UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Faculty of Community and Health Sciences

Title: Psychology students' perceptions of the extent to which group-based systematic review methodology at Honours level prepared them for further postgraduate studies.

Student Name: Celeste Swart

Student Number: 2739824

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Supervisor: Dr. Mario R. Smith

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Abstract

Honours students in Psychology typically form larger cohorts with numbers ranging from 20 to 40 students in comparison to other disciplines that have fewer than 10 students in a cohort. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) requires Honours students to complete a thesis that is equivalent to 300 notional hours or 30 credits. The learning outcome is that students conduct low level research that prepares them for conceptualizing, executing and writing up a research project. The thesis requirement should also prepare them for future studies. The larger cohorts and revised NQF thesis requirement places increased pressure on the staff compliment of Psychology departments. Some of the ways in which departments have attempted to cope with this increased demand include conducting group-based research projects, and secondary research projects. One of the concerns raised is whether these particular types of methodology prepared students adequately for reactive research in further studies. This study aimed to explore students' subjective perceptions about the extent to which group-based systematic review methodology in the Honours year adequately prepared students for conducting research during their masters-level studies. An explorative study was conducted to explore the experiences of purposively selected recent graduates from two identified Honours programmes that have progressed to Masters level studies. Participants were invited on the basis of being graduates or alumni rather than their registration status as Masters students at particular universities. Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted. Data was analysed using thematic analysis. The following are key findings gathered from student interviews. Orientation into the research module at Honours level was found to be a significant factor in facilitating understanding of methodology. Workshops throughout the research process were useful in facilitating their mastery of the systematic review methodology. The step-by step process of the systematic review methodology guided students throughout the research process thereby reducing anxieties that in turn facilitated

academic performance. Group supervision provided opportunities for peers to monitor and hold each other accountable that assisted in producing work that was thorough through providing verification of information and processes. Students reported that systematic reviews prepared them to master essential methodological principles and to evaluate research. Working in groups with peers who were familiar to students was found to improve the efficiency of group processes, as well as overall group cohesion. In order to complete the research in a timely manner, groups developed coping and compensatory mechanisms. Sacrifices were made at an individual and group level in the service of the core group task being completed.

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First and foremost, I want to thank God for providing me with this opportunity and strength to persevere to the end. I would not be where I am today without His continuous presence.

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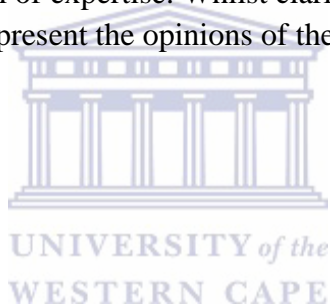
Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Thesis organization

This thesis is comprised of five chapters. Chapter One serves as an introduction to the topic by providing a background to the study, formulating a problem statement and explaining the rationale for conducting the study. Chapter Two is a literature review reporting on significant findings on the topic, also addressing significant gaps in the literature. Chapter Three provides a detailed report on the methodology with a clear description of the different methodological elements used. Chapter Four is a presentation of the results and discussion thereof. The Fifth and final chapter is a conclusion, which served to tie the study together and highlights its significance and limitations, as well as provide recommendations for further research and implications or practical suggestions for supervision and curriculum design.
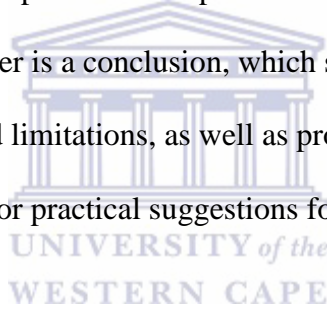
1.2 Background

Higher education in South Africa is under review as there remain significant challenges in the ability to retain students, as well as produce graduates, particularly at postgraduate level (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2015). Post-1994, there has been a significant increase in enrolment, research output and graduation at postgraduate level (Badat, 2010). However, this increase was insufficient in its contribution to the social and economic needs of the country (Ministry of Education, 2001). In response to the above, the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) introduced specific targets to increase enrolment and research output at Masters and Doctoral level. The NPHE was a response to the broader plan for South Africa described in the National Development Plan (NDP) which aimed at

building competencies and skills, encouraging leadership and developing the economy to name but a few (National Development Plan, 2001). The NDP (2001) was shaped by the objectives of the White Paper on Higher Education (Ministry of Education, 2001). The White Paper identified three core functions of Higher education, namely: Human resource development, high-level skills training, as well as the production, acquisition and application of new knowledge (Council on Higher Education, 2016).

The National Strategy in Higher Education 2030 formulated a target of 1.6 million enrolments reached in public universities, 2.5 million in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges and 1.0 million in community colleges by 2030 (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013). The NPHE set graduate benchmarks which institutions were required to meet. A target of 20% participation rate was set as a long term goal. Participation rates, more specifically looking at labour force participation rates, refer to the amount of people employed or actively seeking employment relative to the working age population (Litzinger & Dunn, 2015). Poor throughput numbers have contributed to lower participation rates. Therefore the short-term goal formulated in the NPHE was to increase graduation rates. The NPHE (2001) set benchmarks of 33% graduates at postgraduate level and 20% graduation for masters and for doctoral degrees respectively. The targets were found to be significantly inflated and unrealistic and by 2004 they were revised by between 2.5% and 6% (Human Sciences Research Council, 2008). For example, targets for Masters degrees were adjusted from 33% to 30%. The targets were found to be too impractical due to issues of compromised capacity more specifically, insufficient academic teaching, supervision capacity and institutional capacity which would enable the abovementioned increases (Higher Education South Africa, 2014). Despite growth in enrolment, graduation and research output since 1994, there have still been significant challenges in the ability to retain students, as well

as produce graduates (Council on Higher Education, 2011; Department of Higher Education South Africa, 2015).

In 2008, the Human Sciences Research Council delivered shocking reports reflecting substantially low graduation rates (Letseka & Maile, 2008). Across twenty three public universities in South Africa, the graduation rate for Masters was only at twenty percent and Doctoral graduates at twelve percent (Human Sciences Research Council, 2008). The Department of Higher Education and Training (2012) reported a 1.8% growth in postgraduate enrolment in 2010, but no significant increase in the graduation rate. The graduation rate for masters and doctoral degrees in 2010 reflected poor graduate rates at 19% [with a target of 33%] and 13% [with a target of 20%] respectively which is highly problematic (MacGregor, 2014). In 2012, the graduation rate for doctoral graduates remained constant with a 2% increase at the Masters level. Masters graduates were reported to average at 21% and Doctoral graduates at 13% (DHET, 2014). These rates remained inadequate against the graduate benchmarks set in the NDP 2001 (CHE, 2016).The NDP 2030 identified the National Research Foundation (NRF) as a "key role player" in promoting and building research output. The NRF funded students, with a specific focus on research-based degrees at a postgraduate level. The NRF is commissioned by parliament under the Research Foundation Act which acts to support and drive research in South Africa in line with the National Development Plan 2030 (Government Gazette, 1998). The goals discussed above do not focus on Honours degrees ostensibly because Honours degrees are often considered undergraduate though frequently offered at a postgraduate level (Cosgrove, 2004). There is limited validated data on the experience of students at this level (Kagee & O'Donavon, 2011).

South Africa has an additional postgraduate level referred to as an Honours degree, following the three year undergraduate or Bachelor's degree. Honours programmes in
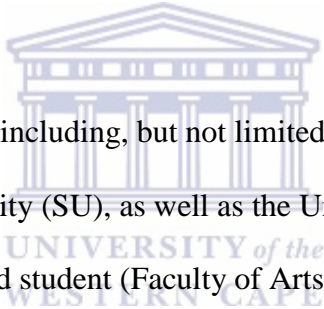
Psychology are offered at four public universities in the Western Cape namely The University of the Western Cape (Faculty of Community and Health Sciences, 2013), Stellenbosch University (Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, 2015), The University of Cape Town (UCT Psychology Society, 2015) and the University of South Africa (UNISA, 2016). The Honours programme is also offered at private institutions in the Western Cape namely Cornerstone Institute (Cornerstone Academics, 2016), the South African College of Applied Psychology (South African College Applied Psychology, 2016), Midrand Graduate Institute (Midrand Graduate Institute, 2016) and CTI Education Group (CTI Education Group, 2016).

The Honours programme requires that students complete a thesis in partial fulfilment of degree requirements (Government Gazette, 2013). Research at Honours level is crucial as it expands students' ability to conduct research after graduation (Cooke & Green, 2000; Hardwick & Jordan, 2002). Honours level research further emphasizes working autonomously, as well as formulating critical and thorough arguments (Atkins & Redley, 1998). Supervisors work alongside students to achieve the above-mentioned competencies.

In the social sciences, Honours level research becomes challenging as students desire to explore topics that are unique to their interests, but often these choices result in studies that are too broad or ambitious (Smith & Magodo, 2014a). At this level students have not yet developed the research skills necessary to carry out primary, as well as producing ethically sound research (Kagee & O'Donovan, 2011; McCormack, 2004). Supervision becomes challenging as higher intake numbers for the Honours programme puts pressure on staff (Ngozi & Kayode, 2013). These authors further argue that limitations have been placed on the type of methodologies used in order to facilitate improved performance of the study rather than undertaking comprehensive studies.

In Psychology in particular, there is a great demand for enrolment as it is applicable in many occupations resulting in larger than usual intakes (Kagee & O'Donovan, 2011). At

the Honours level, larger intake numbers for Psychology Honours programmes across South Africa is a common phenomenon relative to other disciplines (Cornell, 2014). These relatively higher enrolment figures place constraints on human resources as there is an increase in the amount of students requiring supervision (Council on Higher Education, 2009). With dwindling resources, this places tremendous strain on staff to work at higher capacities ultimately affecting the quality of supervision (Tsevi, 2015). Departments coped with this by reducing intake sizes, using secondary data such as systematic reviews or data mining; and working in groups rather than on individual research projects (Ramdass, 2009). Innovative methods are being employed in order to cope with the influx in student numbers, and reduction in the amount of supervisors available to students (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice 2013).

Individual research projects including, but not limited to literature review studies, are employed at Stellenbosch University (SU), as well as the University of Cape Town (UCT) at the discretion of the supervisor and student (Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, 2016; UCT Psychology Society, 2016). The University of the Western Cape and Cornerstone Institute have adopted group-based research projects with systematic review methodology in their Psychology Honours program (Faculty of Community and Health Sciences, 2013; Cornerstone Academics, 2016) at a programme level.

Systematic review methodology is ranked highest on the hierarchy of evidence (Centre for Reviews and Dissemination, 2008). Littell, Corcoran and Pillai (2008) reported that systematic review methodology works to reduce biases that may occur in original studies. A systematic review includes a rigorous search aimed at obtaining high quality research reports (Smith, Devane, Begley & Clarke, 2011). Rigorous searches ensure that all articles are appropriate and relevant to the research question (Stewart, 2014). It also contributed to high

levels of accuracy and reliability by incorporating multiple reviewers at the various levels (Gopalakrishnan & Ganeshkumar, 2013). Smith (2014) cautioned that systematic reviews might offer a practical solution for the human resource challenges, but still have to fulfil the teaching and learning outcomes of the Honours research component specified by the National Qualifications Framework (Government Gazette, 2013). Smith (2014) further reported that systematic review methodology was appropriate for use at the Honours level, but that appropriate guidance and structure must be provided.

1.3 Problem Statement

As mentioned before, larger intake numbers for Psychology Honours programmes across South Africa is a concern as it places constraints on human resources (Smith, 1997). Departments attempted to cope with this by reducing intake sizes, using secondary data such as systematic reviews, and working in groups rather than on individual research projects (Smith & Magodo, 2014a). Group-based systematic reviews are conducted at Honours level as a solution addressing human resource challenges (Smith & Magodo, 2014b). One of the concerns raised is whether this particular methodology prepared students adequately for conducting reactive research in further studies. Insufficient attention to the learning outcomes required at Honours level may cause a ripple effect into Masters, as well as PhD levels which could essentially affect retention and throughput in higher degree programmes (McCormack, 2004; Meyer, Shanahan & Laugksch, 2005). Thus it is imperative that the decision to implement systematic review methodology be evaluated empirically and systematically including students' subjective experiences. Pillay and Kritzinger (2007) identified the subjective experience of the thesis component in Masters Level training in Psychology as the single most important obstacle to completion. Thus the present study explored the subjective experiences of Masters students in Psychology who have conducted a systematic review, in a supervised group, as their Honours thesis. The aim of the study was to

obtain a retrospective view from Masters students about the extent to which systematic review methodology conducted in groups during Honours research was perceived to have prepared them for further studies.

1.4 Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to ascertain the extent to which Psychology Masters students felt that conducting systematic reviews at Honours level prepared them with the necessary skills for Masters-level research.

1.5 Rationale for study

Smith (2014) recommended that students' perceptions about the extent to which systematic reviews conducted in Honours prepared them for Masters-level research must be explored. This would enable us to assess whether students perceived the learning outcomes of the Honours research requirement contained in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to have been sufficiently met. In addition, it is an important investigation following from the Higher Learning Commission's (2013) recommendation that early research experiences significantly impact subsequent experiences objectively and attitudinally.

This study was important to assist programme developers and supervisors to engage reflectively and evaluatively with the perceived impact of using group-based systematic reviews as an intervention (McCormack, 2004; Pitcher, 2011; Meyer et al., 2005; Bless & Forgas, 2013). Acquiring good research skills is essential for students wanting to further their postgraduate studies (Melin & Janson, 2007; Rahman, Yasin, Salamuddin & Surat, 2014). It therefore is important to examine and understand students' perceptions; to hear what has worked and what hasn't; thereby assisting universities in gaining a better understanding of areas needing attention. In this way, providing the necessary guidance and support needed

and can improve academic performance that in turn could improve retention and throughput (Wright, 2003). In addition, improving the research experience and training at Honours directly impacts further postgraduate studies which is in line with the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE, 2001). Thus gaining insight into this intervention incorporates students' subjective experiences and perceptions that have been identified as an important predictor of their subsequent behavioural response and performance (Strydom & Mentz, 2010).

1.6 Theoretical framework

Social constructionism has been used as the theoretical lens for the present study. The social constructionist approach highlights the subjective meaning assigned to a situation in conjunction with other individuals or in a social context (Cresswell, 2003; Gergen, 1999). Burr (2015) reported that social constructionists understand reality to be subjectively constructed through a process of consensual validation and might vary among societies, groups and individuals (Cresswell, 2003; Raskin, 2002). As such Andrews (2012) indicated that within social constructionism phenomena are understood through sense-making of the social environment we are exposed to. Historically social constructionism is thought to enable us to take a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge (Burr, 1995; Freedman & Combs, 1995). In this way historical and cultural contexts can be considered in this approach in terms of their contribution to the meaning given to experiences (Barnhardt, 2006). The constructivist approach permits flexibility through being open to various subjective interpretations of knowledge and experience (Nollaig, 2011). This approach allowed for a greater depth of knowledge to be acquired about students' experiences at Honours and Masters level.

The experience of conducting supervised research at a Masters level and drawing on the learning and experiences in early research exposure during Honours studies takes place in a social context and constitutes a consensually validated reality. This reality is co-constructed by the inputs of the institution, supervisor and the student with their respective cultural and historical subject positions (Philp, Guy, & Lowe,2007). Thus social constructionism was deemed relevant to the present study as it provided an underlying philosophy of science that optimally allowed for an exploration of how students assigned meaning to their individual experiences of conducting Masters level research after having completed a group-based Honours study using systematic review methodology. This lens informed the methodological choices in the study as will be expanded upon in the methodology. In the present study social constructionism was used in a nominal sense with a summary provided in chapter 5 demonstrating the extent to which students experiences were socially constructed.
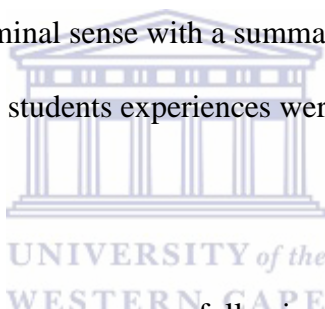
1.7 Key terms

Honours: Honours degree is a one year program following the Bachelor's degree (South African Qualifications Authority, 2015).

National Qualifications Framework (**NQF):** A system that formulates learning outcomes and ratings for courses by prescribing descriptions for each level of study (Council on Higher Education, 2015).

Learning outcomes: Statements that specify what learners will know or be able to do as a result of a learning activity. Outcomes are usually expressed as knowledge, skills, or attitudes (South African Qualifications Framework Authority, 2015).

Supervised research: Research conducted under the guidance of a supervisor (National Research Foundation, 2015).

Systematic review: A type of methodology utilizing secondary research consisting of a comprehensive search attempting to summarise all available literature pertaining to the topic of study (Centre for Reviews and Dissemination, 2008).

Group supervision: Includes a group of two or more students being supervised together (Zhang & Parsons, 2015).

Chapter 2

Literature Review:

The body of literature on Higher education include numerous foci such as, transformation (e.g. Department of Higher Education and Training, 2002), student experiences (e.g. Council on Higher Education, 2016), social and economic growth (e.g. Badat, 2010); legislation, racial and gender inequalities and human resources challenges (e.g. Govinder, Zondo & Makgoba, 2013). There has been a particular focus on research, with strategies to build research capacity (National Development Plan, 2001).

Literature on student research has focused on obstacles to completion, demographic and personal factors, supervisory relationships and early research experiences (Dominguez, 2006; Ngozi & Kayode, 2013; Devenport & Lane, 2006; Abiddin, Ismail & Ismail, 2011; Wadesango, 2011; Chiappetta-Swanson & Watt, 2011; Crowe & Brakke, 2008; Rae, 2015). Early research experiences have been identified as a key factor influencing research productivity and capacitation at higher degree level (Crowe & Brakke, 2008). Some of the aspects included in research on early research experiences included degree structures and requirements, learning outcomes and supervision, format of the research and student subjective experiences. The ensuing review will provide a brief overview of the abovementioned areas in order to formulate an academic rationale for the study.

2.1. Honours Degree structure

An Honours Degree is sometimes included as an undergraduate/Bachelor's degree, while others include it in the list of postgraduate qualifications (Kiley, Boud, Cantwell & Manathunga, 2009). South Africa subscribes to the 3+1 model which describes the three year undergraduate degree with an additional postgraduate level (Council on Higher Education, 2016). The Honours degree in Psychology is offered as a one year full-time programme

following the Bachelor's degree (Subramanian, 2015). The National Qualifications

Framework of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) categorizes the Honours

degree at level 8, linking specific learning outcomes and characteristics attached to that level.

In comparison to the large demand of students hoping to obtain entry into the Psychology

Honours programme, intake at this level is selective as there are only a small number of

students selected to participate in Honours programmes (Smith, 2014). The Psychology

Honours programme is thus highly competitive. Pressure to gain entry into the Honours

programmes may create high stress and anxiety due this intense competition (Subramaniam,

2015).

Honours programmes can also lead to registration as a professional counsellor with the

Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) (HPCSA, 2015). In order to be eligible

for registration with the board as a professional counsellor, the institution needs to have their

Psychology Honours programme and six month practicum accredited as a B.Psych equivalent

programme (HPCSA, 2015). Thereafter a board exam needs to be written and passed with the

required grade in order for a certificate of qualification as a Registered Counsellor to be

issued (HPCSA, 2015). There are only a select amount of institutions in the Western Cape

which offer HPCSA accredited B.Psych equivalent Honours programmes, therefore further

increasing competition at this level.

Enrolment into any Masters programme requires students to have completed an

Honours degree (South African Qualifications Authority, 2015). Similarly, a professional

Masters degree is the qualifying degree for those aiming to become registered psychologists

(Health Professionals Council of South Africa, 2015). There are even fewer places in Masters

programmes when compared to Honours intakes. There is, therefore a focus on functioning at

Honours level in order to obtain entry into Masters degrees. This stresses the importance of

the Honours level as it serves as a building block to higher degrees (McCormack, 2004;

Meyer et al., 2005). Honours programmes also determine the academic preparedness of students for both clinical and research training (Government Gazette, 2013). Though literature indicates that early experiences such as those in the Honours programme are pivotal, there remains less research on Honours level research (Kagee & O'Donovan, 2011).

2.1.1 Research requirements. The South African Qualifications Framework (2015) described research at Honours level as a discrete research component displaying the significance of research as it is separated as a stand-alone requirement. The Honours research requirement entails a supervised research project of 300 notional hours or 30 credits in partial fulfilment of degree requirements (Government Gazette, 2013; Smith 2014).

The research project needs to ensure that research is conducted and findings reported in a thesis (Abdulai & Owusu-Ansah, 2014). A research topic is selected, followed by a proposal on the chosen topic and submission of a final research report (University of the Western Cape Prospectus, 2015; University of Cape Town Humanities Postgraduate handbook, 2015; Stellenbosch University Prospectus, 2015). The research requirement has been found to be a stressful experience (Devenport & Lane, 2006). Students are more competent with the completion of all other requirements at this level, but grapple with the research component (Smith, 2014). Abdulai and Owusu-Ansah (2014) indicated that students often battled in completing their proposals, experiencing uncertainty in the write-up since for many it was a new experience. Similarly, Thompson, Kirkman, Watson and Stewart (2005) reported that challenges within research and supervision resulted in a significant amount of students dropping out earlier in the research process. As mentioned above, research has emphasized the challenges and consequences faced in student research at postgraduate level, yet there remains a lack of research at the base level or starting point of postgraduate studies i.e. Honours.

2.1.2 Learning outcomes. Learning outcomes intend to describe the type of skills and knowledge that a successful student should depart with after completing a particular degree (Calderon, 2013). Honours degrees should prepare students for research at higher degrees (Government Gazette, 2013). As mentioned before, the Psychology Honours degree is positioned at level 8 according to the National qualifications framework. At this level, students should be able to conduct low level research that prepares them for conceptualizing, executing and writing up a research project (Smith, 2014). An increase in research capacity is to be achieved through a broadening of understanding of different methodologies and techniques used (Government Gazette, 2013). Some of the milestones which Honours students are required to reach include the ability to engage critically, to grow in their level of research skills and to work independently (Subramaniam, 2015). At this level the student is expected to be able to work independently whilst supervision is provided. Independence is key at this level as higher degrees require an even greater amount of independence. Honours graduates should be adept at critically engaging with theory. An honours degree usually involves a higher level of concentration and achievement, in preparation for higher level research (South African Qualifications Authority, 2015). As mentioned before, the honours research requirement includes submission of a proposal for approval, attendance of supervision and submission of a final thesis. The thesis component of the Honours requirement is an independent undertaking and should prepare students for further research at higher degrees (Smith & Magodo, 2014).

Research clearly demonstrated that insufficient attention to the learning outcomes stated above during the Honours level may cause a ripple effect into Masters, as well as PhD levels which essentially affects retention and preparedness in higher degree programmes (Wright, 2003; McCormack, 2004; Meyer et al., 2005; Pitcher, 2011). The relationship between the Honours learning outcomes and functioning at higher degree levels has not been explored

summatively and formatively in relation to outcomes and completion rates (Galpin, Hazelhurst, Mueller & Sanders, 1999; Zeegers & Barron, 2009). More subjective foci have been limited to masters and doctoral studies whilst an exploration of the subjective experiences and perceptions of honours students have been recommended (Smith 2014). Thus the systematic exploration of students' perceptions of being prepared for masters-level studies based on honours research remains a focus for further research (Smith, 2014b).

2.2 Honours cohort

The Honours cohort is challenging as learning outcomes specified by the NQF for this group is not clearly defined, making facilitation of the program difficult (Smith & Magodo, 2014 b). There is a more distinct description of learning outcomes at Masters level when compared to Honours degree outcomes. In order to ascertain whether attainment of learning outcomes have been met thus becomes challenging. This suggests that more attention is given to higher degrees, evidenced by the lack of research into Honours degrees reported by Kagee and O'Donovan (2011).

As mentioned before, Honours students in Psychology typically form larger cohorts in comparison to other disciplines (Pillay, Pillay & Duncan, 2014). Pressure to increase enrolment at postgraduate level set out in the National Development Plan, extends to the Honours intake which forms the feeder base for Masters and PhD studies (National Development Plan, 2030). Van Rheedevan Oudtshoorn and Hay (2004) referred to the pressure for significant increases in student numbers entering higher education each year as "massification." The dilemma however is that already larger cohorts place increased pressure on staff as their workload increases and massification will increase staff capacity issues exponentially. Thus the Psychology Honours cohort presents unique challenges to human resources such as, staff capacity to supervise students. The National Research Foundation

(2015) reported that the average supervisor-supervisee ratio of 1:12 impacts directly and adversely on completion rates. Smith and Magodo (2014) reported that the supervision capacity of departments impacts the format of the research requirement.

