

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Faculty of Community and Health Sciences

Title: The subjective experiences of students who withdraw from a directed Masters programme in Psychology at a historically disadvantaged university: A case study

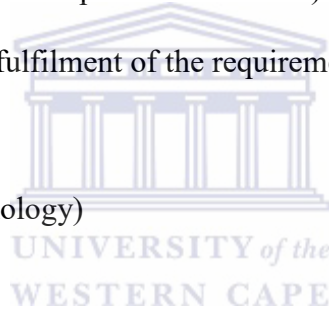
Student Name: Yolande Offord

Student Number: 3503505

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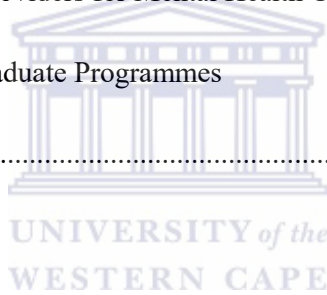
Supervisor: Dr. Mario Smith

Date: 10 February 2016

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Plagiarism Declaration

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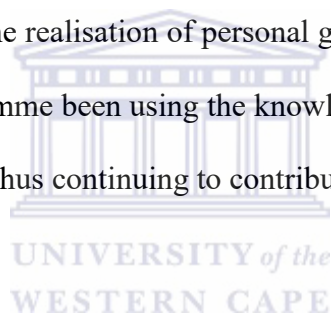
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Abstract

Neuropsychiatric disorders place a great burden on the South African healthcare system. This burden is compounded by the shortage of integral human resources such as mental health care staff. Directed Masters programmes in Psychology can address this shortage as it is the practicing degree to qualify as a psychologist and subsequently register as such with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). A small group of students are selected into Professional Masters programmes in Psychology each year, but not all students complete their studies as some are either terminated from the programme or choose to self-terminate. There is a lack of systematic exploration of the factors contributing to non-completion due to self-termination. The study therefore aimed to explore the experiences of postgraduate students that chose to self-terminate their studies in a directed Masters programme in Psychology and to identify the factors that contributed to such a decision. The study was qualitative and explorative in nature. The sample consisted of four participants who were previously enrolled for a directed Masters programme in Psychology offered at a historically disadvantaged university in the Western Cape. The Senate Research and Senate Higher Degrees Committees of UWC (Ethics Clearance and Project Registration Number: 15/4/44) granted permission to conduct the study. Relevant ethics principles including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity were adhered to. Data was collected through programme records and semi-structured interviews. Interviews were transcribed and analysed by two researchers using thematic analysis. Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously until saturation was reached. Trustworthiness of the findings was achieved through continuous interrogation of multiple readings of the data, reflexivity, and external auditing. Findings revealed numerous factors that incorporate personal, programmatic and contextual considerations as motivations to self-terminate from a postgraduate programme, thus pointing to the complexity of the decision-making process within a socially embedded

reality. The factors influential in self-termination prior to enrollment include the participants' interest in psychological work, their prior work experience and a need for skills capacitation which served as their motives for enrollment. Upon entry into the programme the participants experienced a disparity between their expectations and the nature and requirements of the programme, which led to a lack of satisfaction with the course. Lack of satisfaction, along with academic, physical and emotional unpreparedness, uncertainty about study choice, and perceived competence were some of the obstacles to academic integration. The dissonance they experienced were further exacerbated during enrollment by other factors such as the availability of financial support, interpersonal dynamics within the cohort group, and personal belief systems. The participants were able to find meaning in the process of self-termination as it led to a heightened pursuit of the realisation of personal goals. Participants have subsequent to their experiences in the programme been using the knowledge that they have gained in both salaried and volunteer positions, thus continuing to contribute to the field of psychology.



Acknowledgements

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Lastly, I would like to thank my husband, Graham Offord, for his continuous support and encouragement throughout this academic programme.

1. Introduction

The retention and throughput of students in Higher Education is a long-standing global concern (Braxton et al., 2013; Hovdhaugen, Frølich & Aamodt, 2013). According to Braxton et al. (2013) student retention rates are not only indicators of student success, but also point toward other achievements such as increased academic knowledge and competence, the development of cognitive abilities, higher levels of employability, and personal growth. Early departure from a degree programme thus negatively impacts the attainment of the aforementioned achievements. Furthermore, it leads to reputational harm and economic losses for Higher Education institutions (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004).

Masters degrees in Psychology are the practicing degrees to qualify and register as psychologists in South Africa (HPCSA, 2015a). Directed Masters programmes in Psychology are labour- and resource-intensive, and are offered to smaller groups of students that have passed through stringent selection criteria (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004). The concern regarding student retention is increased exponentially when training is offered to smaller, highly selected groupings where there still remains a risk of termination or non-completion due to not reaching clinical competence, financial exclusion or academic exclusion (Koen, Cele & Libhaber, 2006; McCabe, Trevino & Butterfield, 2001; Wajda-Johnston, Handal, Brawer, & Fabricatore, 2001; West, 2012).

1.1 Problem statement

The adverse effects of attrition are compounded when students elect to terminate their studies by withdrawing from the programme. Though anecdotal evidence exists on the reasons for self-termination, systematic empirical exploration of the factors contributing to non-completion due to self-termination is lacking (Henfield, Woo, & Washington, 2013; Hoskins

& Goldberg, 2005; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). Most students who self-terminate from graduate programmes leave silently with exit interviews to determine the reasons behind the decision to self-terminate being a rare occurrence (Golde, 2000; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). It would be very helpful to gain an insight into the factors that would contribute to such a decision after going through a rigorous selection process to become part of a highly selected group. Thus the present study aimed to explore the subjective experiences of postgraduate students that elect to withdraw (self-terminate) from their studies in a directed Masters programme in Psychology. The objectives of this study were to

- explore the motivation for enrolment in the specific study area;
- to explore student expectations of the study programme and the extent to which those have been met;
- to explore students' subjective experience of the decision-making process;
- to identify the factors contributing to students' decision;
- to explore perceptions of the impact students' had on the programme and other role players.

1.2 Rationale for the study

The burden that neuropsychiatric disorders place on the South African healthcare system necessitates the training of mental health care staff that can supply services and research related to mental health (Bradshaw, Norman, & Schneider, 2007; National Department of Health, 2013). Retention of students, however, is a concern as some students do not complete their studies due to termination by the institution or due to self-termination. This could lead to a shortfall in the number of appropriately skilled mental health staff (Nchinda, 2002), as well as lead to reputational harm and financial losses for Higher Education institutions (Braxton et al., 2004). There is a lack of systematic exploration of the factors contributing to non-completion

due to self-termination. The study thus explores the experiences of postgraduate students who chose to self-terminate their studies in a directed Masters programme in Psychology, identifying factors that contributed to such a decision in order to improve on current retention strategies.

1.3 Theoretical Orientation

The theoretical framework that underpinned this study was social constructionism. Social constructionism states that experiences of reality are informed by social, cultural and historical influences (Gergen, 2000). Students who self-terminate from postgraduate degree programmes often experience the decision as distressing, having a personal sense of failure, and are likely to blame themselves rather than seeing the influence that the academic institution and its culture could have had on their decision (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). With social constructionism a critical view is thus held towards everyday assumptions of behaviour by adopting the stance that understanding is gained within a socio-historical framework (Burr, 2015). Reality, from a social constructionist viewpoint, is negotiated socially. Contexts, relationships and language combine to impact how people develop. Language plays a critical role in social constructionism as the nature of experiences is influenced by how people talk about themselves, others and the world (Raskin, 2002). The subjective experiences of students will therefore be guided by their social, cultural and historical context. Thus subjectivity is valued and participants are considered as co-constructors of the research process and resultant findings which is ultimately a social artefact as well (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Social constructionism was appropriate for this study since the study examined the subjective experiences of the target group whilst carefully acknowledging the reciprocal influences between researcher and participants. Social constructionism furthermore acknowledges that training to qualify and register as psychologists in South Africa occurs in a

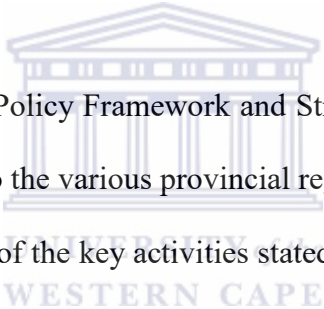
particular social and academic context, which is influenced by the various regulatory bodies within the South African health care system. In addition, training occurs within a personal and familial context that serves to encourage and support the participants in their training and decision-making.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Mental Health Care in South Africa

Mental health care in South Africa receives fewer resources when compared to other sectors of health care (Lund, Boyce, Flisher, Kafaar & Dawes, 2009). This is a concern when noting that neuropsychiatric disorders has the third largest impact on the burden of disease in the country, only surpassed by the impact of HIV/Aids and infectious diseases (Bradshaw et al., 2007). There are also economic and social costs attached to prevalence of neuropsychiatric disorders. Social costs include stigmatisation, discrimination and disruption of social and family networks (Lund et al., 2008). There are direct economic costs related to the provision of mental health care, as well as indirect economic costs related to loss of income and employment that ultimately impacts the family and their financial circumstances (Lund, Myer, Stein, Williams, & Flisher, 2013; National Department of Health, 2013). Lost earnings related to neuropsychiatric disorders exceed the cost of treating these disorders (Lund et al., 2013). The great burden of disease experienced in most developing countries is further pronounced by the lack of appropriately skilled staff and lack of research capacity in those countries to find appropriate solutions (Nchinda, 2002; Saxena, Thornicroft, Knapp, & Whiteford, 2007). In South Africa there is a discrepancy between the supply of mental health services and research related to mental health, and an ever increasing demand for psychological services (National Department of Health, 2013). By 2014 the population of South Africa was 53.7 million (Statistics South Africa, 2015). There are currently about 11 000 psychologists registered with

the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA, 2015b) and if there has been little change to the statistical distribution of registered psychologists reported by Cooper (2014a), about 58% of those registered will be either clinical or counselling psychologists. The majority of psychologists operate in private practice (Cooper, 2014a), but nearly 70% of South Africans access public health care services as their first point of call and only 18.1% of the population are members of a medical aid scheme with possible cover for private mental health care (Statistics South Africa, 2015). Currently the total number of human resources allocated to mental health within the Department of Health and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is 9.3 per 100 000 of the population of which about 0.32 are psychologists (Lund, Kleintjes, Kakuma, & Flisher, 2010; World Health Organisation, 2007).



The National Mental Health Policy Framework and Strategic Plan 2013-2020 (NMHPF) was developed to give guidance to the various provincial regions in South Africa with regards to mental health provision. Some of the key activities stated in the NMHPF are to address the shortage of mental health care staff through human resource development; and to develop surveillance, research and innovation capacity (National Department of Health, 2013).

2.2 Universities as Training Providers for Mental Health Care Staff

Universities are important role players in addressing shortages in staff and research capacity in the mental health sector as they provide the required postgraduate clinical skills training for health professions such as Psychologists (World Health Organisation, 2005). In addition to providing required training, universities also address the need in South Africa for more regular and accurate data collection related to the provision of mental health services through research output to which postgraduate students contribute (Lund et al., 2010). Effective research related to health care, including mental health care, can improve the health status and

economic output of South Africa when research findings are appropriately interpreted and implemented (Nchinda, 2002). Postgraduate students in Psychology can therefore address significant issues outlined in the NMHPF when conducting their research requirements and producing research outputs, as well as by receiving the necessary training through directed Masters programmes in Psychology to practice as registered psychologists.

The South African Public Higher Education landscape consists of 11 Traditional Universities, 6 Comprehensive Universities, and 6 Universities of Technology (CHE, 2014; HESA, 2014). The initial lack of a national plan for higher education in post-apartheid South Africa led to the development of competition amongst public universities (Lindow, 2011). This competition was further emboldened by the growth of the private higher education sector, with 49 Private Higher Education institutions in existence compared to the 23 public institutions (Lindow, 2011). Increased competition led to fragmentation between higher education institutions and increased inequality between historically advantaged and historically disadvantaged universities (Ministry of Education, 2001; Van Vught, 2007).

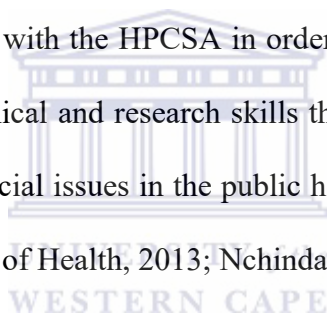
The provision of access to all universities for Black (African, Coloured and Indian) students after 1994 led to an initial decline in enrolment figures at historically disadvantaged universities. Added to a decline in enrolment figures, factors such as increased student debt and difficulties related to student governance and university management contributed to the decreased sustainability of historically disadvantaged universities (Ministry of Education, 2001). Both historically advantaged and historically disadvantaged universities still show racial differences with regards to enrolments (HESA, 2014). The majority of white students continue to enroll at historically advantaged universities, whereas historically disadvantaged universities are accessed mostly by black students. Where university choice and access was previously governed by race, social class now also plays a role (HESA, 2014).

One of the aims of the National Plan for Higher Education developed by The Ministry of Education (2001) is to address inequity and establish greater sustainability at historically disadvantaged universities through financial redress. The purpose of financial redress is for assisted universities to develop a mission in line with the national framework and to ensure that the required academic, administrative and management structures are created to support this mission. Historically disadvantaged universities are regarded as having to provide education to underprivileged students who come from rural areas, but these universities receive insufficient funding to support the needs of those students (DHET, 2102). Funding is a key requirement for increasing enrolment and throughput figures. Although funding is available through the National Research Foundation (NRF) it does not fulfil the financial requirements of students, preventing students from enrolling for or completing postgraduate studies (HESA, 2014). Although government funding for higher education has increased nominally over the years, there has been a decrease in funding when considering it per student capita (HESA, 2014). A mere 2,5% of the state budget was allocated to universities for funding in 2012, compromising 0,76% of the GDP. Public higher education institutions in South Africa tend to receive 40% of their funding from the state, 31% from tuition fees and 29% from third stream sources such as donations, endowments and entrepreneurial involvement (CHE, 2014).

Postgraduate enrolment rates in South Africa comprise a small percentage (16%) of overall enrolment figures. The enrolment at different postgraduate levels is distributed as follows: 58% enrolled for Honours degrees, 33% enrolled for Masters degrees and 9% enrolled for Doctoral studies (CHE, 2014). It thus indicates that there are noteworthy declines in enrolment rates between undergraduate and postgraduate studies, and within progression levels of postgraduate studies. These enrollment rates are also low when considering the economic and social

development needs of South Africa (HESA, 2014). Of notable concern are the national throughput rates for coursework Masters, with only 53% of students graduating (CHE, 2014).

The most recent figures available indicate that the number of 2007 cohort students in coursework Masters in Psychology that graduated within 4 years were 217 students out of 286 (CHE, 2014). Thus 76% of those initially enrolled in 2007 graduated by 2010. This percentage is considerably higher than the national average of 53%. However, it is important to note that small numbers of students are selected into structured masters programmes and the higher completion rates still do not translate into significantly more registered psychologists. It is imperative that students enrolled for a directed programme in Psychology complete their studies and subsequently register with the HPCSA in order to take up the shortfall in mental health staff with the required clinical and research skills that can form part of the attempt to address the Mental Health and social issues in the public health sector in South Africa (Lund et al., 2009; National Department of Health, 2013; Nchinda, 2002).



2.3 Non-completion of Postgraduate Programmes

Non-completion of postgraduate programmes can leave a gap in the knowledge produced in a field of study and it has a roll-over effect on the amount of research output produced by a university, especially where the research component of the course was not completed (Pillay & Kritzinger, 2007). Students can first of all not register as psychologists with the HPCSA until all the requirements for the Masters degree have been met (Cooper, 2014b). As such they cannot practice and can thus not earn an income as psychologists. Furthermore, students cannot start with the required community service year until being qualified and registered as psychologists in the supervised practice category (Pillay & Kritzinger, 2007). Non-completion thus also leads to a gap in service provision and ultimately a denial of mental health services

in poorer communities who are served by health professionals during their community service year.

