Who will I be when I leave University - the development of professional identity

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Universities play an important role in socialising and preparing students for work and developing an early and accurate professional identity (Loseke & Cahill, 1986; Lum 1988). In order to develop an accurate professional identity an understanding of the values, skills and situations that commonly occur within that work role as well as organisational issues need to be considered. Mortimer and Simmons (1978) suggests that as a socialising organisation, the first task of a University should be to correct inaccurate images or misconceptions about the future work role. The career development literature supports the necessity for inaccurate images of work roles to be modified, and adds that an important aspect of career development is to adjust misconceptions about work roles (Figler, 1975; Lewis & Gilhousen, 1981; Thompson, 1976).

In order for Universities to assist students to adjust inaccurate expectations about their future work role it may be necessary for course providers to discuss with students a number of issues that relate to the profession (Mortimer & Simmons, 1978). Thus, it is at least partially the responsibility of Universities to support and assist students to develop an accurate professional identity by adjusting any inaccurate expectations that exist. It is expected that by addressing the issue of inaccurate expectations, the match between students' expectations and the reality of work will be enhanced, thus reducing difficulties graduates may encounter when they make the transition to work.

A review of the career development literature supports the development of a professional identity training program within tertiary courses. Within this paper a program which will assist in the development of professional identity for Human Service students will be proposed. Although the field of the Human Services will be used as a case study by which to discuss the proposed program, it would be possible to create alternative programs for other fields.

It is suggested that the match between a student's expectations of their future work role and the actual reality of professional practice, will be a predictor as to whether or not the student is successful in their future professional practice (Brief, Aldag, Van Sell & Melone, 1979; Cherniss, 1995; Hardy & Hardy, 1988; Lum, 1988; Olson, Downing, Heppner & Pinkney, 1986). This presents a challenge for higher education, in terms of how Universities assist students in forming an early and accurate professional identity? Throughout this paper this questions will be investigated by

reviewing the literature surrounding professional socialisation and a possible intervention will be suggested in order to bridge the gap in reality.

One of the major goals of professional socialisation is to facilitate the acquisition of a professional identity (Brown, 1991). Professional identity is defined as "the possession of clear and stable pictures of one's goals, interest, personality and talents" (Henry, 1996, p. 844). Clearly professional training or education would impact directly on a student's concept of themselves as a professional as well as their professional identity. The development of a professional identity should result in students abandoning their novice view or anticipatory socialisation expectations of the profession for a new professional identity (Brown, 1991). Hence, the student throughout their education should experience a shift that will bring their novice view closer to the professional reality. As a result, it is proposed that students adjust their previous expectations of their future work role so that they are accurately matched to the reality.

According to Bucher and Stelling (cited in George, 1982) there are four essential components to the development of a successful professional identity. The first component is an accurate and clear understanding of what the occupation involves including tasks, responsibilities etc. (Bucher & Stelling cited in George, 1982). The second component involves "a sense of mission, or professional commitment" to the profession (Bucher & Stelling cited in George, 1982, p.9). The third component encompasses "an idea of the proper relationship between worker and client" while the fourth component involves "an idea of the proper conditions for performing their work (i.e. the relationship with the employing agency)" (Bucher & Stelling cited in George, 1982, p.9). Thus, it is not enough to have a sense of the profession and what it involves. It is also necessary to have an accurate understanding of the employing organisation and the relationships within the employing organisation, as well as an understanding of the relationship with the client.

An accurate professional identity and perception of a future work role will assist in the student's transition and adjustment to the work role. Alternatively, if the norms of a role are unclear, then it is expected that the student's transition to work will be more difficult. Thus, the greater the congruence between a student's expectations of the norms and values in a profession, and the reality of work, the smoother the transition will be (Lum, 1988). Unfortunately, realism and accuracy are inhibited by the low visibility and limited access students have to many occupational roles, and the inaccurate portrayal or stereotypes of work roles by the mass media, employers and educational institutions (Cherniss, 1995; Mabey, 1986; Mortimer & Simmons, 1978; Wanous, 1980). The result is a 'professional mystique' or a romanticised view of professional work (Cherniss, 1995).

