

**Constructing gender: Postgraduate psychology students' gendered accounts of
their future profession**

by

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ABSTRACT

In this qualitative study I explored how postgraduate psychology students treat gender in their accounts of their future profession, using a social constructionist framework. I considered how this group of future psychologists drew upon gendered accounts in three different settings in which they found themselves within the profession. These included exploring how participants constructed their own gendered identities in their narratives of how they came to be pursuing professional training in psychology; how gender featured in their accounts of therapeutic processes and interactions with clients; and finally, their reflections on gendered participation in the broader field of psychology.

Interview data from two semi-structured focus group discussions with 12 postgraduate psychology students was analysed using social constructionist thematic analysis. Three main themes were identified that related to participants' gendered accounts according to their personal, professional and more general constructions of gender, namely: 1) psychology as a profession of choice; 2) setting the scene within psychology in terms of gender, which was divided into: a) a construction of gender from the psychologists' perspective, and b) psychologists' construction of gender from their clients' perspectives. The third and last main theme was 3) Increased competition for females as a consequence of women's empowerment.

This study intended to contribute to the expansion of existing literature by addressing the issue of gender and its related aspects in the field of psychology in a South African context, given the dearth of extended research conducted in developing countries so far. The findings supported those of previous studies to an extent, but mainly redressed the perspective of gender through the identification of new themes. By looking into postgraduate psychology students' constructions of their own gendered accounts it appeared that upcoming psychologists viewed gender in complex ways, instead of typically reported notions of difference, inequality and inferiority or superiority. In this way, the benefit of understanding professional development within the field of psychology served as a valuable point of departure in understanding debates around how gender was implicated in the clientele psychologists serve.

Keywords: Psychology, gender, feminisation, gender role, gender identity, social constructionism, thematic analysis, stereotypes and discourse, therapy/therapeutic, postgraduate students.

DECLARATION

I, **Tamanna Hira**, know and accept that plagiarism (i.e., to use another's work and to pretend that it is one's own) is wrong. Consequently, I declare that:

- The research report is my own work.
- I have correctly acknowledged all direct quotations **and** paraphrased ideas/content. **In addition** I have provided a complete, alphabetized reference list, as required by the APA method of referencing.
- I have not allowed, and will not allow, anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as his or her own work.
- I understand that the University of the Pretoria may take disciplinary action against me if there is a belief that this is not my own unaided work, or that I failed to acknowledge the sources of the ideas or words in my writing.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this qualitative research study I explore postgraduates' constructions of gender in the profession of psychology, and the gendered discourses on which they draw when participating in it.

1.2 CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

As a student studying for a master's degree in Counselling Psychology I became aware of the interaction between myself and other students in my group regarding the representation of males in comparison to females in the profession of psychology, and the resulting feminisation. Strebel et al. (2006) see the dynamics behind gender roles, their extent and influence as being culture-specific, and argue that, "social constructionist theory recognises that norms for masculinity, femininity, roles allocated to women and men, and sexual scripts vary widely across communities" (p. 517).

Thus, in order to fully appreciate the position of psychology in terms of gender in South Africa it is necessary first to understand constructions of gender that pertain specifically to the field of psychology in South Africa. Strebel et al. (2006) note that men and women in this context have a strong tendency to prescribe and conform to traditional gender roles which stereotype women as submissive caregivers and men as the dominant providers of the household. The tendency of many South Africans to conform to and remain within the limits of prescribed gender roles has implications for the field of psychology in South Africa. More specifically, a population that refrains from challenging the boundaries of their gender roles could perhaps also be one that would have difficulty in challenging constructions of psychology as a gendered field.

It is important to acknowledge that South Africa has undergone immense changes in the last few decades, and the worldwide trend by which dominant notions of gender are increasingly challenged is also taking place in the country (Strebel et al., 2006). This is evident in women's increasing participation in higher education as well as their growing representation in previously male-dominated fields such as science, engineering and technology (Shackleton, Riordan, & Simonis, 2006). However, despite some gains in professional and workforce participation many women still experience unequal treatment and the imposition of rigid and discriminatory gender roles. This is especially visible in developing countries such as South Africa, a context in which the equality of men and

women remains a new concept that challenges traditional gendered structures, particularly those modelled on patriarchy. Stevens (2007) writes that although women are no longer confined to what was previously defined as their gender role, i.e., housework, cooking, cleaning, bearing and raising children, they are still much more likely to be unemployed than men because of the pervasive nature of such stereotypes. Similarly, men also often remain constrained by traditional notions of masculinity in which male identity is typically regarded as that of being a breadwinner, being in a position of authority in the home and workplace, and garnering respect and high status from others (Ratele, 2006; Sideris, 2005). Recent changes in gendered constructions mean that while such traditional notions of gender still exert great influence they are also increasingly unsettled or resisted in certain South African contexts. With women now beginning to gain power in South African society there has been a gradual and currently ongoing change in expectations of maleness and femaleness (Strebel et al., 2006). High rates of unemployment are causing many men to lose their role as breadwinners, while the introduction of Black Empowerment has been accompanied by an increase in the number of women taking up such positions within higher education.

The recent shifts in “gender power dynamics as a result of women’s increasing earning capacity” (Strebel et al., 2006, p. 522) may have positive implications for the field of psychology and could potentially contribute to the development of less restrictive gendered perspectives and constructions of the field. Professional participation in psychology has historically been constructed in strongly gendered terms, with it first being characterised by male domination of the field and more recently as being increasingly feminised (Skinner & Louw, 2009). The “feminisation of psychology” has been coined as a phrase to describe this recent reversal in gendered representation, with several authors noting that the discipline is increasingly characterised by the disproportionate participation of women (Shefer & Tshabalala, 2009; Skinner & Louw, 2009; Reskin & Hartman, 1986). In addition, historically, psychology’s clientele has typically been depicted as female (Robertson & Fitzgerald, 1992), but the transformation of restrictive gendered constructions could allow the field to gain greater breadth, with professional participation of neither men nor women being discouraged and increased uptake of psychological services by male clientele potentially emerging (Leach, Akhurst, & Basson, 2003).

As I shall demonstrate in subsequent chapters in this mini-dissertation, the feminisation of psychology has received some research interest (Callaghan, 2005; Richter & Griesel,

1999; Rosenzweig, 1994), however there is a lack of research that specifically explore how students in psychology construct gender in relation to the discipline.

1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Psychology as a discipline has historically been constructed in gendered terms, with current discourses around gender and psychology appearing to focus on a growing concern over the feminisation of psychology, yet there is a paucity of studies that explore how students in psychology construct gender. Accounts of how postgraduate psychology students (and by implication, future psychologists) treat notions of gender when reflecting on the discipline can be valuable in transforming restrictive notions of gendered participation the field. This can not only benefit professional development but can also be valuable in informing debates around how gender is implicated in the clientele psychologists serve. This study will explore debates and concerns around gender by analysing constructions of gender in the profession of psychology experienced by postgraduate psychology students themselves. Specifically, it will focus on a group of students in Masters (MA) Clinical and Counselling programmes. Considering the lack of extensive research in this area the study is exploratory in nature and will focus on providing rich descriptions of the accounts provided by the group.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aims to explore how postgraduate psychology students (i.e., student psychologists) construct gender of their future profession. The main objective of this study is to contribute to the expansion of existing literature on the construction of gender, specifically in the profession of psychology.

The primary research questions are:

- 1) How does gender feature in psychology students' narratives of how they came to their current context, as student psychologists?
- 2) How does gender feature in psychology students' accounts of their general, personal and professional identities?
- 3) How does gender feature in student psychologists' constructions of their professional identities in the way they approach their clients and the therapeutic context in general?

1.5 METHODOLOGY

This study makes use of a qualitative research design. For the purposes of this study, twelve research participants from MA Clinical and Counselling programmes were selected using purposive sampling, with the sample divided into two focus groups of six participants per focus group (three males and three females). Data was collected through two semi-structured focus group discussions guided by an interview schedule. Thereafter, data was analysed with thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2000), six-step model infused with a social constructionist approach.

1.6 STRUCTURE

In the current chapter I have introduced the research problem, provided the aims and objectives of the study as well as summarised the methodology that informed the study. Below I provide an outline of the structure of the rest of the mini-dissertation.

In Chapter 2 I present a summary of the main tenets of social constructionism, as the theoretical framework within which this study is positioned. The chapter continues to provide an overview of existing literature related to gender and the profession of psychology.

In Chapter 3 I discuss the methodology employed for the purposes of my study which includes a discussion of qualitative research design, the sampling methods as well as data collection and data analysis strategies. In addition, I briefly look at quality considerations as well as ethical implications of the study.

In Chapter 5 I provide a comprehensive discussion of the results.

In Chapter 6 I draw conclusions from the findings for the research study, and make recommendations based on the findings.

CHAPTER 2

THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I present the main tenets of the theoretical paradigm of this study, namely social constructionism, and consider its implications for the current study. I also provide a review of literature on the subject area and clearly delineate the parameters of the study. I conclude with a summary of the value of the study in relation to existing literature.

2.2 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AS THEORETICAL PARADIGM

The paradigmatic point of departure for this research study is social constructionism, a paradigm which elucidates the process by which people understand and explain their view of the world in which they live (Gergen, 1985). Social constructionism expresses common forms of understanding amongst people's lived experiences, as well as those occurring in the present and that may exist in the future (Gergen, 1985). According to Gergen (1985), social constructionism is based on the following four tenets:

- 1) The concept of knowledge should be viewed from a critical perspective due to the criticism of the positivist-empiricist stance on scientific theory.
- 2) Knowledge is historically and culturally specific and therefore cannot be viewed as innate.
- 3) Social processes are the fundamental building blocks upon which knowledge is constantly created and sustained.
- 4) Social interaction is an integral part of knowledge and therefore implies social action.

When focusing on how views, ideas understandings and attitudes about the world have developed over time, constructionists emphasise the pluralistic and plastic character of reality; pluralistic in that reality can be expressed through many different symbol and language systems; plastic in that reality is constantly being stretched and adapted to fit intentional acts of human agents (Marshall, Kelder & Perry, 2005). There is no unique real world that pre-exists and is independent of human mental activity or human symbolic language (Schwandt, 1994). Language consequently creates and reflects social realities and thus contributes significantly to what makes us human (Cohen, Duberley, & Mallon, 2004).

Given that we construct social reality through social processes, investigation, deliberation and discourse, multiple views of a particular reality can emerge. Social constructionists are interested in narratives or discourses, which refer to powerful structures used by people to position themselves socially and which create different subject positions for people. Social constructionist research has as its aim the deconstruction of grand narratives by focusing on how prevailing norms have evolved over time through being respectful of difference, gender, ethnicity, race, or religion (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1996). Social constructionist research is concerned with identifying various ways of constructing social reality based on a person's lived experience that is available in social relationships and community, exploring the conditions of their use and tracing their implications for human experience and social practice (Willig, 2001).

Given that social constructionists believe that we construct reality out of our given situations, our knowledge and understanding of reality is context-dependent. All knowledge claims are a consequence of a particular cultural and historical situation (Cohen et al., 2004). A social constructionist lens therefore allows for the exploration of gender construction in the profession of psychology as embedded in social reality, human experience, and social practice at present (Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000). These institutions of society, in turn, incorporate and embed these constructions, their own practices and paradigms, reflecting the attitudes of society at large as filtered through self-definition of such institutions (Bohan, 1992).

2.3 THEORISING SEX AND GENDER

In the following section I discuss differences between sex and gender. Thereafter, I consider these terms through a social constructionist lens. According to Gentile (1993), "sex" is a term in which the biological functions of men and women prevail, while "gender" refers predominantly to culturally prescribed traits of maleness or femaleness. The concept of gender is thus more inclined to the effects of social constructionism, and is not fixed to concretely biological factors. Similarly, Unger (1979); Hoffman (2001) conceptualised gender as indicating the traits and characteristics that are socially and culturally prescribed as being appropriate to males and females. The question lies in the extent to which these definitions are adhered to, and the degree to which their interrelatedness influences the social constructions of gender.

From a social constructionist perspective, gender is constantly created and re-created out of human interaction and out of social life, and is the texture and order of that social life

(West & Zimmerman, 1987; Lorber, 1994). Social constructionists hold the view that gender is located within social arrangements. Specifically, as people relate to one another in a cultural and social context, gender differences arise that are sometimes related to biological sex differences, but are more often viewed as arising from cultural expectations of what constitutes appropriate behaviour and characteristics for females and males. Accordingly, research based on a social constructionist stance focuses on identifying conditions that are associated with similarities or differences across gender. From this perspective, sex is treated as a biological category while gender is treated as a social category (Anselmi & Law, 1998).

However, rooting gender in biological differences makes gender difficult to escape or challenge (Ungar, 1979; Eisenberg, 1998). While the concept was developed to rid people of restrictive thinking, it has only partially been of assistance in this endeavour. For example, Connell (1992) remarks that the term gender is used widely by sociologists and feminist historians to refer to meanings, identities and relationships that are socially constructed around reproductive and biological differences. This indicates that the two concepts gender and sex are highly interlinked and difficult to separate. In contrast, Lorber (1994) states that gender is instead a concept far removed from that of sex, and one that is used to organise social institutions as it reflects social status. Others believe that gender is progressively generated through daily social practices and interactions (Thorne, 1993).

Butler (1994) challenges the notion that biological sex is fixed and gender is socially constructed, such as the view advanced by Lorber (1994), but rather argues that both are socially constructed. In that manner, sex derives its meaning from gender and not vice versa. This allows social constructionist theorists to treat both constructs more critically.

While sex and gender are contested categories, with varied positions regarding the extent to which biological sex is seen to influence gender, social constructionists such as Butler (1994) have advanced a view of constructs being constructed. However, in many studies the use of these terms, "sex" and "gender", remains ill-described and as such they continue to be used variably, thereby leaving a multitude of inconsistencies in the literature (Unger, 1993). In the current study I approach these terms as constructed and therefore open to challenge and deconstruction.

2.4 LITERATURE REVIEW

In the literature review that follows I focus on how both the profession of psychology and notions of gender are constructed. I then take a closer look at women's place in psychology's history and go on to examine the current landscape of psychology in relation to gender. I conclude by considering the impact of the feminisation of psychology on research, psychotherapy, and the status and prestige associated with the profession.

