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Exploring the Self Definition and Individuality of Black Professional Women

Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology (DPsych)

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Submitted: January 2010

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'...' indicates that some extracts have been removed for editorial conciseness.

[ ] denotes a grammatical tense change or the inclusion of a grammatical tense for easier reading.

{ } represents a pause in a participant's speech.

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So many people have influenced the writing of this portfolio that it would be impossible to mention them all. Nonetheless, I extend a big thank you to the participants of the research project, Dr Dee Danchev, Dr Paul Holland, my clients, and most of all to my wonderful son.

City University declaration

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SECTION 1:

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to portfolio

Modern Psychology has shown considerable interest in understanding the self (Baumeister, 1987). Epstein (1973) contends that this is because it provides the only perspective from which an individual can be understood. Concerns about selfhood lies at the functional role of self-processes and have implications for self-development (Harter, 1999).

Theoretical and clinical implications of self-development underpin the training of Counselling Psychologists as scientist-practitioners. The model (scientist-practitioner) evolved from the Boulder Conference in Colorado in 1949, and lies at the heart of this portfolio. The essence of the Boulder model is that the practitioner is both a researcher and a clinician (Frank, 1984). In effect, Counselling Psychologists integrate both skills to inform their practice with clients. The application of psychological theory to the therapeutic encounter, fundamental to the work of Counselling Psychologists and illustrated throughout this portfolio, flows directly from the Boulder model (Vespia and Sauer, 2006).

The starting point of research on the self is the assumption that self-concept is contextualised (Showers and Zeigler-Hill, 2007). That is, a person's self-concept in reality consists of multiple selves, distinct identities that are represented by organized bodies of both declarative and episodic knowledge (Cantor and Kihlstrom, 1987; Laing, 1962; Hoelter, 1983; James, 1950; Rosenberg, 1979). However, this portfolio, in keeping with the holistic emphasis of Counselling Psychology, and in contrast to the self-concept of multiple selves seeks to weave all these separate parts into a unified whole. Integral to this process is the understanding of how the individual reconciles her many selves. That is, how the various and different selves of an

individual become integrated. The contribution of this portfolio to Counselling Psychology resides in offering a new understanding of how the individual constructs the jigsaw of the self through negotiating between the many parts of herself and through her relationships with others. The portfolio contends that the success of this endeavour is critical to healthy psychological functioning.

The portfolio is inspired both by my interest in, and my desire to understand, how I function as a person. It is equally underpinned by the wish to value my clients in the professional setting of the therapy room. This value lies in the strength of the therapeutic connection between the self of the therapist and that of the client. Many of the clients I have worked with have expressed the wish to know who they are and to understand their experiences.

Beardslee (1991) proposed that self-understanding is an internal psychological process through which the individual makes causal connections between her experiences of the world and her inner feelings. The process of self-understanding depends upon the individual's ability to report on her own life and in particular, to focus on what sustains her (Beardslee, 1991). Baumeister (1998) asserts that the individual quest for personal understanding (or self-actualization as proposed by Rogers, 1959) is an accepted phenomenon in society and a legitimate aspect of life. In an attempt to synthesise new arguments for self-understanding, critical feminist psychological theory (Qin and Lykes, 2006) posits that self-understanding is an ongoing process wherein the individual is situated and resituated in her raced, classed, gendered and sexualized selves at the intersection of complex sociocultural and historical contexts. That is to say, self-understanding is achieved through the conception that the self is profoundly social (Unger, 1990).

Reflecting on the instances where I have felt connected to my clients has highlighted the fundamental need to understand their integrated self, rather than their many distinct selves. My ability to value clients in their many different contexts (e.g. their position within their family, culture, background, and upbringing etc.) and to help them integrate their presented selves has facilitated their self-understanding. At these times I have been impressed by the speed with which we have been able to build a therapeutic relationship. As Beardslee (1991) suggests, self-understanding fosters growth and development.

At the outset of my training, I believed that the individual self was predominantly about presentation. For example, how a client spoke, dressed or related to others gave an indication of who s/he was, illustrating Winnicott's concept of the false self (Winnicott, 1965). However, I have learnt that this is not a fair representation of the unified true self. Through my work with clients with learning disabilities, I have come to understand the importance of the unified self even to those with low level cognitive abilities who find it difficult to introspect.

My interest in the unified true self was initially inspired by a television documentary (Channel 4, 1997) about women who kill. The programme led me to reflect, both on the circumstances that impelled them to take such extreme action, and the resulting impact on their sense of self. As a black woman, I was particularly interested in black women's experiences of these extreme situations. Although I was discouraged from pursuing this research interest because of the putative vulnerability of black women in prison, and the high probability that ethical approval from the prison would be declined on the grounds that such a study would be a qualitative research undertaking, I nonetheless wanted to continue to explore the unified

self of black women. I therefore modified the research to focus on black professional women in the community. The results of this research are reported in section 2 of this portfolio.

Section 2, which brings together subjective and objective perspectives, is written in both the first and the third person. It seeks to communicate the personal accounts of participants from an objective standpoint. In instances where there is a departure from the objective stance to a more personal account, the narrative is shown in italics.

Section 2 also offers compelling evidence that some participants of the research project choose not to access psychological services because of their life experiences. This has a profound impact on their sustained beliefs of what Counselling Psychology can offer. As a Counselling Psychologist and a black woman who is part of the community that represents black women professionals, I feel propelled to educate the public and, in particular other black professional women, on the aims and objectives of Counselling Psychology. This will not only benefit the profession as a whole but significantly enhance the relationships participants have with themselves and others.

The client study (section 3) of this portfolio presents my experience of being in relation with a client and explores my use of self as a therapeutic tool. Wosket (1999) highlights the benefits of the therapist's use of self as a therapeutic tool as well as the difficulties that can be encountered. The study exemplifies Rogers's (1959) belief that two people must be in psychological contact for an encounter at relational depth to take place (Mearns and Cooper, 2005). This belief forms the foundation of my therapeutic encounters.

Section 3 is written in the first person, highlighting the introspective nature of enquiry within a therapeutic relationship. Further, it gives the reader a window into the self of the scientist-practitioner in accordance with the traditions of qualitative approaches to research. The poem below is included to give the reader a deeper understanding, both of my own search for a unified self, and that same quest as expressed by my clients and research participants.

The final part of the portfolio, section 4, the Critical Literature Review, appraises the self-concept of those with Learning Disabilities. It is narrated in the third person thereby reinforcing the objective basis for evaluating the studies discussed.

I am in my thirties and from a Black African background. I studied sciences at A-levels and intended to become a gynaecologist, following in my father's footsteps. Against my will I moved to England as a teenager. I now believe England to be my home and I continue to strive for a sense of belonging. I have worked in the catering industry, the welfare industry, and more recently in the financial industry. My involvement in the field of Counselling Psychology began after I volunteered as a telephone counsellor for ChildLine. My subsequent training and professional experiences have fuelled my desire to know more about people and how we become who we are.

Who am I?

On this day, I am of age

The age of realization

I know who I am!

On this day, I stand before my bathroom mirror
I am looking at the reflection
I reach out and I touch
I can feel the coldness of the mirror against the palm of my hand
I hear the sound of my heart thumping to the sound of the running water
And I wonder ... who am I?

One this day I notice her...
Who is this that looks so much like me?
On this day, I again wonder as I previously had
Who is she?
She resembles the woman I am inside and out
But I don't know how she got here
Could it be that I am her and she is me?

On this day, I am of age
Because I realize that she may be me and I may be her
On this day,
Just maybe
I know who I am.

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SECTION 2:

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Exploring the self definition and individuality of black professional women.

A. Definitions

The following are definitions of terms used within the research project.

1. Self view / self perception: these two terms are used interchangeably to explain an individual's ability to respond differentially to her own behaviour and its controlling variables. (Mead, 1934; Ryle, 1949; Skinner, 1957; Bem, 1967). That is to say, the individual is able to consider her own understanding of her life world and, to a certain degree, have a formed opinion about that understanding.

2. Unencumbered self: the expression is coined by Sandel (1984) and describes the way people stand towards the things they have, or want, or seek. Thus the unencumbered self distinguishes values from the person who one is. For the unencumbered self, the most important aspect is not the ends (i.e. outcome) she chooses but her capacity to choose the ends. Rawls (1971) also uses this term as a central claim about who one is. He says "It is not our aims that primarily reveal our nature but rather the principles that we acknowledge to govern the background conditions under which those aims are to be formed". Within the context of the research project, Sandel's definition (1984) is used to emphasise the role of choice, and the individual as an independent agent.

3. Self / individual self: The term self or individual self in the context of the research project refers to a person who acts

autonomously on her own behalf (Baumeister et al, 1998). "Who I am is not something given, but something evolving, something that is realized through my projects" (Zahavi, 2007; Sartre, 1948).

4. Ensembled individualism: Sampson (1988) uses the word to describe an indigenous psychology that emphasises a fluidly drawn self–nonself boundary. Ensembled individualism is based on an inclusive conception of the self. This means the self does not exist by herself, her life world includes others.

5. Black professional women: this term is used loosely to describe a woman who is of African descent. She represents an individual who is so defined biologically. The term, albeit perceived as a label, is not intended as one. It is coined purely for descriptive purposes to congregate like-minded women who also consider themselves to be black professionals. Social class and sexuality are not included as parameters for this definition. Although racially, "black" refers to the colour of the skin, Hill Collins (1990) suggests that one way of tackling definitional tensions from a Black feminist perspective is to highlight those experiences and ideas shared by African-American women that provide a unique angle on the self and community.

The word "professional" within the context of the research is utilized for identifying black women who have entered into an "occupational sphere" (Bell, 1990). The standpoint of the research project, similar to the approach by Townsend Gilkes (1982), is that professions are varied and include, but are not limited to, service occupations such as nursing, social work and teaching.

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B. Abstract

What is it like when we know who we are and can make sense of ourselves? This research explores black professional women's attempts to define themselves through their personal and working lives. What makes each of them an individual? The present study aims to investigate the foundation of each of the participants' sense of self and to understand how this has shaped their present view of themselves. The study reports on accounts from semi-structured interviews with ten female participants, which was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This research examines how the meaning-making processes of these women impact on their self definition. Four master themes are presented: self definition – defining me, the self and others, influences on the self, and "my individuality".

The master themes highlight the participants' struggles to self define and maintain their individuality. The analysis suggests, both a competing sense of self, and the influence of past relations on present self definitions. It further indicates an imbalance between how internal and external discourses impact on individuality and self definition. The research concludes by examining the analytic observations in light of phenomenological thinking.

C. Introduction

Shahar, Henrich, Blatt, Ryan and Little (2003) say that self definition pertains to the need to establish a coherent, differentiated, stable, realistic, and positive sense of self. As true as this statement may be, a sense of self is cumulative of both positive and negative attributes. The research project is concerned with illuminating how self definition occurs for, and is experienced by, individual black professional women. It aims to understand how black professional women create themselves through choice and action, and sense-making, thereby achieving their own visibility (Greene, 2006).

Self definition has been explored in numerous ways. For example, self definition has been examined in relation to others (e.g. Blatt and Zuroff, 1992; Tesser and Campbell, 1980; Gaertner, Sedikides, Graetz, 1999; Blatt and Blass, 1996; Blatt, 1990; Oyserman, 1993), within the concept of identity (e.g. Cahill, 1986; Thorne and McLean, 2002; Campbell, 1987) and more recently in relation to particular groups of people such as students (e.g. Kuperminc, Blatt, Shahar and Henrich, 2004; Whitney-Thomas and Maloney, 2001; Hoffman, 2006; Lp and Jarry, 2008). These studies focus on one component of how an individual self defines. In contrast, James (1896) suggests that an individual's sense of self involves a process of integrating different ideas about the self into a single notion. Further, researching self definition in single components fosters fragmentation of self and prevents the concept of an individual as a unified whole. The research study is important because it provides the platform from which to examine an individual's sense of self as an integrated whole.

Smith (2004) proposes that, in order for the individual to make self-evaluation a practical possibility, she needs to conceive a theory about herself (Harre, 1989). That is to say, a person should be able to

reflect on her own experience, seek and perceive meaning in the occurrences in her life world. One means of encapsulating the self definition of black professional women is to record the stories they tell about their life worlds (Zahavi, 2007) where the ways of defining themselves, their personal views and opinions are likely to be embedded.

The women's tales of their life experiences are likely to encompass their ethnicity, race, class, age, gender, cultural and religious views as well as their political stance. This makes self definition a complex, continual and active process (Peck, 1986). Thus, the research study's attempt to grasp the complexity of self definition of black professional women is achieved through analysis of interview material from the sample.

The research study seeks to contribute to qualitative studies on self definition through a holistic, all embracing, hermeneutic phenomenological approach. The use of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith and Eatough, 2006; Smith, 2004) makes this possible through its central concern with subjective conscious experiences. IPA gives an individualised insider perspective (Eatough, Smith and Shaw, 2008) on the phenomenon being investigated. This is in contrast to grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), which is a more conceptual explanation of psychosocial phenomena (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

In summary, the research study asks: how do black professional women construct their sense of self? How is this maintained? First, provided below is an overview of relevant literature.

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D. Literature review

In the West, the self is viewed as a critical intrapsychic aspect of an individual, which has implications for health, emotional, psychological, and social functioning (Tanti, Staukas and Halloran, 2008). Although, cultural and historical discourses have been regarded as influencing self definition, research has suggested that there are multiple levels involved in defining the self (Chen, Chen and Shaw, 2004). In recent years, there has been an emerging interest in the development of various selves (e.g. individual, relational and collective). The manifestations of self definition vary considerably across time and place but, in general, ensue from relationship with others. One's self definition is thought to change in the service of self esteem maintenance, as a function of the relative presentation, and psychological similarity and dissimilarity to others (Tesser and Campbell, 1980). Alternatively, self definition, as proposed by social cognitive theorists (e.g. Bandura, 1989) emanates from 'reciprocal interacting influences'. That is to say, the individual self develops out of relationship with others and the emphasis is on the reciprocal nature of the relationship.

In a similar way, Hermans (2004) suggested that the self of the individual functions as a society, being at the same time part of the broader society in which she participates. Autonomy and relatedness are therefore two recognised needs in determining the self definition of an individual. Autonomy has been construed as conflicting with relatedness (Kagitcibasi, 2005). That is, autonomy reflects tendencies to be independent from others, whilst relatedness encourages communion and union with others.

These varied theoretical perspectives raise questions about the structural properties of the self and how these properties may relate to

psychological well-being. For this particular review, it raises the question of how self definition, or self view, impacts on psychological well-being on an individual basis whilst at the same time acknowledging the contributions from the systems that surround the individual. One such system is the relationship between people. For example, culture has been perceived to be an essential tool in achieving and managing people (Abu-Lughod, 2006). Kemmis (2008) explains that the self is constructed through developmental-historical, cultural-discursive, social and material-economic interactions between people. This view is also supported by Habermas (1992) who proposes that no individuation is possible without socialisation and vice-versa. One could surmise that culture contains symbols and values for establishing an ideological frame of reference through which people endeavour to deal with their individual circumstances (Hill-Collins, 1997). Accordingly, to grasp the self definition processes of an individual involves the appreciation of self definitional methods as well as understanding the unique social systems the individual is concerned with.

Counselling Psychology is a supporter of individuality since the training emphasis is mostly on a one-on-one relationship (i.e. the client–therapist relationship). It could be argued, that the consequence of such relationships is that the individual is able to influence society from the platform of the one-on-one relationship she is familiar with. When in a one-on-one relationship, it is sometimes difficult to imagine the impact the self has on a group. For Rogers (1959) the one-on-one relationship is grounded in the belief that individuals are innately enthused towards growth and development. This suggests that the individual has an innate need to preserve and improve herself through the relationship she has with herself. Self defining occurs within the constraints of this relationship.

Cooper (2004) argues for a balance between the relationship the individual develops with themselves ('I–I') and the relationship that is developed with others ('I–Me'). The relationship with one's self is the acknowledgement of one's own thoughts, feelings and actions which can be viewed as one's self awareness. Contrary to the view held by Cooper (2004), Thatcher and Manktelow (2007) suggest that, amidst the journey of seeking and effecting change on an individual level of consciousness (i.e. psychological well-being), it is important to remember the role of the community and the interdependence at play with the individual self. Thatcher and Manktelow (2007) argue for the recognition, not over and above the 'I–I' relationship, but in addition to, the need for "relational and community values" (Thatcher and Manktelow 2007, page 31). They suggest that the combination of awareness on an individual level, plus the role of the self within the community, can facilitate an expansive sense of self for the individual. Hence, the self definition of an individual, is not one that would discount the collective self or the relational self, nor the individual self, but one that incorporates relations within, alongside and independent of the other.

There is a scarcity of psychological literature which has, as its primary aim, the investigation of individuality and/or self definition of black professional women. Black feminist theorists and black womanhood advocates within Sociology, Anthropology and Education Politics and History have for many years attempted to make black women centre stage in research and general policy development. I would suggest that black professional women constitute a population which has been largely ignored by Counselling Psychologists and Clinical Psychologists. Hence, the rationale for this study is the absence of psychological research into the self definition and experiences of black professional women. The

study has the aim of understanding how black women view themselves, and whether their understanding holds an integrated sense of individuality. Whilst one could argue that black women hold a perspective about their sense of selves, its contours may not be clear to the women themselves (Collins, 1986). Therefore, the contribution of the research project to Counselling Psychology is to help clarify, for black women, the viewpoint they hold true for themselves, and to highlight any discrepancies that may exist in their processes of self definition. The intention of the research study is to advance knowledge about self definition and individuality of black professional women.

It has been necessary to broaden the scope of the review to literature that has generally looked at individuality and/or self definition. Methods used to identify relevant references were selected on the basis of Torraco's (2005) procedures for integrative literature reviews. Google scholar and other library-based educational websites (e.g. PsycINFO) were searched using the keywords 'self definition', 'self view' and 'self understanding' of black professional women and or black women. Articles and/or books were then scanned for their relevance to the self definition of 'black professional women' or just 'black women'. Finally, reference lists for selected literature were examined to identify further relevant material.

In recent years, researchers (e.g. Williams, 2005) have traced how marginalized groups such as black women have moved from a predominantly traditional role within the private sphere to a more public role within both their personal and professional lives. Townsend Gilkes (1982) proposes that the complexities of professional identity entail numerous expectations such as cultural expectations, family expectations and expectations within the profession itself. Both views

highlight the need to assist black professional women integrate multiple identities. Gaertner, Sedikides and Graetz (1999), when investigating the basis of self definition, emphasise that the individual self, as distinct from the collective self, is essential in self definition. It illuminates the importance of considering the relationship black professional women have with themselves rather than the relationships they have with others.

In their study, Gaertner et al (1999) assess the responses of 218 women to feedback. They hypothesize that the most fundamental basis (i.e. an individual or collective base) of self definition would elicit stronger reactions compared to the less fundamental basis of self definition. For example, participants who become angry when feedback is directed at the individual self tend to show a preference for self definition in terms of their collective self. They do this by de-emphasizing personal characteristics, and emphasizing the self within the collective. It could be argued that participants' responses defend against the threat they feel from the feedback. This is to say, that if the participants feel that their personal characteristics (i.e. individual basis) are under attack, they are likely to accentuate self characteristics within the collective frame. Gaertner et al (1999) conclude that given the choice, individuals tend to self define using the individual self instead of the collective self.

In a comprehensive review, Oyserman, Coon and Kemmelmeier (2002) study the differences between individualism and collectivism. They assess the psychological implications of individualism and collectivism and review evidence for the effects of individualism and/or collectivism on self-concept, well-being, cognition, and relationality. Underlying Oyserman et al's (2002) definition of individualism is the premise that individuals are separate from one

another. Consequently, they emphasise personal goals, personal uniqueness, and personal control. Oyserman et al (2002) report that self-concept is essential for creating and maintaining a positive sense of self, and is a basic human endeavour. In addition, abstract traits, instead of social or situational descriptors, are vital for self definition. Oyserman et al (2002) suggest that the individual's relationship with others is important because it enables her attain self relevant goals. Collectivism, in contrast, emerges in the study as a social mode of being, incorporating a diverse range of values, attitudes and behaviours. At its core, collectivism binds and obligates individuals. Generally, individualism and collectivism are viewed as polar opposites. However, Kwan, Bond and Singelis (1997) suggest that it is more appropriate that these two notions be seen as worldviews that differ in the issues they make salient.

The present review is based on the premise that the individual lives within society, and that the relationships which the individual forms inevitably influence both her sense of self as well as her relationships. The principle aim of the current review is to evaluate current findings about self definition, and to consider their relevance to black professional women. The key questions are: the nature of individuality, how it becomes established, and what its relationship is – if indeed there is one – between individuality and self definition. Within the current review, individuality is taken to mean the 'I–I' mode of relating as postulated by Cooper (2004), whilst self definition reflects how an individual characterises herself based on self views or perception. The relationship between the individual and others is assumed from the point of the 'I–Me' mode of relating (Cooper, 2004).

Some of the studies included in the current review describe self definition in terms of individuality. Others describe it as a gender

construct, whilst others view self definition holistically from the perspective of the systems that operate in an individual's life. Self definition is also distinguished on the basis of individual or collective selves. Black feminist theories appear to provide a backdrop to the insider knowledge on black women's self definition. These various perspectives are explored below.

Individuality equals self definition

Current research explains individuality and relatedness as two processes involved in the development of personality (Guisinger & Blatt, 1994; Blatt & Blass, 1996). Guisinger and Blatt (1994) suggest that western individuality is very different to individuality in non-western societies. For them, individuality in non-western societies is seen as part of social interaction where the self cannot be viewed outside of the status of its relationship with others. Sampson (1988) refers to this marriage as "ensembled individualism". This is where the self versus the non-self boundary is less sharply drawn and others are included within the individual's sense of self. Individuality in non-western society is therefore seen as the evil of autonomy and independence.

In considering personality development, Guisinger and Blatt (1994) advocate the importance of the coexistence of two phenomenally correlated processes. Guisinger and Blatt (1994) postulate that individuality develops from a transaction between the 'I–I' and 'I–Me' modes of relating. In other words, to be an individual, the self must be in relation to others. At the same time, the individual must maintain a sense of self which is distinct from the relations with others. An interesting conception about the sense of self of women in this article is that women unlike men have a sense of self which is centred on relating to others. This viewpoint stems from how families

help construct the self definition of boys and girls during the early stages of development. For example, stereotypically, boys are encouraged to show power and dominance through play while girls are oriented towards assuming the role of a carer.

Blatt and Blass (1996) attempt to accommodate the coexistence of individuality and relatedness. They see individuality as one and the same as a sense of self. However, both Guisinger and Blatt (1994), and Blatt and Blass (1996) do not articulate what comprises individuality, but rather imply that individuality is equivalent to self definition which in turn is a sense of self. This is problematic from the view point that the individual does not appear to have an opinion about her unique sense of self. Nonetheless, in referring to the sense of relationship as relatedness, Blatt and Blass (1996) succeed in demonstrating the relevance of individuality to the relationship with others. They propose that aspects of relatedness (such as intimacy and isolation) interact with entities of individuality (such as autonomy) to establish a psychological maturity necessary for psychological well-being.

How is the above relevant to exploring self definition and individuality of black professional women? The two articles support the existence of individuality and present it in two forms: first, an individuality that is distinct from the relationship with others and second, an individuality that embodies its existence within relationships. For black professional women, it may be argued that their individuality encompasses entities of their personal self as well as their relationship with others.

Other researchers (e.g. Lykes, 1985) also postulate two distinct forms of self, in which they distinguish between the relationship the

individual has with her self, and the relationship she has with others. In her research exploring traditional psychological theories of self, Lykes (1985) challenges the traditional notion of singularity, and contends that individuals cannot, in their own right, exist as single entities separate from others. She makes a case for the existence of individuals within a system such as society. She suggests two notions of self: the first notion of self identifies autonomous individuality, whilst the second identifies social individuality. Social individuality signifies the idea that the individual self is rooted in social relationships as well as in the individual's experience of power. For example, an individual in a less powerful group (e.g. women, and those in a minority) is more likely to perceive herself as less dominant compared to an individual in a majority group. Autonomous individuality posits the notion of the self as independent and separate from others.

Lykes (1985) presented 84 participants with various questionnaires measuring the link between individuality, sociality and perception of self within society. Lykes (1985) concludes that her participants' experiences of self are grounded in social relationships. More pertinent to her review is the finding that women are more likely than men to perceive themselves as part of a social context, and more importantly, as part of a collective. This endorses the findings of Guisinger and Blatt (1994) which indicate a socially constructed view of women's relationships in light of a traditional upbringing that orients children's roles based on their gender. The relevance for the current review is that black professional women may define themselves under the umbrella of sociality. That is to say, black professional women could base a definition of themselves solely on relationships. This may be a fruitful future research avenue.

As can be deduced from Lykes's (1985) research, a major contributing factor to how black professional women define themselves, is embedded in their upbringing. In other words, the position and meaning of social structures (e.g. family) is crucial to their individuality. Despite these findings, Lykes (1985) fails to address the notion of 'I–I' relating which is suggested for psychological well-being. She is unsuccessful in her examination of how women in her study self define because her exploration principally addresses relationships with others.

Self definition as a gender construct

Hoffman (2006) sets out to examine the relationships between various gender identity constructs. She proposes the model of gender self definition. For her, this means "how strong a component of one's identity one considers one's self defined femininity or masculinity to be" (page 360). Hoffman (2006) suggests that an individual who has a strong gender self definition will attach more importance to her gender, which in turn contributes significantly to the view she holds about herself. This is critical for considering the individuality and self definition of black professional women because as a group their gender is visible to all. Thus, Hoffman's (2006) proposal could indicate that black professional women self define partly as a result of their gender. Applying this proposition to the current research study implies that the meaning black professional women attach to their gender determines, to a greater or lesser extent, the influence gender has on self definition. For example, if a black professional woman ascribes more significance to being a woman than to being a professional, then it may mean that when she defines herself, features which emphasise her "womanness" will be more prominent than features which stress her professionalism.

In her study, Hoffman (2006) presents 361 female participants, from various ethnic origins, with five instruments which measure gender self definition. The five instruments denote various standpoints in the construct of women's identity. Hoffman (2006) found that the measures for gender self definition correlate with constructs that emphasise the gender of participants. In line with the aim of the current review, Hoffman (2006) provides a working explanation of what she means by gender self definition. Even though she does not directly look at individuality (i.e. 'I–I') she contends that gender is relevant to self definition.

Similarly, the study by Stewart and Winter (1974) explores the self and social definitions of women from a gender difference perspective. In particular, they are interested in finding personality differences (i.e. differences in patterns of thinking and behaviour) which move away from the traditional explanations of differences (i.e. between men and women). The criterion for investigating these differences focuses on career orientation. They chose to use career orientation because, for them, it is the only characteristic where women are free from social role ascriptions. In addition, they propose that career orientation is an important basis on which self definition is created. However, the suggestion that social definition is a subtype of self definition was somewhat confusing in light of what Stewart and Winter (1974) were aiming to investigate. Nonetheless, there seems to be a hint that women self define based on personal achievements outside the influence of societal obligations. This is a contrasting view to the ideas presented above. If this argument is true, then black professional women may self define on the basis of their professional achievements.

Stewart and Winters (1974) administered a four picture Thematic Apperception Test, followed by a questionnaire, to investigate the personality patterns of 68 white undergraduate women. The scoring system measures the women's style of self definition. The two categories within the scoring system are: relative self defining; and relative social defining. Women who relatively self define do so because of the use of positive cues, while women who relatively social-define use negative cues. This is similar to the Lykes (1985) research because of the emphasis on the social context of self definition. However, Mohanty (2003) argues that patriarchy and gender should not be treated as universal constructs, and judged by western standards. This is because such analyses often situate non-western women as inferior and powerless victims who lack agency to interpret, resist and undermine the contexts shaping their lives.

Stewart and Winters (1974) found that the relative self defining women are those who plan careers and tend to organize their thinking in terms of causality, purpose and instrumentality. In contrast, socially defined women tend to see the world as irrational and diffuse. Stewart and Winters (1974) argue that the style of storytelling impacts participants' behaviour patterns. That is to say, self definition is a result of respective styles of retelling experiences.

One could argue that the study by Stewart and Winters (1974) fails in its assessment of self definition because there is no clarity about what self or social definition means. At the same time, some of their suggestions are relevant for the research project because: (a) It highlights the necessity to consider the values and teachings of the family and how that may later impact women's self view at a later stage (b) There is a possibility that women may choose to define themselves in a particular way because they are rebelling against

socially constructed views of what women should be or not be (c) The recall and retelling of experiences can impact self definition.

Systemic view of self definition

How do values and learnings from a younger age impact women's self definition at a later stage? This is a question highlighted in Stewart and Winter's (1974) study. Peck (1986) appears to explore this question in her investigation. She examines the criticisms of models which explore adult women's development from a feminist and developmental perspective. She presents an organised model which incorporates social, historic roles and relationship factors, into an existing feminist approach as a way of gaining insight into women's self knowledge during adult years. One could censure her model as flawed because she is using an established model to enhance her viewpoint. However, Peck's (1986) study is exciting for the purposes of the current review because of its inclusion of systematic influences which can affect women's self definition. It is also invigorating because it focuses on the way women personally construct their reality and respond to the interpretations they make.

Peck (1986) defines self definition as a woman's knowledge of herself as an individual-in-society. The current review describes Peck's model as an orbit of influencing factors which is somewhat cosseted by society and history. Within the orbit is the opportunity to self define, and bearing in mind the nature of an orbit, self definition moves around from one pivotal point to another, depending on the orbiting factors. The relevance assumed from this model to the present review is one of complex relationships (i.e. relationships between women and society, women and history, women and themselves, women and influences etc), time, factorial change (changes in various factors)

perception of others is negative and the self internalises this negativity, as suggested by Mead (1934). The the resulting self view is negative. Regardless of the perception of others, the process of seeing the self in the reactions of the other is termed recognition.

Recognition is coined from Hegelian philosophy and denotes the phenomenology of consciousness. The concept of recognition proposes that individuals see each other not only as equals but also as different from one another. That is to say, the experience of recognition is subjective in that one identifies as being an individual because one recognizes and is recognised by another. This relationship of recognition embraces the theory of symbolic interactionism. In recognition, Fraser (2003) suggests that the concept of recognizing ourselves and others is vital to the reformation of "societal patterns of representation, interpretation and communications in the ways that would change everyone's social identity" (page 13). Similarly, Fanon (1967) suggests that recognition from one side only is useless. Thus, recognition is only effective when the individual self acknowledges the other. Recognition therefore takes the form of interaction between the self and the other so that the self is able to accurately perceive herself. Fanon (1967) says that "in order to win the certainty of oneself, the incorporation of the concept of recognition is essential" (page 217). When the self considers the other, it considers how it is perceived. It is in these perceptions that the self is defined. This may be relevant to how a black professional woman views herself because it reinforces the interaction that occurs between her and others. Fanon (1967) indicates that the individual tries to read admiration in the eyes of others and when that admiration is absent she finds that the "mirror is flawed" (page 212). Fanon (1967) fails to consider that when the mirror becomes flawed, individuals will tend to internalise negative

perceptions and a process of doubting personal values may begin. Thus, it is likely that such perceptions will impact self definition negatively.

Black feminist knowledge on black women's self definition

Self definition permeates historical and contemporary statements of black feminist thought (Hill-Collins, 2004). Hill-Collins (2004) asserts that self definition involves contesting political-validation processes that have resulted in externally-defined, stereotypical images of Afro-American womanhood. This is to say black women are judged (or defined) by historical and political principles and stereotypes. Thus, self definition and individuality is critical for black women in moving away from asserted societal definitions.

Black feminist standpoints are based primarily on the premise that black women are oppressed. As stated clearly by Hill-Collins (2004), self definition has been "external" to black women's processes. Thus, the research project seeks to explore self definition from participants' points of view. From a black feminist ideology, it would appear that for black women to be visible, their self definitions would challenge society's characterizations of them.

Black feminist knowledge clarifies the experiences of black women as both gendered and relational. As discussed earlier in the literature review, there is evidence suggesting that black women self define because of their gender and their interaction with others. Thus, gender and interpersonal relations appear to be a commonality across different notions of black women's self definitions. For the black feminist perspective however, the resistance of dehumanising black women is essential to their perception of black women's self definition

hand, when there is an imbalance between the evaluative processes of the self by the self and others, self understanding is threatened and relationships with others become minimised.

What does this mean for black women's self definition? It may suggest that black professional women will self define differently when there is a conflict between the view of others and their own personal views. Chen et al (2004) found that regardless of a balance or imbalance of self view, there is always a desire for the individual to self verify.

Chen et al (2004) work on the premise that the individual self is separate from the collective self (i.e. the 'I–I' mode is distinct from the 'I–Me' mode). For them, the collective level of self definition refers to the aspects of the self that is in relation to others. As noted, their aim is to investigate the motives of self verification on a collective level of self definition. Contrary to the view discussed above that the individual self defines on the basis of personal goals and achievement, the results of Chen et al's (2004) study denote that individuals view themselves as members of a group and hence define themselves in relation to their particular group. Smith, Coats and Walling (1999) also specify that the individual is not isolated and independent, but is pervasively influenced by her social surroundings which, in turn, impact her thoughts, feelings and behaviour. This opinion appears to be relevant only in cases where the self defines in relation to others.

Chen et al's (2004) study does not implicate the relationship the individual has with herself. The study addresses the implications of examining self definition at a collective level. It highlights the following: (a) the flexibility of the self/individual (i.e. professional self, parent self

etc); (b) the context in which the self/individual presents herself (context is important because the individual draws meaning about the self from within the context); and (c) the influence of others on individual self definition.

Thus far, there have been three contrasting schools of thought about how an individual self defines. (1) The individual self defines from the relationship she has with herself i.e. the 'I–I' relationship (2) The individual self defines from the relationship with others i.e. the 'I–Me' relationship (3) The individual's self definition emerges from the interaction between 'I–I' and 'I–Me' relationships. The basis of these suggestions is that the self exists.

In an attempt to integrate the suggestions about how the self has come to be, the interactionist approaches to self argue that the awareness of an individual comes about through the interactions she undertakes with others. In particular, the interactionist perspective is grounded in the idea that the individual self uses the reaction of others to determine who she is (the theory of the looking-glass self proposed by Cooley, 1902). According to Denzin (1992); the interactionist school of thought collectively refers to the notion of symbolic interactionism, and is defined as the relationship between the self and the social. Symbolic interactionism sees the individual's world as enacted and involving the interplay of significant gestures, symbols and systems of meaning that is embedded within her social context (Pidgeon, 1996).

Mead (1934) proposes that when the individual self takes on the reaction of others, she internalizes what was once external and in so doing takes on the views of others. This may be problematic in cases where the reaction of the other is negative. That is to say, when the

and individuality. For the purposes of the research project, it may be important to consider the links between participants' gendered self and the felt emotions of oppression as well as the recognition/awareness of external and internal derivatives of self definition. This will enrich the understanding of the psychology of black professional women's self definition and individuality. As Baldwin (1980) professes, insights into self definitions are imperative because it allows black women to reject internalized psychological dominations which can potentially damage self esteem.

Black feminists point out, furthermore, that age, gender, race, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, and class operate together to produce compound effects where black women are acutely aware of racism, ageism, sexism, and political oppression. Hill-Collins (2000) says that this is important in understanding the social positioning of black women and the visibility of other systems of inequality. She argues that race and gender are part of our social being. This means that even though individual black women may respond differently, based on different sets of interconnecting issues, there are common themes that all black women can testify to, and incorporate into, individual self definitions and individualities. How is this relevant to the research project? One could envisage that all the respondents of the research project would express these commonalities but to varying degrees. That is to say, the black professional women of this study will incorporate gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, culture etc into their self definitions and individualities. However, the degree to which each element is integrated into the self defining processes will differ for each interviewee.

In contrast to the black feminist thought which exemplifies the "strong black female", Mirza (1993) postulates that the construction of

black womanhood from positive black female role models can sometimes be misleading through the exclusion of black men, and the reification of motherhood. She suggests that while there is culturally specific form of black femininity among African Caribbean women, it does not shape the demands of a female centred society. This assertion is important because the black feminist approach encourages empowerment for black women by moving away from certain frames of reference that portray black women in a particular way. What Mirza (1993) says is that, inadvertently, black feminist theorists advocate a particular frame for the experience of black women which appears to have a negative impact on how they are viewed in society especially by those who are similar (i.e. other black women).

Furthermore, Mirza (1993) highlights the disjunction between some of the arguments made by black feminist theorists. She proposes that black feminists argue that the black female is "marginalised" within society at the same time the black female is also seen as being traditionally self reliant. These arguments are used to account for differences between black and white female working class populations. Mirza (1993) posits that these arguments employ two seemingly incompatible criteria in determining black women's experiences. The point raised here is essential in illuminating the complexity of black women's self definitions and the various disconnections that can exist for black women. It can be argued that these discussions are pertinent to the research project because each separate entity contributes to the self of black professional women. Nonetheless, in defence of black feminist advocates, their epistemological stance relishes in holism. It bridges the detachment between ideas and experiences, thereby applauding the intersectionality of different dimensions.

Exploring the self definition and individuality of black professional women is focussed on understanding their unified wholes as opposed to the sum of the parts. Bell (1990) contends that for black professional women, work identity is a gratifying part of a core identity. Thus, the transition of moving from black woman to black professional woman is one that transcends the immediacy and urgency of transferable qualities. King (1988) suggests that black women's survival is dependent on their ability to negotiate all available resources. Professional status therefore may or may not be a resource for survival. The interrogation of such qualities may highlight the foundation on which the self is built. Gonzalez-Figueroa and Young (2005) suggest that minority women's identity is consistent with a bicultural profile where women of colour develop a contour that encompasses a professional status with their ethnicity and location. For example, Latina professional women were found to develop a professional identity which incorporated their ethnicity as well as their residency in the United States. A work identity allows for personal development and at the same time defies societal and role expectation.

Burke (1980) reinforces the view that through the interaction with others individuals discover the meanings of their professional roles. Centering self definitions and individualities of black professional women may highlight the array of features and attitudes necessitated for a professional status.

Does the self exist?

Not convinced by the arguments for self definition, Spinelli (1989) questions the existence of a core self. He suggests that various psychological studies (certainly from a western perspective) "obscure and confuse rather than clarify" (page 95) the understanding of how

the self has come to be. He proposes a move away from scientific methods in exploring the concept of self (e.g. finding components or characteristics of self) to a more phenomenological process. Spinelli (1989) argues that it is through the reflection of an experience that the conscious sense of 'I' can emerge. One could contend that the reflections of black professional women's experiences can give rise to their sense of self or individuality. Further, Spinelli (1989) proposes that the interpretation of the self at any given time is transitory and a representation of an infinity of probable interpreted selves. He encourages those fascinated by the notion of self to be open to a multitude of meaningful interpretations that can contribute to the support for the existence of the self.

Summary and conclusions

The literature review sets out to understand the salient issues in how black professional women perceive themselves, to examine whether individuality is integrated into a self view, and finally, to understand the components needed in the self definition of black professional women, if indeed a model of such exists. For the aim to be achieved, the current review proposed to critique literature based on the appraisal of self definition and /or individuality and the relationship between them. Literature with the subject areas (e.g. self definition and/or individuality, identity and black women, self definition of black professional women) were examined. The review found the following:

1. There are two distinct forms of self. The 'I–I' and the 'I–Me' selves. Within each distinctive self, the individual is in relation either with herself or others.

2. Distinct forms of self (e.g. individual self, collective self) are viewed differently depending on the society in which the individual resides. In an individualistic society such as the United States of America, the 'I–I' is more dominant and focuses on self goals and self achievements. The self of the individual is thus viewed within the parameters of self goals and achievements. On the other hand, collectivist societies such as within Africa view the self from within the society. Therefore the 'I–Me' is more dominant because the self focuses on shared goals and shared achievements. Thus, when the individual defines herself, it incorporates shared goals, values and achievements.

3. Some researchers argue that psychological well-being is represented in the relationship which the self has with herself while others contend that a balance is needed between the 'I–I' and the 'I–Me' relationships. In cases where the 'I–I' is advocated, self definition is formed on the basis of the individual's self view alone.

4. Women, more than men, use the relationship with others in defining themselves. This is due to the social component of the 'I–Me' relationship and has its origins in women's upbringing. Women tend to be raised as carers and therefore view themselves in relation to others during the process of self definition. This finding highlights the role of gender in self definition.

5. Some women self define in direct defiance to society's constructed roles. For example, in a collective society where a woman's role has been defined as staying at home and caring for the family, women take on alternative careers and define

themselves in relation to their profession rather than defining themselves through society's expected role.

6. Values and learning, especially those present in the relationship with others, are likely to impact individual self definition.

7. The self is a changing entity, and is subject to continual variations in self definition. In addition, the change to self definition is further influenced by experience and interaction with others.

8. One study (Pecks, 1986) found that self definition is a difficult and sensitive process for women because of the balance in maintaining the 'I–I' and 'I–Me' relationships.

9. Black feminist theories provided the backdrop for black women's experiences and an intersectionality of various elements.

10. The context in which the self defines lies at the heart of Counselling Psychology. This is because context emphasises meaning.

11. Viewing the self from an interactionist perspective seems to be beneficial for noticing and observing the different levels of self definition.

12. Recognition is the process of self awareness on both the 'I–I' and the 'I–Me' modes of relating.

13. All reviewed literature assumes that the self is tangible. The phenomenological approach questions the existence of a core self and directs researchers to examine experiences rather than components/characteristics of the self.

These findings demonstrate the complex nature of the self and subsequent self definition. Further, the transitory nature of the self makes it difficult to construct a working definition that explains every phase and context in which the individual self defines. If the self is forever changing, does that mean prior experiences should be discounted? This question has implications for the work of Counselling Psychologists. When a client comes to therapy, the work endeavours to understand the person of the client, within and across, context. If the self is constantly changing, then it will be difficult to integrate the self of the client within the context of therapy to other aspects of the client's self. This is problematic for particular orientations within Counselling Psychology, and for the client who seeks the integration of selves.

How significant are the findings of the literature review for exploring the self definition and individuality of black professional women? The literature reveals that there is a need for more research into how black professional women view and subsequently define themselves. The findings suggest that a favourable way to begin to gather such information is through a phenomenological process whereby the experiences of this group of women are understood. It is imperative that any research into the area of self or self definition is not rigid in its views of the self because of its changing nature. Thus, it is the recommendation of the current review that future research considers the following:

1. For a broader understanding of the individual self, all contexts, experiences and aspects of the self must be considered.

2. Assumptions about the self should be situated in the cultural and ethnic beliefs of the individual self. For example, it would be more appropriate to view the self from a relevant cultural perspective rather than from a westernised vantage point.

3. Using qualitative methods allows for more in-depth understanding of participants' experiences.

4. Researchers must be mindful of the language used to accommodate the varied cultures, including the upbringing, of participants.

5. It is important not to try to compartmentalise the self but to understand the dimensions of self as its extension. This means that the different dimensions of self in various contexts are not separate entities – but function as part of a unified whole.

Bearing in mind these suggestions, the research into the self definition and individuality of black professional women will adopt a qualitative stance; it will endeavour to understand participants within their individual respective contexts.

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E. Methodology

This section examines the phenomenological approach used in the research project to explore the essence of individuality, and the sense of self of black professional women. The section shows how the aims and objectives outlined in the Introduction to this research is contextualized and implemented.

Rationale for a qualitative method

In the attempt to do research, it is possible to use either a quantitative or a qualitative approach, and in some cases, both. To a greater or lesser extent, the determining factor on which route to follow depends on what is been researched. For example, researching the number of clients who prefer a particular therapeutic approach is different from researching the experiences of clients who use a particular therapeutic orientation. The former aims to produce numerical data to establish how many clients prefer the use of a therapeutic approach. The process of examining the information is thus referred to as a quantitative method. The latter attempts to explore the lived experiences of those who use the therapeutic orientation and hence, the procedure is regarded as a qualitative method of analysis. Thomas (2003) seeks to explain the distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods by suggesting that qualitative methods entail the description of characteristics of people and events without comparing the events in terms of measurements and amounts, while quantitative methods focus on those differences as assessed by measurements and amounts. Barker, Pistrang and Elliot (2002) view quantitative methods as those techniques that implement "hard science". They suggest that the distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods of research can be seen in the differentiations between various epistemological stances, and the

perceptions of what science might be. Quantitative research in psychology, which adopts traditional ways of doing research (or hard science, as previously referred to) is not about numbers only, but also about hypotheses, deductions and predicting behaviour.

Qualitative research is concerned with finding meaning and people's truth. Hence, it explores how people make sense of their world, and experience life events. Its epistemological stance entails a relativist understanding of people and assumes that people are ever changing – thus, behaviours and emotions cannot be measured using hard science. Qualitative research method is underpinned by this relativist ontology, however, the devotion to relativism varies.

Willig (2001) suggests that qualitative researchers have a propensity to be interested in the "quality and texture of experience rather than with identification of cause–effect relationships" (page 9). She stresses the importance of focusing on the meaning attributed to a participant's experience rather than concentrating on the preconceived ideas of the researcher. The role of qualitative method is to represent the experiences of the research participants as expressed by the participants as well as incorporating their processes. Shaw (2006) proposes that qualitative research is aimed at the in-depth exploration of human phenomena, which focuses on language rather than numbers, and involves some form of textual analysis which is not dependent on numerical investigation. The focus on language consists of its use by both the researcher and the interviewee thereby helping to draw meaning within context.

Within Counselling Psychology, it can be argued that the practice of being with clients is a form of qualitative research where the experiences of clients are explored within the context of their

presenting problems. Prior demonstration of qualitative research is grounded in the work of Freud with the "talking-cure" in psychoanalysis and in Rogers' work with client-centred therapy (Willig and Stainton-Rogers, 2008). The work of both the aforementioned practitioners focused on the use of case studies. Rogers in particular worked extensively on recording sessions, transcribing and analyzing session material. More recently, the practice of qualitative research in counselling and psychotherapy has been useful in providing a means of exploring the lives of clients, and their construction of their worlds. McLeod (2001) suggests three categories in qualitative research of potential benefit to Counselling Psychologists, psychotherapists and others in the profession. These are knowledge of the other, knowledge of a phenomenon and reflexive knowing. Knowledge of the other is characterised by the interest in seeking to understand the participant's world view and how the construction of this world view develops. Knowledge of the phenomenon aims to expand awareness of the chain of events that may be relevant and applicable to a particular experience. Lastly, the development of reflexive knowing involves the processes of the researcher.

The professional practice guidelines set out by the Division of Counselling Psychology in 2008, stipulates that engaging with subjectivity and intersubjectivity, values and beliefs, and respect of personal accounts marries the scientific demands of empirical enquiry with a value base grounded in the primacy of the therapeutic relationship. Combining this with the three areas as suggested by McLeod (2001) makes the use of qualitative research attractive to those in the psychology profession.

The ability to embrace the researcher's processes and experiences, coupled with the nature of inquiry into the experiences

of black professional women's individuality and self definition, means that a qualitative approach is most suited to the research project. This is because the research project is concerned with capturing meaning, understanding the subjective interpretations of these meanings, and the impact on participants' view of themselves.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA): A qualitative method

Smith and Osborn (2003) propose that the aim of IPA is to explore, in detail, how participants make sense of their respective personal and social worlds. Especially important to IPA is the meanings that each participant attaches to particular experiences. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) posit that IPA researchers are specifically concerned with "what happens when the everyday flow of lived experience takes a particular significance for people" (page 1). This is relevant because it allows the researcher to understand the perceptions that participants make about their world. In IPA methodology, research is seen as an active process which involves the dynamic contribution of the researcher. This involvement takes various forms and includes the relationship that the researcher has with the participant. This connection is not limited to the relationship alone but also includes the researcher's life experiences, since it is with this that the interpretative process evolves. Smith et al (2009) argue that the researcher's meaning-making process is of secondary order in that the interviewer's interpretative skills are more self-conscious and systematic. The interpretation process is a double hermeneutics – this is to say, the researcher makes sense of the interpretations which the participants have made. Thus, double hermeneutics lies at the heart of IPA.