Two sources of non-completion of studies have been identified namely, 1) termination from the programme by training staff and 2) self-termination. Programmatic terminations from degree programmes reportedly result from four core reasons. First, academic dishonesty includes a range of behaviours such as various forms of plagiarism, copying tests or exams, and collaborating on assignments without permission (McCabe et al., 2001; Wajda-Johnston et al., 2001). McCabe et al (2001) found that both individual factors and contextual factors influence academic dishonesty. Individual factors include the pressure to obtain high marks and perform well, low self-esteem, and lack of integrity. Contextual factors, specifically those related to the behaviours of peers, are thought to be most influential in the occurrence of academic dishonesty. Of notable concern in health professions qualifications is that dishonest behaviour could lead to a lack of required skills and knowledge needed to treat patients (Wajda-Johnston et al., 2001).

Second, Koen et al. (2006) cited termination due to academic exclusion where students fail to promote due to non-completion of the degree requirements within the required time frames; where not enough subjects were passed, where a major subject was not passed or where certain subjects are continuously failed.

Third, financial exclusion resulting from unpaid course fees can prevent students from registering or graduating. Although funding is provided to disadvantaged students in South Africa through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) it is not adequate to cover all the costs related to studying (Koen et al., 2006).

Fourth, not attaining clinical competency and issues related to personality functioning can result in termination (Kamaloodien et al., 2012). The scientist-practitioner model is largely

employed in the training of Clinical Psychologists where equal emphasis is placed on the science or academic component and the clinical practice component (Pachana, Sofronoff, Scott, & Helmes, 2011). Students in a directed Masters programme in Psychology thus face a unique challenge. Not only are they required to excel at academic tasks, they are also required to attain competence in a large number of clinical or professional skills and personal development. West (2012) reported that students are often not equally competent in academic and therapeutic skills. Competence is defined by Epstein and Hundert (2002, p. 227) as “the habitual and judicious use of communication, knowledge, technical skills, clinical reasoning, emotions, values, and reflection in daily practice for the benefit of the individual and community being served” which requires “habits of mind, including attentiveness, critical curiosity, self-awareness, and presence”.

Clinical competency in Psychology broadly involves the ability to complete tasks related to the profession appropriately and effectively as required by the specific context. These are achieved through critical thinking and analysis, decision-making, evaluation and modification of judgements, the toleration of ambiguity and interpersonal conflict, and self-reflective practice (Hatcher & Lassiter, 2007; Kaslow, 2004). Three levels of competency are identified namely foundational competencies, functional competencies, and specialty competencies (Kaslow, 2004; Rodolfa et al., 2005). Foundational competencies first entails competence in ethics which involves the knowledge, understanding and implementation of ethics rules and codes related to the profession of psychology. Second, it entails considering individual and cultural diversity, including self-awareness on the part of the practitioner regarding biases and assumptions and employing professional practices in working with diverse groups of people (Kaslow, 2004). Functional competencies in Psychology include the ability to: conduct psychological assessments, diagnose, and conceptualise the case; provide consultation in relation to the needs of the client; manage and administrate the provision of mental health

services; apply research in practice and contribute to knowledge building; and develop professional capability through teaching and supervision (Rodolfa et al., 2005). Specialty competencies may be unique to specific areas of specialties, for example in neuropsychology and geriatric psychology, or may be shared across fields of specialty (Kaslow, 2004). These specialty competencies require more specialised training and advanced knowledge. In addition to specific competencies required, personality characteristics and intellectual skills need to be developed into the skill set of a professional psychologist. These include “interpersonal skills, cognitive and affective skills, personality and attitudes, expressive and reflective skill, and personal skills” (Hatcher & Lassiter, 2007, p. 54).

A number of reasons have been identified as barriers to completion and subsequent self-termination from studies including: insufficient academic preparation (Hoffman & Julie, 2012; West, 2012); lack of resources (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; DHET, 2102; HESA, 2014; Hovdhaugen et al., 2013; Manathunga, 2005); limited research capacity (Hoffman & Julie, 2012; Ismail, Abiddin, & Hassan, 2011; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Pillay & Kritzinger, 2007); personal factors (Cooke, Sims & Peyrefitte, 1995; Golde, 2000; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Hovdhaugen et al., 2013; Kuyken, Peters, Power, & Lavender, 2003; Lee, 2008; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Nilsson, 2007; Sommer & Dumont, 2011); and the supervisory relationship (Berkel, Constantine, & Olsen, 2007; Dickson, Moberly, Marshall, & Reilly, 2011; Manathunga, 2005; Schroeder, Andrews, & Hindes, 2009). Below is a brief exposition of these factors.

Academic preparation: The transition to postgraduate studies can be difficult for students, with students lacking the academic and practical skills required to be effective in a Masters programme (Hoffman & Julie, 2012; West, 2012). West (2012) reported that students who have completed an undergraduate qualification are expected to be able to successfully advance to

postgraduate studies. However, students undergo various transitions when moving from undergraduate studies to postgraduate studies such as personal-emotional transition, social transition and academic transition (Hoffman & Julie, 2012). Few students engaged in academic activities, such as essay writing and producing research output that will adequately prepare them for postgraduate studies prior to commencing postgraduate studies (Dysthe, 2007; Hoffman & Julie, 2012; West, 2012). Transition with regards to academic preparation and motivation is thus required to successfully complete postgraduate studies. Added to that, postgraduate students have a lack of practical experience in their chosen field of study before enrolment in a Masters programme (Hoffman & Julie, 2012). Limited knowledge on programme content and expected academic requirements can be additional barriers to completion (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Suhre, Jansen, & Harskamp, 2007). According to Lovitts and Nelson (2000) students are also drawn to the overall reputation of an academic institution rather than the nature of a specific department within the institution and the academic achievements and intellectual capabilities of the staff associated with the department.

Access to resources: The socio-economic environment in South Africa with high poverty levels dictates that students face numerous challenges with regards to access to resources required to successfully complete studies in Higher Education (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; DHET, 2102; HESA, 2014; Manathunga, 2005). The need to earn an income can take precedence over furthering studies (DHET, 2012). Most structured Masters programmes in Psychology require students to study fulltime thus limiting the capacity of students to earn an income whilst studying. Students are further unable to seek employment as psychologist until all the requirements of the study programme have been met (Pillay & Kritzinger, 2007).

HESA (2014) reported that South African universities face challenges such as inadequate research infrastructure, including lack of teaching and research supervision capabilities

amongst academic staff. In addition to considering the impact of economic resources on non-completion of studies, cultural resources can also impact completion rates (Hovdhaugen et al., 2013). Students can choose to terminate their studies if they experience a mismatch between their own cultural values and that of the academic institution. For example, Hovdhaugen et al. (2013) reported that the extent to which a student's cultural resources are aligned with that of the academic institution will impact academic success and completion rates positively. The current higher education environment allows greater access to students from diverse cultural backgrounds with universities thus having to cater for students from a broad range of experiences and circumstances (HESA, 2014). Although universities have aimed to diversify their own institutional cultures, some students could still lack the cultural resources required to feel a sense of belonging or affective commitment (Cooke et al., 1995; Hovdhaugen et al., 2013).



Research capacity: Only a small percentage of students reportedly participated in research activities, such as the production of publications and attendance at research conferences, prior to enrolment for postgraduate studies (Hoffman & Julie, 2012). Undergraduate students get theoretical exposure to the research process but few develop a thorough understanding of research and are inculcated into a culture of research (Hoffman & Julie, 2012). In addition, although students in directed Masters programmes in Psychology tend to do well academically, students often don't complete the research component of the course in required timeframes. For example, Pillay and Kritzinger (2007) highlighted that the average time for completion of the research component in a directed Masters programme in Psychology was nearly three years, with 70% completing it after the required two years. Lovitts and Nelson (2000) reported that the highest attrition rates are in the academic field of Humanities where study and research are primarily conducted in isolation. Students in Masters programmes require assistance not only

with research methodology, but also with the management of deadlines (Ismail et al., 2011). The research component of a directed Masters programme in Psychology is often completed in isolation which could negatively impact the completion of research within the required time frames. Lack of timely and constructive feedback further impacts the timeous completion of the research component (Ismail et al., 2011).

Personal factors: Alignment of the programme to personal goals, as well as satisfaction with programme content and study activities could influence motivation to complete studies. Intrinsic motivation, associated with autonomy and personal initiative, is the primary source of motivation for postgraduate students (Hoffman & Julie, 2012; Sommer & Dumont, 2011). Motivated students are more likely to engage in study behaviour and activities, such as accessing academic support structures, which stimulate student engagement with the work and thus improve academic performance. Motivation is in turn influenced by the degree of satisfaction that students experience with the course (Suhre et al., 2007), with higher satisfaction leading to higher levels of motivation and lower levels of self-termination (Cook et al., 1995). Research has further identified other personal factors as potential barriers to completion including but not limited to, higher academic stress (e.g. Nilsson, 2007; Sommer & Dumont, 2011), difficulties with adaptation (e.g. Kuyken et al., 2003), reduced levels of self-efficacy (e.g. Nilsson, 2007), academic overload (e.g. Sommer & Dumont; 2011), limited accessing of support structures (e.g. Hoffman & Julie, 2012), availability of supportive academic relationships (e.g. Golde, 2000), and lack of enculturation into the discipline of study and the university (Cooke et al., 1995; Hovdhaugen et al., 2013; Lee, 2008; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) found that student persistence in a postgraduate programme can also be influenced by the student's match to the programme. This includes whether student expectations were met; the student experience within the programme; how

well the student's personal and professional goals matched the academic programme; and the quality of relationships that the student had with faculty members and other students. The use of maladaptive coping styles, such as avoidance, pessimism, substance abuse, emotional detachment and self-blame by students when experiencing stress within an academic environment can act as another barrier to completion (Boyle, 2014; Kausar, 2010; Mahmoud, Staten, Hall, & Lennie, 2012). Conversely, adaptive coping styles including optimism, planning, positive reframing, seeking support, humour and spirituality can facilitate completion (Boyle, 2014; Kausar, 2010; Mahmoud et al., 2012; Maltby & Day, 2003).

Supervision: The quality of the supervisory working alliance, both clinical and research, have been identified as a barrier to students' achievement of required programme outcomes. Influential factors that can lead to poor supervisory working alliance include expectations of students not being met (Manathunga, 2005), the presence of insecure attachment styles (Dickson et al., 2011), compulsive self-reliance (Dickson et al., 2011), inadequate cultural responsiveness and competence from the supervisor (Berkel et al., 2007), limited acculturation (Manathunga, 2005), and insufficient communication with supervisor where appointments are not kept and responses to written communication are avoided (Manathunga, 2005). The nature of a directed Masters programme in Psychology requires academic rigour in which self-reliance can be regarded as a quality associated with success. Dickson et al. (2011) pointed out that self-reliance can lead to difficulties in the supervisory relationship as it can be used as a means to overcompensate for anxiety and can make the student unresponsive to feedback. In South Africa, a culturally diverse country, it can be assumed that faculty and students at academic institutions are also culturally diverse. It is thus likely that cultural differences can be evident between supervisors and students. When differences are either emphasised too much or too

little in supervision, the supervisory working alliance can be hampered (Schroeder, et al., 2009).

Research on postgraduate training in Psychology has focused largely on the supervision working alliance (Berkel et al., 2007; Dickson et al., 2011; Ismail et al., 2011; Lee, 2008; Manathunga, 2005; Schroeder et al., 2009); models of clinical training (Huey & Britton, 2002; Pachana et al., 2011; Stoltenberg & Pace, 2007); clinical competence (Hatcher & Lassiter, 2007; Kaslow, 2004; Rubin et al., 2007); and obstacles to completion 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 (Golde, 2000; Hoffman & Julie, 2012; Lee, 2008; Pillay & Kritzinger, 2007; Suhre et al., 2007; Wright, 2003). Research on postgraduate training in Psychology often emphasise the research component of postgraduate studies and research supervision rather than the overall experiences of students who complete coursework. There is also a larger emphasis on the experiences of Doctoral students rather than Masters students. Research on factors influencing student retention is furthermore more focused on the experiences of undergraduate students rather than postgraduate students. There is thus a gap in knowledge with regards to the non-completion of studies in a directed Masters programme in Psychology. This study was directed at addressing this gap by looking at the subjective experiences of students who elected to self-terminate, specifically from a directed Masters programme in Psychology.

3. Method

3.1 Aim of the Study

The aim of the present study was to explore the subjective experiences of postgraduate students that elected to withdraw (self-terminate) from their studies in a directed Masters programme in Psychology.

3.2 Objectives

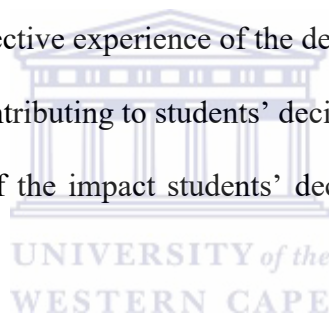
3.2.1 To explore the motivation for enrolment in the specific study area

3.2.2 To explore student expectations of the study programme and the extent to which those have been met

3.2.3 To explore students' subjective experience of the decision-making process

3.2.4 To identify the factors contributing to students' decision

3.2.5 To explore perceptions of the impact students' decision had on the programme and other role players



3.3 Sample and Participants

Target group: Students who self-terminated their studies from a directed Masters programme in Psychology (Clinical, Counselling and Research Psychology) over 2010-2014 at a historically disadvantaged university in the Western Cape formed the target group for the study.

Sample: A criterion-based purposive sampling technique was used to identify potential participants. Purposive sampling allows for the selection of participants that can provide an understanding of the research problem being studied (Creswell, 2007). Five students fitted the criteria and were invited to participate. The sample size was dictated by the number of

participants who fitted the required criteria and who volunteered to partake in the study. Out of the five students that fitted the criteria four volunteered to participate in the study.

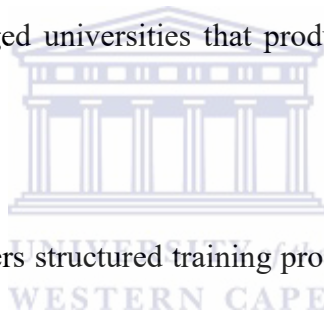
Participants: The sample consisted of four participants who were previously enrolled in one of the three different categories of Masters programmes in Psychology offered at a historically disadvantaged university in the Western Cape. One was enrolled for an M.Psych (Clinical Psychology), another for M.Psych (Counseling Psychology), and two participants for a Masters in Research Psychology. The ages of the students at the time of enrolment ranged between 26 and 42. Two of the participants were male and two were female. Three of the participants were married during the enrolment period and a fourth participant was engaged. The two eldest participants also had children. Further demographic information is not reported on as, being a small sample, it could compromise the anonymity of the participants.

3.4 Research Setting

The research setting was a historically disadvantaged university. Historically disadvantaged universities are regarded as having to provide education to underprivileged students who come from rural areas but these universities receive insufficient funding to support the needs of those students (DHET, 2102). Where university choice and access was previously governed by race, social class now also plays a role (HESA, 2014). As historically disadvantaged universities face challenges that differ from those of historically advantaged universities (DHET, 2102) it might require the development and implementation of distinctive retention strategies. The socio-demographic profile of students at historically disadvantaged universities also leads to unique challenges when transitioning from undergraduate to postgraduate studies (Hoffman & Julie, 2012). The primary motivation for selecting the identified university, a historically disadvantaged university was that it could provide insight

into unique factors that contribute to non-completion of studies in a directed Masters programme in Psychology at a historically disadvantaged university.

The identified university was established during the South African Apartheid era as a university for non-white people, to provide for the human resources needs of a specific non-white racial group according to the racial classification system of the Apartheid government (Wolpe, 1995). Within the democratic dispensation the identified university was first of all reclassified as an emergent research university and more recently as a research-intensive university (UWC Research Policy, 2009). Although there has been an increase in research output from 2008 (0,46 per capita) to 2012 (0,66 per capita) at the identified university, it still lags behind historically advantaged universities that produce outputs of more than one per capita (CHE, 2014).



The identified university offers structured training programmes in most of the categories of registration in psychology, which includes Educational Psychology, Clinical Psychology, Research Psychology and Industrial Psychology. Three of these programmes, Clinical Psychology, Counseling Psychology and Research Psychology were offered within the targeted time period in the Department of Psychology at the identified university. (M.R. Smith, personal communication, April 4, 2014).

