

Reflections on the development of professional identity in professional psychology training...

by

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Summary

Welcome, you are about to witness and be a part of a discussion between the author of this research report (myself) and a powerful South African institution that regulates academic psychology as well as psychology practice. I am referring to the Health Professions Council of South Africa, more specifically the Board of Psychology. I have chosen to present this research report in the form of an imaginary conversation between the Board of Psychology and myself regarding my professional identity development. More specifically, what this small study aimed to look at was how my experience of professional identity developed and evolved over time during my postgraduate training in psychology.

The main reason for this particular form of presentation is that it is congruent with the research position that I have adopted as my lens for this research project, namely the Narrative Metaphor. As we go further and further into the discussion between the Health Professions Council's Board of Psychology and myself, you the reader and as such, a participant in and of this text may begin to understand what this text may be about and make meaning of what is presented based on your own frame of reference. There may be a multiplicity of meanings that evolve out of this text because each reader of this text will interpret what is being said differently based on their personal frames of reference.



Keywords

Professional identity development
story
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experience
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PART ONE

CHAPTER 1

Setting the scene...

BP¹: QUESTION 1

How has your professional identity developed and evolved during your training in professional psychology thus far?

It has been an interesting journey thus far and because I share in the Board's view that professional identity development is a crucial aspect of postgraduate training in psychology, I went a step further and chose to conduct my own personal research or inquiry regarding this topic. Thus, I will attempt to elucidate in this discussion what I have come to understand regarding professional identity development in general and what I have experienced regarding my own professional identity development in particular.

PUTTING THINGS INTO PERSPECTIVE...

The field of psychology has grown considerably within the last 10 years. According to South African statistics (Statistics South Africa, 2008) there were 6498 psychologists registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) in 2008, which includes both the private and public sector.

¹ BP refers to the South African Board of Psychology

The route to becoming a practicing psychologist in South Africa currently involves successfully completing postgraduate master's level training in psychology and thereafter passing the Board of Psychology's examination for psychologists. With regards to training at the University of Pretoria (UP), there are currently three degrees offered that enable one to register as a Psychologist with the HPCSA, namely the master's in Clinical Psychology, Counselling Psychology and Research Psychology. The focus during this discussion is solely on the Counselling Psychology training programme at UP, which I was a part of during 2005 and 2006.

The Master of Arts degree in Counselling Psychology was developed with the aim of focussing on three main areas of training, namely theoretical training, development of psychological skills as well as personal and professional development. With regards to the first two areas of training, namely theoretical training and the development of psychological skills, these are expected to begin to develop from a person's undergraduate training in psychology.

However, the third area of training, namely personal and professional development only begins for a majority of students during their postgraduate years. Interestingly, this area, which is placed in the spotlight mainly during postgraduate training, is understood to be an extremely important area of development. In this regard, George and Christiani (1990, p.12) state:

Before we can focus on what happens with the client involved in the counselling process, we should consider the other person involved in the therapeutic intervention - the counsellor. In their professional behaviour counsellors draw on three somewhat different areas: personal qualities, professional knowledge, and specific counselling skills. Thus, the qualities of the counsellor as a person, as opposed to what he or she actually does during counselling, require special attention.

Furthermore, students who are training as Counselling Psychologists have to demonstrate a competence to plan and conduct research within their field.

Therefore, the researcher/scientist-practitioner model also informs postgraduate training in psychology. Thus, the researcher/scientist-practitioner model forms another component of postgraduate training in psychology, which more importantly, also contributes towards the professional identity development of the Counselling Psychologist (Woolfe, 1996).

In our present-day society, professionals from all fields are emerging everyday. However, there may be very little thought given to how being a professional is experienced by the various people in their respective fields. Furthermore, some of the professionals themselves may often be unaware of or choose not to focus on their journey to and of “professional-hood” due to a myriad of reasons. It may be acceptable in the field of business or law but in the field of psychology it is imperative to be aware of, reflect on and attempt to make sense or meaning out of your journey towards “professional-hood”.

One of the reasons why this quest for awareness and understanding of the self is so important within the profession of psychology is because the self of the psychologist is the main instrument that is utilised in the helping process. The use of the self specifically within the helping professions has come to be known as the “the self as instrument concept” (Combs, Avila & Purkey, 1971, p.5). In this regard, Combs, Avila and Purkey (1971, p.5) state:

...effective operation in the helping professions is a question of the use of the helper's self, the peculiar way in which he is able to combine his knowledge and understanding with his own unique ways of putting it into operation to be helpful to other....the self as instrument concept (thus) helps to explain why the attempt to distinguish the helping professions on the basis of knowledge or method falters.

In order to utilise this ‘tool’ to its maximum level or capacity, one has to have knowledge of how this ‘tool’ works; under what conditions it is at its peak performance, under what conditions does the tool underperform, how does the tool respond to varying conditions and what is special about this tool as

opposed to similar tools in the same category? These are some of the questions that become pertinent with regard to the psychologist's self. This is what I have attempted to embark upon in this research endeavour. Since I believe that we are constantly growing and evolving I will continue to do so throughout my personal and professional journey in life.

Thus, it is important to note that this journey that I am sharing with you in this discussion is like a snapshot of my professional identity development at this stage. There will be many more snapshots in the future and this narrative² of my professional identity development will not end here. Remember that, "stories have endings but they are never over" (Human, personal communication, March, 2007).

CHARTING THE JOURNEY...

Since my research inquiry is a self-reflective one, it is necessary to share with the Board how I came upon the topic that this discussion is about. As I began my postgraduate master's training in psychology, the question of choosing a research topic for the research component of the training became a matter of concern. I started off right at the beginning of the year in 2005 with an interest in research within the field of HIV/AIDS. Specifically, I wanted to focus on the experiences of facilitators of HIV/AIDS support groups.

The main reason for this was that I had been a volunteer at the Centre for the Study of Aids at UP and as a result I participated in several programmes regarding HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, I was a facilitator of HIV/AIDS support groups during my postgraduate training, which further increased my exposure and interest in the field. However, my interest in research on HIV/AIDS soon ran out of fuel as I began the internship year of my master's training in 2006.

² The word narrative is used synonymously with the word story in this research report.

It was during that time at Student Support Services at UP that I started living out my role as Intern Psychologist. It was an interesting time for me because I got to interact with several fascinating people that included senior professionals, colleagues/fellow-students and clients. As I participated in the process of counselling, my interest and excitement in it increased.

I think it was only then that I truly started viewing myself as a psychologist and I began to make sense of what that meant for me personally and professionally. As I continuously interacted with clients I started becoming excited about understanding their 'struggles in living' as opposed to the initial fear and uncertainty that I had experienced at the beginning of the internship. I gradually moved away from a reality of being anxious to a realisation of genuine interest in client's life stories.

There was one particular client (personal communication, 13 April, 2006) who inspired me to look at this research topic because the process of counselling with this client challenged my views on counselling and it allowed me to look at the process of counselling through new eyes. It questioned the dominant narratives surrounding professional psychology practice and it forced me to look at alternative, marginalised narratives within psychology, which resulted in me exploring alternative ways of working (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Morgan, 2000; White & Epston, 1990).

I discussed the above experiences with my research supervisor, Dr L. Human (personal communication, 30 May, 2006) and he suggested that I look at my own process of professional identity development through my interaction with clients. I was very excited about this topic because I realised that it would be a great opportunity for me to learn more about myself as a psychologist and in the process become more effective in counselling. Thus my personal research endeavour was born.

PART ONE

CHAPTER 2

The process of inquiry...

BP: QUESTION 2

The Board adheres firmly to the belief that the practice of psychology should be seen as science, a human science and therefore, as with any science, the scientific approach necessitates that a student/intern practitioner such as yourself utilize and clarify the theoretical framework that you adopt in your practice of psychology and make the process of your research transparent for scrutiny by the scientific community. Regarding your personal research that you conducted in order to explore your professional identity development, can you provide more information such as within which contexts did they occur, what theoretical approach or lens have you utilized as a guiding framework, how did you obtain the data for the study and who was involved in this study?

Yes, I am aware of and acknowledge the importance of having a sound theoretical background/framework when working within the discipline of psychology whether it is as a practitioner or researcher as well as being transparent about the process of research or counselling. I believe that it is about making what you are doing and how you are thinking explicit or known so that a shared understanding or meaning can be achieved when other individuals or groups within the field read or hear about one's work. This is the main difference between pop psychology and professional psychology.

RESEARCH POSITION

The Narrative Metaphor was used as a guiding framework in my research endeavours (Doan, 1998; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Morgan, 2000; Weingarten, 1998; White & Epston, 1990). The Narrative Metaphor evolved out of the postmodern epistemology characterised by disillusionment with the Enlightenment Era and a questioning of taken-for-granted truths. Postmodernists deny the possibility of constructing one, single and correct worldview. Instead they point out the existence of a multitude of views and beliefs about anything and everything. Thus the focus is on an approach that may draw upon many different theories or conceptual frameworks from many historical eras. More importantly, the revered concept of knowledge has since been replaced by the concept of interpretation (Grenz, 1996).

Social constructionism is another concept that emerged from the postmodern worldview. I remember reading this phrase in a book in my fourth year of my Bachelor of Psychology degree. There was so much written about it, that I felt a bit overwhelmed and decided to give it my own personal definition or understanding. Quite surprisingly, over the years my personal understanding of social constructionism did not fade away or was not forgotten. I came to understand social constructionism as a way of viewing reality whereby reality is seen as being constructed or created through the interaction of people through the medium of language (Burr, 1995). In this regard, Rorty (in Freedman & Combs, 1996, p.28) states:

The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not.... The world does not speak. Only we do. The world can cause us to hold beliefs. But it cannot propose a language for us to speak. Only other human beings can do that.

Narrative

Narrative centres on the telling of stories (Doan, 1998; Elliott, 2005; Oliver, 1998; Freedman & Combs, 1996; White & Epston, 1990). Since time

immemorial human beings have told stories. Narrative or the telling of stories is the closest attempt to sharing the experiences that we have with those around us. At the same time, narrative also refers to the storied nature of lives namely that we tell certain stories about our lives because we are imbedded in certain socio-cultural contexts. These socio-cultural contexts provide lenses through which we make sense of our daily experiences. I chose to adopt a narrative lens for this research endeavour because I wanted to share my experiences of professional identity development autobiographically (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). Furthermore, the narrative metaphor has been acknowledged by qualitative researchers within the social sciences as a useful approach to adopt when exploring the phenomenon of experience.

- ***Experience***

Within the narrative metaphor, emphasis is placed on people's lived experiences. People are able to have experiences because they are embodied - that is they have the physiological or anatomical aspects, which make lived experience possible and they have the cognitive and linguistic ability to construct stories or narratives about their experiences (Harrè, 1999; Human, Liebenberg & Muller, 2001). We all have a myriad of experiences each day, however, we choose to story or tell only certain experiences that are deemed meaningful. This implies that the stories that people choose to story do not completely express their lived experience since according to Bruner, "...there are always feelings and lived experience not fully encompassed by the dominant story" (in White & Epston, 1990, p. 11).

- ***Experience and Narrative***

According to the narrative metaphor, the experiences that we have are interpreted and made meaningful through the process of "storying" them. Experiences can be narrated or storied in various ways such as through talking, writing, drawing, music, dancing, clothing and so forth. Although we have a myriad of experiences each day, only certain experiences are interpreted as meaningful and stand out from the other experiences through the process of

storying or narrating them. These stories come to be understood as the dominant stories or narratives about people's lives. There are also alternative stories that arise from becoming aware of exceptions to these dominant stories, which result in a process of storying other lived experiences (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Morgan, 2000; Weingarten, 1998; White & Epston, 1990). Thus, the possibility exists to bring more lived experiences into ones current narrative. In this regard, White and Epston (1990, p.15) mention:

Only a fraction of this experience can be storied and expressed at any one time, and a great deal of lived experience inevitably falls outside the dominant stories about the lives and relationships of persons. Those aspects of lived experience that fall outside of the dominant story provide a rich and fertile source for the generation, or re-generation, of alternative stories.

Those experiences that fall outside the domain of dominant stories are referred to as 'unique outcomes' (White & Epston, 1990, p.16). Unique outcomes contradict the dominant story and once they are identified, they can lead to alternative stories being acknowledged and storied (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Human, 2005; Morgan, 2000; White & Epston, 1990).

- ***Experience, Narrative and History***

The stories that people choose to tell are told over a period of time and as a result, these stories become linked or are weaved together like a thread of continuity. Thus the dimension of temporality or history is an important component within the narrative metaphor since stories or narratives are comprise a past, present and future and the interpretation of current events are always shaped by a future as well as by a past. Therefore, stories are told with the past or the beginnings of that story in mind as well as with the future or progression of that story in mind (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Human, 2005; Morgan, 2000; White & Epston, 1990). How one has experienced a dominant narrative in the past can influence how one assigns meaning to it in the present, how it may impact the person in the present and also how it can be experienced in the future.

- ***Experience, Narrative and Culture***

Stories are also situated and created within certain social contexts (culture). These social contexts shape which stories we choose to narrate and also how we narrate them. Furthermore, the stories that we narrate over time also construct certain ways of being that are accepted as “the only ways of being”, in effect creating certain social contexts or discourses as dominant discourses or dominant ways of being. Discourses can be understood according to Hare-Mustin (1994, p.19) as “a system of statements, practices, and institutional structures that share common values” (in Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 42). Discourses can also be understood according to Madigan and Law (1992, p. 33) as a reflection of the “prevailing structure of social and power relationships” (in Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 43). My understanding of a discourse is that it is a dominant narrative or more simply put a circulating story that is accepted as a normative truth. Thus, it is important to be aware of the discourses that inform the stories or narratives that we tell since these discourses may perpetuate certain views that are accepted as “the truth” instead of “a truth”.

One of the discourses influencing how and what I choose to story or write about in this research discussion is the dominant discourse of researcher-practitioner. As a result of this discourse, I am continuously aware of the audience that is going to read this text and I am continuously aware of the criteria that will be used to judge the “appropriateness” of my text. Being aware of these societal expectations from the research fraternity at UP as well as the Professional Board of Psychology influences and shapes how I construct myself as researcher as well as how I live out that construction in this text as well as in the text of my professional life.

