research. Having worked previously as a student counsellor himself, Schwartz (2013) is able to offer a unique 'insider' perspective on student counselling. His dentist analogy highlights institutional perceptions of student counselling as a non-essential component of institutional functioning:

I have often thought that the attitude of many university administrators to counselling services is akin to the way many us think of our dentists; we are happy when they are around

when there is a problem but we prefer not to think about them any more than absolute necessary (Schwartz, 2013, p. 96).

Mindful of the paucity of research focusing on student counsellors' subjective experiences, the present study sought to address this lacuna by exploring how student counsellors feel about working in student counselling, how they understand their identities in this particular setting, as well as the factors impacting on their identity and work experiences.

3.3. PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY DEFINED
3.3.1. Core concepts

A noted trend in the literature has been to contextualise professional identity in terms of identity – itself a complex construct which has come under greater scrutiny as the world becomes increasingly sophisticated and human relations more interactive, interdependent and blurred (Groff, 2007). The concept of identity has intrigued ancient and contemporary scholars alike, with interest widespread across disciplines such as philosophy (e.g. Plato, Aristottle and Descartes), sociology (e.g. James, 1890), Mead (1934), Goffman (1958; 1959; 1963) and psychology (e.g. Erikson, 1968). Linguistic variations in the term 'identity' have been noted, with identity used interchangeably with concepts such as character and personality (Breakwell, 1986), 'self', selfhood' and self-image (e.g. Davey, 2010; Day, Kington, Stobbart & Sammons, 2006; Stets & Burke, 2003). Breakwell (1986) notes the difficulty in finding a common or universally applicable description of identity, likening the process of defining and theorizing about identity to that of "traversing a battlefield" (p. 10.). Davey (2010) also draws attention to challenges around defining and explaining identity and professional identity, and cites Kortaghen's (2004) observation that the multi-disciplinary attention accorded to these concepts may be contributing to the ambiguous and variable nature of interpretations.

Turner (2013) notes the increasingly popular association of identity with *the self* in contemporary work, asserting that "self is now viewed as a set or series of identities that can be invoked individually or simultaneously in situations but, once evoked, individuals' actions are directed at having others verify an identity or identities" (pp. 331-332). This notion of a core self with multiple selves or identities emerging in a relational context with others, is informed by symbolic interactionism, in particularly Stryker (1980), who asserted that identities are expressions of a larger core self - "internalized positional designations" associated with the various roles and positions that individuals occupy in society (p. 60). The various identities or selves relating to one's varied social positions can include that of father, colleague and friend for male individuals - all connected to a core self but manifested as different identities in different relationships and contexts (Stets & Burke, 2003). Hocking (2000), in contrast, distinguishes between the self and identity, identifying the self as more personal and identity as more social. Identity from a social perspective is understood within the context of group membership and interpersonal interactions in the workplace, with professional identity regarded as one example of social identity that encompasses the professional comparisons and distinctions people draw between themselves and other professional groups (Adams, Hean, Sturgis & Clark, 2006). Markus and Kitayama (1991) assert that the self is a broader concept than identity, suggesting that the self is all- encompassing and inclusive of identity. Gomzina (2012), in her review of relevant literature, similarly states that "the concept of the self appears as an implication of the wholeness through many different (cultural, social, ethnic, personal and other) identities that can be possessed by a person" (p. 6).

Contemporary definitions and interpretations of identity acknowledge the interaction between the personal and professional (e.g. Bruss & Kopala, 1993; Davey, 2010; Öhlèn & Segesten, 1998) with personal identity viewed variously as a necessary prerequisite for professional identity (Hermanus, 1987, as cited in Öhlèn & Segesten, 1998) whilst others regard professional identity as an extension of personal identity or the self (e.g. Ekstein &Wallerstein, 1958, as cited in Bruss & Kopala, 1993). In contrast, authors such as Brewer (1991) adopt a more social perspective on identity, asserting that personal identity represents the "individuated self" (p.475) that encompasses those elements which make us unique, whilst social identity involves the classification and integration of individuals into relevant groups or categories such as race, gender, occupation and organizational membership.

Literary discussions and debates also centre around the nature of identity as a static or dynamic phenomenon and whether identity consists of a core, stable self or multiple, fragmented selves (Gomzina, 2012; Griffiths, 1995, as cited in Haynes, 2008). Gomzina (2012) draws attention to a third integrated perspective which recognises identity as both a stable and dynamic, multi-layered phenomenon, with the multiple layers forming one's "entire self-identity" (p. 7). Relating to the issue of identity stability and integrity are issues of individual agency and social determinism in identity formation (Haynes, 2008). These issues relate to broader modern and postmodern shifts in how human experience and identity have come to be interpreted and understood, and are discussed in greater detail in the section that follows.

3.3.2 Modernism and postmodernism

Understandings of identity and professional identity in particular, reveal interpretive shifts over time that are embedded within broader modernist and postmodern movements in society. The era of modernity, dating back to the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, was

characterised by a rigid, absolutist approach to interpreting and understanding reality. Rooted in a logical-positivist paradigm, the modernist movement espoused the notion of a single, fixed and objective reality that was separate from the individual and that could be accessed via "systematic observation and rigorous reasoning" (Becvar & Becvar, 2000, p. 90). Identity within a modernist paradigm was understood as a stable, singular and universal construct. The powerful influence of a western, scientific model was evident not only in how reality and experience was interpreted within modernism, but also in the empirically-driven, quantitative research orientation preferred (Becvar & Becvar, 2000; Marovic, 2000). In contrast, the postmodern period that followed reflected a greater tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty; this enabled identity to be interpreted and appreciated in more flexible and fluid ways (Becvar & Becvar, 2000; Lloyd, 2009). Knowledge became increasingly accepted as dynamic, fluid and relational, with the possibility of multiple realities existing and constructed in the context of language and social interaction (Lloyd, 2009).

The interpretive implications of postmodern plurality have been both criticised (e.g. Cooper & Rowan, 1999) and supported (e.g. Hansen, 2010; Rappoport, Baumgardner & Boone, 1999. Cooper and Rowan (1999) raise concerns about "the death of the subject" in the context of postmodern plurality, asserting that the subjectivity of human experience is under threat (p.1). They advance the notion of a meaningfully-integrated self-plural position that:

> … moves on from modernism's unified self, but it does not go so far as to kill off that subjectivity entirely. Rather, it postulates an individual who encounters his or her world from a plurality of positions, through a plurality of voices, in relation to a plurality of self-concepts, yet who still retains a meaningful coherence, both at the level of the constituent pluralities and at the level of the total system (Cooper & Rowan, 1999, p.2).

Rappaport et al. (1999) argue that a flexible, pluralistic sense of self is indicative of an adaptive imperative in a world characterised by rapid socio-economic and technological advances. Hansen (2010) also challenges modernism's narrow, rigid influence over how professional identity is conceptualized and applied within the counselling profession. Hansen (2010), instead, advances the notion of a fluid, postmodern counsellor identity that is open to continual reconstruction and redefinition in the context of social and professional engagement with others:

> Rather than being fixed and congruent, identity would be fluid and diverse… identity would not be envisioned as a core element of the psyche that is contained within individuals. Instead, self-definitions would be continually constructed in conjunction with the social group in which the professional is currently participating. This new, postmodernist view of professional identity would mean that identity is locally responsive, not universally defined, and is guided by pragmatic considerations, not professional proclamations (pp. 102-103).

Hansen (2010) advances the possibility of plural and at times, conflicting professional identities co-existing in the individual counsellor, asserting that within a postmodern interpretive framework, such experiences are deemed acceptable indications of diversity as opposed to being a pathological indicator. Hansen (2010) uses the example of a counsellor having two different, yet co-existent humanistic and clinical aspects to himself or herself, asserting that this "is not a sign of self-fragmentation, identity dissolution, or dissociative identity pathology" (p. 103). Hansen (2010) highlights the pragmatic and relative nature of professional identity, stating that identity is informed by the local work environment in which the individual is participating, rather than by a singular, universal model that is passed down and permeates all contexts and settings. This has implications for the training and development of professionals such as psychologists – a topic discussed in more detail in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Hansen (2010) also asserts that a postmodern approach would expand the theoretical and practical horizons of the counselling profession and create opportunities for new and alternate ways of understanding and conceptualizing professional practice. Hansen's (2010) model of counsellor identity and practice offers a relevant and concise overarching framework with which to approach and understand identity in an ever-changing workplace and organizational environment.

3.3.3. Post-structuralism

Post-structural approaches to identity and professional identity, it may be argued, go further than postmodernism in elucidating the complicated nature of these constructs by situating them within the context of politics and culture. Perceptions of post-structuralism vary (Prasad, 2005), however, with some regarding post-structuralism as part of the broader postmodernist movement (e.g. Alvesson, 2002) whilst others such as Culler (1982) and Olivier (2013) distinguish between the two. According to Davey (2010), identity from a post-structural perspective is "unstable, dynamic and relative, involving multiple positions, 'subjectivities' or 'selves'. These multiple and ever-changing identities or subjectivities are constituted and continually reconstructed through semiotic processes, language and within language" (p.28).

Gee's (2000) work exemplifies post-structural thought in his discussion of identity as having both a stable and continuous core self or "I", and multiple, dynamic identities or selves that are enacted in different contexts and are thus historically, institutionally and socio-culturally-driven. According to Zembylas (2003b, as cited in Davey, 2010), the value of post-structuralism lies in its recognition of the cultural, political and power dynamics informing the subjective construction and experience of identity. Davey's (2010) work, discussed in greater detail in the section below, offers an integrated approach to understanding the complexities of

professional identity in contemporary society by drawing on individual psychological, postmodern and post-structural influences.

3.4. DEFINING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

Davey's (2010) work focuses on the identity of teacher educators, highlighting the unique, ambiguous position of a professional group "betwixt and between" the professions of teaching and academia (p.3). The title of Davey's (2010) dissertation, "Career on the cusp", furthermore captures this complex and dynamic identity experience, and prompted me to seek a title for my own dissertation that would aptly convey the experiential ambiguity associated with student counsellor identity. The title of this dissertation, 'On the cusp of context and profession', was therefore inspired by Davey's (2010) work as I found that it resonated with my own research interest in the binary identity position and challenges of South African psychologists employed as student counsellors in higher education.

Davey's (2010) grounded theory study offers not only a rich experiential description of a unique professional group, but also a coherent and holistic conceptual model that has relevant implications for diverse professional groups. Informed by psychological/developmental, socio-cultural and post-structural approaches, Davey's (2010) model advances the notion of professional identity as a multi-facetted experience embodying aspects of "Becoming", "Doing", "Knowing", "Being", "Belonging" and the "Valued Professional Self" (p. 11). "Becoming" a professional entails a process or journey of professional preparation for one's future role; this journey is shaped by one's biographical history, career aspirations, hopes and expectations, work orientation and adjustment experiences as well as professional development experiences (Davey, 201). The "doing" component of professional identity encompasses professional activities or 'work' that one engages in, identifies emotionally with and prefers.

This work has value and meaning for the individual, and is the source from which he or she derives their identity as a professional (Davey, 2010). This suggests that professional identity and work are inter-related and inform each other. Participants in Davey's (2010) study experienced a clash between work demands and their own work values, suggesting that professional identity and the work through which this identity is expressed, consist of both a value component as well as emotional attachment. Davey's (2010) study further highlights the importance of compatibility or fit between work and identity, with participants struggling to assimilate or fit the research component of their job descriptions into their internalised models of professional identity. This resulted in an identity dilemma characterised by feelings of ambivalence, uncertainty and self-doubt. Teaching, in contrast, was experienced by participants as compatible with their existing model of identity and practice and therefore posed no significant challenge to their professional identity (Davey, 2010).

Professional identity is also seen as encompassing content and process elements of '*knowing that*', consisting of discipline-specific knowledge of subject, theory and profession, and '*knowing how*', involving the practical application of one's skill and expertise (Davey, 2010). Consistent with contemporary views of identity (e.g. Wenger, 1998), Davey's (2010) work also highlights the prominent 'group' or collective component in professional identity, with the professional seen as connected to a "purposeful occupational community or group" from which he or she derives a sense of meaning and purpose (p.33).

Davey's (2010) conceptual model of professional identity informs and guides the present study's exploratory focus. In offering a comprehensive account of both process and content aspects of professional identity in the context of teacher educators, one is able to appreciate the complex contradictions, nuanced similarities and differences that both unite and   individuate

professional groups and individuals from each other. Although there is less emphasis on traditional cognitive processes and mechanisms underlying participants' sense-making, such as assimilation and accommodation, participants' metaphorical references offer a unique, alternative lens through which identity experience may be viewed. These include metaphors of construction, design and building, as well as metaphors of nurturing, nutrition and relationships, which variously conveyed different images that participants had of themselves and their professional roles. According to Davey (2010), metaphors offer a unique window through which professional identity may be viewed. This is particularly apt in respect of metaphors of a "journey" and "travel" employed by participants to describe the dynamic, process-orientated nature of becoming and being, a teacher educator. A possible limitation of the study is that the cognitive tensions and mechanisms underlying participants' initial work adjustment, are vague. Reference is made to "meeting challenge" or "taking agency", whilst "chasing one's tail" was used to convey the initial feeling of being ill-prepared and bewildered in the course of adjustment (Davey, 2010, p. 113). The present study hoped to illuminate not only the descriptive content and possible metaphorical references employed by student counsellors to describe their experience, but also the cognitive mechanism that underlie such experience.

3.5. PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY: A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE
3.5.1 Defining professional development

Postmodern perspectives of professional identity contend that identity is a dynamic, fluid and continuously-evolving phenomenon. This perspective was contrasted with modernism and discussed at length in the previous section. The present section extends this discussion by considering the professional training and development implications of varying identity perspectives.

Elman, Illfelder-Kaye and Robiner's (2005) review of professional development literature highlights the varied ways in which professional development has been interpreted, with no single definition prevailing. Elman et al. (2005) define professional development as "the developmental process of acquiring, expanding, refining, and sustaining knowledge, proficiency, skill and qualifications for competent professional functioning that result in professionalism" (p.368). Professional development is perceived as both an internal and external process, involving "the internal tasks of clarifying professional objectives, crystallizing professional identity, increasing self-awareness and confidence, and sharpening reasoning, thinking, reflecting, and judgement" as well as a social, interpersonal dimension (Elman et al., 2005, p.368). Professional development is defined by Ducheny, Allezhauser, Crandell and Schneider (1997) as "an ongoing process through which an individual derives a cohesive sense of professional identity by integrating the broad-based knowledge, skills, and attitudes within psychology with one's values and interests" (p.89). This definition distinguishes between objective and subjective aspects of the individual's professional experience, particularly the interpretation and integration of professional knowledge and skills in light of an individual's preferences and value system. Development is also associated with professional maturity and work experience as one expands his or her range of competencies in the context of senior supervisory and managerial roles (Elman et al., 2005). Professional development is also contextualized in terms of ongoing learning and development after the professional has qualified, in order to remain relevant and responsive to both clients and broader society (Elman et al., 2005).

Identity development literature tend to broadly distinguish between traditional, linear models of development (e.g. Hogan, 1964; Loganbill, Hardy and Delworth, 1982; Stoltenberg and

Delworth, 1987) and more dynamic, social constructivist perspectives that reflect a postmodern orientation (e.g. Dunstan, 2002; Hansen, 2010; Yi & Shorter-Gooden, 1999). Subjective meaning and sense-making are prioritised in contemporary postmodern approaches, with an explicit recognition of multiple personal and social influences on professional maturation and career development (Chen, 2003). These include socio-economic and cultural factors, According to Steenbarger (2001), traditional linear models of development tend to situate professional maturation in the context of discrete stages through which the individual progresses, with each stage involving the completion of specific developmental tasks (e.g. Erikson, 1963; Kohlberg, 1984; Kubler-Ross, 1969; Piaget, 1970). Likewise, developmental models of counsellor/therapist identity development (e.g. Hogan, 1964; Loganbill et al., 982; Stoltenberg and Delworth, 1987) conceptualise professional development in terms of transformations in competency, client and supervisory relationships as the individual successfully proceeds through a series of stages or phases.

Postmodern challenges to the developmental approach assert that identity and professional identity development in particular, are complex, fluid and ongoing processes that cannot be confined to rigid, sequential unfolding (Dunstan, 2002; Hansen, 2010; Yi & Shorter-Gooden, 1999). Developmental models and approaches provide insight into the experiential markers of professional growth and therefore offer a generalized, structured tool for assessing and monitoring development. However, Steenbarger (2001) critiques linear stage models of human development for failing to capture the dynamic and interactive nature of change processes, and for their tendency to "pathologize developmental diversity" (p. 288). Stage models are thus seen as unable to capture the intricate and complex nature of human development, a view shared by Yi and Shorter-Gooden (1999) and Fitzpatrick (2004). Yi & Shorter-Gooden (1999), in their discussion of ethnic identity formation, argue that linear stage models are narrow, rigid

and ineffective in capturing the complex and holistic nature of identity formation, including past and present influences on identity development such as social and support networks and broader social systems. Stage or phase models of development also tend to focus on the trainee population (Fitzpatrick (2004), a trend also observed amongst South African studies (e.g. Kottler & Swartz, 2004). Kottler and Swartz (2004) examine professional identity development from the perspective of Masters-level clinical psychology students, with identity development conceptualized in terms of 'rites of passage' through which the trainee negotiates personal and professional identity, and moves from the status of a lay person to that of professional.

More inclusive models such as Rønnestad and Skovholt's (2003) phase model allow for the developmental experiences of a wider range of professionals with varying degrees of professional experience, to be represented. Of particular relevance to the current study are the developmental challenges and tasks of establishing congruency between one's therapeutic role and one's self-perception (including values, interests and attitudes), and the development of a working style that 'fits' the individual (Rønnestad and Skovholt, 2003). Although Rønnestad and Skovholt's (1992; 2003) work to some extent overcomes the limitations of earlier developmental models by accounting for professionals beyond training, Fitzpatrick's (2004) critique of such models is the tendency to oversimplify and thus to insufficiently capture, a fundamentally complex and intricate experience. Traditional developmental models furthermore do not focus on context-specific samples working in particular employment settings such as student counselling, resulting in a failure to account for possible idiosyncratic environmental influences on the developmental process, such as organizational culture, traditions and rituals.

3.5.2. Training & Workplace Implications

The notion of professional identity as a continuously-evolving and adaptable construct, has important implications for professional training objectives and outcomes. Research foci highlight the need for curricula and practical training programmes to have workplace relevance, to reflect the dynamic nature of the broader social context as well as the evolving roles and functions of professionals in contemporary society (e.g. Lester, 1995; McElhinney, 2008). Thus, it becomes imperative for professional training programmes to reflect a transformative learning agenda. Critical thinking and self-reflection have been identified as important components in the identity development and consolidation process (e.g. Elman et al., 2005; Niemi, 1997). It may be argued that transformative learning experiences (Mezirow, 1997) afforded by professional training programmes and work environments, is central to identity development and consolidation because these contexts can offer opportunities for critical self-reflection, awareness and experimentation (Elman et al., 2005). A transformative educational experience that offers opportunities for transformative learning may thus be seen as facilitating the critical thinking and self-reflection components of identity development.

Transformative learning is synonymous with developmental theory, psychology and adult education, and most notably the work of Jack Mezirow (1997). Mezirow's (1997) theory of transformative learning advocates the importance of adequately preparing learners to be socially responsible, critical and innovative thinkers capable of applying their skills and knowledge in a way that is relevant to contemporary social demands and trends. Lester (1995) and Lopez and Prosser (2000) echo these sentiments in their discussion of adaptive professionals. Lopez and Prosser's (2000) views are discussed in subsequent paragraphs below.

The outcome of transformative learning and socialisation would be professionals trained to critically evaluate their knowledge and skills and to flexibly apply these in the form of contextually-relevant and responsive roles.

For Mezirow (1997), a critical element of transformative learning is change in one's "frames of reference", which he explains as an acquired, "coherent body of experience - associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses" (p.5). Transformative learning involves transforming or adapting our frames of reference by critically reflecting on the underlying assumptions that inform our interpretations and belief systems, and altering the way in which we come to understand and make sense of the world (Mezirow (1997). Central to transformative learning is an awareness of one's own assumptions and being able to assess evidence, defend, challenge and understand our own beliefs and that of others, as well as being open to alternative points of view and beliefs and possibly revising or adapting our interpretation and understandings (Grabove, 1997). This extends to the way in which we interpret our professional roles in the work context, flexibly adjusting our frames of reference and behavioural practice as these relate to our internalised models of identity and practice. Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning ideas, with its emphasis on cognitive adaptability and behavioural change in response to contextual demands, supports my research interest in understanding how student counsellors experience and possibly alter, their perceptions or "frames of reference" regarding their roles and identities in higher education.

Grabove (1997) asserts that transformative learning cannot be taught, but must be *experienced* by the learner. Transformative learning is thus experiential nature. It can be argued that professional training programmes and work environments should both equip trainees and graduates with generic psychological skills and knowledge, as well as offer opportunities that

challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about one's professional role and identity. This may be done through job demands and role expectations that prompt the professional and trainee to reflect on their training and its applicability to the workplace, as well as to consider the impact of systemic organizational influences on their professional practice and ethics.

The importance of transformative learning in the professional socialization of psychologists, is evident in a multitude of studies emphasising the need for flexible practitioners who are able to assess and detect employment opportunities, workplace trends and to diversify their competencies accordingly (e.g. Lester, 1995; Lopez & Prosser, 2000; Nastasi, 2000; Yalof, 1997). As Lopez and Prosser (2000) aptly point out, "by being cognizant of the developing opportunities and obstacles within the field, new professionals have the potential to be responsive catalysts rather than reactionaries" (p. 462). For Yalof (1997), the holistic preparation of psychologists is facilitated by training programmes that encourage an openness to diverse philosophies and alternative models of practice.

The expansion of psychologists' practice into areas beyond traditional workplace boundaries, has been noted. These include personal coaching, business consultancy and telecommunication, in response to technological advances (Lopez and Prosser, 2000). According to Yalof (1997), other non-traditional areas in which psychologists have applied their skills and competencies include physical rehabilitation (Elliot & Gramling (1990), genetic counselling (Shiloh, 1996) and disability (Kemp & Mallinckrodt, 1996). Research highlights the importance of breaking with tradition, diversifying one's approach and being open to new roles, particularly in the area of managed healthcare (Lopez & Prosser, 2000). McDaniel, Belar, Schroeder, Hargrove and Freeman (2002) explore the training needs and workplace competency demands of psychologists working in primary healthcare settings,   asserting the

need for multiple levels of education and training. McDaniel et al. (2002) argue for training that promotes both competency and capability ("the ability to adapt to change, generate new knowledge and continuously improve performance") (p. 67). Marsella & Pedersen (2004) argue for an "internationalization" of the psychology training curriculum in response to what they perceive as a narrow, ethnocentric Western bias in the profession. They maintain that counselling psychology training programmes should be mindful of global challenges and social problems such as poverty, crime and cultural disintegration, emphasising a holistic mode of practice that is also cognizant of the varied multicultural and ethnic modes of interpreting and understanding human behaviour and psychopathology. They also deem issues of social justice and human rights to be a critical component of professional socialisation.

Other authors such as King and Seymour (1982), McKitrick (1977) and Roth-Roemer, Kurpius and Carmin (1998) highlight the versatility of counselling psychology in the workplace. King and Seymour (1982) assert that "one of counselling psychology's strengths is its broad and diversified training that addresses a wide range of professional dimensions and allows counselling psychologists to function in an array of employment settings" (p.834). McKitrick (1977) asserts that it is not so much their unique services or extensive knowledge that distinguished counselling psychology from the other categories, but rather their ability to flexibly and innovatively adapt their strengths to a wide range of issues. This suggests the influence of a transformative learning paradigm on how counselling psychologists are professionally trained and socialised for the workplace.

Psychology's expansion into new terrain has been variously interpreted as a sign of adaptive professional functioning and a potential identity dilemma. Research has been directed at the experiences of counselling and educational psychologists transitioning into 'non-traditional'

employment settings such as health care. Mrdjenovich & Moore (2004), for example, were interested in whether counselling psychologists retained or altered their identification with a counselling psychology model of practice after entering the health care work environment. They reported a lack of consensus on this issue, with some authors such as Altmaier et al., (1998) asserting that counselling psychologists retain their professional identity and actually enrich the health care system with their category-specific professional strengths. Izutsu and Hishinuma (2005) assert that psychologists, in general, adapt well to a variety of work settings because of their unique, broad-based training in areas such as clinical, child development, social, organizational and community psychology. Sank and Shapiro (1979) similarly highlight the flexible role of the psychologist in healthcare, with professionals assuming diverse roles that include administrator, organizational consultant, supervisor, researcher and clinician.

Bernard (1992) and Good (1992), in contrast, cite feelings of isolation and alienation from colleagues in both traditional (academic and counselling centres) and atypical, healthcare settings. Although Good (1992) highlights a number of benefits experienced by the counselling psychologist working in a medical setting, including exposure to varied and interesting work activities, she cautions that psychologists, particularly those new to the profession, can easily feel out of place and viewed as "second-class professionals" in the impersonal clinical environment (Good, 1992, p.72). She advises that counselling psychologists in this setting "best learn to parry and spar challenges to their profession, identity, role, and services" (Good, 1992, p.67). Psychologists' adjustment to non-traditional settings necessitates an expansion of existing knowledge and skills, particularly with respect to medical vocabulary, interpersonal styles associated with the clinical/ medical environment as well as the medical model prevalent in this type of setting (Good, 1992).

Kenkel, DeLeon, Mantell and Steep (2005) consider the issue of identity loss amongst clinical psychologists' transitioning from mental health to integrated healthcare settings, drawing on Berry's (1980) model of acculturation to explain psychologists' identity expansion in the new work environment. Informed by the acculturation process of immigrants adjusting to a new country, Kenkel et al. (2005) propose the employment of an 'integration strategy' whereby the individual retains critical elements of the original professional identity, in addition to adopting and integrating relevant aspects from the new practice setting, such as context-specific language and practices where appropriate. This results in an expanded and integrated professional identity (Kenkel et al., 2005). Kenkel et al.'s (2005) work draws attention to changing trends in contemporary professional practice that emphasize professional versatility and contextual-relevance in the workplace. This is of relevance to the present study's interest in psychologists' adapting to an expanding range of professional roles and activities in the context of student counselling.

3.6. WORK AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY
3.6.1. Work as an expression of professional identity

Contemporary definitions of professional identity assert the notion of a dynamic phenomenon that is actively-negotiated, constructed and revised by the individual within a social context (Davey, 2010; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). *Work* holds a prominent place in contemporary descriptions of identity construction (e.g. Davey, 2010; Jenner, 2012; Jussab, 2013; Lester, 1995; Lopez & Prosser, 2000; Mantica, 2011). However, the concept of work has been contextualised and applied differently, referring both to the professional roles and activities through which an individual defines and expresses his or her professional identity (e.g. Jenner, 2012; Jussab, 2013; Kovacs, 1991; Lester, 1995; Lopez & Elser, 2000; Mantica, 2011; Schoen, 1989) as well as to the identity work strategies and processes employed by the individual in the

course of identity construction (e.g. Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep, 2009). This latter notion of identity work is elaborated on further in subsequent paragraphs.

Of particular interest to me has been IPA research that explores the localized work experiences and identity of professional groups such as psychologists. However, such research has been limited (e.g. Jenner, 2012; Jussab, 2013) despite IPA being particularly suited to investigating the meaning of a particular experience for people in a specific context (Smith et al., 2009). Work as the medium through which psychologists experience and express their professional identity, is highlighted in the limited number of IPA studies focusing on psychologists' professional identity. Jenner's (2012) IPA study focuses on the experiences of psychologists working with female refugees and asylum seekers in the context of sexual violence. This study highlights the importance of work in understanding and articulating professional identity, as well as the impact of overlapping, ambiguous functions on psychologists' experience of identity. The study illustrates the ways in which a particular psychological model of identity and practice, acquired through professional training and socialisation, can inform and guide identity negotiation and management in the context of multiple, diverse role expectations. Participants in Jenner's (2012) study differentiated between roles and functions on the basis of their psychological nature, deeming some functions such as individual therapy and 'trauma' work more compatible with their 'psychologist' identity than other functions such as advocacy and community outreach (Jenner, 2012). According to Jenner (2012), the latter, more socially-driven roles created tensions and posed an identity dilemma for some psychologists, with some individuals viewing this work as a necessary though separate precursor to more psychological functions such as psychotherapy. Some participants also found it difficult to name and describe roles that seemed incompatible with the psychology profession. Jenner's (2012) study therefore reinforces the value of research into work demands, role clarity and its relationship to

professional identity. Given the multiple and varied roles which the student counsellor is expected to perform in higher education (Naidoo, 1996), I was curious as to how student counsellors would make sense of this role diversity and if, in fact, they would be inclined to draw distinctions between 'psychological' and 'non-psychological' functions in the context of student counselling practice.

Mantica's (2011) IPA study further highlights the important relationship between work and professional identity by focusing on the fit between counselling psychologists, who are traditionally associated with the humanistic, person-centred approach, and cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), given that CBT is more directive and aligned to a medical model (Woolf, Dryden & Strawbridge, 2003). Mantica's (2011) study illustrates the ways in which CBT work can either support or challenge the expression of one's preferred, authentic self, with participants experiencing CBT work variously as a source of identity constriction or liberation. Results suggest a flexible and pluralistic sense of self, with some participants perceiving CBT as compatible with the more directive, pragmatic and masculine parts of the self. Those evincing a strong identification with CBT reported feeling connected and reaffirmed by the approach because its theoretical and practical aspects resonated with how they saw themselves as professionals. For others, CBT's directive and structured nature was experienced as restrictive and inhibiting the expression of their authentic self. IPA's suitability for revealing divergence and convergence in the subjective interpretation of an experience, is thus evident here.

3.6.2. Identity work

The concept of 'identity work' implies a dynamic and problematic construct that is actively negotiated by the individual, in the pursuit of a balanced self (Kreiner et al., 2009). Underlying

identity work is the recognition that both identity and context are dynamic and continuously evolving (Kreiner, et al., 2006). This dynamic necessitates identity negotiation and management, or what Kreiner et al., (2006) refer to as "adjustments, tweaks, or overhauls" to identity (p. 1032). Research on identity work has focused on particular social and occupational groups including the homeless (e.g. Snow & Anderson, 1987), priests (e.g. Kreiner et al., 2006) and doctors (e.g. Pratt et al., 2006). Gomaa (1998) adopts a multi-dimensional approach to professional identity development in her exploration of how school psychologists interpret and construct their professional roles and identities. Noteworthy is the depiction of participants as active agents who go beyond the limitations of institutional definitions, to define their own identities in terms of personal-biographical, organizational and socio-historical influences. The study takes cognizance of organizational impact on professional identity construction, whilst also personalising the individual's choice to interpret and respond in a particular way. This is of relevance to the present study, which sought to explore how student counsellors interpret and make sense of their professional identities in the context of personal biographical influences as well as broader institutional and social factors.

Grounded theory appears to be the preferred methodological choice amongst researchers seeking to both elucidate and conceptualise a model of identity management amongst targeted populations. These include Pratt et al.'s (2006) grounded theory study on identity customization strategies amongst medical doctors and Kreiner et al.'s (2006) study of identity negotiation and balance amongst priests in the context of identity tensions. Kreiner et al.'s (2006) findings have important implications for understanding and comparing identity management amongst secular professional groups. Noteworthy is the importance given to individual agency in the management of identity tensions and challenges, with Kreiner et al. (2006) highlighting the opportunity for the individual to respond proactively through the

employment of various "identity work tactics" (p. 1031). Identity tensions highlighted by the study include over-identification with the occupational role, characterised by a loss of the self or detachment from one's personal identity, and identity intrusion, characterised by the experience of one's occupation as intruding or imposing on one's personal life and identity (Kreiner et al., 2006). Differentiation work strategies or tactics entailed conscious efforts by priests to separate personal identity from social identity (the "me" from the "we") in the context of occupational demands (Kreiner et al., 2006, p. 1043). Integration strategies included merging occupational role with identity, as opposed to keeping them separate, and incorporating elements of the self from one's personal history and identity, into occupational tasks (Kreiner et al., 2006). Neutral or dual-function tactics included self-care and interpersonal strategies such as drawing on the support of family and friends to help give one perspective; drawing on available resources such as spiritual material, for guidance, as well as engaging in refresher activities and relaxation (Kreiner et al., 2006).

Breakwell (1986) offers a holistic social psychological approach to identity management by linking intra-psychic coping strategies with socio-political processes. Breakwell's (1986) work also explicitly recognizes assimilation and accommodation as the cognitive processes informing identity negotiation and management. Breakwell (1986) furthermore makes important distinctions between challenges and threats when conceptualising identity management, asserting that not all challenges are threats, only those subjectively-experienced as disruptive to the principles of continuity, distinctiveness and self-esteem which are essential for identity integrity. This is of relevance to the present study, which seeks to explore student counsellors' subjective experiences as they unfold in the context of perceived identity challenges and threats. Coping strategies, according to Breakwell (1986), are "anything the individual believes to be done in order in order to expunge threat" (p. 78), and include intra-

psychic coping strategies such as deflection and acceptance strategies oriented towards the individual's cognitions and emotions. Interpersonal strategies highlighted by Breakwell (1986) include isolation and compliance, whilst intergroup strategies such as multiple group membership, group support and group action are identified as ways of managing perceived identity threats on a group level (Breakwell, 1986). These strategies are discussed in further detail in Chapter Four.

Pratt et al. (2006) sought to expand and enrich understanding about identity construction in the workplace by conceptualizing a theory of identity customization using the experiences of resident medical doctors. Identity customization theory locates identity in the context of work and identity learning cycles, asserting that "identity is tailored to fit the work and not vice versa" (Pratt et al., 2006, p. 242). Pratt et al.'s (2006) study highlights the potential for work to either undermine or validate one's identity experiences ad perceptions. The various groups of medical residents in Pratt et al.'s (2006) study evinced varying degrees of compatibility between work demands and their identity perceptions, with some residents experiencing more significant discrepancies or "integrity violations" than others (p. 245). Primary care medical residents, for example, did not experience major discrepancies between residency work demands and their identity self-perceptions; they continued to see themselves as "coordinators of care" (p.245).