2.4.1 The construction of gender in psychology

Bohan (1992) states that the meaning of gender is socially constructed, as it is for other pieces of knowledge. The understanding of what it means to be masculine or feminine is a product of the social interchange that leads to agreement, even certainty about the nature of reality. Such a construction of gender reflects what Berger and Luckman (1967); Witt (1997) have termed "primary socialisation", an understanding instilled so early by society and so evident in our experience that it passes essentially unnoticed and thus unquestioned. However, the relationship between psychology and society, and consequently with socialisation, is evident in its treatment of gender. Psychology has participated both implicitly and explicitly in the particular construction of gender that merges it with sex, defines it as difference, and sees it as a quality of persons rather than a manifestation of context (Bohan, 1992). Psychology has also, in turn, been influenced by dominant societal constructions of gender, whereby it has played a significant role in introducing the concept that men and women are deeply different psychical beings (Connell, 1987; Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1990a, 1990b, 1990c, 1992; Morawski, 1990; Unger, 1990).

Psychology and the social sciences have been set up as the authority defining "normality" in Western culture (Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1990a; Unger, 1990). Consequently, the ways in which psychology has construed the differences between masculinity and femininity have played an essential part in reproducing the dominant construction of gender and related power inequalities that have surfaced (Shefer, 2001). Psychology, steeped in a Western obsession with dualism and dichotomy, has had a long history of focusing on individual differences using gender/sex difference as primary deciding factors. This reveals a lot about the discipline's larger social roles and tends to raise problems around social division of masculinity and femininity (Shefer, 2001).

According to Hare-Mustin and Marecek (1988), "the primary meaning of gender in psychology has been difference" (p. 455), which suggests that the field of psychology has

largely used the term "gender" as a means by which to indicate difference. Furthermore, the discourse of therapy, when analysing interaction between the therapist and client, has been found to hold cultural assumptions about gender relations, thereby reinforcing the socially constructed gap between the two sexes. However, paradoxes of previous constructions of gender within the discourse of therapy impel theorists to go beyond these hidden meanings underlying gender relations. (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988; Leahy, 2004). Theorists such as Carlson (1972) emphasise the differential role of women and men as researchers in psychology, indicating that the former have a natural affinity towards naturalistic, qualitative and open styles of research while more masculine forms of inquiry involve manipulation, quantification and control. These descriptions reinforce the distance between men and women as they are highly consistent with their socially prescribed and stereotypical roles.

This perpetuates the forces that continue to confine men and women to activities that are viewed as part of their socially constructed gender roles. Haeberle (1981); Sigelman & Rider (2009) state that the seemingly obvious physiological difference between males and females is used to justify the different social roles to which they are confined and that dictate their attitudes and behaviour. Males are socialised into adopting socially dominant and un-empathic positions in society while females are taught to assume the reverse. While the field of psychology may at times perpetuate these constrictive patterns and socially prescribed roles it does however make strong attempts to deconstruct them. Such understandings filter through into the literature that the field of psychology produces, thereby increasing psychologists' awareness of such societal processes. As argued by Basow (1992), "there is little physical or psychological evidence to justify gender stereotypes as reflecting clear distinctions between the sexes. Most of the differences that do exist are the result of gender roles, not the cause" (p. 447).

While psychological understandings of the need to eradicate gender roles do exist, the degree to which they have altered the practices of psychology and the gender-based heterogeneity within the field remains questionable. The practice of psychology is noticed as one that requires an affinity towards altruism and a caring for others (Robertson & Fitzgerald, 1992). Altruism and caring are qualities that have been prescribed to women because they are socially constructed as the more "motherly" of the two genders. As a result, the composition of gender within psychology remains largely feminine. While psychologists are aware of these discriminatory processes and the subtle ways by which

gender roles are perpetuated, the very composition of psychologists in the field could in itself be viewed as a perpetuating factor.

In addition to the above, the manner by which gender roles affect the composition of people seeking help through psychological services is in need of exploration. Robertson and Fitzgerald (1992) confirm that men are indeed less likely than women to seek psychotherapeutic help as a direct result of traditional gender role socialisation. Women are viewed as the gender that is not only expected to offer care for others but that is also given more freedom to seek such help for themselves when needed. Contrastingly, men are socialised into roles that are defined by strength, independence and masculinity, which make the option of seeking psychological assistance when needed somewhat unacceptable. As found by Robertson and Fitzgerald (1992), the greater a man's affinity is towards an idealised form of masculinity, the lesser his chances are of seeking psychotherapy to assist with personal problems. The field of psychology has consequently become one in which both the professionals and clients involved are categorised according to traditional gender roles. These patterns create much difficulty in attempts to eradicate the distance between males and females in the field.

Against this background, this study seeks to capture the self-definition and meaning behind the social construction of gender in the field of psychology.

2.4.2 Women's historical place in psychology

While women currently dominate psychology in terms of professional representation, this was not the case during the earlier development of the discipline. In this section I focus more closely on understanding where women have found themselves positioned in the past in the profession of psychology. Have they been left out because they did not contribute to it, or are there other reasons? (Swan, 2005). Psychology as a discipline has been long criticised for its reproduction of gender and other inequalities, a critique lodged both at its content and practices, including the domains of academia, intervention and organisational structures (Shefer, 2001).

Bohan (1995) writes that "women have in fact been present and active in psychology since its beginnings, but for a variety of reasons both they and their work have been largely invisible to psychology as a whole" (p. 1). Women were, for many years, underrepresented in various roles within the field, including those of author, therapist, administrator and professor. This phenomenon has been attributed to, inter alia, a

historical and cultural White male norm against which gender related endeavours were measured and acknowledged (Heppner, 2010).

The discipline of psychology remains largely masculinist in its method and content, and 30 years of feminist engagement have produced little evidence of change in textbooks or curricula. Those written for a South African context typically have a feminist section, but a gendered analysis is not a sustained feature (Hook et al., 2004; Seedat et al., 2001). Furthermore, in South Africa it has been highlighted that White males have dominated in psychology as a practice and in the production of knowledge, particularly in terms of authorship, where Black and women psychologists have been underrepresented (Shefer, 2001).

Beliefs about women, passing as “knowledge,” have influenced their access, education, entrance into the public sphere, availability and quality of employment opportunities, the areas of psychology in which women have prospered, and those where they have found the recognition of themselves and their work (Bohan, 1982). Women also reflect a societal reality that men often gain access to public roles and professions, including educational opportunities, ahead of women (Heppner, 2010). An understanding of the female gender has been constructed in a manner that leads to women’s invisibility in history, as well as their exclusion from mainstream interpretations of psychology (Bohan, 1982). When mention has been made to women in interpretations of psychology, they have often been pathologised for behaviour and femininity itself, in a manner consistent with the historical trend in psychology (Chesler, 1993).

Society in general has attempted to prevent women from gaining a formal education, then cornered them into specific areas of the professional field classified as work suitable for them, finally forcing them into a state of being unknown (Swan, 2005). Additionally, when psychologists’ names are cited as the last name and first initial only, gender identity becomes anonymous, giving rise to scholars assuming them to be male (Bohan, 1990; 1995). The lack of participation of women in psychology’s foreground can further be attributed to the lack of evidence of their contributions made to the profession. As Bohan (1995) notes:

This exclusion of women and their work has been self-maintaining: the belief that women did not contribute significantly to psychology led us to disregard their actual participation, thus reinforcing the initial belief that they had no important role in psychology. (p. 1)

This created a vicious cycle by which the absence of women in the field has been perpetuated (Swan, 2005). Bohan (1993) further argues that:

Women's relative invisibility in the discipline deprives students of role models who demonstrated women's contributions to and place within psychology, thereby limiting the hopes and distorting the expectations of women. (p. 75)

From the literature reviewed here it appears that the place of women in psychology and its history is constructed in relation to broader systems of patriarchy which typically silences women's contributions (Bohan, 1982, Brooks, 2010).

2.4.3 The contemporary feminisation of psychology

In the next section of the literature review I demonstrate a change in trend from women's place in the history of psychology to current trends in the profession. Since the 1970s, many disciplines and occupations have experienced significant increases in the number and proportion of women among their ranks, one with the term "feminisation", as a useful axiom for describing the phenomenon of the growing movement of women into certain areas of study and work (Richter & Griesel, 1999). The term can also be criticised as feeding into alarmist notions of women "taking over" and unsettling male dominance. It can be seen as perpetuating the assumption that professions lose prestige once women enter the field in great numbers. Roos (1997) questions the frenzied focus on occupations being increasingly characterised by women, stating the following: "Occupational feminisation, occupational decline: I am struck, repeatedly, by how often these two phrases are used together" (p. 75). Roos (1997) adds that occupations that became "masculinised" rarely provoked the same anxious discussion. The term "feminisation of psychology" then implicitly draws on the notion that high female participation is a risk to the profession. It becomes clear that while this term holds utility it should also be employed with care.

In the contemporary context the historical invisibility of women in psychology has then made way for women constituting the majority of psychology professionals in most countries. Women make up, for example, 55% of the membership of the Canadian Psychological Association (Boatswain et al., 2001); 50% of membership in the American Psychological Association (APA) in 2001 (American Psychological Association, 2003); and 68% of all registered psychologists in South Africa (Shefer, Shabalala, & Townsend, 2004). Finally, there are intra-professional differences in terms of representation of men

between the different subfields of an occupation. An APA (2003) report indicates that in 2001, 73.4% of clinical psychology doctorates were awarded to women, compared to 25% in quantitative psychology and 28.6% in comparative psychology.

Rosenzweig (1994) argues that the feminisation of psychology was a consequence rather than a cause of the devaluation of psychology, and could be explained as psychology losing its value, status, and prestige due to an increase in the number of women representing the profession, and the slower growth of men in the profession of psychology as a whole. As various factors make careers in psychology less attractive and viable, some men leave the field and others decline to enter it, thus creating opportunities for increased participation by women. These two factors are then combined in a cycle, with “devaluation of the field and feminisation each stimulating each other” (Rosenzweig, 1994, p. 751).

Ussher and Nicolson (1992) note that the closer a profession is to the activities of nurturing, comforting, encouraging and caring, the more likely it is to be seen as an expression of women's style in general. Hochschild (1983); Erikson (2005) terms this kind of activity “emotional work,” and for several reasons it falls to women in modern societies to perform it. This could be a further reason why more women than men enter the field of psychology, albeit predominantly in certain practical applied elements such as clinical psychology. The fate of psychology's increasingly female body of practitioners however reflects society's devaluation of care-giving in general and women's identification with this arena of life. Philipson (1993) demonstrates that the responsibility for tending to the wellbeing of children, the elderly, and the mentally ill has come to rest increasingly on women's shoulders alone.

A large body of literature on how women outnumber men in psychology, as students and as professionals, is drawn from Europe and the USA; information describing the situation in developing countries is much less detailed (Shefer et al., 2004). Records of the South African Professional Board for Psychology however reveal that in 1975, 26% of all registered psychologists were women. By the 2004, 62% of total registrations of psychologists were women, and 38% were men (Richter & Griesel, 1999). This has been described as amounting to a “re-segregation” of the profession (Reskin & Hartman, 1986, p. 31); (Ridgeway; 1997). As late as 1996, the number of men (2,130) and women (2,125) reached uniformity in terms of professional registration, showing that the number of men had stayed relatively stable and that the change in composition was due mainly to an

influx of women (Richter & Griesel, 1999). This can be considered in relation to the statistical finding that women form 67.6% of the South African population, and men 32.4 % (Shefer et al., 2004).

These results show that the historical trend of male dominance in psychology has been reversed and that the profession is now increasingly staffed by women. The data in South Africa indicate a similar picture in that psychology as a profession is dominated by women. While women are participating in greater numbers in the academic domain, the hierarchy is still populated heavily with men at the top (Skinner & Louw, 2009). This shift in the gender make-up of psychologists in academia and training has led to great anxiety, both locally and internationally (Callaghan, 2005). In other countries women are underrepresented in all but the lower academic ranks. This relatively greater representation of women in higher academic ranks makes South Africa an exceptional case, especially compared to countries such as the USA and Canada. Indeed, South Africa might be regarded as representative in this regard, and since there are more women in general in psychology one would expect them to appear in higher percentages in all ranks of academia (Skinner & Louw, 2009). Further to this, in 2002, 74% of psychology majors were women, and 78% of all master's degrees in psychology were awarded to women. Thus, it would appear that the feminisation of psychology in this country is further advanced than in Europe and the USA. It is not a question of men abandoning the profession but rather women entering it at a much higher rate in recent years (Skinner & Louw, 2009).

Although women academics remain under-represented in the general staff body nationally and internationally, they make up the majority of staff in psychology departments in South Africa, with a total of 294 academics employed in all university psychology departments in 2005. Women made up 52% (152) and men 48% (142), compared to 40% and 60% in the general academic population in 2003 (Skinner & Louw, 2009). Women outnumbered men in psychology at all ranks except that of professor, with strong representation in the ranks of senior lecturer and lecturer (42 and 68 respectively) (Skinner & Louw, 2009). It would thus appear that women have managed to break the seniority barrier in psychology (but not in academia in general), and that it remains a matter of time before they also comprise the majority at professorial level (Skinner & Louw, 2009).

Having discussed the feminisation of psychology, I now turn to specific contexts in which such feminisation has been studied. These contexts include research, psychotherapy,

and the impact of women's participation on the status and prestige of psychology as a profession.

2.4.4 Impact of the feminisation of psychology on research

A concern often linked to the increased participation of women in psychology is that of decreased research activity in the discipline. The increase in numbers of women in the field of clinical and counselling psychology in particular, has been linked to an imbalance in research practitioner activities (Heppner, 2010). There are more clinical practitioners than there are researchers, and some worry that the scientist-practitioner model (the idea that research dictates practice and vice versa) is waning (Heppner, 2010). Specifically, there has been concern that therapists may rely too heavily on clinical judgment rather than empirically supported treatments. Furthermore, within the research community, some psychologists worry that traditional research methods (empirical techniques) may be replaced by inductive qualitative methods. These fears are also grounded in the belief that qualitative research is subjective, and therefore less accurate than standard positivist measures (Heppner, 2010).