Self Narrative

Since this research endeavour is a personal/self-narrative of my experiences regarding professional identity development it is important to communicate to my audience what I understand by self-narrative so that a shared meaning may be reached. We have already learned that the ability to form narratives/stories

provides us with the opportunity of organising our experiences meaningfully over time. Similarly we are able to organise experiences relating to self-narratives or self-stories that enable these self-stories to be weaved together over time thereby contributing to our identity/identities as human beings.

Ricoeur (1992), in his book *Oneself as Another*, focuses on two interpretations of identity, the first one refers to sameness, being equivalent, identical and in contrast the second interpretation of identity is seen as that which can be traced over time, having a sense of continuity. Elliott (2005, p. 125) succinctly conveys her understanding of the above contrasting descriptions of identity as “permanence through time without sameness through time”. As we become aware of and story preferred self-narratives, our identities evolve over time. However, our highest preferred qualities/stories about us remain intact.

In the field of research, narratives of self “are a form of evocative writing that produce highly personalised and revealing texts in which authors tell or show stories about their own lived experiences rather than the experiences of others” (Sparkes, 1999, p. 23). They allow the researcher to talk about his/her own lived experiences and are therefore contrary to the convention followed in dominant research documents. For example, within this research report I will be sharing many different personal experiences in a way that may be termed ‘emotive’ or ‘involved’ if viewed from a traditional research text lens. It is an acceptable way of communicating within this research approach and it allows me the flexibility as researcher to convey my meaningful recollection of events in time with the use of metaphors, characters, common everyday language, and unusual phrasings. This is aimed at inviting the reader/s of this text to experience the events of my self-narrative based on their own frame of reference or socio-cultural lenses.

CONTEXT

There were two contexts within which my personal research was undertaken, namely the academic context (UP) as well as the organisational context (Student Support Services).

The Academic Context

UP is a national as well as an internationally recognised academic institution. More specifically the Department of Psychology, which falls under the Faculty of Humanities at the University, is responsible for the training of undergraduate and postgraduate students in Psychology. I was a student in the Masters Counselling Psychology Training Programme and I successfully completed the academic training during year one (2005) and the practical training during year two (2006) which is the compulsory 12 month internship stipulated by the South African Board of Psychology.

The Organisational Context

Student Support Services at UP is the second context that facilitated and influenced my personal research endeavours and my professional identity development. Student Support Services falls under the Department of Student Affairs, which includes the Disability Unit as well as the Dean of Students. I had chosen to complete the stipulated 12-month compulsory internship within this organisation because Student Support offers students at the university services such as career testing, career guidance, crisis intervention, short-term and medium-term counselling for a variety of challenges or “problems”, workshops regarding study skills and more proactive work through raising awareness by addressing new first year students regarding the challenges facing them and providing avenues for them to explore in order to minimise the negative effects of the challenges facing them.

The idea of working with students and generally a younger population excited me because I had been a student at the same university from undergraduate

level to postgraduate level. I looked forward to the motivation and hope to what I believed would be embodied in the experiences of the students that I would interact with. I envisioned that they too would have the zest for life that my friends, colleagues and myself had had and continue to have in our pursuit of knowledge and meaning in life.

I have come to realise that the entire experience of working as an Intern Psychologist at Student Support Services influenced how I viewed myself, how I interacted with my colleagues and clients then as well as now. However, at the time that I was there, my personal research influenced how I saw and experienced professional identity development in that I chose to specifically focus on the counselling experiences with clients, highlighting my experience of professional identity development through interaction with clients within the context of counselling. Looking back now on the process, I realise how the experience as a whole, influenced how I made sense of my responsibilities and duties as a staff member of the institution and as a member of the psychology fraternity of South Africa. Interestingly I have come to now see my unique place in the field of psychology on a global level as well.

PARTICIPANTS

In all studies there are participants involved and as such with my personal research or inquiry the participants directly involved comprised three people namely two supervisors and myself.

The Researcher

I am a 25-year-old female, South African born only child, Muslim Intern Psychologist. As a researcher, my undergraduate training in psychology at UP as well as my postgraduate training informed my approach. Specifically, I had had academic training in research from my first year at university onwards, through specific research modules that were presented as part of the Department of Psychology's curriculum. This included an introduction to research, exposure to quantitative as well as qualitative research methods in

psychology, exposure of planning research projects and also conducting small-scale research projects for assignment purposes in various modules within undergraduate training in psychology. The research modules that I had taken during undergraduate training provided a broad research background which primed me in the sense that it helped me to acknowledge and accept my role within the research context at a postgraduate level and which I think allowed me to have confidence in embarking upon this personal research endeavour as well.

Also, since I had been a part of the BPsych training programme (during 2003 and 2004), which was introduced by the Board of Psychology and adopted by the University of Pretoria, I had been exposed to the practice of psychology from an undergraduate level. Even though I had not been aware of it at the time, this also contributed towards my professional identity development as I had completed my BPsych compulsory six-month internship at the Pretoria Central Correctional Services as well as at Kalafong Government Hospital. At that time, I believed that the BPsych programme was a gateway towards achieving my goal of becoming a psychologist in the future. However, when I began my postgraduate training, I started to acknowledge the value and significance of the BPsych training because even though I was the youngest in the masters training group, I too had “work experience” and more importantly “life experience”.

Also, the lecturers that I had had contact with over the years at the University of Pretoria had been from various cultural backgrounds and theoretical approaches. The one thing that stood out about the Department of Psychology at the University of Pretoria was the tolerance and acceptance of diverse theoretical approaches regarding the teaching and practice of psychology. This allowed me to explore the various theoretical approaches taught and eventually choose for myself what approach was most compatible with my personality and my personal philosophy regarding how the practice of psychology would be for me as a psychologist as well as what would benefit my clients most.

After my 12-month internship I was fortunate to get a position as a personal assistant to a Neurosurgeon in private practice at Garden City Clinic in Johannesburg while I was working on my research. This opportunity provided me with necessary income but more importantly, it allowed me a glimpse into the professional world of collaborating in running a specialist medical private practice. I was even more fortunate to have had an employer that was transparent in terms of sharing personal information, knowledge, advice and guidance. Even though I was not involved in the practice of psychology while I was there, being able to work in a medical setting allowed me to see more clearly how psychology fitted into this context and its value as a science amidst other sciences.

There were often patients who came to see my employer due to chronic back pain or chronic headaches. MRI scans, CT scans and X-rays would often show no physical impairment. However, their symptoms could not be denied. It was usually after these cases that my employer and I would discuss the value of psychological assistance in terms of addressing underlying psychological/emotional difficulties that were perhaps manifesting physically.

Working as a PA in a medical setting contributed to my professional identity development in the sense that I started having more confidence in my ability to run a practice in the near future. I became more aware of some of the challenges that may face practitioners in private practice. Furthermore, I started seeing my contribution within a multi-disciplinary team and in collaboration with other experts. I will be forever grateful for that invaluable experience at that point in my 'training'.

The Research Counselling Supervisor

Ms Melissa Brokensha, a Counselling Psychologist in private practice who works from a narrative position, was privately consulted by myself for supervision regarding the counselling process, which was an important part of my research project. She completed her masters training in Counselling

Psychology at UP during 2001 and 2002. My research supervisor recommended her as she had been one of his students in the past and was now one of his colleagues. I was interested to meet and work with Melissa because I had heard about her use of the Narrative Metaphor in counselling. Melissa and I saw each other for four one-hour supervision sessions in 2006 while I completed my internship at Student Support Services.

This supervision by Melissa³ was apart from the supervision provided by my lecturers at UP and was in addition to the on-site supervision provided at Student Support Services. Initially, I was anxious about the supervision specifically because I did not know what to expect since it was related to my personal research endeavour (data generation) and unlike prior supervision experiences that I had had. Furthermore, I initially experienced pressure in terms of making sure that I had something substantial to 'take' to supervision and I would often go over this beforehand. However, with time I began to 'let go' in supervision and allowed myself to enjoy the process.

The Research Supervisor

Dr Human, a lecturer and course co-ordinator in the department of Psychology at the University of Pretoria who has experience with the narrative metaphor as a practitioner as well as a researcher collaborated and guided me regarding the research process that I had undertaken. Even though Dr Human had had a large group of students to supervise, we managed to have several research discussions during my training in various forms such as face-to-face verbal contact, written electronic communication via e-mail and written conventional communication on paper.

The influence of computer technology in the form of emails has to be acknowledged as a positive effect in this research project and in our cultural milieu at large, which enabled speedy communication between my supervisor and myself. This also influenced how I saw my professional identity as an intern

³ The supervision sessions that I received from Melissa were my responsibility and not the Department of Psychology's responsibility at the University of Pretoria.

psychologist and I realised the value of technology and I acknowledged the use of computer technology as being an important part of my professional identity as a psychologist as well.

Furthermore, Dr Human became a significant 'mentor' or 'guide' for me. From the first time that I came into contact with the narrative metaphor, which was during my third year at university, there was an interest that had been sparked. This interest grew in my fourth year when we were exposed to narrative ways of working as part of the BPsych programme. However, it was only during my postgraduate training that the narrative metaphor began to make more sense for me personally and I could apply it to my everyday life. This made it easier to understand client's life experiences and work in a narrative way.

I must admit that this understanding of the narrative metaphor did not just come naturally; it was through the numerous activities, exercises, role-plays and discussions that Dr Human exposed us to that facilitated the development of this way of thinking and being. I am therefore very grateful for the approach that was adopted by our course coordinator, which was a rather unconventional and often revolutionary approach.

I have realised that when I work from a narrative position I am more confident to tackle challenges with clients because the challenges are no longer daunting or anxiety provoking. Instead, I have realised that it is the challenges that make working as a psychologist exciting, interesting and an adventure because there truly are no recipes, protocols or blue prints for engaging in the process of counselling. Each journey with a client is a completely unique adventure that has both challenges and rewards.

MATERIAL

The researcher was the main participant from which the material was gathered since this was a self-reflective study. The material-gathering process was as follows:

Phase I - The Counselling process with clients

This involved my experiences with clients regarding the process of counselling. It must be emphasised that it was not the details but the process of counselling that was utilised as material for this study.

Phase II - Keeping a self-reflective journal regarding experiences with clients

The method of gathering material for this study was congruent with the theoretical position discussed above. Therefore a self-reflective journal was used to document my experiences regarding professional identity development through interaction with clients. With regards to utilising a self-reflective journal Connelly and Clandinin (1994, p. 166) state that journal entries can provide an “ongoing record of practices and reflections on those practices” The journal writing created a space where I could think and write about what, how and why I was doing what I was doing in counselling. It provided me with something concrete that I could use to go back to the counselling experiences that I had had.

Phase III – Supervision with a psychologist in private practice

Thereafter, supervision with a psychologist in private practice (Melissa Brokensha) was undertaken with the aim of exploring the different issues or themes that emerged from keeping a self-reflective journal of my experiences. The supervision sessions comprised conversations about certain experiences that I found meaningful in my interaction with clients and it served as a way of exploring alternative experiences that would have possibly gone unstoried or

unnarrated (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Doan, 1998; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Morgan, 2000; Silverman, 2001; White & Epston, 1990;).

Thus, one of the aims of the supervision sessions was to gain greater insight into how I was constructing and making sense of my identity as an Intern Counselling Psychologist. In order to preserve the sequence of discussions, the supervision sessions were recorded. Thus, it served as a record that aided me in the integration of the information from the self-reflective journal as well as the supervision process.

This was the main source of material since the conversations between Melissa and myself seemed to be a rich source of information regarding my development of professional identity because certain stories or themes started emerging which were implicitly a part of how I had worked but which became explicitly known and understood through the process of supervision. I began to discover and understand session by session how my own stories were influencing the counselling process with clients and also how my identity as psychologist was being constructed.

Phase IV – Research supervision

Research supervision was undertaken in order to gain insight into the research process, specifically since this was a self-reflective study and self-reflective studies where the researcher explores his/her experience as the main source of gathering material is not a common practice within qualitative research methodologies. However, there have been a few documented studies from a postmodern paradigm that have opened up opportunities for other researchers, apart from myself, to explore a specific domain within psychology from a first person perspective (Human, 2005; Strauss, 2001; Zagnoev, 1996). Human (2005) made use of a self-reflective study for his doctoral thesis, by reflecting on his experiences or encounters with sport psychology in order to contribute towards the inclusion of a sport psychology component in the MA (Counselling Psychology) course at the University of Pretoria.

Transcribing the material

The recording of phase III, namely the supervision sessions with Melissa, were transcribed by myself word-for-word in 2007. The recordings were first written out word-for-word onto paper and thereafter onto computer. Some of the reasons for transcribing the data myself was that it was cost-effective and the information contained on the recordings at times made mention of certain experiences with clients and therefore it was highly confidential information. Furthermore, the transcription process was an opportunity for me to immerse myself in the data from a so-called third-person perspective.

The process of transcribing the data was time consuming but simultaneously also exciting. It was exciting because as I listened to the recordings, I re-experienced the sessions and made sense of them in new ways. It was as if I was reading an adventure book or watching an adventure movie. The process of transcribing the data re-instilled the excitement and pleasure I had had when I first started off with this research process. In addition, I began to realise the significance of this research for myself as a fledgeling-psychologist. Through hearing my own confessions, discussions and discoveries with Melissa, I once again began to remember what the process of counselling had taught and given me. As I went about my day-to-day tasks as a personal assistant I remembered why it was so vital for me as a person to be in the field of psychology and why I wanted to continue in this field.

Analysing the material

As this was a self-reflective study conventional routes to analysing material were not adopted, instead I used the research position namely the narrative metaphor to make sense of the experiences that I had recorded. What occurred was the reading, re-reading and eventually a process of storying those experiences from the transcriptions that I found meaningful for me. Through immersing myself in the transcriptions certain dominant stories emerged which were eventually replaced by alternative, more preferred stories. In the dominant research story within psychology this is referred to as an inductive process

whereby particular instances of certain phenomena are researched or explored (Sparkes, 1999).

As I progressed through this part of the research process the discoveries that I had made during supervision regarding new ways of being in terms of my identity as psychologist were acknowledged once again and strengthened. It influenced my story of self and specifically my story of psychologist self. I recall experiencing incredible pleasure and joy whilst being engaged in the reading and re-reading of the transcriptions, as they were for me a validation and acknowledgement of my journey. Furthermore, the act of being engaged in the 'analysis' has helped me consolidate a preferred psychologist self which I have become comfortable with and which celebrates the things that are important for me and about me as a psychologist at this snapshot in my development as a professional.