3.5 Research Design

This study employed a collective case study design. The collective case study focuses on one issue, but a number of cases are used to provide a variety of perspectives on the issue (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano & Morales, 2007). Case studies lend themselves to exploratory research where the purpose could be to increase knowledge on a topic or issue, to determine

whether a more detailed study on a topic would be feasible, or to identify methods that can be used in future research (Babbie, 2011). Case studies are based on the experiences of a small number of individuals, most often those that have gone through a particularly difficult event or who have had unusual experiences (Stangor, 2011). The assumption is that the unique experiences of these individuals can be explored to provide insight into human behaviour (Huck, 2012). Case studies can focus on an issue, rather than an individual, and explore the issue at hand within a contextual setting (Creswell et al., 2007). The subjective experiences of students that self-terminated thus provided a variety of perspectives on the decisions involved in termination of studies within the context of a historically disadvantaged university to which the collective case study design could be applied.

3.6 Method of data collection

The study used qualitative methods of data collection to explore the subjective experiences of students who self-terminated. Qualitative methods can provide a description of phenomena by considering data in its original, rich form; can explore under-researched topics; can explore sensitive topics and are consistent with interpretivist paradigms such as social constructionism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Huck, 2012) and are consistently used with case study designs (Cresswell et al., 2007). The study incorporated two methods of data collection namely: semi-structured interviews and programme records.

3.6.1 Programme records of the degree programmes at the identified institution over the period spanning 2010-2014 were accessed to determine two types of information: a) the incidence of self-termination; and b) the timeframe of withdrawal. Records are useful methods of data collection since it houses important information in a central place that can readily be accessed (Creswell, 2007). A major disadvantage of records is that it might not be complete and information required might not be available in the desired form due to inconsistencies in

recording procedures, changes in administrators and administration procedures, as well as the data recorded not supporting the research questions being explored (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The information desired in the study is ethically required by the HPCSA to be recorded and maintained for a five-year period (Kamaloodien et al., 2012). Accredited programmes must be compliant with this requirement in order to maintain their accreditation. Thus there was less chance of the required information not being available in the format requested.

3.6.2 Interviews. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants. Semi-structured interviews were structured relatively open which allowed the interviewer to adjust questions according to informant responses (Wenger, 2001). Personal interviews also allowed for the establishment of rapport and trust between the interviewer and interviewee, which can lead to more truthful responses (Huck, 2012) and is more appropriate for sensitive topics (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). An interview schedule was created that guided the interview and questioning of the interviewee (Appendix A). The interviews were conducted at a time most convenient for the participants with an approximate duration of 60 minutes. Furthermore, interviews were conducted at places that were neutral and safe for the participants, and also determined by them. Interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed by an independent transcriber. All transcriptions were checked for accuracy by the researcher and amended where necessary. The first interview provided a rich data set, which was used to guide subsequent interviews. Although there were only four participants in this study, data saturation was also reached.

3.7 Data Analysis

The transcribed interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a flexible research tool that can provide a detailed outline of the content and salient themes within the data (Silverman, 2004). Thematic analysis can be used across a range of theoretical

approaches, including essentialist, realist, and constructionist paradigms of psychology (Braun & Clark, 2006). Within a collective case study, a thematic analysis can be used to look for common themes across the various cases (Creswell et al., 2007). However, thematic analysis from a social constructionist perspective does not seek themes related to motivation or individual psychologies but rather aims to theorise the sociocultural and structural environments that enable the subjective experiences of respondents (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Braun and Clark (2006) proposed six phases in conducting a thematic analysis, noting that analysis will require a continual move back and forth between these steps with writing being an integral part of the analysis from the first phase. These phases were employed during data analysis. The first phase of the analysis required the researcher to become familiar with the data through transcribing it, reading and re-reading whilst writing down ideas. This allows the researcher to be immersed in the data in order to have a foundational knowledge of the content before proceeding with analysis. Ideas were noted in a journal after each interview. Although the interviews were transcribed by an independent transcriber, the researcher reviewed and amended the transcriptions, noting ideas whilst reviewing the transcriptions. The interviews were listened to numerous times and each transcription was read a minimum of three times. Each interview was transcribed within a few days of completion of the interview.

The second phase involved generating initial codes across the data set and collating relevant data to the codes. Semantic or latent content that are interesting was identified and assigned codes. It further entailed that all data extracts were coded and organised within each code. A qualitative data analysis software programme, Atlas TI, was used to label relevant sections of text within the transcribed data. An initial set of 21 coding categories were developed. Coding was done after the first interview. As the first interview provided a rich data set, no additional codes had to be added during the analysis subsequent interviews.

Looking for themes across the codes was the third phase of analysis. Codes and associated data extracts were organised into possible themes. Visual representations, specifically mind maps and tables, were used in this phase. A table format was initially used to list the various codes and to attach broader categories and themes to subsets of codes. A mind map was further created as visual representation to aid in the identification of category and theme overlap. This process was repeated with each interview completed. Initially, four categories were identified with related themes.

Phase four involved reviewing categories and themes by completing checks on whether the themes relate to coded extracts and the complete data set. There are two levels in this phase. On the first level coded data extracts were reviewed to determine whether a coherent pattern exists. This led to the expansion of the four initial categories into seven categories as new categories were created for the extracts that did not coherently fit into the existing categories. The second level considered the coherence of categories and themes across the entire data set. After each initial analysis, the data set was re-read in order to determine whether the themes were relevant to the data set and to recode the themes that the researcher missed during earlier phases.

Phase five focused on creating definitions and names for each category, theme and sub-theme. A detailed analysis was conducted for each category and theme and as such overlap between them was avoided whilst being considered in relation to each other. At this phase consideration was given to the existence of sub-themes. Sub-themes were continually refined as interviews were conducted, transcribed and analysed. Consideration was also given to names for each category and theme, with the aim to choose names that communicate the essence of the categories and themes.

The last phase involved the production of the academic report (thesis) where relevant extracts were tabulated and used as examples to illustrate the categories, themes and sub-

themes identified. Data extracts were further related back to the literature and research question.

3.8 Reflexivity and Trustworthiness

Aguinaldo (2004) proposed that trustworthiness of qualitative research consists of continuous interrogation of the multiple and often varied readings of research representation. To this end, the researcher engaged in a process of reflexivity. Researcher impressions were recorded after each interview, during transcription and during analysis to track possible subjective interpretations that can impact the data generated and findings stated. Prior work experience in Higher Education assisted the researcher in understanding the South African educational landscape and the requirements of various professional organisations with regards to the completion of studies. Care had to be taken though that the researcher's conceptual understanding of Higher Education did not hinder participants in sharing their subjective experiences. As a Masters student in a directed programme in Psychology, the researcher took note of the possible impact that interview answers could have on the information gathered from research interviews and her own experiences of the programme. Being a student, however, assisted the researcher in building rapport with the interviewees allowing for more complex and richer data. The use of micro skills associated with interviewing led to further rapport between the researcher and the interviewees. Each interviewee brought a different emotional valence with regard to the research topic. As such, the researcher had to adjust the interview according to the level of containment required by the interviewee. Some respondents used the opportunity to voice frustrations and to verbalise thoughts not previously shared. The researcher had to allow the respondent the space to do this whilst keeping the interview focused on the research question. Other respondents were cautious in sharing detailed content on their

subjective experiences and the researcher thus had to wait until deeper rapport was established before probing further into more emotional content.

To facilitate rigour and enhance the trustworthiness of the data, two people completed the analysis. The second reviewer was a Masters level research intern with specialised training in qualitative methods of data analysis. Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously until saturation was reached. Use was also made of external auditing in which the analysis and interpretation was checked by the supervisor. The techniques used to facilitate rigour and increased trustworthiness are in keeping with recommendations regarding the evaluative criteria of qualitative research (Cohen & Crabtree, 2008; Cresswell et al., 2007).

3.9 Ethics Considerations

Permission to conduct the study was granted by the Senate Research and Senate Higher Degrees Committees of UWC (Appendix B). Permission was requested from the Registrar to conduct the study at the identified university and to access student records (Appendix C). The Registrar granted permission, but pointed out that the student details could not be disclosed without their permission in keeping with the Protection of Personal Information Act No. 4 of 2013 (Government Gazette, 2013). The resolution was that the supervisor would contact students since he already had access to the information and introduce the study. Once students indicated interest in hearing from the researcher, the supervisor handed over the contact details of prospective participants. An information sheet was prepared that outlined the aims of the study, what was required of participants and the rights and responsibilities of the participants, as well as the lines of communication to provide feedback or concerns about the research for eligible candidates (Appendix D). The information sheet underscored voluntary participation, the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences for doing so, the confidentiality of information shared, and the right not to reply to questions that the

participant is not comfortable with. Participants provided written consent before being interviewed (Appendix E). All audio-recordings, notes and transcriptions are kept in a safe location with access only available to the researcher and supervisor. Electronic data have been stored using password-protected computer files. Although not required during the research process, there was an option for participants to be referred to appropriate professionals in psychology in the event of emotional distress arising due to the recounting of experiences.

4. Findings

Programme records of the directed Masters programmes in Psychology at the identified institution over 2010-2014 indicated that 71 students were enrolled during the period. Table 1 below provides an overview of the enrollment figures. Out of the 71 students, five students self-terminated from their studies during this period amounting to 7%. Four of the five students self-terminated during Year 1. Out of these four students, two self-terminated during term one of the first semester. Both these students were enrolled for a Masters in Research Psychology. The two other students, enrolled for Clinical Psychology or Counseling Psychology, self-terminated during term two of the first semester. One student self-terminated during Year 2 in the third term. On average, 24% of students enrolled for a directed Masters programme in Psychology do not complete their studies within 4 years (CHE, 2014), either due to termination from the programme by training staff or due to self-termination. If the non-completion rates at the identified university are comparable to national averages, self-termination figures could represent 41% of total non-completions.

Table 1: *Enrollment Figures 2010-2014*

Year	Masters in Psychology (Clinical/Counseling)	Masters in Psychology (Research)
2010	8	
2011	6	
2012	6	
2013	8	
2014	6	
TOTAL	34	

Five categories with themes and sub-themes were identified in the analyses of the data (Appendix F). The categories include: Motive for Enrollment, Academic Integration, Other Considerations, Process of Decision-making, Impact of the Programme. Table 2 below provides a schematic that outlines the categories and themes subsumed therein:

Table 2: *Categories and Themes identified in the Data Analysis*

Category	Themes
Motive for Enrolment	Interest in psychological work Prior experience in psychological work Intrinsic motivation
Obstacles to Academic Integration	Criterion references Nature of the programme Preparedness for the programme Perceived competence
Other Considerations	Financial support Interpersonal dynamics within the group Personal belief system
Process of Decision-making	Experiential knowing Intrapsychic processes Consulting Implementation
Impact of the Programme	Value of psychological knowledge Future academic pursuits

4.1 Category 1: Motive for enrolment

The first category included themes that spoke to the path participants followed to get to professional training. It became evident that there were patterned ways in which participants entered or pursued professional training. None of the participants enrolled for their respective programmes in order to obtain a degree certificate that will allow them to pursue a career within the associated field of psychology. Most participants were therefore interested in aspects of psychological work, but not in following the career paths that a directed Masters programme in Psychology would give them access to. The extrinsic motivations of participants were not aligned to intrinsic motivations but also were not effective in and of themselves in preventing self-termination.

Three themes emerged in this category that reflected their respective routes towards professional training and their motives for enrolling in professional training. The three themes identified are: 1) interest in psychological work; 2) prior experience in psychological work; and 3) intrinsic motivation. Table 3 below indicates the themes and sub-themes in the first category that illustrate the pathways that served as the motivation to apply to the directed programmes.

Table 3: *Category 1: Motive for Enrolment*

Theme	Sub-Themes
Theme 1.1 Interest in psychological work	Empowerment of self Empowerment of others Personal interest
Theme 1.2 Prior experience in psychological work	Community work Counseling Coaching and training
Theme 1.3 Intrinsic motivation	Job satisfaction Skills capacitation Professional identity Category of psychology

Theme 1.1: Interest in psychological work. All participants noted that they had an increasing interest in psychological work, rather than being interested purely in psychological principles or the academic field of psychology. The participants attributed this interest to a number of factors which are merged into three major sub-themes: 1) empowerment of self; 2) empowerment of others; and 3) personal interest. Table 4 below summarises the sub-themes in relation to interest in psychological training with illustrative quotations.



Table 4: *Theme 1.2: Interest in psychological work*

Sub-themes:	Illustrative quotes
Empowerment of self	<p data-bbox="443 315 1406 412">“And I felt that by going the psychology way would help me and empower me to deal with the kind of challenges that I face in working with the community, and to a large extent it did.”</p> <p data-bbox="443 439 1406 535">“And the other aspect of the course and the reason why I went into it, as I’ve said, I wanted to empower myself to be more knowledgeable of the psyche, how people think, how people operate, how people work, so that I can be of assistance to them.”</p> <p data-bbox="443 562 1406 622">“I simply did it because I wanted to empower myself, because I grew up in a community where to be involved in psychology is just taboo.”</p> <p data-bbox="443 649 1406 779">“...but then to actually move yourself into a position where you can actually be a professional and do what you’re supposed to do really well. And I think I was looking forward to that, to be trained and developed to be a person who can really be in a position where I’m well-equipped to actually then serve our people in that area.”</p> <p data-bbox="443 806 1406 826">“...I was looking forward to just being developed, trained and better-equipped.”</p> <p data-bbox="443 853 1406 949">“I also became aware of just how limiting counseling is and I therefore wanted to pursue the Masters degree to broaden my knowledge, skill set, and understanding, and eliminate limitations...”</p> <p data-bbox="443 976 1406 1072">“My expectations were to gain a broader scope within the field so that I can equip myself with the necessary tools to be able to flourish in the field. Also to be able to minimise the limitations and broaden my scope of practice as well as to attain my goal.”</p>
Empowerment of others	<p data-bbox="443 1149 1406 1209">“...I just felt like the psychology...I was going to be working with people and it was going to be in a bit of a more significant way.”</p> <p data-bbox="443 1236 1406 1296">“You get to work with people, and you get to help people who are really struggling, so I like that.”</p> <p data-bbox="443 1323 1406 1384">“I’ve always known, since a young age, that I wanted to be in the helping profession working with people.”</p> <p data-bbox="443 1411 1406 1431">“...to be able to assist individuals holistically...”</p>
Personal interest	<p data-bbox="443 1507 1406 1568">“I was very interested in it and I’m still interested in psychology and the mental side of things...”</p> <p data-bbox="443 1594 1406 1691">“... I have a deep rooted passion for working with children... I discovered that I saw myself as a psychologist. I also had an interest in family law and education. These two professions also relies on psychology to a certain extent.”</p> <p data-bbox="443 1718 1406 1742">“But even right now, as I sit here, I like the idea.”</p>

Empowerment of self: Participants expressed that they were keenly interested in developing themselves by attaining skills related to a professional identity, increasing their fund of knowledge about human development and personality functioning. They further

expressed that they wanted to exceed the boundaries and limitations placed upon them by their relative subject positions.

Empowerment of others: The participants described a growing awareness of the need for psychological services in the respected fields and communities that they were involved in and felt that by empowering themselves through increasing their knowledge and skills in psychology they would be better equipped to serve the needs of these communities. Thus there was an outward recipient of their capacitation.

Personal interest: The perceived possibilities offered by the discipline, in particular more clinical training, sustained a personal interest that was further kept alive through their studies. As illustrated above, participants highlighted their personal interest in understanding the human psyche and indicated how they could explore those interests through the various fields or sub-disciplines of psychology, including clinical psychology and research psychology.

Theme 1.2: Prior experience in psychological work. None of the participants went straight from Secondary Education to undergraduate Higher Education to postgraduate Higher Education in Psychology. The work that they were involved in prior to enrolling for the directed Masters programme in Psychology, to a large extent influenced interest in psychological work. All the participants had prior work and volunteer experiences that contained some aspects of psychology/psychological work. The most notable aspect was interpersonal, people-oriented work. The psychological work sparked interest in the broader field of study of psychology, and the subsequent exposure to psychology provided further opportunities that resonated with their interests. Three key experiences were identified as sub-themes of exposure or experience, namely: 1) community work; 2) counseling; and 3) coaching and training. Table 5 below presents the sub-themes that emerged in relation to the types of prior experiences reported with illustrative quotes.