 Surgical and radiology residents, in contrast, experienced more significant discrepancies between work demands and their identity perceptions. Some functions, such as paperwork and administering of medication, conflicted with the high expectations that surgical residents had of themselves. They saw themselves as professionals who effected "dramatic change in disease" (Pratt et al., 2006, p. 245). These "scut work" role expectations were perceived as

undermining and incompatible with their identities as surgeons (Pratt et al., 2006, p. 245). Accompanying this sense of devaluation was a loss of identity, as if they were far-removed from the medical profession (Pratt et al. (2006). The relevance of Pratt et al.'s (2006) work to the current study is manifold, and includes a discipline-specific research sample (medical doctors) as well as making explicit the relationship between work and identity, between "doing" and "being" (p. 255). Pratt et al.'s (2006) theory of identity customization powerfully illustrates the transformative impact of work on professional identity, and reinforces the importance of research in this area. Pratt et al.'s (2006) study also links micro-level, macro-level and organizational influences on identity construction, thereby providing a more systematic account of process and content aspects of professional identity construction in the workplace. Identity customization theory is explored more fully in the chapter that follows, which focuses on the study's underlying philosophical and theoretical influences. A possible limitation of Pratt et al.'s (2006) research is that the cognitive mechanisms underlying identity customization are not clearly articulated as in Breakwell's (1986) work. It is envisaged that constructivist concepts of learning, such as assimilation and accommodation, as well as cognitive dissonance theory, can complement the contribution made by identity customization theory.

Chreim, Williams and Hinings's (2007) work seeks to address perceived macro-level gaps in identity work studies by focusing on the institutional impact of government and professional associations on the identity construction process. The potential for institutional forces to inhibit or promote identity construction is acknowledged in terms of providing "interpretative, legitimating and material resources that professionals adopt and adapt" (Chreim et al., 2007, p.1518). Chreim et al.'s (2007) work is of relevance to the present study as it allows for a variety of institutional and professional influences on student counsellor identity, to be

accounted for. These include the HPCSA, SAACDHE and Department of Higher Education and Training in South Africa.

Wrzenieswki and Dutton's (2001) seminal model of job crafting complements identity customization work (Pratt et al., 2006) by examining how *work* is customized to fit one's identity. Job crafting is defined as "a creative and improvised process that captures how individuals locally adapt their jobs in ways that create and sustain a viable definition of the work they do and who they are at work" (Wrzenieswki & Dutton, 2001, p. 180). According to the job crafting model, individuals are "job crafters" or innovators capable of influencing the meaning of their work and their identity by altering cognitive, functional or relational work aspects. This includes altering one's perception of the work, altering the form or number of tasks undertaken, or the level of interaction with others (Wrzenieswki and Dutton, 2001). Job crafting is portrayed as a holistic and integrated process ("a psychological, social and physical act") (Wrzenieswki & Dutton, 2001, p.180). Individual agency is highlighted as central to the job crafting process, although Wrzenieswki and Dutton' (2001) also draw attention to issues of context, job discretion and opportunity which can either constrain or promote individual agency in the customization process.

Job crafting theory is relevant to the present study, given the power differentials and resource constraints associated with student counselling in higher education (Botha et al., 2005; de Jager & van Lingen, 2012). In addition, although the study does not focus on professional groups relevant to student counselling, such as psychologists, the fundamental concepts and principles of the job crafting model are applicable across occupations and professions and may thus also be considered in the context of student counselling practice.

3.7. CONCLUSION

This chapter offered the reader a variety of lenses through which professional identity has been viewed in the literature. Specific attention was paid to debates around the dynamic nature of the identity construct, the role of context in the identity construction process and the significance of work to professional identity. The varied approaches and perspectives on professional identity were contextualised in terms of broader paradigmatic shifts from modernity to postmodernity, which are seen as having a profound bearing on contemporary understandings and approaches to identity research. Methodological variations in the study of identity and professional identity were also noted, particularly the under-representation of psychologists' identity experiences in IPA research.

The valuable contributions made by Davey (2010) to identity research in general and to student counsellor's identity in particular, were highlighted. These include Davey's (2010) integration of psychological/developmental, socio-cultural and post-structural perspectives into a comprehensive understanding of teacher educators' identity. This chapter also considered student counselling research trends that reflect a skew towards issues of service delivery whilst neglecting the experience of the student counsellor. Chapter Three also explored developmental perspectives on professional identity, with a focus on linear and more fluid, postmodern models of understanding. These are seen as having significant training and workplace implications globally. Finally, the connection between work and professional identity was explored in the context of identity work studies, with noteworthy contributions highlighted in terms of their relevance to both professional identity and student counsellor identity in particular (e.g. Breakwell, 1986; Chreim et al., 2007; Kreiner et al., 2006; Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Pratt et al., 2006; Snow & Anderson, 1987; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Wrzenieswki and Dutton, 2001).

CHAPTER 4
PHILOSOPHICAL & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This study investigates South African psychologists' experiences of identity in the student counselling context. An explication of the study's philosophical and theoretical foundations is necessary in order to appreciate not only the research findings that follow, but also the methodological processes that enabled these subjective experiences to be illuminated. The phenomenological and postmodern foundations underpinning this study were forged during my early years as an Honours and Masters Psychology student undertaking qualitative research for the first time. My interest in student counsellor identity is also a natural extension of my professional training as a counselling psychologist and my work as a student counsellor in the South African higher education context. As a student in the counselling psychology tradition, I embraced my formal socialisation into the field of counselling psychology, which is characterized by a client-centred, humanistic orientation and an emphasis on human potential and the right to self-determination (Mantica, 2011). Prioritising client subjectivity inevitably meant that I encountered significant variation in client experiences during my career as psychologist and student counsellor, with individuals experiencing and making sense of events in different, idiosyncratic ways. This served to reinforce my appreciation for human experience as an essentially complex and ambiguous experience, one that must be understood and appreciated from a position of context and relativity, as opposed to a generalized approach to meaning.

In light of my professional training and work background, I was inevitably drawn to the phenomenological-constructivist approach, which is underpinned by postmodern assumptions and recognizes that reality is subjectively construed and actively constructed by the individual in the context of multiple and varied influences. In addition, my exposure to trans-disciplinary ideas and concepts from identity research in psychology, organizational studies and related disciplines served to deepen and enhance the theoretical and conceptual base from which this study proceeded. The reader will thus note the presence of multi-disciplinary influences that informed and guided the present study.

4.2. PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK

4.2.1 Postmodernism

The philosophical and epistemological framework adopted in this study is informed by broader postmodern assumptions about reality as a complex and ambiguous experience, with multiple and varied meanings (Becvar & Becvar, 2000; Lloyd, 2009). Postmodernism was therefore deemed an appropriate philosophical framework to guide the present study's investigation and focus. In order to appreciate postmodernism's influence on the present study, it is necessary to contrast postmodernism with its predecessor – modernism. Postmodern assumptions contrasted sharply with earlier modernist beliefs in a single, fixed and objective reality which is separate from the individual and accessible via rigorous scientific means (Becvar & Becvar, 2000). The powerful influence of a Western scientific model was thus evident not only in how reality and experience were interpreted within modernism, but also in the empirically driven, quantitative research methodology that was preferred (Becvar & Becvar, 2000; Marovic, 2000). In contrast, the postmodernist era represented an age of openness, flexibility and opportunity, with postmodernism's anti-essentialist stance emphasising reality as a plural and ambiguous

experience involving the active participation of the individual in the construction of meaning. (Becvar & Becvar, 2000; Hansen, 2010). Postmodernism signalled an increased acceptance of knowledge as dynamic, fluid and relational, with the possibility of multiple realities existing and constructed in the context of language and social interaction (Lloyd, 2009). Mindful of postmodern interpretations of reality as a plural and ambiguous experience, I was keen to ascertain whether my research on student counsellor identity would reveal similar understandings, given the multitude of potential influences on student counsellor identity and practice that include the student population, broader institutional context, SAACDHE and the HPCSA. Would student counsellors report a fragmented, plural identity experience or a single identity that is stable and consistent across work contexts? How would language, in terms of titles and institutional classification, impact on student counsellors' identity experiences? Would the title of 'student counsellor' and 'psychologist' impact differently on participants' experiences and perceptions of identity?

Socio-cultural and post-structural perspectives are seen as embodying postmodern assumptions about reality, in particular the rejection of rigid, absolutist thinking and "grand narrative" tendencies of modernism (Prasad, 2005, p. 238). Socio-cultural approaches emphasise the dynamic interaction between one's personal and professional life, with identity continuously negotiated and reconstructed in the context of one's biographical history, self-perceptions, social environment and social structures (Davey, 2010; Dunstan, 2002; Hansen, 2010; Mantica, 2011; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Yi & Shorter-Gooden, 1999). Socio-cultural perspectives conceptualise identity as a relational phenomenon that is both individually and socially constructed in the context of culture and society. Socio-cultural approaches, however, tend to give priority to the social context, emphasising social determinism over individual agency in their descriptions of identity formation and negotiation (Davey, 2010).

Wenger's (1998) social learning theory emphasizes the social, cultural and political aspects of identity development; in so doing, this theory reflects a socio-cultural orientation. Identity is contextualised in terms of a learning trajectory, which involves understanding ourselves in the context of our past experience as well as future expectations about where we are going (Wenger, 1998). Social learning theory is particularly relevant to the present study's focus on South African student counsellors working within a specific geographical and socio-historical context. Wenger's (1998) notion of identity as involving community membership and participation in "communities of practice", is of further relevance to the present study, given the anticipated influence of multiple group affiliations on student counsellors' identity.

Wenger (2012) defines "communities of practice" as "groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (p. 1). Wenger (2012) distinguishes "communities of practice" from other groups or gatherings of people on the basis of its *intentional* nature, with group members connected to each other by a shared interest or focus. The interactive nature of community membership is also seen as facilitating learning and reinforcing group synergy and solidarity amongst members. As Wenger (2012) aptly points out, "having the same job or the same title does not make for a community of practice unless members interact and learn together" (p. 2). Linked to the notion of shared learning is the emphasis on shared practice, expressed through the sharing of resources, experiences and expertise. This shared practice facilitates the learning process and sustains group membership. For Wenger (1998), identity and practice are linked and inform each other (Davey, 2010). Wenger's (1998) concept of shared practice is deemed relevant to understanding the underlying dynamics of group identity, cohesion, and solidarity amongst student counsellors who are working together to provide a specialised service in higher education.

4.2.2. Post-structural influences

Whilst post-structuralism and postmodernism are often viewed as similar in terms of how reality is perceived, Olivier (2013) differentiates between the two on the basis of different process states of being' and 'becoming':

> … modernism is a mode of thinking that attempts to locate 'being' or a sense of permanence within the flux of existence by finding the ONE there, whilst postmodernism is content to abandon any sense of being in favour of the MANY, becoming or flux. Post-structuralism steers a path between the two, 'thinking them together', or negotiating a course between the Scylla of sterile permanence and the Charybdis of incessant change, demonstrating in different ways that being and becoming cannot, or should not, be separated, and that each is limited by the other, in this way allowing change and stability to enter into a life-giving contract. (p. 1)

According to Prasad (2005), one of post-structuralism's distinguishing features is its emphasis on language, specifically in the context of institutions and power. Post-structuralism's emphasis on language and power is deemed relevant to the present study, given that one of the areas of interest is the impact of institutional titles on student counsellors' identity experiences and value perceptions of themselves in higher education.

4.2.3. Phenomenology

Phenomenology is both a philosophy and methodological approach to explaining and exploring reality (Finlay, 2008). Phenomenology focuses on the rich details of conscious, lived experience as it presents itself to the individual (Finlay, 2008). According to Finlay (2008), the phenomenologist asks "What is this kind of experience like? What does the experience mean?

How does the lived world present itself to me (or to my participant)? " (p. 2). Phenomenology thus lends itself to studies interested in the subjective meaning that particular experiences hold for individuals, with IPA being the natural methodological choice for exploring such experiences.

According to Smith et al. (2009), the origins of phenomenology as a discipline can be traced back to the early twentieth century writings of philosophers such as Edmund Husserl (1931/1913; 1927; 1970), Martin Heidegger (1962/1927), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1956/1943). A variety of phenomenological approaches or strands exist that include descriptive, transcendental phenomenology (Husserl, 1931/1913; 1927; 1970) and interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology (Heidegger, 1962/1927). All strands share "a particular interest in thinking about what the experience of being human is like, in all of its various aspects, but especially in terms of the things which matter to us, and which constitute our lived world" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 11). The present study sought to provide a rich and detailed account of student counsellors subjective experiences of identity, with the ideas of Husserl (1931/1913; 1927; 1970) and Heidegger (1962/1927) seen as particularly relevant to the study's focus.

Husserl's (1927) descriptive, transcendental phenomenology seeks to describe the essential features or qualities of subjective lived experience, but also considers ways in which these qualities could transcend individual experience to represent the experiences of others as well (Smith et al., 2009). Husserl focused on experience from the subjective, first-person perspective, and the ways in which the individual comes to know and be aware of that experience (Husserl, 1927; 1982). For Husserl, all experience is directed towards something; experience is therefore a conscious, intentional phenomenon which he articulates in terms   of

the concept 'intentionality' (Husserl, 1931/1913). Finlay (2008) elaborates on Husserl's concept of intentionality and its application to research:

> In the life-world, a person's consciousness is always directed at something in or about the world. Consciousness is always consciousness of something. When we are conscious of something (an 'object') we are in relation to it and it means something to us. In this way, subject (us) and object are joined together in mutual co-constitution. This important phenomenological concept is called **intentionality** [emphasis in original] and it is a key focus for research (p. 2).

The phenomenological researcher recognizes this intentional relationship between subject and object by seeking to elucidate the particular meanings and experiences attached to the object by the subject (Finlay, 2008). Drawing on Husserl's notion of an intentional relationship between subject and object, the present study sought to explore how professional identity is experienced and understood by student counsellors, on the assumption that an intentional relationship exists between the phenomenon of identity as *object*, and the student counsellor's awareness thereof, as *subject*.

Husserl (1936/1970) argued for a phenomenological approach that "goes back to the things themselves", focusing on the essential qualities or features of an individual's experience as they appear, without imposing any prior explanations or reflections that could contaminate the individual's 'life-world'. Life-world, a core concept in phenomenology (Finlay, 2008), refers to a world "that appears meaningful to consciousness in its qualitative, flowing, given-ness; not an objective world 'out there', but a humanly relational world" (Todres, Galvin & Dahlber, 2007, p.55). For Husserl, a phenomenological appreciation of experience could be achieved through a process of 'bracketing' or putting aside one's previous assumptions and knowledge

(Finlay, 2008). Finlay (2008) cautions against misinterpreting 'bracketing' to mean an attempt at being unbiased and objective. It is instead an attitude of curiosity and openness, without presumption. The process of bracketing enables one to be open to seeing something for what it is and how it is experienced, rather than how it *should* or is *supposed* to be (Finlay, 2008).

The issue of whether to bracket or utilize one's prior experience and assumptions is a contentious issue within the various phenomenological camps. Husserl's descriptive phenomenology prioritises description of experience whilst suspending (bracketing) one's prior knowledge and biases. In contrast, interpretive phenomenological research in Heidegger's tradition regards researcher interpretation as critical to illuminating such experience (Reiners, 2012). According to Willig (2001), IPA requires the researcher to adopt a reflexive attitude that takes cognisance of his or her personal and epistemological influences on the interpretative process. The present IPA study was informed by an appreciation of subjective experience and consciousness in the Husserlian tradition, but proceeded primarily from the Heideggerian position that access to this experience can only be gained through researcher interpretation.

Heidegger's work (1962/1927) work prioritises interpretation, meaning and understanding (*verstehen*) (Reiners, 2012). Heideggger's phenomenological perspective reflects the belief that experience is constructed and made meaningful by the person in context, and that one can gain access to this experience through the process of interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). Drawing on this idea, I saw my role in this study as offering an in-depth, descriptive account of student counsellors' subjective experiences through a process of interpretation. Heidegger maintained that the individual is invariably an *individual-in-context*, situated within a worldly context (*Dasein*), a context that provides the material in the form of people, objects, relationships, language and culture which is then interpreted and utilised by the individual

(Smith et al., 2009). Linked to Heidegger's notion of the individual-in-context is the notion of 'intersubjectivity', defined as the "shared, overlapping and relational nature of our engagement in the world" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 17). Intersubjectivity, for Heidegger, is what enables human beings to communicate and understand each other, and what makes empathy possible through a process of mutual understanding (Smith et al., 2009). For Heidegger, personal awareness and researcher interpretation are integral to phenomenological research (Reiners, 2012). The concept of intersubjectivity enhanced my awareness that, as a phenomenological researcher, I brought my own life experience, professional training and student counselling work experiences into the analytical process, and that this enabled me to empathically engage with, and articulate, participants' narratives as they unfolded during the analytical process.

4.2.4. Constructivism

Constructivism is an epistemological approach to knowing and understanding that focuses on the constructive processes underlying knowledge and sense-making (Flick, 2004). A variety of approaches may be found under the broad label of 'constructivism', each differing in terms of how learning is understood and contextualised. In exploring the cognitive and social roots of student counsellors' professional identity, this study draws mainly on two divergent strands of constructivism in the tradition of Vygotsky (social constructivism) and Piaget (cognitive constructivism).

The roots of Piagetian constructivism can be traced back to Piaget's initial study of molluscs' adaption to their environment. In the course of his observations, Piaget noted that this adaptive process had a modifying impact on the environment itself (Proulx, 2006). Piaget later applied and extended his ideas on adaptation to humans in the context of learning and adapting to new

experiences (Piaget, 1954; 1971), with equilibration, accommodation and assimilation emerging as key concepts in the learning and developmental process (Proulx, 2006).

For Piaget, knowledge is actively constructed by the individual in the context of a dynamic interaction with the environment (Ackerman, 1996). Individuals attempt to make sense of the world by drawing on their prior experiences. In constructivism, this prior experience is referred to as mental representations or cognitive schemas (McLeod, 2015; Proulx, 2006). The use of an existing schema to deal with new experiences is termed 'assimilation' (Bodner, 1986). According to Proulx (2006), assimilation "is an adaptive process that occurs without conscious adaptation" because new learning has been informed by what we already know (p. 8). Prior experience thus acts as a filter or lens through which we categorise and view new information in a particular way (Proulx, 2006). Accommodation, on the other hand, is a more conscious process of adaptation that is facilitated when individuals encounter discrepancies between what they already know and new information from the environment (Proulx, 2006). Ackerman (1996), writing from the context of perspective-taking, asserts that during such discrepant experiences the individual cannot "impose his or her view onto the world" through assimilation, but instead has to "listen to the world" and adapt accordingly (Ackerman, 1996, p. 3). When individuals are unable to fit new information into their existing cognitive schemas of understanding, an unpleasant state of disequilibrium arises (McLeod, 2015). For Piaget, the desire for equilibrium is the catalyst for learning and development, because individuals dislike frustration and will seek to restore balance or a state of equilibrium (Proulx, 2006). Equilibrium is restored by altering (accommodating) existing knowledge in light of new experience and information from the environment.

Festinger's (1957) notion of cognitive dissonance can be seen as complementing Piaget's ideas on assimilation and accommodation by offering a conceptually relevant way to articulate the state of disequilibrium or tension experienced prior to accommodation taking place. Cognitive dissonance refers to a state of tension or discomfort that arises when a person's behaviour is in conflict with their beliefs. The concept of cognitive dissonance may be useful in terms of explaining possible tensions and conflicts that arise between student counselling demands and student counsellors' beliefs about their role and identity in the student counselling environment.

Piaget's original concepts have spawned positive psychology models of growth in the context of adversity and trauma (e.g. Joseph & Linley, 2005; Payne, Joseph & Tudway, 2007). Principles of accommodation and assimilation have also been applied to the study of age-related coping in adulthood (e.g. Brandtstädter & Greve, 1994) goal pursuit and goal adjustment (Brandtstädter & Renner, 1990; Brandtstädter & Rothermund, 2002) and identity processing (e.g. Whitbourne, 1986), with a specific identity process theory emerging from Whitbourne's (1986) seminal work on identity in adulthood. The present study does not specifically adopt identity process theory as its theoretical framework, but rather acknowledges the broad applicability of assimilation and accommodation principles to the study of identity and coping in the context of identity threats and challenges.

Sneed and Whitbourne (2003) describe identity assimilation as "the interpretation of identity-salient experiences in terms of established cognitive and affective schemas about the self" (p. 313). According to Sneed & Whitbourne (2003), identity assimilation enables individuals to maintain a state of balance or self-consistency, even in the face of challenging or discrepant experiences. In the context of aging, accommodation and assimilation are seen as having important implications for how people cope with the inevitability of the aging process. An

over-reliance on identity assimilation is seen as a possible reflection of underlying insecurity, with the individual having difficulty acknowledging his or her own vulnerabilities, flaws and fears (Sneed & Whitbourne, 2003). Thus, aging individuals who rely heavily on assimilation may be reluctant to adopt alternative coping strategies because this would challenge their belief that they are *not old* (Baltes & Baltes, 1990, as cited in Sneed & Whitbourne, 2003). Over-reliance on identity assimilation can give rise to a rigid and prescribed approach to experience - one that inhibits learning and growth because the individual only attends to information that is consistent with his or her existing cognitive schemas (Sneed & Whitbourne, 2003). Identity accommodation, in contrast, involves identity change in response to new experiences and information (Sneed & Whitbourne, 2003). Individuals who rely excessively on accommodation are seen as easily influenced by new experiences because their own identities are unstable and unclear (Sneed & Whitbourne, 2003).

In contrast to Piaget, Vygotsky (1978) saw learning and cognitive development as socially constructed (McLeod, 2014). Vygotsky (1978) adopted a socio-cultural approach to learning and development, arguing that "individual development cannot be understood without reference to the social and cultural context within which it is embedded" (McLeod, 2014, p. 1). Vygotsky (1962; 1978) identified language and culture as "tools of intellectual adaptation" which, through their use in social contexts, enable learning and development to take place (McLeod, 2014, p. 1). The present study was interest in how institutionally based 'cultural tools' such as institutional policies and classification practices, influence student counsellors' understanding of their role and identity in higher education. To this end, Vygotsky's (1978) work is deemed relevant to this investigation.

While Piaget's biological approach to constructivism may be construed as incompatible with social constructivism, research such as Billet's (1995) study on vocational-based learning, supports the notion of an integrated, socio-cognitive approach. Billett (1995) found that knowledge accessed through memory and problem-solving, had been socially acquired and applied. The way in which research participants (hairdressers) constructed and employed their hairdressing knowledge was shaped by the specific hairdressing communities of practice to which these individuals had been exposed and socialised. These hairdressing salons or communities of practice were characterised by specific cultural practices and preferences, including a preference for certain concepts, procedures, activities and approaches. Participants' vocational knowledge and skills were therefore strongly embedded in the social context of vocational practice. These findings have important implications for understanding the complex nature of student counsellor identity, given that participants enter the student counselling context with previously-acquired assumptions and beliefs about what it means to be a psychologist in student counselling. This previously-acquired model of psychological practice has to then be revisited in the context of broader institutional demands and social influences. .

4.3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.3.1. Identity work

The intention of the present study was not to impose theoretical categories and concepts onto the research findings, but rather to allow student counsellors' subjective experiences to emerge. These were then examined in relation to existing theoretical explanations and understandings of professional identity. This study consequently adopts a broad 'identity work' approach that is informed by identity work perspectives previously discussed in Chapter Three. Most notable in this regard are identity customization theory (Pratt et al., 2006), job crafting theory (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001) as well as the ideas of Billet (1995), Breakwell (1986) and

Kreiner et al., (2006). According to Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) identity work is characterized by people "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (p. 1165). Identity work involves the employment of identity management strategies or coping tactics that imply a sense of individual agency over identity construction and meaning-making. Identity work may be seen as having both functional (behavioural) and process (cognitive) aspects which are inter-related, because it is through the performance and evaluation of various functions and activities that one learns more about identity. Work is thus important to understanding identity formation and revision because work holds specific meaning, purpose and significance for the individual and is the medium through which the "preferred self" can be expressed (Kahn, 1990).

Breakwell (1986) draws attention to the varied intra-psychic, interpersonal and intergroup coping strategies employed by individuals to manage perceived identity threats. According to Breakwell (1986), intra-psychic coping strategies are informed by processes of assimilation, accommodation and evaluation, and are thus oriented towards the individual's cognitions and emotions (Breakwell, 1986). Intrapsychic strategies broadly encompass deflection and acceptance, with typical deflection strategies including denial, transient depersonalisation, reconstrual and fantasy. These are aimed at resisting the threat and change to the identity structure. Acceptance strategies are defined by Breakwell (1986) as strategic cognitive adaptations that involve minimal change and are guided by processes of assimilation and accommodation. Acceptance strategies include restructuring and compartmentalism, which Breakwell (1986) describes as "drawing a strict boundary around the dissatisfying addition to the identity structure. It is not permitted to contaminate the rest of the identity" (p. 95). Interpersonal strategies highlighted by Breakwell (1986) include isolation, negativism, and

compliance. Compliance, in particular, may be more common in organizational settings characterised by autocratic leadership, and where power dynamics may constrain and limit the individual employee's authority and job discretion. Intergroup strategies highlighted by Breakwell (1986) include multiple group membership, group support and group action strategies.

Identity customization theory expands the field of identity research by focusing on identity construction in the workplace and locating it in the context of work and identity learning cycles (Pratt et al., 2006). Central to identity customization theory is the notion of work and identity as inter-related, with the individual learning about the nature and content of his or her work (work learning cycle) and in the process, revising their identity perceptions. This process is referred to as an identity learning cycle) (Pratt et al., 2006). Individuals are said to engage in work-identity integrity assessments, which involve assessing or comparing the degree of consistency between one's work and perceived identity. Work-identity integrity violations are said to arise when individuals perceive a mismatch between what they do and how they see themselves as professionals. Work-identity integrity violations range from relatively minor to major violations, which consequently influence the different identity customization processes employed to resolve these violation (Pratt et al., 2006). Identity customization processes or strategies include identity splinting, identity patching and identity enriching (Pratt et al., 2006).

According to Pratt et al. (2006), *how* work-identity integrity violations are resolved depends on the strength of one's identity, the magnitude of the perceived violation and degree of job discretion or autonomy that one has over one's work. Under conditions of minor integrity violations, identity enrichment is the customisation process employed. According to Pratt et al. (2006), the essence and basic principles of the identity remain the same, but the identity is

enhanced and has greater depth (Pratt et al., 2006). Identity patching and identity splinting are employed when integrity violations are perceived to be more serious or major (Pratt et al., 2006). Identity splinting involves the employment of a temporary, alternative identity such as that of 'student', which functions as a splint-like support when the individual is unable to align identity with the work engaged in. Identity patching refers to the attachment of a pre-existing or alternative identity to one's current identity, and is employed by the individual in order to compensate for deficiencies or inconsistencies between identity and task performance (Pratt et al., 2006). Pratt et al. (2006) propose that identity splinting is more likely to be seen early in the course of professional development. As identity challenges and conflicts resolve and identity matures and strengthens, initial identity splinting gives way to identity patching and eventual identity enrichment (Pratt et al., 2006).

Facilitating the identity customization process are what Pratt et al. (2006) refer to as identity customization sources. These include prior socialisation experiences from professional training and external influences from the organization which signify organizational membership or association. The research participants in Pratt et al.'s (2006) study were medical doctors, with some participants drawing significantly on physical signs or artefacts that signified their membership to the medical profession, such as the white uniform. Validating mechanisms in the form of role models and performance feedback from senior colleagues and peers, were also identified as potential influences reinforcing the identity customization process (Pratt et al., 2006). Pratt et al.'s (2006) theory of identity customization offers a valuable conceptual base with which to understand the identity negotiation and management efforts of psychologists working as student counsellors in higher education.

Whilst identity customization theory highlights the ways in which identity is adapted to fit work demands (Pratt et al., 2006), the concept of job crafting draws attention to the individual's proactive efforts at aligning work with their self-perceptions (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Job crafting is said to arise out of the need for people to experience a sense of control over their work and to avoid alienation (Braverman, 1974, as cited in Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Individuals are also said to engage in job crafting to maintain their self-esteem and a connection to others (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). According to the job crafting model, one intended consequence of job crafting is a shift towards a more positive identity, fuelled by the need to experience a positive self-image (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Job crafting strategies include altering either the physical nature of the job by changing the form or number of activities one engages in, altering the cognitive nature of the job by changing one's perceptions of the work, or altering the quality and frequency of interactions and relationships that one has with others at work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

An influential factor in job crafting is the degree of job discretion one has over what they do and how they do it. Opportunities to engage in job crafting are said to depend on the degree of autonomy and the degree of inter-relationship amongst tasks (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Individuals with lower levels of job discretion and greater task interdependence are thus less likely to engage in job crafting. This has implications for understanding the work experiences of student counsellors working in higher education, given that this context is hierarchical in nature, with institutional bureaucracy potentially limiting the degree of autonomy that student counsellors have over their roles and functions in higher education. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) also highlight work orientation as an important factor in the job crafting process. Work orientation refers to the perception that one has of work, and is said to influence or direct the job crafting process because people with different work orientations perceive and respond

differently to their work. Work orientations include seeing work as a *job*, with financial implications, perceiving work as a *career,* with implications for professional growth and advancement, and seeing work as a *calling,* with the emphasis on personal fulfilment and social relevance (Wrzenieswki, McCauley, Rozin & Schwartz, 1997).

Motivational orientation is also said to interact with work orientation to influence the nature and process of job crafting (Amabile, Hill, Hennessy & Tighe, 1994; Wrzenieswki & Dutton, 2001), with extrinsic motivations such as desire for more money or bonuses, reflecting more of a job orientation than a calling. Having a job orientation informed by extrinsic motivations is also seen as limiting the range and the nature of job crafting that one engages in, because the focus is on meeting an external need rather than an intrinsic one (Wrzenieswki & Dutton, 2001). In contrast, individuals with more intrinsic motivations are likely to engage in more in- depth and extensive job crafting behaviours that encourage greater autonomy, a sense of achievement and fulfilment (Wrzenieswki & Dutton, 2001).

Although some literature (e.g. Wrzenieswki, McCauley, Rozin & Schwartz, 1997) assert that individuals have one primary orientation towards their work, I support a more flexible view of work orientation that takes into account the varied ways in which one may simultaneously view work, depending on one's personal and professional interests and circumstances at a particular point in time. For example, one may view work as both a career affording professional fulfilment and as a job that meets one's financial and lifestyle needs. Alternatively, an individual may view their work both as a career and a calling that allows them to apply their skills in a highly specialised way as well as an opportunity to fulfil their altruistic aspirations. Cognisance should also be taken of possible shifts or changes to work orientation, with different orientations taking priority at different times in an individual's life, depending on

personal and professional needs and circumstances. This would be in keeping with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs model. An unemployed individual, for example, is more likely to prioritise the economic implications of employment and the first-order basic needs that could be met, as opposed to seeing employment as a career opportunity with advancement and altruistic potential.

Like identity customization theory (Pratt et al., 2006), the concept of job crafting is relevant to the present study in terms of highlighting the relationship between work and identity. Given the literature's emphasis on a diverse and complex student counselling practice (e.g. Naidoo, 1997), it is anticipated that student counselling demands will have a significant impact on how student counselors experience and negotiate their roles and identity in higher education. It is thus possible that student counsellors may exhibit attempts at both identity customization and job crafting as a means of pursuing a meaningful identity and work experience in higher education.

4.3.2. Organizational Justice

This section on organizational justice complements the previous section on identity work as it draws attention to potential influences on identity work and decision-making. According to Coetzee (2005), managers in organizational contexts are increasingly recognising the important social dimension in employee relations and noting how this impacts on employee satisfaction, productivity and organisational success. Central to human relationships and social interaction is the notion of justice, originally contextualised in terms of social justice or fairness in social interactions Research further suggests that perceptions of justice can influence motivation (Latham & Pinder, 2005), job satisfaction (Al-Zu'bi, 2010) and organizational commitment and intention to leave (Loi, Hang-yue & Foley, 2006).

Greenberg (1987) is credited with conceptualising the notion of organizational justice, which Baldwin (2006) defines as "the extent to which employees perceive workplace procedures, interactions and outcomes to be fair in nature" (p. 1). Subjective perceptions are thus prioritised in organizational justice thought, making the concept compatible with my own study's interest in student counsellors' subjective experiences in higher education institutions. Organizational justice is seen as extending and enhancing industrial psychology, human resource and organizational studies which tend to conceptualise employee wellness and productivity primarily in terms of job demands, job control and social support (Baldwin, 2006).

According to Baldwin (2006), organizational justice can take three forms: distributive justice, procedural justice and interactional justice. Distributive justice refers to the individual's perception of fairness and equity in respect of organizational practices such as remuneration, benefits, career development and advancement opportunities. Underpinning this is the perception that what one receives, experiences or is compensated with (outcomes) is in proportion to what they have invested or put in (input), such as education, training, experience and effort. According to Baldwin (2006), organizational attempts at distributive justice are evident in human resource procedures and policies on job grading, remuneration packages and staff development. Baldwin's (2006) notion of distributive justice has important implications for student counsellors' perceptions of their salaries, occupational benefits and career development opportunities in higher education. I return to this concept in subsequent chapters where I explore the research findings and the transformative implications thereof for institutional change in South African higher education.

Procedural justice, another aspect of organizational justice, refers to perceptions of fairness and transparency in the decision-making process leading to a particular outcome (Baldwin, 2006).

According to Baldwin (2006), procedural justice is reflected in the "voice principle", which refers to the opportunities given to people to present or voice their opinions and concerns before decisions are taken in the organizational context. Organizational interactions and relationships seen as reflecting the voice principle include management's open-door policies, where employees have the freedom and opportunity to raise issues and concerns with management. Other organizational events and practices seen to reflect the voice principle include staff empowerment programmes, appeal processes and participative management (Baldwin, 2006). In participative management, staff are democratically included in the decision-making processes that affect them.

The concept of procedural justice has important implications for understanding student counsellors' work experiences and relationships with institutional stakeholders in higher education. Important issues to consider are the following:

- Does the concept of procedural justice resonate with the issues and institutional challenges highlighted by student counsellors in this study? What is the impact of procedural justice or lack thereof, on student counsellors' work experiences in this setting?

- Do student counsellors' perceive an institutional hierarchy in higher education, and if so, how does this impact on their job discretion and professional autonomy?

- Is the student counsellor's "voice" under-represented in higher education structures? If so, how do student counsellors' make sense of this?

Related to procedural justice but nonetheless defined in its own times, is the concept of interactional justice. Baldwin (2006) defines interactional justice as "the quality of the interpersonal treatment received by those working in an organisation, particularly as part of

formal decision-making procedures" (p. 3). Features of organizational interaction said to encompass interactional justice include truthfulness, respect for employees and communication with employees that is appropriate and responsible (Bies & Moag, 1986, as cited in Baldwin, 2006).