2.3 Format of research

Institutions vary regarding the type of research which is conducted in Honours research projects i.e. qualitative, quantitative, secondary research methods. The Government Gazette (No. 36797) reported that the format of research adopted at Honours level should ensure sufficient preparedness for research at higher degrees, as well as meeting the competencies for the current level. Research should neither be too heavy or too advanced for a particular level (Government Gazette, 2013). Further research is needed in this area regarding the format, the appropriateness of the format and scope of the research requirement. Meyer et al, (2005) concluded that there is thus value in conducting research at this level since Honours degrees form the basis of postgraduate degrees. As mentioned before, at a curricular level departments must decide whether they will offer this requirement as an individual or group project conducting reactive or secondary research, and supervise this individually or in groups. Below is an exposition of each of these three dimensions.

2.3.1 Nature of the research (primary or secondary research)

The NQF level eight (8) specifies that low level research is to be conducted at the Honours level (SAQA, 2015). At this level students have not yet obtained the necessary skills to conduct primary research which complicates the selection of the specific type of methodology appropriate for the needs of a particular study (Saratinos, 2008). At Honours level, the decision on the type of methodology to be used in research projects is taken at either a programme level or individually by students in conjunction with supervisors (Galpin et al.,, 1999; M. Smith, personal communication September 4, 2015; Wiggins, Gordon-

Finlayson, Becker & Sullivan, 2016). A careful exploration of the factors informing decisions

to select a particular type of research format, at the Honours level, remains a focus for further

research. In essence, a choice has to be made between primary or secondary research

methodologies.

2.3.1.1 Primary research. Primary research refers to researchers who conduct their own research which is accompanied by strict scientific methods (Driscoll, 2011). Methods used within primary research at this level often include surveys and qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups (Stewart, Gill, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) cautioned that researchers require a range of competences and skills to ensure that comprehensive and illustrative data are gathered during interviews. Honours level students do not necessarily possess this level of skill which reduces the value of the research. Primary research may have a bearing on human resources and financial layout in that students may incur costs during data collection (Kelley, Clark, Brown & Sitzia, 2003; Opdenakker, 2006).

2.3.1.2 Secondary research. Secondary data is the use of studies which is not an individual's own study, as in primary research, but is being utilized for the particular purpose and focus of their study (Church, 2001). Secondary data puts less strain on human resources as it is less expensive and easier to retrieve (Guffey & Loewy, 2012). Another advantage of secondary research is the wide range of information that is available online where individuals can draw on different forms of primary studies (Cheng & Phillips, 2014). A disadvantage of this would be that the data may not directly meet or attend to the researcher's specific research question (Grady, Cummings & Hulley, 2013). More time can be spent on the analysis phase as data has already been collected by the primary researcher (Boslaugh, 2007,p. 3). There is a reduction of harm or burden to participants as all research has already been conducted on participants. There are different forms of secondary data such as content analysis, secondary analysis and systematic reviews (Daas & Arends-Tóth, 2012). The focus in the present study has been on systematic reviews.

2.3.1.3 Systematic review. Systematic reviews identify good quality, as well as most up to date literature available (Stewart, 2014). Systematic review has been frequently used across the globe with accessibility and a reduction of time spent accessing literature reported as a key benefit (Santesso et al., 2015). As technology has expanded over the years, time-consuming searches at libraries has slowly started to erode and shifted to online libraries accessed online through various search engines (Jupp, 2006). Advanced searches have been created in order to access research material faster, but still maintaining high quality (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel, 2008). Thus this methodology would require students to possess good literature search skills etc.
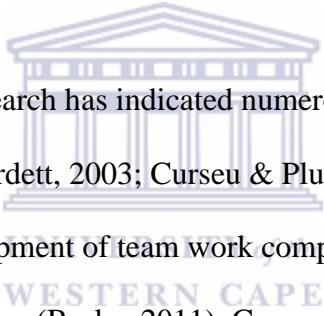
A systematic review is generally conducted at Masters level or higher as it comprises a comprehensive search attempting to exhaust all relevant literature addressing a clearly focused question (Smith et al.,, 2011; Centre for Reviews and Dissemination, 2008; Stewart, 2014). There is thus some merit in conducting a systematic review at the Honours level (Armitage & Keeble-Allen, 2008; Bettany-Saltikov, 2012). An extensive search is carried out following a rigorous scientific method using multiple databases (Littell et al.,, 2008). A systematic review involves a strict step-by-step process which is designed to produce high quality evidence (Centre for Reviews and Dissemination, 2008). Any literature that does not comply with high standards of reliability and validity is excluded from the review (Littell et al.,, 2008). A prerequisite of a systematic review requires research to be conducted with a minimum of two people rather than individually (Stewart, 2014).

2.4 Group work:

Group work has been implemented as a solution to human resource challenges, but may also enable the development of additional skills not otherwise achieved when done individually (van Rheede van Oudtshoorn & Hay, 2004; Boud, Cohen & Sampson, 2014). Group work at tertiary level has been acknowledged as an effective form of learning (Melles,

2004; D'Souza & Wood, 2003 & Burke, 2011). According to Rudman and Kruger (2014) tertiary institutions in South Africa have still not fully utilized group work, as it still plays a very small role in learning. Group work promotes active learning, as it allows students to become actively involved in their learning (Raja & Saheed, 2012; Spiller, 2012; Bentley & Warwick, 2013). Group work requires individuals to be dependent on each other to achieve a common goal. Group work, utilized in higher education in particular, has been positively linked to preparation for later employment and the development of critical skills for higher degrees which will be explored in more detail later (Coers, Lorenson & Anderson, 2009).

Literature described mixed views reported by students pertaining to their perceptions of group work. Some of the challenges and benefits of group work will be discussed below.

2.5 Benefits of group work: Research has indicated numerous benefits of utilizing group work within higher education (Burdett, 2003; Curseu & Pluut, 2013; Harun & Salamuddin, 2010; Deming, 2015). The development of team work competencies have been commended for its significance in the work place (Burke, 2011). Group work enables individuals to develop interpersonal competencies (Deming, 2015). The presence of peers within the group setting allows group members to draw from a broader knowledge base and through peer supervision be able to improve the overall quality of their work (Sahin & Zergeroglu 2008; Spiller, 2012). The next section will explore the abovementioned categories in greater depth.

2.5.1 Team work competencies. The development of team work skills have been reported across literature as an essential benefit of group work (Melles, 2004; van Rheede, van Oudtsoorn & Hay, 2004; Martinex, Fearon, McLaughlin & Eng, 2012; Curseu & Pluut, 2013). Developing good team work skills is beneficial for employability (Burke, 2011). Davies (2009) claimed group work to be an authentic form of assessment in terms of a student's later employability, as working in groups is an essential part of an individual's

career and recruiters often ask students about their experience working in group settings. The group setting provided an environment through which interpersonal skills could be developed (Kriflik & Mullan, 2007; Burke, 2011). The opportunity of collaboration to find solutions is valued. Learning to work with people from different cultures, who speak different languages and backgrounds have been found to prepare students. Bentley and Warwick (2013) identified group members who slacked in the group, but reported that other members would put their heads together in order to find strategies to cope.

    2.5.2 Interpersonal competencies. Lowden, Hall, Elliott and Lewin (2011) recommended group work as one of the ways to develop interpersonal skills of students. Burdett (2003) described skills obtained through social interactions in the group to include learning to co-operate with others, negotiating skills, accomplishing tasks effectively in the group environment and sharing workloads. Through interaction with group members from different backgrounds and cultures, individuals are able to learn and work with people from diverse backgrounds. Similarly, Harun and Salamuddin (2015) reported that the interpersonal aspect of group work stimulate academic success.

    Plante (2010) explained that acquiring good interpersonal skills is vital for Psychology students in particular enabling good therapeutic alliances to be formed. Matin,Jandaghi, Karimi and Hamidizaheh (2010) argued that interpersonal skills are vital for communicating and interacting effectively with others. Similarly, Deming (2015) stressed the importance of social skills in the workplace which facilitates effective communication with others. Ioannidou and Konstantikaki (2008) stated that good interpersonal skills include effective listening, self-awareness, time management, self-reflection and emotional intelligence. Despite knowledge of the importance of the interpersonal skills, research indicated that employers found graduates to still be lacking in these particular competencies (Al-Mutairi, Naser & Saeid, 2014; Paadi, 2014; Azeez, Timothy & Tayo, 2015). Andrews and Higson

(2008) were in agreement that students presented with deficits in interpersonal skills in general and oral communication skills in particular. Shepherd, Braham and Elston (n.d) reported that interpersonal skills such as eye contact, active listening and engagement were imperative for effective group discussions. Much of the research related to group work required for oral presentations in course work and not in research specifically. Thus it becomes imperative to examine students' experiences in group work particularly as it related to early research experiences.

    2.5.3 Peer learning/supervision. Learning through peer interaction has been highlighted as one of the strengths of group work (Sahin, 2008). Ashenafi (2015) argued that regardless of the significant amount of research available on peer learning there remains no significant developments pertaining to its use. Peer learning often included the assessment and evaluation of each other's work (Spiller, 2012). Boud et al, (2014) described peer assessment as an opportunity to reflect on work from an unbiased position thereby evaluating themselves more accurately. Within the group setting there is a wider range of information available where group members are able to share their views with each other thus stimulating creativity (Burdett, 2011). Engaging in critical thinking has been reported as an important and valuable skill at higher education level and later employment. Peer assessment has been reported to provide students with an opportunity for critical engagement between group members. Students are able to obtain feedback from group members on work progress and interpersonal behaviour providing them with an opportunity for self-reflection (Burdett, 2011). Similarly, Sahin (2008) described peer assessment as an opportunity to learn from mistakes rather than view them as failures. Curseu and Pluut (2013) suggest that hard working group members often encouraged other members to exert more effort in their work. Peer learning provided students with a safe environment enabling students to feel comfortable asking questions and receiving assistance from other group members (Keenan, 2014).

In summary many benefits of group work have been reported and these broadly included team work competencies, facilitating capacity challenges, peer learning, social skills, and problem solving skills. However, group work is not always perceived as a positive experience. Below is an exposition of some of the challenges reported when describing group work

2.6 Challenges of group work

Research indicated that a large number of students held preconceived ideas that group work was linked to a negative experience (Burdett, 2003; Campbell & Li, 2006; Kriflik & Mullun, 2007; Isaac, 2013; Tucker & Abbasi, 2016). Students have identified a number of concerns in group work including, but not limited to, issues of equal workloads (e.g. Burdett, 2009; Seidel & Tanner , 2013), work ethic and motivation (Hassanien, 2006) , diversity including gender, culture and race (Popov et al., 2012, unjust mark allocations (e.g. Flint & Johnson, 2010).
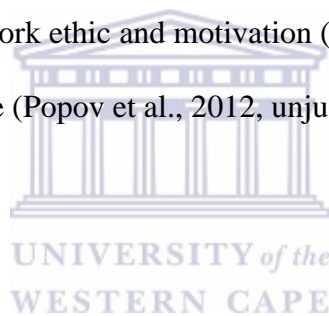
2.6.1 Unequal workloads. Literature reported that one of the prevalent problems faced in group work was related to the dependence on others to execute the work required (D'Souza & Wood, 2007; Burdett & Hastie, 2009; Freeman & Greenacre, 2011). Chiriac (2014) reported that some group members inevitably contribute more time and effort than others. Tucker and Abbasi (2016) identified specific areas of student dissatisfaction with unequal work distribution such as lack of engagement in discussions; quality of work produced and social loafing. Social loafing has been defined as individuals who are more productive when working individually and don't give as much effort and energy when working in a group setting (Karau & Williams, 1993). Hall and Buzzwell (2013) concluded that social loafing reduces overall group productivity. Jones (2013) explained that social loafing may reduce group productivity through creating conflict or friction in the group which acts as a barrier to

proceeding productively with the group task. Literature also refers to the above as "free-riding" to include group members who don't participate in the group, but reap the benefits from the rest of the groups' hard work (Brooks & Ammons, 2003; McArdle, Clements & Hutchinson-Lendi, 2005; West, Tjosvold & Smith, 2005). Burdett and Hastie (2009) added that group members would make this sacrifice of accepting additional work in order to ensure that they were still able to produce a good end result.

2.6.2 Assessment and mark allocation. Burdett (2003) reported that a major challenge to group work projects related to the assessment and mark allocation, suggesting that the marker is often not aware of group dynamics. Similarly, Davies (2009) emphasized the disadvantages of assessment in that weaker students are able to reflect higher competencies while stronger students remained "unstimulated." Van Rheede van Oudtsoorn and Hay (2004) explained that hardworking students may even experience a significant reduction in their mark due to poor contribution of other members. The term "passengers" was used to describe students who did not contribute sufficiently to the group while still being able to obtain reasonable marks (Mellor, 2009). Boud et al, (2014) reported that students placed a high value on assessment, thus signifying the importance of mark allocation. Strauss, U-Mackey and Crothers (2014) reported that students who carried the group felt "exploited" when equal marks were given as other members did not have the academic ability or merely slacked in the group.

2.5.4 Influence of language and cultural diversity: Although language and cultural diversity have been reported as a significant benefit of group work, this may also present many challenges to the overall group performance. With an increase of international students enrolling at tertiary institutions every year, it is important to understand some of the challenges which they face and the impact of working together with other students (Ward, 2006). South Africa is known as a multicultural country which is rich in cultural diversity and

thus faces communication challenges (van der Walt & Oosthuizen, 2014). Higher education classrooms include students varying in language, race and culture and universities are faced with addressing significant communication challenges (Hibbert, 2011). Singh and Rampersad (2010) found the following to be significant communication challenges within South Africa's multicultural and multilingual universities such as prejudice, lack of trust, differing languages and cultural stereotyping.

More broadly, within group work, poor communication or lack of communication between diverse ethnic groups have been reported as a significant challenge (Davies, 2009). As a result of language barriers, non-native English speaking participants tend to shy away from discussing their ideas due to a lack of confidence (Andrade, 2006). Wu, Garza and Guzman (2015) emphasized this lack of confidence by explaining that foreign students need to adjust to new systems and often hesitate to ask for help.

Problems often arose when native English speaking group members dominated group discussions not accommodating those from different cultures. Perceived free-riding has therefore been linked to multicultural group work as non-native members tend to fall into a habit of allowing native English speakers to direct discussions (Davies, 2009). Power relations was reported within the group setting as foreign students whose mother tongue was not English, felt inferior to those who were fluent English speakers. Different cultural backgrounds often possess differing learning styles and academic attitudes (Popov et al., 2012). According to Toseland and Rivas (2005) western cultures emphasize competitiveness and success while non-Western cultures practice humbleness and avoiding direct conflict. A lack of understanding of these cultural values may result in isolation and a lack of social integration in the group (Toseland & Rivas, 2005).

2.5.5 Work ethic and motivation. Work ethic refers to an individual's level at which he/she is able to display competency in work, as well as interpersonal competencies (Boatright & Slate, 2002). Work ethic is often measured according to interpersonal skills, self-reliance, dependability, individual responsibility, self-management and motivation (Hill & Petty, 1995). Individuals who maintain a poor work ethic can stunt group performance (Hill, 2005). Herman (2002) described poor work ethic to include poor time management, including procrastination, negatively affecting other students by slowing down tasks. Work ethic has been linked to motivation and academic functioning (Meriac, 2015). Work ethic may be influenced by motivation, however it is something that is intrinsic, unique to every individual therefore not easily changed or altered (Omisore & Adeleke, 2015). Davies (2009) described student motivation towards work, to be a critical issue in group work as students maintained different ideas about what hard work meant. Burdett (2003) found that students were able to identify different motivations of group members, for e.g. some students motivation was merely to pass thus meeting times were not a priority.

2.5.1 Leadership in group contexts. Leaders inevitably surface in groups (Li, Chun & Ashkanasy, 2012; Emery, Calvard & Pierce, 2013; Pugliese, Acerbi & Marocco, 2015). Eskridge ,Valle and Schlupp (2015) reported that leadership in a group can have immense benefits for the core function of the group. Leadership actively impacts the decision-making processes in groups (e.g. Ejimabo, 2015), the work ethic (e.g. Sohmen, 2013) and the processes for conflict resolution (e.g Anderson & Brown, 2010). Literature is unclear about how the leadership in student work groups emerge, but maintain that traditional styles of leadership do apply (Conyne, 2011, p. 295). Traditional styles include authoritarian, democratic and Laissez-Faire leadership style. The democratic leadership style describes leaders who are open to discussion and ideas from the group where members play a more active role (Adeyemi & Bolarinwa, 2013). This leadership style has been reported to enhance

group productivity (Bhatti, Maitlo, Shaikh, Hashmi, & Faiz, 2012). The laissez-faire leadership style is described as a weaker style of leadership in that members are allowed to dominate group decisions and discussions without involvement from the leader (Chaudhry & Javed, 2012). Authoritarian leadership styles have been referred to as members who act as dictators and evade democracy in group settings (Contento, 2010).

Daft (2007, p. 44) underscored that the respective leadership styles have different impacts on group cohesion and functioning. The democratic leadership style is effective as it enables parity of voices however time management can be a concern when too much input is allowed (Khan et al., 2015) Another challenge with this style is that if group members are providing critical input but lack the knowledge and overall purpose, quality of work may be impacted (Amanchukwu, Stanley & Ololube, 2015). Despite its negative reviews, Laissez-faire leadership can be an advantage when group members share a high level of competency, knowledge and motivation and thus require less direct leadership (Khan et al., 2015).

The authoritarian leadership style has received positive and negative reviews in impacting overall group productivity (Foels, Driskell, Mullen & Salas, 2000; Maslennikova, 2007). Contento (2010) reported that authoritarian leadership may lead to hostility within the group that in turn stunts group cohesion. Authoritarian leadership in a group setting reportedly may lead to dependence on the leader and less of their own input (Hamilton, 2013: 300). Thus this type of leadership style often enables conformity in the group setting (Boejie, 2009). Cress, Collier and Reitenauer (2013) linked conformity to a concept known as "group think" describing groups who value peace which is maintained through conformity. Group think focuses on using one mind and discourages opposing views (Erdem, 2003).

Pressure to conform to the dominant view was described to affect overall group performance (van Rheede van Oudtsoorn, Hay, 2004; Burke, 2011; Peoples, Sigillo, Green &

Miller, 2012; Cress et al,, 2013). What often happens is that those with quieter voices rarely oppose the dominant view for fear of conflict (Burke, 2011). Some group members tend to feel isolated from the group as they are not included in decisions. Hayes (2002) identified that dominant group members often lack the ability to compromise and negotiating skills. When the group conforms to the dominant view it loses its power and that it is more effective when everyone's independent ideas are put together. Authoritarian leaders are effective when they are skilled and knowledgeable on the topic or task and then enforce clear goals to achieve the specific outcome of the group (Maslennikova, 2007).

As mentioned above, there is evidence that group work is an effective form of learning, but is also accompanied by many group dynamics which often creates challenges in the group. However, in light of this knowledge there is still insufficient empirically validated research on the impact of group work at the Honours level and attainment of learning outcomes related to research requirements. Van Rheede van Oudtshoorn and Hay (2004) suggested that students' experience of group work can be improved through exploring student attitudes pertaining to their individual group work experience. There is thus value in empirically investigating the group work component in research projects. The next section moves from the impact of group work to supervision

2.7 Supervision

Research has identified supervision as a significant contributor to the overall success of the postgraduate candidate (Sayed, Kruss & Badat, 1998; Armstrong, 2004; Armitage, 2006; Pearson & Brew, 2010). The extent to which students felt prepared for higher degrees was reflected in their experiences of supervision (e.g Holbrook et al., 2014), their understanding of research (e.g Wilson Howitt, Roberts, Akerlind & Wilson, 2014), their expectations and their relationship with their supervisor (Ali, Watson & Dhingra, 2016).

The research component in particular is a major problem area as the supervisor becomes their primary point of contact during the research process (Abiddin et al.,2011). A quality supervisory relationship is connected to supervisor's interest in the thesis topic (Hockey, 1996; Wadesango & Machingambi, 2011; Ghani & Said, 2014). Other reports highlighted lack of support/interest and lack of time as significant negative contributors to postgraduate studies (Wright, 2003; Wadesango & Machingambi, 2011; Abiddin & Ishmail, 2011).

Pearson and Brew (2010) reiterated the importance of good research supervision, hence the introduction of supervisor development programs should be implemented to improve the efficiency of supervision. McCallin and Navar (2011) highlighted that changes in the funding and delivery of research programs at the university level have in recent years, resulted in significant changes to research supervision. The National Research Foundation (2015) reported that on average one supervisor supervises twelve students therefore negatively impacting completion rates.

Deuchar (2008) reported that in a study conducted on supervisory practices, structural organization, as well as personal barriers were significant categories contributing to overall challenges in the supervisory relationship. The literature has focused on postgraduate supervision at the Masters and Doctoral levels at the expense of Honours level supervision (Cosgrove, 2004). From the literature reviewed, it becomes evident that research into postgraduate research experiences have been skewed in terms of its focus on individual supervision and overlooks group supervision in general (Cosgrove, 2004).

2.7.1 Structure of supervision. Numerous studies have asserted that research supervision has no set prescription, but rather various components such as learning styles, student and supervisor expectations, quality of supervision etc. (James & Baldwin, 1999; Wisker, 2005 Chabaya, Owen, Paul & Chrispen, 2012). Kam (1997) stated that, "There is no fixed recipe

for good supervisory practice."(p.) Supervision is often divided into organizational and interpersonal components. The interpersonal side of supervision addresses anxieties and stresses which often arise during the research process. Berggren et al. (2005) emphasized four underlying ethical values of supervision: "caring, dignity, responsibility, and virtue." Supervision has an educative component as it should promote the further development of skills and reflection of work (Lekalakala-Mokgele, 2008).

Student perceptions revealed that it is the psychosocial aspect of supervision which is often valued to a much larger extent. Students appreciated supervisors who showed respect and empathy, who were able to share experiences and concerns and talked openly about anxieties (Chui et al.,2012). Effective supervisors motivate and encourage students to be independent rather than dictating. Encouraging students to be independent is crucial as it prepares them for further research, as well as furthering their studies. Supervisors should be open to error on their part as it may arise during the research process (Graham & Gadbois, 2013). Wright (2003) reported that positive personal characteristics such as inner strength, confidence, and self-determination have the ability to enable an individual to succeed despite negative circumstances.

2.7.2 Understanding the concept of research. There are often significant differences in understanding the purpose and process of research between supervisor and student that ultimately affects timely completion (McCormack, 2004; Pitcher, 2011). Discrepancies in understanding the concept of research have been associated with slower thesis production and overall frustration (McCormack, 2004; Meyer et al., 2005). Thus a shared understanding regarding the concept of research, may contribute positively to the production of quality research, as well as timely completion (McCormack, 2004; Pitcher, 2011). By identifying initial concepts of research that are lacking in appropriate understanding, it is then possible to identify the "at risk" students and make provisions for them (Meyer et al., 2005). These

authors further point out that students' perception on research are affected by previous learning on the purpose and process of what research entails.

Student perceptions about what research in general and research for higher degree purposes entail are powerful determinants of subsequent behaviour and conduct. (Lekalakala-Mokgele, 2008). The findings suggested that students expected to find structure and support which would facilitate the successful completion of their studies (Lekalakala-Mokgele, 2008). Thompson, Kirkman, Watson and Stewart (2005, p. 283) maintained that expectations, roles and responsibilities of both the students and supervisors should be clarified early in the partnership, which should operate in an atmosphere of respect, commitment collegiality and maturity.