QUALITY

There are different sets of criteria regarding quality of research that are applied within the quantitative and qualitative research domains. This signifies the parallel principle, which was proposed to address the issue of quality in response to the replication principle within qualitative research. However, within qualitative research, there have been alternative criteria that have emerged that are unique to the qualitative research domain (Riessman, 1993). These criteria are craftsmanship, communicative value or validity and pragmatic validity (Kvale, 2002).

Based on the above criteria and exposure to how other researchers within the narrative metaphor have constructed quality, specifically Human (2005), I intended to enhance the quality of this research by adhering to the following guidelines:

- **Craftsmanship** – by being congruent to the narrative metaphor in the construction of this research project.
- **Communicative value/validity** – by engaging the audience or readers of this research text so that there is interaction and conversation instead of merely “presenting the findings” to them.
- **Pragmatic validity** – this means that the research will be valuable if it can be found meaningful and catalytic to the “participant” namely myself as well as those that will interact with this text as readers.

Supervision with Melissa regarding phase three of the material-gathering process also contributed towards the enhancement of the quality of this research project. Since a form of social agreement was achieved by my collaboration with Melissa, this part of the material-gathering phase was the main source of information for me. In this instance, social agreement between Melissa and myself influenced what we agreed upon as being true or trustworthy in this research project (Henning, van Rensburg and Smit, 2004).

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Since this study was a self-reflective study, it was not necessary to get informed consent from any participant. However, a letter of information⁴ was drafted and shown to clients whom I interacted with in counselling. The letter informed the clients that I was involved in the above-mentioned research and that their personal experiences would not be used as data, instead my experiences of the counselling process would be utilised as data for the study.

Another consideration for this study (which is also an ethical consideration for counselling in general) which was continuously highlighted for me because of

⁴ This letter of information can be found in the appendix section of this research report.

being involved in this study was to always embody the values of competence, compassion and respect for my clients. It was as if I had an internal critic that was constantly evaluating my behaviour and the process of counselling with clients. That was one of the explicit effects of engaging in this research for me. It was something that I was taught and that I had read about but the process of conducting this research helped to bring it to life through my interaction with clients, This internal critic influenced how I experienced my role as an Intern-Psychologist as well as how I saw my future role as a qualified Psychologist.

To cognitively know about a concept or way of being and to experience that concept or way of being first hand experientially is vastly different for me since the former is merely a product of one's cognitive processes and an idea which has been narrated to one whilst the latter is an embodied experience that is vividly captured by all of one's senses to be more readily utilised in future because it has become a part of one's personal experience repertoire.

RELEVANCE

With a significant number of psychologists being trained in South Africa annually, this study may provide unique information regarding the possible journey or process of professional identity development that has not yet been documented within the dominant literature. It may also provide insight into possible experiences that may facilitate the process of professional identity development and experiences that may impede this process.

Furthermore, it may serve as a source of motivation for other trainee psychologists to look towards their own experiences with clients and explore how they make sense of those experiences in terms of their own professional identity development. On a more personal level, if this research project can help me as the researcher as well as the "participant" to develop a more critical stance regarding my practice of psychology and enhance my understanding of

my professional identity development as an Intern psychologist, then it would have served its purpose.

PART TWO

CHAPTER 3

Consulting my friends in academia and reflecting on what they had to say...

BP: QUESTION 3

In conducting your personal research, what literature was available on professional identity development and what impact did it have on you as an intern psychologist? What still remained unanswered regarding professional identity development?

Professional development in the field of psychology has been explored and documented both locally and internationally. It has been of central importance in the training of psychologists and counsellors. Studies have been conducted on small and large scales regarding the development of professional identity. Numerous books have been written by professional psychologists about the importance of professional development and professional identity development.

RELATED RESEARCH ON PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE FIELD OF PSYCHOLOGY

A Master's thesis entitled *Die Professionele identiteitsonwikkeling van Voorligtingsielkundiges* by Buchner (1999) completed at the Rand Afrikaans University compared the professional development stages postulated by Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) to a South African sample of Counselling

Psychologists wherein great overlap was found regarding the different stages of professional identity development. These stages are the following: (1) Conventional stage, (2) Transition to professional training stage, (3) Imitation of experts stage, (4) Conditional autonomy stage, (5) Exploration stage, (6) Integration stage, (7) Individuation stage and (8) Integrity stage.

In a phenomenological study conducted by Jason Kay (1996), the growth experiences of three clinical psychology students in training were explored. Six common themes emerged regarding the students' growth experiences namely (1) personal growth, (2) pressure to introspect, (3) psychological distress, (4) support, (5) [training as a] process and (6) meaning (making sense of their experiences). These growth experiences were also experienced by myself in my Counselling Psychology training. Of the above-mentioned growth experiences the one that was highlighted for me was personal growth through making meaning out of training experiences.

In another study, Shoneez Amien (2001) looked at the experiences of master's Clinical Psychology students, focussing on aspects of training that students found challenging and how they coped with these challenges. A struggle for establishing professional identity emerged as one of the themes in this study. This is congruent with my experiences as a Counselling Psychology student as well. Furthermore, it was evident from this study that the participants experienced personal growth, greater self-awareness, dealing with issues regarding separating oneself from one's work, redefining their role in their personal lives and challenging their self-expectations.

A related study by Zagnoev (1996) provides a self-reflective narrative description of the evolution of the author's therapeutic self through reviewing her postgraduate training. As part of this process of evolution, the author focussed on the various theories and contexts (internship/practical work) that she was involved in that have contributed towards her development of professional identity. This study focussed on just one aspect of professional

identity development namely the evolution of the author's theoretical therapeutic approach. In this regard, I must note that my personal experience at a point in my training led me to shift the focus to allow textbooks and theories to take a back seat because the theoretical lenses of mainstream psychology prevented me from seeing beyond certain prognostic research and acknowledge the client I was engaged with. Only once I was able to put it aside, was I able to connect with the client on a deeper level and we managed to work successfully together.

Strauss (2001) also made use of a self-reflective study by focussing on her experience of working with a client diagnosed with schizophrenia from a social constructionist perspective. This study highlighted the different narratives surrounding schizophrenia and in so doing it has contributed towards a broader understanding of Schizophrenia in general as well as a broader understanding of the author's experience with this client in particular. This study represents a self-reflective study, which is what I have attempted to explore with my personal research.

Summary of findings

From the above texts it seems that a common thread runs through the pearls of professional identity development which is personal growth and awareness. It was interesting to note that self-reflective studies within the field of psychology were almost non-existent. It seemed to be a rare phenomenon. As I contemplated this, I wondered about the dominant stories about conducting research within psychology that were informing the practices of current researchers within the field. I also wondered what alternative stories regarding research were yet to emerge.

Therefore, based on the story that my friends in academia were narrating on professional identity development, it became evident that the specific topic that I wanted to explore had not been approached from a first-person self-reflective position. It had, however been explored by researchers that wanted to look at

other psychology professionals' experiences regarding their professional identity development.

Thus, the next step for me was to look at possible stories within academic psychology that could help me better understand my professional identity development. I had come across a few developmental theorists in the past and I decided to revisit them so that they could perhaps share their stories with me.

STORIES FROM MY FRIENDS THE DEVELOPMENTAL THEORISTS...

Erickson (1968, 1974, 1981)

Erikson's story of development covered the entire human life span. Erikson believed that the development of the personality occurs throughout the life span and that problems or difficulties that arise can be resolved at any particular stage in the person's life span. For purposes of this discussion it is important to note the four adult stages beginning with:-

- ***Identity versus role confusion***

It is proposed that this stage, which begins during adolescence and extends into early adulthood, is when the central issue or task of acquiring a sense of one's identity (Who am I, Where do I belong, What are some of the principles/beliefs that I stand for?) comes to the fore. This is usually when certain long-term career goals are also formulated. It can therefore be the beginning of one's career identity.

The story of psychology in my life began when I was about 15 years old. One day as I was looking for books at my local library for an assignment that I had to complete, an interesting book caught my attention. That book was called *Mind Power* by John Kehou. It was his story that introduced me to the field of psychology and I felt an immediate excitement for what he had to say. It opened up an interesting world for me and it introduced me to

things like visualisation, the power of positive thinking, intuition, understanding one's dreams and so forth. I started practising visualisation in my daily life and I used it with friends and sometimes with family.

It was soon thereafter that I seriously thought about studying psychology. I spoke to a friend's uncle that was a lecturer in the field of industrial psychology and he conveyed that he did not think that I had the aptitude to study it. However, I chose not to listen to him and instead went along with my own story. I also had another study/career possibility in mind namely dietetics but after serious contemplation I realised that my interest in dietetics stemmed mainly from my experience of being overweight as a child and being able to lose the weight by myself before puberty. I did not really have a keen interest in the field of dietetics and so I decided to let that one be.

Thus, by the age of 18 years I felt strongly enough about psychology to apply to university to study it. I was impressed with the course content when I got to university because whilst at school I often felt that what I was learning was not going to be used in the 'real' world and I also felt that there was more to it, that something was missing. I loved every moment of studying psychology at university and I felt so lucky to be studying something so relevant and interesting. That joy that I experienced during my first year at university sealed the deal for me. I knew that I had made the right choice and that that was what was right for me. The excitement and enjoyment continued throughout my years of study. It was not always easy for me because there was a considerable amount of domestic strain⁵ at that time. Nevertheless I managed to persevere.

I think it was that time in my late schooling career and early university days that allowed me the opportunity to begin my identity as a student of psychology and as a future psychologist.

⁵ The domestic strain mentioned above relates to my experience of constant arguments and general discord in the family unit between my step-father and my mother.

- ***Intimacy versus isolation***

Erikson proposed that during early adulthood it becomes necessary for the individual to experience a sense of intimacy with another person, usually in a marital relationship. So, in addition to acquiring a personal sense of one's identity it now becomes important to be able to share one's identity with another person that is very close and also form a common identity that reflects the partnership or union with that person. Erikson proposed that such a relationship would help to promote the development of the individuals involved, furthering the development of their relationship as well as the development of their children. The implication is that the respective careers of the individuals within this relationship will also experience an enhancement or development. The love that evolves out of this stage which is felt for one's partner can be extended to a love of one's life, one's children, and one's work.

Furthermore, regarding one's work/career, intimacy versus isolation is specifically experienced in this aspect of life. Regarding my professional identity development, in the beginning I felt somewhat distant from the field of professional psychology, almost a stranger in the world of professional psychology practice. With the passing of time, my understanding, interest and involvement in the field of professional psychology grew and evolved from me being a stranger in the land of professional psychology to slowly becoming an acquaintance, then a friend and now I seem to be an intimate partner with professional psychology. I think what happened with me was that as I interacted with lecturers, supervisors, colleagues, fellow interns as well as psychologists during my internship and eventually clients and institutions related to the practice of professional psychology, my identity as a psychologist started to form and grow.

I also experienced a similar phenomenon with regards to clients that I interacted with during volunteer work and internship training. The strangeness that I felt at the beginning when I started out interacting with

clients in the helping relationship evolved into a more comfortable, connected and interesting experience.

- ***Generativity versus stagnation***

Erikson's story regarding this stage is that it spans most of adulthood and it involves a sense of acquiring generativity, which is understood as productivity, creativity, and of the passing on of culture or a way of being. Within this stage, the opposite, stagnation and pre-occupation needs to be avoided. It is believed that people who acquire generativity and care are concerned with enriching their own and other people's lives. The implication here is for example passing on what people have learned in their field, through their experience to new graduates, colleagues, of enriching the community through moving from being self-absorbed to focussing on collective issues and the well-being of society.

This story about generativity versus stagnation relates to my life in that I am writing this research report in order to fulfil a requirement from the Board of Psychology but simultaneously it is also a form of generativity if it can be catalytic or meaningful for other psychology students, interns or professionals. In addition, the reason for being in the field of psychology for me is to facilitate a process whereby individuals, groups, communities are able to maximise their potential. My identity as a psychologist in itself promotes this kind of altruistic, generative way of being. There are also other psychology students⁶ that I am in contact with and whom I share information and experiences and who simultaneously reciprocate that as well.

Volunteer work is also a manifestation of generativity and it has been an important part of my identity as a person and it overlaps with my identity as a psychologist as well. I have been involved in volunteer work for most of my life now. More importantly, I hope to keep this altruistic part of my

⁶ Other psychology students refer to and include friends, colleagues, extended family members, and acquaintances that are studying within the field of psychology.

identity as a psychologist alive through consistent involvement in community projects or volunteer work as I have come to realise the importance of this for me as a person and as a psychologist. It is an involvement that I have experienced as one that 'feeds my soul'.

- ***Integrity versus despair***

This stage is characterised by a sense of being content with one's life and finding meaning in one's existence. The implication here is that if one finds meaning in life and is content with life then one will also find meaning in one's career and as one looks back upon it one will be content with how it has evolved and developed over time and is thus a legacy of one's life that can be passed on.

Erickson's story of Integrity versus Despair highlights the importance of finding meaning in one's existence and also creating and passing on a legacy. Regarding this, I could say that I am currently engaged in finding meaning in my life through my work as well as my relationships. I have come to understand certain life experiences thus far as being crucial building blocks that have contributed towards my development and growth as a person and also as a professional. I have many years left to experience many more character-building and life-changing experiences. However, now I have come to adopt the belief (that what I am currently engaged in regarding my career path within the field of psychology is) that I am following and realising my divine purpose on this planet by pursuing the practice of psychology in my unique way. I am also simultaneously at the starting blocks of creating a legacy that I hope to pass on to my family, my community, my city, my province, my country, my continent and eventually the world. As Demartini states (2008, p143):

To make a difference in yourself, you must have a community vision. To make a difference in your community, you must have a city vision. To make a difference in your city, you must have a state/province vision. To make a difference in your state/province, you must have a national vision. To make a

difference in your nation, you must have a world vision and to make a difference in your world, you must have a stellar vision.

Reflecting on Erickson's story of development...

I have been familiar with the work of Erickson from my first year of undergraduate studies in psychology, therefore it was a known landscape that I was embarking on when looking at Erickson's views. What resonated very much with my beliefs regarding development is the view that development is an ongoing process, which covers the entire life span. Furthermore, I was more accepting of Erickson's views because they were familiar and known to me.