Table 5: *Theme 1.2: Prior experience in psychological work*

Sub-themes:	Illustrative quotes
Community work	<p><i>"...I was very involved in community work, especially church work."</i></p> <p><i>"I also did lots of community work since my first year up until now. For example, I worked with my community in church events and youth. I worked with our police, also for various NPO's and NGO's."</i></p> <p><i>"... and I work in youth, so teenagers..."</i></p>
Counseling	<p><i>"...so I have been a lay counsellor for about 13 years."</i></p> <p><i>"... in the back of my mind I've got this appointment with a family for marriage counselling."</i></p> <p><i>"I completed my counseling internship at ****. I wrote the board exam and passed."</i></p> <p><i>"Whilst doing my psychometry board exam I did some counselling with children under supervision of a psychologist at the private practice that I completed my psychometry internship at."</i></p> <p><i>"I am currently employed at **** centre as the children's counsellor."</i></p>
Coaching and training	<p><i>"...what I was used to, always working with athletes..."</i></p> <p><i>"I have also conducted a short course regarding the field of psychology to learners interested in making it their career."</i></p> <p><i>"I also tutored at ****, as well as done a series of lectures within the psychology department."</i></p>

Community work: All of the participants have been involved in community work on both a volunteer and salaried basis, which included working for non-profit and non-governmental community organisations, governmental organisations, and religious institutions. Community work suggests that the participants were working or engaged in developmental work that was focused on individual and group interventions with adults and adolescents, providing leadership within communities, and providing psychoeducation through interpersonal, social media and mass media communication. This type of work required a particular skill set, world view and a preference for interpersonal, people-oriented work.

Counseling: The prior work experiences of the participants comprised a variety of aspects related to counseling, including those offered by registered counselors and lay counselors. One

participant did lay counseling for more than a decade with adults and adolescents. Another was involved in the pastoral counselling including working with families and married couples. A third participant qualified as a registered counselor and had experience as a counsellor in a variety of settings which included with those that have been exposed to trauma, domestic violence, and child abuse. The participants noted that they found the work fulfilling and regarded further studies in the field of psychology as a natural progression from the counseling work, whether lay or professional, that they were already involved in.

Coaching and training: Some of the participants were involved in the coaching and training of people within sport and academic settings. One participant was involved in coaching athletes and acknowledged how psychological well-being impacts success in sport performance of individual athletes, as well as teams. This participant employed psychological knowledge that promoted self-development, performance management and group dynamics. Another participant used the academic and practical knowledge gained in prior psychological studies in an academic environment to tutor and lecture others. This participant also conducted a psychoeducation programme on career possibilities in psychology.

Theme 1.3: Intrinsic motivation. The intrinsic motivation of the participants to perform certain functions within the work that they were already involved in did not necessarily align with the extrinsic motivation that comes with attainment of the qualification and the recognition and practice opportunities that accompany it. Four sub-themes related to the intrinsic motivation of the participants emerged which include: 1) job satisfaction; 2) skills capacitation; 3) professional identity; and 4) category of psychology. Table 6 below indicates the sub-themes related to the intrinsic motivation of the participants, substantiated with illustrative quotations.

Table 6: *Theme 1.3: Intrinsic motivation*

Sub-themes:	Illustrative quotes
Job satisfaction	<p><i>“But I think another aspect of it is the fact that I didn’t do it to get a job ...”</i></p> <p><i>“And I know a lot of people, when they improve their qualifications, when they study, the idea is to improve their job situation. I certainly knew one or two of the students who did it for that reason. But that wasn’t the reason why I did it”</i></p> <p><i>“I realised I was following an academic pursuit, which I did, but I couldn’t see myself actually wanting the job at the end of it.”</i></p>
Skills capacitation	<p><i>“I’m very happy with what I have achieved. Yes, I might not have the piece of paper to say that I have mastered the psychology in the master’s programme, but I’m very happy.”</i></p> <p><i>“I’m still involved in what I’m doing and what I enjoy doing, and to me it has become just a piece of paper really. I still achieved what I needed to achieve.”</i></p> <p><i>“So should I have stuck through and just had that on my name? You see, I don’t have to. I’m not a young girl any more. I’m not searching for [that accolade]...that is not my motivation. It is not my motivation.”</i></p> <p><i>“...while working in the field, I also became aware of just how limiting counseling is and I therefore wanted to pursue the Masters degree...”</i></p>
Professional identity	<p><i>“But if my motives were different, if I wanted to start a practice or something like that, then I probably would have been more disappointed and stuff like that.”</i></p> <p><i>“I was not quite sure, even in the beginning, whether I would actually practice as a research psychologist...”</i></p> <p><i>“I was working through honours, and it was just all really appealing, but I can’t say that I knew I wanted to be a clinical psychologist”</i></p>
Category of psychology	<p><i>“If at that stage they could have just magically changed it to a clinical master’s, I would have said pick me. But I didn’t fill out that form. So the actual factors were, will I ever want to study research psychology in my life again? No. Done. Dusted. Not for me. I chose the wrong programme, but I chose it on a default – I wanted a clinical master’s.”</i></p> <p><i>“But for me it was definitely a second choice - which I no longer exercise – it’s no choice now.”</i></p> <p><i>“But the self-termination was, at the end of the day, I wanted a counselling or clinical path.”</i></p> <p><i>“My first application for the clinical Masters programme allowed me to go through the process, however, at the end I was unsuccessful. ... After much thought and research, I then decided that if my ultimate goal is to help then I should pursue research psych ...”</i></p>

Job satisfaction: All the participants were already engaged in a career with some having more than 15 years of work experience before enrolling for the qualification. Only one of the

participants enrolled for a directed Masters programme in Psychology with a specific interest in pursuing a career as a psychologist in the category of registration offered through the degree programme, but only after being unsuccessful at gaining entrance into another category of psychology. Most of the participants stated that they did not need to improve their job situation and for some obtaining the qualification was merely an academic pursuit. The participants mostly expressed fulfillment within their current career paths and did not perceive the qualification that they enrolled for as leading to the pursuit of another job or as leading to the improvement of their current work situations.

Skills capacitation: None of the participants felt that obtaining the qualification they enrolled for would put them on a trajectory that will improve their quality of life. Some participants felt that non-completion of the degree would not detract from their personal experiences of worth. Three of the participants stated that they did not have aspirations to practice as a registered psychologist in their respective categories. Obtaining the degree certificate and the work opportunities that it could bring was thus not of importance to the participants. Participants valued the skills capacitation as more important than the certification and professional registration. Only one participant noted that a Masters degree in Psychology would be beneficial to overcome the limitations imposed on registered counselors by professional scope of practice.

Professional identity: The actual degree certificate offered little pragmatic value to the majority participants as they did not have a desire to practice in the area of specialisation that the Masters programme in psychology they were enrolled for provided. As shown earlier, the majority of the participants had an interest in some aspects of psychological work rather than in Psychology as a career.

Category of psychology: One participant acknowledged interest in Psychology as a career, but not in the area of specialty that the programme in which the participant was enrolled

offered. The category of psychology, namely Research Psychology, was thus a second choice. It was acknowledged that the learning that would have taken place during the programme would have been of use but that it would have played no part in future career aspirations, which was to work in therapeutic settings rather than research settings.

4.2 Category 2: Obstacles to Academic Integration

The second thematic category included themes that described obstacles to academic integration as one of the factors influencing participants' decision to terminate. Four themes emerged to from this category namely: 1) criterion references; 2) nature of the programme; 3) preparedness for the programme; and 4) perceived competence. Table 7 below summarises the themes and sub-themes on the participants' experience of academic integration.

Table 7: *Category 2: Obstacles to Academic Integration*

Theme	Sub-Themes
Theme 2.1 Criterion references	Progression from Honours to Masters Programme requirements
Theme 2.2 Nature of the programme	Intensity of the course Structure of the course Balance between programme and personal life
Theme 2.3 Preparedness for the programme	Fund of knowledge Impact of human distress Ready skills Fatigue
Theme 2.4 Perceived competence	Struggling with abstract content Confidence Professional identities of staff

Theme 2.1: Criterion references. Participants indicated that they had numerous unmet expectations about the training in a directed Masters programme in Psychology. The lack of accurate references for what the programme entailed and required of them resulted in

integration into the programme as a student psychologist being compromised. Here two distinct sub-themes were identified namely: 1) progression from Honours to Masters; and 2) programme requirements. These are presented below in Table 8 below.

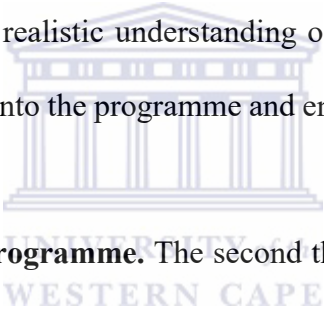
Table 8: *Theme 2.1: Criterion references*

Sub-themes:	Illustrative quotes
Progression from Honours to Masters	<p><i>"I thought it was going to be something similar to my honours"</i></p> <p><i>"It [the Honours degree] didn't [expose me to clinical work]. Certainly it didn't. It was more academic. It was more assignment-orientated and presentation-orientated. Very little practical stuff."</i></p> <p><i>"They obviously communicate that it's going to be really hard and all of that. But I think in my mind I thought, when you go into master's, they'd give you more attention. You know, the group is smaller and they give you more attention and more time. And there is obviously the one-on-one in all of that, and I don't know if it's just me, but I didn't feel like they were giving me the same kind...like in the previous year, the honours year, which I felt like this person is really giving me their time and attention, whereas in the master's year I didn't feel that."</i></p> <p><i>"So now it's worse because it's a very demanding course. It's not like even honours."</i></p>
Programme requirements	<p><i>"Initially, I knew there was going to be a thesis...in fact, the rest of it I wasn't too sure about. I even thought that I could do it part-time, so naive I was with regard to the programme itself."</i></p> <p><i>"And then, you know, before you start the structured master's you actually don't know, because you haven't done it before, you don't actually know what it's going to entail."</i></p>

Progression from Honours to Masters: Most of the participants reported that their expectations about the structure of the Masters programme were not accurate. Prior to enrolment on the Masters programme, the participants based their perceived ability to cope within the Masters programme on their prior academic experiences, specifically those of the Honours programme. In this way their criterion references were poorly informed. They stated that they expected the structure of the Masters programme to be similar to the Honours programme that they completed. The Honours programme was perceived as being more academic, with regular assignments and presentations that had to be completed. In contrast, the

Masters programme was experienced as more practical. The participants thus had unrealistic expectations about the progression from an Honours degree in Psychology to a Masters degree. Some of the participants expected that academic staff would provide more guidance and attention than in previous academic years as the class size was smaller. This expectation was based on the perception that smaller groups lead to greater attention from lecturing staff, which is not necessarily based on reality.

Programme requirements: A manner of naivety regarding the programme requirements existed as participants were not aware of the course content and basis on which the course will be offered, as well as the support available to them. Some participants indicated that limited knowledge about the programme requirements were obtained prior to enrolment. The time required to obtain an accurate or realistic understanding of the requirements detracted from their ability to become integrated into the programme and engaging with the learning required.



Theme 2.2: Nature of the programme. The second theme that comprised this category related to the nature of the directed Masters programme in Psychology. The overarching topic was that participants experienced their respective programmes to be demanding and intense, with limited time left for other activities of personal interest beyond the academic experience. This was further compounded by the combination of course work and a research component in the academic programme. Three sub-themes emerged and are presented in Table 9 below with illustrative quotations. These sub-themes are: 1) intensity of the course; 2) structure of the course; and 3) balance between programme and personal life.

Table 9: Theme 2.2: Nature of the programme

Sub-themes:	Illustrative quotes
Intensity of the course	<p><i>"I found that the programmes itself at the university was very intense"</i></p> <p><i>"And I also just feel that the course at [identified institution name] is very intense."</i></p> <p><i>"It was kind of like, let's get this thing, get the work, do the work, and go and do your thing, which was obviously compounded by the fact that I wasn't feeling good anyway."</i></p> <p><i>"It was tough. It's a very demanding course, like they make you well aware of. So it was very tough."</i></p> <p><i>"And, of course, it was much, much more than what I had expected. It was much more intense. And the reality is that I just couldn't cope – I just couldn't cope."</i></p>
Structure of the course	<p><i>"And I think the masters programme itself was also very intense. I know at the time we were talking amongst ourselves as students, [other institution name] offering the same course over two years, while [identified institution name] is doing it over one year."</i></p> <p><i>"A year, you know, is just impossible, especially coming from the background that I come from."</i></p> <p><i>"...why does [identified institution name] do it over one year. We questioned that, and we weren't very happy with the answers that were given."</i></p> <p><i>"So you don't really have time to sit and work on assignments, research and so on. But really, if it was over two years, I believe that it would have helped me."</i></p> <p><i>"You have your thesis there; you've got the other requirements of the programme also there. And so to me it was just very hard to bring all of it together."</i></p> <p><i>"And especially, if I must give a particular aspect of it, it's the readings that we had to do. I just didn't have the time. When I did have time, my mind just didn't focus on what I needed to look into because I was like, I just need to read through this and I'll get an understanding. But it didn't work like that, it had to be more intense."</i></p> <p><i>"Very time-consuming and demanding..."</i></p> <p><i>"You know, it's every day and the whole day."</i></p>
Balance between programme and personal life	<p><i>"... I struggled to balance my work with the school...then to do my thesis and my master's programme as well, it was very, very challenging."</i></p> <p><i>"I saw that the studies would take out a chunk of my time that I could rather give in a private practice setup to counsel."</i></p> <p><i>"So ja, I can't say I was very balanced in the whole time that I was here. I was making a bit of time to exercise and tried to make time for my girlfriend at the time, but I think in terms of the inside of my head I was trying to get this thing done."</i></p> <p><i>"What I was trying to say, there is the physiological effect. So even though I think, ja, I want to focus academically, I'm so used to doing huge hours physically, so it definitely had an effect."</i></p> <p><i>"My family life suffered as a result also. In fact, my wife still talks about it sometimes...it was very strenuous"</i></p>

Intensity of the course: Participants expressed that they experienced the course as intense and demanding. What emerged is that other intrapersonal factors, such as questioning one's ability to master course requirements and uncertainty about study choice, compounded the experience of the intensity of the course. The combination of intrapersonal experiences and course intensity was a factor in the decision to terminate from the course rather than the intensity of the course alone.

Structure of the course: The participants found the course to be time-consuming, especially with the directed Masters programmes in Psychology being offered over one year at the identified institution whereas some other institutions offer it over two years. A participant noted that a more in-depth understanding of concepts could be gained if there was less of a time constraint and another indicated that the requirements of the course filled most days and most of the day. Participants further expressed a struggle in integrating course content within the time available to do so.

Balance between programme and personal life: The participants detailed a struggle to obtain a balance between their personal life and the requirements of a directed Masters programme in Psychology. The participants related how the nature of the programme impacted on significant others and the pressure that it placed on them. They not only had pressure to complete the requirements of the course within a specific time frame but also felt pressure to continue with life outside the programme as before, which was made difficult by the workload associated with the course.

Theme 2.3: Preparedness for the programme: This theme included thematic content that illustrated how lack of preparedness contributed to a lack of academic integration. The theme included four subthemes depicting the various ways in which participants did not feel adequately prepared for the programme. The sub-themes that emerged in relation to the

preparedness for a directed Masters programme in Psychology were: 1) fund of knowledge; 2) impact of human distress; 3) ready skills; and 4) fatigue. Table 10 below indicates the sub-themes and substantiates them with illustrative quotes.