A causal link has once more been drawn between an increasing number of women psychologists and some aspects of the perceived researcher-practitioner gap. There are inevitably many variables that impact a trend of this nature. For example, in the US an increase in the number of professional psychology programmes that often highlights clinical work instead of research, and a decrease in federal funding for community and treatment outcome mental health research programmes, likely contribute to this trend (Heppner, 2010). Reasons for this trend in developing countries however remain under-researched (Heppner, 2010).

2.4.5 Impact of the feminisation of psychology on psychotherapy

Special consideration for women and gender has been increasingly given in the literature on counselling, indicating that the way in which psychotherapy is conducted within counselling psychology might be affected (Philipson, 1993). Although there has been little professional acknowledgment, it is apparent that psychotherapy is undergoing a fundamental transformation into an all-women's field (Philipson, 1993). This notion has been argued as demonstrating that the feminisation of psychotherapy will have lasting effects on the theories guiding the work of psychotherapists within the consulting room, their views of psychopathology and human development, and even the techniques and goals of psychotherapeutic practice (Philipson, 1993).

Demonstrated here is a current paradigm shift in psychoanalysis, from drive theory to a relational model that is deeply embedded in the gender reconstruction of the field. Just as women represented the "other" in the traditional Freudian paradigm, which had its roots in the patriarchal family of late nineteenth century Vienna and was practiced largely by men, so now men may be approaching a similar status within the emerging relational model (Philipson, 1993).

According to Philipson (1993), the implications of the feminisation of psychotherapy go even further, transcending the boundaries of clinical theory and practice altogether. There is little question that psychotherapy is currently a field in crisis: professional publications tell of the recent "mental health care revolution," in which public and private sector funding and support for both short- and long-term psychotherapeutic care are declining rapidly (Philipson, 1993).

The question that remains is how the increasingly feminised field of psychology has affected psychotherapy? Diamond (2011) emphasises that the presence of men in the field has decreased significantly over the last few decades with less than 20% of master's degrees in psychology being obtained by males. These transitions of men abandoning the field of psychotherapy for decades are so profound that the profession is now thought to have become dominated by female practitioners.

Diamond (2011) writes that the field of psychology started with devaluation of the feminine by theorists such as Sigmund Freud and his many male pupils, including Rank and Jung. However, in more recent times, this has been reacted to through a compensatory action whereby the masculinity that was previously associated with psychology has become devalued. The synonymous entry of women into the profession has led to an increasingly strengthened perception of psychology as being a highly feminine field (Willyard, 2011). Having already outlined the perception of female gender roles in South African society, this feminisation of the field and its increasingly strengthened association with women is bound to have an impact on the way in which psychotherapy is perceived or experienced. One such impression could include the differential values that are seen as being associated with men and women. Such differences in values between a therapist and client could greatly influence the therapeutic process and the client's experience of the therapy.

Nadelson and Notman (1977); Worell and Goodheart (2006) describe the importance of consistent values between the therapist and client, as any discrepancies that could lead to the client being judged as pathological and thus having a significant impact on the treatment plan and process.

As described by Nadelson, Notman and McCarthy (2005):

Even if treatment professionals consciously adopt gender-neutral attitudes, their unconscious views about what is 'normal' may remain unchanged. Those behaviours and attitudes of the patient that are significantly different from the therapist's may be judged as pathological, which can affect treatment. (p. 14)

Shapiro (1993) adds to these understandings by stating that a therapist's gender can influence the way they view a patient's life, and in some cases the conclusions that would be reached by a male and female therapist on the same client could vary significantly. In addition, a client's identification with the therapist is critical in the development of a sound therapeutic relationship. For Nadelson et al. (2005):

Identification with a therapist is also important, although the reasons for the choice may be based on stereotypes, without regard for the characteristics of the specific therapist, the patient's feeling of greater comfort or empathy can facilitate the initial development of a positive therapeutic alliance. (p. 14)

The ability for such identification to occur in contexts in which gender is kept homogenous means that many male clients are faced with the added burden of having to try and identify with a therapist of a different gender (Nadelson et al., 2005). This is a difficult feat, especially when taken in conjunction with the possibility that differing values commonly found across genders could lead to misdiagnoses by the therapist (Shapiro, 1993). Authors such as Willyard (2011) have also noted the influence of beliefs positing that males are engineered "differently" and have differing ways of displaying emotion, implying that only a male therapist will be able to understand such "male" issues. Adherents of such beliefs are concerned that in future there will be too small a male cohort of professionals to serve male populations (Willyard, 2011).

Nevertheless, professionals within the field of psychology are continuously reminded of the importance of practicing self-awareness, which allows them to be cognisant of certain gender stereotypes that they may hold. This awareness allows them to avoid factors such as these from hindering the therapeutic process (Brems, 2001). Alternatively, certain

therapeutic approaches encourage the use of such dynamics as forming part of the transference which can be used as part of the process (Malan, 1979).

2.4.6 Impact of the feminisation of psychology on status and prestige

The question has arisen as to what happens to a discipline or profession that becomes feminised, and many authors have pointed to the positive effects that accompany this tendency. For instance, Tarvis (1996) believes that the feminisation of psychology has meant that White males are no longer regarded as universally representative participants. Female researchers have opened new considerations for gender, ethnicity, cultural background, class, age, and sexual orientation, while research methods have been examined and restructured to include the context of historical factors such as status, sex, race, and class. New approaches to therapy have placed the therapist and client on a more equal footing. Nicolson and Ussher (1992) suggest that the best advantage of this movement will be that it will create a more diversified discipline, resulting in research being conducted on areas that were previously ignored, such as issues relating strongly to women's realities.

While psychologists are proud of the contributions women have made to the field over the last 30 years, some remain concerned that the lack of men may have a downside; the field does not truly represent the diverse group of people it is meant to reach (Willyard, 2011). Further to this, a frequently voiced concern is that when women begin to predominate in a profession, it has a tendency to lose status, prestige, and perceived utility (Snyder, McDermott, Leibowitz, & Cheavens, 2000). The APA Task Force (2000) asked whether the slower growth in the number of men in psychology as a whole was the result of the declining status of the discipline, and expressed its concern if that were the case. Since psychology is already far advanced in the switch this is a question of substance and growing relevance.

Gurevich (2001) suggests that the status of psychology has not diminished as a result of women's increased participation, but rather that multiple shifts in the marketplace, public perception, educational and societal trends and policymaking have brought about these changes. Another concern about fewer men in the field is related to that of salaries. Across all professional domains it has been found that while women may carry out the same jobs and responsibilities as men, their salaries do not reflect this. More specifically, women have significantly lower salaries than men occupying the same positions (Willyard, 2011).

According to Willyard 2011:

There appears to be no evidence that women's increased participation eroded psychology's status. Rather, it is more likely that changes in the marketplace and the perceptions of psychology by the public, policymakers and those at the point of making career choices led at least in part to the differential trends in male and female participation. (p. 40)

In other words, there appear to be two main factors that have contributed to these recent trends. Firstly, the gradual move of men away from the field has caused a reduction in monetary rewards that the profession could offer. When this is considered in the light of most men valuing status and monetary gains, together with a perceived duty to provide optimally for their families, it becomes apparent that the field of psychology has become less appealing to men simply because it cannot meet these standards as well as other professions can. Secondly, psychology is a field that provides flexibility and allows for more freedom in one's daily schedule than several other professions. As women are the "caregivers" within the household (or so their gender role prescribes) it is seen as a convenient field of work that will allow them to carry out their other responsibilities while also generating an income.

The above processes are some of the factors which have led to the profession's "feminisation," and this in itself has caused a reduction in status and ability to provide a viable source of steady income, especially in private practice (Diamond, 2011). These changes may well be a move that affects all members in the future (Rosenzweig, 1994).

2.5 CONCLUSION

This literature review discussed the construction of women in the history of psychology, and how the trend has changed to a more feminised psychology. Furthermore, the landscape of psychology in South Africa in terms of gender at present was demonstrated with the implications of feminisation in psychology being clarified with regards to the aspects such as research, psychotherapy, and status and prestige in the profession. Although attempts were made to find research relevant to South Africa it has mostly been conducted in other countries, so the issues and aspects in the field of psychology that were highlighted needed to be placed in a South African context. In particular, there seemed to be a lack of extensive research exploring how psychologists themselves constructed gender in the profession. This study did therefore not address why

psychology has become increasingly feminised, but rather focused on psychology postgraduate students' constructions of gender in their future profession.

CHAPTER 3

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This research study makes use of a qualitative research design. Details regarding the research design, sampling method, data collection procedure, data analysis procedure, quality criteria employed in this study, and ethical considerations of the study are discussed below.

3.2 A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Willig (2001), qualitative researchers are inquisitive about finding out how people understand the world in which they live and experience events encountered in it. Thus, qualitative research aims to depict and assign meaning to events and experiences, but does not try to foretell them. The outcome of such an understanding in this study is to allow for complex and contradictory meanings and rich accounts around the constructions of gender in the profession of psychology to be explored.

Willig (2001) states that such an explanation of events and experiences allows one to gain knowledge about people in their own natural settings. These settings are “open systems” within which circumstances change and act upon each other in order to maintain this cycle of continuous change, with the researcher ultimately able to ask questions about processes, in this case “How do postgraduate students construct gender in the profession of psychology?”

3.3 RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

In order to obtain rich accounts of the research study, a small sample was selected, namely twelve participants taking part in two focus groups. The number was selected in order to ensure that all would remain actively involved in the focus group discussion throughout the data collection phase (Willig, 2008). I used purposive sampling as a non-probability technique, in which participants were chosen according to available information or what I was familiar with about them (Collins et al., 2000). Participants were selected based on them forming part of postgraduate training programmes in psychology. This sampling strategy was a form of convenience sampling as I was part of the programme and so had easy access and proximity to the participants. Although a limitation of this sampling approach is an inability to generalise the findings, the main

advantage is that it remains consistent with my research aim in that it allowed me to obtain rich, exploratory accounts from a small group of postgraduate psychology students.

The two focus groups comprised of three males and three females, between the ages of 22 and 35 and having described themselves as being from English, Afrikaans, Zulu and Sotho backgrounds. Ten identified themselves as White and two as Black, and all were chosen from both the counselling psychology and clinical psychology master's groups (first and second year). Subjects were selected from different universities across South Africa, including the University of Johannesburg, University of Pretoria, University of the Free State and the University of Zululand. Besides their commonality in currently completing their master's degrees in either clinical or counselling psychology, they remained diverse in terms of other social signifiers, such as being from different socio-economic status groups, and coming from both rural areas and urban areas. Furthermore, they had initially begun their postgraduate psychology training at their respective universities across South Africa, and were at the time of data collection all based at a common internship site at a university in Gauteng. Master's students in educational psychology completing an internship at this site were excluded from the sample due to the aims of this research study and because many of the research questions did not compliment their scope of practice within the profession.

Table 3.1: Summary of participants' demographic details¹

NAME OF PARTICIPANT	AGE	GENDER	RACE	HOME LANGUAGE	COURSE	FOCUS GROUP NO 1 OR 2
1. Fred Gordon	33	Male	White	Afrikaans	MA Counselling Psychology	1
2. Mark Van de Walt	26	Male	White	Afrikaans	MA Counselling Psychology	1
3. Dave Fromm	24	Male	White	Afrikaans	MA Clinical Psychology	1
4. Pauline Schouwink	25	Female	White	Afrikaans	MA Counselling	1

(1) For the purposes of confidentiality participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms.

					Psychology	
5. Lynn van Staaden	27	Female	White	Afrikaans	MA Counselling Psychology	1
6. Tanya Diamond	26	Female	White	Afrikaans	MA Counselling Psychology	1
7. Siphon Kunene	23	Male	Black	Sotho	MA Counselling Psychology	2
8. Thabo Sibongwa	27	Male	Black	Zulu	MA Counselling Psychology	2
9. Carl Schwartz	24	Male	White	English	MA Clinical Psychology	2
10. Tessa le Roux	23	Female	White	Afrikaans	MA Counselling Psychology	2
11. Samantha Collins	23	Female	White	English	MA Clinical Psychology	2
12. Lucy du Toit	22	Female	White	English	MA Clinical Psychology	2

3.4 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Data was collected through conducting two focus group discussions, semi-structured in nature and facilitated by myself as discussion leader (Collin et al., 2000). I decided to use a semi-structured approach, guided by an interview schedule, in order to obtain a variety of opinions on psychology postgraduate students' constructions of gender in their future profession. The semi-structured nature of the focus group provided for a space in which reality is co-constructed rather than simply reflected (Willig, 2008). The strength of this lies in an ability to mobilise participants to respond to and to comment on one another's contributions. In this way, statements are challenged, extended, developed, undermined or qualified in ways that generate rich data for me as both the researcher and moderator of the focus groups (Willig, 2008).

The structure of the two focus groups comprised three male and three female participants from both clinical and counselling registration categories. The two focus groups had an equal number of psychology students from both the counselling and clinical psychology registration categories. I conducted the focus group interviews at a venue on each of two campuses which was easy to access and convenient for all participants. The interviews were voice-recorded in order to allow me to pay full attention to the responses and in turn to follow up on specifically interesting issues that emerged (Strydom et al., 2002).

During the focus group discussions I made notes which I used to complement verbatim transcriptions during the process of analysis. Transcription is typically carried out following either a naturalised or denaturalised approach. MacLean et al. (2004) note that denaturalised transcription grew out of an interest in the informational content of speech and dissatisfaction with the observation of naturalised work, which can be time-consuming as it captures more details of non-verbal speech than the former. I used a denaturalised approach to transcription in order to capture verbatim depiction of speech during the focus group discussions, focusing on verbal speech and not noting all instances of non-verbal speech (such as breathe intakes or exact length of pauses). This allowed me to emphasise the content or body of the interview, which involved capturing the essence of meaning constructed during the focus group discussions (Billig 1999a; 1999b). The transcription notation I used was based on the following conventions, which are also reflected in the manner in which I present excerpts from the interviews in the chapter detailing the findings:

(...)	Sentence trails off
(Over-talk)	Instances of overlapping talk
(Interrupt)	Interrupted speech
(Indistinct)	Indistinct speech
(-)	Dash to indicate a sharp word cut-off
(Laughs)	Non-verbal communication - such as gesturing or laughter

3.5 FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

I identified several themes for the proposed study that guided the questions during the focus group interviews. As a semi-structured interview guide was utilised I chose to ask some of the questions associated with the themes and deviations from the interview schedule occurred if responses indicated the need for such deviation.

