# PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE IN CYBERSPACE COUNSELLING:
## AN ETHICAL CRITIQUE

**by**

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# DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own original work, and has not been submitted to any other university.

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# ABSTRACT

This study investigated the ethical issues of using cyberspace counselling. Specifically, the study focused on ethical issues arising from migration from face-to-face contact to cyberspace counselling using telephone, email, Skype, Facebook and Twitter. It has been realised that since cyberspace counselling is still a new phenomenon, it is important to consider the ethical issues that surround it and how counsellors can adapt to this kind of counselling. The study was underpinned by two theoretical frameworks: consequentialism theory which considers the consequences of counsellors' actions, and deontology theory which considers the duty that cyberspace counsellors have towards their clients. The study used the interpretivist paradigm and adopted a qualitative approach. Snowball sampling was used to select ten cyber counsellors. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with ten cyberspace counsellors in and around Pietermaritzburg. Content and narrative analysis were the main processes that were used to bring order, structure and meaning to data that had been collected. The study established various ethical issues associated with cyberspace counselling. These include: loss of urgency due to time delays, narrative and communication misunderstandings, and the limitations of cyberspace counselling in crisis intervention. The study revealed that cyber hacking may further expose a client to a breach of confidentiality. Insufficient contextual background information of clients may affect the quality of support provided. Where a client's demographic information is unavailable, cultural understandings may not be considered thereby increasing the likelihood of putting the client at risk. An additional ethical concern is that counsellors' skills and limitations may have an effect on the provision of best practice treatment. The anonymity of cyberspace counselling, while beneficial, may increase abusive contact and the opportunity to create a fictional character on behalf of the client. Ethics could be violated in situations where the counsellor does not know how to handle the anonymity of the client. The study recommended that ethical guidelines be created to guide cyberspace counsellors in South Africa and that cyberspace counsellors should inform their clients of the limited security of their correspondence. Clients can then make a choice about whether or not to continue with cyberspace counselling despite its limitations. Counsellors must receive adequate training on using cyberspace counselling and they should make use of an encrypted code for security purposes.

**DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to cyberspace counsellors

who are faced with a variety of ethical challenges.

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# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| APA | American Psychological Association |
| ACA | American Counselling Association |
| ISM | International Society of Mental Health |
| NBC | National Board for Certified Counsellors |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology |

# BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

## 1.1 Introduction

Weiten, Dunn and Hammer (2014) claimed that, in the 21st century, the Internet has taken over people's lives. To keep abreast of the rapidly changing arena of cyberspace technology, most people are embracing the changes. Bambling, King, Reid and Wegner (2008) stated that with the increasing population of those connected in cyberspace, it is gradually becoming comfortable to access and purchase goods and services in cyberspace. Evans argued that "this movement is driven by need to optimize the accessibility of support to service users, whilst also providing flexibility in the nature of technology resources, which are available to assist in such sphere of practice" (2009, viii). For example, businesses use the Internet to advertise their services and products (Tam and Walter 2013). Health programmes, such as fitness and healthy lifestyle diets, are easily accessed in cyberspace. It is only a matter of time before everything that can be automated migrates to cyberspace. The technological advancements have resulted in the development of counselling also moving into cyberspace, and it has become important to find ways to manage this service. One such service that has been embraced by counsellors and their clients, is professional support and guidance within cyberspace counselling.

Chester and Glass (2006) posited that cyberspace counselling is a new phenomenon offered via the Internet with more and more services being made available in cyberspace. Cyberspace counselling involves a new medium of communicating that has many potential benefits, such as ease of access and anonymity.

According to Bambling et al. (2008, 110), cyberspace counselling seems to reduce the social stigma of asking for help and increases the sense of emotional safety due to the lack of proximity and anonymity. Bekker and Vingerhoets (2001, 91) have noted that, in general, males compared to females are seen as having to always be strong. As part of this view, males are expected to suppress emotions and not talk about their problems. In this regard, cyberspace counselling provides a suitable platform to enable males to receive the help they may need and still retain their dignity.

Cyberspace counselling also becomes valuable where other social factors, such as gender oppression or even physical appearance, may prevent people from seeking help. Oravec (2012), found that cyberspace counselling was providing an important option for many individuals who cannot physically meet with face-to-face mental health support providers and/or guidance

professionals. This is also useful where supplementary support is required outside of those sessions.

Some proponents of cyberspace counselling are presenting it as an alternative to face-to-face counselling sessions. This is of special value when individuals are already very comfortable with computing and social networking applications (Oravec 2012).

Within the South African context, Vally (2006, 151) argued that due to oppressive apartheid rule, many black South Africans were in need of counselling. Most black South Africans come from previously disadvantaged backgrounds whereby access to the resources used to address and heal the devastating effects of the apartheid regime was traditionally limited, if not completely unavailable. Vally added that there could be a need for utilising cyberspace counselling in such situations.

Cyberspace counselling is becoming more readily available for the majority primarily due to the increase in access to cell phones, but lack of free access to the Internet remains a technological and financial barrier. Kreutzer (2009), suggested that although South Africa is a country that is in the process of trying to escape the inequalities, mobile phones are experiencing growth in terms of usage as defined by the number of registered sim cards. He claimed that more than 60% of South Africans who are above the age 16 are in possession of a cell phone. This is said to be due to the low cost of prepaid phones, which has made them easier for people from disadvantaged backgrounds to afford. Kreutzer further stated that in most developing countries there is still limited access to computers and the Internet.

In light of the information above, South Africa is moving in a positive direction regarding the use of technology and the Internet, meaning that even people from disadvantaged backgrounds are able to access the Internet. This, in turn, opens up the platform of cyber counselling services to those who may need it the most.

**Table 1.1: Most common use for Internet browsing by phone by country (2015)**

|                   | South Africa | Nigeria | Ghana | Kenya | Uganda |
|-------------------|--------------|---------|-------|-------|--------|
| Facebook          | 41%          | 58%     | 54%   | 44%   | 44%    |
| Send SMS          | 52%          | 39%     | 40%   | 55%   | 43%    |
| FM radio          | 40%          | 36%     | 40%   | 46%   | 46%    |
| Browse Internet   | 40%          | 47%     | 51%   | 34%   | 29%    |
| Take photos       | 45%          | 38%     | 37%   | 34%   | 31%    |
| Instant messaging | 41%          | 34%     | 34%   | 40%   | 34%    |
| Play games        | 34%          | 34%     | 33%   | 30%   | 27%    |
| Download apps     | 34%          | 28%     | 31%   | 19%   | 18%    |
| Twitter           | 14%          | 14%     | 13%   | 14%   | 11%    |

Table extracted from: Africa, I. (2017).
http://www.itnewsafrica.com/2015/04/study-reveals-african-mobile-phone-usage-stats/

Forty percent of mobile phone users browse the Internet. The highest respondent rate was in Ghana at 51% with Nigeria slightly less at 47%. Forty percent of South African phone users browse the Internet with Kenya (34%) and Uganda (29%), having the least Internet browsers.

Although half the 55 million people in South Africa live below the poverty line, more than 75% in low-income groups who are 15 years or older own a mobile phone. Mobile ownership is at the base of the technology ownership pyramid (Africa 2017).

To access cyberspace counselling services, one requires connection to the Internet or mobile network providers. As a result, airtime and/or data needs to be purchased, and the user needs to be in possession of the appropriate technological tools. The barrier for black South Africans, from previously disadvantaged areas, remains one of affordability. This is even though there are organisations that offer cyberspace counselling at no fee.

In spite of its benefits, Mallen, Vogel, Rochlen, and Day (2005) raised some valid concerns regarding the practice of counselling in cyberspace. One of the concerns was who will benefit from cyberspace counselling. Mallen et al. (2005) found that the people who derive the benefits of cyberspace counselling are people who are already in possession of these resources and are not financially constrained.  Within the South African context, it is those who were previously advantaged as well as the newly privileged that easily access cyberspace counselling. Another answer to the concern raised by Mallen et al. (2005) is that most people who reside and work in the cities can benefit from cyberspace counselling as they are able to afford the technology required and the cities have the infrastructure to provide Internet coverage.

However, according to Bambling et al. (2008), one cannot ignore the ethical challenges that emanate from the use of cyberspace counselling. As the service provided is support to a vulnerable person, like face-to face counselling, it stands to reason that the cyberspace method would face similar challenges such as those in face-to face counselling. In this quest for ethical standards and practices, the cyberspace counselling field cannot and should not be an exception. Vally (2006) argued that cyberspace counselling raises a number of ethical issues that need addressing. This study argues that while cyberspace space counselling is being embraced, both counsellors and clients need to understand what is required of them. The study creates awareness that cyberspace counselling is already in use and requires ethical standards that protect the vulnerable client as well as the counsellor.

The researcher is from an African background where many people are unaware of, or do not trust the provision of professional support offered in cyberspace counselling. Initially, the

researcher felt that irrespective of how modern our communities become, little would change when it comes to utilising cyberspace counselling. Despite studying psychology for four years, the researcher was not familiar with the concept of 'cyberspace counselling'. Awareness of cyberspace counselling developed only after reviewing literature on the subject. This sparked an interest in the subject of cyberspace counselling in general, as well as specifically in South Africa and led to the motivation to carry out this study.

## 1.2 Background to the research problem

According to Want, Schilit and Jenson (2015), there has been an increased movement of mental health support and guidance services from the traditional face-to-face counselling to cyberspace. Most professional support and guidance organisations are using modern technology to expand their services to accommodate the needs of service users. Bambling et al. (2008) pointed out that the rapid growth of technology is making it possible for counsellors to deliver psychological help to many more people. They further contended that there will be an increase in the prevalence of people using technology for healthcare reasons in the future. The main reason for this is that most clients are unable to access therapy, counselling and guidance in a traditional way because of conditions such as disability, or being afraid of speaking to someone face to face.

According to Chester and Glass (2006), people view counselling as something between the counsellor and client whereby they share a personal physical space. This is gradually changing, however, as many practitioners or counsellors are slowly migrating to cyberspace counselling. There appears to be a shift away from the traditional face-to-face counselling. Traditional face-to-face counselling involves therapist and client/s having a conversation where both are present and are able to connect (Suler 2001). However, this study notes that to have skills in traditional face-to-face counselling does not translate into having competence into cyberspace counselling.

Richards and Vigan (2013) claimed that there is no clear definition of cyberspace counselling. According to Richards and Vigano (2013), cyberspace counselling is done with synchronous (chat and video conferencing) and more popularly asynchronous (email) communication. According to Beattie, Cunningham, Jones and Zelenko (2006), there are a number of contemporary debates surrounding the success of cyberspace counselling. While there are

critics of cyberspace as a form of counselling, there are those who have embraced it as an alternative to traditional face-to-face counselling.

A comparative study between face-to-face and cyberspace counselling by Barak, Flen, Boniel-Nissim and Shapira (2008) established that Internet based therapy was, on average, as effective as face-to-face therapy. This is because cyberspace counselling offers a variety of alternatives, forms and methods that face-to face counselling does not offer including video conferencing and email. This variety allows an individual to choose methods that suit their needs and comfort. Richards and Vigano (2013) added that like traditional face-to-face, cyberspace counselling provides cyberspace support groups whereby clients can freely join and quit whenever they want. Cyberspace support groups create a sense of community and can reduce distress and feelings of isolation.

The services that cyberspace counselling can offer in the 21st century cannot be denied. However, the use of cyberspace counselling raises several concerns regarding how the counsellor and clients interact with each other (McLeod 2013). It is with this background that this contemporary study explores the lived experiences of ten cyberspace professional support personnel. The study explores how effectively counsellors and clients can meet in cyberspace and considers their challenges. This study is a critique of cyberspace counselling from an ethical perspective. Through the tenets of consequentialism and social constructivism, this study aims at assisting counsellors and clients who wish to utilise cyberspace counselling.

## 1.3 Key research question
What are the ethical issues that arise from the provision of cyberspace support and guidance services?

## 1.4 Research questions
This study aims to understand some of the ethical challenges that are associated with the provision of professional support and guidance in the realm of cyberspace counselling. While many researchers (Barak et al. 2008; Beattie et al. 2006; Richards and Vigano 2013; McLeod 2013) have contributed to the body of knowledge on the development and the use of cyberspace counselling, these studies have not interrogated the use of cyberspace as a form of counselling within an African context. Similarly, the ethical challenges and effectiveness of cyberspace

counselling between counsellors and clients in South Africa remains under-researched. Some of the sub-questions that this study seeks to explore are:

1. What are the processes involved in cyberspace counselling in South Africa?
2. What characterises cyberspace counselling in South Africa?
3. What are the ethical issues that arise from cyberspace support and counselling?

## 1.5 Research problems and objectives

Research on cyberspace counselling has considered its pros and cons within the Western context (Vally 2006). A number of researchers contend that it is the most plausible alternative to face-to-face counselling (Bambling et al. 2008; Harris and Birnbaum 2015; Puri and Luqman 2015). However, most studies have not considered the use of cyberspace counselling and its challenges in Africa, and South Africa specifically. This study aims at exploring the ethical challenges posed by the use of cyberspace counselling in South Africa. The main objectives of this study include:

1. To discover the processes involved in cyberspace counselling in South Africa;
2. To explore what characterises cyberspace counselling in South Africa; and
3. To explore the ethical issues that arise from cyberspace support and counselling.

## 1.6 The significance of the study

This study aims to add to the literature on cyberspace counselling in South Africa; the literature review revealed that this is limited. While the common form of counselling is face-to-face, the researcher feels it would be of benefit to counsellors to know more about cyber counselling before they decide to utilise it.

The study's pivot point is that most literature on cyberspace counselling takes the Western world-view and entrenches a Western construct and approach to cyberspace counselling. A critical survey of scholarship in the context of cyberspace counselling reveals that while the existent work is extensive, it is also myopic and short-sighted on the use of cyberspace counselling in Africa. A survey of literature also reveals that there are few or no studies done on cyberspace space counselling that are applicable in the context of Africa. Therefore, this study is charting new terrain with the aim of filling in these gaps on cyberspace counselling in the specific context of South Africa. Furthermore, exploration of the ethical implications of

cyberspace counselling should be useful to counsellors who practise or intend to engage in cyberspace counselling.

## 1.7 Theoretical frameworks

There are many ways to explore the ethical challenges posed by cyberspace counselling to both counsellors and clients. One of the theories that this study drew on was consequentialism theory which argues that the morality of an action is to be judged based on its consequences. Jeremy Bentham is considered the father of consequentialism. According to Peterson (2003), consequentialism is the normative ethical theory that maintains that an act can be termed morally right or wrong after considering its consequences. In other words, consequential ethics believes that as long as the end outcome is morally good, it does not matter what means are used to achieve that result. Consequentialism connects an act to its outcome. Consequentialism made an impact around the 19th and 20th centuries and it had a huge impact in the world of moral philosophy (Ord 2005).

Applied to this study, consequentialism is a relevant framework for exploring the consequences of cyberspace counselling.  Through the tenets of consequentialism, this study investigates some of the ethical challenges associated with cyberspace counselling in South Africa. Since consequentialism is concerned with the consequences of one's actions, it is a relevant theory for exploring the consequences of cyberspace counselling and its challenges. One of the consequences is that it may be challenging counsellors to give a diagnosis to a client. The theory of consequentialism will assist in looking at the benefits and possible ethical challenges of cyberspace counselling and support.

A second theory that this study explored and built upon is deontology theory. Alexander and Moore (2015) explained that the word 'deontology' is derived from the Greek words, *deon* meaning 'duty' and *logos* or study of. Deontology is one of the normative theories that emphasises what we ought to do (duty) and not what we should do (virtue). Deontology holds that some choices cannot be justified by their effect no matter how morally good their consequences are. These ethics focus moralities on what people do, and not on the consequences of their actions. An action cannot be justified simply because it has produced good consequences. Because of the lack of focus on the consequences, deontology is also referred to as 'non-consequentialist'. An act is morally good if it conforms to a moral norm or law (Scheffler 1982).

The theory of deontology in this study is relevant in explaining why counsellors ought to do the right thing whether they are using face-to-face or cyberspace counselling. This theory benefits the study by looking at the duty and the role of cyberspace counsellors during counselling processes. Every counsellor must maintain integrity during counselling. They should follow the laws that guide them, and uphold certain duties even if they do not agree with them. Cyberspace counsellors have a duty to protect their clients, respect them and treat them fairly. Through the tenets of the theory of deontology, this study explores some of the ethical challenges that force cyberspace counsellors to go against the stipulated counselling norms.

## 1.8 Research methodology

According to Henn, Weinstein and Foard (2009), there are two main paradigms for research: positivism and interpretivism.

### 1.8.1 Positivist approach

The positivist approach is based on the application of the scientific method used in the natural sciences and it is associated predominantly with quantitative approaches that stress reliability and generalisability (Bryman 2001). Positivism follows an empirical approach and focuses on verifiable observations. The researcher made use of the observation in the collection of data commonly expressed as numbers, known as 'data'. The research is established to answer a specific hypothesis. The hypothesis must be established as proved or disproved. There are four main types of quantitative research: survey, correlational, causal-comparative and experimental research. Survey researchers use questionnaires and interviews for the purpose of polling opinions or comparing one group with another. Correlational research tests the relationship (effect) between items with the purpose of establishing which variable has an effect on another variable, and how strong that effect is. Causal-comparative research wishes to establish the cause and the effect a variable has on another. Experimental research is hypothesis guided and attempts to prove and disprove the hypothesis statements (Klazema 2014).