For those who choose to enter the human services, there is often the difficulty of making adjustments between what they expected of the profession, and the reality they experience. The difference or mismatch that occurs between human service graduates' expectations and the work reality, is primarily attributed to the lack of accurate socialisation to human service work students receive while at University, and during recruitment to human

service organisations (Cherniss, 1995; Mabey, 1986; Mortimer & Simmons, 1978; Wanous, 1980). Inaccurate expectations have been linked to what is labelled in the literature as 'reality shock', and can result in a professional burning-out or leaving the profession (Cherniss, 1995). This supports the need for Universities and course providers, to address the issue of mismatch between students' expectations and human service experience, with the aim of reducing reality shock and burnout in new graduates.

Unlike more established professions however, occupations within the human services are not as well defined or accurately portrayed within society (Loseke & Cahill, 1986). The growing diversity in human services occupations (eg. social workers, psychologists, welfare workers, correctional officers, rehabilitation, disability etc.) and the blurring of the boundaries between many of these disciplines have resulted in misconceptions about the human services within society. Furthermore, the need to safeguard the therapeutic relationship precludes opportunities for human service students to observe much of the work of helping professionals. As a result, there are popular misconceptions about the role human service professionals fulfil, for instance the type of relationship a professional has with a client. Therefore, the problem of a 'professional mystique' is especially relevant to the human services.

Despite the debate within the literature, as to whether it is the employing organisation or the educational institution that fails to facilitate sound human service practice (O'Connor & Dalgleish, 1986), it can be argued that Universities are not fulfilling their role as a socialising organisation if they do not attempt to adjust inaccurate expectations. Kramer (1974) argues that difficulties experienced by graduates, results from inadequate socialisation during their education. Olson et al. (1986) suggested that Universities do not address issues such as professional roles, how organisations work, stressful work situations such as, avoiding over-commitment to clients as well as developing personal networks or resources for support. In fact Universities may be implicitly reinforcing students misconceptions and inaccurate images of the future work role by not addressing them. Loseke and Cahill (1986) support this argument by suggesting that Universities may actually give human service students the impression that a human service professional needs more than just knowledge and skill but also inherent characteristics, for example 'altruism', a 'client-centred orientation', and a 'helping concern for the client' (Foley, 1996). Pines, Kafry & Aronson (1981) suggest that within human service training little attention is given to the emotional stresses or difficulties professionals experience in human service practice. Moreover, Pines et al. (1981) suggest that while at University "students learn the implicit lesson that it is illegitimate for them to have needs while in the professional role" and as a result the client-centred orientation is reinforced within humans service students (p.53). As a result, it is proposed that human service educators may be creating inaccurate values or beliefs within human service students, which may be unworkable in practice.

Moreover, Hardy and Hardy (1988) suggest that although graduates "may have basic professional education and socialisation, this socialisation is not always sufficient to meet the demands of professional careers" (p. 170). For instance, Baron, Sekel and Scott (1984) and Singer (1982) contend that

generally within professional education, the content or knowledge of the profession is emphasised, and the process of professional development is under-emphasised or even excluded. Furthermore, Pines et al. (1981) suggest that although human service students may receive concrete professional skills, they are not introduced to the difficulties or stresses they may face in human service practice. Thus, although generic skills are developed, an accurate understanding of intrinsic skills and knowledge may not be developed. For example, human service students may develop report writing and diagnosis skills but lack an accurate understanding of how to deal with stressful work situations such as, abusive and demanding clients, or professional conflicts such as, the needs of the client versus the needs of the employing organisation. Within the human services this may have especially devastating consequences for the professional.