IPA acknowledges the participant as a cognitive, linguistic, affective and physical being (Smith and Osborn, 2003). It presumes that there is an association between these entities but recognizes that the connection is complicated, and often may not be unravelled. Indeed the participant may not wish to disclose her feelings and thoughts about a particular experience and the researcher is left to decipher the participant's meaning. Smith (2003) offers IPA as a tool that is useful when exploring complex issues and the processes involved in it. Since the research project aims to explore the unified self (in the form of individuality) of black professional women, it is believed that IPA as a method will meet the needs of enquiry and thus weave context and meaning. In so doing, IPA as a methodology will ensure that the voices of participants are heard.

Like grounded theory and discourse analysis, IPA is a qualitative research method. It places phenomenological emphasis on experience and is concerned with personal lived experiences. It is not only this lived experience that is important in IPA, but how the participant makes sense of it and its impact on her life. IPA has become a popular method to use in qualitative research and was originally favoured within health and social psychology (Eatough and Smith, 2007). Recently, Clinical and Counselling Psychologists have followed suit because of the emphasis placed on clients' and/or participants' constructed meanings of their lived experiences.

Smith et al (2009) propose that IPA is informed by concepts and debates from three key areas of philosophical knowledge: phenomenology, interpretation and idiography. "Phenomenology is concerned with the way things appear to us in experience; the reality that we live is an experiential one and it is experienced through practical engagements with things and others in the world" (Eatough

and Smith 2008, page 180). IPA is thus borne out of this idea – the experience of human existence. IPA concedes that it is often impossible to get at an experience firsthand and celebrates diversity in history, culture, age, social class, gender, background, upbringing and environment. It focuses on hermeneutics which is the theory of interpretation as relevant to each research participant.

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach to the study of experience (Smith et al, 2009). Phenomenologist Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938), demonstrates the philosophical underpinnings of Counselling Psychology in his writings. Husserl was interested in the phenomenological understanding of the world, and until his death, dedicated himself to this work. Husserl's phenomenological interest is concerned with finding the way in which the individual becomes familiar with her own experience, and in so doing, identifies essential qualities of her experience. He shares some of the ideas of other philosophers before him (e.g. Descartes 1596 –1650, Brentano 1838 – 1917) and was on a quest to discover the "ultimate truth". Husserl proposes that, in order to discover the ultimate truth, it is necessary to examine the "bedrock of everyday experience" (McLeod, 2001). Hence, phenomenology fosters the discovery and representation of everyday experience. Husserl says that, in order to be part of this process, the emphasis should be on the "inquirer" i.e. the researcher. In so doing, the researcher adopts a phenomenological attitude. That is, the interviewer is able to leave behind her existing theories and/or beliefs, and at the same time, returns to examine those theories and/or beliefs in a different light.

Husserl proposes a three-step methodology which will help to achieve clarity and certainty of human conscious experiencing. These steps are named as transcendental reduction, phenomenology and

eidetic reduction. The first part refers to consciousness and its experiences. It focuses on engaging with subjective experience, which is different from external objects and the interactions in relation to people's understanding of their relationship with the world. Husserl further suggests that it is possible to go beyond the human instinct of seeing the world based on the assumptions that we make on everyday experiences by "bracketing-off" those assumptions. He refers to this as 'eidetic seeing' (McLeod, 2001). If eidetic is the reflection on finding the essence of experience, then fundamentally, and in relation to the research project, black professional women are invited to reflect on their inward processes in relation to how they define themselves. Husserl believes that understanding real meaning is achievable through an enhanced process of generalization and this results in a better understanding of the "eidos" itself. Similarly, IPA endeavours to capture unique experiences as described by those owning the experience.

Natanson (1973) and Moran (2000) believe that fostering and producing an extensive phenomenon of everyday experience will result in the understanding of the fundamental structures of the "thing itself" and facilitate the possibility of seeing the "thing itself" from different perspectives. Husserl suggests that the experience can be stripped of the layers getting in the way of its meaning. McLeod (2001) summarises Husserl's interest as thus: "Husserl is striving to break through to a transcendental domain of experience in which the essential nature of phenomena becomes self-evidently true" (page 39). In my research exploring individuality and self definition of black professional women, I attempt to understand the many selves of these women through an all-embracing knowledge of their everyday experiences which leads to an awareness of how they construct their sense of selves.

IPA is particularly close to Giorgi's (1975) empirical phenomenology. Giorgi (1975) attempted to execute Husserl's eidetic phenomenology. He thought that by collecting information from different individuals and looking for features and patterns across the reports, it would be possible to provide a general structure of the experience and get at the essence of experience empirically rather than through Husserl's conceptual method. Giorgi (1975) acknowledges that producing a general structure of experience causes "something" to be lost and emphasises that his views do not represent a learning structure. In contrast, IPA attempts to stay closer to the individual experience, thereby retaining the individual features of that experience. Giorgi's methods are somewhat descriptive in comparison to IPA's methodology which is interpretative. However, Giorgi accepts that his descriptive methods are an alternative to interpretative techniques (Giorgi, 2000).

Heidegger, mentored by Husserl, builds on the premise that phenomenology and hermeneutics should be seen as combined central tenets of understanding human existence rather than individual entities of the same process. He claims that the very essence of phenomenology (i.e. the natural attitude) that most theorists want to bracket-off is the essence of philosophical inquiry (McLeod, 2001). That natural attitude is the mechanism that enables interpretation of another's world to occur. At the outset, Heidegger stipulates that his task is to formulate questions to help him achieve clarification about the meaning of Being (or Dasein as he refers to it). The difficulty for Heidegger, is knowing what "Being" means. He therefore focuses on mortality and death – his interest lies in knowing what it means to be human and make sense of one's existence. This focus essentially distinguishes his thoughts from that of Husserl. Heidegger's focal point is the experience of being in the world. IPA

assumes the Heideggerian focus on the embedded nature of the individual in the world as a central epistemological concern. Primarily, the emphasis rests on how meaning is sought rather than what the meaning might be.

Heidegger's hermeneutic perspective and its fusion with phenomenology is an important inspiration for IPA. IPA contends that people understand events based on previous knowledge and experience. Hermeneutics is different to phenomenology because of its long standing history and inherent interpretation. Hermeneutics is a double-edged sword in that the research participant tries to make sense of their world and the researcher tries to make sense of the participant's making sense of her world. In reality, the researcher is unable to leave behind her roots as a member of a social world. Everything that the researcher does is embedded in her existence as a human being. To get away from the researcher's world, hermeneutics introduces the possibility that one can become infused with the experiences of others through immersion in others' experiences. The hermeneutic circle is the basis of IPA analysis. Analysis is checked and rechecked against emerging patterns and connections that the researcher makes. The hermeneutic circle's concern is with the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole, at various levels (Smith et al, 2009). Unlike grounded theory where the researcher seeks to generate theory, IPA discovers new meanings which emerge from prior interpretations and moves towards a higher level of abstraction. Phenomenology and hermeneutics represent alternative ways of understanding how the world is constructed. Hermeneutics is therefore about the context in which experience occurs.

Merleau-Ponty (1908 – 1961) connects to Heidegger's thoughts in terms of his emphasis on the 'situated and interpretative quality of

our knowledge of the world' (Smith et al, 2009). He differs, however, on the embodied nature of our relationship with the world and how that leads to individual perspectives of the world. Merleau-Ponty states that the significance of the body is underestimated in Husserl's philosophy and proposes an embodied inherence in the world. In perceiving the world, Merleau-Ponty believes that science and analytical ways cannot be rejected. Nonetheless, he declares that knowledge is acquired through the body's exposure to the world. Thus, the experience of our bodies through the world alludes to our phenomenological experience of the world. Merleau-Ponty states "Man is in the world and only in the world does he know himself" (Eatough and Smith, 2008, page 180). This suggests that the individual is a synthesis of relationships in the world. IPA understands and incorporates this idea, and takes into account the individual's experience in the world given her cultural, social, economic and historic status as perceived by her. In so doing, the individual experience is accentuated. Merleau-Ponty proposes that the interaction between a person and their world is not cognitivist, but experiential. That is to say, there is a shift from "the world is what I think it is", to "the world is about individual perceptions and the experiencing of it". The body thus becomes the tool of communication within the world and individual perceptions are interceded through bodily experience. In contrast to Merleau-Ponty's viewpoint on cognitivism, Smith (2004) suggests that cognitive models of research in qualitative methodology are a means of allowing the researcher to enter into the subjective world of the participant.

Idiography fosters the process of accentuating individual experience, and raises the distinctiveness of IPA compared to other qualitative methods such as grounded theory or discourse analysis. Idiography employs IPA because the insight produced is a

consequence of the "intensive and detailed engagement with individual cases" (Willig, 2001). Unlike nomothetics which aims to generate general laws, IPA values its idiographic method because of the values placed on individual uniqueness as well as in the understanding of meaning in individual lives. Eatough and Smith (2008) identify two advantages of the use of idiography. First, the researcher is able to learn from the lived experiences of a participant. Warnock (1987) understands the spirit of the predisposition when he suggests that the deeper one looks into the account of one single case the more it connects one with humanity. Secondly, the subjective and interpersonal intricacy of emotion, thought and action become heard.

Cognition is an essential tool in the meaning-making process of all human action. This means that the researcher and participant share a common basis for understanding their experiences. Hence, the double hermeneutics within IPA, where the researcher makes sense of respondents' sense-making. IPA prefers to use cognition as a way of getting to the meaning-making process rather than information processing. In response to the criticism that IPA appears to be more reflective than pre-reflective, Smith et al (2009) argue that IPA does both and that the concern with cognition occurs within informal, intuitive domain of reflective activity in the natural attitude. That is to say, cognition is a process included in the occurrence of experience – it is not an isolated separate function. Cognition is part of being-in-the-world and is accessed indirectly through an individual's narrative and language, and in due time through meaning-making. Thus, central to the relationship between IPA and cognition is the interaction between thinking, saying and doing. Eatough and Smith (2008) say that this relationship is beneficial to current trends in cognitive neuroscience.

IPA in comparison to other qualitative methods

Unlike grounded theory and discourse analysis, IPA recognises that meaning is constructed both by the researcher and the participant during the interview and subsequently by the researcher during analysis. Other qualitative methods do not place as significant an emphasis on the activity that occurs between understanding a participant's world (i.e. their experience and interpretation) and the researcher's conceptualisation of it. The researcher's formulation and understanding of the participant's life world is based on her own experience and interpretation. Brocki and Wearden (2006, page 96) suggest that analysis involves "close interaction between analyst and text, the analyst seeks to comprehend the presented account whilst concurrently making use of her own interpretative resources". IPA is a unique method that embraces the experience of both parties. Brocki and Wearden (2006) argue that this is the shortcoming of IPA where it is assumed that participants wish to interpret their experiences. The essence of human psychology and in particular IPA is that psychologists and researchers want to understand the nature of how people exist. To do this, a microscopic view of how psychological meaning is constituted is useful and appropriate (Eatough and Smith, 2008).

IPA relies on the ideas of Husserl (Willig, 2001) who believes that understanding and new knowledge is much more than that indicated by the positivist position. However, unlike grounded theory, IPA in its views stands as a combination of realism and aspects of constructionism. It borrows from social construction in the sense that IPA supports sociocultural and historic processes as pivotal to how the individual experiences and understands her life world. Critical realism, so termed by Bhaskar (1978), proposes that constant and continuing features of reality exist independently of human conceptualisation. It is

therefore possible for each individual to attach different meanings to similar events because of her experiences of the reality. Hence, IPA's belief is centred on the assumption that human experience is a valid form of knowledge and therefore the subjective experience is necessary to facilitate understanding. Exploring the individuality of black professional women incorporates this epistemological stance.

In comparison to grounded theory, IPA does not aim to develop theory but rather to give voice to the research participant's experience of being in the world. Shaw (2001) believes that IPA is an exploratory tool that is data driven as opposed to theory driven. IPA is not concerned with proving or disproving existing theory, rather it is concerned with seeing a particular phenomenon from another view point through those who are experiencing the phenomenon. In using IPA to explore the experience of black professional women in defining themselves, the researcher begins with an open mind and allows the participants' accounts of their experiences to speak for themselves. In contrast to discourse analysis, IPA therefore aims to report individual perceptions, feelings and behaviours about the area under investigation.

IPA in contrast to grounded theory uses purposive sampling as opposed to theoretical sampling in order to illuminate a particular research question and to develop a full interpretation of participants' accounts (Brocki and Wearden, 2006). In this way, IPA focuses on examining the divergence and convergence of its small sample. For example, Larkin (2004) suggests that IPA is useful in understanding the experience of service users within mental health and thereby allows the development and evaluation of therapeutic intervention. Likewise, the research project endeavours to understand the experience of black professional women within the context of their personal and

work selves. This is to enable an understanding amongst psychologists who wish to work with this client group. Doing this may further allow psychologists to appreciate the issues facing black professional women. However, purposive sampling does not validate generalising to other populations. Insights and clinical implications from research is the most credible rationale for purposive sampling (Smith, 2004).

IPA shares with discourse analysis its significance for language. However, there are marked differences in where the emphasis lies. Chapman and Smith (2002) suggest that IPA differs from discourse analysis in its perception of the status of cognition. It is concerned with what the participant thinks of the phenomenon being explored and how language is used as a tool to communicate the experience. Discourse analysis on the other hand emphasises how linguistic resources have been developed and focuses on a more "natural talk" (Larkin, 2004). IPA, through natural talk, uses an empathetic questioning technique to follow the experience of the participant. IPA goes beyond the natural talk as the researcher explores meaning from what is being said by the participant. In the research project, IPA is used to explore individual experiences and therefore takes each participant's experience as a means of learning about self construction and self definition.

Using IPA gives the researcher the opportunity to capture black professional women's perceptions of what it was like to maintain individuality within their world. IPA has the ability to identify and describe links between cognitions and physical states (Smith, 1996). Given some of the similarities between the researcher and the research participant, using IPA means the role of the researcher is not ignored. The use of reflexivity during the interviews and throughout the research process is paramount in illustrating the researcher's

involvement in the meaning-making process. "Research urges us to explore the ways in which a researcher's involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research" (Nightingale and Cromby, 1999). Furthermore, in using reflexivity, the researcher monitors herself to prevent bias. To help limit bias the researcher is kept in check by the hermeneutic circle. The circle enables the researcher to leave behind her world and enter into the participant's world, with the intention of viewing the phenomenon being explored from a new perspective.

The use of reflexivity not only enables the researcher to be self aware of the intersubjective dynamics, but also meta-awareness of the varying roles that she can take up during the process of research. In Cunliffe's (2004) "On becoming a critical reflexive practitioner", she states that critically reflexive practice embraces subjective understandings of reality as a basis for thinking more seriously about the impact of the researcher's assumptions, values, and actions on others. Being a reflexive practitioner promotes the understanding of what constitutes the researcher's realities and identities in relational ways. It provides the foundation of how collaborative and responsive ways are developed in the relationship with others. Taking an empathically neutral position, Snape and Spencer (2003), recognise that research is not value free. They advocate that research be transparent. Therefore, as a core principle for both Counselling Psychology and qualitative research, reflexivity is an ethical necessity. In addition, Gergen and Gergen (1993) propose that critical reflection through reflexivity aims to move the researcher outwards to achieve an expansion of understanding. Through this and in contrast to an introspective reflection, it becomes possible to transcend the very parameters in which the research is carried out.

Reflexivity, as a principled requirement, provides the researcher with the space to verify her responses to the participant, and reflect adequately on what her responses signify and their impact on the analysis of data. Lynn and Lea (2005) purport that reflexivity should not be an afterthought, but rather, should be a means of developing a rigorous approach to interpretation which can advance the entire study. Willig (2001) argues for a personal reflexivity where the researcher acknowledges the influences of the research process on her personal and professional life. Extending the argument for personal reflexivity and avoiding an endless cycle of perceptions, King (1996) suggests maintaining a paper trail that explicates the different stances the work has taken or not taken.

I have tried to maintain this ethical necessity and transparency, and therefore aim to show, in the analysis section, the varied elements of interaction interwoven between the participants' world view and my life-world.

IPA and identity

Since the development of IPA, it has been used extensively to explore people's lived experiences in different areas. For example, it has been used in the area of aggression (Forrest et al, 2005), anger (Eatough and Smith's, 2006), and pain (Smith and Osborn, 2007). Recently IPA has been used to explore how people perceive themselves and understand their sense of identities. de Visser and Smith (2006) use IPA to explore the meaning of masculinity to young men. They suggest that using IPA adds another dimension to the research because it focuses on the subjective experience and meaning-making of the participant. Similarly, numerous researchers (e.g. Pastrana, 2004; Larry, 1986; Davies et al, 2006; Flowers et al, 2006)

have investigated black identity. However, the literature suggests that few have employed the use of qualitative methods, especially IPA. It is hoped that using IPA in the research project will allow an insight into how black professional women define themselves and their subjective experiences in doing so.

Dickson et al (2008) use IPA to explore identity crisis in patients with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS). They suggest that the by-products of CFS are often loss of control and biographical disruption. However, a consequence of these two factors is the loss of identity due to the severity of the illness where patients become overwhelmed. They chose to use IPA because of its phenomenological focus which tends to address a "hermeneutic of empathy". In addition, IPA was used because of its connectivity between talk, thought and experience which results in the understanding of a participant's wholeness rather than an understanding of separate components of the participant or phenomenon. Likewise, the research project acknowledges the different elements that contribute to the self definition of the respondent. The research project contends that the link between interviewee's talk, thought and experience will provide an insight into individuality. The research project believes that using IPA will help shed light on the interaction that occurs between the mind, body and environment.

Research using IPA to explore identity is not limited to the construction of or interferences with identity; research has explored the components of identity. Thrift and Coyle (2005) use IPA to interpret identity dynamics of women who have lost a child, or children, to suicide. They propose that their use of IPA provides insight into a participant's life-world but also allows the researcher to assume the

position of an empathetic therapist and therefore gain an inside view of the participant's life. The interaction provided by the researcher in this way enables the participant to gain some understanding of the research issues and the impact of issues for her. Similarly, the researcher hopes that in meeting the participant at a high level of interaction, and allowing the participant to direct the interviews, will create the opportunity for her to understand something of her own processes, and also, possibly, assimilate processes that had not been considered previously.

Doing IPA

Smith and Osborn (2003) suggest that there is no single definitive way to do IPA. The emphasis is on the researcher to adapt ways of working to the exact area of investigation. However, Smith and Osborn (2003) provide suggestive stages in which to begin to use IPA.

The semi structured interview (Smith, 1995) is recorded using an audio digital recorder. The interview is then transcribed verbatim. Smith (2008) maintains that only nuances which give the conversation meaning need to be included in the transcription. Further, Smith and Osborn (2003) suggest that the more detailed prosodic feature is not necessary for IPA. Once the transcribing is complete, the first stage is to read and reread the text to recapture the sense the participant is trying to communicate. Since the interest of the researcher lies in the psychological world of the participant, the researcher makes notes on the left hand margin representing those constructs or beliefs manifested through words that are relevant to the phenomenon being explored, bearing in mind to capture the meaning the participant intends. Smith and Osborn (2003) indicate that at this point, the meaning is not yet transparent; it is through the continued

engagement with the text and through the process of interpretation that the meaning emerges.

The next stage identifies themes that are developing. The aim is to compute what is represented in the text through thematic labels. This is documented on the right hand side margin of the transcript. The emerging themes are noted in succinct phrases that capture the essence and quality of the notes on the left hand side margin. Smith and Osborn (2003) propose that these themes are a high level of abstraction which can include psychological terms and yield psychological truths. The themes must, however, be grounded in the participant's account, and are sought for the whole of the transcript.

Once the themes are identified, the next phase involves the researcher connecting to the themes and producing clusters of themes. She begins by listing them on a sheet of paper. Similar themes are clustered together while others form super-ordinate concepts. She creates a table of themes and evidence for respective themes is found within the participant's narrative. She proceeds with recording the verification of themes next to each respective cluster of concepts. Themes which do not fit the emerging concepts can be dropped. She repeats the process for all transcripts. Finally, when all transcripts have been analysed in the procedure described above, she integrates the accounts by creating a final table of master themes to make a consistent and meaningful reflection of the participant's account of her experiences using her own terminology.

Limitations of IPA

As with most qualitative methods, IPA enables the researcher to tap in to the perspectives and meaning-making world of the

participant. The focus of IPA is to disclose the intricacies of individual experiences so as to understand their meaning and implication from the perspective of the person experiencing. IPA guides the researcher through the process of identifying and integrating themes. However, as a methodology it has its restrictions.

Whilst there is validation in the craftsmanship of qualitative research (Kvale, 1995) especially in using IPA, Willig (2008) argues that IPA suffers from conceptual and practical limitations. She postulates that IPA's limitations fall into the four categories: role of language, suitability of accounts, explanation versus description, and the genuineness of IPA as a phenomenological method.

1. The role of language

As discussed, IPA works on the premise that language is a tool used to communicate experience and therefore relies on the validity of this representation. However, it could be argued that language constructs reality instead of describing it. For example, the choice of words used to describe the occurrence of an event paints a picture of the event happening. Language is used as a medium by the participant to convey the experience which the researcher is interested in. It is possible for another participant to capture the essence of that experience using different words and hence create an alternative belief. This suggests that the use of language merely adds meaning to the occurrence of an event and direct access to the experience itself is unachievable. Consequently, a participant's account tells of her experience in a particular way and within a particular context, rather than the actual experience itself. This may suggest that language helps to shape the experience of an event. Thus, IPA as a methodology is reluctant to accept the constitutive role of language – which is to construct experience.

Although IPA equips the researcher with tools to access the lived experiences of the participant, the language of the researcher also plays a significant role in the process. That is to say, the researcher is liable through her words to convey exactly what she is interested in. In the event that she is unable to use language appropriately, it may change the dynamics needed to establish rapport. The outcome is that the lived experience under investigation becomes less accessible. IPA's theoretical commitment and negotiation between talk, mental and emotional states becomes jeopardised, since the participant is also within her right to make inferences about the researcher's intention and interpretation.

2. Suitability of accounts

The texture of experience is crucial in IPA as it aims to discover the value of experience and gain a better understanding of what a lived experience is like. Its aims are rooted in the experience itself and the meaning of the experience. Since IPA relies on the participant's descriptions of her experiences, questions concerning the suitability of accounts are raised. For example, how successfully is the participant able to communicate the rich texture of her experience to the researcher? (Willig, 2001). Due to the uncertainty posed by the question, the researcher is likely to invite a participant who is better able to articulate herself so that depths of feelings and thoughts can be captured.

3. Explanation versus description

Like Husserl's phenomenology, IPA focuses primarily on perceptions – how the participant views her world. It has no bearing on the origin of the world itself, and often it does not separate the world and the participant. Instead, it looks at the experience of the participant in the world (relational view). The relational view lacks the

understanding of the occurrence of such experiences –(in essence, why these experiences occur for the individual). The relational view does not account for why the participant perceives the occurrence of experiences the way she does. Willig (2007) suggests that recording a participant's perceptions does not explain the conditions that create such perceptions and that the deficiency of contextual knowledge limits the understanding of the experience.

4. Is IPA genuinely phenomenological?

Cognition is important for IPA because it explores what a participant believes about the phenomenon being investigated. Understanding the participant's cognitions may allow the researcher to make sense of the participant's experience. However, this seems to contradict the phenomenological stance on which IPA is built because of the distinction between the individual and the world (i.e. the knower and the known). Thus, IPA is criticized as a study of cognitions, instead of an account of the way in which the world presents itself to a participant in a raw, pre-cognitive way. Therefore, there is limited access to the lived experience because of the exclusion of unarticulated aspects of the experience.

Research design

Phenomenology is grounded in the focus of lived experiences (Eatough and Smith, 2008), and the individual interpretations of such experiences. The research project aims to achieve an experiential understanding of the nature of self definitions as described by black professional women through the use of semi structured interviews. The goal is, not to write the rules to define black professional women, but to unfold the meanings for those who have taken part in the study. Personal encounters, prejudices, pains and triumphs are expected

since the study benefits from the belief that experience is a combination of empiricism and rationalism. As offered by Giorgi (1985) and similar to the principles of IPA, the research project attempts to understand the relationship between profession, personal attributes and roles which contribute to the women's individuality – this is understood from the perspective of a unified whole. Hence, the expression of relationships between various elements of lived experience is supplied by the qualitative interview.

Summary of research aims

The research study endeavours to explore the individuality and self definition of black professional women. It tries to unearth how this group of women construct and define their sense of selves. Questions such as changes in the perception of self, as a consequence of professional and personal experiences are explored. The research project further aims to understand the complexities of issues involved in the self definition of the participants. In line with IPA, the meaning participants attach to their experiences, and the impact their meanings have, form an important aspect of the research.

Ethics

An important part in conducting the research project is the consideration given to ethical issues. A dilemma raised by using a qualitative line of enquiry is that research often provides the voice for others, and a frame for participants' social reality through the researcher's own projections. Hence, there is a struggle to navigate between participants' subjectivity and the researcher's objectivity (Fine, 1994). Exploring the self definitions and individualities of black professional women is no different, because it grew from the questions

posed to the life of the researcher. As indicated in the introductory section of this portfolio, she is intrigued by how she functions as a person and the valuing of unified selves in contrast to distinct multiple selves. Is it then ethical to pose these same questions to other black professional women? After all, just because the researcher is black and a woman, does not mean that there will be similarities between her and other black professional women. The question was posed to others because the researcher wanted to understand the experiences of this particular group. She wants to examine how black professional women define themselves, as well as help provide knowledge that may be useful in a therapeutic setting, should these women embark on a therapeutic experience.

May (1991) proposes that the process of embarking on qualitative research has inherent risks that are associated with any human interaction. This includes embarrassment, anger, violation of privacy, misunderstanding, and conflicts in opinions and values. The ethical considerations in the research project are underpinned by not causing harm to the participant or to the population that she represents. Therefore, before beginning the research project, a proposal was put forward to the ethics committee at the City University London and this was approved. In addition, the research project follows the ethical guidelines as mandated by the British Psychological Society (2006). Due to the interactive nature of interviewing, some essential issues specific to the research project include: informed consent, confidentiality, and the impact of research on the researcher and participant.

1. Informed consent (Appendix E)

The principle of informed consent stipulates that the researcher provides participants with adequate information about the research

so that they are able to make an educated decision about their participation (Cieurzo and Kietel, 1999). Participants were informed about the research and its aims. Respondents were told about possible benefits and potential risks that may arise through their participation, although no perceived risk or harm is envisaged. Cassell and Wax (1980) argue that the inductive nature of qualitative methodology, and the researcher's flexibility regarding the structure of the research questions, sometimes makes the informed consent "uninformed". This suggests that researchers often struggle with the amount of information they provide to participants. Not giving enough information can be construed as deception. Regardless of the implications of this argument, participants' well-being is paramount within the research project. Hence, interviewees were advised of the possibility that sensitive issues may come up due to the nature of exploring the self. In addition, Rosenblatt (1995) suggests that in semi-structured interviews, where the participants are equally responsible for the direction of the interview, it is difficult to predict what will emerge in an informed consent form. For this reason, the researcher sent out information sheets (Appendix C) at the initial contact stage to give participants the opportunity to read through the information and decide whether or not they wanted to participate.

At the beginning of the interviews, participants were asked about their thoughts on the information provided and whether they had read it. For those participants who said they had not read the information, the researcher went through the information sheet with them. They were made aware that they could withdraw their participation at any point in the process including retrospectively. Participants were asked to sign the consent form as an indication that they understood its contents and, to show their agreement to

proceed. Participants were also given contact details of the researcher and her supervisor, should the need arise for them to use it.

2. Confidentiality (Appendix F)

Particular care is taken to protect the identity of participants. This means there are no identifying features of respondents in the write up of the research project. Names have been changed in order to safeguard their anonymity. However, an ethical dilemma, particularly in IPA methodology, is the use of participants' quotes in the analysis section of the research. Price (1996) suggests that, even when informed consent is given, participants do not necessarily want to be quoted. To address this issue of using an appropriate and fundamental method of analysis whilst at the same time maintaining confidentiality, participants were made aware of how the research project would be written up. A discussion ensued with each participant individually as to whether this was acceptable to them. There were no objections to their quotes being used and all participants agreed to proceed.

Respondents were also informed about how their interviews would be stored and who would have access to them. The information would be kept on a memory stick and only the researcher would have access to it. Since the volume of information collected was very high, permission was sought accordingly from all participants on employing a third party to transcribe the interview should the need arise (Appendix J). The letter stated that the third party would be bound by the rules of confidentiality which were already in place. All participants gave their approval for this to happen.

The only caveat to breaking confidentiality was explained to participants as "in extreme cases where there is disclosure of harm to

self or others, confidentiality will be broken to the appropriate authorities". Participants were told that they would be informed at all stages should this happen.

3. Consequence of research on participants and/or researcher (Appendix C)

   Owing to the nature of this inquiry, it was almost inevitable that there would be consequences to both parties. With regards to participants, they shared experiences and tried to understand their experiences through reflection on past decisions and influences. For example, one participant reported that she had not given any thought to certain aspects of her life. Another participant reflected that she had not had the opportunity to think fully about her life-world. Participating in the research project has highlighted her interaction with others.

   To help alleviate any consequence of the interviews that might arise, participants were given a list of resources (Appendix I) that they could use if required. At the end of the interview, participants were debriefed (Appendix H) to ensure they were not distressed after the interview. Debrief also served as an opportunity for participants to share further information, ask questions about the research or make general statements about the whole process of participation. Respondents were thanked for their contribution and asked whether they would like to receive a summary of the analysis upon completion of the research.

   From the researcher's perspective, one consequence of conducting the interviews was that she viewed certain aspects of her life as lacking. For example, the researcher thought that her knowledge of her historical background was inadequate. "I felt that I

was not well informed about my culture or history to have made certain choices about my life. I felt sad that my parents had not passed on to me the history of my culture and that as a child I had been discouraged from taking any interest in my history because, 'history is not going to pay your way in life'. This feeling was overwhelming to the point where I began to look into taking courses in African history. However, on reflection, I realised that I had my own history and that my history was the one which I had consciously decided to carry with me throughout my life's journey. I am affected by the history of black people and culture; however my experiences differ from those of the participants who are sharing theirs with me. My experiences have had an impact on my life in so much as I have responded to them. During the earlier stages of the interview process, before I had become comfortable with my own historical position, it was evident that I was looking for answers to my own questions through the experiences of the participants. I acknowledge that in one instance I even asked whether history was important to a participant. On reflection, I realise the question was self fulfilling and it was not repeated". The researcher recognises this unforeseen consequence on her and was able to address it using personal therapy.

Sample size

Smith and Osborn (2003) say that "idiographic commitment encourages the study of small homogenous samples". They suggest that the number of participants used within IPA research is dependent on a number of factors. For them, using a large sample size signifies the loss of subtle variations of meaning which are conveyed by respondents. Smith et al (2009) propose that the primary concern of IPA is with the detailed report of individual experience; thus, the issue of quality not quantity is addressed by using a small sample size. It was agreed with my supervisor that ten participants would be sufficient in capturing valuable data – the ten interviews include the pilot interview.

Over the past decade qualitative research has changed and continues to change, accommodating the creativity of the researcher. Whilst Smith (2004) initially argued for and advocated the exploration of single case studies, he admits that most IPA investigations are likely to continue to have an idiographic focus, but with a sample size bigger than one. More recently, Smith et al (2009) recommend the use of four to ten interviews for professional doctorate studies. In the research project, I have chosen to carry out ten interviews, rather than interviewing five participants twice, because I believe an equal level of richness is achievable. Furthermore, the demands of negotiating participant availability is minimised by doing one interview per participant.

Participants

- Inclusion criteria

To be included in the research project, participants needed to have fulfilled the following: be a woman, be of black African or Caribbean origin, have a professional qualification of degree level or higher, and to have been currently employed at the time of the interview for a minimum of 12 months. The original age limit (25–40) was removed due to difficulties in recruiting participants within the already stringent criteria.

- Exclusion criteria

Some participants were not taken up on their offer to contribute because of the distance of their location from the researcher. A woman who lived in Milton Keynes wanted to participate but this was too far away and therefore she was excluded from participating.

The respondents of the research project were all black women, defined by the researcher as a woman who originated from Africa or the Caribbean. However, it is also important to note that each participant specified her own ethnic background (see participant's demographics, page 108). It was not necessary for the women to have been born in their countries of origin. Their ages ranged between 22 and 57 years. They all lived and worked in the London area. Respondents worked in varied professions that included: Doctor, Solicitor, Reverend, Counselling Psychologist, Teacher, Mortgage Manager, IT Manager, Social Worker and a Business woman. All participants had degree level or higher qualifications with the exception of one. She has been in her profession for over 10 years and it was thought (after consultation with my supervisor) that her contribution to the research project was beneficial. On this basis the information she provided is included within the Analysis.

Recruitment

The enlistment of participants was in part purposeful (Smith, 2003) in line with IPA methodology. However, it was also dependent on availability. Using purposive sampling enabled homogeneity. Smith et al (2009) posit that the extent of homogeneity will differ from one project to another. Nonetheless, they emphasise that the homogenous sample should not be seen as an "identikit". The sample utilised within the research project fulfils homogeneity in as much as the participants are all women, all originate from African and/or Caribbean heritage, all perceive themselves to be professionals. In as much as some might argue that the varied professions of the participants in this research project does not fulfil the criteria of homogeneity, Smith et al (2009) say that researchers can be more selective about which factors are most important. In the research

project, the value of being a professional is regarded as more relevant to the research area than the different occupations. It may be possible for future research to attain stronger /complete homogeneity by recruiting participants from the same professional background.

The initial idea was to recruit high profiled women. This was because it was imagined that their positions within society would involve a more complex process of self definition. After contacting a few headline professionals through email via their agents and/or managers and realising that their busy schedules would not permit their participation, a flyer (Appendix B) was designed and distributed to various contacts and colleagues in the hope of attracting some interest. Flyers were also sent to black professional groups, a news agency, a recruiting agency, university staff, a London trade union, the black history month publication and the black police association. Prospective participants were sent an email introducing the researcher and the research project, the flyer and research information was attached to the email. In the introductory emails, participants were asked to read the information and consider whether they met the criteria to participate. They were then asked to show their interest in participating by return of email to the researcher.

The first interviewee was contacted personally after her details were found in the black history month magazine. She was described as an accomplished member and contributor to the black community. An email was sent first which she responded to. She indicated her interest and asked to speak to the researcher beforehand. Arrangements to meet for the interview were made over the telephone. The second participant was also recruited via the black history month magazine in a similar way. At the end of each respective interview, participants were asked to pass on details of the

research project to anyone they thought would be interested in participating. The third respondent interviewed was recruited through the first participant. She sent the researcher an email saying she would like to take part and that she had read the information sheet and met the criteria. The researcher responded and a time convenient to both parties was arranged. The rest of the research participants were recruited through recommendations of colleagues or via those who had already taken part.

Of the 10 participants, the researcher saw 4 in their homes (security precautions were taken to ensure the researcher's safety – the researcher called a friend when she arrived at, and departed from, participants' homes), 3 at their work places (the same safety precautions were taken) and 3 at City University.

"Before I began the research I assumed that since I was captivated by the topic everybody else would be too. At the time, I did not fully appreciate that showing interest in participating did not equate to finding time to participate. At different points of the recruitment stages I struggled to find participants. I felt disappointed after being let down by those I had initially contacted who later declared that they were too busy to take part. At the onset, I wanted to recruit 11 participants in total, including a pilot participant. Unfortunately, I decided to settle for the 10 I had done (9 participants and 1 pilot) because of the difficulty in recruiting, and also, because the interview material appeared to be rich enough to represent the experiences of those who were participating. In this way, richness of information took precedence over saturation of information".

Interview

Kvale (1996) says that a qualitative research interview is a construction site of knowledge and that it is an interchange between two people who share ideas or views on a common topic. Since a

qualitative study is largely concerned with meaning and subjective experience, Kvale (1996) suggests that the best way to get at such a level of information is to talk to those who are experiencing the named phenomenon, thereby unfolding the meanings attached to the experiences they recall. Miller and Glassner (1997) extend this argument by identifying the interview as a symbolic interaction. It is possible for knowledge to occur outside the symbolic interaction. IPA often uses semi-structured interviews as a way of understanding the experiences of its participants. For this reason, and in line with the IPA methodology, for which interviews are the most widely used technique for collecting information, ten participants were interviewed face-to-face using a semi-structured schedule.

Semi-structured interviews are seen as a guide for the researcher to use during the dialogue. It provides flexibility for both the researcher and the participant to move freely between recollections of experiences and the feelings and/or perceptions associated with the named experiences. Eatough and Smith (2008) suggest that for IPA, it is crucial to allow the participant a "strong" say in where the interview goes. A lack of participant flexibility may affect the phenomenological attempt. The use of a semi- structured schedule enables a rapport to develop between the researcher and the participant, more importantly and in line with IPA, the semi-structured schedule allows the researcher to focus on the experiences of the individual and the interpretations and meanings attached to respective experiences (Smith et al, 1999).

Emphasis is placed on dialogue rather than on a one-way questioning process to enable participants to share their valued experiences, clarify and elaborate on nuanced descriptions of their life-worlds. The researcher facilitates this process through guarding

against confirmation of pre-existing views by adopting a stance of openness and focusing on participants' experiences. Depending on the initial impression the researcher had of participants, she began the interview with questions relating to their work experiences or questions relating to self perception. The prompts to further explore the information provided by respondents, varied according to how the responses were elicited and/or the salient issues arising as depicted by them. It can be argued that doing the interviews in this way did not impact on the reliability of the interview schedule since the same questions were asked of all participants.

The choice to start with professional or personal questions was decided because the researcher believes that in order to be able to understand the participants' views of their life-worlds it was imperative that they felt comfortable during the process. Part of the ease to talk means the interviews started where it felt comfortable for respondents. The decision to do the interviews in this way was based on both the researcher's initial contact with the participants, as well as her impression of them on the day of the interview. Some of the women were initially nervous about talking, it therefore seemed appropriate to start at a point where they could easily share their experiences.

The interview schedule (Appendix G) was designed around the researcher's particular interest in black professional women's individuality, and how they define themselves given the different roles and circumstances they have created. The research question is: "How do black professional women construct their sense of self? And how is it maintained? Questions around these two issues (construction and definition of self, and maintenance of self) were created.

During the construction stages of the schedule, the questions were tested for validity by having discussions with other black professional women to assess whether the questions posed were indeed asking what the researcher wanted to explore. The women the researcher spoke to said that they understood the questions and reflected on how they had never really thought about themselves in the context of their profession, and how that translated into their self definitions. I noted from these feedbacks the need to stress to the participants that my interest in their lived experiences was not limited to their professional lives but included their life-world experiences.

The interviews lasted between 39 and 99 minutes. Before the interviews commenced participants were asked to complete a confidentiality agreement, a consent form and a demographic questionnaire (Appendix D). A discussion then ensued about participants' lives and professions. As respondents spoke, most did not need to be prompted with questions; the information needed was readily available from what the participants were expressing. At the end of the interviews, the researcher encouraged feedback from the women. There was an opportunity for the participants to ask questions of the researcher. Some of the respondents were interested in the researcher's motives for doing the research. All participants were invited to reflect on how doing the research may be helpful to Counselling Psychology.

All through the interview process, I was sensitive and accepting of participants' experiences. I was mindful that although we shared ethnicity I was different because of my experiences. I tried to be congruent by sharing my views and opinions when I thought it mattered. This was particularly true of instances where the women spoke about their experiences of being black women in a "racist society". Whilst it was apparent that we had differences in experiences and opinions, I was interested in their concerns and wanted to understand the

impact of their experiences on their life-worlds. I felt confident that I had displayed Rogers' core conditions as was necessary in any relational encounter. I hoped that my transparency, honesty and sincerity would dispel any power differentials that can exist in an interview situation.

Conducting a research project commits the researcher to a relationship of reciprocity with participants. Traditionally, the researcher/participant relationship is thought to contain power differences (Wolf, 1996; Mills et al, 2006) where the participant is a subordinate. However, Proctor (2002) contends that power is seen as "unitary, monolithic, unidirectional, structural and necessary negative" (Proctor 2002, page 10). That is to say power differential is not skewed in one direction. Power can be displayed either by the researcher or by the participant.

Nonetheless, some researchers have found that the existence of power differentials within the research relationship can inadvertently impact the research process. For example, Reynolds (2005) found that the respondents of her research had reservations about participating because of their underlying beliefs about power. From her experiences, Reynolds (2005) surmises that her participants' concerns were around her role as a researcher because they perceived that she would only be responsible for the conduct of the interviews. The power and control for the overall research was bestowed on 'another' perceived to be more powerful. Thus Reynolds (2005) proposes that a complex discussion of power relations shows that social research is associated with race, class and gender divisions within society. Clearly her singular status as a Caribbean woman, and not a Caribbean mother researching Caribbean mother's experiences, set her apart from her respondents and thus impacted the research process and created the occurrence of a power differential.

Similarly, Bhopal (2002) expresses that her gender, class and race influenced the relationship she had with her students. In 'Teaching women's studies: the effects of race and gender', Bhopal emphasises the importance of considering the impact of the teacher's (or researcher's) status. For her, gender and race were paramount to the subject area (i.e. women's experiences) she was teaching. Bhopal's students found it somewhat comforting to discuss their thoughts freely because of these elements.

To counteract power dynamics that may exist within the research process and to move researchers and participants to a more even platform, Seibold (1992) suggests that the researcher ought to ask of herself/himself a series of thought provoking questions (such as: how is this person like/different to me? how do these similarities/differences impact the relationship? how does this in turn impact the research and research question?). For Seibold (1992), arranging the interview at a convenient location for the participant, allowing the participant power over the direction of the interview and openness towards the participant all contribute to addressing the issues of power within the research process.

Examples such as those given above about power dynamics highlight the need for researchers to be aware of how they may impact not just the research process but also the response from respondents as well as the outcome of the research. For this research project, participants were similar to the researcher in terms of race and gender. The educational status between them was also fairly matched so that those highlighted elements i.e. race and gender did not produce the same influences as those exampled above. Further, power dynamics were not explicitly experienced within the research process. On reflection, there were class differences which did not create a

power differential per se but highlighted the experiences of individual interviewees and how this is reflected in their self definitions and individuality. I would argue similarly to Proctor (2002) that power will always exist in any relationship, be it research, or otherwise. However, it is not always unidirectional. These power differentials are more evident in relationships/research where there is a greater difference between the researched and the researcher.

Reliability, validity and generalizability

Hansen (1979) says that reliability is dependent on the resolution of both external and internal design problems. External reliability addresses the issue of whether qualitative researchers generate the same constructs in similar settings; whilst internal reliability refers to the degree to which other investigators, given a set of generated constructs can match them with information in the same way as did the original researcher.

Validity is concerned with the accuracy of research findings. To establish validity is to determine the extent to which interpretations represent or measure the categories of human experience that occur (Hansen, 1979). Often qualitative research is criticized for being unreliable or lacking in validity and generalizability. The use of reliability, validity and generalizability is extensive in quantitative research and has traditionally been grounded in the positivist-realist philosophical position that identifies these constructs with truth (Johnson and Saville-Troike, 1992). The problem for qualitative researchers is that these three criteria have previously been used to minimize possible sources of errors including those by the researcher. In qualitative methodologies, the researcher is an acknowledged part of the study. Yardley (2008) suggests that eliminating the influence of the researcher would make it difficult to retain the benefits of the

investigation. It has therefore been important to redefine the basis of these three criteria in order to make them applicable to qualitative studies. Golafshani (2003) postulates that reliability, validity and generalizabilty in qualitative research are multiple ways of establishing truth or reality.

In qualitative research, decisions about reliability, validity and generalizability focus mainly on how findings are interpreted. To this end, Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that for reliability, validity and generalizabilty to be accepted notions in qualitative studies, it is useful to substitute the terms for dependability with reliability, credibility with validity, and transferability with generalizability. In this way, the three criteria become salient tests of reality.

IPA's concern is with the ways in which people perceive the world. It is interested in the subjective experience of people in the world and, it does not share in the traditional positivist view that the external world determines a person's subjective experience. That is to say, IPA does not investigate the reality of the accounts; it is concerned with relativist ontology (Willig, 2008). McLeod (2001) proposes that assessing the truth-value of subjective experiences requires a currency based on the words of the participants not numbers as in the case in quantitative methods. The truth-value (or quality) of qualitative studies is found in the methods used in gathering and analyzing information. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend specific strategies in achieving this. They suggest: peer debriefing (critical analysis of research methodology, collected data, and hypotheses), member checking (an ongoing process of checking research analysis, interpretations and conclusions), and inquiry audit (detailed accounting process and the degree of consistency).

Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson and Spiers (2002) extend these strategies to the importance of a researcher's characteristics. They suggest that the investigator be responsive and adaptable to the changing circumstances of the research and its participants, be holistic, sensitive and, have the ability to clarify and summarize respondents' accounts.

In the research project, the pilot study was conducted to determine the validity of the semi-structured schedule. The outcome, based on the reflections of both the participant and researcher, suggests that there is validation in the interview process. As the interview progressed with other respondents, there was consistency in the themes emerging therefore fulfilling the reliability criterion of a good quality qualitative research. The flexible structure of the interview allowed respondents to communicate their experience and understanding of the topic area. It is hoped that the present investigation has demonstrated transparency and fulfilled the central tenets of good quality qualitative research.

Pilot study

The pilot interviewee is a trainee Counselling Psychologist who was recruited from a London University. She was approached during the planning stages to see whether she could productively respond to the constructed questions, the process of the interview and the researcher's own interview techniques. We agreed to meet at her university library in one of the allocated discussion rooms. The room was situated on the first floor of the library overlooking the gardens. In hindsight, this was probably not the best place because there were structural building works going on outside (it was impossible to get another room).

She was asked to complete the consent form, confidentiality agreement and demographic questions. Upon completion, the researcher asked her how she saw herself and thus the interview began. There was a discussion about her profession, her experiences of her profession, bearing in mind that she was still training; she discussed personal experiences of how she perceived herself and how she thought others perceived her.

After the interview, and during the debrief, she reported feeling comfortable and said she was amazed at how much she had said (the interview lasted 99 minutes). I sought feedback as to how the interview had gone for her and whether she found any of the questions too intrusive. She said that the interview questions were clear and precise; she believed them to be thought-provoking and required considerable reflection.

The pilot interview was informative to the researcher in terms of the interaction with the participant. It helped inform how much of the researcher's experiences should be shared with a participant at the beginning of the interviews. It also gave the researcher an insight into questions participants may ask and the necessity to be prepared to respond appropriately. For example, the pilot participant asked at the end of the interview what had led the researcher to explore this particular area. "At the time, I was not prepared for this and even though I knew why I was doing it I felt that I did not explain it adequately. Also, on reflection, I was not ready to share my personal reasons. At the end of the interview, I felt overwhelmed with the participant's knowledge and the foundation on which she had built herself. I considered changing some of the questions in order to incorporate some of the points she had raised. However, I decided against this because I felt that those were her experiences and I wanted the other participants to share their experiences based on the same set of questions".