It made me wonder about what happens to me in therapy once I am familiar or used to a particular client. It made me realise that perhaps I tend to accept very readily the views of clients that I have seen for a long time as opposed to the views of a new client. My attitude of curiosity is stronger at the beginning of the therapy process with a client and I tend to ask more questions without accepting all of the client's beliefs about his/her situation, whereas later on I am less likely to probe as deep in order to further understand their life stories and gain a thicker description of what is going on in their lives.

Therefore, by looking at what Erickson's story did to me I realised and learned that I need to be on the look-out for when familiarity and known-ness with a client is achieved because it may contribute to me adopting a knowing stance instead of a not-knowing stance which is pivotal in the practice of a postmodern narrative kind of counselling.

Through revisiting Erickson's story of development, those aspects of my identity as a person that is also important to me as a psychologist were highlighted and made explicit to me.

Vaillant (1977)

Vaillant built on Erickson's story in that he included another stage or task between the stage of Intimacy versus Isolation and Generativity versus

Stagnation, which is the idea of Career Consolidation. I wondered about the current situation, where marriage and finding a partner in life is often delayed until one has established a career. Therefore it may be more apt in our context to speak of experiencing career consolidation before Intimacy versus Isolation, especially since many more women have entered the working world and their goals tend to be on becoming financially independent before getting married and starting a family.

My reflection on Vaillant's story...

Vaillant's story is contradictory to my beliefs about development, especially in our current milieu. I believe that career consolidation is becoming more of a focus prior to settling down with a life partner. My personal beliefs regarding development in my life is that I would first like to be established in the field in which I work, before I settle down into a long-term commitment with a partner. I felt quite strongly when I read Vaillant's story and I was immediately in disagreement with it because it went against my core vision, values and beliefs in life. I did not even want to consider that there may be quite a number of individuals who want to settle down first before establishing themselves in their particular careers.

My response to Vaillant's story made me think back on clients that had held beliefs or views that were contradictory to mine and how I had responded to them at the time. When people have beliefs or views that contradict my core beliefs or values I tend to be less patient with them, less attentive and also my attitude of curiosity is stifled. Furthermore, I tend to want to convince them of the benefits of my way of thinking, as I believe that it could be beneficial to them. Therefore, I adopted a persuasive stance in those instances. Interacting with Vaillant's story made me more aware of this aspect of my interaction with clients and the limiting effects it can have on them.

Super (1980)

Super's story focuses on career development across the life span. There are five stages namely:-

- Growth
- Exploration
- Establishment
- Maintenance
- Disengagement

Within the above stages different roles are believed to be fulfilled or adopted within different life spaces or contexts. Super's story further narrates that we choose certain careers in order to express our self-concepts. Super proposed that the process of career development mainly involves developing and implementing occupational self-concepts. Regarding the self-concept, Super was of the opinion that people do not possess one self-concept but that there is a whole collection of self-concept systems that influence career behaviour over the life span (Langley in Watson & Stead, 1999). Therefore, contentment or satisfaction attained from one's work is related to the extent to which one is able to express and realise one's self-concepts within one's career (Louw, van Ede & Louw, 1998).

My reflection on Super's story...

Super's story of career development is one that is congruent to my own story of career development and development in general since I too believe quite firmly that career development is a lifelong process, which evolves over time. When I first came across Super, his words reflected my own thoughts about career development, especially the idea of us possessing multiple self-concepts or self stories and that work-related satisfaction and success depends on how well one is able to express one's self concept or self story within ones work. Super's story helped further strengthen the idea that we cannot fit people into jobs but instead see how well a particular job fits a specific person based on their self-stories. Thus, it helped strengthen my realisation that I may not fit in

with the mainstream, accepted and propagated psychologist 'personality profile' in all respects but that it is quite all right since it simply reflects the diversity and range of my self-stories.

Furthermore, I have experienced a sense of fulfilment whilst engaged in the practice of psychology, which I have never quite experienced in other areas of work⁷. This experience of fulfilment indicates to me, according to Super's story that I am able to express my self-concept or self-concepts optimally within the field of psychology as a psychologist who works from a Narrative position.

Dreyfus and Dreyfus (Benner, 1982)

This story focuses on general professional development characterised by an increase in expertise. Education and experience are said to influence the level of skilled performance or the level of expertise reached at a particular level or stage. In this regard there are five levels of professional development which differ due to two factors:-

- 1) The shift from using abstract principles and paradigms to using one's own work experience to guide performance.
- 2) Cognitive or perceptual changes that occur, from using all of the many parts/elements of a situation to using only selected parts/elements of a situation.

The five stages of professional development in Dreyfus and Dreyfus's story are the following:-

- **Novice**

This stage is characterised by following universally applicable rules in practice since there is no experience to rely on.

⁷ I have been engaged in the world of work since the age of 14 years. I used to work part-time in a retail sales environment and then later on in a wholesale sales environment. My employer was pleased with my work and I enjoyed the work but it did not feed my soul as the practice of Psychology does. I have come to realise that my passion is to assist people to be the best that they can possibly be on their own terms, by their own definitions and psychology provides the platform for me to do exactly this.

- ***Advanced Beginner***

There is some experience gained which can be used in everyday practice. The phenomenon of aspect recognition develops at this stage that involves the identification of global characteristics that can be used to make a decision regarding a specific situation.

- ***Competent***

This is the highest level of performance using textbook rules. The experience gained is sufficient to enable the individual to predict events and know what to look out for.

- ***Proficient***

Aspects are no longer used but are replaced by maxims which are characteristics of a situation that seem to be unintelligible nuances but that provide direction as to what is important in a situation.

- ***Expert***

This stage is characterised by the richest experience base that enables the individual to operate from an intuitive level regarding the important components of a situation.

My reflection on Dreyfus and Dreyfus's story...

This is a general story of career development that hinges on a gradual development from using textbook knowledge to eventually using personal knowledge or experience. It inherently made sense to me since the more experience one has in a given career then the more efficient and successful one would become. I believe that in spite of this story making such sense on my first encounter with it, after reflecting further I realised that my personal experience was contrary. I had to disregard the textbook knowledge which I was exposed to quite early on in my internship because there was a particular client whom I was seeing for counselling that according to the textbooks had a

very poor prognosis but who flourished once I got rid of the textbook voices and the expert voices of certain colleagues and embraced my own voice and started listening to what that voice was telling me about approaching and assisting this client.

Therefore it was my experience that personal experience may be resorted to earlier on in one's counsellor/psychologist development due to incongruence between the textbook knowledge and the beliefs of the counsellor or psychologist in a particular situation. More specifically, when the textbook stories contradict my personal stories in a particular situation with a client then I tend to put aside my textbook stories in favour of my personal stories. Based on the above story of Dreyfus and Dreyfus, I would situate myself in-between the advanced beginner stage and the competent stage.

WHAT COUNSELLOR AND PSYCHOLOGIST PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THEORISTS HAD TO SAY...

Fleming (1953)

This story of Joan Fleming is unlike the models above in that there are no specific stages, levels or phases regarding development. Instead there are three different methods, which characterise the learning process of students at different levels of experience. They are the following:-

- ***Imitative learning*** - learning occurs mainly through imitating the supervisor. The supervisor or lecturer is in a teaching role and the focus is placed on demonstration and suggestion. This is referred to the 'jug-mug model', where the supervisor pours their knowledge metaphorically into the student psychologist/counsellor. Furthermore, due to a lack of professional self-confidence, a supportive attitude is required from the supervisor.

- **Corrective learning** - the metaphor in this case is that of a potter with clay. The supervisor is the potter, and the student counsellor/psychologist is the clay being moulded to the correct shape. Hence the focus here is on correction and there is less of a need for support as the student psychologist/counsellor has more self-confidence.
- **Creative learning** - the metaphor here is that of a gardener tending his garden. The focus is on preparing the soil for what is to be planted and nurturing the plant as it grows. The supervisor adopts a facilitative role.

My reflection on Fleming's story...

I liked the idea of her not having any specific stages in this story because I personally believe that there are sufficient stage theories to help give some structure to our understanding of development but that it is also necessary to fill in the structure with specific information. This author tells a story of different types of learning/teaching styles within counsellor development. When I read this story I began to notice and identify which student/supervisor relationships were characterised by which teaching type in my experience as a Master's student. Certain supervisors adopted one of the types of teaching/supervising more so than the others. It was useful to be exposed to all of the different types of learning/teaching styles described above because my experience as an intern psychologist was characterised by moments when I needed practical advice, certain moments when I just needed emotional support and other moments when I just needed someone to listen to my stories and acknowledge them.

With regards to my research supervisor, Dr Human, I experienced a process of creative learning according to Fleming's story because my research supervisor did not tell me what to do exactly nor how I should do it, instead he managed to facilitate this research process with me in the race and himself as my coach, watching from the sideline. It was not always easy since it is a dominant story in society to have clear-cut steps to follow. At times when I had no clue what I

was doing, I was often tempted to contact my supervisor and ask him for ‘divine guidance’ but luckily I had grown wise enough to understand that he would urge me to do what I thought was necessary and then consult him for feedback later.

‘At a Master’s level one has to be able to work independently’. I had heard this phrase often from my supervisor but I only really understood the importance of it as I engaged with the research process, grappled with the difficulties involved, was able to think for myself and I therefore consulted my supervisor only when necessary. My research experience made me wonder about what some of my colleagues gained from this process as they related their experience as often receiving direct, guided feedback from their research supervisors in terms of what to do, which sources to include, how to write their work, what to include, what not to include and so forth.

Even though this research process has been a long, challenging one, I can honestly say that I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to construct valuable experiential knowledge regarding one way of doing Narrative research and also the general broad structure of doing research at a master’s level from start to finish.

Similarly, I understand and live out my role as a psychologist as someone who facilitates a specific process with a client. My role is not to tell people what to do but to assist them by providing them with the necessary support and information through mutually meaningful interaction so that they are empowered to make informed decisions about their lives and live lives that are congruent with their preferred identities or self-stories.

Hogan (1964)

Hogan's story regarding psychologist development involves the following:-

- **Level 1**

Within this level psychologists are said to be dependent, insecure and anxious. However, they may be highly motivated about their work. They learn through imitation at this level and often rely on a single method in practice. They also have very little insight into their motivation for wanting to be psychologists.

- **Level 2**

At this level the psychologist's level of motivation fluctuates significantly. There is a conflict of dependency and autonomy. The psychologist is in search of his/her unique way /style of working which often contributes to them being overconfident at times and then overwhelmed at other times. Psychotherapy is strongly recommended at this stage for the psychologist.

- **Level 3**

During this level there is a greater degree of professional self-confidence and insight into one's motivation regarding doing this work. Motivation is much more stable compared with the previous levels and there is a state of conditional dependency.

- **Level 4**

This final level, which is referred to as the master psychologist level is characterised by a sense of personal security and recognition of the need to confront personal and professional problems. Furthermore, there is a sense of personal autonomy and a greater degree of insight into one's motivation for doing this work. The level of motivation experienced is also stable or constant at this point.

My reflection on Hogan's story...

Hogan's story of psychologist development acknowledges the emotions of the psychologist and specifically the psychologist's level of motivation. Regarding level 1 above, I must acknowledge that when I first started interacting with clients in my first year of the master's programme I was quite anxious about my counselling abilities and more specifically I was anxious about causing any harm to the client or doing the wrong thing during counselling. I was also very motivated to help and motivated about my role in general. I actually worked more than the stipulated amount of time required per week because I wanted to soak up as much knowledge and experience that was possible during that short time.

During the second year of my master's training, you could say that I had reached level two of Hogan's story because I had taken on the role of Intern Psychologist as opposed to Student Psychologist and I realised that I was now expected to function as a professional. There was often an internal dialogue characterised by a see-saw action where I would on the one hand remind myself that I am a professional and that I ought to be confident but on the other hand I was still uncertain, unsure and in need of support and guidance. It was a time of exploring new terrain and trying to find out what worked and what did not work. I consulted my colleagues, namely fellow Interns and the qualified psychologists in my organisation regarding certain clients that I saw during counselling.

At this point in my professional development I would place myself at level three of Hogan's story above. The reason for positioning myself at this specific level is because I believed that my confidence regarding my ability as a psychologist had grown considerably. Furthermore, I have realised and more importantly experienced what it is that keeps me coming back to do this kind of work. As mentioned earlier, the practice of psychology feeds my soul and gives me a sense of fulfilment but it is not all about the client, yes I love helping people and seeing them grow and develop but I realised that I enjoy being needed and

relied upon by people to serve a specific function in their lives. The counselling experience is also a very unique relationship that one is privileged with as a psychologist. I believe that it is one of the most interesting helping relationships currently existing due to the dynamics of the relationship. In the world of business an accountant is rarely expected to understand the intricacies of a client's life in order to assist him/her with his/her business. In short, the practice of psychology for me is exciting and interesting because I get to work I believe beyond the realm of the expected and the conventional.

As I read through Hogan's story and reflected on my own experience and I found that I was more willing and able to fit my experiences within this model. I think it had a stronger effect upon me because it focussed on emotions. Similarly with clients, when their stories are emotion focussed they captured or drew my attention more quickly and I am more engaged in the process.

There is a self story that I have adopted that is fuelled by mainstream psychology which propagates that in order for clients to get to the core of their issues and deal with them adequately they need to express their emotions. It is not a bad thing to want clients to express their emotions. However, the practice of psychology is not purely an emotion focussed exercise, the client is a complete human being with thoughts, emotions, experiences, values, desires, beliefs that all need attention in order to understand and assist the client efficiently and effectively.

Loganbill, Hardy and Delworth (1982)

This model proposes three stages of supervisee development:-

- ***Stagnation***

This stage is typical of the supervisee being unaware of his or her own deficiencies in professional functioning or a lack of awareness regarding the issues of supervision. A limited and narrow view of the world is adopted

together with cognitive processes that are black or white, all or nothing. Regarding the student's view of him/herself, he/she may think that their functioning is optimal and regard supervision as unnecessary or he/she may have a low self-concept and become dependent on the supervisor.

- ***Confusion***

This stage is characterised by discord and disequilibrium. There is a release of attitudes, emotions and behaviours. Variability in terms of feelings of competence to feelings of failure and incompetence occur. The attitudes towards the supervisor change from dependency to anger and disappointment. This stage is a significant one in that old ways of thinking and behaving are left behind to allow for new learning to transpire.