2.7.3 Group supervision. There is a small body of literature regarding group supervision as individual supervision is prioritized (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998, Bradley & Ladany, 2001). There is an absence of empirical data pertaining to group research supervision in the field of psychology at all levels. Group supervision consists of a primary supervisor supervising a group of two or more supervisees (Zhang & Parsons, 2015). Research has identified a number of benefits of group supervision. Group supervision can assist in reducing overall dependence on the supervisor, foster a safe environment enabling a comprehensive supervision experience, reducing anxieties through contact with other students and reduce issues of power relations (Pearson, 2000). Group supervision provides a platform for discussion, thereby gaining diverse perspectives from group members. Several studies indicate that group supervision reduces feelings of isolation (Pearson, 2000, Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2013). Bozic and Carter (2002) added that the supervisee can feel encouraged through the observation that other group members experience similar problems or challenges as they do. The primary benefit for employing group over individual supervision is that it is cost and time effective (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998; Proctor, 2000; Hawkins & Shohet,

2000;Riva & Cornish, 1995; Werstlein & Borders, 1997). Subramaniam, (2015) reported that Honours students in particular explained how working with other students proved beneficial, "…the most useful discussions I have is with other honours' students, we bounce ideas off each other in a more relaxed environment" (p.8).

2.7.4 Student expectations of supervision. Students' expectations were often linked to the role of the supervisor (Lekalakala-Mokgele, 2008; Severinsson, 2015; Moskvicheva, Bordovskaia & Darinskaya, 2015). Students expressed their desire for extensive direction during initial supervision meetings, but valued the chance to be independent throughout the research process. James and Baldwin (1999) reported that students attach more value to the end product knowing that they have been actively involved in the process. Lekalakala-Mokgele (2008) reported that eighty percent (80%) of students in higher degree programmes had an expectation of the department and university to setup up processes to ensure their success. Students reported that they expected supervisors share some of the responsibility through directing them on their progress and providing them with deadlines and completion dates enabling timely thesis completion. Students expected supervisors to setup up supervision meetings and ensuring that they are on track with where they need to be (Lekalakala-Mokgele, 2008). Students reported that they expected the supervisor to be a trained expert in the field of research. Lessing and Lessing (2004) added that "…students are aware of their educational rights and are more likely to demand competent and accessible supervisors" (p.76).

Drew, Subramaniam and Clowes-Doolan (2002) reported that Honours students in particular perceived their supervisors as not taking on innovative and mentoring roles. These authors further reported that students suggested that they would have liked their supervisors to have been more innovative in the supervisory relationship by suggesting alternative ways for thinking about their research question and the method of analysis. There was a strong

preference for an environment where new ideas could be discussed and explored (Lange, 2008). Students also wanted their supervisors to not only guide them through their dissertation in a supportive role, but also at the same time challenge their ideas and open their minds to new ways of thinking (Schulze, 2012). Mutual respect for each other's ideas was deemed to be important as well (Lessing & Schulze, 2001). Honours students sought supervisors that could provide an environment of academic freedom that supported the students' desire to express their opinions without "recrimination" (Subramaniam, 2015).

2.7.5 Supervisor characteristics. Research has begun to look at the specific traits of supervisors and the role which they play in students overall academic experience. Yeoh and Doan (2012) argued that it is imperative for supervisors to be supportive and to adapt to the unique needs of the student. Supervisors should display friendliness, be approachable,flexible, but also knowledgeable and provide support in order to promote better overall success in student completion (Tahir, Ghani, Atek & Manaf, 2012; Lessing & Lessing, 2004; Graham & Gadbois, 2013). Good listening skills, being responsive to student's unique needs and good interaction between supervisor and student is also identified as crucial in providing quality relationships (Yeoh & Doan, 2012). Effective supervisors should display academic, as well as personal support as students often become overwhelmed and discouraged by work. Supervisors who offer personal support surrounding anxieties of research work, leave students feeling more at ease therefore more motivated to push on (Abiddin et al., 2011).

2.7.6 Giving and receiving feedback. Across literature quality of feedback received from the supervisor has been linked to the overall success in postgraduate research, as well as timely thesis completion (Martin, Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2012; Morton, Storch & Thompson, 2014; Mustafa, Noraziah & Majid, 2014). Supervisor and student may hold different understandings as to what constitutes effective feedback. Martin, Bitchener and

Basturkmen (2012) argued that in order for feedback to be of value to the student, it is important to document their views on what they consider to be effective feedback. Feedback that promotes autonomy is valued amongst postgraduate students. It is important that the work remains their own and that feedback allows for reflection and a further development of their ideas (Whitelock, Faulkner & Miell 2008; Lee, 2008; Mojsoska-Blazevski, 2012). Indirect questions in feedback assist students in reassessing their ideas and finding their own answers. Some appreciate direct feedback, feedback that is specific regarding what to change or what to remove (East, Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2012). Some find unclear feedback or feedback with too many indirect questions to be confusing and unclear. It is helpful when errors are highlighted and explained. However, feedback that is too direct removed their freedom to incorporate their own ideas in writing (Martin, Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2012; Lee, 2007; Lee, 2008; Mojsoska-Blazevski, 2012). Hatzipanagos and Rochon (2014, p. 30 found that students battled with feedback comments when the language used to respond to the student was beyond their understanding.
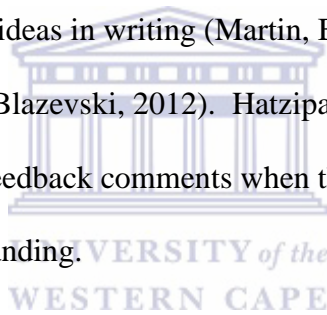
Wadensango and Machingambi (2011) reported that too much negative feedback with no positive and motivating comments presented great challenges in thesis writing. Similarly, Brown and Wisker (2012) proposed that good work should be acknowledged and constructive criticism to be provided in feedback. Constructive feedback is therefore found to be a balance of direct and indirect responses, in conjuction with language and content (Brown & Wisker, 2012).

Ghadirian, Sayarifard, Majdzadeh, Rajabi, and Yunesian, (2014) emphasized that students would like feedback to challenge their thinking and to be able to discuss these challenges verbally. Once feedback is received, a follow-up meeting is needed to discuss errors and possible changes (East, Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2012). Students value follow-up meetings as they are able to openly discuss their feedback and any points which they did not

understand (Abdulkhaleq & Abdullah, 2013). Follow-up meetings are to be a friendly space where open communication takes place. (Oretade, 2011).

2.7.7 Cultural and language barriers. Cultural and language barriers need to be taken into account as it often affects communication between student and supervisor (Lange, 2008; Yeoh & Doan, 2012; Abiddin, Ishmail & Ishmail, 2012). Stepping into a new environment where the language of instruction is different to that of the student is often a difficult and challenging transition (Talebloo & Baki, 2013). In South Africa, Holtman and Mukwada (2014) found that students who did not have English as their primary language, created challenges in supervisor-student communication.

Yeoh and Terry (2013) described students often experiencing feelings of being overwhelmed and anxious by having to adapt and function in a foreign language in a different environment referred to as language shock. Language barriers between student and supervisor significantly impact the student's academic life (Holtman & Mukwada, 2014). Chiang and Crickmore (2009) assert that English proficiency is an important factor affecting the academic achievement of the student. Yeoh and Terry (2013) maintained that international students with low English writing skills often experienced significant challenges in thesis writing, communication and confidence. These challenges impact the working relationship between supervisor and student. The English accent is another factor which foreign students often grapple with (Chiang & Crickmore, 2009; Yeoh & Terry, 2013; Mudhovozi; Manganye & Mashamba, 2013; Holtman & Mukwada, 2014). Within various cultures there are often different connotations and arrangements in language and ways in which one interprets these can be vastly different from culture to culture (Yeoh & Doan, 2012).

Other than language, foreign students also have to adapt to a new culture as the learning culture can be vastly different. Cultural differences affect the type of communication between supervisor and student, and the way that students interact with their supervisors (Kiley & Mullins, 2002; Lange, 2008; Yeaoh & Doan, 2012; Abiddin, 2006; Mostafa, 2006; Yeoh & Terry, 2013). Power relations is a concept associated with the supervisory relationship (Steinmetz, 2012; Armitage, 2008; Schulze, 2012; Kibayashi, 2013). In certain cultures, figures of authority such as the postgraduate supervisor, are seen as individuals with more power who are to be respected, not to disagree with or be questioned (Steinmetz, 2012). Students therefore expect a more direct approach to learning and assume a less critical stance. Cultural differences in learning style have been reported as foreign students often find transitioning to a new learning style challenging (Kiley & Mullins, 2000; Yeoah & Doan, 2012; Talebloo &Baki. 2013). The differences in learning style often result in confusion as they are not adept as to what is expected of them (Steinmetz & Mussi, 2012).

2.7.8 Personality clashes. Personality clashes between supervisor and student have also been shown to impact the quality of the supervisory relationship due to differences in the ideas of what research entails (Ahern & Manathunga, 2004; Abiddin, Ishmail & Ishmail, 2011; Ngozi & Kayode, 2013). Incompatible personalities have been found to create conflict between supervisor and student thereby having a negative impact on communication (Brown & Wisker, 2012; Abiddin et al., 2011). Students opt to switch supervisors or completely abandon studies due specifically to clashes in personality. The research journey may become unbearable as constant conflict arises between student and supervisor (Mistry & Latoo, 2009). Severinsson (2015) reported that students decided to change supervisors when they did not get along well or there were difficulties within in their relationship with their supervisor.

2.10 Significance of student perceptions. There remains an insignificant amount of research attempting to explore student perceptions and experiences within higher education (Cotner, Intrator, Kelemen & Sato, 2000). At postgraduate level, the honours level in particular has been neglected. With retention and throughout being a major cause of concern in South Africa, quality of the overall postgraduate experience has been questioned and highlighted as a focus for further research across literature (Strydom, Kuh & Mentz , 2010). Therefore it is important to explore subjective experiences. Acquiring student perceptions have served as a contributing factor improving and facilitating retention and throughout (Tangwe & Rembe, 2010). Perceptions of students and subjective experiences regardless of accuracy, informs behavioural responses and engagement in the supervised research process (Soebari & Aldridge, 2015). Student voices may provide a window into whether or not learning outcomes for a particular degree have been sufficiently met or not and which factors hindered/facilitated their overall experience (Duke, 2002). Student views have also addressed the level of readiness for higher degrees (Hoffman & Julie, 2012). through exploring knowledge, research skills and experience obtained in earlier studies. The guidance provided by a good supervisor, no doubt, becomes an important determinant of a student's learning outcomes. There is a lack of empirical evidence pertaining to students' subjective experiences of learning in supervised research at honours level (Drennan & Clarke, 2009; Subramaniam, 2015).

It is important to explore student voices regarding their postgraduate experience as they may bring important insight into their expectations and whether they were sufficiently met or not (Lessing & Schulze, 2002). Potential discrepancies between supervisor and student can be identified regarding their concept of research (McCormack, 2004; Pitcher, 2011; Meyer et al., 2005). Wright (2003) stated that student perceptions of postgraduate research can assist universities by gaining a better understanding of what areas need considerable attention. In

this way, being able to provide the necessary guidance, support and appropriate intervention needed improves academic performance and retention. Lekalakala-Mokgele (2008) affirmed the above stating that through the knowledge gained by student expectations of the research process, this information can be used to facilitate their throughput. As mentioned before, despite significant role the Honours level plays in higher degree, it has been neglected..

2.11 Academic perceived preparedness for Masters-level study

The shift from the Honours level to Masters is great as there is a large amount of independence required (National Qualifications Framework, 2015). There is a lack of research into the experience of Masters students and the extent to which they felt that Honours studies prepared them adequately for the necessary requirements in Masters programmes. As Honours degrees are often regarded as undergraduate degrees, literature pertaining to preparedness for higher degrees, were often reported through undergraduate research. The research component at Honours level in particular, was a critical focus point for evaluating preparedness at Masters level study. Lack of training in research methods prior to commencement of studies was reported by Masters students causing a hindrance to studies (Lekalakala-Mokgele, 2008; Mugarura & Mtshali, 2010; Lessing & Schulze, 2003). Although having practical research experience is not a requirement when entering a Masters programme, understanding the foundation of research, including key terminology and methods, positively impact experience at the Masters level.

Faculty interaction was reported as a factor facilitating preparedness for Masters, as well as PhD level studies (Huss, Randall, Patry, Davis & Hansen, 2002). Lee (2005) reported that continuous faculty interaction was positively linked to self-efficacy and clearer understanding of aims and objectives aiding preparation for higher degree programs. As mentioned before, the Honours level in particular has been neglected.. There is thus value in gaining a retrospective view from students who have already enrolled into Masters

programmes, and review the extent to which they felt sufficiently prepared with the necessary skills. Student experiences can therefore contribute to better facilitation of the Honours programme.

2.12 Gaps identified

Though literature indicates that early research experiences are pivotal for preparation for higher degrees, there remains less research on the Honours level. Further, the use of different forms of supervision used at the Honours level produced even less research. Supervised research has focussed on individual supervision and neglected other types of supervision utilized at this level i.e. group supervision. Literature has reported on benefits and challenges to group work, but is applied at the Honours level where it occurs more frequently. The format of research used in Psychology Honours research projects have not been evaluated in terms of its perceived impact on Masters study and has not been evaluated in accordance with the learning outcomes of the degree. Perceptions of students and subjective experiences regardless of accuracy, informs behavioural responses and engagement in the supervised research process therefore it is critical to explore subjective experiences. Therefore the present study addressed the link between functioning at Honours level and academic preparedness for further postgraduate studies. The study explored student perceptions about the extent to which conducting group-based systematic reviews at Honours level prepared them for Masters studies.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Aim:

The aim of this study was to ascertain the extent to which Psychology Masters students felt that conducting systematic reviews at Honours level prepared them with the necessary skills for Masters-level research.

3.2 Objectives:

- To explore students' perceptions about conducting systematic review methodology at Honours level

- To explore students' perceptions about conducting group-based research at Honours level

- To identify features of group-based, systematic review methodology that hindered or facilitated preparedness for further studies, and competence in research

3.3 Participants and research setting:

The target group for this study was Honours graduates who completed a systematic review in a group-based format for the research requirement. These graduates were also enrolled or registered for a Masters programme during the academic year in which the study was conducted. The target group constituted a group based on having graduated from Honours programmes with a specific approach to the research project and not their registration as Masters students. Thus there is no singular physical research setting, but a virtual community of graduates with a particular learning experience at Honours level. Two Honours programmes were identified that used group-based systematic review at a curricular level for the research project. Thus for the purposes of the present study participants were recruited from the identified institutions as graduates rather than from the academic settings where they were registered for masters studies.

Programme A: included participants who completed their Psychology Honours degree at the University of the Western Cape. UWC is a historically disadvantaged university with increased access to marginalized learners. UWC has been classified as a research intensive institution as there has been a shift to a significant focus on research (University of the Western Cape, 2016). Honours students were assigned to groups for their independent research requirements in which they conducted a systematic review. Groups consisted of approximately four students (University of the Western Cape, 2016).

Programme B: consisted of participants who completed their Psychology Honours degree at Cornerstone Institute. Cornerstone is a private university. The Honours programme in Psychology is relatively new, started in 2010. Cornerstone works developmentally enabling students to grow and mature in their academic competence. (G.Franscisus, personal communication, August 15, 2015). Honours students are divided into groups based on interest to conduct a systematic review with groups ranging from four to eight students.

3.4 Sample

This study used purposive sampling to select or recruit participants for the study. This type of sample was appropriate as a specific group of participants were sought for the purpose of this study. Purposive sampling entails selecting participants based on specific criteria (Oppong, 2013). Purposive sampling was used because it is reflexive in nature that in turn increases the likelihood for productive data collection resulting in rich and complex data (McKenna, Fernbacher, Furness & Hannon, 2015). Palinkas et al. (2013) recommended purposive sampling if researchers want to collect complex data for a specific topic studied. In addition, Stake (1995) recommended that the selection of participants should be based on the potential for representativeness of potential participants. In the present study, participants were sampled based on the inclusion criteria and additional features that would promote the

likelihood of obtaining complex data. The researcher purposively looked to identify eligible participants who were reflexive, talkative and interested to join the study.

Okoli and Pawlowski (2004) stated that there is no agreed-upon ideal number of participants for qualitative studies. Tuckett (2004) reported that researchers tend to agree that the sample size depends largely on the nature of the research, the theoretical framework and the available resources. Baker and Edwards (2012) suggested that a sample size between six and twelve participants is appropriate for interpretive epistemologies e.g. Social Constructionism where a particular depth and richness of data is required.

Eligible participants needed to satisfy the following inclusion criteria: Completion of a Honours degree in Psychology during 2012-2014 at the identified institutions where systematic review methodology was used to conduct a group-based honours research projects. In addition, they were to be registered for a Masters programme and would need to have at least progressed past the proposal phase. Completion of a proposal and obtaining ethics clearance was considered evidence that the student was able to conceptualize a study that satisfied the scope, depth and methodological requirements of a masters study. Thus these students would have a reference for the reflection they would be required to do in the present study. Course co-ordinators at both tertiary institutions were asked to identify participants for the study. Thereafter invitations to participate in the study were sent electronically. Fifteen students were identified and 10 were invited to participate.

The final sample size was based on saturation of findings. Baker and Edwards (2012) recommended that data collection continue until such a time as saturation has been reached to avoid data which is insufficient to adequately answer the research question or alternatively, redundant and superfluous. Saturation was monitored by means of constant comparison of the collected data consistent with the recommendation of Palinkas et al. (2013). For these

reasons, recruitment and data collection/ analysis were conducted in parallel to detect when saturation was reached. The final sample consisted of nine Psychology Honours graduates who were now enrolled for Masters-level studies. The students included in this study were registered for psychology masters programmes at UWC. Only one student was enrolled for an international master's programme. The ages of the participants ranged between 23 years to 42 years of age. See Table 3.1 below for a summary of the demographic profile of the sample:

Table 3.1. *Demographics table*

Participant	Gender	Age	Race	Programme	Stage of masters
1	Female	23	Coloured	MA Research	Proposal
2	Male	24	White	MA Psychology	Data collection
3	Female	26	Coloured	MA Psychology	Data collection
4	Female	28	White	MA Psychology	Completed
5	Male	35	Black	MA Research	Submitted for examination
6	Female	42	White	MA Psychological research	Proposal
7	Male	24	Coloured	MA Psychology	Completed
8	Female	35	Coloured	MA Psychology	Data collection completed
9	Female	24	Coloured	MA Research	Data collection

3.5 Research approach

This study was exploratory in nature. An exploratory approach seeks out unexplored and under-researched phenomenon (Shields & Rangarajan, 2013). Exploratory studies are useful and appropriate where there is a lack of understanding and clarity on a particular subject (Hackley, 2003; Shields & Rangarjan, 2013). This approach was relevant for the present study as there is a lack of research into Honours degrees in South Africa, more specifically Psychology Honours degrees. Exploratory studies can yield rich information permitting a deeper level of understanding on the topic (McNabb, 2004). This approach was therefore suitable as an in-depth understanding of students' perceptions were sought.

Exploratory studies aim at seeking out new knowledge where little is known on the subject (Shields & Rangarjan, 2013). Contributing knowledge in the area of Psychology Honours, is important as it supports better facilitation of the Honours programme, as student experiences reported on factors facilitating and hindering their preparedness for higher degrees. Exploratory research attempts to set a foundation for future studies and makes use of current knowledge in order to explain particular phenomena (Thompson, Hickey & Thompson, 2016). Curry Nembhard and Bradley (2009) also maintained that qualitative methods is typically the preferred method of data collection and analysis in exploratory studies.

3.6 Qualitative methods

In keeping with the recommendation by Curry et al., (2009) to use   qualitative methods in explorative research, qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were used in the present study. Wilmot (2005) reported that qualitative research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the world as seen through the eyes of the people being studied. Therefore qualitative methods are more subjective; aiming to measure a particular

phenomenon from the perspective of individuals themselves who are/have experienced it

(White & Jha, 2014). Qualitative methods were thus relevant as it allowed a greater depth of

knowledge and rich information to be obtained from the students themselves (Patton, 2014).

Qualitative methodology does not aim to impose predetermined ideas, but form

interpretations as the meaning emerges from the data (Richards, 2014). The present study

explored students' subjective experience that required interpretations and conclusions to be

formulated from their perceptions. Qualitative methods allowed for more flexibility,

permitted open-ended questions, elaboration and adaption thereby gaining more complex data

consistent with the recommendation from Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest and Namey

(2005). The present study sought rich complex data in the exploration of the topic.

3.7 Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection as it included a list of

prepared questions, but still allowed freedom for participants to expand on their views

(Cohen & Crabtree, 2008). Semi-structured interviews do not assign a strict list of interview

questions thereby a larger variety of possible perceptions could be acquired (Cresswell,

2003). This form of data collection was relevant to this study as it facilitated an exploration

of the subjective experience of students and captured a greater depth of data in comparison to

a structured/predetermined set of interview questions. The freedom of further probing in

semi-structured interviews through follow-up questions, played a significant role in the

interview process. It allowed questions to be adjusted during the interview to follow up on an

idea that was not on the interview guide. (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008).

An interview schedule/guide was developed that included open-ended questions.

Open ended questions are often used in semi-structured interviews which allows for a greater

volume of data to be captured (Whiting, 2012). The initial schedule consisted of four guiding

questions that was informed by the objectives of the study and was submitted as part of the project registration and ethics clearance application process. The schedule was tested in the first pilot interview. A closer examination of the schedule and the resultant interview transcript enabled the researcher to determine if any revisions were required and whether the interview schedule facilitated the process of obtaining relevant data. Revisions consisted of additional questions that were added to elicit more detailed responses. The final interview schedule consisted of six guiding questions that were used in all subsequent interviews (Appendix A). The interviews were captured using audio recording and verbatim transcribing. Markle, West and Rich (2011) underscored that the use of audio recording increased authenticity of information gathered as it allowed for the exact words of participants to be captured.

Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Each interview was conducted in English by the primary researcher. Each interview ended with a question enquiring as to whether there were any points of information that the participant wished to add. This was helpful as the participants themselves often thought of new information as the interview unfolded, which were not covered in the interview questions. This lead to additional information which would not otherwise have been obtained. This process was consistent with Silverman's (2011) recommendation for qualitative interviewing.

3.8 Data Analysis

Data was analysed using thematic content analysis. Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012) argued that thematic content analysis yields rich in-depth data. This method of analysis was appropriate for this study as key factors were identified through themes, which was then applied to data (Alhojailan, 2012). An inductive approach was applied, as new information was sought through central themes which emerged from raw data without

focussing predominantly on themes that have already been identified through research. This approach was thus data driven (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process was followed for the analysis. This was an easy to follow guide which increased the rigour of the study through adherence of each step. Below is a brief exposition of the steps:

Phase 1: The first phase entailed becoming familiar with the data. Three transcripts were transcribed manually by the primary researcher and examined against the audio recording in order to become more immersed and connected to the data. The remaining six interviews were transcribed by an independent company. All outsourced transcriptions were checked for accuracy. Transcripts were read and reviewed repeatedly before generating initial codes. Throughout the interview any important points of information or thoughts at the time were recorded on a note pad. This assisted when doing data analysis by clarifying statements and adding context.
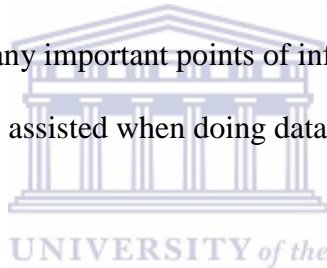
Phase 2: In phase two open coding was used to analyse data. Open coding occurs when raw data is analysed, grouped into codes and data is classified relevant to each code (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The entire data set was coded manually by the primary researcher. Open coding was chosen to closely examine and analyse students' responses. Since an in-depth understanding of the subject was sought, open coding assisted in attaining an overall picture of students' experiences. Thirty codes were identified. Throughout the interview any important points of information such as thoughts and additional interview questions were recorded on a note pad. This assisted when doing data analysis by clarifying certain statements and adding context, as well as the influence of body language to those statements.

Phase 3: Phase three entailed searching for potential themes. Codes were analysed and organized under the relevant themes. When selecting potential themes, it was important to

link each theme to the overall aims of the study. At this point some codes were abandoned. Themes and sub-themes were identified and data was collated into a table according to each theme.

Phase 4: Selected themes were reviewed. Every new interview would be continually contrasted to previous interviews in order to detect repetitive patterns. In line with this inductive approach, important sections of data were then highlighted, incorporating data which seemed irrelevant at the time (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After repeatedly listening to audio recordings, overlooked data was captured that would otherwise have been missed. The themes and codes were further reviewed by an external auditor in order to increase credibility as recommended by Khan et al. (2012).

