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Characterisation of
Changes in the Professional
Identity of Psychologists and
Arts Therapists During
a Crisis Period

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Abbreviations used in the Thesis

COVID-19	Coronavirus disease caused by SARS-CoV-2, identified in 2019
KMO	Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy
PI	Professional identity
RTA	Reflexive thematic analysis

Introduction

Relevance. Professional identity (PI) is a multidimensional construct, and its formation is a continuous, dynamic process that unfolds in the interaction between the professional and the environment and requires constant attention to its maintenance (Ruijters & Simons, 2020). PI is not only a perception of oneself in the profession – it is also closely related to everyday professional life, functioning as an orienting framework in practice that helps professionals make decisions, choose courses of action, and more clearly determine the boundaries of responsibility in situations where the work environment, institutional conditions, or societal expectations change. Changes in PI usually occur gradually, however, powerful events, crises, or socio-political upheavals may accelerate this process, forcing professionals to reconsider their established roles, practices, and boundaries of responsibility within a short period of time. In this dissertation, professional identity is viewed as a process that simultaneously reflects the continuity of professional activity and is sensitive to tensions generated by context, which require adaptation, restructuring of boundaries, and the maintenance of professional meaning. Consequently, PI becomes more analytically visible under crisis conditions, and the tension between established professional expectations and the demands imposed by external circumstances brings to the fore both aspects of continuity and experiences of rupture. At the same time, the field of PI research is characterised by a pronounced diversity of theoretical approaches, and recent reviews indicate that in empirical studies the concept of PI is often used without a clearly specified theoretical anchoring or with an insufficiently precise definition, which hinders the synthesis of findings and conceptual comparability (Tong et al., 2020; Cornett et al., 2022; Semjonova, 2024; Fitzgerald, 2020). Therefore, in this dissertation the theoretical framework is constructed integratively, drawing on the more frequently used socially oriented and practice-based explanations of PI, such as Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) and the Communities of Practice approach (Lave & Wenger, 1991), as well as a dialectical interpretive framework, which makes it possible to analytically trace tensions and changes in the context of crisis. In this dissertation, professional identity is defined as an individually and socially constructed dynamic system of professional self-understanding that is formed in professional practice through the internalisation and reflective integration of individual values, professional norms, experiences of belonging, and understanding of professional activity.

Crisis in this dissertation is not understood as a disruption affecting only one sector or one system. In the recent literature, crisis is more often described as a multidimensional process that may simultaneously involve economic, political, and social upheavals, as well as the mutual reinforcement of these upheavals (Desalegn et al., 2022; Osuna & Rama, 2021; Kousis et al.,

2022; Pavlova et al., 2023). Such periods expose the fragility of systems and generate enduring consequences in everyday life and professional activity. It is particularly important to emphasise interconnected crises, namely, situations in which events do not exist in isolation but form a cumulative field of tension that extends over time and changes the conditions of professional practice (Desalegn et al., 2022). Such a set of sequential and interconnected disruptions may be conceptualised as a crisis period, sometimes also referred to as a “crisis after crisis”, emphasising the cumulative effect and prolonged socio-institutional restructuring (International Monetary Fund, 2022). In this dissertation, a crisis period is defined as a set of socially and institutionally destabilising events whose main structuring elements are the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, while the increase in demand for psychological help is viewed as a social and professional consequence of these processes.

The empirical context of the crisis period in this dissertation includes sequential and partially overlapping macro-processes in which both the conditions of social life and professional practice changed. At the beginning of 2020, reports emerged of a new disease (World Health Organization, 2020a), and it soon became clear that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic would be profound and far-reaching (World Health Organization, 2020b). During the pandemic, the regime of social distancing and restrictions on public life substantially restructured the organisation of psychological help provision, while at the same time the demand for psychological help increased under conditions of isolation, anxiety, and uncertainty (Kalaitzaki et al., 2022; Pavlova, 2023). In this context, the transformation of work formats became particularly significant – a rapid shift to remote or hybrid provision of help, which required the reconsideration of professional boundaries and ethical decision-making practices (for example, privacy, data security, informed consent), while also bringing the content of digital competencies to the forefront (Kule et al., 2026). It is important to emphasise that in this dissertation digitalisation is defined not as a separate crisis, but rather as a crisis-accelerated restructuring of professional practice – a catalyst that intensifies the tension between the continuity of help provision and new conditions of practice.

The second axis of the crisis period is the war in Ukraine caused by Russia, which began on 24 February 2022 and, on a European scale, brought the experience of collective crisis to the forefront by shifting themes of security, loss, and prolonged uncertainty into the emotional sphere of society and the practice of psychological help (Kovtunyk et al., 2023; Budustour, 2022). In the initial phase of the war, institutional communication in Latvia emphasised the security framework and the state’s position, stressing that there was no direct military threat in Latvia. At the same time, this context did not preclude the emotional destabilisation of society, rather, experiences of insecurity, uncertainty, and psychological tension intensified.