- ***Integration***

A more realistic view or understanding of the world, the self, the supervisory process and the supervisor evolves.

My reflection on Loganbill, Hardy and Delworth's story...

This particular story of supervisee development did not draw me in at all; it actually kept me at a distance. I had to read and re-read this particular story several times before I could actually move closer to it and try to reflect upon it. It was as if I had put up a barrier of resistance to these authors and this led me to ask myself the question, "what is it that the above authors are saying about professional identity development that does not resonate with me as a person and particularly as a psychologist?"

I realised that the story of supervisee development viewed the beginner psychologist as unaware of the process and importance of supervision. Furthermore, this particular story spoke of a beginner psychologist who is cognitively inflexible and quite naïve, which was in direct contradiction to what I had experienced in my interaction with my fellow colleagues from all three master's programmes namely the counselling psychology, clinical psychology

and the research psychology groups. I have interacted with most of the beginner psychologists within the above groups in an academic setting and some of them in a social setting and I must admit that their initial functioning could not be described as being within the stage of stagnation.

If I had to place myself within the above model I would probably place myself at the stage of integration as I believe that I have managed to attain a balance between uncertainty and confidence, between knowing and not-knowing, between seeking support/assistance and being self-sufficient, between going with the process and intervening and so on. I have reached a point where I realise that I have acquired a great amount of knowledge and, more importantly, experience but that there is so much more to still explore, learn and experience. This realisation for me has brought a restlessness in pursuit of more as well as a sense of peace that there is always going to be more to discover and that this journey is a never ending, eternal one.

Grater (1985)

This supervision focussed model evolved out of experience as a psychotherapy teacher and as a supervisor. The result is a four-stage model of psychologist development specifically related to supervision.

Stage 1: Developing basic skills and adopting the psychologist's role

During this stage, social patterns of interacting are replaced with so-called therapeutic responses. The anxiety experienced by the student is significantly high therefore this becomes an aspect of focus for the supervisor. Learning goals during this stage involve acquiring specific skills related to the use of body language, nuances of client's statements and the pace of the interview.

Stage 2: Expanding the range of therapy skills and roles

During this stage there is a greater focus on client assessment. The student has to learn to assess clients in terms of their problematic areas and their

expectations of the therapeutic process. A significant learning goal during this stage is increased psychologist flexibility.

Stage 3: Using the work alliance to understand the client's habitual patterns

During this stage the focus is on acknowledging how the client brings his/her maladaptive patterns of behaviour into the therapeutic context. The student is taught to recognise these patterns as they occur and to respond to these patterns in ways that are oriented towards the client's growth instead of the client's stagnation. The learning goal during this stage is to learn about the interactions between the client, the problem and the technique/s or the relationship between the client, the problem and the technique/s.

Stage 4: Using the self in assessment and intervention

Developing from the first three stages, during this stage the student psychologist learns to use the self as a significant tool for assessment as well as therapy. Sensitivity to the process issues of therapy becomes pertinent at this stage.

My reflection on Grater's story...

Grater's story drew me in and captured my attention. I experienced an engagement with this story quite easily. I think that Grater's story seemed to be more representative of a part of what I had experienced. I could relate to all of the stages described above. I remembered while reading stage one how I had started out with accepting and embracing the role of psychologist as well as learning, re-learning and practicing the basic counselling skills acquired. It was initially quite mechanical like learning how to ride a bicycle or drive a car. That's how I remembered stage one.

Stage two for me was about learning more through being willing to try out different therapeutic techniques and wanting to explore the problem from different angles. It was about adapting to the client's self as a driver would

adapt one's driving depending on the kind of road to be travelling on. It was characterised by a more engaging involvement as opposed to the earlier mechanical involvement described above.

Regarding stage three, I gradually started picking up on client's patterns of behaviour within the counselling space and I wondered out loud to the client whether those patterns were prevalent in everyday life and what was the effect of those patterns on the person, the people in his/her life and on the problem situation. It was quite fascinating becoming aware of the patterns, communicating the discovery to the client and also experiencing the response clients had to this. Very often it was the communicating of these very patterns to the client that led to the counselling space expanding a bit further so that additional possibilities could be explored. It also made me more aware of my own patterns of interaction in everyday life that were being extended into the microcosmic counselling space.

Stage four related the use of the psychologist's self in counselling and I realised that even though one is not aware of it at the time, one is always using the self of the psychologist in counselling from day one. I realised that you cannot step out of your 'self skin' before embarking on counselling but once you realise you have this 'self skin' with you constantly it can become an empowering process because you realise that you can utilise it to the client's benefit and to your benefit as and when required. Similarly, you also become aware of the times when aspects of this very 'self-skin' may be hindering the process of counselling and you are wise enough to let go of it in that situation.

Hess (1987)

Hess's work is a synthesis of major preceding stage theories and it is presented as four main stages. According to this theory the professional moves through the following stages, described below, in an ascending spiral pattern.

Inception stage: here the central characteristics are role induction, demystifying therapy, defining of skills and setting of boundaries.

Skill development stage: during this stage the educational and experiential information acquired must be adapted suitably to specific client needs. The role of apprentice or learner is adopted during this stage and the apprentice starts to identify him/herself with a philosophy of human nature or a theory that informs the therapeutic approach adopted.

Consolidation stage: this stage is concerned with integrating knowledge that was previously acquired. The psychologist comes to realise that his/her professional identity is partially defined or informed by the skills that one has acquired thus far. Skills are refined or further developed and a higher level of competence is achieved. The role of the psychologist's personality is acknowledged and used to its maximum.

Mutuality Stage: Within this stage the psychologist has reached professional independence and is able to appreciate the importance of developing and maintaining communication channels with fellow professionals. Furthermore, the psychologist is able to come to creative and unique solutions to problem situations. The possible issues that may concern the professional at this stage are stagnation and burnout.

My reflection on Hess's story...

By the time I got to hear Hess's story it seemed as if I had heard bits and pieces of this before, therefore I was able to assimilate this story more quickly into my existing knowledge base regarding the psychologist's professional identity development. Similarly to Grater's story, it resonated with my views regarding a psychologist's professional development. I could not find anything within the content of the theory that I was opposed to. Beyond the content issues, on a process level, it once again made me realise that when I am faced with information that is congruent with my existing knowledge base and

understanding I adopt a more passive approach to it and it made me become more aware of my role in asking questions and my stance of curiosity in the counselling situation with a client even if what they are telling me seems understandable early on.

Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992)

Two American researchers embarked on a study to document the stages that psychologists and counsellors evolve through during their professional lives. They developed a stage model/theory that comprises eight stages beginning with the first year of postgraduate training to the so-called expert or experienced status/stage.

Skovholt and Ronnestad published their research findings in a book called *The evolving professional self, stages and themes in psychologist and counsellor development*. The stages are as follows:-

Stage 1- Conventional Stage

- This stage is defined as being untrained in the profession of counselling but by being involved in helping relationships' e.g. as a volunteer, a teacher helping students with problems, a physician who is faced with patients' stressors, etc.
- The central task here is to use what one has acquired through one's own personal development and life experience to assist others in need.
- The predominant affect at this stage is sympathy and the helper views his/her role at this point as that of a sympathetic friend who can offer helpful advice. Self-disclosure is often used to assist others.
- One's own personal life and experience is the major source of influence in helping others, the lay helper adopts a conceptual framework based on common sense and one's own personal life experience, world view, etc. which is often unexamined or very superficially examined at this stage.

- More specifically the important factors that influence the helping process at this point are the following: age, life experience, relevant training and experience in human services careers or occupations.
- The process of learning is mainly experiential specifically from one's own life, which is then used to assist others in similar situations.

Stage 2- Transition to professional training stage

- This stage begins with the decision to enter formal training within the field of counselling or therapy and it continues through to the first year of being in a training programme.
- There are various motivational factors that influence the individual to embark on professional training such as wanting to help others, an interest in psychology/behavioural science, a lack of knowledge while working as a lay helper or being in another helping relationship, etc.
- The central task at this stage is to assimilate a vast amount of information that is acquired from graduate lectures, workshops, discussions and to use that in practical work. Performance anxiety with regards to the academic sphere as well as the practical sphere is very high at this point.
- The predominant affect at this stage is that of enthusiasm and insecurity. On the one hand the student counsellor or psychologist is very excited about the prospect of learning how to help others but on the other hand he/she is also very insecure about his/her ability to succeed, his/her knowledge base regarding counselling/therapy and the associated procedures or techniques.
- There are six significant sources of influence which impact on the student counsellor or psychologist namely :-
 - 1) *Theories and/or research*
 - 2) *Professional elders or mentors*
 - 3) *One's own personal life*
 - 4) *Peers or colleagues*
 - 5) *The social/cultural environment*
 - 6) *Clients*

- The role or working style of the student counsellor/psychologist is very uncertain and unclear at this point. The individual's perception of what it means to be a counsellor/psychologist is experimented with. There is constant movement between familiar ways of being and new ways of being as the student counsellor/psychologist explores different identity descriptions that are believed to define the role of counsellor/psychologist.
- The conceptual framework adopted at this stage is not as simple as the previous stage because the student counsellor/psychologist realises the complexity that results from such a vast amount of information that is available. There is an urgent search for one's personal conceptual framework relating to the practice of psychology.
- Cognitive processing and introspection or reflection enables learning and growth to take place at this stage. The student counsellor uses the process of trial and error to learn during this stage. There are two main databases or data sources at this stage namely the information that is acquired in formal classes, practical work and the information acquired from intense psychologising through self-awareness.
- Two measures of effectiveness and satisfaction at this stage are visible client improvement and supervisor reaction.

Stage 3- Imitation of expert's stage

- This stage is defined by the student counsellor/psychologist being in their second or third years of graduate school with some students having completed their master's level and they are now newly employed practising counsellors/psychologists.
- The central task now is to maintain openness to theory and information at a meta level while imitating experts on a practical level.
- As long as the central task of imitation is achieved, the initial bewilderment experienced is followed by calm and a temporary state of security.
- The six sources of influence from the previous stage are also applicable to this stage.

- The role of the student psychologist/counsellor is still uncertain or unclear, meantime a rigid mastery of the basics is achieved.
- At this point there may be four different approaches or conceptual routes that may be adopted, namely:
 - 1) One that is not developed. Instead the older ideas of common sense and one's personal worldview are mutually used with ideas from theory/research, clients, supervisors, peers and one's personal life experience.
 - 2) Alternatively some individuals integrate concepts and elements from different conceptual frameworks.
 - 3) Some individuals may choose one main conceptual model but also incorporate other conceptual frameworks that are secondary.
 - 4) Another route is to intensively learn only one conceptual approach and exclude all other views.
- The process of learning is facilitated by imitation, introspection and cognitive processing at this stage.
- Client feedback and supervisor reaction are the two measures of effectiveness and satisfaction at this point.

Stage 4- Conditional autonomy stage

- This stage is defined by the individual being a full-time intern at the end of the training programme.
- The central task is to be able to function at the level of an established professional.
- The predominant affect experienced at this stage is variable confidence.
- The source of influence that is most pronounced at this stage is the influence of professional elders namely supervisors. The next stronger source of influence is working with peers, namely other interns. The other sources of influence are also of importance at this stage.
- There is an increased rigidity in the professional role and working style of the individual.

- There is a refinement of the conceptual framework of the individual. The ability to differentiate important from unimportant information occurs at this stage.
- Modelling or imitation of peers, supervisors, professional staff, etc. becomes an important mode of further learning. As with the previous stage introspection and cognitive processing is also applicable here.
- Measures of effectiveness and satisfaction at this stage include a more complex view of client feedback and supervisor feedback.

Stage 5- Exploration stage

- This stage is defined by the individual having recently received a graduate degree and he/she is developing a professional experience base.
- The central task within this stage is to explore beyond one's current development and capacity.
- Confidence and anxiety are the predominant affects experienced during this stage. Confidence allows the individual sufficient security to explore beyond the known. However, anxiety is experienced as the individual cannot completely address the complexities of the tasks and there may be characteristics of the work role which may be inherently anxiety provoking.
- The same six sources of influence from the previous stages are also applicable during this stage. However, there is less influence by professional elders as the individual is more independent. Work place mentors offer a greater amount of influence as the individual is now within a work setting.
- The professional role and working style of the individual involve modifying an externally imposed professional style to a more personalised professional style that is congruent with the individual's personality.
- There is disillusionment and rejection of earlier adopted conceptual frameworks as the individual realises that all clients do not fit into the adopted conceptual framework.
- Reflection is the crucial mode of learning at this point. The degree of individual self-directed reflection is the important element in moving from

this stage to the next stage. If reflection is avoided or prematurely abandoned then pseudo-development seems to occur at this stage.

- Measures of effectiveness and satisfaction become increasingly realistic and internalised criteria are now used.

Stage 6- Integration stage

- Individuals within this stage have completed their graduate training, have been practicing within the field for a number of years and have acquired experience in different settings and/or contexts.
- The central task is to develop a professional authenticity that involves adopting a conceptual framework and working style that is genuine for the individual.
- Satisfaction and hope seem to be the main affective experience at this stage. A sense of satisfaction with one's work is related to a decrease in perfectionism and grandiosity.
- The six sources of influence previously listed still continue to exert an influence at this stage. However, there is an addition of a seventh one namely one's own teaching/supervision/mentoring. The influence of one's personal life and experience is heightened during this stage.
- The role and working style of the individual becomes less rigid. There is a greater use of one's natural personality in one's work with clients. Furthermore, individuals within this stage have more trust in themselves, take more risks than inexperienced professionals, possess greater expertise, are more patient, more flexible, more knowledgeable and may be even more humble.
- The conceptual framework of the individual at this stage evolves from the disillusionment of the previous stage to that of renewed hope. One hopeful aspect of this stage is the addition of parts or elements to create a whole or broad framework. The parts that are added are the following:-
 - 1) Insights learned from work with a variety of clients
 - 2) Experimenting with various theories and techniques
 - 3) Learning from a variety of supervisors

- 4) Working in a variety of settings
 - 5) Modelling provided by one's own personal psychologist/counsellor
 - 6) Insights gained from maturation through personal experience and introspection
 - 7) One's experience and assessment of conceptual frameworks used in the past
 - 8) The growing emergence of one's unique personality being incorporated into one's work.
- The individual's conceptual framework has been personalised to fit one's uniqueness.
 - An integrated approach consisting of a variety of systems of thought is utilised at this point.
 - The mode of learning during this stage is dependent on personal preference. A self-selected method is chosen based on what works best for the individual.
 - Measures of effectiveness and satisfaction become even more realistic and internalised criteria are continued to be used at this stage.