Baldwin (2006) highlights various ways in which individuals attempt to deal with perceived injustices in the organization. These behaviours and strategies resonate with the concept of identity work and include exit behaviours such as resigning from the organization or reducing one's work efforts (withdrawal behaviours) (Turnley & Feldman, 1999). Filing a grievance against the perceived injustice (voice behaviours) is considered a positive, proactive response to perceived organizational injustice (Turnley & Feldman, 1999) whilst stealing from the organization (employee theft) is deemed the more passive-aggressive alternative. Organizational justice and employee responses to perceived organizational injustice, provide useful terms of reference with which to understand student counsellors' work experiences, institutional relationships as well as the ways in which they seek to manage perceived injustices in the student counselling work environment.

4.4. CONCLUSION

Chapter Four sought to explicate the philosophical and theoretical influences guiding this study on student counsellor identity. The study's phenomenological-constructivist foundation was advanced and linked to broader postmodern assumptions which assert the notion that reality is a subjective experience constructively negotiated by the individual in the context of multiple and varied influences. In addition trans-disciplinary theoretical and conceptual influences from psychology, organizational studies and related disciplines were outlined and discussed in terms of their relevance to the present study. This chapter paid particular attention to the concept of

organizational justice (Baldwin, 2006) and identity work, with a specific focus on Breakwell's (1986) work, identity customization theory (Pratt et al., 2006) and job crafting (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). I return to these theoretical contributions in Chapter Seven, wherein I consider the theoretical relevance of organizational justice and identity work concepts, to the research findings.

CHAPTER 5
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The present study sought to explore how a group of psychologists working in the South African student counselling context of higher education, experience and make sense of their professional identity. My primary interest was in illuminating the meaning that identity holds for student counsellors, as well as the kinds of influences that significantly impact on this identity experience. Research exploring the subjective perspectives of psychologists working as student counsellors, is conspicuously absent in the literature both locally and abroad. I therefore sought to address this gap by giving voice to the unaccounted experiences of these professionals using IPA as my methodological tool.

IPA is a qualitative research approach with distinctly psychological origins (Smith et al., 2009). IPA was developed by psychology professor, Jonathan Smith, in 1996. He identified a need for a research approach that could "capture the qualitative and experiential dimension, yet still dialogue with mainstream psychology" (Shinebourne, 2011, p.17). Initially employed in health psychology to explore a variety of health-related issues from a subjective experiential perspective, IPA has expanded to clinical, educational, counselling and social psychology (Smith et al., 2009). Of particular relevance to my research is IPA's interest in identity and the experience of the self in the context of health and disease such as Alzheimer's disease (e.g. Clare, 2003; Pearce, Clare & Pistrang, 2002); pregnancy and motherhood (e.g. Smith, 1994; Smith, 1999); sexual identity (e.g. Coyle & Rafalin, 2000; de Visser & Smith, 2006) and the identity experiences of donor offspring (e.g. Turner & Coyle, 2000). IPA has also been used to explore the work experiences and professional practices of health practitioners (e.g. Carradice,

Shankland & Beail, 2002; Epstein & Ogden, 2005; Golsworthy & Coyle, 2001; Harris & Lindsay 2002; Hughes & McCann, 2003; Macran, Stiles & Smith, 1999; Raval & Smith, 2003).

IPA as a qualitative approach to psychological research in the hermeneutic tradition, focuses on "personal meaning and sense-making in a particular context, for people who share a particular experience" (Smith et al., 2009, p.45). IPA was the research method of choice for the present study as its focus is consistent with the study's objectives, which were to explore the subjective, lived experience and sense-making of a specific group, i.e. South African psychologists who share a common experience of working in student counselling. As researcher, I was mindful of similar qualitative options available to me when I decided to embark on this exploratory study. These include grounded theory, which is a theory-driven approach to research with the primary goal of developing theoretical, explanatory accounts of phenomena which are rooted or 'grounded' in the data (Smith et al., 2009). However, the primary focus of my study was not in developing a theory of professional identity, but rather in understanding the *experience* and *meaning* of identity for student counsellors in South African higher education. Grounded theory was therefore not deemed compatible with my experiential aims. IPA was instead selected because it is more experientially-driven, with the aim of illuminating how a particular phenomenon is experienced (Smith et al., 2009).

In using IPA, I adopted a descriptive-interpretive stance which entailed describing participants' experiences and the meanings which they assigned to these experiences (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). Although IPA does not seek out to test hypotheses, assessing research findings in terms of theoretical generalizability is one way of extending IPA's idiographic focus (Smith et al., 2009). Theoretical generalizability refers to the extent to which IPA research findings can engage with wider research and theoretical understandings in the

field. I therefore did not approach my study with theoretical assumptions and hypotheses in mind, but wanted to explore and contextualise research findings in terms of its broader relevance to existing research in the area of identity work and identity customization, with the intention of enhancing and making new contributions to the field.

My IPA study acknowledges the role of language (oral and written) as a medium for expressing and communicating identity experiences, but differs from discourse analysis in that it does not make discursive constructions of identity its primary nor exclusive focus. IPA's main focus is on the meaning of a particular lived experience for a particular group, whilst discourse analysis seeks to understand how people use language to construct particular experiences (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). According to Hancock, Ockleford and Windridge (2009), researchers adopting a discourse analytical approach "are interested in how discourses are organized to be persuasive, or to present a particular 'worldview', and would search for these patterns in the words that are used (linguistic repertoire) and the way that they are utilised (rhetorical strategies)" (p. 13). As an IPA researcher, I would be open to the various ways in which participants make sense of their identities, including but not restricted to, the impact of language-based institutional practices such as titles and classification, on student counsellor identity. In light of the aforementioned differences between IPA and discourse analysis, the latter was not deemed a compatible methodological approach for my study.

Ethnography, specifically the micro-ethnographic approach, was also not selected because although the student counselling community may be construed as a context-specific community of practice or small life-world defined by certain professional and institutional activities and culture-like practices (Griffin & Bengry-Howell, 2010), the aim of this study was

to describe the unique, individual experiences of each participant as well as commonalities in experience not necessarily confined to the notion of 'culture'.

5.2. MAIN FEATURES OF IPA
5.2.1. Phenomenology

IPA is characterised by three major features or orientations that guide exploration and analysis of information: it is *phenomenological, hermeneutic and idiographic* (Smith, 2004). IPA's phenomenological roots stem from its concern with exploring and describing conscious, lived experience in its own terms (Smith et al., 2009). In this sense, it is informed by the ideas of descriptive phenomenologist, Husserl (1927; 1982) who emphasised the description of conscious, lived experience or the individual's life-world. The concept of "life-world" was described previously in Chapter Four. Phenomenological research, for Husserl, entailed adopting an uncontaminated appreciation for things in their own right, as opposed to trying to process and fit them into existing knowledge and experience (Smith et al., 2009). This, for Husserl, could be achieved through a process of 'bracketing' or putting aside one's previous assumptions and knowledge in order "to be open to the phenomenon as it appears" (Finlay, 2008, p. 2).

5.2.2. Hermeneutics

IPA departs from Husserl's phenomenology in its emphasis on the interpretation of subjective lived experience; in so doing, it reflects a more hermeneutic or interpretive stance consistent with Heidegger (Smith et al., 2009). IPA is interested in understanding how individuals derive meaning from a particular experience, but also recognizes that access to this experience cannot be achieved directly, except through the researcher's own interpretation thereof (Smith et al. 2009). Noteworthy is Smith et al.'s (2009) use of the detective analogy when trying to

articulate the interpretive process to the reader. "There is a phenomenon ready to shine forth, but detective work is required by the researcher to facilitate the coming forth, and then to make sense of it once it has happened" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 35). Smith et al. (2009) refer to this interpretative exercise as a "double hermeneutic" involving the researcher "trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them" (p.3). The participant's interpretation or sense-making is, according to Smith et al., (2009) first-order interpretation, whilst the researcher's interpretation is second-order. Drawing on Ricoeur's (1970) two interpretive positions i.e. "hermeneutics of empathy" and "hermeneutics of suspicion", Smith et al. (2009) advise IPA researchers to adopt a double hermeneutic position that combines both approaches (p. 36). Adopting the insider perspective or "hermeneutics of empathy" entails trying to understand what the experience is like from the participant's perspective, whilst a "hermeneutic of questioning" involves the researcher standing "alongside the participant, to take a look at them from a different angle, ask questions and puzzle over things they are saying" (p. 36).

 IPA's focus on researcher interpretation contrasts with Husserl's emphasis on the researcher needing to suspend or 'bracket' off, their assumptions about reality (Finlay, 2009). According to Willig (2001), IPA requires the researcher to adopt a reflexive attitude that takes cognizance of his or her personal and epistemological influences on the interpretative process. I discuss the reflexive aspects of my own research journey in a later section of this chapter dealing with personal reflexivity.

5.2.3. Idiography

IPA's third principle feature focuses on the *particular* (Smith et al, 2009). This idiographic focus contrasts with 'nomothetic' research trends seeking to generalize findings to a larger

group or population (Smith et al., 2006). According to Reid et al. (2005), this idiographic focus also challenges the "traditional linear relationship between 'number of participants' and value of research" (p. 22). IPA's idiographic focus is reflected in its attention to detail and depth of analysis, which entails the rigorous, systemic examination of a particular case, either in its own right as a case study, or before proceeding to the detailed analysis of remaining cases in the sample. Thereafter, interrogation for convergence and divergence of themes across cases is undertaken (Smith, 2004). IPA analysis seeks to balance what is distinct (idiographic level) with what is shared and common across participants (Reid et al., 2005). Close attention is therefore paid to the specifics of an experience, as well as to subtle nuances and variation in experience. IPA's idiographic focus is also evident from its concern with a *particular* experience or phenomenon as experienced by a *particular* group within a *particular* context (Smith et al., 2009).

IPA's concern with the detail, depth and intensity of experience impacts on the sample size of IPA studies, with samples tending to be small and purposive (Smith et al., 2009). It prioritises quality over quantity (Smith et al., 2009). Single case studies are popular, with the focus on demonstrating "existence, not incidence" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 30). My goal as IPA researcher was to prioritise the concrete details of individual experience; however, I was also interested in how individual case studies related to each other in terms of experiential similarity and variation. This entailed moving back and forth between the data in a cyclical pattern or "hermeneutic circle" of understanding, connecting parts to the whole by linking individual (*part*) units of experience in the text, to the broader context of the whole transcript and further, to the shared and varied understandings of identity across different participants. This process was followed in order to arrive at a holistic appreciation of student counsellor identity. The hermeneutic circle in IPA research is further reflected in the researcher's approach and

engagement with the text (part) being influenced by his or her own prior research experiences, history and assumptions (whole) (Smith et. al., 2009). The IPA analytical process is therefore not rigid and linear but rather a fluid, iterative process of engaging and revisiting the transcript (Smith et al., 2009).

5. 3. TARGET POPULATION AND SAMPLING

IPA samples typically range from a single case to approximately fifteen cases (Smith and Osborn, 2003). Smith et al. (2009) suggest an average sample size of three participants for undergraduate or Masters Studies, whilst number of *interviews* is emphasised over number of *participants* in a doctoral study. Smith et al. (2009) suggest between four and ten interviews for a doctoral study.

Purposive sampling was employed for this study, with the sample drawn from the SAACDHE national data base of registered SAACDHE members. Student counselling and development centres are widespread across South African tertiary institutions. I included participants from different provinces and institutions across the country as I wanted to capture a broad and comprehensive perspective of the field as it pertains to the South African context. My sample size is therefore larger than the typical IPA sample size for a doctoral study, with a total of fourteen psychologists from seven provinces in South Africa, agreeing to participate.

To ensure that I obtained an in-depth, comprehensive description from each participant, I chose to conduct two interviews per person, thereby circumventing the risk of obtaining superficial data because of time constraints and large sample size. Criteria for inclusion in the study were professional registration as a psychologist in the categories clinical, counselling or educational, with a minimum of two years working experience in the student counselling setting. This was

deemed a sufficient period for adaptation to the student counselling working environment. I did not include senior staff members in the sample who were functioning in the capacity of student counselling manager or director because it was anticipated that their roles and job description would differ from that of a student counsellor, thereby impacting on the reliability and generalizability of the research findings.

Having worked in student counselling for several years, I noted a lack of consistency amongst institutions as regards the titles 'psychologist' and 'student counsellor', with some institutions classifying professional staff as 'psychologists' rather than 'student counsellors'. However, title variation did not deter participants from engaging in the study, with all those approached expressing a willingness to participate because they found the research both relevant and applicable to themselves.

5.4. PARTICIPANT ACCESS

Potential participants were contacted telephonically and the study's aims and objectives, issues of confidentiality, ethical clearance, and the researcher's professional background, clarified to them. A sample consent form (see Appendix A) further detailing the study, was e-mailed to individuals who expressed a willingness to participate. Participants who agreed to participate were required to sign the consent form prior to the commencement of interviews. Gatekeeper's consent (Appendix B) was also obtained from the respective institutions where participants' were employed, whilst ensuring participant confidentiality and anonymity. Sponsorship details were not included in the consent form at the time of contacting participants because I was still awaiting the outcome of my application for a research grant. Sponsorship details have since been included in the 'Acknowledgements' section of this dissertation.

5.5. DATA COLLECTION

The primary method of data collection was semi-structured, in-depth interviews lasting approximately ninety minutes each. The flexible, open-ended nature of semi-structured interviews was the preferred method of data collection as it assists with establishing rapport, allows for modification of questions in response to emerging information from the participant, and provides the researcher with rich, substantial data with which to work (Smith, 2008). Participants were interviewed at a location of their choosing, taking into account issues of convenience, confidentiality and anonymity. Interviews were all tape-recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim by myself. Two interviews per participant were scheduled. This interview format was adapted from Seidman's (1991) suggestion of three interviews, outlined in his phenomenological guide to in-depth interviewing and data gathering. The first interview focuses on the participants' personal life history up until the present, in relation to the topic under investigation, whilst the second interview focuses on current experience in relation to the research topic (Seidman, 1991). The third interview is an integration of previous interviews as it explores participants' reflections and sense-making of reported experiences (Seidman, 1991). I had to balance time constraints with my desire for a comprehensive, in-depth account of participants' experiences. I therefore integrated interviews one and two, requesting participants to share their historical journey towards becoming a student counsellor as well as their current experience in the student counselling context. Consistent with IPA's hermeneutic focus, the objective of the second interview was to facilitate identity processing by getting participants to reflect on the meaning of their experiences in the context of professional identity. An interview schedule with broad, open-ended questions, guided the interview (Refer to Appendix C). Participants were also be requested to complete a participant profile (background questionnaire) prior to the interviews, as a means of

supplementing interview data and helping to contextualize each participant (Refer to Appendix D).

Completed interviews totalled twenty-eight (two interviews per participant). Interview transcription was both laborious and insightful. Simultaneously listening to, and typing out, the recordings helped me to contextualise the data; this process also stimulated analysis as I found certain features of communication meaningful and began preliminary interpretation thereof. Pertinent information was conveyed through the participant's tone, pitch, pace of speech, pauses and delays in responding; these were then noted accordingly in the relevant margin of the transcribed material. My experience of transcribing supports existing literature highlighting transcription as a critical yet overlooked component of the analytical process (eg. Bird, 2005: Brooks, 2010; Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). Bird (2005) discusses transcription as a multi-layered act with several meanings and functions. These include "(a) transcription as data; (b) transcription as an act; (c) transcription as an interpretive act; (d) transcription as interpretive analysis; (e) transcription as product and (f) transcription as peripheral participation" (Bird, 200, pp.227-232). I found that transcription held multiple meanings for me as well, supporting Bird's (2005) multi-layered perspective. I noted shifts in my appreciation of the transcription process, initially seeing it as a data-gathering act that would connect me to the life-worlds of the participants. In the process of emotionally attending to participants' speech, the words began to take on a new meaning. Recurrent ideas, themes and concepts gradually emerged as I listened attentively to the voices embedded in a particular physical and sensory context of tones, pitches, pauses and delays. This resonates with Bird's (2005) notion of transcription as an interpretive act. All tapes and transcribed material were kept in a secure location and confidentiality of information maintained throughout the interviewing and transcription process.

5.6. CONTEXTUALISING RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

5.6.1 Participant attitudes and responses

Interest in the study was overwhelmingly positive, with all participants expressing a keen interest to engage in the study. Participants indicated that they saw this as a rare opportunity to explore a pertinent though neglected area in both psychology and student counselling. Mild performance anxiety was noted amongst a few of the participants who expressed concern about giving "right" or "appropriate" answers. Some of the reasons given by these participants were that professional identity had not been explicitly incorporated into their professional training, neither had it featured prominently at student counselling forums. I utilise these responses to justify my reasons for embarking on the study. I also emphasised my research interest in their subjective experiences of identity, as opposed to an external, pre-defined model of student counsellor identity. I also forwarded broad interview focus areas to participants prior to the interviews, in order to stimulate reflection.

5.6.2 Participant Demographics

A total of fourteen (N=14) psychologists from seven provinces in South Africa, participated in the study. It was decided not to disclose the specific names of the provinces that participated because there were concerns that some participants would be easily identified, and that this would compromise anonymity. Control was not exercised over race or gender. Participation was dependent on availability and willingness to participate. A breakdown of participant demographics in terms of gender and race, is depicted in Graphs One and Two overleaf.
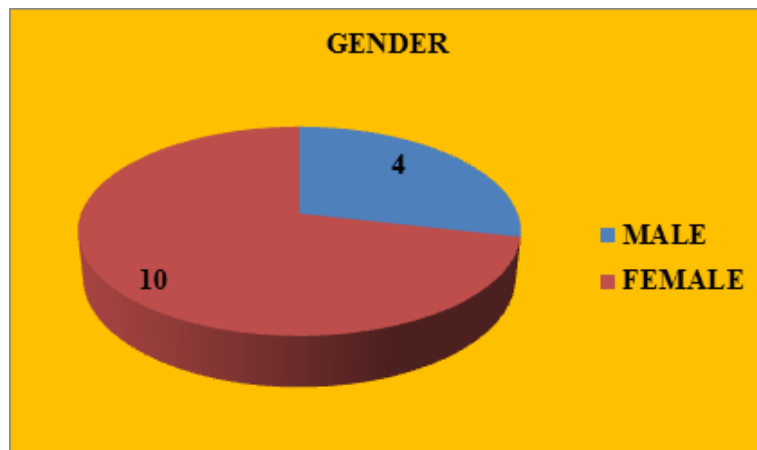
Graph 1: **Gender distribution**
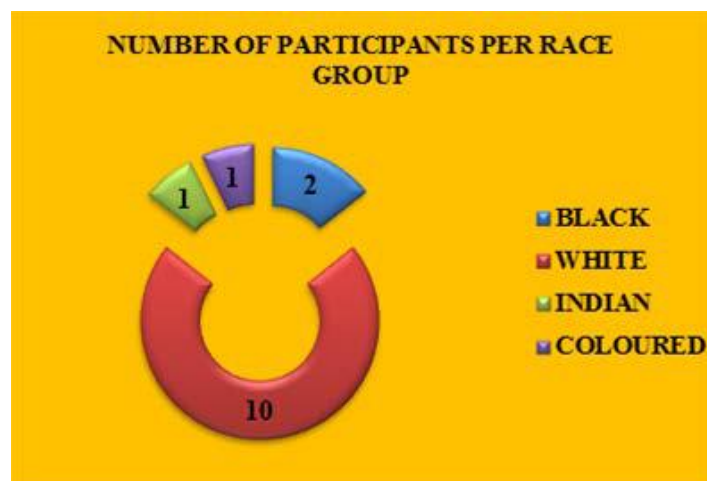
Graph 2: **Race distribution**

White females comprised the majority in the sample. This gender distribution supports existing local studies identifying female psychologists as the majority employed in South African student counselling centres (e.g. Cilliers et al., 2010).
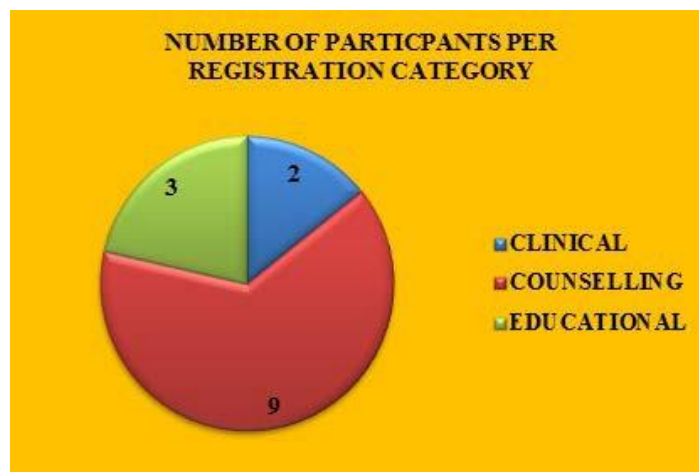
Graph 3 Registration category

The majority of participants were registered in the counselling psychology category (Graph Three).

Graph 4: Post-registration work experience

Research participants had varying levels of post-registration work experience (experience as independent practitioners - Graph Four above). Five participants had one to five years post-registration work experience. A total of five participants had six to ten years post-registration work experience, whilst four participants had between eleven and fifteen years' post-registration experience.

TOTAL YEARS OF EMPLOYMENT IN STUDENT COUNSELLING

1

5

8

■ 1-5 YRS   ■ 6-10 YRS   ■ 11-13 YRS
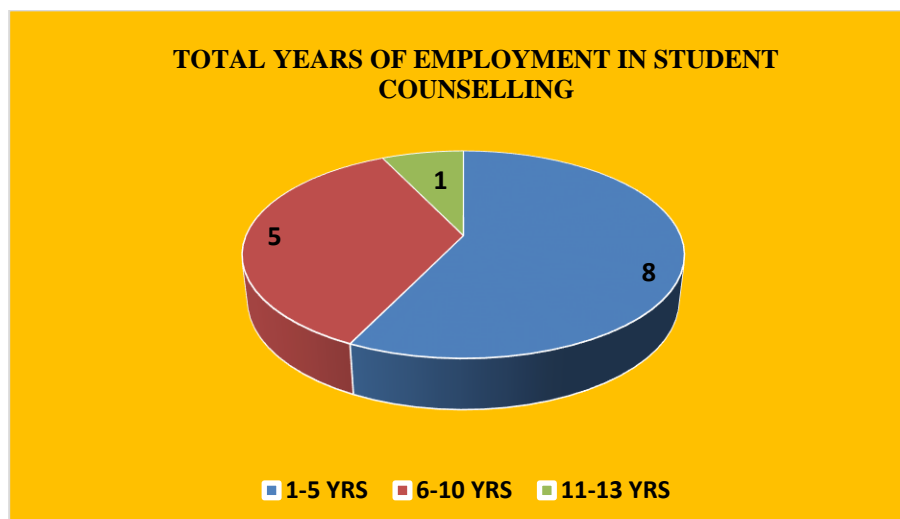
Graph 5: Student counselling work experience

The majority of participants had student counselling work experience in the range of one to five years (refer to Graph five) whilst one participant had worked at the same student counselling centre for a lengthy period of thirteen years.

With regards to internship exposure, seven counselling psychologists in the sample had completed their internships in a student counselling setting and therefore had student counselling exposure prior to their current appointment. Two counselling psychology participants completed their internships at alternative settings attached to a university or school/ academic context. Clinical psychologists in the sample had completed their internship at various accredited hospital and clinical sites, whilst educational psychologists completed their internships at accredited schools and educational assessment sites.

5.7. DATA ANALYSIS

IPA is a flexible approach to qualitative data analysis with broad guidelines rather than a single prescribed method (Smith et al., 2009). Data analysis in the IPA tradition is described

as an iterative and inductive process (Smith, 2007), comprising repeated engagement with the data (iterative) and movements from the specific to the general, from particular experiences to shared experience (Smith et al., 2009). In the words of Smith (2007), "to understand the part, you look to the whole; to understand the whole you look to the part " (p. 5). This is referred to as the "hermeneutic circle" in IPA research (Smith et al., 2009). I employed the following IPA analytical steps as recommended by Smith et al. (2009):

1) Repeated reading

2) Initial note-taking

3) Developing emergent themes

4) Exploring connections across emergent themes

5) Proceeding to next case

6) Establishing patterns across cases

5.7.1. Repeated reading and initial note-taking

The typed contents of the transcribed interviews were centred, with two slim margins included on either side of the page for purposes of making preliminary notes and recording emergent themes. Consistent with IPA's idiographic focus, I started the analytical process by immersing myself in a close, line-by-line reading and re-reading of one transcribed interview at a time. Smith et al. (2009) describe this methodical process as one of slowing down the tendency for superficial reading or skimming. This process required active engagement with the text whilst keeping an open mind, allowing the transcript to speak and thereby, grant me access to the life-world of the participant.

The process of reading was accompanied by note-taking. I had occasionally jotted down initial thoughts and feelings that emerged whilst listening to and transcribing the interviews; I now

continued this process in a more focused fashion. Through the process of reading and making notes, one begins to "identify specific ways by which the participant talks about, understands and thinks about an issue" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 83). This form of note-taking was exploratory and broad, and involved me making notes of anything that I found interesting, on the right-hand margin.

Smith et al. (2009) distinguish between descriptive, linguistic and conceptual notes, which I found useful during this early stage. Descriptive notes are concrete, focus on the *content* of the interview, and serve to highlight key words, phrases or explanations which seemed important to the participant (Smith et al., 2009). Linguistic notes focus on the language use of the participant, with the aim of reflecting on the meaning of particular words, expressions, repetitions, tone, pitch and hesitations (Smith et al., 2009). Conceptual notes are more abstract and interrogative, consisting of preliminary interpretive comments about the individual's experience as well as questions about what a specific statement might mean or be suggestive of, including a possible theme (Smith et al., 2009). Conceptual comments or notes reflect the participant's broader understanding of the issues under discussion (Smith et al., 2009). According to Smith et al. (2009), the more abstract and interrogative style of conceptual commentary facilitates a movement beyond concrete, descriptive analysis to a more sophisticated, abstract level. I also found that the conceptual commentary process eased my transition into the next phase of IPA analysis, i.e. the development of emergent themes.

5.7.2. Developing emergent themes

This process entailed condensing the masses of transcript material and notes from the right-hand margin, into summarised units or statements of meaning central to the participant's experience. These were then synthesised into emergent themes reflecting the participant's

recurrent ideas, thoughts and feelings (Willig, 2001). These emergent were recorded in the left-hand margin of the transcript. According to Smith et al. (2009), emergent themes "reflect a synergistic process of description and interpretation" (p. 92) as they encompass both the participant's words as well as the researcher's interpretation thereof. The relevance of the hermeneutic circle becomes evident as themes pertain to a particular unit of transcription, but are also informed by the broader text in which this unit is located (Smith et al., 2009).

5.7.3. Exploring connections across emergent themes

The next process in IPA analysis involved exploring connections across emergent themes in terms of related meaning and ideas. All emergent themes were then clustered and structured together under a broader superordinate theme. The function of the superordinate theme is to concisely synthesise and encapsulate, the layered meanings within the emergent theme structures. The text box, below, illustrates how the superordinate theme on the left, The student counsellor as institutional "step-child", was abstracted from the three emergent themes in the right of the text box (i.e. "Us" and "Them" spaces, The student counsellor as "stuck" and 'Significance of professional title') which together conveyed a recurrent theme of institutional marginalization. The notion of an institutional "step-child" was drawn from one participant's actual references to student counsellors being treated like "step-children" in higher education.

Superordinate theme	**Emergent sub-themes**
The student counsellor as institutional "step-child"	"Us" and "Them" spaces: Academics as the preferred 'children' - The student counsellor as "stuck" - Significance of professional title

In some instances, I noted that an emergent theme was sufficiently broad yet succinct enough to function at a superordinate level, such as the theme "Wearing many hats": The student counsellor as a "jack-of-all-trades". I found this superordinate theme useful in terms of representing, on an abstract level, the emergent experiences of a challenging practice that required student counsellors to assume multiple, often conflicting roles or 'hats'.

5.7.4. Proceeding to the next case

After connections between themes in the first case were established, the analytical process was repeated with remaining participants' interviews. Smith et al. (2009) advise bracketing information and ideas from the previous participant, in order to appreciate the current text on its own terms. The iterative nature of IPA dictates that the essence of participants' experience conveyed through language, be retained (Smith & Osborn, 2003). I therefore engaged closely with the text in the course of formulating emergent and superordinate themes, constantly checking for accuracy between identified themes and the actual communication of the participant. I was furthermore mindful of linguistic idiosyncrasies that held particular meaning and significance for the participant concerned.

5.7.5. Establishing patterns across cases

The final phase in IPA analysis involved looking for patterns across cases. I was concerned with identifying recurrent patterns as well as new themes that emerged from the different transcripts. According to Smith and Osborn (2003), the aim of analysis is to "respect convergence and divergence in the data – recognizing ways in which accounts from participants are similar but also different" (p.73). Smith et al. (2009) add that "in a good IPA study, it should be possible to parse the account both for shared themes and for the distinctive voices and variations on those themes" (p. 38). Thus, whilst superordinate and emergent themes spoke to

recurrent ideas and issues of significance for participants, it was found that participants sometimes attached different meanings to the same experience. The theme of diversity within student counselling work is an illustration in point, offering the reader an opportunity to discern convergence (similarities) and divergence (differences) in understanding amongst a research sample. Some participants perceived the diversity inherent in student counselling work as a potential threat to their 'psychologist' identity and scope of practice, whilst other participants saw this feature as enhancing their work experience and promoting their professional growth.

A final table of superordinate themes was compiled once all the transcripts had been analysed. Smith and Osborn (2003) highlight the difficulty in prioritizing superordinate themes for inclusion in the final analysis. Suggested guidelines include selecting themes not only in terms of prevalence, but also the extent to which they adequately represent and capture the richness and depth of participants' experience. I found this useful, given my large sample size and the overwhelming amount of data collected from twenty-eight interviews in total. Cognizant of IPA's idiographic focus and the hermeneutic circle, I sought to ground my final list of superordinate themes in the actual experiences of each participant, reflecting a movement from the part (individual case) to the whole (entire corpus of transcripts). My intention was to stay as true to the data as possible by grounding my interpretative ideas and themes in the text. The reader will thus note my extensive reference to participants' metaphors when discussing research findings in the results chapter of this dissertation. The final superordinate themes were translated into narrative accounts of description and included in the 'Results' section of the dissertation write-up. This is discussed further in the section that follows.

5.8. WRITE-UP

5.8.1. Results section

Writing up the analysis or results is a critical component of IPA research, with the researcher functioning as a conduit through which participants' experiences are held and conveyed (Smith et al., 2009). I opted to separate the results and discussion chapters of this dissertation because I wanted the extracted themes from the study to be appreciated and understood in their own right, rather than through the lens of existing theory and discussion. Smith et al. (2009) recommend this option for novice IPA researchers, with more seasoned researchers choosing to have a more fluid and integrated section that merges analysis and discussion of findings. The results section conveys to the reader, your discoveries in relation to the topic under investigation. It is a "full narrative account which is comprehensible, systematic and persuasive to the reader who is coming to your study for the first time" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 109). The introductory section of my results chapter contains a table of superordinate themes and emergent themes which provide the reader with a broad overview of the research findings. This is followed by a detailed analytical discussion of each superordinate theme in relation to its emergent themes. My interpretations are substantiated by extracts from the relevant interviews; this is in keeping with qualitative research where interview extracts make up a large portion of the results section (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2009) refer to this process as making one's "evidentiary base transparent" (p. 110).

Smith et al (2009) suggest an uninterrupted flow between analysis and write-up, in order to stay connected to the material. I found this suggestion helpful as it enabled me to easily access and connect with ideas I had recently engaged with during the analysis stage. As I engaged with the interview material, I found myself continuously revising and refining my understanding of participant experiences. This recursive dynamic between results and analysis

deepened my understanding of the findings and enhanced my ability to communicate these insights to the reader. Smith et al. (2009) detail this multi-directional process below:

In reality, analysis is an iterative process of fluid description and engagement with the transcript. It involves flexible thinking, processes of reduction, expansion, revision, creativity and innovation. Overall, the analytic process is multi-directional; there is a constant shift between different analytical processes. As such, analysis is open to change and it is only 'fixed' through the act of writing up. This dynamism is at the heart of good qualitative analysis and is what it makes it exhilarating but also demanding". (p. 81).

5.8.2. Discussion

The 'Discussion' chapter of my dissertation situates the research findings in the context of its broader theoretical relevance to the fields of student counselling and professional identity in general. Specific attention is paid to ways in which the research findings offer novel ways of understanding and conceptualising student counsellor identity and professional identity in general, as well as the impact of these findings on existing theoretical models and paradigms of understanding. The research write-up also considers the broader implications of the study's findings as these pertain to institutional and professional transformation in South Africa.

5.9. EVALUATING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH
5.9.1. Criteria for evaluation

Criteria for evaluating IPA research relate to broader qualitative research criteria. Writers such as Hollway (2007b) and Yardley (2011) argue that it is inappropriate to evaluate qualitative research against criteria used for quantitative research, because the two have different historical origins as well as epistemological and ontological assumptions. Quantitative research is driven by a positivist, scientific paradigm that asserts a value-free, neutral approach to data collection

and knowledge (Horsburgh, 2003). The scientific rigour and credibility of quantitative research is assumed to lie in its value-free, neutral approach, its measurement of causal relationships between variables, and its potential to generalize findings and to establish universal laws of experience (Hollway, 2007b; Horsburgh, 2003). Qualitative research, in contrast, has its origins in disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and philosophy, places emphasis on the social context and assumes that the research findings can never be entirely neutral and objective (Hollway, 2007b). The relationship between researcher and research participant is therefore prioritised in qualitative research, as well as the views, perceptions, meanings and interpretations of those being researched. Harris (1976) refers to as the adoption of an *emic* perspective.

A number of criteria or standards have been proposed to evaluate qualitative research. These are alternatives to the typical validity and reliability criteria of quantitative research and include the concepts of *credibility*, *transferability, dependability and conformability.* Credibility is the qualitative alternative of internal validity, whilst transferability is the alternative to external validity or generalizability. Dependability relates to reliability in quantitative research, and conformability is associated with objectivity in quantitative research (Morrow, 2005). Whilst quantitative research places emphasis on statistical generalizability, qualitative research is evaluated in terms of its theoretical generalizability. The value of qualitative research is therefore determined by its ability to enhance understanding in similar contexts and situations and possibly, to facilitate theory development (Horsburgh, 2003). Generalizability of findings is not the core objective of IPA (Smith et al., 2009). The emphasis is rather on the content and quality of experiential data with the expectation that it will illuminate, to some extent, the neglected area of student counsellor identity both locally and abroad.