Quantitative data from a survey conducted in Latvia indicate a marked deterioration in emotional well-being already at the beginning of the war – in a study conducted in the first days of March 2022 by the international market research company “Kantar”, 85 % of Latvian residents indicated that the war in Ukraine had negatively affected their emotional state. This background remained persistent over time: in the “Kantar” measurement of 15 April 2024, 76 % of respondents reported a negative impact, showing that over two years the indicator had declined only slightly while remaining at a high level. Thus, even in a situation in which the everyday experience of direct military threat does not necessarily dominate, war functions as a powerful amplifier of uncertainty and emotional tension that persistently changes the thematic background of psychological help work and the structure of professionals’ workload.

The third dimension of the crisis period in this dissertation is not a separate crisis event, but rather the public mental health strain generated by the cumulative impact of the pandemic and the war and the associated increase in professional demand. The cumulative impact of the pandemic and the war created a situation in which mental health risks (anxiety, depressiveness, traumatic experience, destabilisation of relationships, experiences of security threat) became a persistent social background, while the demand for psychological help became a structurally increasing condition of professional activity (Kalaitzaki et al., 2022; Riad et al., 2022). In such a context, the increase in demand is usually not merely quantitative. More often, issues of prolonged uncertainty and meaning in life become salient, which may shift the thematic focus of psychological support and increase emotional burden. The growth of institutional and societal expectations may intensify contradictions in professional identity in practice, especially when resources (time, support, supervision, collegial consultation) do not match the intensity of demand. Therefore, under such circumstances it is particularly important for professionals to preserve professional clarity and maintain the foundations of PI, while reconsidering work organisation and the boundaries of responsibility.

This study analyses changes in the professional identity of psychologists and arts therapists over a period that brought substantial changes to various areas of life and also affected PI. When collecting data through semi-structured interviews, the period under study was initially defined as a “time of change”. This designation allowed the researcher to preserve a neutral wording and not impose a premature, normatively loaded framework of the concept of crisis on the study participants, while at the same time allowing both tension and adaptation, work restructuring, and growth to emerge in their narratives of experience. This also corresponded to the fact that the significance of change in practice may differ across professional positions, workplace contexts, and client/patient needs. However, in the course of

the study, when analysing professionals' narratives of the rapid restructuring of practice, increasing uncertainty, and emotional strain, it became conceptually more precise to characterise this period as a "crisis period". This was also determined by the fact that the period under study consisted not of one isolated event, but of interconnected and partially overlapping crisis processes (changes caused by the pandemic and the transformation of work formats; the experience of collective crisis caused by war; public mental health strain and increased demand for psychological help), which reinforced one another and structured the conditions of professional practice (Desalegn et al., 2022; International Monetary Fund, 2022). Thus, "time of change" is retained in this dissertation as the initial designation open to participants' experience, whereas "crisis period" is used as an analytically refined concept that more adequately reflects the structure of the context and its cumulative impact.

During a crisis period, the contradiction between the need to maintain professional quality and ethical boundaries and the pressure to rapidly adapt to changed working conditions becomes particularly acute in the professions of psychological help. At the same time, societal demand for support and openness to discussing mental health may increase, while professionals face greater workload, emotional risk, and tension of responsibility (Matias et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020; Herbert et al., 2021; Li et al., 2020). Studies on the experience of helping professions during COVID-19 show that crises are associated with increased burnout and psychological distress, which may affect professional self-efficacy, self-evaluation, and the reconsideration of professional roles (Sahebi et al., 2021; Smallwood et al., 2021; Taleb et al., 2024; Micali et al., 2022).

In this dissertation, the experiences of psychologists and arts therapists were chosen for analysis because both they are both professions that provide psychological help (Purvlīce et al., 2018; Mārtinsone & Zakriževska-Belogrudova, 2025) with a common ethical and clinical core of responsibility, but with different conditions of practice that are particularly exacerbated in crisis situations. In both professions, work is directed towards reducing psychological difficulties, and at the same time both share common professional conditions and fields of risk – the framework of ethics and confidentiality, the maintenance of professional boundaries, clinical judgement and responsibility, workload dynamics, supervision practice, and burnout risks. Therefore, examining both professions within a single analytical framework makes it possible to identify universal mechanisms of professional identity change during a crisis period (for example, restructuring of boundaries, maintenance of safety and sustainability, structures of belonging and support).

In order to clarify what is analysed in this dissertation as the content of professional identity change, it is important to define the PI construct itself. PI reflects an individual's

self-understanding in a professional role (Caza & Creary, 2016; Vähäsantanen & Eteläpelto, 2009) and develops through the integration of personal values and experience with the requirements and norms of the profession (Miscenko & Day, 2016). This integration requires the alignment of personal and professional boundaries and continuous adaptation to context (Schubert, 2023; Fitzgerald, 2020). PI is grounded in actions, experiences, and professional values that guide decision-making and ensure professional integrity (Ruijters & Simons, 2020; Fitzgerald, 2020). PI also develops through professional socialisation and communities of practice (Caza & Creary, 2016), and its dynamics are often characterised by tension between internal values and external demands (Akmane & Mārtinsone, 2016; Bouchard, 1998; Jarvis-Selinger et al., 2012). Unresolved tensions may increase the risk of destabilisation (Machorrinho et al., 2025; Hercelinskyj et al., 2014), while reflective practice and adaptation may help preserve quality and develop professional self-understanding (Fitzgerald, 2020; Vähäsantanen & Eteläpelto, 2009). In addition, reviews of PI theories emphasise a paradigmatic shift from more linear, individualistic developmental models toward socially constructed, context- and practice-based, and multilevel perspectives, which are particularly suitable for analysing identity reconfiguration in situations of change and crisis (Cornett et al., 2022; Sternszus et al., 2024).