Using the feedback from the pilot interview, the researcher was encouraged by the rapport that had developed between herself and the participant. It would form the foundation on which participants were able to recall, and share, intimate experiences about how they define themselves. The feedback also highlighted the advantage of allowing the participant to dictate the pace. The pilot participant said that she did not feel rushed and had enough time between questions to think about what she was saying. Generally, the feedback was positive, however, as the researcher, "I felt that I could have been more prepared to answer personal questions, should they have been posed. I felt comfortable with the idea of sharing myself in that way and this helped me respond with more confidence during other interviews when such questions were posed". Because of the positive feedback received, the interview schedule was not changed.

The information collected from the pilot interview was reviewed with the research supervisor, and there was compelling evidence that the data should be included in the analysis due to its richness. There is also a valid argument that the participant offered a valuable insight through her own responses. In addition, she was very forthcoming with her reflections and in sharing her experiences. It was therefore decided to incorporate the information compiled from this interview.

To maintain confidentiality and protect the identity of participants, complete transcripts will not be available to examiners. However, the transcript for one of the participants has been included (Appendix L) to give a flavour of the interviews. Reflexive notes were taken after each interview and can be made available to examiners upon request. Appendix M details the notes made after the pilot interview.

Recording, transcribing and storing data

The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. The researcher transferred each recording onto her laptop in preparation for transcription. At the onset, I thought that I would need help in transcribing the interviews because of the length of time each interview took. I sought permission from each participant requesting that a third party assist me in transcribing. All participants gave their consent with the exception of one. Subsequently, the hard drive on my laptop crashed and all stored information was lost. Fortunately, copies of the interviews were still on the digital recorder and the information was again transferred to my laptop. I decided to transcribe all the interviews myself because I felt that it would bring me closer to participants' experiences. All the interviews are transcribed verbatim in order to help capture the experience of the interview as much as possible. Anybody reading the text will therefore have a good understanding of what the participant is trying to convey. A pseudonym is assigned to each participant's information to protect their identities.

Kvale (1996) suggests that transcription is an interpretative process and is the transformation of one mode of narrative to another. In transcribing the recorded interviews, the researcher is able to reflect on the face-to-face interaction and re-engage with the experiences of participants – and in so doing, draw meaning in the context of what is known of participants' life-worlds.

Transcripts have been printed and stored as hard copies with other research materials in a secure box in the researcher's loft. Information transferred to the laptop was deleted from the hard drive. The original recordings are on a memory stick which is also stored in the secured box. All information (written or otherwise) will be destroyed following the researcher's viva.

Analytic approach

The interviews were analysed using IPA (Smith et al., 1999). The process began with reading and re-reading each transcript several times. In between reading the transcript, the researcher listened to the interviews repeatedly in order to gain a holistic picture of participants' accounts. Commitment to the interview material through immersion in it is an important principle within IPA. The engagement allows the researcher to produce clear, persuasive reports about the subject area.

Connections and/or contradictions, patterns of language and themes were noted. The researcher also made notes of anything interesting that caught her attention. The themes were condensed to master themes, making sure that it related to participants' narratives. The emergent themes were listed and clustered together. Emerging themes were compared across all transcripts and a written analysis was produced from the table of themes.

After attendance at an advanced IPA seminar, the difficulty anticipated with the analysis of the interview material was in being able to construct theme headings in a way that was appropriate to capturing, both a psychologically minded audience, as well as the layperson. Initially, the thoughts of the researcher were to invite research colleagues to validate emergent themes. However, based on the experience of the seminar, that would be counterproductive. To overcome this difficulty the researcher decided to use participants' phrases/words to illustrate meaning and experience.

Each identified theme was transformed into narrative account. It is important to differentiate between the researcher's reflections and the participants' accounts. The researcher's reflections are

illustrated using a different style of writing so that the reader is able to distinguish between the two. Further, a reflexive diary was kept by the researcher to help with the researcher's processes.

In addition, in writing the analysis section, the researcher draws on all the materials she has accumulated in her experiences and during the research process. As suggested by Smith et al (2009), participants' accounts are supported using accumulated material and include: extracts, journal articles, researcher's initial notes. These materials are used where appropriate as evidencing or contrasting what respondents say.

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F. Analysis

This section reports on the Master themes and their sub-themes, which emerged from the analysis of participants' accounts. Each Master theme is defined and its sub-themes discussed in turn. The analysis is grounded in the narratives of respondents' experiences.

The researcher's interpretations are based on her making sense of the women's sense making of their life-worlds in accordance with the principles of IPA – the process refers to the double hermeneutic which lies at the heart of IPA.

Personal features of participants

Table 1 below summarises the demographics of the participants in order to situate and contextualise the sample, and to establish the relevance of the findings. Demographic information about participants was collected at the beginning of each interview. The details provided by respondents were voluntary and not directed by the researcher. This is important because it demonstrates interviewee's self perception within a social context as well as within the context of their various lived experiences. They defined themselves within the categories of marital status, profession and ethnic background. Some participants (e.g. Lola and Lucia) were specific about their ethnic background because it formed an essential part of their self definition. For Lucia in particular this distinction highlighted some crucial qualities of her upbringing. Other participants (e.g. Sammi) did not give this level of detail. Appendix K presents participants' profiles, and summaries of their interviews.

Participant	Age	Marital status	Number of dependents	Profession	Ethnic background	Pseudonym
Pilot	24	Single	None	Trainee Counselling Psychologist	Caribbean	Marisa
1	48	Single	3	Interfaith Minister and Spiritual Counsellor	African and Indian	Lucia
2	57	Divorced	2	Business Woman	Caribbean	Esi
3	48	Divorced	2	Social Worker	African Caribbean	Thandie
4	24	Single	None	Counselling Psychologist	Ghanaian	Lola
5	25	Single	None	Teacher	Ghanaian	Yemi
6	27	Single	None	Doctor	Ghanaian	Fran
7	30	Single	1	Solicitor	African	Gbemi
8	22	Single	None	Mortgage Manager	African	Sammi
9	36	Single	1	IT Manager	African	Ivy

Table 1: Participants' demographics

The participants, all of African and/or Caribbean heritage, work and live in the London area. They have been permanently resident in England for a minimum of five years, and in their current employment for a minimum of twelve months. All participants (with the exception of one) are educated to degree level or higher.

The analysis of the ten interviews yielded a number of themes that summarize participants' definitions of their individuality and descriptions of their lived experiences. The themes are:

1. Self definition – defining me

   The Master theme self definition – defining me presents participants' phenomenological experience of the self. It highlights how the women articulate their self views.

2. The self and others

   The self and others captures the importance for participants of being surrounded by others and their tendency to compare the self to others. In addition, this section explores how respondents use past relationship experiences to assess present interactions.

3. Influences on the self

   Influences on the self refer to personal frameworks underlying participants' sense of self and the subsequent meanings these have on self definitions. These structures draw heavily on discourses that form the foundation for the expression of the self.

4. "My individuality"

   This represents participants' phenomenological experience of being unique. Some participants spoke of individuality as necessary for self definition whilst others experienced individuality as a purposeful separation from others.

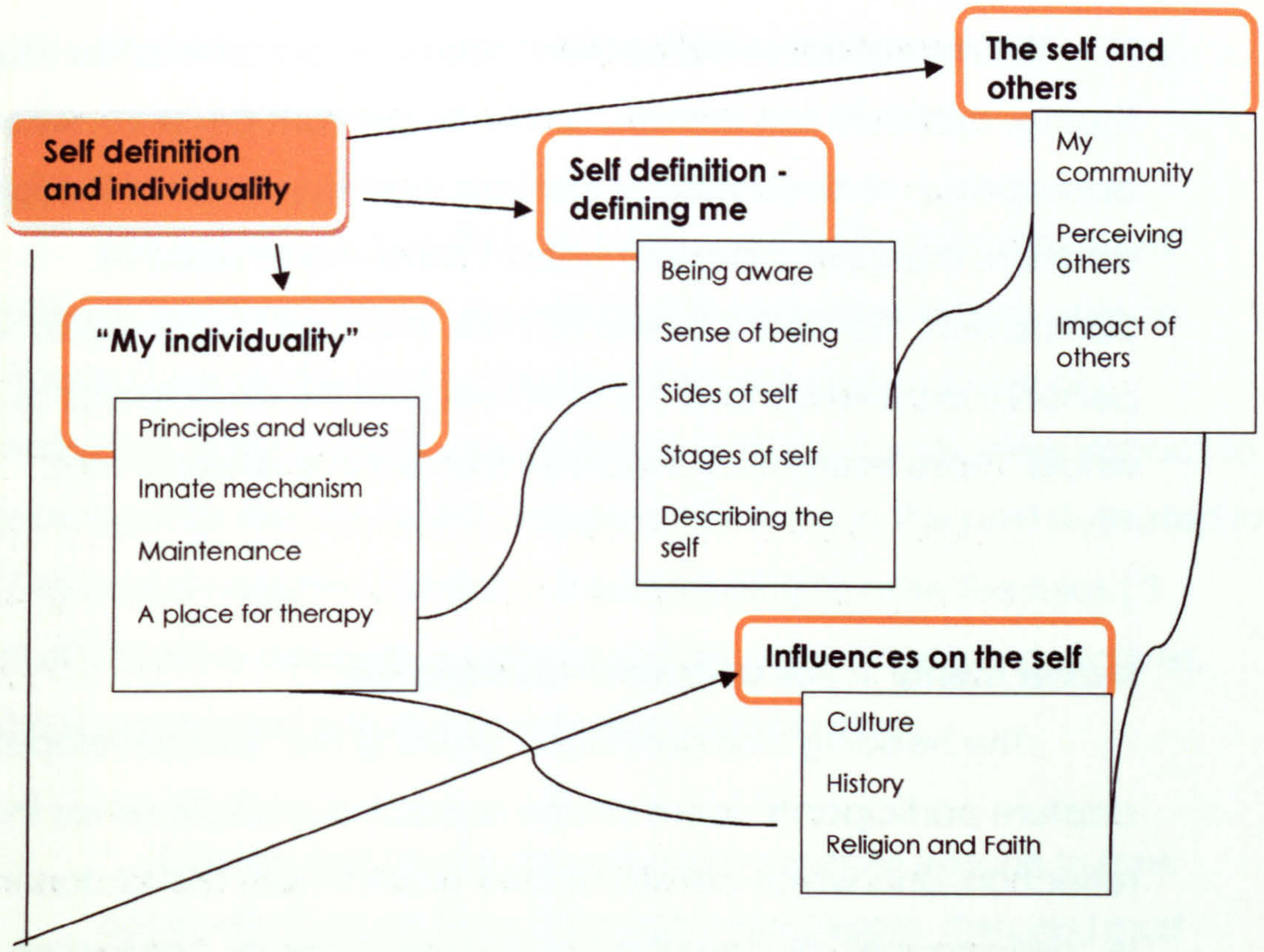


Figure 1- Relationship between themes

Figure 1 is a pictorial summary of the themes, and shows the relationship between them. Participants' accounts show that there can sometimes be an overlap between themes. Thus, displaying the themes in this way illustrates that the experience of each theme is not prescribed for each participant. That is to say, each Master theme has a different place in a respondent's life-world. Self definition – defining me is divided into five areas: being aware, sense of being, sides of self, stages of self and describing the self. The self and others is split into three sub themes: my community, perceiving others and impact of others. Influences on the self are separated into three dominant discourses: culture, history and religion and faith. Principles and values, innate mechanism, maintenance and a place for therapy cluster to form "my individuality". For a broader view of all themes refer to Appendix Q.

The remainder of this section focuses on presenting the Master themes and their sub themes. I draw on relevant literature, where appropriate, to emphasise or contrast existing schools of thought. In addition, there are instances where I have made sense of participants' life-worlds based on their accounts, my professional and personal experience and my knowledge of the participants as a whole. Those interpretations are presented in a different font.

Master theme 1: Self definition – defining me

The heading 'self definition – defining me' was developed to capture participants' focus on the aspects of multiple selves that they reflect on, and which constitute their sense of self. The factors involved in "defining me", as described by the respondents, centred on realising who they are in different contexts. In some cases, the factors confirmed or disproved the meaning which participants held about their self views.

1.1 "being aware"

Self understanding came to participants at different points. Their accounts of "being aware" arose in instances when participants questioned their own actions or reactions in particular circumstances. Attributing self knowledge to self definition implies active participation and constant self reflection; it ignores the impact of the environment and how that may shape one's awareness. For example, the extract that follows describes how the participant's desire to be different emphasises her awareness of past behaviour.

> *"... I must have an impact, somewhat positive impact, umm, and I'm sure I've had a negative impact in the past where I just haven't*

[thought] about the effect of my actions on other people ..." (Ivy, page 5, line 148 – 150)

This extract reveals that Ivy holds a self belief that she "must" make a "positive impact". In making this change she feels able to "impact" her world. For Ivy, the experience is perhaps one of realisation. She moves from wanting to make a constructive impact to knowing that she has had a negative influence in the past illustrated in "I've had a negative impact". It is interesting to note the rules ("I must") that Ivy appears to adhere to from early on in her narratives. She is concerned with how her actions affect others.

"... but now that I'm old enough and I'm mature enough to think about what I do and how it impacts other people, then yes I must have relevance and yes it is important." (Ivy, page 5, line 151 – 153)

Ivy's account seems to reflect a connection between getting older and her sense of developing awareness. Socially, she demonstrates that in her consciousness she is relevant and can have an impact on others. The report "yes it is important" illustrates how Ivy justifies her behaviour and the rules of engagement she has formed. The awareness of her current reality i.e. "I'm mature enough" and past actions, underlies her need to change her behaviour. In Ivy's experience the fundamental embodiment of "being aware" is "to think about what I do".

Not all participants reported experiencing "being aware" in this way. Some respondents reflected on self knowing in the context of their profession. For example, Esi describes her experiences of other businesses and uses her awareness to confirm the value of the work she does.

"...I know the value of what I do, umm, I know the value of what I do to change people's lives and I know the value of what I do makes me feel happy and fulfilled ..." (Esi, page 7, line 237 – 239)

Esi's description is not reported as affirmation of a self view that she must have value; although, the account indicates that she believes her purpose as a business woman is to "change people's lives". In addition, the "impact" of "what I do" brings about her awareness and her feelings of being "happy and fulfilled". For Ivy and Esi, it is their interaction with others that enables self awareness. That is to say, the participants' sense of self is about the respective contribution each makes to the lives of others, and the meaning it has for them.

In contrast, Thandie's account suggests that "being aware" is a by-product of the experience of travel.

"... It's been a process of growth really, essentially. I mean I have looked at some of I mean travel has been quite a significant feature for me and I have been across the Caribbean, I have been to the States and you know it helps put myself in the context of who I am. So I think having travelled across the other umm communities where umm, the representation of [the] black community umm perhaps is rather more advanced or different in context, that has enabled me have more understanding of myself then that's been part of how I've been influenced to see who I am as a black woman". (Thandie, page 3, line 71 – 77)

Thandie talks about travelling and visiting places that have a different "representation" of the black community. She is able to find herself and "understand" who she is in this "context". She becomes aware of her own sense of self and discovers "who I am as a black woman". Thandie's account confirms the idea that the experience of

being aware occurs in relation to others. For her, there is validation of self knowing because of the difference or similarities she experienced on her travels. For Thandie, it is her interaction with others who hold a distinct representation of black people that reinforces her existing sense of self, and creates a new awareness for the possibility of "growth". The realisation leads to change and discovery.

Participants make a conscious choice to embrace their interaction with others. This process echoes Dobzhansky's (2004) discussion on decision-making and control. Dobzhansky (2004) argues that the process of self awareness is a controlled process where the person is mindful of all steps involved in pondering over a challenge. For some participants, the experience of "being aware" serves as a preparatory tool for dealing with issues within their profession which impact directly on their sense of self. Marisa describes how being aware prepared her to deal with the perception of her clients in regards to her skin colour.

> *"... I read up on it and they said about bringing it into the room, being aware that it { } you know, so I felt good that I was prepared for that, umm, to a certain extent. I mean it didn't sort of debilitate me. I think it made me a bit anxious but I was aware that these things { } you know, it comes into the room ..." (Marisa, page 3, line 95 – 99)*

Marisa introduces her skin colour very early in the interview. It sets the scene for Marisa to make the link between herself, her profession and others. Her sense of being aware arises because "they said about bringing" her difference into her sessions with clients. Although Marisa says that she feels "good" about being prepared, there is a sense that the experience of being aware has had an adverse impact on her. The possibility of a negative effect is demonstrated when she says "it didn't sort of debilitate me" it just

"made me a bit anxious". The account suggests that she is not physically "debilitated" by her experience, yet used metaphorically she hints at psychological incapacity where she is uncertain of the effect of "bringing it into the room". It seems that for Marisa, her skin colour is an issue within the context of her work in spite of whether she is aware of it or not, "it comes into the room". She attempts to bracket her skin colour as "these things". "I was aware" thus leads her to prepare for dealing with how her clients respond to her skin colour.

Lucia's account below appears to undermine the importance of "being aware". Her narrative highlights the need to understand one's self and the difficulty that is posed when meaning is not constructed in lieu of self knowledge. That is, when self awareness does not contribute to self knowledge. This is echoed by Nicolas Cage in the movie Knowing (2009) where he says "what the hell is the purpose of knowing if I cannot do anything about it". Lucia's extract emphasises this sentiment below.

> *" ... I wasn't always self aware, umm, you know, you know, what do I mean? I mean that I think that we have a self awareness of ourselves but that often times we don't know what it means. For instance, you might become angry at something or someone. That is there every single time and you're not aware of what your patterns are." (Lucia, page 8, line 293 – 297)*

Lucia talks about not "always" being aware. She illustrates in this excerpt that even when there is an experience of self awareness "often times we don't know what it means". Hence, she questions the usefulness of being aware and links this with "patterns". She concludes that without meaning or understanding of awareness, it is difficult to look for the "patterns" in one's life world. Lucia alludes to more than

just being aware, she talks about recognition of behavioural patterns, and the consequence of not knowing.

Fran demonstrates being aware of her "patterns" in the way that she spoke about her need to follow rules.

> *"... I think that I do play it safe and I do like rule playing because I like certainty and like you know, I am quite a timetabled person, I'm quite a structured person and this is really interesting and again because I just had this conversation with my boyfriend the other day, because he is totally opposite to me. So, whereas I'm like you know, we've got to get up today and this is on our checklist of things to do and I think that we should do this today and he would be like ok chill out it's really not that, you know, life doesn't have to be all about following rules, he's quite rebellious and so I think that umm that's been made more aware, we're exactly the same. It's been pointed out to me on many occasions (giggles). Umm, but I think that this as, you know, there is nothing wrong at all and I think that if that is how I function and it's got me this far, do you see what I mean?". (Fran, page 8, line 301 – 310)*

Fran's experience of being aware reinforces the way she lives her life and this is evident in the way that she likes to "play it safe". In this extract, Fran's notion that her boyfriend is "totally opposite" to her is in contrast to her concluding statement – "we're exactly the same". The difference between her and her boyfriend exacerbates her awareness of herself and the way in which she prefers to be "structured". However, she re-asserts that "there is nothing wrong at all ... it's got me this far".

Participants claim that they have a sense of self. They recognise that they present these sense of selves in different contexts. In most of

the accounts, increasing self awareness serves to nourish participants' self definition.

1.2 "sense of being"

In addition to the experiences of being aware, participants provided evidence of who they are by invoking powerful phrases that are definitive and commanding. Their way of thinking translates into their sense of being. Respondents' accounts indicate that their way of thinking could be their tool for empowerment.

In the main, a "sense of being" refers to the knowledge that the self is recognisable, and this guides the way the self is defined. Reflecting on being a woman, Fran says:

> *"I see a confident, determined person. I see maybe, I see being a woman more comes first than being black, to be honest, for me."*
> *(Fran, page 11, line 407 – 408)*

There are a couple of interesting points to note in this extract. At the outset, Fran is assertive about the kind of person she is. It is fascinating however that she says "I see" rather than "I am". Her account reflects an embodied image of the self as she identifies that for her, "being a woman more comes first than being black". It seems that Fran's sense of being a woman or black appears to be hierarchical. In addition, her sense of being "a confident, determined person" is represented throughout the interview.

Similar to Fran, Lola's experience of having a sense of being, prioritises gender above ethnicity. However, and in contrast to Fran, Lola describes how being black does not always feature in how she defines herself.

"... what is interesting is, that sometimes, the the aspects or the component, the black component doesn't really come into play. Sometimes I just see myself as a woman. And depending on what kind of situation I am or who I'm talking to or what I'm doing, that's when the black aspect comes into it, umm particularly perhaps {} mostly when I'm in my professional role." (Lola, page 1, line 22 – 26)

For Lola, being black does not "really come into play", her sense of being appears to be a representation of who she is only in certain situations – in her "professional role". Her account is not simply to do with her sense of being black or being a woman but also to do with Lola's professional worth. She draws attention to this when she says "particularly".

> *"... I'm from the Ashanti region in Ghana and you know the woman is revered. You are the strong individual who is the mother of the whole community ..." (Lola, page 1, line 30 – 31)*

Lola's choice to see herself as a woman first has been shaped by her experiences as a child. She reflects on her cultural upbringing and how women are viewed within her "community". She draws meaning from "the mother of the whole community", and this meaning solidifies for her the importance of being a woman.

Participants' sense of being requires a level of awareness which, in turn, demands regular reflection. Sammi, does not normally consider her sense of being.

"... I do think about it but not that much. I tend to think yeah Sammi is a black woman. I think (giggles) it makes the term kind of makes me sound a lot more mature ..." (Sammi, page 7, line 207 – 209)

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"I do think about it but not that much" can be viewed as a telling statement. "Makes me sound ..." suggests that Sammi may be uncomfortable thinking about her sense of being. From her extract, it would seem that she associates "a lot more mature" with being a black woman.

> *"... I'm immature in a lot of other ways so I think in that way I'm contradicting who I am" (Sammi, page 7, line 213 – 214)*

Sammi's net result may indicate that her sense of being a black woman intrudes on her sense of self as she appears to "contradict" who she is.

Individual women constructed various explanations about their experiences of being a woman or being black. Some of these accounts are built around visual perceptions "I see", or as a consequence of affect (as reflected in Lola's account). The sense of being one or the other seems to be context-dependent and impacts how the self is viewed at any given time. However, other participants did not differentiate between being black and being a woman. For them, it was enough just having a sense of "being".

> *"... if you are in an environment where there are so many others you forget actually, I'm not black and it's not you are saying you are not black, it's almost like you're saying to yourself actually, here I am as a person in amongst all these different people." (Yemi, page 8, line 279 – 282)*

In contrast to the hierarchical dimensions expressed in other narratives, Yemi's extract suggests that the distinction between being a woman and being black is not always necessary. Yemi cites social reasons for not distinguishing between being black or being a woman

– "in an environment where there are so many others" – but these are superseded by more personal reasons "I am a person in amongst all these different people". Within this social context, Yemi's statement "I'm not black" may signify denial or it can be viewed as diverting attention away from what she is, so that she can have a sense of belonging.

Salgado and Hermans (2005) argue that the self is brought into "being" through communication processes set up in relation to one's self and others. This implies that the sense of being comes into play because of the relationship the self has with herself (Cooper 2004, 'I–I' mode of relating) and others. Instead of a hierarchy, participants negotiate between various salient senses of who they are.

The frameworks of meaning in the narratives presented are powerful because they justify participants' sense of being while at the same time ascribing who they are to various discourses. As demonstrated, these women move between assigned self definitions and self definitions through acts of choice, echoing Baumeister's (1987) classes of self definition. Baumeister's (1987) identified forms of self definition are: 1) self definition which is assigned to the individual, 2) self definition gained through achievements, and 3) self definition acquired through acts of choice. Assigned self definition refers to a stable and passive component of the self that cannot be changed, for example, a person's biological gender, or their family. Achieved self definition relies on the product of an individual's ability and capability. Defining the self through choice provides an alternative to the other two categories of self definition.

1.3 "sides of self"

Spinelli (1989) says that when exploring the self, it is best to focus on experiences rather than on components/characteristics of the self. This is because there is some difficulty with the consensus on which components or characteristics should be ranked as more significant. Despite Spinelli's (1989) suggestion, participants explain how they define themselves in terms of "components of me" or "sides of me". Hence, the sub-theme "sides of self" represents respondents' perspectives on the different constituents of who they are – these categories are emphasised by social influences. "Sides of self" is part of having a "sense of being", however, "sides of self" indicates distinct entities of self, and that differs from a "sense of being" which has clarity.

This section illuminates how these "sides of self" enhance the different ways meaning is formed and their contribution to self definition and individuality. The various methods of perceiving "sides of self" involve the search to understand the mechanics of the self which contain a number of inconsistencies. Yet, the unique lived experiences of participants make it difficult for them to view the self as a unified whole because of context-/situation-driven discrepancies.

For Lola, there are different sides and roles. She uses these terms interchangeably to express various emotional states that range from "smiley" to "dark moods".

"... there's many different sides to me because you have Lola the fun, smiley, enthusiastic kind of person. Then you have Lola who occasionally sips into dark moods and can be very serious and sometimes kind of bitchy. And then you have Lola the professional who takes her job very seriously, who is very passionate about her role

as a Counselling Psychologies Psychologist sorry ..." (Lola, page 2, line 43 – 48)

Lola's account suggests a distinction between personal and professional characteristics. For her, personal characteristics reflect her experience of a "fun" side which is different from the "serious" and "bitchy" side. Lola expresses a range of components in "there's many different sides to me". It may be argued that the demonstration of varied elements of self can make it difficult to view the self as integrated. Lola's professional role is taken "seriously" and may demonstrate a sense of responsibility. It is interesting that she perceives the side of her that is related to her work as a "role". The extract suggests that Lola may perceive the weight of accountability to be more associated with her role as a Counselling Psychologist. One could argue that as a Counselling Psychologist, Lola may have the requisite knowledge of having a unified self but prefers to view herself as having "many different sides".

For other participants, a side of self constitutes an external factor that is not within their control (e.g. family). Family is described by respondents as a personal trait that forms part of the self. Although the family is outside the individual, the family is still thought of as a significant component of the self. On one level, this is understandable because the women have continued exposure to the external discourse (e.g. continued interaction with the family). However, the external discourse may threaten the possibility of a psychologically unified whole. That is to say, unlike traits that can be changed by the participant more readily, the family cannot be altered as promptly, if at all. This lack of control can foster division within the self.

There is a struggle for respondents to understand the self when attempting to balance both internal (within the control of self) and

external (outside of the self's control) discourses. The struggle is exacerbated when the "pull" on the self is skewed towards the external constructs. That is, when the scale of defining the self is weighted more in favour of the external discourse. In this next account, Sammi reflects on how the significance of family contributes to how she defines herself.

> *"umm, probably, I think probably one of the biggest factors is probably family without a doubt. They are probably one of the biggest factors to me being the way I am today."(Sammi, page 3, line 73 – 75)*

In isolation Sammi's extract can be viewed as a positive relationship between her and the external discourse (i.e. family). However, as Sammi goes on to explain, the experience of this "side of self" has not been beneficial to her interpretation of current lived experiences, since they are viewed through the lenses of the past.

> *"umm, hmm, I mean, growing up, { } right, growing up and like my childhood especially I tend to think I didn't have a very happy childhood because my parents were always like arguing". (Sammi, page 3, line 77 – 79)*

The assertion that her "parents were always like arguing" is a reflection of possible unpleasant memories developed from past lived experiences. She hesitates to say more about the impact on this side of her. It is therefore difficult to ascertain how this experience has contributed to her self definition even though she says that it has "without a doubt". Later in the interview, Sammi talked briefly about her difficult relationship with her father.

Likewise, the example below describes the significance of an external discourse which is viewed as a side of self, and suggests a strong hold for how Ivy "defines" herself.

> *"... umm for me, Christianity is a life not a religion and umm it is probably more important than umm family because it defines who I am". (Ivy, page 2, line 29 – 31)*

Ivy is specific in recounting how "Christianity" "defines" her. She is sure about its impact on who she is when she says "it defines who I am". "Christianity" as a "life" is the personification of who Ivy is, and for her, this "side of self" represents the most "important" part.

Other women acknowledge the "side of self" that stems from a whole. Marisa reflects on how her "sides" are part of a complete package. Because of her perception, the idea that she could examine individual sides of self is difficult because she does not want to.

> *"I don't know, I dunno if I can separate them, 'cause they all combine to be me in my whole kind of thing, umm, I don't think I'd want to separate them because they all contribute to who I am ..." (Marisa, page 9, line 315 – 317)*

Marisa's account indicates multiple sides of self. However, looking at the "sides of self" as a "whole" seems to make sense in Marisa's experience. Sides of her that denote being a daughter or a teacher or a trainee are equally as important as the side of her that is a friend. And all bear relevance for how she views herself and subsequently how she defines herself.

The meaning-making of external discourses (such as: Family and Christianity) can be problematic for maintaining an integrated sense of self. This is because the self will look wholly to the external for validity and clarification (e.g. Ivy looks to Religion for validity – "*... it [religion] sets principles for me on how I should live...*" *Ivy, page 2: line 41*). Maintenance will then be reliant on those sides of self that are most significant to the life of the respondent. This can lead to or reinforce the psychological distance that develops when the self is fragmented (Pringle, 2001; Cushman, 1990). Suh (2007) affirms that a system that derives its worth and meaning excessively from its social context puts itself in a significantly disadvantageous position. This is because the self becomes context-sensitive in the service of belonging. Alternatively, the consequence of meaning-making around these discourses can give rise to feelings of worth, and this preserves the self. The research project contends that the difficulty with the latter relates to the withdrawal of the external discourse. This is because withdrawal can lead to the experiencing of negative feelings such as abandonment and/or hopelessness.

The accounts of "sides of self" suggest that the self may be defined differently at various stages. This indicates the re-experiencing of the self at different times. The re-experiencing of the self at various landmarks is explored in the next section, and highlights the women's sense that the self is not the same at every point in time.

1.4 "stages of self"

On a number of occasions, respondents stated that they had "changed" over the years. Although not a major concern, they had thoughts that they would be different in a number of years' time. They all hoped that "it would be for the better". The result of any change is

that the self becomes redefined in line with current experiencing. The present stage, therefore, becomes a facilitator of a new framework of meaning.

This section illustrates how participants' sense of self changes with various stages of their life world, and leads to the experiencing of self that differs to prior understandings of the self. Marisa describes how her role as a daughter changes with the "stages of self".

> *"... I feel I'm not so much a daughter now because I'm now getting a lot older, independent, I'm always going to be a daughter but that's not so prominent now. I'm trying to be more independent and define my own kind of identity, umm, but I think there's just a combination of all those things but it varies at different points." (Marisa, page 9, line 319 – 323)*

"Define my own kind of identity" seems to summarise the "stage" that Marisa is in. She wants to be more "independent" and therefore this "stage of self" signifies a different period in which to redefine herself. Her account suggests a previous experiencing of the self that was perhaps dependent on her parents' identity or more likely, the identity of herself as a "daughter". She emphasises this difference when she says "it varies at different points". Thus for Marisa, this current stage of self means moving away from being reliant to being more "independent" and discovering her own "identity".

In contrast, Sammi's story is not situational. Her account seems to indicate that she is able to "consciously" move between the "stages of self" depending on what is going on for her at any given time.

"... I kind of understand who I am and I'm also conscious of the fact that I can consciously change who I am at any time and but I do kind of know how I got to this stage. I tend to think a lot, reflect a lot on days gone by or even years. And I think oh, I can't believe I used to be like that or ok I still am like that ..." (Sammi, page 5, line 132 – 136)

Sammi's stages of self seem to be motivated by a cognitive process. That is to say, her thoughts guide the path to self definition. Her journey to the present "stage of self" is achieved through constant "thinking" and "reflecting". Saying that she can "consciously change" who she is suggests, perhaps, an awareness of herself, and this is demonstrated when she says "I kind of know how I got to this stage".

Both the accounts by Marisa and Sammi suggest that the "stages of self" come about through their knowledge of self. Owning the control for each "stage of self" illustrated in "I'm trying" and "I can" contributes to how they define themselves. Whilst Sammi is able to "consciously" choose her "stages of self", Ivy's description suggests that "stages of self" are distinct. She reflects on how she was before she discovered her Christian life.

" umm well a lot of impatience, umm and also sarcasm and a bit of anger as well actually, I don't know what it was I was angry about, teenage angst, I was angry (laugh) when you think about it, it's so pointless but umm, yeah, a lot of it was being impatient and being short tempered and and responding to, responding to arguments or discussions with a lot of sarcasm and not thinking about what I am saying, not constructing my thoughts, that was what was there before" (Ivy, page 6, line 173 – 178)

Ivy tells of a "stage of self" where she responded with anger to "arguments and discussions". Her experience of "anger", "sarcasm" and "impatience" is analogous with her interaction with others, and

leads to the desire to be in control of her behaviour. Saying "that was what was there before" highlights the distinction she makes between what she was and what she is now. This framework of meaning allows Ivy to view herself as possibly evolving. Her term "transition" is used to reinforce her stages of self.

> *"it, it's, the transition isn't complete. As I've said we are all works in progress umm, it's not complete. I, I still feel my temper rising sometimes, people irritate me (laughing) as long as I can check myself, when I am responding to things and just (participant takes a deep breath here to demonstrate checking herself) { } I see some sarcastic really insulting line sitting on the tip of my tongue waiting to come out. Umm, so transitions not complete it, it's { }, age has a lot to do with it, my environment, change of environment, in being in a Christian environment, being in a Christian environment where we are challenged to understand what we believe and study across ourselves has made a big difference" (Ivy, page 6, line 182 – 185)*

The excerpt from Ivy is telling in that it is consistent with her belief of how Christianity shapes her self definition and individuality. She is "challenged to understand" what she believes may suggest that, although she knows who she is, she is still discovering herself within the Christian environment. Thus by focusing on Christianity she is able to maintain a sense of who she is. As well as concentrating on this stage of her life, she justifies to herself that the "change of environment" has contributed to her ability to control her anger, thereby ignoring any psychological consequence from the search for an alternative self (i.e. a self that is not angry). It is also possible that Ivy's "transition" could be taken to mean conformity to a Christian life. Although this interpretation is not explicit in her narrative, there seems to be a struggle for her to behave according to what the "Christian

environment" has taught her. This is evident in her having to "check" herself when she gets "irritated" and feels her "temper rising".

Ivy makes further references to transition during the interview, and it seems important for her to progress from one stage to another. Ivy's story indicates that her journey as a Christian woman is a tribute to her ability to take learnings from one phase into another. Further, Ivy's account reinforces the relationship between themes, where one theme paves the way for another theme. In this instance, her awareness and cognitive reflection makes it possible to recognise her "transition" and stages of self.

From participants' stories, the process of understanding and explaining one's self definition appears to fall within two categories: distinct processes and progressive processes. Distinct processes in the sense that interviewees describe separate stages of self (e.g. Ivy's account). In contrast, the process of progressive self definition signals continuous growth. Both processes require a level of self awareness and willingness to reflect on past and present experiences. The impact of either of the processes may facilitate or hinder the perception of self as a unified whole.

It is necessary to acknowledge individual learnings within the stages of self. Although not explicitly described by participants within this theme; cultural, historical and religious knowledge evolve throughout a lifespan (Maynard, 2002). As the women of the research project transit through their stages of self, developmental tasks and the modes of cultural (or historical or religious) learning evolve in response to selection pressures from the environment (Greenfield, 2000). That is to say, awareness and understanding of self definition develop in parallel to the stages of self.

1.5 "describing the self"

Preceding sub themes explored how the self is defined by research respondents. "Describing the self" examines how participants choose to relate their experiences and insights. How participants decide to describe themselves may differ from how they feel about themselves. If their feelings correspond to their preferred description then the meaning-making process is transparent.

Certainty about the self emerges from interviewees' verbal descriptions. As suggested by Baumeister (1987), choosing to describe the self in a particular way in accordance with one's preference illustrates an acquired self definition. Limitations of language (i.e. an inability to describe the self) can be seen as an attack on a woman's sense of self and individuality as she desires to construct it.

In the example that follows, Thandie views and describes herself as someone who is able to exist as numerous entities.

> *"umm there is probably not one word to describe who I am because I see myself as a { } a multifaceted kind of umm person with many roles and many areas of responsibilities, many umm skills ..." (Thandie, page 1, line 11 – 14)*

Thandie's account suggests an examination of a relatively current self view. In addition, her explanation indicates that her experiences come as a direct influence of an internal self view. Saying "I see" disperses other definitions that may be assigned to her but incorporates having "many roles and areas of responsibility". Furthermore, "I see" suggests a visual perception of the self in much the same way as experienced by Fran (extract by Fran on page 104 of this analysis section). Having "skills" demonstrates her capacity to

adapt to any circumstance and leads to the description that she is "multifaceted".

In contrast to Thandie's "multifaceted" selfhood, Marisa, with careful consideration, expresses herself based on her ethnic origin and a drive to achieve.

> *" ... I consider myself like an African British person, umm, who is trying to train to be a Counselling Psychologist, umm, that's it really ..."*
> *(Marisa, page 5, line 167 – 168)*

Marisa reflected earlier in the interview how various issues such as her background, age and political views contribute to how she defines herself. In this extract she describes a different self. Thus, there appears to be a disparity between her self view and how she describes who she is. This highlights the significance of words – it is important here to distinguish between meaning and illustration. From the overall picture painted by Marisa during the interview, she expressed the importance of various discourses in contributing to who she is. The meanings from individual discourses are consistent with each other and they infuse her reality. At the same time, current experiences cause her to express the meaning differently. That is to say, the impact of background, age, political views, ethnicity all equate to who she is (meaning is the same). However, the experience of being a Counselling Psychologist in training is at the forefront of Marisa's consciousness and motivates her need to achieve a goal. This is what she chooses to represent herself as (illustration) in this extract.

Other women describe themselves solely by the meanings they construct from prior experiences of who they are. For example, it is important for Ivy that she is known as a Christian woman, and as

previously quoted, she defines herself as one. For her, to be a Christian woman means:

> *"Somebody who understands their value, umm, somebody who understands the value of others and works with that" (Ivy, page 1, line 10 – 11)*

This account illustrates Ivy's constructed meaning – which is, she must "understand the value of others and work with it". In addition, the excerpt suggests that Ivy may have successfully situated her sense of self with Christianity and therefore all outcomes of life are viewed from that positioning. It is interesting to note Ivy's meaning in the context of her current experience. This is evident in her dialogue when she went on to say:

> *"Oh yes, I am part of a bigger picture, I have relevance, I should hope that some stages in my life will be indispensable" (Ivy, page 1, line 15 – 16)*

Perceived characteristics and/or personality traits are also used as self descriptors. Fran says:

> *"... I think I am, you know, a person who is personally quite laid back but I don't know that's true (laughs) umm, a person who is, who enjoys being with their friends and family umm, who is quite determined and who likes to just get things done umm, I don't like doing things twice. So I am kind of one of those people that are just, does things and does them well, not a perfectionist but almost ..." (Fran, page 2, line 53 – 58)*

Fran's reflection suggests incongruence between the characteristics she has ascribed to herself. This is demonstrated when she describes herself as a "person who is quite laid back" and

immediately says "I don't know that's true". In addition, she seems to reject the person she describes herself to be "a perfectionist". In voicing her likes and dislikes, she is able to describe who she is to the researcher. "So I am kind of one of those people" may be viewed as Fran not wanting to be completely different from others.

1.6 Discussion

> "Here I am. And just before I begin writing these first lines – there you are. I am addressing you, the reader of this text, in this present moment of yours – a moment that will probably remain imaginary to me. Unknowingly you are already answering and questioning me. Not from your present moment, but from my anticipation of you. Every word and every pause, every utterance, and every hesitation, all have your accent – and your absent, yet overwhelming, presence."
> Salgado, J. (2007)

As suggested in this extract, whether willingly or otherwise, we engage in a process of examining everything around us – including who we are and how we ultimately define ourselves. Participants' lives are complex and interwoven, and hence it is difficult for them to discern various elements of their lives. Sociologists will have us believe in the idea that social norms or models account, in the most part, for how we define ourselves. Whilst the research project acknowledges social inputs on self definition, it also argues that social models are not sufficient in explaining the meaning-making processes involved in individuals' lived experiences. Similarly, the way individuals think is not the foundation on which the self is built.

As is evident in the themes, the meaning-making processes of individual black professional women entail logical evaluation, imagination, "gut feeling", intention, and desired outcome. However,

various discourses impinge on the personal meaning-making process. That is to say, there is a struggle between valuing the discourses in their entirety and valuing the self. Indeed, in some instances (e.g. Ivy's experience of religion), these discourses enhance the meaning-making process.

The accounts presented by participants exemplify their descriptions of self definitions manifested through behaviour, prior knowledge and thoughts. They feel that who they are develops from a number of entities (e.g. self knowledge, experience and knowledge of the world, desire). The entities are transformed through a central expression – others. Recent literature (Schlegel, Hicks, Arndt and King, 2009) suggests that the true or actual self is so defined because of personal traits that are enacted around significant others. Psychology has always been concerned with the experience of the individual in relation to others (Chen, Boucher and Tapias, 2006; Sedikides and Brewer, 2001; Uleman, Rhee; Bardoliwalla, Semin and Toyama, 2000; Baldwin, 1992) and the impact of healthy and unhealthy relationships. From these perspectives, the other (or external) becomes the most relevant discourse in the life of the self. The women use this relationship as a platform to facilitate their own preparation for taking on a new definition. A different definition can signify the leaving behind of old experiences or knowledge about the self – however this involves a level of self awareness.

The women's descriptions appear to lack a balance between defining the self through assigned self definitions and acquired self definitions (Baumeister, 1987). Following Sandel's (1984) unencumbered self, and the perspective of psychological well being, the research project contends that, because the women appeared to focus more intently on the values of their assigned self definition, it is

difficult for them to recognise their individual values which contribute to who they are and how they define themselves. For example, Ivy argued for her assigned self definition as a "Christian woman" and that can overshadow the value of individual experiencing and knowing who she is.

Participants highlighted that:

1. Self definition is acquired through constant questioning. This demonstrates a sense of personal evolution through time and space and incorporates acquired related meanings.

2. Self definition relates to desired outcomes (e.g. what I want to be) and can provide self security.

3. Self definition involves what is visible to the other. That is to say, what others perceive of the individual and how that matches with the individual's perception of the self.

4. Self definition is context driven, therefore inconsistencies and assimilation of a unified self may be difficult.

Master theme 2: The self and others

"I am who I am because of the people around me" (Orange mobile advert, 2008). The theme, the self and others illuminate the sentiment echoed in the Orange mobile phone advert. Respondents' accounts of emotion-related experiences are explored. The narratives presented suggest a broad range of meanings constructed from the experiences with the other. In particular, the theme focuses on the effect these meanings have on participants' sense of self and how their responses to others have followed a typical sequence of events

within the context of their interpersonal relating. The described experiences of being in relation to others appear to fall into three main categories: "my community", "perceiving others" and the "impact of others".

2.1 "my community"

"My community" represents the overwhelming sense of connectedness that some participants describe feeling towards their community. Respondents report that having a community is fundamental to their existence. Community is not necessarily characterised by being with people who are similar. In the example that follows, Ivy describes the importance of belonging to different groups.

> *"To me the bigger picture is umm, protecting the village which I (inaudible) umm, the work community, I manage people and I have to develop them as individuals; and my family (Ivy, page 1, line 18 – 19)*

While this is an account of what constitutes community for Ivy, the narrative suggests an underlying symbolic representation of being part of something "bigger", hence, Ivy's introduction of "the bigger picture". In addition, her account indicates that being part of the "bigger picture" is important to her, and that she would do whatever it takes to "protect" it. This is evident when she says "protecting the village which I ..." The "I" stresses the responsibility she owns in fulfilling the task and is further demonstrated in her needing to "develop" others. It seems that Ivy feels duty bound to others and this may be the result of her current experiencing.

The experience of having a sense of "my community" is essential to Lucia. Its significance became more apparent as the interview with her progressed. She repeatedly made reference to "my community" and did so in various contexts. To situate her experience of having this strong connection, it is vital to share some of her reflections. In the example that follows, she talks about her community as a place of safety.

> *"... your safe place was in your family, your community, because nowhere else was safe." (Lucia, page 2, line 47 – 48)*

The notion that safety can only be found in the family or community is the outcome of Lucia's traumatic racist experience at a very young age.

> *"... I have memories of being at primary school you know I was the only black girl in my class and I remember being called you know nigger, wog, blackie, monkey, every single day ..." (Lucia, page 2, line 52 – 54)*

Thus, Lucia has clear grounds to fear the reactions of others. For her, the greatest of all uncertainties may be that she ends up believing the perception of others – "monkey". In disproving this belief, Lucia sought for her community to "mirror back" values in which she could make sense of herself.

> *"... having a sense of community whether it is a family or extended community, that you can draw on to help you make sense of what, you, what's coming up for you in relation to this, in relation to what you understand the world to be before, and that you can check that out with a number of (inaudible) and eventually arrive at what your conclusions are ..." (Lucia, page 6, line 212 – 217)*

Lucia's account reveals that in addition to the community serving as a place of safety, it represents a fountain of knowledge and a place to gain meaning. It is a resource that allows her to understand herself within context. Having a community means she is able to move between both her worlds – one safe, the other racist. However, she returns to the community to "check" herself. Far more than being protected, Lucia uses the values of her community to reach a "conclusion" about her sense of self. This is significant for how she self defines because, without it, her account implies that she is nothing. Hence, her self definition is mainly centred on her interaction with others within her community.

In contrast to Lucia's experience of a strong positive association between the self and "my community", Esi describes feeling sad because the "black community" do not support one another.

> *"My community on the other hand umm, oh dear! I, I, I don't really want to perpetuate this thing about we don't support each other. I really wouldn't want to carry on saying that but I think that within our community, we will benefit more by supporting each other ... The black community, the black business community, the black community umm, I am extremely sad by the fact that we continue to drive a wedge between ourselves ..." (Esi, page 12, line 436 – 442)*

On one level, Esi's account rejects her experience of separation from her community because she does not want to "perpetuate" the experience. The research project suggests that "oh dear" is indicative of a repeated narrative used when conversing with other black people. Her need to experience a sense of belonging is hindered by "the wedge" that exists between its members. It is difficult from this extract to determine whether Esi uses her report to distinguish

between a close knit family-type community ("my community") and a work-based community ("black business community").

The experience of having a sense of "my community" also acts as a basis for self development. Thandie wants to grow and self educate in order to "contribute" to her community. She describes a desire to do so if time permits.

> *"... I might want to { } certainly do more reading and and kind of feed my understanding and knowledge you know, of the world and the things that affect you know, me. And people from my own kind of you know, background and heritage and that's what my my kind of passion is really. Always to make a small difference you know, I've realized I won't change the world (laughs) which is something I thought I could do when I was { } when I came into social work but umm, you know, just to be able to know that I can be doing something to contribute to my community is is really what I can visualize really." (Thandie, page 6, line 199 – 205)*

Thandie perceives that in advancing herself, she will be able to readily identify the things that "affect" her. She wants to "read" more so that she can have a greater understanding of her "own kind". Her story suggests that the knowledge of inter- and intra- personal processes will help foster the connections she has with her community.

Humans develop an innate mechanism to expect reciprocity in interpersonal relationships. A lack of reciprocity leads to a negative affect (Buunk and Schaufeli, 1999). Reciprocity is not limited to intimate relationships but also occurs in professional and informal helping interactions. In psychological models, the capacity to consider others as central to self definition is relevant not just for women but also for men and children (Lyons, 1994).