Open-ended questions were used to encourage participants to set forth their dispositions, ideas, thoughts and feelings from their own frame of reference in a candid way (Collin et

al., 2000). Questions for the focus group discussion were based on the following four themes, reflecting the aims and objectives of this study, with the full interview guide attached as appendix A:

Theme 1: Personal construction of own gendered identity

Theme 2: Professional construction of own gendered identity

Theme 3: General construction of own gendered identity

Theme 4: Academic construction of own gendered identity

When I was eliciting responses based on questions from the aforementioned themes, participants generally appeared to respond as candidly and honestly as possible. Due to me being the moderator and their peer, participants seemed to be more comfortable being congruent in their positioning when discussing gender. At first, participants attempted to keep the nature of the focus group quite formal, each speaking in turn with no interruptions, and no sign of disagreements or agreement with what each was saying. Thus, as a moderator, it was very important for me to intervene and ask at certain points whether participants tended to agree or disagree with each other. Furthermore, I had to facilitate debate by reflecting on my understanding of what was being stated, which opened up the possibility for intervening from other participants to add their opinion to what had thus far been stated. Therefore, my role was more of a facilitator of communication between the participants in order to make the context of the focus group discussion a comfortable one for opinions and viewpoints to be explicitly stated and challenged. As the process unfolded the participants tended to move from being restrained and formal to more flexible and able to challenge each other's opinions and viewpoints.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

I used thematic analysis to explore the meanings and experiences drawn upon in the participants' constructions of gender in the profession of psychology. Thematic analysis can be a social constructionist method in that it takes a closer look at the ways in which events, realities, meanings, and experiences are the result of a variety of discourses present within society (Clarke et al., 2006). Therefore, thematic analysis performed within a social constructionist framework in this study did not attempt to elicit personal motivations or individual psychologies, but rather attempted to theorise the socio-cultural contexts and structural conditions that allowed individual accounts of participants to be generated. In order for these accounts to be generated, the focus of my analysis was guided by the research questions.

In particular, I used Braun and Clarke's (2000) six-step model of thematic analysis, which was not a straightforward process going from one step to another but rather a repetitive process which moved forwards and backwards, throughout the steps (Ely et al., 1997).

The six-step process is outlined as follows (Braun & Clarke, 2000):

Step 1: Familiarising yourself with your data

The first step involved translating data by reading the data a number of times, and writing down initial thoughts.

Step 2: Generating initial codes

During the second step, the researcher systematically coded prominent characteristics of data across the entire set, by putting together data pertinent to each code.

Step 3: Searching for themes

The third step involved organising the codes into possible themes by collecting all data pertinent to each possible theme.

Step 4: Reviewing themes

The fourth step involved checking if the themes are in conjunction to the coded interpretations (step 1) and the entire data set (step 2), by deriving a thematic "map" of the analysis.

Step 5: Defining and naming themes

This step involved developing transparent descriptions and names and its accompanying narrative for each theme by continuously making each theme more precise and distinct.

Step 6: Producing the report

The concluding step involved and allowed for a final chance for analysis. This included choosing clear, overpowering interpretations and linking them back to the research question and literature, and thus consequently bringing forth a scholarly report of the results of this process.

While following Braun and Clarke's (2000) six-step analysis, the process of conducting the thematic analysis was infused with a social constructionist paradigm that identified the varied constructions of gender drawn on by participants in the focus group discussions. I also aimed to explore the functions of these constructions of gender, as drawn on by

participants. This follows from the social constructionist view of language as both constructive and restrictive, in that it both enables and constrains certain understandings of the world and of ourselves (Parker, 1992). A social constructionist thematic analysis therefore considers such constructive and restrictive effects of language in participants' accounts by socially producing and reproducing meaning and experiences of gender within the profession of psychology. Therefore, thematic analysis conducted within a constructionist framework such as in this study seeks to theorise the socio-cultural contexts, and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts of gender to be constructed. Below is an excerpt from the transcripts to illustrate how I proceeded through the first stages of analysis:

THEMES: FOCUS GROUP 2

Theme 1: Personal construction of own gendered identity

1. What attracted you to the profession of psychology?
2. How do you view your own identity from a gender perspective?

(Probe) Do you think being either male or female played a role in this decision?

➤ What attracted you to the profession of psychology?

Male 1:

- 1 For me I think it's my personality like the strength and courage that I want to help.
- 2 {Coughing in back round} yes it's always about that, just helping.
- 3 I wanted to do the program, a helping profession, whether a social worker or
- 4 psychology, or teaching but something that has this helping element.
- 5 So what happened when I went to the varsity the lady who gave me a career
- 6 guidance, he, she was a psychologist.
- 7 I think she has an influence to my career choice right.

Female 1:

- 8 For me it's a calling and it's about making a difference.
- 9 So I feel like it's a platform where I can actually bring about change.

Female 1:

- 10 Yes a religious calling

Male 2:

- 11 I absolutely agree with both of you guys.
- 12 I think it's a vocation and it comes in the form of helping someone.
- 13 For me particularly psychology I am fascinated with like the abnormal.
- 14 So when people do something that's maybe, abnormal is the wrong word but
- 15 something that's different, if they think a bit differently or they behave a bit differently
- 16 that's how I, I was fascinated by that, and that's maybe how id in a sense come and
- 17 help them if it need be.

Female 2:

- 18 I think that mine is a little bit of a blend of both in terms of nurturing and wanting to
- 19 help make a difference.
- 20 But also from a psychology side, I always had an interest in terms of understanding
- 21 how people get to where they are, so sort of the developmental aspect of what
- 22 makes you who you are and experiences.
- 23 So motivation and things like that.

Female 3:

- 24 To me I think I was first interested in psychology, um more related to the
- 25 processes of people and how they can get themselves into situations and be so
- 26 different and interact.
- 27 And to me it was more of an interest um, of functioning and behaviour that brought
- 28 me to be interested in psychology.

Male 3:

- 29 Um... I think for me as well.
- 30 I want to bring the idea of money in the picture.

Handwritten notes:

- Personality helping
- change
- helping uld behaviour
- helping & uld beh
- uld behaviour.
- Exclude Monetary Compensation

(2) Figure 3.1: Illustration of process of identifying themes; focus group 2

3.7 QUALITY CRITERIA IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

I followed Henwood and Pidgeon's (1992) guidelines for increasing quality and rigour in qualitative research. These guidelines, also discussed by Willig (2008), are concerned with ensuring thoroughness while considering idiosyncrasy and creativity in the research process.

3.7.1 Quality and reflexivity

From a social constructionist perspective, reliability and validity have been replaced by dependability and credibility (Willig, 2008). With regards to credibility one cannot conduct a universally valid study from a social constructionist perspective, as this approach advocates different “knowledges” (Burr, 1995). A universal truth does not exist, as knowledge is bound to a specific culture and social relationships, and may change in a different context (Willig, 2001). Instead, the researcher is concerned with giving accurate constructions of the participants’ lived experience as disclosed to the researcher (Burr, 1995). I considered the following aspects in order to enhance the quality of this research study:

The importance of fit: I was mindful to demonstrate the fit between analytic categories generated by the data obtained through the focus group interviews (process of data collection and data analysis) by writing explicit, clear and comprehensive accounts of why phenomena had been labelled and categorised in particular ways (Willig, 2008).

Integration of theory: I aimed to clearly explicate relationships between units of analysis and make their integration at different levels of generality readily apparent (Willig, 2008).

Personal reflexivity: Awareness of how the researcher’s personal interests and values influenced the research process from initial idea to outcome, I critically evaluated and reflected on the research topic, design and process, together with the personal experiences of conducting the research throughout the process (Tindall, 1994). In order to enhance the reflexivity of this research process I kept a reflexive journal which included my inner responses, views, biases, and stereotypes of the research process from start to finish. The entries are included as an appendix.

As the researcher, and being part of the postgraduate training group of upcoming psychologists, I had to continuously be aware of when my own value system, gender, social class, ethnicity and culture affected my positioning in relation to this topic and the

participants, thereby making the findings and research process more subjective. I found that there were a number of occasions on which I had to carefully interrogate my own responses while conducting the research. One such instance was when male participants spoke about “strength and courage” and, being from a culture that is very patriarchal, I automatically related this to their need to be in a position of power and control, especially over female clients. This brought my own cultural biases into play during the focus group, whereby I felt the urgency to challenge their association with power and need to be superior to females. However, I then understood the theoretical paradigm of social constructionism coming into play and was once again reminded that the focus of the discussions was to explore how participants construct notions of gender according to their own realities, and that I could not nullify their opinions and experiences.

When participants stated their viewpoints of their own gendered identities in relation to psychology as a profession of choice and their own therapeutic approaches, it brought my own gender stereotypes and beliefs to the fore and that was evident in the way I paraphrased and reflected on participants’ responses, and the way in which I restated questions when they did not understand the question being asked. In this manner, I inevitably indirectly built in my own reflections which could have shaped the participants’ responses. Participants were however still able to challenge my viewpoints and intervene by stating their own constructions and directing the focus groups into different directions.

Lastly, with social constructionism being the paradigmatic point of departure I was able to construct my own interpretation of participants’ responses, while also sustaining an objective approach to the research process from start to finish. I was further able to reflect on how I viewed my own gendered identity and how this would affect my professional identity as a psychologist in the future.

Functional reflexivity: Functional reflexivity entails continuous, critical examination of the research process to reveal its assumptions, values, and biases. I continuously monitored the role and influences of my own values on the process in order to identify the personal rationale behind decisions and to acknowledge the impact of my own values on the research process and eventual outcome (Tindall, 1994).

Sensitivity to negotiated realities: I attended to the ways in which the research was explicated by the participants who generated the data. I was also aware of their reactions

and attempted to explain differences between my own interpretation and theirs (Willig, 2008).

Transferability: I gave feedback on the study by allowing readers to investigate the degree of suitability it had out of the context within which the data was created (Willig, 2008).

Resonating with readers: To ensure the data was presented so as to encourage reflection in the reader I included adequate verbatim quotes in support of conclusions drawn (Willig, 2008).

Coherence: To increase coherence I attempted to demonstrate how the analysis was logically connected and consistent while simultaneously retaining variations in the data (Willig, 2008).

Credibility: A universally valid study cannot be conducted from a social constructionist viewpoint. Rather a social constructionist perspective represents different “knowledges” (Burr, 1995). I aimed to provide accurate constructions of the participants’ lived experience as disclosed to me. I thus critically evaluated and reflected on the research topic, design and process, together with the personal experiences of conducting the research process. I further monitored the role and subjective influences I had on the process in order to elucidate and bring forth the personal rationale behind decisions and to acknowledge the impact of my own values on the eventual outcome.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Silverman (2005), ethical guidelines stress the importance of informed consent of the participant. Participants signed informed consent forms agreeing to their participation in the research study as well as providing permission for the focus group discussions to be recorded. They were assured that any information about them arising from the research would be treated confidentially and that all reasonable measures will be taken so as to avoid identification of any participant (Collins et al., 2000; Willig, 2008). Each participant had the right to choose whether or not to take part in the research and could withdraw their participation at any given time without negative consequences (Collins et al., 2008; Willig, 2008).

Participants were protected as far as possible from any physical discomfort and emotional stress that might be elicited by the research (Collins et al., 2008). Furthermore, as the topic of gender could have elicited a certain degree of sensitivity, free counselling was

made available at the student support service in University of Pretoria. Lastly, once data was collected, I made sure that participants understood what this study aimed to achieve, and that the participants had access to publications that originated from participating (Willig, 2008). The following appendices have been attached at the end of this research study: The interview schedule has been attached as Appendix A, the letter of ethical approval from the University of Pretoria Research Ethics Committee is attached as Appendix B, the Informed consent form is attached as Appendix C, and reflexive journal attached as Appendix D.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The results and discussion that follow are presented with a focus on the themes that emerged from the research, while also considering the findings in relation to existing literature in this field of study. The study sought to explore how postgraduate psychology students construct gender in their accounts of their future profession, through conducting focus group discussions. The transcribed focus group data was analysed by conducting a social constructionist thematic analysis, based on Braun and Clarke's (2000) method. I identified relevant recurring themes amongst the transcriptions by reading them numerous times and coding the data according to preliminary categories found. Thereafter, the preliminary categories were analysed and used to deduce focal concepts. This process involved choosing clear, overpowering interpretations and linking them back to the research questions and literature, thereby bringing forth a scholarly report of the results of this process (Braun & Clarke, 2000).

During the analysis, 12 preliminary categories were identified and clustered into three focal themes (see brief analysis in Table 4.1 below). These themes were ranked according to their prevalence in the text. The preliminary categories, the basic themes and the ranking of the themes are indicated in table format in Table 4.1. The dominant themes with the highest rankings receive the most consideration in this chapter.

The discussion that follows seeks to capture the essence of the themes which were identified during the analysis, as well as to relate them to themes identified in the literature review. Three main themes were identified during analysis, the first of which relates to how participants account for their decision to pursue a career in psychology; the second to their treatment of gender in therapeutic contexts; and the third to their accounts of gendered participation in the broader discipline of psychology.

Table 4.1: Themes and categories identified in the analysis

Main themes	Preliminary categories and sub-categories
Theme 1: Psychology as a profession of choice	Women are the "feelier type": The influence of gender on pursuing psychology
	The nurturing personality as a factor in choice
Theme 2: Setting the scene within psychology	Psychologists' gender as an influencing factor on aspects of therapy
	Choice of therapeutic clientele, therapeutic techniques, and comfort and approach within the therapeutic context
	A corrective emotional experience within the therapeutic context
	Intersections of social signifiers in the therapeutic process
	Sexual orientation, age, education level and culture of the client as challenges in therapy
Theme 3: Increased competition for females as a consequence of women's empowerment	The impact of feminisation on the profession
	Status and prestige
	Resulting stereotypes
	Increased competition for females as a direct consequence of domination and empowerment of females
	Males are getting lost along the way

4.2. PSYCHOLOGY AS A PROFESSION OF CHOICE

This main theme refers to participants' accounts of what attracted them, as postgraduate psychology students, to the profession of psychology. According to the literature review the primary meaning of gender in psychology has been difference, therefore, the field of psychology has largely used the term "gender" as a means by which to indicate difference (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988). This theme focuses on how gender features in participants' narratives of how they came to their current context as student psychologists in the field, and they offered two seemingly conflicting accounts. In the discussion that follows I first attend to their apparent dismissal of their own gendered identities as influencing their career choice. I then discuss what they described as a "nurturing personality" and the influence thereof on their choice to pursue psychology.

