



# UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN CAPE

Faculty of Community and Health Sciences

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**Title:** Internalisation of the research supervisor: Experiences and perceptions of Psychology Masters Students at a Historically Disadvantaged University

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## Declaration

I declare that this thesis entitled “*Internalisation of the research supervisor: Experiences of Psychology Masters Students at a Historically Disadvantaged University*”, is my own work, and that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Date: .....09 March 2016.

Signed: .....Jabulani Chitanga



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## Abstract

Knowledge-based competition within a globalising economy is prompting a fresh consideration of the role of higher education in development and growth. Previously, it was often viewed as an expensive and inefficient public service that largely benefited the wealthy and privileged. It is now understood to make a necessary contribution to the success of national efforts to boost productivity, competitiveness and economic growth. Several governments see universities as engines for change and expansion of prosperity. There is also an increasing recognition that Higher Education has become dominated by a market-driven, consumerist service ethic and that this may have an impact on the style of research output and research supervision that academics adopt for a new knowledge economy. Research education or training, as it is often termed, is attracting greater scrutiny as research itself is seen of greater importance in the global knowledge economy. Students in post-graduation degree programmes across the world conduct research projects as a requirement to complete degrees. A thesis or dissertation develops the ability to work independently and critically, the ability to develop arguments, and awareness and use of advanced methodological designs that pertain to the student's discipline of study. Thus such learning is argued to be facilitated in the context of research advisement or supervision. Through this process the student might adopt or internalise values and attitudes of the supervisor regarding research. This process is referred to as internalisation of the research supervisor, thereby contributing to the development of the student researchers. The theoretical framework chosen for this study was social constructionism. The aim of this present study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of students in relation to the internalisation of the supervisor that may take place during research supervision. The study utilised in-depth semi-structured interviews to collect data. Eleven participants from various supervisors consented to be part of the study. These were recruited using purposive sampling. The ethics considerations of the study adhered to



the guidelines stipulated by Ethics committee of the University. Data was transcribed, and analysed using thematic analysis. The findings of this study indicate factors contributing to internalisation vary depending on aspects such as personalities of both the supervisor and the student, perceived quality of supervision and the supervision process itself. Findings also suggest that internalisation, whether positive or negative, of the research supervisor took place among the participants.



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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background and rationale

Kiley (2011) and Wolf (2010) reported that universities are seen by many governments as engines for change and expansion of prosperity. Deuchar (2008) indicated that Higher Education has become characterized by a market-driven, consumerist service ethic. This new knowledge economy may impact the style of research output and research supervision that academics adopt (Pomfret & Wang, 2003). Abbott and Doucouliagos, (2004) concluded that research is regarded as an important indicator of the present and future economic competitiveness of a nation.

As mentioned before, Pearson and Brew (2010) argued that research education, or training, as it is often termed, is attracting greater scrutiny as research itself is seen of greater importance in the global knowledge economy. In turn, concerns to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of research supervision are leading to the introduction and extension of programmes for supervisor development. Lucas (2007) reported that academics are required to shift from a situation of limited involvement with research to being significant contributors to research cultures within university departments due to radical transformations in the Higher education landscape.

Government funding formulas for universities has progressively become linked to postgraduate completion and publications (Lee, 2008). Therefore the primary aim of research institutions and higher institutions alike are to ensure the successful building of research capacity in both postgraduate students and supervisors (McLean-Anderson, 2004). Many institutions measure student, as well as supervisor success in terms of timely completion which they see as influenced by programme capacity issues, funding, faculty-student relationships, graduate policies, and most importantly supervisory input and capacity (Kiley,

2011; Wolf, 2010). Local research concluded that South Africa does not currently have enough highly educated people in most professions (Council on Higher Education, 2009; De La Rey, 2007). This shortage has been attributed to an insufficient amount of students coming through the education system successfully at postgraduate levels (Dell, 2010). The need for highly qualified human resource staff has been reiterated in the National Development Plan 2030 as an ongoing priority (Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012).

Students in post-graduation degree programmes across the world conduct research projects as a requirement to complete degrees (DeLa Ray, 2006). Atkins and Redley (1998) emphasised that a thesis or dissertation develops the ability to work independently and critically, the ability to develop arguments, and awareness and use of advanced methodological designs relative discipline of study. Thus such learning is argued to be facilitated in the context of research advisement or supervision.

The work of postgraduate students constitutes a vital component of the research efforts of a university and contributes significantly to the research profile of the institution. Delany (2009) argued that it is in the interest of universities to reliably improve the efficacy of postgraduate supervision since the quality of supervision has a demonstrable effect on postgraduate outcomes. In a beneficent cycle, high calibre students are attracted by a reputation for excellent supervision and a strong research profile (Delany, 2009).

Supervision is an important context in Higher education in which research training is facilitated. It is also a forum through which knowledge of methodology and attitudes, values and beliefs to research are transmitted from supervisor to student/supervisee, that is, intentionally and unintentionally (Murray & Cunningham, 2011). Moreover, graduates need to be sufficiently capacitated to be productive researchers who are contributing to knowledge production and/or reproducing through supervision. For example, Lucas (2007) and also

Itzhaky (2001) argued that high quality supervision facilitates students in fulfilling their potential which, in turn, enhances the research reputation of the institution. Development of students through capacitation involves the process of internalisation (Nye, 2003). In Psychology, internalisation is thought to involve the integration of attitudes, values, standards and the opinions of others into one's own identity or sense of self (Schoenwald, Sheidow, & Chapman, 2009). Internalisation can be said to occur when an individual accepts the content of the induced behaviour, the ideas and actions of which it is composed (Kelman, 1998).

### **1.2 Problem statement**

Effective supervision facilitates timely completion, competency in technical research skills and the development of an internal supervisor (Lee, 2008). Research on supervision has focused primarily on the research process (e.g. Drennam & Clarke, 2004) and obstacles to completion (e.g. Golde & Walker, 2006), as well as the capacitation of technical skills (e.g. Frantz & Smith, 2010) whilst Delany (2009) identified that the development of an internal supervisor during research supervision as having been under-researched. Thus the process and subjective experiences that influence the internalisation of the research supervisor needs to be explored in order to develop a more holistic understanding of the development of an internal supervisor. In addition, those universities that were previously disadvantaged because of the apartheid system in South Africa still struggle in developing more supervisors in the form of researchers (Council of Higher Education, 2009) that can impact the process of internalisation.

### **1.3 Aim of the study**

The aim of the present study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of students in relation to the internalisation process that may take place during supervised research.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the study**

1. To identify students' subjective experiences and perceptions of the following attributes of their research supervisors:
  - Knowledge of research methodology
  - Attitudes to research
  - Values adhered to in research
  - Beliefs about research
  - Art of mastery or competence in research
  
2. To identify the extent to which students report internalisation (that is, integrating attitudes, values, standards and the opinions) of their supervisors into their own identity as researchers with specific reference to:
  - Knowledge of research methodology
  - Attitudes to research
  - Values adhered to in research
  - Beliefs about research
  - Art of mastery or competence in research



#### **1.5 Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework chosen for this study is that of social constructionism.

This theoretical orientation draws its influences from a number of disciplines such as sociology and linguistics, making this a very multidisciplinary theory in nature (Young & Collin, 2004). Early social constructionists sought to divert from a positivist worldview and use different approaches such as symbolic interactionism to reveal the hidden world of everyday interaction and decision-making (Brown, 1995). Thus, this approach proposes a unique method for framing information based on the assumptions it makes about people's knowledge, ideas or thoughts and consequently meanings that are attached thereto (Visser, 2007). This epistemology holds certain assumptions about the knowledge we attain in the world in which we live, which will be explicated further (Holstein & Miller, 2006).

Social constructionism is based on the notion that our knowledge and common understanding of our world is constructed through numerous social interactions and

processes which guide social action; and ultimately sustains particular patterns of social action (Visser, 2007). Therefore, the contextual environment influences the meaning we give to our world, our ideas and attitudes. Social constructionism adopts a critical stance by remaining suspicious of the assumptions about how the world appears to be and by contesting the taken-for-granted knowledge that informs social behaviour (Nightingale, 2009). Our understanding of the phenomenon is framed within a particular historic-cultural milieu which is specific to the culture and time and social processes we are exposed to (Bujold, 2004).

Social constructionist approaches focus on the construction of social reality through discursive processes (Kiguwa, 2006). Elements typically conceived as personal individual characteristics are taken to be socially constructed and can therefore be revealed through everyday conversation. Language is considered a central aspect of this theory (Holstein & Miller, 2007) According to Kiguwa (2006) discourse both facilitates and endorses the emergence of certain relations made in everyday concepts. Thus the aims, research design and data collection procedures of the present research study conformed to this approach. The key features of the social constructionist framework are presented below.

The social constructionist approach assumes a critical stance towards knowledge which is often taken for granted (Young & Collins, 2004). The researcher is then compelled to be ever-suspicious of assuming 'common' knowledge. The labels or categories people tend to use in everyday life are neither truth nor reality. It is subjective to that particular individual. Elements or concepts often used within a context typically represent social constructs (Kiguwa, 2006).

Holstein & Miller (2007) stated that people's understandings are historically and culturally specific. It stands to reason that our perceptions are rooted in a context and this context is always culturally and historically influenced. We are all influenced by our environment or society. However, this does not imply that one should analyse the history and

culture of each individual. It merely emphasises the role and significance of historical and socio-cultural influences on the means by which the world is seen and lived in (Kiguwa, 2006).

Within this paradigm, knowledge is sustained by social processes (Rogers, 2000). People therefore construct their own knowledge of the world, but do so involving others. This theory is congruent with many social theories. Social interactions and especially language are of great considerations to social constructionists as language frames people's knowledge.

Social constructionism views knowledge and social action to have an interaction effect (Rogers, 2000). Therefore, the knowledge that individuals acquire will determine the nature of social action that they may adopt because all knowledge is constructed differently and so they act differently (Kiguwa, 2006). The realities that individuals construct for themselves allow them to attach understandings and meanings to various elements within that reality.

This theory is ideal in framing and explaining Masters students' understanding and meanings they attach to their experiences of conducting supervised research and the process of developing an internal supervisor. It offers a unique approach in seeking to attain reflexivity (which is crucial in any research study) by moving away from simply accepting anything as truth but rather questioning and understanding interpretation. In this paper, there is no assumption that internalisation takes place. Students' meanings can be understood by asking about their assessment and awareness of different values and attitudes towards research in their research supervisor and whether they are noticing those same attributes in themselves.

Social constructionism emphasises meaning attached to an individual's perspective of his or her reality. This theoretical orientation will allow for a deeper insight into their social realities. Within the present study, the researcher utilised these principles whilst conducting



and analysing the interviews transcriptions with an awareness of all the processes involved when working with people and their individual experiences.

This paradigm was appropriate for the present study since it aims to gain insight into the subjective experiences of the process of internalisation in the context of the research supervisory relationship. This relationship takes place in a social context and is a relationship that is influenced by a number of personal and contextual variables such as age, gender, race, country of origin and personalities (Schoenwald, Sheidow & Chapman, 2009).

### **1.6 Rationale of the study**

Bates et al. (2006) that governments and external agencies in developing countries have recognised the need for capacitation in research. Locally the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) reported that Historically Disadvantaged Universities (HDIs) respectively contributed only about 3% to research outputs and publications (DHET, 2014). Tedrow and Mabokela (2007) has reported an increase in research outputs in HDIs, but cautioned that the rate of increase is still considerably low. The intentional and concerted development of student researchers may enhance these figures thereby contributing towards growth of knowledge economy. In December 2014, the government announced R4 billion boosts for Historically Disadvantaged Universities (CHE, 2015). The Minister of Higher Education encouraged the development academic staff and research output ([www.dhet.gov.za](http://www.dhet.gov.za)). The assumption was that more capacitated staff will be able to transfer research skills and knowledge, and provide a model that students can identify with and internalise. The policies of student development and publication funding aims to encourage research productivity by rewarding quality research output at public higher education institutions (DHET, 2014). It hopes to enhance productivity by recognising the major types of research output produced by higher education institutions and further use appropriate proxies to determine the quality of such output. However, the pursuit and attainment of these goals

may be assisted through understanding how skills are transferred from supervisors to supervisees. Thus the exploration of students' experiences and perceptions of the internalisation process in supervised research can contribute meaningfully.

The Institutional Operating Plan (IOP), also known as the Strategic Framework for Universities, 2015-2019 identifies a focus on throughput and retention, as well as the overall student experience (Phillips, Goldman, Gasa, & Leon, 2014). Goal three of the institutional operating plan at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) aims to enhance significant research and Innovation, promote regional and international engagement and increase connectedness to the public sphere (UWC, 2013). Furthermore, it is of note that UWC as an institution recently was reclassified as a research-intensive university providing further impetus to the shift away from a primary teaching focus reflected in the movement from the 2010-2014 IOP to the 2015-2019 IOP (Universities South Africa, 2014). For postgraduate students, this places the focus on the attainment of research skills as an essential part of learning, where the emphasis is on helping students to build strong intellectual and practical connections between research and their own learning (Webb, Smith & Worsfold, 2011). This can be partly achieved by the transference of skills from supervisors to supervisees. In addition, the IOP aims to ensure that our higher education policy is evidence-based, informed by research of the highest quality.

## **1.7 Key concepts of the study**

The theoretical definitions of the major concepts used in this thesis are provided below;

1.7.1 Internalisation – internalisation of attributes (values, beliefs, attitudes etc.) in the current study was conceptualised as the process by which students progressively accept values of the research supervisor and integrate them to be their own. In general,

internalisation is a process whereby individuals/groups take someone's values to be their own (Grusec, 2002).

1.7.2 Council of Higher Education (CHE) – is an independent statutory body established in May 1998 in terms of the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997. The functions of the CHE include the following; to contribute to the development of higher education through intellectual engagement with key national and systematic issues, including producing publications and development of researchers, and to develop and implement a system of quality assurance for higher education, quality promotion and capacity development (Scott, Yeld & Hendry, 2007).

1.7.3 Higher Education in South Africa (HESA) – now known as *Universities South Africa* - is an association of the 26 public universities across all nine provinces in South Africa (HESA, 2014). Its function is to form a unified voice for the interests of its members, to form common policy for its members on matters of national importance, and to provide various services to its members (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014).

1.7.4 National Qualification framework (NQF) – The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act (Act 67 of 2008) mandates the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) to develop policies and criteria for assessment, after consultation with the Quality Councils (QCs). This framework improves the coherence of the higher education system and facilitates the articulation of qualifications, thereby enhancing the flexibility of the system and enabling students to move more efficiently over time from one programme to another as they pursue their academic or professional careers (CHE, 2009). The NQF sets boundaries, principles and guidelines which provide a vision, a philosophical base and an organisational structure for the construction of a qualifications system. Detailed development and

implementation is carried out within these boundaries. All education and training in South Africa fits within this framework (SAQA, 2015).