Tesser and Campbell (1980) suggest that the relative performance of another and the closeness of that other operates in concert to affect the way a person defines herself. That is to say, when another person's performance is relevant to one's individuality, then the individual engages in a comparison process. For example, during the interview with Sammi, she compares her achievements to that of her siblings. In so doing, she defines her achievements relative to theirs. The meanings she draws from this process impacts on the way she defines herself.

Participants' reflections of various experiences, although different, focused on the self in relation to others. *For me, the image of a circle is invoked when I think of the women's accounts. The centre point of the circle represents the respondents whilst the circumference formed corresponds to those around them. As the participants move from the centre to various points on the circle, they use it to reflect on their own sense of self and relations with significant others. This invariably impacts their self definition and individuality.*

In summary, the sense of self is conceived of in terms of, and in relation to, the sense of others. That is, a reciprocal transaction between the self and others (the self and the community). Mead (1934) contends that the symbiotic nature of self definition is fundamental to being human. That is, and as applicable to the theme (the self and others), the self is dependent on others for its existence and therefore reliant on the connection to help define her. This is echoed in Heidegger's concept of Dasein. Heidegger believes (1962/1927) that the Dasein is thrown into a pre-existing world of people and objects, language and culture, and cannot be meaningfully detached from it. Smith (1999) affirms that there is a close connection between the way the self is formed and its relationship to others.

2.2 "perceiving others"

The sub theme "perceiving others" demonstrates how participants make sense of themselves whilst making sense of others. The process occurs in both personal and professional lives. "Perceiving others" is a general tool used in everyday life but is particularly relevant for the experiences of this group of women because of the meaning it holds when they consider themselves alongside others. The sub theme highlights the way participants' need to justify their perception of others impacts on their self definition. The individual meanings constructed when the self is re-experienced and distinguished from others forms the basis for other relationships.

Smith's (1999) study, 'Towards a relational self', proposes that mutual psychological exchange with others helps the process of identity development. Smith (1999) thus suggests that the loosening of the self/other distinction or the heightened awareness of interpersonal connection enables an opportunity for shifting perspectives on meaning. That is, the recognition of the self as different from others allows the dynamics within a relationship to be redefined. The research project explores this idea from a different perspective in that psychological engagement is seen as a process that follows on from perceiving others.

Yemi's extract describes her perception of her sister Biola whom she says is a "well rounded" person. Early in the interview, Yemi reported going through a period of unexplained medical symptoms. When asked what it was like for her she says:

> *"Its absolutely, it's actually quite devastating because I have always especially when I look at someone, like my sister who obviously, Biola, obviously we've all got our problems, Biola's very well rounded, you know. She knows what she wants from life and she knows what she is*

doing. Like sometimes, she gets frustrated then that is fine because we all get frustrated at times, but she is very strong and you know most of the women in my family are really strong as well and you just think to yourself look at them (laughs). But they are ok. You know, they are all doing fine. Obviously they have no idea how I truly feel inside ...' (Yemi, page 3, line 81 – 89)

From what Yemi was saying, it would seem that she was imagining how Biola would cope in her circumstances. She goes on to describe a common family value where "most" of the women are "strong". For Yemi, this value has potentially damaging consequences because nobody knows what she "truly" feels. It may be that she views the women in her family as stronger than her. This could lead to a re-evaluated sense of self in comparison to the women in her family. Her perception that "they are ok" appears to undermine her ability to cope.

"... am just angry because you know ... it is quite hard, I do find it hard but I guess I am doing a lot better (Yemi, page 4, line 104 – 106).

It is difficult for Yemi to trust in her understanding of the symptoms she is experiencing. Thus psychologically, this impacts her self esteem and makes it hard for her to separate herself from the other. For Yemi, there is a struggle to maintain the union with others whilst preserving herself. In light of the two accounts by Yemi, through "perceiving others" she seems to have set herself a standard of strength against which she measures herself.

The impact of perceiving others is intricate and involves individual variations of self views. Yemi's difficulty may be based on her commitment to the family's common value as indicated by her narrative. Thus, the aim to commit (or entrust) to the other is about

locating one's self within the other's value. Yemi gives an account where she examines herself against others through recognizing their value. That is to say, she accepts their worth. Fran describes how she perceives a younger woman who has a "less sense of self". Her conclusion is reached as a product of her comparison process.

> *" ... I wasn't one of those girls that had a boyfriend, you know, this is my first proper serious relationship. I think you know going through 24 years whatever or 23 years whatever, it is just you know, where actually I was the most important person in my life has been a really good grounding for me ... " (Fran, page 9, line 358 – 362)*

> *"Like when you see that the 19-year-old girl who's already got four kids umm who's never been single and you know her baby father's out sleeping with other women and she knows it but doesn't want to leave him, you just think, what you are doing? ... It does make you think because obviously you know people like her maybe have a less sense of self because actually they can't figure out in their heads what's { } not that it's wrong or right but they just can't digest the situations as well perhaps." (Fran, page 9 – 10, line 366 – 372)*

Fran talks about her "first proper relationship" and discusses how she was the "most important person" in her life for 23 or 24 years. She compares her experience to a "19 year old" with "four kids who has never been single". It could be argued that Fran may find it difficult to imagine herself in this scenario and hence suggests that "people like" the 19 year old girl "cannot figure out in their heads". For Fran, she has had "grounding" because she has been single. Thus for me, this narrative portrays a situation where Fran is in control, and constructs a self which is experienced as sufficient, confident, independent and strong. For Fran, these qualities are not associated with a single woman with a "less sense of self".

The outcome of perceiving others is different for both Yemi and Fran. Whilst Yemi experiences a loss of an ideal self in that she did not feel she matched up to others, Fran reinforces her self definition as a woman with "good grounding". In the example that follows, Sammi demonstrates that her perception of others influences her behaviour.

"I'd say umm, I'm kind to people who deserve it." (Sammi, page 1, line 16)

Sammi's statement not only highlights a heightened arousal towards others who are unkind to her, but it also illustrates her reaction/behaviour towards them. Both her arousal and behaviour stem from her perception of "people who deserve it".

In these examples, there are a number of competing explanations. Fran draws on her experience as an independent and "grounded" woman who is self aware. Yemi's description suggests she may not be as "strong" as the other women in her family. And Sammi's reaction to others is dependent on how she perceives them. These frameworks help the women to make sense of themselves and create meaning from individual experiences.

Respondents' reports are centred on their position in contrast to significant others. Markus and Kitayama (1991) propose that the self assigns to the other a significant and functional role when defining the self, and this role depends on the degree of separateness or connectedness between the self and the other. Comparing the self to others serves as a process where the self recognises who she is. The re-experiencing of the self gives rise to various feelings and is understood by participants as others impacting them. Impact of others is explored in the sub theme "impact of others".

2.3 "impact of others"

The theme "impact of others" focuses on how respondents of the research project experience the effect of others. Generally, participants recalled negative experiences. They differentiate impact from influence (experience of influences is covered in a separate theme) where impact is expressed as a lack of choice (i.e. respondents are unable to control for the impact of others), and influence is linked with choice where participants describe being able to choose what influences them. The ability to choose what affects the self is echoed in Baumeister's (1987) acquired self definition where the self defines through acts of choice. The "impact of others" is subdivided into two main areas: experience of racism and the experience of loss and separation.

2.3.1 experience of racism

The research project is not concerned with exploring the experiences of racism. No references were made by the researcher to implicate the investigation of a racist phenomenon. Nonetheless, a number of participants shared experiences around this issue, and discussed how it affects their sense of self. The experience of racism as expressed by respondents appears to be a direct outcome of the "impact of others". In the example that follows, Lucia describes her experience of racism and how it impacts negatively on her sense of self. She gave the impression that as a child, she used to be bubbly and outgoing, but, with the experience of racism she has "a very strong memory of becoming introverted".

> *"…. I think when you grow up in a, in a, in a space that is so hostile (inaudible) umm you know in general terms as a human being and that that is kind of like also inherited in terms of your your you know, your spiritual, your cultural heritage umm you have to find you have to*

you will go mad if you don't find (laugh) you know kind of like that grounding somewhere and so certainly the time I was born in this country you know umm, the hostility umm, was very umm, umm, it was very blatant, it was very normal, it was very in your face it was constant it was every day."(Lucia, page 2, line 38 – 45)

"... I remember becoming I have a very strong memory of becoming very introverted ..." (Lucia, page 2, 55 – 56)

In this extract, Lucia makes an explicit connection between the experience of a "hostile" space "in general terms" and "spiritual and cultural heritage". The narrative reveals a belief that hostility can be "inherited". "Inherited" hostility can also indicate that Lucia uses the historic cultural value of racism to explain her own experience of racism. That is to say, she may be adopting traditional meanings of racism – it is not just about her own experience but the experience of her "heritage". To break the cycle of "going mad", she calls on the values of spiritual and cultural heritage to give her "grounding" and help her manage the "hostility". Lucia describes the occurrence of racism as happening "everyday" and "constantly". The overwhelming sense that she could not get away affirms the idea that she had no choice but to bear it. This experience ensued because she "was the only black girl in" her class.

"umm, you know the kind of like umm, I, I mean I, I have memories of being at primary school you know I was the only black girl in my class and I remember being called you know nigger, wog, blackie, monkey, every single day and and I remember, I remember becoming, I have a very strong memory of becoming very introverted umm, you know because it was just not safe. And my mum had like younger chil[d] you know, like younger children so she didn't have the, she couldn't come to the ... you know she (inaudible), I have a memory of that. I certainly have a memory of that experience

in that kind of like real cruelty and that very interruption of it happened { } in which { } outside of you know, in the school space, umm" (Lucia, page 2, line 52 – 61)

The psychological battle between the effects of being racially abused, and the lack of support from her mother, emerges from Lucia's description. The account suggests that Lucia created a narrative which enables her to make sense of her experience. In addition, the story also reveals that she does not openly acknowledge having no support from her mother, but rather, associates the lack of support with the care of her younger siblings. "She didn't have" exemplifies Lucia's mother not having enough time to "come" to her aid. The psychological impact of others is imprinted in her "memory" however, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which this memory has impacted on her self definition.

Lucia's "memory", "real cruelty" and the "very interruption" of her life at that time occurred "in the school space". This may have contributed to the construction of her account where she links the education system with the occurrence of racist behaviours. She later discusses unfortunate events such as the institutional racism found within the police force following Stephen Lawrence's murder. Occurrences such as these do nothing to dispel her negative associations.

In contrast to Lucia's experience of racism, where the event occurred in the context of her schooling, and with people she was visibly different from, Yemi experienced racism within the context of a friendship. Yemi reports that her skin colour had never been an issue since she had spent a lot of time with people from different cultures and places of origin.

"... and this girl was like, umm, she grabbed my hand and she is like oh my gosh you're black, dirty and I was like could you excuse me (laughs). I was so taken aback. I could not believe it. One person had been racist to me and she was the second person I was like I could not believe this girl ..." (Yemi, page 9, line 297 – 300)

The actions of Yemi's friend leads to her heightened awareness of being different because of her skin colour. From Yemi's description, her reaction is complex – disbelief entwined with shock. She reflects on the event saying:

> *"... it did make me think oh my God, I am actually black and I'm not and I should always think to myself, you are black, you are black, because otherwise you end up in a situation where people are rude to you because of your colour and you are taken aback ..."(Yemi, page 9, line 307 – 310)*

The experience reminds Yemi that she is black and that others may perceive her blackness as "dirty". For Yemi, it is a renewed awareness in the midst of her embracing difference. Later, she says "I'm Yemi first then I'm a black person" – she portrays a situation where her skin colour is prioritised because of the other. In effect, the "impact of others" suggests that Yemi perceives being black as an externalised version of herself, so it does not have first ranking. It also highlights for Yemi the disparity between how she perceives herself as Yemi "first" and how others perceive her as "black" first. The process where Yemi separates who she is from the colour of her skin, may lead to different versions of self, as opposed to an integrated self – an integrated self meaning a self that embraces all parts of self.

Similar to Lucia, Gbemi describes an experience of racism embedded in the education system.

"... I just feel like you know, in the school especially, that's where the problem starts. If you've got racism by the teachers or someone who has got stereotypes, they always treat people differently and I remember when I started umm ... and in school I was labelled as someone who wouldn't do anything and that was because I was in a group of girls and they did muck about when I was doing my work but I was labelled as someone who would like muck around even though I wasn't. And it's just kind of sad to believe that you know, I am not going to do anything, maybe I'm not good at this and I am not good at that but it's wrong ..." (Gbemi, page 5, line 137 – 147)

Gbemi's interpretation of being labelled is linked to her experience of racism and "teachers or someone who has stereotypes". For me, institutional racism appears to strike a particular note with Gbemi perhaps because she works within the legal system. Notice how she accepts that her friends "*muck*" around during school but rejects being categorized. The potential of failure emerges from being "labelled" and Gbemi says "it's wrong". Dealing with racism is demonstrated a number of times during the interview as Gbemi reports feeling a sense of "injustice", and she "strives" hard to overcome it. It may be argued that Gbemi's sense of injustice could lead to a self definition that is based on the colour of her skin and the unfairness she perceives from others.

The women's desire to make sense of their experiences is evident in each of their approaches in accounting for the impact of others. The type of explanation provided by each individual reflects the outcomes of their meaning-making process. That is to say, their experiences of racism portray a situation where "it is them against us". For example, Gbemi who is entrenched in the legal system looks to a dynamic political explanation to deal with her experience. Lucia who previously emphasised the need for safety within her community,

sought to clarify her experience in terms of inherited hostility for black people.

2.3.2 experience of separation and loss

The aim of this section is to present the experiences of respondents who have lost the relationship of a significant other. Some of the recalled experiences occurred when participants were children. They do not apportion blame for the "impact of others", however, from their reflections, it has been difficult for them to forget the experience and thus the experience plays an important part in subsequent self definition.

Esi reflects on her journey to Britain, she describes being separated from her mother and the "misery" of having to leave her aunt behind.

> *"... my parents left us in in my aunt's charge so she { } my aunt actually looked after us for many years before my parents had enough money to bring, to send for us in my formative years – I was very very close to my aunt because I came over here when I was 9 and all my early recollection of Jamaica is with my aunt so when I came over here I was thoroughly miserable for many many years because it was as though I had been ripped away from my mother ..." (Esi, page 5, line 150 – 155)*

Esi introduces her parents, as well as her aunt, at the beginning of this narrative. She describes how her parents left her to her "aunt's charge". She then tells of the experience of losing her aunt as being "ripped away from her mother". It appears that the relationship she had with her aunt substituted for the relationship with her mother, thus suggesting that the early connection she felt towards her aunt far

surpassed that felt for her mother. It could be argued that Esi experienced separation and loss twice as a young girl (i.e. losing both the relationships with her mother and aunt).

In addition, her narrative implies she may have experienced the separation as unsettling for her sense of self, which would have made her question her sense of belonging in England. She found the loss of her aunt difficult and remained "miserable for many years". She subsequently reflected that she understood her mother's plight and that the experience has helped her understand the needs of those she meets that may be in similar situations.

The effect of having a transparent self leaves Yemi experiencing vulnerability. She describes this as the result of the "impact of others", and a separation from the ideas she holds true about her sense of self. Transparency for Yemi means the mirror image of internal representations reflected in her external versions of self. That is to say, Yemi's voiced feelings/thoughts/ideas are indicative of her internal state.

> *"... I got played into that when one of my ex-boyfriend quite literally he {} like I, when I met him I was I was weak at that time and you know you meet someone and you're not that strong anyway and the person sees that vulnerability and they're like, hmm, I like this person because she is vulnerable and you know and he played on that and because he played on my vulnerability I became even more vulnerable without even realising ..." (Yemi, page 2 – 3, line 60 – 65)*

Yemi describes the ensuing despair of the perceived impact of her ex-boyfriend "playing" her. She was feeling "weak" and "vulnerable" when she met him and became "even more vulnerable" during the relationship. This exacerbates her emotional state. The

account indicates that Yemi's story of feeling vulnerable is similar to that of not being accepted. She suggests that she did not go into the relationship intending to show her weaknesses. However, she alludes that her boyfriend is a "person that sees other people's vulnerability and decides to play on that". Thus, for her, her boyfriend sought her out because of her "vulnerability" and then "played" her. This experience is interpreted as negative since the other did not appreciate the outward representation of her internal turmoil.

Thandie, on the other hand, illustrates how the "impact of others" through the experience of separation can be seen as positive because it enables the redefinition of the self.

> *"... about 10 years ago I, I was married and I think that when I divorced I think that time in my life shook up abject my life into another phase ... Umm ... also helped me to really look back on who I was and what happened in that experience to make me who I am now. " (Thandie, page 4, line 97 – 100)*

The experience of redefining herself outside of her marriage enables Thandie to explore who she "was" and who she is "now". The narrative positions her in a place where the impact of others on her sense of self is minimal. Rather than focusing on the event in itself, she concentrates on her experience, and how she can make things better for herself.

The critical factor to note is that the negativity which develops from participants' experiences is evident in the way that they respond to their particular situations. Whether experiences of the "impact of others" are negative or positive, respondents find themselves in a position where they have to examine who they are. Changes are not always necessary however; there is a reassessment of the self.

2.4 Discussion

This section attempts to conceptualise participants' experiences of perceiving others and draws on ideas embedded within psychological understanding of the relational self.

The materials provided illustrate respondents' descriptions of felt emotion in relation to the views they have of others. These perspectives influence the behaviour of the women, their self definition (in terms of where they place themselves in relation to the other), their self views and further relations with others.

Some psychological studies (Lykes, 1985) view intrapersonal and interpersonal factors of relating as separate entities. However, as demonstrated by Mead (1934), these processes are inter-dependent. For example, Yemi's self view of not coping in difficult circumstances, occurs in parallel with seeing herself in conjunction with her sister's abilities; Gbemi's confidence in the education system occurs alongside her experience of being labelled, and her involvement with the legal system; the redefinition of Thandie's sense of self occurs following her divorce. Hence, self definition is strengthened by relations with others. Mead (1934) contends that a person's sense of self is coiled with the person's sense of the other: thus, self definition is intrinsically social and relational. Similarly, Markus and Cross (1990) suggest that the relationship with others shapes the individual's core sense of self and is continually integrated into the self concept.

Guisinger and Blatt (1994) propose that individuality in non-western cultures is part of social evolution, where the self cannot be viewed as separate from its relationship with others, echoing Heidegger's definition of the Dasein. Taking this one step further, the research project postulates that irrespective of the society (western or

eastern) in which the individual resides, her sense of self and definition is underpinned by her relationship with significant others. That is to say, self definition is not static. It modifies and transforms as the women evolve in their personal and professional lives. For example, Yemi's self definition as a black woman changes following her experience of racism. The change is dictated by her current environmental engagements; in which cognition plays an important role. As Smith et al (2009) suggest, cognition is an aspect of "being-in-the-world", and is accessed through a person's account, language, and ultimately, their meaning-making. The idea affirms the importance of meaning-making within the current experiencing space. That is, new meanings are assimilated as new experiences of relationships are formed. Whilst old interpretations of relationships are significant, and bear relevance for psychological well-being, new deductions are equally vital. Markus and Kitayama (1991) summarise this succinctly when they said: "the self is viewed not as a hedged closure but as an open field".

The research project suggests that the relationship with others provides the platform for the psychological understanding of the self and hence self definition. From very early on in life, caring is invoked voluntarily and extends to all interactions. Beattie (1980) argues that others are an extension of the self. So having a relationship with the other constitutes self essence. The black professional women of this study suggest the following about their sense of self and the relationship they have with others:

1. Community is important and denotes a group that the self can relate to. The meaning of community varies depending on the role it plays in an individual woman's life. It determines her position relative to others.

2. Her perception of others impacts her existing relationships, and associations are developed with current experiences.

3. Whilst the interaction between her and others is crucial to the process of self definition and individuality, it is sometimes difficult to separate them. Hence maintaining relationships takes precedence over maintaining the self.

4. Negative experiences with others are internalised and affect self definition.

5. Relationships with others form the footpath to self knowledge and awareness.

Some studies (Brewer, 1991; Markus and Cross, 1990; Markus and Kitayama, 1991) differentiate between the terminologies used for relational self. The research project uses the relational self under the umbrella of relationships encompassing all significant others. In addition, the terms used to denote relational selves such as 'social self', 'interdependent self', 'public self' etc. connote different selves. In contrast, the research project argues for a fundamental unified self, but acknowledges that the self can be different depending on context. Chen, Boucher and Tapias (2006) define the relational self as that which is experienced in relation to the significant others in one's life. Tice and Baumesiter (2001) remind researchers that the interpersonal dimension of the self is not different to the self but part of the essence of the self.

Master theme 3: Influences on the self

The core of this third Master theme is choice. The women's sense making of their influences and its impact on self view and self definition is explored. Perceptions of acquired legacies and learnings constitute respondents' accounts of their influences. They describe memories of their upbringing and values. Participants' perceptions give rise to intense emotions and illustrate what the women are about. Influences on the self are captured under: culture, history, religion and/or faith.

3.1 culture

Culture is a sub theme that marks a significant influence in the lives of the participants. Culture is taken to mean a shared system of learning used by members of a group to understand and interpret experiences as well as manage behaviours (Wijsen, 1999). Cultural practices and interpretations are cumulative in nature because they occur between and within generations. Meanings and activities accumulate and transform over developmental and historical times (Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni and Maynard, 2003). Owusu-Bempah (2002) points out that culture is different across society, and that each culture cultivates its own unique psychology. Similarly, the excerpt below shows that there is a shared system of understanding. However, the sub theme culture also highlights the impact on each individual respondent.

In the first instant, Lucia tells of what her culture is and what it teaches her as a person.

"umm, I umm, draw very heavily on my cultural upbringing and my understanding of my cultural background. Umm, in its original, originally which is African and Indian. So I, I try to experience myself

within that umm within that space of experience and understanding. From my experience and my upbringing, culturally in Britain tells me that for instance as a daughter you know, you had, you would actually, your mother for instance because I did not grow up with my father, in a particular way you will relate to elders in a particular way so { } you know, I do not have equal status with them not in terms of their kind of their wisdom and understanding ..." (Lucia, page 1, line 9 – 17)

Lucia's understanding of her culture guides the way she relates to her "elders". The narrative indicates that she believes she does "not have equal status" with her elders and hence she "relates" to them "in a particular way". She distinguishes between her "understanding" of growing up in Britain and those of her "cultural upbringing". Lucia endeavours to balance the learnings of her culture with that of her current lived experience. For Lucia, her preference is to experience herself within her cultural understanding because it marries with how she situates herself in the world. For me and within my experience, Lucia's account suggests that to ignore the cultural values would be to dishonour the "elders". Further, her account emphasises the importance of respect within the African/Indian culture. Attention is drawn here to the choice of accepting one influence over another, and highlights the way Lucia decides to define herself.

Lola conveys her constructed meaning of culture through the values it instils in her.

"... when you asked how my culture played a part in who I am umm, it instilled in me values of strength and respect, umm, ambition, umm, well definitely. Because those are all the things that I was taught from when I was a little girl, that you know, you go out there and find a path for yourself but remember that you have all these values instilled

in and that you are a strong black individual ..." (Lola, page 8, line 301 – 305)

Lola describes growing up with cultural values of "strength and respect". This is significant for how she views and defines herself because strength and respect retain a place in her life. The values are a constant reminder of what she needs to be. For Lola, the experience of growing up with these values and it being "instilled" in her suggest that cultural values take precedence over any other values. Thus, for her, culture is a source of self worth. "You are a strong black individual" indicates Lola's grounding, and serves as the standard that guides her through life.

In contrast, Fran recollects that culture did not feature highly during her formative years. She reports that she has discovered what culture means for her and is fascinated with her experiences. She describes what she perceives her life would be if her culture had been part of her life from a younger age.

"I think, I think I'd probably be really different. I think I'd be less regimental. Umm, I'd probably not follow rules so much because in many ways, in Ghana you know, you may have to hustle ..." (Fran, page 13, line 493 – 495)

For Fran, "I'd probably be really different" illustrates perhaps a desire to identify with her culture, specifically with its values – possibly giving her a sense of belonging and connectedness. She perceives that culture will give her a "different" life in terms of her experiences of it in a "less regimental" way. "Not follow rules so much" may reflect her need to be less structured and this is in contrast to her earlier descriptions of "rule playing". However, the realisation here may be that the service of following rules and being very structured separates

her from her culture – this is demonstrated in her view that Ghanaians "hustle". Further, her account indicates that she may be open and enthused by the possibility of living life differently.

Participants' extracts emphasise the influence of culture as a guide for the way they live. On one level, they attribute failure/success to an external influence (i.e. culture) rather than to the self. It appears that cultural values are adapted to suit individual experiences, and accordingly become embedded in how respondents see and define themselves. Culture is therefore a frame of reference – something to go back to when current day experiences fail. Culture symbolises a life-line to what worked before and the invaluable knowledge that has been passed down.

3.2 history

In addition to cultural influences, history as presented by the respondents, is also a fundamental basis of self definition and individuality. Participants of the research project have their own respective historic legacies. It is from these legacies that the selves of the women are defined.

History as we know it is often the occurrence of a momentous event. For example, on 5th November 2008, the first black American president was named – here history is made. This is symbolic for a number of black people in terms of the opportunities they foresee for themselves, whilst for others it signifies freedom and a break in negative representation of the black community. This is partly because in the history of black people, most are familiar with slavery and the oppression of black people. On 5th November 2008 the

historic legacy shifted from no opportunity to be a leader to "yes we can".

History occurs in various forms. The history of slavery is common to all respondents, irrespective of age. In this extract, Lucia describes how the history of slavery is a part of her because of her heritage.

> *"... I will go so far to argue that as African heritage people you know, born and (inaudible) have come through the experience of slavery, that is also part of our cultural memory and you know it's part of ourselves, it's part of our D umm, DNA." (Lucia, page 12, line 472 – 474)*

Lucia's statement represents a powerful frame of reference. For her, the connectedness to slavery is seen as "part of our DNA". Her account implies that it is impossible to separate the experience of slavery from the self because it is in the "DNA". This view contrasts with her earlier expressed view that black people "have come through the experience of slavery". It seems that this narrative enables Lucia to justify and make sense of the continued experiencing of racism which is, perhaps, viewed as developing from slavery.

Like cultural experiences, constructed meanings of historic experiences remain with participants. Meanings from historic experiences feature as part of a personal psychological trait to explain current experiences. It also determines where respondents situate themselves within the context of world history. This is echoed by Marisa when she describes how history has biased her.

> *"I think the pivotal point for me was learning much more about my history and where I came from. I think that was the major explosion ..." (Marisa, page 16, line 594 – 595)*

Learning about history triggered a "major explosion" which became for Marisa a "pivotal point". Reminiscent of teachings from culture, she goes on to explain historical learnings that portray the existence of hierarchies and division within society.

> *"... and then learning about slavery and what happened there and how that played out to the basic things in terms of how people worked, sort of set upon against each other, how hierarchies were created how people umm, and why people reacted that way in that condition, you know, why thing[s] were sort of { } why they kind of turned on themselves in a way because you internalise the hate that you saw in { } you went { } considered and everything about you was considered grotesque and horrible and even after slavery you know, the whole sort of minstrels and the caricatures and everything and that made me so angry and it made me angry in a way of, well no, I'm not going to be that. ..." (Marisa, page 17, line 646 – 648)*

Marisa presents the idea that her attempts at meaning-making give rise to feelings of anger and become a strong indication of how "I'm not going to be". Possibly, it underlines the experience of a divided self in that on one level, she wants to be part of history. On the other hand, for her, the consequence of history is something she does not want for herself. The account also reflects frustration at how slavery led to division and how people "set upon against each other". Her meaning-making appears to equate the experience of slavery with present day representation of black people as "caricatures" and describes how it is possible to "internalise the hate" and that makes her "so angry".

Despite the differences in Lucia and Marisa's accounts, their respective extracts confirm the influence of history on self definition

and individuality. Both use the status of historic events as a template for understanding their own sense of self.

In contrast to the history of slavery, Yemi and Thandie both tell of a different kind of history – personal histories. For them, personal histories are equally relevant for self definition. Yemi for example reflects on the history of her name.

> *"... I guess also umm, history in the sense that especially with me is because my name is because I'm named after one of my grandmas because she took care of my grandma and how cool is that that's another part ... even little things like our surname is really important because my grandpa took his now I think his surname was Silva and then he added the Vaughan onto it so then we ended up with a double barrel surname which also means that actually we were the only people in Ghana with that surname. Things like that, it is how like that it's good to know about your own history even though the fact that Silva-Vaughan is a unique surname, it doesn't help who I am because it is kind of like it is a surname (laughs) you know but it is weird in that, it is the way people see you, I guess. Anyway it helps the way people see you ..." (Yemi, page 14, line 485 – 496)*

Yemi's account weaves the connection between her name and history. It is a powerful means for illustrating both cultural and historic legacies. The narrative suggests that Yemi's reaction to this experience is not of disdain but rather appreciation for the name her grandfather passed on. However, she seems to think that "it doesn't help who I am". Rather, Yemi perceives that history influences how other "people see you".

Similarly, Thandie explains her personal history in terms of her own transition and how that is vital for her.

"... recognizing that you know, what I understand more about my history and you know, the whole kind of transition of coming, migration, coming from the Caribbean and and you know surviving within the society, understanding racism, all the journey of what happened in that time of that experience for black people you know, in the 60s and what that meant, what it meant for me as a child and what it means for me as a woman and how I can help my daughter understand the sense of what is relevant for her you know as a young black woman you know two generations on, well she's third second generation". (Thandie, page 8 – 9, line 284 – 287)

Thandie states that "my history", and how she makes sense of it, is pertinent to the way that she sees and defines herself within her current experiencing. Thandie paints a bigger picture in which other essentials such as survival, knowledge, and meanings at various phases of life play a significant role. The account further indicates how important it is for her to be able to transfer knowledge to her daughter, thereby helping her daughter to make sense of herself. In the account below, Thandie elaborates on what history means for her.

"The history is umm, sometimes quite distressing but other times quite exhilarating you know, umm, liberating in the sense that we have come so far. Sometimes I feel we have come far sometimes we have not come anywhere at all but in the context of the whole experience it's been a learning kind of you know, process of seeing changes, that experience in itself has been phenomenal change umm, but it is also in the context of time as well 'cause we you know, often I think about young people as young people now and what their experiences are and then you look at young black people and what their experiences are so you know it's not just a kind of clear cut sort of you know, it is to do with us as black people it's to do with how time has changed as well so you know the whole experience has has given us a template for learning." (Thandie, page 9, line 293 – 302)

Thandie's meaning-making process highlights a number of issues. She has mixed emotions about "coming so far". At the same time, she echoes other participants' views that history is about survival and the "phenomenal changes" it brings. Whilst she is able to acknowledge these changes, it appears that the passage of time has no bearing on the interpretations made by others about black people. Thandie's account proposes that the experiences of young black people today should not be judged against previous experiences of other young black people. Her narrative places her as empathic and protective. "It is to do with us as black people" signifies the individual responsibility she affords to black people about their actions and reactions.

History as demonstrated in these examples exists in more than one form. The various types of histories capture the impact on participants and the effect of defining themselves through these histories. In addition, history represents the back drop of future experiences. A rejection of history does not make it less relevant, because it remains a point of reference for participants.

3.3 religion and faith

The theme religion and faith symbolises the spiritual well being most participants report growing up with. Religion and faith serve as an additional tool for strengthening the self. The extent to which it affects each individual life may vary; nevertheless, religion and faith are a strong hold for the respondents of the research project. Thandie's example below illustrates the importance of the church in her life.

"... umm the church as well has been quite a significant part of my life. I have been [ ] brought up as a Christian within the umm the Christian faith so that's had quite a profound influence on my understanding of my value base ..." (Thandie, page 4, line 102 – 104)

The Church was part of Thandie's life growing up. Its phenomenological meaning forms the grounding for her "value base". That is to say, her sense of worth is drawn from the teachings of the Church. The "profound influence" is indicative of how equally important religion and faith are in influences on the self. For Thandie, religion and faith are "a significant part of" her life and one can imagine that they form part of her self definition. To a certain extent, Thandie knows no other way. She was brought up with faith and continues to "understand" her life world with it.

Similarly other participants also view religion and faith as significant to their self definition. For example, Ivy perceives religion and faith as the backbone of her existence.

"... there is a set of principles and a way of life umm that to me is the truth. There [ ] are other religions; there are other principles by which people live. To me this is the way, it is the truth and it is the life ..." (Ivy, page 2, line 38 – 40)

Taking into consideration the whole interview with Ivy and the selected quotes presented within the analysis, the extract suggests that Ivy's involvement in religion and faith may be deliberate in that she has chosen to have religion and faith in her life. Ivy's narrative suggests a phenomenological experience "set" by her religion and faith. She explains that religion and faith "set" the "principles" she lives by – this is demonstrated by her view that religion and faith are "the life" and "the truth". In this context, religion and faith take on the

symbolism of life and become the template on which Ivy defines herself.

Fran identifies with the significance of religion and faith, however, for her, her sense of self appears to be more in tune with faith. This highlights that religion and faith however connected, can be viewed as separate.

> *"... I think I have quite a strong faith like I'm not religious, I am religious actually that's a lie. I am religious, I don't practice { } I don't go to church regularly but I do believe in a higher being. I do believe in God. I think that that probably is my inner strength, just knowing that someone is there, do you see what I mean?" (Fran, page 6, line 228 – 231)*

It seems that having "faith" is the "inner strength" that Fran subscribes to. Faith emerges as more important than being "religious" and still exists even though she does not "practice". "Just knowing that someone is there" is symptomatic of her affirmation that "I do believe in God".

Lucia alludes to a certainty about having a higher being as her secure base.

> *"... I know that it's not just me, nothing that I do is just me, it can't be just me you know, it's all those that have gone before and its all of those that I am part of now and it's the spirit that guides me so you know, umm I'm not Christian when I say I believe that umm you know we are all parts of the same. God is called by a many million names so it's kind of, you know, umm that just opens up the whole world ..." (Lucia, page 17 – 18, line 723 – 729)*

"I know that it's not just me" affirms her belief that something watches over her even though she expresses this not as a "Christian". At the same time, she seems to question her belief when she says "it can't just be me". Emphasising that she is not on her own, she invokes "those that have gone before and those that I am part of now". The intensity of this declaration rests in its capability to negate alternative understanding of how she has come to be as well as the opportunity to name "God" in a different way. For Lucia, this opportunity "just opens up the whole world" enabling the creation of an understanding where the "spirits" "guide" her.

3.4 Discussion

The master theme influences on the self, emphasise the women's internalised social constructs. Culture, history, religion and faith are societal concepts that help guide morality and social existence. These social concepts provide the moral basis for the self to exist within her relationships. That is to say, the self is kept in check by society. The participants of the research project recognize these social paradigms and make it applicable to them and their current understandings of who they are. This means that respondents adapt and modify social constructs to fit in to existing frame- works of meaning.

The research project was not developed specifically to enquire about culture, history or religion and faith. Thus, it may appear to the reader that the researcher was insensitive to this area because there were no specific questions probing these constructs. However, it is evident from the compelling descriptions of lived experiences of participants that these elements form a strong basis for self definition. I would argue that culture, history, religion and faith represent internal

supporting structures that hold the self when she is unable to proceed through psychological difficulty. Beckford and Demerath (2007) suggest that these constructs, particularly religion, can evoke intensely subjective and private experiences and emotions, as well as strongly held convictions. This may explain Ivy's confidence in religion and its importance as a "way of life". Thus, belief in the re-framed social construct is crucial for the state of mind and self worth of participants. This means that psychological well being is enhanced as a result of respondents' certainty in how they have reconstructed and accommodated social constructs.

The research project contends that whilst the phenomenological experiences of these paradigms are unique for each individual, they are common to all. However, King (1988) argues that the importance of any one factor in explaining black women's circumstances varies according to the particular aspect of experiences under consideration, and how this is used in reference to others. That is to say culture, history, religion and faith have different meanings for each individual. The significance of each construct depends on participants' exposure to the named construct. The combination of all three social structures suggests that the need of each respondent may be met depending on the nature of psychological conflict that arises. For example, Thandie discusses the "profound influence of religion on her value base". When questions about her values arise, she turns to her religious beliefs to find answers. Similarly, her "template for learning" is found in her cultural and historical understanding of herself. On the whole, participants appear to rely heavily on influences on the self in drawing inferences about themselves, anchoring themselves within the world, and defining who they are. For some women, their reports indicate a linear relationship between social constructs, while others evidence a hierarchical

relationship. Within the linear relationship, culture, history, and religion and faith have equal status. Alternatively, for some participants, a particular social construct can be more significant than other social paradigms. How does this help to characterize participants' individuality?

Lehman, Chiu and Schaller (2004) suggest that influences such as culture and religion and faith (and, to a certain extent, history) act as a psychological shield against the existential anxiety that results from the awareness of mortality. Religious beliefs can offer a continuity of existence in the ideas about life after death. Underlying these social constructs (i.e. culture, religion and faith, history) are the set of ethics and normative standards against which individual women become judged as worthwhile or socially acceptable. Although this proposal is not explicitly expressed by the respondents' of the research project, it can be argued that social worth and acceptance undermines individual acceptance and self worth. In the attempt to unify the self, participants engage in behaviours that reinforce their self definitions. Social paradigms provide the opportunity for them to achieve that goal.

In summary, participants of the research project express the following as relevant to their individuality:

1. Culture is taught and learnt
2. Culture is grounded in history
3. Being an individual is about choosing the social structure(s) that is compatible with existing understanding of the self

4. History can be the basis on which others judge the self

5. Social constructs (particularly religion and history) are about survival

6. Social constructs can be both useful and detrimental to self definition at the same time

Master theme 4: "My individuality"

The master theme "my individuality" presents participants' accounts of uniqueness and how their uniqueness differentiates them from others. However, Lucia's account suggests that individuality is not always an accepted "concept" especially when it conflicts with deep-rooted beliefs.

> *"I have a difficulty with the whole concept of individuality" (Lucia, page 4, line 113)*

Her "difficulty" arises through her perception that the idea of individuality conflicts with her sense of "community". Triandis (1995) suggests that a collective society is one where the individual exists within the group and it is within the group that the self is defined. Lucia explains her "difficulty".

> *"umm now let me think about this { } umm, { } on one hand, we are all unique as individual human beings but more importantly than that we are all connected as a, as a, umm, a collected umm, race on the planet and and that's kind of like biologically, spiritually, you know, we are all connected. Those kind[s] of experiences I was just talking about creates a sense of separation umm. Umm { } umm, so umm, I think that sense of separation in this society is reinforced on all the*

same levels umm, from what we learn, how we learn, how we learn about each other. The pressure on the family, on family is to become you know kind of like { } sort of separate and non communal, I mean you know I grew up you know kind of with ... in a situation where in the community that I lived in, the extended family is as important as the nuclear family umm so and then but you find yourself in a situation in a society where that experience is not valued and so I think that umm I think on a spiritual level our journeys, our paths are separate in a sense but at the same time it connects us and therefore umm the way in which we have lived as Africans and Indian people reflects that ..." (Lucia, page 4, line 115 – 131)

Lucia's reflections highlight a number of issues. She says people are "unique as individuals but more importantly than that we are all connected". Although acknowledging individuality, for Lucia, the connection between "human beings" supersedes individuality. She uses "biologically" and "spiritually" as powerful frameworks to explain the connection between people i.e. "race on the planet". While Lucia tries to find indisputable connection between people, her biological explanation hints at differences between individuals – i.e. biology suggests different DNA. For Lucia, it seems that individuality symbolises a detachment from significant others and community. Her framework of meaning extends the philosophy of connection to society as a whole and is used to explain social deficiencies where the "experience is not valued". Lucia suggests that people (or individuals) are split because they learn separation from society. For her, societies such as Africa and India are collective and therefore cultivate a communal way of life.

Individuality as discussed in the literature review of the research project equates to one's sense of self. This is echoed in Hofstede's (2005) definition of individualism which says: "individualism pertains to

societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family" (page 76).

According to Lucia, the phenomenological experience of the collective should be valued over individuality. It could be argued that Lucia's narrative suggests a need for her to be valued. In addition, her account appears to link value with a sense of belonging. As previously discussed in the sub theme "my community", Lucia found safety and security within her community. Thus, it is not simply about the implications of individuality but about Lucia's lived experiences of "community". That is to say, she is who she is because she stays connected to her collective community.

Esi shares in Lucia's view of a collective existence. At the same time, she says it is important for black women to be individuals.

> *"Yeah, it is extremely important because people are already putting you into a certain box and if they see a black woman living in a society like this we are still fighting stereotypes and umm the only way we are gonna get them to see that people are different as individuals is that we don't compromise and we do have idiosyncrasies like everybody else ..." (Esi, page 12, line 410 – 414)*

Both Lucia and Esi draw attention to the issue of society and its impact on individuality. In effect, how society judges the individual by societal standards. Esi's account suggests a connection on some level between all people – i.e. "having idiosyncrasies like everybody else". The extract reveals that, in Esi's experience, individuality provides a means to escape from "stereotypes" i.e. societal standards. Therefore, it could be argued that for Esi to maintain her individuality and escape society's "stereotypes" she does not "compromise".

Lola reflects on why she is an individual through echoing that individuality signifies difference.

> *"... What makes me an individual? I think the fact that I look at myself in the mirror everyday and I don't see anybody like me ..." (Lola, page 2, line 38 – 39)*

When Lola made this comment I laughed because I thought it was funny she would imagine her individuality as a physical feature of herself. However on reflection, it occurs to me that Lola's individuality is denoted by her self confidence and uniqueness, and this is reflected in her self image. "Look at myself in the mirror" illustrates how real individuality is for Lola – it is possible for her to see it in her "mirror". For her, individuality occurs not in the words that is used to describe "me" but exists in the person who "sees" it. Her account indicates that nobody "looks" like her therefore nobody is her. Her uniqueness or individuality is thus evident in the knowledge that she has not seen anybody that "looks" like her.

Fran shows surprise and finds it interesting when she is asked about her individuality. This is because she recollects being brought up to be independent. So for her, she experiences individuality as a reality of life much in the same way as Lola.

> *"That's really interesting question because I think I've been brought up, I think really subconsciously by my mother to always believe that I can exist as Fran on her own and like, it was always like if everyone tomorrow just hated you and you had to do it on your own how would you survive. I think actually that I do have a strong enough sense of self to be able to keep with that and to, you know, have my own you know, identity and I probably would be able to. You know, it would be difficult but if I [was] just in solitude and I didn't have any of these things around me, I think I would be to umm I think I'd be ok, I*

think you know perhaps just get on with that." (Fran, page 3, line 95 – 101)

In this extract, there is a strong sense that Fran has spent many times "existing on her own". She was "brought up" to anticipate isolation in the event that she is "hated". Therefore, individuality appears to be a necessity for coping with life and a tool for survival. Fran's report hints at a fear of being secluded and is evident in her "difficulty". During the interview, Fran reveals that she regularly needs "me time" where she spends time with herself "recharging her batteries". Her phenomenological experience of individuality may equate to having her own space when she dictates it.

The meaning of individuality for Gbemi is captured by her desire to assert herself during decision making.

"Just somebody who is not influenced by umm, just not influenced by anything. I am not influenced by much, I'm not influenced like by fashion or umm people or how people expect me to be or how, what they expect me to do or have expected me to react or act. I'm not influenced at all, I'm not really bothered." (Gbemi, page 13, line 439 – 442)

Like Fran, Gbemi's idea of individuality is about existing on her own and not being "influenced" by "anything". Her narrative echoes the idea that individuality is a survival tool. It is interesting to note how concerned she seems about being influenced by "people" – this is noted because she uses the word "influenced" five times in this extract. It may be that living her life through the expectation of others is viewed as pressure on her sense of self. Thus "I'm not bothered" may show how she reinforces her individuality and perhaps protects herself from the "influences" of others. It is difficult to imagine the impact of

no influence on Gbemi's sense of self as she seems to be persistently defending against the influence of others. In my mind, I questioned Gbemi's insistence against the influence of others and wondered whether she was grappling with social influence/change and how that can impact her sense of self. It reminded me of my reasons for choosing to do the research project – is it possible that a person can have an accurate sense of themselves without the influence of a significant other/event?

Ivy's experience of individuality hints at possessing qualities "built in to me" which others do not have.

> *"... I have the ability to read people built in to me. And that's what marks our individuality." (Ivy, page 4, line 102 – 103)*

Unlike the other reports, Ivy's explanation is not of personal responsibility – in terms of being in relationship with others. Ivy's account is a reflection of a complex existence and personal belief because her uniqueness is marked by "the ability to read people".

Three sub themes are presented as an indication of respondents' sense of individuality. In addition, the sub theme "a place for therapy" is also captured under the master theme of individuality because it corresponds to individual opinions about psychotherapy.

4.1 "principles and values"

Respondents' intra- and inter- personal relating are based on adopted principles and values. That is, beliefs and ethics that participants have personalised. These principles and values about life and people exist irrespective of whether the "concept" of individuality

or collectivism is embraced. Principles and values are the foundation on which the individual creates a sense of self.

Gbemi and Esi depict values that are entrenched in fairness. For them, it is crucial to treat other people as they want to be treated.

> *"it's just really a sense of fair play I think I demand fairness, I demand fairness, I have a strong sense of right and wrong it doesn't sit well in this day and age so I think that's not taught in schools anymore ..." (Esi, page 11, line 384 – 386)*

For Esi, "fairness" is paramount. She feels "strongly" about "right and wrong" and believes that fairness should be applicable "in this day and age". Esi's account portrays fairness as clear cut "right or wrong". Her individuality is based on the fairness that she "demands" from others.

Gbemi talks about fairness in the context of her work and this seems to overlap with her personal beliefs.

> *"umm basically umm if I got to be treated fairly that's it like no other reason. The only thing I have learnt about equal opportunities is that some people cannot be treated fairly because they need extra help to make them do something to make them equal to someone else. I understand that ..." (Gbemi, page 19, line 667 - 670)*

In contrast to Esi, Gbemi describes wanting fairness for others and to "be treated fairly". She suggests that "some people cannot be treated fairly because they need extra help". "I understand that" may indicate an experience of unfairness. For Gbemi, to be treated fairly may mean to be "equal" to others.

For some participants, personal attributes become their principles and values. These attributes are described as important for how respondents live. For example, Fran states that:

> *"... honesty, umm to me that is a huge one actually umm, I just don't see the point at not being honest. I think it causes a lot of unnecessary stress ..." (Fran, page 5, line 190 – 191)*

For Fran, "honesty" is vital and "huge" and has implications for "unnecessary stress". This may mean that Fran uses "honesty" as a strategy to manage life stresses.

According to participants, principles and values guide both the respondents and the relationships they form. The emphasis that principle and values serve to guide participants' lives is demonstrated in the quality of individual self worth. For example, Ivy says that her principles and values stress the *"value of people" (Ivy, page 3, line 77)*. Ivy's belief reinforces her self worth.

> *"... The strongest principle in Christianity is that Christ is the son of God came and died for us. And died for our sins, he sacrificed his life and even if if it was just one of us he was doing it for he still done it. What that tells me is my value in God's eyes ..." (Ivy, page 3, line 79 – 82)*

In this extract, Ivy describes her "strongest" principle and how it emerges from "Christianity", and from her perception of God's "sacrifice". For Ivy, "what that tells me is my value in God's eyes" highlights how she obtains self worth from her relationship with God. It is not surprising given the consistency in Ivy's narratives and her belief in God that she extends "value" to others.