The present study was guided by the following four qualities deemed essential for evaluating qualitative research: "sensitivity to context"; "commitment and rigor"; "transparency and coherence", and "impact and importance" (Yardley, 200, p. p. 219). The study's sensitivity to context is reflected in its focus on the unique and shared experiences of South African psychologists working in the student counselling context of higher education. Sensitivity to context is also reflected in the idiographic nature of the analytical process, with the detailed interrogation of each individual case as well as being open to emotional and behavioural nuances expressed during the interview process. These observations and their influence on my interpretations, were then noted in the actual interview transcripts.

Commitment is reflected in my attentiveness to participants' narratives during the interview, sensitivity to interview protocol and to the manner in which data was analysed for each case. Rigor and thoroughness is evident in the purposive nature of the sampling technique adopted, characterized by my focus on a specific professional group, i.e. psychologists, employed in a specific work environment, i.e. student counselling. I also adopted a thorough approach to interviewing and data collection by probing and seeking clarification where necessary, thereby preventing gaps and misinterpretation of information.

Transparency was sought by explicitly detailing the different stages of the research process in the write-up, including selection of participants, interview schedule and stages of data analysis (Smith et al., 2009). I sought coherence by assessing the relationship between results and the theoretical and philosophical principles guiding the study. The study is perceived as meeting Yardley's (2000) criteria for impact and importance by focusing on the professional identity experiences of psychologists working as student counsellors in higher education. This is a neglected area of enquiry both locally and abroad, with research findings having significant

theoretical and professional practice implications which are discussed in Chapters Seven and Eight of this dissertation.

An independent audit is identified by Smith et al. (2009) as a useful means of assessing the validity of qualitative research. In assessing for the credibility of an account, the independent audit takes cognizance of the inherently subjective nature of interpretations in qualitative research, acknowledging that there will always be multiple ways of interpreting and perceiving things:

> The aim of an independent audit is not to produce a single report which claims to represent 'the truth', nor necessarily to reach a consensus. Instead the independent audit allows for the possibility of a number of legitimate accounts and the concern therefore is with how systematically and transparently this particular account has been produced (Smith et al., 2009, p. 183).

An independent third person, not part of the research process but conversant with the features and dynamics of the South African student counselling context, was identified and requested to review and assess the links and connections between the raw data (transcripts) and my interpretations. This individual confirmed a credible interpretive account of participants' experiences. In keeping with the UKZN Research Policy V: Research Ethics (2014), research data will be kept in a secure location for a period of five years. Tape recordings will be incinerated upon completion of the study.

5.9.2. Researcher reflexivity

Reflexivity is an important consideration in IPA research and qualitative research in general. It stems from the assumption that the qualitative research process and findings are never completely neutral or value-free. According to Horsburgh (2003):

> Qualitative research usually operates from the premise that total detachment on the part of the researcher is unattainable (even if deemed desirable) and that the individual who carries out research comprises an integral component of the entire process and product as opposed to being a disembodied bystander with the capacity to provide an 'uncontaminated' account (p. 308).

Reflexivity therefore requires an ongoing awareness by the researcher of how his or her own background, experiences and assumptions, influence the meaning and context of the experience being investigated (Horsburgh, 2003; Morrow, 2005).

As IPA researcher, it is also my responsibility to disclose the various personal and professional influences that have shaped my research interest in identity as well my preference for phenomenological and postmodern approaches to exploring human experience. As mentioned previously in Chapter Five, my qualitative research orientation and phenomenological leanings are rooted in my formative exposure to qualitative research during my postgraduate training at Honours and Masters level. It was during this time that the opportunity arose to conduct a phenomenological investigation into satanic cult involvement in the South African context. This Honours research project marked my formal introduction to phenomenological research, and I have since continued to gravitate towards issues that lend themselves to phenomenological exploration. My Masters research study explored South African media representations of Satanism using a discourse analytical approach. My interest was in

understanding how newspapers depicted the nature and extent of alleged satanic cult activity in South Africa, and the reasons underlying these media constructions. Particular attention was paid to the socio-political climate of South Africa at the time, characterised by political uncertainty and impending change as the country approached its first democratic elections. My appreciation for the challenges and conflicts associated with subjective experience, and the important role of systemic influences in shaping this experience, thus emanate from my early postgraduate training experiences.

In addition, student counselling work demands and institutional expectations seemed to challenge my own assumptions about my identity as a psychologist in this setting. As mentioned in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, I took up my position as student counsellor at UKZN in 2007 and soon thereafter, began reflecting on the nature of my professional identity in this setting. I was also curious about other student counsellors' experiences of their identity, and wondered if they shared the same conflicted experience as me. To my surprise, I noted that no one had actually researched this area before, neither had it been a focus of discussion at relevant conferences and forums. I found it both peculiar and ironic that professionals who strive to promote self-reflection and insight in their clients, would overlook this important aspect of themselves. On another level, I was not surprised. In retrospect, I myself could not recall a module or course from my postgraduate training that had focused on professional identity and its implications for contemporary psychological practice. This prompted me to initiate research into this neglected area, with the intention of informing and enhancing psychology training programmes in South Africa and abroad.

My interest in student counsellor identity was strengthened by the fact that I had previously worked in public service as a principal psychologist. I was therefore able to discern similarities

and distinct differences in the two settings which I felt, impacted on my identity experience in the student counselling setting. These differences included workplace demands and expectations, professional titles as well as remuneration. I was curious about the tendency for some institutions to employ the title 'student counsellor' instead of 'psychologist' when the minimum criteria for employment to the student counselling position was, in fact, a Masters degree in psychology. I also noted a lack of consistency regarding the use of the 'student counsellor' title amongst South African institutions, with several institutions retaining the title 'psychologist' instead of 'student counsellor'. I wondered about the impact of this practice on psychologists' experiences of identity, given that the title of 'counselling psychologist' is very significant to me. I also prefer the title of 'psychologist' over that of 'student counsellor', even though I am referred to as a 'student counsellor' in this setting. From my perusal of public service vacancies for psychologists in South Africa, I had also noted remuneration differences between higher education institutions and the public service sector. The salaries of psychologists in the public sector appeared to be significantly higher since the implementation of the OSD[3] implementation. This prompted me to question how student counsellors felt about their salaries in comparison to their peers in the public sector.

Part of adopting a reflexive attitude is to acknowledge how my personal identity and race, in particular, has shaped my professional interest in student counsellor identity. For me personally, being 'Coloured' was both an apartheid-driven, socio-political reality of living in South Africa, as well as an ambiguous, multi-racial identity experience that invoked feelings of   confusion, belonging and exclusion. The term 'mixed' was thus an apt analogy for the

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[3]OSD −The Occupation-specific dispensation (OSD) was introduced by South African government in an effort to attract and retain skilled employees in the public service sector (DPSA, 2007). It included revised salary structures for each occupation and career pathing opportunities that took into account experience, competencies and performance (DPSA, 2007)

ambiguity and ambivalence associated with my racial identity, particularly the feeling that I was a part of, but also distinct from, the other race groups that spawned me. Assuming my husband's Indian surname after marriage, I found myself once occupying an ambiguous racial identity position. People expressed surprise and confusion at my physical appearance, which seemed to contradict the stereotypes and assumptions they held about people with "Indian" names and surnames. My name and physical appearance seemed to challenge their propensity to define and neatly classify others according to predefined categories and assumptions.

Over time, I have gradually come to embrace this ambiguous, in-between space that I have occupied all my life. I have learnt that this space is, itself, an authentic and legitimate place of occupancy. This space also reflects my understanding of what an authentic, post-apartheid South Africa, should be. For me, a truly integrated South African identity transcends narrow racial divides and defies pre-emptive definitions of the self and others. My personal identity is a complex, multi-layered experience that is constantly reviewed and revised in the context of my personal and professional circumstances. It is, in essence, the quintessential postmodern experience. My personal identity has therefore had an indelible influence on my research interest and paradigmatic assumptions, allowing me to appreciate the complexities of being a student counsellor, straddling both the psychology profession and higher education context.

In the course of collecting and analysing the research data, the challenge was to appreciate the data in its own right whilst also acknowledging that as an IPA researcher I inevitably brought a certain perspective to the study. This perspective was based on my own experience, attitude and beliefs about the phenomenon under investigation. I therefore had to negotiate a balance between owning my own subjective experiences and feelings about the topic, whilst maintaining an appropriate distance from this material in order to appreciate the subjective

world of others. While the contentious and complicated issue of whether to bracket or exploit one's prior knowledge and preconceptions is acknowledged, Finlay (2008) offers a useful suggestion that the researcher "simultaneously embody contradictory attitudes of being 'scientifically removed from', 'open to' and 'aware of' while also interacting with research participants in the midst of their own experiencing" (p.3). I strived to achieve this when entering the hermeneutic circle of interpretation – appreciating each case in its own right whilst remaining cognizant of prior knowledge and assumptions that inevitably shaped this interpretive enquiry.

5.10. CONCLUSION

This chapter formally introduced the reader to IPA, focussing on the historical origins of this qualitative approach, core philosophical influences as well as its defining phenomenological, idiographic and hermeneutic features. Practical research issues pertaining to sampling, data collection, participant demographic features as well as significant statistical patterns and trends, were also reported. Chapter Five also provided a detailed explanation of how IPA analysis was conducted and written up, discussed qualitative criteria for evaluating the study as well as explicated issues of personal reflexivity considered important in qualitative research evaluation.

CHAPTER 6
RESEARCH RESULTS

6.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter highlights for the reader the dominant research findings as they pertain to South African student counsellors' identity experiences in higher education. The chapter is systematically organized into dominant superordinate themes and sub-themes which speak to the notion of a unique, context-driven identity experience that is actively negotiated by student counsellors in the context of competing and often contradictory, systemic influences. Metaphors were frequently employed by research participants to convey the conflict and ambivalence experienced by them in relation to their student counsellor identity and practice. For participants, such experiences did not easily lend themselves to literal description, hence their reliance on metaphorical accounts to convey experience and meaning. This finding seems to support existing work that recognizes the value of the metaphor for describing experience and conveying meaning when this is difficult to articulate literally (e.g. Carter, 1990; Fainsilber & Ortony, 1987; Paris, 1988). Noteworthy metaphors relate to the experience of a multi-layered, relational student counsellor identity ("part of something bigger"), the diverse and challenging nature of student counselling practice ("wearing many hats" and "stretched like a pancake") and student counsellors' perceived marginalization by higher education institutions (institutional "step-child").

Emerging from the data was an ambivalent and often contradictory 'relational self' through which student counsellor identity was shaped and defined. Systems and relationships within and beyond higher education were variously experienced as challenging, constraining,

affirming and enhancing the student counsellors' professional identity in this setting. These systems included the immediate student population, whose diverse profile and needs represented a profound challenge to the traditional ways in which participants had practised and defined themselves as psychologists. The shift away from a reactive, pathogenic approach to counselling was noted, as student counsellors redefined the nature of their work and their role in a more proactive, empowering light. The theme of the student counsellor as 'developmental specialist' elaborates on this finding in more detail.

Student counsellors contextualised their identity challenges in terms of an ongoing, tenuous struggle to balance contextual demands with professional obligations and preferences. Tensions between professional and institutional accountability were observed, with student counsellors feeling torn between their HPCSA professional membership and the demands of higher education. This was particularly evident in their expressed struggle to retain autonomy over their student counselling roles and practice whilst remaining financially dependent on the institution for survival. The student counsellor identity as a negotiated compromise between the *preferred self* (Kahn, 1990) as psychologist and the *compliant self* as institutional employee, emerged from the findings. The theme pertaining to student counsellor identity management strategies, explores the various ways in which participants negotiated these tensions between context and profession. Institutional expectations and practices, as perceived by research participants, emerged as powerful influences on student counsellor identity in higher education. The theme of the student counsellor as institutional "step-child" specifically highlights student counsellors' experiences and perceptions of rejection and marginalization in South African institutions of higher learning, and will be elaborated on further in this chapter.

Table 6.1. outlines the different thematic aspects of the student counsellor identity experience as these emerged from the data. These themes are elaborated on more fully in the sub-sections that follow, which includes verbatim extracts that exemplify these thematic experiences. **Please note, all names of participants and institutions have been changed to protect their identities.**

Table 6.1.

SUPERORDINATE THEMES	SUB-THEMES
• "Part of something bigger": Student counselling as a relational experience	
• Student counselling as an emerging community psychology approach	• Challenging traditional psychological practice • Challenging the institutional status quo
• "Wearing many hats": The student counsellor as a "jack-of-all-trades"	
• From "putting out fires" to "getting them on time": The student counsellor as developmental specialist	
• The student counsellor as institutional "step-child"	• "Us" and "Them" spaces: Academics as the 'preferred children' • The student counsellor as "stuck" • Significance of professional title
• Student counselling as a 'battleground' between context and profession	
• Student counselling as a territorial compromise	

6.2. "PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER": STUDENT COUNSELLING AS A RELATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Student counsellors' experiences of identity suggest the transcendence of a narrow, individualised sense of the self, with participants perceiving their roles and identity as inextricably connected to broader structures, systems and communities both within and beyond higher education. The relational nature of this identity presented a challenging dichotomy for student counsellors, with some institutional relationships experienced as identity-affirming whilst other relationships frustrated and suppressed the student counsellor's preferred identity as 'psychologist' in student counselling. One such example is that of Ronald, a counselling psychologist who had been employed in student counselling for approximately three and a half years at the time of the interviews. Ronald describes the defining impact that student counselling work relationships and group interactions have had on his individual identity as a student counsellor:

Ronald: *My professional identity has been guided by the people that I've worked with, conferences I've attended, and that identity has been formed around the idea of being part of a team* [emphasis in tone and pitch] – *still a psychologist but part of a team who work to make a difference in students' lives.*

Ronald explicitly locates his individual identity within the broader, collective identity of the student counselling team and profession of psychology. There is a sense of fluidity and ease implied in his reference to his relationship with the 'team' whilst he still seems to retain his individuality as a professional ("still a psychologist - but part of a team"). Ronald's account seems to suggest that the student counsellor identity experience lies on an individual-relational continuum, comprising both individual and group aspects of relating. This individual-relational dimension emerges in another extract from my interview with Ronald:

Ronald:	*… working with the other departments gives me a sense of variety in terms of my job performance but it also allows me to understand how the other departments fit into the bigger picture as well, so it gives me a sense of 'this is how this department contributes to retention and throughput and this is how we fit in; this is how they support and this is how we support', and it's nice to work together so in the end, it just helps to solidify that whole feeling of belonging to a team.*

Ronald sees his student counsellor role as complementing the functions of other units and departments, with each unit making a unique contribution which is then integrated and connected to a larger institutional goal of academic retention and throughput. He is able to distinguish his unique contribution from other role players, whilst acknowledging that each component within this larger system works in synergy, to achieve a common goal ("this is how this department contributes to retention and throughput and this is how we fit in").

Student counselling as a shared, relational experience was also apparent from the comparisons participants drew between student counselling and private practice. Participant Tracy is an educational psychologist who, at the time of the interviews, had three years of student counselling work experience. Tracy had also worked as a consultant and private practitioner prior to student counselling. Tracy's account suggests that she experiences context-specific differences between her previous and current work environment:

Tracy: When you're in private practice, it's interesting. It feels like I'm ultimately responsible firstly. It's just me, there's not a manager or a colleague necessarily there, so it feels like I have to take on all the responsibility and it feels heavy, it feels like more responsibility … it is different to here, where my role is quite clear and

defined by an organisation, I'm part of an organisation, I'm part of something

bigger, I have a very defined role. I don't have to ultimately take responsibility for

everything that happens. I can refer, I can dish out, I can ask, I can say "this is not

for me".

Tracy's account highlights her experience of student counselling as a multi-layered, shared experience, whilst her perception of private practice is more of a solitary, burdensome experience ("feels heavy"). She also positions her individual student counsellor identity in relational terms, locating it within the broader organizational identity of the institution ("I'm part of something bigger").

The experience of the self in relation to a larger community ("part of something bigger") had an enriching impact on student counsellors' work experiences. This is illustrated in participant Susan's account below:

Susan: In my previous job I was the only psychologist, so you're working on your own with

people who don't have an understanding of psychological practice. In private

practice I was associated with a lot of other psychologists but didn't have a lot of

interaction in terms of case discussion and that kind of thing, so I think it has been

a huge benefit. It's almost like being in a practice, but with a whole lot of other

psychologists that you can discuss ethical issues with and that kind of thing, so I

think it's been a very good learning ground for me [cautious tone].

Susan is a registered educational psychologist with approximately fifteen experience in diverse work settings, including private practice. At the time of the interviews she had worked in student counselling for five years. Susan draws comparisons between private practice and

student counselling, noting distinct differences between the two settings. These differences impact on how she experiences her professional role and relationships in student counselling. Her reference to only being 'associated' with psychologists in private practice and her colleagues in private practice not "having an understanding of psychological practice" suggests that she sees the student counselling team as a significant influence on her student counselling practice. This reinforces the relational nature of student counsellor identity and practice.

The larger social context also emerged from the findings as a significant influence on student needs and challenges in South Africa. This, in turn, had a defining impact on the student counselling perspectives and approaches adopted by research participants, reinforcing the relational nature of the student counsellor identity and practice. Participant Fiona's account, below, illustrates this. She is a clinical psychologist with approximately three years of work experience in student counselling. Prior to this, she had completed her mandatory community service for clinical psychologists (HPCSA, 2010) in a rural community setting. Fiona's account suggests a relational shift in her approach to student counselling, characterized by the adoption of a broader, socio-dynamic appreciation of her clients:

Fiona: *Students are increasingly coming out of incredibly impoverished and pressured home environments and you know, being able to kind of somehow hold that tension between being in an environment where there is a lot of pressure and expectation around your academic performance … It's very difficult for students to actually request help because to acknowledge that I'm not coping and I don't have enough food to eat and I'm eating one meal a day and I'm trying to study and I'm working a job, you know those kinds of issues… also grief, loss of parents, often in violent circumstances, I've had quite a few clients whose parents have been murdered either*

recently or in the past. PTSD is also a big one, relating to sexual trauma but also a

lot of our students experiencing things like assault and robbery on-campus, off-

campus. Rape is a very big one, date rape, substance abuse, alcohol abuse is also a

big one and dagga use is also quite high here.

Fiona's description suggests that she has shifted away from a narrow, intra-psychic understanding of students ("students are increasingly coming out of incredibly impoverished and pressured home environments") to appreciate broader psycho-social influences on the student's psyche. Challenges endemic to South Africa society, such as poverty, are seen as permeating the experiences of students in higher education, necessitating that student counsellors like Fiona respond accordingly.

Institutional relationships also emerged as a powerful influence on student counsellors' practice. Participant Helen's experience is a case in point:

Helen: *It doesn't just influence it, it prescribes it, it actually prescribes how   you will*

work. I have a little bit of scope in terms of what I do in this room but it's quite

prescriptive in that there's stats to be kept and you know if you're sitting with a

client for too long you'll be asked why you're sitting with the client for so long

and you have to justify it and um and there's an expectation that you have to

manage turnover, you can't have waiting lists, you have to move! It's like a fast

food restaurant.

Interviewer: *Where are these expectations coming from?*

Helen: *Straight from management who has very different expectations and   beliefs in*

terms of psychology, than I have, it's not the same, so we have very different

opinions about how things should be done, so um [sighs] but you know   when

it's an official policy and I guess the bottom line is basically you either work in

this model or you don't fit in this environment, so you either fit in with this

environment and you work in this model mostly, or this is not the right

environment for you; you can't handle student counselling, you must work

somewhere else.

Helen is a counselling psychologist who, at the time of the interviews, had worked in student counselling for seven years. Helene's account illustrates the complex binary position occupied by student counsellors in higher education, with some institutional relationships complicating the student counsellor's identity experience even though individuals may belong to the same profession. Helen sees her line manager as prioritising organizational practices over Helene's professional preferences, and displaying a lack of interest or empathy in Helene's thoughts or feelings on the matter. This is evident from the manager's autocratic expectations ("you either work in this model or you don't fit in this environment") which Helen makes reference to. Implied in Helen's account is that her line manager displays greater affiliation with the higher education system, even though she shares the same 'psychologist' identity with Helene. This suggests that student counselling staff in more senior positions may possibly have a different identity experience to that of student counsellors working in the same context, hence my decision not to include student counselling managers or directors, in the sample. Helen sighs with a tone of resignation as she communicates her reluctance to comply with "official policy". Helen sees student counsellors like herself coerced into complying and aligning themselves with the broader institutional business model. This underlying reluctance, coupled with a sense of powerlessness, seems to be exacerbated by the professional betrayal from Helen's 'psychologist' manager.

6.3. STUDENT COUNSELLING AS AN EMERGING COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY APPROACH

Participants' accounts highlight a context-specific, community-orientated experience of student counselling practice in the South African context. For student counsellors, their student counselling practice both challenged and drew from, mainstream psychology. This theme was apparent not only from the complex range of client issues and relationships which participants had to negotiate, but also in the expansion of their student counsellor roles into areas beyond traditional, reactive counselling and psychotherapy. More proactive interventions highlighted by student counsellors included life-skills training, diversity and social justice campaigns, student advocacy, as well as institutional and broader community engagement.

Several participants tried to make sense of their student counselling practice by framing it in terms of a more contextually-relevant version of psychological practice in the South African student counselling context. Some participants explicitly located student counselling within the realm of community psychology, proposing that a community psychology framework might be more relevant to the student counselling context than mainstream Eurocentric psychology, with its narrow, individualistic focus. In other cases, the link between student counselling practice and community psychology was implied. This IPA study seeks to document both the implied and explicit interpretive links made by student counsellors in relation to community psychology and student counselling practice, without imposing a fixed label onto these experiences. The term 'emerging' community psychology approach was therefore employed because this title suggests a tentative and dynamic process of experiential construction that is neither fixed nor rigid. The notion of an 'emergent' community psychology approach suggests, rather than imposes, an alternative way in which student counselling practice in the South

African higher education context, may be understood. Experiential support for this alternative view of student counselling, is provided in the sub-themes below.

6.3.1. Challenging traditional psychological practice

Participants' experiential accounts highlight a community-orientated student counselling practice inextricably shaped by multiple contexts and systems, as opposed to an isolated, individualised experience. Participants described dealing with a wide range of psychological, psycho-social and academic challenges characteristic of a diverse student community. In addition, these experiences seemed to resonate with the socio-historical, economic and cultural characteristics of the broader South African society from which the student population originated. Student counsellors consequently questioned the relevance of imported Eurocentric psychological models to the South African student counselling context. They saw student counselling as warranting a more flexible and uniquely South African model of identity and practice that could resonate with the ambiguous nature of the South African experience:

Fiona: We seem to be looking towards America, how student counselling centres do things over there and what worries me is that it seems we are looking towards models that take away from the context in which we're working, which is the South African model in a developing world ... I can't see how that is going to work ... life experience for South Africans is not well-regulated. There's a lot of crime that's happening, there's a lot of uncertainty, there's a lot of kind of upheaval in it and I think that we ought to be paying attention to creating something that is about being able to respond at a level that does not involve applying certain treatment regimens and session numbers, you know, set things. I think we're going to have to be a lot more flexible and I don't know what that looks like because I think this is something that we often speak about even in our centre is we're very good at speaking about what we need and the things

that we find frustrating, but it's very difficult to know how implement that at a

practical, pragmatic level.

Fiona perceives the South African experience as a fluid, complicated and often chaotic reality which does not lend itself easily to rigid, imported models. For Fiona, such models tend to neatly categorise human experience and at times, are incompatible with the realities of South African students and the population at large. She seems to echo the concerns of community psychology proponents such as Naidoo (1996; 2000), who argues that psychology in South Africa needs to reflect the profiles and experiences of South Africans and respond to their needs accordingly. Fiona was originally trained as a clinical psychologist who prided herself on her psycho-diagnostic skills. Such skills reflect a more clinical, definitive approach, with the emphasis on precision and clarity of diagnosis. However, in student counselling, we see a gradual shift in Fiona's understanding of her role and identity. Initially reliant on traditional, clinical and therapeutic frames of reference, we see Fiona gradually evincing a more holistic appreciation of students; this allows her to exercise greater tolerance when dealing with experiential uncertainty and ambiguity in the South African student counselling context.

Parallels between student counselling and community psychology are reinforced by Fiona as she compares her community service placement with her student counselling work experiences. She concludes that both settings exposed her to, rather than sheltered her from, the harsh realities encountered by many South Africans:

Fiona: *You know I think that what working as a therapist in student counselling has done is*

it's really challenged some of the romantic ideals I think I had around being a

therapist um … [pause] I… I think it was a very romanticised notion of wanting to

be able to save and kind of help and sort out and that idea of healing and the

wounded healer healing her own kind of wounded self ... It's just so much more gritty and so much more real and so much more traumatic than I envisaged it to be ... I thought moving from the comm service context into this context would be kind of different, maybe give me just a little bit of respite from that experience, and I don't know that it did [tone of regret] *um it doesn't feel much different from my community service year because you're still confronted with ... how hard and how harsh life can be and the kinds of things that people got through, the kinds of things that they're exposed to, so I think it's kind of what it's done is it's challenged some of those very romanticised notions about what it was to be a therapist.*

Expecting to find a less demanding experience in student counselling, Fiona instead finds the work to be an intense, reality-based experience. This experience challenges her traditional, 'practitioner as expert' assumptions acquired during her clinical training and considered characteristic of mainstream psychology (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). The nature of student counselling work compels Fiona to revise her perceptions of herself as student counsellor. She begins to see herself more as a facilitator of coping, rather than the expert who has all the power to resolve or 'sort out' her client's difficulties. This is evident from her expressed admiration for her clients' as she highlights their resilience in the face of adversity. Fiona's account captures the transformative potential of the student counselling environment as we see her shifting from a former, naive self to a more reality-based self-perception. These experiences seem to resonate with Mezirow's (1997) notion of transformative learning, which I return to in the discussion chapter, Chapter Seven. Fiona still identifies herself as a 'therapist' in student counselling, suggesting that she still wishes to remain connected to the psychology profession by gravitating towards activities traditionally associated with the profession, for example, psychotherapy.

Participants, overall, saw the student counselling context as warranting a more contextually-relevant model of psychological practice that was compatible with the experiential realities of South Africa. Some participants explicitly linked student counselling with community psychology, seeing the two as compatible:

Susan: *… to me it's [community psychology]   very relevant, it's all of the things that restricted psychology or traditional psychology in South Africa wasn't, and it helps to understand clients in terms of their full context, where are they coming from, historically, culturally,* **and** *[emphasis in pitch] also to understand the effect of community, like the difference between the sort of European sense of self as isolated, separate from others, but ... yah there's a lot ... in community psych in South Africa there's a lot of emphasis on community, and understanding yourself* **in relation to** *[emphasis in pitch] other people, and not ... sort of internally...*

The extract above illustrates Susan's understanding of the South African student population as shaped by broader systemic experiences and a more relational sense of self. Susan consequently sees community psychology's contextual focus and relational emphasis, as compatible with the experiences of South African students and the population at large. Participant Eric, below, reiterates the need for a context-specific, South African model of psychological practice:

Eric: *I believe in the idea that they had about the BPsych, the generic sort of training, where people go through the BA or the BA (Psych) and get exposed to a lot of different aspects in psychology - the multicultural approaches. I'm talking about teaching people how to deal with people from different cultures. It's interesting that 75% of all my clients are from other cultural groups, only 20%*

are from my own culture. I think people should have those skills you know, how

to approach from different cultural groups, and it's not easy, especially in South

Africa because a lot of people have so many different perspectives and beliefs

and frames of reference and I think our training is too theoretical …

Eric is a registered educational psychologist with thirteen years of work experience in the student counselling context. His dominant experience of the South African student population is one of cultural diversity. This, for Eric, has important professional training and practice implications for psychologists working in student counselling and South Africa in general. Eric finds this diversity aspect of student counselling practice challenging, hence his emphasis on professional training programmes that promote greater cultural sensitivity and multi-cultural awareness. His reference to training being "too theoretical" suggests that he perceives a disconnection between current training models and the experiences of the South African population. The overwhelming majority of student counsellors in the sample, shared Eric's view. In the course of working with diversity at the level of race, gender, culture and presenting problems in student counselling, participants perceived the need for psychological training and practice in South Africa to reflect this diversity and inclusiveness. Eric seems to endorse a more generic and inclusive approach to psychological practice in South Africa, seeing this as a more realistic and pragmatic response to the diversity inherent in student counselling and the broader South African context. Eric's experience resonates with those of participant, Fiona and Susan, whose concerns about South African models of training and practice were highlighted in previous paragraphs.

The majority of participants were of the opinion that student counselling challenges the narrow, Eurocentric paradigm which they had been trained in. Jane is a counselling psychologist who

had been working in student counselling for a total of three years at the time of the interview. Prior to that, she had worked as a social worker for nine years in the context of child welfare. She explains:

Jane: I think the way I was trained has a lot of limitations in terms of the South African context, so I find that limiting at times and sometimes I wonder if psychology is the only way, or where do the boundaries of psychology begin and end, because lots of things work for people, not only psychology, and so you start to ask those kinds of questions.

Jane's student counselling experience seems to have prompted her to reflect critically on the relevance and limitations of mainstream psychology in this particular setting. Prior work experience as a social worker, coupled with the diverse range of issues in student counselling seems to have sensitized Jane to the need for a more holistic and inclusive approach to student counselling practice in the South African context. Such a view seems to support the inclusive, multi-disciplinary model for student counselling and development services endorsed by SAACDHE (de Jager & van Lingen, 2012). I discuss this model further in the discussion chapter, Chapter Seven.

Jane further highlights the need for a broad-based South African psychology that is socially-responsive in its prioritization of community needs and accessibility:

Jane: I think some universities train people in ways that they can only go and work in affluent suburbs with housewives, to be sarcastic, and they just won't cope in a different setting, and vice versa you know, will I cope in affluent suburbs with housewives? I don't know, maybe not you know. [Reflective pause] *Psychology is*

not accessible to the majority of South Africans, it's not affordable, and that's the

one problem...

Jane links psychology training and practice in South Africa to broader systemic issues of a socio-economic and political nature. These include issues such as social equality and access to resources. For Jane, South African mainstream psychology and professional training programmes do not adequately reflect these priorities, rendering the profession an exclusive and elite one that is accessible only to a minority of the South African population. In contrast, these issues are key considerations in community psychology (Kagan et al., 2011; Lazarus, 1988; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005; Rappaport, 1977). In highlighting her difficulty working with wealthy, elite clients, Jane seems to be rejecting mainstream psychology in its current narrow form, and expressing her allegiance to an alternative community-oriented model. Implied herein is that student counselling provides Jane with the opportunity to pursue her preferred community-orientated self.

Also emerging as significant for student counsellors was the free nature of the student counselling service:

Susan: I think it must be a free service because most of our students don't have money and their

parents don't have money. I think we're just not there to really charge people a fee

[laughs] *and people just don't have the right sort of economic background.*

Some student counsellors saw the absence of a fee as impacting negatively on their practice in terms of diminishing client responsibility and participation in the therapeutic process. Such views suggest a more internal, psychodynamic model of student counselling. Others, such as Susan above, seemed to subscribe to a more community-oriented model of practice. Susan sees

the free service as an inherent feature of student counselling practice, with the implication being that service priorities are accessibility and based on needs ("we're just not there to really charge people a fee").

Working in student counselling not only challenged participants existing modes of practice, but also their perceptions of their role and that of their clients. Student counsellor, Jane, explains:

Jane: *Sometimes you feel like you'd want to do more, but then you also need to understand what you are thinking is not always the best for your client, the client knows and gets the best out of the session, although sometimes you'll want to look at other issues and continue with the client [deep sigh] it doesn't always happen. That's the reality that one has to face hence it's important that you make the best of what you can and it's up to that person to ensure that he or she comes back or that they utilise the session optimally ...*

Interviewer: *Why do you think?*

Jane: *I think to some extent as professionals, we tend not to always listen. When a client says "I'm okay" they may just mean that they are okay, and we would want to address other issues - maybe they are not that important to them and it's what we think is important; it's not always the case. When they are good and ready to address other issues, they will come back, which is what is happening with students. At that moment perhaps they just wanted to be contained and then they just go on with their lives. When something else happens, they do come back.*

Jane experiences student counselling work as conflicting with the traditional, Western scientist-practitioner model that positions the professional as the 'expert' (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). Jane has to resist the desire to assume this 'expert' role by allowing them greater autonomy over how they choose to utilize the student counselling service. Jane's disclosure about not always listening to clients, and her later reference to needing to listen to the client and being guided by the client's actions, suggests that student counselling compels student counsellors to revise their therapeutic assumptions and approaches when working with the student population. The client's right to self-determination seems to be a core value of student counselling, and is reflected in Jane's renewed appreciation for client autonomy in this particular context. Such values resonate with the values and principles of community psychology (e.g. Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005) and serve to reinforce emergent parallels between student counselling practice and the discipline of community psychology.

Budgetary and resource constraints are some of the challenges encountered by student counsellors in higher education (e.g. de Jager & van Lingen, 2012; Hodges, 2001; Lacour & Carter, 2002; Lafollette, 2009). The research findings corroborate this, with participants also highlighting the impact of budgetary constraints on their student counsellor roles and practice. An expanding and diverse student population, coupled with fiscal constraints and staffing challenges at many institutions, led participants to consider more flexible and innovative ways of responding to student needs. These included psycho-education and awareness campaigns, career development, academic and life skills training as well as greater institutional and community engagement. This shift towards a more interactive, expansive role is evident in Ronald's account of their peer counsellor training programme:

Ronald: ... the peer counsellors are helping us a lot with workshops and we also teach

a basic course in course skills, listening skills, identifying and then sifting

through whether this is just a problem with time management which a peer counsellor can teach them, so that we [student counsellors] *have more space to see somebody who has got more serious problems.*

Ronald's account highlights the resourceful and proactive response of student counsellors in the face of diverse student needs and staffing limitations. They are seen as negotiating the challenge of limited staff and high caseloads by training peer counsellors to assist them with the needs of the student population. The response of student counsellors also challenges the stereotype of the psychologist as an isolated analyst working behind closed doors (Naidoo, 2000). Peer counsellor training furthermore challenges the 'practitioner as expert' model that participants were trained in, because they are empowering the student community to be self-reliant, as opposed to retaining the expertise for themselves. This developmental aspect seems to resonate with the community empowerment aspect of community psychology. According to Nelson and Prilleltensky's (2005) community empowerment involves training, mentoring and connecting individuals in similar situations, in order to optimise resources and promote control over one's life. Parallels between student counselling and community psychology are discussed in greater detail in the 'Discussion' chapter that follows.