1.7.5 Postgraduate studies– According to the NQF, all courses obtained at Level 8 are considered post-graduation qualifications. These include Honours degrees, Post graduate certificates/diplomas, Masters Degrees and Doctoral degrees (Council of Higher Education, 2009).

1.7.6 Research Supervision - Research supervision in higher education is a professional developmental process of support provided to postgraduate students who are undertaking research projects as part of the requirements of a degree programme at any given institution (Olivier, 2007). In addition, it is a forum where supervisees review and reflect on their work in order to do it better. In this context, supervisors bring their actual work-practice to another supervisee or to a group of supervisees (Caroll, 2007).

1.7.7 Supervisor – Olivier (2007) stated that the supervisor provides guidance and assistance to students so that they may carry out their own research. A supervisor must be well versed in the topic under study and generally is expected to hold a degree at one level higher than what the student is registered for e.g. a Masters student must be supervised by someone with a Doctorate degree.

## **1.8 Structure of thesis**

The thesis will be presented in five chapters namely; Introduction, Literature review, Method, Findings and discussion, and lastly Conclusion.

### 1.8.1 Chapter One - Introduction

This chapter gives a background of the study by outlining some of the main aspects of Higher Education in South Africa and the way it is moving towards contributing to the economy. The chapter also includes the problem statement, aim and objectives of the study.

The theoretical framework of Social constructionism was also introduced in this section and lastly the rationale of the study. Lastly, key concepts of the study were described briefly.

### 1.8.2 Chapter Two – Literature Review

This chapter presents a review the body of literature relevant to the topic of this research study. Therefore, it will consider empirical studies on research capacitation in particular the process of internalisation in supervision. The focused review will attempt to provide an academic rationale for the study by highlighting the gaps in the literature.

### 1.8.3 Chapter Three – Method

The method implemented in the study will be described in this chapter. The research design, participant selection, procedure, data collection and analysis, reflexivity and very importantly, the ethics guidelines followed in the execution of the study will be reported on. The aim of this chapter is to provide a process account of the methodological decisions made and to report on the rigour with which those decisions have been executed.

### 1.8.4 Chapter Four – Integrated results and discussion

This chapter presents integrated results and discussion in which the findings of the study are reported relative to the literature reviewed and the methodology employed. The themes derived from thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach will be presented with illustrative quotes. Each theme is also substantiated with the literature reviewed, as well as the social constructionist framework.

### 1.8.5 Chapter Five – Conclusion

The last chapter of the study offers an executive summary of the study in relation to the stated aims and objectives. The chapter also summarizes the limitations acknowledged, as well as recommendations made for future research and the significance of the study.

# CHAPTER TWO

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter attempts to contextualise the present study against the background of the body of literature on research capacitation. The body of literature on research capacitation has included several foci including the higher education landscape and learning outcomes for higher degrees (e.g. McCallin & Navar, 2011; ESRC, 2005); capacity issues in staff (e.g. Frantz & Smith, 2010); and capacity issues in students (e.g. Mahtani, 2004; Subanthore, 2011); supervision models (e.g. Sterner, 2009); the supervisory relationship (e.g. Manathunga, 2005; Grant, 2003); supervisor-supervisee matching techniques (e.g. Cheon, Blumer, Shih, Murphy, & Sato, 2009), as well as recommendations and lessons learnt from clinical supervision (e.g. Reynolds & Riviera, 2012; Schwartz-Mette, 2009). A comprehensive review of the broader body of literature is beyond the scope of this thesis and thus a focused review is provided here that focuses on the internalisation process during research supervision at a post-graduation level.

### 2.2 Higher education in South Africa

Similar to other countries, institutions of higher education in South Africa have witnessed dramatic changes as academic staff found themselves in institutions with new expectations from the early 1990s, (Fourie, 1999; Johnston & McCormack, 1997). The most significant and stressful change was a pressure to perform in research (Ramsden & Moses, 1992). These international developments also had an impact on Higher Education in South Africa in its transition from Apartheid to an equal and democratic society (Engelbrecht, 2012). The key policy initiatives, over the past two decades, such as the Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act 101 of 1997) (DoE, 2000) and the National Plan for Higher Education (DoE, 2000) emphasised the key role of research in affirming the production, acquisition and application of knowledge towards national growth, competitiveness and innovation (Buijnath,

Christiansen & Ogude, 2007). The post-apartheid government revived a culture of research in universities as a basic minimum requirement for claiming to be sites of knowledge generation and for them to be comparable with more research-intensive institutions in other parts of the world (Zezeza, Zezeza & Olukoshi, 2004).

Two decades ago, higher education sectors undertook reforms which impacted on research of which the first was the inclusion of incentivized funding schemes (Johnston & McCormack, 1997). This has placed mounting pressure on higher education institutions to enhance their research output as funding has been linked to research performance (Geuna & Martin, 2003). This in turn significantly impacted on many aspects of the academic lives of faculty members (Bath & Smith, 2004). The Higher education sector has been identified in the National Development Plan (2030) as in need of revision or attention (HESA, 2014). Currently, the country has 26 public universities of which 6 are defined as historically disadvantaged. The predominantly poor black student tertiary institutions, which include universities of Fort Hare, Zululand, Venda, Limpopo, Western Cape and Walter Sisulu are considered historically disadvantaged (Jansen & Sayed, 2001) This is because the apartheid government treated them differently than white universities. The far-reaching impact of this differential treatment is evident to this day where these institutions battle to compete equitably with historically white universities, such as University of Cape Town and Wits University (Cross, 2004). There is a backlog of developments in historically disadvantaged universities, such as a lower number of academic staff with PhDs, the number of post-graduation students, as well as general retention and throughput issues (Letseka & Maile, 2008). The Ministry of higher education pointed out that funding of historically disadvantaged institutions remains their priority (Higher Education South Africa, 2014). The funding of universities has been on an upward trend, from R11 billion in 2006 to R26 billion in 2013 of which most of this funding proportionally goes to HDIs ( (Presidency, 2011). In

addition, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February 2016, the Finance Minister allocated R93 billion to Higher Education when he announced the budget (Treasury, 2016).

### **2.3 National qualifications framework**

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in South Africa is a comprehensive system approved by the Minister of Higher Education and Training for the classification, registration, publication and articulation of quality-assured national qualifications and part-qualifications ([www.saqa.org.za](http://www.saqa.org.za)). This framework improves the coherence of the higher education system and facilitates the articulation of qualifications (CHE, 2009). The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act 67 of 2008 mandates the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) to develop policy and criteria, after consultation with the Quality Councils (QCs), for assessment (Gazette, 2009). The NQF Act of 2008 articulates the purposes and characteristics of degree programmes.

The primary purposes of a Masters Degree are to educate and train researchers who can contribute to the development of knowledge at an advanced level, or prepare graduates for advanced and specialised professional employment (SAQA, 2013). According to the National Qualifications Framework, the credit rating system rates 10 notional hours as equivalent to one credit thereby a Masters degree consists of at least 1200 notional hours and must have a significant research component (DoE, 2007). A Masters Degree may be earned in two ways: (1) by completing a single advanced research project culminating in the production and acceptance of a thesis or dissertation, or (2) by successfully completing a course work programme requiring a high level of theoretical engagement and intellectual independence and a research project culminating in the acceptance of a dissertation (CHE, 2009). In the latter case, a minimum of 60 credits, that is, equivalent to at least 600 notional hours at level 9 must be devoted to conducting and reporting research (DoE, 2007).



Masters graduates must be able to deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements using data and information at their disposal and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences, demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level, and continue to advance their knowledge, understanding and skills (Government Gazette, 2012). In addition, Masters degree completion meets the minimum entry requirement for admission to a cognate Doctoral Degree, usually in the area of specialisation of the Masters degree.

#### **2.4 National Development Plan**

The National Development Plan 2030 acknowledges the importance of higher education as the major driver of the information/knowledge system, linking it with economic development (NPC, 2012). According to the NDP, higher education is much more than an instrument for economic development, and is also important for good citizenship and enriching and diversifying life (Cloete, 2014). Good-quality science and technology education provided by universities plays a vital role in innovation and development, and is crucial for development in South Africa. Similarly, the humanities programmes offered by universities are important for enabling understanding of some of the challenges the country faces, such as the need for transformation, service delivery, education and innovation, and issues of violence, corruption, the gap between rich and poor, gender and race (ASSAf, 2011).

The vision for higher education for 2030, as defined by the National Development Plan 2030 (NPC 2012), states that; each university will have a clear mission that sets out its unique contribution towards knowledge production and national development, universities will be efficient institutions, characterised by increased knowledge productivity units, throughput rates and graduation and participation rates. For example, 75% of university staff

is targeted to hold PhDs by 2030. The PhD graduates, either as staff or post-doctoral fellows, will be the dominant drivers of new knowledge production within the higher education and science innovation systems, university system will be diverse and differentiated, based on the strengths and areas of specialisation of each university (CHE, 2009).

Research outputs in terms of research publications have increased markedly since 1994, but the number of researchers has not increased proportionally (Nienabar, 2011). A possible reason for this is that the funding has encouraged greater research productivity per researcher, but there are insufficient postgraduates being produced to replenish the supply of researchers in the population (NPC, 2012). Hence, the building of research capacity has been identified as one of the principal aims of research institutes and institutions of higher learning worldwide (e.g. ESRC, 2005).

## **2.5 Research supervision**

Research has identified supervision as a significant contributor to the overall success of the postgraduate candidate (Sayed, Kruss & Badad, 1998; Armstrong, 2004; Armitage, 2006; Pearson & Brew, 2010). Abiddin, Ishmail and Ishmail (2011) asserted that the research component in particular is a major problem area as the supervisor becomes their primary point of contact during the research process. A quality supervisory relationship is connected to supervisor's interest in the thesis topic (Hockey, 1996; Wadesango & Machingambi, 2011; Ghani & Said, 2014). Training in supervision is becoming an increasingly important component of psychology programmes and subjective experiences of supervision have been documented and identified as a problem area (Pillay & Kritzinger, 2007). Good supervision should be an integral component of quality research governance (Thompson *et al.* 2005). Fazackery (2005) identified poor communication skills, weak postgraduate students and inadequate supervision as some of the factors that influence research supervision. The strong personal and interpersonal aspects of research supervision

have also been found to require special attention (Pearson & Brew, 2010). Research supervision is an important aspect of not only the development of the student researcher, but of academic staff and research activity in general (Pearson & Kayrooz, 2004). Knowledge of relevant research and skills are required to assist students in developing research competencies (Deucher, 2008; Brown & Wisker, 2012; Haesler, 2003). Good supervisory practices help students fulfil their potential and contribute to the research profile of the institution. The following passages in this section discuss major components of research supervision.

2.5.1 Supervisor-supervisee relationships - At many universities, the terms of a supervisory relationship are left almost entirely to the discretion of individual research students (supervisees) and supervisors. While this approach usually works well, it occasionally proves unsatisfactory (Mistry & Latoo, 2009). Findings from more recent studies are that the quality of the supervisory relationship directly impacts a student's potential to succeed to a large extent (Lategan, 2009; Kiguwa & Langa, 2009; Kiley, 2011; Rochford, 2003). Gurr (2001) examined postgraduate student satisfaction and found that a quarter of the group was not satisfied with their experience of conducting research for degree purposes and 31% of this group attributed their dissatisfaction directly to the supervisory relationship. A lack of clarity between student and supervisor with regard to expectations and responsibilities can adversely affect progress towards the completion of the degree (Abiddin, Hassan & Ahmad, 2009). Their research further showed that students expect their supervisors to have the knowledge and ability to supervise in a particular area of research, but also want them to be reasonable, serious, approachable and supportive of their work in good times and bad (Abiddin, Hassan & Ahmad, 2009).

The subjective experiences of thesis supervision have been documented and identified as a problem area (Pillay & Kritzing, 2007). Students often deregister or complete without feeling confident about their ability to conduct research independently or to supervise

research (Sterner, 2009). Holdaway (1997) reported that in the Canadian higher education sector, the quality of research supervision was found to be inconsistent where one of the main concerns was the lack of contact between the student and supervisor. An aspect identified as a means of providing quality supervision was the importance of supervisors being actively engaged in research.

The communication and ways of imparting knowledge, values of research and attitude to students is a key to successful research output (Ives & Rowley, 2005). There is much sensitive work written about how to supervise doctoral students which has identified (ever increasing) lists of tasks for the supervisor to undertake and some suggestions for anticipating and handling problems (Delamont et al, 2002). This has identified the powerful impact of the supervisor's previous experience as a PhD student on how they supervise now (Lee, 2008). Pillay and Kritzinger (2007) reported that just above a third of practicing psychologists who have been working for between 5 to 10 years felt that their Masters thesis supervision was inadequate in helping them meet the academic demands of thesis writing. Just over a 25% of participants identified supervision issues as a determining factor in the non-completion of their thesis (Pillay & Kritzinger, 2007).

2.5.2 Feedback in research supervision - Quality of feedback received from the supervisor has been linked to the overall success in postgraduate research, as well as timely thesis completion (Martin, Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2012; Morton, Storch & Thompson, 2014; Mustafa, Noraziah & Majid, 2014). Supervisor and supervisee may hold different understandings as to what constitutes effective and efficient feedback. Martin, Bitchener and Basturkmen (2012) argue that in order for feedback to be of value to the student, it is important to document their views on what they consider to be effective feedback. Feedback that promotes autonomy is valued amongst postgraduate students. It is important that the work remains their own and that feedback allows for reflection and a further development of

their ideas (Whitelock, 2010, Martin, Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2012; Lee, 2008). Indirect questions in feedback assist student in reassessing their ideas and finding their own answers. Some appreciate direct feedback, feedback that is specific regarding what to change or what to remove (Andrea, 2012; Mojsoska-Blazevski, 2012). Some find unclear feedback or feedback with too many indirect questions to be confusing and unclear. It is helpful when errors are highlighted and explained. However, too much direct feedback removed their freedom to incorporate their own ideas in writing (Whitelock, 2010, Martin, Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2012; Lee, 2007; Lee, 2008; Mojsoska-Blazevski, 2012).