4.2 "innate mechanism"

The sub theme "Innate mechanism" focuses on an inherent awareness and process of being an individual as described by participants. There is an overlap between this sub theme and the sub theme of maintenance, which is discussed below. According to respondents, maintenance involves a conscious process whilst innate mechanism refers to an automatic process. Participants report an overwhelming sense of just knowing that there is "something" there that propels them to carry on. Reflecting on interviewees' descriptions of an innate mechanism, I felt that the representation of being an individual resembles the image of a foetus in the womb that automatically knows how to breathe whilst in a sack of fluids.

Esi's account seems to support my reflections. Her narrative highlights the strength and courage showed by her mother during a difficult period – this versatility allows Esi to conclude that "something must have motivated her".

> *"I actually do think that we are told that umm, we have to be strong and we are told that we can bear pain so therefore you know, our pain threshold is the constitution of a horse so you know, so when people are kicking you down so when you feel as though you're being abused, you know, you're strong, you are big enough to take it. I think, I think, that's where we all are in a way, even [to] my mother. I mean she must have been thinking, something must have motivated her, told her that under no circumstances should you buckle. You've got, you've got eight children to bring up but you can do it, don't you dare call in social services you're strong enough to cope. And I think well that is what it's all about ..." (Esi, page 25, line 905 – 914)*

This extract suggests that in Esi's experience she is told to be "strong". She uses the metaphor of a "horse" to demonstrate the strength she is perhaps expected to have. Esi uses quite strong

language (e.g. "abused") in explaining how to "bear pain" and the treatment from others. Thus, Esi's phenomenological experience tells her that, no matter the difficulty she may encounter, she can "cope" on her own, just as her mother coped with eight children. There seems to be no doubt in Esi's mind that that "is what it's all about". On the basis of this extract, one could argue that Esi's individuality is partly made up of her sense of being able to "cope".

The idea of existing as a single unit is completely contradictory to the reflections of participants thus far, and may suggest a mêlée between the individual existing on her own and existing with others.

Yemi's idea of an innate mechanism is evident in her experience of the women in her family.

"... maybe it's just within ourselves maybe it's something, I don't know cause I don't (inaudible) maybe it is to do with, maybe it is something like genes ..." (Yemi, page 15, line 515 – 516)

Prior to this extract, Yemi talks about how the women in her family have motivated themselves to be strong. She links this to how it has happened before with other "generations". Thus, suggesting a dichotomy between learned behaviour (i.e. learning to be strong) and Yemi's account (line 515 – 516). The biological explanation for an innate mechanism allows the self to be equipped with tools needed to cope in any situation. In Yemi's reflection, this innate mechanism is situated in her "genes" – emphasising a coping process that is part of her genetic makeup.

Fran's experience partly suggests a learned behaviour rather than an innate mechanism. However, she also describes an "inner" way of being.

"... it would be very hard, but I probably could do it because it, you know, I've got this inner, you know, maybe I do have this inner strength ..." (Fran, page 6, line 214 – 216)

The idea of coping, managing or maintaining the self through learning has been dispelled in this instance in favour of a more intrinsic mechanism. It could be argued that this process of acknowledging the self is related to how the self is viewed as primarily responsible for its own preservation (Carl Rogers refers to this process as self actualisation).

4.3 "maintenance"

To maintain individuality or a sense of self, participants describe using a number of methods. These methods appear to be different for all respondents. The sub theme "maintenance" was developed to capture the ways that each technique maintains the individual's sense of self. For some women, maintaining their sense of individuality relies on the interaction they have with others. For example, Ivy describes sustaining who she is through the way people respond to her in different contexts.

" ... I see how people respond to me, I can see how people warm to me, I can see how when I will put my hand to do something and I set the objective to whatever it is and it could be to lead a seminar in church and I have set objectives by which I can measure the success of the program from the chief to (inaudible) and I have done it, but I stand on something that is not changing. Principles on which I operate from which I operate are not changing, so there's always something to go back to base and measure (Ivy, page 9, line 270 – 275).

The extract suggests that she feeds off the positive reinforcement of others when she "sees how people respond" to her. This in turn reinforces her behaviour towards others. She appears to have a protocol to the way she approaches "something" – that is to "always go back to base and measure". For the positive interaction to occur consistently, Ivy may focus on the behaviours that guarantee that people will "warm" to her. When Ivy was asked how she copes with knock backs she said that she does not "beat" herself up, she just takes "each day at a time".

Fran maintains her main principle and value (i.e. honesty) as well as her sense of self through her relationship with others. The interaction with others enables her to keep a balance between what she perceives to be honest and what others perceive to be honest. This emphasises the co-dependency between the self and others.

> *"umm, I'm quite vocal about how I feel and about things I do, so like [not] much happens in my life that no one know[s] nothing about (giggles). Do you see what I mean? And I think that in that sense, it's always quite nice to have someone to bounce it off ..." (Fran, page 5, line 199 – 201).*

For Fran, her belief is weighed up against the belief of others – expressed as "nice to have someone to bounce it off". For her, maintaining honesty means being open and "vocal". A practical approach helps another participant maintain her individuality and sense of self. Lucia tells of how meditation and ritual serve as tools that maintain connectedness to her sense of self.

> *"umm, for me meditation is what does it for me. Ritual is what does it for me, umm, you know umm, using our { } some of our traditional*

umm, spiritual practices is what does it for me and I think that, I think that ritual is so important" (Lucia, page 7, line 239 – 242)

This is an interesting response from Lucia because earlier (see master theme 4) in the interview, she had "difficulty with the whole concept of individuality". It seems to be that her understanding of what individuality represents (i.e. separation) causes her to question her collective values. On some level, this disparity describes the conflict that can arise between one's sense of self and maintaining the connectedness with others. The balance of maintaining Lucia's sense of self and connectedness is demonstrated in both the use of "meditation" (for self) as well as "traditional practices" (for connectedness).

Other participants propose that to maintain principles and values is not to flutter away from what defines them as an individual. For example, Esi says:

"umm I just don't compromise, I don't, I suppose, I suppose it's because of my age it's also because of the situation in my particular circumstances ..." (Esi, page 11, 392 – 393)

For Esi, "particular circumstances" means to be financially stable. Esi's chosen method for maintaining her individuality is not to "compromise". To make sense of not compromising, Esi implicates her "age" and "circumstance". The connection between age and circumstance emphasises the role of nature and nurture in maintaining her individuality.

Similarly, Lola believes that maintaining who she is involves not compromising.

"... umm, I suppose just by reminding myself of the things that I have learned. And also because those principles and values have become { } because they've been instilled in me, they've become part of who I am. They've become part of my identity. Umm, so in maintaining my identity, umm, so in maintaining my identity I make sure that I'm not compromising myself in anyway. I make myself, I, I make sure that you know I'm not compromising myself ..." (Lola, page 9, line 330 – 335)

For Lola, maintaining her individuality is about "reminding myself of the things that I have learned". In so doing, she does not "compromise" herself or her "identity" which has developed from the "principles and values" that have been "instilled" in her. Essentially these principles and values have "become part of who I am". For me, the most fundamental element of Lola's account is her learning – because without it there would be nothing to remember. Thus, through "maintaining my identity" Lola is able to show appreciation for the principles and values have been "instilled" in her. This may also be indicative of a process where she maintains her connectedness to others.

When Thandie was asked how she maintained her individuality she says:

"umm that's not difficult, I pray (laughs) and I { } you know, my whole kind of { } I mean my belief system is not just based on going to church on Saturday. My belief is with me all the time so that's something I see as part of every aspect of what I do ..." (Thandie, page 7, line 222 – 224)

For Thandie, her chosen method of maintenance bears relevance to her faith. "That's not difficult" seems to demonstrate Thandie's ease of maintaining her sense of self and value. This ease may also represent the significance of self awareness and self confidence in the process of self definition. One could therefore argue

that it is not "difficult" for Thandie because she knows is. For Thandie, "praying" signifies the connection between her and "part of every aspect of what I do".

Gbemi's sense of self encourages flexibility of principles and values. She describes, that in order to maintain her individuality, it has been vital for her to adapt "what it is you are going into", whether this is at work or in her personal life.

> *"you can maintain individuality if you adapt some part of what it is that you are going into. I think some part of me – a name or I don't know about that { } I'm questioning whether I'm trying to adapt but umm you've got to fit in ..." (Gbemi, page 25, line 896 – 898)*

Gbemi's reflection is replete with the struggle to maintain who she is by modifying herself to fit into her environment. The account seems ambiguous because Gbemi does not "know" the psychological consequence of "adapting" who she is. This is evident because she is "questioning whether I'm trying to adapt" as a tool for maintaining herself. This account ties in with Gbemi's earlier experience where she described finding it difficult to get a job despite her wealth of professional experience. She went on to shorten her Nigerian name because she believed that it prevented her from getting job interviews. Her belief is confirmed when she gets a job after her name change.

In summary, participants describe methods of maintaining themselves, their individuality, and their principles and values using their interaction with others, faith, traditional practices, adapting and not compromising. It would appear that these methods all involve using tools that are already available to the respondents.

4.4 a place for therapy

A place for therapy was developed to complement the other sub themes of individuality. In the main, participants attribute their sense of self to being in relationship with others. A therapeutic relationship is no different to other forms of interrelating except psychological engaging is required at some level. Psychological therapy provides a space to explore individuality and a sense of self in its entirety. This sub theme captures participants' reflections about having an alternative to "something". Owusu-Bempah (2002) advocates cross-ethnic therapy which embraces the self of the collectivist culture. This research project contends that when therapy is provided, it is done with the self not as a separate entity to its culture, environment, profession or any other part of the self but as an inclusion of components of the self even if it seems insignificant to the client.

Some of the respondents have had experiences of being in therapy and some are practitioners within the field of Counselling Psychology. What seems to transcend for a number of the participants is the idea that black professional women do not "have" therapy. One reason could be that there exists a belief within this group that an innate mechanism is sufficient to see the self through any difficulty or challenge. However, more importantly, the participants share the need to have a black therapist/psychologist provide them therapy. For example, in the extract below, Esi describes a resistance to someone who is different on the basis that they will not understand the "historic discrimination" she has gone through.

"I think, I absolutely think it will not, it, if this is an idea that is being cultivated at the moment ... That should help a society who is ailing, a black society who is ailing and in need of some sort of counselling so then it would not get off the ground if they did not quick time start to look at the practitioners umm who interface with that group of

people and make sure that they look like them, they have the same experiences and when they say I understand what you feel that there is the likelihood that that person will understand what you feel. I am not saying they will because talking to you I know that you have not had the same experiences as I have had, umm age, geographical location, but there is a kind there is a kind of of umm umm given that somewhere along the line you will know what I am talking about – the issues and and ticking off of those issues to say yeah that's as close as its going to get. However, if I if I was in need of some form of counselling with those particular challenges we are talking about, professional life umm and I took out that same list, umm I will not be able to tick off as many if I was talking to a Caucasian person, or a European person umm may not have had any experience of the Caribbean or Africa, may not have come across like the kind of discrimination that we have come across historically and even present yeah present day, so the chances are they can't help me (laughs)" (Esi, page 26, line 929 – 948)

Esi's account is a strong affirmation that she is not yet prepared to engage with a non-black therapist/psychologist. She demonstrates an awareness of the experiences of others – "I know that you have not had the same experiences as I have had" – which are dissimilar to hers. At the same time, the extract suggests a compelling need for her to be understood by somebody who is able to "interface" and value where she is coming from. For this reason, Esi believes her therapist has to be black. She says: "I will not be able to tick off as many if I was talking to a Caucasian person or a European person". Perhaps the idea that non-blacks will not understand the historical discrimination may be traced back to participants' views about the experience of slavery/racism.

In contrast to Esi, Thandie has had the experience of both being a client and being trained in counselling. The extracts below build a picture of Thandie's views about therapy.

> *"Yeah umm I think it's a well kind of needed profession or need within our experience and I think for different women, it comes at different times. I trained as a counsellor and I, part of my vision at the time was to be able to work with black women. What happen[ed] was that umm I realized when I was training to find a black counsellor was incredibly difficult" (Thandie, page 21, line 757 – 760)*

> *"Although I did manage to find one umm and also the counselling training does not necessarily take on board the black perspective in terms of the experience. A lot of the theoretical base is is is from a very much Eurocentric kind of perspective" (Thandie, page 21, line 762 – 764)*

Thandie alludes to the same concept raised by Esi – "the black experience". Thandie's extract suggests that a black person knows what the black experience is like and thus, the therapist/psychologist's work will include the knowledge about the "black experience" as well as the understanding of that experience. One could argue that these women want someone who "mirrors" them in the therapy room. That is, another woman or perhaps another black person. It may be useful for future research to explore this.

Thandie also raises issues about the training of therapists/psychologists and the model of training. How efficient is the training able to support the needs of those who need it? From her account, it would seem that for Counselling Psychologists to successfully attempt to engage with black professional women it would be necessary to have a basic knowledge of black culture and

history. Further, the sense that only a black person is able to meet the needs of black professional women is perhaps akin to their sense of togetherness. The sense of togetherness and belonging is one that is part of each individual. The sense of belonging comes with recognizing the other as familiar (or same) and this is reflected in Thandie's views of therapy. Thandie further clarifies the "barriers" which prevent black professional women (and black women especially) from seeking the help that they need.

> *"Yeah, yeah breaking through all that sorts of umm make an issue around you know what what it might mean to go to a therapist and then what it means to actually open up all of your experiences you know I can remember actually been in therapy myself and at one point feeling really umm quite umm aware of the fact that I was talking about my family and all my experiences and how somewhere I do not know where and I could not kind of place who told me or why I believe that you just couldn't do that (laughs) you know but somehow it just didn't feel like that was something you did and it almost felt like a betrayal to my family that I was talking about how I felt and how my mum you know my experiences with my relationship with my mother and all of those kind of stuff you bring to your therapy to make sense of of your experiences somehow seemed very strange to be doing in a professional context. But I think its I think the education should in some way educate the black community in how why it's important and helpful and useful and you know enriching to be able to go to that place but you know come through some of our experiences in the context of starting therapy or counselling you know actually could bring you on in your life in your understanding of yourself and in your understanding of your experiences" (Thandie, page 22, line 785 – 799).*

Thandie's account leads one to believe that as a member of the black culture/community, an individual is meant to keep the

secrets of the family, culture and community. Thus to discuss one's feelings, emotions or experiences of the culture/community with an outsider is seen as "betrayal" and breaks fundamental rules of loyalty. Thandie describes having an awareness of this rule although she is unable to account for its root. She also describes feeling "strange to be doing" it "in a professional context". It may be that her feeling "strange" demonstrates the difficulty of achieving self definitions outside one's community. For Thandie, the experience of therapy with a black woman was "the most ... life changing experience" in the way that she viewed and interpreted her experiences.

> *"I mean I certainly felt that umm for me that experience is probably the most you know kind of life changing experience actually to have umm I don't mean to have counselling but to have it with a black woman because I felt we reached places I would never have got to with a white therapist. I may have eventually but I think that a bit like my work with black children there's nothing that can compensate for the sense that you can identify with the person that you are actually relating to" (Thandie, page 22, line 811 – 816)*

The essence of Thandie's experience is based on her therapist being "black". She reports finding the experience helpful and was able to "reach places" she would not have reached if the therapist had been "white". It is important to highlight the desire for identification. The opportunity to recognise the other as different, but also similar, appears to be the suggested frame of psychological work with black professional women. Thandie also raises the issue of educating the community about what therapists/psychologists do. The question that sticks out for me is: how do we begin to break the "barrier" that seems to exist and suggests that therapy is "betrayal"?

Therapy is not just a symbolism of relationships; it highlights self transparency, (i.e. "opening up" during the process of therapy), stigma (the idea that "we do not tell the secrets of the family") and self education (understanding one's self and processes). All these things are reflected within the account given by Thandie and all bear relevance for her experience.

In summary, participants appear to suggest that their individuality emerges from a foundation (principles and values) which may be learnt or innate.

4.5 Discussion

The Master theme "my individuality" is concerned with how participants experience their distinctiveness. Respondents' constructed meanings are self implicating, and involve a sense of connectedness or separateness from others. As a consequence, the women's uniqueness was both a judge for the personal self and the self of others. For example, Esi wanting fairness was representative of both her need and her expectation of others.

The interviewees' views on connectedness and separateness are consistent with those studies (Guisinger & Blatt, 1994; Blatt & Blass, 1996) that have identified two diverse processes in the development of personality. Whilst their arguments are situated within personality development, it can also be applicable to respondents' sense of self. Rather than disengaged processes, the individuality of the black professional women rotates around a binary process where connectedness is viewed alongside separateness. Similarly, Sampson's (1988) ensembled individuality proposes that the self and non-self

boundary is not rigidly defined. That is to say, individuality is characterised by a fluid self–other boundary.

The women's accounts of their lived experiences are typical of how their individual sense of selves, narratives and circumstances are filtered through the eyes of society. This can both be restrictive and helpful depending on the subjective interpretation. For example, questions about therapy were raised under the umbrella of the therapist. An enriched interaction is expected from a therapist who is black and female. This implies an interpretation embedded in the knowledge/bias that a black female therapist is more likely than any other to understand and appreciate where participants are coming from.

In summary, the analysis of "my individuality" demonstrated the following:

1. Wanting to be unique can sometimes conflict with participants' sense of belonging

2. For some, individuality eliminates stereotypes

3. Individuality is not necessarily about the individual self in isolation but includes the "interface" with others

4. Principles and values are learnt and then customised to the self before becoming psychological traits. Thus, behaviour and experiences can often be automatic

5. Linked to one's individuality is the expectation that comes with one's underlying principles and values

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G. Acknowledging sameness and difference while representing the other

I am a woman of Black African origin. My research is concerned with exploring the self definition and individuality of black professional women. As a researcher I have a number of "things" in common with the participants. Aside from shared opinions, we share similar culture, history and religion. We are classed as "identical" in terms of our group membership i.e. black women professionals. Am I able to represent their views adequately within the research whilst maintaining the boundary of difference? The main aim of this section is to address issues raised by the similarities between myself as the researcher and the respondents of the research project. This section is included within the Analysis because the issues raised are pertinent to the interpretations made in light of the meaning-making process of the women. In addition, the recognition of sameness and other is consistent with the ethos of IPA methodology.

The intricacies of delicately negotiating the boundaries that emerge out of similarities/differences between the researcher and the researched have been examined (Fine, 1994). Hurd and McIntyre (1996) argue that sameness distances the interviewer and the interviewee from reflexive research processes and privileges one over another, and results in the researched narratives being misrepresented. I argue that sameness allows for the narratives to be understood within the context of which it has been set out by the research participant. That is to say, it is because I am a black woman that respondents feel able to discuss with me radical opinions about their life-worlds (see Thandie's narrative in "a place for therapy").

As a black woman I was able to gain insight and information into the everyday lived experiences of other black professional

women in the way that they perceive and define themselves. Indeed, the research questions originated because I desired to make sense of my own life. My understanding in interpreting their experiences thus stems from the basis that I have also been through similar experiences and, as such, I am situated in a position to recognize accurately the feelings of the participants.

Sharing commonalities presented some difficulties. For me, these were issues of meaning and expectation. I noted how some participants expected that I interpret my experiences in the same way as them, and showed surprise when my meaning was different. For example, Esi, who talked about racism and the impact on black people, appeared surprised that, even though, I was black, I did not have the same perceptions as her.

Contrary to Hurd and McIntyre (1996), the researcher's meaning enables respondents' reflections to be accessible. Personal experiences indicate shared reality as do racial experience (Bhopal, 2006). However, the constructed meanings of experiences are unique to the individual regardless of mutual values. For example, history meant a great deal to Marisa in the way that she saw herself as a mentor. My experience of history generates stereotypes. To a certain extent I have created some distance between myself and history whilst Marisa is driven towards history and historical values. Thus, our constructed meanings impact us differently.

I also questioned how my age or gender or class or race had impacted the research process. I queried whether I showed appropriate sensitivity to participants' responses and experiences based on the understanding of my own experiences and whether this was represented adequately in the Analysis. The point here is these

elements (age, gender etc) are who I am, and form the basis of who the participants are. The interaction we shared occurred because these elements of commonality both united and separated us. Irrespective of age, gender, class or ethnicity and from a Counselling Psychology perspective, "acknowledging sameness and otherness" enriches relationships and in this case the research relationship. It disperses to a certain extent power differentials because "we can agree to disagree". The main premise of the research project is, not to view these elements (or the effects of these elements) in isolation, but as a whole. It is to recognize the unification of these elements in achieving a desired self definition and individuality. Furthermore, race, gender, class or ethnicities are features that can reinforce interpretation and meaning.

Bhopal (2010) says that an appreciation of difference is fundamental to the research process. The Analysis may appear to be critical in parts because of my experience of difference and similarity. For example, during the interview with Ivy she echoed my religious beliefs about trusting in God. I identified with her ideology of living a Christian life. However whilst revisiting the transcript of the interview and even as I wrote the Analysis section, I interpreted those beliefs differently. Nonetheless the Analysis section portrays Ivy's story beautifully and it is consistent with the religious grounding that she has.

To cater for these similarities and differences, as well as present exclusive narratives of the participants, I maintained hermeneutic alertness (van Manen, 1997). That is, I diligently reflected on collected stories through each stage of the analytic process, managing to be aware of my own preconceptions and the women's conveyed meanings. Using the reflexive diary enabled the elimination of bias on my part. Checking my interpretations against the respondents'

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H. Synthesis

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by
And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost, 1916

This final section builds on the critical observations made in the Analysis – it shows how the themes are intertwined. It examines black professional women's self definition and individuality as embedded in their internalization of experiences. It draws on their struggles to make choices and the consequences of those choices.

The research project aimed to explore the meaning of self definition and individuality within the context of black women's work and personal lives, and to consider how their sense of selves are maintained through negotiating the multiple parts of self. I refer to this as the 'psychological syncretic process' whereby participants endeavour to reconcile the irreconcilable.

In the accounts, there is a clear sense that self definition is a component of identity. Using an interpretative analysis illuminates how traditional explanations of the self neglect the experience of the "meaning-making person" and what she brings to the chronicles of her life. The focus on how self definition and individuality inform black women's subjective experience enriches Counselling Psychology's understanding of the women's life world. Further, and contrary to previous research (e.g. Markus and Kitayama, 2003; Eckensberger, 1995; Fisek and Kagitcibasi, 1999; Kerber and Lerner, 2005; Collins, 2000) that mainly focuses on culture, history and race, the research

narratives ensured that they were grounded in their accounts (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). In addition, I have highlighted my thoughts in a different font to draw the reader's attention to them, and thereby separating them from participants' views.

project highlights the role of choice and conflict in the construction and maintenance of the self. Choice and conflict change how the self is conceptualised. So, instead of the emphasis on others impacting the self, it highlights the impact of the women's own choices on their sense of self.

Exploring processes involved in self definition and individuality will enable practitioners to formulate therapeutic interventions that examine conflicting or competing sense of self. Conflicting and competing sense of self is used interchangeably to describe the struggles that are created within an individual's experience. The Analysis of the research project reveals contradictions as participants wrestle to understand the dynamics between internal and external discourses. Respondents' inability to reconcile conflicting discourses exacerbates psychological distress and fosters distinct sense of selves.

Counselling Psychologists' formulation with this population will need to grasp the meaning-making process and its impact on both the internal and external discourses. The therapeutic challenge will be to reconcile the warring discourses and to empower the individual to accept both processes as necessary for self definition and individuality.

Self definition and individuality is about survival. How do the choices we make conspire to help us endure? Coelho (1993) asks the same question in his book The Alchemist. The Analysis indicates that, contrary to academic claims on identity, self definition or individuality, (Brewer and Roccas, 2001; Donahue et al 1993; Rafaeli-Mor and Steinberg, 2002) the population of the research project self define on choice, a finding that supports Baumeister's (1987) research. The predominant concern for the respondents of the research project is

the development of a competing sense of self that arises as a consequence of their choice and thus preventing the experience of a unified whole. The resulting interpretation of reconciling inconsistencies (or not) have implications for self view and individuality.

The results are highlighted under four areas: self definition – defining me, the self and others, influences on the self, and "my individuality". Self definition – defining me relates to the constituents of the self that are paramount to participants' sense of self. The Analysis reveals that relevant attributes interweave with everyday experiences and result in the cognitive representation of the self. However, self narratives can sometimes conflict with internal perceptions making it difficult to reach a consistent evaluation on how the women define themselves. McAdams (2001) argues that "who I am" is synonymous with a particular quality of self understanding, a way in which the self is configured or arranged. As is evident from the Analysis, self understanding is only half the story.

Relationship with others forms the basis of the second Master theme. It documents the mêlée in how respondents related to others and how that in turn influences self definition. This emerges from participants' experiences of having a sense of community and how that sometimes conflicts with the impact of others. On the one hand, the experience of having a sense of community is mostly positive and indicative of participants' strong sense of togetherness. On the other hand, the reported experience of the impact of others is mostly negative, resulting in the difficulty of incorporating self definitions across contexts. Thus, the self views that develop from a strong sense of connectedness conflicts with the self views that originate from the negative impact of others (e.g. Thandie's interpretation of her racist

experience competes with her strong sense of community). This finding is similar to the Gaertner et al (2002) study which found disparity between individual and relational selves.

The notional difference between the impacts of interpersonal relationships and other social, cultural and historical influences on participants' sense of self is captured in the third Master theme. Master theme three emphasises the relevance of respondents' choices, both voluntary and involuntary. Self definition consists of all influences, however, sub themes are characterised by a hierarchy of significance. For example, in one instance, history was found to be more influential than religion. In the narrative, self definition was dominated by the importance of history. The competing sense of self arises when the participant examines both influences (historic and cultural) in defining herself.

A holistic approach to understanding self definition is demonstrated in the fourth Master theme "my individuality". The self is often experienced as a metasystem, which is defined by the sum of its parts. Although the self consists of numerous aspects for various purposes (contexts), it functions as a single entity. Respondents share what is unique about them whilst also acknowledging social influences. Principles and values initially appear to be entrenched in historic and cultural discourses. At the same time, participants have re-experienced and re-interpreted those initial learned principles and values to arrive at a meaning distinct to them. McAdams (2001) postulates that self identity takes the form of a story complete with setting, scenes, character, plot, and theme. People begin to reconstruct their personal past, perceive the present, and anticipate the future in terms of an internalized and evolving self-story, an integrative narrative of self that provides psychosocial unity and

purpose. Nevertheless, participants still engage with initial principles and values, and thus a competing sense of self is ensues. Further conflict transpires between learned principles and values, and the notion of an innate mechanism where the women believe in the association between individual principles and values, and traditional historic cultural values. There is a discord with the idea that they are exclusively responsible for their own individuality due to a genetic makeup.

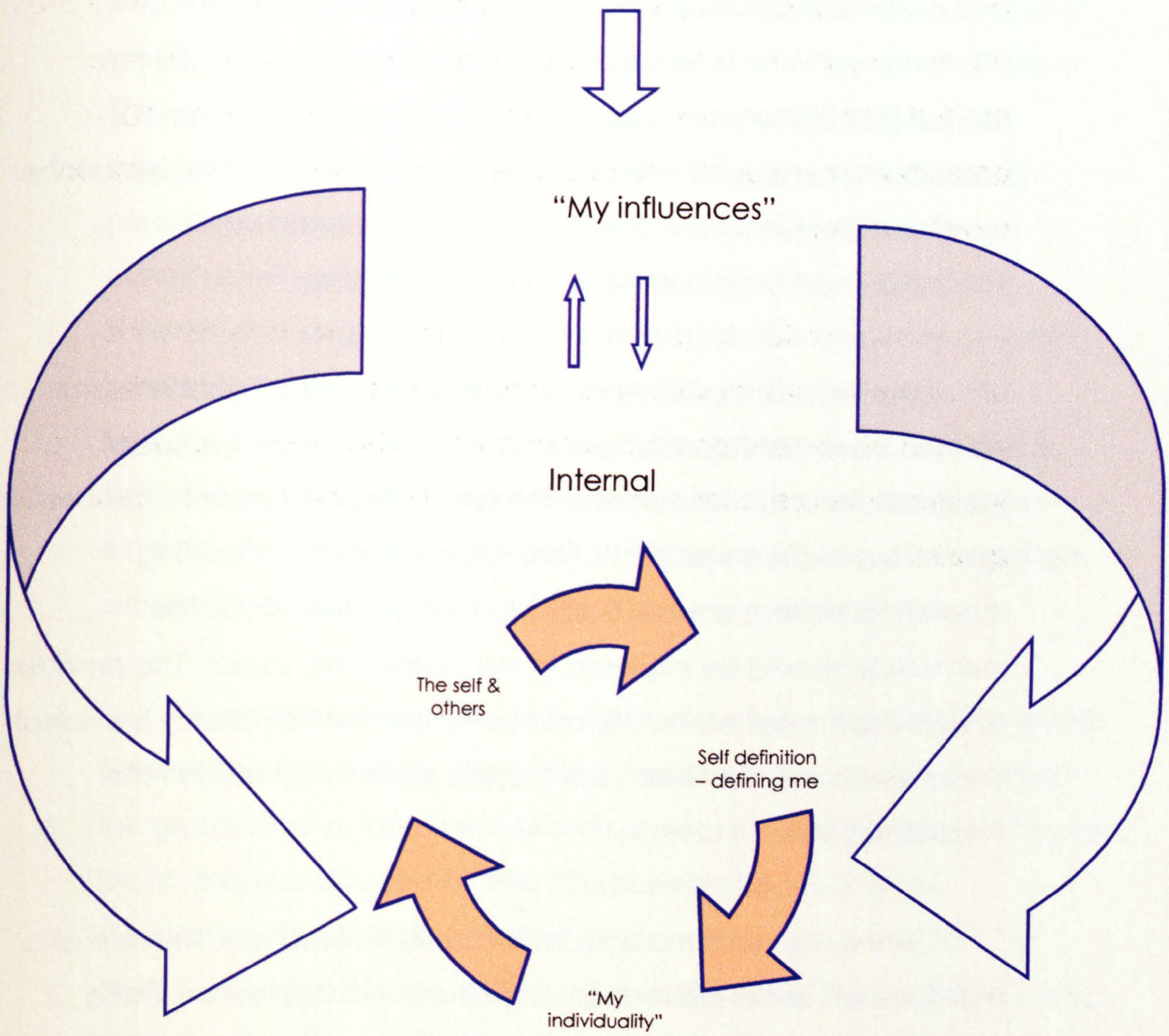
The phenomenological accounts given by respondents reveal variation in the choices they make. Twin processes of self definition are evident when struggling to preserve the foundation on which the self is built: a) self definition that occurs internally, based on voluntary interpretations of the self, and b) imposed self definitions. Participants' reflections do not suggest a dominant process. However, the women often drew disproportionately on one of the two processes. Nevertheless, both processes are in a constant flux of circular interaction. The interdependent relationship between both processes is needed for self awareness, validation and grounding. At the same time, it creates conflict within the self.

The figure below attempts to demonstrate the connection between the two processes. From the onset, the individual self is surrounded by an external (such as the family, society etc) and this precipitates the exploration of influences (i.e. sub themes examined under "my influences"). The interface between "my influences" and the external discourse is constant, and can be regularly updated. The women swing between what is external and internal to them. This interaction initiates a globular relationship between the internal processes incorporated in self definition – defining me, the self and others and "my individuality". The participants aspire to find order

when arriving at self definitions, or senses of individuality, which encompasses both their experiences as well as their interpretations of it. It is important to note that this suggestion does not imply a rigid self definition/individuality (Peck, 1986). The alliance between the themes shown in figure 2 is specific to the ten respondents of the research project and is indicative of their experiences. Therefore, it is not a generalised representation of self definition processes which others may testify to.

A distinction is made between external and internal processes of self definition in order to highlight the disparity between how the women of the research project assimilate what exists outside of the self from interpretations surmised using internal processes (Gaertner et al, 2002).

Figure 2: Globular relationship between themes (Ade-Serrano, 2010)



External social influences shape the individual from birth but are subsequently interrogated by the individual as she constructs her autonomous sense of self (Kagitcibasi, 2005; Assor, Kaplan and Roth, 2002). Thus the process of self definition starts in childhood, and is constantly refined and redefined as respondents examine their experiences and interpret the effects and affects of those

experiences. This process in itself does not create the competing sense of self. Conflict arises from the imbalance between the influences of external and internal factors. The lack of balance between internal and external discourses can be likened to Sartre's (1956) "Nothingness". This is because the absence of balance fixes the meaning of the women's self definition at any point in time. For example, Lucia's sense of connectedness (external factor) distorts her sense of individuality (internal factor), so that her self definition is formed primarily from her sense of connectedness.

The competing sense of self highlights the individual in social context. Thus, participants' descriptions aim to challenge social explanations and make explicit the psychological syncretic process. In light of the research project's findings, I contend that existing theoretical notions of how black professional women define themselves should be explored in the therapeutic space. The process of defining the self is intricate and complex. The complexity is evident in the relationship between the themes as demonstrated in the Analysis section.

Self complexity theory (Linville, 1987) incorporates the role of a multifaceted self in the reduction of illness and depression. More recently, Hannah et al (2009) affirm that within a given context a person is able to bring the "right stuff" to his/her role. The research project undermines this claim and instead proposes that all aspects of the self are unified in the formation of the individual. Viewing these various aspects of the self as separate entities fosters a fragmented sense of self (self definition) leading to unhealthy psychological functioning. However, caution should be exercised in asserting that a competing sense of self always implies psychological impairment. This is because participants' testimonies suggest that they are able to

juggle varying degrees of conflicting sense of selves.

Brook, Garcia and Fleming (2008) and Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke and Luzzini (2008) suggest that, for psychological well being, a person ideally has to have equal access to positive and negative self views. Showers and Zeigler-Hill (2007) propose the idea of evaluatively integrative self structures which contain a mixture of positive and negative attributes. This mixture enables the self to maintain a cohesive self definition that draws on more than one discourse. Showers and Zeigler-Hill (2007) further assume the possibility of stability between the external and internal discourses. That is to say, the evolution of self definition will incorporate the themes identified as salient to internal discourses with themes identified as significant in external discourses. For example, "my influences" can be integrated with external social factors to form a coherent sense of self.

In addition, the research project raises a number of issues about Counselling Psychology and what is needed to counsel a client from this group successfully. The research project reveals participants' belief that therapy is clouded by the '"Eurocentric" education of Counselling Psychologists. Further, respondents worry about being "truly" understood in the entirety of their life world. The women's sense indicates that they could best be understood by someone of the same racial, cultural and historical identity. For them, this is more important than shared experiences. Misrepresentation and misinterpretation of all these discourses render the women's self definition and individuality meaningless (Moodley, 2005) and the quest to find meaning in one's own experiences is short lived.

The research project's phenomenological standpoint draws on the work of Bretano (1838 – 1917), Husserl (1859 – 1938) and more

recently Pfander (1967). The work distinguishes self determined acts, which are described as those reflecting one's will (or choice), from other forms of stimulus. Pfander (1967) says that acts of will are exclusively those experienced "precisely not as an occurrence caused by a different agent but as an initial act of the ego-center itself" (page 20). He elaborates that external others (or inner urges) often supply the impetus for choice but when it happens, the self endorses the actions that follow from external prompts (Ricoeur, 1966).

Cognitive theorists (e.g. Markus and Cross, 1990) offer mental representation as an alternative process to self definition. The research project acknowledges the role of cognition whilst contending that the individual still engages with choice. That is, regardless of mental representation, the participant chooses to self define in a particular way based on self knowledge and experiences.

Chen, Boucher and Tapias (2006) propose that the self defines based on her relationship with others (relational self). However, this explanation does not account for the experiencing of the individual self. Hence it fails to account for the individual's meaning-making which is essential for self definition.

The reconstructive process of narrative theories (White, 2007) allows a shift from negative to positive and valued end points (Eatough and Smith, 2006), and highlights the profound consequence of this process on the individual's sense of self. The respondents of the research project suggest that they do not want to ignore the influences of their lived experiences but to acknowledge them – positive and negative – and hence define the parameters of their individuality.

The strength of the research project lies in its methodological strategy and its relativist epistemology as well as its lack of a priori assumption about its outcome. The research is driven by the human motivation to understand. It should be noted that the results do not consider bodily experiences of self definition and/or individuality. Merleau-Ponty (1962) proposes that the body is inextricably caught up with our sense of self and our life world. Likewise, van Manen (1998) reminds us that the body is an integral part of being-in-the-world. A different dimension may have been added to the research if it had been explored openly as part of a process of defining one's self – "simply put we are our bodies" (Eatough and Smith, 2006).

It could be argued that the sample represents a wide population in terms of participants' different professions. However, the research project's findings are subjective and may not characterise the views of other black professional women. Nonetheless, the research project's participants highlight the need for more black professional women in all walks of life, and the need for appropriate education for therapists/psychologists. In addition, the research project's findings emphasise the need for the educational system to recruit appropriate and gifted educators to represent black women rather than simply fulfilling numerical quotas.

The depth of narratives generated provides the reader with a template of multiple contexts and issues which require consideration. It may be that the study attracted women who are questioning their self definition and thus were more open to explore related issues.

The research project illuminates the benefits of a much needed Euroblackafrican perspective within therapy as opposed to just trans-cultural therapy. Using a framework that embraces the complexity of

multiple issues pertaining to being black, being a professional, being a woman, and being all of these things combined, will attract a greater number of the black population in London to access mental health services without fear of being "tabooed". Black feminism may provide that frame or intersectionality from which to consider the different components of the black professional women's self. This is because it is built upon the lived experiences not just an objectified position (Hill-Collins, 2010).

Self definition and individuality must be understood, not as a symptom of social deviance but as a survival strategy in response to the exercise of choice and the need for recognition. Exploitation, invalidation and the experience of not belonging are all fundamental to a sense of self. An integration of internal and external factors is necessary for the lived experiences of black professional women, and most importantly for the experience of a unified whole.

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I. The research project and its application to Counselling Psychology

The research project has shown that the participants regard choice as undoubtedly important to their self definition and individuality. As proclaimed in the texts preceding this section, choice is only half the story. The question is thus: how can the findings of this investigation be translated into professional practice? As a matter of ethics, Counselling Psychology is a practice of ongoing research whereby therapists seek to explore clients' lives, continually update the information they hold on clients and provide interventions based on their relationships with clients and theoretical knowledge. Therefore, the link between research and practice is not new to the field of Counselling Psychology.

Cooper (2010) posits that research is useful in enabling Counselling Psychologists and others in the field to develop a praxis by providing a structure through which we begin to move away from rigid views of the therapeutic process. One possible implication of this suggestion is that time- restricted interventions could be rendered ineffective when working with clients of similar status to the participants of the research project. For example, the interviewees emphasised the need to be heard. Respondents had a story to tell. The tales provide the premise for therapists to understand the nature of clients' histories, cultures and experiences. Time-limited interventions put pressure on this process. Consequently, the research project informs therapists about the time and space required to enable the women's tales to be told.

Even though Cooper (2010) expresses concern about how research talks in generalities about clients' experiences, fundamentally, the research project delineates the foundation of

what Counselling Psychologists will find helpful when working with this particular group of clients. For example, culture, history and religion played an important role in respondents' lives. The degree of significance varied for each individual. Counselling Psychologists will do well to explore what each of these systems represents and how clients make use of them respectively. It will not be valuable to assume that black culture, history or religion epitomizes similar meanings for individual black professional women clients.

The women of this research project have highlighted the significance of engaging a black therapist. Depending on the inclination of the reader, this issue may prove to be challenging on the basis that, some would argue, the colour of the skin is not a prerequisite to providing effective therapy. I would argue that, for this group of participants, and possibly many others, the representation of "being black" is comforting for clients. The ability to be able to identify with the "other" encourages a union far beyond the comprehension of the research project. On a wider scale, this is a sensitive issue and therapists will need to work within therapeutic boundaries to prevent possible over-identification. Further, I would contend that this kind of work brings with it a level of intensity. It is recommended that therapists participate in self care and reflective activities (e.g. personal therapy and supervision) where support and exploration can be provided for both the clients' and therapists' processes.

The poignant impact of conflicting sense of selves is illuminated within the research project findings. It is recommended that Counselling Psychologists familiarize themselves with the contradictions borne out of exercising choice. As indicated earlier this can be achieved through understanding clients' "stories". As professionals, we would endeavour to value the connection between

internal and external discourses (see figure 2). Advocating acceptance of both discourses as necessary for growth fosters a unified self and prevents psychological distress.

The research has communicated that the preconceived ideas about working with this client group is not just about outcomes. It is about listening and going back to basics – that is, connecting to clients on a human level, essentially, understanding what is vital in the women's lives. It is crucial that Counselling Psychologists practice holistically even for those with specialized modalities. There is an ethical requirement to recognise that clients' experiences and definitions change through their life time. Thus our interventions, links between clients systems, ought to integrate and/or accommodate those changing factors. For example, Marisa talked about the importance of history in her life. It will be important to continually explore meaning with her as she develops. As the significance of history may (or may not) be retained through life phases.

The application of the research project findings within Counselling Psychology proposes that the various teaching tools available to trainees lack a consistent, defined and developed method of exploring the intersection of black race, black culture, black history and religion. Not just for the black community, but also for other minority groups that feel alienated within the Psychology world. Going through the training system myself there is no focus on black cultural, historical or religious practices which helps to situate the therapeutic process. Therapists' awareness can rectify this oversight. Training institutions also need this awareness to enable the adequate provision of holistic education.

Evidence-based practice is not just the linking of research to

practice but the incorporation of clients' own ideas. It is not a "recipe book" (Houser, 2010). It requires "thinking outside the box", trusting in clients and having a commitment to clients, whatever the therapeutic outcomes.

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J. Strengths and limitations of the research project

Observing and getting to know the participants during the interview process enabled the researcher to accurately present their views so that their "voices" have been heard. The qualitative methodology was particularly instrumental in achieving this outcome. The research project offers valuable insight into the unique lived experiences of the black professional women who took part in the project.

The flexibility of collecting respondents' reflections was effective because participants were able to go at their own pace. When they shifted perspective it was easy to go with their "flow", managing to explore new areas and make new connections, as applicable to the research area. In this way, the women remained true to themselves and the pressure to respond in a particular way was minimized. Participants also expressed appreciation for the research area as it gave them the opportunity to consider themselves within different contexts in a bid to recognize shared (or different) qualities across settings. For them, the interview was both invigorating and provocative, enabling the possibility of a unified whole.

It is acknowledged that the analysis of the research project is, to some extent, in accordance with the researcher's perceptions and interpretations. The possibilities of other interpretations are plausible. A longitudinal qualitative study which assesses changes in self definitions may be ideal for endorsing or disproving the researcher's interpretations. This could enrich, both phenomenological experiences of the participants as well as the understanding of professionals who work with this client group.

The interviews proved to be successful; however, they

generated volumes of information which the researcher had not been expecting. Aside from the rigorous task of conducting qualitative research, there were additional quantities of information to process. The project required much patience, which was important for familiarisation with the texts. And, a study that is time-restricted puts additional pressure on the researcher. To regulate this, future researchers may like to consider collaborations with other colleagues. Alternatively, if one researcher is to conduct the investigation, it is recommended that they focus on a smaller research area. For example, linked to this particular project, a smaller area might be exploration of how self definitions and individualities influence parenting choices.

At the outset, the researcher believed that recruitment would be easy. However, there were difficulties in employing respondents. These difficulties were encountered because there were not enough participants following through their initial interest in participating. Undertaking the research within a specific service may ease the stress of recruitment, and further improve homogeneity. In the research project, the age range within the sample group was from 22 to 57. Recruiting within a service may also reduce the age variation. However, it is note-worthy that the research project did not find any differences in self definition and individuality that could be attributed to the range of ages.

There was limited exploration of how participants experienced self definition and individuality physically (i.e. bodily experiences) or how their physical environment may have contributed to their self definition and individuality. This is relevant since the research project advocates a phenomenological experience of a unified whole. In part therefore, the physical environment plays an important role and

could be a significant determinant in the choices these women make in defining themselves. It would be essential for any research examining bodily experiences of self definition and individuality, to reflect on both the psychological impact as well as sociological outcomes. This is because there is a lack of psychological investigations with this client group.

K. Future research

The research project identified and discussed four crucial components of black professional women's self definition and individuality. Further research may attempt to examine these areas in more detail. This is especially recommended for "the influences on the self" where participants reflected on their cultures, histories and religion as central to their self definitions and individualities. For example, the effects of various cultures on self definition and individuality could be investigated. Although it is recommended that future research explores this area, it is equally important to note the complex relationship that exists between these various elements as is evident in the research findings.

Aside from cultural, historical and religious influences on self definition and individuality, one could argue that respondents' social locations affect the choices and consequences of choices black professional women are faced with. All the women of the research project reside in London. Would the self definitions of those from similar backgrounds and cultures differ if they lived in another part of the country? Examining this area could highlight any class differences that may affect self definition.

Participants' professions varied, albeit all entailed a certain level of educational achievement. An area for future research could be an exploration into whether black professional women with varied educational levels share similar or different ways, of self defining and experiencing their individualities. This will help Counselling Psychologists and others in the field to interpret and tailor interventions accordingly. It will also shed light on whether educational attainment enhances self definitions and individualities.

Respondents assert a preference for black therapists. The enhancement of the therapeutic experience and the enriching of self-discovery foster the necessity of this connection. However, it is unknown whether a male or female black therapist best serves this experience. Future research could investigate this avenue. Identification with a male black therapist may shed light on participants' meanings on being black women. Issues of self worth and identity could be expressed differently because of the women's interpersonal relationship with the male therapist (i.e. the frame of reference changes). Likewise, complementing this area of inquiry, research could explore whether similar notions to those found in the analysis of the research project are replicable if a black male researcher were to conduct the research. One would assume that the core principles and values would remain the same, but the essence of being black professional women would be accentuated.

One aspect for consideration is the connection between self definition and sexuality. Black feminist thought is linked to a conceptual framework of African American women's sexual scripting (see Stephens and Phillips, 2005). Researchers could explore how sexuality impresses on self definition and individuality since the negotiation of an understanding of self is formed and reformed within the context of a unified whole. The sexual self is part of a unified whole and its relationship to an overall sense of self is essential. This area was not highlighted in the findings of the research project; it could potentially alter the interventions of clinical practice.

Reference

Stephens, D.P. and Phillips, L. (2005). Integrating black feminist thought into conceptual frameworks of African Amercian adolescent women's sexual scripting processes. *Sexualities, Evolution and Gender, 7 (1),* 37 – 55.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Ethical approval from City University

Ethics Release Form for Psychology Research Projects

All students planning to undertake any research activity in the Department of Psychology are required to complete this Ethics Release Form and to submit it to their Research Supervisor, **together with their research proposal**, prior to commencing their research work. If you are proposing multiple studies within your research project, you are required to submit a separate ethical release form for each study.

This form should be completed in the context of the following information:

- An understanding of ethical considerations is central to planning and conducting research.
- Approval to carry out research by the Department of Psychology does not exempt you from Ethics Committee approval from institutions within which you may be planning to conduct the research, e.g.: Hospitals, NHS Trusts, HM Prisons Service, etc.
- The published ethical guidelines of the British Psychological Society (2004) Guidelines for minimum standards of ethical approval in psychological research (BPS: Leicester) should be referred to when planning your research.
- **Students are not permitted to begin their research work until approval has been received and this form has been signed by 2 members of Department of Psychology staff.**

Section A: To be completed by the student

Please indicate the degree that the proposed research project pertains to:

BSc ☐ M.Phil ☐ M.Sc ☐ Ph.D ☐ D.Psych ☑ n/a ☐

Please answer all of the following questions, circling yes or no where appropriate:

1. Title of project

A study to explore the individuality of black professional women in London. How will they define/construct themselves. The implications of working with this client group as Counselling Psychology

2. Name of student researcher (please include contact address and telephone number)

Yetunde Ade-Seremo Flat 7 84 Britannia Walk London N1 7NS 07979896087

3. Name of research supervisor

Dr. Dee Dewhurst

4. Is a research proposal appended to this ethics release form? (Yes) No

5. Does the research involve the use of human subjects/participants? (Yes) No

If yes, a. Approximately how many are planned to be involved? 6 - 8 participants

b. How will you recruit them? Privately contacting individual professional Black Women

c. What are your recruitment criteria? Black ethnicity, Women, 30-40, Professionals, Living in the London area

(Please append your recruitment material/advertisement/flyer)

d. Will the research involve the participation of minors (under 16 years of age) or those unable to give informed consent?