Research problem and research gaps. Although the study of professional identity in crisis contexts is growing, gaps remain in the literature regarding the understanding of its changes during complex crisis periods. To identify the research gaps, a targeted literature analysis was conducted in the international databases “Web of Science” and “Scopus”, analysing studies on professional identity in crisis contexts. First, previous studies more often analyse isolated events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or work-related reorganisations associated with it (Lourens & Uren, 2023; Uren & Lourens, 2024; Xu et al., 2025), or professional experience in a specific war context (Gamliel et al., 2025). Although some studies also examine professional activity under conditions of multiple interrelated crises, for example, under the cumulative impact of economic destabilisation, a pandemic, and a catastrophic event (Nassif et al., 2024; Nassif et al., 2025), these studies mainly emphasise the destabilisation of the therapeutic frame, adaptation, and the reorganisation of professional activity in a specific context, rather than systematically analysing the dynamics of professional identity change over a prolonged and overlapping crisis period. Second, the literature review conducted within this study did not identify studies in which gradual reconfiguration of professional identity and moments of rupture were systematically linked within a single analytical framework in order to describe change as parallel coexisting dynamics. This limits the possibilities for conceptualising PI change as a dynamic in which continuity and interruption may coexist. Third, the literature

review less frequently reveals studies that encompass several related professions of psychological help within a single research design, thus enabling the simultaneous analysis of shared mechanisms of change and profession-specific manifestations of tension. Fourth, the literature on PI measurement approaches points to heterogeneity of instruments and challenges regarding psychometric soundness (Tabatabaei et al., 2024), which complicates both the stable operationalisation of the construct and the comparability of research findings. There is a particular lack of instruments that are both psychometrically sound and conceptually suitable for the field of psychological help professions. This aspect underscores the need to develop an instrument in the context of psychological help professions.

Within the theoretical framework of this study, the crisis period is viewed not only as a set of circumstances that disrupt the usual professional order, but also as an environment in which professional order is transformed. A dialectical approach was chosen as the analytical framework because the development of professional identity under crisis conditions often manifests as tension between stability and change, professional norms and new practice demands. A dialectical perspective makes it possible to analyse these contradictions not only as destabilising factors but also as drivers of professional development (Boshoff, 2021; Zwart, 2022). This means that crises may increase vulnerability and uncertainty, generate distress and disorientation, yet at the same time activate opportunities for professional development if adaptive solutions are found and forms of practice are restructured (Dafermos, 2024; Ahlqvist, 2022). Therefore, in the analysis it is important to study not only ruptures and disruptions of professional activity, but also adaptation as a process that enables the maintenance of the sustainability of professional activity and the consolidation of professional identity.

To analyse this, a dialectical framework is employed in this dissertation, making it possible to unite continuity and interruption (rupture) within a single interpretive space. Professional changes are interpreted using the dialectical approaches of Hegel and Badiou, which complement one another: Hegel emphasises gradual development through contradiction and sublation, whereas Badiou emphasises event-produced rupture and the formation of new commitments (Badiou, 2005; Hegel, 1977; Hegel, 2010; Houlgate, 2005; Singer, 2001; Inwood, 1992). The dialectical approach as an analytical framework has been described in the study of various professions, for example, in nursing (Pereira & Oliveira, 2019), medical education and the professional development of early-career doctors (Ashari et al., 2024; Dornan et al., 2023), the professional context of teachers (Costa, 2019; Lu, 2026; Martínez-Martínez & Fernández-Larragueta, 2026), and supervision (Yerushalmi, 2024). At the same time, within the literature review conducted for this dissertation, no studies were found in which a dialectical

analytical framework had been directly applied to the study of the professional identity of psychologists and/or arts therapists.

Scientific novelty and practical utility of the dissertation. The scientific contribution of the dissertation consists of several interrelated elements. First, within the framework of the dissertation, a professional identity questionnaire for psychological help professions is developed and psychometrically tested, thereby ensuring operationalisation of the construct and providing a basis for further research, as well as for practice-based assessment of PI strength and the tracking of change dynamics, considering that in the literature PI strength is associated with higher job satisfaction, lower burnout, and less frequent intentions to leave work (Gendler et al., 2025; Lucas et al., 2025). Second, PI changes are analysed in the context of a crisis period, emphasising that this period is shaped by the cumulative impact of interconnected disruptions and persistent restructuring of the professional environment, rather than by the consequences of a single isolated event. This provides a basis for more practice-appropriate, multilayered professional support solutions under conditions of prolonged tension. Third, in the interpretation of the qualitative results, a dialectical framework (the approaches of the philosophers Hegel and Badiou) is systematically employed, allowing the simultaneous conceptualisation of gradual reconfiguration, moments of rupture, and the consolidation of new orientations in practice, thereby clarifying what types of professional support and resources are needed in different change situations. Fourth, the dissertation offers an integrated view of PI changes among psychologists and arts therapists within the framework of a crisis period, making it possible to distinguish broader shared features and profession-specific aspects that may serve as a basis for more targeted professional development, supervision, and institutional planning solutions.