Stage 7- Individuation stage

- A process of individuation that involves both separation and relatedness defines this stage. An individual at this stage has completed graduate school and has been practising within the field for many years now (10 –20 years).
- The central aspect during this stage is unique personalised growth that contributes towards deeper authenticity.
- Predominant affects at this point are satisfaction and distress.
- The seven major sources of influences continue to impact upon the individual but they further evolve. Experiences with clients become a strong influence in the individual's work, allowing one to come to a point of accumulated wisdom.

- The psychologist/counsellor in the Individuation stage has developed the ability to be present for the client while working but at the same time to be distant from the client while not working.
- The therapeutic relationship takes on a deeper role and is of greater focus during this stage since the psychologist comes to realise that he/she is the instrument as opposed to external techniques and procedures.
- Responsibility is shared with the client at this stage since the psychologist is very aware of not taking too much responsibility.
- The conceptual framework of the psychologist/counsellor has become even more personalised. At this point it comprises of:
 - 1) All the conceptual integrations that have taken place in the past
 - 2) It is greatly influenced by the setting within which the person works
 - 3) The significant personal experiences that the person has had
 - 4) There is less of a reliance on abstract theoretical concepts and greater utilisation of guiding principles that have evolved out of the psychologist's/counsellor's past experience.
- The psychologist/counsellor continues to refine and develop the preferential mode of learning which is highly self-directed.
- Measures of effectiveness and satisfaction continue to be realistic and internal at this stage.

Stage 8- Integrity stage

- Individuals within this stage have usually worked for about 25-35 years within the field, they are close to retirement and they usually are about 60 – 70 years of age.
- The central task is to retain one's complete individuality and also prepare for retirement.
- The predominant affective experience is that of acceptance of self.
- Sources of influence at this stage are still the same as before but their specific impact differs.

- Individuals at this stage rely on their accumulated experience base rather than theories. The conceptual system used is highly integrated, personalised and based on one's personality.
- The individual's role and working style is now even more congruent with his/her personality.
- Modes of learning are at their most personalised or unique at this stage. Learning seems to be that of re-interpretation, integration and synthesis.
- The work that one does may be most satisfying at this stage since the anxiety experienced at earlier stages has diminished significantly or may even be non-existent.

My reflection on Skovholt and Ronnestad's story...

Initially there was a battle going on in my mind as I read this comprehensive and extensive story of professional development of the psychologist/counsellor. The battle involved me trying to capture all of the information in an orderly way and secondly it involved me trying to fight hard not to fit my experiences into this story, thereby not boxing my experiences.

My response to the first battle was to use bullets to gain more control over how the information was presented and my response to the second issue was that I kept my mind active in recalling my personal experiences as I read the authors' story. Bulleting of information is a strategy that I employ quite often when there is a vast amount of information presented to me at once. It gives me a sense of control and order that then helps in the retention and retrieval of information. Interestingly, what happens in bulleting information is the same thing that happens when we narrate a story about someone else's story. The main points may be captured but the thick descriptions are lost. This is an inevitable aspect of being a narrator.

The above reflection made me think of the counselling situation wherein the client narrates his/her experiences to the counsellor/psychologist who thereafter responds to the often vast sum of information by summarising

important points raised by the client. The importance of asking the client to summarise his/her story (as opposed to the psychologist always having to do this) was highlighted for me as well as the counsellor's/psychologist's ability to allow the client to expand on the story so that a thick description of the story being narrated is attained.

At this point in my professional development, according to the above model, I could say that I am in between stage four and stage five namely the conditional autonomy stage and the exploration stage.

REFLECTING ON THE ABOVE COLLECTION OF STORIES OR 'KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTIONS'...

The above stories have been acknowledged and legitimised through the institution of academic psychology as providing knowledge on how normative development occurs for counsellors/psychologists (Freedman & Combs, 1996; White & Epston, 1990). As I immersed myself in the above stories I caught myself trying to fit my own experiences of my training into these stories at times. However, I was painfully aware of the effect of the modernist voice and reminded myself that these concepts and explanations regarding normative counsellor or psychologist development are not the only lenses that are available through which one can view professional identity development.

Through scanning the literature above I gradually came to value my own experiences as well and I realised the value of my research. The process of going through all of the above stories of career development, counsellor and/or psychologist professional development made me realise that I was the only person who could tell my unique story. Nobody else would be able to tell my story in terms of how I had made meaning of it. Yes, it could be narrated to another researcher, however, it would be told in their own unique way based on their interpretation and meaning of what I had shared with them.

Thus, the process of reflecting on the stories that my friends in academia had to share gave me the opportunity to experientially learn about the difference between research from a first person self-reflective position as opposed to mainstream research that focuses on other people's experiences. It is difficult enough to write from a first-person perspective because there are so many experiences, which have been storied, but unfortunately all of them cannot be captured in a research text such as this. This realisation brought with it the understanding that mainstream researchers that tell stories about other people's stories also have a myriad of experiences which are narrated to them by their co-researchers, however, they too cannot capture all of those experiences within their specific research texts. Therefore, it brought a greater understanding and appreciation of the challenges facing all researchers in this regard.

There were certain experiences within the literature that I could relate to but there was so much within the literature that excluded my unique experiences. In this regard, Foucault (in White & Epston, 1990, p.26) refers to subjugated knowledges as:

“Those regional (local) knowledges that are currently in circulation but are denied or deprived of the space in which they could be adequately performed... considered insufficient and exiled from the legitimate domain of the formal knowledges and the accepted sciences.”

Referring specifically to Skovholt and Ronnestad's (1992) story, which seems to be the most current and comprehensive story on professional identity development of the psychologist/counsellor at present, I believe that it can be acknowledged and utilised as a broad framework or blueprint regarding the process of professional identity development. However, it must be borne in mind that this research story is representative of an American sample of

respondents, which excludes the unique South African discourses that relate to professional identity development.

Furthermore, although this model is based on the experiences of counsellors and psychologists, their experiences are interpreted and made meaningful by the researchers. Implying that it is a story of someone else's (the respondents) story. In a study that was conducted on professional counsellor identity development of Hispanic interns, Nelson and Jackson (2003, p. 4) also note that "the voices of counselling students about their own professional identity development were seldom represented in the literature."

Furthermore, the researchers that have developed this story of counsellor/psychologist development acknowledge that 'it is impossible to describe each individual's developmental path in detailed accuracy' (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1990, p.13). Therefore, the motivation for pursuing the topic of professional identity development from a first person, self-reflective narrative approach grew within me. I became more interested in telling my unique story of professional identity development as I acknowledged the value in this local form of knowledge as contributing towards 'knowledge' in the field of psychology as well.

In addition, reflecting on the stories from the literature was a form of supervision for me. It helped demonstrate how one can through the process of reflection gain insight and understanding into how one interacts with certain stories. In addition, it also made explicit how one's self-stories play out when we come across and interact with other people's stories. Therefore, I want to also ask the audience that will be hearing or reading this text to look at their own self-stories and try to understand how their self-stories influence how they will interpret and make sense of my stories within this research story.

PART TWO

CHAPTER 4

Reflections on supervision with Melissa...

BP: QUESTION 4

Ruqayya, you have taken us through quite a journey thus far, but what is of interest at this stage is how you developed your identity as psychologist and what comprises your psychologist identity thus far in your professional development?

Yes, I agree, it is time for the most interesting and exciting part of this discussion namely my journey towards self as psychologist. I have used the transcription sessions from supervision with Melissa Brokensha (a counselling psychologist in private practice) as the main source of data for my study. During the process of reading the transcriptions certain experiences stood out as sparkling moments for me that I have chosen to present to the Board as important aspects that I have come to acknowledge as part of my psychologist self at this stage.

I started going to supervision in July 2006 and my last supervision session was in December 2006. Although the supervision process occurred for a period of only 6 months during my internship year, the experiences and stories that were born from those sessions have continued to grow and were strengthened over time. The time that has lapsed since then is not viewed as just a temporal point or temporal location but as a resource in terms of giving me the opportunity to fully develop my preferred story regarding my psychologist self. Furthermore, I

am of the opinion that my exposure to the professional world of specialist medical practice as a personal assistant to a neurosurgeon for a year following my internship has also been a great resource and opportunity for growth and development in terms of my professional identity.

I must also acknowledge that the beginning of my story regarding my identity as psychologist began to form in 2005 during the first year of my master's training, specifically during the adventure week that we had to attend at Glenmore in Kwazulu-Natal as a compulsory part of our training. That was during June 2005 and I remember that that was the very first time that the idea of being a psychologist really sunk in and became a reality for me. Until then, I held on to the belief that I was a student in training to become a psychologist in the near future. The thought that I was already in the process of becoming this so-called psychologist only hit home during the time that was spent at Glenmore. I think it was some of the adventure activities that we were engaged in there that helped me think about my role as psychologist at that stage.

The outdoors presented a very experiential way of exploring the self through the activities that we were engaged in. Some of the activities were the following: a series of obstacle courses, mountain biking, sea kayaking and abseiling. We were expected to keep self-reflective journals during this week and we also had group reflection sessions twice a day. It was a very intense week that demanded quite a lot from each person as well as the group as a whole but which I believe was and is an integral part of the Counselling Psychology training programme at the University of Pretoria.

This adventure week had a very positive impact on me as a trainee and I have decided to incorporate the use of an adventure medium within my identity as psychologist because I experienced the value of it first-hand. My aim is to find ways of incorporating outdoor adventure activities into my practice of psychology where appropriate in the near future but right now let us look at

some of the conversations during supervision that sparked certain realisations or discoveries.

THE MOST IMPORTANT DISCOVERY REGARDING MY SEARCH FOR AN IDENTITY AS PSYCHOLOGIST...

M: ...realising that you are already becoming and living who you want to be right now in the present! (Supervision, September 2006)

The above citation is applicable to my search for an identity as a psychologist. At the start of this research endeavour or research process I believed the modernistic view in terms of there being a pre-determined, out-there description of psychologist identity which I believed that I was going to uncover. However, I realised with time that the postmodern view of psychologist self for me was that of being constantly engaged in the storying of a psychologist self which is not essentially different from the self of the psychologist as a person and which can be seen in different contexts that the psychologist may already be engaged in.

I came to experience that certain stories about the self, which related specifically to being a psychologist, were becoming more prominent or were highlighted as opposed to other self-stories that were becoming less prominent in the context of counselling and the practice of psychology. Thus, there was a huge shift away from searching for 'the' professional self or 'a' professional self and instead embracing descriptions of myself that were already being experienced in other areas of my life and as a professional in general.

It was a rather humbling experience to realise that there wasn't going to be some grand process of 'morphing into a psychologist' but that I was already becoming and living who I wanted to be as a person and as a psychologist right then in the present. The implication of that for me was empowering in that I

realised that I was in control of my psychologist identity and I could choose aspects of the self, my self that would be helpful to my psychologist identity and work towards incorporating those within my practice of psychology. Similarly, I realised that there were also aspects of my self that were sometimes unhelpful in the counselling context, which I began to work on transcending.

As discussed in chapter 3, the above experience of mine (in relation to the supervision process with Melissa) is congruent with Super's proposition that we choose certain careers in order to express our self-concepts. It is also in line with Loganbill, Hardy and Delworth's stage of integration whereby specifically in my case a more realistic view or understanding of the self evolved. Regarding adopting the psychologist role, it is mentioned in stage 1 of Grater's theory and the first stage (inception stage) of Hess's theory (Grater, 1985; Hess, 1987; Super, 1980).

A TENTATIVE, EXPLORATORY WAY OF COMMUNICATING...

R: Even though it was difficult for you to share the "black dot" with me, you decided to stand up against its influence on your life and expose it. In exposing it, we were able to make an important link between the past and the present, which pleasantly surprised both of us and which, perhaps further loosened the "black dots" influence on the present?

R: ...how I'm speaking, for example, what I like about you, which I try to do a lot as well is to talk tentatively instead of talking definitively and I think for me as a psychologist that is something important because it doesn't steal away my client's experiences. It doesn't impose experiences, it suggests and it asks and that for me is very powerful, that is something which I became more aware of which I feel is very important to me as a psychologist that I want to continue.

(Supervision, August 2006)

The first extract above is from a letter I wrote to a client of mine regarding our counselling experience. The tone of the above paragraph as well as putting it

into question form communicates an inviting, exploring, tentative stance. I learned about this way of communicating from my reading of narrative ways of working (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Morgan, 2000; Weingarten, 1998; White & Epston, 1990). I also got to witness first-hand how narrative principles such as a 'not knowing, curious stance' can be communicated practically. I learned about this through attending supervision with Melissa as well as during the group discussions or exercises that we had with Dr Human, our course co-ordinator in the master's training programme. I had read about these things in books but it was quite something else to see it happening and experiencing it first-hand.

At the beginning I felt quite restricted in my practice of psychology, as I knew all these wonderful narrative ways of working which made sense to me but I did not exactly know how to put it into practise. I think experiencing it for myself during supervision with Melissa really made a huge difference in terms of me being confident that it can be done, that it does work and that I was knowledgeable in terms of being able to put it into practise. In this regard, both Fleming's method of imitative learning as well as Skovholt and Ronnestad's imitation of experts stage mentioned in chapter 3 is applicable (Flemming, 1953; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992).

As I started trying out narrative ways of working with clients I began to experience counselling in a different way than before. It took away the burden of always knowing how, what, when, why from me and instead I acknowledged my role as explorer; that I was there to understand and assist where possible with the assistance of the client. It involved engaging the client in the process by finding out instead of telling, by exploring the current situation instead of assuming, by listening more carefully, by fitting in the pieces of the puzzle and trying to better understand the story from the client's point of view instead of my own.

Therefore, something as simple as changing the way I spoke during counselling which was informed by my understanding of narrative practice enabled me to experience counselling in a different light. I no longer felt that huge burden of always having to know everything because the new reality that I came to experience was that although psychologists may be experts on the subjects included in psychology, clients are the real experts during counselling because they are the most knowledgeable persons to consult regarding their life experiences (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Morgan, 2000; Weingarten, 1998; White & Epston, 1990). .