Phase 5: This phase included defining and naming themes. Upon selecting the name of each theme, it was important to reflect on how that theme related to the overall relevancy of the study. Seven themes were initially identified, after reviewing all themes, five themes including sub-themes remained. Sub-themes provided greater depth of understanding to the broad and complex themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 6: The last phase entailed producing a report of all data collected and analysed. Specific extracts from interviews were selected and used as examples to illustrate accuracy of summaries. Themes were measured against literature and drawing back to the research aims in order to increase accuracy of the analysis. In this instance Chapter Four and Five will reflect the results and discussion, but the entire thesis constitutes the research report.

As mentioned before, data collection and analysis transpired in parallel until saturation was reached. Analysis was conducted by two persons including the principle researcher and a research psychologist with specialized training in research methodology and qualitative analysis in particular. As the primary researcher, I have had training in Research

Methods. During the Honours programme I was afforded the opportunity to practice techniques and was assessed through exams and assignments. I have also had additional training with a Research Psychologist in which the first transcript was used as an experiential guide which assisted significantly in developing a clearer understanding of the analysis phase. There was thus a sufficient level of training and expertise in the people conducting the analysis

3.9 Trustworthiness and Credibility

Member checking was used to increase trustworthiness or reliability of information. Member checking allowed participants to validate their responses (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Bruce & Ahmed, 2014, p. 88; Carlson, 2010). Whilst generating initial codes and themes, some participants accents were not clear as English was not their first language. They were then contacted telephonically as agreed in interviews, to clarify parts that were unclear. Additional information such as demographics was also requested telephonically. Verifying accuracy of information strengthened the credibility of the study.

In order to increase credibility of interpretation, debriefing was held following each interview in order to identify factors that may have affected the interview process (Bruce & Ahmed, 2014, p.88). Debriefing consisted of both the interviewer and interviewee, participating in a discussion where there was an opportunity for reflection on the interview. Debriefing also allowed a chance for the interviewees to ask their own questions. An overview of the study was given for further clarification. I was also able to thank the participants for their involvement in the study and explain how they fitted into the study.

As recommended by Carcary (2009), a second researcher, trained in qualitative research, was used to assist with the analysis which contributed to maintaining rigour and tracking the impact of the researcher on the process. An additional means of enhancing

credibility was through incorporating illustrative quotes. Extracts of raw data were included in order to gain deeper insight into student experiences. As mentioned before, following the generation of initial codes and themes by the primary researcher, the research supervisor added to the analysis by reviewing and re-examining and reviewing codes and themes. This form of external auditing recommended by Cooper and McLeod (2014) contributed to increasing credibility of results.

3.10 Reflexivity

Reflexivity was an important tool in the process of conducting this research that is consistent with the theoretical frame and qualitative methodologies utilized (Cresswell, 2003). I understood that I was a co-constructor of the findings, and subsequently needed to track my potential influence rather than try to maintain "objectivity." In order to facilitate a reflexive stance I committed to increasing my own awareness of my subject position. Creswell (2003) underscored that demographic signifiers can have a potential impact on the research process and recommended that these signifiers should be tracked and reflected upon critically. The following signifiers were particularly important for me to demonstrate an awareness of given the focus of the study. I have reflected on my subject position in order to gain insight into my potential influence on the nature and quality of rapport established and data collected, as well as themes extrapolated (Raskin, 2002). A number of signifiers were identified that warrant mentioning here.

First I am a coloured, female with a fairly outgoing personality. I recognised that my gendered construction and personality disposition influenced the process of establishing rapport with participants who quickly were at ease with me during the interviews. I also found that they were more willing to agree to participating in the study due to my perceived disposition. Potentially this could be attributed to participants not feeling threatened by me

and being able to identify with me as many shared my gender and race signifiers. In this way my subject position impacted positively on the process and deepened rapport which enhanced the nature and quality of information.

Second I am a Masters student in Psychology at UWC. As such I had my own responses in mind about the extent to which I felt prepared by my particular Honours training. It became important to guard against my preconceptions influencing the interview process unchecked which would result in a narrowing of the scope of interpretation, and produce poor data. Most of the participants were registered at UWC for their studies which provided another signifier that they could identify with. I was also somewhat familiar with the participants that assisted by increasing the level of comfort with each other. I was registered for a Masters by thesis which meant that I worked independently and did not share classroom or work space with the participants that created a more appropriate boundary between myself and participants.

Third, I am a first-generation student which is not atypical for the student population at the identified institutions. This provided me an opportunity to understand issues related to first generation student experience that might emerge from the interviews. Though this particular positionality was not necessarily known to participants and not disclosed voluntarily, it provided a lens through which I could remain curious and empathic to participants' accounts which enhanced the data collection process.

Fourth, I am a Honours Psychology graduate from one of the identified institutions and have completed an independent research project using systematic review methodology in a supervised group. Through a personal subjective engagement with group-based supervised research I witnessed and was a part of various dynamics that the group work component entailed. This knowledge has thus allowed me to flesh out topics that I have experienced, as

well as collecting new knowledge from a diverse group of individuals. Due to my own experience at Honours level with this particular methodology, I was able to establish a deeper connection with interviewees. Further as a Masters student, I hoped to conduct a study involving participants (reactive research) as I have had my own ideas about the extent to which I felt prepared and the learning objectives were attained.

Fifth, I am now an employee in a Psychology department where systematic review methodology is being used for Honours level research. I witnessed student and supervisor interactions throughout the research process, and have been privy to the curricular discussions about this particular decision. This deepened my interest to conduct an explorative study into student perceptions. It also sustained me in the process of completing the thesis. The process of thesis completion extended into a third year of registration and I had to find a way to balance my interest in the topic with the technical aspects of preparing a thesis in fulfilment of degree requirements. I also had to guard against making assumptions on the part of the intended audience of the thesis about the process and curricular decisions behind hits phenomenon. In this instance my subject position assisted with my own retention in the programme, but detracted from the writing process since I was almost over-immersed in the phenomenon. This was particularly experienced in reviewing the literature since I veered towards literature that supported my ideas and had to rely on the supervisory process to redirect and correct where appropriate.

The following techniques were employed to help track my potential influence on the project. As the primary researcher, I have had my own debriefing following interviews consistent with the recommendation from Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2012). A Research Psychologist who has no connection to the study, but has extensive experience in conducting qualitative research facilitated the debriefing sessions. The decision to use an impartial person who was not linked to the study was rooted in the following considerations: The study

forms part of a broader project that is funded and the thesis supervisor is the primary investigator. Thus the objectivity was welcomed as a strategic consideration. In addition, the primary supervisor also initiated the implementation of systematic reviews in the Honours programmes at both identified institutions. Thus there was a level of investment that was important to offset. Before meeting, the Research Psychologist previously viewed transcripts and all work covered. She asked questions and reviewed codes and themes. I was also asked to explain any bias that could have impacted the study and to what extent the study has impacted me. Supervision sessions with my supervisor also acted as an external audit. I kept a field journal to increase awareness of my impact on the research and actively engaged in reflexive thinking in all aspects of the process.

A second analyst was used in data analysis. The core function of the second analyst was to track subjective biases in the interpretation of the data collected through interviews. A consensus was reached between myself and the analyst to remain open to new evidence regardless of disagreements in the responses.

3.11 Ethics considerations

Ethics clearance and project registration was obtained from the Senate Research Committee of the University of the Western Cape (Appendix B). Permission to conduct the study at the identified institutions was requested from the Registrar, Chief Academic Officer and Dean of Research at the respective institutions (Appendix B). An information sheet (Appendix C) was prepared for all participants that spelled out the following: Participation is voluntary. Participants have a right to withdraw without fear of negative consequence or loss of perceived benefit. Confidentiality would be maintained. Participants' identities would be protected and research conducted in accordance with the Ethics Rules of Conduct under the Health Professions Act (Health Professions Act 56 of 1974, 2011), All participants signed a

consent form indicating their voluntary participation and informed consent (Appendix D). Participants were briefed before their interview that their identity will not be used in the study. All information was stored in a protected location with password protection. Other than the primary researcher, the only person with access to the raw data captured was the primary supervisor. This study was funded by the National Research Foundation and the financial contribution must be acknowledged whilst clarifying that the research has not been commissioned nor does it represent the opinions of the NRF.

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Chapter 4

Results and discussion

The analysis resulted in two thematic clusters. The first cluster was entitled, Systematic review, and comprised of three themes. Each theme included sub-themes that have been distilled from the thematic analysis process. The second cluster was entitled, Group Work and comprised of four themes. Similarly each theme included subthemes. Table 4.1 below provides a summary of the main themes and subthemes extracted.

Table 4.1 Clusters, Themes and Sub-Themes Identified in the Analysis of Data

Cluster	Theme	Sub-Themes
1. Systematic review	Pedagogical considerations	Orientation Technical & theoretical aspects Structural provision (Training & Supervision)
	Conducting systematic reviews	Conceptualization and execution Feedback
	Evaluation of SR	Benefits Challenges Preparedness for higher degrees
2. Group work	Group as a whole	Core function Group familiarity
	Benefits of group work	Peer support Peer supervision Friendship and camaraderie Shared workload Normalization
	Challenges of group work	Differing work ethics Unequal workload Lack of co-operative work
	Differing personalities	Impact of personality on group functioning

Cluster 1: Systematic Reviews

This cluster dealt with thematic content related to the systematic review methodology. It included three themes namely 1) pedagogical considerations, 2) conducting systematic review studies and 3) evaluation of systematic reviews.

Cluster 1, Theme 1: Pedagogical considerations

This first theme focused on the decision to use systematic review at a programme level and the pedagogical considerations related to the decision. The theme included three subthemes such as, Orientation, technical and theoretical aspects, and structural provisions for the requirement (e.g. training and supervisory capacity) The subthemes are presented below and supported with illustrative quotes.

Sub-theme A: Orientation. Participants reported on the orientation to the research requirement and the decision to complete the independent research project in a group using systematic review methodology. Both programmes provided a general orientation to induct students into the requirements of the module and the methodology. In one of the programmes, the induction workshop included a motivation for the programmatic decision to use systematic review methodology. The theme essentially reported on or identified their subjective experiences of and reactions to orientation. Table 2 summarizes some of the subjective reactions.

Table 4.2. *Sub-theme A: Orientation*

Illustrative quotes
"As a group just as a starting point, I felt like I was drowning ...I think the jump from theory to application can be significant regarding the task of a research project, any research project at that stage for me but in this case a systematic review."
Participant 6
"I think initially I was very anxious about it because I had no idea what it was"
Participant 8

"At first I thought systematic review was just kids play…I was inside seeing this like nonsense what is this now? Why am I not doing real research."

Participant 5

"I felt like a horse you know the horse racing when the gates open and you got to go there wasn't a stage where I felt that I could stop."

Participant 6

"[Conducting a systematic review was] Basically new to us, came into Honours haven't done a proposal before especially a systematic review. So it's quite new to us."

Participant 9

"I have never really been a fan of group work to be honest and doing the systematic review was no different…

Participant 2

Participants reported uneasiness at the start of the research project related to both the group work requirement and the methodology. Some participants linked feelings of uneasiness with a lack of knowledge and understanding of the methodology. For example, participant 8 recalled feeling "very anxious." Similarly participant 6 reported feeling that the "group was drowning." Participants attributed their anxiety to the unfamiliarity of the methodology, as well as the unfamiliarity with conducting research in general. For example, participant 9 reflected that even writing a proposal was new to all honours students. Participants also reported that the independent module included new tasks such as writing a proposal that was anxiety provoking and that now they were required to also learn and master systematic review methodology. The following quote from participant 9 captures the sentiment that new or novel requirements extends their fund of knowledge and skill level that in turn raises the level of anxiety:

> *"…this is the first time you ever doing a mini thesis so it's like a blank slate, you know certain things yes and you know certain things that are*

Although participants indicated uncertainty due to lack of knowledge, most understood that a higher level of work was expected in their research project. For example, participant 3 stated that progressing to a higher degree level (e.g. Honours) would be more challenging and difficult than the preceding degree level. Participant 6 also felt that the jump from theory to application could be "significant." Thus the findings indicate that research requirement at Honours was a novel experience at a higher level of functioning that left them challenged and anxious.

The literature resonated with this finding and indicated that research methodology as a body of knowledge was associated with a measure of anxiety. For example, Devenport and Lane (2006) reported that research methodology has often been experienced by students as anxiety provoking. Literature explicitly attributed students' anxiety about their research requirement to the uncertainty of what is expected of them (Hall & Longman, 2008; Abiddin et al., 2011).

Participants felt that the orientation was too academic and did not really support them nor prepare them for the application of theory into practice. This suggests that the subjective aspects of the process were not adequately acknowledged or addressed through the orientation process. Some participants reported that supervisors expected too much from them upon entering their research project that in turn increased their level of anxiety. The quote below from participant 3 illustrated this sentiment well:

> *"and you know certain things that are expected of you but you can't expect to be on a supervisors level they took years to get there. I'm not going to say you like a little baby now that I have to baby or spoon feed you but like be patient with the person and you are learning as you going so in that way that would like facilitate growth for me expected of you, but you can't expect to be on a supervisors level they took years to get there."*

Participants also reported mixed reactions to the induction to the new methodology. Some participants held an assumption that secondary research was not authentic research and would have preferred to conduct their own primary research instead. This sentiment was captured in the quote by participant five that reflects that there was an expectation to conduct "real research." This perception was linked to a level of resistance to using the methodology since it was not aligned with the participants' expectations for the module requirement. Other participants felt the pressure of the robustness of the type of research from the start of their research endeavour that either increased or sustained their anxiety about and through the process. For example, participant six likened the process to a horse race and stated that "there wasn't a stage where I felt that I could stop."

This finding was substantiated by Symons (2001) who underscored that academic supervisors may assume that students should already be skilled in certain areas thereby not requiring sufficiently comprehensive induction sessions. Further, it was found to be unhelpful to students when lecturers expected students to have a clear understanding of concepts that are completely or largely foreign to them (Heussi, 2012). Abdulai and Owusu-Ansah, (2014) substantiated this finding through reporting that students often battled in completing their proposals, experiencing uncertainty in the write-up since for many it was a new experience. In short, the findings of this study reciprocated a theme (sub-theme A) in the literature that identified that students experienced increased anxiety at what they considered increased learning tasks or activities to master. In this instance, there appears to have been a compounding effect given that the research process was new and the methodology was new to students.

Participants also reported mixed reactions to the realization during orientation that group work would be required. This theme reports only on their initial reactions to the group work requirement during orientation whereas their reactions to the subjective experience of

working in a group during the process are presented in a separate theme. Some participants held negative views of group work and expected that the group was going to become an additional source of anxiety. For example the quotation from participant two illustrates the feeling towards group work stating that he has never "been a fan of group work " and this view applied to working in a group on the systematic review.

The orientation or induction merely stated the group work requirement, but did not provide an induction into group work. This lack of explanation of the principles required for group work and the considerations for making it compulsory, in turn compromised the frame of the entire project. Most importantly what emerged is that students made sense of the group work requirement relative to prior experiences of group work rather than the pedagogical reasons for its inclusion in this requirement.

This aspect of the finding was consistent with Kriflik and Mullan (2007) who found that students had mixed views of group work, but that a significant percentage of students reported the idea of group work negatively. Burke (2011) added that students' initial reactions to group work are expressed through a significant resistance to engage in it. Sorenson (1981) referred to this phenomena as group hate. Johnson and Johnson (1994) suggested that this negative idea of group is caused by a lack of induction into group where group skills are taught.

Sub-theme B: Technical and theoretical aspects. This subtheme related to the finer details and operational steps of the methodology. Participants reported that they were not familiar with systematic review methodology, as well as the formatting required for the proposal of a review study. Participants also reported mixed responses to the highly structured nature of systematic review methodology provided. Table 3 provides a selection of illustrative quotes for subtheme B.

Table 4.3. *Sub-theme B: Technical & theoretical steps*

Illustrative quotes

"I didn't know much about a systematic review…I think what really helped for me was a step-by-step process … this is what you need to do at this point, this is what the abstract needs to look like…"

Participant 8

"We were able to look at it one step at a time instead of like this massive project that feels like you never going to get finished."

Participant 1

"I had never done a systematic review before. It was interesting I think it was a nice way to start doing research because it was like step by step the way systematic review is laid out."

Participant 4

"It was a tedious process looking for such a large amount of articles"

Participant 9

"It was just a lack of search engines first of all but that did get sorted out."

Participant 6

From the table above, it becomes evident that students engaged with the strict protocols and rigorous steps for systematic review methodology. The subjective responses to and experiences of the high level of structure was mixed. Some participants found the step-by-step operations containing and helpful. They reported that the strict protocols assisted with the apprehension of the enormity of the research project by approaching it in byte sizes. Participants explained that when they were able to do their project in steps it was far less intimidating and from their perspective became more attainable and manageable. Participant four reported that a systematic review "was a nice way to start doing research because it was like step by step the way systematic review is laid out." Participants found the structured and systematic approach to the methodology to constitute a good introduction to research. Other

participants indicated that they found the structured method to be tedious. Some participants commented on the large amount of time spent searching for articles. The essence of this theme was that the methodology was highly structured that could be both containing and repetitive or tedious. Thus in essence, the methodology was experienced as having a high level of structure and requires very focused and meticulous reading.

The finding reciprocated the theoretical and empirical literature on the systematic review methodology. For example, Perry and Hammond (2002) stated that systematic review methodology involves strict protocols that are used as a base or outline throughout the review process. Similarly, Littell, Corcoran and Pillai (2008) described a systematic review as highly structured, including specific requirements/protocols which guide the researcher through a step-by-step plan which was reflective of students' experience.

The literature supported both reactions to systematic review reported by the students in the present study. For example, Bettany-Saltikov (2012) reported that once student researchers discovered the step-by-step process which a systematic review entailed, they no longer felt as intimidated by it. . Thus supporting the reaction of containment reported in the present study. The experience of tedium was also supported in the literature. For example, Frunza, Inkpen and Matwin (2010) described the meticulous and rigorous reading and screening of large amounts of literature or articles as a tedious process. Similarly, Choong, Galgani, Dunn and Tsafnat (2014) also used the word "tedious" to describe the rigorous systematic review procedures and were in agreement that systematic reviews may be time-consuming,

Sub-theme C: Structural provisions. Participants reflected on structural provisions made in the programme during the research process. The theme was termed structural provision in that it referred to programmatic supports or provisions made for students during

the independent research process. Two provisions were identified namely training workshops and supervision. Participants reflected on the format and timing of the workshops, the expertise of the facilitators and the perceived utility of the workshops. Participants also reflected on the supervisory process as a structural provision. Table 4 summarizes illustrative quotes for the subtheme. The quotes have been organized into two sections to reflect the programmes because each programme had different structural provisions. In programme A there was a once-off workshop whereas a staggered approach was adopted in Programme B.

Table 4.4. *Sub-theme C: Structural provisions*

Illustrative quotes

Programme A

"I think the breakdown was fairly concise that [the lecturer] gave in the beginning of the year. I think that actual crash course should have been split up over the course of the year sort of as we go about our research rather than just in the beginning of the year and then you sort of forget the steps and you have to go back."

Participant 2

"What I did appreciate at the beginning of this year, [one of the lecturers] done a systematic review workshop with us. It was the workshop that really opened your eyes to seeing that a systematic review isn't such a horrible thing ...to a certain extent I almost felt that we needed that [Systematic review workshop] in Honours before we done it, but I am so grateful that we got it at Master's level because if I ever have to do a systematic review again I can go back to what he taught us."

Participant 1

"One of the first things was that we sort of got a crash course in the beginning two weeks of the year I think it might have been a bit longer and we only really started working on our systematic review in June/July so everyone had forgotten what they had spoken about."

Participant 2

Programme B

"We were shared the theory in class and that was covered well."

Participant 6

"Like in our first session our supervisor kind of let us just talk about what is pending at the moment, what topics we can use, what data bases we can use and we just like had a general discussion and then he told us what he would like – like an outline or an overview of what he would like us to have for example by the next time he saw us."

Participant 3

"Before I did my systematic review, we had a workshop of which we were a group of at least forty students, but there was no hand out from that lecture. I'm saying that because after that in my Masters degree, we did a workshop almost similar, but we had a hand out. So I think it helps so I could refer [back to] most of the things .I think the workshop must just provide enough. So you have kind of a booklet to guide us. In that time[Honours] I don't remember getting a booklet, comparing to the other booklet I got after that.

Participant 5

Participants reported that the systematic review workshops in general were beneficial in terms of understanding what a systematic review entailed and exploring the various steps. Participants from programme A described that once-off workshops were provided, but they would have preferred a series of workshops over the course of the research project. For example, Participant two referred to it as a "crash course" which contained a lot of information that needed to be digested over time. This participant went on to recommend that the workshop should have been presented in a staggered way over time.

I think that actual crash course should have been split up over the course of the year sort of as we go about our research rather than just in the beginning of the year and then you sort of forget the steps and you have to go back."

Participant 2

Participants who were given once-off workshops reported anxiety and confusion even after the workshop as illustrated in the quote below from participant nine.

"I think even in our first initial workshop before we did it, as they were explaining I was still very confused…"

Participant 9

Participant five expressed that one workshop would have been sufficient had it been accompanied by a "hand out" or "booklet" to take home and consult through the process. Other participants suggested that the staggered approach may have been useful in that it could correspond with a particular aspect of the process that they were busy with, in comparison to a once off workshop. For example:

"The workshop for me, there was only one workshop, you new in doing this, the one workshop you still trying to understand where you are and what this is about. I

don't think the one workshop is sufficient…I would prefer more workshops throughout the year because one doesn't, for me personally I didn't know where I was heading…it would have definitely been such a help in the process"

Participant 8

"I remember we had like a workshop, small workshop, it was basically just a class it wasn't a full workshop, on introductory chapters on basically just what a systematic review is, cause we didn't know what it was. But they were basically telling us why we can't do a literature review, why a systematic review will be better and what to expect going forward…I would have preferred something more substantial I guess or something long over time like while you actually doing the systematic review, have like another course or something."

Participant 3

Participants also commented on the timing of workshops. Participants who had a once-off workshop reported that they had forgotten the input by the time they conducted the research. The quote below from participant 2 illustrated this sentiment well:

"we only really started working on our systematic review in June/July so everyone had forgotten what they had spoken about."

Participant 2

Participants from both programmes reported that a staggered approach would have been more beneficial in terms of facilitating better understanding of the methodology. The difference came in that some participants from Programme B acknowledged that a once-off workshop was sufficient with some additions or provisons. Participants essentially were commenting that a particular level of depth is required if there is only a singular workshop. For example, Participant 1 reflected that a workshop on systematic review in her Masters year helped her fully appreciate the value of the method and stated that a workshop with such depth would have been useful in her Honours year.

"What I did appreciate at the beginning of this year, [one of the lecturers] done a systematic review workshop with us. It was the workshop that really opened your eyes to seeing that a systematic review isn't such a horrible thing …to a certain extent I almost felt that we needed that [Systematic review workshop] in Honours before we done it, but I am so grateful that we got it at Master's level because if I ever have to do a systematic review again I can go back to what he taught us."

The findings here indicate that the structural provision of a training or workshop input has most value when it is staggered and presented over the time. The findings suggested that the quality of the input of such workshops was a key consideration. The findings also underscore that the timing of workshops were key as they were thought to significantly impact the research experience.

The sentiments in this theme reciprocated a major theme in the literature illustrated by van der Westuizen (2014) who reported that students valued introductory workshops into a particular module, but reported that it was often not adequate in terms of the depth of information received. Similarly, Stamp, Tan-Wilson and Silva (2015) reported that students experienced a series approach more favourably. These authors also concluded that additional research training workshops assisted in the strengthening of skills thus producing a better end result in research work.
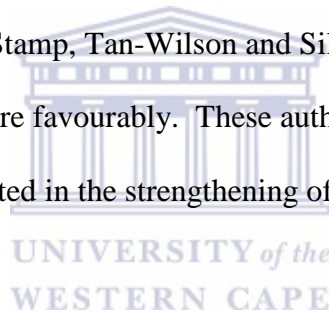
The level of expertise of the lecturer conducting the workshop also contributed to the experience of participants. Higher levels of expertise inspired faith and reduced anxiety that ultimately was containing. Participants were also supervised in groups during this process. Participants reported that the level of expertise in the supervisor impacted their experience of conducting the research. Perceived lower levels of familiarity or expertise in the methodology in the supervisor did not assist in reducing anxiety or inspiring faith. Higher levels of perceived expertise or familiarity with the methodology in the supervisor was containing and inspiring for students. For example Participant six reflected on the positive experience of expertise in both theory and practice in the academic staff.