### 1.8.2 Interpretivist approach

Interpretivism, on the other hand, is predominantly associated with qualitative methods that place a high emphasis on validity. The purpose of social research is to build an understanding of the motives and intentions that underpin social research.

Carson, Gilmore, Perry and Gronhaug (2001) saw interpretivist researchers as avoiding the rigidity and carefully structural frameworks of positivist research, and adopting a more freely personal structure to make sense of what reality is perceived to be. They went on to describe the research as being focused on understanding and interpretation, where the researcher is able to experience what they are studying. Qualitative methods in interpretivism use interpretation to make meaning of human interactions and what they perceive as their reality. The researcher allows the knowledge of human behaviour to develop without any preconceived ideas, and gains insight by discovering meaning (Carson et al. 2001, 6).

There are three main methods of gathering information in qualitative research. In interactive interviewing, people are asked to describe their experiences verbally. Another method is to obtain written descriptions by the participant. Lastly, observations of verbal and non-verbal behaviours can be recorded (Myers 2000).

Social research such as this dissertation can be either qualitative, quantitative or mixed. Qualitative research offers a "close-up" data analysis of phenomena without the use of statistics and other forms of quantification (Moriarty 2011, 17). One of the strengths of qualitative research is that it allows flexibility in its approach. However, it is susceptible to the weakness of bias due to its subjectivity (Cho and Trent 2006).

On the other hand, quantitative research employs fixed mathematical methods and the tests are limited to the samples from which they draw general conclusions. Quantitative research has the merits of objectively explaining one phenomenon in a way that allows the results to be universal (Thomas and Magilvy 2011, 152).

In a mixed method research, there is a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research methods in an inquiry (Venkatesh, Brown and Bala 2013, 21). Although it requires a skilled researcher to identify the limitations of quantitative or qualitative, mixed method research can be very insightful (Galt and Pharm 2007, cited in Abbott, Fuji and Galt 2015).

For Denzin and Lincoln (2005), "qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter; it attempts to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them". The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of cyberspace counsellors and the ethical challenges they encounter.

According to Terre-Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006), a qualitative study such as this one allows people to narrate their experiences and interpret how they feel by sharing their emotions and thoughts. In the context of this study, qualitative methods allowed the researcher to explore

the ethical challenges of cyberspace counselling as narrated by counsellors through interviews (Thomas and Magilvy 2011).

This study is social research, interpretive in nature, and upholds that to explain human behaviour, social researchers need to understand the meanings and interpretations that people attach to phenomena in the social world (Wagner, Kawulich, Garner and Botha 2012). This is therefore an interpretivist qualitative study.

## 1.9 Sources of data

Data for this study was generated from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources of data command more authority because they are 'original' and unsullied (Hopkins, Bollington and Hewitt 1989, 256). Primary sources of data for this study were personal interviews with ten cyberspace counsellors from in and around Pietermaritzburg in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. As a method of data collection, interviews allowed the researchers to narrate their experiences and meanings as accounted for by the participants – in this case, cyberspace counsellors (Kumar and Phrommathed 2005). Also, by using interviews as a method of data collection, the researcher was able to give each participant (in the selected sample) an opportunity to narrate his/her views in his/her own words about his/her experiences with cyberspace counselling.

Secondary sources used in this dissertation comprised mainly of books, peer-reviewed and cyberspace journal articles, newspapers and published and unpublished theses on the topic of cyberspace counselling. Secondary sources of data complemented primary sources. By utilising secondary sources of data, the researcher managed to get a grasp of the subject and found extensive bibliographic information for delving further into the ethical challenges of cyberspace counselling (Kumar and Phrommathed 2005).

## 1.10 Aim and rationale of the study

Counselling is moving onto the Internet, albeit more slowly when compared with booming cyberspace industries such as health and fitness. It is becoming beneficial to those who find it hard to participate in traditional face-to-face counselling, due to time constraints, geographical distances or personal fears such as shyness. This is ushering in a new era of counselling in South Africa. However, there is a lack of research on the cyberspace counselling and its ethical challenges in South Africa.

This study becomes important as it addresses the growing realisation that although there is an increasing migration from face-to-face to cyberspace counselling to the cyberspace format, there is a need to explore some of ethical challenges faced by both counsellors and clients. Puri and Luqman (2015) found that the ethical challenges of counselling services provided in cyberspace have hardly been touched, despite considerable research on the topic of cyberspace counselling.

This study could influence the dynamics of cyberspace counselling in South Africa. By exploring motivations, experiences, and challenges faced by South African counsellors and clients, this study seeks to add to the literature on cyberspace counselling. On a more practical level, this study develops recommendations and a new framework that could stimulate effective cyberspace counselling in South Africa.

## 1.11 Delimitation and scope of the study

This study considers the experience of cyberspace counselling by counsellors, psychologists, social workers and pastoral counsellors. These participants are located in South Africa in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg. The target participants are ten cyberspace professional support personnel consisting of males and females of different race groups and ages. All participants reside and practise mainly in urban areas.

## 1.12 Limitations of the research study

This study has certain limitations. Firstly, the researcher acknowledges her intentional sampling criteria of selecting cyberspace counsellors and not clients. Future studies could look at the experiences of the clients who have participated in cyberspace counselling. This may be seen as ruling out the views of clients which may vary from the views of cyberspace counsellors. Sourcing suitable participants was a limitation encountered as not every counsellor is familiar with or practises helping on the cyberspace platform. In addition to this, some cyberspace counsellors reside far from Pietermaritzburg. It was also challenging to carry out interviews at scheduled times.

**1.13 Overview of the dissertation**

The first chapter has provided an overview of the entire study. The chapter sets the scene and briefly introduces the research questions, objectives, method and methodology, theoretical framework that will guide the arguments encapsulated in this research.

The second chapter is a review of relevant literature on cyberspace counselling. It examines the contending narratives that are both in favour of and against cyberspace counselling.

The third chapter uses consequentialism and deontology as contextual frameworks for unpacking the ethical challenges of cyberspace counselling in South Africa. The two theories support the study because they help to assess the client experience in using cyberspace counselling.

The fourth chapter describes the research methods used in this study. The chapter gives an overview of the methodology and data collection techniques. This is vital when qualitatively exploring the experiences of cyberspace counsellors. The research paradigm, research methods, target population, sampling data collection procedures, data analysis methods, validity and reliability and rigour, and ethical considerations are considered in this chapter.

Considering the above, the fifth chapter presents and analyses data and findings. The chapter consists of a detailed analysis of the findings on cyberspace counselling in South Africa. The data is analysed using the existing literature review and the two theoretical frameworks of consequentialism and the deontological theory.

Finally, the sixth chapter six summarises the main arguments. It also offers some recommendations and proposes further future studies on the use of cyberspace counselling in South Africa.

**1.14 Conclusion**

This chapter has been introductory, setting the scene for what the study seeks to do and how it seeks to do it. It has provided a general background to the study, outlined the research questions, problems and relevant theoretical framework that the study uses to explore the ethical challenges of cyberspace counselling in South Africa. The next chapter reviews past studies, critical reviews and relevant literature on cyberspace counselling.

## CHAPTER TWO
## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

As noted in the preceding chapter, this study is a critique on cyberspace support services from an ethical perspective. The previous chapter has set the scene for what the study seeks to do and how it aims to achieve this. It discussed the background to the study, the research problem and objectives of the study. It also contained justification for the study, the research methodology and concluded with an outline of the chapters. The study's focal point of analysis underscores the ethical challenges faced by cyberspace counsellors and clients during counselling. Although the literature on cyberspace counselling is expanding, the preceding chapter established that cyberspace counselling is accompanied by ethical challenges, particularly in South Africa, and these remain ignored or under-researched. Therefore, this study is an exploration of the ethical challenges of cyberspace counselling as experienced by South African counsellors.

This chapter reviews past studies, critical and relevant literature on cyberspace counselling and its ethical challenges. It focuses on any form of counselling offered through the Internet. The chapter acknowledges that there are different types of Internet counselling: educational, marriage and pastoral counselling. The argument that psychological distress may be addressed by the availability of cyberspace resources leads to a review of literature related to advantages and disadvantages of using cyberspace counselling.

### 2.2 Cyberspace counselling

Kreutzer (2009) showed evidence of Internet usage in low income children which shows that most people are able to at least afford a mobile phone, and this means the number of people who are able to access cyberspace counselling is increasing. Though some may not own a mobile device, these findings suggest that even people with low income are able to access the Internet and could benefit from cyberspace counselling. In low-income schools around Cape Town, 77% of respondents reported having a handset and a remarkable 68% reported using a mobile phone on the previous day to access the Internet. Chigona, Beukes, Vally and Tanner (2009) also found early indications of mobile Internet use among low-income urban South Africans; this suggests that there is a growing number of people who have access to the Internet.

As more people are connected to the Internet, there is a growth in the exchange of goods and services between consumers and sellers within cyberspace. As indicated earlier, the use of technology in the treatment of mental health problems is becoming a reality in the wider community in the 21st century. Rickwood (2012) referred to the 21st century as a century characterised by the e-spectrum where a variety of cyberspace interventions now exist. Not only has technological advancement supplemented traditional face-to-face counselling, it has also created a new level of intervention in terms of cyberspace counselling. In cyberspace counselling, a counsellor does not need to have physical contact with his/her client; they meet in cyberspace, unlike in face-to-face counselling where a counsellor and client meet physically.

According to Shiller (2009), different researchers have different definitions of cyberspace or cyberspace counselling. For instance, Rochlen, Zack and Speyer (2004, 270) defined cyberspace counselling as the use of "a cyberspace therapist and any qualified mental health professional who uses the Internet as a medium for practice". Joyce and Rummell (2010, 482) described cyberspace counselling as "any delivery of mental and behavioural health services, including but not limited to therapy, consultation and psycho-education, by a licensed practitioner to a client in a non-face-to-face setting through distance communication technologies such as the telephone, asynchronous e-mail, synchronous chat, and video conferencing".

Anibueze (2013) equated cyberspace counselling as Internet counselling, e-counselling, e-mail counselling, e-therapy, web counselling, e-psychotherapy, Internet psychotherapy, or cyberspace counselling/psychotherapy. Bloom (1998) defined cyberspace counselling as "the practice of professional counselling that occurs when the client and counsellor are in separate or remote locations and utilize electronic means to communicate with each other". Richards and Vigano (2013, 994), described cyberspace counselling as the "delivery of therapeutic interventions in cyberspace where the communication between a trained professional counsellor and client(s) is facilitated using computer-mediated communication (CMC) technologies provided as a stand-alone service or as an adjunct to other therapeutic interventions".

Oravec (2012) further described different terms that are equated with cyberspace counselling such as Internet therapy, e-counselling, e-therapy, cyber therapy, e-mail therapy, web counselling, Internet counselling, cyber counselling, synchronous single-session counselling

and therapy-e-mail. As part of synchronous counselling sessions, Oravec (2012) contended that counsellors can facilitate cyberspace counselling via video-conferencing. Oravec also claimed that video-conferencing is ideal because it allows for a two-way conversation between the client and therapist. Video-conferencing allows both the client and counsellor to hear and see each other. However, Oravec (2012) preferred a secure web-based messaging and text exchange (chat) between client and counsellor as a cheaper means of cyberspace counselling to video-conferencing. Chester and Glass (2006) and Richards and Vigano (2013) claimed that email counselling is the most commonly used form of cyberspace counselling.

It is commonly agreed that 'cyberspace or cyberspace counselling' is the use of computers and the Internet by counsellors and clients to communicate for the purpose of attaining some therapeutic and productive relationship.

From the descriptions that emerged from the literature review, it can be argued that there are many definitions and descriptions of cyberspace counselling. However, in this study, Anibueze's (2013) description of cyberspace counselling will be used, as quoted above. This is because this definition includes two forms of cyberspace communication: asynchronous communication such as emails where there is a time delay between interactions and synchronous communication where the dialogue is immediate and takes place in a cyberspace chat room.

Most research agrees that cyberspace counselling uses some of the following five dimensional features of communication: synchronous/asynchronous, text/sensory, imaginary/real, automated/personal and invisible/present (Suler 2001).


## 2.3 Suler's five dimensional features of communication

### 2.3.1 Synchronous /asynchronous
The synchronous method involves the client and counsellor sitting at their individual computers or phones and communicating with each other at the same time (this includes video conferencing and calling). The communication is in real time and live, via emails, short message texts, instant messaging and audio-video conferencing. An appointment is usually scheduled to ensures both parties are free and 'present'. One of the cons of this method is that the flow of communication is heavily dependent on the speed and availability of the associated networks.

In the asynchronous methods, the counsellor and client do not have to sit at their computers or correspond telephonically simultaneously (Suler 2001). As there is usually no appointment scheduled, the conversations are not synchronised and immediate. There could be long intervals between responses. This is because each party (client and counsellor) responds when they can. The feeling of 'presence' can be lost. It can also be intrusive as no designated time is allocated to focus exclusively on this conversation.

### 2.3.2 Text/sensory

Most cyberspace communications take place in a text format. The advantage to this is the opportunity for efficient record keeping and the chance to go back into the history for clarity if needed. The downside to text-based communications is that the sensory contribution is very limited. For example, the power of an encouraging smile is lost. The ability to convey an emotion is limited to how articulate authors are, as well as how readers interpret text from their own world views. Misunderstandings are common, and nuances that may provide clues are often lost. Sensory communication involves sight and sounds: subtle non-verbal cues such as a nod of the head, or perhaps a stronger cue such as a picture. While text involves vision to be able to read words, it differs from a sensory experience in this context which can convey emotion. Sensory benefits in counselling are the ability to encourage with non-verbal cues and to express empathy. Emotions are often easier to express using sensory communication. However, a client that is extremely shy or lacking in confidence may find having to expose themselves like this overwhelming and threatening.

### 2.3.3 Imaginary/real

The imaginary setting in cyberspace includes playing cyberspace games with real people who have often assumed a fictional character. Personal identities are often discarded in favour of more desirable ones. An additional component to the imaginary space is what we perceive others to look like, sound like and be when we have not met them in person, based on our own imaginations and what is told to us by that person. Accuracy and even honesty are sacrificed. There are benefits in imaginary settings for counselling too. Role playing, simulations and acting fall under this category. Suler (2000) also discussed 'Avatar Psychotherapy', a form of therapy used to explore the healthy and maladjusted aspects of the participants' identity while the therapist directs, participates or observes the representations as they develop.

Real communication is the opposite of imaginary communication. Despite taking place in cyberspace, the true identity of the participant in real communication is known. The points of contact are commonly audio-visual conferencing such as Skype, or a telephone conversation.

The use of technology instead of face-to-face traditional counselling is what qualifies this as cyberspace counselling.

**2.3.4 Automated/interpersonal**

The field of automated services is evolving rapidly. This includes sending a response to an enquiry, or a more sophisticated programme that uses algorithms to analyse text to rate a person's mood. Psychometry makes use of automated scoring, and the input can be made directly by the client using the Internet. Programmes such as 'Eliza' were developed to simulate 'talking-therapy', but are far from perfect at this stage. These automated systems have value in diagnosis and as more cost-effective solutions. However, the human component is missing and users report feeling frustrated at Eliza's lack of empathy, obvious mistakes and lack of concrete advice (Suler 2000).

Interpersonal communication is part of an interpersonal relationship. Humans experience this as authentic and caring. Client also feel like they matter if someone is taking the time to listen to them. In cyberspace, some of this is lost. However, as the programmes become more and more sophisticated, they can emulate some of this. As a very simple example of this, should a therapist not be available to respond to an email, an automated message can be customised to reflect the therapist's caring nature and be sent back to the client on receipt of their email.

**2.3.5 Invisible/ present**

An example of an 'invisible' therapist is where an email response is first vetted and approved by a more senior person than the counsellor before sending it back as the final answer to the client. In situations where the client believes that they are dealing with a single person, ethical questions may arise, specifically where informed consent was not obtained first. The advantages of this include multiple resources working on a single issue and ensuring the best quality support is given. An invisible client may be advantageous as the therapist's own prejudices can be limiting. The disadvantage is that culturally sensitive information may be lost, resulting in partial or ineffective help.

Present communication means being in a cyberspace counselling session. In this mode of communication, a level of trust between the counsellor and client is established. This form of counselling is experienced as sincere and congruent. This is established initially by informing the client as to what to expect, discussing any concerns around this, and obtaining informed consent.

## 2.4 Discourses around cyberspace counselling

Barak et al. (2008) and Richards and Vigano (2013) argued that the effectiveness of cyberspace counselling is the same as that of face-to-face counselling. A study done by King et al. (2006) in Brisbane, Australia, established that preference for telephone counselling among clients was high when compared with cyberspace options. Another study by Hanley (2006) revealed that cyberspace counselling was seen as less threatening than face-to-face in the United Kingdom. Hanley (2012) also established that there was a growing need for cyberspace counsellors to be aware that the 21st century population was seeking counselling cyberspace. Richards and Vigano (2013) claimed that even if practitioners have reservations about the effectiveness of cyberspace counselling, clients have adopted the technology and will continue to seek help in cyberspace. As many people in the 21st century is dependent on technology in many areas of their lives, it is logical that they will increasingly seek cyberspace counselling (Figgie 2014).