Students described that feedback that focussed too much on language or grammar was found to be less helpful as content and organisation is seen as more important. Some argue that language is critical and appreciated. Wadensango and Machingambi, (2011) reported that too much negative feedback with little or no positive and motivating comments presented great challenges in thesis writing. Similarly, Brown and Wisker (2012) asserted that good work should be acknowledged and constructive criticism to be provided in feedback. Constructive feedback is therefore found to be a balance of direct and indirect responses as well as language and content (Brown & Wisker, 2012). Likewise Wadensango and Machingambi, (2011) reported that students found feedback on language and grammar at the start as more useful as they are then able to improve along the way. Steinmetz and Mussi (2012) emphasized that students would like feedback to challenge their thinking and to be able to discuss these challenges verbally. Once feedback is received, a follow-up meeting is needed to discuss errors and possible changes.

2.5.3 The supervision process - Research supervision can be regarded as a relational and knowledge process, which takes place in the encounter between supervisee and supervisor (Franke, 2002). Supervisors play a critical role in the postgraduate experience, in the success and achieving faster progression and lower attrition rates among students (Golde

& Walker, 2006; Lee, 2008; Sadlak, 2004). Good-quality supervision creates positive experiences of research (Wisker, Robinson, & Shacham, 2007). This has been associated with the development of personal and professional capabilities such as problem-solving, the ability to write, the ability to analyse, and the ability to plan and develop work (Conrad, Haworth, & Millar 1993; Orna & Stevens 1995; Atkins & Redley 1998; Demb & Funk 1999). These capabilities are directly and indirectly passed on to the supervisee. Lee (2008) reminds us that the quality of supervision is affected by a supervisor's own experience of supervising, and how they themselves were supervised when they were postgraduate students amongst other factors and thus introducing subjectivity and internalisation of the research supervisor's values, attitudes, beliefs etc.

Research on postgraduate training in Psychology has focused largely on the supervision working alliance (Ismail, Abiddin, & Hassan, 2011; Dickson, Moberly, Marshall, & Reilly, 2011; Lee, 2008; Manathunga, 2005; Schroeder, Andrews, & Hindes, 2009); models of clinical training (Huey & Britton, 2002; Pachana, Sofronoff, Scott, & Helmes, 2011; Stoltenberg & Pace, 2007); clinical competence (Hatcher & Lassiter, 2007; Kaslow, 2004; Rubin et al., 2007); and obstacles to that include factors such as poor socialisation into the programme, insufficient academic preparation, approaches to research supervision, late completion of the dissertation, lack of motivation, personal problems, and inadequate mechanisms of support (e.g. Cahill 1999; Golde, 2000; Hoffman & Julie, 2012; Lee, 2008; Pillay & Kritzinger, 2007; Suhre, Jansen, & Harskamp, 2007; Wright, 2003).

A substantial part of the literature has focused on clinical supervision, with a particular emphasis on the working relationship between students and supervisors. These findings indicate that the quality of the relationship, perceived or real, was a significant predictor of success and perceptions of the process as stressful (Wadesango & Machingambi, 2011; Smith, 2004). This research has also examined the impact of personality or

psychological factors such as self-esteem, locus of control, on the working alliance between students and supervisors.

2.5.4 Influences on research supervision - The body of literature have also examined the impact of personality or psychological factors such as self-esteem, locus of control, on the working alliance between students and supervisors. Elmhodt (2003) reports that postgraduate students emphasise characteristics related to supervision that contributes to them completing their theses more quickly such as, close cooperation between supervisor and supervisee, regular meetings, and collaborative article writing. However, Franke and Arvidsson (2011) bid us to note that the experiences of supervisees and supervisors differ widely depending on what stage they are at in their research as regards organisation and thesis work, and thus related supervision. In short, an active reflection on the role and intentional behaviour of the supervisor emerges as an important aspect (Crespi & Dube, 2005).

Personality clashes between supervisor and student have also been shown to impact the quality of the supervisory relationship due to difference of ideas of what research entails (Ahern & Manathunga, 2004; Abiddin & Ishmail, 2011; Ngozi & Kayode, 2013).

Incompatible personalities have been found to create conflict between supervisor and student thereby having a negative impact on communication (Brown & Wisker, 2012; Abiddin, Ishmail & Ishmail, 2011). Students opt to switch supervisors or completely abandon studies due specifically to clashes in personality.

Severinsson (2015) reported that students placed high expectations on their academic supervisors. Specifically they wanted to have an active part in the research process and wished that the supervisor would clearly articulate requirements and what was expected of them. Yeoh and Doan (2012) argued that it is imperative for supervisors to be supportive and to adapt to the unique needs of the student. Supervisors should display friendliness, be

approachable and flexible, as well knowledgeable and provide support in order to promote better overall success in student completion (Tahir, Ghani, Atek & Manaf, 2012; Lessing & Lessing, 2004; Graham & Gadbois, 2013). Good listening skills, being responsive to student's unique needs and good interaction between supervisor and student was also identified as crucial in providing quality relationships (Yeoh & Doan, 2012). Effective supervisors should display academic, as well as personal support as students often become overwhelmed and discouraged by their work.

Communication difficulties, control and engagement, academic bullying, lack of trust and desertion were factors found to influence supervision at Doctoral level (Lee, 2008). The relationship between students and supervisors is vital to successful PhD completion, and this study has provided some of the experiences students share with each other in an online postgraduate discussion forum (Dell, 2010). The online discussion forum of this study provided an insight into students' perspectives of supervision, but there was limited analysis as the forum was asynchronous. Further research incorporating synchronous data collection methods would be helpful to examine students' experiences in greater detail. This study shows how an online postgraduate forum can be used as a source of data to gain an insight into PhD students' perspectives of supervision (Yarwood-Ross & Haugh, 2014).

The research supervisory relationship, particularly from the perspective of the student, has been the subject of recent research (e.g. Wilson et al., 2009; Baum, 2011; Davidson, 2011), but perhaps what is surprising is the lack of studies exploring what takes place within supervision (Bogo, 2006; Holden et al., 2011). It is impossible to be a competent supervisor if one does not have the ability to address issues of diversity in the supervisory relationship and the supervisee's process of conducting research for higher degree purposes (Tsong & Goodyear, 2014). Culture incorporates the influences of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, class, and so forth on our thoughts, assumptions, and behaviours, so it is



possible to conceptualize all supervision as multicultural (Killian, 2001). It is essential then, to consider the socio-cultural–political identities of the supervisory dyad that includes the supervisee and the supervisor.

The quality of supervisory working alliance, both clinical and research has been identified as a barrier to students' achievement of required programme outcomes (Kagee & O'Donovan, 2011). Influential factors that can lead to poor supervisory working alliance include expectations of students not being met, the presence of insecure attachment styles, compulsive self-reliance, inadequate cultural responsiveness and competence, and insufficient communication with supervisor (Ismail et al., 2011; Dickson et al., 2011; Manathunga, 2005; Schroeder, et al., 2009).

Comparative descriptive studies between South Korea and the United States, there were differences, as well as similarities in the characteristics of counselling and clinical supervision which would affect the process of clinical supervision across the two countries (Joo, 2009). These findings suggest that clinical supervision, including the factors that make up and influence the process of supervision is influenced by cultural factors and values. Kleintjes & Swartz (2008) showed that seven clinical psychologists who had trained or were currently in training at a South African university were interviewed concerning their experiences of training which involves different forms of supervision. Issues associated with race were salient to all respondents during training, though to differing degrees. Responses were analysed according to the model of Friedman and Kaslow (1986) which provides a developmental perspective on the functions of supervision during clinical training. The research concluded that awareness of the sensitivity to racial issues is essential in supervisors in the local context, and the issues will need continued exploration in the light of changing South African circumstances. Supervision is central in the training of the future psychologists because the outcome of the supervisory process will eventually be an internalisation of the

supervisor's functioning (Kelman, 1998). These studies show some lessons learnt on clinical supervision and they must also be tested out in research supervision. In addition, research studies were conducted in Australia and other European countries and their results would also reflect specific cultural values. Thus supervision practices can take on cultural differences and research findings differ in every context.

2.5.5 Research capacitation through supervised research - Research indicated that the academic environment is unique and invigorating, but very few practitioners receive explicit preparation for the faculty role (Crist 1999; Frantz & Smith, 2010). The growing literature has indicated that new or early career academics, also defined as those within the first five years of academia, constitute the most vulnerable group in the science system and are therefore the first to suffer from stress (Laudel & Gläser, 2008; McArthur-Rouse, 2008). Frantz et al. (2010) highlighted that finding a balance between the three main areas of performance for academics, teaching, research and administration can be a major source of stress. However, the acquisition of the necessary skills to become productive researchers or to engage independently in research in a sustained manner is disproportionately challenging for neophyte academics (Laudel & Gläser, 2008; Geber, 2009; Hemmings & Kay, 2010). As mentioned before, literature has indicated that early career academics lack the necessary skills needed to become productive researchers or to engage independently in research in a sustained manner (Laudel & Gläser, 2008; Geber, 2009; Hemmings & Kay, 2010).

McArthur-Rouse (2008) provided empirical support for the notion that the majority of new academics recruited to departments are experienced practitioners within their field but may have limited experience in education and conducting research. Smith and Boyd (2012) identified that the traditional route to academic roles are via doctoral studies, however, the majority of lecturers in the health professions take up academic roles having developed

considerable clinical professional expertise. Frantz and Smith (2010) further identified that clinicians who are transitioning into academic seldom will have direct experience of research activity beyond obtaining their qualifications or practicing degrees. Most health professions have a Bachelors as a practising degree which means that even fewer staff might have Masters or Doctoral qualifications (Frantz & Smith, 2010; Smith & Boyd, 2012).

## **2.6 Internalisation process**

Internalisation is the process of consolidating and embedding one's own beliefs, attitudes, and values when it comes to moral behaviour (Grusec, 2002; Lee, 2008).

Internalization is a proactive process through which people transform regulation by external contingencies into regulation by internal processes. Internalisation of norms takes place through socialization and also might take place following religious conversion, or in the process of the more general moral conversion of the person (Kelman, 1998). Kelman (1998) further argued that internalisation can be said to occur when an individual accepts the content of the induced behaviour, the ideas and actions of which it is composed. In Psychology, internalisation involves the integration of attitudes, values, standards and the opinions of others into one's own identity or sense of self (Kiley, 2011). One of the lessons learnt from clinical supervision is that internalisation is a legitimate process that take place (e.g Kochanska, 2002; Stice, Mazotti, Weibel, & Agras, 2000; Yamamiya, Cash, Melnyk, & Posavic, 2005). This process can also be applied in research supervision since the conditions of transference are almost the same as in clinical supervision (Kiley, 2011).

2.6.1 Conceptualisation of Internalisation. The process of internalisation includes concepts borrowed primarily from, but not limited to, psychodynamic theory, cognitive theory, learning theory and systems theory. Below is a brief exposition of the core theoretical tenets underpinning internalization.

a) Psychodynamic theory - This theory argues that early experiences influence current functioning as encapsulated in the concept of psychic determinism (St. Clair, 2004). For example, people review emotions, thoughts, early-life experiences, and beliefs to gain insight into their lives, their present-day problems and to evaluate the patterns they have developed over time. This notion of psychic determination essentially means that students have been involved in a number of personal or professional relationships before they enrolled into Masters Degree programmes and bring their previous experiences and expectations to the supervisory relationship (Berzoff, Flanagan, & Hertz, 2008). Recognising recurring patterns helps people see the ways in which they avoid distress as a method of coping so that they can take steps to change those patterns. Central to psychodynamic theory is that it can demonstrate the manner in which the people interact with others (Colarusso & Nemiroff, 2013).

Carry over from past relationships into current relationships is referred to as transference that can also help illuminate the ways in which a person responds in relationships today as a function of early-life relationships (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983). This intimate look at interpersonal relationships can help a person to see his or her part in relationship patterns and empower him or her to transform that dynamic. It can also assist in identifying appropriate responses to relationships that might evoke negative or overly positive transferences. Students thus theoretically can enter supervisory relationships and relate to the supervisor from a transference point of reference rather than in the here-and-now (St. Claire, 2004). Positive transferences are thought to be conducive to establishing a good working alliance, but overly positive or negative transferences can adversely impact the quality of the supervisory relationship and by extension the successful completion of the research (Geller, 2013).

Quintana & Meara (2009) conducted a study using Structural Analysis of Social Behaviour to chart the internalization of the therapeutic relationships of 48 clients in short-term psychotherapy at two university counselling centres. After initial and final sessions, clients reported their perceptions of counsellors' actions and attitudes toward them, their own actions and attitudes toward counsellors, and their intrapsychic dispositions. Results suggested clients internalised dispositions that they perceived counsellors held toward them. Furthermore, results indicated that clients perceived interpersonal complementarity at the beginning, but that the degree of interpersonal complementarity did not increase over time. In contrast, clients who perceived a lack of interpersonal–intrapsychic complementarity early in therapy but perceived an increase in this complementarity at the end of therapy (Quintana & Meara, 2009). This process has also been documented in research on clinical supervision where students reported that they noted increased complementarity with their supervisors on certain attributes. For example, Garmston, Linder and Whitaker (1993) reported that clinical supervision over a 3-year time frame resulted in positive long term effects on leadership and communication skills, the desire for self-development, self-knowledge and similar research. Participants reported that they found themselves drawing closer together in their thinking and teaching styles as the process of clinical supervision continued. They also were able to develop an internal supervisor that enabled them to assess their own work based on attributes and thinking processed that they have taken on board from their supervisors. Thus it is theorized that students in research could move through an internalization process such that would reflect increased complementarity at the end of the supervisory process.

2.6.2 Cognitive theory – In this theory the major principles are that; there is emphasis on knowing, rather than stimulus-response bonds (Bandura, 1986). The major emphasis is on mental events and on mental structure or organisation in which an individual's knowledge is organised and new stimuli are interpreted in light of this knowledge (Meyer, Moore, &

Viljoen, 2003). The theory defines a view of the individual as being active, constructive, and planning, rather than as being the passive recipient of environmental stimulation (Schunk & Meece, 2012).

Borst, Nilboer, and Taatgen (2014) have demonstrated that concepts are easily transformed through participation in a task. In this way supervision provides several opportunities for participating in tasks with a supervisor that can facilitate cognitive restructuring and mental organization for the student. As the student reorganizes material into their mental structures, they are able to respond to the stimuli presented in the course of the research process in different ways that could begin to approximate the supervisor's behaviour, attitudes and thinking patterns.

2.6.3 Learning theory. Learning theory involves theoretical tenets such as readiness to learn, exercise, effect, primacy, intensity, freedom and requirement of the learning process (Gordon, 2003). Almost all of these principles are involved during research supervision. Internalisation is also often associated with learning and making use of what has been learned from then on (Cook et al, 2008; Fleming & Steen, 2004). Research supervision at post-graduation level encompasses most of these characteristics that constitute a learning process that might results in internalization. The notion of internalization therefore also finds currency in applications in education, learning, and training, and in business and management thinking (Eva, 2005). Moreover, internalisation may therefore take place and can be useful in the development of new or upcoming researchers.