"...the lecturer at Honours level, he taught us how to do systematic review is par excellence in terms of how he taught us, and besides the fact that he doesn't teach on something that he doesn't do

himself [and] is well published. So we were able to learn from a Master and I took that opportunity and the benefits I have already felt and I am sure I will feel them into my future."

<div align="right">***Participant 6***</div>

Some participants reported that not all lecturers were well versed in the particular methodology. For example, Participant two reported that he felt like his supervisor did not fully understand what a systematic review entailed. This resulted in back and forth interaction between supervisors to get help. He expressed frustration having to go to other supervisors who were more knowledgeable regarding what was required when conducting a systematic review. Similarly participant two perceived lecturers to have only received a crash course themselves and thus they felt an increased level of vulnerability.

"I got feeling that a lot of supervisors also just got the same crash course that we did and not really everyone knew what was going on and how to sort of conduct systematic review so we were sort of running around from supervisor to supervisor…"

<div align="right">***Participant 2***</div>

Overall the participants also indicated that the workshops provided theoretical insight which did not necessarily translate into confidence in application or fieldwork. The systematic review workshops were appreciated as it played a role in the reduction of anxiety by providing more insight. In addition, participants reported that the quality of the workshop and the level of expertise of the presenters were important considerations. Similarly, the expertise of supervisors was an important factor impacting the student experience.

These findings reciprocated the major themes in the literature. For example, Wisker, Robinson, Trafford, Creighton and Warnes (2010) reported that research development programmes such as these workshops offered as a part of the academic programme improved overall success in proposal and thesis writing, as well as in the actual undertaking of research. Collis and Hussey (2009) identified the need for additional training of postgraduate students to assist with sufficient skills needed to conduct research at post-graduate level. According to

Ngozi and Kayode (2014) the type of research undertaken and prior research experience

needs to be taken into account when designing programmes since they play a significant role

in overall performance. Similarly, Heussi (2012) highlighted that the quality of support

received, in this case workshops, is a significant factor when new concepts were introduced.

Cluster 1, Theme 2: Conducting systematic reviews

The second theme included subthemes such as experiences of conducting the research

(e.g. conceptualization and execution) The subthemes are presented below and supported

with illustrative quotes.

Sub-theme A: Conceptualization and execution. In order to meet their goal of

completing the research, students commented on their strategy as a group. In other words,

how they conceptualized the steps necessary to complete the task, and their execution of that

task. Strategies included delegation of tasks, planned meetings, re-evaluation of previous

tasks and open discussions on article selection. Table 4.5 provides quotes illustrating

strategies implemented within the group.

Table 4.5. *Sub-theme A: Conceptualisation and execution*

Illustrative quotes
"There were just times where we had to sort of meet up quite a bit because there was a time where we delayed meetings. As it came closer to the time of submitting, we had to have more and more meetings."
Participant 9
"...we all have our parts that we have to do like the searches and then we all come together again because we all have to work on that and it was so difficult when we had to get together and work on what we found if someone says, but I didn't do my searches yet and the rest are already to go on to phase two or step two."
Participant 1

"…you work on your own I guess most of the time the only time I actually spoke to my group was in supervision and when we spoke about what articles to use besides myself and one of my other friends that we were closer, we would work often together but other than that, it wasn't much."

Participant 3

"…the first couple of meetings we sort of just wasted on talking about things that you were going to do. Once we knew what to do then we sort of regularly set up meetings I think two, three times a month with our supervisor."

Participant 2

Participants reported different approaches to conceptualizing the execution of their work. Some participants perceived their group to not have a clearly defined group strategy or plan, but having an understanding of what needed to be done. For example, participant 1 reflected that work was delegated in the group and members needed to complete their allocated sections. Thus the group was not working together as a whole, but divided up work responsibilities that were delegated to and executed by individuals. Thus conceptualization of a work plan entailed a delegation strategy that required pooling of individual work product rather than working as a group. This constituted a very pragmatic response to the group work requirement.

Some participants reported initial resistance to meeting as a group to develop or conceptualize a work plan. For example, participant nine explained that there were instances when the group delayed work and then came together and took the decision to schedule additional meetings as submission drew closer.

"There were just times where we had to sort meet up quite a bit because there was a time where we delayed meetings. As it came closer to the time of submitting, we had to have more and more meetings."

Participant 9

Participant two perceived the first few meetings between groups members as non-essential stating that time was "wasted" simply discussing the plan of action for research. It is evident here that participant two did not perceive the conceptualization phase to be of importance and preferred the execution phase where conceptualized strategies were put into action. This view was reflected in the quote below:

"...the first couple of meetings we sort of just wasted on talking about things that you were going to do. Once we knew what to do then we sort of regularly set up meetings I think two, three times a month with our supervisor."

Participant 2

In essence the findings indicated that participants did not explicitly set out to develop a group plan. The findings suggest that participants demonstrated resistance to meeting in order to conceptualize a group plan. This resistance manifested an avoidance of meetings or engagement with required tasks, devaluing the importance of group meetings and focusing on delegation of tasks rather than conceptualizing a coherent group plan. Thus adopting a very pragmatic stance

The findings in this theme were somewhat contrary to the recommendations in the literature. For example, Rudman (2014) identified planning and distribution of specific tasks as a significant group undertaking in order to complete the desired goal. Though meetings were scheduled to discuss the way forward, participants reported focusing on the delegation of specific tasks without focusing on planning. The delegation and execution of tasks resembled Morgeson, Derue and Karam's (2010) reference to the execution of group strategies as the action phase. These authors suggested that the action phase consisted of practical steps, such as the organization of team tasks in order to proceed to the desired goal. Furthermore, Kozlowski, Ilgen and Daniel (2006) suggested that when group members are unified in their understanding of what needs to be done, there is an increase in devotion to

complete the task. The resistance to planning and developing a unified understanding of what needs to be done reported in the present study, would translate into counterproductive outcomes for the group.

Sub-theme B: Feedback. The second sub-theme that emerged addressed the role of feedback during the process of conducting the systematic review project. Two distinct foci emerged under this sub-theme namely a) the quality and timing of feedback, and b) the impact of prior supervisory experiences. Table 4.6 summarize quotes that are illustrative of the foci of the subtheme.

Table 4.6

Sub-theme B: Feedback

Illustrative quotes

Timing of the feedback

"…[Honours co-supervisor] would email the same day or if she couldn't read it the same day she would at least state she will read it the weekend so we can expect drafts back the following week or two weeks' time."

Participant 3

"[Supervisor] was just very detailed with everything…and very prompt on returning the feedback. So it gave me enough time to space myself and work well with time that was given…"

Participant 8

"I got irritated waiting for emails and she would say sorry I couldn't email now, I will email back next week or something…the group that I was originally in… hindered me I honestly think that if I had stayed with her I wouldn't have made deadlines because I wouldn't have gotten feedback as much as much feedback on drafts…I got a really good mark for my thesis and my Honours thesis and that was only due to like three or four drafts going back like final drafts back and forth…"

Participant 3

"The challenges were that we didn't see him very often he is very busy so we didn't see him very often…"

Participant 2

"I think my supervisor I had in Masters was a great supervisor, but the fact that I didn't get feedback as often as I got in Honours level which was a huge stumbling block because sometimes I would go two months without any feedback."

Participant 7

Quality of feedback

"I would choose the supervision style of my supervisor in Honours level because of regular feedback."

Participant 7

"...the positive was that [his supervisor] his feedback was very thorough and very detailed so when we did get feedback from him it was very helpful and it was very clear as well as you knew where you had gone wrong but you also knew how to fix it and how to move forward."

Participant 4

"...we did get some feedback but it wasn't a great deal I don't know if we just got it right or the supervisor didn't know what sort of should be there, what shouldn't be there but I can't remember much feedback. We did get positive feedback from her and we did get some feedback which wasn't a bad thing for me the less feedback you get the less work you have to do."

Participant 2

"...if there was a draft due, it would be detailed as to what needs to change, everything made sense, I didn't have to go back and ask even a question on clarity..."[Honours supervisor]

Participant 8

A: Timing of feedback

Participants identified that feedback was either constructive or posed a barrier to progress. Several qualities of the feedback were identified that determined whether feedback was experienced as constructive or as less helpful. Below is an exposition of these qualities followed by an integration of findings from the body of literature.

Constructive feedback: participants identified six key features that contributed to the feedback being constructive and facilitative of progress and development.

Consistent and regular: Participants reported that feedback was useful and constructive when it was provided regularly and with consistency. This facilitated a consistent and steady pace for students to complete the work. In this way they reported that they were able to stay engaged in the process of conducting the research. On the contrary, delayed feedback

impacted the group negatively causing the group to fall behind and work on "tighter time

constraints" when compared to other groups. Due to the supervisor's busy schedule, the time

in which the group met with their supervisor was limited which delayed their feedback.

Participant 7 reported that irregular feedback was "a huge stumbling block" and that there

were instances when the gaps between waiting for feedback reached two months. Limited and

irregular feedback caused confusion in that students were often not aware whether it was

limited due to strong work or if the supervisor did not have clarity on what was expected.

"...we did get some feedback but it wasn't a great deal I don't know if we just got it right or the supervisor didn't know what sort of should be there, what shouldn't be there but I can't remember much feedback. We did get positive feedback from her and we did get some feedback which wasn't a bad thing for me the less feedback you get the less work you have to do."

Participant 2

Prompt: Participants reported that prompt feedback was helpful. It allowed sufficient

time to work when needing to meet deadlines. Participants expressed frustration due to

delayed email responses regarding feedback. For example, participant 3 felt that she would

not meet her deadline and produce a quality level of work due to delayed feedback and

subsequently switched supervisors. Switching to a supervisor with more prompt

communication regarding feedback proved to assist with binding her anxiety and the

completion of the thesis work. Similarly, participant 4 waited long to receive feedback due to

the busy schedule of the supervisor. Participants also reported that they were appreciative of

supervisors who acknowledged delayed feedback and time lost as illustrated below:

"We didn't get feedback as often as we might have liked. But, then like when we did start working the

supervisor did understand did acknowledge the fact that we didn't have a lot of time so he then did

make more time for us in the end and kind of pushed and helped us to finish."

Participant 4

B. Quality of feedback

Detailed and comprehensive: Participants expressed mixed reactions to the extent to which feedback was required to be detailed or comprehensive. On the one hand, participants emphasized that detailed feedback facilitated a clearer understanding of areas requiring attention. Participants reflected that detailed feedback enabled them to refine their work so that they were able to produce a work of a higher standard. On the other hand, some participants did not mind receiving minimal feedback. They reported that less detailed feedback meant that they had less work to attend to. The quote from participant 2 below captured this sentiment well.

"… I can't remember much feedback. We did get positive feedback from her and we did get some feedback which wasn't a bad thing for me the less feedback you get the less work you have to do."

Participant 2

A lack of detail or comprehensiveness in feedback reportedly left participants feeling unsure about its meaning. For example, participant 2 stated, "*I don't know if we just got it right or the supervisor didn't know what sort of should be there, what shouldn't be there."* Thus the lack of detail created doubts about the capacity of the supervisor and limits the extent to which students could test their own evaluation of the work against an external and more objective other.

Clear and directive: Participants reflected that when feedback was clear, they were able to proceed with confidence. They also reported that direct feedback was preferred above vague and limited feedback. Directive feedback provided clarity about what was expected and reduced their anxiety. For example, participant 8 described the clarity that directive and clear feedback provided in the following quote,

"...if there was a draft due, it would be detailed as to what needs to change, everything made sense, I didn't have to go back and ask even a question on clarity…"[Honours supervisor]

Participant 8

Similarly, participant 4 stated how directive and clear feedback was beneficial in that it provided input on remediation or correction required, as well as how to proceed with the next stage of research.

"...the positive was that [name of supervisor's] feedback was very thorough and very detailed. So when we did get feedback from him it was very helpful and it was very clear, as well as you knew where you had gone wrong but you also knew how to fix it and how to move forward."

Participant 4

Some participants reported that indirect, but clear feedback was also beneficial. Such feedback stimulated the student's own critical thinking that enabled the student to engage with their work. This finding resonated with Azman, Nor, Nor, and Aghwela. (2014) describing that indirect feedback acts as guide encouraging critical and creative thinking.

Iterative process: Participants reported that multiple drafting assisted in improving the quality of the work. Thus feedback on multiple drafts provided in an iterative manner provided a developmental process that produced good results. For example, participant 3 attributed their results to the iterative nature of feedback.

"I got a really good mark for my thesis and my Honours thesis and that was only due to like three or four drafts going back like final drafts back and forth…"

Co-supervision: Some participants reported that their groups were co-supervised. Participants reported increased satisfaction when feedback from co-supervisors were coordinated. This prevented them from receiving feedback that was contradictory that could add to their confusion. Thus coordination and conferring between co-supervisors was more helpful and made feedback more constructive.

The presence of a co-supervisor was useful in that it provided students with an alternate avenue when they felt frustrated with their supervisors. For example, participants pursued or requested feedback from the co-supervisor when they were unhappy with the delay in feedback from the main supervisor. Participants reported that this was in done in the hope that more timely and prompt feedback would be received. Participants reported satisfaction noting better response times and acknowledgement of emails subsequently from the co-supervisor.

The findings presented above resonated with the sentiments expressed in the general body of literature. The emergence of feedback as a subtheme in the experience of conducting research in a group was intuitive given that Wegener and Tanggaard (2013) identified feedback as a private interpersonal exchange which makes the group identity less real and preserves the individual relationship and individualism of each student. Thus feedback became an important way for students to hold onto their individualism in the group project.

The features reported in the present study resonated with reports in the literature. For example, Wadesango (2012) reported that students expressed significant appreciation for regular and prompt feedback. Conversely, Mutula (2009) identified delayed feedback as a challenge in postgraduate research. D'Andrea (2002) reported that detailed feedback was important because it facilitated a clearer understanding of areas requiring attention. Azman et al., (2014) found that limited feedback was unclear therefore unhelpful. Further, Azman et al., (2014) noted that indirect feedback was often of benefit to the student as it stimulated the student's own critical thinking and enabling the student to engage with their work.

East, Bitchener and Basturkmen (2012) cautioned that the supervisor and student, as well as supervisors may hold different understandings as to what constitutes effective

feedback. Therefore Crispen, Chabaya, Paul & Owence (2012) explained that when there is more than one supervisor providing feedback, consistency is important.

Overall, positive feedback experiences at Honours level carried a level of expectation upon entering Masters studies. The social constructionist view is depicted through prior interaction with the supervisor at Honours level, which formed a view or assumption on what feedback should look like. Upon entering masters studies their idea of what feedback should constitute was shaped by their prior experience. The way they made sense of their world now at masters level was through their prior experience. There was dissatisfaction with the Masters supervisor because of a different experience with their honours supervisor or vice versa. This is evident in the constant comparison of supervisors at masters and honours level. Through positive feedback experiences at Honours level, this may have set up a precedent and expectation upon entering masters level studies.

There was an interplay between the type of feedback given and how students rated their supervisors. There were several references to preferring the Honours supervisor to the Masters supervisor ostensibly due to a more containing process with feedback that was perceived as more constructive. This may relate to the notion that feedback in that context (however effective) created a sense of being attended to despite working in a group context whereas at a Masters level that was a given and an expectation. Thus there could be a way in which the experience at honours could have primed students at M level to expect more.

Cluster 1, Theme 3: Evaluation of SR

The third theme included thematic content that reflected evaluative comments from participants. Three subthemes were included in Theme 3 namely, a) perceived benefits of SR,

b) challenges of using SR and c) preparedness for Masters studies. The subthemes are presented below and supported with illustrative quotes.

Subtheme A: Benefits of systematic review methodology. This sub-theme related to the benefits participants perceived to using the systematic review methodology. Overall, participants reflected on the systematic review as a positive experience, though many experienced this type of methodology unfavourably at the start. Five key benefits were articulated by participants. Table 4.7 below summarizes the quotes that best illustrated the reported benefits.

Table 4.7

Sub-*theme A: Benefits of systematic review methodology*

Illustrative quotes
[When working on a literature review] *"But, if you are adding onto a bigger body of knowledge and you not accurate the next person using yours that inaccuracy is going to follow so I think with some systematic review it almost makes you more aware that what you are doing has to be right to the best of your ability."* *Participant 1*
"For me my understanding is the literature review is what is out there on this topic for me literature review isn't specifically a synthesis of the data collated the systematic review was far more in depth which has prepared me at a completely different level." *Participant 6*
" it makes you aware of things you would never notice if you didn't have to do a systematic review…I think it made me much more aware and it just changes your perspective of reading, you will never read an article the same again… usually one would just read the introduction and jump to results and findings because the rest all seem boring, but that is where the truth of it lies really and the power of your study lies within the methods and the procedures but that you only realize once you have been through a systematic review like one of those growing pains you need to go through." *Participant 1*
" it makes you more aware when you are doing your literature review also because you don't read things the same anymore so the way you are writing up differs" *Participant 1*
"The only thing I can think of that it helped with was in terms of reading articles and learning how to search for articles so in terms of that it was very important because with systematic review that is all you do."

Participant 2

"I think a systematic review involves much more procedures than just the plain literature review, so it is actually better then for us, I think it's more, you gain more experience."

Participant 9

1. Methodological quality: Participants reported that systematic review methodology raised a growing appreciation for the methodological quality of published or disseminated work. Participants reported that the appraisal step in particular helped to develop a clearer sense of the relationship between the quality of methodology and the quality of the findings. Participants also reported that the systematic review methodology brought a deeper awareness of the importance of validity and reliability of studies. The quote from participant 1 below captures this sentiment:

"doing the systematic review made me aware of the validity of your study and that your study is reliable and the methods you put in place and stuff things you are using will be able to uphold if it were to be used in a secondary study"

Participant 1

This finding resonated with the assertion from the Centre for Reviews and Dissemination (2008) that systematic review methodology produces high quality evidence. Similarly the literature reported that systematic review methodology entails comprehensive literature searches attempting to exhaust all relevant literature addressing a clearly focused question, but still maintaining high quality (Lamb et al., 2008; Smith, Devane et al., 2011; Centre for Reviews and Dissemination, 2008; Stewart, 2014). Brown and Sutton (2010) stated that the process of systematic reviews assesses the accuracy and quality in the reporting of data that in turn develops an appreciation of and capacity to assess methodological quality in reporting.

2. Methodological rigour: Participants described the robustness and rigour required to conduct a systematic review. After conducting a systematic review, some expressed their understanding that there needed to be a high level of accuracy otherwise others who utilizing the poor quality findings it continue adding to or perpetuating the inaccuracies.

"...it is quite a robust exercise this systematic review and the learning is in the doing so it was sitting in front of the computer and looking at journal articles for me it was certainly an exercise of you can't stand outside of the process, you very much part of the process learning while it is happening so you got to have the flexibility in approaching it that way."

Participant **6**

Some participants reported that they underestimated the rigour of the methodology, because it was not reactive or primary research. For example, participant 5 reported that at the commencement of his research project he underestimated the robustness of a systematic review and later realised its importance when searching for relevant articles. In this way systematic review methodology facilitated a critical reading of research. Through the process of SR participants reported that they were now more critical of the quality of the methodology underlying the findings. Some participants described a new awareness of learning to read articles in greater depth. Students reported that they no longer only read the summation or conclusion, but actually engaged with the methodology section that was previously considered boring and superfluous. The quote below captures this finding:

" it makes you aware of things you would never notice if you didn't have to do a systematic review...I think it made me much more aware and it just changes your perspective of reading, you will never read an article the same again... usually one would just read the introduction and jump to results and findings because the rest all seem boring, but that is where the truth of it lies really and the power of your study lies within the methods and the procedures but that you only realize once you have been through a systematic review like one of those growing pains you need to go through."

Participant **1**

After conducting the systematic review, students were made aware of a higher level of screening and assessing for overall quality of studies. In essence, participants started to identify that they are consumers of research.

This finding resonated with the literature where systematic reviews were considered more rigorous than narrative reviews. For example, Littell, Corcoran and Pillai, (2008) commented on the rigorous scientific method and extensive searches required when conducting systematic reviews. Similarly, Crowther, Lim and Crowther (2010) commented that the subjective nature of choosing articles in narrative reviews was inferior to systematic review methodology. Stewart (2014) identified rigour as a key feature of systematic reviews based on the prerequisite that the research must be conducted with a minimum of two people rather than individually. Armitage and Keeble-Allen (2008) recommended the use of systematic review in student research, because it provides a framework for assessing and learning methodological rigour, quality and coherence. Bettany-Saltikov (2012) concurred that the rigour of systematic review provides the merit for using the methodology in student research, specifically at the Honours level.
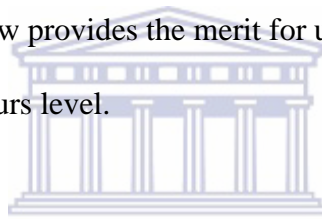
2. Technical skills: Participants reported that they were able to acquire and/ or hone particular technical skills that were necessary for research. For example Participant 6 reported that her literary search skills were improved. Participant 1 reported that her writing or reporting skills were enhanced given the awareness raised through the use of systematic review methodology. Overall, the participants reported the systematic review positively. Participants felt that the methodology provided the necessary scaffolding to introduce students to research at the Honours level. Despite earlier perceptions participants felt that they were able to conduct high level research. For example, Participant 7 expressed her appreciation for being given the opportunity of conducting a study of such high quality at an Honours level.

This finding resonates with Gopalakrishnan and Ganeshkumar, (2013) in reporting that systematic reviews must keep to high levels of accuracy in order to be reliable as it is often

utilized in order to demonstrate gaps in in knowledge or explaining results of interventions. Armitage and Keeble-Allen (2008) found that students at Honours level appreciated that conducting a systematic review enabled them to explore topics or specific areas in much greater depth.

Sub-theme B: Challenges to using SR.

This sub-theme related to the perceived challenges in conducting a systematic review. Challenges were centred on time consumption, unproductive conflicts and disputes, segregated decision-making and managing inaccurate work (i.e. data extraction). The subthemes are presented below and supported with illustrative quotes.

Table 4.8

Sub-*theme B: Challenges of systematic review methodology*

Illustrative quotes

"...with the data extraction we split up articles and then everyone did a few articles and some people did the data extraction very well and had all the information but other people either did it wrong or they didn't do it completely so then when we did the write up we had to go back to the articles and search through and find the information so it kind of made it a bit longer than what it would have been".

Participant 4

if you meet others they want to overrule others decisions and then others decide to keep quiet or pick up a fight so they won't avoid that part of picking up a fight."

Participant 5

[Articles] "Each one we had to go through one by one, it was very tedious…it was a very long procedure."

Participant 9

"It was also just subjective levels of what to include in terms of – I remember as a group the first search on titles and then abstract by the time we got to abstract besides specific exclusion criteria like age or those specifics that was fine, but thereafter subjective understanding of the abstract we already started filtering there we said no we should include this, no we shouldn't. So it is almost at that stage as in a group you need to already promote an argument for your inclusion or exclusion so it wasn't as simple as we will take these ten documents."

Participant 6

Some reflected on searching for articles as time consuming because a large amount of time was spent searching through large amounts of articles and screening each individually. For example, participant 4 explained that each group member produced a different level of quality. It was not possible to foresee errors until the group reconvened but when they did, it was even more time consuming to correct mistakes.

"...with the data extraction we split up articles and then everyone did a few articles and some people did the data extraction very well and had all the information but other people either did it wrong or they didn't do it completely so then when we did the write up we had to go back to the articles and search through and find the information so it kind of made it a bit longer than what it would have been".

Participant 4

Scheduling meeting times to accommodate all group members was described as a significant challenge affecting group efficiency. Participant one commented on the absence of certain members at meetings after special efforts were made to accommodate all members.

Another aspect that was difficult about using systematic review was the requirement that raters had to come to a consensus. In this process there were disagreements on article selection which held up the research process. Though it is the provision of the methodology that disputes be debated until resolved, participant 3 reported conflicts that resulted in some members withdrawing from the group and completing work individually. Protocols for handling these disputes were made through the intervention of the supervisor. Lack of agreement was seen as a hindrance rather than a natural unfolding of the process which means that reviewers had differentiated opinions or the instructions were unclear. Participant 3 also described conflict arising when important decisions needed to be made regarding the article selections. This conflict was not always resolved and resulted in work methods that

were not conducive to the requirement of collaborative decision-making in systematic review methodology.