The general aim of the dissertation is to investigate changes in the professional identity of psychologists and arts therapists during a crisis period by analysing tensions and contradictions, aspects of continuity and rupture, that become salient in professional self-understanding and practice, and by interpreting them within a dialectical framework. In order to achieve the stated general aim, the dissertation was structured in two phases as a set of three sequentially implemented studies. A sequential mixed methods research design was used in the dissertation, with a quantitative phase of operationalising the professional identity construct followed by an in-depth qualitative investigation of changes in professional identity. In the first phase, Study I was conducted, in which the psychometric testing of the PI construct was implemented through the development of a professional identity measurement instrument and its psychometric examination, whereas in the second phase Studies II and III qualitatively analysed changes in professional identity during the crisis period and interpreted them within

a dialectical framework. In this dissertation, the development of the instrument serves as the phase of operationalising the professional identity construct, which makes it possible to empirically structure the dimensions of professional identity and provides a conceptual basis for the subsequent qualitative interpretation of the data. In summary, it may be stated that the central focus of the dissertation is the investigation of changes in the professional identity of psychologists and arts therapists during a crisis period, while the development of the instrument and the dialectical interpretive framework serve as means for the empirical and theoretical understanding of this process.

The aim of **Study I** is to develop a professional identity questionnaire for psychological help professions and to conduct an empirical examination of the PI construct. To achieve this aim, the following **research question** was posed for **Study I**: Do the psychometric indicators of the developed questionnaire conform to psychometric standards accepted in science? The following sub-questions were also posed: (1) What is the experts' opinion regarding the wording of the items in the initial version of the questionnaire? (2) What is the factor structure of the developed questionnaire? (3) What are the item response and discrimination indices of the questionnaire items? (4) What is the internal consistency of the questionnaire scales? In order to answer the research question and sub-questions, the following **tasks** were set for **Study I**: (1) to identify and analytically evaluate the scientific literature on the concept of professional identity and its measurement approaches in psychological help professions, (2) to develop an initial set of questionnaire items ensuring content coverage of the construct and the appropriateness of wording to the professional context of psychological help, (3) to evaluate and refine the content validity of the items through a sequential expert review process, (4) to organise empirical data collection for the psychometric testing of the developed questionnaire, (5) to determine the factor structure of the questionnaire using appropriate factor analytic procedures, (6) to calculate item response and discrimination indices, (7) to assess the internal consistency of the scales, (8) to summarise and interpret the results of the psychometric testing, and (9) to present the course and results of the study in the dissertation.

The aim of **Study II** is to investigate changes in psychologists' professional identity during a crisis period. To achieve this aim, the following **research question** was posed for **Study II**: How do psychologists characterise changes in professional identity during a crisis period? The following additional questions were also posed: (1) What contradictions in professional practice and self-understanding did psychologists experience during the crisis period, and how do they describe them? (2) How do these contradictions indicate and structure the course of psychologists' PI changes – in which cases does continuity dominate and in which does rupture emerge? (3) How do psychologists integrate tensions and contradictions into their

professional identity? In order to answer the research question and sub-questions, the following **tasks** were set for **Study II**: (1) to obtain empirical data on psychologists' PI changes during a crisis period by conducting semi-structured interviews and preparing transcripts for analysis, (2) to conduct a thematic analysis of the interview data, identifying themes that characterise psychologists' PI changes during the crisis period, (3) to identify and describe within each theme the tensions and contradictions in psychologists' professional self-understanding and practice that constitute the content of the theme, (4) to analytically distinguish which aspects of the themes are characterised by continuity and which are marked by rupture in PI changes, (5) to carry out a dialectical synthesis within each theme by integrating the resolutions of tensions and/or the new professional orientations consolidated in practice through experiences of rupture, and (6) to summarise and interpret the results by linking them to the theoretical framework and the research questions.

The aim of **Study III** is to investigate changes in arts therapists' professional identity during a crisis period. To achieve this aim, the following **research question** was posed: How do arts therapists characterise changes in professional identity during a crisis period? The following additional questions were also posed: (1) What contradictions in professional practice and self-understanding did arts therapists experience during the crisis period, and how do they describe them? (2) How do these contradictions indicate and structure the course of arts therapists' PI changes – in which cases does continuity dominate and in which does rupture emerge? (3) How do arts therapists integrate tensions and contradictions into their professional identity? In order to answer the research question and sub-questions, the following **tasks** were set for **Study III**: (1) to obtain empirical data on changes in arts therapists' professional identity during a crisis period by conducting semi-structured interviews and preparing transcripts for analysis, (2) to conduct a thematic analysis of the interview data, identifying themes that characterise changes in arts therapists' professional identity during the crisis period, (3) to identify and describe within each theme the tensions and contradictions in arts therapists' professional self-understanding and practice that constitute the content of the theme, (4) to analytically distinguish which aspects of the themes are characterised by continuity and which are marked by rupture in PI changes, (5) to carry out a dialectical synthesis within each theme by integrating the resolutions of tensions and/or the new professional orientations consolidated in practice through experiences of rupture, and (6) to summarise and interpret the results by linking them to the theoretical framework and the research questions.