Research indicates that a positive professional identity is beneficial for students during both study as well as at work. Inglehart and Brown's (cited in Henry, 1993) study with medical students found that a positive professional identity was not only related to academic achievement at University, but was also a strong predictor of later satisfaction within graduates work. Research into the theory of met-expectations also supports this view. In a meta-analysis of studies into the met-expectations hypothesis, Wanous, Poland, Premack and Davis (1992) concluded that if previous expectations of the work environment are met then job satisfaction, work commitment and intent to remain in the job will increase. Results from Irving and Meyer's (1994) investigation of the met-expectations hypothesis however, suggest that met-expectations may only be an issue for initial stress experienced as a result of the transition to work and is therefore especially relevant to the issue of reality shock. Thus, it appears that Universities and course designers play a significant role in assisting students to form an accurate professional identity. By doing this, it is suggested that the satisfaction of graduates in the workforce as well as their ability to perform in their work role, if only for the initial few months, will be improved.

Henry's (1993) research into career development supports that career development courses enhance professional identity. Hardy and Hardy (1988) also suggest that role strain could be reduced if a program "designed to facilitate modification and expansion of existing attitudes, knowledge, values, and behaviors appropriate for their new role" occurred (p. 171). As a result, it appears that the transition to work would be made easier for the graduate and would enhance performance in their new work role if a career development program was introduced (Hardy & Hardy, 1988). These conclusions clearly support career development courses as a way of increasing professional identity.

Addressing Inaccurate Expectations

A review of the career development literature supports the concept of a professional identity training program within tertiary courses. Henry (1993) supports that career development courses enhance professional identity. He

found that for pre-medical students, their effectiveness as practitioners increased as a result of a career development program (Henry, 1993). In addition, Fogleman and Saeger (as cited in Henry, 1993) found that after a eight week program about the medical profession, participants had a more realistic view of what was involved in becoming a health care professional as well as an increase in awareness of the general issues in health-care (Fogleman & Saeger as cited in Henry, 1993). Furthermore, Feldman's (1976) study into socialisation programs found that socialisation programs affect "general satisfaction of workers and the feelings of autonomy and personal influence workers have" (Feldman, 1976, p.449). Similarly, Hardy and Hardy (1988) suggest that role strain could be reduced if a program "designed to facilitate modification and expansion of existing attitudes, knowledge, values, and behaviors appropriate for their new role" occurred (p. 171). As a result, they argue that the transition would be made easier for the graduate and would enhance performance in their new work role (Hardy & Hardy, 1988). These conclusions clearly support career development courses as a way of increasing professional identity.

Application of Professional Identity Training Program

Therefore, it appears that professional identity training (which adjusts inaccurate expectations) is beneficial for future professionals and that this training should occur throughout undergraduate courses. However, how and what aspects of professional identity training should educators incorporate into a University course? Results from research and literature indicates that students motives and hopes for wanting to work in the human services be addressed. Olson et al. (1986) as a result of their study with psychology post-graduate students, suggested that transitional issues be clarified and that students be prepared for the difficulties they are likely to encounter in their future profession. They suggested that this could occur through a mentoring - supervision program (Olson et al., 1986). Furthermore, according to Henry (1996), stress management training should begin in undergraduate courses as part of a professional development planning.

Application within Course Structure
Pena (1997) suggests that professional identity training need not be separate to the overall purpose of higher education, that is, the pursuit of knowledge. Instead it should be complimentary. Therefore for Universities to fulfil knowledge development and professional development they need to look at how degree programs can incorporate the two and compliment each other. Therefore, it is suggested that educators consider how the subject's content or skill relates to professional identity. This is important since the knowledge or skills being taught can only have meaning in the context of professional identity (ie. the students concept of the profession). The results from the current study suggests that an understanding of caring for self as well as the client, relationships and management skills need to be related to human service practice so as to reduce the potential of reality shock and burnout experienced.

Thus, throughout a degree program educators could be assisting students to frame and reframe their professional identity in terms of each subject or the content being taught and draw attention to areas such as, caring for self and the client and management skills, relationships and the human service ethos. Consequently knowledge development and professional development can be achieved together in the broader structure of the degree program as well as at the subject level by incorporating how the two interact in the subjects taught. In order for this to occur academics must accept the importance of professional development within the education of human service students. Furthermore, the wider University system will need to support and encourage academics (eg. through the allocation of time and resources) to incorporate professional development with knowledge development. Table 1. Indicates a summary of the main issues Holton (as cited in Pena, 1997) and Kurland and Salmon (1992) have suggested should be included into professional identity training.