4.2.1 Women are the “feelier type”: The influence of gender on pursuing psychology

Participants assumed a number of positions in relation to the influence of their gendered subjectivities on their choice to pursue a career in psychology. Literature reveals that gender differentially influences the early career-relevant decisions of men and women and beliefs about gender and gender roles are seen to influence individuals' understanding of their competence at various career-relevant tasks (Correll, 2001). Individuals therefore use this gender-differentiated understanding when making career decisions, and these beliefs about gender and gender roles may direct men and women along widely different career paths (Correll, 2001).

Although the literature places much weight on gender as a factor of influence in decisions regarding career, most of the participants mentioned that their gendered subjectivity as male or female had not played a role when deciding upon psychology as a profession of choice. The following excerpts illustrate such a dismissal:

Lucy: I chose psychology on my own belief or my own interest, it didn't, I can't see that my gender was influenced in, I just can't see that, because I was female I chose a female orientated job. I only knew that there were more females as I got into psychology, I didn't know that from the beginning.

Sipho: My choice of psychology was not influenced by my gender at all. I never knew the ratios or anything it was purely from my interests that I chose psychology.

Fred: I don't think for me being male or female played a role in my attraction towards psychology. Alright so my attraction was based on figuring people out, figuring myself out, basically.

The aforementioned dismissals of gender might have a number of implications. Firstly, there is some sense in these comments that participants did not wish to be reduced to their gender. In stating that their gender was the main influence in their career choice, they risk appearing as if they did not make a choice out of their own volition. By attributing their career choice to their gender they reduce their own agency in making the decision. In these statements, participants resisted such an attribution and in that manner put forward a depiction of themselves as active and independent social actors. This is especially evident in Lucy's response that she chose psychology out of her *own* belief and

own interest, as if to emphasise that she was not automatically channelled into a career due to factors considered to be outside of her control or choice, such as her gender.

Secondly, at times during the focus group discussions participants seemed to defend themselves against stating that their genders had in fact played a role in their decision to pursue psychology as a career of choice, such as in the above excerpt of Siphon in which he states his choice was not influenced by his gender *at all*. This might be partly due to participants' specific context in terms of their career where, when taking into consideration the demographics of the sample (i.e., upcoming psychologists within the profession of psychology), it is possible that due to their being at a point where they were still being trained in the profession, their responses were often aligned with a critical or non-stereotypical view. Put differently, they found themselves in a life stage in which they were expected to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions, and their dismissal of gender in these instances might be related to these assumptions.

Not all participants expressly dismissed the influence of their gendered subjectivities on their choice to pursue a career in psychology. There were also instances during the focus groups where a small number of participants supported the notion that gender did determine their choice of profession. This contrasting view is illustrated in the following response:

Thabo: I think I was intensively influenced by gender, when I look at the theories for instance you look at Freud, Erikson, Rogers, most of them are males. And that brought a question to me whether males are good in this field. So that was one of background motivations to say that if so many males have been famous, if you look at the list of the most famous psychologists, the majority of them, like three quarters of psychologists are males I mean. So that I think to some extent brought some gender bias for me, I think it did influence me a bit.

Thabo's comment stands in contrast to other participants who expressly resist the notion of gender informing their career choice. However, Thabo does not demonstrate an awareness of the historical context within which theorists in psychology rose to prominence. As described in Chapter 2, women were historically marginalised from professional participation in the discipline of psychology and his attribution of the prominence of male theorists being indicative of a particular aptitude for men to excel in psychology does not indicate a critical awareness of this broader socio-political context of gendered participation.

Further to this, as stated in Chapter 2, psychology is a field that provides much flexibility and allows for much freedom in one's daily schedule compared to several other professions. As women are typically the "caregivers" within the household (or so their gender role prescribes) authors such as Diamond (2011) have noted that it is likely that psychology is regarded as a field of work that allows women to carry out their other gendered responsibilities while also generating an income (Diamond, 2011). Related to this, another marginal reason offered during the group discussions reiterates such a view:

Tessa: For me my gender did play a bit of a role. One of the things I considered in choosing a career was being able to stay at home when I'm a mom and having a job that I can have more flexible time, so becoming a psychologist was something that I felt suited well, because I can have a private practice, I can go in the mornings, I can leave in the afternoons when school comes out, that kind of thing.

A final position assumed by participants in their accounts of how gender influenced their choice to pursue psychology is one that is more closely aligned with traditional notions of masculine and feminine qualities. While the first position discussed here seems to point to a dismissal of the significance of gender in participants' decision-making, this final position highlights the influence of gender roles based on traditional gender stereotypes. As noted by Crooks and Braur (2010), the ascribing of gender roles guide people to certain assumptions about how others will behave. Within such a traditional construction of the male-female binary the female gender role is associated with being nurturing and empathic, while the male gender role creates a perception of men as being more proactive and helpful with concrete solution-based problems (Crooks & Braur, 2010). These roles are also assigned to psychologists, thereby influencing the nature of problems and clients with whom they will be confronted. These gender stereotypes are highlighted in the following responses in constructing meaning around the profession of psychology:

Thabo: The more complicated work is for male-related genders and if it's less complicated then it should be for females.

Carl: Men I suppose would be good with practical stuff and in rationalising the problem. I can definitely see then how you would go to a female and express your emotional stuff, you would get empathy because that's what you would expect from a female.

Tessa: When a client feels like discussing something which requires empathy and someone to listen, then a client may want to go to a female psychologist. However, if a

client wants something to be done about a problem then she may want to speak to a male psychologist.

Tanya: My social construction is a bit, maybe not really but if you think of it plainly and stereotypically it is like, the women are the "feelier type". Females talk about your feelings and the males are more like maybe scientific or the doctors.

This position offers a contrasting view in that it reflects a more stereotypical view of gender, where traditional notions of male and female genders shape participants' career decisions. In the above statements, participants construct women as more suited to psychology in that they are described as warm, empathetic and good listeners, while men are described as more solution-focused, objective and rational. As stated in Chapter 2 in the literature review, Ussher and Nicolson (1992) note that the closer a profession is to the activities of nurturing, comforting, encouraging, and caring, the more likely it is to be seen as an expression of women's style in general. Such "emotional work" for various reasons befalls women in modern societies to perform. (Hochschild, 1983). Participants' statements reflect such a prescription that women are more suited to pursuing a career in psychology due to their traditionally gendered characteristics predisposing them to "emotional work".

Based on the aforementioned responses, two aspects come to the fore: firstly, that upcoming psychologists in the profession seem to dismiss notions of gender as difference; secondly, socialisation appears to determine gender roles with subsequent gender stereotypes coming into play. In other words, primary socialisation through ones' upbringing influences which gender roles one will choose to follow, and possibly even the career path one chooses to pursue. This was elucidated in the following participants' responses:

Mark: I think men and women get socialised into their genders as they grow up.

Fred: It has been happening throughout your whole life. When I think about gender it is not this static biological thing, it is more a way of interacting I think, a pattern of interaction which you have learnt coming over a period of time.

Bohan (1992) states that the meaning of gender is socially constructed, as is true of other pieces of knowledge. The understanding of what it means to be masculine or feminine is a product of the social interchange that leads to agreement, even certainty about the

nature of reality. Such a construction of gender reflects what Berger and Luckmann (1967) have termed primary socialisation. Participants' statements point to an awareness of how such patterns of interaction are narrated by traditional gender stereotypes that form the basis of their interactions. In the following theme I take up the notion of gendered characteristics predisposing men and women to different professional fields further and specifically discuss the gendered notion of a need to nurture, comfort and care in more detail.

4.2.2 The nurturing personality as a factor in choice

This preliminary theme continues the focus on participants' treatment of gender in their accounts of arriving at the choice to pursue psychology as a profession. Participants offered to dismiss the influence of gender and instead emphasise the role of innate personality traits in one's choice of psychology as a career. More specifically, nurturing personality characteristics that are stereotypically associated with the female gender role are considered as the motivating factor behind such a choice. Examples of such characteristics include the ability to be empathic, to care for others, to play a "motherly" role and the need to help others who are suffering. Such a personality is described as playing a mediating role in decisions regarding career as these qualities need a space to be foregrounded. In the previous section I illustrated how such gendered characteristics are drawn on by participants to describe women as more suited to the "emotional work" of psychology. However, here I demonstrate how such gendered characteristics are extended beyond a stereotypical gender role to refer to a nurturing personality. As argued by Harton and Lyons (2009), students who regarded themselves as being highly capable of empathy are more likely to choose psychology than those who do not. Thus, it is possible that individuals who believe they possess these traits are more inclined towards choosing psychology as a profession:

Tessa: I don't think gender had such a big influence on the fact that I am interested in psychology, but it does influence the way I do therapy, because I can feel that I am more nurturing I want to mother people and that's what influenced my decision in choosing psychology as a profession to go into.

Samantha: *I think that mine is a little bit of a blend of both in terms of nurturing and wanting to help make a difference.*

While participants' statements seemingly work towards a dismissal of gender as shaping their career narratives, through appealing to a construction of a nurturing personality, the

responses cited here are to a large extent gendered. Tessa and Samantha reinforce the idea that feminine traits such as being “nurturing” and “motherly” contributed towards the choice of a career in psychology. By referring to such a nurturing personality in gendered terms (e.g., through references to “mothering”), these statements did not serve to dismiss gender, but instead indicated that it *had been* evoked in making such decisions.

Egan (2010) states that this deeply rooted conviction that certain types of people are capable of helping others come to terms with their problems has historically played itself out in different phenomena across genders, noting that today this notion is predominantly associated with helping professions such as psychology. Although there is some gender variability in participants' constructions of the need to help others, a discourse of nurturing is generally associated with female gendered identities, and specifically with the act of mothering. Lucy and Carl reiterated this gendered construction of the nurturing psychologist in the following excerpts:

Lucy: If we are female than we're the nurturing therapist, if we're male we are the protective therapist.

Carl: There's a discourse, females are meant to be nurturing, you feel the societal pressure okay I need to be nurturing in this situation, so you play into the discourse.

The use of gendered language was also evident when male participants described their role as psychologists in more conventionally masculine terms, thereby accommodating a normative male identity. In the following excerpt Thabo refers to the influence of a nurturing personality, but reframes it to focus on features typically associated in dominant discourse with a normative male identity:

Thabo: For me I think it's my personality like the strength and courage that I want to help.

Thabo's statement appears to refrain from terms that are typically associated with feminine characteristics, and instead uses language that is more congruent with what is seen as normatively masculine. In this manner, his gendered identity is brought into alignment with his professional identity as a psychologist.

In summary of this theme, gender was found to be implicated in participants' references to a nurturing personality. While most refuted the idea of gender playing a role in mediating their career decisions, the gendered nature of the language they used to describe their

qualities as psychologists served to reinforce this notion. Their definitions of the “nurturing personality” drew on traditionally feminine identities, thus it was constructed in gendered terms, despite participants offering it in support of their dismissal of the influence of gender. Interestingly, this notion of a nurturing personality was altered according to the gender of the respondent. Though being “nurturing” is traditionally associated with the female gender role, male participants altered these traditional definitions to include characteristics of the male stereotype. In this manner, nurturing was constructed in terms that accommodate traditional masculine gendered qualities, such as when Thabo referred to having “the strength and courage” to help others. This reframes a discourse of nurturing associated with being motherly, to accommodate traditional masculine qualities of strength and courage. It is possible that such reframing has the function of constructing a professional identity of psychologists that is not in conflict with participants’ gendered identities. While Tessa’s reference to wanting to mother people was congruent with her female gendered identity, Thabo’s statement reframed the act of nurturing by using traditionally masculine terms in order to achieve this fit between gendered and professional identity. In the following section I move on to discuss the second theme identified in the transcripts.

4.3 SETTING THE SCENE WITHIN PSYCHOLOGY

This main theme elaborates on participants’ treatment of gender in different therapeutic contexts in the field of psychology.

4.3.1 Psychologists’ gender as a contributory factor to aspects of therapy

A number of subcategories were identified under the theme of participants’ gender as a contributory factor to therapy.

4.3.1.1 Choice of therapeutic clientele, therapeutic techniques, and comfort and approach within the therapeutic context

This section of the analysis focuses on how participants construct the role of gender in their approach to their choice of clientele, their therapeutic techniques and how they interact with clients in a therapeutic context. Most psychotherapies have acknowledged the importance of a therapeutic alliance in the process of therapy and certain factors have been found to contribute to such a rapport. Nadelson et al. (2005) write of the importance of consistent values between client and therapist and there also seems to be a higher ability for such identification to occur in contexts where gender is kept homogenous between them. Participants’ referred to such a notion:

Tessa: I would say that when I work with females I tend to be more open to self-disclosure than when I work with males. In a way, that can enhance therapy.

Lucy: I'm more aware of what I say or do when I'm in therapy with males, because I am scared that I may do something that will cause transference.

This notion is confirmed by Jones and Zoppel (1982), who found that female therapists rated themselves as more successful, particularly with female clients. From the literature and the above excerpts it can be seen that not only will therapists succumb to taking on clients who are of the same gender as themselves, but clients themselves may also seek therapists of the same gender. This is done as a means by which to heighten therapist-client identification and to simplify the process of developing a therapeutic relationship.

In addition to seeking same-gendered therapeutic relations, other factors could also play a role in such choices. For instance, in the previous section I discussed how the female gender role is often associated with activities of nurturance, emotionality and the care of young children. These stereotypical roles see women as the submissive caregivers and men as the dominant providers of the household (Strebel et al., 2006). Thus, the possibility remains that male psychologists may not identify completely with child clients while female psychologists would, due to their prescribed gender roles. Following from this, psychologists may be prompted to remain within the limits of their gender roles. This is confirmed by the following excerpt:

Carl: I know from some of the male psychologists that I've spoken to, a lot of them do not like working with children.