Yes (No)

e. If yes, will signed parental/carer consent be obtained? Yes No

6. What will be required of each subject/participant (e.g. time commitment, task/activity)? *(If psychometric instruments are to be employed, please state who will be supervising their use and their relevant qualification)*

The participant will be required to participate in a semi-structured interview for about an hour to ninety minutes – this will include some time for debriefing

7. Is there any risk of physical or psychological harm to the subjects/participants?

Yes (No)

If yes, a. Please detail the possible harm? ---

b. How can this be justified? ---

8. Will all subjects/participants and/or their parents/carers receive an information sheet describing the aims, procedure and possible risks of the research, as well as providing researcher and supervisor contact details?

(Yes) **No**

(Please append the information sheet which should be written in terms which are accessible to your subjects/participants and/or their parents/carers)

9. Will any person's treatment/care be in any way compromised if they choose not to participate in the research?

Yes (No)

10. Will all subjects/participants be required to sign a consent form, stating that they fully understand the purpose, procedure and possible risks of the research?

(Yes) **No**

(Please append the informed consent form which should be written in terms which are accessible to your subjects/participants and/or their parents/carers)

11. What records will you be keeping of your subjects/participants? (e.g. research notes, computer records, tape/video recordings)?

Audio recording will be kept from the interview.

12. What provision will there be for the safe-keeping of these records? A locked box will be purchased to keep these recordings secure.

13. What will happen to the records at the end of the project? All records will be destroyed at the end of the research.

14. How will you protect the anonymity of the subjects/participants? There will be no named referencing on any of the recordings or information collected

15. What provision for post research de-brief or psychological support will be available should subjects/participants require?

A list of resources will be given to the participants at the end of the research which they might find useful should they require it.

(Please append any de-brief information sheets or resource lists detailing possible support options)

If you have circled an item in bold print, please provide further explanation here:

(5) In order to explore the experiences of black professional women, it would be necessary to get their input and therefore these group of people would be recruited

Signature of student researcher ---------- Date 2-11-06

Section B: To be completed by the research supervisor

Please mark the appropriate box below:

Ethical approval granted ☐

Refer to the Department of Psychology Research Committee ☐

Refer to the University Senate Research Committee ☐

Signature ---------- Date 20/11/06

Section C: To be completed by the 2nd Department of Psychology staff member *(Please read this ethics release form fully and pay particular attention to any answers on the form where bold items have been circled and any relevant appendices.)*

I agree with the decision of the research supervisor as indicated above

Signature ---------- Date 23 Nov 06

Appendix B

Flyer

<u>Exploring the individuality of black professional women.</u>

My name is Yetunde Ade-Serrano and I am a Counselling Psychologist in training at City University London. For my doctoral thesis, I am researching how black professional women of African and/or Caribbean origin develop and maintain their individuality. It is of value to explore the experiences of professional black women, perhaps there are common elements which may influence construction and maintenance of our self definition. Furthermore, it may inform Counselling Psychologists of the issues black professional women bring to counselling and psychotherapy. I am being supervised by Dr Dee Danchev (Dee.Danchev.1 @city .ac.uk).

Criteria for participation in this research project:

- You have to be of black African or Caribbean origin
- Have a professional qualification of degree level or higher
- Currently be in employment and have been so for a minimum of 12 months
- You have to be a woman

Confidentiality and code of ethics:

This research is conducted according to the British Psychological Society's Code of Conduct. Care will be taken to ensure anonymity, and neither participants nor their organization will be identifiable in the research thesis and associated papers. Participants can be sent a summary of the research findings at the end of the project on request.

If you are interested in participating please email me at <u>yade15@hotmail.com</u>**.**

Appendix B

Flyer

<u>Exploring the individuality of black professional women.</u>

My name is Yetunde Ade-Serrano and I am a Counselling Psychologist in training at City University London. For my doctoral thesis, I am researching how black professional women of African and/or Caribbean origin develop and maintain their individuality. It is of value to explore the experiences of professional black women, perhaps there are common elements which may influence construction and maintenance of our self definition. Furthermore, it may inform Counselling Psychologists of the issues black professional women bring to counselling and psychotherapy. I am being supervised by Dr Dee Danchev (Dee.Danchev.1 @city .ac.uk).

Criteria for participation in this research project:

- You have to be of black African or Caribbean origin
- Have a professional qualification of degree level or higher
- Currently be in employment and have been so for a minimum of 12 months
- You have to be a woman

Confidentiality and code of ethics:

This research is conducted according to the British Psychological Society's Code of Conduct. Care will be taken to ensure anonymity, and neither participants nor their organization will be identifiable in the research thesis and associated papers. Participants can be sent a summary of the research findings at the end of the project on request.

If you are interested in participating please email me at <u>yade15@hotmail.com</u>**.**

Appendix C

Information sheet

Research title: A study to explore the individuality of black professional women. How do they construct and maintain their sense of self? The implications of working with this client group for Counselling Psychologists.

Researcher: Yetunde Ade-Serrano

Research supervisor: Dr Dee Danchev of City University

Research aims: This study will explore the individuality of black professional women. It will attempt to find out how professional black women construct and maintain their sense of self. To achieve this aim, I will explore the construction and maintenance of self. For the participants of the research, has their perception of self changed with the position they hold? It would be important to explore any changes in perception that have occurred as well as explanations for these changes. Conversely, if self-perception throughout the experience has remained unchanged, how have they maintained this?

Why the research is being undertaken and some benefits: This research will form part of my doctorate portfolio in Counselling Psychology at the City University, London. I am interested in this area because I have questioned my own sense of self and individuality – (I am thinking that individuality is a hard concept to define) – in the process of undertaking this professional path. It would be of value to explore the experiences of other professional black women, perhaps there are common elements which might influence construction and maintenance of our self definition. Understanding this may give

Counselling Psychologists an insight into the black professional woman's development of self and may enable them to understand some of the issues that professional black women bring to counselling and psychotherapy.

This research may help you explore who you are, your personal achievements, and may deepen your understanding of yourself. It could help integrate your self-identity, self definition and professional identity. This research could also be of help to other professional black women who may also be exploring who they are. It is important to know that, in discussing the self, some sensitive issues might come up. If this were to happen, you could stop the interview for a break at any point, if you so wished. A list of resources will be given to you at the end of the interview so that you will know where you can seek further support should you require it.

Approval of research: This research has been given ethical approval by City University, London and is supervised by Dr Dee Danchev (Dee.Danchev.1 @city .ac.uk).

How will the research be conducted: The research will be in the form of an interview. You will be asked a series of questions about self-identity and how you define yourself. Your experiences and thoughts will be of value to the research. The interview will be recorded using a digital audio recorder. Your identity is protected at all times and, in so doing, the tape will not bear your name or status. Any identifying information will be removed from the research report. No information will be passed on to a third party and, at the end of the research, the tape will be destroyed. You have the option to withdraw from the research process at any point in time.

The interview will remain confidential and, in rare circumstances, where there is the unlikely event of disclosure of harm to yourself and others, the code of ethics as per the British Psychological Society, means I would have to disclose any such information to the appropriate authorities.

How will the results of the research be used?: The thesis will be written up and presented as part of the Doctorate programme in Counselling Psychology.

I am contactable via email on yade15@hotmail.com should you require any further information.

What if I want to complain? If you wish to make a complaint about the interview process, you can contact:
Dr. Dee Danchev at Dee.Danchev.1 @city .ac.uk
or
Nikki Hann, Programme Administrator at City University on 020 7040 4564.

Thank you.

The interview will remain confidential and, in rare circumstances, where there is the unlikely event of disclosure of harm to yourself and others, the code of ethics as per the British Psychological Society, means I would have to disclose any such information to the appropriate authorities.

How will the results of the research be used?: The thesis will be written up and presented as part of the Doctorate programme in Counselling Psychology.

I am contactable via email on yade15@hotmail.com should you require any further information.

What if I want to complain? If you wish to make a complaint about the interview process, you can contact:

Dr. Dee Danchev at Dee.Danchev.1 @city .ac.uk

or

Nikki Hann, Programme Administrator at City University on 020 7040 4564.

Thank you.

Appendix D

Demographic questionnaire

AGE:

PROFESSION:

LENGTH OF SERVICE AT THE ABOVE PROFESSION:

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND:

G.C.S.E / O'LEVEL:

A' LEVEL:

DEGREE:

PhD:

OTHER:

MARITAL STATUS:

NATIONALITY:

ETHNIC BACKGROUND:

NUMBER OF CHILDREN (IF APPLICABLE):

OTHER INFORMATION (IF APPLICABLE):

Appendix E

Informed consent form

I consent to participate in this research project entitled "A study to explore the individuality of black professional women. How do they construct and maintain their self definition? The implications of working with this client group for Counselling Psychologists" conducted by Yetunde Ade-Serrano, Counselling Psychologist in training at the City University, London (yade15@hotmail.com). The research is supervised by Dr Dee Danchev (Dee.Danchev.1 @city .ac.uk).

I understand that the research will be conducted in accordance with the Code of Conduct and Ethical Principles of the British Psychological Society.

I also understand that the results of this research will be coded in a way that my identity will not be attached to any information I give. All data collected about me will be destroyed at the end of the research.

I can withdraw my participation at any point in the research process.

Signed (participant):

Name:

Date:

Appendix E

Informed consent form

I consent to participate in this research project entitled "A study to explore the individuality of black professional women. How do they construct and maintain their self definition? The implications of working with this client group for Counselling Psychologists" conducted by Yetunde Ade-Serrano, Counselling Psychologist in training at the City University, London (yade15@hotmail.com). The research is supervised by Dr Dee Danchev (Dee.Danchev.1 @city .ac.uk).

I understand that the research will be conducted in accordance with the Code of Conduct and Ethical Principles of the British Psychological Society.

I also understand that the results of this research will be coded in a way that my identity will not be attached to any information I give. All data collected about me will be destroyed at the end of the research.

I can withdraw my participation at any point in the research process.

Signed (participant):

Name:

Date:

Appendix F

Confidentiality agreement on the use of audio tapes:

This is to further clarify that confidentiality conditions of the use of audio tapes by Yetunde Ade-Serrano are for the purposes of psychological research.

I have given my permission for the interview to be taped on the conditions that:

1. I can withdraw from the research at any time.
2. The tape is used only for analysis by Yetunde Ade-Serrano.
3. The tape will not be heard by any other person other than by Yetunde Ade-Serrano and the research supervisor Dr Dee Danchev (and possibly a third party for the purposes of transcribing – such a person will be bound by the British Psychological Society ethical code of conduct).
4. The tape will be stored securely and destroyed at the end of the research.

I have read and understood the conditions stated above and consent to the audio taping.

Signed (participant):

Name:

Date:

Appendix G

Interview schedule

Self Definition

1. If I said who are you what would you say?
2. How do you see yourself outside these roles?
3. What are your principles and values? How do you maintain these?
4. Do you think you have a sense of self?
5. How important is it for you to be an individual?

Professional sense of self

1. Do you think the profession you are in matches your individuality?
2. Do your professional principles conflict with who you are?
3. Has being a professional changed how you think of yourself? If so, how?
4. I wonder what you think your profession tells others about you.
5. Can I ask you to remember your self definition. If you were to choose a profession based on how you defined yourself, what would it be?
6. If that profession is different from your current profession explore ...
7. Is the view of others important in achieving a professional sense of self? How does that influence you individually?

Other

1. In thinking about your personal sense of self and your professional sense of self, is there a link?
2. In exploring this area, what do you think Counselling Psychologists should bear in mind?

Appendix H

Debrief

Thank you for taking part in this study. I understand that this may have been difficult for you. Your assistance is very much appreciated.

Now that the interview is complete, do you have any questions or comments about the research?

How was the interview process for you? Were there things you found helpful, or unhelpful?

Are there any other things you would like to bring up?

Would you like a copy of the analysis and/or final report?

If, after you leave here you experience difficult emotions and think that you need someone to talk to as a result of doing this interview, please feel free to call one of these organizations – they may be able to help you.

Appendix I

Resource list

These are lists of possible organisations which may provide support should you need it.

Organisation address	Telephone Number	Web
1. Samaritans (open 24 hours a day)	08457 90 90 90	www.samaritans.org

Samaritans is a 24-hour telephone service which is provided to anyone experiencing despair.

2. Southall Black Sisters 020 8571 9595 www.southallblacksisters.org.uk

This is a service specifically for women from ethnic backgrounds and deals with issues around violence.

3. Careline 08451 228 622 www.carelineuk.org

This is a counselling service that provides support with various types of presenting issues.

4. Women and Girl's Network 020 7610 4345

A provider of various therapeutic services for women from all works of life. Its focus is on helping people who have experienced violence.

5. African Women's Welfare Association 020 8885 5822 (open Monday to Friday 9.30 am – 5pm) www.awwg.org.uk

This organisation provides various health supports to women including counselling.

6. The Maya Centre 020 7281 2728 www.mayacentre.org.uk

A woman's centre which provides a counselling service.

7. Westminster Pastoral 020 73614800 www.wpf.org.uk

Foundation

They provide counselling and psychotherapy to individuals and groups.

8. Black Women's Mental 020 8961 6324 www.bwmhp.org.uk

Health Project

This is an organisation that provides counselling, as well as hands on support, for women experiencing mental health related issues.

9. Relate 0845 456 1310 www.relate.org.uk

An organisation that offers relationship counselling (couples and family).

10. British Association for www.bacp.co.uk

Counselling and Psychotherapy (click on 'find a therapist')

11. British Psychological Society 0116 254 9568 www.bps.org.uk

(click on find a psychologist)

Appendix J

Permission to transcribe

RESEARCH

From: Yetunde A-S (yade15@hotmail.com)

Sent: 21 October 2007 01:58:39

To:

Hi

Some time ago, or perhaps not so long ago, you were kind enough to participate in my research. I have now done ten interviews and I have one more to go.

At the time I began this journey I did not realise how much data I would have. It has now become apparent that I will not be able to transcribe all the interviews myself.

I would like to ask your permission to authorise an individual to help me transcribe the interviews. I do understand and appreciate the confidentiality agreement we have and that still stands. The individual I am thinking of will also have to agree confidentiality.

If you would prefer that I do not ask her to transcribe our interview, I will respect that, and transcribe it myself.

I thought it respectful to ask before I send my authorisation to this person. I would therefore appreciate your thoughts on this.

I hope this email finds you well and look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,

Yetunde

Appendix K

Participant Profiles

Pilot interview

Marisa was born in England and describes herself as Black British of African Caribbean descent. She is 24 and is studying on a doctorate Counselling Psychology programme. She has been doing this for the past 2 years. Marisa says she is a strong believer in history and goes as far as to say "history is who I am". She describes herself as ever changing and believes that different roles will become prominent depending on life stages.

Summary

- Awareness of herself as a black woman in the context of her profession
- Wants to be seen as a professional first
- Issues such as background, age, political views define who she is. History makes up 70% of who she is
- Self presentation (e.g. how you wear your hair) is important
- Merging personal and professional self means you do not compromise the self
- Pressure on black professional women to conform to society's standard
- All roles combine to make up who she is
- Self definition changes depending on context
- Media perspectives in this society can lead to negative feelings as a black person
- Principles and values include working hard, taking advantage of opportunities
- Minority – black and woman

- Lack of black professionals
- "We need to increase the numbers"
- Representation of black professionals
- Society is not accessible
- Her qualities fit her profession

Interview 1

Lucia is an interfaith minister and a spiritual counsellor. She is 48, a single mother of three children and has been in her current profession for 2 years. She was born in England and describes her ethnic background as African Indian. She particularly enjoys the gathering of ethnic women and says this helps reinforce her sense of self. I would describe Lucia as a traditionalist who believes in the traditional values of existence.

Summary

- Religion is very important for her and she defines herself in terms of her relationship with God
- Identifies with multiple roles and these make up who she is
- Cultural upbringing, community and family are central to who she is
- Describes growing up in England as a "hostile place" and this leads to a sense of not belonging
- Internalising negative experiences
- Who she is, has not been influenced by society, especially not by the "white society"
- Relationship with others is important because it reflects who you are – "mirror back"
- Rejects individuality and believes it breeds separation. Advocates for a communal sense of self and care provided within communities

- Maintains principles and values through meditation
- Negative representation of black communities through media
- The society's perception of you impacts on the perception you have about yourself
- Rejects the definition of others
- Childhood experiences have impacted on the kind of profession she has chosen
- Concerned about social injustice
- Believes that the training of primary healthcare providers for the black communities need to be more specialised
- People's perception of professional is important
- Traditional values vs. Western values – society teaches that your upbringing is not of value

Interview 2

Esi is a 57 year old business woman who was born in the Caribbean. She was brought up by her aunt until the age of nine when she came to England to join her parents who had previously travelled to England in search of a better life. Esi is one of 8 children and describes her family as close knit, held together by the "centre" – the centre for her is her mother. She has two children, a son, 27 years old and a daughter, 17 years, old and she runs her business with her brother. The start of the business coincided with the birth of her first child when she was 30. Since then Esi has received an accolade of MBE from the Queen. She describes herself as a "happy person living up to her name". Her only reservation is that she did not achieve a higher level of education. This is because she associated a higher level of education with having power and authority with the black community.

Summary

- Defines herself in terms of her role as a mother and a business woman
- Having the business is crucial to her role as a mother
- Believes firmly in a sense of responsibility
- Describes her individuality as her uniqueness
- Her sense of self combines the professional self and her personal self
- Her environment impacts on self
- For her, her mother is a significant influence (role model)
- Considers hard work more important than academia – this is linked to experience of her mother
- Her principle and value is fair play
- Has a strong sense of right and wrong
- Believes black woman are pigeon-holed in a society like this
- Believes that black communities do not support each other
- Believes that black children are disadvantaged in competing for top jobs
- Believes that there should be more black businesses
- Talking to someone does not help, however people need to be educated about psychology –"marketing"
- She says, if she ever needed to talk to someone, she would not go to a non- black therapist

Interview 3

Thandie is a social worker who specialises in adoption. She helps to place black children in black families and has been in her profession for the past 21 years. Before she became a social worker she worked as a nurse. She is 48, divorced and a mother of two children. She is really excited and looking forward to moving on to the next phase in her life when her daughter will be less dependent on her and she will

get an opportunity to have some time for herself. She is motivated to do more for the black community because of her own experiences.

Summary

- Self is multi-faceted and varies with context and changes over time
- Main roles (e.g. mum, professional) are just as important as one another
- More positive black professional women role models
- Defines herself by her support and peer group as well as exposure to other cultures through travelling
- Growing up as a first black British generation in England was confusing and displacing for her
- Church is an important aspect of who she is and her religious beliefs form the foundation of her principles and values
- Believes that there is an innate thing that can be passed on from generation to generation to help instil values
- Believes that the description Black British does not give any indication on who she is
- Individuality matches her profession because she does not feel as though she is working
- Experience of black families at the time was, they would be users of a service, rather than providers
- Personal beliefs sometimes come into direct conflict with professional – manages the conflict by not doing the work – suggests that personal beliefs override professional beliefs
- Black role models are important
- Most life changing experience was one she had with her black therapist –would not have been as in depth with a white therapist
- Finding a black counsellor was incredibly difficult
- Counselling training does not take on board the black perspective – a lot of theory is from a Eurocentric perspective

- Culture changes

Interview 4

Lola is a recently qualified Counselling Psychologist. She is 24 years old and describes herself as Ghanaian. She has been in her profession for three years and is educated to doctorate level. Lola lives in London and hopes to someday take her profession "home".

Summary

- The self has many components and all the components define her
- She believes that all the components are linked and cannot be separated
- She believes that self definition changes and these changes occur in context
- Culture is important for self definition
- Separating the components will mean that she is a different person
- Few black professional women in Counselling Psychology
- Few black women training as Counselling Psychologists
- Impact of few black women training means black communities are not accessing mental health services
- Pressure on the few black women that do train to present in a particular way
- Society sees her as a double minority (woman and black)
- Representation of black professional women in the community is important
- Being intelligent is important
- She is motivated by success
- Her principles and values are part of who she is
- Believes her individuality fits her profession. Would also like to be a writer because she believes she can reach more people

- Profession is not a separate entity of self (suggestion that . professional self and personal self are merged)
- Counselling Psychologists should beware of issues such as sameness

Interview 5

Yemi is 25 years old and a teacher. She was born in the UK to Ghanaian parents and considers herself to be of black African ethnicity. She is one of two children but has a large unit of extended family. At the time of participation Yemi was going through a phase of being unwell and was unsure of a diagnosis. She welcomed her profession as a means of being somebody else almost like "acting" she says. For her, the experience of being a "person" was more important in developing the self than being a black professional woman. At the same time she described the realization of being "black" in the midst of diversity.

Summary

- Self is influenced by the way she was feeling about herself
- Family is very important for her. She particularly believes that the way she is now has been influenced greatly by her relationship with her parents.
- Discussed symbolism e.g. a nursery rhyme that represents racism
- Seems to be influenced by the opinion of others
- Alternative explanation to slavery
- Personal history is important e.g. grandfather fought in the WWII
- Educating the public about what counselling psychologists do

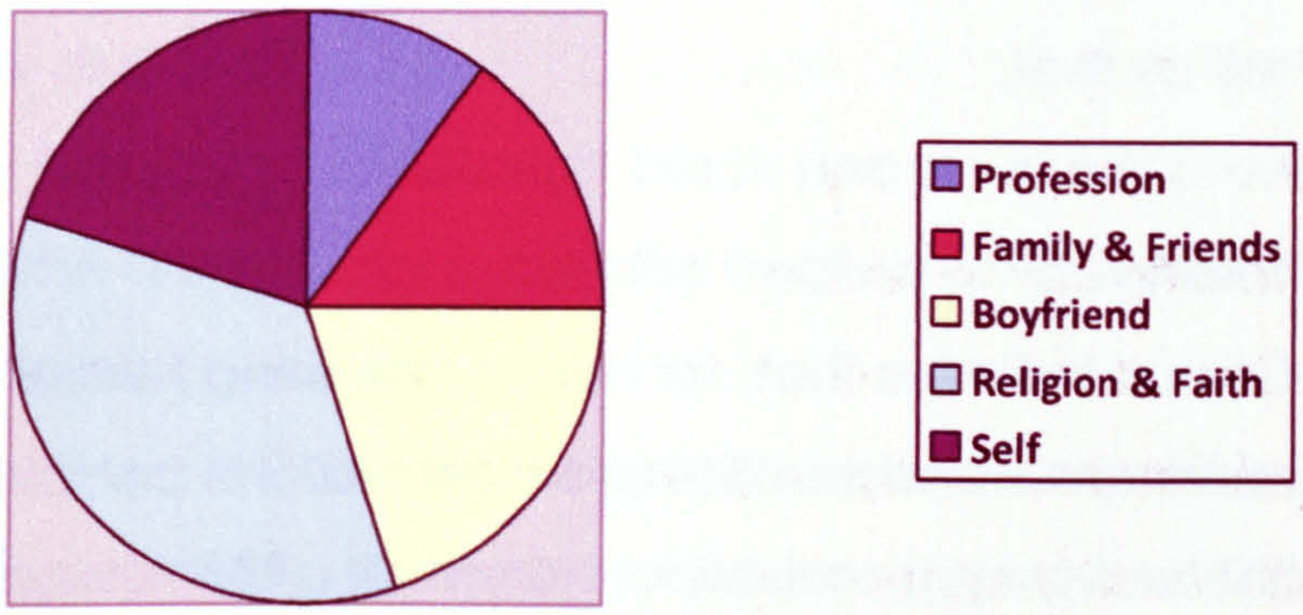
Interview 6

Fran describes herself as a timetabled person. She is 27 years old and qualified as a doctor 4 years ago. Up until 2 years ago she was quite satisfied with her profession, however, due to changes in personal

circumstances her view on her profession has changed. She began a relationship just over a year ago and describes this as enhancing her cultural values. She views herself as a British Ghanaian, who without individuality becomes "insane".

Summary

For Fran, the following makes up who she is:



- Her perception of her profession has changed over the last year and a half, however, this does not impact her perception of herself
- Upbringing has taught her that she could exist on her own, however, she thinks that this could be a "dark place" to be
- Describes her inner strength as "strong faith"
- Principles and values are based on upbringing
- Would like to instil the fundamentals (religious upbringing) in her children
- She values the experience of having her first serious relationship at the age of 26 because it has provided her with an ability to have a sense of self but at the same time described herself as being "emotionally default"
- She was brought up in an all white environment, did not have any black friends until she was at university. Having black friends has brought her culture into her life

- Few black professional women in her field

Interview 7

Gbemi is 30 years old, a single mother and trained as a solicitor. She has been qualified for 2 years and describes her profession as fulfilling for her but finds the "injustice" of her clients overwhelming to the point where she describes feelings of powerlessness and has began to question what she does. She is of African heritage and describes herself as that.

Summary

- Gbemi believes that, for her, maintaining herself involves being in contact with where she grew up and the people she grew up with
- She very much embraces herself as a black woman and constantly "battles" against the stereotypes within society and within her profession.
- It is interesting that one of the perceptions of others is that she is "more white than black"
- Her profession makes it difficult to "get away" from the perception of others
- Believes that the location of where she grew up has influenced the way she perceives others, especially black people
- Feels that she is motivated to help people
- Feels very strongly about injustice of others especially disadvantaged people. In her experience, these were black and/or ethnic minority people
- Reflected on her struggles on becoming a black female solicitor
- Believed that changing her name enabled her to get a job as a black female solicitor
- The way you dress and/or speak influences how others perceive you – feels that this has no bearing on her ability to do her job

Interview 8

Sammi presents as a mature 22 year old. She is currently a Mortgage manager and has held her current position for a year. She is single and has no dependants. Refers to herself as Black African originating from Nigeria. Sammi described herself as just "simple Sammi".

Summary

- Believes that being a black woman is hard and there is pressure to be "twice as good"
- Feels that there are not enough black people in her profession
- Women who are not black are also treated unfairly but it is slightly worse for a black woman
- Components of the self are personality, views and opinions
- Respect is something she learnt while growing up and that is a major part of who she is – "at work I won't even call people by their first name if they are a certain age over me"
- Her daily principle is to treat others as she would like to be treated – believes in kindness
- Family has also contributed to who she is – reflected on not having such a happy childhood
- Believes that she can choose to change who she is at any time
- Believes she lacks self confidence – stemming from a competitive relationship with her family and tends to compare herself with others
- In her experience she tends to separate her personal self from her professional self. However, she relies on certain parts of her personal self in her professional self e.g. respect
- Integrating both selves would make her feel more comfortable with who she is
- For her individual means "standing out"

- Her ideal job would be a position with "the potential to help people"
- Perceives that others may view her in a negative way because she is a black woman (stereotype?)
- Believes that the clothes people wear defines who they are
- Has never really considered therapy
- Childhood experiences have been vital in shaping who she is and this would be relevant for counselling psychologists to bear in mind if they see black professional women.

Interview 9

Ivy is 36 years old, a single mother and she works as an IT manager. She has been in her profession for 11 years. She is of African descent and was born in Zimbabwe but also considers herself as British. For Ivy, religion is extremely important and vital to her existence. She prefers to see religion as a lifestyle and, as such, she puts in a lot of effort and time into the work she does at church. For her, she believes that she has relevance to the world and thus her relationship with others bears relevance.

Summary

- She believes that her faith is the "truth" and "the way", and tries to live life as such – through faith
- Defines herself through her faith and sees herself as a Christian woman
- For her there is an hierarchy of importance
  a) faith
  b) daughter
  c) family
  d) work
- Considers individuality to be everybody's innate mechanism and this is "in built"
- There is a transition of self in her experience. For her, this is incomplete and is influenced by age and environment
- The impact of having a Christian life is success
- Believes in effecting change
- Was drawn to having a Christian life because of a "sense of security"
- Believes that her transition began in her early 20s
- Family influence was more significant at a younger age

Appendix L

Transcript – "Lucia"

1. **R**: If I asked you umm who are you? What would you say to me?

2. **P**: Ha ha I would say in the first instance I am a child of God umm and in the
3. world umm multiple identities gonna make up the whole of who I am, so umm,
4. daughter, sister, mother, aunt, partner, spiritual counsellor, reverend, multiple,
5. multiple, identities.

6. **R**: So for you, who you are is is is a combination of all these multiple things.
7. How do you see yourself in each of those, how do you see yourself as
8. daughter, how do you see yourself as sister, as a mum as a reverend?

9. **P**: umm, I umm, draw very heavily on my cultural upbringing and my
10. understanding of my cultural background. Umm in its original, originally which is
11. African and Indian. So I, I try to experience myself within that umm within that
12. space of experience and understanding. From my experience and my
13. upbringing, culturally in Britain tells me that for instance as a daughter you
14. know, you had, you would actually, your mother for instance because I did not
15. grow up with my father in a particular way you will relate to elders in a particular
16. way so … you know I do not have equal status with them not in terms of their
17. kind of their wisdom and understanding. And therefore you know I look to them
18. a lot for support and umm I [inaudible] with wisdom and understanding umm
19. they have experiences and knowledge that I do not have yet that I am acquiring
20. as I go through life and I look to them for validation of a lot of you know
21. [inaudible] and will that fit into a continuation of umm kind of answers to
22. heritage really things like that …

23. **R**: Yeah

24. **P**: so I draw heavily, I do draw heavily from from from from that umm
25. experience and I have to say in in terms of experience because what I
26. experience is what I understand umm and at opens up a very wide range of
27. people that I can umm relate to who mirror that back to me not just in terms
28. colour like elder women in the community, African women, Indian women,
29. Caribbean women umm and there is there is a there is a very strong link, there
30. is a deep link, there is a ancestry link, there is a cultural link, and there is an
31. understanding that is not about agreement it is an understanding that goes
32. along with all of that …

33. **R**: so what you are saying is that in terms of the way you've grown up, in terms
34. of the cultural background that you have there are certain things about sort of
35. not … rules you know that you kind of follow that you just understand you just

36. know that that is the way it is and you just follow that and that gives you you a
37. sense of who you are

38. **P**: yeah its gives me a very strong grounding you know I think when you grow
39. up in a in a in a space that is so hostile [inaudible] umm you know in general
40. terms as a human being and that that is kind of like also inherited in terms of
41. your your you know your spiritual your cultural heritage umm you have to find
42. you have to you will go mad if you don't find (laugh) you know kind of like that
43. grounding somewhere and so certainly the time I was born in this country you
44. know umm the hostility umm was very umm umm it was very blatant, it was
45. very normal, it was very in your face it was constant it was everyday

46. **R**: mmm

47. **P**: and your your the safe place was in your family your community because no
48. where else was safe

49. **R**: umm what what do you mean by hostility

50. **P**: well I mean just you know you know blatant racism

51. **R**: Yeah

52. **P**: umm you know the kind of like umm I … I mean I I have memories of been at
53. primary school you know I was the only black girl in my class and I remember
54. been called you know nigger, wog, blackie, monkey, every single day and and I
55. remember I remember becoming I have a very strong memory of becoming
56. very introverted umm you know because it was just not safe. And my mum had
57. like younger chil …you know like younger children so she didn't have the she
58. couldn't come to the you know she [inaudible] I have a memory of that I
59. certainly have a memory of that experience in that kind of like real cruelty and
60. that very interruption of it happened … in which … outside of you know in the
61. school space … umm

62. **R**: so your only experience of that was at school?

63. **P**: yeah …

64. **R**: how did that make you feel?

65. **P**: umm I think you just you know you you I think it is inevitable that you just end
66. up internalizing umm you know umm a sense of not belonging … of umm cause
67. to other people we weren't British thing umm a sense of not belonging umm a
68. sense of … a sense that there was something wrong with you umm and a

69. sense of been hated actually I think when you kind of like experience you know
70. cause its very traumatic and you know and so you know where you've you
71. know where you're safe you know where people who are like you are and umm
72. you … yes I think that of inevitable in the amount of internalization that
73. happened at that part you know that in … from that point on in recognition to
74. kind of like the society this society as a whole and umm so when I look back
75. umm it is very obvious where the comfort where the reinforcing of who I am
76. came from … it did not come from white people it didn't come from white
77. society it didn't come from anything that the society had to offer at that time

78. **R**: so for you just reinforcing what you said before your comfort your sense of
79. who I am came because of partly because of this experience you kind of gelled
80. with your family and feeling safe within that environment is that is that what you
81. are saying?

82. **P**: yeah … I think also the sense of who you are also comes from the negativity
83. that you've internalized … because I think that is an inevitable process … when
84. you are isolated in that way

85. **R**: can you say a little more about that

86. **P**: well you know it's kind of umm …

87. **R**: how does that experience contribute to to who you are?

88. **P**: umm hmm I think I think because what what I think because what happened
89. because you internalize that there's something wrong with you and that you are
90. not born normal and umm that you know and if that manifests itself in multiple
91. ways you know the I kind of like having your experience mirrored back to you in
92. the books and in the materials that are used in the resources that are drawn on
93. in the examples to the way that people treat you specifically in a one to one or
94. in a group space umm it's a very very powerful experience to have and so umm
95. what it means is that you begin to question who you … you know who you are
96. in that space why you are been treated that way

97. **R**: hmm hmm

98. **P**: you know you begin to internalize that there is something wrong with you
99. because otherwise people wouldn't treat you in that way and on another level
100. you realize it's because umm they identify you as been different they identify
101. you as been black in those days they identified you as been black or
102. monkey or whatever umm and so you know from a very from a very early
103. point you realize that you are different you are identified as different you're
104. treated as if you are different and not only that you are different but that you
105. are not acceptable and that what that means is that you well for me I didn't
106. believe that I could do things umm didn't believe that I was good enough
107. and that didn't believe I yeah, yeah that you're ugly … all kind of things cos

those kind of things although it's just really [inaudible] things but with that kind of experience

R: so what would make you an individual what would make unique to you as a person as a black women what is unique to you that is different from somebody else maybe?

P: I have a difficulty with the whole concept of individuality

R: ok

P: umm now let me think about this … umm … on one hand we are all unique as individual human beings but more importantly than that we are all connected as a as a umm a collected umm race on the planet and and that's kind of like biologically, spiritually, you know we are all connected – those kind of experiences I was just talking about creates a sense of separation umm (phones rings, participant answers). Umm … umm so (clears throat) umm I think that sense of separation in this society is reinforced on all the same levels umm from what we learn how we learn how we learn about each other. The pressure on the family on family is to become you know kind of like … sort of separate and non communal, I mean you know I grew up you know kind of with … in a situation where in the community that I lived in the extended family is as important as the nuclear family umm so and then but you find yourself in a situation in a society where that experience is not valued and so I think that umm I think on a spiritual level our journeys our paths are separate in a sense but at the same time it connects us and therefore umm the way in which we have lived as Africans and Indian people reflects that and and and and and kind of like you know umm ancient cultures as well but that is so far in the past and those that's what I hold on to in terms of my sense of self so … (talking together) originally you can be you you you can exist on your own in terms of spirituality but at the same time still reconnect it to your parents your family everybody around you … and that's equally as important you know I you know I I think you know have to have you have to work at having a level of self awareness to know what you are thinking at any particular point in time, umm to be able to articulate that to be able to find ways of coping with that because it's not easy living in a in a communal sense if you like there are lots and lots of challenges umm so I think that you know we also need to be encouraged and supported to have the ability to kind of you know umm umm to to to to kind of like be internal when we need to umm but I but I don't but for me I don't see that's it's not the most important thing but the most important thing is striking a balance between that and you know and honouring kind of like your connection with other people so you don't [inaudible] in a way that is separate from other people and there seems to be a very strong pressure here to me it appears to me to have like to develop a sense of individuality at the expense of the communal which kind of like promotes and fosters a sense of separation …

R: Ok

P: and and not be responsible for your neighbour or not or for not being a village that raises the child and you know I mean when I was when I was young and when I was a young mother if you walked along the street with your child in a push chair and their nose and their nose was running you know somebody your mother's age (laughs) is gonna say to wipe the child's nose (laughs) and there was a sense that every mother was your mother because you know you would respond to them in that way. You might not like it its ok for you not to like it but you would never disrespect an elder umm and I I feel like that's kind of like held me and umm I haven't always been aware of the fact that that's umm what it was doing but that is what it was doing and I think that that's how [inaudible] that's one of the attributes I am trying to pass on to my own children and you know I had my my network if you like umm reflects has people that shares those same values regardless of where they come from so umm yeah ...

R: you talked about having difficulty with the concept of individuality, what would you what would you say your difficulty was?

P: umm I think that the sense of individuality that exists in the western world today is an extreme and is at the other end of the continuum and it kind it it it comes out in a it's not even its even gone past self determination (laughs) and it's sort of it's it's it's entered a phase where its it feels to me it looks to me that umm nothing is sacred every taboo is to be broken, to and to be experienced and that I, I there does not seem to be a sense of individual responsibility to the collective that there the responsibility and even that there is a lack of responsibility to the self so I think that people create all kinds of situation it's like pushing pushing back the boundaries very very hard without consideration to the consequences and the consequences are not just for yourself they are for everybody around you

R: what what do you mean by that? Like sort of an individual pushing the boundaries of wanting to be separate from everybody else?

P: umm ok umm I think that pushing the boundaries and wanting to be separate is a phase that you would go through particularly in in adolescence in the west ... I get a feeling that that is not the case in all cultures and so umm that transition as it appears to me today has got to the point umm that that creating an individual identity is more important than your relationship with community that's how it appears to me umm and I had to really struggle as a mother to enable my children to experience, to continue to experience the communal collective and how important that would be and how much wit will hold them as they go through the period where they explore for themselves who they are. Umm because I think that you have you know you don't have to be religious you don't have to be spiritual I don't believe that kind of [inaudible] spirit just because you don't believe in it (laugh) just because you are not aware of it we can say whatever we want to say I mean when I was a student (laughs) I was very clumsy established [inaudible] umm but I think that when I really experience through myself and through my own children is that whatever values and principles you umm reflect in the way in your style of upbringing that you experience that you pass on is

what will ground them later on ... when they ... not later on I mean because
you experience changes throughout our live but that's what they will come
back to and umm I think that that can be done in an expansive way it
doesn't have to be rigid because when people think about traditional they
think about rigidity and I don't think that that is necessarily the case umm
and so and so my son is at university now is kind of like coming up to 20
and he umm he is experiencing a life style that you been umm you know
that he is not used to in terms of other peoples values and in terms of all
kinds of things that students do when they are at university (laughs) and he
will come back and he will talk to me about it now to me that's a gift it is a
gift that we can have that kind of communication that we have a
communication that is open you know umm he's got two older sisters that he
can that he also gets support from in terms of some of the things struggling
with in terms of you know what he has been brought up with and what he is
experiencing now but I think that is about you know a sense of having a
sense of community whether it is a family or extended community that you
can draw on to help you make sense of what you what's coming up for you
in relation to this in relation to what you understood the world to be before
and that you can check that out with a number of [inaudible] and eventually
arrive at what your conclusions are going to be umm and I think one both
my daughters went into a period of what I consider to be a very self
destructive umm and luckily it was quite it was very short lived umm I was
(laugh) [inaudible] and you know she is working out who she is by enabling
herself to experience different types of situations experience herself in
different kind of situations and I can see that's where we have we have been
similar because that is what I've done umm and at the same time she
comes back to base all the time you know she has people around her that
also reflect some of the values she has been brought up with and that is
how she relates and responds to people and Max *(this name has been changed to protect the identity of the participant)* is doing the same thing as
well and you know you can see that when umm they umm meet people that
are not don't have the same background or don't have similar values who
have contrasting values that you you know it sends a real [inaudible]
sometimes and that happens to us even as older adults you are not
grounded in what your belief systems are and how to handle it ...

R: so how do you maintain the values between you wanting to be self aware
you wanting to be an individual not connected to the collective but at the
same time keeping open the connection that you talk about as an individual
to the collective

P: umm I do want to stay connected to the collective, it's really important to
me that connection is really important umm and and both are equally as
important so umm for me meditation is what does it for me ritual is what
does it for me umm you know umm using our some of our traditional umm
spiritual practices is what does it for me and I think that I think that ritual is
so important

R: what do you mean by ritual

awareness of ourselves but that often times we don't know what it means for instance you might become angry at something or someone that is there every single time and you're not aware of what your patterns are umm and once you decide that you are going to look at that and anything can that any point in your life can help you decide that that is what you are going to look at and umm you could decide to look at it through I don't know say massage, having counselling, umm you know have engaging in in in activities that have a cardic effect on your life so I think it can be triggered on many different levels umm you know you could be a musician and develop self awareness and I went to a drumming workshop a shamanic drumming workshop in April and I had not realized I've wanted for many years to learn the drums I don't feel that I am very musical (laughs) and what I realized it was a whole day workshop that drumming is a form of meditation and you know and that was such a beautiful experience and its like anything in life can be like that that opens you up umm and you know I have had periods of counselling, counselling for me counselling doesn't work everybody and and I think you know I think it does but I also think it is a very umm one stem way of approaching issues and umm having rituals works for for some people counting words [inaudible] you could think of counselling in those terms as well but I prefer things that a much more active and I can feel it in my you know kind of like physically umm because everything ... everything on the energetic plane resonates in our body whether is talking or walking or we are dancing or whether we are listening to music whether we are cooking you know all our senses are engaged and so I think that there are lots of different ways for us to find or begin to develop you know self awareness and and if you and I think if you grow if you grow up close to nature it would be much easier than if you grew up in an urban environment umm it's not impossible I think I think its hard and I think also you have you have a one stead mind set which means that we have to think about things logically or that's how we are trained and you know kind of we and everything rests in umm in kind of like set in early education ... it has been frightening to separate from each other and that's not how we experience life so there's already a contradiction going on and we are taught to ... I remember when my my children when my son was in in junior school he came home and said to me mummy he said women can't drive can they? And I looked at him (laugh) I said do you really believe that? He said yeah and I said darling what about aunty so and so, aunty so and so, aunty so and so because at that time I didn't drive and he listened and I asked him do you still believe that and he said no. that came from school I ... all this came from school all of this started at school (talk together and laugh) and that was a direct contradiction to his own personal experience and so you know ... I remember ... I mean in the Caribbean I don't know but I am sure in the African countries they say it in a different way you are go in a situation and meet someone and you might say my spirit doesn't take that person and you know we're talking about intuition and we are ... intuition intuition is big now (laugh) so come out of primary school and umm you know you are taught not to trust your community ...not to ... I was taught not to listen to my mother not to trust my cult ... my culturous traditions not to trust the wisdom in in their traditions and the way in which the involved you which is different to kind of a year or century [inaudible] I was taught not to trust those things and I have struggled to teach my children not only must they must they honour those things but they must honour them within themselves as well and umm (phone rings & laughs & apologizes, I'm so sorry – I have to turn that off as well... hello) and umm so I think that umm

I'm gasping and gasping such an exciting journey it's an exciting journey for me it's being an exciting … well it's like seeing the kids now come back and when my daughter got to the [inaudible] or got to 19 and she started asking me all these questions she goes you know when you just tell me this and no no no and she wanted to know things in more depth and I was like oh my God! And you really expect me and I it's it's such a gift it is such a gift and its really happened me to understand the importance of umm staying connected to what has been … you know … not everything … it's not a romantic view what has been passed down but honouring the things that work … because there there wouldn't be a … there are things that work and we tend to just throw everything out you know you know when my umm mum was growing up she would say to us you know speak English properly because you are English children so we were not allowed to speak patwa, Patois

my mum doesn't speak patwa Patois and she's Indian but she in the same way

when she was in Jamaica she wasn't allowed to speak Hindi so her you know she understood a little bit my grandmother could speak it to her mother but it wasn't passed down to her so it wasn't passed down to us and to some extent that serves as a disservice because you know you if you you know you can really really open up communication with your community if if you shared their language umm and so there is restrictions there but at the same time it's like … and something you know where ever you were will have an impact on where you are … because I have a very difficult umm umm time around seeing myself as western but I am a western you know I was born and brought up in the city and I do not know what it is like to not live in an urban environment (laughs) you know my mum everybody I know from the Caribbean from Africa from India … they can grow things you now

you know my partner he grew up in a village, I said I can't cannot relate … I can't relate to that at all, its alien to me and umm and its important for me that I accept that that you know that that because I have so much to learn then from you know other people from other places and that's a gift as well and umm I enjoy that you know every day I meet new people and it's like you

know the world [inaudible] no two weeks are the same and it's like I'm … and

it's really nice when you can create connection you know and umm its exhausting but it's wonderful it's wonderful and I … one time in my life I had umm an Indian partner and umm he came from a city in marahastow Maharashtra which

is like central state in India and he's saying you know like in India there is no privacy there are people everywhere 24/7 and you know individuality please it's kind of like I couldn't think about … it's like through the personal development thing … I say development kind of strongly … it's like cos [inaudible] kind of like work it out and come back sometimes you have to work it out if you are in a you know if you are in a situation you have to you have to work it out otherwise people will kill each other do you know what I mean it's another kind of skills that you have to learn and it wasn't until I went to India that I understood exactly what he meant … its just like 24/7 and it's very communal and its very it can be you can experience it as very oppressive in the same way you can in some traditional African cultures as well but I think it very depends on where you situate and base yourself as well …

R: as a young person umm you know I imagine that I imagine somebody who is quite young you know in their 20s or in their 30s whatever trying to kind of like find themselves umm you know experience not not a lot of connection but just to experience self awareness just to understand who they are and understand what makes them who they are would been in such a tight collective existence like you said oppress that their ability to be self aware not necessarily to be disconnected but how does that allow that what what makes makes it possible for that person to be self ware if they are so connected you know so together how can they draw themselves out because for you it is important to maintain that connection it's important for you to be able to have your family your culture and the way you were brought up and but also be individually aware you know some of the things I've come across relate to people that are some people are so interconnected with their family and friends you know like you said everybody is on top of each other everybody knows your business but it's so hard for somebody like that to say where am I what makes me me yes I appreciate mum and dad and I appreciate going to church I appreciate this I appreciate that but who am I can I unitarily make a decision on my own …

P: I mean I think I I I know how … what a diffic … how difficult what difficult how difficult … no … what do I mean? I mean I I I mean where or how been in that situation is perceived as been very difficult and experienced as been difficult as well and when I I I am not going to say that umm that that difficulty that is experienced by someone or all or maybe the majority has not always been there but I am also I feel I think I think it's something to do with I think it is to do with the perception of self in that situation if you … if you are … if you are living in a very communal setting and umm you know where my mum lived … umm they lived back home, they lived in a kind of like a very traditional kind of Indian umm setup which is very similar to African set ups it's almost like a compound you know my mum and grandma lived there and all the house around or has somebody lived in their family so umm and then you know and the wives that came to live there and there were always arguments and kind of like cursing one another and its sort of because and you could say you could say looking at that that it's because they are all on top of each other and at the same time because they were all on top of each other everything is on the surface everyone is conscious of what is going on and I think it's possible to experience your…self in that process but I also think that people have to be able to understand that as well and that doesn't necessarily happen and that should be the role of the elders the wisdom of the elders but a lot of the elders have been … umm they don't have the wisdom because of the … some of the influences that come from the outside and I mean that is a lot of kind of debate. Isn't it? But I actually I do … I don't think that you can say that because I am living in this communal situation and its difficult for me to experience myself as separate or as an individual in that situation that that situation is wrong and but I think that if if you are in a situation and umm your (clicking fingers) and your are constantly been triggered aren't you by one thing or another because of so much going on all the time but it's no different living in the west we are bombarded 24/7 with umm umm stimulus from being on the bus music in you iPod (laugh) you know it's it's it's it's about your perception

R: but as an individual you can choose to turn that off you can choose not to umm you know in the western world I can choose not to if somebody kind of

448. on top of me quote unquote(fingers gesturing) I can choose to go to move
449. away from that person but probably in the culture that you're describing that
450. so strong for you to a certain extent you can't push your family away

451. **P**: no … you can't … it's really hard … and at the same time you shouldn't
452. want to push your family away I will go as far as to say that you might feel
453. as though you want to you might feel ah irritated like you've had a enough I
454. want to go to sleep now you know really basic basic things … you know I
455. am not saying it's easy but I am saying that within that there is still the
456. opportunity to change your perception of what you are experiencing and its
457. about and it's that and it's been able to recognize that that can enable you to
458. develop a sense of self within that situation what happens is is that we kind
459. of like we get all of those feelings and we haven't got anywhere to take them
460. so then they kind of grow they multiply and then it's like oh my god been in
461. this situation is too much and umm and therefore I don't want to be in this
462. situation anymore and I reject the situation and I think that every and I am
463. talking now on a spiritual level I think that every situation offers you the
464. opportunity to to be able to make a shift but with because people there
465. people are not aware of it or what you know I've had to do my work to
466. become aware of it you know when you go away on retreat and you're you
467. know sometimes I hate groups you know I it's like but I think ok why do I
468. hate groups what is what is what is been true with me what is going on for
469. me why is that I want to go away and be on my own and that is always to do
470. with things that happened earlier that happened earlier in my life that kind of
471. like the umm the the the the painful things that have been umm internalized
472. it it always goes back to that and I will go so far to argue that as African
473. heritage people you know born and [inaudible] have come through the
474. experience of slavery that is also part of our cultural memory and you know
475. It's part of ourselves its part of our D umm DNA. Its and so both a lot of
476. what we are grappling with and I mean in African more so I think than in
477. India umm because in India you've got a cast systems so its slightly different
478. umm that there's always an impact of umm industrialization is not
479. necessarily the right word you know the colonial experience of organization
480. all those kind of things impact on people's ability to not therapeutic because
481. it was there before but what I mean is kind of like its it impact on people's
482. way of thinking and shifting away from umm certain ways of being to
483. wanting to be more kind of like western and more modern and umm I know
484. that in some kind of like African countries because of the impact of HIV for
485. instance you know maybe 80% or 70% of the population is under 30 and its
486. you know and its down on elders to you know (laughs) the elders are in the
487. villages and so it's sort of I think I really do believe that you're your sense of
488. self how you perceive yourself how you experience your self is also about
489. your surroundings as we have been saying whether it's in an urban situation
490. or whether it's in you know in your communal, family or village or whatever
491. but it's all communal and it's just how we think about it and I think that if we
492. have lived in in societies that umm finding the human process more blatantly
493. you open (giggles) and support of that process and I think that people will
494. have the ability you know I mean I'm talking about through the educational
495. system I'm talking about supporting the family to support the family to
496. support the children if you know what I mean to support you know to support
497. those interrelationships and the relationships between communities umm
498. but we don't have that (laugh)

R: you know you talked about sometimes when that person is living in the communal setting and they don't have anywhere to take that where Would you take it?