Table 1: Suggestions and Issues that should be included
into Professional Identity Training

Holton (as cited by Pena, 1997)	Kurland and Salmon (1992)
Issues to be considered in an intervention: • The going to work process • Fitting into a new culture • Reality Shock • People, Politics and Relationships • Developing a winning attitude • Professionalism • Supervisor relationship • Breaking in strategies • Transition-coping skills • Personal Issues	Five areas that Universities should emphasise in their courses. These are: 1. "Helping workers set realistic goals in the work, while encouraging them to recognize and appreciate the small successes that are achieved by their clients. 2. Developing positive norms and setting limits. 3. Working with open-ended groups and with individuals and groups where attendance is sporadic. 4. Dealing with differences and conflict, especially racially based conflict. 5. Using activities to help clients express their thought and feelings and work cooperatively with others" (p.241).

Application External to Course

Therefore, it is suggested that issues such caring skills, relationships, systems situations, reality shock, accurate and positive norms, and coping skills be incorporated into program design. Moreover, in order to address some of these issues in more depth and make them explicit to students it is suggested that professional identity training occur separately to knowledge development (but also in relation to it). Furthermore, in order for the training program to be successful it is suggested that the program be acknowledged and encouraged by the University and where possible credit points for attendance and participation allotted (Pena, 1997). Therefore, the following professional identity training program is suggested. Table 2 represents the overall structure of a professional identity training program for human service students incorporating suggestions made within the literature.

Table 2. Three Year Professional Identity Training Program

YEAR 1 ASSESSING THE GAP	➤ Students consider what they perceive is part of the future work role ➤ Therefore they will examine – the skills involved, stressful work situations, expected pay, type of hours etc. ➤ Students also explore their motives for wanting to work in the Human Services as a way of beginning to dispel any inaccurate expectations that may be related to the human service ethos ➤ This is then compared with the experience of professionals currently working in the profession and may involve discussions with professionals ➤ Students will then be asked to consider how this relates to what they had considered and if they need to adjust their perception of the profession ➤ They will also be asked to consider how this relates to them personally – this is especially related to their motives and own self-identity
DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY	IT IS EXPECTED THAT AT THE END OF THIS SECTION STUDENTS WILL HAVE DEVELOPED A PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY STATEMENT WHICH WILL BE REVIEWED OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS
YEAR 2 TRANSITION TO WORK SKILLS	➤ The student begins planning for the transition to work ➤ What to expect in the first year, month, week? ➤ How to build working relationships with colleagues and clients ➤ The student develops 'Going to work skills'
REVIEW PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY STATEMENT	REVIEW PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY STATEMENT, IN RELATION TO THE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE LEARNT IN 1ST YEAR.
YEAR 3 PROFESSIONAL MANAGEMENT SKILLS	➤ The student develops 'Professional Management Skills' ➤ For example: time management, coping skills, recognising burnout, management skills
MENTORING PROGRAM	➤ Begin Mentoring – Networking program with professionals in field
REVIEW PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY STATEMENT	➤ Examine, review the professional identity statement and review it in terms of experience and knowledge learnt in 1st and 2nd years. Then explore how it has changed to draw out professional growth in the student IT IS EXPECTED THAT BY THE END OF THIS PROGRAM STUDENTS WOULD HAVE PRODUCED A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING STATEMENT OUTLINING WHAT THEY HAVE LEARNT AND HOW THEY INTEND TO PUT THIS INTO PRACTICE AT WORK OR WHEN THEY ENTER THE WORKFORCE. FINALLY STUDENTS WILL BE MADE AWARE THAT THE UNEXPECTED MAY STILL OCCUR

Within the first year of the training program the first goal would be to assist students in becoming aware of any misconceptions they may have about their chosen profession (Mortimer & Simmons, 1978). The literature

suggests that human service students would possess idealistic ideas and motives for wanting to work in the Human Services (Cherniss, 1995; Foley, 1996; Kurland & Salmon, 1992). Thus, it is suggested that not only issues such as hours of work but also motives for wanting to be a human service professional be addressed. The second goal of the first year would be to assist students in developing a professional identity statement. The professional identity statement will then be reviewed over the next two years of the program. Moreover, in order to address the issue of how much personal identity human service students invest in their expectation of the professional role (Foley, 1996) it is important to introduce in the first year, and follow up in the next two years, the difference between professional identity and personal identity as well as caring for self.