Method. To achieve the aim of the dissertation, three interrelated sequential studies were implemented within a sequential mixed methods research design. In Study I, the professional identity construct was examined through the development and psychometric

substantiation of a PI measurement instrument for psychological help professions. In Studies II and III, PI changes during a crisis period were analysed qualitatively on the basis of semi-structured interview data and interpreted within a dialectical framework. In this design, the quantitative phase served to operationalise the professional identity construct, whereas the qualitative phase served to deepen the understanding of changes in this construct in professional practice. Approval for the study was obtained from the RSU Research Ethics Committee (No. 6-1/1235). In all phases of the study, voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, and data confidentiality were ensured.

Study I was implemented in two phases.

Participants and sampling. In the first phase of Study I, experts with differing competence and professional experience were involved in instrument development and content evaluation ($n = 17$). The clarity of item wording and stylistic consistency were evaluated by a text editor ($n = 1$). The comprehensibility of the items was evaluated by representatives of three professional groups, including an arts therapist, a psychologist, and a social worker ($n = 3$). The correspondence of item content to the definition of the construct was evaluated by representatives of the target group with professional experience, including a mental health nurse, an organisational psychologist, a clinical psychologist, a school psychologist, a social worker, a psychiatrist, a psychotherapist, an arts therapist, a music therapist, a drama therapist, and a dance and movement therapist ($n = 11$). Finally, two additional experts participated in the evaluation of item content validity and the arrangement of items into scales ($n = 2$). In the second phase, 202 representatives of professions involved in the provision of psychological help were recruited for the psychometric testing of the instrument ($n = 202$; $M = 45.84$; $SD = 10.50$), of whom 94.6 % were women ($n = 191$) and 5.4 % were men ($n = 11$). The sample included social workers ($n = 49$), psychotherapy specialists ($n = 29$), medical psychotherapists ($n = 8$), mental health nurses ($n = 6$), psychologists ($n = 54$), psychiatrists ($n = 13$), and arts therapists ($n = 43$). Participants were recruited through the informational channels of professional associations and social media groups, using a convenience sampling principle.

Instrumentation and procedure. In the first phase of Study I, a content map of professional identity was created and an initial set of questionnaire items was developed in order to ensure content coverage of the construct. The items were then sequentially evaluated with the involvement of experts, focusing on clarity of wording, stylistic consistency, and the correspondence of content to the definition of the PI construct and to various psychological help professions. The expert evaluation was used to strengthen the content validity of the instrument by assessing the clarity of item wording, its correspondence to the content of

the professional identity construct, and its suitability for the context of psychological help professions. The expert evaluation took place in September 2020. In the second phase of Study I, the initial version of the developed questionnaire was transferred into electronic format and uploaded to the survey platform “Visidati”. Professional associations distributed an electronic link with an invitation to participate and also posted the link in association groups on the social networking platform “Facebook”. Data were collected from 11 to 24 November 2020, and the questionnaire was distributed together with information about the study, conditions of participation, data processing, and data storage.

Data processing and analysis. In the first phase of Study I, the feedback provided by experts was compiled and used to refine, reword, and structure the items, resulting in an initial version of the questionnaire suitable for data collection. In the second phase of Study I, psychometric testing of the instrument was conducted, including exploratory factor analysis (with data suitability assessed by the KMO index and Bartlett’s test of sphericity), using both orthogonal (varimax) and oblique (oblimin) rotation, as well as the calculation of psychometric indicators for items and scales. Item functioning was evaluated by analysing item response indices as item means and discrimination indices as item-rest correlations, whereas internal consistency of the scales was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha coefficients. Data analysis was conducted using Jamovi software. As a result of this phase, an empirically substantiated instrument structure and psychometric indicators were obtained, which ensure more precise operationalisation of the professional identity construct in the subsequent parts of the dissertation.

Since **Studies II and III** were implemented simultaneously (in parallel) and were based on a unified procedure for qualitative data collection and analysis, the instrumentation and procedure, as well as data processing and analysis, are described jointly for both studies. At the same time, the characteristics of participants and the sampling process are presented separately for each study, because the studies covered different professional groups.

Participants and sampling for Study II. Study II included 45 Latvian psychologists aged 30 to 65 years, of whom 87 % were women ($n = 39$) and 13 % were men ($n = 6$). All participants were registered psychologists listed in the Register of Psychologists of the Latvian State Service of Education Quality. The inclusion criteria required work experience and the beginning of a professional career in the profession of psychologist prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to ensure sufficiently rich reflections on changes in professional identity during the crisis period. Participants were identified through publicly available professional registers and approached individually by telephone, based on the principle of convenience sampling. The number of participants was selected in order to

ensure diversity of experience across different contexts of professional practice, and data saturation was observed in the course of analysis.