The argument for counsellors to provide cyberspace counselling in the 21st century can be premised on a number of factors. Firstly, cyberspace counselling provides clients with easier access to counsellors than face-to-face. Many clients have access to the Internet through smart-phone technology which facilitates the ability of any client to contact a cyberspace counsellor with 'a click of a button'. Secondly, due to shame and fear, face-to-face counselling services are not attracting many clients who are in need of mental help (Rickwood, Deane and Wilson 2007). Thirdly, Anthony (2000, cited in Wright 2002) stated that the rapport between counsellor and client in cyberspace is developed not by reacting to another person's physical presence and spoken word, but by entering the client's mental constructs via the written word. Fourthly, Lange, van de Ven, Schrieken and Emmelkamp (2001) and Figgie (2014) argued that cyberspace counselling gives potential and actual clients a greater and less stigmatised choice in service delivery. Lastly, cyberspace counselling is a time-saving and cost-cutting service to both clients and counsellors. There is minimal movement between the client and counsellor. As Suler (2005) noted, cyberspace allows clients to disclose their personal information. Therefore, the length of rapport building between the client and the counsellor is reduced.

Suler (2004) stated that having an authority figure in front of one can have a negative impact in that the client may feel intimidated by a professional, well-dressed counsellor. The manner in which the counsellor addresses the client is formal and may come across as intimidating. These factors may have a significant impact on the counselling session where building rapport is paramount to establishing a relationship between two people. However, in cyberspace counselling, the client does not see the counsellor so they have no judgment to pass on about

who they are dealing with, nor how they represent themselves and this can make them feel more comfortable and at ease. The result is that a freer, less formal environment is established which is conducive to opening up and sharing more.

Francis-Smith (2014) pointed out a limitation with cyberspace counselling: it does not include non-literate clients, as reading and writing are necessary, thus many who might benefit might not be able to benefit due to a lack of skills. In addition, Epley and Kruger (2005, cited in Francis-Smith 2014) in a study which explored the differences between voice and email communication, suggested that ambiguity was more likely to be present in written communication than communication through the use of a voice

Zamani (2009) argued in as much as people still want to use face-to-face counselling, cyberspace is becoming an easier alternative for people to access counselling services. Those who feel threatened and stigmatised by face-to-face counselling may find it easier to share their issues with cyberspace counsellors. This means that more and more counsellors are embracing the use of cyberspace in counselling. According to Richards and Vigano (2009, 786), more clients are spending their time in cyberspace interacting with their counsellors or support groups and cyberspace counselling appears to be a growing trend. Richards and Vigano (2009, 786) reviewed 123 studies on cyberspace counselling and established that cyberspace counselling was growing among individuals who felt isolated and who found it difficult to form relationships with other people.  According to Richards and Vigano (2009), isolated and lonely individuals found it easier to talk to counsellors who they could not see. They felt comfortable with cyberspace counsellors, as there were no physical face-to-face meetings.

Another study done by Adebowale (2014) revealed that cyberspace counselling is of tremendous benefit to many people particularly those who are living in distant or isolated areas, the disabled or those with agoraphobia (fear of open places). In addition, Adebowale (2014) established that, as a service, cyberspace counselling was ideal for clients who were relocating but still wanted to work with their current therapists and people with fast-paced lifestyles or with unusual employment schedules. Another study done by Dunn, Roy and Gillet (cited in Adebowale 2014) established that cyberspace counselling worked for clients who cannot form a rapport and alliance with face-to-face counsellors. In addition, Brown (2012) mentioned that cyberspace counselling allows for the clients who are sick, or have disabilities, or who even those with demanding jobs, to utilise the services of cyberspace counselling. Another benefit of cyberspace counselling is that it allows the client to feel emotionally safe and they seem to have a sense they will not be judged by cyberspace counsellors (Bambling et al. 2008). Shiller

(2009) stated that writing can be therapeutic. Cyberspace counselling mostly takes the form of writing and cyberspace clients are often more honest when they are writing things down.

In her study, Timm (2011) found that young people experiencing emotional distress hesitate to ask for help from face-to-face counsellors. Often, they turn to cyberspace peer support. This is because cyberspace allows them to remain anonymous. In addition, Timm (2011) established that cyberspace counselling allowed counsellors to reach a diverse population. It is also cost-effective to counsellors. Similarly, a study done by Errera, Roestenburg and Rensleigh (2012) established that cyberspace counselling reported high levels of disclosure between counsellors and their clients. This is because many clients prefer to remain anonymous. Timm (2011) added that counsellors and their clients appeared more comfortable with this kind of counselling. Wright and Bolton (2012) argued that young people may prefer cyberspace counselling because it allows them to be in control in terms of the amount of emotions to be shared.

According to Suler (2004), cyberspace clients are invisible most of the time. This gives them courage to say or do things they might not do if they were seen or if they were around people. Suler (2004) made an interesting point about there being two sides to the self: a person may harbour aggression in face-to-face living but be able to express that aggressiveness in cyberspace. If a person is shy with other people and outgoing in cyberspace, both are true aspects of one self, each representing a different context. Suler (2004), citing Jung, claimed it can additionally be noted that different sides of a person operate in a dynamic polarity relative to each other. This means that there are two sides to the same personality. The self does not exist alone and is actively always at work, hand in hand, with the environment

In this regard, cyberspace counselling gives the client power to be in control of their situations: they can log on or off during counselling when they want. This is contrary to face-to-face counselling where both the counsellor and client have to be present during all sessions. Cyberspace counselling gives counsellors time to reflect and consult. It also gives counsellors time to think before they respond enabling them to carefully consider their therapeutic responses. Francis-Smith (2014) further mentioned that clients of cyberspace counselling can be flexible when selecting the type of cyberspace technology they are comfortable with (phone or emails or video conferences). This flexibility also applies to those who have transport problems or family obligations.

There are also counter-arguments on the use of cyberspace counselling. Abbott, Klein and Ciechomski (2008) found that cyberspace counselling does not suit everyone and all

conditions. Owen and Weikel (1999) argued that cyberspace counselling may hinder the effectiveness of counsellors who are interested in personality types of the clients. Orthman (2010) contended that development of technology does not mean that all counsellors are cyberspace literate. It requires training of counsellors on how to use cyberspace counselling services.  According to Larson et al. (1999), there is lack of control over the therapeutic relationship between counsellors and clients when counselling is done in cyberspace. This is because cyberspace work subverts traditional power relationships between counsellors and clients. The fact that cyberspace counselling allows counsellors to be more flexible in the delivery of counselling services, with creative possibilities (Richards 2009), seems to be negated by the concerns and possible pitfalls of cyberspace. In cyberspace counselling, counsellors are not able to develop a holistic assessment of the client. For example, clients may present themselves as people that simply want to have someone to talk to, when in fact they are depressed.  Counsellors who have skills for traditional face-to-face therapy and counselling may not necessarily be competent in cyberspace counselling. Another drawback of cyberspace counselling is the absence of spontaneous clarification from either counsellor or client. Clients may not be self-validating enough to compensate for the loss of visual and auditory cues which would reassure them. On the side of the counsellor, especially if training in text-based communication is lacking, important information about the client may remain between the lines with the real issues evading assessment. A study done by Tanrikulu (2009) found that most counsellors had inadequate information and education on cyberspace counselling. As a result, most of the counsellors preferred traditional face-to-face over cyberspace counselling. The participants in this study said that they would prefer cyberspace counselling, if they had no chance of face-to-face counselling.

Despite showing the benefits of cyberspace counselling in their studies, Adebowale (2014) and Zamani, Nasir and Yusooff (2010) contended that this mode of counselling reduces human interaction. In many cases, clients of cyberspace counselling find it difficult to build and commit within the cyberspace therapeutic relationship. Another challenge of cyberspace counselling as articulated by Moulding (2007, 25) is that there is no facial expression and body language. This may lead to bad communication between the client and therapist. Lack of proper communication can result in an incorrect diagnosis. Bambling et al. (2008) argued that cyberspace counselling may lead to the loss of verbal cues. This could contribute to lack of proper communication. Lack of proper communication between the client and counsellor may result in a client feeling isolated and alone. Lack of connection between the client and

counsellor may lead to an abrupt end to counselling. Moulding (2007) added that cyberspace counselling does not provide room for dealing with suicidal clients who may need to see someone face-to-face for a proper assessment.

Barnett (2005) addressed the payment issues that may arise. When paying fees for face-to-face counselling sessions, one can pay in cash or by cheque, whereas when providing counselling over the Internet, many of the payment options are lost. In additional to limited choices, cautious clients might have a problem trusting this kind of payment because of Internet scams.

Accessibility to cyberspace counselling can also be a challenge. Shiller (2009) claimed that access to cyberspace counselling has its limitations. Only people who have access to the Internet can have access to cyberspace counselling. Beel and Court (1999) added that the increasing cost of Internet hampers clients who want to access cyberspace counselling. This is because, theoretically, counselling is modelled on the traditional face-to-face sessions. Therefore, the development of cyberspace counselling is rendering many counsellors or psychologists incompetent. Francis-Smith (2014) argued that cyberspace counselling is modelled for literate and educated clients and non-literate clients cannot access it. This means that if you cannot read and write properly, cyberspace counselling is most probably not the tool for you. Furthermore, Bambling et al. (2008) stated that email counselling can be time consuming as it can take considerable time to read and formulate a response. This can be an expensive utilisation of valuable time and resources.

## 2.5 Ethical challenges of cyberspace counselling

Much of the foregoing literature focuses on either the pros or cons of the use of cyberspace counselling. To date, the research on the ethical challenges that cyberspace counselling poses is limited in scope and breadth. McLeod (2013) argued that moving counselling services into cyberspace raises several ethical concerns on how both clients and counsellors handle each other. A number of studies have focused on ethical concerns of cyberspace counselling. According to Shaw and Shaw (2006), the National Board for Certified Counsellors (NBCC) in North Carolina in the United States of America, was the first to adopt standards for cyberspace counselling in 1997. Included in the NBCC standards are guidelines for the counselling relationship. This led to the formation of International Society for Mental Health Cyberspace (ISMO) to promote the understanding, use and development of cyberspace communication

information and technology for the mental health community. The ISMO suggested that the following principles be followed during the cyberspace provision of mental health services.

The first principle of cyberspace counselling is **beneficence** and **non-maleficence** meaning that:

> Psychologists strive to benefit those with whom they work and take care to do no harm. In their professional actions, psychologists seek to safeguard the welfare and rights of those with whom they interact professionally and other affected persons, and the welfare of animal subjects of research. When conflicts occur among psychologists' obligations or concerns, they attempt to resolve these conflicts in a responsible fashion that avoids or minimizes harm. Because psychologists' scientific and professional judgments and actions may affect the lives of others, they are alert to and guard against personal, financial, social, organizational, or political factors that might lead to misuse of their influence. (American Psychological Association [APA], 24)

According to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2010), cyberspace counsellors need to be aware of their own physical and mental health ability before helping clients. The second principle of cyberspace counselling is **fidelity** and **responsibility**. Cyberspace counsellors must establish trust in their relationships with clients. Cyberspace counsellors must uphold their professional standards in the way in which they conduct themselves. They must also clarify their roles and obligations to their clients. They must take responsibility for their own behaviour and must manage any conflicts of interests that can lead to exploitation or even harm to their client.

**Integrity** is the third principle that cyberspace counsellors need to uphold at all times. Cyberspace counsellors must promote honesty and accuracy in everything that they do during counselling sessions, whether they are teaching or dealing with clients. They must not steal, cheat or engage in fraud during their relationship with clients. Psychologists must strive to keep their promises and must avoid unclear commitments. The fourth principle that must guide cyberspace counselling is **justice**. Psychologists must treat their clients with fairness. They must treat every client without biases and prejudice. Every client must be able to access the benefits from the contribution of cyberspace counselling. Cyberspace counsellors must not condone unjust practices.

The principle of **respect for people's rights and dignity** is the fifth principle that must prevail during cyberspace counselling. As in face-to-face counselling, cyberspace counsellors and

psychologists must respect the rights and dignity of every person. Cyberspace counsellors must respect the individual's privacy and confidentiality at all times in all circumstances. Cyberspace counsellors must respect their clients' cultural background, age, gender, race ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, disability and language.

Haberstroh et al. (2007, 3) argued that there was a need to use the ethical guidelines of the APA (2010) in cyberspace counselling which are as applicable in traditional face-to-face counselling. The American Counselling Association (ACA 2005) asserted that, in addition to the foregoing principle and guidelines of cyberspace counselling, there are other rules that need to guide cyberspace counsellors and clients. Firstly, counsellors and clients must follow legal and ethical procedures, should they know enough details of each other. Haberstroh et al. (2007) argued that one has to establish the legal and ethical requirements of counsellors' jurisdiction and that of the clients before engaging in cyberspace counselling. Laws governing cyberspace counselling differ from one state to another. Therefore, counsellors must be aware of this so that they can carry out their practice accordingly. Secondly, counsellors must assess their clients' knowledge and ability to use cyberspace. Haberstroh et al. (2007) agreed that counsellors need to assess their clients' knowledge and ability related to technology before using cyberspace counselling. This is necessary for reliable and good communication between clients and counsellors. Thirdly, counsellors must be able to determine their clients' access to private locations where they may go should they need further assistance. This is necessary in cases where a client may need further assistance, for example with drug abuse or a suicidal client. Drug addicts and suicidal clients need to know where they can go for further assistance. Fourthly, counsellors must discuss the issues of confidentiality, security and encryption and they must be able to provide their clients with an alternative option of communication in the case of technological failure. According to the ACA (2005), everything that is confidential must be encrypted (video, audio and text), that is, unreadable to any third party.

Similarly, the APA (2010) argued that in all means of counselling, professional core counselling values must be adhered to at all times and situations. Counsellors and clients must adhere to counselling professional norms. According to the APA (2010), the following professional norms should be adhered to in cyberspace counselling:

    1) Cyberspace counsellors should enhance human development of their clients;

2) Cyberspace counsellors need to honour diversity and embrace a multicultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of clients within their social and cultural contexts;

3) Cyberspace counselling should promote social justice and safeguard the integrity of the counsellor/client relationship. In this case, both counsellors and clients must carry out cyberspace counselling with competency and ethically;

4) The APA (2010) argued that counsellors should be guided by professional values such as autonomy (controlling the directions of one's own life);

5) Other norms that need to be adhered to during cyberspace counselling are: non-maleficence (avoiding actions that could possibly cause harm to someone else or other people), beneficence (working in the interest of the individual or society at all times), justice (treating individuals fairly and equally), fidelity (honouring commitment and keeping promises that you make to people), veracity (being truthful to clients or anyone who one meets professionally).

The preceding APA (2010) norms are the general principles for all counsellors for all work that they do.

Beel and Court (1999) argued that cyberspace counsellors must be aware and understand the issues surrounding the use of Internet (its weaknesses and strengths). The counsellor must also inform the client of the possible risks of using cyberspace as medium of counselling. The 21st century has been marred by the issue of Internet security. If the conversations between the client and therapists are hacked by an unknown entity, privacy of the client is violated. Confidentiality may be violated during cyberspace counselling. Joyce and Rummell (2010) argued that it is easier to administer informed consent during face-to-face counselling than in cyberspace. Clients need to understand that if they sign the informed consent, they are allowed to withdraw at any time. It is difficult for counsellors to establish the age of their clients in cases of misinformation. If the client is underage and misleads the counsellor as an adult, it is hard for a cyberspace counsellor to verify this. This poses a challenge on how counsellors may screen potential clients on age, address and contact details (Brown 2012). In addition, it is not easy for clients to trust information given to them by cyberspace counsellors: information such as fees, confidentiality and its limitations. Kraus (2010) noted that cyberspace counselling presents ethical issues such as how to insist a client commits to the sessions.

Another ethical issue is that clients may not know whether all cyberspace counsellors are registered or frauds. It is not easy for counsellors to be honesty with their field of specialisation (Kraus 2010). The preceding challenge is linked to record keeping. It is up to counsellors and clients to decide whether/not to save their cyberspace conversation for future reference.

Shiller (2009) says that other ethical issues are boundary issues, in which a client may assume that the availability of an email means that the counselling is always available. Some clients may also think that because they have the counsellor's email address they can continue to use it even after their sessions are terminated. Some counsellors and clients may start stalking or become infatuated with each other during or after their sessions (Mellin, Hunt, and Nichols 2011). In some cases, cyberspace counsellors may enforce their religion, culture or sexual orientation. In other cases, cyberspace counsellors may overlook the religion or culture that is important to their clients. According to Shiller (2009), counsellors are required to abide by a code of ethics and this means that they must make sure that they practise in their own scope of practice and they must be educated in that chosen field. Shiller (2009) added that counsellors should be aware of the jurisdiction/culture differences of their cyberspace clients.

Shaw and Shaw (2014) and Harris and Birnbaum (2015) claimed that cyberspace counsellors are faced with the challenge on how to warn clients who threaten to harm someone else or themselves. This is because a client may use a false identity during the session. This is different to face-to-face therapy where the client and the therapist work together in such a way that the counsellor provides support to the client and allow the client to be comfortable and speak at his/her own pace.