6.3.2. Challenging the institutional status quo

The previous section highlighted student counselling's potential to challenge the status quo of the psychology profession in South Africa. This section connects and expands on this theme by exploring the broader implications of this transformative practice for institutional and social transformation in South Africa.

The research data suggests that student counsellors critically interrogate the relevance of prevailing psychological models of practice in the South African context. They seem to advocate for a South African model of training and practice that reflects greater social and community engagement. In addition, the broader meanings that student counselling practice held for participants, in terms of power, equity, transformation and redress in South Africa, suggests that student counselling practice may present a challenge to the institutional status quo on multiple levels. This was particularly pronounced in relation to perceived institutional resistance to student counselling services, which participants saw manifesting in the form of institutional discourses around resilience and coping:

Jane: *I'm not sure if everyone at university level understands the powerful link between emotional, socio-economic, social difficulties and its link with learning and ability to learn. I think it's overlooked sometimes ... and I have a pet hate for a word that is thrown around at the university which is 'resilience' and it gets thrown in a blanket over the student and they'll say "but our students are resilient" – of course they're resilient, they don't have a choice, they have to survive, and to make it something romantic you know, resilience is not romantic, it's the need to survive and to minimise the difficulties that our students sit with under the blanket of 'being resilient' ... it's not okay!*

Interviewer: *What do you make of that, that mind set or like you say they explain students' behaviour and their functioning in terms of 'resilience'?*

Jane: *I think it's a defense and I think it's a defence against acknowledging that things are not okay, not okay in the community and, well I suppose, not okay at the university as well. There are things that need attention, the discipline needs attention, structures are needed to be put in place you know, the funding systems, the feeding, the accommodation, you know ... we're just busy with our*

statistics and it shows such an interesting thing, that in the last two years it's [student counselling] *been growing exponentially. The wealth of students that make use of our service in distress…*

Jane's use of psychological terms such as "defense" indicates that she attempts to understand institutional attitudes and responses by psychologizing such behavior. This suggests further that she is reliant on her professional identity as a psychologist to make sense of her experience in higher education. Jane sees the institution as disconnected from the realities of the South African student population. She highlights the increased demand for student counselling services, which seems to imply that the student counsellor, in contrast to the broader institution, is more sensitive and responsive to the realities of the South African student population. For Jane, higher education disregards the holistic needs of the South African student population by endorsing narrow, patriarchal-like discourses around endurance and self-sacrifice – concepts embodied in the notion of 'resilience'. Jane sees this as a form of institutional denialism that does not acknowledge systemic weakness or flaws that can potentially hinder student success, instead locating responsibility on the student for his or her own success ("it's a defense against acknowledging that things are not ok"). For Jane, student counselling exposes, rather than conceals, possible underlying systemic obstacles to student success and well-being, hence the institution's perceived reluctance to acknowledge the need for student counsellors in higher education.

6.4. "WEARING MANY HATS": THE STUDENT COUNSELLOR AS A "JACK-OF-ALL-TRADES"

Student counselling work emerged from the study results as a defining influence on student counsellors' identities, with multiple and varied roles requiring student counsellors to expand

their traditional scopes of practice as psychologists working in the South African student counselling context. For participants, this entailed going beyond traditional, reactive one-on-one counselling and psychotherapy to include more proactive roles and greater institutional engagement. This shift was evident in the demand for career assessments and counselling, psycho-education awareness and life skills programmes, community outreach as well as more interactive relationships and networking with internal and external stakeholders. Kyle, a counselling psychologist with approximately nine years of student counselling work experience, highlights the expansive nature of his student counsellor role in higher education:

Kyle: *I see myself as … this is a centre for student counselling but we focus on counselling, development for the whole community and not just the university – also the outside. So I think that's also one of the pillars of the university: teaching, research, community outreach.*

Kyle's student counsellor role and identity is shaped by the broader institution's academic priorities and community-engagement objectives. Evident from the extract is his initial, individualized perspective of his identity which then alters, after a brief pause, to reveal a larger sense of self in relation to the broader student counselling department ("we focus on counselling, development for the whole community"). Kyle's reference to counselling *and* development emphasises the inclusive nature of student counselling practice characterised by both reactive and proactive approaches targeting both institutional and external communities.

The nature of student counselling demands necessitated that student counsellors expand their HPCSA scope of practice. This posed a challenge for several participants, who saw the potential for role blurring and identity loss inherent in student counselling work. Descriptions

such as "wearing many hats" and functioning like a "jack-of-all-trades" served to highlight the ambiguous nature of student counselling practice:

Lisa: In this context I think we're doing a bit more than the strict definition of what a psychologist should be doing. There's a lot of case management, there's a lot of social work that is added to it... I still think that I'm a psychologist, I would, you know ... I think I will call it that ... it's a difficult question to answer. I haven't thought about it in terms of naming it um ... hm. The first thing that comes to my mind if I have to just say what comes to my head is 'jack-of-all-trades' you know and a little bit like master of none [laughs]. *... I know that I can't be too rigid, I know that I have to adjust to what's in front of me and it's a very wide context that enters my office, very different cultural perspectives, very different* [sighs] *circumstances, issues, so the range is wide and I respond differently to different people. I also use different theoretical models with different clients, so it's not always the same ... I think I'm okay to say that I'm a psychologist. I don't think I can say what kind of psychologist I am.*

Lisa is a counselling psychologist with approximately nine years of student counselling work experience. Lisa's account suggests a broad and seemingly enmeshed experience of her student counsellor identity and practice. In the initial lines of the transcription, Lisa sees her student counsellor identity as more eclectic in nature ("more than the strict definition of what a psychologist should be doing"), with a social worker role interwoven into this identity. Her ambivalent response to this ambiguous identity is evident from her seemingly-hesitant reference to thinking that she is still a psychologist, but not entirely sure what type of psychologist she actually is. This occurs in the latter part of the extract. Her reference to being a "jack-of-all-trades" and a "little bit like master-of-none" alludes to a broader, more generalist

identity. However, the implication therein is that her 'pure' psychological identity has lost its clarity and distinction as a specialized discipline.

Lisa's response to the question of her identity ("a very difficult question to answer") reinforces the notion of student counsellor identity as a complicated and ambivalent experience that is not easily articulated or defined. There also seems to be a tension between wanting to hold onto her identity as a psychologist whilst being aware that student counselling demands a revision thereof ("I know that I can't be too rigid, I know that I have to adjust to what's in front of me"). The metaphor of "wearing many hats" lends itself to Lisa's experience of student counselling practice as she is required to 'take off' the psychologist hat and 'put on' an alternative social worker hat, when necessary. Her reference to other social work-related activities being 'added on' rather than incorporated into her psychological identity, suggests that she differentiates between her identity as a psychologist and the identity of a student counsellor. Lisa's strategies of differentiation and patching-on enable her to retain her psychologist identity whilst still responding to the needs of her work environment. Such strategies suggests an adaptive process or compromise that resemble Pratt et al.'s (2006) identity patching strategy and Kreiner et al.'s (2006) differentiation strategy. These strategies have been discussed at length in Chapters Three and Four, and are explored again in Chapter Seven (discussion chapter) in relation to the research findings.

"Wearing many hats" held both positive and negative implications for student counsellor identity. Some participants, like Susan below, saw "wearing many hats" as enhancing their efficiency and employment potential:

Susan :   I sometimes feel like I'm a 'jack-of-all-trades' [laughs]*, like I can do a little   bit of*
everything you know, I can help you a little bit with your study skills, I can do

counselling, I can do trauma debriefing with you, I can help you design a budget, I can help you look at your CV and I can help give you strategies on where to find work, I can do stress management with you. I feel like if you work here, you should be able to you know after you leave here, if you go into private practice, cope with absolutely anything because you get absolutely anything here, and you get skilled in a lot of things that maybe I don't know if someone in private practice will now sit with a client and help him draw up a budget you know, and help them discuss how to manage their money, those kinds of things ...we do a lot of life skills training, how to cope with life, how to manage your stress, how to manage communication in relationships, that kind of thing. A lot of [pause] *psychological training, like emotional training.*

Susan sees the "wearing of many hats" as an opportunity to diversify and expand her identity as a psychologist. However, the need to wear many hats still concerned the majority of participants in the sample, reinforcing the ambivalent identity experience of the student counsellor in higher education. Many highlighted that they felt conflicted and overwhelmed by the competing demands that ranged from psycho-social issues of hunger and poverty to severe psychopathology and trauma. Participants reported feeling fragmented and confused by the enmeshed client issues, as the extract below, illustrates:

Noah: Students don't come with 'clean' psychological problems [laughs]. *In the very limited private practice that I've done and colleagues in private practice who I've spoken to, their client's come with 'pure' psychological problems. Most of them have established financial situations to some degree. They aren't worrying about squatting or not having a place to live or food to eat or haven't got their results because they can't pay, or a grandmother who's supporting all of them on her*

pension, and [emphasis] *also issues about your identity and that you feel unsure about who you are and what you – you know* [laughs]. *So in one session you're operating as a therapist and reflecting historical abuse as a child but also saying "Oh let me see if I can get you a food parcel"* [laughs] *so it's quite a schizophrenic kind of existence!* [Laughs] *whereas I imagine in other – I fantasise* [emphasis] *I think that other psychologists have a more integrated and peaceful hour.*

Noah is a counselling psychologist with approximately nine years' of student counselling work experience. Noah had previously worked for brief periods in private practice and the public sector. Noah experiences student counselling as a serious threat to his existing beliefs about the role of a psychologist in this particular work environment. Competing work demands and role expectations threaten to blur his preferred identity as a psychologist, causing a great deal of identity conflict or dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Noah's reference to students not presenting with "clean psychological problems" suggests that his experience of student counselling practice is a chaotic and enmeshed experience, characterised by a blurring of interdisciplinary roles and issues (the 'wearing of many hats'). The need to "wear many hats" seems to have a confusing and overwhelming influence on Noah, as is reflected in his metaphorical reference to student counselling practice being like a "schizophrenic kind of existence". This schizophrenic analogy suggests that he feels disconnected from, or out of touch with, the psychology profession, as the demands of student counselling threaten to overwhelm and dilute the psychological core of his professional identity. Private practice, in contrast, lends itself to a more clearly-defined, discipline-specific work experience that is consistent with Noah's professional assumptions and expectations. This, in turn, creates a more pleasant and harmonious work experience for Noah ("more integrated and peaceful hour") as compared to the unsettling nature of student counselling work. However, Noah still appears to want to retain

his identity as 'psychologist' in student counselling, as is evident from his comparative reference to "other psychologists" in private practice. The implied inclusion of himself in the category of 'psychologist' suggests that his preferred identity is still that of a psychologist, whilst also possibly signalling a rejection of the 'student counsellor' identity.

Psychosocial issues relating to poverty and food insecurity emerged as powerful challenges to the student counsellor's role and identity in higher education. Some participants reported that they found it difficult to remain objective and neutral in the context of such pressing student issues, and struggled to maintain professional boundaries. In these instances, they dealt with the challenge by assuming a more personal stance ("humanist"), or by invoking an alternative professional identity, such as social worker, that would be more compatible with the particular need of the students.

Lisa: *Some clients come to you and they say "I don't have food" and they haven't eaten for the last week, and then you have an apple on your table and then ... then the humanist in you says "Oh! Just give him the apple!" or they'll say to you "I need R10 to go home" and you know you've ten bucks in your wallet and then the humanist in you or social worker or helper in you wants to give them the money.*

Lisa's account highlights the conflict engendered by student counselling demands, with student needs appearing to go beyond her psychological scope of practice. Identification with alternative identities such as that of social worker and 'fellow human being' (on a more personal level) grant Lisa permission to respond in a way not permitted by her identity as a 'psychologist'. For student counsellors like Lisa, the diverse demands of student counselling do not permit them to exclusively wear the psychologist's hat in this setting. They are instead

compelled to flexibly adopt a number of multi-disciplinary 'hats' in the course of their student counselling duties. This is further illustrated in the extract below:

Jane: I think of myself as a psychologist but I'm not sure that I'm a psychologist when I'm here; I think I'm a counsellor. I think it's two different things. A lot of the work that I have to do here ... is [sighs] *is multi-tasked. We have to be maybe a therapist, maybe a counsellor, but you also have to do a whole lot of referrals, a whole lot of other activities, a whole lot of social work stuff; we don't have a social worker on campus so I find myself with a whole lot of case management to do. I find myself phoning around helping people to get to the right places, follow-ups, letters, management, you know just a whole lot of administrative management and case management to get things done so ... am I a psychologist? What kind of psychologist? Yah um, I do think I get a chance to develop becoming a psychologist. Is it what I had in mind when I started studying? Maybe not.*

Jane's account suggests a plural identity experience composed of different parts or identities, including that of social worker and counsellor. Jane offers a thought-provoking account of the conflict between her preferred identity ideal, which is that of psychologist, and the diverse realities of the student counselling context. Whilst Jane appears to have control over how she sees herself on a cognitive level, the extract also draws attention to the context-driven nature of student counselling work, which ultimately seems to define how Jane's identity is enacted in this setting. Jane seems to shift between the identity positions of psychologist and counsellor, indicative of an ambivalent identity position, with her student counsellor identity emerging as an eclectic, multi-disciplinary identity experience. Jane perceives certain student counselling functions, such as advocacy, to be more compatible with a social worker's scope of practice. She consequently appears to split these off from her preferred 'psychologist' identity in order

to maintain identity integrity. Towards the end of the extract, we see Jane further pondering the complexities of her identity as a psychologist and student counsellor, ("Am I a psychologist? What kind of psychologist?"). Whilst her account suggests a desire to retain the identity of psychologist in student counselling, there is an awareness that, as a student counsellor, the work demands require her to occupy a more ambiguous, in-between space that overlaps multiples disciplines and contexts. Jane's difficulty in describing exactly what psychologist she is in student counselling reinforces the notion of a complex and ambiguous identity on the cusp of context and profession – belonging partially to the psychology profession whilst also leaning towards other disciplines and the context of higher education.

Student counselling's inclusive approach to employment also resonated with the notion of "wearing many hats", with educational, counselling and clinical psychologists all permitted to work as student counsellors in South African higher education. This had implications for skills diversification amongst the different categories:

Penny: It's not just being a psychologist any more as the psychologist you'll find in private practice, only focusing on specific issues. Here you do a whole range of things, for instance my registration is 'clinical', but I'm doing also your study skills, academic development, something that is not part of the clinical work, and you know developing other aspects within the profession. In a way, that is a good thing because you're not just focusing on clinical cases; we do get those but other times we do career assessments, and that is not really the core of what a clinician would do, but we develop certain aspects within the profession. I've come to understand that it's not just your clear-cut cases that you'd get, the ones that you'd read on the DSM - IV or whatever and the kind of training that you receive – it does not really prepare us totally for different environments that we find ourselves in.

Penny sees private practice as affording psychologists the opportunity to specialize ("only focusing on specific issues"), whilst student counselling requires psychologists to go beyond their HPCSA scope of practice and to "wear the hats" of other registration categories as well ("developing other aspects within the profession"). This is evident in her reference to being a clinical psychologist yet conducting career assessments, study skills and academic development activities which fall within the realm of counselling and educational psychology, respectively (HPCSA, 2011). Penny's statement that she has "come to understand that it's not just your clear-cut cases that you'd get", as well as her reference to the limitations of her professional training, suggest further that the student counsellor's identity and practice are experientially-acquired in the context of direct work engagement, as opposed to being fixed and pre-determined by their professional training.

6.5. FROM "PUTTING OUT FIRES" TO "GETTING THEM ON TIME": THE STUDENT COUNSELLOR AS DEVELOPMENTAL SPECIALIST

Student counselling has been widely acknowledged in the literature for enhancing student well-being and promoting academic success through personal counselling and psychotherapy, career guidance and counselling, as well as life-skills training (Bishop, 1990; van Lingen, 2012). Research findings of the present study support this, with participants highlighting a proactive shift towards student development, as opposed to a narrow pathogenic focus:

Ronald: It's always been about development, to help others achieve their potential, to motivate others, to guide, to counsel and that's always been my goal. Within the public service department where I worked previously, I wasn't really getting that because there I wasn't motivating, guiding, it wasn't development. There I was putting out fires basically and that was a different story. So I wanted to get into it to

help others to develop. ... when I saw what I was dealing with at the public service
department, I realised that I was getting them too late because by then they were
already working, they'd developed a lot. By the time I got to them, they were 27, 28;
there wasn't much I could do then. I wanted to focus on the earlier years, those
transition years – the 18, 19, 20, but that was what I wanted to focus on.

Ronald is a counselling psychologist working in student counselling. His developmental aspirations centre on enhancing clients' skills and strengths ("getting them on time") as opposed to removing pathology or as he terms it, "putting out fires". His preference for this 'developmental specialist' role seems consistent across work settings, not just in student counselling ("It's always been about development"). Whilst Ronald's previous work environment seems to have frustrated his developmental aspirations, the student counselling context presents Ronald with opportunities to assume a more proactive role with his clients. This context therefore lends itself to Ronald's preferred identity as a 'developmental specialist' and suggests a compatible fit between work environment and professional identity. The relevance of the workplace environment in enhancing or constraining one's identity preferences and aspirations, is clearly discernible from the comparison Ronald makes between student counselling and his previous employment. This finding supports Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman and Johnson's (2005) concept of the person-environment fit, broadly defined as "the compatibility between an individual and a work environment that occurs when their characteristics are well matched" (p. 281). This concept and its applicability to the present study's findings, is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven that follows. Although Ronald sees himself as retaining the identity of 'psychologist' in student counselling, he has a broader understanding of the psychologist's role in student counselling. This is highlighted in his

reference, below, to "not knowing whether psychologists in private practice ever engage in training on their own*":*

Ronald: I do the study skills, I do workshops for the peer helpers, I run basic counselling for them where we teach them basic skills in terms of empathy, listening, responding. I do crisis intervention with the group, career counselling, behaviour change, mentoring skills, portfolio development … most of them we formulated ourselves and that's what I enjoy, building a workshop up from the ground. It still comes back to me having the identity of a psychologist influencing others and helping them to change their lives through another means. It's not just counselling; it's counselling, training and development - all that that makes up the role. I don't know whether psychologists in private practice ever engage in training on their own and maybe this is why I enjoy this rather than private practice, but I don't see it as being the sole focus …

The proactive nature of student counsellors' practice was facilitated not only by their developmental interests and preferences, but also, to a large extent, by the unique developmental stage of the student population in higher education. This, for participants, maximized the impact of their student counselling efforts:

Melanie: Students are a very specific population, so it's nice for me because I'm interested in how they think about things and everything, yet they're still young enough to be converted into something else, if I can put it that way. They're not like adults that are set in their ways; it's easier. They are more ready for therapy than what I think some adults, who have spent many years living a life in a specific way. They [students] *are more open to change and suggestion and all that.*

Melanie is a registered counselling psychologist with approximately three years of work experience in student counselling. Like Ronald, the timing and impact of interventions are important considerations for Melanie. The age and developmental-specific needs of students therefore have a defining influence on her student counselling role and practice in higher education.

Although all participants espoused a developmental approach to student counselling practice, their individual accounts reflect varied interpretations and applications of the concept 'development'. This, in turn, influenced the types of roles and activities which they gravitated towards. Some, like clinical psychologist Fiona below, contextualizes student development primarily in traditional, therapeutic terms:

Fiona: *I think it has to some extent shifted from just being your classical therapist to being, to some extent, more developmental in nature, you know. You empower them to be able to go out there and be themselves as much as you possibly can, unlike, you know, doing the reflection and everything. Sometimes students, they just don't get that. They look at you and "What are you on about?" and for them you don't make any sense! I had to just adapt to a different environment altogether.*

Fiona's description suggests that whilst she still defines herself as a therapist in the context of student counselling, there is less emphasis on intra-psychic functioning and a reduced reliance on classical techniques such as interpretation and reflection. Her emphasis on empowering her clients to "go out there and be themselves" suggests a more reality-based therapeutic approach that focuses on the individual's interaction with the external world. Furthermore, shifts in Fiona's professional development seem to be connected to her personal identity experiences, as the extract below, illustrates:

Fiona: ... one of the things that I think has really informed a conscious part of my identity and my professional identity from when I started to where I am now, is an even greater awareness of difference and a sensitivity to difference and difference not only in terms of the clients that one works with, difference in terms of one's colleagues, difference in terms of how I position myself within this centre, and it seems quite different from the community of professionals who are predominantly Afrikaans-speaking individuals ...

Fiona elaborates further on her experience*:*

Fiona: My shifts in identity have been around being assertive and actually experimenting with the fact that, yes, I am a dynamic therapist. Yes, I love psychodynamic therapy, I'm okay with that. Yes, I am very liberal in my views. Yes, I will engage with some of the more difficult aspects. I'm happy to work with clients who are grappling with their sexual orientation. I welcome especially challenges to how we identify ourselves in the world because that is what clients bring, specifically conflicts with identity, and so my own kind of conflicts around feeling different is something that I have felt in my life. Difference has always been an issue.

Fiona's experience of being 'different' on a personal level seems to have sensitized her to issues of diversity in the context of student counselling. She appears to draw on this personal experience when interpreting and applying her developmental role as student counsellor, gravitating not only towards individual counselling and psychotherapy, but also towards advocacy roles and projects that deal with student diversity. This suggests a dialectical relationship between the student counsellor's personal identity and professional identity.

6.6. THE STUDENT COUNSELLOR AS INSTITUTIONAL "STEP-CHILD"

Student counselling services in South Africa has been widely acknowledged for the role it plays in assisting higher education institutions respond to the needs of a diverse and expanding student population (Africa, 2005; Naidoo, 1997; Naidoo & Thaver, 2008). However, the present theme contradicts the literary depiction of student counselling as a key role player in higher education, with participants highlighting instead, a marginalized identity experience analogous to that of an institutional "step-child". The sub-sections that follow draw attention to specific aspects of this marginalized experience.

6.6.1 "Us" and "Them" spaces: Academics as the preferred 'children'

The research participants highlighted several identity challenges and threats experienced whilst working in the student counselling context, which in turn impacted on their institutional integration and sense of belonging in higher education. Student counsellors' experiences may be metaphorically likened to that of a "step-child" to the extent that they felt their professional status undermined and their needs dismissed in favour of academic staff who were perceived as the favoured or preferred 'children' of the higher education 'family'. Student counsellors' perceptions of institutional exploitation seemed to exacerbate their sense of marginalization. Carol is a counselling psychologist who has been working in student counselling for approximately six years. She makes explicit reference to the "step-child" status of student counsellors in higher education:

Carol: Sometimes I feel like we're the step-children of the institution. Often they forget that we exist. Only when something happens, they'll remember "oh, yes student counselling - there are psychologists there who can sort this one out." Other than that, we don't get any form of [sighs] *recognition or acknowledgement … for the*

students, getting that degree is only because of the intervention of the academics.

That's basically that, sometimes I feel like perhaps I don't belong here [laughs].

Carol explicitly likens the student counsellor's status as an 'outcast' to that of the forgotten step-child whose contribution is often overlooked ("only when something happens, they remember"). This marginalised feeling is reinforced by Carol's reference to feeling unwanted and displaced in the higher education context ("I feel like perhaps I don't belong here"), whilst her use of tentative language ("sometimes" and "perhaps") conveys feelings of insecurity and instability. Carol sees her significance in higher education as temporary and conditional, occurring only in the context of crisis management. Carol's experience supports the comparison that Schwartz (2013) makes between the student counsellor and a dentist. For Schwartz (2013), the student counsellor is acknowledged and utilised in much the same way as a dentist, whom people only recall and acknowledge when they have a dental problem. Carol's reference to being tasked with "sorting this one out" indicates that she sees the institution as undermining her specialized skills by making inappropriate referrals and demands which are beyond the scope of her practice.

Research participants frequently referred to themselves as the "container", "dustbin" and "dumping ground" when reporting institutional demands and expectations of them. These metaphorical descriptions vividly capture the experience of professional degradation as their role is relegated to that of disposing unwanted 'waste' in higher education:

Penny: Sometimes I feel like I'm being made a dustbin, you know. All this nonsense – they shift

towards me and I have to ensure that this particular nonsense is sorted out and they

keep their hands clean. I have to do all the dirty work, something that is not

necessarily my role. Teaching students to discuss – it's something that should be

done in class, not by me! To analyse a question, to analyse critically one, two, and three - that's more academic but it gets shifted to me. I'm a dustbin! People who matter in the institutions are the academics because they teach students, because the institution's funding is based on throughput, how many students pass. It's basically the academics that are doing that, forgetting that for a student to excel in academics, that student also needs other forms of support to ensure that this particular person is able to focus and perform well in academics ... so there's still that, you know, the academics are 'the people' and support staff are different, even with regard to HR issues, leave of the academics is different to support staff leave. With salary scales it is the same. They are like okay, you're just part of the system but not necessarily the core. They call it the 'core function' of the institution - that is the academics, so we're just somewhere at the back.

Penny cites a number of institutional practices which, for her, create a divide between student counselling and the academic sector, i.e. between "us" and "them". These include the way in which the institution utilizes the student counselling service as well as perceived benefit discrepancies between academics and support staff like herself. Her choice of metaphors such as "dustbin", "dirty work" and the word "nonsense" suggests that she feels demoted and her skills degraded. Penny's account furthermore conveys her perception that higher education is unwilling to work together with student counsellors ("I have to ensure that this particular nonsense is sorted out and they keep their hands clean"), preferring instead to let student counsellors do the 'cleaning up'. Implied therein is an institutional hierarchy, with student counselling located at the bottom of the hierarchy and tasked with 'lower-end' functions which require them to "get their hands dirty". Both implied and explicit from Penny's account is that the institution has a higher regard for academics, and values them

more (they are considered the "core function") whilst student counsellors are "just somewhere at the back". Penny's reference to academics being "the people" and support staff "different", reinforces the notion of "us" and "them" spaces that emerged prominently from the research findings.

The majority of participants highlighted unrealistic demands and feelings of exploitation by the institution, with one participant likening this experience to being "stretched like a pancake":

Penny: *I see myself sometimes as a pancake – it's stretched widely but it's so thin* [laughs] *because you have to do all these other things at once! The question that I would normally ask is about the quality of the service that I'm providing – is it really up to scratch if I'm stretched that much? So it leaves me feeling uncomfortable in terms of the work that I'm doing. Sometimes I feel like it's just numbers that I have to push, not the quality of the service!* [Frustrated tone] *Most of the time there is very little choice. You have to do what you have to do, as thin as it is…*

Suggested by Penny's account is that she feels both powerless and frustrated by institutional expectations. She attempts to mask these through bouts of nervous laughter. The pancake analogy captures Penny's lack of control over her student counsellor identity as she is 'flattened' and manipulated, like a piece of dough, in the image of the institution. Her reference to "having to do what she has to do", no matter how "thin it is", suggests that she sees institutional demands as compromising the quality of service that she provides. The result, for Penny, is an over-extended or 'stretched' service lacking in depth and substance. Penny raises quality assurance and ethical concerns which are echoed by Fiona, below:

Fiona: *I do feel that with the amount of students that we see, on an ethical level, something feels compromised. I was actually reading an article the other day for CPD and I*

was reading on the issue of how relevant are case notes and what actually needs to be in session notes, and realising how quite detailed it has to be ... there's a lot of different things that you'd need to include in order for you to be legally covered should something go wrong, and I realised my goodness, you know, that doesn't happen here and it doesn't happen just because we don't have the time to sit and write those kinds of session notes, so I tend to write as detailed as I can, but you know I often have moments where I think oh! You know if someone had to pull that file for whatever reason ...

Fiona finds the demands of student counselling overwhelming at times. Her account suggests further that the demands of student counselling threaten to overwhelm and sabotage her identity as a psychologist. Implied from Fiona's account is that the student counselling context is not necessarily conducive to practising and identifying oneself as a psychologist, particularly as regards compliance with the ethical standards of practice prescribed for psychologists in South Africa (HPCSA, 2004).

The perceived divide between academics and student counsellors was particularly salient in participants' accounts of enduring a burden of proof in higher education. The extract below highlights Penny's exasperated efforts to convince the academics of her professional status:

Penny*: There's an issue of academics versus what we call the support staff. It's as if the kind of training that we have* [student counsellors] *does not equate to what the academics have. I think part of the bigger challenge has been to explain yourself to them, that "Hey, I did go to varsity after all!"* [Raised tone] *I have a certain qualification. For me to be a student counsellor or a psychologist, this is what I had to go through. I understand perfectly when you say assignments, tests and everything. It's not as if I*

I'm totally clueless, I've been there myself but please, I'm not 'just' an administrator. My role is just as important in ensuring that these students, when they leave the university, they have received some form of total holistic development, it's not just academics, writing tests and assignments and that's all! There's a big role that we play.

Penny's account suggests that academics are sceptical of student counsellors' professional credentials and status. Her experience has thus been one of having to prove that she has earned her professional status and should therefore be accorded the same respect and recognition as the academics in higher education:

Penny: *I had to work extra hard to prove that "Hey, I'm just as professional as any of you. I might be a psychologist, not an engineer, but being an engineer doesn't make you smarter than I am; it's just that we're in different fields." Sometimes you know you'd even be almost rude in responding to some of the questions that they would normally ask – "What exactly do you do? Do you have any scientific evidence in what you're doing? The testing itself, is this scientific or not?"*

Penny's account is an emotional one and highlights the frustration engendered by the burden of proof which student counsellors reported enduring in higher education. This burden of proof may be metaphorically likened to a court of law, wherein Penny finds herself defending her right to be in higher education. Penny's account suggests that student counsellors are evaluated against academic criteria which may not be applicable or appropriate to their work. Penny's assertion that she is "not 'just' an administrator" suggests that she actively rejects what she deems to be a distortion or misrepresentation of her professional identity in higher education.

The significance of institutional classification is alluded to here, but is more fully explored in a later sub-theme focusing on institutional titles and classification.

Student counsellors also saw benefit and remuneration discrepancies between student counsellors and academics, as exacerbating the divide between the two sectors in higher education. Some participants reported that it was difficult for them to pursue a doctoral degree, for example, because they did not qualify for sabbatical leave as their academic counter-parts. They therefore had to juggle work and study commitments as a student counsellor and part-time PhD student. Suggested by such reports was a feeling of discrimination and favouritism of one sector over the other, based to a large degree, on how the student counselling service is classified in higher education. Participants also felt that the student counsellor salary was not competitive enough to attract or retain them in this context. They saw their salaries as undermining their professional status and contribution to higher education. Tracy, below, compares her salary with that of industrial psychologists in the private sector

Tracy: I feel that it's not taken as seriously, the role isn't recognised as significantly as it should be, by the powers that be higher up, you know. I think with industry, there's always a relation between productivity and performance, between a person's well-being, psychologically, and their productivity and poor performance. It's always measurable in terms of how the company can benefit - income, turnover or whatever. So I think that's where psychology is valued more, because it's more of a commodity [laughs] *whereas in these contexts, it's not seen as producing anything of value. But I don't think that psychologists here should be seen differently... I think that sometimes the importance of our role is realised when things go wrong and then it's "Ok, we need them!"* [Laughs]

Tracy sees remuneration discrepancies as a reflection of how psychologists are valued in different work contexts. She offers an economic rationale for why psychologists in student counselling are not paid the equivalent of their peers' in the corporate sector, citing student counselling's limited income-generation potential as determined by a business model of appraisal ("how the company can benefit - income, turnover…"). However, Tracy does not evaluate her own worth using the institution's business model. She instead uses more abstract, subjective criteria that emphasises student counselling's qualitative value to the institution, particularly in crises situations.

Carol's concerns about salary discrepancies (below) reinforce the "step-child" experience of the student counsellor in higher education:

Carol: *The monetary value is problematic. I have felt more deserving of a better salary and what I'm basing that on is what I know other people in private practice are earning, what I know other colleagues in other settings such as health, are earning.*

Interviewer: *How do you understand the difference in salary in the different contexts?*

Carol: *It tells me that the role that you play is either misunderstood or it's not seen or not regarded as valuable. People can give me a pat on the back and tell me stuff at the end of the year like "counselling's done a sterling job!"; that's all very well and that's good and that's nice but there also needs to be congruency not only in terms of people talking but also in terms of how that translates into salary. I suppose it's a sense of self-worth ... a sense of value that what you put in, you get out; so what I'm putting in is what I should be paid for. You do feel more valued. I know money does have an effect on how you feel about yourself*

but also how professional you feel as well, so I think when I feel that I'm not

being remunerated as I should be, it reflects on my professional identity.

Carol feels that higher education does not adequately compensate her for her expertise. Whilst she acknowledges behavioural recognition for her work, her account suggests that she also seeks and values tangible forms of validation, such as a better salary. The difference between input (professional contribution) and output (salary) consequently makes her feel undervalued and exploited. Such experiences seem to resonate with the concept of organisational justice (Greenberg, 1987) discussed earlier in Chapter Four. The relevance of organizational justice to student counsellors' experiences, is explored in greater detail in Chapters Seven and Eight that follow.

Budgetary constraints and funding disparities were found to further exacerbate the "step-child" experience amongst student counsellors:

Penny: *Sometimes I wonder if the institution sees or actually recognises the value of student counselling because it seems that sometimes money is pumped into other areas that's not as necessary as what we are, yet there seems to be money for certain things within the university but there's never money for student counselling.*

Interviewer: *What does that tell you? How do you understand that … that difference in budget allocation?*

Penny: *I understand it that they don't really realise how necessary student counselling is and what a huge part it plays in the support of the students.*

Penny sees their budget allocation as a reflection of how little student counselling is valued and prioritised in higher education. There is a sense of preferential treatment and discrimination

that emerges from Penny's extract, with the implication being that there is an institutional hierarchy that tends to favour or 'spoil' the academic 'children' whist neglecting the student counselling "step-child". Penny's statement that "there's never money for student counselling" also suggests an institutional pattern of neglect rather than an isolated occurrence. This reinforces the relevance of organizational justice to the student counsellor's experience in higher education.

The notion of an institutional "step-child" is further evident from Jane's account below, which describes how the institution responded to their request for additional staff in the student counselling department:

Jane: They said there's no money, not enough finances, they have to focus on more important areas like lecturing and that sort of stuff. Now lecturing staff are more important because that brings in direct money you know through students, extra students and subsidies, while we don't really bring in a subsidy.

Jane's account highlights the institution's economic rationalization for funding, with student counselling bearing blame because they do not "bring in a subsidy". This serves to reinforce the divide between the academic sector and student counselling services in higher education.