"…one of the students I was working with we didn't all see each other at the exact same time so she just went home got all the articles she wanted did the work and then submitted it to him and he actually spoke to her in the group interview and said, or the group session and said no everyone has to have the same articles, so you guys have to share your articles…"

Participant 3

Collaborative decision-making was therefore reflected as a difficulty as some members were perceived to have pushed their views by discounting others.

The body of literature on systematic review clearly identifies the features that students reported as challenging as legitimate features of the methodology. These features included frustrating aspects of SR such as the tedium (e.g , Ham-Baloyi & Jordan, 2016) and collaborative decision-making (e.g Littell, Corcoran, & Pillai, 2008). These features are typically reported to be integral to securing a high level of methodological rigour and coherence (Perry & Hammond, 2002; Centre for Reviews and Dissemination, 2008; Frunza, Inkpen, & Matwin, 2010). However, in the present study students report these aspects as obstacles and difficulties. One possible explanation for this is the intersection of the high level of technicality required and the vicissitudes of group work that will be discussed in the next thematic cluster.

Sub-theme C: Preparedness for Masters studies

This subtheme related to participants' perceptions as to how conducting systematic review methodology in a group prepared participants for higher level supervised research. Overall participants reported positively with some qualifications. Table 4.9 presents illustrative quotes of students' perceptions.

Table 4.9: Sub-theme *C: Preparedness for Masters Studies*

Illustrative quotes

"It almost seems like the literature review would have been – it would still have been a process to apply yourself to, but it wouldn't have prepared me as robustly…The preparation was outstanding, I am very grateful for the process…the robustness of the research I have had to be a part of, that's why I'm so grateful for the systematic review."

Participant 6

"I have done literature review before but now after systematic I understand what it is and what I can include, why am I excluding this, I can easily do that…there are a lot of clashes [at Masters level] because most people are not used to working in a group. But fortunately for me I'm used to working as a group…"

Participant 5

"that prepared me kind of in a sense that okay, I did a mini thesis I know more or less what is expected and how this is going to go so I went into my current into Master's thinking the same thing and it prepares you but I think it can only prepare you so much…"

Participant 3

Many reported that systematic reviews prepared them well in mastering essential methodological principles to evaluate research. Participants reported that they entered masters studies with an understanding and familiarity of terms. For example, participant 6 stated that Honours level research using a systematic review benefited her in her current Masters studies as she had experience with what methodological rigour entailed, procedures and abstracts and screening of articles for their quality. Participant 4 reported that systematic review methodology provided a good foundation for research as she could enter Masters with a sense of confidence in her research skills to be able to carry it over into primary research such as interviews and focus groups.

Some participants felt that conducting a systematic review could not prepare them for reactive research but enabled them to feel confident enough in their skills to carry over when conducting primary research such as focus groups and interviews. Reported skills attained or enhanced were writing up an introduction, background, abstract, understanding inclusion and

exclusion criteria, team work skills and a familiarity of quantitative and qualitative data. Participant 5 reported that he was able to gain experience in the layout of academic writing needed at masters level such as how to write up an introduction and background. This was then easier to achieve at masters level as it was introduced at Honours level. Participant 6 expressed her appreciation of systematic review methodology as it enabled her to gain a deeper meaning and understanding of qualitative and quantitative data which she felt was much needed at masters level.

"For the systematic review it was a wider scope, looking at qualitative and quantitative data and synthesising that, has prepared me very well for the level of studies of Masters. Had I not done a systematic review I would have faulted at Masters level I'm convinced."

Participant 6

" It does give you kind of a foundation of conducting research so I think I would feel confident enough in my skills in conducting research to be able to kind of carry that over and do things like interviews or focus groups or create surveys and things like that."

Participant 4

Systematic reviews were perceived to be a good preparation for consuming large volumes of research in a critical manner. Participant 9 stated that having read numerous articles whilst conducting her systematic review, she was well prepared with the heavy reading load at Masters Level.

"Gearing me up for having to read so many articles all the time because that's basically what our life has become right now. So I think that is just one of the things that stood out."

Participant 9

Systematic reviews were perceived to have been a better preparation than narrative reviews. Participant 6 reported that conducting a literature review for her research project would still have been beneficial but would not have prepared her as robustly as a systematic review did. She added that had she not have conducted a systematic review at Honours Level, she wouldn't be nearly as prepared as she is now.

"I must say if I hadn't had the experience of the systematic review I think I would have been shaking in my boots with the supervisor at Master's Level because I wouldn't have known what to produce what to provide in terms of methodological rigour or sections or procedures or abstract for any of those."

Participant 6

These findings echoed the sentiments reported by Armitage and Keeble-Allen (2008) stating that honours students were in favour of conducting a systematic review as it gave them exposure to rigorous research. The review protocols required when conducting systematic reviews exposes individuals to techniques and processes such as inclusion criteria; quality assessment and search strategies (Centre for Reviews and Dissemination, 2008).

Cluster 2: Group work

This thematic category refers to experiences of conducting research in a group. Four key themes emerged namely a) Group as a whole, b) benefits of group work; c) challenges of group work and d) differing personalities. Some themes included sub-themes that will be discussed later.

Theme 4: Group-as-a-whole. The group members had to form a whole or functioning group unit and find ways to work as a group rather than individual members. Two sub-themes emerged in relation to the group as a whole namely a) core function and b) group familiarity

Subtheme A: Core function. The group setting brought together students from diverse backgrounds to work together towards a common goal despite their differing personalities, individual styles and differing work ethics. Group work required individuals to be dependent on each other to achieve a common goal. Thus the group took on a life of its own with a core function or role and will be illustrated in the quotes below.

"The method you need to follow is very strict so it was difficult because you needed people to be on the same page with you, you can't miss a meeting and we had done something and you come next week and we can redo that or what not."

Participant 1

The participants reported that working in a group meant that deadlines and deliverables were jointly attained or missed. Thus "the group" had to be sufficiently focused to attain the primary function or task of the group i.e. complete the research requirement. The participants identified numerous threats to this core function and listed the following ways in which threats to completion were managed in an attempt to ensure the life or cohesiveness of the group.

Table 4.10

Sub-t*heme A: Core function*

Illustrative quotes

"…I took the decision that as a group of four and headed forward I felt like I would like to use the word I was generous with the information that I had for the sake of putting this team through but it was a choice I had made and I was willing to do it but to say that all four of us came equal load absolutely not. But, fortunately it showed on the marks at the end."

Participant 6

"…one of the students I was working with we didn't all see each other at the exact same time so she just went home got all the articles she wanted did the work and then submitted it…I remember she mentioned that no she doesn't work at everyone else's pace, she has a lot of other things that she has to do as well, so we like had to either hurry up or that type of thing, so that was a bit irritating at first, but after that you kind of just like suck it up…"

Participant 3

Some participants reported that not all group members pulled their weight equally which meant that certain duties had to be absorbed in order for the work to be completed. For example, participant three described how two group members took on more responsibility in order to compensate for the lack of cooperation or performance of other members. Similarly participant six described how another group member singularly took responsibility for completing work when the group was even unable to meet. This phenomenon has been described in the literature as social loafing whereby a minority of the group fills in where other members slacked (e.g. Davies, 2009). Myers et al. (2009) found a positive link between group members who slacked in their work contribution and exclusion from group tasks by other members.

Participants reported that the ability of the group project or research to continue through the steps of the review was contingent on participants completing their respective tasks and sharing their work product. However, when members were not completing work,

participants who were working had to deal with the challenge of how to ensure the
completion of the project. For example, participant six described making a conscious decision
to share work product for the sake of the group despite unequal work load. Chung (2012)
explained that students often take on roles "by default" in order to propel or push the group
forward. This participant described "being generous" with her work for the sake of the group.
From the quotation it becomes evident that marks were awarded individually which
seemingly reflected the extent to which group members engaged with the work and the
process. Similarly, participant six distributed her independent work product.

*"…I took the decision that as a group of four and headed forward I felt like I would like to use the
word I was generous with the information that I had for the sake of putting this team through but it
was a choice I had made and I was willing to do it but to say that all four of us came equal load
absolutely not. But, fortunately it showed on the marks at the end."*

Participant 6

Participants also reported that some group members were openly confrontational when
the group was not performing as a cohesive whole. Confrontational group members were
more expressive about their feeling, as well as their perceptions of others and what they
required in order to move forward. For example, participant three reported that a group
member put an ultimatum to the group after expressing her reality and needs but also ended
up taking an action that the group needed.

*"…I remember she mentioned that no she doesn't work at everyone else's pace, she has a lot of other
things that she has to do as well, so we like had to either hurry up or that type of thing, so that was a
bit irritating at first, but after that you kind of just like suck it up…"*
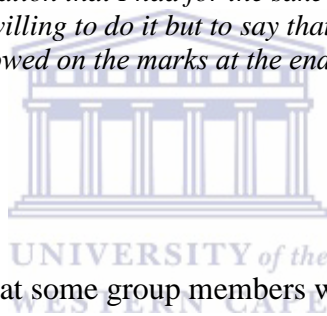
Participant 3

The quote above also described how the other members accepted the chastisement
despite their feelings about it. This suggests that actions which can ensure the group progress

will be tolerated above individual needs or feelings. For example, participant one made a decision to complete others work which inadvertently benefited the group moving forward. This was evident in the use of her word "we" when referring to the final submission date rather than it being an individual motivation.

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"In the end it ended up maybe two people in the group trying to work out everything and then just sending it to everyone because you know they not going to cooperate and we needed to reach the date for submission."

Participant 1

Overall participants reported that working in a group meant that they had to manage interpersonal and dynamic challenges. These were not always negotiated proactively and sometimes meant that sacrifices were made at an individual or group level in the service of the core group task being completed. The emergence of this sub-theme was consistent with literature. For example, French, Walker and Shore (2011) stated that "a group has a primary directive which is to ensure that the group survives and achieves its overall objective" which in this case was completing the research (p.394). Similarly, when the group comes into existence it requires individuals to be dependent on each other in order to achieve a common goal (Pearson, 2000). Befar, Peterson, Mannix and Trochim (2008) identified process conflicts that pertained to conflict around group tasks which included work distribution. Bentley and Warwick (2013) went further stating that group members will find strategies to cope with challenges in productivity, commitment and functioning in order to ensure that the group task is completed. Similarly, Rudman and Kruger (2014) stated conflict is expected in a group setting, but found that students are able to resolve it amongst themselves in order to proceed with the task. The psychodynamic perspective refers to the above as an unconscious process, whereby the group naturally gravitates towards tolerance of its members in order to

survive (Geldenhuys, 2012). In this case in order to complete the research. This has also been referred to as group mind (Fraher, 2004) or group-as-a-whole (Fonagy, 2003).

Sub-theme B: Group familiarity. Group familiarity was perceived to have positive implications on group performance. Participants described their experience of entering the group setting as less intimidating due to the members being familiar with each other. Most students explained that they knew and were often friends with their group members before entering the group setting which made the prospect of group work less intimidating. The quotes below illustrate the essence of this sub-theme.

Table 4.11

Sub-theme B: Group familiarity

Illustrative quotes
"Well for me it was actually fine because most of the people that was in my group, we were all basically friends so that sort of made it easier to work together. We knew each other's strengths and weaknesses."
Participant 9
"We were four in a group, but in my group, fortunately we understood each other because they were in my class so we worked well."
Participant 5
"The students that I, that was with me was students obviously in my class and it was friends that I had within the group as well. So I think those that I didn't maybe know, I wouldn't really go to them. I would really go to the ones that I had relationship with. And I think that just kind of laid the foundation for me in just being confident even in going to them and asking them to assist with certain challenges…for me it was a huge advantage."
Participant 8
"You work on your own I guess most of the time the only time I actually spoke to my group was in supervision and when we spoke about what articles to use besides myself and one of my other friends that we were closer, we would work often together…"
Participant 3

"There were some different experiences mostly it was good working in a group because the people who I worked with I was quite close to them and we kind of understood the way that each other worked so it was very helpful…"

<div align="right">***Participant 4***</div>

Participants commented on their easy transition into the group due to a sharing of friendships prior to entering the group. Prior friendships were perceived to have improved group performance as a whole through a pre-existing platform or basis for communication and identification with each other.

Participant nine reported that having a prior, positive, relationship with her group members gave her insight into their "strength and weaknesses." therefore facilitating smoother and more efficient group processes. This is reflected in participant five's experience stating that "fortunately" there was a prior relationship enabling the group to work well together. Participants reported a positive link between close relationships and working as a whole. The quotes below capture this sentiment well:

"Well for me it was actually fine because most of the people that was in my group, we were all basically friends so that sort of made it easier to work together. We knew each other's strengths and weaknesses."

<div align="right">***Participant 9***</div>

"We were four in a group, but in my group, fortunately we understood each other because they were in my class so we worked well."

<div align="right">***Participant 5***</div>

Since prior friendships were already formed outside of the group setting, some were reliant on those that they had relationships with. For example, participant eight only felt encouraged to seek help in the group from those that she shared close relationships with.

"The students that I, that was with me was students obviously in my class and it was friends that I had within the group as well. So I think those that I didn't maybe know, I wouldn't really go to them. I would really go to the ones that I had relationship with. And I think that just kind of laid the foundation for me in just being confident even in going to them and asking them to assist with certain challenges…for me it was a huge advantage."   ***Participant 8***

This finding illustrates that familiarity with group members softened the transition into the group and provided a basis for collaborative work. The finding resonated with the body of literature that clearly concluded that familiarity with group members constituted or resulted in better group cohesion (e.g. Rockett & Okhuysen, 2002). Cumming (2010) is in agreement that there is a positive correlation between prior group familiarity and group functioning, as well as execution of tasks. This is supported by Vakkalanka and Engu (2012) who reported that group familiarity renders trust between group members that enable them to share information more freely.

Cluster 2, Theme 5: Benefits of group work

All participants recognized the substantial benefits of working in a group. The group provided a platform for students to receive peer supervision, support academically and emotionally and verification of information and processes. The Group work was also reported to have provided a sense of normalization of feelings and work processes, as well as a lighter work load. Five sub-themes were highlighted namely, a) peer support, b) friendship and camaraderie, c) peer supervision, d) shared workload, e) normalization. A number of benefits were identified by participants.

Sub-theme A: Peer support. Practical and emotional support was available in the group setting. The opportunity to engage with other group members academically, but also emotionally was appreciated. Some described the group setting as a safe and comfortable space in contrast to individual supervision that can be quite intimidating. Table 4.12 below summarizes quotes that illustrate the subtheme.

Table 4.12: *Theme 2: Peer support*

Illustrative quotes
"...it was very helpful as well and they also provided support practically and also emotionally..."   **Participant 8**

"When having supervision you not the sole person in the room with the supervisor, you have other people that can sort of back you up…meeting alone with your supervisor, there's a sort of level of anxiety that you have as a student, whether you actually meet your supervisors expectations
Participant 9

"Working with everyone else, you know if everyone is going through the same thing it kind of makes it easier because you can always ask them if you get stuck with something,. You can ask them for example, with systematic review, how to do this and how to do that…"
Participant 3

"The pro's [of group work] was thee just having the peer involvement and being able to ask…having a support base to work from…"
Participant 8

Group support was reported as beneficial in choosing correct articles and checking whether procedures were followed properly. Some group members reported that they were often asked for help from the different group members who struggled with the research. The group enabled some to feel a sense of normalization, as they often shared similar anxieties and challenges. These findings resonated with Bozic and Carter (2002) who expressed that the supervisee can feel encouraged through the observation that other group members experience similar problems or challenges as they did. Likewise Keenan (2014) reported that group supervision helps to lessen the anxiety experienced in supervision and was thus less intimidating for students.

Sub-theme B: Peer supervision. Peer supervision included monitoring and accountability. Participants reported that it was helpful to obtain additional views on research work and evaluate whether they were on the right track. Participants reported that group interaction provided opportunities for peers to re-examine questions and concepts and gain deeper understandings. Peer input during group supervision was beneficial for acquiring feedback and reflection during the research process. Illustrative quotes are presented in Table 4.13 below.

Table 4.13: *Theme 2: Peer supervision*

Illustrative quotes

"I think a systematic review is just so huge if you want to be thorough, you need someone else to be checking what you are doing and I think I appreciate that part the most that there is someone double checking what you are doing because there are so many things you can miss if you are doing it on your own."

Participant 1

"It was very helpful getting other people's opinions and kind of helping to see if what you had done was the right thing and kind of finding the way forward."

Participant 5

"...working as a group, at the end it helped as in listening [to] the bad and also checking up on each other, did you choose the right articles? Did we follow the procedures?..."
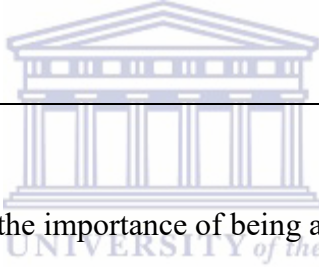
Participant 4

"[Group work] ...at times you wouldn't really know what to do next and you were able to access uhm people in your group and find out from them, I think we were just so grateful to each other."

Participant 3

"Systematic review you have to check on each other for it to be objective so eight of us in our class I'm well prepared."

Participant 4

Participant one emphasized the importance of being able to check each other's work in the group. This was important for quality assurance purposes as important information may have been missed had they viewed it individually. Participant four explained how questions could be reflected on more in the group setting. This is supported by Keenan (2014) describing the safe environment which the group brings enabling students to feel comfortable asking questions and receiving assistance from other group members. Participants reflected that peer supervision continued outside of scheduled supervision times. This suggests that the peer supervisory space was meaningful to group members and was incorporated into their broader academic experience. These findings resonated with Boud et al., (2014) who described peer assessment as an opportunity to reflect on work from an unbiased position thereby evaluating themselves more accurately. Similarly Reiser and Dempsey (2012) suggested that peer groups can provide feedback and assist in deepening one's understanding of academic content.

Sub-theme C: Friendship and Camaraderie. Genuine friendships were formed in the group as a result of working closely together. Some mentioned that it made it easier to work together in the group when group members became friends or developed camaraderie. Friendships formed in the group continued beyond the group task. Table 4.14 below captures quotes from participants to this effect.

Table 4.14: *Theme 2: Friendship and Camaraderie*

Illustrative quotes
"…a lot of us became friends through that process because obviously we worked closely together so it was actually a very good time working with the people." *Participant 4*
"Like sometimes everything is going so fast that she comes back to certain things so that was nice and personality wise we got on very well and I think it ended up being not just the student mentor supervisor relationship, because we still friends now" *Participant 3*

Participant four expressed her admiration for the close friendships she was able to form in the group setting. This was evident in the participant's use of the word "actually" suggesting that there may have been a preconceived idea that group work was viewed in more negative light. Interestingly, participant three described a friendship which evolved from a mentorship role to a friendship

"…a lot of us became friends through that process because obviously we worked closely together so it was actually a very good time working with the people."

Participant 4

"Like sometimes everything is going so fast that she comes back to certain things so that was nice and personality wise we got on very well and I think it ended up being not just the student mentor supervisor relationship, because we still friends now"

Participant 3

Burdett (2003) found that forming friendships in the group was a significantly positive experience in student group work. Lee (2008) recognized that friendships may form between

supervisor and student and found that some viewed their supervisor as more than a mentor, but as a friend.

Sub-theme D: Shared work load. Participants recognized the benefits of having a shared workload.

Table 4.15: *Theme 2: Shared workload*

Illustrative quotes
"I think that it helped a lot being in a group because the sort of the workload was spread and they allowed us to split up the systematic review into three instead of everyone just writing their own so that was probably the only plus point."
Participant 2
"It did make it a bit easier the workload was lighter because I can't imagine doing a systematic review on my own because it is a lot of work"
Participant 1

Interestingly, participant one perceived the shared workload to be the only benefit of group work. Participant one commented on how dividing the workload between group members facilitated her individual performance.

"I think that it helped a lot being in a group because the sort of the workload was spread and they allowed us to split up the systematic review into three instead of everyone just writing their own so that was probably the only plus point."

Participant 2

"It did make it a bit easier the workload was lighter because I can't imagine doing a systematic review on my own because it is a lot of work"

Participant 1

The perceived magnitude of the methodology was reduced through the ability of sharing or dividing of the research. Burdett (2003) found a positive link between a shared workload within the group setting and positive experiences of group work.

Sub-theme E: Normalization. Some students perceived the group to have provided

affirmation or normalization of the feelings of not knowing, frustrations with group or

research tasks.

Table 4.16: *Theme 2: Normalization*

Illustrative quotes
"Coming into the group setting, doing a systematic review, wasn't as threatening I think especially with the magnitude of the study uhm. I think everyone started off at the same place and I think that helped. No one really knew what was happening and that was comforting."   *Participant 8*
"It kind of makes you feel like, you know, we all in this together, you all have the same deadlines; you can all talk about it together."   *Participant 3*

Participant eight felt reassured and supported within the group setting as she was able

to share similar challenges thus reducing feelings of apprehension. Participant three shared

similar feelings in that she was able she was able to verbalize her feelings on particular group

aspects. Sarkisian (2010) stated that the opportunity to share personal experiences concerning

work, improve the quality of group processes as members can often relate to particular

aspects thereby providing a sense of normalization.

Cluster 2, Theme 6: Challenges of group work

Participants identified challenges to group functioning that substantially impacted the

research process. Three sub-themes were highlighted namely, a) differing work ethics, b)

unequal work load/ contribution, c) lack of cooperative work

Subtheme A: differing work ethics. The group had to establish a work ethic and rhythm

with a division of labour, role assignation and accountability that all impact whether the

group succeeds in achieving its primary goal which is to complete the research. This

constituted a work plan that was contingent on the work ethic of each member for its

feasibility. Differences in work ethic and attributions about the perceived differences were expressed as having negative effects on the progress of the group. Table 4.15 reflects illustrative quotes to support it in the subtheme.

Table 4.17: *Sub-theme A: Differing work ethics*

Illustrative quotes

"There were some people who were kind of quieter so when we had our group discussions they didn't really say much but those people they did the work they didn't really contribute much to the discussions, but they did do like when it came time to sharing the work they had done the work."

Participant 4

"We had one guy two people were foreigners that came over and who had different ideas of what hard work entails and then people just don't sleep at night at all so they are just on top of it the whole time and you are like how the heck are you doing it"

Participant 1

"There are those who are very diligent on how to do things and then those lacking that. I think when it comes to if there's certain deadlines if you need to maybe do something to a certain deadline they stick to that, they work hard and that's what I mean by diligent and just covering all bases at a specific time of which it is requested."

Participant 8

"People are not pitching for meetings especially when it is so difficult to find a slot that fits all of us"

Participant 4

" There was definitely in the group obviously the person who takes charge uhm, but that sort of didn't cause any drama, so that was okay, uhm and then there was also people who sort of done their work much more quicker than others in the group…

Participant 9

"And then you have the other personality type that's very passive and last minute thing. Waiting for last minute and then doing it."

Participant 8

From Table 4.17 above it emerged that participants felt that students had different ideas about what hard work and a good work ethic entailed. The differences they observed underscored the relativity of the definition of work ethic. These differences contributed to feelings of anxiety, competence, and frustration. Participants attempted to make sense of it by forming attributions such as being a "foreigner" and "personality" such as "a happy-go-

lucky-person" and "last minute worker." In essence group progress was determined by the

pace of the slowest or weakest worker. Participant one reported that some group members

would complete their work in a timely manner, but opted to remain out of group discussions.

Participant one described group members who failed to produce their work in a timely

manner and the challenge of addressing them.

"And then we had someone else who was always happy, happy just a very happy person and then you feel almost bad to say like when you going to do your work because you are so happy the whole time and like just we can do it, but we not seeing your contribution to it so it was those things. And then you have the other personality type, maybe that, is just very passive and last minute, waiting for last minute and then doing…And then I told you about our energy bunny? Which is always on top of it…The other one, the foreign girl her personality was a last minute worker which for some people it works out and I am sure it worked out for her but if you are in a group it can make the other people – it can either make us behind or it can make us fairly anxious because we know that we are not last minute workers so I am not a last minute worker so I need at least some time, so that was a bit difficult."

Participant 1

Participant 9 recalled that the members differed in their pace of completing the work
required.