**2.6 Cyberspace counselling in South Africa: An interface**

From the foregoing survey on literature, in the African context, research on cyberspace counselling is almost non-existent. Attempts to assess the use of cyberspace counselling in Africa have been based on comparing its effectiveness in Europe and other developed countries. Few studies have focused on cyberspace counselling in Africa. A study done by Kolog (2014) established that in Ghana, many counsellors and clients were unaware of, or had little knowledge about, the use of cyberspace counselling. Some researchers contend that cyberspace counselling in Africa is yet to develop because of lack of the correct infrastructure (Kolog 2014). According to Ipsen (2011), Africa still lags behind in information and communication technology (ICT) and therefore Africa is not able to embrace cyberspace

counselling. Okopi (2010) argued that poor training in ICT is a key militating factor that hinders the development of cyberspace counselling in Nigeria. In South Africa, cyberspace counselling remains under-researched. A pilot study done by Errera et al. (2012) at the University of Johannesburg revealed that students had more confidence in the e-counselling programme in addressing their problems when compared with face-to-face counselling.

Furthermore, from the survey on literature, cyberspace counselling in South Africa remains under-researched. A study such as this one, that explores the experiences of cyberspace counsellors in South Africa, is therefore valuable. While most researchers (as shown) have concentrated on the effectiveness, merits and demerits and ethical challenges of cyberspace counselling, the under-researched experiences of cyberspace counsellors in South Africa is a motivation and edifice of this study. From the foregoing discussions, a logical conclusion this study is founded on is that an analysis of cyberspace counselling should not be dependent on its effectiveness, merits and demerits but on interrogating the lived experiences as narrated by cyberspace counsellors in South Africa. The experiences of the South African cyberspace counsellors are lacking or less documented in the exploration of the ethical challenges of cyberspace counselling. This study aims to bridge this research gap.

Therefore, this study utilises consequentialism and the theory of deontology to refine an understanding of ethical challenges of cyberspace counselling as narrated by the South African cyberspace counsellors. This study applies some of the elements captured in the foregoing review of literature in its exploration of ethical challenges of cyberspace counselling as experienced by cyberspace counsellors in South Africa. In view of the subject matter of this research, the study emphasises and casts a critical gaze on the experiences of cyberspace counsellors in South Africa.


## 2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to interrogate and contextualise the literature on cyberspace counselling. The chapter began by looking at different research definitions of cyberspace counselling. The literature revealed that different researchers view cyberspace counselling differently. Some refer to it as e-counselling or web-counselling. The chapter looked at the effectiveness, merits and demerits of cyberspace counselling. The chapter also discussed different ways of administering cyberspace counselling and the challenges that cyberspace counsellors face. Overall, the chapter noted that most of work by researchers contains

narratives that corroborate, modify or rebut the effectiveness, challenges, merits and demerits of cyberspace counselling.

This chapter has examined debates and highlighted the under-researched area of cyberspace counselling in Africa, especially South Africa. The chapter also highlighted the neglected realities and experiences of cyberspace counsellors in understanding ethical challenges of cyberspace counselling in South Africa. As noted in this chapter, many researchers have carried out theoretical studies that indicate the challenges of cyberspace counselling. However, the review of many of this literature lacks the empirical backing of the lived experiences of cyberspace counsellors, particularly those in South Africa. The experiences, insights and arguments of empirical realities of cyberspace counsellors can substantively contribute to the knowledge of ethical challenges of cyberspace counselling in South Africa. The next chapter examines the ethical theories that will guide the dissertation.

# CHAPTER THREE
# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## 3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a literature review on cyberspace counselling. As noted in the background chapter, the aim of this study is to critically analyse professional support and guidance in cyberspace counselling from an ethical perspective. To arrive at this aim, this chapter explores the theoretical frameworks that will guide the dissertation: consequentialism and deontology. It is important to note that though consequentialism appears to be contradictory to deontology, these theories have been used in a complementary way.

The chapter has been divided into six sections. The first and the second sections present the theory of consequentialism and its critique respectively; they also look at the relevancy of consequentialism to this study. Consequentialism is the normative ethical theory that states that the morality of an action is judged by the consequences of an action (Peterson 2003). The third and fourth sections contextualise deontology and its critique respectively, and also look into the relevance of deontology in this study. According to Alexander and Moore (2015), deontology includes the moral theories that guide and assess the choices of what one ought to do. While consequentialism looks at the consequence of an act, deontology is concerned with norms that guides the choice of what one ought to do. Moral theorists like Bentham have argued that it is difficult for one to perform an act that produces negative results. However, deontologists like Scheffler (1982) forbid some choices, no matter how good their consequences are. In this study, deontology looks at the duty of the counsellor in cyberspace counselling and at what compels them to do the right thing for the client. On the other hand, the ethical theory of consequentialism will look at the consequences of the ethical issues (negative and positive) of cyberspace counselling.

According to APA (2010) and Suler (2001), it is conceivable that all cyberspace counsellors (like their face-to-face counterparts) have ethical norms that they ought to abide by during counselling. Therefore, the utilisation of both consequentialism and deontology allowed this study to meet its aim of exploring professional and guidance support of cyberspace counselling from an ethical perspective. Importantly, the theory of deontology justified this study's aim as to why ethical challenges that cyberspace counsellors experience are important in exploring cyberspace counselling in South Africa.

## 3.2 The ethical theory of consequentialism

Since the nineteenth century, one influential approach to moral questions has been consequentialism (Ord 2005). According to Peterson (2003), consequentialists claim that the right thing to do in any situation is the act with the best consequences. What response would consequentialism require to a situation such as helping a person? To such a question, a consequentialist will respond that the right act should solely depend on the virtue of its consequences (Jamieson 2008, 27). Consequentialism is said to be a connection of an act such as helping someone else and the goodness of the outcome of that act, after helping that person. This research focuses on the cyberspace counsellor, who in his/her line of work is expected to produce positive outcomes, meaning that after the client has seen the counsellor the client should be feeling less troubled than when she/he had walked into the counselling session. As reported in Chapter Five (findings), participants felt that cyberspace counselling was a convenient tool for most clients because a counsellor can log in at any given time to the client.

The term consequentialism was coined by Elisabeth Anscombe (1958), an English philosopher in her 1958 essay 'Modern Moral Philosophy'. This was Anscombe's critique of the modern period English moral philosophy developed by Jeremy Bentham (1748 - 1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806 - 1873). During the modern period, the strand of consequentialism that Bentham and Mill adopted, added the element of utility in the choice of any action one does (utilitarianism). By utility, Bentham and Mill argued that one should choose an act that satisfies the greatest number of people. In this case, consequentialism is informed by the tenet that the rightness of an act is dependent on the consequence that gives good or happy results to the greatest number. This means that a counsellor can have romantic feelings for a client and go as far as having a relationship with the client but this view may clash with deontology theory.

There is directive consequentialism whereby an act that is morally wrong or right depends on the act itself rather than the agent's motive of a rule or practice. Evaluative consequentialism depends on the value of the consequences. According to hedonism, the value of the consequences depends on the pleasure and pain in the consequences; in the same way, the study is looking at ethical issues, both negative and positive. Maximising consequentialism says that moral rightness depends only on which consequences are best while aggregative consequentialism looks at which consequences are best in some function of an act. Lastly, universal consequentialism holds that moral rightness depends on the consequence for all

people or sentient beings, in this case excluding animals because they are believed to have no emotions.

Even though there are different ways of looking at consequentialism as mentioned above, the overall view is that consequentialism looks at maximising the pleasure and minimising the pain. According to Van Norden (2007), the simplest way to motivate for consequentialism is to see it as developing the thought that morality or moral action should be concerned with making the world a better place. In this regard, one can argue that 'x is right' simply means 'x best promotes the good' (Agrawal and Chhatre 2011). In the case of this study, consequentialism argues that the morality of cyberspace counselling can be judged by the consequences it produces for cyberspace clients, for instance cyberspace is said to bring about good consequences because it is able to reach a wider client base; cyberspace counselling is furthermore convenient because a client can access it at any given time; clients can access cyberspace counselling from the comfort of their own homes; it can also be good if a person is introverted and finds it difficult to talk to people about problems; and in cyberspace counselling, the client does not have to worry about transport costs. If a great number of clients' lives are improving, then cyberspace counselling can be judged as morally good. However, if the greatest number of cyberspace clients fail to improve their lives, then cyberspace counsellors have failed according to consequentialism theory, thus making cyberspace counselling morally wrong. Consequentialism will advocate for cyberspace counselling if it minimises unhappiness among cyberspace clients.

### 3.3 Critique of consequentialism

Consequentialism has not been immune to criticism. For instance, Anscombe (1958) strongly opposed the principle of consequentialism. According to Anscombe, consequentialism meant that an individual does well if s/he acts for the best in a particular circumstance according to his judgment of the total consequences of the chosen action. Mason (2009) added that consequentialists assume that it is the consequence of an act that matters and not the act itself. According to consequentialism, we ought to do what yields the best consequences, even if this means lying, stealing, or even killing. Anscombe blamed consequentialists for their lack of cognisance that "there are certain things forbidden whatever consequences threaten, such as choosing to kill the innocent for any purpose, however good" (1958, 10). Mason (2009) argued that there are also things that one should do, no matter what the consequences, whether bad or

even disastrous. For instance, one should always tell the truth no matter the consequences. This is contrary to consequentialists' argument that we should act based on the consequences only.

Bergstrom (1996) claimed that consequentialism always requires that people act in a way that brings possible good outcomes. What happens if an act is good but does not produce good outcomes? Does this mean it is morally unacceptable? According to Bergstrom (1996), consequentialism is morally offensive because it apparently implies that under certain conditions, the consequentialism rule may be applied and not in the others, for instance to kill one person to save others. This justifies taking a life. In the case of this study, consequentialism implies that cyberspace counsellors should not report their clients to the police even if they receive death threats from their clients. Another example: counsellors should not report their clients to the police if they are about to commit murder. Consequentialism will put the needs of the client above those of the cyberspace counsellor to ensure that the counsellor brings the best out of the clients. In addition to this, Ord (2005) claimed that a criticism of consequentialism is that it cannot be applied practically in real life situations. Consequentialism simply looks at the right and wrongness of a particular action, but who is to say what is right or wrong? When it comes to real life situations, it not easy to put the consequentialism theory into practice; there are cases where this theory does not work. Furthermore, Ord (2005) argued that in order to use consequentialism and what it means to maximise happiness/good, we need to know what will happen in the future, which is not always possible.

Mulgan (2001) contended that consequentialism ignores that people are different and that they all have different lives. Happiness is experienced differently by different people. Most consequentialists think that one should aim for the best outcome in every situation. This raises the question as to how two different agents may balance both their own interests and those of others. The theory appears to neglect the uniqueness of people.


### 3.4 Relevancy of consequentialism to this study

Applied to this study, consequentialism argues that cyberspace counsellors should ignore counselling norms so long as their clients are happy. This implies that the feeling and thoughts of cyberspace counsellors do not matter as long as they produce pleasure for their clients. Bergstrom (1996) claimed that consequentialism is groundless; there is no evidence for it – it simply puts forward a statement and cannot account for it. Consequentialism does not contribute to any kind of development of facts. It simply looks at the right or wrongness of a

particular action. Consequentialism theory can be useless in practice, as we can never know if an action is right or wrong. With cyberspace counselling, the counsellor may go to extreme measures to help a client, disclosing a private number to call outside sessions. If this goes wrong and the client starts misusing the number, who is wrong in this case? According to the consequentialism principle, in some extreme cases, one might think that a particular action was wrong, when it was actually right. However, this is not of much help when it comes to ordinary life situations, for instance in a case where the counsellor develops feelings for the client or the client develops feelings for the counsellor; the consequences may be that the client may not be able to receive the help required due to these emotions or a client could be helped by developing an emotional relationship with the counsellor. This is where duty and consequentialism clash, because the consequences of the counsellor having a relationship with the client may result in the counsellor losing their license to practice, but deontology may suggest that it is the counsellors' duty to help the client, but to what extent? One of the findings described in Chapter Five revealed that there are callers who sometimes call for no reason or simply wanting attention; what does a counsellor do with a duty to respond to people who say they need help?

It can however be useful to use consequentialism to explore the consequences of using cyberspace counselling. One challenge to counsellors is giving the correct diagnosis. The ethical theory of consequentialism is relevant to this research study as it gives support in explaining the research question in terms of the ethical implications of using cyberspace counselling. The theory of consequentialism assists in looking at the benefits and possible ethical challenges encountered by cyberspace counsellors. Of great importance is that consequentialism assists in exploring and understanding the consequences of cyberspace counselling. The theory of consequentialism is also relevant in unpacking how in/ appropriate counsellors adhere to the universal norms of counselling. In light of this study, what would be the consequences of cyberspace counselling be to a client if a counsellor overlooked the ethical concerns of his/her clients? Consequentialism does not consider whether counsellors may be having problems in their own lives or whether or not the counsellor was feeling well during the time of counselling. What matters for consequentialists, if applied to this study, is the consequences of cyberspace counselling for the client.

Regardless of the critiques of consequentialism, this research hopes it can achieve its desired aim of exploring the ethical challenges of cyberspace counselling as narrated by cyberspace counsellors in South Africa. In cyberspace counselling, the counsellor has a responsibility to bring about the best outcome for the client. This means following the right processes when it

comes to counselling. So, the action taken by the counsellor when counselling becomes important when it yields good outcomes. Counselling is concerned with the emotional well-being of the client; when a client seeks counselling help, it becomes the responsibility of the counsellor to make sure that by the end of the session the client is better than at the start.

### 3.5 The theory of deontology[1]

According to Alexander and Moore (2015), the word 'deontology' is derived from the Greek words, *deon* meaning 'duty' and *logo*s meaning 'study of'. In contemporary moral philosophy, deontology is also a normative theory. The theory of deontology dates back to Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). According to Kant in the eighteenth century, for one to act in the morally right way, it must for the sake of duty. Kant added that the highest form of good does not depend on what it produces but on good itself. An act is "good in itself when it is intrinsically good without qualification"; Kant used the example of pleasure to illustrate deontology. For instance, Kant argued that pleasure appears not to be good without quantification (Kant 1785 cited in Alexander and Moore 2015). For example, people may take pleasure in watching others suffer. For Kant, "there nothing in the world – indeed nothing even beyond the world, can possibly be conceived which could be called good without qualification except a good will" (Alexander and Moore 2015).

As a moral theory, deontology falls within the domain of moral theories that guide and assess our choices of what we ought to do (Bentham 2014). Contrary to consequentialists, Gray and Schein (2012) argued that deontologists maintain that some choices cannot be justified by their effects – no matter how morally good their consequences, some choices are morally forbidden. Ditto and Koleva (2011) added that the simplest principle of deontology is that an act is right if it is in conformity with a moral norm; an example of a moral norm is killing and everyone knows it is wrong to commit murder. Deontologists maintain that norms that guide people's choices are to be simply obeyed by each person regardless of his/her position in the society. Accordingly, the right is said to have priority over the Good. If an act is not in accord with the right, it may not be undertaken, no matter the Good that it might produce (including even a good consisting of acts in accordance with the right). That is, certain actions can be right, even though they may not maximise good consequences (Gray and Schein 2012). Such actions are

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[1] http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/ethics-deontological [Accessed 17 July 2016]

permitted, "not just in the weak sense that there is no obligation not to do them, but also in the strong sense that one is permitted to do them even though they are productive of less good consequences than their alternatives" (Moore 2008, 11). Examples of strongly permitted actions include actions one is obligated to do and those that one is not obligated to do, for instance in the case of the current research, the counsellor has a duty to report to the law if required to provide evidence against or for the client. Even if this means the confidentiality clause is broken, the counsellor still has to testify, and this automatically becomes part of their duty. It is what we ought to do that warrants the principle of the theory of deontology: action is more important than the consequences. MacDonald and Beck-Dudley (1994) stated that for Kant, deontology meant to do the right over good for the sake of duty. Kant placed duty first, and acting out of respect for the moral law.


**3.6 Critique of deontology**

Alexander and Moore (2015) stated that it was crucial for deontologists to deal with the conflicts that seem to exist between certain duties and rights. They asserted that this theory is inflexible in that it does not allow one to break unhelpful rules in cases where individual circumstances warrant this. As a result, the theory does not motivate individuals to be creative. Alexander and Moore (2015) claimed that there is what might be called the 'paradox of relative stringency' within the theory of deontology. This means that all deontological duties must be performed no matter the consequences. This creates no balance and discrimination within resulting in conflict. Alexander and Moore (2015) added that there are situations where compliance with deontological norms will bring about disastrous consequences, for example, if the counsellor testifies against the client and this means that there is a chance that the client may go to jail. In such cases, deontology does not give an alternative. For instance, if the client wants to commit an act of crime, such as killing, what deontology suggests is that the counsellor has a responsibility to report this as it is part of his/her duty as a counsellor, which disregards the harm that this will cause to the client. Deontology does not consider that universal laws cannot be applied to all situations; it fails to see that morality should be relativist not absolutist, because with relativism there are no universal moral principles.