6.6.2. The student counsellor as "stuck"

Participants saw their step-child status perpetuated by the lack of career mobility for student counsellors in higher education:

Jane: Basically I'm going nowhere; I'm stuck in a certain level. There is no career growth, there is no career pathing, there is no possibility of ever getting a senior position – the structure is flat. Everybody, all the psychologists are on level 8

> *and that's just about it. There's no such a thing as moving from one notch to the*
>
> *next. Whatever notch that you come with when you join, you'll only get your*
>
> *annual increases – that's basically that.*

Interviewer: *What does that tell you about how you are seen in this place?*

Jane: *Like really I'm just part of the furniture. You're in the system, you're stuck,*

basically! That's the feeling that I'm getting; the minute you get in the system,

you're stuck there.

Jane sees her potential for career advancement constrained by the institution's "flat structure". Her repetitious words and tone ("basically"; "there is no career growth, there is no career pathing"; "that's just about it") convey a sense of resignation and powerlessness, suggesting that she sees her career mobility already pre-determined by the institution. Jane furthermore appears to succumb to her fate of being an inanimate and powerless piece of 'furniture' in the institution. Jane's description further highlights her perception of the institution as an autocratic influence over her career progression. This is evident from her reference to the institution's non-negotiable stance on issues of notch progression. Jane also suggests that this stagnant experience is not unique to her, but is a common experience amongst South African psychologists working in higher education ("everybody, all the psychologists…"). A number of participants indicated their intention to eventually leave student counselling because of the limited career pathing opportunities available for student counsellors. This suggests that for some participants, their identity as 'student counsellor' is a temporary, transitional experience, as opposed to a permanent and enduring state.

6.6.3. Significance of professional title

Institutional classification and student counsellor titles also emerged as factors impacting on the student counsellor's "step-child" experience in higher education. Participants highlighted

their concerns about higher education's tendency to classify student counselling as part of the broader administrative or support sector. This classification was deemed too inclusive as it encompassed a range of other support services that included student funding and health services. For student counsellors, the ambiguous connotations associated with the terms 'administration' and 'support served to conceal and undermine their professional status in higher education. Some participants also expressed concern about the practice implications of such a broad classification, seeing it as potentially compromising student counselling's neutrality within the institution. Eric's account below, illustrates this concern:

Eric: We should be an independent unit because as soon as the students see you as being part of Student Services, there's a problem. Normally when they [students] have strikes or when they have infractions, they actually go through the Dean of Students and they complain about fees and all that stuff and then how can you be seen as independent if you're part of their management or part of that sort of team?

Participants also saw the 'student counsellor' title as problematic. They were of the view that it blurred the distinct psychological nature of their role and identity as professionals in this particular context, relegating them instead to the status of lay counsellors. Tracy, an educational psychologist, elaborates on why she prefers the use of the title 'psychologist' in student counselling:

Tracy: It's important because somehow 'student counsellor' denotes like a slightly less formal qualification than 'psychologist'. I mean someone can be a counsellor, employed as a counsellor, from my understanding, without actually being a qualified psychologist, so it doesn't give credibility and credit to the fact that the person is registered with the Health Professions Council and is actually more qualified than someone else who can call themselves a 'counsellor' but may not be a psychologist

... so I think if we didn't have it, it would bug me [laughs] *because it is something that you work for. It is validating and it also gives the clients that you are serving trust in the sense that you are a professional ... I mean not to say that student counsellors aren't professional. It's not a sort of superiority thing.*

The 'psychologist' title is important to Tracy because it affirms her identity as a psychologist and endorses her registration with the HPCSA. She still sees herself as a psychologist in student counselling, suggesting that her preferred identity in this context is that of 'psychologist' rather than student counsellor. The significance of professional title is further highlighted by Tracy's reference to having earned ("worked for") the title of 'psychologist'. This suggests that she sees herself as belonging to an exclusive professional community whose membership has to be earned through a process of rigorous professional training. This view was shared by the overwhelming majority of participants in the study, who felt that they had earned the right to be called a 'psychologist' instead of 'student counsellor'. Participant Penny, below, considers the broader, macro-level implications of the 'student counsellor' title:

Penny: You know it's so sad because everybody is 'counsellor' and as a result, I think perhaps maybe part of the reason we've had such a lukewarm response from the academics and everyone in terms of not really understanding or maybe to some extent even undermining what we do, is that anybody and everybody is a counsellor. A chaplain calls himself a 'counsellor' and understandably so; he's doing counselling the way chaplains will do it, and then we've got HIV counsellors you know. Only when we say "I'm actually a psychologist" would they pay attention; other than that, it's like everybody's a counsellor.

Penny's reference to only being respected when she uses the 'psychologist' title, suggests a correlation between titles and institutional value perceptions, with titles serving to either undermine or validate the identity of the psychologist working in student counselling. Penny surmises that the 'student counsellor' title may be partly responsible for higher education's "lukewarm" response to the service. Furthermore, Penny's description of the student counsellor title as a 'sad' experience, suggests that professional titles have emotional significance for psychologists working in the student counselling context. Penny is a clinical psychologist by registration, and she does not see the 'student counsellor' title as equivalent in meaning and value. The 'psychologist' title, in contrast, reinforces her professional status in higher education. Her account also reflects an underlying sense of unfairness or injustice, as if Penny has been unfairly denied her rightful identity as a 'psychologist'.

For two participants in the sample, the 'student counsellor' title held more work-related significance, as opposed to value and status implications:

Ronald: *I don't really have any issues with the title. I don't take much fancy to titles. In the past, when I was introduced to people, they'd want to know what I do and I'd say "I work with students". I feel that's just what I do – I work with students. I'm a psychologist working with students, so the title 'Counsellor' is fine by me.*

Ronald sees the 'student counsellor' title as a reflection of the work that he does in this particular context, as well as the specific population that he works with in this setting. This example highlights the idiographic nature of IPA research, with different participants ascribing different meanings to the title of 'student counsellor'.

6.7. STUDENT COUNSELLING AS A 'BATTLEGROUND' BETWEEN CONTEXT AND PROFESSION

Results of this study suggest that the student counsellor's identity embodies conflict, negotiation and compromise, with participants striving to balance competing contextual demands with professional allegiance and obligation. Tensions between context and profession were articulated in terms of 'preferred self' (Kahn, 1990) and 'compliant self' identities, with participants seeking a workable compromise by alternating between acts of institutional compliance and professional assertion. Tensions are illustrated in the extract below:

Jane: *There's a permanent tension for me between protecting my space as a psychologist and what I do, and defining what I do and defending what I do in a way, versus the expectations and the demands from people who don't quite understand what it is that we do. So there's this constant having to educate and then advocate, having to defend and make arrangements that more or less work for everyone.*

Jane's protective stance ("protecting my space as a psychologist") suggests that she sees her psychologist identity as under threat and therefore in need of protection. This protective stance appears to emerge in the context of a perceived threat from higher education to 'invade' and take control of her identity as a psychologist. Jane sees herself as needing to defend her identity against the distortion of institutional stakeholders "who don't quite understand what it is that we do". There seems to be a conflict between Jane's preferred identity as a psychologist ('preferred self') and an institutional identity, with Jane's account suggesting that she feels pulled in opposite directions, as if caught between two conflicting spaces that she has to negotiate her way around ("make arrangements that more or less work for everyone"). Her reference to arrangements that work for everyone, suggests a tenuous, makeshift compromise that suits everyone, rather than a precise, desired outcome that only suits herself. Jane's use of

the present tense "having to defend …" suggests that identity negotiation is an ongoing process that is never really finalised or concluded for the student counsellor working in higher education.

As alluded to earlier, financial dependence on higher education emerged as a powerful influence on the student counsellors' identity and practice, with their sense of institutional obligation impacting on their professional autonomy in student counselling. Participants saw a commercialized model of practice dominating most higher education institutions in South Africa. This model, with its emphasis on concrete, time-limited pragmatism, was problematic for student counsellors, who expressed different work values:

Jane: *I think an organisation requires output, proof of output, and they want practical stuff to … to justify your existence or to prove that you are – that you're doing what you're doing and I think sometimes psychology doesn't really lend itself to that. As I said yesterday, psychology is more of an abstract thing and they want concrete proof of-of what you're doing and that is very hard to give. It's very difficult for me to give that, but I give that in terms of my statistics and that kind of thing.*

Jane sees her student counselling practice as essentially qualitative and abstract in nature. It therefore does not lend itself to the institution's quantitative model she sees as being imposed on student counsellors. This experience was echoed by the majority of participants in the sample. However, despite this discontent, student counsellors' efforts to "justify their existence" and to negotiate "middle ground" with higher education, suggests attempts at an institutional compromise by partially submitting to the institution's quantitative standards of evaluation ("statistics and that kind of thing").

Student counsellors highlighted attempts to limit their decision-making in respect of caseload quantity and frequency of therapeutic contact with clients:

Helen: *It doesn't just influence it, it prescribes it, it actually prescribes how you will work. I have a little bit of scope in terms of what I do in this room but it's quite prescriptive in that there's stats to be kept and you know if you're sitting with a client for too long, you'll be asked why you're sitting with the client for so long and you have to justify it and there's an expectation that you have to manage turnover, you have to manage the 'window', you know you can't have waiting lists, you have to move! It's like a fast food restaurant.*

Helen's numerous 'prescriptive' references suggest that she feels 'bullied' by the institution to function in a particular way ("it actually prescribes how you will work"; "keeping stats"; "you'll be asked why you're sitting with the client for so long"?). Her references to "managing turnover", "manage the window" and working "like a fast food restaurant" suggest the influence of a commercial model of practice on higher education priorities. For student counsellors like Helen, such a model is in conflict with their preferred ways of working in this setting.

Helen: **...** *when in private practice I can decide how I want to work with the client, I can decide how long I need to work with the client, I can decide what approach to use. It feels like more freedom. It's a bit like, to put it bluntly, it feels like I'm in charge there; here, I'm not in charge. I'm told what to do here to a large extent; in my private practice I can do it the way I'd like to do it …*

Helen's account, above, highlights her experience of greater autonomy over her professional identity in private practice. She sees private practice not as a 'battleground' between context and profession, but rather as a context that is supportive of the psychology profession.

6.8. STUDENT COUNSELLING AS A TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE

Student counsellors' identity experiences reflect an uneasy compromise between institutional and professional obligations:

Jane: *I think I've learnt that the setting that I'm in determines my identity for me. If I had not been in a university setting, I think my identity as a psychologist would have been slightly different but, given the context that I'm in, given the expectations that are placed on me, I kind of had to adjust to that, and it has become part of my identity.*

Interviewer: *What made this adjustment possible? How did it happen?*

Jane: *Time, thinking* [laughs]*, lots of fights back and forth, discussions, really looking at my beliefs, what I want, listening to the organisational needs and finding* [sigh] *a middle ground for everyone in between. It didn't happen painlessly or seamlessly, there was a lot of "but this is not okay", "but this is what we expect", "but this is not okay", "but this is what we expect", "can we move this a little bit by that", "can we bring that into the back", so it's negotiating at the end of the day and it's ongoing, it's ongoing.*

Jane seems to see higher education and student counselling in particular, as a metaphorical battleground, with her description suggesting a tug-of-war-like experience of succumbing to and resisting, institutional demands. This tug-of-war-like dynamic is reflected in the agency and assertiveness she conveys as she negotiates ("but this is not okay", "but this is what we

expect"), which is intertwined with passivity and resignation as she seems to accept the context-dependent nature of her student counsellor identity ("I've learnt that the setting that I'm in determines my identity for me").

Identity management, for Jane, is a complex and intense process involving introspection ("thinking"; "really looking at my beliefs") and external engagement with institutional others. Jane still sees herself as a psychologist, but a psychologist whose identity is indelibly shaped or 'stretched' by the student counselling context. This compromise, reflected in the 'stretching' or extension of the psychologists' boundaries by student counselling, is illustrated in the extract below:

Jane: *It is a struggle, it's not an easy process, it's not an easy fit, it's not as if you come   out of your training and you fit nicely into the system. You have to become comfortable in the system; it's not automatic, certainly not from training to here, so it becomes a process.*

Jane's account draws attention to the psychologist's struggle to 'fit in' to the student counselling context in higher education. A consequence of this struggle is a psychological identity that has expanded or 'stretched' in the course of environmental adaptation. Implied therein is that the student counsellor identity is experientially-acquired, and involves reconciling or accommodating one's professional training experiences with new information and demands from the student counselling work environment. Jane's statements that she has "learnt that the setting determines her identity", and that "it [context] has *become* part of her identity" suggest a process of accepting the contextual inevitability of student counselling, and internalizing this aspect as her own. Her explicit reference to "struggle", "not an easy process", "not an easy fit", reinforces the complicated nature of this identity transformation process.

The majority of participants struggled to retain their identity as psychologists in the context of ambiguous, multi-disciplinary student needs. Such demands seemed to go beyond their HPCSA-regulated scopes of practice and therefore challenged their existing beliefs about their role as psychologists in student counselling. Janice, a counselling psychologist, describes how she managed to negotiate a balance with the assistance of a senior colleague in student counselling:

Janice: He always asks "so what's psychological about what you did?" We complain that "Oh students are coming here for financial aid. They don't need to come to us for this, they don't need..." and he says "Sure they don't, but when you talk to that student, what are you doing? What do you offer that someone else isn't offering? If you're offering something that someone else can help them with, then just refer them there, but if you can add something, a perspective that's psychological, maybe just helping that student see something different ... you need to know what psychological value you bring to that context". So he reminds us that we [student counsellors] *bring a certain value to the institution, and he helped us differentiate.*

Janice's senior colleague offers her a more context-specific interpretation of her role and identity as a psychologist in student counselling. This broader interpretation resonates with Dole's (1981) description of psychology in the college setting as a distinctly context-driven, sub-speciality of psychology, rather than a new profession. Dole's (1981) work was discussed in detail in Chapter Two of this dissertation. Janice is encouraged to broaden her psychological perspective by considering socio-dynamic factors that can impact on student well-being. In so doing, she is able to retain both her identity as a psychologist whilst responding to the needs of students. Janice's adjustment of her student counselling perspective also resonates with

Naidoo's (2001) recommendation that student counsellors adopt a 'broad lens' in order to effectively respond to the diverse needs of students in higher education.

Student counsellors also sought to preserve their identity as 'psychologists' by differentiating between professional *identity* and institutional *role*:

Janice: *There was a part where you put down what your profession is and what your job is. And he said "That's not your profession, you're a psychologist functioning as a student counsellor. You were never trained as a student counsellor". So he helped us to realise that we kind of came into student counselling and functioned as student counsellors. So we are psychologists functioning as student counsellors. That's something that I had to think about … I'm the psychologist bringing all of what I know from psychology into this role as a student counsellor, because a student counsellor can be a registered counsellor, they can be a social worker, but psychologists bring an additional quality, social work has got a different perspective…*

"Psychologists functioning as student counsellors" suggests a professional identity that intercepts the psychology profession and student counselling context. Some participants resorted to splitting or differentiation strategies when they perceived their student counsellor roles to be incompatible with their 'psychologist' identity. Such strategies resemble Breakwell's (1986) compartmentalism and compliance strategies discussed previously in Chapters Three and Four. The extract below illustrates such strategies:

Noah: *I don't use it* [laughs]. *I always use 'counselling psychologist' title. I don't use the title* [student counsellor] *unless I'm filling in an HR form.*

Interviewer*: Why is that the case?*

Noah:	*Because my identity is primarily around 'counselling psychologist' rather than 'senior student counsellor'.*

Noah's preferred identity in student counselling is that of 'psychologist', and he regards the 'psychologist' title as an appropriate reflection of his professional identity in this context. He seems to use the 'student counsellor' title mainly out of obligation rather than preference. He consequently differentiates between the 'psychologist' and 'student counsellor' titles because they do not hold the same meaning for him.

Emotional disengagement and perceptual splitting were other identity management strategies employed by student counsellors in this study:

Melanie:	*I don't let it affect the way I see myself. I'm not going to have doubts about myself or my role that I'm playing here. That's what I mean when I say that I 'just carry on'. I'm not going to let it hinder my performance in any way - the way the university sees me, or how I perceive the university to see me.*

Melanie copes with negative value perceptions by making a conscious decision not to identify with and internalise them as her own. Her decision is then expressed in the cognitive and behavioural choices she makes ("I don't let it affect the way I see myself"; "I just carry on").

Student counsellors also relied heavily on their student counselling teams when managing perceived identity challenges and threats:

Ronald:	*When the expectation is that you're not seeing enough clients and the suggestion is that you should double-book yourself because sometimes people don't pitch, then you would resist that. As a team you would say there's no way we're gonna do that and when the whole team resists … it kind of works. So these suggestions*

would come and then you'd resist it ... We brought in little things like we call it

a meeting, a debriefing session you know, where we'll talk a bit about whatever

but we protect that space ... We talk about how you are doing, you know that

kind of thing, so we create spaces within the environment, pockets where you

can protect some of the stuff that you want to protect.

Noted in the extract above are the collective efforts of the student counselling team to assert authority over their identity as 'psychologists' in higher education. They achieve this by drawing on their common identity as a distinct professional community, which they then use to assert professional boundaries and implement team-building fora ("pockets" or "spaces"). This group membership also enabled student counsellors to attend to issues of professional self-care, and to nurture their preferred psychological identities in the context of ongoing professional development. This collective group action resonates with the group support and group action strategies identified by Breakwell (1986) as ways of managing identity threats. Ronald's account further suggests that student counsellors' individual experiences prompt a collective response from the team ("the whole team resists"). Implied therein is that individual and group student counsellor identities are intertwined.

Participants specifically drew on their HPCSA scopes of practice and code of ethics when defending their preferred identities as psychologists in higher education:

Eric: We had different meetings and we just kept on these points, you know the ethical   legal

stuff and according to the HPCSA, somebody can't supervise you if you are not a

psychologist. They just stayed away from us after a while, they just left us there

... we stuck to our guns [laughs]. *It's important not to just give in, to have good*

arguments, good reasons why it shouldn't happen and then that's what we did. So

far, it's worked.

Eric's account reinforces the notion of identity management as a collective effort involving the whole student counselling team. Comments such as "We just kept on these points" and "stuck to our guns" highlight the identity struggle inherent in the student counselling context. Eric's later references to student counsellors being left alone ("They just stayed away from us after a while, they just left us there") alludes to a 'victory', albeit temporary 'victory' for student counselling in this particular 'battle'. Although Eric cautiously notes a victory for student counselling, his account also seems to imply that identity management is an ongoing process for the student counsellor working in higher education. The possibility that another struggle might emerge in the future, is alluded to at the end ("So far, it's worked"). This suggests that student counsellors occupy a precarious position in higher education. .

Student counsellors also sought to enforce professional boundaries by establishing referral networks with internal and stakeholders, and making appropriate referrals when necessary:

Tracy: *We try very hard to build resources that kind of help us with those kinds of things,*

        so we have outside organisations that we refer to. We have a feeding scheme with

        one of the other organisations now so we try and we visit when we now have time.

        We visit a whole lot of other organisations, meet with the people, see what they can

        offer, you know, find out what the other resources can be, so that we can try and

        keep our boundaries very clear. The moment it oversteps it, we can refer on.

Tracy's reference to "trying very hard to build resources" suggests that identity management requires strategic effort, interpersonal skill and collaborative partnership-building with a wide

spectrum of role players. Tracy's reference to monitoring and being aware of the moment boundaries have been crossed, suggests further that identity management requires student counsellors' to be conversant with, and vigilant over, their psychological scope of practice in the student counselling context. .

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, student counsellors' saw their salaries as a reflection of how much they were valued in higher education. Participants sought to manage the potential threat of a low salary by reframing or re-construing the meaning and impact of institutional compensation. The extract overleaf, illustrates this process:

Ronald: *I have a nice variety of stuff that I do. I'm involved in a lot of different aspects which I see a lot of my friends or colleagues in private practice don't have. For them, it's one client after the other, fill your day up as much as possible because you need to make as much money as possible as well, and I don't have that; it's a completely different thing for me. I don't have to worry about people paying me because I get paid at the end of the month regardless of how many clients I see, which I guess has a drawback as well because you always think "Aw, I could probably be making more money in private practice", but I like the variety and I like not having to sit in my office from 9 to 5, seeing clients the whole day, and I feel like I'm touching people in different ways as well; I'm developing people in different ways other than just being in a session with someone.*

Some student counsellors, like Ronald, prioritised intrinsic rewards ("nice variety of stuff"), economic security and stability. Others aligned their role perceptions with a more service-orientated model of practice. Such a model emphasised service over monetary gain.

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6.9. CONCLUSION

The present chapter presented key aspects of the student counsellors' identity experience as these emerged from the research data. These included the notion of a relational identity as well as the dichotomous tensions engendered by this extended sense of self which serve to both constrain and support the student counsellor's 'preferred self' in higher education. Student counsellors' attempts to understand their professional identity were also explored in the context of perceived identity conflicts and challenges posed by the institutional environment. This chapter also highlighted the student counsellors' pursuit of an identity compromise that is both professionally compliant and contextually responsive. Chapter Seven that follows, considers the South African student counsellor's identity experience in greater detail, with a particular focus on the theoretical and transformative implications thereof for the field of professional identity in general, student counselling in particular, as well as social change in South Africa.

CHAPTER 7
DISCUSSION

7.1. INTRODUCTION

There is a dearth of research focusing on the subjective meaning and experience of identity for psychologists employed in specific work settings and organizational contexts. This is particularly noticeable in the area of student counselling, with limited attention paid to how this group of professionals experience and make sense of their identities in higher education. Furthermore, studies on professional identity generally seem to lack a holistic perspective that accounts for both the experiential content of identity as well as the processes underlying identity construction and sense-making (Davey, 2010). Adopting a phenomenological-constructivist approach, this IPA study sought to address this lacuna by investigating how South African psychologists experience and make sense of their professional identity in the context of student counselling. The study also focused on the influences that shape and inform student counsellors' understanding of themselves in this setting.

Chapter Six highlighted specific themes which advance the notion of a unique, context-driven student counsellor identity. According to the research findings, such an identity draws on mainstream psychology, the sub-discipline of community psychology, as well as the broader South African social context. The present chapter integrates these themes into a coherent discussion of student counsellor identity as a complex, multi-layered identity experience that is negotiated and reconstructed in the context of work activities, power dynamics and relationships with significant professional, community and institutional others. The title of this dissertation, 'On the cusp of context and profession', further advances the complex nature of

the South African student counsellor identity as it intercepts the profession of psychology and context of higher education. The present chapter also contextualises the research findings in terms of the study's underlying philosophical and theoretical frameworks which were discussed in Chapters Three and Four. These include postmodernism (e.g. Becvar & Becvar, 2000; Hansen, 2010), post-structuralism (e.g. Culler, 1982; Olivier, 2013), constructivism (McLeod, 2009; Piaget, 1954; 1971; Proulx, 2006; Sneed & Whitbourne, 2003) and the concept of 'identity work' (Snow & Anderson, 1987; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), with attention drawn to points of convergence and divergence in understanding. Chapter Seven also explores the way in which student counsellor experiences resonate with ongoing debates concerning psychology's relevance to the South African context (e.g. Dawes, 1998; Macleod, 2004; Naidoo, 1996; 2000; Piper-Mandy & Rowe, 2010; Pretorius, 2012), with student counselling practice emerging as both a challenge and response to identified dilemmas within mainstream psychology.

7.2. ON THE CUSP OF CONTEXT AND PROFESSION: STUDENT COUNSELLING AS A SYSTEMIC EXPERIENCE

The evolution of student counselling services has been extensively documented abroad, with research contextualising the growth of the service in terms of an increasingly diverse and complex student population, as well as broader social and political dynamics within which institutions of higher learning are embedded (e.g. Bishop, 1990; Dean & Meadows, 1995; Hodges, 2001; Kiracofe et al., 1994; Lafolette, 2009; Martin, 1997). South African contributions to the field, although less extensive, reflect a similar systemic understanding of a service indelibly shaped by broader socio-historical trends. Most notable in this regard has been post-apartheid transformation and institutional change in the country (e.g. Botha et al., 2005; de Jager, 2012; de Jager & van Lingen, 2012; Naidoo, 1997; Naidoo, 2001; van Heerden,

2012). Participants' experiences support the notion of a multi-layered identity or 'Relational Self' that is shaped by inter-connected, systemic influences. Diagram 7.2. visually depicts the most salient systemic influences found to impact on the South African student counsellor's identity:
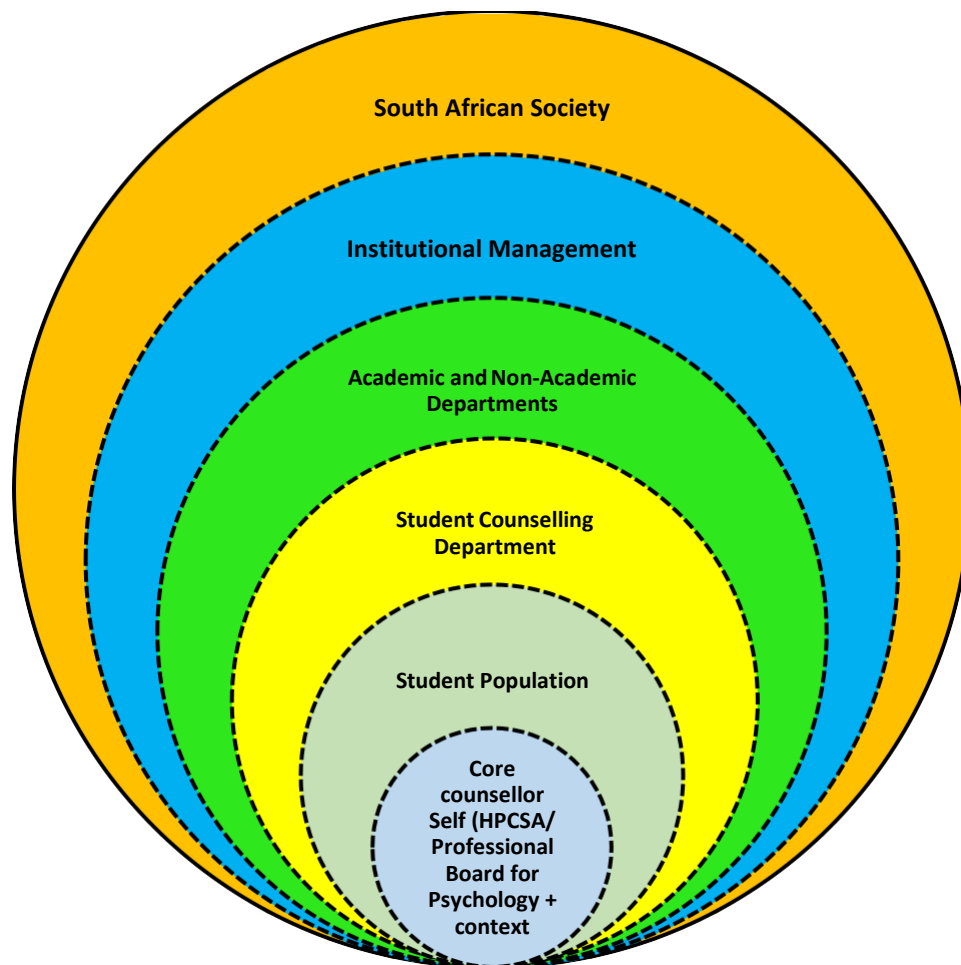
Diagram 7.2.

The theme of the 'Relational Self', highlighted in Chapter Six, represents a shift away from a narrow, insulated view of student counsellor identity towards a more relational, community-oriented perspective of the self-in-context. Evidence of this shift was observed from student counsellors' adoption of a broader psycho-social perspective in their practice, as a result of students presenting with issues suggesting a powerful connection between layers two (student population) and six (South African society). These included poverty, food insecurity and

trauma-related crime and violence. This broad lens helped student counsellors contextualize the South African student beyond their intra-psychic functioning, taking into account his or her socio-historical circumstances as well. Such findings resonate with the work of Naidoo (2001), who maintains that it is imperative for student counsellors to promote both psycho-dynamic and socio-dynamic healing through the adoption of a "broad lens" or "advocacy lens" (p. 4).

Poverty, employment and healthcare inequalities persist in post-apartheid South Africa (Roberts, 2006). Williams et al. (2007), in their literature review on South African crime, also highlight trauma as deeply-ingrained in the South African psyche. Findings of the present study highlight similar issues encountered by student counsellors in the context of student counselling practice, including food-insecurity relating to poverty and unemployment, as well as bereavement and symptoms of trauma resulting from crime and violence. These findings therefore suggest that the South African student counselling context is a microcosmic reflection of the broader South African social context, mirroring in particular, social challenges highlighted by Roberts (2007) and Williams et al. (2007).

Also highlighted by the research findings was the significant influence of the HPCSA on student counsellor identity, with participants' drawing on their HPCSA membership and scopes of practice in particular, to maintain professional boundaries in student counselling. This was particularly salient amongst clinical psychologists, who seemed to rely quite heavily on their clinical scope of practice when dealing with ambiguous role demands and expectations. Participants in general, also drew on their ethical code of practice (HPCSA, 2004) when negotiating challenging institutional expectations relating to client confidentiality, institutional feedback and accountability, management of case loads and professional administration, as well as psychology intern supervision. The Professional Board for Psychology is one of many

discipline-specific branches of the HPCSA that co-ordinate and monitor compliance with professional and ethical standards of behaviour for South African healthcare professionals registered with the HPCSA (HPCSA, n.d). Research findings furthermore suggest a skewed reliance on the HPCSA and the Professional Board for Psychology, with student counsellors tending to under-utilize other professional resources at their disposal, such as the Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA). This is ironic, given that PsySSA is a recognized professional body that seeks to advance:

> Psychology as a science, profession and as a means of promoting human well-being. PsySSA ensures quality of psychological services, safeguards ethical standards, builds professional relationships in South Africa and abroad, promotes collective bargaining for better remuneration, new work opportunities and conditions of service for psychologists, and provides numerous benefits to its members... (PsySSA, n.d. p.2).

 SAACDHE is frequently credited for helping to legitimize student counselling and development services in South African higher education. (e.g, de Jager, 2012; Naidoo, 2012). However, findings of the present study appear to challenge this. SAACDHE, like PsySSA, is not included in diagram 7.2 because SAACDHE did not emerge from the findings as a significant influence on student counsellors' identity, even though participants' roles and functions were found to be consistent with those outlined in SAACDHE'S constitution (SAACDHE, 2007). A possible contributing factor may be SAACDHE's apparent concern with student counselling service delivery and less emphasis on the subjective impact thereof, on student counsellors' work experiences. In addition, professional registration with the HPCSA is a prerequisite for psychologists wanting to practice in South Africa (Health Professions Act No. 56 of 1974; HPCSA, 2013). Registration with SAACDHE, in contrast, is not a pre-requisite for practising as a student counsellor, although professional membership is

encouraged. This difference in registration requirements may possibly account for the HPCSA's more salient influence on participants' identity and work experiences in this study. In addition, SAACDHE endorses a more inclusive, multi-disciplinary identity for student counselling services, as opposed to an exclusive identification with the psychology profession (de Jager & van Lingen, 2012). De Jager and van Lingen (2012) assert that:

… the developing SCD profession recognizes a fundamental need to be inclusive rather exclusive, to the extent that it accommodates provision for more than just one professional discipline in defining itself. This explains why it will, as matters stand, not insist on prescribing a single professional discipline - such as psychology - for its members (p.59).

SAACDHE'S endorsement of such a broad identity may partly explain participants' reliance on a more discipline-specific body, like the HPCSA, to help them make sense of their identities in student counselling.

7.2.1. A community-oriented perspective on student counselling

Diagram 7.2. (p. 185) visually depicts the various contexts and communities impacting on the student counsellor's identity; these are presented as overlapping 'layers' that are embedded within each other. The term 'layers' is employed because it implies a dynamic flow between the different contexts or systems, whilst the serrated boundaries separating each layer are intended to reinforce this interactive connection. The structure of the diagram is influenced by Prilleltensky, Nelson and Peirson's (2001a, as cited in Nelson & Prilletensky, 2005, p.78) ecological representation of multiple, interconnected influences that inform individual experience. This ecological or ecosystemic perspective emphasizes the relationship between the individual and context, and is a core feature of community psychology (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 1997, as cited in Pillay, 2003). Community psychology is a sub-discipline of

psychology that challenges what it perceives to be narrow values, principles and restrictions of mainstream psychology. Community psychology instead, endorses a broader, systemic understanding of human experience (Naidoo, 2000; Nelson & Prilletensky, 2005; Pillay, 2003). The ecological metaphor was introduced by Kelly (1966) and advanced by, amongst others, Trickett, Kelly and Todd (1972) as a way of enhancing community psychology's systemic appreciation of the individual in context (Nelson & Prilletensky, 2005).

My choice of an ecologically-inspired diagram was informed by a number of significant parallels that emerged between community psychology and student counsellors' experiences. Notable amongst these was the theme of the 'Relational Self', which highlighted participants' broader, systemic interpretation of their roles as student counsellors, whilst the theme 'Challenging traditional psychological practice' and "Wearing many hats" drew attention to participants' perceived dissatisfaction with mainstream psychology's reliance on imported, Eurocentric models to train and define the profession in South Africa. Participants' concerns echoed the sentiments expressed by community psychology proponents such as Duncan et al. (2007), Kagan et al. (2011), Naidoo (2000), Nelson and Prilletensky (2005) and Seedat, Duncan and Lazarus (2001) who argue for a more contextually-relevant model of psychological practice for the South African context. .

South African community psychology emerged in response to the perceived inadequacies of mainstream psychology, particularly in respect of broader social engagement and the experiences of marginalised groups and individuals in society (Seedat et al., 2001). Facilitating the emergence of community psychology both locally and abroad, has been concerns about the ongoing prevalence of a narrow, individualistic Western model of psychology that endorses white, elitist Eurocentric values (Naidoo, 1996). Proponents of community psychology view

such a model as incompatible with the realities and needs of a diverse South African population, particularly those oppressed and marginalized by their political and socio-economic circumstances (Naidoo, 1996; 2000). Nelson and Prilletensky (2005) highlight Rappaport's (1977) seminal thoughts on community psychology as being difficult to define "because it is more of a new paradigm, perspective or way of thinking whose contours are constantly emerging, than a distinct and fixed entity" (Rappaport, 1977, as cited in Nelson & Prilletensky, 2005, p. 4). The research findings seem to suggest similarities between community psychology and student counselling, particularly in respect of service accessibility, client empowerment and broader community engagement. Whilst the literature indicates that the contours of community psychology are constantly being forged and revised, the present study's findings allude to student counselling as a possible extension of these contours.