P: umm I guess it's easy for me to say that ok where would I take if I'd been in a communal … the only time you can … that you can … the way in which I have dealt with it is umm when I … when I [inaudible] a journal umm to make myself go to sleep because sometimes sleep is the only time that you have or just before sleep and first thing in the morning and in any other [inaudible] where you could just pull out [inaudible] I mean you know umm I was prepared for [inaudible] children and I had I had I had very little time but I still had to find the time how did I do that? Sometimes it can be through talking to another human being … to stimulate … somebody who you know will be able to help you with things sometimes that could be from an aunty you know it could be through a brother or sister you know umm I don't think that that sense of individualist [inaudible] necessarily comes from been by yourself umm it can be but it can also be a combination of things …

R: what happens to somebody who you know who you know calling on your own experience say I don't know say somebody you know perhaps who has come from a generation where there's been a continual split from the communal family and umm they found themselves in a sort of unitary family the nuclear family where there isn't an aunt there isn't an uncle there isn't the you know sort of extended communal family that you We're talking about to take this to where will they take it?

P: umm well they could even take it to a counsellor or they … I do also believe that it's it's that you can create community too that will reflect back to you what you need and that you know in order to …you know it depends on what that person is you know in terms of their state of mind and and and firm use of how they see themselves you know if you are somebody who is kind of like …umm I'm just trying to think of groups I have worked with umm where you've experienced isolation umm in terms of where you live and maybe you internalized umm hateful experiences that that that then leads you towards isolating yourself from other people it's very hard to do and that therefore there is a process of feeling that will happen and normally for most people they can't do that on their own so they have to try out different things and sometimes it's about suggesting things that people could try umm or they will go to what you would suggest to them and they will try out different things and when they become stronger, hopefully they it it you know it it they will become more open to themselves and maybe to more of how they can get their need met. And on another level it's you know other people attribute their [inaudible] community and my daughter lives umm with her partner in Johannesburg she doesn't have any of her family there and she is umm you know her her her kind of like in law extended family have very different values she's grown up in a completely different role she's been exposed to different things she's very western in that situation and it its creating really big challenges for her umm and luckily she can talk to her partner about it because you know she has travelled quite a bit so you know but the rest of the family kind of like don't understand her and she's having to feel her way through quite a tricky situation and umm but she has the tools to do it even though she may not feel that at times and even though she may think the

world of her challenges she does have the tools to do it and I will constantly try to reinforce that for her but I'm not there but it's also going to be about finding the things she needs in that space umm and I think you know you can't do it for somebody you either have to support them and encourage them (laugh) and umm sometimes you have to watch in pain and horror somebody else's pain because of that you know I have a good friend umm from Kenya and she … you know when goes when she's here she misses her family so much and when she goes home and she's there she's (giggles) kind of like overwhelmed by everybody been in your business and wanting to spend time with you when kind of like you know [inaudible] oh my god when when I'm leaving to come back its like like [inaudible] I can I can I can sleep I can read I can think between on the journey on that 9 hour journey between Kingston and come back to my life here so I was saying we all need time out umm and but this it can happen in different ways and it depends on where you are and what you have and there are also there is something about supporting and enabling people to realize that there are different ways in which it can be done and that it's neither good or a bad thing in tha because I think we we if you attach those values to your process then you're (swallows loudly)that's that's I think that's very dangerous and difficult because you are where you are and people have to stand on their back and umm you know you can't and and some people will get a lot from reading a book on self help and some people say I can't do that I can't understand I can't do that and need somebody to hold their hand through that process and umm I'm very aware of those different things and I am very fortunate (laughs) but it can of like it helped me to see to really relate to old people and the way they were and and in rela … to my mum we have different understanding of the world but like we are both mothers you know we've both been single parents you know umm her husband my father left her you know and and kind of like I've been through that experience as a woman and you know I grew up seeing my mother do everything so to me there's nothing I can't do on some levels but you laugh) like she wants to do it [inaudible] and you are constantly learning and you know I thinks it really difficult if you are rigid and you find yourself in a situation where you don't have that self awareness and then you can't learn because you see it as something been done to you as opposed to something a process and experience that you are going through that you can … you change… choose to open yourself up to or not and umm and there are also different tools you can use for that and I think for me the spiritual tool is the strongest now and umm because it does it does help me to open up and receive but it doesn't mean that that receiving is not difficult and painful and challenging sometimes umm but you know I just stay with it to and to question myself in it and …

R: so you 're constantly challenging yourself about (both talking)

P: do you know what I mean? I I challenging yourself is part of the process of life and growth and I think that if we can within our with our communities enable each other to do that safely with each other because we do do it but from a very absent point as well umm I think that that is very life sustaining and at the end of the day that is what it's about you know we hear numerous stories I mean disproportionately about 12% of of young people that don't have those life sustain skills to help them make sense of what they are experiencing you know umm I hire I am i am in horror some of the things

599. that that umm black boys have to negotiate in this city in this country but its
600. not just this country do you know what I mean? What they have to negotiate
601. is never what I had to negotiate you know kind of like the life and death
602. situation in many instances depending where you are and what community
603. you are in that that is horrifying and you know how …

604. **R**: perhaps that's the reason why people want to be individuals and not be
605. part of you know this community of at the moment there's this picture of of
606. the black community as been very unsafe you know you only have to go
607. somewhere with a bunch of teenagers for something [inaudible] is it possible
608. that that is the reason why some people might chose and say well his is not
609. for me this is not what I want to be part of …

610. **P**: I think that's fine I want everybody out there to say this is not for me I
611. don't want to be part of his but I actually see that as a result of umm of a
612. really strong quest for individuality as a opposed to a sense of collective
613. responsibility and care for each other umm you know when I was young
614. people still fought you know they had disagreements they argued with each
615. other they didn't kill each other it wasn't there wasn't this thing about respect
616. or anybody coming from different areas they that didn't exist and you know
617. you go to you go to Africa or Indian or to India humans still argue or they still
618. dislike each other and all kinds of things but generally in the society there is
619. an understanding a level of respect it depends on the society because we
620. do have societies that have been you know that have been umm
621. systematically umm where people have been brutalized we have seen in
622. many parts of the world we still you know but not in Africa you know it it it
623. the the sense of self in that kind of space begin to take on you know
624. different meaning umm you know it can can then become about survival and
625. those kinds of things and so you know we we are empathetic .. I believe we
626. are living in very dangerous times and also in very mean times and we can
627. learn from the impact of those situations about umm human connectiveness
628. and responsibility that for me is the most important it …

629. **R**: so for you in your own experience what you are saying in terms you know
630. people still having arguments in those days where that … we had more
631. respect for each other and we don't now …

632. **P**: yeah, that's my experience, that's my experience I mean I am not saying
633. that is true right across the board because it isn't umm you know people of
634. African and African Caribbean background make up less than 2% of this
635. society so they emm the way in which the news comes across is like there
636. are halls of black boys everywhere killing each other and umm you know
637. how many how much of that less than 2% of this society do black boys
638. make up and how many of that of all group of black boys is doing that kind
639. of thing so it's a very useful portion of the perception that we have and we
640. need to be aware that that's the case and umm you know in the same way
641. we need to be aware that there are thousands of professional women out
642. there that globally you know leading umm kind of like fulfilling fruitful lives
643. taking care of families and themselves but if you grape … you know I … the
644. mentality like we do in this country because it's like that [inaudible] then you
645. be,

you can be forgiven for having that kind of perception of yourself. Because there is very little here that reinforces umm that that kind of perc ... positive perception for me do not look towards the norm what's considered the norm in society look to what it is that you know that that does exist that is there that you have to reach outside of what is in front of you you have to look around the corner or you know you have to kind of like you know wind and really wind your perception and umm and I ... you don't necessarily have to travel to do that ... you know I mean I went on a course, I went on a course run by Birkbeck a few years ago and it was called African pre-colonial history and it was held at the women's museum and it was great because it was nothing that has never been held in the history of London and it was great and I went to that course and umm on that course there were about 10 African heritage women all from different places how beautiful is that. And when the class finished at 10 o'clock we were still sitting there talking every week and the tutor who was tutoring the course was an African woman from Nigeria and it was like oh my God ... how many times do we find ourselves in a space like that when we can learn from each other you know there is such a strong sense of separation there is such a lot of ignorance about each others community and it's not just about been here it exists on the continent as well but that was like wow wow wow wow wow and you know and it's sort of and it's to those places that I look to reinforce my sense of self

As an African heritage woman. Now as an African heritage woman who is also Indian its harder you know and as and I umm I have had to work really really hard to umm umm create that a sense of value of that identity because it brings up so many different things for other people but that is external to me so umm and and and that's you know kind of like only my mother that's that's basically it comes down to that basic thing umm and at the same time its only my father so when everyone asks me what I am you know they ask me what my ethnic background is I will always say African and Indian but it's like they want you to unpack that for them but I am very clear about what that means for me so umm

R: how does umm we talked about before how your sense of being and sense of self transfers itself into your professional identity and you talked about you know having always to strive in that area do you think that the person you are grow from all the things that you talked about is that kind of help you maintain your professional identity you talked about choosing not to work for someone and you know working for yourself do you think that if weren't as self aware or you didn't have those things that you have that helped you along would you still be in the profession you are in now or would it be different?

P: hmm, silence I might not be in the profession I am in now umm when I think about like the early days umm I started off doing my nursing training and I left that and then I became a community worker I might still have been doing those things in a sense I still work in the community but I think I don't know I might not be doing what I am doing now I think having the space to do what I want has enabled me to be where I am now umm having that space was a conscious decision after I was made redundant many years ago that was a conscious decision to to to do what to create a life style that enabled me to bring up my child and do what I wanted to do and umm and that has not been easy generally umm but I think it goes back even earlier I

think my childhood experiences has pushed me galvanized me into a particular way, in a particular type of work... I ... service cos' like nursing and community work is like servicing the community umm and wanting to address issues of social injustice and that's a very much a part and parcel of who I am but also I was brought up in my mum has a ... she is a very giving person, she's a very generous and kind person, she would help anybody and we have taken that from her and umm it like that combination of experiences umm but I think that have I not taken that space I would be probably be much angrier than I am now and reacted to the world than I am now and I am a mother I am not but that's what kills you from the inside so yeah I am really grateful, I am really grateful, I am really grateful I don't have to rise to everything that happens around me or that the society puts out that we should be concerned about you know and I am glad I can see the bigger picture and that you know I am interested in lots of things in lots of different kinds of people you know I think when I got to a certain age the amount of fear that I had I remember making a conscious decision that I was never going to do anything because I was frightened because you don't want to get old and then look back and say I didn't do that because I was scared laughs and then in saying that there are loads of things that I am scared of but I will push myself to umm to even go through the fire I am not scared because I know that I can come out the other side of it and if I die in the process so be it because you know I also see that for me personally that death is part of life and death is not the end so I don't have that kind like strong fear of death so yeah life is to be lived laughs it is you know I have guidance from spirits I have a really really wonderful wonderful family you know and network of people and you know communities that I am part of you know if the rest of my life is like that I will be fine (laughs) I won't like to give it up umm and I know that it's not just me nothing that I do is just me it can't be just me you know it's all those that have gone before and its all of those that I am part of now and it's the spirit that guides me so you know umm I'm not Christian when I say I believe that umm you know we are all parts of the same god is called by a many million names so it's kind of you know umm that just opens up the whole world and i have had situations that make me feel bad and very uncomfortable and umm I was I always go back to the ones I feel comfortable with umm (laughs) but that's life that's life and I and I I have had to do a lot of research to come to that point where I could feel comfortable with that because I was not given all of that I was given some but I think that we can be more or less you know prepared for life if you like and I like to think that umm I have enabled my kids to be prepared ... they just need to be reminded that they do have the skills so ... you know ... yeah

R: would there be anything that you would want to share with me umm that I have not mentioned already

P: you haven't mentioned

R: that you haven't mentioned

P: silence hmm my partner studied psychology, he is a psychologist, a very good friend of mine who is also into [inaudible] she is a psychologist we

have this well we kind of like we definitely have this ongoing debate about what is psychological and what is psychology and what isn't and I remember I studied I went to a counselling course long ago and they started introducing different counselling concepts which really pissed me off (laughs) the whole thing about transactional analysis and I just thought oh my god I can't fit people into this different scenarios bloody ways of kind of I don't want to do that I am not going to do it and umm I remember that I was the only person in the group that was like I was [inaudible] and umm then it really came to a crux the whole thing about umm you know primary health team when you do get somebody who who displays certain types of behaviour that you have a responsibility to report and I was like I am not doing it I am not prepared to do that I am not going to do that I won't do that you know because if I know your meaning if I thought it depends on the particular meaning you bring to the situation and you cannot assume that it has a particular outcome and I refuse to umm accept that it has to b e that way and I think that you know whilst you can use frameworks and frameworks are useful that it is as much your umm self awareness instant intuition as a practitioner working with people that also has a part to do with it and I will not … for instance you know I know when I know the condition of black people in mental health system in this country I am not going to choose that road necessarily umm you know and I decided not to go (laughs) any further with that training and whenever I have this conversation about psychology umm I was going to do psychology when I was at college I was going to do it at A level but I decided not to do it and umm and when he talks about psychology and I say ok maybe what we are arguing about is terminology then and umm because I was kind of like I tend to be to relate to everything experientially and at an intuitive level and I do not need concepts to which … we are not say in concepts obviously … and so we have this struggle I have utmost respect for him and also to see things and understand human processes and we both have it but it comes from different places or maybe it's just a human condition so hmm I am one of these people who doesn't necessarily feel that I am … [inaudible] and as a spiritual counsellor umm my training yeah training was umm enables me to … it feels very comfortable for me to work in a way … the spirit enables me to work in and and I am happy with that so umm umm and now allows different levels of working with people so umm so yeah life is a journey and I am learning a lot so you know … whets interesting about you picking out black women and professionalism I thought was really really interesting because that whole term professionalism just brings out so much umm in terms of how umm people think about what professionalism means and how they have to be within that definition of that term and umm I was at a training day consultation day on Tuesday which was it was local authority and it was about the abolition you know the legacy of abolition and what they want to do as a [inaudible] in relation so the were consulting people. And it was a council meeting but we started of the council meeting with a blessing and attunement and grounding and we ended it with that and people were like wow this is so unusual to open the council meeting in that way be it really did open you up to the process and that is very normal to me and umm and I was wearing this bright orange – orange is my favourite colour I love orange and my colleague she wears purple and we were the only two there that were not dressed in like standard colour like black or dark coloured jacket or trousers or whatever and even if I worked in that environment I will still wear my orange (both laughs) but I am glad that I am not restricted by that you know when I go to do training or to do workshops it's like I love to challenge people's perception of what

797. professional looks like so I will wear my clothes and I will [inaudible] my hair
798. or
799. whatever and umm and I will have a conversation about with 'cos we don't
800. have to .. we don't have to be … we don't have to allow … I don't believe …
801. we no longer have to allow those emm those those narrow perimeters to
802. restrict who how we experience ourselves because that could be very
803. [inaudible]
804. and so [inaudible] so you know I went with my umm my partner was in
805. mental
806. health in a residential care home and I went with him to visit somebody on a
807. locked ward that was an experience I have never experienced that before …
808. and I was watching the psychiatrist talking and umm and this man was a
809. shorter white man with a working class accent and he was jumping around
810. as he was talking and he wouldn't couldn't make direct eye contact and he
811. was he was elemented and he was using a particular kind of language and
812. he was explaining everything that he was qualifying everything that he said
813. every piece of terminology and he was talking to a black woman … I love to
814. observe things like that (giggles) because you can just tell so much about
815. what is going on for me and you can learn that you can learn the [inaudible]
816. of life
817. that's what are elders understand that what they know and I find it upsetting
818. that we live in a society that would say that what they know and have to
819. teach is not valuable because they did not go to any university you know
820. because they did not do this training or that training and that the training
821. they are going to give you is less than having a piece of paper and that's
822. where I see the things about striking a balance and how your sense of
823. professionalism you can become depending on who you are schizophrenic
824. trying to go between one or the other you know trying to kind of like make
825. value of that make sense of that because the society teaches you that
826. something that is intrinsic to your upbringing your background has no value
827. umm and that's my bulk bear of that kind of like trying to get values and I did
828. intercultural therapy at goldsmith's and I chose that course because they
829. looked at non traditional ways of healing and and because I think that we
830. have to be much more expansive than what is taught in our universities so
831. umm that's it really …

832. **R**: thank you

Appendix M

Reflexive notes

Pilot day - 29.03.07

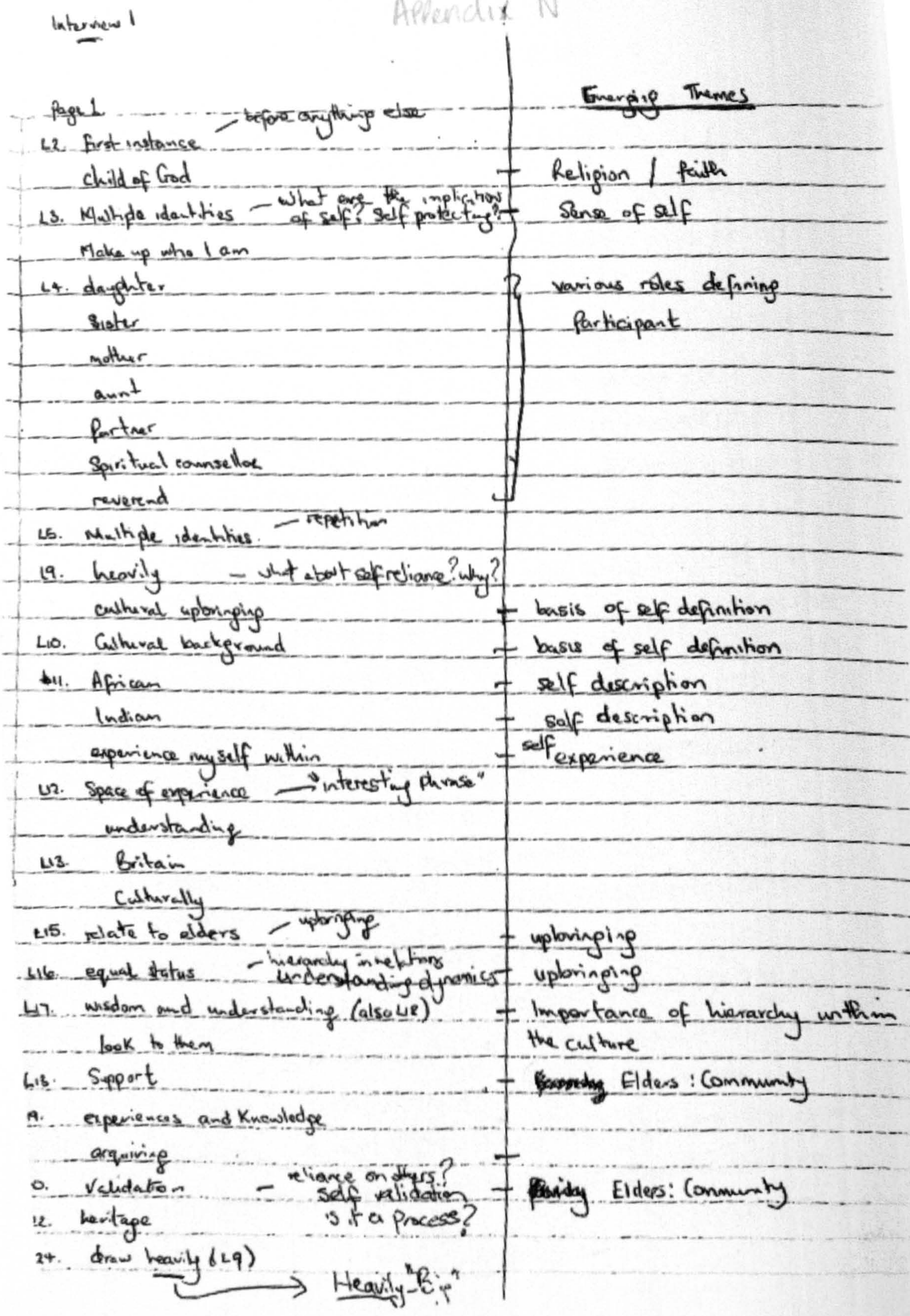
24 years old, Trainee Counselling Psychologist, time in profession is 1 ½ years.

a. Feeling really nervous even though I know the participant
b. Worrying about the order of the questions and where to start
c. Not sure what to say first and when to start recording
d. I thought I might say "thank you for attending the interview". Actually I started with saying "hello and how are you?" "Before we start, can I get you to read the consent and confidentiality forms, please sign if you are happy to carry on."
e. When she was happy to carry on I explained the aims of the research. It would have been helpful to remind myself of the contents of the information sheet. (Note for next interview)
f. I started with asking her about her work
g. I tried to reflect back the things she was telling me so that I could clarify my understanding
h. At certain points I found myself thinking about whether she was bored or whether the questions were relevant to my area of research – I am really unsure!
i. I have not memorised the questions – I do have the list in front of me but did not want to keep referring to it because I did not want to lose the connection I had with her
j. I went blank – I did tell her I had gone blank. She was rather nice and allowed me to gather myself. Can she tell I am nervous?

k. I was aware of the room, its coldness and my feeling uncomfortable because of it (remember this for next time)
l. I am glad that I followed what she was saying
m. Sometimes I had to bring her back to the research area
n. She talked about history – I feel bad – do not know enough???
o. I liked her – there was a lot to consider from the things she talked about e.g. impact of history, hair was such a big thing for her.
p. Was very conscious that she may include me in her prejudices however I do not think that I fit
q. Questions about me do not seem resolved
r. Overall: good rapport, uncertainty about questions solved following feedback
s. Pleased with the end result

Appendix N

Transcript analysis – "Lucia"



she seems assured questioning experience?

Emerging themes

.25 .26. what I experience is what I understand — Validating experience or 'just a hunch'? · Self Knowledge

27. relate

mirror back — relationship with others

28 colour

community

african women

indian women

29. Caribbean women — Issues within relationships

strong links

30. deep

ancestry

Cultural

31. agreement ? negotiating the relationship

age 2

.38. strong grounding — "haven" — Culture (positives)

39. space

hostile — difficult recollection although said in a matter of fact way underlying emotion — experience of racism

41. Spiritual — support from culture/family

Cultural heritage Sadness — " —

42. mad — Lack of support

44. hostility (also L39) — Question not telling part of the experience impact on self definition — experience of the country she was born

blatant — experience of racism

45 very normal

very in your face — the other side of the relationship coin — experience of racism

constant — " —

everyday — " —

7. life place — Support/Rescue — Stable environment/family/Commun

family

community

0. blatant racism — Nobody stops it Storking — experience in childhood.

L52. memories — childhood experience.

L53. only black girl

L54. nigger — I am silent. Feels important for this experience to be expressed. Strong Emotions } experience of racism
wog
blackie
monkey
every single day

L55. strong memory (Line 52) — experience in childhood.

L56. introverted — consequence impact of experience

just not safe → the world is not safe? ONLY familiarity — consequence of experience

L58. couldn't come — let down by the very SAFETY — lack of attention due to Error (regret)
memory (52, 55)

L59. memory (52, 58, 55)

read cruelty — experience of racism

L60. interruption — experience of racism

L61. School space — environment of racism

L65. inevitable

L66. internalizing — Impact HOW HAS? THIS HAPPENED. conscious process? — consequence of experience
sense of not belonging — consequence of experience

L67. other people — perception of others
we weren't british — NOT JUST ABOUT COLOUR
sense of not belonging (L66)

L68. something wrong — perception of others

L69. sense of been hated - negativity — perception of others

L70. traumatic - prolonged negativity — impact of experience on self

L71. Safe — relationship with others
who are like you. or interacting with similar people

L72. inevitable (L65)
internalization (L66)

L73. recognition — Maybe importance relevance to STATUS?
↳ interesting because I want to be "recognised"

Page 3

Emerging themes

L74: society — questioning the environment — Impacts of society on self defi
L75: reinforcing — rebellion against white society
L76: white people — "fault" or "blame" — sense of self comes from
L77: white society — segregating
L82: negativity — me vs them? — Impact of experience
L83: internalised (66.72) — effect on self
inevitable process
184: isolated — consequence of experience
190: Not born normal — Link? — Effect of experience
(effect of internalising)
manifest
multiple ways
11: mirrored back (previously = relation to others, now in other form) — relating to others
12: books.
materials
resources
: people treat you — relationship with others
one to one
: group space
powerful experience
: questioning who you are — Self questioning
: something wrong with you
wouldnt treat you
: realize — Impact of racial differences.
identify
different
black — Does she feel animal
black = monkey — like because she
very early — is black?
realize (L100) — Mixed feelings re
different — account. Appears
ck = different) — matter of fact ly

— Pain from Existence

Emerging themes

9 L105. not acceptable — Impact of experience on self (

L106. didn't believe I — Impact of negative e

could do things on self.

* didn't believe I was

good enough

L107. you're ugly

Page 4.

L113. difficulty — Individual vs Community

concept of individuality SHE DOESN'T

L116. unique BELIEVE IN — description of individual

individual human beings BEEN AN

importantly INDIVIDUAL.

L117. connected — Perception of the world

collected

MEE

L118. biologically

Spiritually

connected (L117)

L119. experiences

creates

L120. separation — negative experience impacting on the sense of community

L122. reinforced

learn INDIVIDUALITY

L123. each other IS LEARNED

pressure PRESSURED

family "CULT LIKE"

L124. separate

non communicat

L126. community — Community

extended family — Community = extended = nuclear

important

		Emerging themes
L127 nuclear family		
L128 not valued		Negative impact of society
L129 separate	'word repeated'	dilema between individual vs comm
L130 connects	Isolation	
L131 Africans Indians	self Isolating or ?	Cultural values
reflects		
L133 hold to sense of self		maintaining a sense of self
L134 exist		maintaining a sense of self separate from others
L135 Spintuality reconnect		
L138 selfawareness		Self education
L140 not easy communal		difficulties of communities
L141 challenges		
L142 encouraged supported ability		Ability to self sustain
143 internal		
145 striking a balance		Self vs others
146 honouring connection People		relationship with others
1 separate		
98 strong pressure		developing individuality
A develop individuality	Contradiction? Why?	
expense		
communal		
). promotes fosters Separation		

Page 5:	Emerging themes
452. responsible	relationship with others
453. village raises the child	
458. respond	relationship with others
459. never disrespect an elder	relationship with others.
462. attributes	— self definition.
463. pass on	— values
464. reflects Share Values	? interaction with others (different from initial view Share People of the same colour)
468. individuality western world	— self individuality vs con differences in different cultur
469. extreme end of the continuum	
470. Self determination	— Rules
472. sacred	
473. individual responsibility (Is this individuality)	— Lack of self responsibility
474. collective	
478. lack of responsibility to the self	— self lack of self responsibility
476 boundaries	— lack of self responsibility
477. consequences (x2)	
478. everybody	
482. phase adolescence	— stages of self
483. not cultures (making divisions between worlds White/Black?)	— differences in different cultures.
484. transition	— stages of Self
485. individuality 486. community struggle	— individual vs community

	Emerging themes
87. experience	
L188. Communal collective	+ personal values
L189. hold	
explore	
L191. religious	+ relationship with family children
Spiritual	
Page 6	
L196. Values and principles	+ upbringing
L197. style of upbringing	+ upbringing
pass on	
198. ground	
199:200 come back to	
L201. rigid	+ upbringing
202. traditional ≠ rigid	+ perception of the world
205. other people's values	+ experience of other people's world
208. communication "on	+ relationship with children
209. "open"	
213. community	+ support
216 check	
217 your conclusions	+ responsibility to self
125. reflect values	+ relationship with others.
belief systems	+ Self awareness
37. stay Connecting	+ maintaining relationship with others.
87	
39 meditation	Staying connected + ways of maintaining relationship with others
ritual	"IMAGES CONJURED"
1. Spiritual practices	
5:246 wind	+ awareness of the world.
Sun	
earth	

		Emerging themes.
L248. disconnected	interesting difference between being connected & disconnected.	. anger
L249. incongruent		
L250. deepen		
L251. not at the expense.		
L252. incorporates.	(Intensity)	
L256. Knowing		. self awareness.
L261:262 still in the world.		
L272. communal experience.		
L273. Hindu temple		. Religious experience } very
L274. African church		. Religious experience. } grounded
Page 8		
L282. Battle	Emotional?	. balance between self and profession
L284. anger		. —— " ——
rage	why now? Residue of recent experience? or past?	
L285. its still there		. anger
L287. authentic		. choice
L291. constantly striving		. balance between self and profession
L295. what it means		. self awareness
L301. massage		. mediums of exploring self awareness.
counselling		
L302. cardiac effect		
L310. Counselling		. experience of being in therapy
312. one stem way		. —— " ——
315. active		. preference of exploration
322. urban environment		. impact of where you live.
Page 9	REASON FOR NOT SEEKING GROWTH INDIVIDUALLY?	
326. fightening to separate.		. the other side of anger
335 contradiction		. other people's values vs personal val
340. initiation	ALONE?	. forming perceptions
341. trust		. against community

L342. listen

L343 trust wisdom

L346 honour

359. throws everything out

L365 passed down

L367. communication

368. language

Page 10

372: 373 not to live in an urban environment

377. so much

382. exhausting

389. work it out

394. oppressive

pL 11

417. very difficult

34. role

35 wisdom of Elders

45. your perception

58. develop.

12

52. reject

4. Shift

3. what is going on

11. painful

internalized

: slavery

Cultural memory

Colonial experience

way of thinking

Shifting

? Repetition
CONNECTEDNESS

← Use of internalized constantly thru" interview "Emotional WEll"

Emerging themes

personal value

against community

· link between communities

· where you live is home.

learning from others

relationship with others.

against individuality

some experience of communities

Some experience of communities

support to experience self

choice

self awareness

self questioning

personal memories

history

history

impact of history

tradition vs Western

L486. down on elders
L489. gam surroundings
L494:495 education system

Page 13

L504. journal
L505. Sleep
L510. talking
L513. Individualist
(the sense of being an individual ≠ being by yourself)
L522. counsellor
L523. create community
reflect back

Page 14

L585. Spiritual tool
(strongest)
L586. open up
receive
L587 difficult
Painful
Challenging
L591. Challenging yourself

Page 15

L601. I had to negotiate ← self
L603. horrifying
L612. strong quest ← seeking
L612:613 Collective responsibility
L619 respect
L621 Systematically
brutalized

Emerging themes

hierarchies of traditi
I am who I am because
those around me.
— means of support.

- self care

Self care as resolving issue

self care/ self help

Process of life

past vs present

ON ONE HAND
SELF or the other community
Conflict?

self care / support
interaction with others
Negative impact of society

Page 46		Emerging themes
4647. little here that reinforces	Self Value	negative values of society
4648 positive perception	VS	
norm	Society Value	societal norms
654 African precolonial history	↓	self education
4662. learn from each other	Self processes	relationship with others.
663. separation	or Otherwise?	Negative impact of interacting with others.
ignorance		
(these exist within communities).	SHE CHOOSES ONE PROCESS OVER ANOTHER	
666 reinforce my sense of self		= maintaining a sense of self
(I look to those places e.g gatherings)		
667. African heritage woman		self definitions description
668 Indian		—"—
669. really hard		personal value
670. different things		perception of others
671. external		—"—
of 17		
086 might not		profession and self mismatch
8		
10 space "enabled"		
16. childhood experience		Motivation
galvanised me'		
1. address issues of social injustice		Part of me (self definition)
generous		~~relationship with others~~
Kind person		maternal influence
taken that further		
much angrier		Possible impact of lack of self A
reacted to the world		
Kills you from the inside		
fear I am grateful		= self reflection
frightened		= impact of negative experience
die		
		consequences of motivation
07. society puts.		= impact of experience

	Emerging themes.
L718. death is part of life death is not the end	personal belief
L720. guidance from spirits L721. family network of people	personal belief.
L723. nothing I do is just for me	personal sense of community
Page 18	
L731. research	self education
L754. enabled my kids	passing down knowledge
L748. different scenarios	relationship with people
L752. types of behaviour	Labelling
L754. I am not going to do that	rebellion against (norm) rules.
L755. meaning	self perception
L756. outcome	self perception
L761. mental health	reactions to others.
L765. ~~negative~~ I was going to do it at A' level	regrets
Page 19	
L768. experientially L769. instinctive level	this is how she reacted → reactions to others
L778. life is a journey	Perception of the world
L779. interesting	views of interview
L782. definition	
L790. I was wearing this bright orange L791. I love orange L794. I will still wear my orange	self presentation
L795. not restricted	Impact of profession
L797. hair	self presentation
PAGE 20 L817. elders understand upsetting L823. Professionalism	L800 we don't have fairness not education rebellion against society perception of ~~community~~ cultural values.

Appendix O

Initial cluster of themes from "Lucia" transcript

Initial cluster of themes emerging

Religion
Cultural values
Family
Society
Racial differences
Racism
Rebellion against society
Perception of the world/others
Impact of where you live
Community (for and against)
History
Traditional values vs western values
Labelling
Foreign (not belonging)

Self perception
Roles
Basis of self definition
Self description
Experience
Upbringing
Self knowledge
Support
Self questioning
Individual vs collective
Maintenance of self
Challenges
Personal values
Relationships
Basis for relationships
Self values vs values of others
Impact of relationships
Self and profession (professionalism)
Stages of self
Awareness (and methods)
Choice
"I am who I am because of the people around me"
Self care
Process of life
Past vs present
Education
Motivation
Mothering
Self presentation
Rules

Regret
Anger
Self esteem

Experience of therapy
Interview feedback

Appendix P

Master table of themes from "Lucia" transcript

Appendix P

Master table of themes - Lucia

1. Self definition - defining me		
Theme	***Key words or phrases***	***Page/line***
being aware	We don't know what it means	8 . 295
sense of being	comes from the negativity that you've internalised	3 . 82
sides of self	Daughter, sister, mother, aunt, partner, spiritual counsellor, reverend	1 . 4
stages of self		
describing the self	African and Indian	16 . 674
2. The self and others		
my community	Your safe place was in your family, your community, because nowhere else was safe	2 . 47
	I remember been called ... nigger, wog, blackie	2 . 53
perceiving others	to help you make sense of ...	6 . 214
impact of others	it didn't come from white people	3 . 76
	A space that is so hostile	2 . 39
	I have a strong memory of becoming introverted	2 . 56
experience of separation and loss	I was the only black girl in my class	2 . 53
3. Influences on the self		
culture	I umm, draw very heavily on my cultural upbringing and my understanding of my cultural background	1 . 9
history	It's part of our D umm, DNA	12 . 475
religion and faith	I know that it's not just me, nothing that I do is just me. it can't be just me	17 . 723
4. "My individuality"		
individuality	I have a difficulty with the whole concept of individuality	4 . 113
	We are all connected	4 . 117
principles and values	human connectiveness and responsibility	15 . 627
innate mechanism		
maintenance	For me meditation is what does it for me. Ritual is what does it for me	7 . 239
a place for therapy		

Appendix Q

Master table of themes for all participants

Master table of themes for the group

1. Self definition - defining me

a. "being aware"

Ivy:	The effect of my actions on other people	line 145 - 150
Ivy:	What I do and how it impacts other people	line 151 - 153
Esi:	I know the value of what I do to change people's lives	line 237 - 239
Thandie:	It helps put myself in context	line 71 - 77
Marisa:	It made me a bit anxious but I was aware of these things	line 95 - 99
Lucia:	We don't know what it means	line 293 - 297
Fran:	I do play it safe	line 301 - 310

b. "sense of being"

Fran:	I see being a woman comes first	line 407 - 408
Lola:	The black component doesn't really come into play	line 22 - 26
Lola:	The mother of the whole community	line 30 - 31
Sammi:	I do think about it but not that much	line 207 - 209
Sammi:	I'm contradicting who I am	line 213 - 214
Yemi:	I am not black	line 279 - 282

c. "sides of self"

Lola:	There's many different sides to me	line 43 - 48
Sammi:	The biggest factor is probably family	line 73 - 75
Sammi:	My parents were always like arguing	line 77 - 79
Ivy:	Christianity ... Defines who I am	line 29 - 31
Marisa:	They all combine to be me	line 315 - 317

d. "stages of self"

Marisa:	I feel I'm not so much a daughter now	line 319 - 323
Sammi:	I can consciously change who I am at any time	line 132 - 136
Ivy:	That's what was there before	line 173 - 178
Ivy:	The transition isn't complete	line 182 - 185

e. "describing the self"

Thandie:	There is probably not one word to describe who I am	line 11 - 14
Marisa:	I consider myself like an African British person	line 167 - 168
Ivy:	Somebody who understands the value of others and works with that	line 10 - 11
Ivy:	I am part of a bigger picture	line 15 - 16
Fran:	A person who is personally quite laid back but I don't know that's true	line 53 - 58

2. The self and others

a. "my community"

Ivy:	To me the bigger picture is ... protecting the village	line 18 - 19
Lucia:	Your safe place was in your family, your community, because nowhere else was safe	line 47 - 48
Lucia:	I remember been called ... nigger, wog, blackie	line 52 - 54
Lucia:	to help you make sense of what, you ...	line 212 - 217
Esi:	My community on the other hand, oh dear!	line 436 - 442
Thandie:	Always to make a small difference ... I realise I won't change the world	line 199 - 205

b. "perceiving others"

Yemi:	She knows what she wants from life and she knows what she is doing	line 81 - 89
Yemi:	I am doing better now	line 104 - 106
Fran:	I was the most important person in my life	line 358 - 362
Fran:	Like when you see that the 19-year-old girl who's already got four kids ... who's never been single	line 366 - 372
Sammi:	I'd say umm, I'm kind to people who deserve it	line 16

c. "Impact of others"

i. Experience of racism

Lucia:	A space that is so hostile	line 38 - 45
Lucia:	I have a strong memory of becoming introverted	line 55 - 56
Lucia:	I was the only black girl in my class	line 52 - 61
Yemi:	Oh my gosh you're black, dirty	line 297 - 300
Yemi:	It did make me think oh my God, I am actualy black	line 307 - 310
Gbemi:	I just feel like you know, in the school especially, that's where the problem starts	line 137 - 147

ii. Experience of separation and loss

Esi:	I was thoroughly miserable for many many years	line 150 - 155
Yemi:	I got played	line 60 - 65
Thandie:	I think that when i divorced I think that time in my life shook up abject my life into another phase	line 97 - 100

3. Influences on the self

a. culture

Lucia:	I umm, draw very heavily on my cultural upbringing and my understanding of my cultural background	line 9 - 17
Lola:	it instilled in me values of strength and respect, umm, ambition, umm, well definitely	line 301 - 305
Fran:	I think I'd probably be really different, I think I'd be less regimental	line 493 - 495

b. history

Lucia:	It's part of our D umm, DNA	line 472 - 474
Marisa:	I think the pivotal point for me was learning much more about my history and where I come from	line 594 - 595
Marisa:	The basic things in terms of how people worked, sort of set upon against each other, how hierarchies were created	line 646 - 648
Yemi:	I'm named after one of my grandmas because she took care of my grandma and how cool is that that's another part	line 485 - 496
Thandie:	What i understand more about my history and you know, the whole kind of transition of coming, migration, coming from the Caribbean and and you know surviving within the society	line 284 - 287
Thandie:	The history is umm, sometimes quite distressing but other times quite exhilarating	line 293 - 302

c. religion and faith

Thandie:	The church as well has been quite a significant part of my life ... profound influence on my understanding of my value base	line 102 - 104
Ivy:	There is a set of principles and a way of life umm that to me is the truth	line 38 - 40
Fran:	I have quite a strong faith like I'm not religious, I am religious actualy that's a lie, I am religious, I don't practice	line 228 - 231
Lucia:	I know that it's not just me, nothing that I do is just me, it can't be just me	line 723 - 729

4. "My Individuality"

Lucia:	I have a difficulty with the whole concept of individuality	line 113
Lucia:	We are all connected	line 115 - 131
Esi:	It is extremely important because people are already putting you into a certain box and if they see a black woman living in a society like this we are still fighting stereotypes	line 410 - 414
Lola:	I think the fact that I look at myself in the mirror everyday and I don't see anybody like me	line 38 - 39
Fran:	I've been brought up, I think really subconsciously by my mother to always believe that I can exist as Fran on her own	line 95 - 101
Gbemi:	Just somebody who is not influenced by umm, just not influenced by anything.	line 439 - 442
Ivy:	I have the ability to read people built in to me	line 102 - 103

a. "principles and values"

Esi:	it's just really a sense of fair play I think I demand fairness	line 384 - 386
Gbemi:	Basically umm if I got to be treated fairly that's it	line 667 - 670
Fran:	Honesty, umm to me that is a huge one actually	line 190 - 191
Ivy:	The strangest principle in Christianity is that Christ is the son of God came and died for us	line 79 - 82

b. "innate mechanism"

Esi:	So when people are kicking you down so when you feel as though you're being abused, you know, you're strong, you are big enough to take it	line 905 - 914
Yemi:	Maybe it's just within ourselves	line 515 - 516
Fran:	I've got this inner, you know, maybe I do have this inner strength	line 214 - 216

c. "maintenance"

Ivy:	I see how people respond to me	line 270 - 275
Fran:	I'm quite vocal about how I feel and about things I do	line 199 - 201
Lucia:	For me meditation is what does it for me. Ritual is what does it for me	line 239 - 242
Esi:	I just don't compromise, I don't	line 392 - 393
Lola:	And also because those principles and values have become ( ) because they've been instilled in me	line 330 - 335
Thandie:	That's not difficult, I pray	line 222 - 224
Gbemi:	You can maintain individuality if you adapt some part of what it is that you are going into	line 896 - 898

d. a place for therapy

Esi:	I absolutely think it will not. It, if this is an idea that is being cultivated at the moment ... That should help a society who is ailing, a black society who is ailing and in need of some sort of counselling so then it would not get off the ground	line 929 - 948
Thandie:	I realized when I was training to find a black counselor was incredibly difficult	line 757 - 760
Thandie:	The counselling training does not necessarily take on board the black perspective	line 762 - 764
Thandie:	Seemed very strange to be doing in a professional context	line 785 - 799
Thandie:	That experience for me is probably the most you know kind of life changing	line 881 - 816

SECTION 3:

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE:

ADVANCED CLIENT STUDY

The therapist's use of intuitive self in facilitating self awareness in a client

Part A – Start of therapy

Rationale

I have chosen to write about this particular client for the following reasons:

1. The start of our relationship coincided with the start of a module I took on specialist supervision in person-centred therapy (PCT). We learnt a lot about working at relational depth and this meant that my practice was in sync with what I was learning.
2. Due to the nature of the client's presenting problem I felt able to explicitly use myself as a tool in facilitating change within the client. I will use this piece of work to reflect on the challenges created for me whilst working in this way.
3. I felt proud of my therapeutic alliance with this client given the fact that it was formed within the restrictions of a service that was limited to a six session contract.

For this client and for our relationship, our work together was centred on being in relation to other people. In therapy, this presented itself as the relationship between the client and me, and how she related to me. Hence, the journey started with past relationships in general but in particular the client's relationship with her husband and the reported impact of domestic violence on her. We explored her relationship with other women from Algeria and the beliefs which she said were in judgement of her. The therapeutic relationship came to an end because our contract ended at a point where she was discovering the relationship that she had with herself.

I struggled with my internal supervisor and the lack of sufficient challenging of the use of myself as a therapeutic tool. This has taught me, and reinforced the importance of both objective self reflection and external supervision, especially with the explicit use of self. It has also highlighted the restrictions placed on the therapist by their chosen model of practice. Clarkson and Aviram (1998) suggest that adhering strictly to established theories of counselling and psychotherapy can sometimes be "stifling" to the creativity of the therapist. The therapist's use of self as a therapeutic tool has, possibly, not been as openly acknowledged as other methods of interventions.

My decision to work within the person-centred approach was based on the reasons I have provided above, but also because I believe that the impact of the therapeutic relationship as reinforced within PCT, lays the foundation from which the client is empowered to build new relationships and mend broken ones.