**3.7 Relevancy of deontology in this study**

In this study, as argued in the literature review chapter, cyberspace counsellors have norms and specific duties during counselling. The duty of cyberspace counsellors is to bring the best out of their clients: providing mental healing psychosocial solutions to their clients who face emotional issues, social issues and spiritual issues, as well as to give them tools which will make them better equipped to handle the situations they face in life. The theory of deontology is used in this study to explore how cyberspace counsellors can help their clients out of duty and good will and not for the sake of good outcomes. Deontology can also help to understand how counsellors whose ethical norms are violated by their clients continue to carry out counselling as a duty, for example, when they receive prank callers or have clients who use abusive language. According to Donaldson and Werhane (2002), duty is more than doing what is right; it is acting with respect and dignity. In this study, deontology explores how to cope with ethical challenges in situations where they are violated in cyberspace counselling. For instance, counsellors in this research revealed (described in Chapter Five) that confidentiality was not always guaranteed in their line of work, because there were cases that compelled them as counsellors to break that code; duty supports the counsellors to do what is right and what they ought to do.

**3.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has critically discussed consequentialism and deontology as relevant lenses through which the data of this study can be refracted for analysis in Chapter Five. According to consequentialism, the right thing for the cyberspace counsellor to do, whatever it takes, during counselling, is to produce the best results in their clients. Therefore, cyberspace counsellors should use whichever means to produce the best result in their clients – even if it means going against counselling norms.

The chapter has explored the principle of the theory of consequentialism in this study; the morality of cyberspace counselling can be judged by the consequences it produces to cyberspace clients. A distinguishing element of consequentialism is that 'x is right' simply means 'x best promotes the good' (Agrawal and Chhatre 2011). In this case, cyberspace counsellors are right when they promote the good of their clients, no matter the means they use. Implicitly, consequentialism means that there should be replacement of ethical norms that hinder promotion of well-being in clients during cyberspace counselling. Therefore, consequentialism was useful in this study in the context of South African cyberspace

counsellors, in order to view promotion of good in clients within or outside the set norms of cyberspace counselling.

For the purpose of providing a holistic framework of understanding the duty and the rights of cyberspace counsellors, the chapter also explored the tenets of the theory of deontology. This study noted that in its traditional conceptualisation, deontology sees cyberspace counsellors as people who have a duty to follow set norms in counselling their cyberspace clients. This requires that they follow a set ethical code in performing their cyberspace counselling sessions. Any deviation from the set ethical codes of counselling, even for the good of their clients, renders them immoral. While literature on deontology tends to concentrate on duty, this study sees cyberspace counsellors as people who may be forced in real life situations to break counselling norms.

The background and research problem (Chapter One); a review of relevant literature on cyberspace counselling (in Chapter Two) and analyses of the theories of consequentialism and deontology in this chapter (Chapter Three) provide the backdrop for exploring and critiquing professional support and guidance in cyberspace counselling within the context of South Africa, as narrated by South African cyberspace counsellors.

# CHAPTER FOUR
## RESEARCH METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the theoretical frameworks of the consequentialism and deontology theories. This chapter presents the research design, methodology and methods of data analysis that were employed during the study. According to Silverman (2000), methodology defines how one will go about studying the phenomenon while the methods are the techniques that are used to collect the data. The idea in this section was to explicate how data was obtained during fieldwork, sampled, presented and to situate the data in the context of the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter Three. This study was done qualitatively by exploring the ethical challenges that cyberspace counsellors experience in South Africa. As qualitative research, this study is offering a "close-up" data analysis of phenomena – the experiences of cyberspace counsellors in South Africa (Thomas and Magilvy 2011, 152). The strength of qualitative research like this is that it has allowed researchers to explore how cyberspace counsellors deal with ethical concerns during cyberspace counselling. In the end, it addressed the tendency of the researchers to impose personal assumptions or biases, conclusions and results from the data (Wiersma 2000, 211-212).

The chapter begins by offering a discussion on method and methodology used in the study. The second section of the chapter is an explication of data analysis methods and ethical considerations taken throughout the study. The ethical considerations guiding this study were embedded in protecting the autonomy of the participants and ensuring that they were well informed during the collection of data (Creswell 2012, 22). Finally, the chapter looks at data analysis with a view to systematically search for meaning (Leech and Onwuegbuzie 2007). When the data collected is examined, it will yield a coherent account of the findings (Green et al. 2007). The study used thematic analysis on primary data and content analysis on secondary data. Both methods of data analysis complemented each other to shape the evaluation of the comprehensive data collected.

### 4.2 Research method and methodology

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), social realities can be studied quantitatively, qualitatively and or using mixed methods. McGregor and Murnane (2010) added that research method entails the techniques and procedures used to conduct the study, such as the sampling

that the researchers chose; how the researchers went about collecting data; how the data would be analysed and the results would be explained. This study adopted a qualitative approach in its inquiry. For McGregor and Murnane, (2010, 420), qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter; it attempts to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them. Tsang (2013) claimed that the aim of the qualitative approach is that it intends to explore and to discover issues about a problem. The underpinning rationale here is that very little knowledge is available and there are different dimensions to this one problem.

As qualitative research, this study broadly sought to understand the social reality of individuals and groups within a particular context (Sarantakos 2005). By employing the use of the qualitative approach, the intention of the researchers is to explore amongst other things the comportments, the perceptions and the experiences of people and what shapes these. Essentially, the core of a qualitative research hinges on an interpretive approach to social reality and in the narrative of the lived experiences of human beings (Creswell 2009). Due to the divergent ways through which social realities can be approached, a primary task of a researcher would be to find the best way to design how to approach the phenomenon they intend to explore. This can be realised by having an effective research design that can discern the kind of evidence that is needed in order to adequately address the research questions, objectives, and problem statement (Babbie and Mouton 2001).

This study was done qualitatively through an exploration of ethical challenges of cyberspace counsellor through interviews. At the time when the study was being undertaken, there were no updated official profiles and statistics of the experiences of cyberspace counsellors in South Africa. For this reason, this research needed to be an exploratory analysis. Through the gathering of qualitative data from interviews (fieldwork) and review of documents, the study was able to explicate the ethical challenges faced by cyberspace counsellors.

**4.3 Research design**

The study is qualitative. According to Kvale (1996), using qualitative methods enables one to understand the thoughts and emotions of the participants. In other words, it allows one to understand the participants better. This also allows the application of the qualitative generation of data and analysis. In the context of this study, the qualitative approach allowed me to

understand the issues that affect the participants when it comes to cyberspace counselling, to tap into their thoughts and emotions.

Hesse-Biber (2011) stated that qualitative data refers to all non-numeric information or information that has not been quantified. It includes words, pictures and narratives, which can be combined with quantitative, numerical data from a larger-scale study on the same issue, allowing research results to be generalised for future studies and examinations. In the current study, the use of qualitative methods allowed for collecting qualitative data through interviews with social workers and counsellors, and this means that the research engaged with the participants one on one, to listen to them and understand what it is that they do. Qualitative data from the interviews was transcribed, analysed and was presented thematically. Within the qualitative research approach are different designs; this study made use of the interpretive paradigm.

To put the research problem into context, the present study is supported by the interpretivist paradigm. According to Khan, and Gibbons (2014, 224), a paradigm also known as a worldview, the interpretivist paradigm is subjective. It allows individuals to be able to form their own kind of world, and to form their own opinion about the world they live in. Every individual is different as is how they perceive the world around them. The value of a research design is such that it ensures that whatever evidence is gathered in the course of an inquiry should enable the researchers to effectively answer whatever questions the study intends to address (Creswell 2013). According to Yin (2014), the focus of a research design is on the logical structure of a proposed inquiry. Implicit in the preceding notion is the supposition that a research design does not refer to a mode of data collection. It concerns itself with ensuring that a researcher asks the right questions to gain the right answers. Gathering evidence requires a specification of the type of evidence needed to answer inter alia, the research question, or to accurately describe some phenomenon. In other words, when designing research, we need to ask: "given this research question (or theory), what type of evidence is needed to answer the question (or test the theory) in a convincing way" (Vaishnavi and Kuechler 2015, 25). Therefore, in this study, the research design afforded the researchers with the insights and evidence they needed in gathering responses from the participants (cyberspace counsellors); this study allowed the participants to be able to tell their own story, drawing from their own experiences in terms of cyberspace counselling. Each participant was treated as an individual which meant that everyone's opinion was respected by the researcher.

## 4.4 Sampling

According to Wang and Cohen (2007), sampling in relation to appropriate research methodology determines the quality of any study. This means that researchers ought to choose a well calculated sampling criterion and be guided by the principle so that their study samples do not necessarily represent the 'undifferentiated' or wider population (Wang and Cohen 2007).

This study targeted counsellors, psychologists and social workers in and around Pietermaritzburg, in South Africa. Specifically, the study targeted counsellors and psychologists who were involved in cyberspace counselling: those who were using email, telephone, Skype, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or WhatsApp. Originally, the intention was to use the convenient sampling technique to get participants. The researcher initially believed that convenient sampling would be suitable for the study. However, convenient sampling proved to be difficult and ultimately snowball sampling was used.

According to Biernacki and Waldorf (1981), the snowballing method is a chain of referrals, which is made up of people who have the same characteristics. Snowball sampling is described as a method of interviewing a person's immediate social environment by using sociometric questions in the interview for sampling purposes. For example, in this study, the research first interviewed each cyberspace counsellor by asking each of the interviewees to identify other cyberspace counsellors. Then each of the referred cyberspace counsellor was interviewed and later asked to identify other cyberspace counsellors and so on (Cohen and Arieli 2011).

Snowballing worked well for the study and was an easy way to find the participants. Ultimately ten participants were identified through snowballing.


## 4.5 Data collection

Data collection involves obtaining intricate details about a social phenomenon. This includes observing feelings and thought processes of participants (Creswell 2012). To achieve the foregoing details from the participants, personal interviews, participant observation and a review of relevant documents were used.

Personal interviews allow researchers to study experiences and meanings as accounted for by the participants. Kumar and Phrommathed (2005, 127) posited that the choice of interviews is determined by at least three criteria: the "nature of the investigation" (that is, the sensitive nature of issues involved); the "geographical distribution of the study population"; and the

"type of study population". The researchers favoured the use of interviews over questionnaires in this study. This is because the study aimed at understanding the opinions on ethical challenges of cyberspace counselling as narrated by cyberspace counsellors. Researchers such as Coleman (2012), Creswell (2013) and Yin (2014) agreed that interviews are one of the most important sources of qualitative data. An interview is the process whereby researchers interview the target population either by phoning or in a face-to-face situation. Questions are asked and recorded by the researchers. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2003) noted that standardised open-ended interviews are used in which the exact wording and sequence of questions are determined in advance. Personal interviews with cyberspace counsellors mitigated the problems of "limited administration/application, low response rate and limited opportunity to clarify issues/views that questionnaires could have accorded this study" (Kumar and Phrommathed 2005, 114). Personal interviews accorded each participant (in the selected sample) an opportunity to narrate his/her views in his/her own words about the ethical challenges of cyberspace counselling.

For this study, an interview guide was used to obtain the necessary information. Before interviews commenced, cyberspace counsellors who showed interest in the study were given a consent form, which included details of the intended study and the descriptions of the research. The researcher explained the interview procedure and informed each participant that no money or any other incentive was to be given for taking part in this study. Interviews took place with ten cyberspace counsellors.

The ten participants were involved in different kinds of cyberspace counselling (see Table 4.1 below). Three males and seven females participated in this study. Nine participants were interviewed at their various places of work. Only one participant was interviewed at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus. All interviews lasted for approximately 45 minutes. The structured interview protocol with standardised open-ended questions (see Appendix 1) was used to collect data from the participants and to gain a deeper understanding of the ethics surrounding the use of cyberspace counselling. Interview sessions were tape-recorded and later transcribed as discussed in the data analysis.

### 4.5.1 Participants

**Table 4.1: Sample of respondents**

| Participant | Gender | Qualification | Estimated age | Method used | Years of experience in counselling |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pink | Female | Counsellor | 50 | Email, telephone | 5 years |
| Red | Female | Counsellor | 30 | Email, telephone | 3 years |
| Blue | Male | Counsellor | 27 | Email, telephone | 1 year |
| Brown | Female | Social worker | 26 | Telephone | 4 years |
| Orange | Female | Social worker | 26 | Telephone | 6 years |
| Green | Female | Social worker | 39 | Telephone | 9 years |
| Purple | Female | Social worker | 26 | Telephone | 5 years |
| White | Male | Manager for social workers | 39 | Telephone | 10 years |
| Grey | Male | Psychologist. Pastoral counsellor | 40 | Email, Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp | 15 years |
| Peach | Female | Psychologist | 38 | Email, Skype | 7 years |

As shown in Table 4.1, for confidentiality and anonymity, participants' real names were not used. Colours were used to represent each participant. Three counsellors, five social workers and two psychologists participated in this study as shown in the table. Their ages ranged from 26 to 50 years. Table 4.1 also reveals that all participants had different qualifications and experience in counselling. Different participants used different methods of cyberspace

counselling (five used telephone, three used telephone and email, two used email, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Skype).

Participation/observation affords meaningful, usually first-hand, information. It serves as both an approach to enquiry and as a data-gathering tool. In general, although all participants were keen to be part of this study, Pink was the happiest – she seemed excited to be talking about what she did and how cyberspace counselling worked for her. It was obvious that Pink was passionate about cyberspace counselling. Red and Blue were nervous at first but became enthusiastic as the interview progressed. Brown, Orange, Green and Purple were not over-enthusiastic about being interviewed about their work. White spoke with confidence and was very welcoming and insightful. Grey and Peach were a delight to be interviewed but they were both very busy with their clients and were not able to spare much time for interviews.

A review of relevant literature (use of secondary sources) helped with exploring the research topic. Various journals and books, newspapers and magazines, archival material, unpublished theses and the Internet as well as seminar papers were used as secondary sources of data. The review of secondary sources of data was used to complement interviews and general participant observation.

## 4.6 Methods of data analysis

Service (2009, cited in Corbin and Strauss 2008) claimed that in data analysis, the researcher brings order, structure and meaning to the data obtained. During this process, pertinent themes and patterns are identified within the collected data (Ngulube 2010). In this study, content and narrative analysis were the main processes that were used to bring order, structure and meaning to data that had been collected. Content analysis can be defined as "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics within a text" (Krippendorff 2004, 9). Lasswell (1949, 120), explained that content analysis seeks to find out "who says what, to whom, why, to what extent and with what effect?" Weitzmann and Miles further observed that "in any content analysis, the task is to make inferences from data to certain aspects of their context and to justify these inferences in terms of the knowledge about the stable factors in the system of interest" (1995, 95). Content analysis in this study involved data being transcribed, coded and presented under emerging themes.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic presentation organises and explains the data in more concise detail and interprets many aspects of research topics. This was the reason for

choosing this method. Qualitative data that was collected using interviews in this study was transcribed and analysed thematically. Themes included: time delay, narrative and communication issues, no description of client, different counsellors, confidentiality issues, therapeutic relationship problems, and not easily manageable, positive issues of cyberspace counselling. The themes helped to derive meanings expressed through words and the use of conceptualisation. According to Creswell (2009, 218), thematic analysis involves creating codes and themes qualitatively, counting the number of times they occur in the text data, looking for emerging themes and recurring events and categorising them.

Thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), is usefully flexible. Furthermore, thematic analysis organises and describes the data found in more details. The following steps, as espoused by Braun and Clarke (2006), were used in analysing the data thematically.

**Step One**: The researcher familiarises him/herself with the data. At this stage, the researcher engages with the data found after collection. This involves repeated reading. During this step, it is also important that the researcher starts noting ideas of codes. Transcribing is also important as it helps the researcher become more familiar with the data, as was the case with this study. After transcribing, the researcher needs to re-read data to ensure that all has been transcribed. Codes for the transcribed data need to be noted (Braun and Clarke 2006).

**Step Two**: The researcher generates codes, after reading and becoming familiar with the data. In this study, the researcher highlighted words that were used by participants frequently (Braun and Clarke, 2006)  See Table 4.2 for an example of coding.

**Table 4.2: Sample of data extracted and coding**

| Data extracted | Coding |
|---|---|
| "*Understandable at times its better more done on weekends which causes an extra initiative from my side, because we don't work on weekends, it is a matter of one being flexible.*" White | 1. The counsellor and client are not always available.<br><br>2. Going the extra mile than what your job requires. |

**Step Three:** This involves creating themes after generating codes. Braun and Clarke (2006), noted that tables can be used or mind maps to show this (as shown in Table 4.2).

**Step Four:** This involves the review of themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) explained that this entails refining the themes that have been generated and taking out those that will not work.

During this phase, one is able to see if the themes are appropriate to the particular study. Certain themes may not be relevant. The themes that work need to be extracted and those that do not, must be removed. In this phase, the researcher should have an idea of the themes that will represent the data.

**Step Five:** This step involves defining, naming and refining the themes found during the interviews. This is done in accordance with what the research study seeks to find. During this step, the researcher begins to analyse the data within the themes found. For each theme, the researcher writes a detailed analysis of what was extracted from the data, while identifying the narratives that are being told. In this study, one of the themes was how cyberspace is not easily manageable. For this theme, participants reported on preferring face-to-face to cyberspace counselling.