2.6.4 Systems theory - Systems theory is the interdisciplinary study of systems in general, with the goal of discovering patterns and elucidating principles that can be discerned from, and applied to, all types of systems at all nesting levels in all fields of research (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). A central topic of systems theory is self-regulating systems, that is,

systems self-correcting through feedback (Brown & Campione, 1996). In this instance, students from part of a subgroup and a larger system. They receive feedback from supervisors, ethics committees, departmental structures and also examiners who all represent various subsystems. Supervisees adjust and readjust to base on this feedback provided by various subsystems and facilitated or moderated by the supervisor(s). The boundaries around these subsystems need to be permeable to allow the flow of feedback and also transition. Thus students can learn and graduate and then also move into other subsystems such as becoming supervisors themselves. Supervisors on the other hand also act as examiners, serve on committees and these various roles all bring valuable perspectives that feed into the dyadic relationship between students and supervisors.

## **2.7 Gaps in the literature**

The importance of the supervisory relationship to the research process is evident and potentially major problems are occurring within these relationships. The supervisory relationship is an area in which much research has been conducted. However, many of the existing studies have examined clinical supervision in clinical settings and in fieldwork (Everett et al., 2011; Myers et al., 2012; Reynolds & Riviera, 2012; Schwartze-Mette, 2009; Swaggler & Ellis, 2003; Veilleux et al., 2012). Subramanian, Anderson, Morgaine and Thompson (2012) reported that significantly less research has been conducted in the area of research supervision, especially the component of Masters and Doctoral programmes in any field. Thus the challenges associated with research supervision require more attention and remain a focus of further research (Armstrong, Allison & Hayes, 2004; Subramanian et al., 2012).

The drawbacks of the existing body of literature on research capacitation in postgraduate students identify that the supervisory relationship is a dynamic relationship in which all psychological constructs are thought to be operant (Dickson, Moberly, Marshall &

Reilly, 2011; Smith, 2004). The literature has been extended by exploring the impact of specific demographic or personality variables such as self-esteem, network orientation etc. with the results largely supporting the primary notion that the quality of the relationship between student and supervisor is impacted by such psychological variables (Manathunga, 2005; Nilsson, 2008; Shroeder, Andrews & Hindes, 2009). Despite this growing focus and exploration, psychological processes found to be important in clinical supervision have not been explored sufficiently in research supervision. More recently, there have been attempts to explore processes like attachment styles and the working alliance between research supervisors and supervisees (Stern, 2009). A continued recommendation from the body of literature is that such processes should be explored further (e.g Smith, 2004; Pillay & Kritzinger, 2007). A process that has been found to be more prominent in clinical supervision was internalization (Kiley, 2011). Core findings reflect that the internalisation in educational processes entails the passing of values, beliefs and attitudes to trainee professionals in any field. The literature also underscored that there are cultural and contextual patterns to all supervision processes including internalisation (Dittmar & Howard, 2004; Carr, 2003). Thus the present study aimed to obtain a retrospective view of students' experiences of conducting supervised research at a Masters level and to determine whether the internalisation process took place during research supervision as well.

Studies investigating supervision and the internalisation process have been conducted using quantitative methods (eg Kelman, 1998; Eva, 2005) and those that have conducted qualitative studies mainly focused on the supervision at Doctoral level (e.g Lee, 2008), and have rarely attempted to discover experiences from the perspective of students in their own words. The focus was more on supervisors. Almost all of these studies were conducted in developed countries with long established academic and research-based traditions such as Australia and the United States of America (e.g Vygotsky, Hanfmann, & Vakar, 2012;



Chirkov & Willness, 2005; Lee, 2008; Eva, 2005). Thus further exploration and study into these processes in developing countries becomes an important gap in the literature.

Historically Disadvantaged Institutions in South Africa present different contexts compared to international studies that the particular impacts of the Apartheid regime. Rapid changes in the landscape of higher education and more recent challenges experienced at universities increase the relative importance of further research at this level exponentially. In particular, research into any aspects of processes that might explain or provide solutions to the discrepancy between enrolment figures and graduation figures at a postgraduate level, as well as appropriate capacitation of graduates are foci for further research. Therefore, a gap in the literature exists to explore supervision in a contextualised manner that identifies how the values, process and skills of research were passed onto postgraduate students from supervisors.



# CHAPTER THREE

## METHOD

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the elements of the research methodology employed relative to the aim and objectives of the present study. The chapter aims to report on the methodological decisions taken by the researcher and the motivations underpinning those decisions. The chapter further attempts to demonstrate the methodological rigour applied and the methodological coherence achieved between the various elements of the study against the backdrop of the stated social constructionist theoretical framework.

### 3.2 Aim of the study

The aim of this present study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of students in relation to the internalisation of the supervisor that may take place during research supervision.

### 3.3 Objectives of the study

1. To identify students' subjective experiences and perceptions of their research supervisors in terms of:

- Knowledge of research methodology
- Attitudes to research
- Values adhered to in research
- Beliefs about research
- Art of mastery or competence in research

2. To identify the extent to which students report integrating attitudes, values, standards and the opinions (that is, internalisation) of their supervisors into their own identity as researchers with specific reference to:

- Knowledge of research methodology
- Attitudes to research
- Values adhered to in research
- Beliefs about research
- Art of mastery or competence in research

### 3.4 Research setting

The research setting for the present study was a Psychology department at a Historically Disadvantaged University in the Western Cape. In the past, South Africa used education as a tool for discrimination (Universities South Africa, 2013). This practice was also visible in higher learning institutions (CHE, 2009). The establishment and existence of some institutions of higher learning was therefore politically motivated to cater for Black students from disadvantaged communities and poor family backgrounds (Mabuza, 2001). Many of these institutions were not resourced as well as universities designated for White students resulting in a racialized and socio-economic pattern to resource allocation at institution of Higher learning. The Council of Higher Education (2009) refers to Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs) as a label to designate those institutions originally classified as for the black community during the Apartheid era. The African National Congress (ANC) in 1992 found that the sciences and technology system inherited from decades of apartheid was internationally isolated, fragmented, uncoordinated and not in the interest of South Africa (Oancea, Engelbrecht, & Hoffman, 2009). As a result, the post-apartheid government revived a culture of research in universities as a basic minimum requirement for claiming to be sites of knowledge generation and for them to be comparable with more research-intensive institutions in other parts of the world (Zezeza, Zezeza, & Olukoshi, 2004).

The identified institution in the present study has more recently been classified as a research –intensive institution. Thus there is a particular emphasis on growing the number of postgraduate numbers. as well as producing competent researchers (Samuel, 2010). The present study specifically focused on Masters Students in the Department of Psychology at the above mentioned institution. Three Masters Degree courses are offered in the department of which two include structured course work and the third is by full thesis. The two structured courses include a mini thesis contributing 50% of the total weight and lead to registration as

either Clinical or Research Psychologists, that is, with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) ([www.uwc.ac.za/psychology](http://www.uwc.ac.za/psychology)).

### **3.5 Participants and sampling**

Eligible participants were recent graduates who completed Masters studies in Psychology between 2012 and 2014 at the identified institution. The annual intake for the department of psychology in the three Masters programmes offered for that period ranged from 15-25 students per year and a total of 37 students graduated within the 2012 to 2014 period (personal communication, Registrar, October, 2015). The online library of the institution shows that 25 thesis papers have been submitted by Masters Students from the Psychology Department between 2012 and 2014.<sup>1</sup> Thus the sampling frame consisted of the 37 graduates during the stated period.

Purposive sampling was used in this study because it increased transferability of the study results and maximised the range of information that can be obtained about the object of study (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Purposive sampling methods can be used to select cases based on the specific criteria (Babbie & Mouton, 2007). Purposive sampling requires selecting participants who are knowledgeable about the issue in question, because of their sheer involvement in and experience of the situation. Creswell(2003) states that purposive sampling refers to selection of participants that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question, they must be willing to reflect on and share their knowledge. In this case, graduates would be able to reflect on their entire process of conducting supervised research. In an attempt to balance the data produced from the study, potential participants were contacted through various supervisors in the department. Potential participants were also identified according to the programmes they were enrolled in, that is, Clinical Psychology, Research Psychology and Full thesis masters. Although twenty-five

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<sup>1</sup> Students who graduated in September will not necessarily appear on the library list

participants from various supervisors were targeted, the study managed to recruit eleven former students. Recruitment of participants continued until saturation was reached in the analysis in keeping with data collection.

The final sample consisted of 11 participants:

**Gender** = 3 males, 8 females

**Ethnicity** = 1 white, 1 black and 9 coloured

**Year in which they graduated** = 5 in 2014, 4 in 2013 and 2 in 2012

**Programme in which they were registered** = 4 Masters Research (thesis only) and 7 MA Research Psychology (structured)

**Supervisors represented** = 5

In addition, participants were drawn from a small sampling frame and thus disclosure of certain demographics, age for example, in combination with other information might make it possible to identify the participants. Limited information is reported here to merely provide an idea of the sample contextually. Also information is provided for the group rather than for individuals, which would inadvertently disclose identities

### **3.6 Research approach**

The present study was exploratory in nature. Exploratory research attempts to gain new insights, discover new ideas, and increase the knowledge of the topic under investigation (Creswell, 2007). Exploratory studies are implemented when a researcher examines a new topic of interest and deems it appropriate for further investigation (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Richard, 2008). Exploratory research was the most appropriate for this study because there is less known about internalisation of the research supervisor and the approach is likely to be useful in the identification of salient factors that might be of relevance. As identified in the previous chapter, the dearth of information on the internalisation process that takes place

during supervised research renders the exploratory approach appropriate for the present study. Internalisation is mostly studied and applied in a different setting from research supervision therefore this study applied exploratory research, that is, creating new avenues for upcoming studies.

Exploratory studies favour qualitative methods of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative methods were appropriate for the exploration of perceptions and experiences (Burns & Groove, 2001). Qualitative methods were preferred since it relies on the “*naturalistic description or interpretation of phenomena in terms of the meaning these have for the people experiencing them*” (Langdrige, 2007, p. 2). Mouton (2007) similarly argued that qualitative methods are naturalistic, holistic and inductive. In this way qualitative methods allowed for an understanding of the complexities of research supervision as a complex phenomenon and to immerse oneself in the details and specifics of the information. Thus this type of methodology allowed the researcher to study certain issues in depth and detail and attempt to understand categories of information that emerge from the data (Stevens & Wrenn, 2013). Qualitative research methods emphasise the dynamic, holistic and individual aspects of human experiences, and attempt to capture those experiences in their entirety, within the context of those experiencing them (Polit & Beck 2004). Qualitative research methods are suitable for studying phenomena in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpreting a phenomenon in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Creswell, 2007).

The use of qualitative methods in the present study allowed for the researcher to capture information of phenomena in the words of and from the perspective of the informants. The researcher was the key instrument of data collection and sought to deeply engage with the students (participants) through reflective discussions. As such, the adoption of qualitative methods of data collection and analysis in the present study was appropriate to content, aims and processes. This was pertinent to a study of this nature as it was not the wish

of the researcher to generalise findings, but to gain an understanding about the experience of developing an internal supervisor through an internalization of the research supervisor, from a particular group of people (masters graduates) in their particular context (department of Psychology at the identified institution).

### **3.7 Methods of data collection**

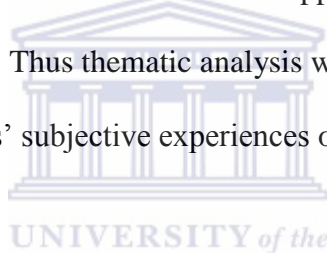
Data was collected by means of in-depth semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were used because of the sensitive, personal nature of the research supervision experience. It allowed the interviewees to talk freely and extensively about their reflections without being concerned about how their contributions might be perceived by other participants for example, in a Focus group discussion. This aided in freely exploring, probing and asking questions to expand on or clarify particular topics to generate extensive and rich data consistent with Howitt's (2010) recommendations. Interviews also provided an interactive context that was consistent with social constructionist aims to not isolate participants from their normal context and to provide human interchange that brings meaning to language (Flick, 2002). In addition, interviews increased their level of comfort (Stevens & Wrenn, 2013). My aim for data collection was to keep the interviewees at ease, so that they can talk freely. I wanted to create a more conversation-like interaction so that the interviewee would not feel inhibited by the formality of the interview. This was achieved by use of a semi-structured interview technique.

The interviews lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. English was used as the language of the interview as it is the language almost all students converse in for academic purposes. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix A). A pilot interview was conducted to assess the initial interview schedule. Afterwards, I changed the sequence of questions and rephrased some questions to make them more appropriate for further interviews. This promoted longer sections of talk and detailed accounts of their

experiences. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed. There were eleven transcribed interview sessions.

### **3.8 Method of data analysis**

Thematic analysis was selected for the data analysis in the present study. According to Croatia (2012), thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis. Thematic analysis is seen as a basic method for qualitative analysis and encompasses everything from identifying and analysing patterns within data reporting (Larkin, 2009). ). Descombe (2010) asserted that a thematic analysis is compatible with both essentialist and constructionist paradigms thus emphasizing its flexibility despite Giorgi's (2009) recommendation that a discourse would be most applicable when working within a social constructionist framework. Thus thematic analysis was appropriate in this study because the focus was on students' subjective experiences of research supervision experience.



Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps for conducting a thematic analysis were adopted for the present study because they allowed me to combine analysis of the frequency of codes with an analysis of their meaning in context. These authors identified a six-phase guide to conducting a thematic analysis which is briefly outlined below:

3.8.1 Familiarisation and Immersion - Phase One involved familiarizing oneself with the data. The key to this step is completely immersing oneself and becoming knowledgeable of the transcripts. Braun and Clarke (2006) stated that this provides the 'bedrock' for the remainder of the analysis. Accordingly, it was important to become immersed in the transcribed scripts. This was achieved in two ways: First, I conducted the data collection myself which provided the opportunity to establish an early awareness of the content of the data. Similarly, I developed an idea of the themes that may arise based on my field notes and reflections. Second, I refined my initial impressions through engaging in a process of reading



and re-reading the transcripts that provided a better idea of the depth and breadth of the content of the data. I read transcriptions and listened to the audio of every interview recording for several times that allowed me to gain a sense of the data and to understand the experience of the students.

### 3.8.2 Generating initial codes - Phase Two entails the generation of initial codes.

Braun and Clarke (2006) recommended that the researcher should systematically work through the data, paying complete attention to each data item and identify interesting aspects in the data on the basis of repeated patterns. Another important recommendation was that the analyst codes the information as far as possible. Generation of codes was done using Atlas.Ti (a data management tool). 152 codes emanated from the combined transcripts. In keeping with Braun and Clarke's recommendation, I erred on the side of having as many codes as possible rather than too little information since it would not be clear in the initial coding what may or may not be essential information later. I also manually verified these codes to reconcile the differing wording or phrasing used by students. The codes were subsequently reduced to 120.