Context/referral

I worked independently within a voluntary mental health organisation situated in the Eastern region of London. I saw clients on the first floor of the two storey building and leading up to the therapy rooms were a flight of stairs with very old carpet. There was a waiting area although clients rarely used this before the sessions began, as usually, they were met at the door by their therapist who, in turn, led them to the therapy room. Typically, this was a free self referral service. However, attendance was usually on the recommendation of their general practitioner (GP). Normally, the service had a waiting list and in addition, there was a further time lapse between the initial assessment and being seen by a therapist. This was due to matching the availability of the client to that of the therapist. The contracts were

for six weekly sessions each lasting fifty minutes. Extensions to the contracts were discouraged.

The client presented in this case study had self referred on the recommendation of her GP, who had suggested therapy as an alternative to prescribing antidepressants. On the referral, the GP mentioned the client's experience of domestic violence and thought this would be best explored in therapy as well as using it as a coping tool in her current situation.

Theoretical framework

It is necessary in this piece of work to briefly discuss the idea of self, and how this is relevant to the therapeutic relationship with this client. Intuitively, the self is something that we are aware of in our everyday lives, as we refer to ourselves on this basis – for example, me, myself and I. However, in the context of this case study, the self would be regarded as the entity which exists in relation to others. Mann (1994) suggests that the self is largely formed from its interaction with other people. Furthermore, Andrews (1991) states that the ideas we have about ourselves develop from the "internalisations of how significant others" view us.

Wosket (1999) proposes a distinction between the therapist's use of self and the person of the therapist. She refers to the latter as part of the therapeutic relationship which may be, *inevitably, present* during the interaction. The former, she refers to as the deliberate use of the therapist self. The deliberate use of self comes about by the way in which the therapist uses their person for the benefit and growth of the client. In this case study, the therapist utilises "the self" in support of the client to facilitate empowerment and confidence within the

client. This view was advocated by Wosket (1999), who suggests that the use of self necessitates the use of "personal characteristics", applied in a way that facilitates the therapeutic process.

At the core of PCT is the relationship between the therapist and the client. Rogers (1957) proposes that for any psychological growth to occur within the client, a set of core conditions needs to be fulfilled. The first of these conditions is that two people have to be present in psychological contact, (and this has been seen as a prerequisite) for the other core conditions (empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard). Aside from these core conditions the therapist's self has been acknowledged (Wilkins, 2003) as central to the therapeutic encounter and growth of the client. Therefore the success of the therapeutic relationship is partly dependent on the therapists' use of self. Rogers (1967) regards the self as a fluid, growing and changing phenomenon that has the potential of becoming. He postulates that the most important factor in the changing phenomenon of the client self is the person of the therapist.

Recent theorists (e.g. Mearns and Cooper, 2005) have built on this view, suggesting the meeting of both the therapist self and the client self. Mearns and Cooper (2005) work on the premise that the therapist and the client are able to relate and experience a great sense of connectedness with one another. This approach to PCT had the main focus of neither, maintaining a non-directive stance, as is seen in traditional PCT, nor of facilitating emotional change per se, but of an emphasis on encountering the client in an in-depth manner (i.e. working at relational depth) and sustaining that level of interaction. They conclude that the experience of "real engagement" is central to the healing relationship. One could argue therefore, that the impact of the client experience on the therapist and client, and

the response to each other begins the path of the therapeutic relationship, as well as the process of healing. Whilst, in this particular instance, the emphasis was not on emotional change, it was hoped that the encounter with the client would facilitate an emotional shift which would, possibly, encourage the development of other relationships. The therapist's use of self enables the client, who comes to therapy with interpersonal conflicts, to learn from the therapist's "open, intimate and reciprocal way of engaging with others" (Mearns and Cooper, 2005, page 20) and thereby use this as the basis of relating to others outside the therapy room.

Preliminary biographical information

All the names in this client study have been changed to protect the identity of the client. At the time of therapy Sarah, an Algerian woman, was 39. It was not clear whether she was officially divorced from her husband but they had been separated for a while. She had been married traditionally in Algeria and had come to England in 2004 with her husband. Before coming to England, Sarah had reported that she had married because her husband was the only man willing to marry her, even though he knew that she had no education. She valued his interest in her and said she thought this was enough to start a relationship with him. Sarah described how they had lived with his family initially after their wedding, and how she had witnessed his `bad behaviour' towards his family. She reported that she was unable to leave him after the violence towards her began because she thought no one else would take her. She said she had also been convinced by her mother-in-law that his bad temper would calm once a child was born. Sarah said she was aware that other women her age "with an education and a life of their own would have taken no crap from him". Sarah had four children by him, all of whom (a girl aged 15 and

3 boys aged 14, 11 and 8) currently live with her. However, Sarah described herself as alone and that her husband had never shown any appreciation of her.

Sarah's brother lived in London and she had made friends with other Algerian women once she moved to London from Birmingham in 2005. After the eventual separation from her husband, because the alleged domestic violence had worsened (he had punched her repeatedly through her pregnancy and after their baby was born) Sarah reported that she was alienated from her friends because of their "Algerian mentality". Explaining this, Sarah said she believed that they talked behind her back because she was a mother of four with no husband. She described dissatisfaction with her relationships and said she could not remember the last time she had anyone to talk to "truly".

Assessment

The organisation did an initial assessment of the client issues and used this initial assessment as a template for matching the client with a therapist. This is usually on the basis of convenience in terms of what time is best for the client to attend sessions and the availability of therapists at that time.

Client assessment within the PCT approach is often questioned, although it is regarded as a necessity within the medical model (Mearns and Thorne, 2000). Raskin and Rogers (2005) suggest that PCT is different from other forms of therapy in that it starts immediately. Based on this principle, assessment seen as a history- taking, diagnosis-making and treatment ability process is not necessary for person-centred therapists. Since the process of therapy begins instantly, the

therapist is thus focused on establishing a connection with the client, showing respect, listening attentively without prejudice and open to the feelings that the client may bring. Rennie (1998) holds the view that assessment in PCT is not emphasised because it draws attention away from the client focusing on their feelings. Furthermore, he believes that the locus of responsibility during an assessment session moved away from the client to the therapist. Hence, therapists using the PCT approach are encouraged to see assessment as an on-going process of evaluation and checking in with the client.

For me, the term assessment would be taken to mean consideration and, in part, will follow the view of Raskin and Rogers (2005). This process involved giving consideration to the client by way of explanation of the system. This is to say that the procedures of the establishment (or organisation) were explained to the client, and to provide a safe space for exploration, therapy was also explained to the client. Issues such as confidentiality, what it meant and in what circumstances this would be broken, were also explained. The client was made aware of the boundaries of our work together. For example there were only six sessions available and we were limited to meeting once a week for fifty minutes. The client was then given the opportunity of deciding whether this was a process she wanted to be involved in. Further, giving consideration to the client enables the client to begin to share their story from a comfortable stand point. The beginning dialogue of this process is best illustrated by the excerpt below by Rogers (Corsini and Wedding, 2005, page 147)

> *"I don't know what you might want to talk about, but I'm ready to hear. We have half an hour, and I hope that in that half an hour we can get to know each other as deeply as possible, but we don't need to strive for anything. I guess that's my feeling. Do you want to tell me whatever is on your mind?"*

First session

I met Sarah for the first time on a Friday afternoon. She was dressed in full Hijab. I noted her smile, which I liked because I thought it was very warm. I explained about confidentiality and how the sessions would work. I noted that, unlike clients I have worked with in the past, she was not very eager to talk about herself. The opportunity to facilitate communication presented itself in filling out the core forms which were mandated to be completed in the first session. We discussed the forms and the reasons for completing them. I thought that Sarah opened up a bit as she started to talk about her children, and how they were in school, and what her dreams were for them. In a similar way that Rogers invites his client (as quoted above) to begin to talk about herself, I invited Sarah to bring what was on her mind and her reasons for coming to therapy. She explained that her GP "was worried about her and did not want to prescribe anti depressants". She further explained that her husband had been hitting her, and on some occasions a visit to the hospital had been necessary. Recently, Sarah said she had gone to the police but she did not want charges to be brought against him. She said she was fighting for custody of her kids and that she was really stressed. She was finding it difficult to eat or sleep. Sarah also talked about her relationship with her husband and she shared some of her thoughts about the relationship. Towards the end of the session she said that she was not sure therapy was for her and that she might not return the following week.

My intuition was that Sarah had found it difficult to express herself since she had mostly discussed facts of her life rather than emotions. As she spoke I got the impression that she wanted me to tell her she had done the right thing. My thought was that Sarah had been brave to make the decision to leave her husband. I felt it would

be appropriate to interact with her at a high level of interaction (Mearns, 1996) by reflecting my thoughts to her. I acknowledged to her my thoughts of bravery and how hard it was for her perhaps to reach the decision that she had reached. Mearns and Cooper (2005, page 21) say that "to meet someone at depth requires receptivity to them as well as an expressivity". My hope was that being congruent at an early stage within the relationship would show Sarah that I was not only being attentive to her unspoken needs but also willing to engage with her on an emotional high level. I perceived this to have had an impact as Sarah smiled and said goodbye. I thought that the main impact of the intervention for Sarah had been that her struggle and bravery had been openly acknowledged and validated.

Sarah's view of the problem

Sarah described to me the experience of being a victim of domestic violence and also the neglect she had "suffered" at the hands of her ex-husband. She said that she wanted to know how to be a good mother to her children and to be able to develop social relations outside her community. She said she had "trouble" sleeping and that the sleeping pills her GP had given *her were not working. She* reported having a pain in her heart and head.

My thoughts about Sarah's presenting issues

After the first session, my clinical impression of the client was that she may have been finding it hard to cope with the separation from her husband and that perhaps there were difficulties with providing care for her four children on her own. It may be argued (as I myself thought) that separating from her husband was a positive outcome given the experience she had within the relationship. However, it may

be that Sarah struggled with this outcome because it meant that for a period of time she would no longer be in an intimate relationship. Or perhaps, she could not understand the disparity between the positive feelings after separation and the apparent negative reactions from her circle of Algerian friends. Mearns and Cooper (2005) suggest that loneliness is often associated with a physical absence from others. This view was asserted earlier by Sergin (2001b) who suggests that a lonely person would perhaps appreciate meaningful and intimate friendships. The idea of loneliness was plausible because Sarah had expressed the desire to form relationships.

An area of concern for Sarah seemed to be that it was important for her to have certain events in her life validated. I felt that this was evidenced when she reported that her friends "talked about me because I do not have a husband anymore". It may be that this alienated Sarah, and having someone validate her experience would have made her feelings real. This may suggest that Sarah's experiencing of her reality was in conflict with her ideal self. The need for validation may also suggest an external locus of evaluation, whereby she may have difficulty in making decisions or in knowing what she feels (Mearns and Thorne, 1999).

Sarah talked about getting married to make her mother happy, since her mother had suggested there would be no hope in her finding a man that would accept her due to her lack of an education. Further she described the pressures she was under as the majority of her friends had been married before her. It may be the case that, for Sarah, following the expectation of others meant winning their approval and acceptance. Hence, the desire to move towards a fully functioning state was not a priority. This was further evidenced when she said she was coming to therapy because her GP thought it was

best for her. I made a mental note to ensure that I was communicating my unconditional positive regard to help facilitate acceptance of Sarah's thoughts and decision making. This was because, at this stage, Sarah had not discussed her feelings in any detail about what was happening in her life. My hypothesis at this early stage in the relationship was that Sarah had felt let down by previous relationships, for whatever reason, and therefore, had developed a negative representation of interaction with others. Hence, there might have been fear to let me in to her world. It may be that by not discussing how she felt she did not connect to her emotions, and ultimately, maintained a non high level interaction with others as suggested by Mearns and Cooper (2005). This led to distancing herself from intimate relationships which, in turn, may have created a feeling of loneliness.

Based on these initial thoughts, I made a conscious decision to demonstrate a different kind of relationship, which I hoped would foster self awareness and acceptance, plus a shift from externalised to internalised locus of evaluation and control. I hoped this would lead to contact with internal positive feelings and a representation of self as being worthy. My thoughts about achieving this were to use myself as a tool to create an experience that Sarah would feel connected to. As previously mentioned, the person of the therapist is part of the therapeutic process. Wosket (1999) says that, if it was the case that the person of the therapist was part of the therapeutic process, the therapist's use of self becomes apparent when they use aspects of their personality with the intention of influencing the client. In my mind, and with reference to my training, I had the belief in myself and I hoped that extending this aspect of my person would help Sarah entertain the idea of strength in herself. With this in mind, it was important that I presented myself as me i.e. my intuitive self free from

pretence or expertise. It is vital to note here that although I was willing and open to being with Sarah (i.e. using my intuitive self and relating at relational depth), I acknowledge her participation in achieving the relationship. Mearns and Cooper (2005) refer to this as a mutually enhancing interaction.

Part B – Development of therapy

Development of therapy

Reflecting on the first session I noted how, from the start, I had liked Sarah's smile and had felt touched by her story, which, in my opinion was of bravery in the face of adversity. I was also aware of my uncertainty as to whether Sarah would return to therapy because she had shared her uncertainty with me at the end of our first meeting, and we had not had the opportunity to explore it further. I questioned whether I had done enough in that first session to connect with her, to make an impression that I was genuinely interested in her. I questioned whether I had succeeded in establishing contact at relational depth where Sarah felt safe enough to share herself as she was experiencing it, as Mearns and Cooper (2005) suggest. Unfortunately, the challenges to my reflections stayed with me as an internal supervisor because I felt I had nowhere to take them. Supervision at the time did not provide an opportunity to discuss my process with Sarah. It was focused on content of session and technique. Wosket (1999) suggests that, unless therapists are open to self questioning and the possibility of failure, as is sometimes the case in therapy, it is easier to attribute such failures to the client as apparent resistance or unreadiness for change.

I decided that the only way to keep tabs on myself was to frequently reflect my thoughts to Sarah in the hope that she would be willing to correct me if I was wrong. One of the ways I did this was

through process identification. According to Rennie (1988), process identification occurs when the therapist is able to draw the clients' attention to what they are doing. It may be possible to achieve this cognitively or behaviourally. For example, Sarah had recalled, through the use of different narratives, how her husband had treated her; and how she thought that her friends from Algeria did not condone her being an unmarried mother. I shared with her my thoughts about whether the actions of her friends made her feel rejected. I chose to respond in this way because I hoped that it would show Sarah my understanding of the pain she was experiencing. I hoped that my response helped her see that at the edge of her awareness she was possibly feeling excluded. Sarah acknowledged my response by saying that they were her friends and that it hurt her feelings for them to think that about her. Here was the landmark in emotion I had been waiting for. Mearns and Cooper (2005) indicate that Sarah's acknowledgement of emotions may mean she had gone past the presentational level of self where she no longer seemed to be presenting a particular part of herself to me. Instead she was being real.

I could argue that the next phase in our relationship was about trusting each other. However, I think that in some ways this was achieved when Sarah brought herself into the therapy room and acknowledged her feelings of hurt. I felt that this was her invitation for me to meet with her at an emotional level (relational depth). With this invitation I felt able to bring myself more freely (i.e. bring in more aspects of the person of the therapist) and therefore show that I was able to be there for her emotionally. Mearns and Cooper (2005) suggest that the therapist's work is much more than receiving a client. They say that therapists must be willing to reach out to the client and to share something of who they are.

In as much as I was using my intuitive self, there was also a place for empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence. I had to be aware of my own wishes for Sarah's progress, and also be aware of my communication of such hopes (see example below). This was partly the challenge of using my intuitive self. I had pledged to myself to continue to be real with her, yet there were times when I did not agree with the decisions she had made. External supervision would have been helpful to me to explore ways of dealing with my incongruence. In such circumstances, rather than appear judgemental and risk losing the engagement at that high level of interaction, I encouraged Sarah to begin to accept and trust in the decisions she was making for herself. For example, in the fifth session, I noted from her mannerisms that there was something wrong since she was not making eye contact as she had in previous sessions. I asked her about it, thinking to myself that she was probably feeling as nervous about our ending as I was. Sarah replied that she had given up school and thought that I would be disappointed in her for dropping out.

This showed me that our relationship was important for Sarah because she valued my input. I was aware that I was disappointed and that I would not have given up myself, but I was also proud of her because she had recognised that school was no longer providing her with what she needed (social interaction; the school work began to overtake the interaction Sarah enjoyed with other students on her course). I shared these thoughts with Sarah, and I hoped that this intervention would help highlight for her that she was capable of making her own decisions even if someone else would not make the same decisions. I hoped that my response to her in this way showed that, despite the differences in the decisions we would have made, hers was right for her, and mine would have been right for me.

Furthermore, just because I would have made a different choice did not indicate that I thought any less of her. She said she was happy that I understood her decision.

For me, this marked a beginning shift from externalised to internalised locus of evaluation and control as previously, she may have taken my thoughts as a criticism of her actions. However, it seemed that Sarah had begun to recognise her thoughts and feelings about things and she was actively searching to rely on her innate mechanisms.

Ending this relationship continued to play on my mind. I did not want to finish our relationship because I felt that we were just beginning to see the shift in Sarah psychologically. I was concerned about what would happen with her, and worried that the therapeutic impact would not be enough to see her through. In the fifth session I decided to address this issue of ending with her. The process was about acknowledging my feeling about the ending, and also, about helping alleviate the fear she might feel from losing our relationship. When I discussed my thoughts with Sarah she burst into tears and said that I had been a "very good friend" to her and that she would miss coming to sessions. I told her that I would miss her and that it was sad for me to lose contact with her after such little time together when there still seemed a lot to talk about. I chose to share with her my admiration of her. I felt that it would have been a template to empower Sarah and show that I believed in her, especially since she rarely received this validation or acknowledgement elsewhere. This may appear contradictory to my *initial* suggestion that I did not think the therapeutic impact was enough. At the time I was not entirely sure that following this intuitive intervention was appropriate because I

feared Sarah would pick up on my mixed feelings. Sarah did not give me any indication to support or discount this.

In the last session, I reflected to Sarah how impressed I had been that she had managed to attend all six sessions, given the ambivalence she had in session one. She laughed at this and said she was happy she had stayed. We explored what having this therapeutic relationship had meant for her. She shared with me that she felt stronger about where she was in her life because she believed she had done the right thing by leaving her husband. She began to reflect on the possibility of having other intimate relationships. For me, I felt proud that she believed in herself. I imagined that Carl Rogers would have said that this was the beginning path to the fully functioning self.

One of the issues Sarah had discussed in the beginning was that other women from Algeria were in judgment of her being a single mother. Sarah said that she realised that these women were probably envious of her because she was able to stand up against her husband hitting her. Sarah said she realised that, even though they had an education, these ladies were still reliant on their husbands emotionally, just as she had once been. This led me to reflect to her that perhaps they were not better than her, as Sarah, herself, had initially thought. I felt that it was important to point this out in the hope that Sarah would be encouraged to believe more in herself. This seemed to have worked because she said, that for her, it was about the relationship she had with herself. She recalled that in the past she had no faith in herself or her abilities. The process of self exploration had begun. Whilst Sarah's marriage to her husband may have ended, it seemed that she was beginning to marry her self-structure and organismic valuing process.

Part C – Therapist's process

Challenges of work and supervision

I worried greatly about using my intuitive self explicitly (i.e. showing a great degree of transparency) in the work with Sarah. I questioned whether the interaction had been more about me because I was choosing to use myself as a therapeutic tool. I questioned the ethicality of using myself in this way. This led me to ask how using myself would be useful to the growth of the client. These were just some of the questions I struggled with. Some, for example Rowan and Jacobs, 2002, argue that using intuition in therapy leads the therapist to not notice certain processes in the client, and hence does not integrate into the therapeutic relationship. Others, for example Wosket, 1999, indicate that a therapist's unresolved personal issues may hinder the therapist's use of self. Yet, despite these issues, as therapists, we are also encouraged to move beyond the boundaries of our learning and take a risk with our clients.

In taking a risk and keeping a balance between the negative perceptions of the use of self in therapy and the positives, which could lead to healing within the client, I relied upon the use of my internal supervisor, through challenging myself to separate what were my own issues, from those of Sarah's. The internal supervisor, as described by Casement (1987), is the use of resources (e.g. previous discussion with supervisor) that may be applicable during the interaction with the client. My internal supervisor was made up of ideas gathered from previous clinical discussions and presentation within my training. I used these as background to my intuitive responses in the interactions with Sarah. A particular way of thinking, which had been discussed previously, was weighed up against my own intuitive response. For example, when Sarah *told me that she had reported* domestic violence to the police but had failed to press charges, my intuitive

response was to normalise the behaviour and perhaps encourage her to press charges against her husband. However, the internal supervisor allowed me to weigh up the benefit of such a response with previous discussions I had been involved in about domestic violence. Instead of my intuitive response, I decided to reflect to Sarah the difficulty of making such a decision and the impact that making such a decision may have had on her. This, in turn, led Sarah to share her thoughts about why she had made that decision. I believed that in so doing, there was no direct pressure on Sarah to indicate that she should have behaved in a particular way.

This internal supervisor, together with personal therapy, allowed me to acknowledge my identification with Sarah, in that we had both felt let down by intimate relationships. The way I achieved this was to tentatively check my understanding of Sarah's expressions of herself and to explore her experiences in depth, thereby moving the focus away from me. A great understanding of my own awareness and feelings allowed the free flow of empathy as I often recognised the feelings that Sarah described. I noted that using myself for the therapeutic growth of Sarah did not necessarily mean self disclosure; I could use my experiences to empower and contribute to her self-belief and strength. Baldwin (2000) suggests that the positive use of self in therapy occurs when the emphasis is towards empowering the client, and hence the therapist chooses the best way to implement that. Furthermore, Wosket (1999) suggests that using the internal supervisor (or internal client as she terms it) offered a way of understanding the therapists' use of self and how it could be developed to benefit both the client and the therapist. This idea was similar to Rogers (1967) who claims that the self is fluid and ever changing. Wosket's suggestion perhaps implies that, within the therapeutic relationship, both the self of the therapist and that of the

client have the opportunity to grow and change with the appropriate use of the internal client.

My supervisor helped me evaluate my trust within the therapeutic process but did not help in the immediate interaction with Sarah in my use of self as a therapeutic tool. Wosket (1999) suggests that suitable supervision emphasises the therapist's own dynamics and reactions to the client whilst constant evaluation of the therapists' own needs, drives and motivations will help develop the internal supervisor.

My supervisor also helped remind me that the process of therapy was unpredictable – he suggested that I "go with the flow". Tolan (2003) suggests that it is only with hindsight that one can reflect and see the sense in the therapeutic experience. However, I now realise the importance of taking a closer look at the process of play in using myself as a tool and imagine that the implications such feedback may have contributed positively to a greater involvement with Sarah.

Reflections and learnings

"Intimacy in relationships is both feared and highly valued" (Mearns and Cooper, 2005, page 59). Wosket (1999) says that immediacy involves the therapist as they really are, rather than simply as a representative of some important figure in the client's experience. For me, both these ideas summed up my learning in the work with Sarah. It was new for me to go beyond the learning of genuineness into the realms of relational depth and use myself as a facilitative therapeutic tool. I was able to achieve a link between theory and practice. I believe that to a certain extent, the use of therapeutic self in facilitating growth within a client can be successful.

However, my experience highlighted the importance of keeping a balance between external and internal supervision. I was reassured by the hug which Sarah gave me at the end of our work together as symbolic of the impact of the relationship we had managed to achieve in so little time.

The other relationship which was equally as important as the relationship I had with Sarah, was the relationship with my supervisor. I recognised that I was not congruent within that relationship. I did not ask my supervisor for the appropriate supervision I needed. For my future development I intend to utilise the resource more appropriately and ask my supervisor for adequate help and support in using myself as a therapeutic tool.

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SECTION 4:

CRITICAL

LITERATURE

REVIEW

Exploring self concept in people with learning disabilities

In recent decades and more, a number of studies (e.g. Cooley and Ayres, 1988; Dyson, 2003; Elbaum and Vaughn, 2003; Gans, Kenny and Ghany, 2003; Nunez et al, 2005) have reviewed and examined self concept (SC) in people with learning disability (LD). Mostly SC in people with LD has been appraised in the context of academia, transition from one phase of life to another and also within the context of social functioning and acceptance. These studies often compare those with LD, and those without, in an attempt to identify gaps in services, and to implement policies in aid of those with LD. As has been identified (Silverman and Zigmond, 1983; Byrne, 1996; Bear, Minke and Manning, 2002; Marsh, Tracey and Craven, 2006) there are many issues with methodology and instruments of measure when considering SC and LD. This review will critically evaluate studies that have investigated SC in people with LD in an attempt to understand the relationship that exists between SC and LD. Thus, this review will critique studies according to how SC has been measured in people with LD.

SC is a term that is frequently used in everyday life, psychology and philosophy. However, and ironically, it remains difficult to define. Historically, SC develops out of relationship with others. Theorists such as Rogers (1947), Descartes (1978), Shavelson and Bolus (1982) and Purkey (1988), who have explored the concept of self, indicate that the perception of self is formed through one's experiences in relation to one's environment as well as in relation to significant others. Purkey (1988) defines SC as "a complex, organized and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes and opinions that each person holds to be true about his or her personal existence". Harter (1999) further defines SC as "evaluative judgements of attributes within discrete domains

such as cognitive competence, social acceptance and physical appearance". The range of SC definition suggests that having a sense of self is a continual and evolving process across the lifespan of an individual with or without LD.

The cognitive emphasis placed on LD, (Clever, Bear and Juvonen, 1992; Montague and van Garderen, 2003), means that it is difficult to assess whether people who have LD are able to understand and perceive themselves in relation to others. The difficulty arises because people with LD sometimes struggle to articulate what it means for them to be in a relationship. Stone (2004) contends that a possible explanation for this is a frequent "decoupling" of effort and outcome as well as the inconsistent treatment of others. By the nature of the term, LD implies a difficulty with the learning process. The National Joint Institute of Learning Disability defines LD as a broad range of disorders made apparent by significant difficulties in acquiring and using skills involved in listening, speaking, reading, writing etc. These disorders are believed to be the result of damage to the central nervous system (Das, Mulcahy and Wall, 1982). DSM-IV-R suggests that LD occurs in people who are below the average achievement for their age (APA, 2000). The efforts at defining LD draw attention to how people with LD have been categorized (Matinez and Semrud-Clikeman, 2004) and the difficulties associated with conducting investigations when there is no consensus on definition (Zeleke, 2004b).

A person with LD can be identified as such according to either their achievement ability or their age ability (Montague and van Garderen, 2003). The effect of this categorization is that, the exploration of LD and SC together is usually in the context of an academic setting, since it is believed that SC has a significant impact

on LD (Rogers and Saklofske, 1985). To further complicate matters, the difficulty highlighted by examining the relationship between SC and LD is the question of whether SC is a unitary or a multidimensional system.

Bruner (1995) suggests that the traditional view of SC focuses mainly on the individual and his/her wellbeing, and how that individual perceives himself/herself to exist in the world without significant consideration for context. A multidimensional construct indicates that the self can be perceived *similarly* or *differently* across various domains. For example, a social SC may be perceived differently to an academic SC, which may be perceived differently to a family SC. Within each domain of SC (i.e. social, academic or family) there exists sub-groups. For example, academic SC can be classified according to the subject area so that it is possible to differentiate between a mathematical SC and a music SC. Elbaum and Vaughn (2003) propose that a multidimensional construct allows for the combination of different SC to be aggregated into a global SC. Various measures of SC have thus been designed to assess SC from either a global perspective (unitary system) or from numerous perspectives (multidimensional system).

The primary aim of this review is to highlight the measures used in investigating SC in people with LD, and to draw attention to how the lack of consistent definitions in the areas of SC and LD make it more difficult to investigate the relationship between SC and LD. In critiquing the studies in this area, the current review focuses on instruments of measure, the method of investigation, whether the studies are explicit in defining LD and SC, classification of LD and the impact of classification on the type of instrument used. Finally, the review will attempt to aggregate suggestions which may be helpful

for future interventions in this field. Before attempting to critically evaluate the literature, it is important to state that, within the context of this review, SC is regarded as an individual's perception of himself/herself in relation others. In addition, self perception, self worth and self esteem are used interchangeably to mean SC. These terms have previously been utilised interchangeably by Swann, Chang-Schneider and McClarty (2007).

The studies being assessed were identified from an internet search through Google by typing in various term combinations such as "self concept and learning disability", "self perception in people with learning disability" etc. Through reading various articles in the learning disability journal and using the references from the internet and journal search, applicable articles were selected based on the aims of this study.

Kershner (1990) explored SC as a predictor of LD in children. His study was conducted over two academic years with the aim of testing whether IQ and SC were significant predictors of remedial success in children with LD. There were twenty-five participants, nineteen boys and six girls who were identified as having LD according to the Ministry of Education guidelines. The definition of LD within these guidelines excluded neurological disorders, emotional disturbance, sensory loss and any LD resulting from environmental and instructional influences. Diagnosis of LD was further upheld by a psychologist. The instrument used in this study was the Coopersmith Self Esteem Inventory (CSEI) (Coopersmith, 1981). The subscales of CSEI measure expectation of success, acceptance and personal strength in dealing with peers, family relationships and school. The questionnaire was administered in small groups of eight or nine children by trained researchers; firstly in 1985 (Test 1), and again in

1987, twenty-one months later (Test 2). The results of the study indicate no relationship between IQ and LD. However, it was found that SC predicted successful achievement in learning areas. One of the strengths of the investigation is that the CSEI attempted to explore the relationship between children with LD and significant others such as peers and family. The CSEI has a norm group of over seven thousand children from various socioeconomic backgrounds which means that the scope of comparison to the norm is large enough to allow results to be interpreted based on the large norm group. CSEI was used at both test 1 and test 2 –there was a significant difference between the two periods. The difference at time 1 and time 2 may be related to improved response. That is, participants had become familiar with the test and hence their response time improved.

Kershner's (1990) study highlights the impact of SC on a specific learning area (auditory-linguistic). To minimize the effect of LD, items on the questionnaire were read out to the participants to aid their understanding of the items. Validation for using a global SC measure to examine a specific area (i.e. auditory-linguistic) of LD was not explicit. Zeleke (2004b) suggests that since LD has many different facets it is more helpful to explore a particular facet of LD with an appropriate measure of SC. However, it is acknowledged that CSEI has an academic SC subscale. Further, SC was not defined within the parameters of the investigation. Therefore, when the results showed a significant relationship between SC and success in achievement it was difficult to understand the context in which the relationship existed. This led to confusion about how responses were scored and interpreted.

The study by Winnie, Woodlands and Wong (1982) also used the CSEI to explore differences in the SC of children with LD in comparison

to normally achieving children and gifted children. Winnie et al's (1982) investigation was based on the premise that SC theories hypothesized that these groups of children are classed differently and hence have different SCs. Therefore, the aim of Winnie et al's (1982) investigation was to examine the construct of SC as displayed by LD, gifted and normally achieving participants. In addition to using the CSEI, Winnie et al (1982) employed the use of Sears Self Concept Scale (SSCS). The rationale behind using two measures was to ascertain the structure of SC and LD constructs – i.e. whether the two instruments measured the same constructs with the same group of participants. Winnie et al (1982) assumed that SC primarily shapes the development of children and as such incorporates the significance of being in relation to others.

Unlike the CSEI, which is a 58-item questionnaire with four subscales measuring general SC, self-peer relations, home relationships and academic perception, the SSCS is a 48-item instrument with nine subscales exploring physical ability, appearance, social relations, happy qualities, convergent mental abilities, divergent mental abilities, academic abilities and work habits. Scores on the CSEI are calculated by ascribing positive items a high code (e.g. 5) and then summing them, negative items are also summed after being ascribed low codes (e.g. 1). This means that negative items are in direct proportion to the high expressions of SC. The SSCS scale only contains positive items, thus items are ascribed various codes from 5 to 1 depending on how positive the item is. For example, code 5 is ascribed to an "excellent" response while 1 is ascribed for "not so good" response. The totals in each category are then summed to provide an overall impression of SC.

In Winnie et al's (1982) study, participants were identified as either LD, normal or gifted according to scores on vocabulary tests, basic skills test and teacher identification. Children with LD were so categorized because of the discrepancy between their actual scores on the administered test and their grade scores. Children with LD were found to be at least 1 or more grade equivalent below their achievement level. It is important to note here that this form of categorization is about achievement relevant to the educational level rather than age. This is to say, there is a difference between achievement level and age level. Zeleke (2004a) and Bear, Koetering and Braziel (2006) suggest that this difference occurs because children with LD have been characterized with repeated failure so, as they grow older the difference in achievement is more noticeable. This in turn impacts the children's SC. The definition of LD was not explicit; there was confusion over classifying *participants* appropriately. The effect of labelling children as LD reduced due to a time delay between identifying students and allocating them to various groups. However, Winnie et al (1982) highlight brilliantly the suitability of comparing SC of different groups using two SC scales. They showed that SC was comparable across all groups of students with or without LD.

Waldon, Saphire and Rosenblum (1987); Rogers and Saklofske (1985); Coleman (1985); Alvarez and Adelman (1986); Margalit and Zak (1984); Silverman and Zigmond (1983); Dyson (2003); Cooley and Ayres (1988) and Gans, Kenny and Ghany (2003) are some of the researchers that have used the Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale (PHCSCS) developed by Piers (1969) to explore the SC of children and adolescents with LD. PHCSCS consists of 80 items with closed responses and relates to how each participant feels about themselves. The scale was developed on the basis that SC is

consistent throughout development. The scale was standardized using over a thousand 8 to 18 year olds. In comparison to the norm group of the CSEI measure which had over seven thousand participants, the norm group for PHCSCS was not large enough. Additionally, the inclusion of 18 year olds, who are technically adults, may skew the results of studies using this measure. To avoid socially desirable responses the measure has equal numbers of positive and negative statements. PHCSCS is a multidimensional measure of SC (Cooley and Ayres, 1988) and therefore is ideal for measuring different facets of SC. Kershner (1990) argues that the PHCSCS is a good measure to use with students even though he used the CSEI in his study.

The study by Dyson (2003) identified how SC impacts on other areas of life such as academic and social life. She found that there was a strong relationship between SC and academic achievement – she named this a predictor relationship where SC predicts academic achievement. In contrast to other studies comparing those with LD and their peers, Dyson (2003) explored differences between children with LD and their non LD siblings. She set out to test the hypothesis that children with LD have a lower academic, social and global SC when placed in a different setting. She provided plausible arguments for reasons why children may present with low self perception in academic competence. However, there was no indication of what low self perception meant. Nevertheless, the study points out that exploring SC in school settings emphasises grade differences and may skew the results of studies that explore academic SC in an educational setting. In Dyson's (2003) study, LD was categorized based on achievement ability rather than age ability. As a consequence, children with LD who have continually experienced failure score less on the PHCSCS. To counteract the effect of administering the instrument in a school setting, Dyson (2003)

administered the scale at home. No differences were found in academic SC of children with LD and their siblings without LD. This finding helps to reconceptualise SC in children with LD. Certainly within a context outside the academic setting (as was the case of this study employing the family context), children present with a SC which is comparable to a normative range.

Silverman and Zigmond (1983) found no difference between the SC of adolescents with and without LD. They used the PHCSCS as a multidimensional scale of SC to consider the psychosocial characteristics involved in adolescents with LD. Silverman and Zigmond (1983) contend that those with LD are aware of their learning abilities and the expectation of significant others. They propose that the labelling of a "poor SC" in those with LD is largely due to clinical experience and case record. Participants with LD were identified individually, and the scale was administered twice to each respondent. To combat against reading differences, the "yes" and "no" responses were pre-typed on cards and participants were required to drop their responses in corresponding boxes for each item on the scale. One possible pitfall of the study is the administration of the scale in a resource room. As suggested by Dyson (2003), exploration of academic SC in an educational setting tends to emphasise only the grades of children. Further, Silverman and Zigmond's (1983) study assumes that the reader knows what LD and SC mean and therefore no explanation is given for their use of it. Nevertheless, they found a difference in the SC of those with and without LD based on where they lived (i.e. urban and suburban areas have different effects on SC). The impact of this finding, together with the findings of Dyson's (2003) study, *suggest that there are other* valuable variables outside academic achievement involved in the SC of children with LD.

Silverman and Zigmond's (1983) findings relate to the reference and social comparison theories. Silverman and Zigmond (1983) suggest that these two theories correspond to how people with LD compare themselves to others when assessing their SC. In the case of Silverman and Zigmond's (1983) study, the participants were involved in a dual program which meant that they were in involved with similar (i.e. others with LD) and different (others without LD) people. Thus, one of the two groups would have been used as a reference point. In addition, Silverman and Zigmond (1983) also suggest that adolescents with LD compare different SC with different significant others. For example, adolescents with LD will compare their academic achievements with LD peers, but compare other SC with peers without LD.

Cooley and Ayres (1988) found evidence of group differences between students with and without LD. Their study was concerned with SC and attributions made about academic successes and failures. Cooley and Ayres (1988) believe that a "low global SC" is due to differences in perception of intellectual and school status. That is, LD deficits are restricted to school aspects of the child's perception but transcend all areas of the child's life. Thus, interventions to combat intellectual and school status SC will effectively impact the child's global SC. However, their use of PHCSCS indicates otherwise since the scale was used as a measure of multidimensional SC rather than a specific SC (i.e. intellectual and school SC).

Cooley and Ayres's (1988) study fails to demonstrate what SC is, let alone low SC. The PHCSCS was administered individually; those without LD completed the measures in their classrooms whilst those with LD completed the scale in their resource room. Based on their results, Cooley and Ayres (1988) propose an attribution theory which

says that the type of attribution a child makes will affect the level of motivation he or she brings to an activity. This implies that there could be internal/external acknowledgements of failure. The tendency for students or children to make internal or external attributions will lead to a lack of motivation and incentive to carry on. The study lacked clarity in respect of how SC is viewed – as a unitary system or multidimensional system. In addition, a varied group of respondents may have been helpful, especially in the light of results that highlight how students may or may not make attributions to failures and successes.

Thus far, the discussion has focused on three scales: SSCS, CSEI and PHCSCS. Generally, the studies examined have been varied in their findings, and also, in their use of the different measures. More recent measures used are: Adult Source of Self Esteem Inventory (ASSEI) used by Ping-Ying Li, Sing-Fai Tam and Wai-Kwong Man (2006); Culture Free Self Esteem Inventory (CFSEI) used by Zeleke (2004b); Student Self Report System (SSRS) used by Montague and van Garderen (2003) and Self Description Questionnaire (SDQ) used by Nunez, Gonzalez-Pienda, Gonzalez-Pumariega, Roces, Alvarez, Gonzalez, Cabanach, Valle and Rodriguez (2005).

Ping-Ying Li et al (2006) explored SC in the context of social relationships in adults with LD. This is one of the few studies that use adult participants. Ping-Ying Li et al (2006) suggest that family, social and academic components of SC are important attributes of the global SC of Hong Kong Chinese participants. Ping-Ying Li et al's (2006) study illustrates the effects of a collectivist society on those with LD, and suggests that a positive SC correlates with the social component. For Ping-Ying et al, SC is important because it helps those with LD tolerate internal and/or external stresses as well as influencing

their quality of life. In doing so, they acknowledge the "transaction" made by individuals to and from significant others in perceiving themselves.

Ping-Ying Li et al's (2006) study approaches the research from a holistic perspective – that is, their procedure incorporates semi-structured interviews as well as self reports. Only those with mild LD were used in the study because they represent the highest population of those with LD in Hong Kong, but the ASSEI required very high level cognitive function and communication skills. Whilst some caution is drawn to the high level cognitive skills required to use the ASSEI, it is commendable that the study is different from others in its use of a qualitative method. This sits nicely with the notion of a general well-being. Aside from the study's use of mixed methods, the open-ended questions of the semi-structured interview may benefit from rephrasing. For example, one of the questions asked which areas of life made participants feel good or bad. The way this question is phrased indicates that participants should feel one way or the other. Perhaps just asking how they feel about the areas of their lives would have been sufficient. In administering the measure, participants were seen individually and careful measures were taken to ensure that respondents understood what was required of them. The ASSEI was used as a multidimensional scale of SC, which seemed appropriate, since the components of SC were being investigated as well as an overall global SC. One downside however, was that LD was not explicitly defined and thus the impact of how participants were categorized was difficult to identify.

Unlike Ping-Ying Li et al, Zeleke (2004b) was more specific in his approach to SC. Zeleke (2004b) explored SC in the context of an academic setting and defined the parameters of the context by

investigating Mathematics disabilities (MD). Despite the strength of the specific domain investigation; Zeleke (2004b) fails to provide a working definition of LD or SC. Several references were made to previous research in the field of LD and SC and various shortfalls of various studies were pointed out, but the reader was left to imagine how SC and LD were viewed. Nonetheless, children were systematically classified as LD, depending on the child's achievement in mathematics. To be classified as LD the child would have scored below their grade and age level. The study was conducted in Ethiopia where children had not been formerly diagnosed as LD. Non diagnosis of LD minimises the effects of labelling or stigmatization in terms of how the children with LD perceive themselves. The CFSEI was specifically designed to measure both a domain specific SC (i.e. academic SC) as well as a global SC. However, for the purposes of the study the academic component was substituted for mathematics SC which is a domain of academic SC. The measure is interesting in that it incorporates a measure for adults and children. Precautions were taken to minimize reading difficulties by translating items, and using trained personnel to administer the measure. A low score on the instrument indicates a low mathematical SC. The result of the study suggests no significant difference between the SCs of those with MD and those without. Zeleke (2004b) concluded in favour of a domain specific measure for SC.

Montague and van Garderen (2003) share Zeleke's (2004) opinion on the importance of domain specificity. They conducted a similar study and investigated student's mathematics achievement, estimation ability, estimation strategies and academic self perception. There were 135 participants split according to their mathematical ability and IQ scores. Respondents were presented with specific estimations tasks as well as two subscales of the SSRS, each with 9 to

10 items. It would seem that the SSRS was developed based on the multidimensional system since it has subscales measuring different domains of SC. Both the scales use a 5-point Likert scale with 1 being the most positive response (i.e. "I am the best I...") and 5 being the most negative (i.e. "I do very poorly ..."). Depending on the participant's response, a score is allocated. It seems that the study is more focused on estimations than on the impact of mathematical LD on SC, or vice-versa.

There was a lapse (one week) between administering the first set of measures and the second measures. This was to balance out the similarities between the measures used. It could be argued that the similarities in the measures will improve responses at time 2 and that this will impact the scores as well as the interpretation of the results. Montague and van Garderen (2003) suggest that using participants with LD demonstrates the importance of studying individual differences in both cognitive and affective domains. However, no effort is made to define SC or LD.

Based on the studies that have been reviewed thus far, the minimum number of items on a scale has been 30. The effectiveness of a 10 item scale is not clear. In addition, it appears that the study has too many variables, inevitably impacting (i.e. too many correlations between variables) on participants' scores. As previously noted, SC becomes the by-product of the study and not its main concern. The results showed no interaction between the subscales of the SC measure and no significant differences were found between the SC of participants with LD and those participants whom were regarded as low achievers.

The main intention of this critical literature review is to investigate how SC has been measured in people with LD and, in particular, to explore the relationship that may exist between LD and SC. To achieve this aim, the review set out to critique studies that examined the SC of those with LD. The review identified some of the different instruments available for measuring SC; there was evidence to illustrate how people with LD are classified (either through academic achievement or through age achievement). The review considered the various methods used by researchers and how LD and SC are defined in various studies. The review highlights that there are no consistent measures of SC. The measures reviewed in this evaluation were either for global SC (unitary system) or various facets of SC (multidimensional system). The type of measure used depended on how the concept of SC and/or LD is viewed. Zeleke (2004a) contends that earlier models of SC are predominantly unidimensional (or unitary system as so referred within this review) where there is only a general factor of self concept. More recently, theorists, as shown in this review, have started to move towards a multidimensional construct of SC. This serves a number of purposes, for example; SC can be measured across many domains (e.g. academic, social, family etc.). Zeleke (2004a) proposes that there is a relationship between SC and other variables, and that in understanding such relationships it is vital to embrace the multidimensional construct of SC. Some theorists have gone further and suggested that the use of multidimensional constructs of SC can facilitate understanding on a domain specific level.

It is noted that the majority of the studies explored above used children or adolescents as participants – however, much could be learnt from adults with LD about the construction of SC. This may be vital because adults with LD can share their experiences of growing

up with LD. One similarity that runs across all studies reviewed is that the various studies agree that there is no consistency in definitions. Nonetheless, advancements have been made on the instruments used, the procedure, and on the recognition given to the affective component in the life of people with LD (only one of the studies reviewed used a qualitative method).

This review suggests the following:

1. More use of qualitative methods, such as semi structured interviewing, in determining the SC of those with LD.

2. To minimize any cognitive difficulties, it may be possible to use other modes of communication, such as play therapy, to determine how people with LD view their relationship with others.

3. There needs to be a focus on the individual administration of instruments in order to minimize feelings of pressure that participants may feel if the measure were to be administered in a group setting.

4. It may be important to administer instruments outside the corresponding setting. For example, when exploring academic SC it may be more constructive to administer instruments in non-academic settings.

5. In interpreting results of studies, researchers need to bear in mind whether SC is a function of age or achievement level. For example, a participant's score needs to be viewed in the context of age or achievement level. Stone and Lemanek (1990) suggest that children cannot provide accurate

reflections of their emotions before the age of 8 or 9. Thus, using self reports before this age may be meaningless.

6. Although there has been some movement in the way research is conducted using people with LD, this review is of the opinion that the definitions of LD and SC perhaps need to evolve to accommodate current experiences of those with LD.

7. New research to be conducted needs to avoid basing their research on the assumptions of previous research. For example, previous research assumes that people with LD will score low on measures of SC. However, there is evidence to suggest the contrary.

8. When interpreting results of studies, researchers need to be mindful of generalizing against different facets of LD and indeed of SC. For example, a person scoring low on a mathematic SC will not necessarily score low on verbal SC.

9. Researchers may want to bear in mind that variations in the results exploring SC in those with LD may be due to age, environment, or indeed, the instruments used. Dyson (2003) rightly points out in her study the differences between parents and teachers when they perceive the SC of children with LD. For example, teachers tend to rate more negatively in academic SC compared to parents.

10. It may be that the theories of SC need to accommodate the notion of expectation. This is to say that SC may be something others (e.g. teachers, psychologists etc) expect an individual to

have and this may increase the pressure (for groups such as those with LD) to understand and articulate one's sense of self.

In light of some of the results that have indicated no differences between the SC of those with and without LD, how would practitioners, such as counselling psychologists, work with people who have a LD? And why is SC so important to the work that is done with people who have LD?

It could be argued that LD is a label, and that by referring to children, adolescents or adults as such may increase the possibility of a negative perception of self. The negative perception of self is taken in the context of the definition given at the beginning of this review. It may suggest that those with LD view themselves, possibly, as less worthy than others in the setting where the label is established. The consequence of a label such as LD is not dissimilar to any other form of labelling.

SC is important. Harter (1999) contends that the affective dimension of SC relates to both motivation and behaviour, and indirectly to self worth. Self worth is sometimes judged on the basis of one's self view in relation to others. If people believe they are capable, then they, at least, endeavour to achieve. As Counselling Psychologists, it may not matter to the therapeutic relationship whether a person has LD or not, but it does inform the practice of engaging with clients who have LD. Counselling Psychologists can thus be equipped with appropriate information to allow them to be more creative in their work with those with LD – perhaps focusing on maintaining and/or achieving positive SC. Psychotherapy is now advocated for people with LD (Linington, 2002; Willner, 2006), and various therapies such as psychodynamic and cognitive behavioural

therapy are being used. People with LD experience distress just as much as people without LD (Willner, 2005), thus knowledge about SC of people with LD would facilitate engagement and an awareness of the issues experienced by those with LD.

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