Student counsellors' experiences suggest that the student counselling context challenges the 'practitioner-as-expert' medical model which they had been socialised in. This medical model is considered a defining feature of mainstream psychology (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). One clinical psychologist reported a shift in priorities, moving away from primarily psycho-diagnostic work to an increased focus on clients' resilience and self-determination during the therapeutic encounter. These values are consistent with that of community psychology (e.g. Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005) and serve to reinforce emergent parallels between community psychology and student counselling practice. Some clinical psychologists also drew comparisons between their community in-service training experiences and the demands of student counselling, reinforcing the notion of student counselling as a community-orientated practice.

Some participants saw the absence of a student counselling service fee as compromising the therapeutic relationship. They were of the view that non-payment diminished client responsibility and commitment to the therapeutic process. A larger number of student counsellors in the sample saw the free service as a context-driven necessity, given the challenging socio-economic circumstances of the majority of students accessing higher education. These varied interpretations suggest that student counsellors subscribe to different models of practice, with those in support of a free service reflecting a view compatible with the principles and values of community psychology (e.g. Lazarus, 2007). Those in support of a student counselling fee, seemed to endorse a more Eurocentric, psychodynamic model that attaches intrapsychic significance to fee payment (e.g. Freud, 1913/1958; Menninger, 1958, as cited in Tudor, 1998).

The notion of a 'Relational Self' also lends itself to African cultural concepts and principles such as *ubuntu* and its accompanying expression, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,* which endorse a broader, systemic understanding of the self in relation to others (Mkhize, 2013). According to Mkhize (2013), *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* is a cultural understanding of the self as a dialogical, relational being, emerging and existing in the context of communal engagement with other people. This cultural notion necessitates that we "come to terms with the Other's points of views, or lenses through which he or she makes sense of the world" (Mkhize, 2013, p. 76). Mkhize (2013) adds further that it is through the recognition of others' views that we become "conscious of who we are" (p. 77). The related concept of *ubuntu* in African culture translates to a basic respect and compassion for others, and encompasses what it means to be essentially human (Louw, 1999). Ubuntu also embodies the spirit of co-operation, consensus and agreement - unifying principles that are accentuated in African communities (Louw, 1999). One research participant with an interest in community psychology and culture, drew attention

to the relevance of these cultural concepts to student counselling practice in the South African context. She saw 'ubuntu' as a valuable cultural tool which she often drew on to help her understand her role as a psychologist in South Africa and student counselling in particular. She also felt that South African psychologists, in general, were not making sufficient use of the concept of 'ubuntu' when contextualizing client experiences and relationships. The research findings suggest that it was in the context of adopting a "broad lens" (Naidoo, 2001, p. 3) through observing, respecting and interacting with the different worldviews and voices of student and institutional communities, that participants became more conscious of their own identities as student counsellors – a finding which seems compatible with the African cultural notions of *ubuntu* and *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (Mkhize, 2013). The application of these cultural understandings to student counselling therefore seems to be an appropriate and logical extension for a practice already reflecting a strong community orientation.

7.3. CHALLENGES OF THE 'RELATIONAL SELF'

Insufficient literary attention is paid to the experiential nuances, tensions and challenges associated with the binary identity position of the student counsellor as it intercepts the psychology profession and higher education environment. A review of global student counselling literature suggests that this crucial dynamic, seemingly characteristic of an integrated student counsellor identity experience, has thus far been neglected by researchers. Limited exceptions in this regard were found abroad, and include the work of Dean and Meadows (1995), Dole (1981) and Grayson and Cauley (1989). Chapters One, Two and Three drew attention to these authors, who consider the complex and ambiguous nature of the student counsellor's identity experience in higher education. The present study seeks to break new ground in this area by illuminating the challenges associated with an integrated student counsellor identity or 'Relational Self' as it is negotiated in the context of competing tensions

between HPCSA professional membership, student needs and institutional demands and expectations. The themes of "Wearing many hats" and 'The student counsellor as institutional "step-child" draw specific attention to some of the challenges that have to be negotiated in the pursuit of an extended, relational identity in student counselling, with specific reference to conflicting professional and institutional group memberships as well as perceived institutional rejection. Reference was made earlier to the African cultural concepts of ubuntu and umuntu ngubmuntu ngabantu as useful cultural concepts that help to contextualise the systemic experience of the South African student counsellor. The themes of 'Wearing many hats' and 'The student counsellor as 'institutional step-child' suggest that whilst self-expansion in the ethos of ubuntu and umuntu ngubmuntu ngabantu is both necessary and inevitable in the context of student counselling, it is nonetheless a challenging and conflicted process that has to be negotiated by student counsellors both individually and collectively as a student counselling community.

7.3.1. "Wearing many hats"

Chapters One, Two and Three of this dissertation explored the global attention accorded to student counsellor roles and functions in higher education. However, researchers appear to have paid scant attention to the impact of varied role expectations on the subjective experience of student counsellor identity. Naidoo (1997) highlights the complex and ambiguous role profile of the South African student counsellor, alluding to multi-disciplinary overlap between psychology, social work, academia and administration, amongst other disciplines. Naidoo (1997; 2001) furthermore draws attention to student counselling' departure from traditional, reactive psychological approaches to include more proactive roles that focus on student advocacy and skills development (Naidoo, 1997; 2001). However, the subjective impact of role diversification on student counsellors' identity, has not been sufficiently interrogated before.

The themes of 'Challenging traditional psychological practice' and "Wearing many hats" specifically highlight the impact of diverse role demands on participants' experiences of identity, with particular attention paid to both the shared and unique meanings which the different registrations categories attach to student counselling work. Participants, in general, referred to themselves as psychology generalists or "jack-of-all-trades". Some student counsellors further qualified this description with the phrase "master-of-none", suggesting an ambivalent identification with the broad student counsellor identity. The implication therein was that their 'psychologist' identity had expanded but also been diluted or 'weakened' during the expansion process. Some participants saw themselves as being "more of a psychologist" in private practice because this particular environment lent itself to more specialized, discipline-specific work. Other perceptions were varied and task-dependent, with respondents' identity perceptions shifting from that of psychologist to social worker as a result of the work that they were doing. These work-related identity shifts offer support for identity customization theory (Pratt et al., 2006); in particular, the idea that identity and work are inter-related, with changes to work accompanying changes to one's perception and experience of identity. Such shifts also offer support for the postmodern view of reality as complex and multi-faceted, with the possibility of multiple realities existing and constructed in the context of language and social interaction (Lloyd, 2009). Research findings furthermore seem to corroborate Cooper and Rowan's (1999) notion of the "plural self" discussed earlier in the literature review chapter of this dissertation (Chapter Three).

Clinical psychologists in the sample seemed to identify less with the eclectic nature of student counselling work. Their identities in this context still seemed to be closely wedded to their clinical training and scope of practice which centres on assessment, diagnosis and treatment of psychological distress and/or psychopathology (HPCSA, 2011). Clinical psychology

participants consequently sought ways to maintain their distinct clinical specialization in the student counselling context by gravitating towards psycho-diagnostic assessment and psychotherapy for clinical conditions. Counselling and educational psychologists, in contrast, were in support of "wearing many hats" and seemed to evince a more compatible fit with the 'generalist' student counsellor identity. Educational psychologists in the sample also expressed an affiliation with their counselling psychology peers, with one participant remarking that his training as an educational psychologist was more inclusive and overlapped significantly with his counselling psychology peers, but that he felt constrained by his narrow HPCSA scope of practice. Counselling psychologists, in particular, seemed to prefer the role diversity and ambiguity associated with student counselling work, tending to see their diverse roles and functions as an identity-enriching experience. This is in keeping with international perspectives on counselling psychology:

> Counselling psychology is a broad-based field of specialisation that seeks to assist individuals, groups and organizations. It appears that this diversity of activities, clients, interventions and workplaces makes counselling psychology so difficult to define; indeed, while the other disciplines within applied psychology seek to specialise, counselling psychology is considered to be more of a generalist category (Savickas, 2007, as cited in Young, 2013, p. 424).

The counselling psychologist's scope of practice, as defined by the HPCSA (2011), involves assessment and intervention with clients across the spectrum of normality, adjustment difficulties and psychopathology. Emphasis is on optimizing psychological well-being and intervening in the context of developmental problems (e.g. career decision-making) and life challenges (HPCSA, 2011) such as HIV/Aids, stress, violence and trauma. This is in keeping with the needs and challenges of the student population in higher education, as highlighted by

student counsellors in this study. Such experiences lend support to the concept of person-environment fit (e.g. Cable & Judge, 1996; Edwards, Caplan & Van Harrision, 1998; Kristoff-Brown et al., 2005), which explains the individual's relationship with his or her environment in terms of fit or compatibility. According to Cable and Edwards (2004), a person's characteristics or features can include psychological needs, values, goals, abilities and personality, whilst environmental features can include job demands, cultural values and rewards. The research findings suggest varying degrees of fit between student counselling demands and psychologists' scopes of practice as determined by the HPCSA (2011), with some experiences suggesting a more positive person-environment fit than others. The research findings of this study magnify and elevate the value of counselling psychologists to student counselling and the broader South African context; this is particularly apparent when one considers that the South African higher education context is a microcosmic reflection of the broader South African society from which students originate. This is an interesting finding that seems to challenge the dominant clinical discourse and perceived superiority of clinical psychologists over counselling and educational psychologists in the psychology hierarchy (Pretorius, 2012). Pretorius (2012) cautions against the continued reliance on a medical model, exemplified in the clinical discourse, to define psychologist's' practice. Pretorius (2012) sees this as erroneously elevating the status and competency of clinical psychologists above the other categories. For Pretorius (2012), the clinical discourse perpetuates the perception that clinical psychologists have "free reign to perform any psychological act with their clients, while the "lower level" categories must be reined in and have clearly definable boundaries" (p. 515). This was powerfully echoed by an educational psychologist in the sample, who contrasted her positive experience in student counselling with what she described as a professional hierarchy in mainstream psychology circles that relegates her to "the bottom of the barrel" whilst elevating clinical psychologists above the other categories. In light of the positive fit

between student counselling and counselling psychology, one possible recommendation would be to reserve the student counselling setting for counselling psychologists, just as hospitals are reserved for clinical psychologists and schools for educational psychologists. This is explored in greater detail in sub-section 7.5.1 of this chapter.

7.3.2. Institutional "step-child"

The theme of the 'Relational Self' highlighted efforts by participants to incorporate various institutional and social elements into their student counsellor identity and practice. The theme of the institutional "step-child", in contrast, draws attention to the challenges associated with this 'Relational Self', with institutional marginalization and a sense of not belonging, emerging as significant influences on the student counselor's identity experience. The experience of institutional rejection was most salient in student counsellors' perceptions of institutional discrimination and exploitation by the higher education community. Kagan et al. (2011) describe the concept of 'community' as ambiguous, contradictory and problematic. According to Kagan et al. (2011), "communities can enhance and empower our lives, but they can also lead us into becoming stigmatised and marginalised" (p. 71). This resonates powerfully with the ambivalent group experiences of student counsellors in this study, with the affirming influence of student counselling teams contrasting sharply with the perceived rejection by institutional stakeholders at other levels. Participants' metaphorical references to themselves as the institutional "container", "dustbin" and "dumping ground" served to highlight their perceived rejection by South African higher education institutions. This marginalized experience is amplified when one considers the peripheral placement of dumping sites on the outskirts or margins of towns and societies. The exploitative tone underlying these metaphors further suggests conflicting identity and value perceptions of the student counselling service,

with participants viewing themselves as psychology specialists whilst the institution takes a more indiscriminate view of their role in higher education.

When participants did report institutional support for student counselling, reference was made to "pockets" or limited spaces within the university structures, as opposed to a general institutional attitude. This suggests an 'emerging' and possibly fragmented relationship with institutional stakeholders. This finding appears to challenge de Jager's (2012) notion of an integrated student counselling and development service in South African higher education, suggesting instead that student counselling has yet to experience full institutional integration. Such experiences furthermore have implications for how student counselling has been envisioned in local legislature such as the National Plan for Higher Education (DoE, 2001). I consider this issue in greater detail in Chapter Eight.

The research findings drew attention to specific institutional practices which student counsellors saw as a potential threat to their identity and status in higher education. These related to funding and resource restrictions, perceived institutional exploitation ('Stretched like a pancake"), problematic institutional classification ('Significance of professional title') as well as remuneration and career development disparities between academics and psychologists in public service (The student counsellor as "stuck"). Academics were perceived as the preferred, legitimate 'children' of the higher education 'family' who enjoyed 'parental' nurturance and support from the institution in the form of adequate funding, resources and growth opportunities. Underlying financial dynamics may be partly responsible for this "step- child" status, given that participants highlighted the institution's perception of student counselling as having limited income-generation potential and therefore of little economic value to them. Academic, in contrast, were seen as direct sources of income for the institution

through their lecturing activities which promoted student throughput, as well as their research publications. For student counsellors, this economic model contrasted sharply with their more abstract, qualitative value perceptions. They saw themselves as playing a significant, albeit indirect role, in income generation by virtue of their developmental and supportive interventions which indirectly promoted student retention and throughput. These student statistics, in turn, influenced government funding allocated to higher education institutions. Unfortunately, the perceived "step-child" experience of the student counsellor draws attention to higher education's apparent dismissal of the student counsellor's contribution, in favour of a more tangible, economic model. The theme of "Us" and "Them" spaces: Academics as the preferred 'children', also resonated powerfully with the concept of organizational justice (Baldwin, 2006) discussed earlier in Chapter Four, with participants' reporting experiences of perceived injustice in the South African higher education system. I return to the concept of organizational justice in the concluding chapter, with reference to research findings and implications for institutional reform.

The research findings indicate that despite their marginalized experience, student counsellors actively seek to manage the challenge of institutional marginalization and exploitation by asserting ownership over their professional identity and practice. Individual and collective strategies employed by participants, illustrate the conceptual relevance of identity work (e.g. Snow & Anderson, 1987; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) discussed previously in Chapters Three and Four. These include the implementation of student counselling group meetings which functioned as team-building and identity management fora or "spaces". Participants also drew on professional tools or "raw materials" (Pratt et al., 2006, p. 246) such as their HPCSA scope of practice and ethical code, to reinforce professional boundaries. The notion of "raw materials" is drawn from Pratt et al.'s (2006) identity customization theory. As discussed in

Chapters Three and Four, Pratt et al. (2006) maintain that the process of identity customization is facilitated by identity customization sources that include prior socialization experiences from professional training as well as organizational influences and artefacts which signify organizational membership. Findings of the present study demonstrate the potential use of such identity customization sources for purposes of identity management and self-preservation amongst student counsellors, with student counselling teams drawing on 'tools' such as their HPCSA membership, to manage threats to their practice.

7.4. STUDENT COUNSELLING AS AN IDENTITY COMPROMISE

The majority of participants appeared torn between their preferred ways of defining and expressing themselves as psychologists in student counselling, the ambiguous demands of the student population, and broader institutional expectations. Participants sought to manage these competing tensions by negotiating an identity compromise. This compromise involved strategies of identity integration and differentiation, variously expressed through 'Preferred self' and 'Compliant self' identity positions.

Identity integration and differentiation strategies allowed student counsellors to differentiate between preferred psychological roles ('Preferred Self') and what they saw as compliant, non-psychological functions ('Compliant Self'), with the latter being 'patched-on' when necessary. Such strategies seem to offer particular support to the identity patching strategy of Pratt et al. (2006) and Kreiner et al.'s (2006) differentiation strategy discussed earlier in Chapters Three and Four. Identity patching refers to compensatory efforts by the individual to deal with deficiencies or inconsistencies between task performance and identity (Pratt et al., 2006). This strategy was employed by student counsellors partly out of a desire to maintain the integrity and clarity of the psychologist identity or 'Preferred Self', which would otherwise be blurred

if elements or influences from other disciplines were incorporated and owned by the student counsellor. Other participants altered their identity perceptions in different contexts, identifying themselves more as 'psychologists' in private practice and as 'student counsellors' in the student counselling setting. Some student counsellors distinguished between their professional identity as 'psychologist' and institutional role as 'student counsellor', with this distinction allowing them to express both their 'Preferred Self' and 'Compliant Self' in the context of student counselling. These experiences seem to broadly support postmodern notions of the individual as an active participant in the construction of meaning (Becvar & Becvar, 2000; Hansen, 2010) whilst also demonstrating the contextual relevance of identity work to the South African student counseling context (e.g. Snow & Anderson, 1987; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

Although their work involved attending to a broad range of presentations consistent with a diverse student counselling practice, clinical psychologists tended to express their 'Preferred Self' in the context of clinically-oriented roles and functions consistent with their HPCSA scope of practice. These individuals gravitated more towards psycho-diagnostic assessment, counselling and psychotherapy for psychosis, anxiety and mood disorders, amongst other psychopathology. This experience suggests an active process of job crafting undertaken by student counsellors of the clinical registration category, and offers support for Wrzenieski and Dutton's (2001) job crafting theory discussed earlier in Chapters Three and Four of this dissertation. Counselling and educational psychologists evinced a preference for more proactive developmental roles that involved skills development and student empowerment. Activities which they gravitated towards included academic and life-skills training, psycho-education awareness campaigns and career counselling.

The construction of a 'Preferred Self' was also informed, at times, by student counsellors' personal life experiences and demographic characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity and culture. These personal aspects seemed to influence the kinds of roles and projects that some student counsellors leaned towards, such as diversity, gender equality and women empowerment. An example of this was research participant Fiona, who recounted her experience of cultural and linguistic differences amongst English and Afrikaans-speaking White South Africans. Fiona's experience of being a 'White', English-speaking female yet 'different' to other 'Whites' in her community, had shaped both her personal identity and later on, her professional interests as a psychologist in student counselling. Fiona's professional interest in diversity amongst the student population, seemed to be a natural extensions of her personal experiences in the broader South African social context.

Research findings offer a contextual extension of Kahn's (1990) "preferred self" concept and Davey's (2010) notion of the "valued professional self" discussed in Chapter Three. Davey (2010) asserts that professional identity is embodied in the activities or work that one engages in, identifies emotionally with and prefers, because this work has value and meaning for the individual. Student counsellors' experiences seem to corroborate this, with participants expressing a strong preference to remain connected to the psychology profession because this membership and the roles and functions associated with this membership, hold particular meaning and significance for them. Kahn (1990) similarly maintains that "people have dimensions of themselves that, given appropriate conditions, they prefer to use and express in the course of role performances. To employ such dimensions is to drive personal energies into physical, cognitive, and emotional labours" (p.700). Kahn (1990) goes on to say "that to express preferred dimensions is to display real identity, thoughts, and feelings" (p.700). This suggests that authenticity is a key component of the 'Preferred Self', and is supported by

student counsellors' preferences for certain functions which they deem to be a true reflection of themselves as professionals.

The notion of a 'Compliant Self' complements and extends the ideas of Davey (2010) and Kahn (1990) by illustrating how professional identity is negotiated in the context of student counsellors' preferred and ambivalent modes of identification. The 'Compliant self' aspect of student counsellor identity was driven by an awareness that student counselling services is reliant on higher education for its survival. This power dynamic introduced a sense of institutional accountability amongst the student counselling community, with research participants evincing a need to demonstrate their value to the institution. This was articulated by student counsellors in terms of a 'burden of proof' that included assuming alternate roles and identities (such as social worker), in the absence of adequate multi-disciplinary staff.

Tensions between the 'Preferred Self' and 'Compliant Self' were evident from participants' concerns about conflicting professional and institutional models of practice. Student counsellors highlighted perceived incompatibilities between the subjective nature of their work and higher education's objective criteria, with many participants stating that it was difficult for them to quantify therapeutic outcomes and efficacy. Themes such as "Stretched like a pancake" drew attention to the professional and ethical challenges associated with this 'burden of proof'. One participant, for example, expressed concern that high caseloads would compromise student counsellors' ability to maintain effective client records. Also of concern was the perceived imposition of a short-term therapeutic model of practice onto student counsellors. Participants saw this as undermining their professional autonomy and status as independent practitioners.

Research participants sought to manage tensions between the 'Preferred Self' and 'Compliant Self' by enforcing their preferred, HPCSA professional membership and their status as autonomous, independent practitioners in student counselling. They asserted autonomy over their caseloads and frequency of therapeutic contact, whilst drawing on the HPCSA's ethical guidelines to manage potential ethical challenges in their practice, particularly in respect of client confidentiality. The assumption of a 'Compliant Self' position was evident from student counsellors' submission of monthly statistical reports to institutional stakeholders. These reports served as evidence of student counselling activity and justified student counselling's relevance to the institution.

7.5. STUDENT COUNSELLING AS TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE

Student counsellors' work experiences suggest a more flexible, generic interpretation of their HPCSA scopes of practice in the South African student counselling context. The research findings seem to offer support for Dole's (1981) generic perspective, in particular, his description of psychology in the college context as a context-specific, sub-speciality of psychology, rather than a new profession. The experiences of student counsellors in this study also have broader implications for the psychology profession in South Africa, and offer support for Hotho's (2008) notion of a recursive relationship between individual identity transformation and transformation of a profession in the context of change. The inclusive nature of student counselling teams, characterized by the employment of clinical, counselling and educational psychologists, furthermore seems to challenge the need for separate scopes of practice and registration categories in South African work settings such as student counselling. Participants' experiences of their identity and practice suggests that a more generic and inclusive scope of practice is warranted, with student counselling serving as an exemplar of

how such a generic model is operationalized within the context of higher education. This idea is further elaborated on in the section below.

7.5.1. A unique 'community of practice'

Whilst the student counselling environment tends to offer internships to counselling and educational psychology interns (Pretorius, 2012) the sample of this study reflects a more inclusive employment practice that accommodates clinical psychologists as well. Research findings and student counselling employment trends in general, indicate that this setting incorporates rather than excludes, the different registration categories, with student counselling emerging as a unique professional community within higher education. The identity preferences and challenges collectively experienced and negotiated by the different registration categories in student counselling, resonate with Wenger's (1998; 2012) notion of a "community of practice". Wenger (2012) describes communities of practice as having a common identity constructed around "a shared domain of interest" (p. 1). He states further that communities of practice are composed of practitioners who develop a "shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems- in short a shared practice" (Wenger, 2012, p.2). Research findings suggest that student counsellors' individual identities are shaped and defined around their group identity as a student counselling team. The cohesive nature of this group experience contrasted sharply with the experience of marginalization highlighted by the theme of the 'institutional "step-child". Davey (2010) identifies the experience of 'belonging' as an important aspect of professional identity; the research findings offer to extend this understanding by suggesting that student counsellors' identity experiences exist on a continuum of both *belonging* and *not belonging* to different communities.

Both the shared and category-specific challenges highlighted by student counsellors in this study, pose a number of alternatives for both applied psychology and professional training in South Africa. One option would be for the student counselling context to be reserved for counselling psychologists, given the positive fit between student counselling demands and the counselling psychology scope of practice. The other alternative would be to adopt a broader, more integrative approach to the training of all categories of psychologists, so that all categories can comfortably engage in a variety of work settings, including student counselling. Broader, more inclusive training programmes for all registration categories would then raise the question about the continued need for distinct categories if all psychologists undergo the same inclusive training. This leads on to the third suggestion, which would be to disband separate psychological registration categories and instead adopt a broader, generic psychological model of identity and practice that is more relevant and responsive to the South African student population and broader population at large. Such a model was actually proposed by one of the research participants, who highlighted the contradiction in training and practice amongst the different registration categories. Suggested by this individual was a more integrated training model for South African psychologists that draws on the diverse skills and competencies of all the registration categories. Such training would thus enable South African psychologists to function in a range of employment settings, with the option of specializing or pursuing the 'Preferred Self' in a particular area or work setting. Such a model may also help reduce the professional hierarchy and associated tensions that reportedly exist between different categories. These tensions have been highlighted by amongst others, Kriegler (1993), Pretorius (2012) and Rock and Hamber (1994). Pretorius (2012), in particular, views the recently-promulgated scopes of practice as an opportunity for South African psychologists to re-define the identity of the psychology profession along more inclusive terms that encompass curative,

preventative and developmental roles. Student counsellor roles, as highlighted by this study, seem to support Pretorius's (2012) vision for the profession.

Research findings also suggest an ambivalent and contradictory relationship between student counselling practice and the category of 'registered counsellor' in South Africa. Student counsellors' experiences suggest that they identify with the registered counsellor's primary-level scope of practice (HPCSA, 2011) whilst still aspiring to retain their identities as psychologists. This was evident in participants' rejection of the 'student counsellor' title because they perceived it as overlapping with the title of 'registered counsellor', even though the preventative nature of their student counselling work was consistent with that of registered counsellors. Research findings suggest that the practice of student counselling, the context in which it is applied and the population it seeks to serve, resonates with the registered counsellor's scope of practice discussed earlier in Chapter One of this dissertation. It is therefore possible that student counsellors are actually responding to the objectives which initially prompted the introduction of the 'registered counsellor' category in South Africa. In addition, prior to the HPCSA's introduction of the 'registered counsellor', South African psychologists reportedly practised according to a broader scope or model ("Psychologists up in arms", 2011).Concerns raised by South African counselling psychologists in relation to the newly-defined scopes of practice, seem to reinforce the need for a more integrated and versatile interpretation of psychological scopes of practice in the South African context. Objections to the revised scopes of practice include concerns that they are narrow, limiting and not consistent with broader, global definitions of counselling psychology's scope of practice (van den Berg et al., 201, as cited in Young, 2013; "Psychologists up in arms", 2011).

Research findings indicate that student counsellors are compelled to adopt a more flexible approach to their practice that takes cognizance of the diverse South African student population in higher education today. This population comprises White, Indian, African, Coloured and foreign students with diverse profiles and multi-layered needs. Research findings have implications for existing debates concerning the relevance of psychology to the South African context (e.g. Dawes, 1998; De la Rey & Ipser, 2004; Macleod, 2004; Naidoo, 1996; 2000; Painter & Terre Blanche, 2004; Piper-Mandy & Rowe, 2010; Pretorius, 2012; Rock & Hamber, 1994; Shefer, Van Niekerk, Duncan, de la Rey & Rondebosch, 1997), with the identity and practice of the student counsellor offering a novel way in which to reconcile and integrate mainstream and community psychology practices. Student counselling furthermore has implications for the way in which the concept of 'community' is understood and applied, given that student counselling practice is defined and applied in relation to a racially diverse and socially complex student community. This community, in turn, may be seen as representing the South African 'community' in its totality.

Research findings also seem to resonate with Dawes's (1998) ideas on the Africanization of psychology, particularly his suggestion that an indigenous psychology should move away from the "African/European dichotomy" and draw more on the concept of "modern vs. modernising communities" (p. 12). Within such a view "locally developed psychological knowledge becomes not a feature of a specific culture, but an account of the dialectic between mentalities and social practices which occur within particular cultural communities" (p. 12). This is particularly relevant in light of the fact that South African students and the population in general, exhibit varying degrees of identification or acculturation with traditional African and Western worldviews (Naidoo, 2012). As Naidoo (2012) rightfully points out, some African individuals identify more with a Western individualistic model of psychotherapy whilst others

are more open to a traditional African perspective that emphasises relational and spiritual aspects (Naidoo, 2012). It logically follows, therefore, that a more fluid, integrative indigenous model of psychology is needed in the South African context, one that is open to both Western and indigenous African elements of healing and support. An example of this would be the utilization of traditional healers (sangoma or inyanga) in student counselling for those students who subscribe to a more traditional African perspective, whilst Western forms of therapy, in addition to more culturally-appropriate forms of intervention, would be employed to assist acculturating individuals (Naidoo, 2012). Acculturated clients are those individuals who subscribe to a Western belief system even though they display racial and ethnic diversity. For such individuals, Western forms of intervention and support would be appropriate.

7.5.2. Professional training and development implications

Research participants expressed concern about the suitability of their professional training to the South African student counselling context, and voiced specific concerns about what they perceived to be an individualistic Western model of psychology that endorses white, elitist Eurocentric values. These concerns echoed earlier criticisms made by Naidoo (1996) regarding the suitability of Eurocentric models to the South African experience. Also highlighted by some participants were perceived contradictions in professional training and scope of practice, with reports of overlap in training during the Masters programme yet restrictions imposed by the HPCSA scopes of practice. The research findings suggest that the identity of the student counsellor continuously develops and revises itself in the course of negotiating contextual demands and challenges, with student counsellors seeking to retain and assimilate discipline-specific aspects of their 'old' identity as psychologists whilst the environment compels them to revise and flexibly adapt their internalised psychological models in accordance with

environmental needs. The tensions and struggle engendered by these two influences supports Finnegan's (1997) description of identity as a "site of struggle" (p.68).

Student counsellors' identity experiences have important developmental and contemporary practice implications, with research findings suggesting that the student counselling context offers a transformative learning experience wherein the student counsellor's traditional cognitive frameworks or 'frames of 'reference' (Mezirow, 1997) as a psychologist, are challenged, interrogated and revised. The push-and-pull tensions between existing knowledge and the demands of student counselling lends itself to being contextualised within a constructivist paradigm, with specific reference to the processes of assimilation and accommodation that facilitate learning, development and change (McLeod, 2015; Piaget, 1954; 1971; Proulx, 2006; Sneed & Whitbourne, 2003). For Mezirow (1997), a critical element of transformative learning is the adaptation or shifting of one's frames of reference by critically reflecting on and altering, the underlying assumptions that inform one's interpretations and belief systems. The reality-based nature of student work prompted student counsellors in this study to critically re-evaluate what they saw as a privileged White, Eurocentric worldview embedded in their training. As student counsellors, they were required to respond to a complicated, often enmeshed student experience, with issues such as psychological trauma, food insecurity and academic under-preparation simultaneously shaping the client's presentation in student counselling. They saw their clients' enmeshed experiences as a realistic extension of the broader South African population, and believed that such experiences did not easily lend itself to the Western propensity for neat categorization.

Although this study did not intentionally set out to promote a critical psychological approach, Collins's (2004, as cited in Hook, 2004) description of critical psychology strongly resonates

with student counsellors' experiences of identity transformation in the South African student counselling context. Collins (2004, as cited in Hook, 2004) asserts that:

> Critical psychology has a double meaning: a critique of psychology and a critical way of doing psychology. The aim is not to destroy psychology but to transform it to the point where it can become what it claims to be: simultaneously a rigorous way of understanding people, and a caring profession. It is not the enemy of psychology, nor its sibling, but rather its conscience; the insistent voice of self-reflection that will not rest until psychology lives up to its best principle" (p.23)

7.5.3. Student counselling and institutional transformation

As mentioned in the introduction section of this chapter, student counsellors' experiences have important macro-level implications for the psychology profession and higher education institutions in post-apartheid South Africa. South Africa is a country that continues to strive towards redressing the inequalities of its dark past. This past was shaped by an apartheid system of racial segregation, with laws and practices that served to deny people of colour the right to a meaningful life in South Africa. In the new democratic dispensation, South African people are protected by a Bill of Rights, enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, (1996), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, colour, gender, religion and ethnicity. Government redress efforts have also been directed towards achieving economic, political and social transformation at various levels within South African society. To this end, higher education in South Africa has been identified as a key role player in assisting transformation in a post-apartheid era.

The identity experiences of student counsellors and the perceived 'step-child' status of this group, have an important bearing on legislature devised specifically to guide transformation in

South African higher education. These include the Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (DoE, 1997) and the National Plan for Higher Education (DoE, 2001). According to the Education White Paper 3, the challenge for South African higher education institutions "is to redress past inequalities and to transform the higher education system to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs, and to respond to new realities and opportunities" (DoE, 1997, p. 7). The National Plan for Higher Education (DoE, 2001) seeks to operationalize the White Paper's vision of equal access and opportunities for all, by prioritising student access, participation and graduation rates, whilst also emphasising the quality of graduates exiting the higher education system. Van Schoor (2001, as cited in Botha et al. (2005) identifies student counselling as uniquely positioned to assist higher education in meeting this transformation mandate, with Botha et al. (2005) drawing specific attention to student counselling's core function of promoting holistic student development. Botha et al. (2005) highlight a 2001 report by the Society for Student Counselling in Southern Africa (now referred to as SAACDHE), which identifies counselling and therapy, career development, academic development and student advocacy, as significant influences on student retention and throughput. Botha et al (2005) assert that:

> In the context of transforming the higher education system, increased access and retention of students are inextricably linked to counselling, career and holistic student development as an integral part of academic development and progress (p. 81).

The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), 2013) also endorses the role of student support in South African higher education, asserting that "support is crucial to ensure that students adapt to the demands of college life and that they can meet the demands of college programmes" (p. 17). The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training identifies career counselling, a core function of

student counselling services, as crucial to post-school education and training, stating that "improved career guidance at college level will help to ensure that students are able to make appropriate learning pathways and career decisions" (DHET, 2013, p.18). However, concerns raised by the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training in relation to support programmes, seems to highlight the contradictions endemic to the student counsellor's "step-child" experience, with student counselling recognized as a necessary component for student learning and success, yet not receiving the appropriate recognition and support in terms of institutional practises and funding allocation. According to the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (DHET, 2013) "support programmes are often not treated as priorities and insufficient resources are available to the colleges to improve them" (p. 17).

The National Plan for Higher Education (DoE, 2001) identifies equity and redress as key objectives guiding institutional transformation in South Africa, with the Education White Paper 3 (DoE, 1997) describing equity and redress in terms of granting individuals:

> … fair opportunities to both enter higher education programmes and to succeed in them. Applying the principle of equity implies, on the one hand, a critical identification of existing inequalities which are the product of policies, structures and structures based on race, gender, disability and other forms of discrimination or disadvantage, and on the other a programme of transformation with a view to redress. Such transformation involves not only abolishing all existing forms of unjust differentiation, but also measures of empowerment, including financial support to bring about equal opportunity for individuals (par. 1.18, pp. 7-8).

The themes of 'Challenging the status quo' and 'Student counsellor as institutional "step-child" highlight the perceived lack of support for a service designed to support higher education's

transformation objectives. The research findings indicate that student counsellors subscribe to a holistic model of student support that takes cognizance of the complex socio-historical needs and challenges of a diverse South African student population. For student counsellors, this perspective conflicted with what they saw as a narrow, traditional academic orientation perpetuated by higher education institutions in South Africa. Student counsellors furthermore saw prevailing institutional discourses around student resilience and endurance as negating the role of student counselling in higher education. Whilst student counsellors also highlighted student resilience in the context of therapeutic support, they distinguished this from what they saw as an institutional disregard for the underlying social dynamics that can influence student academic performance and well-being. For participants, such a stance suggested institutional stagnation in a climate of broader social change.