Participants and sampling for Study III. Study III included 31 Latvian female arts therapists aged 28 to 54 years. The participants represented all four arts therapy specialisations, including visual arts therapists ($n = 12$), dance and movement therapists ($n = 8$), music therapists ($n = 7$), and drama therapists ($n = 4$). The inclusion criteria required work experience and the beginning of a professional career in the profession of arts therapist prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to ensure sufficiently rich reflections on changes in professional identity during the crisis period. Participants were identified using publicly available information from the websites of professional associations and specialisations and were approached individually by telephone, based on the principle of convenience sampling. The number of participants was selected in order to ensure diversity of experience across different arts therapy specialisations, and data saturation was observed in the course of analysis.

Instrumentation and procedure for Studies II and III. In September 2022, an information letter was prepared for potential participants (psychologists and arts therapists), explaining the aims of the study, the procedure, the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity, data storage and processing, as well as participants' right to withdraw from the study at any time. The letter also included the interview questions in order to encourage considered engagement and reflection before the interview. The interview reflection framework covered the period from March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic began, until the time of the interview, encompassing experiences of social and professional restructuring caused by the pandemic, as well as the beginning of the war in Ukraine on 24 February 2022, thereby also marking the socio-emotional background of this period. Potential participants were identified using publicly available information from the websites of the professional organisations of both professions. A convenience approach was used in participant selection. Participants were initially approached by telephone, and those who agreed to participate in the study then received the above-mentioned information letter and were invited to an interview. Data were obtained through semi-structured individual interviews using the five interview questions included in the information letter, which were formulated so that participants could reflect as comprehensively as possible on changes in professional identity during the period defined within the study. Interviews with participants who agreed to participate in the study were conducted in October and November 2022 in person, remotely, or in written response format, and were carried out by trained research assistants. Although a very small portion of the data was obtained in the form of written responses, reflective thematic analysis focused on

the structure of meaning in the text, and therefore the different formats of data collection did not significantly affect the analysis process.

Data processing and analysis for Studies II and III. With participants' consent, interviews were recorded in audio or video format, transcribed verbatim, checked against the recording, and anonymised using unique codes. Some participants submitted written responses to the interview questions. Audio and video recordings were irreversibly deleted after transcription, whereas transcripts, including the written documents containing responses to the interview questions, were uploaded to and are stored in the Rīga Stradiņš University e-resource repository, with access restricted to the author of the dissertation and the co-researcher. Reflective thematic analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used for data analysis, and a dialectical framework was integrated into the interpretation of the themes in order to illuminate tensions and contradictions in the experience of professional identity change and to highlight moments of continuity or rupture in professional activity. The dialectical framework was used throughout the entire analysis process – already during familiarisation with the data and the writing of initial analytical notes, the interview material was read through the prism of contradictions, tensions, and change. Subsequently, it was also integrated into coding, the formation of thematic groups, and the formulation of subthemes by structuring them within a framework of contradictions. RTA was implemented in five phases: (1) familiarisation with the data by making initial analytical notes and reading the texts through a dialectical lens, paying attention to tensions and contradictions in the experience of professional identity change, (2) systematic coding of data fragments by selecting significant extracts relating to the experience of professional identity change, (3) combining codes into thematic groups and initially identifying points of contradiction and tension, (4) refining themes and subthemes by grouping them into pairs of contradictions and identifying features of continuity and rupture, and (5) final synthesis and theoretical integration by constructing the thematic narrative and dialectical interpretation. Data analysis was carried out by two researchers (the author of the dissertation and a co-researcher) in order to strengthen methodological transparency and consistency of interpretation. Throughout the data analysis process, both researchers kept their own reflective journals, recording analytical notes, interpretive considerations, and observations regarding the emergence of tensions and contradictions in the data.

Structure of the dissertation. The dissertation consists of an introduction, five chapters, and concluding sections. The first chapter presents the theoretical framework, covering the conceptual foundations of professional identity, its specificity in psychological help professions, the professional framework of psychologists and arts therapists in Latvia,

the dialectical approach, and the crisis period as the context of the study. The second chapter presents the methodological framework, whereas the third and fourth chapters reflect the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study, respectively. The fifth chapter provides the integrative discussion, while the concluding sections of the dissertation include the overall conclusions, recommendations and directions for future research, as well as limitations.

Conclusions

The aim of the dissertation was to investigate changes in the professional identity of psychologists and arts therapists during a crisis period by analysing, within a dialectical framework, the tensions and contradictions that became salient in professional practice and self-understanding, as well as aspects of continuity and rupture. To achieve this aim, the dissertation was implemented in two phases as three interrelated studies: in the first phase, a professional identity measurement instrument was developed and initially psychometrically substantiated, whereas in the second phase changes in professional identity during a crisis period were analysed qualitatively in samples of psychologists and arts therapists. Integrating the results of both phases of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

- 1 In the dissertation, professional identity in psychological help professions is substantiated as a multidimensional and context-sensitive construct, for the empirical study of which a professional identity questionnaire for psychological help professions was developed and initially psychometrically substantiated as an instrument for operationalising the PI construct.
- 2 Exploratory factor analysis made it possible to identify four professional identity scales – “Professional Self-Understanding”, “Belonging to the Profession”, “Development and Reflection”, and “Recognition in the Team” – which together characterise the personal, relational, and collective dimensions of professional identity.
- 3 The psychometric indicators of the instrument overall indicated acceptable internal consistency of the scales and sufficient discriminatory power of the items, while also pointing to the need for future validation to evaluate the response distributions of individual items across different samples.
- 4 Analysis of the experiences of psychologists and arts therapists showed that changes in professional identity during the crisis period predominantly take the form of gradual reorganisation of professional practice, in which professionals refine professional boundaries, reconsider conditions of accessibility, and adapt practice to changing working conditions.
- 5 Under crisis conditions, the dimensions of professional identity become interconnected in tensions that emerge in professional practice and affect choices of professional action, work organisation, relationships with clients or patients, and solutions related to professional sustainability.
- 6 At the same time, changes in professional identity during crisis are not limited only to gradual adaptation, because in certain cases boundary points emerge at which

the habitual model of professional action can no longer be sustained and new orientations of professional activity are consolidated.