Table 10: *Theme 2.3: Preparedness for the programme*

Sub-themes:	Illustrative quotes
Fund of knowledge	<p><i>"I didn't have much of a psychology background in the sense that I came right from starting the first year psychology, etc., etc."</i></p> <p><i>"I studied a while back, and came back and I was actually in the [other humanities] department, so I finished up my undergrad in [other humanities degree]. Then I obviously had psychology as my second major."</i></p>
Impact of human distress	<p><i>"The other aspect that I struggled with in the course programme itself was, you know, your case studies you're doing where you... It's the clinical aspect of it, I struggled a little bit with that, the kind of disorders and clinical stuff that people go through. And because I wasn't exposed to that kind of thing before, this being my first time, I took it quite hard. I couldn't believe that people struggled with disorders like that, clinical stuff like that."</i></p>
Ready skills	<p><i>"I have done independent diplomas here and there for just to equip me further. I also read quite widely."</i></p> <p><i>"So I had familiarity with the research component with my supervisor, because at [other institution name] at my honours level we did a systematic review, so I was familiar with the processes of research and what was going to be required of me."</i></p> <p><i>"I think by the time you are at master's level, you need to read and write at a level of sophistication."</i></p>
Fatigue	<p><i>"And I completed my honours and my degree part-time. So I studied actually for 11 years without a break in-between teaching, church, community work and studying."</i></p> <p><i>"At that stage it was way over the ten-year mark where you pick up on previous studies, because I studied directly after school. So I basically started again at undergraduate level..."</i></p> <p><i>"So I had done my honours year, and then...I mean, the programme does start quite early"</i></p> <p><i>"I felt like I didn't have a break. I was tired when I started."</i></p>

Fund of knowledge: The participants that were enrolled in Clinical/Counseling Psychology programmes expressed a lack of mastery of academic psychology content and a lack of confidence in accessing their fund of available knowledge of Psychology. The participants had

difficulty accessing it due to the length of time elapsed between first initiating studies and enrolling for a Masters degree or due to the length of time elapsed between ceasing undergraduate studies and resuming postgraduate studies.

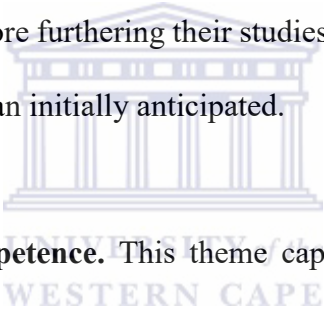
Impact of human distress: The practical exposure sought by participants was aligned with their primary interests rather than being related to the field of psychology for which they enrolled. These participants had limited prior exposure to clinical disorders, the impact of human suffering and the reality of mental disorders, which one participant in particular found challenging to face. For the participants enrolled in Clinical/Counseling Psychology programmes the lack of prior exposure to more severe pathology and human vulnerability became an obstacle to academic integration. The participants had to manage the academic requirements in a high intensity and fast paced course whilst also containing their own affective reactions to the human distress that they were exposed to in the programme.

Ready skills: Two of the participants, specifically those enrolled for the Clinical Psychology and Counseling Psychology programmes, reported a lack of ready skills to meet the unique requirements of a Masters programme in Psychology, specifically the clinical skills component of the course. The clinical skills component requires knowledge of clinical disorders and the practical aspects such as, interviewing skills and therapeutic abilities. These participants, having completed the first semester of the course that include content emphasis on foundational skills such as intake and assessment, and interviewing techniques thus had a basis from which to report a deficit (whether perceived or real) in the required skills set.

Fatigue: This theme spoke to participants' experience of not being able to engage optimally in the programme due to fatigue resulting from various sources. The first source contributing to the experience of fatigue was that participants reported that they were not fully prepared for the taxing nature of the course. The participants did not have a realistic expectation of the

energy required to complete the course and thus was ill prepared to deal with the physical, psychological, emotional and cognitive investment they were required to make.

A second source of fatigue was that the break between an Honours or work, and Masters year was reportedly too short as the Masters course commences early in the new academic years. Thus students selected during the Honours year entered the course with a measure of study fatigue that compromised their optimal immersion and engagement in the programme. They reportedly experienced a sense of continued fatigue. The experience of carry-over fatigue was compounded for participants who were studying part-time for their Honours degree and holding down full time employment and family responsibility. For example, one participant reported having studied part-time for eleven years whilst working. Two other participants worked for a number of years before furthering their studies and thus had to complete an extra amount of undergraduate years than initially anticipated.



Theme 2.4: Perceived competence. This theme captured participants' struggles with specific skills and content that resulted in concerns about their competence and level of mastery. Three sub-themes emerged here: 1) struggling with abstract content; 2) confidence; and 3) professional identities of students. The sub-themes comprising the over-arching theme, 'perceived competence' are presented in Table 11 below supported with illustrative quotations.

Table 11: Theme 2.4: Perceived competence

Sub-themes:	Illustrative quotes
Struggling with abstract content	<p><i>"The readings...I remember that time ***** was responsible for that part of the course... and you needed to have a lot of insight to do it. Stuff was very abstract to me, and so I struggled a lot with that."</i></p> <p><i>"I read through it. I tried to read through it. I would underline stuff. I'm honest with you now, when I get to the end of the article I still don't know what's happening there."</i></p> <p><i>"Because those things were so abstract, if you don't go into it, you are lost."</i></p> <p><i>"I just thought it was a lot. I just remember it being a lot. And I'm not a jargony person. I try and simplify things. So it is one of the things I didn't like...but I mean, regardless of that, I always try and take things and I try and simplify it. But I mean, psychology is not like that. It is just ridiculous."</i></p> <p><i>"So I have to be honest, if there are things that are beyond me, then it's beyond me, and, if there's something that I understand, then I understand it and I try my best to understand it. There's a lot that I understood and understand, but I'm okay with that. There's a lot that's just over my head."</i></p>
Confidence	<p><i>"I felt so small, just being there. There were times when I felt I didn't want to go to that class. But that would have been a bad reflection on me and so on, so I struggled through that but I felt very embarrassed and ashamed"</i></p> <p><i>"And I felt in a sense very inadequate, especially where the readings are concerned."</i></p> <p><i>"I couldn't respond when lecturers asked me about my thinking or my thoughts."</i></p> <p><i>"But when it came to those theories and those readings and stuff like that. You know those deep, profound concepts and words, I was lost and I wasn't ashamed to say it."</i></p> <p><i>"I don't know if it's because I just didn't have the experience of it, or if I don't have the ability to do it, or if it's because I was just focused on too many other things...I don't know."</i></p> <p><i>"And, you know, I'm a very basic person and I say things in the simplest terms, but you know, you've got to speak the psychology speak. I struggled with that. Oh, I struggled with that."</i></p> <p><i>"But I wasn't terribly academic, so I still needed, felt I needed kind of more help. I wasn't confident academically."</i></p> <p><i>"...and I was feeling in that master's year that I was just coming in, lecturers coming in and doing...but it wasn't like you had that extra time and support. Maybe that is what they expect from a master's student, so maybe I wasn't actually ready."</i></p> <p><i>"I couldn't relate to their speak and their academic intelligence that they had."</i></p>
Professional identities of students	<p><i>"...but she intimidated me. And because of where I come from, not having this knowledge, made me feel this way. And when you are intimidated, you just close up as well, and that's what happened to me."</i></p> <p><i>"I just felt very uncomfortable in that [professional psychology] environment as well. I still do, actually, I still do."</i></p>

Struggling with abstract content: Some of the participants described their struggle with the abstract nature of the academic content within the field of psychology, stating that some of the content included concepts and terms that were beyond their understanding. These respondents also explained how they would attempt to manage their struggle by underlining content and simplifying terms, but their experience was that the field of psychology cannot always be simplified. This struggle with abstract content could have impacted their perceived struggle with competence as Masters students despite having been successful in prior academic studies. All these factors influenced the extent to which they perceived themselves as competent within the course which could be a latent motivation for termination from the course.

Confidence: One of the respondents stated that feelings of inadequacy, shame and embarrassment were elicited due to the struggle with the abstract nature of the academic content. This in turn impacted their confidence to be successful within the programme and to be effective in class discussions. Participants stated how their levels of confidence were adversely impacted by struggling with academic activities and the nature of the academic content, limited availability of time to become familiar with content, limited support from staff, and a sense of inadequacy in relation to other. For example, one participant reported that participation in classroom activities was directly related to the perceived difference between his level of academic knowledge and his confidence. As a result, this participant was less prone to take part in discussions or to volunteer answers. This negatively impacted the participant's classroom experience.

Professional identities of students: A participant described feeling intimidated and uncomfortable amongst qualified psychologists and described how it impacted on the experience of the programme. The apparent ease with which lecturers were able to engage with the difficult material often resulted in the experience of staff as intimidating. Participants thus tended to view themselves as students rather than trainee psychologists, leading to the apparent

rift between themselves and other psychology professionals. Participants experienced a sense of inadequacy in relation to their ability to master the content, as well as their ability to participate in class discussions and engage with the lecturing staff and psychology professionals.

4.3 Category 3: Other Considerations

The third category comprises of other considerations that were of importance to the participants in their decisions to terminate their studies. Three themes emerged in this category namely: 1) financial support; 2) interpersonal dynamics within the group; and 3) personal belief system. Table 12 below presents an outline of the themes and sub-themes that comprise this thematic category.



Table 12: *Category 3: Other Considerations*

Theme	Sub-Themes
Theme 3.1 Financial support	Lack of income Availability of funding
Theme 3.2 Interpersonal dynamics within the group	Demographic differences
Theme 3.3 Personal belief system	Sense of self Established belief system Active practice

Theme 3.1: Financial support. Participants highlighted that a lack of income and financial support through mechanisms such as bursaries were one of the considerations when deciding to self-terminate from their studies. The sub-themes related to financial support are: 1) lack of income; and 2) availability of funding. The sub-themes and related quotations are provided in Table 13.

Table 13: *Theme 3.1: Financial support*

Sub-themes:	Illustrative quotes
Lack of income	<p><i>"I had family to take care of; I had children to put through school and varsity. ... where would I get an income?"</i></p> <p><i>"...but we had expenses. We had to take care of the family. So I think that was probably also one of the most important reasons, maybe not something that I thought about a lot, but I think that did have an impact."</i></p> <p><i>"So if I sat without a job that time and studying my master's, imagine the pressure on the family as well. So ja, ... certainly, it was a factor in helping me to make that decision that I had to make."</i></p>
Availability of funding	<p><i>"But just nothing...the finances were not coming through. I didn't have financial support (a bursary) because obviously I didn't expect to get in. So I was beginning to battle financially because you know that time I couldn't do work or anything."</i></p> <p><i>"But financially there would have been a problem as well, absolutely. I didn't have a bursary, or nothing, also."</i></p> <p><i>"And I think that is probably also one of the reasons why I maybe pulled out because I could see it was going to...there was possibly support coming from some people closest to me, but I didn't feel like it was the right thing at the time. You know, support can come in various ways and at times it can be right, but I just didn't feel like it was right at the time. It was going to put some other people under a lot of stress as well."</i></p> <p><i>"That specific time I could have got support from someone very close to me. I knew they wanted to, but it was going to impact them in a very sort of almost bad, difficult way."</i></p>

Lack of income: Some of the participants were the breadwinners in the family and studying fulltime thus had a financial impact not only on the participants but also on their family members. Directed Masters programmes in Psychology are only offered on a full time basis, which means that students do not have the time available to earn a viable income during the time that they are enrolled for the programme. The participants all had prior employment and enrolling for a directed Masters programme in Psychology thus constituted a loss of income for at least a year. Students reported that their financial obligations remained despite the lack of income whilst studying fulltime. The nature of the programme made any form of employment impossible thus intensifying the effects of financial constraints on the student and significant others. In addition, the course came with its own expenses that increased the deficit in their financial budgets.

Availability of funding: The participants described the financial difficulties that they had to face whilst being enrolled for the programme and the struggle to obtain financial support. The lack of available scholarships and bursaries further meant that the participants were not able to make up the loss or shortfall in income. Other participants did not want to place a financial burden on others who were considering or were willing to assist financially. Not being able to provide for family members and placing a financial burden on others constituted ethical reasons that supported the decision to self-terminate. For two participants the lack of financial support that they experienced was a major motivation in self-termination from the programme.

Theme 3.2: Interpersonal dynamics within the group. The interpersonal dynamics within the group were complicated by the demographic differences and the nature of the relationships that participants had with other members of the academic cohort. It was reported that a measure of isolation or tentativeness resulted from the interpersonal dynamics with the need to track oneself more carefully in order for true feelings to not be disclosed. Mention was made of elements related to the structure and functioning of the group that either positively or negatively impacted their academic experience and connection that they felt with the academic cohort. One sub-theme, namely demographic differences, emerged related to the theme of interpersonal dynamics within the group. Table 14 provides quotations from participants to illustrate the interpersonal dynamics within the cohort group.

Table 14: *Theme 3.2: Interpersonal dynamics within the group*

Sub-themes:	Illustrative quotes
Demographic differences	<p><i>“That would have been another challenge for me because I am supremely organised. So now you’re dealing with the 23-year-old level of organisation, which includes no petrol money, or no airtime.”</i></p> <p><i>“So if I had still been on that team, I would have been exposed; my frustrations would have been exposed. I would have had to exercise my voice, and I probably would have stepped in like the mother and put that extra pressure on myself.”</i></p> <p><i>“And I remember having to regulate myself, I remember distinctly, because while they were speaking I distinctly thought they were on the wrong track.... there’s insight of being the age that I am and my life experiences...”</i></p> <p><i>“It was a real, real challenge for me in the sense that I was ... the oldest student in the class.”</i></p> <p><i>“...they were all females – I was the only male there...”</i></p> <p><i>“Anyway, so I was sitting with the younger bunch. But I really do enjoy young people. I love their idealism – I enjoy that. And then classes started, and classes were upstairs. Then it kind of sunk in.”</i></p> <p><i>“Within the class, you know, a great bunch of...and I call them kids, I can’t help it...and they are not actually kids, they’re adults.”</i></p> <p><i>“I remember a day, sitting in the class, and I just felt like the granny in the class.”</i></p> <p><i>“And if there had been older people on the group, it might have sustained me for longer...it might have kept me buoyant for longer in terms of having a peer of my age, male or female, whatever, but it would have masked the inevitable.”</i></p>

Demographic differences: The demographic spread, most notably with regards to age and gender, influenced the experiences of participants in the classroom as members of the group specifically with regards to roles within the group. The discrepancies, whether real or perceived, impacted the extent to which the participants could interact with other members of the cohort. One participant described the experience of being more knowledgeable and having more life experience than most of the other students in the classroom as challenging. The participant felt that a conscious effort had to be made not to take on a parental role and also not to naturally assume a leadership role within the group because of the participant’s perceived higher measure of life experience. The same challenge was faced by those participants that were notably older than other students in the class, again having to guard against not taking on a parental role and allowing the other group members to learn and grow at their appropriate

level of functioning. Although demographic differences did not directly serve as a motivation for self-termination, it placed an added pressure on some participants. These participants felt that they had to be more aware of their place within the group and had to continually manage their own behaviour in relation to the group dynamics.

Theme 3.3: Personal belief system. All the participants made mention of a personal belief system that they held and which have a central place in their lives, influencing their experience of the course and informing their decisions. They were able to tolerate anticipated discrepancies between personal belief systems and content in the course. There were different factors that enabled them to do so, outlined in the three sub-themes: 1) sense of self; 2) established belief system; and 3) active practice. Table 15 below indicates the themes and sub-themes in this category.



Table 15: Theme 3.3: Personal belief system

Sub-themes:	Illustrative quotes
Sense of self	<p><i>"I expected that [contradictions with my personal belief system]. I expected that. So ja, that's definitely not one of the things that kept me back or made me leave or anything. I expected it."</i></p> <p><i>"I found that with a lot of the psychology and my belief or my faith, there was a little bit of contradictions with a lot of things."</i></p>
Established belief system	<p><i>"I didn't have a problem with theories, in essence, because I knew where I stood with my faith. I respected the theorist and what he said about it – that's his thing."</i></p> <p><i>"When I came across something that sort of contradicted what I believe in, I just moved on from it. I wouldn't make a big noise about it."</i></p> <p><i>"...if there was something that didn't line up, then I think I'm okay and secure enough in my faith to not have a problem. It's not like it's going to unsettle me."</i></p> <p><i>"...but I didn't have a problem at all with theories or anything that couldn't line up with scripture."</i></p>
Active practice	<p><i>"Because I know that ultimately, God knows your heart and he's the counsellor. So I do take things to him in prayer..."</i></p> <p><i>"I suppose I must be honest with you, I mean, I was praying about it and I left it with God, and when it didn't happen I just said, okay, I wasn't feeling sure anyway. So when it didn't happen I was like, okay, so now we move in a different direction."</i></p> <p><i>"I mean, every decision I make is basically, what does God want?"</i></p>

Sense of self: The participants expected that discrepancies would exist between the spiritual beliefs that they hold and some of the psychological theories in existence. All the participants also noted that these discrepancies did not influence their decision to self-terminate, demonstrating a sense of self in relation to their belief system.