**Step Six:** In this phase, all themes are categorised. It is the final stage of data analysis and the writing up of the findings. This phase also requires that the researcher consults secondary sources of data (relevant publications and articles) on the same issue under investigation.  In this study, once the themes from Step Five were identified, the researcher compared themes with the literature review. Finally, the researcher needs to write up the report and the findings.


**4.7 Validity, reliability and rigour**

Neuman (2007) pointed out that reliability and validity are central issues in all measurement. Both concern how concrete measures are connected to constructs. Reliability and validity are important issues in research because constructs in social theory are often ambiguous and not directly observable. All social researchers want their measures to be reliable and valid. Both ideas are important in establishing the truthfulness, credibility, or believability of findings. Both terms also have multiple meanings. Here, they refer to related, desirable aspects of measurement. Thus, Neuman (2007:345) claimed that "reliability means dependability or consistency. It suggests that the same thing is repeated or recurs under identical or very similar conditions. The opposite of reliability is a measurement that yields erratic, unstable, or inconsistent results". Validity, on the other hand, suggests "truthfulness and refers to the match between a construct, or the way a researcher conceptualises the idea in a conceptual definition, and a measure. It refers to how well an idea about reality 'fits' with actual reality. The absence

of validity occurs if there is poor fit between the constructs a researcher uses to describe, theorise, or analyse the social world and what occurs in the social world" (Neuman 2007, 345). Reliability was ensured in this study by tape-recording the views of counsellors and psychologists. The responses of the participants could then be accurately transcribed. Seale and Silverman (1997, 381), stated that "transcripts of recordings provide an excellent record of naturally occurring interactions".

Validity and reliability of the instruments, in other words, issues such as trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility (Neuman 2007), were considered for this study: good qualitative research contains comments by the researcher concerning how their interpretation of the findings is shaped by their background, such as their gender, culture, history, and socio-economic origin. The researcher maintained a professional approach during data collection and avoided being drawn into organisational politics. Even though the researcher has also used cyberspace counselling, she made sure that her views did not interfere with the views of the participants. Creswell (2014) emphasised that clarifying the biases that the researcher brings to the study by way of self-reflection, creates an open and honest narrative that resonates well with readers.

Furthermore, Golafshani (2003, 599), noted that in the case of empirical research, it is important for a researcher to provide means that will account for the validity, reliability and rigour of the research. Validity is concerned with the meaningfulness of the research, whether the research measures what it is supposed to measure. To ensure validity, it was important to make sure that consent forms were given to participants before interviews, so that participants would not feel forced to participate. Consent was required from the participants to show participants' free will in participating (see Appendix 2 for consent forms and Appendix 3 is an information sheet for participants). As a researcher, I had to respect the confidentiality of the information from participants and also provide pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. This study also ensured that it measured what it was supposed to measure by focusing on the research question.

To achieve trustworthiness and credibility, researchers need to document qualitative research procedures by, for example, keeping an audit trail for the study in the form of a research journal. According to Krefting (1991, 215), rigour is the assessment of trustworthiness; trust has to come from both the researchers and the participants. This means going through the right channels in terms of research ethics. In order to adhere to these ethics, this study ensured that participants had understood and consented to being part of the study. It was also made clear to

the participants that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any stage if they so wished, and that they should also feel comfortable enough to freely say no to answering certain questions, and that there was no monetary benefit linked to their participation in the study. Pseudonyms were used (in this study, the names of colours replaced actual names) to ensure confidentiality. With regard to this research, should participants want any feedback on the results, an appointment will be made to provide feedback.

Authors such as Yin, Hou, Romanova and Sweedler (2011) and Creswell (2014) have suggested that qualitative researchers need to do their qualitative research methodically. Being methodical, according to Yin et al. (2011), entails documenting the procedures of the study; for example, all the transcripts from the interviews in this study have been carefully filed and kept. There are also copies of informed consent forms which were given to participants. Documenting as many steps of the procedures as possible, and setting up a detailed case study protocol and database, means a researcher can be transparent in that this allows other people to review, follow the procedures and try to understand them (Yin et al. 2011; Creswell 2014).

The interview guide was subjected to scrutiny by my supervisor and consequently, it was refined. Yin et al. (2011) and Creswell (2014) recommended that an instrument should be subjected to criticism, support or refinement by a diverse group of people such as a participant in one's qualitative research, peers, academics and other researchers. The oral review panel also made some suggestions on my interview guide, which I took into consideration.

The study adhered to an explicit set of evidence. Since the goal of the qualitative research was to have participants describe their own experiences and decision-making processes, the evidence consisted of participants' actual language as well as the context in which the language was expressed. In these situations, participants' words can be viewed as self-reports about their behaviours. The language is valued as the representation of reality. The words cannot be literally accepted but require further corroboration, for instance, to determine whether the behaviour occurred (Yin et al. 2011).

The researcher is also an email counsellor, who understands and knows what it is like to be a cyberspace counsellor. Creswell (2014) noted that by spending prolonged time in the field, the researcher can develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study, can report in detail on the research site and the people and this lends credibility to the narrative account. The more experience that a researcher has with participants in their settings, the more likely the findings will be accurate and valid. For instance, the findings of this study can be applied

to other cyberspace counsellors in other towns of South Africa. It worth nothing that this study does not generalise its findings but it is adding to a scarce body of knowledge on the ethical challenges faced by cyberspace counsellors in South Africa. Confirmability in this study ensured that the researcher reflected the actual responses of participants in line with the views of researchers in the literature review.

## 4.8 Ethical considerations

Strydom (2005, 57), defined ethics as a "set of moral principles which is suggested by an individual or group, is subsequently widely accepted, and which offers rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents, employers, sponsors, other researchers, assistants and students". Strydom noted that ethical guidelines serve as standards and a basis upon which each researcher ought to evaluate his/her own conduct. As such, this is an aspect, which should be borne in mind continuously. Ethical principles should thus be internalised in the personality of the researcher to such an extent that ethically guided decision-making becomes part of one's whole research lifestyle (Strydom 2005). Ethical issues were carefully taken into consideration throughout this study.

Anonymity and confidentiality of respondents was ensured during data collection and reporting the results as advised by Babbie (2004). This was done by informing the respondents that participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the study if they so wished without any repercussions. The researcher also explained the nature of the research to the respondents to clarify, reassure and to encourage their trust. The researcher promised to handle information in a confidential and anonymous manner. The respondents were assured that their identities and the data collected were going to be handled with the strictest care and used for no other purpose than this particular study. The study used pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants; they also signed informed consent forms.

Ethical compliance involved using a standardised informed consent form from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, which was attached to the interview guide and the respondents were required to read, understand and sign before answering the questions. All possible or adequate information on the purpose of the investigation, the procedures followed during the investigation, as well as the credibility of the researcher were available to the potential participants. This was consonant with Strydom (2005), who argued that emphasis must be placed on accurate and complete information, so that subjects fully comprehend the

investigation and consequently can make a voluntary, thoroughly reasoned decision about their possible participation. Participants must be legally and psychologically competent to give consent and they must be aware that they would be at liberty to withdraw from the investigation at any time.

In this study, all the participants were in the age group between 25 to 50 years and were therefore legally independent and seemed competent enough to respond to the questions that were asked. Participants were able to ask for clarity regarding anything which they felt they did not understand. It was also my duty. as the researcher, to make sure that they understood every question asked.

The study appeared to be of benefit to the participants because during the interviews, there were two respondents who revealed that even though they were using cyberspace counselling, they did not have adequate training in this field. Therefore, the study raised awareness of possible issues that may arise.

A recorder was used to capture the views of counsellors on what they feel about cyberspace counselling. This ensured that accurate transcription of the responses of the participants could be possible. Seale and Silverman (1997, 382), stated that "transcripts of recordings provide an excellent record of naturally occurring interactions".

## 4.9 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed research design, methodology and methods and data analysis. The chapter justified the use of a qualitative methodology for this study. Snowball sampling was used to select participants. Through snowball sampling, the researchers selected an information-rich sample of cyberspace counsellors in Pietermaritzburg. Personal interviews, general participant observation and review of relevant secondary sources were also used to gather data. Data was analysed through content and narrative analysis and presented using different themes.  In summary, data from sources (both primary and secondary) was gathered. The following chapter presents the findings of the study.

# CHAPTER FIVE
# FINDINGS AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

## 5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the methodology of this study, looking at the how data was collected (methods used). The chapter also looked at the paradigm framing the study and the target population sample. The current chapter is an analysis of the themes gathered during the field study. While the first three chapters helped with understanding the research process, the fourth chapter probed how the actual experiences of cyberspace counsellors in Pietermaritzburg (the subject under investigation) could be explored and considered. The current chapter presents how some of the findings of this study challenge research arguments made in the literature review. The current chapter analyses the ethical challenges of cyberspace counselling as experienced and narrated by cyberspace counsellors on the one hand, and on the other hand, it explores the capacity of cyberspace counsellors to deal with cyberspace counselling. By drawing on the experiences, insights and arguments of the empirical realities of cyberspace counsellors in dealing with cyberspace ethical challenges, this chapter contributes to increasing knowledge on cyberspace counselling in South Africa.

## 5.2 Demographic profile of participants

As presented in the methodology chapter, ten cyberspace counsellors from Pietermaritzburg participated in this study. All participants who participated in this study were given pseudonyms. A different colour represents each participant: Pink, Red, Brown, Orange, Purple, Blue, Grey, Peach, Green and White. This chapter presents the data of this study under the following thematic sections: counselling methods, response times, narrative/ communication issues, unpleasant callers/emails, no client identity, counsellor non-continuity, limitations of cyberspace counselling, confidentiality, challenges of confidentiality, and suitability of cyberspace counselling.

## 5.3 Counselling methods

The first theme that the research sought to establish was to explore the different counselling methods used by cyberspace counsellors. In this study, Pink, Red and Blue were using email as their method of cyberspace counselling. The study established that counsellors Brown, Orange, Green, Purple, White, Grey and Peach were using the telephone as their preferred

method of cyberspace counselling. Additionally, counsellor Red, Grey and Peach used Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Skype in some of their counselling sessions. Table 5.1 summarises these methods used.

**Table 5.1: Counselling communication method**

| Participant | Method used |
|---|---|
| Pink | email, telephone |
| Red | email, Facebook |
| Blue | email |
| Brown | telephone |
| Orange | telephone |
| Green | telephone |
| Purple | telephone |
| White | telephone |
| Grey | email, Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp |
| Peach | email, Skype |

A variety of different methods of cyberspace counselling was evident in this study's participants. The findings of this study support those of Hanley and Reynolds (2009) who argued that different counsellors use different methods such as e-mail, chat rooms, video conferencing and telephone. However, email is the most preferred method of cyberspace counselling.

## 5.4 Response times

During the study, all participants argued that the common challenge of cyberspace counselling was a delay in communication between counsellors and clients. From the views of participants, there was a time gap of responses between the client and counsellor during counselling. In some instances, it was up to the counsellor to follow up to find out why the clients were not responding on time. Some counsellors said that there were times they could not respond urgently to their clients due to their workloads. In some instances, communication between counsellors and clients could end abruptly: clients would sometimes choose not to respond to the counsellor. Therefore, delays in communication between counsellors and clients were

identified as one of the greatest challenges of cyberspace counselling. For instance, according to Pink:

> During email counselling we get back to you within 24 hours. We are not always able to do that. Sometimes technology plays part sometimes counsellors just, you know something's happened in their lives and they just can't get there and they haven't managed or gotten a time to get the other counsellor to take their space, so there are times but we try our best.

According to Pink, it is not easy to respond to clients within the specified hours due to unforeseen circumstances. An example that Pink gave is that she works for an organisation of counsellors. Therefore, if one counsellor does not turn up for duty, she needed to replace that counsellor. As a result, she could often not respond to her own cyberspace clients on time. Pink revealed that time delay happens maybe when a counsellor who is supposed to be responding to the emails, is not available due to other reasons or personal crisis. This creates a 'knock-on' delay.

In addition, according to Red, "… I have to wait for the clients to respond in their own time. By that time, their mind-set of how they were feeling could have changed. I would get answers like I can't remember; he was just angry." According to Red, the counsellor is not the only cause of a time delay; delays can also come from the client and often it is up to a client to choose when to respond. This interrupts the counselling session. In the end, the counsellor may decide not to continue to have sessions with such clients.

Red mentioned problems coming from clients, who often take a long time to respond: "By the time clients respond, they may no longer feel the way they had felt the time they wrote the first email". This disrupts the therapeutic relationship between a counsellor and client. It can become difficult for the counsellor to address the clients' initial issues.

Purple argued, "it takes longer for an outsider to help, so that delays the person to receive help in time". Purple cited examples where a client needs help and the counsellor has to refer the client to a nearby counsellor or institution: "clients do not like to be referred to other institutions," said Purple.

Bambling et al. (2008) supported the arguments made by Pink, Red and Purple. According to Bambling et al. (2008), cyberspace counselling is characterised by delays in communication between the client and the counsellor. When it comes to cyberspace counselling, Bambling et al. (2008) argued that delays in communication can be a problem for cyberspace counsellors;

the slowness of responses makes it difficult for the counsellor to come up with an intervention quickly. Rochlen et al. (2004) argued that a delay in communication is an issue for people that utilise cyberspace counselling. There is also the issue of disparities in writing, where the client may write something on Monday but the counsellor may only respond on Friday; delays may cause the client to become more nervous about their problem resulting in increased suffering.

## 5.5 Narrative and communication issues

Cyberspace counselling creates a potential for narrative and communication issues. In narratives and communication, client and counsellor miscommunication or misunderstandings are inevitable. This is because it is not easy to understand immediately what the other is saying. It important to understand that misinterpretations of what others write are common. This may be different from what we are used to. This happens during cyberspace counselling too. It is not always clear what the other person is trying to say in writing or when the person is not in close proximity. In the case of the counsellors, they could be trying to understand what the client is saying, but failing to do so. Miscommunication and misunderstanding of texts between clients and counsellors usually leads to one party giving up. Unlike face-to-face counselling, in cyberspace counselling, it is challenging to ask for clarification when the counsellor cannot understand what the client is saying. Seeking clarification may make a client feel that the counsellor has not been attentive. This may create frustrations on the part of both the client and the counsellor which could ruin the counselling.

According to Red, the solution to miscommunication is focusing on face-to-face counselling.

> I think the traditional way of having someone in front of you, using body language and seeing the person's expressions is better. It immediately gives feedback as to whether the client understands what you as the counsellor is conveying to them, so you know when you are recapping or rephrasing that kind of confirm if you understand but in the email you can't really do that.

According to Moulding (2007, 25), this may lead to bad communication between the client and therapists. Lack of proper communication can result in wrong diagnoses and delays due to technology failures and may cause the client to feel isolated and alone.

According to Red, unlike face-to-face counselling, cyberspace counselling is different in the sense that you do not see the client. Therefore, it is not easy to interpret the client's emotions or to know whether the client understands what the counsellor is saying. Furthermore, Red

argued that recapping and rephrasing the clients' narrative was not easy. This is unlike in face-to-face where the client is front of you. In face-to-face counselling, clients ask for clarification in cases where they do not understand certain things. However, in cyberspace counselling, the counsellor is not able to tell because the client is far away: counsellors cannot see client's emotions, body language or whether or not what a client is saying is the truth. Red continued to say that "it is very hard for me (the counsellor) to know if you (the client) understand what I am saying, are you understanding what I have typed out or texted to you or sent in a message?"

Another challenge of cyberspace counselling as articulated by Moulding (2007, 25) is that there is no facial expression and body language. Red explained that since the method that she uses is email in counselling, it becomes difficult to know how clients feel after receiving her responses. According to Red, "it is always easy to be able to tell through their facial expression in face-to-face encounters … with email, it's difficult if the client is not responding and me not knowing if the client has worked through it". With cyberspace counselling it is very difficult to be able to tell if the client is working through their issues, unlike when the person is in front of a counsellor. In face-to-face counselling, "the moment a person walks in with their problem, it shows that they are not at the right place in their lives, and you can see that the more they come to see you that they are changing. This can be seen through their tone and how they express themselves, even how they appear", argued Red. However, in cyberspace counselling, it difficult to tell if the counsellor is making a positive impact on a client's life. Some clients may find it difficult to build and commit within the cyberspace therapeutic relationship, if there is no interaction. The same applies to counsellors.

Black contended that in cyberspace counselling as a counsellor,

> You are not there to really see your client. It is also frustrating when doing telephone counselling because you want to explain like I am talking to you, I am using hands and I can see your face. However, through the phone you can't tell whether this person is (sad) or (happy) … you can only assume that this person is angry through what they say.

In addition, Purple focused on the issue of emotions, saying "it is not easy to convince or appeal to a person if they are physically present".  For Purple, "it is not easy to convince a person if you are talking to them over the phone". In this case, a client may be overwhelmed with emotions. However, cyberspace counselling lacks the physical touch and makes it difficult to calm an emotionally charged client.  Researchers such as Adebowale (2014) and Zamani et al.

(2010) contended that this mode of counselling (cyberspace) has its own challenges. One such challenge in cyberspace counselling is that there is a lack of human interaction. Most of participants of this study argued that not having someone in the room and seeing them face-to-face, makes it difficult to assess their state.