In the second year of the program the first goal would be to develop 'going to work skills' (Holton as cited in Pena, 1997) or transition to work skills. At this stage the student begins to plan what it would be like to go to their first job after University, develop those skills that will help them blend into the organisational structure (Olson et al. 1986; Pena, 1997) and begin to understand relationships in the organisation. The second goal of the second year would be to review the professional identify statement. When doing this students would further adjust their perception of what it means to be a professional in their chosen professional field according to what they have learnt over the past two years.

In the final year of the program it is suggested that professional management skills, such as time management (Henry, 1996) and internal and external management skills be developed. Another goal of the final year would be to begin a networking-mentoring program that will support students in making the transition to work as well as assisting students once they are in the workforce (Olson et al., 1986). As a way of capping the whole program students will review their professional identity statement. Students would do this by considering not only the issues and skills discussed and developed in the professional identity training program but also the knowledge learnt within the degree program. Furthermore, since professional socialisation continues throughout a persons working life, the final year of the training program should address how students will continue to develop their professional identity once they leave the University (Lum, 1988). Finally, it is suggested that trainers be careful not to put any unnecessary stress on students or give them the impression of certain disaster once they leave University. However, they will need to make students aware that surprises may arise and encourage students to develop a professional network for support.

Conclusion

In terms of preparing for future work roles, it was argued that Universities have a responsibility to assist students in developing an accurate Professional Identity and transition to work skills (Loseke & Cahill, 1986; Lum, 1988). However, an analysis of the literature found that Universities may be perpetuating misconceptions about work roles by not addressing

Professional Identity and only developing content knowledge (Baron, Sekel & Scott, 1984; Olsen et al., 1986; Singer, 1982). Moreover, it was found that within the Human Services the need for the development of an accurate Professional Identity is vital, since individuals who enter the Human Services tend to have the traits and motives that make them vulnerable to stresses that are inherent to the Human Services (Pines et al., 1981). As a result, graduates of Human Service courses are especially vulnerable to reality shock and burnout in their first year of work (Smith & Boss as cited in Foley, 1996).

In order to reduce the amount of reality shock experience by graduates of the Human Services it was suggested that Professional Identity Training occur. Professional Identity Training should compliment knowledge development by:

1. incorporating Professional Identity issues into subject design; and
2. by conducting a separate but complementary three year Professional Identity Training program.

It is expected that as a result of professional identity training students performance while at University will increase (Inglehart & Brown as cited in Henry, 1993). Furthermore, it is suggested that the amount of reality shock experienced by graduates upon entry to the work role will decrease and that graduates will be more satisfied while in the work role (Inglehart & Brown as cited in Henry, 1993), and as a result reducing the risk of burnout especially in the initial year at work. It is also suggested that professional identity training will be beneficial for employers (Olson et al., 1986). For instance, the time saved gaining full productivity from new professionals will be reduced, and since graduates will be more satisfied turnover rates should also decrease (Olson et al., 1986). Finally, the University also will benefit since the students will perform better at work, which will increase the Universities standing in industry and the community. Therefore, professional identity training is in the best interest of students, professionals, educators and the community (Olson et al., 1986).

Finally, it is not suggested that this intervention will rid graduates of reality shock, however it is suggested that training will reduce the impact of it, since students will be more aware of the issues that surround the transition to work. Thus, the gap between students expectations of work may be bridged in some respect by preparing students, while they are still at University, for the transition to work through professional identity development, transition training and career development (Pena, 1997).

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