Established belief system: They were able to accept the varying viewpoints that their personal belief system and psychological knowledge brought and were able to hold both in mind. The participants all indicated that they had an ability to hold ambiguity, which is a necessary requirement for those training as psychologists.

Active practice: Participants acknowledged that their spirituality was used as an adaptive coping skill in making a decision that they found particularly hard. They were able to see

meaning in events which led to a positive appraisal of the event. As such their ability to deal with the challenging decision to self-terminate was strengthened.

4.4 Category 4: Process of Decision-making

The fourth category pertains to the process of decision-making. Four themes emerged that informed this thematic category namely: 1) experiential knowing; 2) intrapsychic processes; 3) consulting; and 4) implementation. The category captures the varying emotional and cognitive processes and considerations during their decision-making process that led to self-termination. Table 16 below presents the themes and sub-themes that comprised the process of decision-making.

Table 16: *Category 4: Process of decision-making*

Theme	Sub-Themes
Theme 4.1 Experiential knowing	Uncertainty about choice Foreboding
Theme 4.2 Intrapsychic processes	Emotions and cognitions Ethics and moral obligation
Theme 4.3 Consulting	Consultation with staff Consultation with significant others Formal processes
Theme 4.4 Implementation	Managing significant others' expectations and reactions Managing staff expectations and reactions Managing cohort expectations and reactions

Theme 4.1: Experiential knowing: This theme captures the idea that the participants described as having experienced a sense of knowing that their time on the course was over and that self-termination was the right choice, rather than engaging in a deliberate decision-making process. This sense of knowing is further illustrated in two sub-themes, namely: 1) uncertainty about choice; and 2) foreboding, that are briefly described below and illustrated with quotes in Table 17.

Table 17: Theme 4.1: Experiential knowing

Sub-themes:	Illustrative quotes
Uncertainty about choice	<p><i>"I can't say I was absolutely sure about masters, but I was leaning towards it. And then I eventually just decided to go through the process of the selection, but right up to the end I can't say I was exactly one hundred percent sure I wanted to do it."</i></p> <p><i>"And yet I have to admit that, my application and filling it in, it was a mistake. It wasn't the correct choice."</i></p> <p><i>"...but at the time I literally made the decision based on the fact that, I wasn't sure, but it was a really good opportunity and I said to myself, listen, ****, you've got this far, just go through with it. Ja, but I can't say I was absolutely sure I should have at the time."</i></p>
Foreboding	<p><i>A day came within those three weeks where I felt very convicted. I actually had to leave the class and take a walk around the campus, and really ask myself what am I doing here."</i></p> <p><i>"That Masters year was different. I just knew all the time it was different. Nothing was falling into place. But I battled through. I obviously didn't just stop and I battled through."</i></p> <p><i>"I think I wasn't enjoying it. I just wasn't enjoying it at all. But it wasn't because of the lecturers and the people or anything, I think it was really just me and where I was at at the time."</i></p> <p><i>"I know now I wasn't, but I didn't want to just not go in because it was such an opportunity. And, then also once I was in it, I didn't want not to push through with it, but every day was kind of confirming, and it was getting worse and it wasn't getting better. And it's not about the, really the circumstances, because that can be sorted out, but it was more about what I was feeling. It just never got better for me."</i></p> <p><i>"Whereas if you feel like this is where you belong, you are in the right place, so even if it's hard, then you have the energy, and the strength, and the grace and the desire to just go through. That wasn't there. I felt it immediately, it had stopped. Ja, so it was tough, it was tough."</i></p>

Uncertainty about choice: There was a lingering sense of uncertainty reported by participants. This sense was first reported during the application phase with some of the participants not being confident about whether they wanted to enroll for a Masters programme. This sense of uncertainty remained after successfully being selected. Participants reported that they enrolled for the programme hoping that immersion into the training would bring a resolution to the sense of uncertainty about the appropriateness of the decision for them. One participant stated that the reason for enrolment on the programme, despite being unsure, was

because of the opportunity to do the course especially taking into consideration the difficult selection process into the programme.

Foreboding: Once in the programme, participants reported a continuing sense of unease in which they experienced emotions and cognitions. For example, a participant reported a sense of knowing that being on the course as akin to being in the wrong place. It was also reported that there was a lack of energy to complete the requirements of the course. One participant described a lack of enjoyment of the course and the daily battle that being in the course entailed. Another participant experienced a sense of conviction about being enrolled in the programme, whilst questioning the reasons for studying. These experiences at a subjective level suggested that their concerns about being in the programme were intensifying and that they were moving towards termination. This developed into a sense of foreboding.

Theme 4.2: Intrapsychic processes: The second theme that emerged addressed the internal reactions or processes reported by participants. Though the processes were intertwined, the analysis attempted to separate the reported experiences into thematic categories. These processes included two sub-themes namely 1) emotions and cognitions; and 2) ethics and moral obligation, which are represented in Table 18.

Table 18: Theme 4.2: Intrapsychic processes

Sub-themes:	Illustrative quotes
Emotions and cognitions	<p><i>"It was very hard. I literally cried."</i></p> <p><i>"...it was very hard and it was very emotional to me. I literally cried about it, honestly."</i></p> <p><i>"But it was hard and it was very emotional, even to such an extent that I didn't want to go to the university. I didn't want to speak to anybody. I didn't want to see anybody."</i></p> <p><i>"You know, to achieve that, it was an achievement, so you can imagine the disappointment that I went through not being able to see it through."</i></p> <p><i>"I felt a depth of...this is disappointing..."</i></p> <p><i>"Academically and professionally it was really difficult."</i></p> <p><i>"It was also a very emotionally loaded period for me."</i></p> <p><i>"So it surprised me, those feelings of being on campus and feeling this. I didn't even feel ambivalent. I felt like it was over."</i></p> <p><i>"It was so tough...So I was really not happy. I was struggling to make that decision. But I just learned you move forward, you just keep moving forward, and it becomes more and more clear. Eventually it wasn't a decision. I didn't have to make it. I just knew that was the right thing to do."</i></p> <p><i>"And then once I made the decision, just peace, I just, I felt...it's weird how you can get yourself so far along and you can't make a decision, and then you make the decision and you're just at peace."</i></p> <p><i>"I drove home and I thought, the decision was made. It was very surprising; I don't like not finishing what I've started."</i></p> <p><i>"I felt as if my golden opportunity was being taken away from me and I knew that opting to leave would negatively affect or influence future applications and leaving would leave me with the same restricted scope of practice."</i></p>
Ethics and moral obligation	<p><i>"And the thing that I felt worst of, was that I had taken somebody's place that could have been on that programme. That took a while, and it's probably something that I still sit with, that I took somebody's slot. Because the slots are so coveted in this country."</i></p> <p><i>"I was faced more with a personal and moral choice to make. I chose to assist my family because if I didn't I wouldn't have been the person I strive to be."</i></p> <p><i>"And I think that is probably also one of the reasons why I maybe pulled out because I could see it was going to... put some other people under a lot of stress as well."</i></p> <p><i>"That specific time I could have got support from someone very close to me. I knew they wanted to, but it was going to impact them in a very sort of almost bad, difficult way."</i></p>

Emotions and cognitions: Participants reported a range of emotions and cognitions during their time in the programme that caused them discomfort. For example, some reported that the emotional turmoil led to physical reactions such as crying. Others reported that the emotions they experienced led to avoidant behaviour and disappointment. The emotions reported are generally perceived as 'negative emotions' that require management in order to prevent further

emotional dysregulation and compromised ability to be mindfully present in the course. Furthermore, participants reported that they experienced a high level of cognitive dissonance as manifested in the dominant thoughts in their cognitive processes during their time in the programme. For example, a participant reported that the unease experienced throughout the time on the course only lifted once a decision was made to self-terminate. Another participant expressed concern that the decision would negatively impact future career aspirations, which made the decision to self-terminate more difficult.

Ethics and moral obligation: Participants also reported that they experienced a sense of ethics and morality that complicated their decision-making and caused them dissonance. For example, they expressed an awareness of the privilege of being selected and afforded an opportunity to commence with the training. Participants also reported an acute awareness of the resources and time being invested in their training to date that warranted their reciprocation by remaining in and completing the course. At the same time, they had to find a way to do hold onto their integrity. Thus their decision-making was impacted by a subjective sense of obligation ethically and morally given the limited number of spaces available for training.

Theme 4.3: Consulting: Participants reported that they engaged in a consultative process to assist them in their decision making and implementation of the decision. The participants placed emphasis on their consultation with university staff whilst little mention was made of consulting with significant others. Apart from notifying the department of the decision to self-terminate, there were university requirements that also had to be fulfilled some of which took a notable long time to complete. Three sub-themes related to the consultation process became evident. These are: 1) consultation with staff; 2) consultation with significant others; and 3) formal processes. Table 19 provides an outline of the sub-themes subsumed within the consulting theme.

Table 19: Theme 4.3: Consulting

Sub-themes:	Illustrative quotes
Consultation with staff	<p><i>"I met with him I think about twice, asking for advice, and he gave me some very good advice on how to go about it."</i></p> <p><i>"As a psychologist I think he did the right thing, he led me on to just say what I needed to say and had to say in front of him."</i></p> <p><i>"So I made an appointment to see her specifically. It's never comfortable when you need to retract, but I sat there and I apologised. But she was so gracious, so she provided a soft landing."</i></p> <p><i>"They were outstanding."</i></p> <p><i>"...but there were others who just demanded their pound of flesh"</i></p> <p><i>"But ja, there was an incident in the classroom, which I didn't enjoy, and it could be wrapped up in...it's difficult to express it...but there was a day with a lecturer in class where I felt nailed."</i></p> <p><i>"To be honest, I was beginning to feel in that Masters year that it wasn't actually that good."</i></p> <p><i>"It wasn't like I had experienced the previous year in honours. I was beginning to feel...I don't know; it wasn't the same. I don't know if it was a deliberate thing where you are now master's and you must sort of take care of it yourself..."</i></p> <p><i>"So I sat with him for about three sessions. He was very hard with me. I think he's a sadist or something. He was very hard, and I don't think he understood really how I felt."</i></p> <p><i>"...But when it came to helping me deal with it emotionally, he was aloof, very aloof."</i></p> <p><i>"...but emotionally he was also very detached: you can do it, you know, let go of the church and concentrate...let somebody else do it. But it wasn't as easy as that. To him it might have been, but not to me."</i></p> <p><i>"... and he didn't get that, because if he did he would have taken me a little bit still around emotionally, thinking about things..."</i></p>
Consultation with significant others	<p><i>"I had to make a decision that wasn't just based on how it would affect me but my parents as well."</i></p> <p><i>"...my parents would never make such a request unless they felt they had to."</i></p> <p><i>"I didn't have any pressure from parents thinking I have to complete this...I had no pressure from my husband to complete something that I had started."</i></p>
Formal processes	<p><i>"I did speak to lecturers about it and some of them were very supportive"</i></p> <p><i>"...but the thing is, **** wrote me a really great letter after terminating, and he was very encouraging."</i></p> <p><i>"Although she let me go very graciously, and I felt that it was authentic."</i></p> <p><i>"You know, it was adult. It was adult: they shared their feelings of frustration and disappointment, but I'd rather that because it's true."</i></p> <p><i>"...there was a lot of rapport between me and my supervisor. So moving forward I felt quite elevated."</i></p>

Consultation with staff: The participants reported a patterned way of consulting with staff. The first of these consultations was with staff whom they perceived to be supportive. Feeling supported by staff members enhanced the experience of connection that participants had with the study programme and with the institution. One participant specifically experienced the staff members dealt with as supportive and approachable. This participant showed how adequate support from staff members can decrease perceived negative emotional experiences and assist students in transitioning through the process of self-termination more effectively. The second way in which they consulted was with staff who were in positions of authority specifically to assist or advise them with the processes of withdrawing from the course. Some of the participants described some of the staff as emotionally detached when they discussed their possible decision to self-terminate with staff. There was an expectation amongst some participants that staff members that practice within the field of psychology would show more empathy than what was experienced. Thus the support received by some participants translated into another unmet expectation. This unmet expectation reinforced the motivation to self-terminate.

Consultation with significant others: Little mention was made of consulting with significant others during the process of self-termination. One participant reported on making the decision to self-terminate upon request from family members as they required personal support at home. Another participant reported that there were no expectations from any significant others to complete the programme and as such no consultation with significant others were reported.

Formal processes: The formal requirements that participants had to complete constitute an external process for the participants rather than an internal process. The legal and practical requirements of the university when students decide to self-terminate from their studies were described by the participants as lengthy and drawn-out. Most participants wanted to move on

from their decision self-terminate towards other activities. The university requirements, however, made it difficult and were described with a sense of tediousness. For one participant the process took more than a year to complete.

Theme 4.4: Implementation: In terms of the fourth theme the participants reported that they also had to engage in a process of managing the expectations and reactions of others in relation to their decision to withdraw from the programme. They designated three subgroups whom they had to engage with were significant others, staff and peers in the cohort. Each of these subgroups will be presented as a subtheme: 1) managing significant others' expectations and reactions; 2) managing staff expectations and reactions; and 3) managing cohort expectations and reactions. Table 20 below provides an overview of the sub-themes related implementation of the decision.

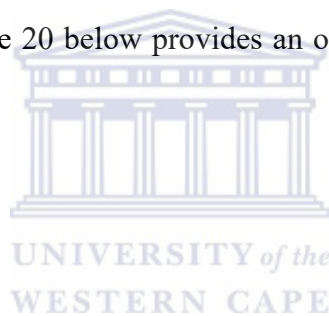


Table 20: Theme 5.2: Implementation

Sub-themes:	Illustrative quotes
Managing significant others' expectations and reactions	<p><i>"So in some ways, because I wasn't tethered to anybody else's expectations of me, it made it harder. Sometimes those external factors can push you to complete something."</i></p> <p><i>"People were really, I felt that they were really investing a lot into me and I knew I was going to let people down. So that was really hard. But at the end of the day, you know, I just had to do it."</i></p> <p><i>"But she wasn't happy, you know, and I think she couldn't see it, which was fair."</i></p>
Managing staff expectations and reactions	<p><i>"But I think at the back of their minds it was: you deserted us, you left us, that kind of thing. And that makes me feel bad. It makes me feel that I failed in what I set out to do"</i></p> <p><i>"...and I know I disappointed him a great deal because I didn't make it."</i></p> <p><i>"****, I do believe he was frustrated. There was anger. And our e-mail communication was that I meant no disrespect to him. It was difficult to enter into some of that anger because I didn't (and I still don't realise) probably the amount of effort and resources that did flow my way."</i></p> <p><i>"And my supervisor, whom I didn't know from a bar of soap, she came up to me and said, 'I just want to let you know that after the interviews where they have chosen the team...' Then apparently the supervisors choose who...and she said she fought for me. So that stays with me because she fought for me."</i></p> <p><i>"And in terms of the impact on my supervisor...I want to use the word terrible."</i></p> <p><i>"The people were really good. They were really good, but I knew that I was letting people down."</i></p> <p><i>"I suppose people do say what they need to say. And you're dealing with psychologists, so you know what the right thing is to say and do. But you can feel, but that's fine for me. They make a decision, you know, they're basically trying to make a decision on who to take and they put their trust and their hope in you, and then when you disappoint, then you can expect a feeling. And I say feeling because there was nothing said that was not right."</i></p>
Managing cohort expectations and reactions	<p><i>"I think they felt very bad themselves when they heard that I was leaving, and I felt that I let them down too. I let them down because they wanted to see us altogether doing it."</i></p> <p><i>"So the impact, of course there's an impact, there's an impact of disappointment."</i></p> <p><i>"Maybe a little bit. You know, there's a person, and then the person is not there. I mean, we spent a lot of time together, so there has to be some sort of an impact and effect. But I don't think in terms of they would not see this thing through. I got the impression that they wanted to be there and they knew they had to be there. So if there would have been an impact they would have got over it."</i></p> <p><i>"...and I'd done quite well, so maybe in their minds they thought I was quite strong. So for me to withdraw, he said something which I thought could sort of impact on them negatively, because if you are withdrawing and you are supposedly quite strong, so ja, it could impact them."</i></p>

Managing significant others' expectations and reactions: The participants provided detail on how their decision impacted others and noted the emotional reactions, such as anger, disappointment and frustration that their decision elicited in significant others. Along with having to cope with and understand their own emotional experiences, participants also had to manage the emotional reactions of those around them.