3.8.3 Searching for themes - The third phase was the search for themes in the transcripts. Once all the data had been coded, the focus narrowed towards coding to a broader level and focused on the themes the codes were indicative of. The analyst may not initially see the bigger themes, but rather sub-themes. This is not necessarily a delay of the analysis process, since sub-themes could later be identified as larger themes. For example, there are a number of codes that were changed to themes and other themes to codes. At this stage I came up with 14 themes of which I later combined some of them for they were focusing on similar themes. For example, I decided to combine the themes such as *nature of feedback* and *duration of feedback*.

3.8.4 Examination and reviewing of themes – Once the preliminary list of themes was drawn, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that step four involves an examination of these themes. In this phase I reviewed the themes under consideration carefully. In some instances, some themes overlap and other times some themes were realised as not being valid. Once this process was complete, I was able to see the importance of certain themes based on the manner in which it complimented or contradicted each other and the overall results of the analysis. At this stage, it became quite confusing because it was not easy to put themes into categories. The supervisory process assisted in clarifying the work process and final outcomes.

3.8.5 Defining and naming the themes - Here, I identified the ‘essence’ of each theme, as well as the feature of the data that each theme captures. This information is then also used in the naming of the theme. At this stage, themes were named according to their functions. I initially came up with fifteen themes. These themes were taken to my supervisor for discussion and additional input. We had to change other themes to codes for they were falling under other major themes. I ended up with ten themes that fell into two categories.

The above steps then led to the step sixth step, that is, the production of the report which in this case is the entire thesis with specific emphasis on Chapters Four (Results & Discussion) and Five (Conclusion).

### **3.9 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is the act of reflecting on the role that the researcher plays through their own personal, political and intellectual autobiographies in creating, interpreting and theorising data ( (McKay & Ryan, 2003). Identifying pre-conceived ideas, thoughts and opinions, which each individual possesses, is important for a researcher, especially when conducting a study that could be of specific bias for that individual (Morrow, 2005). By employing a social constructionist framework for this study I should be sceptical of the idea

that a researcher can ever play a purely facilitative role in allowing the participants to give expression to her or his feelings and experiences – all meanings are seen as being co-constructed between facilitator and participant (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2001).

I am a black, male Psychology Masters student. I am also a foreigner in South Africa although I have been staying here for about seven years. Creating rapport with former students, especially those who are outside of town was not easy. I found it easy to create rapport with black Xhosa participants for I understand IsiXhosa. Although I spoke and learnt English since I was five years old, I am a Shona man from Zimbabwe and the way I pronounce some words is very different from the local people. My vernacular language influences the way I pronounce some words. The way I or participants pronounce some words might have sounded awkward and this might have influenced the way we conducted interview sessions. I have conducted independent research under supervision twice already and the current is my third.

As a Masters student, I also had my own research supervision experiences and perceptions on the internalisation process of the supervisor. Being cognizant of my own experiences, I was continuously and consistently aware of how I am positioned, its impact on participants and construction of the research findings. As such, I was reflective and reflexive in the manner in which I conducted the study from beginning till the end. Constant discussion meetings with my supervisor field notes after each interview session were attempts to track my influence on the research process and maintain reflexivity.

### **3.10 Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is established through credibility, transferability and dependability (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2001; Golafshani, 2003). The purpose of establishing trustworthiness was to increase the rigour of the methodology and to enhance the credibility of the study by ensuring that the findings, interpretations and conclusions were supported by the data.

3.10.1 Credibility – credibility in qualitative research is involved in establishing that the results of the research are believable (Golafshani, 2003) and this was ensured by prolonged engagement in semi-structured interviewing, the adoption of well-established research methods and developing early familiarity with the participants. Interviewing is one of the most common methods of data collection in social science research and students are well versed with this kind of method. In qualitative research, I am an instrument as well so I have an influence on method of data collection and reporting of findings. I am a Psychology Masters student who has been trained in methods of data collection at Masters Degree level and the way I must present myself in such situations. In addition, during my Masters Degree year, I conducted several interview sessions for my other courses that gave me the opportunity for feedback and refinement of skills.

3.10.2 Transferability – transferability is similar to generalizability in quantitative research (Golafshani, 2003) and it was ensured by a thick description of phenomenon in sufficient detail so that one can begin to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people. To this end a clear description of the research setting/context and participants was provided in this study.

3.10.3 Dependability – In addressing the issue of dependability (reliability) of this study, a description of all research practices followed were provided and of other researchers who were not directly involved in the research process, but assisted with the process of data collection and analysis. The two involved researchers were Masters Degree students who are also trained in data collection and analysis. Their assistance was verified by my supervisor as well. To promote trustworthiness of data and because of time constraints, I transcribed seven interview sessions and the other four were equally divided between two fellow researchers. My fellow researchers are in their fifth year of Psychology training that includes methods of research and they are currently enrolled for a Masters Degree in Research Psychology.

However, I went through the outsourced transcriptions for verification of the accuracy of the transcription and to familiarise self with the data.

### **3.11 Ethics considerations**

Permission to conduct the study and ethics clearance (15/4/66) was given by the Senate Research Committee (Appendix B). Permission to access students was requested from the Registrar (Appendix C) and subsequently obtained (Appendix D). The Registrar gave permission indicating that I had to access the students only after being introduced to them by my supervisor since he had access to potential participants' information as a staff member. This particular recommendation was in an attempt to remain aligned with the Protection of Personal information Act of 2013(PoPi) that promotes the protection of personal information processed by public and private bodies (Gazette G. , 2013). This Act recognises and provides that everyone has the right to privacy. The right to privacy includes a right to protection against the unlawful collection, retention, dissemination and use of personal information. In this regard, students' information kept by the institution was not available to me.

Eligible students received an invitation to participate in the study (Appendix E) after they indicated their willingness to find out more about the study. They also received an information sheet outlining the aim and nature of the study, rights and responsibilities of researchers and participants, what participation entails, as well as recourse in the event of dissatisfaction (Appendix F).

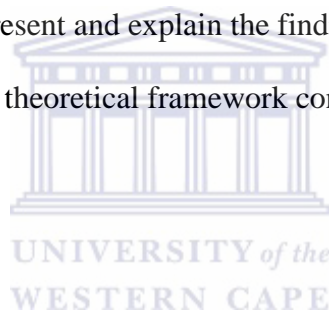
Participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time without loss of perceived benefit or fear of negative consequence. Identifying information was anonymized and information kept confidential. This was achieved by replacing any identifying words/phrases with general words. For example, where name of supervisor was mentioned, I removed it from the findings. In addition, any information that could lead to the tracing of participants was omitted, for example date of birth or age. Written consent was provided by

participants. Data was only accessed by the researchers and supervisor directly involved in the study. The data was stored in a safe and secure location and was only handled by the researchers involved. Participants were furthermore informed of the dissemination protocol that includes 1) an unpublished thesis; 2) conference presentation and 3) peer-reviewed manuscript.

### **3.12 Conclusion**

This chapter has described the method of the research study. A sketch of the research design was delineated, supporting the aims and objectives of the study. Participant selection, data collection, data analysis and reflexivity were also described. Furthermore, crucial ethics concerns were also discussed which were maintained throughout the research process.

Chapter Four of this thesis will present and explain the findings of the study in terms of the literature reviewed, as well as the theoretical framework considered.



# CHAPTER FOUR

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings resulting from the thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews, as well as a brief discussion of each theme. This study aimed to explore the experiences and perceptions of graduates from Psychology Masters degree programmes at a Historically Disadvantaged Institution regarding internalization of the research supervisor attributes. Three thematic categories were identified, that is, the *research supervision experience*, *quality of supervision* and *internalisation process*, along with their subsidiary themes. Extracts from the interviews are also presented in order to substantiate and illustrate the themes. The findings of the study are presented below:

### 4.2 Thematic category 1: experiences and perceptions of research supervision

The first category addressing the experiences and perceptions of research supervision at Masters Degree level included three themes that are displayed in Table 4.1 below followed by a brief exposition of the themes in this category.

Table 4.1: Category 1: Experiences and perceptions of supervision.

Thematic Category 1:	Themes
<b>Experiences and perceptions of supervision</b>	a) Baseline expectations
	b) Subjective experience of establishing supervisory working relationships
	c) Impressions of attributes

#### 4.2.1 Theme 1: Baseline expectations

The first theme to emerge addressed baseline expectations as demonstrated through the process of supervisor allocation. It emerged that there were two different processes in which supervisors could be allocated to students: That is, whether students exercised a choice in selecting a supervisor or whether they were allocated to a supervisor. In some instances, students either sought out particular supervisors whilst in others they were assigned to the supervisors. Some participants conveyed that they actually executed a proactive choice in that they approached the supervisor due to particular expectations based on their interest in the supervisor's research focus or worked with the supervisor before. This is expressed in the excerpts below;

*"I actually approached him to discuss opportunities going forward. He mentioned that there was a particular project that was to run subsequently and that is how I became to be supervised by him ... I was comfortable with him, I like his style."* **Participant- 1**

*"He was one of my lecturers at honours degree; I did my honours part time. The classes were smaller so we formed close relationships with our lecturers so that enhanced good understanding of each other. I would not want to work with a stranger just because of a topic allocated."* **Participant -2**

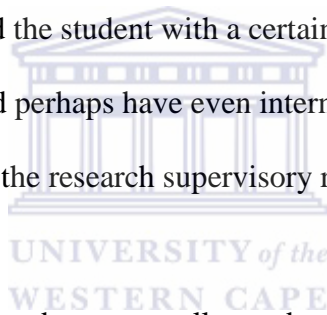
*"I knew my supervisor before research supervision for he was one of my lecturers at honours degree level and third year undergrad."* **Participant -7**

*"I really liked her because I had worked with her previously during my counselling internship so it was really easy to adapt to her needs and beliefs, her way of doing things. A relationship was already formulated before the research supervision in question."*

**Participant- 9**



From the above extracts it is apparent that the participants associated good experiences from previous encounters as student-lecturer or as supervisor-supervisee to be indicative of good supervisor-supervisee relationship during the Masters Degree endeavour. Where students took on a proactive role to pursue a supervisor, their actions were based on either on an already established relationship with the supervisor (for example, having taken a class, developing a relationship, having been supervised clinically or research at lower levels) or on interest in their research niche or field. Familiarity with the supervisor allowed for a greater degree of connection interpersonally, but also created a level of anxiety about the familial relationship taking on a more evaluative aspect when work was submitted. In addition, perceptions of the lecturer/honours degree supervisor as a competent and warm professional has already presented the student with a certain set of values with which the student is positively identified and perhaps have even internalised. They are now looking to extend that identification through the research supervisory relationship and provide a more robust basis for the ensuing work.



The second way in which students were allocated was based on procedures followed in the general screening and course administration. In other words, they were assigned based on any number of programme or administrative considerations. These considerations included interest in the same topic, capacity and availability. This particular process included the possibility of no or little familiarity with the supervisor as illustrated in the excerpt below:

*“I didn't know him at all; I actually didn't meet him before at all because we didn't have him during honours.”*

***Participant 3***

What emerged very strongly was that there was an expectation that the supervisor was going to be knowledgeable and capable of facilitating the research process for the student to learn optimally. Another participant contended that, “*she did not mind about who was going*

*to be allocated to her, her focus was to learn the process and procedures of research”*

**(Participant 5).**

This theme demonstrates that even though there was a differential pattern of assignment of supervisors, all students were looking for a facilitative relationship that brings a level of containment based on professional expectations at baseline or prior evidence of the person being able to establish a warm and productive working relationship. The expectation of a facilitative relationship is thus based on a set of attributes (values, knowledge, beliefs, competence etc.) that forms part of the very first allocation to or choice of a supervisor. Supervision at this level does not take place in a vacuum. Students thus have a baseline expectation of supervision steeped in experiential or reputational familiarity with someone who has known desirable qualities or in professional identities.

#### 4.2.2 Subjective experiences of establishing working supervisory relationships

The next emerging theme is subjective experiences of supervision. The extracts show that participants expressed that despite their initial subjective impressions and experiences of the supervisor, they were able to settle into a functional working relationship guided by growing knowledge of their supervisor in terms of personality working method, ethics and preferences. This is most illustrated in the following extracts;

*“I think I was quite intimidated the first time I met with my supervisor, because he was so passionate and I felt like he knew a lot so I felt like I do not know enough or maybe I won’t be able to live up to his standards. As we proceed the process became smooth as I expected.”*

***Participant -1***

*“At first, I found her to be intimidating because she was an expert and I was a junior. I was worried that maybe I am and will do things wrong...kind of liking to impress but as we go I got accustomed to her and I chilled. I was then comfortable to ask any questions and guidance from her.”*

***Participant -9***

*“I thought that I would be the kind of guinea pig because I was her first student, but as we proceeded I got used to her.”*

***Participant -8***

It becomes evident from the excerpts that a functional working supervisory relationship was developed as the students got accustomed to the ways of their specific supervisors. Thus, baseline impressions and expectations also seemed to have played a role in how participants approached supervision. These findings are consistent with Abiddin, Hassan & Ahmad (2009) in ascertaining that relationship between supervisor and supervisee are influenced by expectations from either part involved, and is vital towards an effective research process.

#### 4.2.3 Impressions of the supervisor attributes

This theme related to the students' impressions of the attributes exhibited by their supervisors. The following illustrate the impressions of participants on supervisor's attributes (values, beliefs, attitudes and competence on research). Quotes presented under this theme express descriptions of competency, clarity and structuring of the research project from the supervisor's side. One of the significant topics that emerged under this heading is that previous encounters with the supervisor influenced the way impressions of the supervisor were reported. Both negative and positive initial impressions were reported. For example, the following excerpt described a participant's initial positive impression of her supervisor:

*“He seems quite passionate about research...ummmh...the way he explained things to me and the way he explained how I must do certain things and the way I must approach research and my topic, conceptualising my topic and all those things. He seemed quite passionate.”*

***Participant -1***

Participant 2 also expressed that she realised the values of the supervisor when they first met to discuss the then proposed project.

*“I think the first time I noticed of his values was when I met him the first time to explain on his bigger project so that was kind of before the actual conceptualising stage of my actual project, my specific topic for my research”.*

It is during early interactions such as this initial meeting to explain the project and initial impressions stated above that expectations from the supervisor start to crystallize. The following quotes express the same sentiment that the impressions of the supervisor give rise to expectations of and concerns about the unfolding research process including their compatibility and initial complimentary as it pertains to their ability to establish a functional working relationship.