" There was definitely in the group obviously the person who takes charge uhm, but that sort of didn't cause any drama, so that was okay, uhm and then there was also people who sort of done their work much more quicker than others in the group…

Participant 9

The literature on group functioning also highlighted that the group task is threatened

when group members work inconsistently, failed to stick to deadlines, produced poor quality

work under the pressure of time or procrastination (e.g. Davies, 2009). Similarly, when the

necessary tasks were not completed by designated members other members needed to fill in

the gaps causing feelings of frustration at times (e.g. Capdeferro & Romero 2012). Tripathi

and Reddy (2008) reported that group progress was delayed by having to wait on the slowest

worker in the group before proceeding in the research process. What emerged more clearly

from this subtheme is that differences in work ethic impacts progress, process and

relationships. Attempts to understand and respond to these observed/ perceived differences in

work ethic reflect that work ethic is socially constructed and that the expectations around work ethic is socially embedded (Ciletti, 2010).

Sub-theme B: Unequal work load/contribution. Some participants reported that not everyone in the group pulled their weight which impacted the entire research process negatively. Two outcomes were identified. First, members who took responsibility for completing the work on behalf of the group felt that they needed to be generous with their work product. For example Participant 6 reported that as others in the group were not pulling their weight, she was thrusted into being "generous" with the information that she had in order for the group to proceed at a steady pace. Morgeson, Derue and Karam, (2010) reported that some group members "intervene" in group work by taking on some of the other group members tasks in order to progress with the particular given task. Interestingly, Burdett (2003) suggested that some students who assume leadership positions carry an idea that they "do most of the work." This suggests that there may be a socially constructed view on the way or motivation in which work is carried out.

Second, the work load was disproportionately carried by a subset of the group members. For example, Participant one expressed frustration when members would not pitch for meetings or showed up at meetings not having completed what they needed to which held the entire group back from proceeded to the next phase. Participant 4 stated that due to incomplete or incorrect work the research process took longer. More work was required to attend to other people's mistakes whereas this would benefit others.

Table 4.18: *Sub-theme B:* Unequal work load/contribution

Illustrative quotes
"Working as a team it wasn't unpleasant, don't get me wrong it wasn't unpleasant but it was unequal and as far as team work goes."   ***Participant 6***

"...people in the group didn't really do their part which made it difficult…"

Participant 4

"In the end it ended up maybe two people in the group trying to work out everything and then just sending it to everyone because you know they not going to cooperate and we needed to reach the date for submission."

Participant 1

This finding has been supported through literature, as unequal work contribution remains a prevalent challenge to group work (D'Souza & Wood, 2007; Burdett, 2009; Freeman & Greenacre, 2011; Marshall, 2013). Hall (2013) identified students who do not pull their weight and perform consistently, are reported through literature as "free-riding." More importantly, their behaviour places other group members in a bind since they will have to complete the work themselves in order to ensure the group delivery whilst carrying the other members or sharing their work product with group members who have not contributed (Bentley &Warwick, 2013). Cambell and Li (2006) described student's lack of work contribution in the group as problematic and irritated and upset students. This resulted in work being split between less people who could be trusted to complete work in a timely manner to meet the deadline

Sub-theme C: Lack of Cooperative work. Participants reported that the lack of cooperative work was a challenge to the group achieving its goal. This was separated as an independent subtheme since the group was required to work collaboratively in order to execute the operational steps of systematic review methodology. Table 4.19 below includes quotes that illustrate participants' experiences of not being able to execute the operational steps in designated pairs or groups as required by the systematic review methodology.

Table 4.19: Sub-*theme C: Lack of Cooperative work*

Illustrative quotes

"But I didn't do my searches yet and the rest are already to go on to phase two or step two"

Participant 1

"„she also worked way ahead of everyone else so she would finish everything on time way in advance, give it to him and then we kind of like but we haven't all decided on the articles that we wanted to choose, so that was a bit irritating…"

Participant 3

"Obviously having to work in a group, you actually have to work at the pace of the slowest member in the group, so that's definitely a hindrance…having to wait on that person."

Participant 9

Frustration was expressed when group members did not work in unison, worked ahead of the group or lagged behind the group. Some group members would work ahead of the group and present their work to the supervisor without consulting other group members. This resulted in disagreements amongst certain group members. This resulted in members no longer working as a group, but as individuals.

The literature on systematic review methodology clearly indicated that at least two reviewers must execute each operational step (Centre for reviews and dissemination, 2008). Even more so, these pairs of reviewers must reach consensus on all the decisions taken at each operational step (Stewart, 2014). In this instance groups constituted a review team that had to work collaboratively and reach consensus. Failure to work collaboratively would constitute a threat to the methodological rigour of the study due to non-adherence to the review protocol (Smith, Devane, Begley, & Clarke, 2011; McDonagh, Peterson, Raina, Chang & Shekelle, 2013). A particular challenge in this instance is that the group task of conducting a systematic review entails cooperative work for the purposes of ensuring methodological rigour and adherence to review protocols. Thus participants could have experienced greater
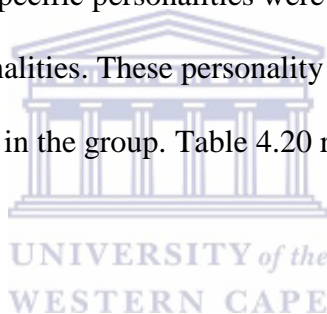
levels of stress about the lack of cooperative or collaborative work based on the intersection between group work and the design elements of systematic reviews. .

Cluster 2, Theme 7: Differing personalities/Roles

Working in a group also meant that students had to contend with personality differences. Participants reported differences in personalities in a binary way where dominance or forcefulness was juxtaposed with quietness or being reserved. Two subthemes were identified namely A) Personality types and B) Impact on functioning.

Sub-theme A: Personality types. This subtheme related to the types ofpersonalities identified by participants. Three specific personalities were described 1.) dominant 2.) quiet/ reserved and 3.) leadership personalities. These personality types are also associated with particular roles that were fulfilled in the group. Table 4.20 reflects the personality types identified, with illustrative quotes.

Table 4.20: Personality types

llustrative quotes
Driven/Assertive/ Dominant personalities

"...like some people would bring their work and then she would say no that is not right you have to do it this way and she wasn't very good at listening to what other people had to say so that kind of resulted in some conflict."

<div align="right">

Participant 4
</div>

"...if you meet others they want to overrule other decisions…"

<div align="right">

Participant 5
</div>

"The other three that I was in a group with we were a group of four they were in their twenties one in particular the one in particular was more driven than the other two was because she had a clear life goal she knew that she wants to embark on post graduate studies so I could say her drivenness?"

<div align="right">

Participant 6
</div>

"And then I told you about our energiser bunny? Which is always on top of it!"

<div align="right">

Participant 1
</div>

"There were other people who kind of took charge just from the beginning, there were people who decided to just take charge and kind of be the leaders or something of the group those people were very outspoken and kind of tried to drive the process in the direction if they wanted it to go."

Participant 4

Quiet/reserved personalities

"I'm a very laidback type of guy, I mean me myself I was a chilled guy always at the back."
Participant 7

"There were some people who were quieter so when we had our group discussions they didn't really say much…I think I wasn't one of the dominant parties I think I was more the kind of quieter parties."
Participant 4

Leadership personalities

"I kind of took the bull by the horns and like any group situation a leader quickly emerges whether that leader is bossy or determined or on a different time schedule there are different motivations for emerging as a leader."
Participant 6

"There were other people who kind of took charge and kind of be the   leaders or something of the group those people were very outspoken and kind of tried to drive the process in the direction they wanted it to go."
Participant 4

An interesting note is that the "negative" personalities were described by their traits whereas positive personalities were described by the function fulfilled in the group. Dominant personalities were described as poor listeners and drove the process their way. Littauer (2001) supports this finding describing driven personalities as great leaders but not open to any other perspective since that were always right.

Some group members, who did not consider themselves as a "leader" or "dominant," described a sense of isolation from the group as they were are not included in decisions. Burke (2011) is in agreement here that leaders often surface in group settings and what often happens is those with quieter voices rarely oppose the dominant view for fear of conflict.

Certain personalities were portrayed positively; propelling the group forward ensuring the group remained on track with the end goal. Dominant personalities were described as the "take charge leaders" who steered the process in a direction in which they wanted it to go.

Hayes (2002) linked dominant group members to positive behaviour such as initiating and providing relevant information the group.

Sub-theme B: Impact of personality on group functioning

Personality factors were reported across several interviews as having a significant impact on the group's performance. Participants described working with different personalities as challenging and underscored that personalities impacted the ability of the group to function or progress on the research tasks. In short, participants indicated that personalities impacted the group and constituted another dimension to deal with, but that it did not make it impossible to complete the group task as illustrated in the Table 4.21 below. Dominant personalities and more reserved personalities both impact the functioning of the group.
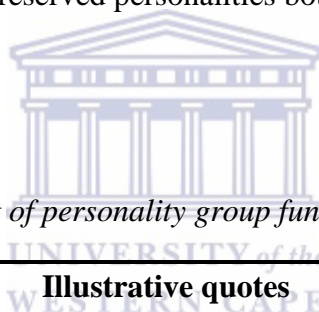
Table 4.21: Sub-theme B: *Impact of personality group functioning*

Illustrative quotes
"It was challenging with people who had more dominant kind of personalities and kind of pushed their way of doing things. But it didn't make it impossible to do it we kind of find ways to make it work."   *Participant 4*
" There was a girl who was very kind of dominant and take charge and she got people annoyed with her for trying to constantly push her agenda…"   *Participant 4*
"…they always said I am the guy who calmed the group down if there is a fight in the group I would say listen guys let's do this…"   *Participant 5*
"I didn't always have a lot to say in the group, but I did my work."   *Participant 7*

Differing personalities created challenges in the group setting e.g. conflict between its members, individual agenda's, lack of participation and a lack of consensus in decision-

making. However, challenges were often managed in the group in order to meet deadlines.

Dominant types provided direction but risked the harmony of the group. Quiet or reserved

personalities ensured that the group's primary function and the required work was completed,

thus providing stability and continued progress and momentum. Leadership types

safeguarded against conflict reaching heights that could affect the progression of the group.

"It was challenging with people who had more dominant kind of personalities and kind of pushed their way of doing things. But it didn't make it impossible to do it we kind of find ways to make it work."

Participant 4

" There was a girl who was very kind of dominant and take charge and she got people annoyed with her for trying to constantly push her agenda…"

Participant 4

Some participants described themselves as "chilled" and "laidback" always retreating

to the back yet still produced the work required. Other group members would come up with

ideas, these group members would just build on those ideas. These group members would

often help others wherever they are battling even as the questions piled up. Some group

members were described as more reserved or withdrawn who didn't always share their

opinions or ideas that they had with the rest of the group. "Quieter personalities" who rarely

took part in group discussions yet they did contribute to work. Some described themselves as

peace makers in the group and were able to calm the group when conflicts arose. Peace

making also meant that there was a high tolerance to allowing others to take over and do

things their way yet remain calm. According to Forrester and Tashchian (2010) emotional

stability described individuals who were able to tolerate the erratic behaviours of others and

managing the behaviours of group members. Participant five reported that his quieter

personality assisted in settling the group and state that others perceived him as "the guy who

calmed the group down." This resonates with Hamilton (2013) describing the presence of

"harmonizers" in the group setting who helped move the group forward in a constructive way when tension arises.

"...they always said I am the guy who calmed the group down if there is a fight in the group I would say listen guys let's do this…"

Participant 5

There are two central insights that emerged. One being that in any group situation leaders will emerge regardless of their personality type. Secondly, the group process and core function has to be attained in the context of interpersonal dynamics and personality styles.

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Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of themes

The present study explored Masters Psychology students' perceptions of the extent to which their experiences in research at Honours level prepared them for conducting supervised research in Masters programmes. The participants were recruited based on having completed the Honours research requirements using systematic review methodology in groups. In taking a retrospective view, students were able to identify factors which they felt hindered or facilitated their preparedness for further postgraduate studies, i.e. Masters degrees. In particular they were able to reflect on how the learning outcomes of the Honours research requirement articulated into the functioning at Masters level. Two thematic clusters were extracted from the thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews. The first thematic cluster included content related to the use of systematic review methodology. Three themes were included in this cluster namely, a) pedagogical decisions, b) conducting systematic reviews and c) evaluation of systematic reviews.

A). Pedagogical considerations: related to the academic or pedagogical reasoning behind using systematic review methodology albeit from the students' perspective. The participants thematically identified three considerations that effectively constituted issues of pedagogy. First, orientation was an important consideration which was aimed at inducting students into the requirements and learning outcomes of the research component. Participants thought that orientation into the research module substantially contributed to their understanding of the methodology and the motivations behind having to use it at a curricular level i.e. mandated by the programme. Participants felt that the orientation was particularly important as the systematic review methodology was a new concept to all students.

Second, (technical and theoretical aspects) participants reported that they found the systematic nature of the systematic review helpful. The step-by step process was appreciated as it reduced anxieties by guiding students through the specific steps at each stage of the research process. The daunting research process was now more structured and therefore felt more manageable. Participants identified the core features of systematic review and reported that they experienced it as tedious with copious amounts of work. This was consistent with the literature.

Third, (structural provisions) participants felt that an induction workshop was beneficial in reducing anxieties and confusion about the methodology. There were two approaches to orientation. Programme A and Programme B provided a once-off orientation workshop. Participants from Programme A reported that the once-off workshop was not optimal in that aspects related to later stages of the project were not retained and therefore not accessible at the time when it was most needed. These participants felt that having workshops spread across the module would have been more beneficial. In addition, participants reflected that the expertise of the presenter during orientation was an important factor that could off-set the structure (once off versus staggered) of the orientation.

A. Conducting systematic reviews: The second theme related experiences of conducting the research. First, conceptualisation and execution: Participants reported different approaches to conceptualizing the execution of their work. Some participants perceived the group to not have a clearly defined group strategy or plan, but having an understanding of what needed to be done. Conceptualization of a work plan entailed a delegation strategy that

required pooling of individual work product rather than working as a group. The group therefore did not work together as a whole.

Some participants reported initial resistance to meeting as a group to develop or conceptualize a work plan. For example, participant nine explained that there were instances when the group delayed work and then came together and took the decision to schedule additional meetings as submission drew closer.

Participants did not explicitly set out to develop a group plan. The findings suggest that participants demonstrated resistance to meeting in order to conceptualize a group plan. This resistance manifested an avoidance of meetings or engagement with required tasks, devaluing the importance of group meetings and focusing on delegation of tasks rather than conceptualizing a coherent group plan.

Second, feedback: There was an interplay between the type of feedback given and the preference of the student. Positive feedback experiences at Honours level carried a level of expectation upon entering Masters studies. There were several references to preferring the Honours supervisor to the Masters supervisor. Different experiences of feedback were reported. Delayed feedback impacted the group negatively resulting causing the group to fall behind other groups. Limited feedback caused confusion as there was often no sufficient clarity on what was expected. Within the group setting co-supervisors were also present. Frustration and anxiety was expressed due to delayed email responses regarding feedback. In one case this resulted in a switch in supervisor. There was a significant appreciation for regular and prompt feedback Prompt feedback was helpful when needing to meet deadlines since it allowed sufficient time to work. Good end results were reported after receiving multiple drafts of feedback from their supervisor. Acknowledgement from the supervisor on time lost was appreciated due to delayed feedback. Participants emphasized the importance of

detailed feedback which facilitated a clearer understanding of areas requiring attention. When feedback was clear, students felt that they were able to proceed with confidence and not hold anxiety due to confusion regarding what was expected. Detailed feedback enabled students to refine their work so that they were able to produce a work of a higher standard. The social constructionist view is depicted through prior interaction with the supervisor at Honours level, which formed a view or assumption on what feedback should look like. Upon entering masters studies their idea of what feedback should constitute was shaped by their prior experience. The way they made sense of their world now at masters level was through their prior experience.

C.) *Evaluation of systematic reviews*: The third theme included thematic content that reflected evaluative comments from participants. First, benefits. Participants reflected on the systematic review as a positive experience, though many experienced this type of methodology unfavourably at the start. Despite earlier perceptions, participants felt that they were able to conduct high level research. Participants felt that the methodology provided the necessary scaffolding to introduce students to research at the Honours level. Participants reported that systematic review methodology raised a growing appreciation for the methodological quality of published or disseminated work. Through the process of SR, participants reported that they were now more critical of the quality of the methodology underlying the findings. The appraisal step in particular helped to develop a clearer sense of the relationship between the quality of methodology and the quality of the findings. In essence, participants started to identify that they were consumers of research.

Second, challenges: The methodology was often described as time consuming. Firstly, searching and screening a large quantity of articles required extensive time. Secondly, the group produced different levels of quality. Identifying and fixing mistakes took a considerable amount time and was perceived as a frustrating. These errors were only

identified once work was submitted which impacted the progression to the next phase of the research. Group efficiency was compromised through battling to schedule meeting times to accommodate all of its members.

Another aspect that was difficult about using systematic review was the requirement that raters had to come to a consensus. In this process there were disagreements on article selection which held up the research process. Though it is the provision of the methodology that disputes be debated until resolved, participant 3 reported conflicts that resulted in some members withdrawing from the group and completing work individually. Protocols for handling these disputes were made through the intervention of the supervisor. Lack of agreement was seen as a hindrance rather than a natural unfolding of the process which means that reviewers had differentiated opinions or the instructions were unclear. Participant 5 also described conflict arising when important decisions needed to be made regarding the article selections. This conflict was not always resolved and resulted in work methods that were not conducive to the requirement of collaborative decision-making in systematic review methodology. Collaborative decision-making was therefore reflected as a difficulty as some members were perceived to have pushed their views by discounting others.

Third, preparedness for higher degrees. Many reported that systematic reviews prepared them well for masters studies. The systematic review process entailed them grappling with and grasping essential methodological principles to evaluate research. Participants described the robustness and rigour required to conduct a systematic review in reporting on rigorous procedures that needed to be followed in keeping with high methodological standards. Screening large volumes of research was reported as good preparation for masters studies as the content is greater at that level. Participants were exposed to key terminology such as inclusion and exclusion criteria, and qualitative and quantitative data. Participants became familiar with the basic layout of work such as, what is expected in the abstract, introduction

and background sections of research reports. Team work skills were learnt through their experience of group work which made it easier to work in groups in coursework requirements at masters level.

The second thematic cluster included content related to the use of systematic review methodology. Three themes were included in this cluster namely, a) group as a whole, b) benefits of group work, c) challenges of group work and d) differing personalities.

A) *Group as a whole: First, core function***:** The group had a core function of completing the research. Group work required individuals to be dependent on each other to achieve a common goal. Certain duties had to be absorbed in order for the work to be completed. Proceeding through the steps of the review was contingent on students completing their respective tasks and sharing their work product. Participants reported that working in a group meant that they had to manage interpersonal and dynamic challenges. These were not always negotiated proactively and sometimes meant that sacrifices were made at an individual or group level in the service of the core group task being completed. Members who were not fulfilling their work contribution resulted in other members needing to deal with the challenge of how to ensure the completion of the project. Open confrontation was used when the group was not performing as a cohesive whole.

Second, group familiarity: Familiarity with group members was perceived to have positive implications on group performance. Participants described their experience of entering the group setting as less intimidating due to the familiarity of its members. Most students explained that they knew and were often friends with their group members before entering the group setting which lessened the intimidation factor. Participants commented on their easy transition into the group due to a sharing of friendships prior to entering the group.

Prior friendships were perceived to have improved group performance as a whole through better communication and identification.

B) *Benefits of group work***:** The second theme reported on some of the challenges and benefits of group work. First, peer support: Confusion about what was expected could be resolved in the group setting as other students could help clarify points or content. Peer support was available in the group setting and was perceived to have helped students through support both on a practical and emotional level. Students' expectations and misgivings about group was based on earlier experiences or understanding of what group work entailed.

Second, peer supervision: Monitoring and accountability through peer supervision was highlighted as beneficial in producing work that was thorough and verification of information and processes. Being able to reflect on each other's work found to be helpful as often there were areas that may have been missed.

Third, friendship and camaraderie: The development of friendships in the group was perceived as a significant experience. Close friendships were formed which enhanced the quality of group processes. Friendship within the group also impacted the experience of group work as negative or undesirable to perceiving its benefits. Some reported that friendships formed within group supervision were translated to friendships outside of the Honours year and at times still supportive in further studies.

Fourth, shared workload: Dividing the workload between group members facilitated individual performance. The enormity of the research project was perceived as less overwhelming to students as they were able to share in the workload. Interestingly, a shared workload was perceived by some as the only benefit of group work.

Fifth, normalization: The group brought a sense of normalization through group interaction. The normalization experienced in the group setting enabled students to disclose a shared reality of some of the challenges faced emotionally and academically. Thus through peer interaction there was an opportunity to process and make sense in their new social context.

C) *Challenges of group work***:** The third theme identified the challenges reported when describing group work. Firstly, differing work ethics: Challenges to group work included differing work ethics, unequal workload or contribution, lack of cooperative work and the impact of personalities. Differences in work ethic were perceived as having negative effects on the progress of the group. Group work hindered the research process in that not every student had the same work ethic. Some students reported frustration with students who neglected their work until the deadline drew closer and then would inquire from them how to proceed. The group had to work at the pace of the slowest worker which was a major hindrance to the rest of the group. Group progress was determined by the pace of the slowest worker. Different ideas of what hard work entailed hindered group progress as it contributed to feelings of anxiety, lack of competence and frustration.

Second, unequal workload: Unequal workload/contribution impacted the research process negatively. In order to proceed, the group responded in two primary ways. Generosity with their work product and secondly dividing of work between fewer people who could be trusted to complete work in a timely manner in order to meet deadlines.

Third, lack of cooperative work: Lack of cooperation between group members was perceived as an additional factor which held up the group process. Students entered the group with different ideas, i.e. different cognitive realities of what work ethic should look like. This may have come through prior interaction at different undergraduate institutions, interactions with lecturers or their created values. Clashes occurred when these different realities needed

to now work together in order to complete the research. People worked at different paces, workload was not evenly distributed, work was often incomplete.

D) *Differing personalities***.** The fourth theme reported differences in personality. Firstly, the impact of personality on group functioning**:** Several participants identified the group work component to be of significant value. The group needed to work together to achieve their goal to complete the research. There were mixed views reported at the start, pertaining to group work. During the research process many started to recognize significant benefits accompanied by working in the group setting.

Personality differences in the group created challenges, but were managed in the group. Three groups of personality types were identified: Driven/dominant, quiet/reserved and leadership personalities. Although dominant personalities were recognized as initiators of the group, they were also perceived as poor listeners. Leadership personalities were described as possessing a clear goal, who were reliable and prompt with what needed to be done. Quiet/reserved personalities were not perceived to contribute much in group discussion but still contributed their part in the work. They were at times linked to that of peace makers in the group. This assisted in diffusing high conflict situations in the group.

5.2 Social Constructionism Formulation

The present study played out within Higher education as a meta context. In this context participants were placed within the discipline of Psychology and placed within a degree level (i.e. Honours degree). There is consensual agreement about what constitutes a Honours degree and the overall learning outcomes that are articulated in the NQF. The NQF is a statutory or regulatory body that is authorised and designated by the government to determine what degree levels entail and what the learning requirements are. In particular the present study focused on the independent research project which was framed by an

understanding that the requirement would entail 300 notional hours or 30 credits. The designation of fourth year postgraduate students includes an expectation of capabilities and skills to conduct low level research that exceeds that completed at undergraduate level. Thus there was an agreement and expectation that Honours students will conduct independent research in partial fulfilment of the degree requirements. This expectation is further informed by the prescribed programme or curriculum of the particular institution. All of these social realities have meanings assigned to them that are constructed within the context of higher education. The learning outcome might be stated explicitly, but it lacks operational definition that leaves programmes and academic staff to rely on their own interpretations. This process is contingent on the various subject and meaning signifiers of the staff.

The subject position of the participants was informed by their designated location, their relative place at the university. The study was conducted at two Psychology departments that have large Honours cohorts. One is a private institution and the other is a public university. Cornerstone is a private institution, dedicated to training and making higher education affordable and accessible to students from lower socio-economic statuses. UWC is a public university which is historically disadvantaged. Given the above, Cornerstone is very similar to UWC in terms of the category of students that are accommodated despite one being a private institution.