Managing staff expectations and reactions: Staff members were reported as having similar reactions of anger, disappointment and frustration than those reported to be experienced by loved ones. Participants thus had the added pressure of managing the emotional reactions of staff as well.

Managing cohort expectations and reactions: Participants acknowledged that their decision to self-terminate had a cognitive and emotional impact on other group members. Disappointment and an initial lowering of confidence were perceived to be the impact that the decision to self-terminate had on other students in the programme. The nature of the relationship was perceived as supportive, as described above, and as such group members felt disappointed when their support was not enough to help carry the participants through the challenged that they faced. Participants also mentioned that group members might initially have questioned their own ability to complete the course when other members self-terminate. But the participants felt that the students remaining in the group had enough resilience to continue with what they had set out to do.

4.5 Category 5: Impact of the Programme

The participants acknowledged that even though they did not complete the directed Masters programme in Psychology they were still able to gain some lasting value from it, thus using positive reframing as an adaptive coping style in the face of circumstances and decisions experienced as challenging. Two themes relating to the impact of the programme were

identified namely: 1) value of psychological knowledge; and 2) future academic pursuits. Table 21 indicates the themes and sub-themes related to the last category.

Table 21: *Category 5: Impact of the programme*

Theme	Sub-Themes
Theme 5.1 Value of psychological knowledge	Knowledge and experience gained Referral to psychological services Personal growth
Theme 5.2 Future academic pursuits	Ongoing desire to be trained in psychological work

Theme 5.1: Value of psychological knowledge. All the participants expressed how the experience of being enrolled in a directed Masters programme in Psychology had a positive impact over the long term. The sub-themes that illustrate the value of the psychological knowledge that participants gained are outlined in Table 22. These sub-themes are: 1) knowledge and experience gained; 2) referral to psychological services; and 3) personal growth.

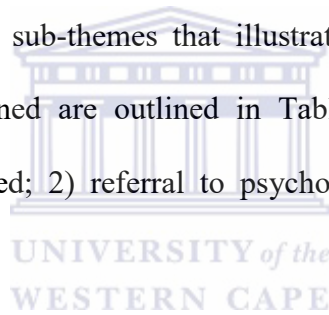


Table 22: Theme 5.1: Value of psychological knowledge

Sub-themes:	Illustrative quotes
Knowledge and experience gained	<p>“...and despite me leaving ... I still learnt a great deal. A lot of information that was sort of just loaded on top of us, I could still embrace it and I’m still using it right up to today.”</p> <p>“But I quite like it that I’ve got that little story in my arsenal to tell. It’s valuable. I’ve got to treat it as something of value.”</p> <p>“What made sense to me in the programme, I embraced, and in a very practical way I’m still applying it to my counselling. I do marriage counselling. I do substance abuse counselling.”</p> <p>“...and I will be able to relate a good story and say, oh, you know what, ten years ago, let me tell you the story of what I did. Or maybe help other students to say, you know what, stick to your first choice. Stick to your first choice, you might for a year be unemployable or not studying, but if this is really, really, really what you want, nothing else will satisfy. It’s not going to satisfy you.”</p>
Referral to psychological services	<p>“And up to today I still encourage people to go for therapy and to go for counselling. If I can’t help them with my little knowledge that I have, I refer them.”</p>
Personal growth	<p>“So ja, it has helped me to grow in that area, and to be understanding towards other people and to teach others who don’t know what is happening.”</p> <p>“And psychology has empowered me, so I don’t regret any of the days that I decided to go and study. I’ve learnt such a great deal. I’ve empowered myself.”</p> <p>“It was a very difficult season, but probably one of the best in terms of everything that was being done in me. Today I feel really grateful for that whole experience, just those years where I could come back, it was meant to be really tough for me. But it was necessary, so it was really good.”</p>

Knowledge and experience gained: Most of the participants still use the knowledge that they have gained from the course in various ways. One participant found meaning in the experience by noting how the experience can be used to motivate and inspire others in future. Another participant uses the knowledge gained within the area of lay counseling in the community work that the participant does.

Referral to psychological services: A greater appreciation for the mental health sector have been gained and one of the participants, through referring people to available psychological services and by doing psychoeducation, is helping to dispel the myths surrounding mental health in certain communities. The same participant now also has the knowledge to understand

when lay counseling can be done and when people need to be referred to appropriate psychological services.

Personal growth: The experience was linked to personal growth for all the participants, empowering them and leading to a greater understanding of others. One participant viewed the process of going through selections, enrolling for the course and then deciding to self-terminate as a necessary part of the journey through life which led to greater personal growth.

Theme 5.2: Future academic pursuits. One of the positive impacts that the programme had on the participants was that it enabled them to gain a clearer understanding of the specialty areas in psychology and how those areas relate to their personal and professional goals. Table 23 below indicates the sub-theme of training in psychological work substantiated with illustrative quotations.

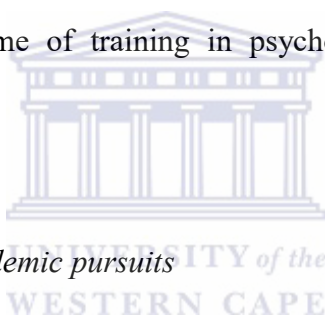


Table 23: *Theme 5.2: Future academic pursuits*

Sub-theme:	Illustrative quotes
Training in psychological work	<p><i>“And I started with my master’s in pastoral counselling ..., which is a correspondence course. It’s a little bit less stress and I take my time. So I’m busy with the thesis as well and stuff like that. So ja, I just want to empower myself”</i></p> <p><i>“...it’s more of a master of science in psychology, but with some structured blocks, which means you travel to the country for blocks. So it’s like semi-structured. And that’s what I took, and I eventually decided to go on an American programme.”</i></p>

Training in psychological work: Despite self-terminating from the programme, two of the participants are now furthering their studies in areas in which they have a more specific interest. Their initial enrolment in the respective areas of Psychology did not align with their personal interests and goals. They were able to move past the disillusionment that they experienced and use the self-knowledge and insight gained to pursue academic courses in their field of work

and interest. Two other participants expressed an interest in continuing with studies in psychology should they get a chance again at an opportune moment.

5. Discussion

The timeframe for self-termination for the majority of the sample was by the end of the first semester during year one of their studies. The participants noted particular difficulties that they experienced during their stay on the course with adaptation into the programme and with enculturation into the specific field of study. Literature indicates that difficulties with adaptation (Kuyken et al., 2003) and lack of enculturation, specifically into the field of study (Hovdhaugen et al., 2013) can act as barriers to completion. Furthermore, the participants experienced a mismatch between their personal goals and expectations and the programme offering during their time on the course. This finding supports the results of Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) that student persistence in a programme is influenced by the student's match to the programme, including whether the student's personal goals were aligned to the academic programme and to what extent student expectations were met.

The motive for enrolment in a directed Masters programme in Psychology was informed by the participants' interest in psychological work, prior work experience and the need for skills capacitation. The discipline of Psychology was perceived by participants as offering solutions to some of the challenges noted in themselves, others and the community context within which they were working. These solutions included the empowerment of self and others. The challenges faced within the settings in which participants worked left the participants with a sense of disempowerment. The participants acknowledged that in order to overcome this sense of disempowerment within the communities they needed to find ways to empower and equip themselves first. This translated into the perceived belief that a Masters programme in

Psychology would be a tool towards empowerment. It would most notably empower the participants to further their skills to develop people, leading to the emphasis on empowering others. Interest in psychological work seemed to serve as a motive for enrolment, but not as a motive for the completion of studies. The vocational and volunteer experiences of participants placed them in positions where they were engaged in work of a psychological nature. The participants thus regarded themselves as already doing work associated with the field of psychology. This suggests that their motivation to study or enroll in professional programmes felt like a normal progression from their prior experience with the aim of complementing the work that they were already involved in. The majority of the participants enrolled for the degree programme to attain rewards that were not contained in the traditional extrinsic factors or motivations. There was thus a mismatch between what the participants wanted to obtain through their studies, which served as intrinsic motivation, and what the directed Masters programme in Psychology practically offered, such as entrance into a specific career and professional area of practice. The prestige associated with being a psychologist and in certain registration categories held a particular allure that sparked the participants' interest in the field, but it was not sufficient to sustain or retain them in the programme until graduation. Thus demonstrating that extrinsic motivations were not sufficient to prevent self-termination. Previous findings indicate that the primary motivation for postgraduate students is intrinsic motivation. Those who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to engage with available support structures and with the academic content of the programme (Hoffman & Julie, 2012; Sommer & Dumont, 2011). The participants did, however, maintain an internal locus of control that enabled them to make the decision to self-terminate despite the prestige attached to the professional qualification.

The uncertainty about study choice that participants had experienced from the outset of the programme detracted from their ability to tolerate the nature of the training. Participants also had expectations of what the course would entail, and not having these expectations met further supported the participants' thinking that enrolling for the course was a wrong decision. The experience of the training in Psychology received at a Masters level can be intense (as described by the participants) which serves to amplify the doubt about study choice to the point where self-termination could feel like a reprieve. There is a lack of clarity regarding how the mismatch that the students experienced between the programme offering and their expectations impacted on them. The participants reported an interest in gaining more practical skills but also appeared disappointed at the course having a large practical component. It should also be noted that there was an expectation of more individualised academic support with progressed academic study, despite having more academic experience and knowledge than students at lower levels of tertiary studies. The participants reported that their expectations, however rationally informed, could not capture the full or comprehensive expectations of the programme. The expectations of the participants with regards to academic content, programme requirements and attention from staff were unmet, which added to their disillusionment with the programme and furthered uncertainty about their study choice. It also then impacted on their ability to continue during the difficult intensity of the course. Students that experience higher satisfaction with a course are more motivated and less likely to self-terminate from the course (Cook et al., 1995; Suhre et al., 2007). The students who self-terminated also indicated a lack of satisfaction with the course as it did not align with some of their personal and professional goals. This supports the findings of Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) that student persistence in postgraduate students is influenced by the match between the programme and the goals of the student. The requirements of the course are difficult to accurately comprehend based on earlier experiences, research or fact finding. The extent to which expectations are anomalous adversely impacts students'

ability to become integrated into the course as student psychologists. A wider mismatch between their expectations on entry and the emerging realisation of the programme requirements can make it easier to self-terminate from the programme.

All the participants noted how the nature of the programme influenced their experience of the various directed Masters programmes in Psychology. Completing the academic course requirements in one year added to the intensity of the course. The participants acknowledged that they would have preferred to complete the course over two years, as offered at other institutions, rather than in one year. Some of the reasons were that the participants had little time for anything other than preparing for classes in the evenings after spending most of the day in the classroom. This thus impacted on their time spent with family members and on non-academic activities. It also impacted on the time that they had available to complete the research component of the course. The decision to self-terminate can thus be regarded as including a choice to be made between academic studies and the participants' personal life, compounded by the pressure that the intensity and structure of the course placed on participants. The nature of the programme led to an unsatisfactory experience for most participants. The motivation to complete studies can be linked to the amount of satisfaction that students experience with the course (Suhre et al., 2007), where greater satisfaction with study activities is associated with increased motivation and a decreased propensity towards self-termination (Cook et al., 1995).

Preparation for a directed Masters programme in Psychology extends beyond mere academic preparedness, knowledge and skills. Students might be academically prepared for a Masters course, having the capability to write and conduct research (Dysthe, 2007; Hoffman & Julie, 2012; West, 2012), but they might not necessarily be prepared for the unique requirements of a directed programme in psychology, such as practical skill requirements. This can be challenging from the outset of the course and if a student is already questioning whether

they should be studying a course and the initial lack of practical skills can support a decision to terminate. The participants evidenced that preparation is also required with regards to subject engagement, some exposure to practical aspects of clinical work in psychology, and the development of interviewing and counselling skills. This supports the findings of prior research (e.g. Hoffman & Julie, 2012) that a lack of prior experience in a field of study prior to enrolment could act as a barrier to completion. Participants also need to be prepared with regards to the physical and emotional energy required to complete the course. Unpreparedness, in its various forms, acted as an additional stressor for the participants, supporting their decision to self-terminate.

The abstract nature of Psychology as a field of study becomes more pronounced at higher levels of academic inquiry. Some of the respondents highlighted their struggle with the abstract nature of some academic content. These respondents, however, did not complete undergraduate degrees specialising in Psychology and it is likely that their prior engagement with the subject content related to the field of psychology had less depth than that of other participants. Kaslow (2004) indicated that the competency-based training approach used in training psychologist can lead to aspirations of achievement and with self-reflection used as a tool to gauge levels of achievement. This is, however, a subjective measure and students could either over-value or under-value their competency. Personal confidence with both academic content and as a trainee psychologist impacted on the participants' experience of the programme. It appears that lower levels of perceived academic and personal confidence negatively impacted on the participants' overall experience of a directed Masters programme in Psychology. These negative experiences served to motivate the decision to self-terminate. The study further indicates that students who perceived themselves as less competent than fellow students viewed competency

as an influential factor in the decision to self-terminate. Those who perceived themselves as competent in the course did not view competency as a motive towards self-termination.

The identified university, being a historically disadvantaged university, does not receive sufficient funding to assist academically or to provide financial support to students than historically advantaged universities (DHET, 2102). The bursaries available also do not cover the loss of income that students experience during the year of study. It could act as a deterrent not only for completing the course but also for prospective students wanting to enroll in a directed Masters programme in Psychology. The findings support the literature that financial resources have an impact on the ability of more mature students to pursue fulltime studies (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; DHET, 2102; HESA, 2014; Manathunga, 2005; Pillay & Kritzinger, 2007). Students at the identified institution have to forego earning an income for at least a year in order to complete the directed Masters programme in Psychology. There is also a lack of available scholarships and bursaries to financially support these students. The socio-economic circumstances in South Africa dictate that some students would thus choose to earn an income rather than furthering their studies (DHET; 2012). Although the financial constraint that students experience is not the sole reason for self-termination, it was an influential factor for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those that had families to support. Students often plan for this level of study by focusing on tuition fees and fail to track the other life, family and household expenditure that they will be obligated to fulfil whilst not earning an income. The students did not view the availability of cultural resources (Hovdhaugen et al., 2013) or the culture of the academic institution (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000) as influential in their decision to self-terminate.

The participants were all part of a small group of students that gained entrance into a directed Masters programme in Psychology. As such, participants spent a large portion of their time within a classroom room environment where they are open to scrutiny not only by lecturing staff but also by other students and themselves. The quality of the relationships with other group members thus had an effect on their overall experience as a Masters student. Being members of a group the participants were not only influenced by other group members, but also had an effect on the group. Their decision to self-terminate would also impact the group and change the dynamic interaction within the group. The greatest challenges with regards to interpersonal dynamics within the group were related to discrepancy in knowledge and life experience that participants perceived to have in comparison to other group members. Positive connections with fellow students are important factors in student persistence in a postgraduate programmes (Golde, 2000; Hoffman & Julie, 2012; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). In a small group the impact of factors such as differences in demographics is exponentially increased, intensifying experiences within the group. Although the study found that it is not a manifest factor in the decision to self-terminate, the daily experiences within a group can either lighten the burden already faced by students or add to the burden, thus becoming a latent factor in the decision to self-terminate.

Various cognitive and emotional experiences were related to the decision to self-terminate. These findings support those of Lovitts and Nelson (2000) that the decision to self-terminate from postgraduate degree programmes are accompanied with feelings of distress, failure and some measure of self-blame as students who self-terminate feel that they have not only disappointed themselves but also others. These experiences of emotional turmoil are most likely heightened by the strenuous selection into the programme, not wanting to give up once having made it in, and the uncertainty of study choice. Participants also described experiencing

relief after making the decision, providing an emotional reprieve to them. The participants had to hold multiple possibilities and realities in mind during the decision-making process. They thus displayed a capacity to tolerate ambiguity and to make decisions that might appear wrong but that also feel right. These decisions were made whilst holding in mind that they might be disappointing others but that they also need to do what is right for them and the profession.