Furthermore, I experienced this way of talking which was tentative as being much more helpful in that we were able to explore multiple options, perspectives, realities instead of just one or a few (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Morgan, 2000; Weingarten, 1998; White & Epston, 1990). In this regard, Grater's stage 3 (using the work alliance to understand the client's habitual patterns) referred to in chapter 3 is applicable as this tentative, exploratory way of communicating opened up areas for the better understanding of the client (Grater, 1985).

In addition, it empowered the clients by placing the responsibility and control regarding the pace and course of counselling in their hands. I became less anxious as a result of this. I experienced an increase in confidence and I started enjoying the process of counselling more. Hogan's level 3, discussed in chapter 3 is synonymous with the above benefits that I experienced as a result of communicating in a tentative, exploratory way (Hogan, 1964).

I think I acknowledged that I could only play a certain part in this process and that the client has his/her part to play as well. It made me look at counselling as a team effort instead of a one-man/one-woman show. Through this experience, the dominant story regarding the psychologist as the agent of change was challenged experientially as I experienced the partnership between psychologist and client as the agency of change.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THERAPEUTIC LETTER WRITING...

R: I'd also perhaps like to write something, a letter to you sharing my experience of our experience together, how would that be for you? And she said, "That would be wonderful." ...

M: Okay, do you think you could look at the experience you had with writing the letter, in terms of how you experience therapy? Are there any similarities with regards to the most difficult part of it?

R: Ya, I think, not just with the letter and therapy but with most things in life...for me personally and maybe other people, I don't know, the getting started is most difficult because of the unknown...

M: Okay!

R: ...because of the discomfort, not knowing how, what, uhm, I think once I get past that, I tend to enjoy it with lots of things. I tend to enjoy it, I think it's just that initial part that is difficult. I think I need to trust that it will work out. (Supervision, August 2006)

While reading through the above dialogue between Melissa and myself the idea of getting started as being the most difficult part of any process was highlighted for me. We were specifically talking about the letter writing that I had embarked upon and used with a client of mine. I had learned about letter writing as a therapeutic tool through my reading of narrative ways of working and it resonated very much with myself in that I believed that where necessary and appropriate it could be used to strengthen the client's alternative story and that it could serve as a concrete way of re-remembering one's past success in times of difficulty (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Morgan, 2000; White & Epston, 1990).

However, I had not used it before this. I think perhaps I did not have the confidence prior to this to embark upon it and I did not have any previous experience of doing it therefore it was difficult initially to get started. I remember sitting in front of my computer, reading over process notes, reflecting back on the sessions that I had had with this specific client and immersing myself in the process that I had experienced with this client before I could

begin. I didn't know how to go about it, I didn't know what to include, what not to include but what I did know was that I wanted to do this. I knew that it was important to me because it could assist this client of mine.

Once I overcame this initial phase of uncertainty and basically the 'not knowing' I was able to just write and it began to flow. I started to enjoy this exercise and it allowed me to use my love for words in creative and different ways. The above uncertainty and 'not knowing' in terms of the letter writing was also paralleled in my process of beginning this research report. The getting started was the most difficult part for me with this research report and I constantly wondered whether what I was doing was correct and if I had included what ought to be included. Once I had overcome the initial uncertainty I began to enjoy what I was doing and the words seemed to flow. The uncertainty described above has been acknowledged by level 1 of Hogan's theory, the confusion stage of Loganbill, Hardy and Delworth's theory as well as stage 2 of Skovholt and Ronnestad's theory (transition to professional training stage) discussed previously in chapter 3 (Hogan, 1964; Loganbill, Hardy & Delworth, 1982, Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992).

Furthermore, the dominant story regarding a psychologist or counsellor writing about a client is mainly to communicate to other professionals when doing referral letters or in doing process notes for personal recording of sessions. However, I had the wonderful opportunity of writing to a client of mine with the intention of helping the client connect with past successes since I was a witness to the client's process during therapy (Freedman & Combs, 1996; White & Epston, 1990). It was not only beneficial to the client as I had expected but it was also beneficial to me as psychologist. This came as a complete and pleasant surprise to me.

I think that what I realised through writing this letter to this client of mine was that just as it provided the client with something concrete to have in times of self-doubt and difficulty, it was also a reminder to me that I had been able to let

go and trust the process with this client and what needed to happen happened without me necessarily having to be in control or in charge of the process. Thus, it served as a reminder to me of my past success with therapy.

Similarly, as I began this discussion regarding my research report with the Board and it started taking shape, it motivated me to continue with this endeavour in the belief that what needs to be communicated will be communicated and that I will be able to do it as I have been able to do other things which seemed difficult initially but which went quite well in the end. Thus, I also learned through that experience of letter writing that all I need to do is work hard at getting started and thereafter just trust that what needs to unfold will unfold and more importantly trust in myself as psychologist.

So, the process of letter writing made explicit the process of counselling and the process of embarking on this research project and lots of other processes in life where getting started is often the most difficult part because of the voice of the uncertainty. Furthermore, the process of writing the letter to that specific client of mine made me realise the value of letter writing as a counselling tool and I incorporated the story of myself as a psychologist who would be able to make use of such a 'device' in counselling. Therefore, I realised that letter writing was an important part of my psychologist identity.

REFLECTING ON REFLECTION...REFLECTION AS ONE OF MY GIFTS...

M: So, all of this, like you're saying to be able to go and think about it, whether you use the letters or go back to experiences, uhm, and we've spoken about reflecting earlier in the session as well, uhm, just by having to write the letter itself, you had to reflect back on the sessions, which also means that you need to reflect back on your therapeutic experiences...and I know reflection is, is, err...I'm just wondering if you are starting to express how important reflection is to you as a psychologist, because I think for all of us, we have our things that are very meaningful and that help us along the process...I'm just wondering if reflection happens to be one of those things for you?

R: ...Uhhh. I think so because if you block the psychologist identity side and just look at me as a person, I am a very reflective person in general...I like to...even if I go through a difficult patch...I want to look back on it and see what I have learnt...I'm always like that. Uhhh, so I think yes, definitely, it informs my therapeutic identity as well. (Supervision, August 2006)

Reflecting on reflection brought me to the realisation that I have always been someone who enjoyed reflecting on past experiences in order to make sense of these experiences. I remember one of the earliest experiences that I struggled with was my father's death when I was eight years old. It took a long time for me to be able to reflect back upon it and find something positive that had come out of it but eventually I did find quite a few things. Over time I realised the strength and the courage that I had discovered through that experience. It made me come face to face with my own mortality as well as those close to me. It made me appreciate the times that I had had with my father and I was grateful for the many happy memories that we had created while he was alive.

Furthermore, that experience changed the way I conceptualised death. I refused to look at death as the end in terms of my relationship with my father but instead I understood death as a sort of physical end to the relationship, which occurs because our earthly realm and existence cannot transcend the limits of space and time. Thus, I found new ways of transforming the relationship with my dad using the spiritual story of life after death in terms of the spirit being able to live on once the body dies.

This spiritual story helped me to make peace with my father's passing on and it allowed me a space in time to communicate with my father on a spiritual level in the belief that he would be able to see me, hear me and know what I was feeling at any given moment in time and more importantly I would be able to communicate whatever I needed to communicate to him despite him physically not being around.

Reflecting on experiences was thus something very natural to me that I often engaged in as a person in the past. Therefore, it is not only part of my psychologist identity in the present. It has not only emerged in my work as psychologist because it has had its roots long before I even realised that my path would be towards ‘psychologist-hood’.

In terms of my psychologist identity, I think that because I seem to be a very reflective person in general I tend to bring that into the therapeutic space and see how clients respond to that more readily. It is a natural part of who I am outside the context of being a psychologist that I believe enriches the counselling context as well. I have experienced that most of my clients are able to use the reflective element that is characteristic of our counselling space to their benefit in terms of learning new things about themselves and about their process or journey in life. The realisation that there are always lightbulb moments in the process of counselling as well as in life is something that my clients get to experience first-hand during the course of our process together. Similarly there are always light bulb moments for me as a psychologist and as a person.

M: Yeah, what if that’s the thing that you are actually giving your client?

R: That they are able to reflect as well and learn...that would be wonderful!

Melissa: I wonder if this...it’s not the only thing but...one of the things that you are bringing into the relationship?

R: That would be great, it would be wonderful!. Yeah, I think with this client, she does reflect and with every session I give her things to think about... something to write but mostly to think about. And she even asks me, “what homework do I have?” (Laughter). And she is very excited and she always remembers the next time, you know... so if I had to put it in my words, yeah, I think she is very very insightful...into her own life, which is why I think the lightbulb, the last part about the lightbulbs...that there’s always going to be these lightbulbs.

M: yeah, so, again, maybe you don't bring textbook knowledge to the experience, but maybe it's about bringing something as simple as reflection to the experience. (Supervision, August 2006)

I have come to understand that reflection is one of the things that I as a psychologist bring to the relationship. It is one of the gifts that the supervision process has brought me. Even though it is seen as a given and taken for granted within the dominant story of counselling as something that should be part of the process anyway, it is especially important to me and it features prominently in my practice of psychology. I experience it not as one of the criteria that I need to fulfil in order to be acknowledged as a psychologist but it is instead a natural and comfortable part of who I am right now in the present and also whom I would like to be in the future. As discussed in chapter 3, the consolidation stage of Hess's theory as well as the exploration stage of Skovholt and Ronnestad's theory is applicable here (Hess, 1987; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992).

TRUSTING MYSELF & THE PROCESS...

M: ...I wonder if therapy is slowly becoming more a place of being, than a place of being in control or being strong or all of those different experiences that you usually choose?

R: I think it is. I think, slowly I can see with other clients that I've also started processes with, I'm much more relaxed. I think I'm becoming more confident about just trusting that whatever needs to happen will happen and that all you need to do is just be there, that's all I need to do is be there!

(Supervision, September 2006)

I think at some point in my journey as intern psychologist, I started to trust myself more. It is seen above in my use of therapeutic letter writing where I was able to immerse myself in the task without the thought of being evaluated

or critiqued. I think as time went on, counselling slowly started to be less a foreign or strange place and more a place where I could just be myself. Since I am generally quite confident about my abilities as a person I think it was a little bit easier for me to just trust myself in this context as well.

Each time that the voice of self-doubt emerged in counselling I would try to quieten it with evidence of my past victories. One specific experience that stood out for me which was a sparkling moment and that reminded me time and again that I would definitely be able to learn about the practice of being a psychologist was my experience of learning to ride a mountain bike at Glenmore in 2005. It was our second day at Glenmore and the next activity on our itinerary was mountain biking. When I found out that that was what we were going to do I was quite worried because I did not know how I would be able to because the last time I rode a bicycle was when I was four years old and that was a tricycle. I remember telling my lecturer that so that he could understand if I was not able to participate in the activity.

I thought in my mind that I would try and see if I could ride the bike but having never ridden a bicycle as an adult, I was quite sceptical about it. Nevertheless, I made my way with the rest of the group to the shed to choose a bike and helmet and thereafter we went to the open field to practice a bit before we embarked on the mountain biking trail. While everyone was riding I got onto the bike and tried to balance myself but unfortunately I kept on falling over to one side. I remember Marilyn and Edrich, two of my colleagues were pushing my bike as I sat on it and pedalled. At some stage they let go and I was cycling. However, I did not have any balance and I did not know how to get the bike in motion again once it had stopped.

My colleagues were very helpful and they tried to give me tips on how to get the bike in motion. As I was busy trying out the strategies and getting frustrated by not being able to get the bike in motion, I recall exclaiming out loud that even if I could just learn how to ride by the end of the day, that would be sufficient for

me. I would not necessarily need to complete the mountain biking trail, I would just need to learn to ride for starters. So, I set off with the rest of the group and my goal of wanting to learn to ride motivated me to keep on trying no matter how many times I fell off the bike. It was not easy, but after several failed attempts and many bruises I finally succeeded in getting the bike balanced and in motion. I was finally cycling and it felt really great. The sweetest part of the experience was being able to learn how to ride a bike for the first time in just a few hours. I felt so proud of myself because I could have easily sat back and chosen not to try but instead it was the part of me that has always been keen on learning new things and that loves challenges that really kept me going until the end. I surprised my lecturer as well as my colleagues and myself that day!

The above experience of learning how to ride a bike could not have come at the right time for me because being a novice psychologist was like learning how to ride a bike for the first time. There was the element of not knowing how, of being afraid at the start, of worrying about keeping the bike in motion or the counselling in motion, of getting tired along the way, of experiencing the joy of success, of realising that I can do it as long as I keep trying no matter how long it takes. The uncertainty described above has been acknowledged by level 1 of Hogan's theory, the confusion stage of Loganbill, Hardy and Delworth's theory as well as stage 2 of Skovholt and Ronnestad's theory (transition to professional training stage) discussed in chapter 3 (Hogan, 1964; Loganbill, Hardy & Delworth, 1982; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992).

One of the important lessons that bicycle riding taught me or reminded me of was to believe in my ability to succeed and more specifically to believe in my ability as a psychologist. It helped me to reconnect with my self-confidence, specifically in the context of developing as a psychologist, which was particularly low during that time. Furthermore, the bicycle riding taught me to also trust the process and surrender to the process. I began to focus on what I could do instead of what I could not do. I learned that it would work out as long as I was motivated, willing to try and not afraid of 'falling' at the start.

Furthermore, trusting myself and the process also evolved further as I started using what I had learned by putting it into practice with clients during my internship. The supervision process with Melissa also helped re-enforce certain acquired abilities and help me incorporate it into my psychologist identity. The interesting thing is that the more I became aware of certain issues that were facilitating the counselling process and those that were hindering the counselling process I actively worked towards doing more of what seemed to be working and less and less of what was not working.

R: ...each time that I would go back it would almost feel like what we talked about and what came up and what was highlighted or what stood out for me...I started living that...it started becoming a part of me and it was like...yeah, I think it helped me to trust more as well...and I could see it playing out ...I could see myself living it ...so...it was almost like...there's a saying that I found in this book to the effect that words are just words some say but they begin to live the day that they're said.
(Supervision, August 2006)

The above extract from one of my supervision sessions talks of how I started to 'live' out what was discussed in supervision regarding my development as a psychologist and it helped me trust myself more to know that there was a professional who was facilitating this process with and for me. The supervision process paralleled the counselling process in that I believed that what Melissa represented for me in supervision I started becoming for my clients in the counselling process.