There is the challenge of not being able to see the body language of the client. According to Orange, "if you don't see the body language, a client may manipulate you as you don't see them". The client can easily manipulate the unseen counsellor to help them or to seek attention. Not everyone that seeks help is in need of help. It is difficult to tell this through cyberspace counselling. Green stated that *"the thing is with counselling, requires a lot of things cause you don't only look at just what the person is saying, you don't look at what they are saying at that time they are talking to you"*. For Green, cyberspace counselling demands a lot from the counsellor. This is because "as the counsellor you have to be sure when counselling a person and act in the best interest of the client. You also have to be careful in the way you respond to the client." This requires dedication and time. Green claimed that *"if you are with a person, you get to speak their language the way they say things, through the body language.* Peach agreed with Green and added that seeing the person holistically is helpful if a counsellor wants to do a proper diagnosis of the client. According to Peach, "you need to holistically see the person so that you can assess the person holistically, see their facial features and their body language". By holistic, Peach meant that you need to see the clients' facial expressions rather than only hear the tone of their voices.

As noted above, most of the respondents revealed that they had problems when it came to knowing what the client was dealing with. This shows that misunderstandings can easily happen in cyberspace counselling. This is because they cannot see the client's facial expressions and body language. This creates a barrier. In addition, one of the respondents spoke about clients being able to manipulate when a counsellor is unable to see them. The views of participants are in contrast with Shiller's (2009) view on cyberspace counselling. According to Shiller (2009), writing can be therapeutic, and some cyberspace clinicians have suggested that some people are more honest when they are writing things down. However, according to the views of participants, writing during cyberspace counselling may be misinterpreted.

## 5.6 Unpleasant calls and emails

Most participants claimed to have received many unpleasant calls and emails during cyberspace counselling. By unpleasant calls, participants were referring to clients who were harsh to talk with or hostile. A client going through a very difficult time will not know how to talk in the right manner, so may use harsh words and be defensive. This can also happen if the client does not want to deal with what is really wrong, or when they are expecting the counsellor to give them solutions to fix their problems quickly. Clients can become frustrated and may end up insulting the counsellor. Some participants mentioned that sometimes clients call counsellors for reasons other than counselling. In most of these situations, unpleasant emails and calls are the result of clients disrespecting counsellors. Even though the client is seeking help, some clients use the cyberspace platform to say anything simply because the counsellor cannot see them. According to Pink, some clients use offensive language. For instance, "some clients use f-word even after we have acknowledged their issue. In some situation, clients just say 'uuhm'". Pink said that she did not tolerate clients who used vulgar and offensive language. At first, she counselled them, but if a client does not stop, she puts a stop to the session.

Blue said that as a cyberspace counsellor, "we do get our prank callers that try to call us". According to Blue, there are people that call and pretend to have a problem. In this case, people pretend to be seeking for help whereas they are not serious. Grey claimed that not being able to see the client makes it difficult and challenging to know if you are counselling someone who has real issues or if they are just bored and need someone to talk to: "I am not sure at times whether I am counselling people with real issues or people who are playing games". Blue and Grey claimed that jokers and prank callers hinder counsellors from offering cyberspace counselling.

## 5.7 No client identity

The identity and description of a client is another challenging concern to the cyberspace counsellor. In most cases, as argued in the literature review, when the identity of a client is not hidden (whether they are using the wrong name or whether it is not visible at all), this creates problems for the counsellor. A counsellor may not know the real identity, age and location of a client who uses false names to remain anonymous; the counsellor can only work with what the client is willing to share. Cyberspace clients may lie about their identities. Pink gave a detailed description of how cyberspace counselling works in the organisation in which she works:

… so we got the system and the emails coming into this one area, and all contact details and identifying detail get taken away from that, and it gets sent to the counsellor, and then the counsellor response gets approved by another counsellor, ok, and then it gets sent back to the client and gets approved the third time by the counsellor who is sending it back to the client, so there is no time at no time does the counsellor know the person's name or where they from, their gender… they don't have to, they have no idea of the culture they belong to, sometimes by name but you can't always identify someone.

Pink talked further about the issue of not having a client description:

… so say today is Wednesday and it's my slot I can counsel any time from one o'clock and eight o'clock, I go onto a programme there are submissions from clients. I respond to them, there are no contact details, there is no surname, no address, no email address, no cell number, so I don't know, so I cannot contact that client directly.

For Pink, things like the client surname, and an address, even a cell phone number, gets removed from the client and it not easy to identify with the client when this happens.

Red also explains how having no description of the client affected her: "I never get information on an email there's no address, I don't have the contact, so ethically it is my duty to ensure that person's safety but it's a challenge of not having that. So I would say that is one of the challenges." Red acknowledged that even though there may be no description of the client, it automatically becomes her responsibility to ensure that the client is safe. This means that it takes longer for her to do what is the best interest of the client at all times.

The respondents revealed that due to confidentiality, they could not force any client to reveal more about their personal information. They wanted clients to feel comfortable to share. Not knowing the client's general background including aspects such as culture, name and surname, creates difficulties for counsellors. If they respond to the client and write something that is offensive, then it becomes a problem.

However, some participants argued that it did not bother them when clients chose not to reveal their identities. Grey stated, "I also don't need to know who they are but it works out for them. If they don't disclose who they are, there is some level of guarantee kind of confidentiality to

the client". Grey's view implies that if a counsellor wants to act in the interest of the client, it does not matter whether or not the clients' identity is withheld. However, according to Shiller (2009), counsellors should be aware of the jurisdiction/culture of different clients from different countries. People have access to the Internet from all over the globe and every country has its own jurisdiction. This applies to the rights of cyberspace clients. In some countries, the identities of both the counsellor and client have to be revealed while in others, identities have to be withheld.

However, "even though withholding identity of a client ensures cyberspace confidentiality, it does not help counsellors," argued Green. Concealing clients' important details can cause a barrier between a client and a counsellor.

## 5.8 Counsellor non-continuity

This study was carried out among counsellors who work for different organisations. Since most counsellors worked for different cyberspace organisations, they had to comply with different organisations' norms. Pink expressed that "the big issues we experience as counsellors is conforming to our way of counselling ethics". According to Pink, their organisation does not allow them to tell their clients what to do. In addition, "in our organisation, a client generally doesn't get the same counsellor every day. So we have to counsel in such a way that any counsellor can take up what is being … then we can't counsel what the client is going through at this point". Other participants concurred with Pink that they never dealt with only one client.

The findings of the present study reveal that different counsellors can deal with the same client at different times. This is challenging because it can be difficult for a new counsellor to pick up from where a previous counsellor left off. It is important in counselling that the client does not feel disconnected from their counsellor as this can slow the recovery of the client. If several different counsellors attend to the same client, each counsellor must ensure that responses are in line with what the previous counsellor has said, and this is not always easy to do.

## 5.9 Limitations of cyberspace counselling

Cyberspace counselling is appropriate for every crisis. There are issues that counsellors cannot deal with in cyberspace and which require face-to-face counselling. According to Pink, "We do recommend face-to-face for immediate rape incidences". Pink added that cyberspace

counselling is not recommended for suicidal clients. Issues like rape and attempted suicide require that a client be calmed down during face-to-face counselling. According to Pink,

> … cases we have most of them are rape and murder and most of them happen within the families so it's not easy talking to someone over the phone. Cases like murder it not easy to offer someone cyberspace counselling, because in this case you need to be there with the person and be able to give proper diagnosis.

Chester and Glass (2006) supported Pink noting that cyberspace counselling was inappropriate for suicidal and psychotic clients which require client-counsellor interaction so that proper diagnoses can be made. On the contrary, Dunn, Roy and Gillet (2008, cited in Hanley 2012) claimed there are clients who cannot develop a rapport during face-to-face counselling. For them, cyberspace counselling can be the best alternative.

Green mentioned that follow-ups could be difficult using cyberspace counselling. "You cannot do a follow up with a telephone as I said before". In cyberspace counselling it not easy to a follow up especially times when the clients' numbers are not available. Or when clients are offline. When the client does not see the counsellor, s/he may take the counsellor's suggestions lightly. Green said, "the bad thing about the telephone interviews follow up is that it is up to a client to call again, and you have to, I don't know whether to say you need the person to see that you know their story, so you have to remember their voice".

## 5.10 Challenges of confidentiality

Confidentiality is one of the most important issues in cyberspace counselling. If the client cannot be assured of confidentiality, then this service contravenes clients' privacy, rights and dignity. Clients need to feel that are safe when they speak to a counsellor in cyberspace. This allows them to talk to the counsellor and tell them their problems easily without fear. However, if there is no guarantee of confidentiality, clients will not seek cyberspace counselling.

According to Blue, there is no one who has access to his communication with his client. "Well, I only have access to my email and am assuming that the client also has their own access to their email account as well". For Blue, it is the client's responsibility to ensure that no one else has access to his/her emails in order to ensure confidentiality. Email communication between Blue and clients are printed and kept safely in a folder: "We keep them in a folder like a report". It is difficult to ensure that information from both the client and counsellor is confidential; electronic communication can be hacked.

Kraus (2010) claimed that record keeping was another ethical issue. If the messages from the counselling sessions are simply left on the computer, and if the client or counsellor decide to save the transcripts, then these can be retrieved at a later stage. A challenge to confidentiality emerges where a counsellor may want to market his/her services. For instance, if the counsellor has a web page, this will mean that anyone can access the page. Access to the webpage may give hackers an opportunity to hack into counsellors' confidential information.

## 5.11 Suitability of cyberspace counselling

During the study, participants also revealed that cyberspace counselling has a number of merits. Grey argued that cyberspace counselling allowed him to be able to reach out to a large section of his clients. This is unlike face-to-face counselling which can be limiting. Cyberspace counselling allows flexibility. During cyberspace counselling,

> I can access quite a number of people within a short space of time so. In one session, I can chat with about four or five clients through email. I can respond to many clients within a short period. This not likely to happen if clients are sitting before me. I can also use email, Twitter, and Facebook at the same time.

For Peach, cyberspace counselling is convenient because she does not need to travel far to see her clients. Since most of her clients are working, Peach is able to communicate with them through email. This saves them time. According to Pink,

> I would say it more convenient thus making it more effective because people nowadays are too busy to come for face to face therapy. The good thing about cyberspace counselling is that you can access it at any time, and it can be used as an alternative with face-to-face for the client.

Red claimed that cyberspace counselling is good because it reaches out to a wider audience beyond Pietermaritzburg: "I think cyberspace counselling reaches further out to people in Pietermaritzburg but we can go out as far as we want to go". She added that "people can call us from anywhere in the country". Furthermore, Red stated that

> … my understanding that some people cannot get physically or sometimes not telephonically but a lot of people these days have smart phones or emails and stuff like that and it is just for us to provide them, a life line a different way that they are comfortable with.

Therefore, for Red, cyberspace has made counselling a cheap and easier service to access. Most people now have smart phone. They can access many things in cyberspace easily. For those who cannot accesses face-to-face counselling due to disability, cyberspace counselling is a good option. There are also people who are scared to talk face-to-face and cyberspace makes it easier because they know no one can see them.  Some people are scared of being judged. People have their own different reasons for wanting to use cyberspace counselling. According to Blue, cyberspace counselling has helped those with questions related to drug addictions to call or email appropriate centres.

## 5.12 Analysis of the challenges of cyberspace counselling within the tenets of consequentialism theory and deontology

As noted by Peterson (2003) in Chapter Three of this study, consequentialism is the normative ethical theory, which argues that the morality of an action can be judged by the consequences caused by an action. According to the tenets of consequentialism, it can be argued that cyberspace counsellors in South Africa experience a mixture of ethical challenges. On the other hand, the tenets of deontology place an emphasis on doing the right thing:  acting for the sake of duty. Should counsellors act out of duty or according to consequences? Deliberating on this poses a threat to the ethical codes of counselling. According to this study's findings, it emerged that a number of variables were responsible for the negative and positive consequences of cyberspace counselling.

In this study, participants described different challenges of cyberspace counselling. For instance, eight counsellors argued that delay in communication was a big challenge. The consequences of using cyberspace counselling were that the client may take a long time to respond and by the time they did respond, they may no longer be in the same state they were in when they were seeking for help. This can become a problem for the client: not being able to deal with what was bothering them previously, delays the counselling process; something may no longer bother them, or they may choose to ignore it, but this does not mean they have dealt with it. Delays in responses from both the client and the counsellor are often beyond their control and can include signal loss, electricity shut down, battery dying on phone, or being sick. In the context of consequentialism, delay in reaching out to clients is a negative consequence. It does not produce happiness for the majority of counsellors and clients. According to the tenets of consequentialism, cyberspace counselling is morally wrong if it

brings less pleasure. But according to deontology, if the delay is due to duty, it is morally justified.

Another consequence of using cyberspace counselling revealed by this study is that counsellors cannot always be available in cyberspace. They may be experiencing a crisis or be busy with other things. For consequentialists, the outcome of counsellors not being available in cyberspace produces negative effects in clients. Counsellors also need time to respond to their own personal crises or for leisure. In this situation, consequentialists do not offer a solution as to how the two consequences can be reconciled.

Hooker (2000) claimed that the question that the consequentialist sought to answer was what the consequences would be if someone did something. Where counsellors get prank callers or even people that appear not to be serious or clear about why they are emailing or calling, the counsellor still has a role to play and whatever action they decide to take, they also have to do this in a way that produces less unhappiness. In the case of rude callers, a counsellor could lash out in anger but they should handle clients in the best manner possible.

Pink stated that in her line of work "it is not about the counsellor… it is all about the client … we never give our opinion … we never can make suggestions". In this case the counsellor will always put the client first, no matter what they think about the situation or the clients' choices. It is not for the counsellor to say or tell the client what is right or wrong. Should they decide to do this, the consequences of those actions may not be good because if the client does what the counsellor tells him/her and it does not work, then the client will have the right to blame the counsellor. In this case, the consequences of helping a client may produce bad consequences for the counsellor, regardless of how good the intentions.

The second main findings from the study are concerned with the issue of communication and narratives: seven of ten respondents noted that cyberspace counselling does not allow them to read a person's body language. Because the counsellor does not see the client face-to-face, it can be more difficult to 'see' a person's real emotions. Sometimes counsellors may not be able to understand the narrative or what the client is saying and sometimes the client may not be able to understand the counsellor. In face-to-face counselling, it is easier to clarify quickly what the other means. According to consequentialism, this does not produce the best result, because if the counsellor does not understand the client, there will be a communication barrier and the counsellor will not be able to assist the client properly.

Language and culture can cause a barrier when it comes to communication. If the counsellor does not understand the client's language and their culture, he/she might not understand the client, or the counsellor may say something to the client which could come across as being offensive.

The main reason for clients wanting to use cyberspace counselling appears to be because it allows for confidentiality. The counsellor does not know who they are and cannot see them, and this can lead to a good outcome for the client which supports the theory of consequentialism. But this also creates a challenge for the counsellor because when they receive emails without detailed information about the client, it can be hard for them to counsel such a person.

Even though people may be keen to use cyberspace, it important to note that it is not appropriate for all cases; some crises require face-to-face counselling. One of the respondents mentioned that it is not ideal to counsel someone who has been raped through cyberspace. According to consequentialism, any act is expected to minimise unhappiness and maximise happiness, which is the aim of counsellors/social workers who utilise cyberspace counselling. Even though they are faced with challenges, they must still serve their clients and try to bring about the best outcomes for them. Cyberspace has many different consequences for counsellors and can result in a huge responsibility in cases where a counsellor is unsure and may not know whether taking a certain decision with regard to the client will bring about a good result.

## 5.13 Through the lens of deontology theory

Deontology theory was used to analysed the results further. This theory became relevant to the study because it considered the duty of the counsellor when conducting cyberspace counselling. Despite various challenges, counsellors are still required to protect the client and to have the best interest of the client at all times.

According to Alexander and Moore (2015), for Kant, deontology meant right over good; it also means acting for the sake of duty. Kant placed duty first, and acting out of respect for moral law, cyberspace counsellors have a duty to heal their clients and make their burdens feel lighter, but there can be problems and challenges in this duty. A number of themes have been discussed above and it also becomes the duty of the cyberspace counsellor to find a solution to all the challenges in cyberspace counselling; even if they do not find the solutions, they have to try

and alleviate anything negative and that might cause any distress to the client. They have to put the best interests of the client first at all times.

From a deontologist perspective, it is morally unacceptable for counsellors to be offline when the duty of cyberspace counselling demands that they be available in cyberspace. Deontologists might argue that there is no need for counsellors to join cyberspace services if they know that they cannot live up to its expectations. From a deontologist perspective, it is evident in both theory and practice, as shown in the findings, that it is a lack of adhering to the demands of cyberspace counselling that renders the service ineffective. As this study shows, from a deontologist point of view, the level of success of cyberspace counsellors is dependent on availability, efficiency and effectiveness of technology, not on whether the counsellor or client is in cyberspace or not, but on what cyberspace counselling ought to do and the duty of cyberspace counsellors.

It is the counsellors' duty to ensure that their clients are protected at all time; regardless of the challenges and limitations of using cyberspace counselling, they have to make clients feel better at the end of the counselling session. One of the respondents (Black) said, "I prefer to see the person so that I … because you know as a social worker you have to also consider the nonverbal communication". This respondent clearly showed that even with an absence of facial expressions and other nonverbal cues, counsellors still have the duty to do their best to understand how the client is feeling. The counsellor cannot afford to misread what the client is saying and everything that the counsellor says, matters to the client.