According to the aforementioned literature, it could be said that psychologists' gender could in fact play a role in their choice of and interaction with clientele. The following excerpt demonstrates some contestation of the abovementioned stereotypical roles by stating that even though the female gender role is associated with nurturance and the possibility of working with children, not all female psychologists may feel comfortable in staying within the limits of their prescribed gender roles, and that males could rather take on the gender roles of females in this regard:

Tessa: I know of females that don't want to work with children at all, but I also know of male therapists that work well with kids.

Though some participants may feel more comfortable with clients who fall within the confines of their prescribed gender roles, others view this as a limiting factor of which they are aware and try to avoid.

4.3.1.2 A corrective emotional experience within the therapeutic context

Gender has been described as playing a role in the effectiveness of therapy, specifically in the ability of psychologists to provide a corrective emotional experience described by Yalom (2005), as an expression or experience of emotion that is in some way liberating or enlightening for the individual, related to their identification as either male or female and how that corresponds to their clients' prior experiences with men and women. This could be linked to the concept of authority. Several studies have found that increased credibility is associated with greater influence (Brief, Buttram, Elliott, Reizenstein, & McCline, 2001; Fragale & Heath, 2004; Lampinen & Smith, 1995; Tormala, Brinol, & Petty, 2006). When considering the normative male gender role, it is evident that males are considered to hold greater power than females, whereby women are viewed as submissive (Strebel et al., 2006). Thus, it could be argued that societal beliefs of the superior authority of male psychologists allow for greater opportunity to influence clients, in other words, to create a corrective emotional experience. Participants made reference to such a notion during the focus group discussions, when they referred to how male psychologists could draw on stereotypical gender roles in their interaction with female clients:

Samantha: I'm just thinking now, because Carl is going to work at Eldorado Park next semester with women who have been abused in recent relationships, which in some cases can be concerning if the woman is afraid to open up to another man. But like you say, it could provide that corrective emotional experience that the psychologist is the nurturing male who doesn't attack her like she has experienced before.

Sipho: Our society has defined males as perpetrators and as these bad people. They [the clients] have a male that is doing the exact opposite of what is being seen from what society has defined males as. I [the psychologist] come in to say I can be the protector.

The above responses portray the idea that a psychologists' gender plays a role in the effectiveness of certain therapies, yet a closer reading indicates that even such responses are prone to being shaped by societal gender roles. Participants drew on a perpetrator/protector binary in constructing men's involvement in women's lives. What is significant in the manner in which this binary is drawn on is that references to either perpetrators or protectors both insinuate greater power over females. Both these positions

evoke a subject position of women as powerless victims. In this manner, the notion of a corrective emotional experience is constructed as only being possible when the male psychologist assumes a role as protector of the female client, thereby reinforcing the notion that men hold power over women regardless of the role they take on.

Anderson and Umberson (2001) support this notion by bringing about an awareness of how men "do" and "accomplish" their genders, by either taking on the role of perpetrator or protector, thereby reinforcing gender stereotypes of male power and female passivity. In this way, male psychologists who view themselves as taking on a protective role for their female clients are feeding into these gender stereotypes. As mentioned by Anderson and Umberson (2001):

A 'masculine identity' exists only as the actions of individuals who stylise their bodies and their actions in accordance with a normative binary framework of gender. In addition, the performance of gender makes male power and privilege appears natural and normal rather than socially produced and structured. (p. 359)

In addition to considering how participants reflected on their comfort with certain groups of clients, based on their own gender, the analysis also explored how they related their own gender to their therapeutic interaction with their clients. More specifically, I was interested in how participants related notions of gender to their choice of therapeutic technique:

Fred: I think there isn't a one size fits all in therapy. Rather let the process unfold and then see what is in the best interest of the client. We need to be open to the experience and be flexible. You cannot let your gender biases or ideas of what genders should behave like keep you from being flexible, because if you say no a male acts this way and a female only acts that way, you have now just limited the complete range of things that you could do for your client. But if you're flexible, then you can move beyond that.

Tanya: I think for me it is important to know what I am comfortable with, what technique I can do. Because even though CBT would work with depression and anxiety, I am uncomfortable with CBT no matter what gender my client is or regardless of my gender. I just struggle with it.

Tessa: I think for young inexperienced therapists it comes directly from what you know. So you will do something that you feel comfortable with, and what you have been trained in.

These responses portray the view that gender does not play a role in psychologists' choice of therapeutic techniques. Though all psychologists find certain therapeutic approaches to be variably comfortable, the degree of such comfort could not be linked to how participants treat constructions of gender. While participants did find it important for the therapeutic approach used to resonate with the psychologist and a degree of comfort with the approach was deemed necessary, the overriding view was that therapeutic approaches should be suited to the clients' presentation. The literature supports this notion, as studies have shown that variations of therapist-client groupings are not related to measures of psychotherapeutic treatment processes or modalities used (Zlotnik, Elkin, & Shea, 1998).

4.3.2 Intersections of social signifiers in the therapeutic process

While the focus of this study is on how gender is treated in participants' accounts, during the process of analysis various social signifiers were identified as intersecting with gender in participants' accounts of therapeutic processes.

4.3.2.1 Sexual orientation, age, education level and culture of the client as challenges in therapy

While the previous section focussed on participants' constructions of their own gender, in their choice of clientele and use of therapeutic techniques, in the following section I turn the focus onto how participants treated client characteristics in their discussions. It delves into the varying characteristics of clients and the role that such characteristics play in the therapeutic process as described in participants' accounts. Such characteristics may have variable functions in the therapeutic context, depending on the gender of the psychologist. One such characteristic referred to by participants is that of sexual orientation, which links back to a psychologists' level of comfort with certain clients and raises the possibility that certain gendered psychologists may not be comfortable in a therapeutic setting with clients of a certain sexual orientation. Participants referred to this as follows:

Samantha: To be honest, I know it is okay for me to work with gay men as a female, but I am very uncomfortable working with lesbian women.

Lucy: It's not really about gender, it's more about sexual orientation that's creating the difference. If I am seeing a gay male then it doesn't really matter, my guard will definitely be down and I'll feel more open with him in therapy.

The main notion that arises from these responses is that participants' concern lies primarily with the nature of possible transference feelings. Samantha and Lucy describe working with gay male clients as being more comfortable than working with lesbian clients, due to them perceiving the possibility of the development of sexual transference feelings being greater with the latter. Following this line of reasoning, the same would apply to male psychologists working with gay male clients. In the excerpts that follow, participants reiterate this view by stating that what is relevant for them as far as gender is concerned is the potential for sexual transference feelings. Such possibilities are not limited to gay or lesbian clients, but are also mentioned with heterosexual male clients. The psychologists' discomfort is constructed here as a barrier to therapy. These same processes could be applied to female psychologists' level of comfort in working with male clients. An example of this is provided in the following excerpt:

Tessa: When I work with females, I tend to be more open to self-disclose than when working with males - in a way that can enhance therapy later on. I am more aware of what I do and say in therapy with males because I'm scared that I can do something that could cause transference.

It is interesting to note that participants' statements seem to imply the existence of a universal heterosexual psychologist, thereby suggesting that all psychologists will hold emotional, romantic, or sexual attractions to members of the opposite sex as themselves. This heteronormative view was not challenged or critiqued by participants.

A second factor constructed by participants as a hindrance to therapy was that of client age and education level intersecting with other social signifiers such as gender. Many participants were of the opinion that instead of gender, factors such as these were more prominent as contributors or obstructions to therapy. Despite this view, it can be said that gender remains relevant, but the manner in which it combined with or intersected with other signifiers within their identities, such as age, culture and education level created particular challenges for the participants:

Sipho: For me, just the issue of age for example, a male of fifty two comes to me with a presenting problem like impotence. For me it becomes difficult to explore the problem more because he's like my father's age. You cannot ask more personal questions to a fifty two year old man. So it [the age of the client] does affect therapy.

Thabo: I think it's also about the attitude that you give back, because most of them come with this attitude that 'I'm older than you, do you have a baby?' and all these issues that they mention. But it's about how you as a psychologist bounce back and show them that it's not about all other aspects, it's about the context that we are in.

These responses indicate that many psychologists, especially novice ones, are somewhat intimidated by older clients who bring life experiences to therapy to which the psychologists have not been exposed. In addition, these statements make implicit reference to gendered identity, in that having fathered a child is often considered as a marker of a "successful" male identity. Morrell (1998) refers to this when he describes the widely held view that patriarchy and masculinity in their true sense are only achieved when an authoritarian role as a husband, and the subsequent fathering of children, has been fulfilled. With this in mind, it seems as if participants are reflecting on how gender appears to intersect with other aspects of social identities and cannot be teased out as having a singular influence. Lucy and Samantha comment on this intersectionality of social signifiers when they state the following:

Lucy: I think the clients' education level also plays a role, are they as educated as me? That has a big impact.

Samantha: I must agree that education plays a role. If I compare three older males that I have seen in therapy, the first one I was very uncomfortable with - I felt intimidated all the time. He was well educated; he spoke English a lot better than I do. The second male I saw was not as well educated, he spoke the same (level of) language that I spoke - we had a great process, nothing was intimidating there. The third male I saw was also well educated, but I didn't feel intimidated, however I do feel the fact that I am a female does influence the therapeutic process.

The overriding theme that emerges from these responses seems to be related to power, and psychologists' experience of such power within the therapeutic setting. As argued by Prilleltensky (2008), though psychologists claim to be disengaged from power it is actually a dynamic that is continually present within the field. Thus, it could also be said that psychologists experience themselves as holding power within the therapeutic setting. Lerman and Rigby (1990) support this notion when they describe the profession of psychology as one that holds a measure of power over others, especially clients. Accordingly, the power of the client is seen as being less than that of the psychologist.

However, there are other means by which to attain power in society, such as education level and age, and participants' reflections attest to this. Wanko (2003) explains that one of the most common ways to gain power is through academic success, i.e., education levels. Therefore, a client who claims power through level of education may pose a threat to the power of the psychologist within the therapeutic setting. Participants' responses also indicate that gender acts as a moderating factor in such processes. Lips (1991) states that an inequality of power exists between men and women, with women being prescribed less power than men. Following from this, a well-educated male client could potentially create greater discomfort in a female psychologist due to the power relations that are prescribed by gender in addition to level of education. In summary, it can be said that participants describe themselves as novice psychologists, which might make their awareness of feeling intimidated by particular clients more salient.

In addition to sexual orientation, age and education level, participants also made reference to the culture of clients as being of significance as the importance of adherence to prescribed gender roles and their application may be culture-dependent. It has been found that the expectations of men and women to conform to normative notions of gender, together with the intensity of such expectations, differ across cultures (Crooks & Baur, 2010; Martin, 1990).

Thabo: I think we can also trace it back to the way that people are brought up in their homes. This can be based on how we think about genders, for instance, in our African culture we look at women as submissive. Women are the supporters of the men, therefore being subservient. So obviously a man from my culture won't go to a female psychologist because he would want to be dominant because of the way we have been brought up. Therefore I think that most of it is based on what we have been made to believe about gender roles from a very young age.

Tessa: Something that I have experienced, not only with my gender and my culture, but when I see black males, they are very uncomfortable in the first session and they constantly tell me that it's not right for them to come to a female therapist and expose their whole life to them. But I'm okay with that because I understand that it's a cultural thing.

Sipho: It's easier for them [African males] to go to another male psychologist to express their feelings. It's like it's not the right thing to do, it becomes more difficult to go to a female.

In these statements participants draw on a notion of cultural differences in normative gender roles. Thus, the socialisation of each client within these gender roles is an important consideration to make when considering their decision to see certain gendered psychologists. This represents an intersection between culture and gender. Male clients who come from cultures that ascribe much power and dominance to the male gender may experience discomfort in a setting that ascribes power to a female, in this case a female psychologist.

In conclusion, participants referred to gender as playing a role in the level of psychologists' and clients' comfort within the therapeutic setting. Such levels of comfort have found to be related to several other factors, including client age, education level and culture. The dynamics that are posed by power relations and gender roles were found to form the foundation of many such processes within the therapeutic setting. Simply put, the profession of psychology is permeable to the dynamics of gender roles that exist within the larger society.

4.4 INCREASED COMPETITION FOR FEMALES AS A CONSEQUENCE OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

This final main theme seeks to capture the residue that has been left behind in the profession due to its rapid feminisation. This theme mainly explores how upcoming student psychologists construct meaning around the notion of feminisation and the implications it has for them in terms of their gendered identities.

4.4.1 The impact of feminisation on the profession

Since the 1970s, many disciplines and occupations have experienced significant increases in the number and proportion of women among their ranks. The term "feminisation" is a useful one for describing the phenomenon of the growing movement of women into certain areas of study and work (Richter & Griesel, 1999).

4.4.1.1 Status and prestige

As various factors make careers in psychology less attractive and viable, some men leave the field and other men decline to enter it, thereby creating opportunities for increased participation by women. These two factors are then combined in a cycle, with "devaluation of the field and feminisation stimulating each other" (Rosenzweig, 1994, p. 751).

According to the aforementioned literature, it could be possible that the loss of status and prestige of the profession may have contributed to the way upcoming psychologists view

their gendered identities within the profession. The excerpts below portray the view that males are reluctant to enter the profession due to not wanting to be associated with a profession that is stereotyped as a female-oriented profession entailing the role of “nurturing” and “caring” - a role that is constructed in dominant discourse as only fulfilled by females. In addition, in order to compensate for the profession losing its status and prestige due to its high rate of feminisation, males already present in the profession are constructed as needing to obtain status in other ways, such as through advanced degrees, in order to be recognised as an authority of knowledge within the profession. This view is extrapolated in the following participants’ excerpts:

Mark: I think that males are reluctant to enter the profession because psychology is the more nurturing and caring role that only females can do. For this reason males do not want to associate themselves with psychology. I wonder if this is related to the field losing its status.

Lucy: I wonder if males have the need to get a PhD more than females do in this profession because there is more status in saying that I have a doctorate degree in psychology and many females do not reach this level of accomplishment even though the field is mostly feminised.