- 7 Such orientations are manifested, for example, in the acceptance of remote or hybrid practice under specific professional conditions, in the professionally justified choice not to conduct psychological assessment in situations where methodological and ethical requirements cannot be ensured, as well as in the strengthening of professional sustainability as a precondition for the provision of high-quality psychological help.
- 8 Changes in professional identity in the samples of psychologists and arts therapists include both common and profession-specific aspects. The shared features are related to questions of professional boundaries, safety, accessibility, belonging, and sustainability, whereas the differences are determined by the specific form of practice and institutional context of the profession.
- 9 The integration of the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study shows that the dimensions of professional identity are not merely measurable components of the construct, but are also manifested in choices of professional action that are reconsidered, refined, and consolidated in professional practice under crisis conditions.
- 10 Overall, the results of the dissertation show that professional identity in psychological help professions under crisis conditions is formed as a dynamic process in which professional self-understanding, belonging, reflection, development, and professional recognition interact with one another and are restructured in professional practice.
- 11 The dissertation expands the study of professional identity by showing that under crisis conditions changes in professional identity can be interpreted as a dialectical process in which gradual adaptation and moments of rupture coexist in professional practice, thereby refining the theoretical understanding of professional identity change in the context of psychological help professions.

Proposals

Based on the results of the dissertation, the following recommendations were developed for future research, professional practice, education, and the development of professional policy.

For future research

- 1 It is recommended to continue the validation of the professional identity questionnaire by testing the stability of the factor structure in independent samples and supplementing the assessment of structural validity with confirmatory factor analysis.
- 2 In the further validation of the instrument, it is recommended to expand the assessment by including test–retest reliability, measurement error, criterion validity, as well as invariance and cross-cultural validity.
- 3 It is recommended to evaluate the applicability of the instrument across individual professional groups by testing whether the scale structure remains similar across different psychological help professions.

For professional practice and organisations

- 4 The instrument is recommended for use in the empirical assessment of professional identity among representatives of psychological help professions, taking into account its initial psychometric substantiation and the need for further validation, in order to quantitatively characterise aspects of professional identity in accordance with the identified scales.
- 5 Institutions are recommended to specify the conditions for remote and hybrid work by establishing clear criteria for safety, confidentiality, and accessibility of psychological help services.
- 6 Employers are recommended to establish clear principles for the use of communication channels and working time in order to reduce the blurring of professional boundaries and expectations of constant availability under conditions of remote work.
- 7 It is recommended to strengthen support mechanisms for professional sustainability by ensuring workload review, opportunities for emotional recovery, supervision, and accessible professional support under prolonged crisis conditions.
- 8 It is recommended to purposefully maintain mechanisms of professional connectedness, including opportunities for exchange of colleagues' experience and professional networking, in order to reduce the risk of professional isolation.

For professional education and the development of professional policy

- 9 In the training and continuing education of professionals, it is recommended to systematically develop digital skills, including not only the use of technologies, but also aspects of safety, ethics, and professional responsibility in remote practice.
- 10 In the education of arts therapists, it is recommended to emphasise issues of telepractice and hybrid practice, including how to preserve the quality of the creative process, how to establish and maintain the therapeutic alliance in a digital environment, and how to manage the distribution of responsibility for the setting and art materials. In the continuing education of psychologists, the organisation of psychological assessment in remote formats should be emphasised, particularly highlighting situations in which the professionally justified solution is to postpone the assessment or refrain from conducting it.
- 11 It is recommended to develop profession-specific guidelines for telepractice and hybrid practice for each profession, as well as to strengthen the institutional integration and support mechanisms of psychological help professions so that the quality and sustainability of professional activity under crisis conditions can be maintained more robustly.

List of publications, reports and patents on the topic of the Thesis

Scientific publications in journals indexed in international databases (Web of Science, Scopus):

1. Akmane, E., Mārtinsone, K., & Stierle, C. (2026). Shaping psychologists' professional identity during a period of crisis: An existential-dialectical approach. *Acta Psychologica*, 264, 106431. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2026.106431>
2. Muižniece-Slesare, L., Akmane, E., Havsteen-Franklin, D., & Mārtinsone, K. (2026). Adapting through adversity: The transformation of art therapists' professional identity. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 102429. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2026.102429>
3. Akmane, E., & Mārtinsone, K. (2025). The story of art therapy in Latvia: A historical approach. In M. Hills de Zárata, D. Waller, & C. L. Vaculik (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of art therapy practice* (pp. 593-606). Routledge.
4. Akmane, E., Mārtinsone, K., Kriķe, Z., Perepjolkina, V., Drunka, A., & Kolmane, A. (2021). Professional identity questionnaire for psychological help providers: Development and validation. *Society. Integration. Education. Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference*, 7, 13–23. <https://doi.org/10.17770/sie2021vol7.6444>