Differing experiences of support from staff members were reported depending on who the participants sought support from. Most of the participants experienced a lack of emotional and academic support during the time that they were enrolled for a directed Masters programme in Psychology. Although most participants only sought emotional support once leaning towards self-termination rather than completion of the programme, participants might have remained in the programme longer if they received adequate emotional support (Golde, 2000). It further appears that the participants sought approval from a higher authority to self-terminate rather than wanting to be convinced to remain in the programme. Participants thus only sought support once they were more likely to self-terminate rather than when they were still confused about their place within the programme. The ability of academic staff, especially those in authoritative positions, to contain the intrapsychic experiences of students are thus crucial in the retention of students. More emphasis was placed on consultation with staff rather than consultation with significant others in the decision to self-terminate. Consultation with significant others might, however, be under-reported.

Personal belief systems can often contradict scientific enquiry, which was evident for some participants. They did, however, show the capacity to hold various experiences and forms of knowledge in mind and to extrapolate meaning from a variety of teachings. As such, the participants' sense making is informed by a personal belief system that supersedes the rationale

of the scientific discipline and endeavour. Their personal belief system served as a meaning making mechanism that guided decision-making rather than being only an adaptive coping mechanism (Maltby & Day, 2003). Although the participants reported that their personal belief system helped them throughout the decision-making process of self-termination, it could also be used to support those that choose to continue with a directed Masters programme in Psychology. As such, personal belief systems can serve as an important factor or criterion in meaning assignment that can have a major bearing on how students engage in the entire process of training.

Participants felt that they had let significant others, staff members and other students in the programme down and disappointed them by choosing to self-terminate from the programme. Participants, however, noted the continued interactions with staff and other students after self-termination as positive. They were thus able to manage the disappointment and frustration initially felt through continued positive and honest interaction.

The process of self-termination can have a positive outflow that has an impact beyond the individual that self-terminated. The participants were able to find meaning in the process of self-termination through positive reframing of the experience, and adaptive coping mechanism (Boyle, 2014; Kausar, 2010; Mahmoud et al., 2012). Finding meaning within the process of self-termination also translates to experiencing personal growth. Participants were able to apply the knowledge that they gained in the various areas that they work in or are involved with whilst enrolled for the course. For some participants the broadened knowledge that they have gained have been applied in their current work situations and within the volunteer work that they do in communities. The participants were therefore able to identify the positive impact that their enrolment on the course had on them. The experience of self-termination led to a

heightened realisation of the personal goals that some participants had who subsequently pursued academic studies in an area of specialisation in Psychology that is more related to their interest. Even though some of the participants are not specialising in the areas in which training is offered at the identified university, they are still pursuing academic studies in the broader field of Psychology. Some of those that self-terminated will thus still be contributing to the required services and research in the mental health sector in South Africa (Bradshaw et al., 2007; National Department of Health, 2013). By pursuing their actual interests, they might be more likely to continue working in the mental health sector for longer.

6. Conclusion

Lovitts and Nelson (2000) stated that students are more likely to leave postgraduate studies because of what happens to them after they arrive at an institution than because of the elements that they brought with them into the study programme. The findings of the current study indicate that there a number of factors, both prior to enrolment in the programme and during the programme, that made the participants vulnerable to experiencing difficulties within the programme. The factors prior to enrollment include the participants' interest in psychological work, intrinsic motivation for enrolment, criterion references regarding the programme, and uncertainty of study choice. Once they were in the programme the dissonance they experienced both resulted from earlier factors and were exacerbated by other factors such as the nature of the programme, preparedness for the programme, perceived competence, availability of financial support, interpersonal dynamics within the cohort group, and personal belief systems. In addition, the participants had to manage the expectations of academic staff members, significant others and their academic peer group after making the decision to self-terminate. The findings demonstrated that the decision to apply for the programme, to enroll, to attend coursework classes and to self-terminate from a directed Masters in Psychology were a function

of a socially embedded reality. The decision-making process is complex and incorporates personal, programmatic and contextual considerations.

The findings of this study thus supports available literature (e.g. Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; Cooke et al., 1995; Hoffman & Julie, 2012; Hoskins and Goldberg, 2005; Hovdhaugen et al., 2013; Sommer & Dumont, 2011) on insufficient academic preparation, lack of resources, academic overload, lack of enculturation into the discipline of study, mismatch between student expectations and the programme offering, and the student experience within the programme acting as barriers to completion. The supervisory relationship, and research capacity was not mentioned as influential factors. The participants did not report the quality of the supervisory relationship (clinical or research) as a factor influential in the decision to self-terminate. They did, however, report inadequate responsiveness from their supervisors in response to their decision. According to Berkel et al. (2007) inadequate culture responsiveness and competence can act as a barrier to completion. The findings of this study indicate that participants perceived some supervisors as unresponsive to their difficulties. Enhanced responsiveness could have acted as a retentive factor. Little mention was made of the research component as influential factor in self-termination. As the participants chose to self-terminate towards the end of the first semester it is likely that little progress had been made on the research component. This, however, needs further investigation.

7. Limitations

This is an exploratory case study based on the experiences of a small sample at one historically disadvantaged university. Case studies are based on the unusual experiences of a small sample and can thus not provide information on whether other individuals would react the same if faced with similar circumstances than the sample (Stangor, 2011).

This study also only provided information on the experiences of those that self-terminated, as they constitute a vulnerable group, and not on those that completed the course. Having identified the factors that could lead to a decision of self-termination, it would be of interest to compare if students who completed their postgraduate degree programme experienced similar dissonance and to determine what informed their decision to remain in the programme.

8. Recommendations

The findings of the present study identified core factors contributing to the decision to terminate Masters level studies that could inform support strategies in the service of increased retention rates. On an individual level, prospective students can use the information provided by this study to evaluate their level of academic integration, specifically related to their expectations of the programme, the nature of the programme and their level of preparedness for the programme prior to applying and enrolling for a directed postgraduate programme in Psychology. On a programmatic level, it would be beneficial for supervisors and academic staff members in authoritative positions to become aware of the various coping styles used by students and to engage with adaptive styles in the service of retention. Furthermore, students require continuous feedback in competency-based programmes, specifically to lessen instances of under-valuation of competence which, according to Kaslow (2004), could ultimately guide self-termination.

Higher Education institutions can assist prospective students by outlining which expectations will be met during the course, making prospective students more aware of the skill level required at outset of the course as well as how their skills will be developed throughout the course in order to become a professional in psychology. The information gained can further be used during selection processes by determining the intrinsic motivation, personal goals, professional goals, and programme expectations of prospective students. Greater satisfaction

with the course can initiate greater motivation which could ultimately inform programme completion. Understanding what the expectations are of postgraduate students can assist Higher Education institutions in more accurately managing expectations, leading to greater satisfaction and motivation within the programme. The same holds value not only for students enrolled in a directed Masters programme in Psychology but also for those enrolled in other postgraduate programmes.

Future research could include a replication of the study with samples from other institutions to provide a larger collective case. This could lead to insight into patterned ways in which this process might be taking place with the institution as a dimension of intersectionality. Further research can be done with comparative studies on those that persisted within a postgraduate programme and those that self-terminated to determine whether there are unique intrapersonal factors or coping skills that individuals have that leads to completion of studies. Comparative studies can also be conducted to compare experiences of self-termination at historically advantaged and historically disadvantaged universities to determine whether any unique factors present at either that needs to be addressed in the service of retention of postgraduate students in Psychology. Furthermore, future research can involve exploration of the strategies employed by the training department or programme to retain students at risk. Explorative studies can also be done on how the retention strategies employed by the training department or programme intersect with the student's subjective experiences.

9. Significance of the study

This study provided an opportunity for the affected students to engage in a reflective process about their decision without the valence of emotional energy attached to this process during decision-making. The information gained regarding the experiences of student at a

historically disadvantaged university can be used as a basis for more detailed research on the factors that lead to self-termination from a directed Masters programme in Psychology. The information can also be used to develop or enhance retention strategies.



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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Time of Interview: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

(Briefly describe the project)

Questions:

1. What were your reasons for enrolling in a directed Masters programme in Psychology?
2. What were your expectations of the programme?
3. To what extent were your expectations met?
4. What was your experience of this programme?
5. How did you experience making the decision to terminate from the programme?
6. What were the factors that contributed to your decision?
7. How was your relationship with fellow students?
8. How did you balance studying and other life responsibilities?
9. Did you experience and personal or other difficulties (elaborate)?
e.g. financial, relational
10. What impact do you perceive your decision made on the programme and others?

(Thank the participant for taking part in the study. Assure the participant of confidentiality of responses)

Appendix B



**OFFICE OF THE DEAN
DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT**

09 July 2015

To Whom It May Concern

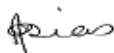
I hereby certify that the Senate Research Committee of the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology and ethics of the following research project by:
Mrs Y Offord (Psychology)

Research Project: The subjective experience of students who withdraw from a directed Masters programme in Psychology at a historically disadvantaged university: A case study

Registration no: 15/4/44

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval.

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse event and/or termination of the study.



*Ms Patricia Josias
Research Ethics Committee Officer
University of the Western Cape*

Appendix C



UNIVERSITY *of the* WESTERN CAPE

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa, Telephone: (021) 959-2283/2453
Fax: (021) 959-3515 Telex: 52 6661

The Registrar

Student Administration

UWC

Private Bag X17

Bellville, 7535

13 July 2015

Re: Permission to conduct research at the University of the Western Cape.

I am currently registered as a student in the M. Psych programme at UWC. I have to complete a research project/thesis in partial fulfilment of the degree requirements. To this end, I wish to apply for permission to conduct my Masters level study at UWC. The proposed study has been approved for ethics clearance at the Senate Research Committee (15/4/44). The study aims to explore the experiences of students who have withdrawn or self-terminated from professional programmes in Psychology at a historically disadvantaged university. The study is being supervised by Dr. Mario R. Smith, who is co-signing this letter to request permission to conduct the study.

The study has been designed with M.Psych students who have withdrawn from Masters programmes in Psychology that lead to registration as a Psychologist with the Health Professions Council as the target group and UWC as the research setting. The proposed study is a collective case study in which the target audience will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes to complete in a neutral space chosen by the participants. The study will also use programme records to identify pertinent information. Given the small target group, their anonymity will be further protected by limiting the demographic details that are disclosed. All other ethics principles will be observed. There are no risks anticipated in participating in this research, but support will be made available in the event that participants become emotionally dysregulated in the process. The benefits of participating include the opportunity to engage in a reflective process about their decision to terminate their studies without the valence of emotional energy attached to the decision-making process.

In addition to permission to conduct the study, I would like to request permission to approach the Dean of CHS and Head of Department of Psychology to request access to programme files. It is also envisaged that my supervisor who has access to the names and email addresses for these ex-students, will introduce the study to eligible candidates and invite them electronically to participate in the study. In this way only students who express an interest in the study and who was given permission for their personal contact information to be made available to me, will be contacted. Thus the recruitment strategy of the study will be in compliance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (PoPI).

We anticipate that the proposed study will help us gain insight into the experiences of students and the factors they considered in making this difficult decision. This in turn could be helpful in facilitating student retention and throughput, and informing student support. Find attached a copy of the proposal, ethics clearance certificate and proof of registration.

We hope this application will be met with your favourable approval. Please do not hesitate to contact my supervisor or myself if you require additional information.

Thanking you in anticipation.



Mrs. Y Offord
Student #3503505
yolande.offord@gmail.com
0824418118



UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN Cape Dr. Mario Smith
Supervisor
mrsmith@uwc.ac.za
0823309284 / Office x3713



UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

Tel: +27 21-959 2283, Fax: 27 21-959 3515

E-mail: yolande.offord@gmail.com

Appendix D

INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: The subjective experiences of students who withdraw from a directed Masters programme in Psychology at a historically disadvantaged university: A case study

What is this study about?

This is a research project being conducted by Yolande Offord at the University of the Western Cape. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you have terminated your studies in a directed Masters programme in Psychology at UWC in the last five years. The purpose of this research project is to explore the subjective experiences of postgraduate students that elect to withdraw (self-terminate) from their studies in a directed Masters programme in Psychology.

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

You will be asked to participate in an in-depth, semi-structured interview at a time most convenient for you. Interviews will be conducted at a place that is neutral and safe. The approximate duration of the interview will be 90 minutes.

The semi-structured questions include:

- What were your reasons for enrolling in a directed Masters programme in Psychology?
- What were your expectations of the programme?
- To what extent were your expectations met?
- What was your experience of this programme?
- How did you experience making the decision to terminate from the programme?
- What were the factors that contributed to your decision?
- How was your relationship with fellow students?
- How did you balance studying and other life responsibilities?
- Did you experience and personal or other difficulties (elaborate)?
- What impact do you perceive your decision made on the programme and other?

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

The researcher undertakes to protect your identity and the nature of your contribution. To ensure your anonymity, the researcher will create an identification key linked to your audio-recording, notes and transcribed interview. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to this identification key.

This research project involves making audio-recordings of you. The audio-recordings will be transcribed in order to look for common themes arising from various interviews. The audio-recordings will be kept in a safe location with only the researcher having access to it.

To ensure your confidentiality, the audio-recordings, interview notes and transcribed interview will be kept in a safe location with access only available to the researcher. Electronic data will be stored using password-protected computer files.

The researcher will protect your identity in all formats that findings will be distributed including

- An unpublished thesis
- A conference presentation
- A manuscript submitted for publication

What are the risks of this research?

All human interactions and talking about self or others carry some amount of risks. During this study there is a possibility that your reflections on your decision to withdraw and the circumstances surrounding that process might stir up emotions that could require containment. We will nevertheless attempt to 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?

The benefits to you include the opportunity to engage in a reflective process about your decision to terminate your studies without the valence of emotional energy attached to the decision-making process.

The results may help the investigator gain insight into this difficult decision-making process and to identify core contributing factors that could possibly inform support strategies in the service of increased retention rates.

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 Yolande Offord at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact:

Researcher:
Yolande Offord
Dept of Psychology, UWC
082 441 8118
yolande.offord@gmail.com

Researcher supervisor:
Dr. Mario Smith
Dept of Psychology, UWC
021-9592283/ 0823309284
mrsmith@uwc.ac.za

Head of Department:
Dr. Michelle Andipatin
Dept of Psychology, UWC
021-9592283
mandipatin@uwc.ac.za



Dean of the Faculty of Community and Health Sciences: *the*
Prof José Frantz
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X17
Bellville 7535
chs-deansoffice@uwc.ac.za

This research has been approved by the Senate Research Committee and Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape.



UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

Tel: +27 21-959 2283, Fax: 27 21-959 3515

E-mail: yolande.offord@gmail.com

Appendix E

CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: *The subjective experiences of students who withdraw from a directed Masters programme in Psychology at a historically disadvantaged university: A case study*

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 consent to an audio recording of my interview, as well as to the dissemination of the findings in the form of

- An unpublished thesis
- A conference presentation
- A published manuscript

Participant's name.....

Participant's signature.....

Date.....

Appendix F

Category	Theme	Subtheme
1. Motive for Enrolment	Interest in psychological work	Empowerment of self Empowerment of others Personal interest
	Prior experience in psychological work	Community work Counseling Coaching and training
	Intrinsic motivation	Job satisfaction Skills capacitation Professional identity Category of psychology
2. Obstacles to Academic Integration	Criterion references	Progression from Honours to Masters Programme requirements
	Nature of the programme	Intensity of the course Structure of the course Balance between programme and personal life
	Preparedness for the programme	Fund of knowledge Impact of human distress Ready skills Fatigue
	Perceived competence	Struggling with abstract content Confidence Professional identities of students
3. Other considerations	Financial support	Lack of income Availability of funding
	Interpersonal dynamics within the group	Demographic differences
	Personal Belief System	Sense of self Established belief system Active practice

4. Process of Decision-making	Experiential knowing	Uncertainty about choice Foreboding
	Intrapsychic processes	Emotions and cognitions Ethics and moral obligation
	Consulting	Consultation with staff Consultation with significant others Formal processes
	Implementation	Managing significant others' expectations and reactions Managing staff expectations and reactions Managing cohort expectations and reactions
5. Impact of the Programme	Value of psychological knowledge	Knowledge and experience gained Referral to psychological services Personal growth
	Future academic pursuits	Training in psychological work