These statements point to a construction of males entering the profession as a result of seeking to regain their status and their place in the profession through overtaking females. However, the truth remains that since many men in society place a high value on status and power, and since these values are closely associated with financial status, some men choose to pursue them in more financially rewarding professions than psychology. Psychology was once a comparatively lucrative vocation, but less so now (Diamond, 2011).

4.4.1.2 *Feminisation and resulting stereotypes*

A typical historical trend in psychology has been associated with gendered stereotypes coming to the fore due to the feminisation of psychology, and psychology has thus at times been a profession associated with females and the notion of nurturing and caring. As mentioned above, Hochschild (1983) terms this kind of activity “emotional work,” and that for various reasons it falls to women in modern societies to perform it. This could be a further reason that more women than men choose to pursue a career in psychology. The fate of psychologists’ increasingly female body of practitioners speaks to society’s devaluation of care-giving in general and women’s identification with this arena of life

(Philipson, 1993). Such devaluation stems from stereotypes which arise from the feminisation of the profession, as suggested by Thabo:

Thabo: I think that in time when you say you are psychologists and you are male, people will tell you that psychology is really a female thing.

Some participants reiterated that psychology is not necessarily a female-oriented profession, and males and females in the profession can rather strive for equality by moving beyond what society has perceived the profession to be. This view was elucidated by the following responses:

Mark: Psychology is not just about fuzzy feelings; there is a role for males in the occupation. Therefore psychology is just being perceived as a female-type of career by society.

Fred: I think there is potential for males coming into the profession in that males can complement what females have already done because I think there is much more that we can achieve instead of competing against each other.

Pauline: I think that having both genders there will keep the profession honest. This way we can provide the best service to our clients in the future by learning from each other.

These responses clearly depict the view that despite striving for equality between genders and complementing each other, the feminisation of psychology has had implications for both male and female psychologists.

4.4.1.3 Males are getting lost along the way

A question which remains is that while the feminisation of psychology has had these implications for females, where are the males in the scenes of psychology, and what implications have the feminisation of psychology had on the male gender?

A predominantly female demographic has been a pressing reason for men decreasing in numbers in the field of psychology. Firstly, a possible reason for this is financial. In recent decades it has become increasingly difficult to earn a desirable living as a psychologist of any discipline, be it clinical psychology, clinical social work, marriage and family therapy, or counselling. Considering the continuing influence of normative gender ideals positing that men should be providers for their families, the mental health profession, especially private practice, is no longer perceived as a viable source of steady income for men.

Many male psychotherapists have left the profession, finding work in other venues that hold higher monetary rewards (Diamond, 2011). This perception is supported in the following excerpts:

Fred: I think that on an academic level, a lot of males are not getting into psychology, they rather qualify in something else first and then somewhere down the line they decide to take up psychology.

Lucy: What I am seeing is that somehow through undergraduate we lose the males, and then honours and master's we lose even more of the males. Therefore by master's there are maybe only about four males applying, so that goes for me to say that the males are getting lost along the way.

Lynn: I often wonder what happens to the males, and when I really think about it, I think that somewhere along the line they change courses.

Tanya: I know someone who was a teacher at a school and after that he went into psychology because initially psychology was not something that he considered.

Tessa: I think that part of the imbalance is because of money. I think that males can earn a lot more in any other professions and I think that males feel that they cannot support their families to the extent that they would like to because there is just not enough money in psychology.

Samantha: I think that psychology is then not linked to gender, it is linked to income.

There are two main factors that have contributed to these recent trends. Firstly, the gradual move of men away from the field has caused a reduction in monetary rewards that the profession could offer. If one accepts that most men value status and monetary gains, together with the ability to provide optimally for their families, it becomes apparent that the field of psychology has become less appealing to them because it cannot meet these standards as well as other professions can. However, these statements also serve to reinforce the view of men as being "breadwinners" and therefore being in need of greater monetary rewards than women. The participants seemed to have fallen prey to an uncritical notion of men as breadwinners. The notion was not challenged, but instead was simply adhered to and formed part of their discourse. This in itself demonstrates that also professionals within the field of psychology are subjected to and support normative societal gender discourses that privilege male interests.

In addition, the view that is promoted seems to position men as being victims of feminisation, which is thought to have led to a reduction in the monetary value attached to services. As found by Snyder et al. (2000), when women begin to dominate in a profession it has a tendency to lose status, prestige, and perceived utility. That this discourse reinforces the idea that men offer services of greater value seems to be overlooked, and instead men are seen as having been disadvantaged through the process of feminisation and have been labelled as the "victims".

4.4.1.4 Domination, empowerment and increased competition for female psychologists

This subcategory is concerned with how participants reflected on the impact of the feminisations of psychology on female psychologists. For female psychologists, feminisation has led to domination and empowerment of females in the profession, thereby continuing the trend through domination and empowerment of females. However, a direct consequence is increased competition amongst females in the profession, which is constructed in participants' accounts as a threat for women in psychology. To date, research accounts describe the feminisation of psychology as a threat to males alone (Philipson, 1993). However, it has provided women with income, status, freedom, self-esteem and autonomy, thereby exposing women themselves to an increased amount of competition amongst each other as well as a pressing need to be more assertive and responsive to perceived threats from other females within the profession. For this reason, the feminisation of psychology can actually be depicted as a platform whereby males could enter the profession as the more "needed commodity" instead of the "victim of feminisation". Such a construction of feminisation as a threat to female psychologists is demonstrated in the following responses:

Lucy: I wonder if it's not an empowerment thing. Females were previously seen as historical and males as the knowledge, times are changing now, therefore the feminisation of psychology has led to females feeling more empowered, now we can do so much more. However, this will also mean that that we will have more competition.

Tessa: As a female it means that I will have to be on top of my game, because people won't just come to me because I am female, there are so many female psychologists around, therefore in order for clients to choose me as their psychologist in the face of so many other female psychologists, I am going to have to be the best at what I do. Even for

internships, males are more likely to get a place because they are male. There are just so many females that it becomes more difficult for all of us to get selected.

Pauline: I think it is going to make it difficult to have a living if there are so many female psychologists. You just need to differentiate yourself even more to make sure that you are the best that you can be.

In these statements, participants construct the feminisation of psychology as a threat to women in the profession. This does not seem to be mentioned elsewhere in literature; instead the feminisation of psychology is typically discussed as a threat to *men* (Leathwood & Read, 2009). The changing use of assigning either men or women as victims serves as a testimony to gender bias. That female participants view other female psychologists as a "threat" did in itself reinforce the idea that gender did play a role in their perceptions. Therefore, not only is the presence of males in the profession seen as a threat by women, but the presence of other females seems also to be viewed as intimidating to their own positions.

From the above responses it is evident that men are thought to be forced into a position of having to exclude themselves from the discipline and are therefore constructed as victims of feminisation. On the other hand, the growing number of women within the profession poses a threat to women as they seem to view each other as competition, thereby also allowing themselves to be positioned as victims. Both women and men were thus labelled as victims, thereby indicating that the participants readily drew on this category when probed on the topic of feminisation. Given that both men and women seem to be conceptualised as victims of feminisation, it could be assumed that feminisation is viewed by both men and women in the profession as dire. Interestingly, such viewpoints are confined to feminisation and are not witnessed in industries that are undergoing masculinisation. As mentioned by Roos (1997), occupations that are thought to have become "masculinised" rarely provoke such discussions.

4.5 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings presented in this chapter point to complex and at times even contradictory treatment of gender in the accounts of postgraduate psychology students. The themes indicate that participants at times dismissed the influence of gender in their career narratives as well as their interactions with clients. However, I also demonstrated how participants' statements in some instances served to reinforce the persuasive influence of gender. Further to this, the process of feminisation seems to be one that is

generally constructed in negative terms by both male and female participants, within and external to the profession of psychology. Such viewpoints serve to reinforce gender stereotypes that prescribe men as being dominant and their participation in the profession as more valuable than that of women. Furthermore, now that there is a serious shortage of men remaining in or entering the psychology profession, decisions regarding which gender will provide services in the future remains an unanswered question. This reflects a possibility that males may hesitate to enter the profession even more in the future, despite participants stating the need to strive for equality in the face of feminisation.

The indication remains that men and women clinicians have very divergent perspectives, psychologies and life experiences, and each bring something different to the profession (Diamond, 2011). A significant component here is their gendered personal and professional identity. Therefore, gender in the profession of psychology is not about being better or worse, superior or inferior, but rather being different and equally valuable.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The study has sought to capture how postgraduate psychology students construct gendered accounts of their future profession from their own realities. It may contribute to the expansion of the existing literature by addressing the issue of gender and its related aspects in the field of psychology that need to be given light in the South African context, given the dearth of extensive research conducted in developing countries so far. The findings support those of previous studies to an extent, but also add to the current body of literature through the identification of new themes. In this chapter I first provide a brief overview of the findings, before reflecting on the strengths and limitations of the study, providing suggestions for future research, and finally concluding with recommendations based on the findings.

5.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In conducting this qualitative study I made use of a social constructionist approach to conduct two focus group discussions with postgraduate psychology students, in order to obtain a variety of opinions. I used thematic analysis to explore the meanings and experiences drawn upon in the participants' constructions of gender in the profession of psychology. Thematic analysis can be a social constructionist method in that it takes a closer look at the ways in which events, realities, meanings, and experiences are the result of a variety of discourses present within society (Clarke et al., 2006). In particular, I used Braun and Clarke's (2000) six-step model of analysis. Below follows a brief summary of the themes I identified in this process:

5.2.1 Gender as a motivator for psychology as a profession of choice

Beliefs about gender and gender roles are seen to influence individuals' understanding of their competence in various career-relevant tasks. Individuals therefore use this gender-differentiated understanding when making career decisions, and these beliefs about gender and gender roles may direct men and women along widely different career paths (Correll, 2001). Therefore, when looking into why participants chose psychology as a profession in which to venture it seems as if this contrasting position reflects a more stereotypical view, shaped by traditional notions of male and female gender. As stated by Ussher and Nicolson (1992), the closer a profession is to the activities of nurturing, comforting, encouraging and caring, the more likely it is to be seen as an expression of

women's style in general. Participants' accounts supported such a notion of women being responsible for and being more suited to such emotional work.

5.2.2 The nurturing personality as a motivator for psychology as a profession of choice

This theme explored a construction of innate personality traits in participants' choice of psychology as a career. More specifically, personality characteristics related to activities of nurturing, stereotypically associated with the female gender role, are considered as motivating factors behind such choices. Participants' responses indicated that postgraduate psychology students' accounts of gender in their future profession is influenced by the personality traits that they view themselves as holding, specifically their desire to help other people, with this notion of a nurturing personality being altered according to the gender of the participant. In addition, it was evident that socialisation and the resultant formation of gender roles also impact on an individual's choice of psychology as a career.

5.2.3 Psychologists' gender as a contributory factor to aspects of therapy: Choice of therapeutic clientele, therapeutic techniques, and comfort and approach within the therapeutic context

This theme focused on how gender is drawn on in discussing the importance of a therapeutic alliance in the process of therapy. Participants referred to the widely supported notion that there is a higher ability for optimal identification to occur in therapeutic contexts in which gender is kept homogenous between client and therapist (Nadelson et al. 2005). Participants made specific reference to a notion of women being more capable of caring for young children, whereas male psychologists may not identify with this association, thereby implying that psychologists may remain within their prescribed gender roles also in their professional activities. However, participants in this study noted that even though the female gender role was associated with nurturance and the possibility of more successfully working with children, not all female psychologists felt comfortable in staying within the limits of their prescribed gender roles, and that many males could take on the gender roles of females in these circumstances.

5.2.4 A corrective emotional experience within the therapeutic context

Though it was found that psychologists' gender plays a minimal role in their choice of therapeutic techniques, it was noted that gender was perceived as playing a role in the effectiveness of therapy, namely, in the ability to provide a corrective emotional

experience. Societal beliefs of the superior authority of male over female psychologists allows for greater opportunity to influence clients, in other words, to create a corrective emotional experience. Participants referred to the way male psychologists could draw on stereotypical gender roles in their interaction with female clients. The notion of a corrective emotional experience seems possible when the male psychologist assumes a role as protector of the female client, thereby reinforcing the notion that men hold power over women regardless of the role they are taking on. The analysis also explored how participants related notions of gender to their choice of therapeutic technique. Their responses portrayed the view that although all psychologists find certain therapeutic approaches to be variably comfortable, the degree of such comfort could not be linked to their gender. The overriding opinion was that therapeutic approaches used should instead be suited to the client's presentation.

5.2.5 Intersections of social signifiers in the therapeutic process: Sexual orientation, age, education level and culture of the client as challenges in therapy

Varying characteristics of clients and the role that they play in the therapeutic process were described in participants' accounts. For them, gender played a role in the level of psychologists' and clients' comfort within the therapeutic setting. Such functions of gender were found to intersect with several other factors, including client age, education level and culture. The dynamics posed by power relations and gender roles were found to form the foundation of many such processes within the therapeutic setting. Simply put, the profession of psychology is permeable to the dynamics of gender roles that exist within the larger society.

5.2.6 The impact of feminisation on the profession: Status and prestige

Rosenzweig (1994) has argued that the feminisation of psychology is a consequence rather than a cause of the devaluation of psychology, and can be explained as psychology losing its value, status, and prestige due to the increase in the amount of women representing the profession, and the slower growth of the number of men in the profession as a whole. Participants' viewpoints indicate that males who enter the profession do so as a result of seeking to regain their status and place in the profession through overtaking females. However, since so many men in society place a high value on status and power, and since these are closely associated with money, some men choose to pursue them in more financially rewarding professions.

5.2.7 Feminisation and resulting stereotypes

A typical historical trend in psychology has been associated with gendered stereotypes coming to the fore due to the feminisation of psychology, and psychology has thus remained a profession associated with females and the notion of nurturing and caring. Participants however felt that psychology was not necessarily a female-oriented profession, and males and females in the profession could rather strive for equality by moving beyond what society has perceived as the profession to be in, and that the feminisation of psychology has had implications for both male and female psychologists.