*“My impression of my supervisor is that he loved and is highly competent in research, that it’s something that comes natural and easy for him, something manageable and achievable if you set out what you intend on doing and you clear in your methodological processes, and I realised that he is very knowledgeable about research, he is an expert in the field and someone I can work with, and personality wise as well”.*

**Participant -2**

*“He is very passionate about research and I think that is something that really spilled over to my life as well, like he...he really stood for like social justice and doing research for social change which is a value that I really thought is important and he was very kind with us in the beginning.”*

**Participant -3**

*“My impression of him was that he valued research so highly and he was so clear of what he wants and what he expects from a student.”*

**Participant -7**

*“In the beginning I was very anxious because he valued the project so highly, more so because I was part time and I knew nothing about systematic reviews. It was my first time using that particular approach to research, so initially my confidence and anxiety was negatively correlated. My confidence was low and my anxiety high about my ability.”*

**Participant -11**

*“She was very thorough, very structured, she was well prepared and well organised and that gave me a good impression of her, the way she worked, her knowledge and respect for research process.”*

***Participant -8***

In addition, my participants also reflected on the extent to which their initial/ baseline impressions of their respective supervisor’s attributes (knowledge of research, values and attitudes towards research) changed over time. The following quotes below illustrate their view that initial impressions were fairly constant over time and that apparent changes were more indicative of revisions to their expectations.

*“Nothing really changed to a negative, the only thing that was a negative to be but a lesson as well... was that at masters...the supervisors become so busy, with supervision, lecturing, their own writings. Masters, honours, and other students are involved with him. Sometimes this affected the turnaround time in terms of meetings and feedback from the supervision. The attention became less. At a certain point, I thought my supervisor was not so competent in terms of organising his students and research work.”*

***Participant -2***

*“It did not change in terms of the knowledge of research, but on the process. Sometimes feedback took long, at a certain time I had to wait for 2 months to get feedback. Feedback on a regular basis was going to make things much better.”*

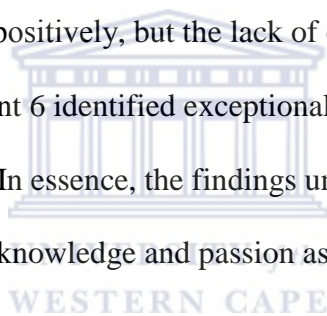
***Participant -11***

*“Not at all, I got used to how she works and she also got used to how I work, that is even before the masters. So nothing changed in terms of my impressions of her. She proved to be knowledgeable throughout from conceptualising up to writing of the mini-thesis.”*

***Participant -10***

From the above extract it becomes apparent that the unfolding process of research provides an opportunity to see the application of perceived values in the context of work pressure and demands. Participants identified factors such as work load, number of students and competing demands as factors that impacted the extent to which the perceived values and

attributes could be lived out or experienced in the context of supervised research accommodating for contextual givens. Feedback and turnaround time were most affected by the contextual givens, but the perceived attributes remained. It appears that students increasingly could make a distinction between attributes and relational functioning. The excerpts also show that the actual impressions of knowledge, skills and attitude towards research did not change, but the reality of sharing the research supervisor with other competing interests and academic work responsibilities did raise concerns about the supervisor's ability to manage workload. For example, participant 9 reported that her supervisor was new in the academic field and she did not know how to engage in supportive activities although she was so good in the topic under study. The impressions of the supervisor's attributes continued positively, but the lack of experience in managing the student became evident. Participant 6 identified exceptional attributes, but thought that the supervisor was spread too thinly. In essence, the findings under this theme indicate that there was a difference between ability, knowledge and passion as compared to student management.



#### 4.3 Thematic category 2: Quality of supervision

The second thematic category addressed experiences related to the quality of supervision. Significant topics to emerge under this category were *feedback*, *interaction methods* and *perceived forms of support*. Table 4.2 below shows themes under this section.

Table 4.2: Thematic category 2: **Quality of Supervision**

Thematic Category 2:	Themes
Quality of Supervision	a) Feedback
	b) Interaction methods
	c) Perceived forms of support

#### 4.3.1 Feedback

Nature/quality and timing of feedback was a major recurring theme throughout the data. Participants showed that they have their own way of constructing the meaning of feedback and how it must be delivered. In addition, participants had different views on the effects of nature and timing of feedback. Some viewed it as disturbing, others viewed it as a learning process and others think the way you get feedback develops independence in conducting research. Feedback was almost linked to all other themes throughout data. Findings under this theme are divided into different aspects of feedback.

Timing of feedback- findings show that time or timing of feedback seemed vital to most students. Timing of feedback was also reported by almost every participant. Students experienced delays when it comes to getting feedback from supervisors as discouraging and halting progress. Others even reported that they thought it was part of the research learning process until they realised it was pressure of work from the supervisor's side. This is how some of them responded after being asked to describe their experiences related to the transfer of skills, particularly through feedback.

*“What is important is that a supervisor is able to give appropriate feedback on time when they are comfortable with the topic or subject matter.”* **Participant -5**

*“The only thing that was a negative, but a lesson as well was that at masters the supervisors become so busy, with supervision, lecturing, their own writings ... Sometimes this affected the turnaround time in terms of meetings and feedback .”* **Participant -2**

*“In terms of the timing of the feedback, it always came late. My supervisor had other responsibilities at the University, of which is okay and I understood but I would appreciate feedback in time.”* **Participant -4**

*“Sometimes feedback took long, at a certain time I had to wait for 2 months to get feedback. Feedback on a regular basis was going to make things much better. I felt like the supervisor*

*does not respect my time as well, but only do things according to his will. I thought it was part of the process to delay feedback but at the end I realised that they have a lot of students under them. I could not move forward since I had to wait for feedback.”* **Participant -7**

*“In the beginning it was on regular basis, that is, during conceptualisation and proposal writing stages. As we go it became more delayed. Coming back to internalisation, I think I will do my best to do something opposite when it comes to feedback. It is so irritating not to get feedback in an appropriate time.”* **Participant -8**

*In terms of timing of feedback, that considerably depended on what else was on the go. Sometimes there was a considerable delay but it allowed me to focus on other work so it was fine.* **Participant -7**

Other previous studies indicate that it is important that the work remains their own and that feedback allows for reflection and a further development of their ideas (Whitelock, 2010, Martin, Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2012; Lee, 2007). From the excerpts above, some participants thought that delays in feedback were an intentional educational intervention. However, when they realize that this was not the case, the wait was experienced negatively as it then represented their perceived value and importance. In which case they were left feeling disrespected and devalued. The ability to reframe delays in feedback as meaningful and constructive impacts positively on the overall experiences. For example Participant 7 initially reported that the delays in feedback allowed him to do assignments from other courses, but when he realized that delays were the result of competing demands in the supervisor’s schedule he felt devalued and that his progress was delayed. The effects of delayed feedback was also found in other studies that concluded that feedback is linked to the overall success of postgraduate research as well as timely thesis completion (Martin, Birtchener & Basturkmen, 2012; Mustafa, Noraziah & Majid, 2014; Morton, Storch & Thompson, 2014).



Nature/quality of feedback – This section focuses on how participants perceived and described their experiences on the nature of feedback. The nature of feedback tends to influence perception of the quality as well.

Feedback that is minimal or insufficient had a negative impact on the relationship and the student's progress in that it did not add value or provide direction. This was also demonstrated in other studies which show that some students appreciate direct feedback, feedback that is specific regarding what to change or what to remove (Andrea, 2012; Mojsoska-Blazevski, 2012). The excerpts below describe the impact of receiving insufficient feedback.

*“So sometimes I would send my drafts to my supervisor and I would get bare minimal input so I was not sure if I had written was correct or not correct”.* **Participant -6**

*“I would send her an entire chapter and there would be no comment on the content, it would be like, re-work this sentence or add a linking sentence here, your paragraphs don't flow into each other. You know things like that.”* **Participant -11**

*“I honestly felt like, but what is the point of meeting with you when you do not read my stuff. She will print whatever I email to her and she will write a note and so she will give me the thing with the note but it will be things like, if I have a spelling error for example, you know and I would feel like, what is the point of meeting for you to show me spelling error, you know, I can go and find that out myself.”* **Participant -6**

Participants reported that the ability of a supervisor to give meaningful feedback was related to the fund of available knowledge of methodology and the topic or content as illustrated in the excerpt below.

*“I think it was easy for my supervisor to give proper feedback because he has vast knowledge on the topic I was studying. He could easily relate to literature and how I must structure my*

*whole thesis... The negative part was that sometimes he did not get back to me in time. The positive was that you will know that he is always there to support you.”*

***Participant -10***

*Although they were sometimes delays in feedback, the feedback would be useful and meaningful thereby taking me a step further”.*

***Participant -9***

In this instance the quality of the support from the supervisor overrides the effect of delayed feedback. . These findings also correspond to Brown & Wisker’s (2012) study that asserted good work should be acknowledged and constructive criticism to be provided in feedback. Meaningful feedback seems vital to the supervision process thereby leading to fruitful relationship that can withstand empathic failures such as not being able to give feedback in a timely manner or unavailability due to competing demands.

Participants reportedly had a clear idea of what constituted meaningful feedback for them. In particular the expectation was expressed that the supervisor must be directive and tell what is being done wrong, and where elaboration is required and also on the link between study and literature. Some participants reported on high quality feedback received that spoke to these expectations. The excerpts below reflect this sentiment.

*“... tell me where I need to elaborate on the work, tell me where I am not making a link between my study and the literature, you know, tell me those things, don't tell me this sentence doesn't sound right”*

***Participant -6***

*“My feedback even included suggestions of how I can do it better using a proposed approach. She would refer me to readings she had come across. It was never just editorial stuff.”*

***Participant -9***

The nature of feedback was also reported to be relative to the stage of research. This was consistent with Franke and Arvidson (2011) who noted that the quality of research

supervision differ widely depending on what stage students were at in terms of conceptualisation, data collection or writing up of the research paper. The excerpts below illustrate the manner in which the nature of feedback was a function of the stage of research.

*“in terms of the stages, there was a lot of input during conceptualisation stages so when I came up with the topic; I had a totally different topic although it was similar in terms of concept. It was [name of topic] but it was phrased totally different and the supervisor assisted me in breaking it down and laying it bare and sort of deconstructing it and put it in a different way that will make it a feasible Masters Degree research thesis”.* **Participant -4**

In essence the findings here suggest that constructive feedback would be well-timed and balance negative feedback with positive and motivating comments consistent with the recommendations from Wadensango and Machingambi (2011). Failure to provide constructive and well-timed, developmentally appropriate feedback can contribute to great challenges in thesis writing. Language and grammar feedback is most appreciated at the start as they are then able to improve along the way, but cannot be the only type of feedback provided. Students would like feedback to challenge their thinking and to be able to discuss these challenges verbally consistent with Steinmetz and Mussi’s findings (2012).

#### 4.3.2 Interaction methods

One of the other major highlights from the findings is the *interaction methods* between the supervisor and supervisee. Participants stressed that the ways/platforms of interactions influenced the transfer of skills/attributes during research supervision. Platforms and forms of engagement proved to have an impact on the outcomes of interaction with the research supervisor. The participants’ accounts highlight the importance of communication using blended platforms in research supervision and how it can enhance internalisation. This is a clear example of what Ismail, Abiddin & Hassan (2011) describes as the supervision

working alliance, an alliance that can be promoted through interaction methods. The following excerpts illustrate this theme.

*“We also had him on ‘whatsapp’ so it helped. He would say don’t worry I am just busy with something and I will get back to you, that made me feel comfortable.”*

***Participant -8***

*“What he would do is that we would sit together, brainstorm, conceptualise etc... and to come up with strategies on how to go about doing it exactly. There were individual consultations throughout so that he would explain the whole process of research to each one of us. It was really well done.”*

***Participant -9***

*“We interacted via emails, phone calls, it was different means.”*

***Participant -3***

*“He would give me face to face feedback and e-mails feedback depending on his availability. Most of the time we engaged in face- to -face feedback, including his team of interns and other students.”*

***Participant -10***

The participants reported many different platforms and formats of interactions. Others reported that they were meeting in groups and others were being lectured by their supervisors as well. Interactions are a way of giving feedback, planning of schedules and even clarifying issues. In addition, it is also clear that various forms of interactions were used, some as a follow up or simultaneously. For those who were studying full time Psychology programme, it was an added advantage since they could continue with interactions during lectures. Clearly the concept of interactions is again important to understanding participants’ experiences:

*“He was my lecturer as well and also during the [name of module], I did a presentation on [name of paradigm] so that helped me in my thesis as well so it prepared me well for my thesis.”*

***Participant -3***

*“We used to have meetings for feedback but right at the end, polishing stages of the full draft it was through e-mails because she was swamped with a lot of work and other students.”*

***Participant -4***

*“We were working as a group of 4 to do [research method] so he would instruct us on what to do via e mail then the feedback of what we did was delivered in meetings.”*

***Participant -7***

*“We sat together a lot in the conceptualisation stage as compared to other stages. That was because we were still trying to shape up the whole study.”*

***Participant -9***

*“It only happened at the end of the research project, in the beginning of the other year. I did not finish within time. He would sit down with me; open my writing on his PC then make changes together and explaining methodological reasons for that. I improved my research skills through that process.”*

***Participant -10***

Sitting together with a supervisor seemed valuable to some of my participants.

Although he reported not submitting on scheduled time, he managed to take more from the supervisor in terms of skills of conducting research. The use of social network and e-mails was significant and adding value to face-to-face meetings or interactions. In addition, Participant 2 reported that she became more motivated because of various meetings;

*“Through various meetings and stages of research, everything became live and I actually started enjoying research. That was reinforced mostly by his qualities and values that he portrayed.”* It is during these meetings when the participant felt lively in terms of research processes. One-on-one meetings tend to be vital in this instance. These interaction methods are also perceived to be types of support.

#### 4.3.3 Perceived forms of support

Participants expressed that forms of support plays a big role towards transfer of skills and internalisation of the research supervisor. Although research at this level of education is more independent, students still expect considerable amount of support from the supervisor, department and the institution. Most of them pointed out that the nature of support

contributed to how they learn and respect the supervisor. The following extracts illustrate forms of support that participants experienced positively.

