



“Identity in Motion” Narratives of Growth, Tension, and Transformation in Psychology Training

Luzelle Naudé, Carla Nel, Jacques Jordaan, Lindi Nel, Catherine M. Shirima, and Ramon Karamat Ali
IDEaS Interdisciplinary Hub for Identity Research, Department of Psychology, University of the Free State, South Africa

BACKGROUND

- Professional identity develops through ongoing negotiation between personal and professional selves.
- Psychology training involves identity exploration, relational positioning, and meaning-making.
- Narrative identity theory emphasises how individuals construct coherence across past, present, and future selves.
- Limited Global South research explores professional identity development among psychologists-in-training.

AIM

- To explore how South African psychology students and early-career psychologists construct and negotiate personal-professional identities across the journey of becoming a psychologist.

METHODS



37 participants



Honours, Master's, and Doctoral cohorts



Focus groups and reflective activities



Narrative research design

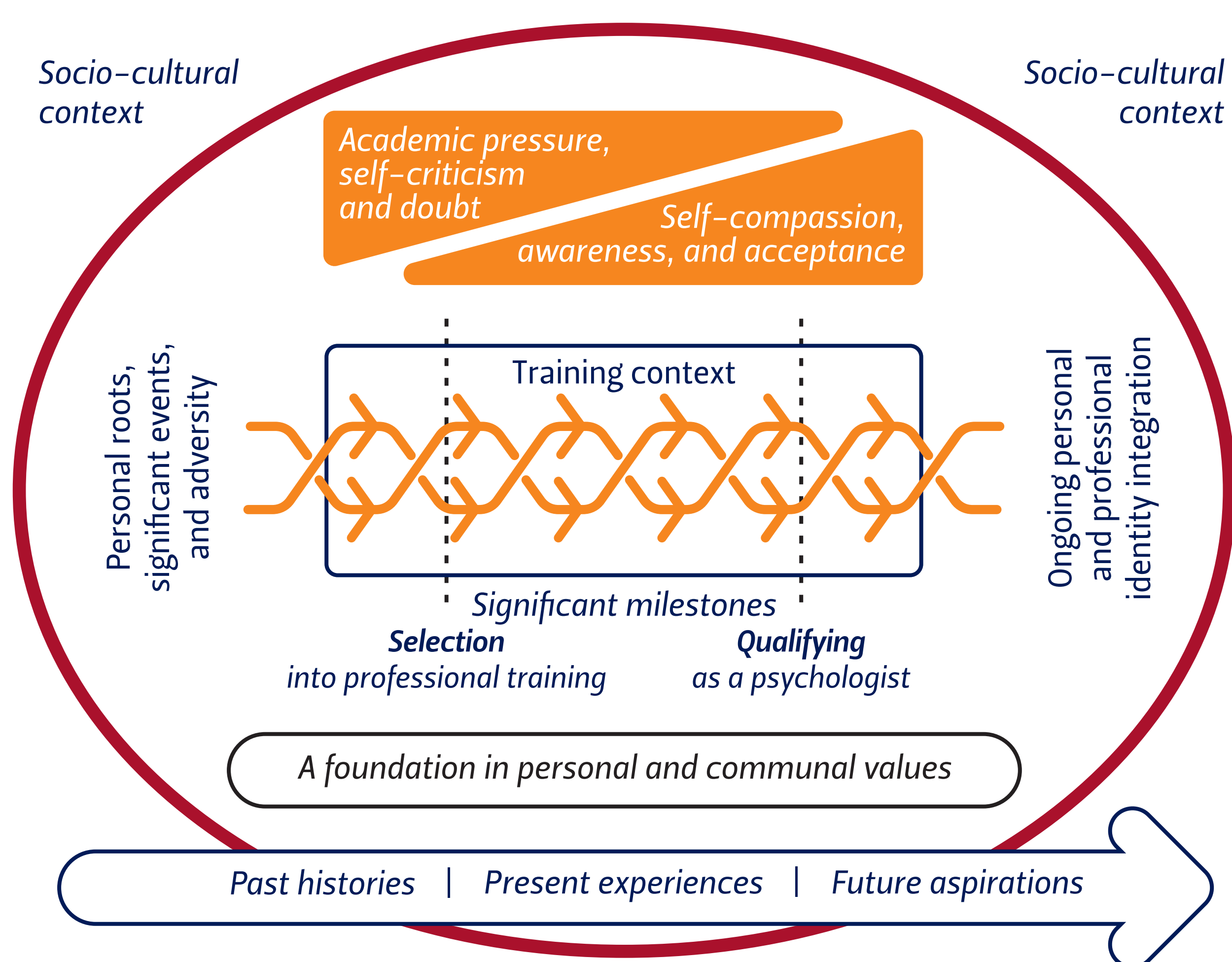


Narrative thematic analysis



Social constructivist framework

Spirals of the Integration of Personal and Professional Identities on the Journey to Becoming a South African Psychologist.



FIVE STORYLINES



Origins of Professional Identity

- Early motivations, adversity, and pathways into psychology
“I always knew...”
“I wanted to know myself... psychology gave that platform into exploring self.”



Professional Training as Crucible

- Training as transformation, challenge, and growth
“Nothing prepared me for this.”
“It has challenged me in ways that forced me to look back within myself.”



Identity Negotiation through Belonging

- Searching for belonging, validation, and support
“You cannot walk alone.”
“You are just being an imposter... camouflaging all the way.”



Owning Your Story

- Integrating personal and professional selves
“Psychology is literally everywhere.”
“I’ve had aha moments... yes, this is why I’m doing this.”



Continuing the Journey

- Growth, uncertainty, resilience, and future becoming
“Everything has a time. Everything has a season.”
“I’m looking forward to the time when I am unconsciously competent.”

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

- Professional identity development was dynamic and non-linear.
- Identity integration involved ongoing negotiation between personal, professional, relational, and sociocultural contexts.
- Participants described balancing vulnerability, resilience, self-doubt, and growth.
- Becoming a psychologist was experienced as a lifelong journey of transformation.

MAIN TAKE-AWAY

“Professional identity is not found – it is continually constructed through the stories we live, struggle through, and grow into.”



IDEaS

Interdisciplinary Hub for Identity Research



www.ufs.ac.za

Inspiring excellence, transforming lives
through quality, impact, and care.



UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA

For more information, contact Luzelle Naudé – naudel@ufs.ac.za