5.2.8 Domination, empowerment and increased competition for female psychologists

For female psychologists, feminisation has led to domination and empowerment of females in the profession, thereby continuing the trend of feminisation through domination and empowerment of females. However, this study brought forth a contrasting view to how the impact of the feminisation on the profession of psychology was previously portrayed and understood. To date, literature has depicted the feminisation of psychology as a threat to males alone. Less attention has been paid to the extent to which it has provided women with income, status, freedom, self-esteem and autonomy, which has also exposed women to an increased amount of competition amongst each other as well as a pressing need to be more assertive to perceived threats from other females within the profession. For this reason, the feminisation of psychology can actually be depicted as a platform whereby males could enter the profession as the more “needed commodity” instead of the “victim of feminisation”.

5.2.9 Males are getting lost along the way

A predominantly female demographic has been a pressing reason for men fleeing the field of psychology. According to participants, two main factors have contributed to these recent trends. Firstly, the gradual move of men away from the field caused a reduction in monetary rewards that the profession could offer and, secondly, males need to strive for status and prestige through monetary gain. Equally important, being able to provide for their families does not seem feasible in the profession as it has never been presented as such. However, this could also indicate that due to complementary polar differences, women will always need male psychologists, and men will always need female psychologists. Both genders will always bring a different perspective to the profession, and one that encompasses their personal and professional gendered identities.

5.3 EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH

In reflecting on the study, a number of limitations as well as strengths are apparent.

5.3.1 Limitations of the study

This research study was exploratory and therefore limited to a small sample drawn from only four universities across South Africa, therefore the findings of the study are restricted to these participants and generalisations to other populations on the same topic are not possible. Further to this, as the researcher of this study I also was part of one of the universities from which the sample was selected and was thus part of the same postgraduate training programme. Therefore, the way in which I approached the study, thought about the subject matter, positioned myself towards the participants, and interpreted the data was dependent on my positioning as a student where having my own biases, values and perceptions on the topic, and being an upcoming psychologist myself, I may unwittingly have sought certain types of responses and constructions of gender. My historical, cultural, and linguistic background of course also influenced my interpretations.

Lastly, when reflecting on the responses of the participants, a question I was left asking myself was: were the participants truly critical in their viewpoints? This may be a limitation of the study as participants were at times reluctant to express their viewpoints especially when the responses they had might appear very different from others expressed during the groups. There were some instances during the focus group discussions where participants withdrew from challenging each others' viewpoints and I could not facilitate a richer understanding of their statements. This is in part typical of focus group discussions and since my aim was to access broader social meanings as drawn on by participants, it is possible that this might not be a significant limitation of the study.

5.3.2 Strengths of the study

The relatively small sample made it possible for me to provide rich descriptions of students' constructions, but despite the limitations in number I was able to attain a measure of diversity in the final group of participants (in terms of gender, race and institution of training), which added to the richness of the study. Furthermore, this study adds to a much neglected area of research in that there are no other studies that I could identify which focus specifically on students' accounts of gender in their future profession of psychology.

5.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The following recommendations can be made for possible future research. Considering the nature of the sample used in the current study, it will be valuable for future research to expand the scope of study to include postgraduate students from different registration categories and working in different contexts. Further to this, this study focused on the constructions of postgraduate students, but it will also be valuable to explore how psychologists in independent practice or psychology professionals in academia construe gender in relation to their field.

From the findings it appears that psychology remains strongly associated with caring and nurturing roles largely associated with women. Future research could seek to capture the constructions of male students in particular and explore their perceptions of the profession, their reasons for pursuing psychology as well as their motivations for choosing to pursue a different profession should they not continue in the field.

Furthermore, previous research and literature has only focused on psychology losing its status and prestige due to its rate of feminisation and the implications this has on males, either in the profession already or those considering psychology as a plausible career option. However, as indicated by the findings of this study, literature has failed to bring forth the idea that the feminisation of psychology also has implications for female students and psychologists. This was particularly highlighted in students' constructions of the feminisation of psychology as a threat, due to increased competition amongst female professionals. As a result, females' experiences of the movement of feminisation have been ignored and need to be explored further.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON FINDINGS

The findings of the study may have implications for others in the profession; hence the following recommendations are made.

5.5.1 Recommendations for higher education

Due to gender having intersections with many other factors, such as culture, age, educational level, and how these intersections with gender may affect the therapeutic process, it may be useful to incorporate critical gender studies as a compulsory subject during undergraduate studies. Furthermore, it appears from participants' accounts that psychology as a potential career choice is not always thoroughly described to prospective students and accordingly they may not be aware of what psychology entails. Psychology

should hence be presented more vividly and accurately, as the current portrayal of it in society is one that appears to be stereotypical and skewed. In view of that, by presenting psychology more positively, the unequal entry of males and females to the profession can be addressed and equal opportunity and competition may arise during the selection process. This effect can spread over into academia and the professional level, where both males and females will be represented proportionately.

5.5.2 Recommendations for postgraduate psychology training programmes

On a postgraduate level, training needs to be inclusive of insight-oriented work, specifically including an introduction or expansion to critical gender and sexualities, and how our own thoughts, biases and understanding about gender and the attendant discourses may affect our work as psychologists. In addition, participants indicated that it was not only gender but rather a host of other social categories which impact on their constructions of themselves, their clients and the field. It may then seem viable to recommend that training programmes not only present content on critical gender studies, but also interrogate other categories of identity (such as sexuality, race, social class, and education level) and challenge students to work effectively within such complexity and difference.

It will be valuable for training programmes to place emphasis on personal and professional development, including work on privilege, social disadvantage, sexism, racism and the psychological impact of prejudice and other challenges encountered in the face of diversity (Adetimole, Afuape, & Vara, 2005). This could incorporate experiential workshops around issues of difference and diversity so as to broaden the scope beyond that of gender (or other categories of identity) as difference and diversity. Programmes should include policies committed to training in relation to gender issues and other issues of diversity in context of training, for example, power relations, issues and experiences of minority groups, and use reflective and reflexive practice on them. Placement supervisors should receive training specifically on the importance of raising these issues in supervision.

5.6 CONCLUSION

From the results of this study it has been determined that no matter how non-stereotypical we attempt to be with regard to gender roles pertaining to both our personal and professional identities, societal assumptions and gender roles have been instilled in us from a very young age. Consequently, due to socialisation of such gender roles, our own

gender will always affect us and our interactions. Gender remains a topic of debate in the profession, as it is interwoven with various aspects of identity and its impact cannot be denied. An interesting notion is to expand on how gender and its intersections have an effect on various components of therapy, given our diverse South African context.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Schedule

Appendix A: Interview Schedule

The researcher has identified several themes for the proposed study that will guide the questions during the focus group interviews that will be held with the masters students participants. As semi-structured interviews will be utilised in the study, the researcher may choose to ask some of the questions associated with the themes, or deviations from the interview schedule may occur if responses from the masters students indicate the need for such deviation.

Theme 1: Personal construction of own gendered identity

1. What attracted you to the profession of psychology?
2. How do you view your own identity from a gender perspective?
(Probe) Do you think being either male or female played a role in this decision?

Theme 2: Professional construction of own gendered identity

1. How do you view your own identity as psychologists from a gender perspective?
2. Are there aspects that make males or females better psychologists?
(Probe) If so, could you please describe these aspects?
3. How does being male or female affect the way you approach a client of the same sex as you?
4. How does being male or female affect the way you approach a client of the opposite sex as you?
5. Does your gendered professional identity influence your choice of therapeutic techniques?
(Probe) If so, could you please elaborate on how this influences choice of therapeutic technique?

Theme 3: General construction of own gendered identity

1. What are your views on the profession of psychology losing its status due to an increasing number of women entering the profession?

2. What impacts do you think the increasing number of women entering the profession of psychology has on you as up-coming psychologists

Theme 4: Academic construction of own gendered identity

1. What are your viewpoints on the representation of the male versus female ratio in academia in the field of psychology?
2. What are your viewpoints on the representation of the male versus female ratio on a professional level in the field of psychology?
3. Do any changes need to be brought about with regards to academia in the profession of psychology?
(Probe) If so, could you please elaborate on these changes that need to be brought about?
4. What effects will the increasing number of women entering the profession of psychology have on the future of academia and employment at a professional level?

APPENDIX B

Ethical clearance document



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities
Research Ethics Committee

25 September 2012

Dear Prof Maree,

Project: Constructing gender: postgraduate Psychology students' gendered accounts of their future profession
Researcher: TC Hira
Department: Psychology
Reference: 11281953

I have pleasure in informing you that the Registrar has formally given **approval** for the above study to be conducted at the University of Pretoria. Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should your actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

The Committee requests you to convey this approval to the researcher

Sincerely

Prof John Sharp
Chair: Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Humanities
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
e-mail: john.sharp@up.ac.za

Research Ethics Committee Members: Dr L Bickland; Prof M-H Coetzee; Dr JEH Grobler; Prof KL Harris; Ms H Klopper; Prof A Mlambo; Dr C Panebianco-Warrens; Prof J Sharp (Chair); Prof GM Spios; Prof E Tallard; Dr FG Wolmarans; Dr P Wood

APPENDIX C



**Faculty of Humanities
Department of Psychology**

Informed consent document for research participation

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Masters students' construction of gender in the profession of psychology A social constructionist study

Purpose of the study: The proposed study aims to qualitatively explore how master's students construct and perceive gender in the profession of psychology through the use of focus groups.

Your participation in this study will entail taking part in the focus group interview session which will be conducted in a time frame of two to three hours. The entire focus group interview will be voice recorded using a Dictaphone.

I _____, am voluntarily participating in the masters student' research study. The main purpose of the research study is to explore masters students' constructions of gender in the profession of psychology. The study will be conducted using a social constructionist theoretical framework.

Consent for use of data (voice) recording equipment: I have been informed and give my consent for my responses to be voice recorded using a Dictaphone.

Risks: Some of the questions posed might be sensitive to me although there are no known harms or discomforts associated with the questions constructed for the purposes of

the focus group interviews. If the need arises for me to seek counselling, I am aware that such counselling services will be provided for free by qualified psychologists at University of Pretoria- Student Support Centre (012 420 2333).

Participant's rights: The nature and purpose of the procedures, and known risks involved have been explained to me. I understand that being evaluated is voluntary and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I understand that I may withdraw my participation at any point in the assessment process with no penalty or consequences thereof.

Confidentiality: I am aware that all responses and individual information obtained will be treated in a strictly confidential manner, and at no time will my personal identity be revealed. However, in the focus group setting, confidentiality cannot be assured and thus in order for confidentiality to be upheld, participants must respect confidentiality of what will be discussed in the group by not discussing the content of the interview with anyone else.

Dissemination of research results: I understand that the results obtained from this study will be shared with the lecturer/Head of Department/course coordinator. These results will also be made available for possible journal article publication at the University of Pretoria, however, my name will not be used in any documentation or text. A pseudonym will be provided to each participant which will assure that my identity remains anonymous. Furthermore, the results will be stored at the Department of Psychology for a period of fifteen years at archives. I am also aware that in the event that I withdraw from the evaluation or my involvement in the process is terminated; all data concerning myself will be destroyed.

Feedback to participants: As I was a participant in this study, the researcher will ensure that I am provided with the relevant feedback after the completion of this research study.

I certify that I have read all of the above and received satisfactory answers to any of my concerns pertaining to this research study. I willingly give my consent to participate in this research study. I will be provided with a copy of this signed Informed Consent upon request.

Student's Name

Date

Student's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

Supervisor's Signature

Date

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APPENDIX D

Informed consent to data recording



INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT FOR DATA RECORDING

I _____, have been fully informed that my responses during the focus group interview will be voice recorded using a Dictaphone, and hereby give my consent for data recording to be conducted for the intended purposes of this research study.

_____	_____
Student's name	Date
_____	_____
Student's signature	Date
_____	_____
Supervisor's signature	Date
_____	_____
Researcher's signature	Date

APPENDIX E

Reflexive Journal

Focus Group 1: Journal Entry 1

The first focus group that I conducted was quite anxiety-provoking as I did not know how well the focus group would go, whether I would be able to facilitate the focus group well, and whether the responses I got would be adequate for the purposes of my research.

As I was also part of the master's programme in psychology, it was difficult to not try and veer the discussion into a direction that I most desired in order to obtain richer data that resonated with me more. I had to remind myself constantly that my role here was specifically to be the researcher and not a cohesive part of the participants in my focus group. This separation proved to be a challenge with this particular focus group as I had formed an identity within this group during the course of my master's year. Furthermore, it became apparent that gender can become a sensitive topic of discussion and being against a patriarchal society and rules and norms governing such communities, it remained difficult to not feel strongly about particular viewpoints of males in the group and then attempting to validate a female's perspective.

In addition, it was challenging to change my role from a master's student to the role of a researcher in this focus group. A shift from one role to another here included the ability to look beyond my own cultural and personal biases regarding gender and how it may influence me in phrasing my questions to my focus group participants. I remained cognisant of these inner-most feelings and perceptions regarding the topic, and more specifically my own gender stereotypes that were being either questioned or reformed as the perspectives of each participant were brought forth during the discussion.

Regardless of the internal struggle I faced, I somehow toward the middle of the focus group interview started to come to terms with how to remain unbiased and at the same time adhere to the boundaries, ethics and purpose of my research.

Focus Group 2: Journal Entry 2

The second focus group interview was slightly less anxiety-provoking as I had gauged the style of facilitating a focus group. I became aware that my own inner perceptions were no longer a challenge to deal with and process. I expected to have my own inner turmoil due to being part of the profession myself. The participants seemed to be faced with many

debates and inner reflections about their own gendered identities not only in the field of psychology but also on a personal level. During their debate, I was questioning my own gendered identity and trying to find the answers to the questions I was asking the participants in my own persona.

While listening to their debates and responses, I became aware of how diversity and culture in the South African context can actually change the way psychology as a profession has been portrayed and understood in the past. I learnt how to work with diversity in a group context as in the case of this focus group, and how our differences may in fact open both new opportunities and limitations in the profession of psychology. This brought forth my own strengths and weaknesses I may possess in my own gendered identity that may be a barrier to my growth in the future. By becoming aware of this I was able to walk away from the focus group interview being cognisant of the challenges I will face as a psychologist in the future.

To conclude, the focus group interviews not only challenged my research abilities, but also provided me with my own experience of being able to be part of a research process from the initial stage of a proposal, to data gathering and the write-up on a topic that is very close to home for me professionally.