As the supervision process unfolded week by week into a beautiful multi-coloured tapestry with interwoven experiences, insights and connections regarding my professional identity development, my trust in the counselling process and my role as facilitator and co-explorer became more a part of my identity as a psychologist. Melissa did not impose her own stories on the supervision sessions instead she attentively listened to my stories, acknowledged them and brought in other dimensions to my stories that I sometimes overlooked.

BEING WITH THE CLIENT...UNCONDITIONAL ACCEPTANCE...

M: ...it is not always about doing like in his case but that the acceptance itself was the significant moment or the beginning of an alternative story or the aha...but its something in our action-oriented minds that we would never have thought is so significant...no, we must do and yet he has taught you that there's something else...so do you think that one of the gifts that again keeps presenting themselves and the last one was reflection and how you brought reflection into the process but maybe the next gift that has been discovered is the gift of acceptance which is possibly linked to self-acceptance? (Supervision, September 2006)

Acceptance or unconditional acceptance was something that I had read about in textbooks, which I thought I had understood and was able to put into practice. However, I struggled for months with a client that was having social difficulties (in DSM IV terms he could have been viewed as 'having' social phobia) during my internship because I had failed to accept him exactly as he was. At the time, I thought that the client was uncooperative because I had been seeing him for quite a few months then and I felt that the therapeutic process was going absolutely nowhere. In this regard, Dreyfus and Dreyfus's novice stage, level 2 of Hogan's theory and Loganbill, Hardy and Delworth's stagnation stage (as discussed in chapter 3) is applicable.

Quite out of the blue, almost intuitively, one day I decided to do things differently. I completely relinquished all control, sat back and threw the ball into the client's court. At the start of one of our sessions I said, "When you're ready you can start." We sat in silence for about half an hour. However, what transpired thereafter was and is an experience that will be with me forever. To my complete surprise that one simple act of accepting the client unconditionally, which allowed me to allow him to just be, made all of the difference.

R: "...Cos I'm not used to waiting for things to happen...I want to make things happen. And...and in the past I didn't really accept him completely and really get into his shoes because if I did accept him completely and was able to get into his shoes I'd realise that that is what he needs...and to be fully accepted...for him to

feel fully accepted I need to sit there and be okay with his difficulty in finding words.” (Supervision, September 2006)

That one session proved to have quite a unique outcome (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Morgan, 2000; White & Epston, 1990). The unique outcome in terms of my contribution to the process was that I did not take control of the session as usual, I allowed the client to initiate the process. I was very patient with the client and I had the confidence to try something different. The unique outcome in terms of the client’s contribution to the process was that he was able to finally initiate the process all by himself even though it was really difficult for him, he was able to express his emotions explicitly for the first time, he opened up and started talking without me having to probe him constantly and he was hopeful about his situation for the very first time in all of our sessions together.

Just when I had thought that that session was amazing in terms of process goals, this particular client surprised me even further. Usually, when a session ends, I shake hands with my clients because that is congruent with how I am as a person and as a psychologist. I believe that physical contact is important and I incorporate that into the counselling encounter mainly through hand shaking. On this particular day as I got up to greet the client, I was about to extend my hand to him but to my surprise the client leaned forward and hugged me. It was one of those tight hugs which was completely unexpected and completely out of character for this client. When he had finished hugging me he looked at me and said, ‘That was spontaneous!’ and I said, ‘Yes it was’.

That was completely unexpected for a beginner psychologist as myself. I was really caught off guard and the more I thought about what had transpired the more surprised and excited I got. Here was a client who could not make eye contact with me at the beginning of counselling but who managed to actually trust the process and me enough to actually show affection. It finally struck me...the power of something as simple as unconditional acceptance of who he was and what he was struggling with. This client had felt comfortable enough in

the counselling space to be able to just be himself for a change, a self that he had not been in a very long time.

I had always seen my role as that of a 'doer' within the process of counselling. I had come to the conclusion that in order to be an effective psychologist I had to adopt an action-oriented stance which implied movement and change. However, this client had taught me otherwise. I realised through this particular experience that perhaps it is not always the doing that is helpful, particularly with clients that are less verbal but that just being present and by that I mean being comfortable with being with the client at the moment, accepting it and the client regardless of what is happening at that moment. So I had the opportunity of learning a different way of being a psychologist which went against the dominant story of progress or development being the result of planning, strategising and always doing something. I learned that it was okay and even necessary to sometimes sit back and do nothing in order for progress to be made. I learned to accept a particularly 'difficult' client unconditionally!

As discussed in chapter 3, the above is congruent with the integration stage of Loganbill, Hardy and Delworth's theory, stage 3 and 4 of Grater's theory as well as stage 5 (exploration stage) of Skovholt and Ronnestad's theory (Grater, 1985; Loganbill, Hardy & Delworth, 1982; Skovholt & Ronestad, 1992).

COUNSELLING AS AN ADVENTURE...

M: If you had to use a metaphor to describe yourself in the therapeutic relationship, what would you use?

R: I've already used it...the adventurer...and I think not just in counselling but as an individual... You embark on a certain journey but you're not sure what that journey is yet...so its an unplanned experience and a spontaneous trip that you take... You never know when it is going to begin, you never know whom its going to be with, you never know where its going to take you and you just decide at that point that you're willing to take on this journey and you do it. And I think wherever it brings you, wherever you're going to place your flag and see it blowing in the

wind... Its going to bring you a sense of fulfilment and a sense of joy and excitement...and gifts. Counselling is an adventure! (Supervision, November 2006)

Towards the end of my internship year I started seeing and experiencing the therapeutic experience as an adventure where I was the adventurer or explorer. As I had the opportunity to interact with many different clients with different challenges that had brought them to counselling, I slowly began to view counselling less as my job or my future occupation but instead as an adventure. What made it an adventure for me was the challenge of assisting clients to overcome problematic situations. At the start it often seemed really difficult or almost impossible but somehow the client and I would manage to navigate our way through the different terrains or landscapes in order to put the pieces of the puzzle together so that we could empower ourselves against the influence of the problem. Initially the not knowing made me anxious and unsure of what to do but after some time the same not knowing became exciting because I realised that we would figure out what to do as we went along just as an adventurer does as he/she explores uncharted terrain.

I realised further that the client was a co-explorer and a co-adventurer in that both of us would be exploring new places, discovering new things and learning from the experience as we went along. I realised that just as it was sometimes scary or uncertain for me, it could also be scary and uncertain for the client as well. The thing we both had in common was that we both wanted to rise to surmounting the challenge of the problem with the client and myself victorious. Sometimes the terrain was smooth and easier to navigate but sometimes the terrain was bumpy and winding which made the process longer and more challenging but nevertheless we persevered and kept on going.

As discussed in chapter 3, the above experience of mine is similar to level 3 of Hogan's theory, Loganbill, Hardy and Delworth's integration stage, Hess's consolidation stage and Skovholt and Ronnestad's exploration stage (Hogan,

1964, Loganbill, Hardy & Delworth, 1982; Hess, 1987; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992).

Reflection on the above discoveries...

The above experiences became explicit through the process of supervision and more specifically through conducting this research project. As I began to write about my experiences above, I started accepting these experiences and descriptions of myself in relation to counselling more readily. The aim of this research project was to explore my professional identity development and through engaging in the research process I came to understand how this process of professional identity started and evolved for me. The humble beginnings of my professional identity were born at Glenmore during the masters' compulsory week-long adventure holiday. Adopting this so-called professional role was facilitated by interaction with lecturers, clients, colleagues, narrative authors, authors in the field of professional identity development, intern institutions/organisations, supervision (within the course as well as extra supervision provided by Melissa), journal writing and personal reflections.

My undergraduate education in psychology as well as the master's first year equipped me with the necessary theoretical knowledge, information regarding my role as a psychologist, the parameters within which I was expected to function but the internship year of my training namely exposure to psychology practice was an important catalytic process that significantly contributed towards my professional identity development.

PART THREE

CHAPTER 5

Reflections on ending...

BP: QUESTION 5

We have journeyed with you from the beginning and we are nearing the end of your story. If you were to reflect on this entire story, what would you say the impact of doing this particular research has had on you? Lastly what advice would you give to beginner psychologists such as yourself regarding this research endeavour and more importantly professional identity development?

I want to emphasise that this first person self-reflective research is a thick description of my story and therefore very limited in its generalisability to other intern psychologists. The purpose of this kind of research is not to generalise but to generate unique descriptions of phenomena such as in my case the development of my professional identity as a psychologist.

AN EXTRACT OF THE DISCOVERIES I MADE DURING SUPERVISION...

R: Some of the discoveries; gaining acceptance, letting go of control, realising that you (I) can be open, genuine and honest with people, learning from experience and becoming wiser in the process, allowing other people to learn from their experiences, realising and acknowledging your own strength, realising that you are already becoming and living who you want to be right now in the present...particularly as a psychologist, an excitement that there are always going to be lightbulb moments and that you are (I am) continuously learning new things

about yourself (myself) and making new discoveries. (Supervision, December 2006)

THE IMPACT OF DOING THE RESEARCH ...

Looking back on this process I must admit that it has been challenging because this type of research is not a common story within the field of psychology. I struggled with the voice of the dominant research story shrieking at me saying that what I was doing was not science or valid research. However, I managed to also keep the alternative voice going which emphasised that what I was doing was valid, scientific and that this process would hopefully assist me to learn more about my own professional identity development. Also, I hoped that this small research endeavour of mine would encourage other qualitative researchers to perhaps also engage in this type of research where appropriate.

In addition, the process of being engaged in this research enabled me to look at my own professional identity development more closely and try to understand how it came into being and how I managed to incorporate certain stories within my psychologist identity. An important discovery for me was that there was no grand process of 'morphing into a psychologist' but instead I started using and acknowledging what I naturally had as a person/psychologist that worked in the counselling space and I began working on incorporating and developing that which my clients needed within the counselling space in order to develop further and overcome the challenges.

This research endeavour helped me to be more aware of what was happening within the counselling process and in effect become more present during the sessions with clients. The process of embarking on and doing this research paralleled what I had experienced in the counselling situation as a beginner psychologist. In both cases there was the not-knowing stance which in my experience involved not knowing exactly what to expect, not knowing what needs to be covered, not knowing how the process will develop, not knowing

exactly what will emerge out of the process. However, despite all of this there was an experience of being willing to trust that the process will take me where I need to go and trust that I am able to deal with where the process will take me. In the counselling context it was also about trusting that the client will take me where he or she needs to go in terms of his/her counselling process and therefore, trusting and accepting the client as my co-adventurer in the counselling journey.

I also learned experientially that we interpret and experience other stories based on our own frames of reference. I had interacted with client's stories based on my own stories or experiences and likewise I had engaged with the authors that I consulted in this research endeavour based on my own self-stories. We cannot escape this process of interacting in this way since we are not objective robots but human beings with a myriad of experiences and embedded stories, which we bring to the counselling process. What we can endeavour to do is to become aware of our stories or lenses through which we interpret and make sense of our experiences with clients and also about life in general.

Since using the Narrative Metaphor as a guiding framework my experience of being a psychologist has changed from someone who deals with problems to someone who faces challenges collaboratively with clients in creative ways (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Morgan, 2000; Weingarten, 1998; White & Epston, 1990). I am often asked by friends or family members if I don't get tired of dealing with people's problems and my response to them is that I do not view it that way, instead I view being a psychologist as being a co-adventurer with the client and through engaging in the process of counselling the client and I stumble upon and discover certain pieces of the treasure map until finally we are led to the treasure which is eventually victory over their challenges.

MY GUIDELINES TO BEGINNER PSYCHOLOGISTS

I realised that the master's training programme was just the tip of the ice-berg in my journey of self-discovery and my journey as an agent of change. I want to encourage other novice psychologists to look towards their own development and in so doing discover their unique experiences and stories which they can use to strengthen their own professional identities and in the process assist their clients more effectively.

Also, I would like to emphasise the significance of having quality supervision sessions with a psychologist that is trained in the approach that the trainee has adopted. It can be a powerful process in assisting one to explore and consolidate one's 'psychologist' qualities and identity. It can be a space where the psychologist can grow, learn and become confident of his/her abilities. It can be a space where simple but yet great insights are born. It can also be a space where the psychologist gets to experience and understand how their clients may experience the counselling process. Just as the counselling process is a space of possibilities, the supervision process can be a space of infinite possibilities as well.

Belief in the self and one's capacity is important in this process of becoming a psychologist and in the process of life in general. It has been my life experience thus far that the challenges will never cease. I believe that the challenges that we face are important opportunities for growth and development in all aspects of life. More specifically in one's search for an identity as a psychologist there will be uncertainty, moments of self-doubt, criticism from others but even those moments are once again opportunities for growth and development. Embracing the challenge of exploring my professional identity and becoming this psychologist is not an end in itself but it is a small part of the process of me fulfilling my vision or my divine purpose on this planet.

Although this research story has come to an end my personal story of professional identity development as a psychologist has only just begun. Even as I am conveying this to you there are other stories that are being highlighted for me that will be the focus at this new snapshot of my development right now in the present.

I would like to leave you, the reader with a few words from Paul Ricoeur (1992, p. 147)

“The person, understood as a character in a story, is not an entity distinct from his or her experiences. Quite the opposite: the person shares the condition of dynamic identity peculiar to the story recounted. The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his/her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character.”

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APPENDIX A– LETTER OF INFORMATION

To whom it may concern

I would like to inform you, my client, that as part of my academic training as an Intern Counselling Psychologist, I am required to conduct research within the field of psychology. In accordance with that requirement I have discovered an interest in the Intern Psychologist's professional identity development and I will be doing self-reflective research using my experiences of the counselling process. I want to emphasise that your experiences and the content of our conversations will not be used in the research. The aim is to focus on my experiences regarding my professional identity development only.

Yours faithfully

Ms R. Seedat

APPENDIX B – LETTER OF PERMISSION

09 July 2006

LETTER OF PERMISSION FROM STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

This letter is to certify that Student Support Services is **aware of and gives permission** to Miss R. Seedat with regards to her conducting self-reflective research through exposure to clients that she sees while completing her internship at our division.

Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Dr Beatrix du Toit
(Psychologist)