*“He kind of made the process more exciting and it made me realise it’s not only about reading articles, but it’s about getting all this knowledge about a specific topic together, and kind of using this knowledge, creating ideas etc.”*

**Participant -2**

*“He always help me through a situation or a methodology section he wasn’t that type of person who would say do chapter one and just leave it there. He would always explain how it needs to be done and why we have a problem statement and why we have that, his willingness to just take an extra step in helping or in allowing students to ask and understand”.*

**Participant -8**

*“He was kind of a mentor, in the research process. He took me through all the stages of my thesis work. I really got the support I wanted”*

**Participant -11**

*“I think he was well organised and that reassured me during the whole process.”*

**Participant -1**

*“He was quite helpful throughout the process but then what he also did that was helpful was, he also did like practise interviews with me because I was like young. I was quite young at that time and I thought, coming into a study and speaking to older people... And so I think what my supervisor really did well was he made me understand that dynamic between me and the participants. He always checked out how it went, how I felt after the interviews, so it was very good, he was very supportive.”*

**Participant -3**

*“So obviously it was a reciprocal relationship where I was required to meet deadlines and likewise she felt that with that meeting of deadlines,*

**Participant -11**

*“She really knew how to encourage me to get my best and she was aware of what I wanted to get out after research project and the whole psychology research degree. We were really familiar with each other.”*

**Participant -9**

The above excerpts illustrate the several forms of perceived support from supervisors. Participant 9 valued the encouragement she was getting from her supervisor. Another

participant also perceived follow up from the supervisor after field work to be a vital in terms of support. The same participant added that they conducted practical sessions with a supervisor as a way to prepare for field day. Mistry & Latoo (2009) also reported that the terms of supervisory support and relationships are almost left at the discretion of students and supervisor. There is no stipulated way of showing support to students. This may cause frustrations to both parties especially the students. Excerpts under this theme show that my participants perceived support to be positive when the supervisor provide with clear guidelines throughout the process of research. Some appreciated support during the stage of data collection. However, perceived forms or nature of support depends on several factors including demographics and other personal factors. As pointed out by Wright (2003), personal factors influence the way supervisees react to the whole process of research. The excerpts below illustrate negative experiences related to the provision of support.

*“In terms of the content, subject matter of the topic that I was dealing with, my supervisor was not well versed at content. So for me that lacked a lot because I was looking at my supervisor as a guide, somebody who would assist in the provision of knowledge of the content and the process of the study.”*

**Participant -4**

*“I got a lot of input from other people from the faculty other than from my supervisor. So for me I think the problem was that the supervisor did not know the subject matter very well.”*

**Participant -6**

*“So I do feel that a co-supervisor is beneficial and but at the same time I don't feel like maybe I wouldn't have felt that way if I had a different primary supervisor. In terms of support, let's put it this way. I'd give [main supervisor's name] my proposal and I'd give [co-supervisor's name] the rest of my thesis.”*

**Participant -7**

Thus the excerpts suggest that limited or unsatisfactory support increased stress as it negatively impacted the overall experience, completion and relationship with the supervisor.

The findings resonate with Wadesango and Machingambi (2011) who stated that the quality of the relationship perceived or real, was a significant predictor of success and perceptions of the process as stressful. The findings also indicate that participants will augment or supplement unsatisfactory support by seeking help from others. Though this might be a functional coping mechanism, it can be potentially unproductive if the help provided is not aligned to the expectation of the supervisor. In addition, the concerns that are hampering the relationship are not addressed and cannot be resolved.

#### **4.5 Thematic category 3: Internalisation process**

Internalisation may or may not take place during research supervision and the process may be described as conscious or sub-conscious. This section of describes and discusses internalisation in terms of its direction (did it take place or not), internalised components (that is, attributes/skills taken from the supervisor) and contributing factors (facilitative and preventative). Table 4.3 below displays themes under this category;

Table 3: Thematic category 3: Internalisation process

<b>Thematic Category 3:</b>	<b>Themes</b>
<b>Internalisation process</b>	a) Directionality
	b) Internalised components
	c) Contributing factors

4.5.1 Directionality of internalisation - There were different reactions from participants in terms whether internalization took place. Some participants were adamant that they did not take anything from the supervisor whilst others reported taking on similar values, beliefs and attitudes towards research as those of their respective supervisors. The following excerpts illustrate positive responses about internalisation of the research supervisor;



*“I think, I think. I think I have taken more attributes from my supervisor. I can’t even describe it. But just as random when people speak about research outside and then something just clicks in my head I just say something and I say wait... that what my supervisor would have said.”*

*“I have taken much from my supervisor. It is much difficult for me to pin point which one [attribute] exactly.”*

**Participant -5**

*“I think I am now a mini-[name of the supervisor]. In terms of knowledge of what we have done, I gained in-depth knowledge of [research method] conduction. One of the major attitudes I have taken from my supervisor is constantly working on a research project and conceptualising and giving reasons or motivating on every decision I make in terms of research work. And to always engage with your literature so that more things flow from there and what is it you are setting out to do.”*

**Participant -2**

*“He was really good when it came to the qualitative staff and understanding what role the researcher plays in that whole process and I think that's something that I adopted very strongly, even now, today like when I speak to my students in the class room or I supervise my independent research students, it always comes across very strongly, like I always advocate for qualitative even though I do like quantitative but I think I lean slightly more towards the qualitative but that's just based on my experience so I think if I had a quantitative experience, it would have been different.”*

**Participant -3**

Excerpt above clarifies that this participant is applying what she learned from her supervisor to other students. She illustrated that she adopted qualitative method because of her supervisor. This is where internalisation is important to the development of future researchers or supervisors.

*“I think without a doubt she was, uhm, definitely one of the most influential in terms of values I now have as a researcher, uhm, so some of the values obviously the way I write, the way I think, uhm, and then the discipline that comes with it. Uhm, she really encouraged being disciplined and sticking to deadlines and stuff.”*

***Participant -11***

From above it becomes evident that strong positive identifications have been formed with the supervisor and the participants have identified conscious and unconscious ways in which they have taken on the values and attributes of the researcher suggesting that an internalization process had taken place.

Strong negative reactions were also reported in response to the internalization of the supervisor. Some participants emphasized the lack of complementarity with their supervisors and attributed it to negative experiences in the working alliance or supervisory relationship. The excerpts below illustrate the participants’ awareness of their need or desire to be different from and to conduct themselves differently as supervisors and researchers.

*“Well, I definitely do not want to be like main supervisor... yes...yes...yes. I am sure, because of several reasons ...[including] that she was not serious about my topic and concerns.”*

***Participant -6***

*“I am trying to do things differently from my supervisor because as a student I felt that there were a lot of deficiencies in the way that I was supervised so I wouldn’t want a student to feel the same way I felt because research is not an easy thing especially when you are a student, you need guidance and support from your supervisor.”*

***Participant -4***

*“I would say no. I feel like everything I learnt, I taught myself and if I look at the different ways we work now, I do not feel like we are similar in our work ethic, you know anything work related. I feel we are different.”*

***Participant -6***

*I think this is a difficult one...let me think...I think my I only decided to learn or take from one of my supervisors. The other one seemed to be confused and it was kind of confusing me as well. So I made a conscious decision.*

***Participant -11***

From the above, it emerged that the impressions of supervisor’s attributes and the experience of supervision as negative contributed to the conscious decision to not take aboard the attributes of the supervisor. The abovementioned participants indicated that they wanted to be the exact opposite of their respective supervisors. They reported that they did not like the process of supervision due to lack of knowledge from the supervisor’s side. It is clear from the above quotes that initial or baseline impressions of supervisor’s attributes thereby influences if internalisation will take place. The same participants also reported that they were not pleased with their feedback for it was minimal or mere grammatical corrections. Although personal factors may have played a big role, one of my participants felt that he was not being respected by a female supervisor and that in his culture one must not discuss or argue about male or female issues with opposite gender. Thus it emerged that these considerations were counterproductive to the internalization process. It became even more poignant with one participant who chose to identify with only one of her supervisors during the same supervision process.

4.5.2 Awareness of internalisation process –the findings suggests that the extent to which students are aware of internalization can range from being unconscious to conscious. Internalisation can still take place whether a supervisee is aware or not.

Speaking to others and acting as a supervisor were identified as particularly useful in heightening awareness of internalization. The following excerpts illustrate the less conscious internalization processes;

*“I think it was more sub-consciously that I internalised my supervisor, it wasn’t in the beginning that I want to be just like him, it kind of happened gradually throughout the year and towards the end. Towards the end I realised had mastered how to conduct research work.”*

**Participant -1**

*“I think of it now and I am having the same attitude towards research as that of my former supervisor. So I can say it was more sub-conscious. A thought like that came over in my mind at some point and so it was like funny, like the tapping of a leg.”*

**Participant -5**

*“As I am also supervising now, I think through a situation and ask myself what he would have done, not only with my research work but with every assignment in terms of knowledge, I always think how I am going to conceptualise this topic, that is, according to him. How am I going to go about everything? Are the aims and objectives flowing nicely? But during my Masters year, I never thought about these things or whether I am taking his values and attitudes of research.”*

**Participant -3**

*“I think it was subconscious. I do not remember telling myself that I am being or I want to act like my supervisor but I now realise that I approach research in his ways. I kind of unintentionally put him in my mind.”*

**Participant -7**

*“I think there by then when I was in the programme, I did not realise it as much, but now that I’m a supervisor and I teach research, I think it has more impact as compared to my year in context. The internalised knowledge of research was much revealed when I had my first class as a research methods lecturer.”*

**Participant -2**

The gradual nature of internalization and increased similarity between student and supervisor might make the process less conscious as illustrated above. The excerpts also provide evidence that being engaged in research or supervision actively provide opportunities for becoming more conscious about internalized attributes.

Other participants pointed out that they consciously and intentionally attempted to take the values, beliefs and competencies of their research supervisors. The excerpts below contain illustrative examples of more conscious internalization of the research supervisor.

*“It was very conscious. I mean I watched. Like I said I worked with her previously and in that time I watched her very closely, like I admired my supervisor from the get go”.* **Participant 9**

*“I think it was conscious, uhm because and I’ll tell you why because I think that I aspire to be like her, she became a role model and so because I looked at her as a role model, uhm, when I internalise her it’s a positive kind of process because uhm, I want to take on her values and knowledge including her way of working and her view towards research.”* **Participant -8**

From the excerpts above it emerges that more conscious internalization is related to familiarity and positive regard for the supervisor from early on in the research process. This is ostensibly due to already strong identifications which in less conscious processes might have only been established over the course of conducting supervised research.

4.5.3 Internalised components (attributes) – Various components were derived from the interviews with participants. Most participants reported taking the attribute of knowledge from the supervisors. Of the 7 participants who reported taking similar values to those of their respective supervisors, most of them described that they took almost every component including administration skills. In addition, another participant explained that she taken a specific qualitative analytic method and writing skills from the supervisor. The following excerpts illustrate some of the descriptions;

*“I have learned a lot that the type of methodology that you do or that one thing that my supervisor always say is that every decision you make is a methodological decision when it*

*comes to your research...I don't know, I can't say which one because the entire process from conceptualisation till analysing and writing up, the whole process.* **Participant -1**

*“But in terms of transfer of skills I think what I have taken is that he valued research highly. So do not just do a topic for fun... if you do not want to make any change or contribution to research society or people's lives. I think I have integrated those values from him.”*

**Participant -10**

*“I think I have taken out a lot from my supervisor in terms of the way certain things need to be done when it comes to the research methodology and things like that, so I think I have taken a big extent of his knowledge of research and beliefs and skills and how he would do something and I think I will apply that to my own research and maybe when someone asks me for advice it terms of how do I go about doing this methodology.”* **Participant -8**

*“I think for me it was more knowledge on method of research, then process of research that I gained more from my supervisor.”* **Participant -4**

Most participants reported to have taken on knowledge of research, an attribute that can contribute towards developing the fund of knowledge in future researchers.

4.5.4 Contributing factors – contributing factors under this section are divided in two, that is, *facilitative* and *preventative* factors.

Facilitative factors: - It has been identified that when students hold accurate and realistic expectations of the supervisor they tend to take more from him/her. The following are excerpts from my participants describing their perceptions of factors that may have influenced internalisation of the research supervisor's attributes and skills to take place;

*“The factors that probably facilitated the process of internalisation are that I was comfortable with my supervisor and we had a good relationship because I worked with him before so I kind of knew what he likes and expect from a student although this was a new thing to me altogether. So this was quite clear from the onset, even the expectations,*

*responsibilities and so forth. I knew what type of a person and his style was like and also in terms of goodness of fit, the matching was spot on.”*

**Participant -2**

*“I think my supervisor was that kind of person who always motivated positivity. He always looked after his students and the positive energy behind the whole process. That is the thing that made me say I want to be like him and to imitate his characteristics and values especially when comes to doing research.”*

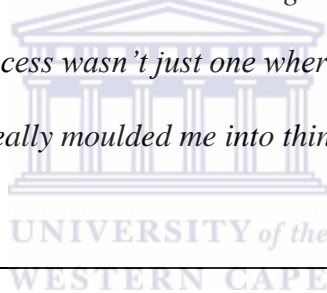
**Participant -11**

*“I would say it was more positive because there was a lot of input. She always made herself available, she checked in with me every day and so I felt much supported, I felt like this person actually cared about what I am doing and about me as a person.”*

**Participant -6**

*“I think that is the biggest thing for me was how she taught me, I feel that she really moulded me, uhm, she ah, the research process wasn’t just one where she supervised my work and made corrections and stuff. She really moulded me into thinking in a certain way.”*

**Participant -8**



From the above quotes, it is evident that ways of supervision and availability of the research supervisor was important to my participants. Participant 8 even mentioned that the way she was taught enhanced internalisation to take place. Thus positive attributes of the supervisor is vital for transfer of skills. These findings also uphold Kiley’s (2011) assertion that it is an advantage to research supervision when the supervisor and student expectations match. Maintenance of baseline impressions may enhance internalisation of the research supervision for changes can lead to a variety of frustrations and misunderstandings. The following participant 11 also added that; *“I did not want to disappoint him since he values research so much plus it just happened on its own. I do kind of self-correction before typing.*

*By self-correction mean doing according to his style. I ended up improving my standard by trying to match his ways.”*

One of the major highlights was the nature of interactions/relationship between the supervisor and supervisee. Some of the quotations are presented below;

*“I think having a good relationship with my supervisor helped with that process, I think our similarities were similar in the sense that we both more relaxed people, we don't stress too much but we get the work done and I think if I had to have another supervisor who had a different personality, I think that would have impacted that relationship.”* **Participant -3**

*“I think the nature of meetings and conversations we were having facilitated the process. Although the meetings were scarce in the middle stages of the project, they were regular at the very end of my work.”* **Participant -7**

*“We spent a lot of time together in conceptualizing the project, like she guided me, like the analysis method, you know. She was the person that introduced me to [name of method], I had never heard of it before.”* **Participant -9**

It has emerged once again that a good relationship between a supervisor and supervisee facilitates the process of internalisation during supervision. Above presented excerpt show that attributes such as knowledge of research method and attitude toward research play a big role in enhancing the process of internalisation. This theme is directly linked with other themes such as *interaction methods* and *perceptions of supervision process*. Participant 7 explained that although the meetings were at the end of research paper, it was imperative for transfer of knowledge because of the nature of meetings. Spending of time during feedback sessions also seems to influence the process as compared to interacting via electronic mails only. It is also evident that matching personalities facilitate easy transfer of skills. If personalities of supervisor and supervisee differ, it may pose great challenges of which political/power issues may arise.