Kant claimed that duty was more than doing what one felt was right; duty is acting with respect for other rational beings, so one should respect every person and treat a person fairly and not use a person to achieve one's own ends. According Donaldson and Werhane (2002), "so ethically, it is my duty to ensure that person's safety". Red revealed that they have the same challenge, with cyberspace counselling one cannot guarantee that the client is safe wherever they are, because they only have what the client is telling them. If clients do not reveal whether they are safe, this can weigh heavily on counsellors and they should accept that there is only so much they can do. In the case where a client has been raped and cyberspace counselling is not ideal, the counsellor can refer the client to a nearby place for face-to-face help, but if the client prefers cyberspace counselling, the counsellor can only try and assist the client as best as he/she can. Counsellors may not believe the client will receive the best care in this way, but they still have a duty to help their clients if cyberspace counselling is their choice.

All professional support and guidance personnel have principles to live by, and they have to abide by them at all times. Organisations have different ethical codes which they must follow at all times. These ethical codes give counsellors the guidance which they need to carry out their duties efficiently; even if it may be hard for them to follow some of the ethical codes, it is their responsibility to make sure they fulfil their duties. Clients should not be made to do things or be part of things which they have not consented to. Similarly, in terms of confidentiality, if they do not want to share their information with anyone even family, counsellors are expected to respect that. Clients are human and this means they have rights which need to be respected.

Black noted that

> yes the social work ethics where you can't force the person to answer if a person says no am not ready to talk to me at this time, then we will do that and you can't use like I am using my social work ethics where I can't judge I have to be non-judgemental all the time and be positive as well and that maybe things will be better or rather say that if the phone calls doesn't work, I'll have to do the home visit myself face to face.

Black is explaining here that if the client is not ready to talk to the counsellor then it is the counsellor's duty is to ensure that he/she does not put pressure on the client. It is important to let clients talk when they are ready to do so. It is also the counsellors' duty to ensure that they do not judge the clients no matter what the circumstances. The counsellor has the duty to support the client at all times and to put the client's needs first at all times.

According to deontology, the Right is said to have priority over the Good. According to Kant, duty is more than doing what you feel is right: duty is acting with respect for other rational beings, so one should respect every person and treat them fairly and not use a person to achieve one's own ends (Donaldson and Werhan 2002). According to Pink,

> I am a bit flexible but I think that … it is preference of the client. Some clients do not want the exposure of personal issues so it is a safer kind of counselling for the client where they do not feel like you know who I am when you see me.

If the client is choosing to remain anonymous, it is duty of the counsellor to make sure that the client's identity stays private. One of the reasons a client may choose cyberspace counselling, might be because he/she knows that the counsellor will not know or see them. It is important to respect a client who wants to remain private in this way.

**5.14 Conclusion**

This chapter has critically analysed the ethical issues that cyberspace counsellors encounter in their line of work. The research was interested in the experience of the cyberspace counsellors rather than the clients. Findings were analysed according to themes that emerged from the data. Ten themes were found in the data: response times, narrative/communication issues, unpleasant calls and emails, no client identity, counsellor non-continuity, limitations of cyberspace counselling, confidentiality, counselling methods, and challenges of confidentiality. These themes were taken from the interviews and are a reflection of what the participants were feeling and their experiences with cyberspace counselling. All these themes seemed to be concerned with negative issues that arose for cyberspace counsellors; the data did, however, also include positive outcomes such as cyberspace counselling being convenient for the client, and the counsellor also, not needing to budget for travel expenses and that cyberspace is a good platform because it can reach a wider audience. The data was analysed in the light of the literature and according to two theories, deontology and consequentialism theory. Both these theories were suitable for the research because they considered the actions of the cyberspace counsellors – action being the practice of cyberspace counselling and the outcome being the effect of the counselling on them as counsellors. Deontology theory was used to consider the duty of the counsellor towards counselling including ethical guidelines and what is considered the right thing to do. Consequentialism theory is more concerned with consequences.

## CHAPTER SIX
## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 Introduction

This study set out to examine the ethical issues of cyberspace counselling from the perspective of the counsellor. As cyberspace counselling is a relatively new phenomenon, it is useful to make people aware that these types of services are being offered in cyberspace, especially in the case of those who need to speak to someone but find it hard to go and visit a psychologist or a counsellor. This could be due to a disability. A person who travels extensively may not have the time to see a counsellor. There are also people who do not have the money to pay for face-to-face counselling and cyberspace counselling is more affordable. For reasons such as shame, fear and stigma, the Internet gives these people an easy way to get help without being worried because they do not need to be seen. Cyberspace counselling can help those who are afraid of being judged or who feel they cannot be open with another person. People with disabilities that affect their mobility can also find this form of counselling more convenient. Cyberspace counselling caters to different people and can be offered via various methods – a person can use Facebook, email or Twitter to get help in their own comfort zone.

### 6.2 Summary of key findings

This study interrogated the challenges of cyberspace counselling experienced by South African cyberspace counsellors. The focal point of analysis of this study was, therefore, the ethical challenges of South African cyberspace counsellors. The study primarily analysed the experiences of ten South African cyberspace counsellors from Pietermaritzburg. Specifically, this study investigated some of the ethical challenges that cyberspace counsellors from Pietermaritzburg experience and how they deal with them. In terms of methodology, the empirical nature of this study necessitated the use of qualitative methods. The study adopted an interpretive approach in explicating the subject matter of the research.

The study began by outlining its main arguments, objectives, questions and specific questions. The first chapter introduced the study's background and foregrounded its research problem. It also identified the research task. The chapter presented the research objectives and corresponding research questions. Furthermore, the first chapter delineated the study's scope and limitations. It highlighted the significance of the study, followed by a brief statement of the research methodology and research design. The chapter also noted certain methodological and practical limitations of this study. Furthermore, the study noted, according to Vally (2006,

151), that due to oppressive apartheid rule, many black South Africans were in need of counselling. Most black South Africans come from previously disadvantaged backgrounds where access to the resources for healing from devastating effects of the apartheid regime were and are limited, if not unavailable. According to Kreutzer (2009), cyberspace counselling is beginning to be more readily available for the majority group primarily due to the increase in access to cell phones, but the lack of free access to the Internet remains a technological and financial barrier. Kreutzer (2009) suggested, however, that although South Africa is a country that is in the process of trying to escape the inequalities, mobile phones are experiencing growth in terms of usage as defined by number of registered sim cards. Thus, mobile phones and increasing cheaper access to the Internet means that cyberspace counselling can be an option to help more people. The chapter concluded with an outline of the structure of the study.

The second chapter reviewed and compared relevant literature on cyberspace counselling. It was noted that most contemporary researchers were concerned with the role of cyberspace counselling, its merits and demerits. Through a review and comparison of relevant literature, this study established that cyberspace counselling remains under-researched in the context of Africa. Cyberspace counselling research is almost non-existent in South Africa. This chapter emphasised that there is a need for a nuanced understanding of the ethical challenges of cyberspace counselling as experienced by cyberspace counsellors which was the main aim of this study.

The third chapter critically discussed consequentialism and deontology as possible lenses through which data of this study could be refracted for analysis in Chapter Five. According to consequentialism, the cyberspace counsellor should do whatever it takes during counselling, to produce the best results with their clients. Therefore, from the consequentialist perspective, the morality of cyberspace counselling should be judged by the consequences it produces for cyberspace clients. A distinguishing element of consequentialism is that 'x is right' if 'x best promotes the good' (Agrawal and Chhatre 2011). From this perspective, cyberspace counsellors are right when they promote the good of their clients, irrespective of the means. Implicitly, consequentialism advocates that there should be a replacement of ethical norms which hinder the promotion of well-being in clients during cyberspace counselling. In answering the research question as to what ethical issues arise from cyberspace support and counselling, consequentialists propose that the consequences for the cyberspace client be the yard stick. Therefore, consequentialism helped to explain why some South African cyberspace

counsellors view promotion of good in their clients as their ultimate goal, be this within or outside of the norms of cyberspace counselling

For the purpose of providing a holistic framework for understanding the duty and the rights of cyberspace counsellors, the chapter also explored the tenets of the theory of deontology. Traditionally, deontology sees cyberspace counsellors as people who have a duty to follow set norms in counselling their cyberspace clients. This requires that they follow an ethical code during cyberspace counselling sessions. Any deviation from the set ethical codes of counselling, even for the good of their clients, renders them immoral. While literature on deontology tends to concentrate on duty, this study sees cyberspace counsellors as people who may be forced, in real life situations, to break set counselling norms. Deontology proved useful to consider what characterises cyberspace counselling in South Africa and helped to explain why some cyberspace counsellors stick to set norms of counselling. While literature on cyberspace counselling seems to be informed by counselling norms, the deontology paradigm insists that cyberspace counsellors who deviate from counselling norms, do so to serve their personal interests.

The fourth chapter presented the research design, methodology and methods of analysis that were employed during the study. By using a qualitative approach, this chapter was able to explore the different ethical challenges faced by cyberspace counsellors and their views on cyberspace counselling. Through snowball sampling, the researcher selected an information-rich sample of cyberspace counsellors from Pietermaritzburg. Personal interviews, general participant observation and review of relevant secondary sources were used to gather data. Data was analysed through content and narrative analysis and presented using different themes. The data was used to realise objective three of this study: to discover some of the ethical challenges faced by cyberspace counsellors and clients in South Africa. The data was further explored in Chapter Five.

The fifth chapter critically analysed the ethical issues that cyberspace counsellors encounter in their line of work. Results from the qualitative data gathered and described in Chapter Four, were analysed in Chapter Five. It was revealed that cyberspace counsellors face a number of ethical challenges in their line of duty. They face technical challenges like technological failure, access to cyberspace services by their clients and poor communication. The analysis of data revealed that cyberspace counsellors found cyberspace, in general, a convenient means for counselling. Some of the positive views of cyberspace counselling, as narrated by cyberspace counsellors, were that it was less expensive when compared with face-to-face counselling.

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Cyberspace counselling eradicated travel expenses between a client and counsellor. Other counsellors claimed it allowed them to reach a wider clientele than face-to-face counselling. One could be anywhere in the world and receive the help required.

## 6.3 Recommendations

From this study's findings, the recommendation is that ethical guidelines are required on how the counsellor should handle situations in which there are conflicts between their duty as counsellors and the consequences for clients. In addition, the consequences of their counsellor actions should still follow the set of ethical norms of counselling. Any counsellor interested or engaged in cyberspace counselling needs to realise that the ethics of cyberspace counselling should be based on the competency and integrity of cyberspace counsellors. This study recommends that cyberspace counsellors require sufficient training to be competent. For instance, Hanley and Reynolds (2009) recommended that in terms of narrative writing, cyberspace counsellors should be trained to encourage their clients to express themselves – clients' writing must be made free as possible.  The writing style of the client is very important because this is how the counsellor will come to understand the type of person s/he is and begin to understand her/him better. As a result, writing is essential for a good therapeutic relationship between the counsellor and the client. In cases where there are different cyberspace counsellors working in one organisation, this study recommends that one counsellor be assigned to a particular client for the entire counselling process.  In addition, this study recommends that organisations employ more counsellors to address the shortage of cyberspace counsellors.

Another challenge to cyberspace counselling identified by this study is the issue of client identity and verification. In this study, it was established that clients could lie about their identity and manipulate the counsellor into believing they are something or someone else. Rochlen et al. (2004) advised that cyberspace counselling organisation websites have passwords to address the issue of clients' identities. Counsellors and organisations can be introduced via their web page before the client communicates with any counsellor. Furthermore Rochlen et al. (2004) suggested that there is a need for training cyberspace counsellors to better use this form of service. Thus, this study recommends that cyberspace counsellors be trained so that that they can be more effective in handling clients' identity and verification.

For cyberspace counselling security, Griffiths and Cooper (2003) suggested that cyberspace counsellors should inform their clients of the limited security of their correspondence. Clients

can then make a choice about whether or not they want to continue further with cyberspace counselling knowing its limitations. Secondly, a client must be informed of all counsellors and professionals who have access to the cyberspace counselling organisation's website. Clients must further be informed on whether or not the information they give to cyberspace counsellors is secured by an encryption code. Thirdly, upon conveying the 'risks' of cyberspace therapy to a client, the professional counsellor should execute a client waiver. By means of a client waiver, clients acknowledge that they have been informed of the potential hazards. Fourthly, counsellors should acknowledge that cyberspace therapy is impeded by the counsellor's inability to read facial and body-language cues. This should be stated clearly on their websites. Fifthly, the emotional and intellectual capability of the client must be of foremost concern during cyberspace counselling. Sixthly, cyberspace counsellors must verify that the potential client is above whatever age limit is required. Seventhly, if a client is under age, written consent is required from the minor's legal guardian or representative. Lastly, the client should perform a credential check on any therapist found in cyberspace. This study suggests that the preceding suggestions by Griffiths and Cooper (2003) can be of use to cyberspace counsellors in eliminating some of the ethical issues expressed by participants in Chapter Five.

**6.4 Conclusion**

This study set out to examine the professional guidance and support of cyberspace counselling and sought to ethically critique cyberspace counselling. It strived to answer the question: What are the ethical issues that arise from the provision of cyberspace support and guidance services? Each chapter of the thesis has explored the experience of using cyberspace counselling and the effect that this has, in particular, on the counsellors. The researcher hopes that the research will contribute to adding to the literature and making people more aware of both the benefits and limitations of cyberspace counselling.

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# APPENDICES

**Appendix 1: Interview schedule for cyberspace counsellors**



Interviewer guide:

1. Can you please give a background information about yourself: how long have you been practising?
2. Tell me about cyberspace counselling?
3. Can you please explain how it works.
4. What are the different methods and modes that are used?
5. Kindly explain what made you want to engage from face to face support and guidance in cyberspace counselling.
6. What have been your experiences with using cyberspace counselling?
7. Do you think cyberspace counselling is effective? If yes, why? And if no, why?
8. In your opinion, what is the difference between cyberspace counselling and face counselling?
9. Can you share some of the challenges and dilemmas you face within your practice of cyberspace counselling?
10. How have you been dealing with such challenges and dilemmas?

**Appendix 2: Informed consent**



**INFORMED CONSENT**

**Working Title:** Professional Support and Guidance Services in Cyberspace counselling**:** An Ethical Critique.

**Scholars: Nomshado Zondi**

I agree to participate in the above research project. Detailed information has been explained to me. Also, I have had an opportunity to ask all the questions about the study and I am satisfied with the answers received.

- I agree to my interview being recorded on audiotape.

**OR**

- I do not agree to my interview being audio taped and prefer the scholars to take hand Written notes.
- I understand that I am free to stop participation at any time without prejudice. I

Have been informed that prior to its analysis, any data that has been gathered before the withdrawal of this consent will be returned to me or destroyed.

- I understand that neither my name nor any other identifying information will be Disclosed or published, except with my permission.
- I am aware that I can contact the scholars at any time after the interview.
- I understand that I will be given a copy of this form to keep.
- I have read the information above, and agree to participate in this study

Name of Interviewee: …………………………………………………..

Signature of Interviewee: ………………………………………………….
Date: …………………

I certify that the terms of the Consent Form have been verbally explained to the participant, and that the participant appears to understand the terms prior to signing the form and that Proper arrangements have been made for an interpreter where English is not the Participant's first language.

Signature of Interviewer………………………………………………
Date: …………………..

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**Appendix 3: Information sheet for research participants**



Dear _____,

**Participant information sheet: research study on cyberspace counselling**

**The research study**

I am conducting a study on cyberspace counselling, on psychologist or counsellors who use cyberspace counselling, the result of the study could assist those other counsellors or psychologists who want to find out more about cyberspace counselling including clients who want to first know what cyberspace counselling is before they decide to use it, you are therefore invited to participate in the research study.

**The interview**

The interview will follow a semi-structured format, and the interviewer will therefore pose a series of open-ended questions to you about cyberspace counselling and how you view it. The interview should not take longer than 60 minutes and will take place at a venue that suits you and the scholars, or via Skype or telephone.

**Confidentiality, anonymity, and risks/benefits**

You may elect to use your actual name or a pseudonym (i.e., a made-up name) during the interview and this research study. If you elect to use a pseudonym, this name will be used thereafter in any dissertations and journal articles that may arise, and you will not be identifiable within the study. We will also remove any identifiable information from the data set that you produce (e.g., degree, current place of work/study). However, if you elect to use your actual name, you are electing to have your identity revealed in the research study, and any dissertations or journal articles that may arise from the study. You can always change your mind at a later stage regarding the use of your actual name or pseudonym. There are no foreseeable risks to your participating in the interview.

With your consent, the interview will be audio-recorded so that the scholars can transcribe and analyses the interview at a later stage.

**Storage of information and accessing more information about the study**
The audio-recording and transcript from your interview will be stored in a secure location for a period of five years, after which they will be destroyed. The data will be used for postgraduate student dissertations and journal publications. If you selected to remain anonymous in the interview, no identifying information about you will be published
Voluntary participation and freedom to withdraw from the study
Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any point and for any reason.
A summary of the findings from the research study can be made available to you on request.

Thank you,
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