Scientific articles published in peer-reviewed journals in Latvia:

1. Akmane, E., Mārtinsone, K., & Kriķe, Z. (2020). Instruments for measuring the professional identity of psychological help providers: Rapid literature review. *Education. Innovation. Diversity*. 1(1), 6–15. <https://doi.org/10.17770/eid2020.1.5335>

Scientific articles published in relevant peer-reviewed journals abroad:

1. Akmane, E., Martinsone, K., Kriķe, Z., Ricou, M., & Marina, S. (2022). The goal of psychological intervention and performed functions of psychologists as an aspect of the professional identity of psychologists: Latvian sample. *SHS Web of Conferences*, 131, 03006. <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202213103006>

Reports and theses at international congresses and conferences:

1. Akmane, E., Mārtinsone, K., Kriķe, Z., Ricou, M., & Cordeiro, S.A. (2022, July 5–8). The Goal of Psychological Intervention and Performed Functions of Psychologists: Latvian Sample [Konferences prezentācija]. Symposium: Identity of Psychology – Challenges and Future Directions, 17th European Congress of Psychology. Psychology as the Hub Science: Opportunities and Responsibility, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Reports and theses at national congresses and conferences:

1. Akmane, E., Mārtinsone, K., Krone, I., Stafecka, K., Muižniece, L., Pētersone, L., & Dzene, J. (2023, March 29–31). Adapting to Change: A Study of Psychologists' Professional Identity in the Face of Covid-19 Pandemic and Digitalisation [Konferences prezentācija]. RSU Research Week 2021. International Scientific Conference "Society.Health.Welfare. 2021", Rīga Stradiņš University, Latvia.
2. Akmane, E., Mārtinsone, K., Kriķe, Z., Perepjolkina, V., Drunka, A., un Kolmane, A. (2021, 28.–29. maijs). Psiholoģiskās palīdzības sniedzēju profesionālās identitātes aptauja: attīstība un validēšana [Konferences prezentācija]. Zinātniskā konference "Society. Integration. Education.", Rēzeknes tehnoloģiju augstskola, Latvija.
3. Kolmane, A., Drunka, A., Akmane, E., Mārtinsone, K., un Kriķe, Z. (2021, 22.–24. aprīlis). Psiholoģiskās palīdzības sniedzēju profesionālās identitātes aptaujas izveide [Konferences prezentācija]. 7. starptautiskā zinātniski praktiskā konference "Veselība un personības attīstība: Starpdisciplinārā pieeja", Rīgas Stradiņa universitāte, Latvija.

4. Akmane, E., Mārtinsone, K., Krieķe, Z., Kolmane, A., un Drunka, A. (2021, 22.–24. aprīlis). Mākslas terapeita profesionālās identitātes raksturojums: PPS PI aptaujas 1.posma rezultāti [Konferences prezentācija]. 7. starptautiskā zinātniski praktiskā konference “Veselība un personības attīstība: Starpdisciplinārā pieeja”, Rīgas Stradiņa universitāte, Latvija.
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7. Akmane, E., un Mārtinsone, K. (2020, 27. oktobris). Latvijas iedzīvotāju apmierinātība ar darbu un tā nozīmi [Stenda referāts]. Konference “Latvijas mantojums un nākotnes izaicinājumi valsts ilgtspējai”, VPP Projekts “Latvijas valsts un sabiedrības izaicinājumi un risinājumi starptautiskā kontekstā” [INTERFRAME-LV].
8. Akmane, E. (2020, 23. oktobris). Profesionālā identitāte pārmaiņu laikos [Konferences prezentācija]. Zinātniski praktiska konference “Psiholoģiskās palīdzības sniedzēja profesionālā identitāte un izaicinājumi pārmaiņu laikos”, Rīgas Stradiņa universitāte, Latvija.
9. Akmane, E., un Mārtinsone, K. (2020, 22. oktobris). Profesionālā identitāte Covid-19 krīzes ietekmē [Konferences prezentācija]. Zinātniskā konference “Psiholoģiskie resursi un riska faktori iedzīvotāju veselībai Covid-19 apstākļos. VPP pētījumi praksei”, Rīgas Stradiņa universitāte, Latvija.
10. Akmane, E., Krieķe, Z., un Mārtinsone, K. (2020, May 22–23). Instruments for measuring the professional identity of psychological help providers: literature review [Konferences prezentācija]. International Scientific Conference “Society. Integration. Education.”, Rezekne Academy of Technologies, Rezekne, Latvia.
11. Akmane, E., Krieķe, Z., un Mārtinsone, K. (2020, 27.–29. aprīlis). Kā izmērīt profesionālo identitāti? [Konferences prezentācija]. 6. Starptautiskā zinātniski praktiskā konference “Veselība un personības attīstība: Starpdisciplinārā pieeja”, Rīgas Stradiņa universitāte, Latvija.

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