Majority of participants seem to view quality of supervision and supervisory relationship as the most important factor in determining transfer of skills/attributes. The importance of the supervisory relationship to the research process is evidence and that major problems are occurring within these relationships. The same sentiments are shared by Everett et al (2011) and Swaggler and Ellis (2003). In addition, the independent research requirement is an incredibly complex process and due to its challenging and personal nature, the human element becomes just as important to study as the academic element (Lin, 2011; Peyton et al., 2001; Subanthore, 2011). Participants may be having different and several perceptions just because of personal life dynamics.

Preventative factors: - My participants also described their perceptions of factors that might have negatively influenced internalisation to take place. Nature of feedback and the way it was conveyed seem to have played a part. For example, the following participant mentioned that, *“I think, in some respect maybe there is a lacking in the element of practicality. With this I mean in terms of the methods of research during feedback sessions. Most of my feedback was in the form of e-mails.”* This finding add to a conclusion by Stener (2009) also Kiley (2011) that supervisory relationship has the potential to further aggravate negative effects or even hinder any positive effects caused by personal or demographic variables.

The following are quotations describing perceptions of other participants on the factors that may have hindered internalisation process;

*“I think personality wise; there are a lot of things that hindered the process. I am a black man and my supervisor was a [ideology] and I do not like [ideology] to be honest with you and as a student you also need respect and I mean a supervisor must act professionally. If a supervisor says I am going to send feedback in two weeks’ time they must do so or at least*

*send an e mail apologising. There are also few logistical things that can be improved to enhance internalisation.”*

***Participant -4***

*“As we progressed in my research I felt more alone even though she was there. She got quite busy.”*

***Participant -6***

*“The main factor was time of feedback; the second was work overload on the supervisor’s side. At a certain point I wanted to drop because I was upset. These lecturers have a lot of work and supervisees. I blamed the academic system actually.at a certain point, I waited three weeks for feedback. This is a value I do not want to take from my supervisor at all.”*

***Participant -10***

The above excerpts show that participants 6 and 10 were concerned about timing of getting feedback from the research supervisor. Delayed feedback factor seem to be effected by increased work overload from the supervisor’s side. Participant 10 perceived differences in ideology between him and the supervisor hindered the process of internalisation. He also added that their characteristics also seemed to differ. Thus fundamental importance associated with matching characteristics and ideology illustrates how students generate expectations that lead to internalisation. Supervisees seem to be discouraged by supervisors who do not provide expected attention, and who are not well versed in knowledge of the topic or of method to use in a study. Studies by (Atkins & Redley, 1998; Demb & Funk, 1999) also reported that research capacitation is one of the major factors in the supervision relationships.

Issues of gender differences also arise under this theme. It seems as if some participants could not align their characteristics with that of their supervisor. Another participant reported experiencing isolated for she felt doing the project alone. This does

resonate with Grant, 2003; Manathunga, 2005; Wisker, Robinson, & Shacham, 2007; Wright, 2003) who concluded that postgraduate research is a fairly isolated process.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

The present study addresses an important aspect for the development of tertiary education in South Africa. There is a growing need to understand ways in which institutions can develop new researchers and increase their research outputs. Internalisation, which is embedding of one's values, knowledge and beliefs to self, is one of the major factors that plays a bigger role in the development of new or upcoming researchers or supervisors. It is during research supervision where transfer of skills and attributes between supervisor and supervisee takes place. It was found that description of perceptions and experiences of participants varied depending on their different personalities, characteristics and research supervision itself. The review of literature explicated the need to explore internalisation process in other areas including research supervision settings as in clinical settings where it is most common in therapeutic sessions. Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs) still seem to be lagging behind in research output as compared to the previously advantaged institutions.

The National Development Plan stressed the need to produce more supervisors in the form of Doctoral and Masters Degrees graduates. Specifically, the study sought to explore experiences and perceptions of Psychology masters students at a Historically Disadvantaged Institution on research supervision. Students had varying experiences and perceptions of research supervision, especially in terms of transfer of skills and supervision process. Students also described their socially constructed views of how they expect the research supervision must go about so that they may be able to take from their supervisors. Participants also strongly associated supportive and "good" supervision with internalisation. The more they favour the research supervision process the more they also reported

favourably on how skills were transferred and how much they took from their respective supervisors attributes towards research. In addition, previous encounters and baseline expectations also played a role on whether the process of took place positively or negatively. Feedback in terms of its timing and nature also seemed to be a major contributor.

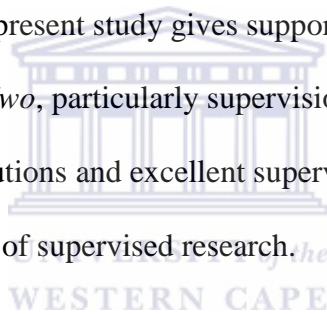
The internalization process can occur intentionally or in less conscious ways. The engagement in research outside of degree purposes and supervision of students provide opportunities for reflection and increasing awareness of internalized attributes as evidenced by behaviours that are characteristic and reminiscent of the supervisor. Findings also suggested a lack of identification with the supervisor can prevent internalization. In fact, participants reported that they intentionally were trying to be different from the supervisor. The impact on the behaviour as researchers or future supervisors thus raises the question whether this still constitutes a form of internalization with a negative direction. The present study set out to establish whether internalization takes place and a more systematic exploration of “negative internalization” was beyond the scope of the study given the definition of internalization adopted.

The results suggest that internalisation was embedded in social contexts and that the meaning assigned to the experience and perception of the supervisor was informed by a complex collection of cultural, psychological and demographic factors. In the context of HDI and Psychology as a discipline, the awareness of contextual factors will enhance the contextual sensitivity of the supervisor that in turn can assist in a more intentional stance towards creating a supervisory context or working alliance that will be conducive to producing researchers that are appropriately skilled, can facilitate a sustained engagement in research and increase completion to throughput rates.

### **5.1 Implications of the study**

Research supervision is seen as a major drive towards development of other researchers thereby contributing to the so important knowledge economy. This study attempted to explore perceptions and experiences of psychology masters students from a historically disadvantaged institution. It was found that the nature of the research supervision and characteristics of the supervisor were motivational tools towards internalisation process. Furthermore, the findings of the study can be useful to stakeholders at institutional, policy and governmental level in that it underscores the dynamic nature of developing or capacitating researchers through supervised research.

This study could also contribute to intervention efforts by those interested in research supervision in South Africa. The present study gives support to challenging issues in Higher Education discussed in *Chapter Two*, particularly supervision of post-graduation students in Historically Disadvantaged Institutions and excellent supervision practice. It also focuses attention on the relational aspects of supervised research.



### **5.2 Limitations of the study**

A limitation of the study occurred during the data collection process in that potential participants were scattered around the country and two of them were outside of South Africa. It was not always possible to conduct face-to-face interviews. One skype interview and two telephonic interviews had to be conducted. One of the participants is based in Mauritius and one in Johannesburg. In addition, it was difficult to locate some of the potential participants because the identified department did not have an updated list of alumni.

Towards the end of data collection, there were fees protests at the institution which limited access to the interview space, supervision and access to participants that were based at the institution in different capacities. For example, the interns were uncomfortable to meet anywhere outside of the institution. The other challenge was that some participants shared

with the researcher that they were not familiar with the process of internalisation under study shared. This might have influenced the amount and nature of data collected. More importantly it impacted the extent to which potential participants were willing to participate in the study.

As transcribing took place, it was clear that participants were touching on several issues or experiences in one question, rendering the analysis process quite challenging. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for greater flexibility in interviewing and responding. This in turn was taxing on the skill level of the researcher. Balancing the desired content and aims with the fluid and dynamic process of reflection proved to be a challenge. A more structured schedule of questions might have improved the fidelity to the aims of the study and eased the analysis process. Thus the study could not report on all attributes equally or separately.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

Regardless of some of the challenges occurring during the research, the present study identified pertinent supervision issues which can be addressed in future research. Although some of the experiences and perceptions of the participants were expected, they recognised the impact of their research supervisor in developing them. Interventions strategies promoting healthy and viable research supervision processes could assist in fast tracking the development of the much required researchers. Perhaps a quantitative study could reveal whether the perceptions and experiences of my participants are common to other Masters Degree students.

Future research should be conducted on the directionality of internalization to assess whether negative reactions to supervisors followed by intentional behavioural attempts to be distinctly different from the supervisor constitutes negative internalization or no internalization. The relationship or distinction between internalization and an internal

supervisor must also be explored. Additionally, participants described better communication and nature of feedback as a factor which could enhance internalisation. Most participants believed that if the supervisor is knowledgeable on the topic under study, he/she will be able to give meaningful feedback and communication. With more capacitated supervisors, development of potential supervisors can be elevated.





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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Semi-Interview guide



### UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

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#### Semi-structured interviews guidelines questions

Reflect on your experience of research supervision during your Masters degree. For the purposes of this interview we are interested in the extent to which you have internalized or taken on the values, attitudes and beliefs about research that were held by your supervisor.

- What were your impressions of the values attitudes and beliefs your supervisor held about research in general and research at Masters level in particular?
- How did you first become aware of the abovementioned?
3. How did your impressions change over the course of your research process? (e.g. proposal writing & conceptualization, fieldwork and analysis, write up and reporting)
4. What were your experiences of the transfer of skills between you and your supervisor with specific reference to;
  - Knowledge of research methodology
  - Attitudes to research
  - Values adhered to in research
  - Beliefs about research
  - Art of mastery or competence in research
5. Did your awareness and impressions change over the course of your research process? (e.g. proposal writing & conceptualization, fieldwork and analysis, write up and reporting)
- To which extent have you taken on similar views as their supervisors with regards to
  - Knowledge of research methodology
  - Attitudes to research
  - Values adhered to in research
  - Beliefs about research
  - sense of mastery or competence in research

- Did your awareness and impressions change over the course of your research process? (e.g. proposal writing & conceptualization, fieldwork and analysis, write up and reporting)
- Would you describe your process of internalization as more conscious or sub-conscious? To which extent were you intentional in the internalization process
- Can you identify any factors that facilitated the internalization process?
- Can you identify any factors that hindered the internalization process?

Comments and reflection

Thanks



## Appendix B: Ethics clearance



## Appendix D: Research permission



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24 JUNE 2015

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: PERMISSION TO DO RESEACH

I hereby confirm that permission has been granted to Mr J Chitanga (Student No: 3508260), a Masters Student in the Psychology Department at UWC, to conduct a research study with Psychology Masters Students in the Faculty of CHS with assistance from her Supervisor towards her Research Project: "Internalization of research supervision: Experiences of Psychology Masters students at a historically disadvantaged university" with Registration No: 15/4/66 as reference.

Yours sincerely

MS N LAWTON-MISRA  
REGISTRAR



## Appendix E: Information Sheet



# UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

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### **Project Title: Internalisation of the research supervisor: Experiences of Psychology Masters Students at a Historically Disadvantaged University**

#### **What is this study about?**

This is a research project being conducted by Jabulani Chitanga (Masters Student) at the University of the Western Cape. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you have been involved in post-graduation research process under supervision. The purpose of this research project is to explore experiences and perceptions of students in relation to the internalisation process that might take place during supervision.

#### **What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate?**

You will be asked to respond to interview questions related to your experiences on how you have internalised your supervisor during various stages of supervision. Questions will only be related to the internalisation process and how you identify yourself with that. The study will be conducted at the University where you are enrolled. Duration of the interview will be approximately 60 minutes. The discussions will be audio recorded for analysis purposes.

#### **Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?**

The researchers undertake to protect your identity and the nature of your contribution. To ensure your anonymity, your name will not be used at all. The study will make use of pseudonyms. Only a researcher directly involved with the study will have access to the pseudonyms for linking purposes during analysis.

To ensure your confidentiality, whatever said during the interviews stays there. Participants are encouraged to do the same. All the data to be kept in locked files, and password-protected computer files to be used. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected.

#### **What are the risks of this research?**

If there may be some risks from participating in this research study, support will be provided through the department of Psychology. We will nevertheless minimise such risks and act promptly to assist you if you experience any discomfort, psychological or otherwise during the process of your participation in this study. Where necessary, an appropriate referral will be made to a suitable professional for further assistance or intervention.

#### **What are the benefits of this research?**

This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about how we can improve the work of an internal supervisor. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of research supervision. There is a great need to improve the standards of Historically Disadvantaged Institution, University of the Western Cape included. Further studies can also be done in other institutions.

**Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time?**

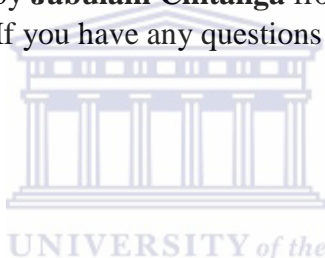
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.

**What if I have questions?**

This research is being conducted by **Jabulani Chitanga** from the Psychology at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact:

***Jabulani Chitanga-0782816855***

***E-mail- [3508260@uwc.ac.za](mailto:3508260@uwc.ac.za)***



Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

**Research supervisor:** Dr. M. Smith; Dept. of Psychology, UWC, Private Bag X17 Bellville 7535, E-mail- [mrsmith@uwc.ac.za](mailto:mrsmith@uwc.ac.za)

**Head of Department:** Dr. M. Andipatin; **E-mail-** [mandipatin@uwc.ac.za](mailto:mandipatin@uwc.ac.za), Dept. of Psychology, UWC, Private Bag X17 Bellville 7535, E-mail- [mrsmith@uwc.ac.za](mailto:mrsmith@uwc.ac.za)

Dean of the Faculty of Community and Health Sciences:

Prof José Frantz

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17

Bellville 7535

[chs-deansoffice@uwc.ac.za](mailto:chs-deansoffice@uwc.ac.za)

## Appendix F: Consent Form



# UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

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### **Title of Research Project: Internalisation of the researcher supervisor: Experiences of Psychology Masters Students at a Historically Disadvantaged University**

The study has been described to me in language that I understand. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand what my participation will involve and I agree to participate of my own choice and free will. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed to anyone. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without fear of negative consequences or loss of benefits. I also hereby consent to the dissemination protocol explained to me in language that I understood.

**Participant's name**.....

**Participant's signature**.....

**Date** .....

**Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study!!!!**