The Psychology departments at both institutions have made a decision at a programme level to implement systematic reviews. This indicates a top down approach as it is a prescribed methodology. The students did not have a decision regarding the type of methodology that would be used in their research. There was thus a consensual decision to implement systematic review methodology at a programme level. Inevitably there is going to be variation in the extent to which the academics were familiar with the methodology and variability in the extent to which they agreed with the methodology. This decision had very

specific implications for students. Firstly, secondary research is to be conducted. Secondly, supervision will take place in a group. These are the particular realities that came into being by this decision. Thus the contextual givens play an important role in the experiences of students and the meaning they assigned to their particular experiences.

Students do not embark on the research requirement in a vacuum. They carry preconceived ideas about research prior to starting their Honours research project/thesis. For example, they hear about the experiences of others, might have conducted research before, and took research courses, as well as perceptions about the skills and desirability of academic staff. All of which added layers of meaning assignation to the research requirement before it even commenced. Thus students have expectations about this process that may be rooted in subjective experiences and perceptions or in more objective information. These expectations must be reconciled with the unfolding reality of the honours thesis process.

The present study used qualitative methods to tap into how the student ascribed meaning to their experiences in the identified programme. Two thematic clusters emerged from the analysis. The first thematic cluster identified systematic review methodology and included three themes namely pedagogical considerations, conducting systematic reviews and evaluation of systematic reviews.

a.) Pedagogical considerations: The first theme discussed pedagogical considerations. The decision to use SR methodology was made at a programme level, was a decision relating to curriculum and teaching. This decision was implemented with educational provisions such as orientation and supervision. Tertiary institutions typically provide an orientation and supervision in order to guide students through their thesis work. Both institutions provided an orientation and supervision relative to the institutional values and human resources available resulting in different structures. The decision to use the same methodology was understood

and implemented differently thereby producing two different experiences. The differences in the structural provisions by each institution influenced the experience of students. The sub themes that were identified from students' experiences in part reflected the ways that structural provisions were operationalized this decision. The students' experiences are had in this context.

Orientation in this instance has the function of socializing students into the process of research and methodology. The way in which orientation was implemented was reflective of what educators understood that students needed. Thus the programme or structure of orientation was informed by the meaning educators assigned to students' abilities, developmental needs and learning outcomes. From a social constructionist perspective, it was not the mere provision of an orientation, but rather what was understood, by educators, to be required in the structure and method of implementation to match the needs of the student and attain the learning outcomes. The emergence of orientation as a theme did not only reflect student's experiences, but their recognition that this aspect of their experience was in part impacted by the pedagogical considerations of their respective programmes.

Orientation into the new methodology was perceived at first by most participants as overwhelming, confusing, and anxiety provoking. . However, the research was later perceived as more manageable. The interpersonal dialogue between students and the interaction between teaching and learning in this requirement took place at an individual, group, programme and institutional level that created a particular experience that was socially constructed. This resonated with Heath, Toth and Waymer (2009) explaining that within the social constructionism view, humanity is created, maintained, and destroyed through individual dialogue. In essence the orientation was facilitated from a particular vantage point and experienced by students from within the framework of earlier experiences and expectations.

Students reported two different experiences of the research endeavour that was related to the differences in how they were conducted. The differences underscore the importance of the context in which the experiences are being had. Students from programme A received a once off induction and expressed dissatisfaction, a need for additional instruction and the mismatch between the induction and the process nature of the research project. Participants from programme B received a staggered orientation that included the motivation for the decision to use systematic review and oriented students to phases as they conducted it that aligned the orientation to the operational steps in the overall process rather than a once off orientation. These students reported a higher degree of satisfaction with the staggered orientation. In this way the students' experiences were impacted by the structure of orientation as a structural provision that impacted on the process of meaning assignation and sense-making.

Systematic review is a recognised stand-alone methodology. This methodology comes with a particular set of protocols of how to do things. It therefore has a particular meaning assigned to it already by the academic community. It prescribes the operational steps in this type of research and subsequently provides a particular flavour to the research experience. The findings reflected the benefits and disadvantages of such a highly structured methodology and how it impacted the subjective experiences of students. On the one hand, frustration with the methodical and rigorous aspects of the methodology. On the other hand they reported containment and security with the predictability of the standardized structure of the methodology.

The next sub-theme addressed the technical and theoretical aspects of the research. As mentioned in the findings, the systematic nature of SR methodology was perceived by participants to have created a more manageable view of the research. Students perceived the SR as daunting and overwhelming at the start of their research project. These perceptions

were informed by a lack of knowledge of the methodology as mentioned by participants. Upon engaging with the methodology, students then constructed a new meaning to the methodology. This new understanding, now viewed the methodology as less daunting because of its step by step process. In essence, their perceptions reflected their experience of the methodology as manageable within their current designation i.e. Honours students. As students engaged with the methodology, their opinions were shaped further. Thus the level of engagement contributed to the meaning assignation process and the subjective experiences of students.

The next sub-theme identified structural provisions. Workshops and supervision were provided by the educators. The students' experience of these provisions was informed by the level of knowledge of the person presenting it. It is linked to the theoretical knowledge, the familiarity with the operational details of the programme. There were two different experiences. One experience described participants who felt confident or had a good experience because they perceived the trainer to be knowledgeable. Others described an experience where they felt uncontained and very anxious because the trainers couldn't speak to their questions/needs. The extent to which the educators were able to demonstrate mastery influenced the experience of students. Yes the provision was made, but whether that provision was going to be successful hinged on the actual knowledge and the perceived competence of the educators providing it. The extent to which staff and students were familiar with the methodology was also a function of training and exposure that is highly contextual.

b.) Conducting systematic reviews: The next theme focused on the actual experiences of conducting the research. This included conceptualisation, execution and feedback as subsidiary themes. There were two different interpretations of conceptualisation. Some participants did not think that meeting as group to plan the way forward was critical. Another

group of students felt that meeting as a group in order to develop a work strategy was imperative to the success of their research project. Different constructions of what was important for the success of the group inevitably affected the end product.

Although the research was completed, the quality of the process leading up to it may have been more strenuous for lack of an agreed plan or strategy. When people worked individually, it put more strain on the group which had to then re-group with tighter time constraints in order to get work completed timeously. Those who re-grouped felt that they shared a similar understanding or rather reality of what was needed to get the work done. Overall, as group work/supervision was a new concept for most, they would have benefited more, with more direction from educators regarding the concept of group work and how it is understood. This findings does not only reflect the differential experience in this process, but also reflect the different approaches and attitudes towards group work and how supervisors facilitated the process. Thus the experiences were a product of all these considerations. In addition, students' interpersonal skills and attitudes, as well as experiences in group contexts also impacted the emergence of this finding.

The way in which supervisors provided feedback reflects the influence of different meanings and contexts. These may have included their own experiences of feedback, whether either replicating what they had or what they didn't have, reflects whether they are engaging with supervision as an academic, reflects human resources challenges, their views of supervision. Also, the way that the feedback was received was influenced by experiences at the lower level or through prior interaction with the supervisor at Honours level regarding feedback style. Participants thus formed a view or assumption on what feedback should look like. Upon entering master's studies this view was shaped by their prior experience. There was a preference for the feedback style of the Honours supervisor. There was dissatisfaction with the Masters supervisor because of a different experience with their honours supervisor.

This was evident in the constant comparison of supervisors at masters and honours level. Thus the aspects of supervision reported on did nto occur in a vacuum. The experiences reported were in part a reflection of the "ghosts of the previous supervisors", the fantasies and wishes about supervision and even the comparison of supervision practices between students in groups supervised by different supervisors. These findings are thus constructed in a socio-cultural and historical context. The findings must be reviewed cautiously to understand the consensual realities that were at play in this sample and target group.

c.) Evaluation of SR: Three sub-themes emerged in the students' evaluation of having conducted systematic reviews namely benefits, challenges and preparedness for higher degrees. Students' current position as Masters students' brings a new reality in terms of what is expected of them and the particular structure of the programme. A Masters programme entails an increase in the quality of work, as well as higher levels of independence. Due to their particular exposure to SR methodology, students perceived its rigorous processes to have prepared them well to understand the rigour and robustness required at Masters level. At an individual level, students have assigned meaning to what it means to be 'prepared.' Some have ascribed it to confidence in their research skills, preparation for large volumes of reading, articulate screen of article, knowledge of research terminology and working in a group. Although each participant expressed their reality differently, there was an overall thread amongst students, feeling that SR methodology at Honours, provided sufficient preparation for Masters level research. It is important to note that the notion of preparedness was a construct that was further interpreted and given a hue relative to the particular experiences, expectations and challenges at masters level. Despite the varied ways of assigning meaning here, students concluded that they were adequately prepared.

Cluster two identified group work as a major thematic cluster that included four themes namely a) group as a whole, b) benefits of group work, c) challenges of group work and d) differing personalities.

a.)   Group work: The first theme described the group as a whole that related to the primary function of the group to ensure that the learning outcomes and academic deliverables were achieved. The findings indicated that the academic product was prioritized and that group members found ways to negotiate around challenges or developed a functional and dynamic roup identity characterized by commitment and shared goals. This finding is also informed by other undercurrents that must be acknowledged in order to credibly evaluate the findings.

What needs to be examined is the extent to which the educators engaged with the group work as a learning tool rather than a pragmatic decision. Students were not trained how to work in groups and it was assumed that students were familiar with and capable of managing group processes. Group familiarity was reported to be advantageous to adapting to the group. Before they even started they expected it to be difficult. Prior experiences of positive established friendships served group members well, who were now brought into a new somewhat intimidating reality of group supervision. Forming new bonds within the group may however be compromised due to a desire to hold on to a perceived secure reality. In other words, why venture out and form new bonds if there is no pressing need to. Consequently, this may enable the group to function as a group of individuals and be more challenging to establish a group identity. This points to the impact and realities of group work not being addressed in the structural provisions including the induction and supervision that focused on the technical aspects of the methodology.

b.) Benefits of group work: The second theme that emerged under this cluster was the benefits attributed to group work. The following sub-themes emerged such as peer support, peer supervision, friendship and camaraderie, shared workload and normalization. Due to their context of a prescribed unfamiliar methodology and way of supervision (i.e. group supervision) peer support may have been willingly embraced or received. Being able to relate to other group members provided a sense of normalization which was appreciated. Given their context, understanding that other group members share in the same prescribed reality and set of challenges may have improved their adaption. Their reality of group supervision provided opportunities not always possible in an individual setting. Upon interaction and realization of the opportunities and gains found within in the group, participants constructed a new, more positive reality of group work/supervision.

c.) Challenges of group work: The next theme that emerged addressed the challenges of group work. Differing work ethics, unequal workload and a lack of co-operative work emerged as sub-themes. Upon entering the group students already maintained preconceived ideas of what good work ethic entailed. This may have been informed by prior experiences or their own personal values. Their perceived experiences reflected the extent to which their meaning/understanding of hard work was portrayed by other group members. Unequal workload contribution was perceived as a major hindrance to the research. Unequal workload can be attributed to several factors including, motivation, context, clashes between group members. This comes back to the point that students were not inducted into group work and thus the group was not conceptualized as an explicit learning experience. This is reflective of the particular pedagogical decisions made in the respective programmes. The implicit and explicit decisions impacted the experiences of students and in particular prior negative experiences presented as a barrier to collaborative work that required management. In this

way the finding here must be contextualised as a function of various factors as mentioned above.

d.) Differing personalities: The final theme identified under group work was the presence of differing personalities. Differing personalities in a group setting is inevitable but needs to be managed. Included in an individual's personality, is a particular way of thinking that results in particular behaviour or attitude. Students may not understand the thinking of other personalities which may lead to frustration in working together efficiently. Although students have a joint understanding of completing the research, they do not have a sense of how to work with different personalities. This reiterates the point that they have not been orientated on the relational aspects of group work. Its needs to be understood that, whatever participants say is going to be relevant to how they were supervised and how the supervisor managed the group. Student's perception also reflected how much the programme thought about working as a group which will include differing personalities. Meaning is established long before they reached the group. The experience of the group is impacted by preconceived ideas about fellow students based on perception or prior experience (history) that also play out in other learning contexts (e.g. lectures) and the institutional setting.

Overall, students' perceived experiences have been influenced by a number of factors. These include their particular context, their location, the meaning assigned to that location, prior experiences, personal preferences, departmental and institutional cultures and the higher education authorities that govern and prescribe learning outcomes and requirements. Students' designation as group members conducting SR methodology and the implications thereof goes back to the decision made at the programme level. The way that educators have made sense of what was required to meet students' needs was reflected through the implementation of this decision. As already discussed, implementation yielded different experiences. Though group work may have been a controversial and somewhat detested

requirement, there was no induction to group work in this process. Consequently, students'
experiences reflected their own ideas about group work based in the here-and-now or there-
and-then, as well as the pedagogical considerations and structural provisions of the educators
in relation to group work and group supervision on the independent research project.

5.3 Conclusion

The present study aimed to explore the perceptions of Masters Psychology students
about the extent to which group-based systematic reviews in Honours prepared them for
further postgraduate studies. Three core objectives were developed to explore students'
perceptions about 1) systematic review methodology, 2) group-based research at Honours
level and 3) students' perceptions about the extent to which conducting group-based,
systematic review at Honours level has prepared them for Masters level study. The third
objective specifically was to identify features of group-based research that hindered or
facilitated preparedness for further studies, and competence in research.

1. Perceptions about systematic review methodology: The findings suggest that
systematic review methodology was appropriate at Honours level consistent with the
recommendations in the body of literature. The methodology required a high level of work
and application that posed a challenge for students and necessitated a clearly developed frame
within which they could engage with this process. The step-by step process of the systematic
review methodology provided scaffolding to guide students through the research process and
the operational steps inherent in the methodology constituted a useful framework for student
exposure to research. The structure was useful in reducing students' anxiety about research
and enhanced academic performance.

Participants reported that the quality of supervision and structural provisions such as induction workshops were useful in moderating the anxiety students experienced. Orientation into the research module was found to be a significant factor in facilitating understanding of the methodology. The participants recommended that a staggered approach to the induction in the form of a set or regular workshops. In this manner, the workshops made it possible for students to optimally benefit from smaller inputs that were closely linked to the operational steps of the methodology. Thus a default framework was established for participants to execute the required work.

2. Perceptions about group-based research: The findings suggest that negative views towards group work based in personal experiences and student discourses posed a barrier to engagement with the group-based research. Initial negative perceptions appeared to be based in previous experiences of working in a group. Mixed results were reported by students about the group work requirement. On the one hand, participants reported that the group presented difficulties in managing different personalities, work ethics and commitment to the group project. On the other hand, the group requirement provided an opportunity for sharing the high work load inherent to the methodology. Familiarity with group members was found to be an advantage to the group and improved the efficiency of group processes, as well as overall group cohesion. The group also provided opportunities for peer monitoring and accountability. Participants reported that peer supervision was beneficial in producing work that was thorough through the process of verifying information and processes.

Participants reported that working in a group meant that the group had a primary task i.e. completing the research project in a timely manner whilst maintaining methodological quality and rigour. The group developed a system of coping mechanisms in order to complete the research. Personal sacrifices were made at an individual level in the service of the core group task being completed. The group work requirement was something participants lived

with and found a way to work around. Some participants reported that they met as groups, but essentially worked independently. Thus programmes must provide orientation and training/ input in group work to diminish the impact of group hate. The group work requirement appeared to have been considered at a programme level as a human resource solution whilst the pedagogical implications were not sufficiently dealt with.

3. Preparedness for Masters studies: The findings suggest that Systematic review methodology prepared students for masters studies. There were three aspects of the Honorus requirement that were explored in relation to facilitation of preparedness for masters studies. First, systematic review methodology prepared students for Masters studies by developing an awareness of and appreciation for methodological rigour and coherence. Students identified the robustness and rigorous nature of the systematic review to have prepared them at a higher level. This level of preparation enabled confidence in research skills upon entering Masters studies. In particular, mastering the essential methodological principles to evaluate research reportedly translated into improved conceptualization, improved writing and more intentional use of methodological principles. Students reported that they were prepared for reading widely, executing literature searches, reading critically and reading the entire article rather than reading summations only. More importantly it provided a structure for evaluating and consuming research in a more critical manner.

Second, mixed reviews were reported about preparedness for primary research. In general, participants felt that their skills in assessing for methodological rigour sharpened their own conceptual skills that could articulate into reactive research. However, participants also reflected that the exposure to secondary research was not sufficient preparation for the level of research management required in reactive research e.g. fieldwork and analysis. Some felt that some skills such as quality assessment could be applied to reactive research.

However, some students felt that systematic reviews could not prepare them for reactive research. It appeared that secondary research and systematic review in particular could prepare students provided that there is an intentional attempt to help establish links between the evaluation of research and the execution of reactive research.

Third, group –based work prepared students to manage group work in the masters course work and not specifically with the research requirement. Students did not optimally benefit from the group work requirement. It seems like the group work requirement was treated like a more pragmatic decision and not a pedagogical decision. In essence, group-based, systematic reviews spread the work load that assisted with retention. Group work potentially could prepare students for collaboration, peer reviewing and facilitation skills if explicitly used from a pedagogical view.

In short, the early research exposure in Honours studies has been well documented to impact later capacity and functioning in research. Systematic review methodology satisfied the learning outcomes specified by the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The extent to which it prepares student for further research studies is impacted by a number of individual, cohort, programme and institutional factors.

Significance of study

Little is known of the perceptions or experiences of Honours students, more specifically Honours Psychology students in South Africa. This study provided some insights into the experiences of Psychology Honours students in relation to their research requirements. It provided insight into the perceived impact of this particular intervention [group-based systematic review methodology] that will have benefits for supervision practice; research training; retention and throughput and human resource capacitation. Thus gaining insight into this intervention assists and augments earlier findings by incorporating students' subjective

experiences and perceptions that have been identified as an important predictor of their subsequent behavioural response and performance **(**Strydom & Mentz, 2010**).** It is imperative to further research on this particular group as they form the base of postgraduate studies. Readiness for higher degree studies is contingent on good early experiences in research. What happens at this level may cause a ripple effect into further studies. Shanahan and Laugksch (2005) reported that insufficient attention to the learning outcomes required at Honours level may cause a ripple effect into Masters, as well as PhD levels which essentially affects retention and throughput in higher degree programmes.

The findings of this study can assist programme developers and supervisors to engage with the perceived impact of the intervention i.e. group-based research using systematic reviews, through awareness of factors which hindered/facilitated academic performance.

Limitations of the Study

Although some participants could remember their experience clearly and report on it, some participants battled with this. The present study provided a limited use of social constructionism. The study did not track what particular type of study participants were conducting at Masters. This study only explored student perceptions and not supervisors. The study provided data on group fieldwork and execution but was limited in terms of group supervision particularly.

Recommendations for future research

A critical recommendation is to significantly expand research in the area of postgraduate research on Honours student perceptions in South Africa. Exploratory studies are needed to identify other factors at Honours level which hindered or facilitated further postgraduate study. Research is needed to expand knowledge on this particular group in

general, as mentioned throughout this study, Masters and PhD studies have been prioritized with little focus on the Honours year.

The introduction of set or regular workshops throughout the research was a recommendation by the participants in the study, as they perceived its importance in facilitating the research process. This was particularly important when new methodology was introduced.

The next recommendation is to promote group supervision alongside individual supervision. Peer supervision, formulated under group supervision, was also found to be a factor facilitating overall quality of work and individual.

There is much value in utilizing peer supervision groups, especially at Honours level where a large amount of work is covered in a short period of one year. Peer supervision groups are thus recommended at this level.

Teaching group skills to assist students in learning optimally from the group requirement is recommended. Thus the group is a pedagogical consideration and not merely a pragmatic consideration.

This study should be followed up with research on supervisors, programme directors, longitudinal studies tracking from honours into masters, repeating this study with other forms of honours projects e.g. secondary data analysis, reactive studies, project based studies, independently developed projects.

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Appendix A – Interview schedule/ guide

- What were your experiences of conducting group-based, systematic review?

- What kinds of challenges were faced in the group?

- Describe the members of the group and the extent of their influence toward completing the research.

- To which extent do you perceive the group –based research in your Honours independent project to have prepared you for Masters level study?

- To which extent to do you perceive the systematic review (secondary research) in your Honours independent project to have prepared you for reactive research?

- Identify features of group-based-secondary research that hindered or facilitated preparedness for further studies, and competence in research.

Appendix B – Ethics Approval Form

OFFICE OF THE DEAN
DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT

UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

19 June 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:
Ms C Swart (Psychology)

Research Project: Psychology students' perceptions of the extent to which group-based systematic reviews methodology at Honours level prepared them for further postgraduate studies.

Registration no: 15/4/71
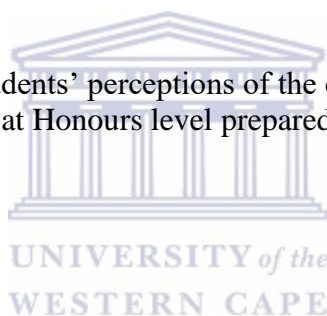
Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval.

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

Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535, South Africa
T: +27 21 959 2988/2948 . F: +27 21 959 3170
E: pjosias@uwc.ac.za
www.uwc.ac.za

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a place to grow, from hope
to action through knowledge

Appendix C – Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

Tel: (021) 959-2283, Fax : (021) 959-3515

E-mail: celestes@cornerstone.ac.za

Project Title: Psychology students' perceptions of the extent to which group-based systematic reviews methodology at Honours level prepared them for further postgraduate studies.

What is this study about?

This is a research project being conducted by Mos. Celeste Swart and Dr. Mario Smith at the University of the Western Cape. We are inviting you to participate in this research project as we are interested in your experience as an Honours graduate and your thoughts and feelings about the extent to which your Honours independent research project (group-based, secondary research) prepared you for Masters level studies. This knowledge is being sought in order to evaluate whether the use of systematic review methodology at Honours level sufficiently prepares students for the Masters level study.

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

You will be asked to participate in an interview which will last for an hour. The study will be conducted at an agreed-upon location. Questions surrounding your experience of systematic review group-based research will be explored and the extent to which you perceive it to have prepared you for Master's level study. Thus your participation is as a graduate of the Honours programme and not a student at your current institution.

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

The researchers undertake to protect your identity and the nature of your contribution.   To ensure your anonymity, *your name will not be included on data collected. A code will be placed on the collected data.* To ensure your confidentiality, locked *storage areas will used to store information, using identification codes only on data forms, and using password-protected computer files.* If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected. This research project involves making audiotapes of you. The audio recording will ensure authenticity in the study. It enables the capturing of data in greater detail. The recordings will be stored in locked filing cabinets and will be destroyed after the study is completed.

What are the risks of this research?

All human interactions and talking about self or others carry some amount of risks. We will nevertheless minimise such risks and act promptly to assist you if you experience any discomfort, psychological or otherwise during the process of your participation in this study. Where necessary, an appropriate referral will be made to a suitable professional for further assistance or intervention.

What are the benefits of this research?

This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about the extent to which group-based research at Honours prepares students sufficiently for furthering their studies. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the group-based Honours research. A direct benefit for you is the opportunity to reflect on the extent to which the learning outcomes in your independent project have been achieved and how that has contributed to your overall research capacitation

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 participate 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. Participation in the research is not a course requirement.
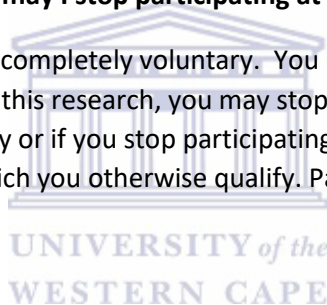
What if I have questions?

This research is being conducted by *Celeste Swart in the Psychology Department* at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact **Celeste Swart** at: 0763587803 **Email**: celestes@cornerstone.ac.za

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

 Supervisor: Dr. M. Smith, Department of Psychology, UWC, Private Bag X17 Bellville 7535, mrsmith@uwc.ac.za

Head of Department: Dr. M. Andipatin, Department of Psychology, UWC, Private Bag X17 Bellville 7535, mandipatin@uwc.ac.za

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

Appendix D- Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

Tel: (021) 959-2283, Fax : (021) 959-3515

E-mail: cswart@uwc.ac.za

Title of Research Project: Psychology students' perceptions of the extent to which group-based systematic reviews methodology at Honours level prepared them for further postgraduate studies.

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 agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.

____   I do not agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.

Participant's name………………………..

Participant's signature……………………………

Date………………………