Student counsellors' experiences of marginalization may also be metaphorically likened to that of apartheid, with participants' accounts of discrimination on the basis of their 'non-academic status' suggesting a divided institutional system ironically tasked with promoting social cohesion, healing and redress in South Africa. The integration challenges encountered by research participants point to possible lags in institutional transformation, whilst also offering ways in which such transformation may be accelerated in the context of student counselling. The identity negotiation and reconstruction processes undergone by student counsellors in this study, furthermore offer a metaphorical illustration of how a once-divided South African population may be reconciled.

CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

8.1. INTRODUCTION

A number of studies have investigated the impact of work demands and context on professional identity (e.g. Bernard, 1992; Good, 1992; Izutsu & Hishinumu, 2005; Mrdjenovich & Moore, 2004; Sank & Shapiro, 1979). Such studies focus on the experiences of counselling and educational psychologists working in atypical work environments such as healthcare, with a view to establishing whether such environments pose potential identity dilemmas for these professionals. In the field of student counselling, such research is lacking. Student counselling literature globally has tended to focus on the diverse and expanding role of student counselling services in response to institutional transformation and broader social change (e.g. Bishop; 1990; Cilliers et al., 2010; Dean & Meadow, 1995; de Jager & van Lingen, 2012; Hodges, 2001; Kiracofe et al., 1994; Lafolette, 2009; Martins, 1997; Naidoo, 1997; Sokol, 2009). Little research effort has been directed at understanding how student counselling work impacts on the identity of student counsellors working in higher education. The present study sought to address this prominent research gap by investigating the identity experiences of South African psychologists employed as student counsellors. Employing IPA as the methodology of choice, the study sought to illuminate how this particular group of professionals experience and make sense of their identities within the localised context of higher education. This study offers a uniquely South African perspective on student counsellor identity, with results revealing a context-driven experience indelibly shaped by broader socio-historical, economic and cultural influences unique to the South Africa context. In so doing, this research hopes to make a

significant contribution to the field of professional identity and student counselling in particular.

8.2. ON THE CUSP OF CONTEXT AND PROFESSION: STUDENT COUNSELLOR IDENTITY AS A NEGOTIATED COMPROMISE

An intensive investigation into the experiences of student counsellors reveals a complex and multi-facetted experience embodying elements of conflict, negotiation and compromise. Results of this study suggest that student counsellors occupy a precarious and ambiguous space on the cusp of the higher education context and psychology profession, and constantly seek to negotiate a compromise that is compatible with their professional preferences, contextual demands and institutional obligations. Such complex identity experiences are compatible with postmodern explanations of identity (e.g. Hansen, 2010).

Research findings indicate that participants value their professional identity as psychologists and seek to maintain a connection to the psychology community in their capacity as student counsellors. The study also highlights powerful, context-driven influences that compete with the student counsellor' preference for this discipline-specific identification. Participants' accounts highlight a diverse range of student needs and institutional expectations inherent to the South African student counselling context, which appear to challenge their beliefs and assumptions about what it means to be a psychologist in student counselling. Diversity formed an indelible part of the student counsellor's work experience, with participants highlighting a complex South African student population presenting with racial, ethnic, cultural and language differences. Also highlighted were socio-economic and lifestyle disparities amongst the student population, stemming primarily from South Africa's legacy of apartheid. For participants, this historical legacy required them to be more cognizant of systemic issues that can impact on

student adjustment and success in higher education. This, coupled with the lack of appropriate multi-disciplinary staff to adequately attend to diverse student needs, necessitated that student counsellors go beyond their narrow psychological scopes of practice and assume a more multi-disciplinary approach to their work. Participants highlighted a broad range of discipline-specific issues consistent with their psychological scope of practice, such as depression, anxiety, trauma and adjustment disorders, to more context-specific academic and developmental work. These included career assessments and counselling, academic and life-skills training as well as psycho-education and awareness campaigns that focused on diversity and student empowerment. Participants also cited systemic issues of a psycho-social nature, such as poverty, food insecurity and accommodation difficulties, which many saw as a potential threat to their psychological scope of practice.

Whilst the research findings draw attention to the ambiguous nature of student counsellor identity, the findings also raise further questions about how professional identity is understood, conceptualized and enacted in context-specific settings such as student counselling. Student counsellors' identity experiences seem to suggest that professional identity is an idiosyncratic, context-driven reality, rather than a rigid construct that is fixed by one's professional training and constant across work contexts and situations. The research findings further suggest that the student counselling context warrants a unique inter-disciplinary identity that can accommodate the diverse demands and complex dynamics unique to this setting. This is in keeping with SAACDHE's vision of a more inclusive, multi-disciplinary identity for student counselling and development services in the South African higher education context. The notion of a unique student counselling identity also resonates with existing discussions on the professionalization of student counselling and development services in South Africa, particularly the recognition

of student counselling as a distinct community of practice with its own unique identity (e.g. Beekman et al., 2001; de Jager & van Lingen, 2012).

Research findings indicate that student counsellors see themselves making a unique psychological contribution to student well-being and academic success in higher education Results of this study also draw attention to the problematic impact of student counselling demands on psychologists' identity, with the implication being that this setting, with its ambiguous role expectations and absence of appropriate multi-disciplinary staff, is not conducive to discipline-specific roles and identities. An appropriate identity compromise therefore has to be constantly negotiated by the psychologist employed in student counselling. The identity challenges highlighted by research participants suggests that a multi-disciplinary team is needed to fulfil student counselling's holistic objectives. Results of this study therefore support De Jager's (2012) assertion that student counselling services ideally should consist of "multi-disciplinary cross-functional teams with different capabilities in order to render comprehensive professional services to diverse student communities" (p. 12), whilst also drawing attention to the ethical and practical complications that can arise when this multi-disciplinary vision is not realistically enabled with the appropriate role players. The research findings indicate further that the lack of appropriate staff in student counselling can result in psychologists feeling exploited and at a higher risk for burn-out. One participant described this experience as being "stretched like a pancake". The question that needs to be asked, therefore, is whether it is appropriate for one discipline, i.e. psychology, to assume the roles and responsibilities ideally meant to be shared by a number of other, related disciplines?

Participants' identity experiences offer a context-specific extension of Davey's (2010) work, supporting in particular, the notion of identity as a state of becoming, belonging, doing and

being. My findings indicate that the student counsellor identity is a dynamic state of *being* that is constantly reconstructed in the context of *doing* student counselling work, and through the negotiation of competing professional and institutional memberships. This IPA study suggests further that the identity of the student counsellor is shaped by experiences of both *belonging* and *not belonging*, with the experience of institutional marginalization strengthening the student counsellor's affiliation with the HPCSA and student counselling team.

In my IPA analysis of student counsellors' experiences, I found that the pursuit of a meaningful identity is an ongoing work-in-progress for the psychologist employed in student counselling. It involves the pursuit of a workable identity compromise that balances personal preferences with contextual demands and obligations. Metaphorical parallels may be drawn between the experiences of student counsellors who participated in this study, and the broader identity challenges facing South Africans in a post-apartheid era. Just as student counsellors grapple with issues of identity transition, belonging and marginalization in higher education, so too do South Africans grapple with the identity ideal bestowed upon them as the 'rainbow nation' in a new South African democracy. The difficulties inherent in reconciling and integrating previously divided racial identities into a common 'South African' identity is perhaps analogous to the experiential complexities encountered by participants in their pursuit of a meaningful identity in higher education.

8.3. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study offers a uniquely South African perspective on student counsellor identity. The research findings are therefore limited to the experiences of South African psychologists employed as student counsellors in higher education. It is recommended that similar qualitative studies be conducted on an international scale, with a view to identifying similarities and

differences in experience. Such research could augment the present study's findings and make a meaningful contribution to the field of student counselling globally. It would be particularly interesting to ascertain how established student counselling is in other African countries, and whether socio-historical, cultural, economic and language issues also emerge as important considerations for student counsellors in these areas.

Student counselling directors or managers were not included in the study's sample. It is recommended that future research be conducted on this group, with the aim of exploring how they experience and make sense of their identities in student counselling. Specific areas for investigation could include the impact of managerial role on professional identity, and whether psychologists in senior positions identify more strongly with the higher education institution than the psychology profession. Such findings could augment the present research and offer a more comprehensive perspective on student counselling in the South African context.

The experiences of student counsellors from other disciplines, such as social work, are also not represented in this study. This is a potential area for further investigation both locally and abroad, given that the psychologists in the sample who had prior social work exposure, leaned more towards generalist, multi-disciplinary interpretations of their student counsellor identity. Research should focus specifically on the extent to which other disciplines are represented in student counselling, as well as the capacity in which these individuals are employed. The aim should be to establish whether these professionals are also employed as 'student counsellors' and if so, what their experience of identity is in this setting. Cillers et al. (2010) conducted a national benchmarking study of South African student counselling centres/ units five years ago, and reported that social workers were employed in forty-five percent of the student counselling units surveyed. Future research could provide a more updated indication of   whether

SAACDHE'S vision of an inclusive, multi-disciplinary identity for student counselling services (de Jager & van Lingen, 2012), is being achieved. It would also be interesting to ascertain whether social workers, employed as student counsellors, perceive role differences between themselves and other professionals employed in the same capacity. It would also be useful to investigate how important professional titles are to practitioners from other disciplines, and whether they, like psychologists, prefer to use discipline-specific titles in the student counselling context.

Research findings are qualitative in nature and reflect the employment of a particular mode of phenomenological enquiry i.e. IPA. IPA adopts an interpretive or hermeneutic stance which acknowledges that one cannot directly access research participants' experiences except through the researcher's own interpretation thereof (Smith et al. 2009). This interpretive process or "double hermeneutic" (Smith et al., 2009) therefore impacts on the type of data gained from the study, and may be construed as a limitation. Qualitative research in general is subjective, with the researcher's own worldviews, perspectives and experiences potentially shaping the direction and nature of research undertaken (Ratner, 2002). Issues of personal reflexivity have already been acknowledged in Chapters One, Four and Five of this dissertation and will thus not be duplicated here. However, it is important to reiterate salient personal and professional influences that may have influenced my research interest in student counsellor identity. These include my own personal experiences of an ambiguous racial identity, which sensitized me to the complex nature of identity and possibly coloured my perspective and interpretation of student counsellors' experiences in this research. In addition, whilst my own personal aspirations and frustrations as a student counsellor may have helped me to identify with the challenges and dilemmas reported by participants, I have had to be mindful of projecting my own frames of reference onto these individuals. Issues of personal reflectivity necessitated that

I maintain an introspective stance throughout the research journey – an experience facilitated by regular researcher debriefing and supervision with my research supervisor.

In order to ensure transparency and credibility of my research findings, an independent third person was also requested to review my research themes and interpretations. However, given the subjective nature of qualitative research, I cannot rule out the possibility that other researchers, investigating the same phenomenon, may have arrived at different interpretations and conclusions.

From a quantitative perspective, the study's sample size of fourteen may be regarded as small. However, it is fairly large in comparison to other IPA studies. My intention was to select a sample large enough to capture a broad range of student counsellors' experiences, without compromising IPA's in-depth, idiographic focus (Smith et al., 2009). Whilst qualitative research such as IPA allows for the generation of rich, detailed information, findings cannot be generalized to the entire student counselling population in South Africa. This exploratory study illuminates areas of potential generalization which may best be investigated using quantitative approaches. Quantitative research that investigates matters of statistical relevance to student counselling, may therefore complement the present research findings. Areas of focus could include the employment distribution of different disciplines in student counselling, title preferences of student counselling practitioners and the statistical prevalence of presenting problems in this setting, Quantitative research exploring the degree of student counsellor job satisfaction as well as retention and turnover rates of student counsellors in South African higher education institutions, would also provide a useful augment to the present study's experiential focus.

The findings of this particular study illustrate the utility of in-depth qualitative approaches such as IPA and the necessity of substantiating quantitative research data with more intensive, subjective exploration. An example of this is the theme of the student counsellor as institutional "step-child", which appears to challenge the results of Cilliers et al.'s (2010) student counselling benchmarking survey. Seventy-three percent of respondents in Cilliers et al.'s (2010) study indicated that they felt valued by senior management at their respective institutions, whilst the theme of the student counsellor as institutional "step-child" indicates that student counsellors feel marginalized and undervalued in higher education. This suggests that qualitative methods such as IPA may provide a more in-depth and revealing subjective perspective which may otherwise be obscured by studies offering a more statistical perspective on the same phenomenon.

IPA research is not theory-driven (Smith et al., 2009) and thus not conducive to the construction of a theory or conceptual model. IPA research instead prioritizes "people's experiences and/or understandings of a particular phenomenon" (Smith et al., 2009, p.46). IPA research findings can then prompt future theory-building initiatives. One such example is the use of South African student counsellors' experiences to review existing theories and models of student development and support in higher education. Student counselling and development services globally are informed by student-centred theories, models and frameworks that prioritise the profiles, needs and challenges of the student population in higher education. This was discussed at length in Chapters Two and Three. However, student counsellors' perceptions of themselves as disempowered "step-children" in higher education, point to the need for such experiences to be included in models and theories of student development and support. The research findings suggest that a more inclusive model of student development and support that incorporates the profile of both the student *and* the student counsellor, is long overdue. Such a model may offer

a more holistic and pragmatic approach to student counselling services in higher education, whilst also helping to legitimize the role of the student counsellor in this context.

8.4. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
8.4.1. Professional practice implications

This IPA study highlights an indelible connection between student counsellor identity and student counselling practice, and provides a clear illustration of how professional identity informs professional practice in the context of student counselling. The complex range of psychological and psycho-social issues which student counsellors engage with, coupled with their re-appraisal of the therapeutic role and the power dynamics inherent in student counselling, point to the need for a critical re-appraisal of how psychology is conceptualized, taught and applied in the South African context. This study draws strong parallels between student counselling's systemic focus, its developmental orientation and the values and principles of community psychology. Student counselling's engagement with broader psycho-social issues such HIV/Aids, poverty, food insecurity and skills development needs, highlight the pivotal role that community psychology can play in addressing ongoing concerns about psychology's relevance in the South African context (e.g. Dawes, 1998; Macleod, 2004; Naidoo, 1996; 2000; Piper-Mandy & Rowe, 2010' Pretorius, 2012).

The research findings also have important transformative implications for psychologists' scopes of practice in South Africa. Whilst the research findings suggest that counselling and educational psychologists may be more suited to the student counselling context than clinical psychologists, participants' work experiences overall strongly suggest a need for the HPCSA and its sub-division, the Professional Board for Psychology, to reconsider the feasibility of narrow psychological scopes of practice. The identity dilemmas reported by   student

counsellors in this study, suggests the need for a broader, generic model of identity and practice that is versatile and reflective of broader social engagement. Such a model would thus enable psychologists, irrespective of category and scope of practice, to flexibly adapt and function in a variety of communities and work settings in South Africa. Pretorius (2013) argues against a generic category "that does not fit all people in South Africa" (p. 513), proposing instead that all categories promote equal access to psychological services by rendering services where they are needed the most. It could be argued that a generic model of practice can serve the dual purpose of allowing all psychologists equal access to settings where the service is needed the most, without denying these professionals the opportunity to specialize in environments of their choosing.

Results indicate that professional bodies and associations like SAACDHE and PsySSA are under-utilized by psychologists working in student counselling, with participants relying primarily on the HPCSA to negotiate perceived identity challenges and threats in higher education. Both SAACDHE and PsySSA are professional bodies that espouse a commitment to developing the profession of psychology and field of student counselling respectively. It is hoped that the results of the present study encourage greater dialogue and collaboration between the HPCSA, PsySSA and SAACDHE on matters of concern to South African student counsellors. A possibility that student counsellors could explore is the establishment of a specific PsySSA sub-division for psychologists working in the student counselling context of higher education. Such a division is currently lacking. The Division of Psychology Professionals in Public Service (PiPs), launched at the 2013 PsySSA congress, represents psychologists employed in the public service sector (Fafudi, 2014). This divisions aims to:

advocate for and promote the work interests and conditions of service for psychology

professionals (including psychologists, psychometrists, registered counsellors, interns, and

community Service psychologists) in the public sector. The conditions of service include aspects such as annual salary adjustments, salary scales or levels, performance bonuses, pay incentives, and pension benefits. It also includes aspects impacting on service delivery such as the availability of appropriate facilities, equipment and staffing levels (Fafudi, 2014, p. 4).

The present study highlighted similar issues of concern to student counsellors, and suggests that the establishment of a similar sub-division for South African student counsellors in higher education is both timely and necessary. Issues that could be taken up by this proposed division of PsySSA include the following:

- the perceived impact of institutional titles and classification on student counsellor role clarity and status in higher education.

- the lack of multi-disciplinary staff to enable student counselling's objective of a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary service in higher education, as well as the ethical implications of staffing constraints for psychologists' scope of practice.

- compensation disparities between psychologists in higher education and the public sector, and the impact thereof on student counsellors' value and status.

This study supports the notion of a multi-disciplinary, group student counselling identity that still recognizes the distinct psychological contribution of the psychologist to the student counselling team. The findings indicate that the 'psychologist' title is important to professionals working in student counselling. Participants who were allowed to retain their 'psychologist' title welcomed this institutional practice, whilst those who were referred to as 'student counsellor' felt that the title undermined their professional status and promoted role blurring and confusion. In light of these findings, it is suggested that standardization of

professional titles for student counselling services be considered by institutions both in South Africa and abroad, with a view to psychologists retaining the discipline-specific title of 'psychologist' whilst still contributing to the multi-disciplinary vision of student counselling services in higher education. The HPCSA, PsySSA and SAACDHE are encouraged to collaborate with each other and collectively drive this process.

Student counsellors' experiences suggest that higher education should ideally be employing a variety of staff from disciplines relevant to student counselling, including social work, education and research psychology. South African institutions that do reflect this diversity seem to be the exception, rather than the norm. This may reflect, to some extent, funding disparities that enable some institutions to employ more staff than others. My research recommendation could be construed by some as idealistic, given the decline in government funding and consequent need for higher education institutions to supplement their income and resources by other means (Wangenge-Ouma & Cloete, 2008). However, it is argued that such inclusive employment practices could expedite the achievement of a comprehensive and effective student counseling service in higher education. This, in turn, could enhance student throughput rates which institutional funding depends on. A more comprehensive student counselling team could also help reduce the potential for burn-out highlighted by some participants in this study. The distinct contributions of these role players could be recognized by also allowing them to retain their discipline-specific titles in student counselling.

8.4.2 Professional training implications

The present study's findings support postmodern interpretations of identity as an idiosyncratic, context-driven experience that is constantly negotiated and adapted in response to a variety of systemic influences. This has important implications for the professional training of

psychologists both locally and abroad, particularly the preparation of psychologists for organizational engagement and adaptation to work environments such as student counselling. Research findings therefore support existing literature that highlights the importance of adequately preparing professionals for the world of work (e.g. Branch, 2002). Branch (2002) recommends the integration of a professional identity training component into graduate and postgraduate studies in order to foster more realistic and accurate identity perceptions and expectations in the workplace. The identity experiences and challenges encountered by student counsellors in this study, reinforce the need for such training. It is suggested that students be granted both theoretical and practical opportunities to engage with the meaning and experience of 'professional identity', particularly the shared and nuanced complexities surrounding what it means to be a psychologist in a specific work setting and social environment.

The South African student counselling context is a microcosmic reflection of the broader South African society, with its diverse and often harsh psycho-social challenges that include poverty, food insecurity, crime and violence as well as HIV/Aids. Participants expressed concern about the elitist, Eurocentric nature of their professional training, which they saw as incompatible with the actual experiences of vulnerable groups in South African society. Community psychology, with its systemic orientation and empowering, developmental focus, is deemed the appropriate alternative to mainstream psychology's narrow focus. The research findings highlight the need for an indigenous, community-oriented model of psychology that can equip psychologists in general and student counsellors in particular, to engage with the myriad of socio-cultural and psycho-social realities of South African people. Such a model would be compatible with the lived experiences of the population it intends to serve, rather than imposing onto South Africans, an imported, foreign reality. The research findings furthermore advance the importance of a proactive, wellness approach that can empower, rather than   pathologize,

South African experience. This shift away from a clinical discourse serves to elevate the importance of both community psychology and counselling psychology to the psychology profession, and necessitates a more inclusive psychology curriculum that incorporates both pathogenic and salutogenic models of practice that can best meet the diverse needs of the South African population.

This study has also has important implications for peer supervision as well as the continuing professional development (CPD) obligations of qualified psychologists in South Africa. The research findings highlight a dynamic and complicated student counsellor identity experience, with the implication being that professional identity is constantly evaluated and revised in the context of contextual demands and influences. This dynamic necessitates ongoing peer consultation and support as well as professional dialogue at the level of CPD forums.

8.4.3. Institutional implications

South African higher education is strongly urged to take cognizance of the "step-child" status reported by student counsellors in this study. Such experiences suggest possible contradictions and inconsistencies between government legislation designed to promote institutional transformation in post-apartheid South Africa, and the actual policies and practices implemented by institutions themselves. If such discrepancies continue, they could point to a lag in institutional transformation and a possible failure on the part of higher education to meet its transformation mandate set by the South African government.

The "step-child" status of the student counsellor also highlights the need for higher education institutions to review this experience in the context of employee job satisfaction and turnover rates in student counselling. Specific aspects highlighted by student counsellors include

institutional classification, career development opportunities, remuneration and benefits for professional staff in the support sector. Participants also identified productivity expectations, funding and resource constraints as impacting on staff morale and increasing their risk for burn-out and compassion fatigue. Student counsellors' experiences necessitate a review of higher education's current recruitment and retention strategies for professional staff classified as 'support staff' or 'administrative staff'. Research findings suggest that the value placed on student counselling services in government legislature and institutional policies is not necessarily translated into practice, with student counsellors feeling that their mediocre salary and lack of career mobility undermines their professional status and growth potential in higher education. To this end, it is recommended that higher education consider specific recruitment and retention strategies such as the Occupation-specific dispensation (OSD) discussed previously in Chapter One.

Revised salary structures for student counsellors may help to address observed salary disparities between psychologists employed in public service, private practice and higher education. This, in turn, may reduce the "step-child" view which student counsellors currently have of themselves. Student counsellors also highlighted the need for greater autonomy and seniority as they matured professionally, but noted with frustration that such opportunities were limited in student counselling. Wachowiak, Bauer and Simono (1979) suggest incremental rank systems or semi-administrative positions, as well as exchange programmes, sabbaticals and role rotation to prevent burn-out amongst student counselling staff. Such strategies and benefits could be appropriately adapted to the South African student counselling context and should therefore be considered by South African institutions of higher learning. A review of student counselling structures at the various South African institutions reveals that at some institutions, the student counselling department is sub-divided into specialized units, each

focusing on a specific aspect of student counselling and development, for example, academic support, personal counselling and therapy, career development. These different units thus complement each other. Staff within these units also occupy varying positions of seniority. Such models of structuring can promote greater role clarity and expertise as well as support the professional preference of psychologists working as student counsellors. Should financial constraints prevent the establishment of formal specialized structures, institutions could consider assigning specialized portfolios to student counsellors. These should be important considerations, given that practice preference or the 'Preferred Self', emerged as a core aspect of the student counsellor's identity experience.

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APPENDIX A

(PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM)

[4]SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Doctor of Philosophy - PhD (Psychology)

Researcher: Paulette Naidoo

Supervisor: Professor Duncan Cartwright

Dear Respondent

My name is Paulette Naidoo and I am a counselling psychologist and student counsellor currently employed at the [5]Centre for Student Counselling, Westville campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am also a Doctoral student registered with the School of Psychology, Howard College campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban. My ethical clearance number is HSS/0381/2010. My supervisor is Professor Duncan Cartwright, Associate Professor and Head of the Centre for Applied Psychology in the School of Psychology.

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[4] Previous departmental structure prior to 2012 UKZN devolution. Psychology department's current designation is as follows: **Discipline of Psychology, School of Applied Human Sciences, College of Humanities**

[5] Departmental title prior to UKZN devolution. This has since changed to Student Support Services: College of Law & Management Studies.

You are invited to participate in my doctoral research study exploring the professional identity of psychologists working as student counsellors in the student counselling context in South Africa. The title of my study is: [6]***The Psychologist as Student Counsellor: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of professional identity in the South African student counselling context.'***

The main aim of my qualitative study is to capture and understand how psychologists experience and make sense of their professional identities as student counsellors, as well as the influences impacting on the identity construction process. I will be adopting the qualitative research method known as interpretative phenomenological analysis in my investigation. Through this study I hope to address the research gap in the area of 'student counsellor' professional identity noted both locally and abroad. The results of this study are envisaged to have relevant implications for areas such as professional training and internship programmes for psychologists, professional development of qualified practitioners as well as to stimulate dialogue amongst professionals and professional associations about the current and future status of psychologists in the country, particularly those employed in the student counselling context. It is also anticipated that the results of the study will add value to the design and delivery of counselling services in higher education.

As participants will be employees of higher education institutions, permission to interview subjects will be sought from the relevant institutional authorities prior to commencing

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[6] Original title of dissertation. This title has since been revised. Current title is as follows: '***On the cusp of context and profession: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of identity negotiation and compromise amongst South African psychologists employed in student counselling'***.

fieldwork. Should you agree to take part in the study, you will be requested to participate in two semi-structured, in-depth interviews scheduled on different days, lasting approximately 90 minutes each. I will also request you to complete a short biographical questionnaire concerning your qualifications and work history that will assist me in getting to know you better. All interviews will be conducted by the researcher herself. All costs relating to the study will also be borne by the researcher. Subjects are not anticipated to incur any financial expenses resulting from participation in the study; should this occur, subjects will be fully reimbursed. The interviews will be scheduled at a venue and time of your convenience. Interviews will be audiotaped, transcribed verbatim and coded. During the interviews I will request you to share your experiences of working as a student counsellor, and how this impacts on your sense of professional identity. No risk or harm to yourself or others is anticipated in this study. You are under no obligation to participate in this study, and are free to withdraw from the interview at any point during the interview process. Once interviews have been completed, data analysed and documented in the study, it would not be possible to retract information. Your decision not to take part in this study will be respected and will have no negative repercussions on your personal or professional life.

Confidentiality of information will be maintained at all times. Your identity will be protected and anonymity maintained through the use of a pseudonym which you may select should you so wish. The specific names of participating institutions will not be mentioned in the study; instead, reference will be made to participating regions and institution types e.g. University of Technology. Tapes of interviews and transcribed material will be kept safe at all times by the researcher. Extracts from your interviews may be incorporated into my thesis, future academic articles, professional conferences and seminars that may emanate from the study, without revealing your identity. In instances where I require clarification of interview responses or

further information from you, I may request this via e-mail or arrange a follow-up interview, at your convenience. For purposes of assessing the study's validity, I will maintain all relevant documents and artefacts pertaining to the study from the beginning of the research process through to the final report, including documents such as the research proposal, interview schedule, audiotapes and verbatim transcriptions, thereby enabling an independent researcher not part of the study to track and assess links and connections between the raw data and the final report (Smith et al., 2009). Upon completion of the study and the awarding of the degree, audiotapes will be destroyed.

Should you agree to participate on the basis of having read and understood the nature and conditions of this research study, please sign the designated section below. . This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethics Committee, whose task it is to make sure that the research participants are protected from harm.

Contact details for UKZN Research Office:

 Ms Phumelele Ximba

tel: 031 260 3587

 E-mail: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

Should you require clarification or further information regarding the study, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor. Relevant contact details are provided below.

PARTICIPANT DECLARATION

I ………………………………………………..... (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the

research project, and consent to participating in the study. I agree to complete the requested biographical questionnaire, consent to be interviewed and grant permission for interviews to be audiotaped, and for transcribed interview material to be utilized for research purposes.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw consent from the study up until the time of interviews, should I so wish.

_____   _____

Signature of participant   Date

_____   _____

Signature of researcher   Date

Contact details of Researcher:

Paulette Naidoo

Counselling Psychologist

Student Counsellor

Centre for Student Counselling

Westville Campus

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tel: (031) 260 7084

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[7] This fax number has since changed. Current fax number is as follows: (031) 260 7581.

Contact details of Supervisor:

Duncan Cartwright, Ph.D.

Associate Professor & Head: Centre for Applied Psychology

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APPENDIX B

(GATEKEEPER'S CONSENT FORM)

[8]SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Doctor of Philosophy - PhD (Psychology)

Researcher: Paulette Naidoo

Supervisor: Professor Duncan Cartwright

Dear Respondent

My name is Paulette Naidoo and I am a counselling psychologist and student counsellor currently employed at the [9]Centre for Student Counselling, Westville campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am also a Doctoral student registered with the School of Psychology, Howard College Campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban. My ethical clearance number is HSS /0381/2010. My supervisor is Professor Duncan Cartwright, Associate Professor and Head of the Centre for Applied Psychology in the School of Psychology.

I request permission from your Institution to allow me to interview psychologists for my doctoral research study exploring the professional identity of psychologists working as

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[8] Previous departmental structure prior to 2012 UKZN devolution. Psychology department's current designation is as follows: **Discipline of Psychology, School of Applied Human Sciences, College of Humanities**

[9] Departmental title prior to UKZN devolution. This has since changed to Student Support Services: College of Law & Management Studies

student counsellors in the student counselling context in South Africa. The title of my research is: [10] *'The Psychologist as Student Counsellor: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of professional identity in the South African student counselling context.'*

The main aim of my qualitative study is to capture and understand how psychologists experience and make sense of their professional identities as student counsellors, as well as the influences impacting on the identity construction process. I will be adopting the qualitative research method known as interpretative phenomenological analysis, in my investigation. Through this study I hope to address the research gap in the area of 'student counsellor' professional identity noted both locally and abroad. The results of this study are envisaged to have relevant implications for areas such as professional training and internship programmes for psychologists, professional development of qualified practitioners as well as to stimulate dialogue amongst professionals and professional associations about the current and future status of psychologists in the country, particularly those employed in the student counselling context. It is also anticipated that the results of the study will add value to the design and delivery of counselling services in higher education.

Individuals who agree to be part of the study will be requested to participate in semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Participants will also be requested to complete a short biographical questionnaire concerning their qualifications and work history which will assist me in getting to know them better. All interviews will be conducted by the researcher herself. All costs relating to the study will also be borne by the researcher. Subjects are not anticipated to incur

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[10] Original title of dissertation. This title has since been revised. Current title is as follows: '*On the cusp of context and profession: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of identity negotiation and compromise amongst South African psychologists employed in student counselling*'.

any financial expenses resulting from participation in the study; should this occur, subjects will be fully reimbursed. The interviews will be scheduled at a venue and time of participants' convenience. Interviews will be audiotaped, transcribed verbatim and coded. During the interviews I will request participants to share their experiences of working as a student counsellor, and how this impacts on their sense of professional identity. No risk or harm to participants, others or to the reputation of your institution is anticipated in this study. Participants will be advised verbally and in writing that participation is voluntary, and that they are free to withdraw from the study up until the time of interviewing.

Confidentiality of information will be maintained at all times. Participants' identities will be protected and anonymity maintained through the use of pseudonyms. The specific names of participating institutions will not be mentioned in the study; instead, reference will be made to participating regions and institution types e.g. University of Technology. Tapes of interviews and transcribed material will be kept safe at all times by the researcher. Extracts from interviews may be incorporated into my thesis, future academic articles, professional conferences and seminars that may emanate from the study, without revealing participant or institution identity. Should you agree for your employee to participate on the basis of having read and understood the nature and conditions of this research study, please sign the designated section below. This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethics Committee, whose task it is to make sure that the research participants are protected from harm.

Contact details for UKZN Research Office:

 Ms Phumelele Ximba

Telephone: 031 260 3587

E-mail: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

Should you require information regarding the study, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor. Relevant contact details are provided overleaf.

INSTITUTIONAL CONSENT

I …………………………………………………..... (Full names of respondent) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and consent to psychologists/ student counsellors employed at ……………………………… ………………………………………. (Institution name) participating in the study.

_____   _____

Signature of Institutional   Date

Representative

_____   _____

Signature of researcher   Date

Contact details of Researcher:

Paulette Naidoo

Counselling Psychologist

Student counsellor

Centre for Student Counselling

Westville Campus

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Contact details of Supervisor:

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Associate Professor & Head: Centre for Applied Psychology

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[11] This fax number has since changed. Current fax number is as follows: (031) 260 7581.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW 1: FOCUSED LIFE HISTORY AND DETAILS OF EXPERIENCE

1. Please describe your journey towards being a student counsellor. How did you enter the field of student counselling?

2. What is your official title/designation in the institution?

3. How do you feel this title (what does this title mean to you)?

4. Describe your initial experience as a psychologist working in student counselling when you first started here.

5. How do you currently experience your role as a student counsellor?

6. What experiences and influences have you had that you feel impact on how you see yourself as a student counselor?

7. Describe the kind of impact that these factors have had on your experience as a student counsellor.

8. What part of your work do you value? Why?

9. What part of your work experiences do you not value? Why?

10. How do you deal with these negative aspects of your work experience?

11. How does being based in a student counseling centre influence how you practice and operate?

INTERVIEW 2: REFLECTION ON MEANING

1. Given what you have said about your initial and current experience of being a student counsellor, how have you come to understand your identity?

2. What do you think your experience says about how counsellors are valued in higher education?

3. What do you think your experience says about the effectiveness of student counsellors in higher education?

4. Please share with me what implications you think your experience as a counsellor has, for the professional training and development of psychologists?

5. What do you think your experience of identity says about the status and position of student counsellors in South Africa?

6. What implications do you think your experience in student counseling has for the profession of psychology in general?

7. In light of your own experiences in student counseling, how do you see the future in general?

8. How do you see the future in student counseling, specifically?

APPENDIX D

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Personal Details

Name & Surname	
Date of birth	
Gender	
Race	
Marital status	
Dependents (yes/no)	
If yes, please specify number	
Place of residence	
Contact details (cellphone, landline numbers and e-mail address)	

2. Tertiary Education
Please specify all degrees and diplomas obtained, including non-psychology degrees**.**

Degree/ Diploma	Year obtained	Institution

3. Psychology internship

Name of internship site and institution	
Period of internship	
Internship completion date	
List your main activities and roles during your internship	

List the main populations served during your internship (e.g. children, adolescents)	

4. Occupational history
(Please include all contract, permanent employment and non-psychological positions)

Place of employment	Position held	Period of employment	Main roles and functions	Population(s) served

5. Current employment

Details of employer (Centre/department and institution)	
Position held	
HPCSA professional category registration (e.g.clinical, counselling,educational)	
Official institutional title	
Total number of years employed in this work setting	
Please list any other positions previously held in this setting	
Please list **all** work activities in your current post	

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION!