STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE RESEARCH COMPONENT IN AN APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY MASTER'S PROGRAMME

by

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DECLARATION

I, Nicole Candice Burger, 2016089795, hereby declare that the dissertation titled "Students' perceptions of the research component as part of an applied psychology master's programme " is my own work and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment or completion of any postgraduate qualification to another university or for another qualification.

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I hereby approve of *Nicole Candice Burger (2016089795)* submitting this dissertation 'Students' perceptions of the research component in all applied psychology master's degrees' in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Magister Artium in the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Humanities, at the University of the Free State. I also declare that this dissertation has not been submitted as a whole or partially to the examiners previously.

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I hereby confirm that I performed text editing on the dissertation of Ms Burger. I attended to the following:

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2. stylistic consistency
3. general logic and argumentation

I did not judge the argument in itself, and I also did not check the sources for technical correctness, correct quotations and arguments. Furthermore, I did not check the factual correctness of arguments

I hold an M.A. degree in language practice from the University of the Free State

Yours faithfully

Elri Marais

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ABSTRACT

This study is aimed at exploring students' perceptions of research as a component in an applied psychology master's program. The perceptions of the students were explored through the lens of the self-determination theory (SDT) of Deci and Ryan (1985), particularly the basic psychological needs sub-theory.

A qualitative approach was followed and a multiple case study design was applied. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 13 participants. The data were analyzed using the thematic analysis approach, which resulted in the finding of three themes and nine subthemes. The findings are discussed using the three basic psychological needs sub-theory to assess how the motivation of the participants was affected by either the thwarting or satisfaction of those needs. The basic psychological needs of the students were frustrated in specific instances during the research process, and for others these needs were fulfilled for the majority of the research process. Participants perceived the mini-dissertation as time consuming and financially and emotionally challenging but simultaneously as beneficial for personal and professional development. Participants were also challenged with difficult supervisory relations. The study could provide current applied psychology master's training programs and their students with valuable information regarding challenges and shortcomings of the training programs. Researchers interested in the training of psychologists could also benefit from the information provided by this study.

(Keywords: research, mini-dissertation, self-determination theory, master's degree, autonomy, competence, relatedness)

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

This study is aimed at exploring students' perceptions of the research component in an applied psychology master's program. The introductory chapter will address the background literature that informed the study and provides the context. The purpose of the study and the research problem will be stated. In addition, the theoretical concepts essential to the study will be clarified and the possible value of the research discussed. Furthermore, a brief overview of the methodology will be provided. The chapter will be concluded with an outline of the chapters included in this document.

1.2. Background to the Study

Abiddin and Ismail (2011) highlight the growing importance of the perceptions of students regarding the experience of higher education. Van Zyl and Weiss (2011) state that postgraduate students, in particular, are essential to the economy but remain neglected in research and practice. A migration toward a more student-oriented approach can be seen not only in universities but also in the amount of research being conducted around the student experience (Abiddin & Ismail, 2011). The interest in the experiences of higher education recipients, particularly postgraduate students, is growing steadily. This is important for several reasons, one of them being the importance of these students for the funding of universities (Van Zyl & Weiss, 2011). Furthermore, an understanding of the student perceptions could aid in preventing students from dropping out (Silinda, 2018). Yet, despite the aforementioned information, studies concerning master's students doing research remain fairly limited (Silinda, 2018).

The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA, 2019) stipulates that both clinical and counselling psychologists should have the competency of designing, managing and conducting ethical and responsible research contributing to psychological knowledge, theory, and practice. They should further have the ability to report on such research and implement the outcomes of said research in policy and practice. In addition, clinical psychologists must have the ability to collaborate with other healthcare practitioners to produce research (HPCSA, 2019). In light of the requirements of the HPCSA, universities are thus responsible for training psychologists to produce rigorous research. The adaptations to

the structures of the master's training programs in clinical and counselling psychology, however, implies that the research component possibly creates challenges for these training programs.

Inconsistencies in the structures of the training programs in applied psychology across South Africa indicate uncertainty regarding the most efficient structure and possible gaps in the training programs. These arguments point toward the necessity of more research from the perspective of the students. Resultantly, this study addresses the aforementioned need. Pillay and Kritzinger (2007) are two of the few researchers to have conducted research in South Africa on the mini-dissertation as a component in the training of psychologists. They outline several challenges that the participants of their study experienced. The challenges included difficulties completing the mini-dissertation within the stipulated two-year time frame, negative or indifferent attitudes, insufficient research knowledge, and a perceived disconnect between research and practice (Pillay & Kritzinger, 2007).

The theoretical framework for the study is the self-determination theory (SDT) of Ryan and Deci (1985), specifically the basic psychological needs sub-theory. What is essential to this study is an understanding of the influence on motivation when the basic psychological needs are either thwarted or fostered.

1.3. Aim and Objective of the Study

The aim of this study is to understand how the dissertation as a component of the applied psychology master's degree is perceived by individuals who have already completed their master's degrees. The objectives of this study are to explore the aforementioned perceptions through the lens of SDT, particularly the basic psychological needs sub-theory. This will provide information on how the motivation of the participants was affected by either the frustration or satisfaction of the three Basic Psychological Needs.

1.4. Methodology

1.4.1. Research design.

This study is a qualitative study (Gravetter & Forzano, 2011) using a multiple case study design (Yin, 2003).

1.4.2. Participants.

A purposive sampling method (Frost, 2011) was used to define the criteria for participants selected for the study. To furthermore source a group of 13 previous master's students, a snowball sampling method was utilized (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). For the specific purposes of this study, the participants had already completed their research and obtained a master's degree in clinical or counselling psychology in the last ten years from six different South African universities. The sample was made up specifically of five clinical psychologists and seven counselling psychologists.

1.4.3. Data collection.

The data were collected by means of conducting one semi-structured interview with each participant, resulting in a total of 13 interviews to be analyzed. Questions targeted the participants' perceptions of the research component as part of their applied program and training.

1.4.4. Data analysis.

The data gathered were analyzed using the thematic analysis approach of Braun and Clarke (2012). This type of approach identifies different themes that emerge by carefully and repeatedly reading the transcripts from the interviews. By reading through the data, the researcher combs the data with the intention of establishing common patterns. In addition to this, a deductive approach to thematic analysis was taken, where the researcher searched the data set for codes that fit the theoretical framework of the study.

1.5. Value of the Study

The key aim of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of students about the research component embedded in an applied psychology master's program. In doing so, the research could provide essential information to the training programs offering the qualification. By gaining a richer understanding of the perceptions of students, the study could possibly address the challenges that students face with completing their research within the allocated time period. As the research component in the master's program contributes up to 50% of the overall mark, the importance of conducting research that assesses students' perceptions thereof is clear.

1.6. Definitions of Key Theoretical Concepts

- **Mini-dissertation** – a written scientific report accompanying a structured master's degree (University of Johannesburg, n.d.).
- **Perceptions –** an expression unique to an individual and how they view the world that is colored by several sociocultural components (Mcdonald, 2012).
- **Applied master's degree** – "graduate-level degree with a curriculum that focuses on the practical applications of knowledge and research in a scientific field" (Online Education, 2016–2020).
- **Counselling psychology** – specialist category in professional psychology promoting personal, social and educational functioning, career functioning, and well-being of individuals, couples, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Normal developmental issues as well as the prevention and alleviation of mental health disorders, ranging from mild to moderate, are addressed (HPCSA, 2019).
- **Clinical psychology** – specialist category in professional psychology providing comprehensive and continuing mental and behavioral healthcare to individuals and groups across the lifespan. In addition, clinical psychologists specialize in assessment, diagnosis, evaluation, and treatment of psychological and mental health disorders ranging from mild to severe and complex (HPCSA, 2019).
- **Motivation –** motivation refers to being encouraged to do something (Ryan & Deci, 2000).
- **Autonomy** – actions resulting of one's own accord and without pressure (Ryan & Deci, 2000).
- **Relatedness –** a feeling of connection and belonging to significant others (Ryan & Deci, 2000).
- **Competence –** effectively interacting with one's environment and feeling a sense of confidence in one's abilities (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

1.7. Outline of Chapters

This document consists of seven chapters. Brief details of each chapter are provided below.

In Chapter 1 the study is introduced and contextualized. In addition, the objectives and aim of the study, as well as a brief overview of the methodology are provided.

Finally, the value of the study and the definitions of the key theoretical concepts are outlined.

In Chapter 2 the literature review of the study is presented. The literature review covers the definition and necessity of research, research as a component of academic and psychology master's degrees, as well as challenges related to the mini-dissertation. The attitudes of students toward the mini-dissertation, research supervision practices, and, finally, the skills and other requirements for completing the mini-dissertation are also presented.

Chapter 3 consists of a discussion of the framework through which the data collected are conceptualized. Here the central theory, namely SDT, as well as the sub-theories of the theoretical framework are discussed. The sub-theories discussed include cognitive evaluation theory, organismic integration theory, causality orientations, and basic psychological needs.

In Chapter 4 the methodology used to reach the aim and objectives of the study are discussed. The results of the study are then presented in Chapter 5, and the findings of the study are discussed in Chapter 6.

Finally, in Chapter 7 the study is concluded with a presentation of the strengths, limitations, and implications of the study. The recommendations for future research and a few final reflections are also included in this chapter.

1.8. Conclusion

The introductory chapter provided the reader with the context of the study as well as the aim and objectives of the study. The methodology and value of the research were specified. Finally, an outline of the chapters that follow were provided and key theoretical concepts were clarified.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the research component of an academic degree is discussed. This discussion highlights the joys and challenges of completing a mini-dissertation as a step toward obtaining a master's degree. Another important aspect to be reviewed is that of supervision practices related to completing a mini-dissertation. Additionally, the attitudes of students toward the mini-dissertation and how this could affect the process of completion is discussed. The chapter concludes with a section on the skills and essential elements necessary for completing the mini-dissertation, as reported in the literature.

2.2. What is Research?

In considering descriptions and definitions of research, a variety of functions and aims are highlighted. The term *research*, when taken literally, means to "search again" (Bodla, n.d., p. 2). This implies that a researcher will repeatedly search for the information to be found regarding a specific phenomenon or problem. Swindoll indicates that research is "the process of collecting and analysing information to increase our understanding of the phenomenon under study" (2012, p. 112). The Council of Higher Education (CHE) (2016) describes research as an integral part of higher education and defines it as "the skilled, knowledgeable and systematic quest for a better understanding of nature and society through rigorous methodologies" (p. 193). Research is said to include a disciplined, explicit, and methodical process (Mohajan, 2018). Naidoo (2011) further states that research is essentially the act of gathering information. Additionally, Impedovo and Malik (2016) postulate that research begins with a critical view of the world and knowing how to implement strategies for change.

From all these different angles it is clear that research is conceived from a vast wealth of knowledge. In moving from the question of *what* to that of *how*, the research process should be considered. The research process involves steps such as defining and redefining problems; formulating hypotheses; suggesting solutions; collecting, organizing and formulating data; making deductions; and reaching conclusions and testing whether the conclusions fit the hypotheses (Bodla, n.d.).

An important differentiation to make is that of basic or applied research. The former refers to research that is conducted to expand on a concept, and the latter to research that is aimed at solving a problem (Bodla, n.d.). Regarding the question of rigor and science, Naidoo (2011) outlines the characteristics that research should have for it to be considered scientific. These include: (a) relevance, (b) research conceptions, (c) research orthodoxies, (d) theoretical orientations, and (e) ethical framework. This implies that for any scientific research to be conducted, there must be a need for it, and it thus becomes relevant. It is, furthermore, necessary for the research to be anchored in theory, which could also link to relevance. Finally, scientific research must at all times be ethical so as not to cause any harm to participants or to the specific profession being researched (Naidoo, 2011).

2.3. Why Research?

Research is used for several purposes, including (a)decision-making, (b) problem solving, (c) generating new knowledge, (d) creating policies, and (e) expanding on existing knowledge (Bodla, n.d.; Morgan, Gliner, & Harmon, 1998; CHE, 2016; Naidoo, 2011). Furthermore, conducting research within a specific discipline serves the purposes of supporting the theory on which the discipline is grounded, generating methods to evaluate phenomena that are important, and providing explanations for relevant phenomena and the relationships between them (Morgan, Gliner, & Harmon, 1998). According to the CHE (2016), research is an essential vehicle for driving the South African economy because of the importance of knowledge production. This stresses the importance of building capacity in skilled researchers.

When considering these conceptualizations of research, it becomes evident that although research is defined differently by different authors, the central focus is understanding, innovation, and solutions. Research evidently encompasses a wide variety of topics and viewpoints ranging from basic to more intricate. Also, it is clear that research is a necessary component, and without it advances would not be possible in economies, educational institutions, businesses, and many other organizations. Finally, research is particularly important in any academic discipline, in order for it to grow.

2.4. Research Supervision Practices

Research supervision refers to the guidance, by a more experienced research supervisor, of the postgraduate student toward obtaining a postgraduate degree (Lessing & Lessing, 2004). Postgraduate research supervision is aimed at providing support, guidance, and assistance to postgraduate students. Supervision can be classified into two different categories, namely independent and dependent. The former refers to allowing the student to take initiative in proposing and conducting the research. The latter refers to a process where the student is more dependent on the supervisor in both the proposal and execution of the research (Rademeyer, 1994).

Gurr (2001) proposes the Student/Supervisor Alignment model, which suggests that the supervisor be more hands off and allow for the student to develop a sense of autonomy, while continuously adjusting the process according to the growth of the student. Burnett (1999) suggests the collaborative cohort model, where students gather either via teleconference or face-to-face meetings and discuss the research process. This fosters a sense of cohesion among the students and allows for encouragement as well as the enhancement of critical thinking skills and knowledge of research methodologies. McAlpine and Weiss (2000) are of the view that the student and supervisor should continuously interact and collaborate throughout the process. Bailey (2001) acknowledges the critical nature of the process and states that it determines the success of the mini-dissertation. Ghadirian, Sayarifard, Majdzadeh, Rajabi, and Yunesian (2014) concur that the experience of the students is highly dependent on the skill of the supervisor.

According to Bartlett and Mercer (2001) as well as Kelly and Ling (2001), supervisors have several roles in the supervisory relationship. Some of the roles identified include being mentors, confidantes, facilitators, guides, coaches, and co-learners. Furthermore, research supervisors are expected to be, among other things, writing teachers, editors, career mentors, and networkers. These are the supervisory roles outlined in published literature, but what do students expect?

Students enrolled for a mini-dissertation generally expect supervisors to (a) be knowledgeable in terms of research, (b) honor the agreement between the student and supervisor, (c) provide encouragement, (d) be easy to communicate with, (e) provide timeous feedback, and (f) be organized (Katikireddi & Reilly, 2016; Lessing & Lessing, 2004). Postgraduate students further prefer to have structure within the process, including the

provision of deadlines for the completion of each chapter. Despite all these guidelines for the role of the research supervisor, some students still frequently report unmet expectations (Shannon, 1995).

2.4.1. Student frustrations.

The literature reported above indicates that the mini-dissertation supervision process is not flawless. Several frustrations of the students are thus presented below.

In a study conducted at the University of Stellenbosch (Bock-Gilbert, 2013), participants reported that they felt isolated from other students, which made it difficult to work on the mini-dissertation. In addition, they experienced a delay in feedback from the supervisors, which, in some instances, resulted in non-completion of the mini-dissertation. According to a study by Zulu (2014), some students were frustrated with a misunderstanding between student and supervisor as well as the many drafts of each chapter that had to be submitted. Students in this study initially struggled with understanding the expectations of their supervisor and had to adjust to the style of working to which the supervisor was accustomed. Zulu (2014) also reports that when students had adjusted to the supervisor's style of working, they could then better appreciate the support and guidance they received. Some students described the supervisors as motivating, inspiring, and supportive (Zulu, 2014).

Another South African study, conducted among master's of education students, found that the participants perceived the research supervision process to be positive when supervisors possessed attributes of friendliness, support, patience, time consciousness, informativeness and availability (Chireshe, 2012). Contrary to this, research supervision was perceived to be negative due to aspects such as delayed feedback, losing the work of the students, harassment by the supervisor, a lack of availability by the supervisor, and a lack of research guidelines provided to students.

In considering the role of supervision, the expectations of the students, as well as the frustrations of the students, it can be concluded that the postgraduate supervision process, although fraught with challenges, can be positive and rewarding. In light of the literature cited above, it is clear that the supervision process is dependent on several aspects, the most important possibly being the relationship between supervisor and student.

2.5. The Research Component as a Core Component of an Academic Qualification

The research component is considered a critical aspect of a postgraduate degree. The mini-dissertation is described by Zulu (2014) as a research study comprising a restricted scope, with the focus on an issue relevant to a particular discipline. Postgraduate research is intended to test assumptions, generate new knowledge, and disseminate and apply the results of the research conducted (Mutula, 2009). The end result should provide a theoretical framework that will assist in understanding the information reported by the student conducting the research (Mutula, 2009). Mutula (2011) also states that postgraduate research is intended to develop and build students' capacity for conducting research.

Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (1990) developed the *triple-helix concept*, which focuses on the research relationship between higher education, the government, and the industry (CHE, 2016). An understanding of this concept contributes to understanding the necessity for research within universities. This concept shifts the focus from the relationship strictly between the industry and the economy to one that includes universities as a role player in strengthening the economy. Industry has, therefore, become dependent on universities to produce students who can participate in the production, transfer, and application of new knowledge. As a result, universities are required to equip students with the skills essential for carrying out research activities. In this manner, universities produce students capable of advancing and contributing to a growing economy.

Furthermore, universities are dependent on the completion of master's and doctoral degrees for funding purposes (Govender, 2012). Policies within South Africa stipulate the dependence of research funding upon the completion of postgraduate research. In this regard, universities receive guidelines on specific targets that must be met in terms of research output (CHE, 2016). As a result, academics are pressured to deliver a large amount of research output.

In addition to being a critical component in the economy and in universities, research further assists in the intellectual and personal development of postgraduate students. Drennan and Clarke (2009) explored the research supervision experiences of students in applied master's programs in Ireland. These programs were found to develop skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, self-directed learning, and the ability to conduct research. In the United Kingdom researchers found that the dissertation, specifically, is designed to develop similar skills, including that of working critically and independently, learning to develop

arguments and knowledge, and applying advanced methodological skills (Atkins & Redley, 1998).

Demb and Funk (1999) postulate that the master's dissertation in England serves the purpose of evaluating the quality of master's programs, becoming skilled at a respected set of learning outcomes, and resolving developmental challenges encountered by students. Among the learning outcomes of the master's dissertation in England are aspects such as learning to integrate and transform knowledge (ultimately providing intellectual growth), internalizing information, as well as managing information (Orna & Stevens, 1995). Making connections between field research and theory by integrating the information with other research activities, as well as the learning of interpersonal skills, are also learning outcomes of the master's dissertation in general (Orna & Stevens, 1995).

Students participating in studies relating to the master's dissertation reported having learned critical thinking skills and analytical reading skills, and reported having developed the habit of reading current literature of interest (Anderson, Day, & McLaughlin, 2008; Drennan & Clarke, 2008). The same studies indicate that the participants reported learning several skills they had not had before the writing of the dissertation. These skills included academic writing and critical thinking, and some participants reported having gained the courage to take on any type of research project they were given. Demb and Funk (1999) reported that students had acquired skills of perseverance, handling complexity, asking good interview questions, writing for a specific audience, and separating opinion from data. Some students in the study also reported gaining confidence in their own abilities, and others mentioned that the master's dissertation had further developed their counselling skills.

2.6. Research as a Core Component of Master's Degrees in Applied Psychology

Pillay and Kritzinger (2007) report that the dissertation is a critical component in the training of clinical, counselling, and educational psychologists. It teaches the scientific enquiry skill, a prerequisite for the field of professional psychology. The dissertation, according to Drennan and Clarke (2009), is effective in teaching postgraduate students the ability to apply theory to practice. As with many other applied master's programs, it is important for psychology students to learn to apply theory and research to professional practice. In addition, the scope of practice for registered clinical and counselling psychologists, as outlined by the HPCSA, indicates that these professionals can undertake

work that includes continuously conducting research as well as supervising research projects (Department of Health, 2008). Specific prerequisites are outlined by universities in South Africa in order to gain entrance into their master's programs in applied psychology.

Universities differ in terms of their requirements for postgraduate studies in applied psychology, such as the time allocation, the weighting of the dissertation, and the overall structure and processes involved in the research component (Mutula, 2011). Pillay and Kritzinger (2007) report that the master's dissertation carries a weighting of between 40% and 50% of the entire master's degree in clinical psychology. Current research (Rhodes University, n.d.) indicates, however, that the percentage ranges between 34% and 50% across different universities in South Africa offering the applied psychology master's degrees (Rhodes University, n.d.; University of Pretoria, n.d.; University of Western Cape, n.d.; University of Johannesburg, n.d.; University of the Witwatersrand, n.d.). The HPCSA stipulates that students undertaking a master's degree in clinical or counselling psychology must complete the degree within three years of commencement (Department of Health, 2008).

Most training programs in applied psychology include a research workshop/seminar or module. These provide students with the necessary information to conduct research at master's degree level and teach them the skills to undertake their research. These workshops usually commence with an introduction to the different research areas, and students are then required to contact the research supervisors within the research area that is of interest to them. In addition to the importance of the mini-dissertation for the development of essential skills, it is also important for the development of the discipline of psychology specifically.

Psychotherapy in South Africa continues to be predominantly based on the Western notions and theories of psychotherapy (Mkhize, 2004; Motoane, 2012; Baloyi & Makobe-Rabothata, 2014; Mkhize & Ndimande-Hlongwa, 2014; Nwoye, 2015). There is, however, a movement toward developing an "African Psychology" that intends to accommodate the multiculturalism in South Africa (APA, 2017). The number of journal articles that have been written (Baloyi & Ramose, 2016; Long, 2017; Bantjes, Kagee, & Young, 2016) and papers presented on moving from a Westernized paradigm of psychotherapy to one that is based more on the African context, is evidence of the necessity for research to bring about a change in the context of psychotherapy in South Africa.

To further accentuate the role of research within psychology, Gough and Lyons (2016) highlight that introspection, clinical interviews, and close observation are all methods used in both psychotherapy and qualitative research. In addition, the current Scope of Practice for psychologists in South Africa indicates that clinical psychologists must offer evidence-based treatment (Bantjes, Kagee, & Young, 2016). This implies that the psychologists would need to know how to develop evidence-based treatments plans, which requires a reasonable knowledge base on conducting research. Although essential, the component of research within applied psychology degrees in South Africa does have certain challenges.

In the field of clinical and counselling psychology specifically, students cannot register with the HPCSA until all the requirements for a master's degree in the field have been met (Pillay & Kritzinger, 2007). As students only register upon completion of the mini-dissertation, they are out of work – and thus have no income – as they may not perform any psychological services for financial gain. In many instances, students then seek jobs to compensate for the lack of financial income. This, in turn, leads to less time for the mini-dissertation. Working on a mini-dissertation after eight hours of an additional job can be a daunting task.

Pillay and Kritzinger (2007), who investigated the challenges related to the postgraduate dissertation in clinical psychology, refer to the misuse of the term "thesis" instead of "dissertation". "Thesis" refers to a broader and more in-depth body of work that is original and is a requirement for a doctorate degree (University of Johannesburg, n.d.). Students writing a mini-dissertation therefore se the task as a thesis, implying that they aim to do research on a much broader scale than necessary. This misunderstanding could be a contributing factor to both the attrition and dropout rates of master's students. Mutula (2011) agrees, stating that postgraduate research is not intended for students to reinvent the wheel but rather to demonstrate an ability to conduct research in a professional, systematic and concise manner.

2.7. Challenges Associated with Doing Research as Part of an Academic Qualification

Student attrition within postgraduate training programs is a significant problem both internationally and nationally (Silinda & Brubacher, 2016). Considering that the rate of throughput for doctoral students in South Africa specifically is 12%, (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013), challenges with the process of completing the dissertation can

be inferred. The challenges associated with completing a mini-dissertation include personal issues, process-related issues, and other general challenges.

Several studies indicate that postgraduate students have trouble with the undertaking of the dissertation (Khan & Matin, 2017; Komba, 2016; Schulze & Lemmer, 2017). Khan and Matin (2017) found that students communicated feeling inadequately supported by their institutions. The lack of support includes limited guidance and research counsel, insufficient resources, inadequate examples of thesis or dissertation writing, and a lack of general cooperation from the institution (Khan & Matin, 2017).

The lack of understanding on how to do a dissertation appears to be a central concern (Komba, 2016; Matin & Khan, 2017). Ngodi and Kayode (2013) conducted a study at a Nigerian university and confirmed many challenges contributing to the difficulty of doing a master's dissertation. These challenges included a limited knowledge base, frustration, loss of interest, negative feedback, as well as insecurity from the supervisor and a lack of independence related to the mastery of research skills. Ngodi and Kayode (2013) further report that students received different levels of training in research methodology, contributing to their insufficient knowledge base. Khan and Matin (2017) state that a common difficulty with the dissertation is a lack of understanding of the process and the steps involved, supporting Ngodi and Kayode's (2013) findings. In the study conducted by Pillay and Kritzinger (2007), participants reported that they felt they did not have enough grounding in research to successfully take on the dissertation. In addition, a study conducted by Dukic (2015) reports that participants are often not aware of the importance of the research component until they do a master's degree. In light of the above, some participants hold a negative perception of the task before they begin, which could indicate that students do not receive sufficient training to prepare them for the dissertation. Similarly, Zulu (2014) reports that students tend to enroll for a master's degree and only in hindsight realize the academic rigor necessary to complete the degree.

In addition to the aforementioned challenges, Vos (2013) also reports on the skill of academic writing, with which many students have significant difficulty (Vos, 2013). Zulu (2014), in her study "The experience of the master's dissertation journey among postgraduate students", similarly found that some participants showed low language proficiency and inadequate academic language skills. Schulze and Lemmer (2017) also report on the language difficulties of English first language learners in South Africa. Difficulties with language as

well as expressing and linking ideas in the discussion section were also identified by (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006). Postgraduate students at a distance learning institution in South Africa reported that they felt unsupported on an intellectual level. In addition, they felt that they were not provided with sufficient guidance in writing the dissertation (Silinda & Brubacher, 2017). At the same institution, a group of students reported a lack of academic support in terms of access to resources as well as feedback from both the institution and research supervisors (Silinda & Brubacher, 2017).

The importance of peer support when completing a master's dissertation is highlighted by Biggam (2008), who states that the dissertation process is made easier when students make use of learner circles. However, when students experience a lack of support during the dissertation process, it could lead to feelings of anxiety. Silinda and Brubacher (2017), as well as Bocar (2009), agree that anxiety is one of the major factors contributing to the difficulties of writing the dissertation. Other factors leading to this anxiety include poor time management skills, isolation, frustration, and feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work (Silinda & Brubacher, 2017).

On a personal level, students are challenged with issues of physical illness and relationship difficulties, among other things (Zulu, 2014). Zulu (2014) reports that although the participants in her study struggled with psychological difficulties, they did not openly admit to them. Students reported several stressors as affecting the research process. These stressors include finances, which is said to be the most difficult challenge to face; family; time-management; and feelings of uncertainty, which ultimately lead to a decrease in self-confidence (Abbidin & Ismail, 2011; Silinder & Brubacher, 2016). Zulu (2014) furthermore reports that students were challenged with losing jobs or having overly demanding jobs, as well as employers who fail to provide time for research-related activities.

2.8. Attitudes Toward the Research Component

The beliefs of the researcher are regarded as a crucial factor, because the motivation for conducting a research study stems from those beliefs (Memarpour, Fard, & Ghasemi, 2015). To begin any study, the researcher must have sufficient knowledge on the topic to be studied and be well informed of research principles (Memarpour, Fard, & Ghasemi, 2015). For many students, however, it is their first time attempting a task of this nature and, therefore, nothing about it is familiar. The attitudes of master's students toward the research component include

their feelings and thoughts about the task as well as the behaviors they exhibit toward it (Shaukat, Siddiquah, Abiodullah, & Akbar, 2014).

In the international arena, medical students in several countries, including Ireland, Pakistan, Croatia, and New Zealand, have a more positive attitude toward research (Memarpour, Fard, & Ghasemi, 2015). This can be attributed to having future plans in research, the manner in which the research module was taught, being actively involved in research at the time of the study, and, finally, seeing the connection between research and practice. A study conducted on master's students at a university in Dhakar concurs, stating that the perceptions of the participants about the research component are generally positive (Yasmin, 2016). This positive perception is due to supportive supervisors and a supportive intellectual climate. Research conducted with medical students in Pakistan found that some of these participants also had a positive attitude toward research because they considered it to be helpful in their profession (Sabzwari, Kauser, & Khuwaja, 2009).

Shaukat, Siddiquah, Abiodullah, and Akbar (2014) indicate that male postgraduate students tend to have a more positive attitude toward the research component. The female postgraduate students in the same study viewed the research component as tedious and as merely a degree requirement. Memarpour, Fard, and Ghasemi (2015), however, report that the difference in attitudes toward research between male and female postgraduate students is insignificant. The study further reports that the level of study as well as demographics, such as marital status, age, and level of education, all seem to have a negative effect on their attitudes toward research. Postgraduate students were found to have less positive attitudes toward research than undergraduate students. These attitudes can be attributed to heavy workloads (research and coursework) as well as family responsibilities (Memarpour, Fard, & Ghasemi, 2015).

A study conducted at a university in Saudi Arabia explored the perceptions, attitudes, and practices related to research among senior medical students (AlGhamdi, Moussa, AlEssa, AlOthimeen, & Al-Saud, 2013). The researchers found that a significant number of the participants perceived the research component as essential and mandatory for all medical students. These attitudes were a result of the motivation to do the research. The participants had a generally positive attitude toward the research as they believed it would be a good addition to their résumés, act as a catalyst in securing a residency, improve research skills, achieve publication in research, as well as sustain their research interests.

In their study on undergraduate pharmacy students' attitudes toward research, Kritikos, Saini, Carter, Moles, and Krass (2015) found that those participants who intended to pursue a postgraduate degree in pharmacy were naturally more interested in the research component than those who did not envision a postgraduate degree. These participants also perceived the research component as a critical aspect to advancing the profession of pharmacy. Kritikos, Saini, Carter, Moles, and Krass (2015), further report that the undergraduate pharmacy students in their study who had past experience with research were more motivated and interested than those who did not have any previous research experience.

The perspectives of South African master's students tend to differ from the international perspectives, as the research component is mostly viewed as an enormous and intimidating task (Zulu, 2014). At a number of South African universities, students had not had the opportunity to engage in research prior to writing the master's dissertation. Kritikos, Saini, Carter, Moles, and Krass (2015) confirm this, arguing that the difficult and challenging perceptions of students about the research component possibly stem from their lack of knowledge regarding the research process. The process is, therefore, often viewed as an obscure one with many skills to uncover (Zulu, 2014). As indicated by Safari, Navaseshkah, Azizi, Ziaei, and Sharafi (2015), the lack of experience in research also leads to a lack of interest.

Comely-White and Potterton (2018) conducted a study on physiotherapy master's students at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa and report that the participants perceived support as the most important factor. An environment conducive to research, that is, an environment where students have sufficient time for the planning and writing of the dissertation, was also found to be an important aspect in completing the master's dissertation. These physiotherapy students further perceived the dissertation as stressful, but reported that it had a positive impact on both their professional and personal lives (Comely-White & Potterton, 2018). In her research, Zulu (2014) affirms that students reported the easiest times of the dissertation as being those times where they felt most supported by family, peers, and supervisors.

Pillay and Kritzinger (2007) state that students in the field of clinical psychology found the research to serve minimal or no purpose to their clinical practice. In such instances motivation to conduct the research may be negatively affected and could lead to students

potentially completing the research component merely to obtain a degree and not due to genuine interest in the subject. The perceived disconnect between clinical practice and research can lead to either a negative or nonchalant attitude toward research. Students who are interested in remaining in the academic field are more likely to engage with the research component and put more effort into it than those who are solely interested in practicing as psychologists. Research shows that the students who do publish are often the students intrigued by the world of academia, of which research forms a substantial amount of the work done (Pillay & Kritzinger, 2007).

2.9. Completion of The Master's Dissertation

Applied master's students are a distinct group of the graduate population who face the challenge of a somewhat different experience than other students. On the one hand, undergraduate students are predominantly required to complete coursework and (sometimes) a mini research project. Most doctoral students, on the other hand, are required to complete a full thesis. Applied master's students, however, are required to do both coursework and a mini-dissertation (Drennan & Clarke, 2009). Psychology master's students, in particular, are faced with both academic stressors (including the research component) as well as adapting to becoming a psychologist (Nel & Fouché, 2017). In relation to this, it might be beneficial for this group of students to have a good understanding of the skills and elements necessary to complete the mini-dissertation.

Biggam (2008) discusses several generic skills necessary to ensure the success of the dissertation. These skills include: (a)time management and organizational skills; (b) self-discipline skills; (c) communication skills (verbal and written), which includes good listening skills; and (d) independent learning skills. He specifies two types of time management, namely micro and macro time management. The latter refers to the amount of time allocated to the entire dissertation, and the former to the time allocated to the specific chapters and sections that will be written. Time management and organizational skills are regarded as necessary for ensuring students meet the deadlines set for each chapter and, finally, the complete mini-dissertation. Effective management and planning of the dissertation could also help to reduce feelings of anxiety.

Self-discipline plays a crucial role in ensuring that the student does not stray from the dissertation work for too long. Furthermore, self-discipline helps students remain committed to the dissertation despite feeling overwhelmed or demotivated. Communications skills and

good listening skills are both necessary for communicating ideas effectively as well as for receiving and implementing constructive criticism from the supervisor. Given the individual journey of doing research, students need to have the skill to work independently and take initiative in the process. Biggam (2008) also highlights the following personality traits as essential for successfully navigating through the dissertation process: (a)self-motivation, (b) self-confidence, and (c) self-centeredness.

According to Morton and Worthley (1995), a good working relationship with the faculty/department or school at the institution of study aids students in the success of the dissertation. Similarly, Abiddin and Ismail (2011), suggest that master's students need to build up a network of peers and expert colleagues. Although there are students who find it beneficial to work from home, many prefer to work in the library where they have access to resources such as quiet spaces and technology (Kinsley, et al., 2015).

As mentioned before, the supervisory relationship is deemed to play the most pivotal role in the success of the master's dissertation (Ho, Wong, & Wong, 2010). Students reported that supervisors who were accessible were of most help to them. They suggested that more thought and preparation should be involved when choosing a supervisor. Brown and Atkins (1988) suggest the writing up of a definite plan outlining good supervisory practice for each department. These practices should include regular meetings between supervisor and supervisee, record keeping, and progress tracking. These activities are likely to provide more support and structure, which are necessary for postgraduate master's students to successfully complete their dissertation.

Massyn (2018), in her study "Enhancing the completion rates of the mini-dissertation", outlines the strategies used in the supervision process of an MBA program at a South African university. The research supervisors studied made use of cohort supervision (supervising more than one student simultaneously) and implemented stringent time management strategies. The mini-dissertations were divided into smaller sections and due dates provided for each section. Stringent rules were implemented with regard to handing in after the due date has lapsed. An administrative department kept track of student progress in the mini-dissertation, and a rigid due date was provided for the entire mini-dissertation.

Massyn (2018) further discusses additional changes implemented to enhance the completion rates of the mini-dissertation. Among these changes are the presentation of workshops addressing the use of the library from home and finding credible sources. The workings of quantitative and qualitative research were also discussed, and the students' academic writing skills were assessed. The challenges that arose from the assessments were

then addressed by means of a workshop. At the commencement of the program, all students in the program were required to register for a specific module that would assist them in choosing a suitable topic for their research project. Students were also required to present their topics to a team, and the feasibility of the topics was assessed in this meeting. The aforementioned strategies resulted in a sharp increase in mini-dissertation completion at the university in question. These changes implemented in the program indicate that step-by-step guidance of the students could be a key element in the successful completion of the dissertation.

It is evident that the master's dissertation requires a wide range of skills in order to be successfully completed. These range from skills that the researcher/student should have to the skills of the research supervisor. The research supervisor and the relationship between student and supervisor appear to be essential in the process too. It is clear that the master's dissertation requires sufficient time and planning. Without any of these skills, the research process may prove difficult.

2.10. Conclusion

It is evident from the discussion above that the mini-dissertation is necessary but partly flawed. The process is necessary for growth in academic disciplines and the acquirement of new skills. These skills are applicable in both coursework as well as practice. It becomes a difficult task, however, when students perceive the mini-dissertation negatively. Supervision practices of the mini-dissertation process also require much development. Finally, although it includes many challenges, the mini-dissertation can be successfully completed.

Chapter 3: The Self-Determination Theory as a Lens

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter the theoretical framework of this study, namely SDT, is discussed. The chapter begins with the development of the theory. The sub-theories of SDT are then briefly explained with the aim of providing the reader with a deeper understanding of the theory. The aim is also to provide the reader with context and SDT relates to this study. The chapter continues with an exploration of how SDT has been used in different areas of research. In conclusion, the chapter explores how SDT, and specifically the three basic psychological needs, are relevant to this study.

The aim of the study is to explore the perceptions students have regarding the research component of the applied master's degree. SDT is considered a means of understanding how the research component, a core component of applied psychology master's degrees in South Africa, affects the motivation of master's students to do research.

3.2. The Self-Determination Theory

Motivational theories predominantly focus on the processes that take place to achieve specific outcomes (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). One such theory is the behavioral theory of Bandura (1977), which does not address why certain behaviors are desired but only examines how to bring about these behaviors. According to Deci and Ryan (2008), motivation is what pushes human beings to think, act, and grow. Deci and Ryan (2008) further postulate that SDT is an overarching theory of human motivation. The theory encapsulates subjects such as psychological health, energy, non-conscious processes, and goals, among other human behaviors.

SDT provides explanations for how motivation has an impact on the aforementioned processes and is intended to explain human motivation and behavior. It does so through the exploration of individual differences in motivational orientations, contextual influences on motivation, and interpersonal perceptions (Hagger & Chatzisarantis, 2015). Through self-determination, individuals are able to engage in goal-directed behaviors and be the drivers of their personal outcomes (Hyde & Atkinson, 2018). This type of motivation has been found to be related to psychological well-being as well as higher rates of target behaviors (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2008).

Researchers postulate that the quality of motivation outweighs the quantity, which leads to a distinction between autonomous and controlled motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008). SDT is said to comprise different types of motivation (ranging from amotivation to integrated motivation), which can be divided into two different categories of autonomous and controlled motivation (Hyde & Atkinson, 2018). Autonomous motivation comprises both intrinsic motivation and the type of extrinsic motivation that involves activities to which the individual has attached value. In contrast, controlled motivation refers to externally regulated motivation. This continuum is conceptualized through the organismic integration theory, a sub-theory of SDT.

Researchers describe two types of controlling environments: externally and internally controlled contexts (Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006). The former refers to environments where language such as "should", "ought to", and "have to", as well as the implementation of deadlines are used. The latter refers to environments where individuals are compelled by internal pressure. Due to the fact that controlling environments do not necessarily meet the human need for autonomy, it is expected that they will not foster intrinsic motivation to the extent that autonomous environments do (Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006). This continuum is conceptualized through the cognitive evaluation theory, another sub-theory of SDT.

In conclusion, this section has addressed how a specific theory for studying human motivation, SDT, began as well as the several processes it entails.

3.3. The sub-theories

3.3.1. Cognitive evaluation theory.

The cognitive evaluation theory provides an explanation for how interpersonal interactions and social contexts affect intrinsic motivation either positively or negatively (Ryan, 2009). The cognitive evaluation theory considers how intrinsic motivation is undermined or enhanced by factors such as rewards, deadlines, feedback, and pressures because of how these factors affect autonomy and competence (Ryan, 2009). The cognitive evaluation theory thus values the role of autonomy and competence as important in increasing intrinsic motivation. Engaging in actions that promote the fulfilment of the need for competence and autonomy increases intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). An example of this would be a child receiving a medal for finishing in first place in a race. The

contexts in which the fulfilment of these needs is thwarted decrease intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). An example of this would be a student receiving negative feedback for a task in which they did not enjoy engaging.

3.3.2. Organismic integration theory.

Organismic integration theory strives to explain how externally regulated behaviors become internalized and self-determined (Hagger & Chatzisarantis, 2015). The theory addresses both intrinsic motivation, which is believed to exist on a continuum, as well as the different types of extrinsic motivation, which, when internalized, can become intrinsic motivation. Individuals engage in intrinsically motivated behaviors without expecting any reward and simply do so for the sake of being interested in the activity (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Externally motivated behaviors are engaged in for the sake of being instrumental to a separate consequence (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). Externally regulated motivation has previously been thought to undermine intrinsically motivated behavior or the internalization of behavior. However, researchers have since concluded that extrinsic motivation can be divided into several subtypes, some of which foster the internalization of behavior and are thereby considered necessary for effective functioning and motivation.

3.3.3. Causality Orientations.

Causality orientations refer to the extent of the self-determination in general of individuals across a range of domains (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Three orientations exist, namely autonomous, controlled, and impersonal. Autonomous orientation results in the highest level of psychological health, while impersonal orientation provides the lowest level of psychological health and general well-being. The high level of psychological heath related to an autonomous orientation is likely because it meets basic human psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. The low level of psychological health and well-being related to an impersonal orientation is likely due to a lack of meeting the aforementioned human psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

3.3.4. Basic psychological needs.

SDT postulates that human motivation and well-being are optimized when three inherent psychological needs are met (Deci & Ryan, 2000). According to Ryan and Deci (2000), the basic psychological needs are innate and necessary for well-being, social and personal

development, and overall growth. Vansteenkiste, Niemiec, and Soenens (2010) posit that these needs are not specific to any gender, social class, or cultural context but are universally essential for psychological well-being. These needs are autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The satisfaction of these basic psychological needs is said to foster autonomous motivation, specifically identified and intrinsic motivation. Mental health is also thought to be improved when basic psychological needs are satisfied. As a result, the basic psychological needs sub-theory is thought to be the most important construct within SDT research (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Needs within SDT are distinct from other theories in that the needs are innate and must foster psychological growth along with the aforementioned aspects (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Competence implies being knowledgeable in attaining several internal and external goals as well as having the ability to effectively perform the required actions for this attainment. Relatedness encompasses the development of secure connections in which the individual feels content. Finally, autonomy refers to the self-initiation and self-regulation of actions (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). SDT postulates that psychological health increases if these basic human needs are met. Researchers found that different types of motivation increase or decrease the level at which these needs are met (Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006). The theory of basic psychological needs, as mentioned before, has been used in a vast array of different research studies.

3.3.4.1. Autonomy.

Autonomy refers to the behavior in which an individual engages of their own free will, which is said to provide a sense of ownership and psychological freedom for the individual (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Autonomy is increased when the behavior of an individual corresponds with their interests, needs and values (Roth, 2014). In order for behavior to be integrated, the individual engaged in the behavior must comprehend how it aligns with their goals and values. In order to fulfil the need for autonomy, an individual needs to feel that they have chosen to engage in a given behavior (Núñez, Fernández, León, & Grijalvo, 2015). Feeling coerced into engaging in a specific behavior thwarts the need for autonomy. Deci and Ryan (2000) have found that the need for autonomy is an essential role player among the three basic psychological needs.

The value of autonomous motivation for mental health and well-being, as opposed to controlled motivation, is thus illuminated here (Ryan & Deci, 2000). A strong link between

autonomy supportive environments and psychological need satisfaction, motivation, and psychological well-being has been found in settings of healthcare, school, and work (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ng et al., 2012). Adie, Duda, and Ntoumanis (2012), found that when participants perceived their soccer coaches as trusting of their abilities, respectful of their perspectives, and knowledgeable in decision-making, all three basic psychological needs were fulfilled.

Within an educational context, students were found to be autonomously motivated when they found the schoolwork to be meaningful and interesting (Núñez, Fernández, León, & Grijalvo, 2014). A classroom environment and teachers who displayed characteristics of support and responsiveness encouraged learners to engage in autonomous self-regulated learning. Núñez, Fernández, León, and Grijalvo (2014) attempted to investigate whether autonomy support would lead to autonomous motivation. Results indicated that the support of learner autonomy led to autonomous motivation and ultimately deep processing of work as well as perseverance when the work was not perceived as interesting (Núñez, Fernández, León, & Grijalvo, 2014).

Autonomy has been found to play a specific role in the relationship between mindfulness, basic psychological needs, and well-being, in a study conducted to explore the mediating role of the three basic psychological needs in this relationship (Chang, Huang, & Lin, 2014). The study outlines that the specifications of non-judgement and non-reactiveness of mindfulness pushes individuals to realize that they are not completely steered by controlled and habitual patterns. This realization indicates that individuals can make their own decisions and control their own behavior, leading to feelings of autonomy.

3.3.4.2. Competence.

Competence refers to an individual feeling confident in their own abilities as well as having a sense of mastery over the environment and their goals (Hyde & Atkinson, 2018). The need for competence is potentially fulfilled in environments where the development of new skills is required (DeHaan, Hirai, & Ryan, 2015). Competence is said to be intertwined with optimal challenge (Riley, 2016), which can be explained as something that challenges an individual at the level of their skill in order to maximize the learning experience (Shernoff, 2013). An increase in intrinsic motivation can be seen when individuals successfully take on optimal challenges and ultimately experience a sense of competence (Renninger & Hidi, 2015).

Chang, Huang, and Lin (2014) explore the relationship between mindfulness, basic psychological needs, and well-being. Mindfulness plays a specific role in fulfilling the need for competence. It promotes engagement in work-related tasks without being focused on the evaluation following task completion. This occurs because the individual is fully engaged in the present moment (Chang, Huang, & Lin, 2014).

3.3.4.3. Relatedness.

Relatedness refers to feelings of connectedness and significance to those individuals considered important (DeHaan, Hirai, & Ryan, 2015). It further refers to feeling cared for by others and taking care of others. The research of Bowlby (1979) on infant attachment is one of the earliest examples of the significance of the need for relatedness in relation to intrinsic motivation. Bowlby postulated that infants who display a secure attachment to their primary caregiver are more intrinsically motivated to explore.

A study on the motivation and antecedents of motivation of environmentally active people has shown that relatedness is one of the key factors for pro-environmental behaviors (Cooke, Fielding, & Louis, 2016). The mechanism at play is postulated to be that of belongingness and group identity motives. The perception that pro-environmental behaviors are supported by others motivates people to engage in them too, to meet standards of being accepted in social relationships. In terms of the group identity motives, when people experience a sense of relatedness by engaging in environmental action, the behavior is seen as a norm, which triggers group identity motives (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007; McDonald, Fielding, & Louis 2012; Smith et al., 2012).

The role that relatedness plays in the relationship between the basic psychological needs, mindfulness, and well-being is outlined by Chang, Huang, and Lin (2014). The need for relatedness is fulfilled through the act of mindful awareness, as mindfulness allows the individual to become aware of their relationship with the outside world. This happens because being mindful of the outside world encourages individuals to let down their guard of defensiveness (Chang, Hodgins, Lin, & Huang, 2014).

3.4. The Self-Determination Theory in Research

SDT has been applied to a vast array of research areas (Ryan, 2015). As with the present study, SDT has been used as a theoretical foundation and has had practical implications in many other studies. Topics approached from an SDT standpoint include healthcare (Williams, McGregor, Zeldman, Freedman, & Deci, 2004), work (Gagné & Deci, 2005), education (Riley, 2016), psychotherapy (Dwyer, Hornsey, Smith, Oei, & Dingle, 2011), sustainability (Cooke, Fielding, & Louis, 2016), corporate parenting (Hyde & Atkinson, 2018), food-related parenting (Zimmer-Gembeck, Joyce, Kerin, Webb, Morrissey, & McKay, 2019), and sport exercise (Adie, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2012) to name a few.

SDT, specifically the aspects of autonomy and basic need satisfaction, was used in a study focused on providing support for intellectually disabled individuals. In short, the study concluded that need satisfaction and the perception of autonomy support were effective in increasing levels of psychological well-being among these individuals (Freilink, Schuengel, & Embregts, 2018). Cooke, Fielding and Louis (2016) used the sub-theory of basic psychological needs and intrinsic motivation to explore the role that these factors play in environmentally active individuals. The researchers found that the satisfaction of basic psychological needs correlated positively with "pro-environmental behaviours" (Cooke, Fielding, & Louis, 2016).

SDT is also often used in studies on physical activity. A recent study specifically used SDT to explore supportive communication in fostering motivation to engage in physical activity and sport (Ntoumanis, Quested, Reeve, & Cheon, 2017). Somewhat more relevant to the present study, SDT is widely used in education and the exploration of motivation within the classroom (Narendran, et al., 2018). SDT was found useful in a study on home education (Riley, 2016). The study in question specifically looks at the importance of intrinsic motivation for children being home schooled and also highlights the difficulty of fostering this type of motivation within a classroom (Riley, 2016).

In considering SDT and its uses in research, it becomes clear that SDT is a pivotal theory in understanding motivation. In addition to assisting in the understanding of motivation, SDT further provides important information for the enhancement of motivation in an array of different fields, including education, parenting, physical activity, and healthcare. Finally, SDT provides essential information for the enhancement of psychological growth and well-being.

3.5. The Relevance of the Self-Determination Theory for the Present Study

Research has found that students are more intrinsically motivated in environments that are autonomous than in environments that are controlling (Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006). Environments fostering autonomy are more likely to increase the internalization of an activity by students, whereas the opposite was found in controlling environments. In a South African based study on first year psychology students' experiences regarding academic success, the participants reported a need for a learning environment that was structured and responsive and that offered a sense of relatedness (Naudé, Nel, van der Watt, & Tadi, 2015). Participants preferred scheduled lectures, tutorials, learning outcomes and test guidelines. In addition, they expected involvement from the lecturers, peer groups or tutorial discussions, and support from family. All of the above was perceived by participants as informational, which led to the experience of competence. The need for an autonomy supportive environment, although deemed necessary, was not a priority for these participants.

As discussed in Chapter 2, psychology students who have a specific interest in the field of research tend to be more motivated for and have a more positive outlook on the research component. In contrast, students who have no interest in a continuing career in the field of research or academia merely complete the research component to obtain the degree and finally practice as psychologists. Both these groups could still be extrinsically motivated, but the types of extrinsic motivation will differ for each group. The former group of students may experience identified regulation, implying that they can identify the value of the research component and therefore internalize it. The latter group most likely experiences external regulation or introjected regulation (Deci & Ryan, 2008), where it is either the experience of anxiety (internal pressure) that motivates them to complete the dissertation, or the external reward (master's degree). In addition to understanding whether students are intrinsically or extrinsically motivated to do research, it is essential that the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness be explored. The following section focuses on how the three basic psychological needs are related to this study.

3.5.1. Autonomy as an ingredient of the completion of a research component.

Considering the definition of autonomy within SDT, *a willingness to engage in an activity without any pressure to do so* (Deci & Ryan, 1985), the research component can potentially be seen as undermining the need for autonomy. The minimal room for choice that applied psychology master's students have in completing a research project to obtain their

degree could be viewed as threatening to their need for autonomy, thereby decreasing intrinsic motivation, which could lead to poor academic achievement.

SDT posits that when students engage in a learning activity to obtain external rewards, they may perform poorly due to the negative effect on intrinsic motivation (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999). In the context of the present study, if students are coerced to produce a mini-dissertation to obtain their degree, this could result in the decrease of intrinsic motivation and, therefore, possible poor performance. According to a study conducted by Núñez, Fernández, León, and Grijalvo (2014), the vitality of students is diminished in controlling educational contexts, and students experience more excitement and positive energy when the environment is autonomy supportive. Autonomy can be achieved by providing applied psychology master's students with more freedom to choose topics and research supervisors and to communicate methodological preferences (Rosenkranz, Wang, & Hu, 2015). All of these may potentially enhance perceived autonomy within the research component.

3.5.2. Competence as an ingredient of the completion of a research component.

The satisfaction of the need for competence, along with autonomy, is essential in developing intrinsic motivation (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). This is important as intrinsic motivation is an important foundation of the learning process. A study investigating how academic motivation influences academic procrastination by using SDT as a framework indicated that the satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs was vital in maintaining academic motivation, while the thwarting of those needs played a role in academic procrastination (Cavusoglu & Karatas, 2015). In a study conducted on motivating medical students to do research, the results indicated that participants who felt they were lacking in research experience and knowledge also felt that their need for competence was frustrated because of that lack (Rosenkranz, Wang, & Hu, 2015). Ultimately, they experienced research related anxiety.

According to Rosenkranz, Wang, and Hu (2015), compulsory research activities, rather than the lack of choice, leave students feeling demotivated due to their anxiety about competence. Participants further reported an increase in confidence to be one of the elements that led to higher motivation to do research (Rosenkranz, Wang, & Hu, 2015). Finally, the study suggests that to promote competence in students who take on research projects, the following are necessary: (a) regular feedback, (b) statistical support, (c) structured learning activities, (d) avoidance of presumed research knowledge, (e) early and staged introduction to

research methods, and (f) regular feedback emphasizing students' skills. Niemiec and Ryan (2009) suggest that in the provision of feedback to students, efficacy rather than evaluation should be emphasized. Autonomy and competence can, however, not exist in isolation, and the need for relatedness plays an essential role too.

3.5.3. Relatedness as an ingredient of the completion of a research component.

As with autonomy and competence, studies show that the basic psychological need for relatedness is necessary for the development of intrinsic motivation (Cavusoglu & Karatas, 2015; Xiang, Ağbuğa, Liu, & Mcbride, 2017; Cox, Duncheon, & McDavid, 2009). According to Niemiec and Ryan (2009), people will internalize the values of those to whom they feel connected and of contexts in which they experience a sense of belonging. This indicates that the need for relatedness must be satisfied. The isolating and individual nature of the research process, as it is frequently described, may thus impede the fulfilment of the need for relatedness. Rosenkranz, Wang, and Hu (2015), however, report that this can be countered by promoting group work and exposing the students to others also completing the mini-dissertation as well as staff role models. The latter, however, may be challenging for students working at internship sites or doing community service. In such cases research workshops and seminars, as suggested by Mutula (2009), could be helpful.

As mentioned before, the negative attitudes and anxieties revolving around the research component may pose a threat to the needs of SDT in that the research component is not always supportive of the autonomy of students. Research by Onweugbuzie (1997) suggests that the general negative attitude that students at master's and doctoral levels have toward research is due to poor preparation, which, in turn, leads to a lack of intrinsic motivation (Van der Westhuizen, 2014). The implication is that students require more preparation to fully equip themselves for the dissertation required at master's level.

3.6. Conclusion

This chapter provided a brief overview of the development of SDT as well as the different sub-theories thereof. These include the cognitive evaluation theory, the organismic evaluation theory, causality orientations and the basic psychological needs theory. The chapter further considered several research studies in which SDT was used. The relevance of SDT, and specifically of the three Basic Psychological Needs, for this study was also demonstrated.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter the qualitative research approach and design, as well as the sampling and data collection methods utilized in this study, are described. The method of data analysis is presented. Furthermore, the trustworthiness of the findings are discussed. As an integral part of the trustworthiness, the aspects of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability are focused on. Finally, the ethical considerations of the study are examined.

4.2. Qualitative Research Approach

According to Kitto, Chesters, and Grbich (2008, p. 243), qualitative research is "concerned with the systematic collection, ordering, description and interpretation of textual data generated from talk, observation or documentation". Dabbs (1982) indicates that to conduct qualitative research is to explore the quality of a phenomenon. This would require exploring the how, what, why, who, and when of the phenomenon under study. Lune and Berg (2017) describe qualitative research as that which refers to the "meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things". The qualitative researcher takes a naturalistic and interpretive approach to studying phenomena. This means that phenomena are examined through the meanings attached to them by participants. The aim of qualitative research, according to Kitto, Chesters, and Grbich (2008), is to study processes of interaction and behaviors as well as values, meanings, and experiences of intentionally sampled individuals or groups of people in their "natural" settings. The present study seeks to explore the perceptions held by previous master's students in counselling and clinical psychology regarding the dissertation being a core component of obtaining a master's degree in psychology.

4.3. Research Design: Multiple Case Study Design

The case study approach is defined as one that is able to investigate both simple as well as intricate phenomena (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003). Berg and Lune (2017) describe a multiple case study approach as a broad study of different cases instrumental to the topic, with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of and insight into the topic. According to Yin (2003), studies using the multiple case study approach are considered more robust in

general. One of the goals of the multiple case study design is also to understand the differences and similarities between cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The multiple case study design thus allowed the researcher to compare and contrast the perceptions of the participants. It furthermore allowed the researcher to critically analyze the data and gain a better understanding, resulting in a coherent and comprehensive report of the findings.

4.4. Sampling Methods: Purposive Sampling

4.4.1. Sample universe.

Robinson (2014) asserts that the sampling process of qualitative research commences with defining the sample universe. The sample universe is described as the total number of individuals who may be justifiably sampled in an interview study. To do this, Robinson (2014) suggests that inclusion criteria, exclusion criteria, or both be specified. Considering the aim of the present study, specific inclusion criteria were specified. Although all participants within the sample of this study shared the commonality of being either clinical or counselling psychologists, they differed in age, race, religion, and culture. Mason (2002) suggests that a sample such as the aforementioned is more likely to yield results where the phenomenon can be generalized to diverse groups of cases instead of a specific group. Within the present study, both purposive and snowball sampling methods were used.

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling (Patton, 2015), meaning that participants were intentionally selected, in a non-random manner, due to the characteristics they possess. Purposive sampling requires the identification and selection of individuals or groups who are well informed about the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Patton (2015) and Yin (2011) affirm that purposive sampling is based on the richness of information that has been provided by the participants chosen for a study. The sample size will, therefore, partly depend on this factor. Considering that the central focus of the study was gaining an understanding of how the participants perceive the research component embedded within the applied psychology master's programs, it was not essential to focus on the demographics of these individuals. The inclusion criteria for the present study were as follows:

- counselling and clinical psychologists; and
- dissertations completed between at least six months and ten years ago.

4.4.2. Sampling and participants.

A total number of 13 participants from six different universities in South Africa, were recruited for the study. The sample consisted of five clinical psychologists and seven counselling psychologists.

Table 1: Participants' registration categories

Participants	Registration category
Edwin*	**Counselling**
Laura*	**Clinical**
Tina*	**Counselling**
MP*	**Counselling**
Leeanne*	**Counselling**
Sam*	**Clinical**
Verky*	**Counselling**
Anthony*	**Clinical**
Lauren*	**Counselling**
Karen*	**Clinical**
Adeline*	**Clinical**
Melani*	**Counselling**

According to Robinson (2014), the sample size of interview research with an idiographic aim is usually small. The purpose of the size is to allow for a locatable voice of the participants within the study as well as an intensive analysis of each case. Robinson and Smith (2010) agree that a smaller sample size ensures that the participants have a defined identity within the study, makes provision for the development of cross-case generalizations, and prevents the researcher feeling overwhelmed by the amount of data to be analyzed.

Participants for the study were furthermore recruited by means of snowball sampling (Robinson, 2014), which is largely a referral method for sampling. Merriam (2009) classifies this type of sampling as a form of purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was used to define the characteristics necessary to participate in the study, and snowball sampling to recruit participants for the study. The researcher began by identifying individuals who would

possibly fit the criteria for participation in the study. Additional participants were then referred to the researcher by the participants previously identified.

Challenges encountered with recruitment led to having the study advertised on the internet. The researcher identified a network of psychologists of varying categories on a social media platform. The study was advertised and interested candidates were required to contact the researcher privately to avoid any possibility of voiding the anonymity of potential participants. Hamilton and Bowers (2006) discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this approach and conclude that one of the disadvantages would be a skewed sample toward individuals of higher income and education levels. The focus of the present study is, however, educated individuals in the same career field, so the aforementioned disadvantage was not regarded a barrier.

4.5. Data Collection

4.5.1. Semi-structured interviews.

Interviews can be defined as a means of collecting data involving an interviewer who asks questions (Polit & Beck, 2006). Interviews are the most common form of collecting qualitative data and are deemed to be necessary for contributing theoretical and conceptual knowledge (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The popularity of the interview stems from the fact that it requires talking to either individuals or groups of people, which is considered the most natural form of eliciting information (Griffee, 2005). Through interviews, qualitative researchers gain a deep and contextual understanding of the lived experiences of participants as well as the manner in which the participants perceived these experiences (Schultze & Avital, 2011). Face to face interviews were chosen for this study in order to gain a rich understanding of the perceptions of the participants.

In this study, 13 semi-structured interviews were employed. Semi-structured interviews are designed for the purpose of gaining subjective responses from individuals who have experience with the particular phenomenon under study (McIntosh & Morse, 2014). Semi-structured interviews consist of a set of predetermined open-ended questions and additional questions stem from the conversation between the interviewee and interviewer (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Successful interviews begin with planning an interview schedule (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The interviews in the present research study commenced with a broad open-ended question, as recommended by several researchers (DiCicco-Bloom &

Crabtree, 2006; McIntosh & Morse, 2014; Doody & Noonan, 2013), in order to allow the participants to ease into the interview slowly. The follow-up questions then delved deeper into the experiences and perspectives of the participants. Doody and Noonan (2013) suggest that the more complex and sensitive questions be asked later on in the interview. The interview guide for this research study consisted of the following questions:

- What are your views regarding the dissertation being a core component of all applied psychology master's programs in South Africa?
- Describe your personal process of completing your dissertation.
- What did you find to be the most challenging in completing your dissertation?
- Why do you regard these to have been the most challenging aspects?
- How did you address these challenges?
- What did you find to be the least challenging aspect of completing your dissertation?
- Why do you regard these as the least challenging aspects?
- Given the opportunity to make any changes to the research component of the training program, what would those be?
- How would your ideal research component be structured?

At the beginning of each interview the participants were provided with an information sheet and consent form. Participants were given time to go through the documents presented. All interviews were recorded, which is recommended by Whiting (2008) as the easiest method of keeping records of data.

4.6. Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clark (2012) define thematic analysis as a manner of systematically identifying, organizing and providing insight into patterns or themes in a set of data. This means of data analysis allows the researcher to make sense of shared meanings and experiences. Thematic analysis uses the approach of extracting meanings and concepts from data that were gathered by the researcher, and themes or patterns emerging from this data are then critically analyzed (Javadi & Zarea, 2016). Braun and Clark (2012) differentiate between inductive and deductive thematic analysis with the former being a bottom up approach and the latter being a top down approach.

The present research study made use of both inductive and deductive thematic analysis. Some of the codes and themes emerged from the data collected, while codes related to the theoretical framework of the study were searched for in the data set. The researcher approached the data set with no preconceived notions of what will emerge from the data. This approach was used due to the study being an exploration of individuals' perceptions regarding the phenomenon under study. The aim was to create meanings and concepts (Javadi & Zarea, 2016) from the data provided by participants, rather than approaching the data with predetermined concepts and searching for data that fit it. Braun and Clark (2012) identify six phases of thematic analysis, which are outlined below:

- phase 1: familiarizing yourself with the data;
- phase 2: generating initial codes;
- phase 3: searching for themes;
- phase 4: reviewing themes;
- phase 5: defining and naming themes; and
- phase 6: producing the report.

A definition of each of these phases follows, along with how they were approached within this study.

- Phase 1: Familiarizing yourself with the data

Several authors agree that the first and most important step of commencing with the process of data analysis is to read through the data several times in order to begin the process of meaning making (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Javadi & Zarea, 2016; Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). As Braun and Clarke (2012) suggest, the data were read through while listening to the audio recordings of the interviews with the participants. While reading through the data the researcher engaged in a process of critically and analytically thinking about the data. The process of thinking about which themes and subthemes were possibly emerging already began at this point. The repetitive reading of the transcripts naturally led to questions regarding the meaning of the data. As is suggested, notes and questions were written down for further exploration and meaning making. Questions about motivation, power struggles, supervisor/supervisee relationships, the effect of personal struggles, and emotional processes were all jotted down for further reflection.

- Phase 2: Generating initial codes

Coding the data involved identifying features of the data that may be related to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This was done in a systematic manner as the researcher slowly read through the data, searching for information that was considered relevant and meaningful to the research question. The data gathered for this research study were coded using an open-coding approach. The data were combed through carefully while searching for specific information in the participants' descriptions of their processes of completing the dissertation, and each portion of data relevant to the study was highlighted and given a code. This resulted in many codes that had to be reworked. Information such as the supervisory practices, the relationships between supervisors and supervisees, the most challenging aspects, the least challenging aspects, coping mechanisms, emotional struggles and internal conflicts, among other aspects, were all highlighted and assigned either to a theme or subtheme. Coding can be either semantic or latent. Semantic codes provide a specific term that describes a portion of the data. Latent codes, meanwhile, provide an interpretation of what the participant may have meant, and this is usually in the form of a concept. The data were coded using both semantic and latent codes. For example, when participants spoke of *giving up*, the data were coded with a latent code because it related to the concept of motivation. If participants spoke of *the literature review being the easiest part of the dissertation*, that would be semantically coded as the least challenging aspect, because it was clearly stated. Certain portions of data were coded with more than one code. For example, difficulties with a supervisor would fit into subthemes of supervision processes as well as the emotional challenges participants faced.

- Phase 3: Searching for themes

The process of searching for themes entailed grouping certain codes into one set, ultimately creating a theme (Javadi & Zarea, 2016). Searching for themes within the coded data set is an active process of identifying codes that share similarities (Braun & Clark, 2012). By doing so the researcher creates themes and subthemes that will represent significant patterns within the data. At this stage, the researcher begins to think about how themes relate to one another and how they will form a coherent narrative about the data gathered.

The coded data were combed through for the identification of similar information from the different participants. At this stage, many similarities in the participants' experiences and perceptions were identified, which led to grouping the sets of coded data that appeared to

reflect a similar theme or meaning. Some of these were the difficult emotional processes they went through, the supervision practices they were exposed to, as well as personal challenges unrelated to the dissertation. Participants also had different research backgrounds, and some perceived their previous research education to have been sufficient while others found it to have been lacking. Once the coded data were grouped, the data were then combed through again to ensure that all information was suitable for each group. This then started the process of reviewing the themes and subthemes.

- Phase 4: Reviewing themes

Themes were reviewed by comparing them to the coded data and to the entire data set, as suggested by Braun and Clark (2012). It was then found that some of the data needed to be reorganized in terms of allocating certain codes to different themes or subthemes or replacing some of the subthemes and themes. After the grouping process, the data were again read through carefully for the identification of any data that did not belong in a specific group or may have been redundant. During this process, data were removed from certain groups and replaced with more suitable data. Subthemes were also removed and new subthemes identified. For instance, the final theme, which was initially named *Coping mechanisms*, had several subthemes but not enough data to substantiate those subthemes. The final theme thus changed from initially having four subthemes to having two subthemes. One subtheme was removed from the first theme of *General views and attitudes* and was replaced with another. Repeatedly reading through the data resulted in the addition of a subtheme to the second theme, *Personal processes.* This was done because the data were not sufficient to support the themes and subthemes identified. The next step, which involved the naming of the themes, then followed.

- Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

This process involved the discussion of the meaning of each theme and interpreting some of the data from the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The names of certain themes were changed. For example, *Coping mechanisms* was changed to *Creating a more positive master's dissertation experience.* This occurred after the interpretation of the data did not suit the name of the theme. This process also involved ensuring that the names of the themes would alert the reader to the core of the theme as well as ensuring that the names of themes are clear, accurate, and evident (Javadi & Zarea, 2016). This implies that after reading the

name of the theme, the reader should immediately know what it entails. Below is a diagram of the themes and subthemes identified in this study:

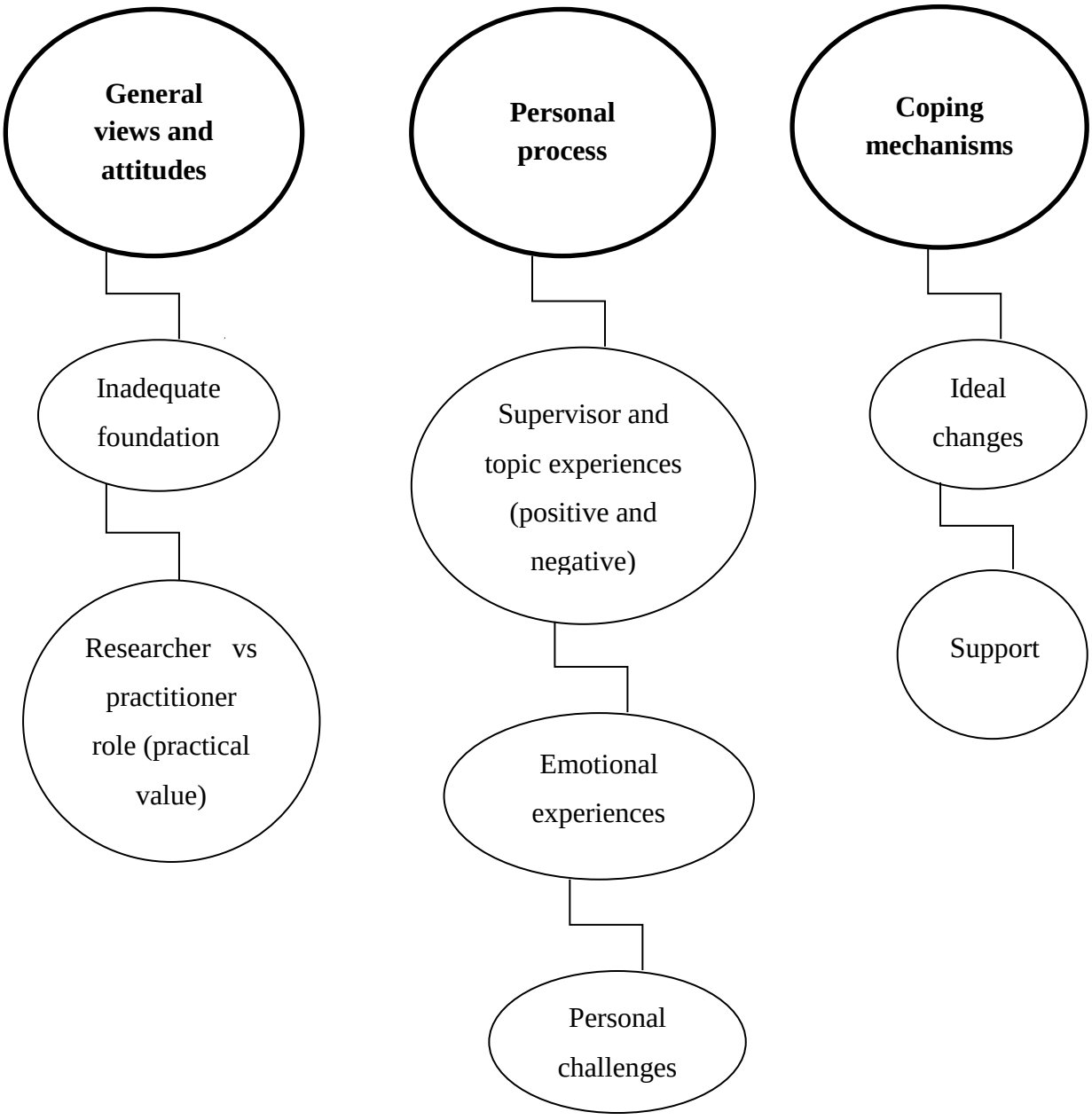

Figure 1: Themes and subthemes

- Phase 6: Producing the report

The report is produced with the goal of telling a persuasive story about the data based on what was found through analysis (Braun & Clark, 2012). While the story should be clear, it

should also be embedded within a theoretical framework, providing an argument that answers the research question (Javadi & Zarea, 2016). The discussion chapter of this research study is informed by SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The chapter narrates the story of the challenges, negative and positive supervisor/supervisee relationships, power struggles, internal conflicts, difficult emotional processes, and interesting perceptions of the necessity of the research component as shared by the participants about completing the research component of the applied psychology master's degree. Each of the above-mentioned aspects are looked at through the lens of SDT, specifically looking at the three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness).

4.7. Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the term trustworthiness or rigor when referring to the validity and reliability of a qualitative study. The trustworthiness of a study is determined by several factors, including credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4.7.1. Credibility.

Polit and Beck (2014) suggest that credibility is the most essential aspect of trustworthiness. The credibility of a study is said to be solid when readers are able to relate to it or recognize and experience it (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). It can further be described as the confidence in the findings of a study. Credibility is ensured through the use of several techniques, including researcher triangulation, data collection triangulation, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, member checking, and peer debriefing (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

To ensure the credibility of this study, the following can measures were implemented:

- The researcher engaged in a rigorous process of reading about the topic and the chosen method.
- The interviews were recorded and data were compared to previous studies to identify similarities and differences.
- Participants who were recruited provided knowledge based on experiences from several different training institutions in South Africa, implying that the data set is not based on one frame of reference.

- To ensure maximum levels of honesty from participants, participants were given the option to participate voluntarily and encouraged to be honest from the beginning.
- Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without justification for doing so.
- The interviews were transcribed immediately after the interview had taken place, and themes that appeared apparent were taken note of.

4.7.2. Dependability.

The dependability of a study is defined as the level of stability of the data over conditions of the study and over time (Polit & Beck, 2014). To achieve this the research process must follow a logical sequence and must be thoroughly and traceably documented (Tobin & Begley, 2004).

To ensure dependability in the current study, the following measures were taken:

- Precise methodological procedures were followed.
- Justifications were made for the methods used.
- Detailed notes were kept of procedures.
- The transcripts of interviews and analyzed data are held by the researcher. Both hard copies and soft copies are safely kept with codes to accessing them.

4.7.3. Transferability.

Transferability refers to the ease of generalizability of a study and whether it can be applied to other people in other contexts (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the transferability of a study is the responsibility of the researcher seeking to transfer the studies to an alternative context. To ensure transferability in the present study, recordings of interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure that the descriptions are thick.

Shenton (2004) is of the opinion that it is impossible to prove that findings of one study are applicable to another population due to the small sample size. It is, however, suggested that the boundaries of the study be clarified for the next researcher attempting to replicate the study with a different sample (Shenton, 2004). The limitations section in Chapter 7 addresses the boundaries of this study. For this particular study it is important to consider that these results stem from a particular context at a particular time. The quality of the training

programs of applied psychology master's degrees may increase or decrease depending on changes to the structure of the degree. It is thus important to note that the information provided by participants is specific to how the training programs were structured at the time that they were completing their master's degrees.

4.7.4. Confirmability.

Confirmability refers to the interpretations and findings of a study being a direct result of the data that were gathered (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

To ensure confirmability in the present study, the following steps were taken:

- The chosen methodology of the study was outlined and justified.
- The researcher needed to be self-aware as she too is completing a dissertation for an applied psychology master's degree. It would thus be easy to be subjective rather than objective in collecting and analyzing the data. The contributions and constant feedback of a study supervisor were helpful in ensuring that the researcher remained objective in her interpretations.
- A reflexive diary was kept to journal the researcher's progress as a researcher and what was learned from the process of the mini-dissertation. In addition, this assisted the researcher in separating personal thoughts and inferences from those of the participants.

4.8. Ethical Considerations

When research is conducted with human beings, how they are treated by the researcher is essential and, therefore, ethical codes are an important aspect of the research. First and foremost, research protocols should be approved of by a professional ethics committee. The proposal for the present research was approved by the Departmental Committee of the Department of Psychology, University of the Free State, as well as the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Free State (UFS-HSD2018/0010), which can be traced in Appendix A. This was done to ensure that the study is feasible and that all measures have been taken to ensure the safety of those participating in the study.

An information sheet detailing all the specifics of the study was compiled for the participants to read. It explained issues of confidentiality, anonymity and the privacy of their participation in the study. Each participant was given sufficient time to read through the

information sheet and clarify any misunderstandings. The participants were then required to sign consent for participation in the study, along with the signature of the researcher agreeing to the information and terms within the information sheet (see Appendix B for an example of the information sheet). To protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms were used to name the individual recordings and transcripts as well as in the research study itself. No biographical details of the participants was included in any of the documents. Participants were ensured of the voluntary nature of the study and their right to withdraw at any time.

Information provided in the interviews was immediately transferred from the recording device onto a password protected computer, accessible only by the researcher. The hard copies of the transcripts are kept in a locked safe and will be destroyed by shredding after five years. All soft copies will be permanently deleted from the electronic device on which it is stored and from all other devices that may have copies of the data.

Participants were assured of at least three debriefing sessions with a registered counselling psychologist (paid for by the researcher) in cases where it may have been necessary. Participants were further assured that they did not need to answer any questions that may make them uncomfortable. It was important for the researcher to remain as professional and warm as possible during the interviews.

One aspect that may have been of concern is the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the participants. The researcher knew one of the participants personally. This required of the researcher to be aware that this relationship may affect the quality of the data that were being gathered, as well as the manner in which the participant responded. However, having once been in the same position as the researcher in previous years, the participant understood the value of professionalism and integrity in providing data for the research study. Both participant and researcher understood their roles in the specific context.

4.9. Conclusion

This chapter provided the reader with an understanding of the methodology used in this study. This plays an essential role in understanding the context of the study. The recruitment and sourcing methods of purposive and snowball sampling were used respectively. This resulted in a multiple case study design that included 13 participants. The thematic analysis approach of Braun and Clarke (2012) is the chosen method of study for this mini-dissertation. The approach has been widely used over the years to systematically analyze data. The

thematic analysis approach was considered for this study due to the systematic process it follows. It is, furthermore, a useful and simple approach for making meaning of participant experiences. The findings of the study are presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1. Introduction

The analysis of 13 semi-structured interviews resulted in the finding of three themes and nine subthemes in total. The themes and subthemes are summarized in the diagram below. A detailed description of the themes and subthemes follows the diagram. Each subtheme is substantiated with verbatim quotes from the participants. Quotes can be traced in Appendices D–O). Use the referencing as a tool to find the quote within its context. For example: (Tina; Page 4; Par: 3) means that the quote comes from the participant named Tina and can be found on page 4 in paragraph 3 of her interview transcript.

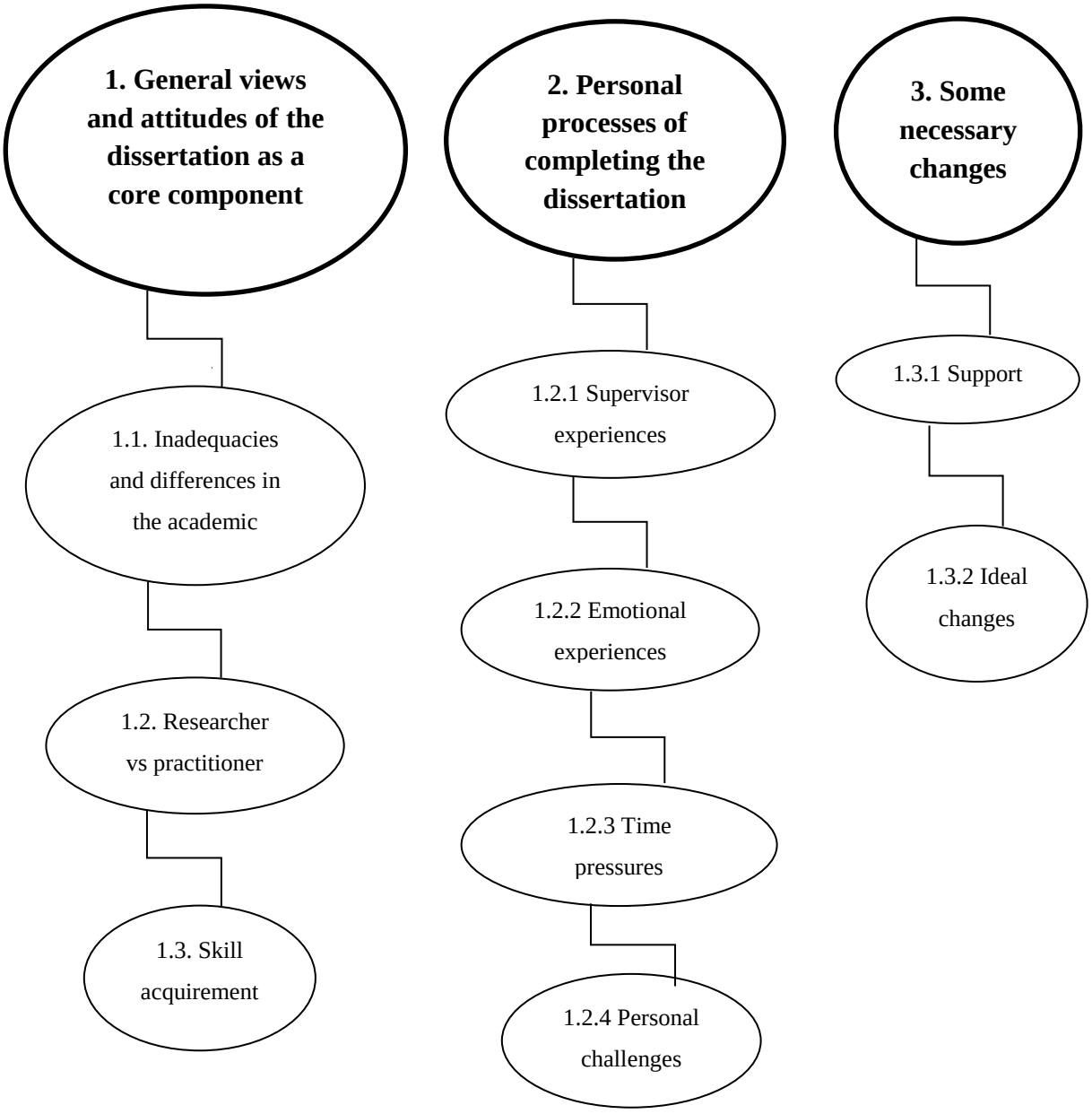

Figure 2: Themes and subthemes

5.1.1. Theme 1: General views and attitudes about the dissertation being a core component.

Theme 1 stems from giving the participants an opportunity to discuss their general perceptions regarding research as a core component of all applied psychology training programs in South Africa. What surfaced were conflicting opinions about the necessity of research, the level of preparedness for research, as well as if and how the research component contributed to the growth of the participants. The subthemes, therefore, are (a) inadequacies and differences in the academic foundations, (b) researcher versus practitioner, and (c) skills acquirement.

5.1.1.1. Inadequacies and differences in the academic foundations.

When describing their perceptions of the topic of research, several participants stated that they felt as if they lacked grounding in and knowledge of research. They perceived themselves as inexperienced and were of the opinion that they had not learned enough about the research component in their undergraduate and honors degrees. The participants further reported that, being from different universities, many of their colleagues had different experiences with research. The following quotes illustrate these opinions:

Tina highlighted the negative effect of her perceived insufficient research knowledge:

> *"…before we had even begun the year we had to have a proposal ready and, like I said, coming out of a place where I hadn't really done research before, it was completely unknown. I didn't know what to do so then found that that research proposal was totally inadequate/" (Tina; Page 1; Par: 2)*

Verky mentioned the lack of practice some of her colleagues had in writing a proposal:

> *"What I do know is when we all met in M1, coming from different universities, we all had different experiences with research and that played a role because some people hadn't really done a proposal so they didn't get to practice that, or if they did it was like a five page one." (Verky; Page 4; Par: 2)*

According to Laura, the exposure she had in her honors course was not sufficient. She said:

"From the university that I came from we didn't really have a very, very good research component as part of the honors year. There was something but it wasn't very applied. We did a…I think we did a proposal but we didn't do a full dissertation. So I didn't feel like I really knew what research was in master's – like really, really knew." (Laura; Page 4; Par: 3)

This was echoed by Lauren, who said that she had no training in research and noticed that she and her colleagues, being from different universities, all had unique ideas of the research process:

"We didn't have any training in what was the expectation, what is the level we are supposed to do, how do we write a research project. We came from different universities with different ideas of how to do things and now we all in the same space but how do we do it?" (Lauren; Page 4; Par: 5)

It is clear that participants felt a significant lack of the experience needed for the master's dissertation, resulting in a lack of knowledge about how to approach the task. An added lack of confidence in their own abilities accompanied these perceptions.

5.1.1.2. The researcher versus the practitioner.

Participants were conflicted about the necessity of research as a core component of all applied psychology degrees in South Africa. Some participants had difficulty making the connection between research and practice and felt that it was unnecessary because they could not grasp the application value. Others perceived it to be essential. The participants further outlined specific conditions under which they thought it necessary and when not.

Verky was able to identify the ways in which she applies in practice the skills she acquired through research. She said:

"So I think research plays a role, like today in my practice I think it plays a role in how I approach stuff, how I interact, how I think about things and how I approach reading an article or picking things out or being aware of certain things because it's so intense, you do, like, a lot of reading. So it's tough at the time but so valuable." (Verky; Page 4; Par: 2)

For Lee-Anne, the value of research was not so clear. She had this to say:

"I'm trying to think how and in what way I benefitted to become a psychologist by doing a dissertation and the answer is quite frankly none. I did it in an area that I'm very passionate about but I don't employ it my practice day to day." (Lee-Anne; Page 1; Par: 1)

Some participants referred to the importance of research in generating new knowledge. Laura said:

"I think it's important for psychologists to do research, and it's always interesting for me when people say they want to become psychologists but they don't like research, because all psychology is based on research and if you want something to be scientific and you want people to appreciate and value what you do, then it has to be based on research." (Laura; Page 1; Par: 1)

Melanie's view, highlighting the importance of literature when it comes to contextualization of knowledge, can be added to this discussion:

"…but ultimately the whole point of research, from what I understand, is to add to the body of knowledge that there is already and from research. It's kind of where we move forward from and if there wasn't any research where would we be at? We'd probably still be stuck in some Freudian/Erikson view of the world and not all the new theories that have come from that. And also if it's specific to our country and our setting, it's very different from other European or Westernized regions and it does assist in that regard." (Melanie; Page 1; Par: 2)

Mbali highlighted how the overall impact on the student's confidence and the role that plays in finding one's feet as a practitioner:

"I think because of the nature of the course, you're sort of coming to an understanding of yourself as a practitioner, and I think the research really pulls you apart and it sets so much doubt in yourself and also in your capabilities and your competence as a practitioner, which I feel is actually unrelated to what you do in practice, because my practice competence is different to my research competence and I think that's what I struggled with." (Mbali; Page 2; Par: 2)

Mbali also indicated the applied value of the research component being lost in the process:

"I would've appreciated having a connection between the two, having a better connection between my research and my practice." (Mbali; Page 2; Par: 2)

Mbali's conflicting perceptions became evident when she went on to describe what she enjoyed most about the master's dissertation:

"Sitting with the transcripts. It was difficult but I enjoyed it because that was where I saw the relation to practice, engaging in people's stories, engaging in how they lived their experiences and how they convey those lived experiences to interviewers or researchers." (Mbali; Page 3; Par: 4)

From the quotes presented above, it is clear that the participants in this study differed in their views about the role, value, and necessity of the master's dissertation. Despite these differences in opinion, the more pressing issue that results from this theme is that students are not adequately oriented and enlightened about the *why* of research.

5.1.1.3. Skill acquirement.

Many of the participants, despite being quite conflicted about the necessity of the master's dissertation, found it to be valuable given the development of new skills. One participant thought that the skills of critical analysis and critical writing are important for psychologists to acquire. She said:

"Uhm, I would be concerned if psychologists were coming out of a master's degree without the ability to critically read, critically do research and critically put together a report." (Tina; Page 1; Par: 1)

For another, self-discipline is essential:

"Self-discipline – I think that's the biggest skill of the dissertation." (Lee-Anne; Page 1; Par: 2)

Melanie highlighted that the coursework and research components differ in terms of the skills with which they equip students. She added:

"It does teach you a different set of skills that I don't think you'd utilize or come across if you were just going to class, writing tests and assignments…uhm, because you do focus on different skills like critical thinking, because you're really applying yourself and it

also pushes your limits because it's largely just yourself doing everything. So lots of independent work." (Melanie; Page 1; Par: 1)

For Sam, the challenges of the master's dissertation contributed to building character, both personally and in practice:

"Because it's such a difficult process it really forces the psychologist, whoever is doing the dissertation – clinical, counselling, educational – to become stronger as a person and then it also teaches them to better deal with the problems their patients have. Uhm…that's kind of like the emotional growth from it." (Sam; Page 3; Par: 4)

Finally, although challenging, Verky can appreciate not only the research skills she learned but also general skills. She said:

"…like, it's hard and I think it's really stressful, but I gained a lot from that and not just learning about my topic. I mean even just about time management and getting participants and having to do analysis and all of that I think is really important." (Verky; Page 1; Par: 1)

The participants found research to be valuable not only in developing skills but also in building character and contributing to their growth in terms of being psychologists.

5.1.2. Theme 2: Personal process.

In describing their personal processes of research, the experiences of the participants varied. The theme of personal processes of the dissertation thus includes the following subthemes: (a) supervisor experiences, (b) emotional experiences, (c) time related pressures, and (d) personal challenges.

5.1.2.1. Supervisor experiences.

Participants expressed both significant difficulties as well as positive experiences in dealing with research supervisors. Some participants expressed that the supervisory experience made the master's dissertation experience an unpleasant one:

"The supervisory relationship for me was the most challenging. Ja, uhm…I found the process to be very critical and I don't, it doesn't bode well with me uhm…that kind of constant, like, negativity, uhm, it doesn't sit well with my personality and it kind of breaks me down. So that was where I kind of lost motivation and that was my biggest

challenge, to kind of find the motivation to do this despite knowing the intense criticism that was gonna come from every section that was handed in." (Tina; Page 3; Par: 6)

Both Adeline and Melanie had difficult experiences with their supervisors who, they reported, spent supervision time on other activities or took a long time to send feedback. Both reported feelings of helplessness:

"Most challenging would be my supervisor. The appointed supervisor was actually using the time not to focus on research but to talk about history events and obviously you're in a very dependent position, so you need them and you can't challenge them or you can't push the process and often if you push the process you get a lot of blocks in doing that." (Adeline; Page 1; Par: 3)

"Another thing was supervisors taking their time. That was a big part of my frustration. I had to wait six months for feedback on a draft I did and I feel like that's wasted time because it was a draft and I couldn't do anything." (Melanie; Page 2; Par: 2)

Some participants also discussed the emotional impact the relationships with their supervisors had on them:

"It was an extremely long process and unnecessary, and I suffered financially and emotionally, and just being dealt with from an authoritarian position just because they can." (Adeline; Page 2; Par: 4)

"The whole thing just became a mess. It was a frustrating process for me. I felt very bullied by my supervisor. He started making very personal remarks to me. I felt really quite broken by him." (Lauren; Page 2; Par: 2)

In contrast with the experiences described above, some participants reported having positive relationships with their supervisors. Verky said:

"I think I also had a phenomenal supervisor. She did tweak my literature review and help me through that, which was amazing because I had to change a lot but I had the foundation." (Verky; Page 2; Par: 3)

"I think my supervisor was amazing but went like a Trojan and did not stop. I received feedback on my dissertation in the morning hours and it was like academics and that was her life as well, so amazingly supportive." (Verky; Page 2; Par: 4)

Anthony emphasized how the constant support of his supervisor made the process less challenging:

> *"I would say the least challenging was *pause* engaging with my supervisor, in the sense that no matter how I felt, no matter how fed up I was, no matter how frustrated, no matter how crap my writing was (and it was crap), he was always there. I could literally phone him any time of the day and he would come back to me and say, 'Okay, I'm available at that time for you to come and see me.' So I really experienced tremendous support from him and a couple of colleagues around me. That helped me a lot." (Anthony; Page 3; Par: 2)*

Laura found the input of her supervisor valuable and vital in making the process slightly easier:

> *"My supervisor, she really made the process easy. She really gave me valuable feedback that I could incorporate and she spoke to me in a way that I understood, so that made it really much easier." (Laura; Page 3; Par: 1)*

5.1.2.2. Emotional experiences.

The participants described different emotional experiences including anger, frustration, anxiety and demotivation.

Edwin felt anxious about the master's dissertation and used the metaphor of drowning to describe his emotional state. He said:

> *"Research was the module that I found most difficult or most challenging because it was the most anxiety provoking. It's just the one that took kind of the most emotional toll on me and that's why I kind of avoided it for as long as I possibly could and procrastinated. I remember saying to her [colleague] – whenever I was in the middle of going through my transcriptions or writing up – I remember saying to her, 'I feel like I'm in the middle of an ocean and I can't see land. I feel like I'm drowning a little bit. I'm feeling quite overwhelmed.' I think I must have said that to her on about five or six different occasions and that was in part because of my inconsistency with working with it." (Edwin; Page 6; Par: 1 & Page 4; Par: 1)*

For Anthony, the master's dissertation evoked so much anxiety that he appeared to be reliving the feeling throughout the interviewing process. He said:

"I think while I was talking to you I just, I could feel in my body all the tension that came with just doing the dissertation." (Anthony; Page 4; Par: 2)

In addition to feeling angry and frustrated, Anthony reported on the impact that these feelings had on his level of motivation:

"There was a lot of anger, there was a lot of frustration, you know. The impact of that decision resulted in even less motivation." (Anthony; Page 1; Par: 3)

Another participant experienced frustration, isolation and anger:

"…nightmare…extremely stressful. There's a lot of unforeseen circumstances and often feeling alone, and unsupported and angry. So it was a very frustrating process." (Adeline; Page 2; Par: 2)

Laura discussed how feedback had a negative effect on her level of motivation. She said:

"Sometimes it was really demotivating when she sent you something back and everything was red then you're like, 'Wow, okay, I literally put everything in here, my heart, my soul and she just…doesn't like anything.'" (Laura; Page 1; Par: 3)

Tina spoke of the aftereffects of the master's dissertation and how it has influenced her view on doing research in such a formal manner. She said:

"…it was required to be a very independent process, which I absolutely hated at the time and felt like my supervisor should be helping me more and doing more, so I found the experience quite traumatic. It's taken, like, a long time for me to not have an animosity around it. Uhm, for me it has left, like, an issue…like, research is still, like, a traumatic thing for me. It's something that's difficult, I will read journals for enjoyment and I love it but if you ask me to write something up for a journal it creates a lot of anxiety." (Tina; Page 2; Par: 1 & Page 3; Par: 3)

5.1.2.3. Time pressures.

Participants reported not having enough time to focus on both their coursework and research. They referred to the sacrifices they had to make to get it done. The time pressures had an impact on different areas of their lives.

Tina described how the dissertation became less of a priority for her because of the time pressures she faced:

> *"…the pressure of you need to be done by December, you need to be done by December, in my eyes, that was my personal experience just because with the modules and everything that was happening in that year it was cramming in a few hours of sleep or doing research and survival kind of became key *laughs*. So I put it on a backburner." (Tina; Page 1; Par: 4)*

Lee-Anne found herself having to make tough decisions regarding what she would devote her time to:

> *"You have to choose: am I researching for my client to be a better psychologist or am I going to do my dissertation tonight? And you end up doing your dissertation. So that's very difficult because you're not doing the best you can because your dissertation is waiting for you." (Lee-Anne; Page 2; Par: 2)*

> *"You're trying to squeeze the two in. I feel like both areas lose. You're not applying yourself 100% to your research. It could be better but there's no time. And my internship – there's areas I should have learned more, did more research, took in more, but I couldn't because there's no time because I was doing the other. So I feel both areas actually suffer." (Lee-Anne; Page 4; Par: 1)*

Self-care took a backseat for some of the participants. They stated the following:

> *"I think throughout the year I was just like a train that kept on going and I never had a chance to really feel if I wasn't okay or if I was tired because I just didn't have the time to be tired." (Lauren; Page 7; Par: 1)*

> *"I got full burn-out, though, afterwards, that I took off almost a year just to recover." (Lee-Anne; Page 2; Par: 3)*

Participants clearly found the time pressures to be a constant uphill battle. They found themselves sacrificing their mental health in some instances and some found themselves succumbing to procrastination.

5.1.2.4. Personal challenges.

In conjunction with the difficult emotional experiences discussed, participants dealt with personal challenges that were unavoidable. The following statements describe some of the difficult circumstances the participants faced while completing their master's dissertation:

> *"I also think it takes up a lot of your personal life and I missed out on a lot. I missed out on a lot of family time, relationship time, doing things I loved." (Laura; Page 1; Par: 3)*

Financial challenges proved to hinder how productive the participants could be regarding the master's dissertation. The following was reported:

> *"I would say two things: 1) from a financial perspective I was very worried because I've got house bonds, car bonds, etc. to pay. As a guy I also feel that I'm responsible for earning and in that regard I was starting to look for little short-term jobs that I could do to earn money, which took up more time and took me out of the frame of reference that I needed to complete the dissertation." (Anthony; Page 2; Par: 1)*

> *"The most challenging aspect was literally experiencing the difficulty of financial obligations and then shifting between the frame of reference of looking for work and moving back into the frame of dissertation. That for me posed quite a bit of difficulty." (Anthony; Page 2; Par: 2)*

Lee-Anne focused on the emotional aspect when describing her personal challenges:

> *"I got burn-out and my family suffered and my husband suffered, so at their expense and at my own expense, but I got it done." (Lee-Anne; Page 2; Par: 3)*

5.1.3. Theme 3: Some necessary changes.

The focus of theme three was aspects contributing to the master's dissertation as a more positive and bearable experience for the participants. The participants discussed how they managed to cope despite the challenges described. In addition, participants shared information on which aspects they thought would make the master's dissertation experience less stressful. Many participants struggled to identify what they did as a means of coping. Subthemes were identified as (a) support and (b) ideal changes.

5.1.3.1. Support.

Participants described the type of support they received in order to cope with the difficulties they faced during the process of completing their master's dissertation. Support from family members, colleagues and staff appeared to play a critical role in helping the participants cope throughout the research process. Below are some of the support systems they used, as identified by the participants:

The importance of knowing that she was not alone in this situation made it slightly easier for Tina. She added:

> *"…also, major support in terms of family, my husband who kind of motivate you. I think that was a big thing for me, and my husband's in research so it was nice to have, like, a partner in crime." (Tina; Page 3; Par: 4)*

For some participants the department provided support. Verky said:

> *"I never at one point felt lost because everyone was there and we would even like meet for lectures and the lecturer would check in with us to find out how it's going and we would be able to have a bit of a debriefing." (Verky; Page 3; Par: 4)*

For others, the support of their colleagues was vital:

> *"The next level was of course some colleagues, some people who went before me or still busy, engaging with them, breaking the isolation because that's a big thing." (Anthony; Page 2; Par: 3)*

> *"Something I can think of that assisted me throughout the process when I did my research: the support I had from close family members as well." (Karen; Page 3; Par: 4)*

Lauren found supervision to be helpful:

> *"At my internship site I had a supervisor and I had outside supervision as well to assist me with my internship site stuff, but also we talked a lot about research and it was supposed to be about the clients but it became more about research because I was having such a terrible time." (Lauren; Page 6; Par: 5)*

5.1.3.2. Ideal changes.

In discussing how the master's dissertation could have been less stressful, participants naturally made recommendations of how they think the "problem" can be solved:

Some participants highlighted that they would have appreciated having more time to do their master's dissertation:

> *"I think I've always envied, in hindsight, universities where you get one year for your classwork and your theory and the next year for your research and then your internship…that sounds absolutely incredible and, uhm, the ability to go into your internship knowing that your research is completed for me would be a major improvement. I know there's pros and cons but that's something I would consider." (Tina; Page 6; Par: 1)*

> *"I think if I were in a position to change anything I think it would be to change the time to do it in – a year and a half – and it would take the pressure off and actually not cause a lot of us to freak out." (Verky; Page 3; Par: 2)*

> *"A bit more time in my master's year so, say, maybe a few hours where you can actually work on that because I felt at the university where I did my master's there were so many assignments that you never actually had the time to work on your research." (Laura; Page 4; Par: 4)*

Others, such as Adeline, thought it might be good to restructure the entire course, which would essentially provide more time for research. She said:

> *"Moving towards having a two year course for counselling, education, and clinical and then during that time the first year would be more focused on academic work and a little bit of research and the second year would be more focused on research and then having a little bit of academic training and then moving onto your internship so that you actually complete your research component as part of your two years that you're at the university." (Adeline; Page 4; Par: 2)*

Edwin suggested time where students can give the research component their undivided attention. He added:

"I think what needs to happen is that you get a year to do the applied stuff, maybe nine months of the year to do the applied work and get dedicated time to just do research. Or maybe in that nine months or the chunk of the year where you're just doing applied stuff you do minimal research, so maybe getting together your proposal and getting ethics clearance and that sort of stuff, but the actual data collection and analysis and writing up you almost need dedicated time." (Edwin; Page 1; Par: 3)

Whereas some focused on the amount of time to do the research, others suggested some changes in either the structure of supervision or the training of supervisors. This is what Lauren had to say:

"Better supervisor training and selection from a university perspective because I've heard all round from many people that the supervisors just suck, you know, they're not good and everybody has a lot of issues with them." (Lauren; Page 4; Par: 2)

Sam experienced a lack of support and said:

"What would have made it a bit better for me would be if I had more support and not the kind that came from family members but support from people who actually knew what they were doing." (Sam; Page 3; Par: 1)

Finally, Tina suggested a change in responsibility of the supervisor, implying that this would make the supervision experience less stressful:

"I think my main changes would be, as I mentioned just now, an external. We had one external and then our supervisor marked. I'm not sure how it works at every other university but I would take away the aspect of the supervisor marking, uhm, your research and rather have two externals marking just so that those that maybe struggle with it or have a tense relationship, you're able to know you can get through the process without it impacting on your final results." (Tina; Page 6; Par: 1)

To conclude, many participants agreed that the master's dissertation does contribute to the development of certain skills they would not have attained had they not done the dissertation. Many perceived their challenges to have stemmed from an inadequate foundation in research. The participants further experienced conflict between the roles they were required to fulfill as both researcher and practitioner. Supervisory practices led to different experiences, both positive and negative. In addition, personal challenges, emotional

experiences, and time pressures proved to make the master's dissertation process more challenging for the participants. Lastly, participants evidently appreciated the support they received and had many opinions on the changes they would recommend to make the master's dissertation process a more positive experience.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1. Introduction

Each of the themes presented in Chapter 5, namely (a) general views and attitudes about the dissertation being a core component; (b) personal processes in writing the dissertation, and (c) necessary changes, will be discussed in relation to relevant literature. These themes are explored through the lens of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000), particularly the sub-theory of the three basic psychological needs.

6.2. Perceived Incompetence

Some of the participants expressed feelings of inadequacy regarding the undertaking of a research project. These perceptions correspond to the findings of Komba (2016) as well as Khan and Matin (2017), who found that students lacking in their understanding of how to conduct research. In contrast, other participants perceived the mini-dissertation as time consuming rather than as difficult. It was, however, interesting to note that those participants also mentioned that they received good training in research prior to enrolling for their master's degree. The participants also attributed the ease of the mini-dissertation to their personality types and hard-working nature.

Ngodi and Kayode (2013) and Pillay and Kritzinger (2007) indicate that students conducting research at master's level tend to lack the necessary knowledge base in research and frequently have different experiences in their training in research. This finding surfaced in the data collection process of the present study too, as participants indicated that they did not feel competent to write their mini-dissertation and did not do a full research project in their honors training. The satisfaction of the need for competence is necessary for individuals to feel confident in their own abilities (Hyde & Atkinson, 2018). Relating this back to the results of this study, it appears that participants did not exude confidence in their ability to conduct research at master's level. As indicated in Chapter 3, intrinsic motivation can be maintained when individuals are optimally challenged, thus fulfilling the need for competence (Renninger & Hidi, 2015). Participants in this study, however, initially perceived the mini-dissertation as a task that exceeded their skills. The need for competence in this instance was not fulfilled and intrinsic motivation possibly lacked. As a result, it was difficult

for the participants to develop autonomous motivation, making the process of writing the mini-dissertation even more challenging.

6.3. The Development of Personal and Professional Skills Despite Conflicting Views About the Mini-Dissertation

"From the concrete who knew that a flower would grow?" This is a popular saying reflecting the perceptions of many participants in this study. The participants described the mini-dissertation process as confusing, challenging, frustrating, and anxiety provoking, but amidst all these negative connotations, they experienced both personal and professional growth. The purpose of the mini-dissertation was initially unclear for many of the participants and led to conflicting feelings regarding the necessity thereof. In discussing their general perceptions of the research component, participants did not necessarily express a positive attitude. However, many could identify the value it holds for practicing as a psychologist. Some reported improvement in their report writing or client conceptualization skills, while others reported having become more proficient at reading journal articles. Many participants appreciated how the mini-dissertation fostered growth in critical thinking and critical writing. Considering that participants were able to identify how they benefitted from the mini-dissertation, the question can be raised whether the participants had a negative attitude toward the mini-dissertation itself or rather about specific elements of the mini-dissertation process. Memarpour, Fard, and Ghasemi (2015) indicate that it is possible for students to develop a positive attitude when they are able to recognize the relation between research and practice. Similarly, Sabzwari, Kauser, and Khuwaja (2009) note that students are more positive about the research component when they perceive it to be beneficial to their profession. In light of these two studies, it becomes clear that the participants in the present study were able to identify the value of the mini-dissertation once they began practicing.

The internal conflict participants experienced became clear through the perceptions of some of the participants. Two of the participants clearly stated that they could see absolutely no link between the mini-dissertation and practicing as a psychologist, but later on in the interview mentioned skills or characteristics they had developed because of the research component. The latter stands in contrast to the findings of Sabzwari, Kauser, and Khuwaja (2009), who indicated that students had a positive attitude regarding research when they could identify the value of the research for their profession. Participants in the present study, although appreciating the link between research and their profession, maintained negative

attitudes about the mini-dissertation. In contrast, some participants stated that the research component served a purpose in a professional capacity by shaping how they think about things and how they interact, and by creating a general awareness of certain things in the profession. Again, the conflicting views on the mini-dissertation are reflected here.

Participants from this study appreciated how research contributes to advancing the field of contextualized psychology, which they perceived to be essential. This important contribution of research is also supported by several researchers focusing on moving away from a Westernized view of psychology (Baloyi & Ramose, 2016; Long, 2017; Bantjes, Kagee, & Young, 2016). This view is supported by the American Psychological Association (2017) who highlights the importance of developing an "African psychology". One participant stated:

> *"if there wasn't any research, where would we be at? We'd probably still be stuck in some Freudian/Erikson view of the world and not all the new theories that have come from that and, also, if it's specific to our country and our setting, it's very different from other European or Westernized regions and it does assist in that regard."*

In this instance, majority of the participants thought it necessary for psychologists to be knowledgeable in the field of research.

In keeping with the South African viewpoint voiced by Pillay and Kritzinger's (2007) findings, some participants failed to see how the mini-dissertation added value to their process of obtaining a master's degree in clinical or counselling psychology. Although the perceived disconnect between research and practice did emerge, the majority of the participants in this study were able to identify how the research component contributed to their growth in a professional capacity. The aforementioned speaks to the fulfilment of the need for autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000). It does appear as though the need for autonomy may have been thwarted, as students are not given a choice regarding their engagement in the mini-dissertation. The reported information on their development, however, points toward the fulfilment of their autonomy through the skills they acquired as a result of completing the mini-dissertation. The skills they acquired aligned with their interests in psychology as well the skills they would need as practitioners (Roth, 2014).

In addition to the acquirement of academic skills, participants reported on acquiring personal skills too. Personal skill development included interpersonal skills, time-management, working independently, self-discipline, and self-awareness to assist in better

managing the challenges of future patients. Similarly, Drennan and Clarke (2009) report that the master's dissertation develops skills of critical thinking, self-directed learning, and the ability to conduct research independently. Orna and Stevens (1995) also report that the acquirement of interpersonal skills is one of the learning outcomes of the master's dissertation. Furthermore, Biggam (2008) notes the importance of being able to work independently and maintaining an attitude of self-discipline, which many participants regarded as key while completing the mini-dissertation.

During the interviews, the participants reported feeling more confident at the end of their dissertation writing process than at the beginning. In light of the above, Demb and Funk (1999) found that students develop more confidence in their skills toward the end of the master's dissertation process. From the perceptions of the participants of this study, there are indications that they were not motivated to complete the master's dissertation because they felt incompetent and confused about the entire process. The majority of the participants reported that they continued to feel incompetent throughout the process because they would receive negative feedback from supervisors. Upon reflection of this process, however, and from the perceptions they shared, it became obvious that the mini-dissertation had been beneficial in satisfying their need for competence. The fulfilment of their psychological need for competence was reflected in their identification of acquired skills. This coincides with the findings of DeHaan, Hirai, and Ryan (2015), who found that the need for competence is likely to be satisfied in environments where the development of new skills is required. For this to happen individuals must receive feedback that supports their efficacy (DeHaan, Hirai, & Ryan, 2015). Although new skills were acquired by the participants, an important aspect to highlight from the current findings is that many participants perceived feedback as negative and unsupportive. This finding contrasts with DeHaan, Hirai, and Ryan's finding that feedback must support the efficacy of the student. Instead, participants reported that they felt less motivated after seeing their feedback from their supervisor.

6.4. Supervisor Experiences

Ghadirian, Sayarifard, Majdzadeh, Rajabi, and Yunesian (2014) found that the research experience of a student is highly dependent on the skill of the supervisor. Different experiences with supervisors and topics emerged from the interviews. Some participants perceived their supervisors as intimidating and felt quite demotivated by them, while others perceived their supervisors as supportive and motivating. One of the terms used to describe

the nature of the supervisory relationship was “authoritarian”, which resulted in the participant feeling as if she was powerless in the relationship. This participant described her feedback as all negative. She pointed out that she felt quite demotivated because there was a lack of positive feedback.

In evaluating the descriptions of the participants regarding the supervisory relationship, it becomes clear that there was often a power struggle between participant and supervisor. The power struggle appears to have been the result of the dependent nature of the relationship. The position of dependence was highlighted by many of the participants and made them feel powerless to a point where they were fearful of voicing their opinions or frustrations about the process. Participants often found themselves having to wait for long periods of time for feedback or felt that they were forced to do things in the manner in which their supervisor had suggested. Many felt that expressing their own opinions or pushing their supervisors for feedback would result in negative repercussions for them. The supervisors of the participants in this study failed to meet the expectations outlined in the literature. According to the literature, supervisors are expected to provide timeous feedback and encouragement, and act as mentors, editors, and confidantes. (Bartlett & Mercer, 2001; Kelly & Ling, 2001; Shannon, 1995). Participants in this study had similar expectations of their supervisors, but these were not met by all supervisors.

Drawing from the reported findings of this study, it can be argued that many supervisors preferred the dependent style of supervising. Some of the participants felt that supervisors misused their position of power through acts such as making them wait and using supervision time to discuss matters unrelated to the mini-dissertation. Research supervisors are responsible for providing support and guidance (Lessing & Schulze, 2004), but in this study, many participants perceived a lack of these elements. It appears as if the supervisors discussed here do not conform to the supervisory models suggested by Gurr (2001), Burnett (1999) and McApline and Weiss (2000). These researchers suggest the Student/Supervisor Alignment (SSA) model, which fosters autonomy and independence; the Collaborative Cohort Model (CCM), which encourages cohesion and group meetings; and the more dependent model, where student and supervisor interact and collaborate continuously throughout the process. These models further seem to promote the fulfilment of the three basic psychological needs, which could indicate the need for supervisors to follow a structured model for supervising dissertations. This may be able to promote psychological health and ultimately motivate students.

In contrast to the discussion above, some of the participants reported positive experiences with their supervisors and stated that their supervisors were of great help. Having supervisors who were helpful, available, and supportive were essential for the participants who had positive experiences. These students reported that although the process continued to be challenging, the support they received from their supervisors made it bearable. It appears to have been comforting for them to know that they always had someone knowledgeable on whom they could count for support. These participants further reported that they never felt afraid to voice their opinions and to go and see their supervisors.

In feeling powerless, the participants' need for autonomy was not fulfilled. When the need for autonomy is fulfilled, it becomes easier for behavior to be integrated (Núñez, Fernández, León, & Grijalvo, 2014). This means that individuals will engage in behavior not out of coercion, but because they feel autonomously motivated to do so. Autonomous motivation cannot exist in an environment where individuals feel powerless and coerced (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Núñez, Fernández, León, and Grijalvo (2014) indicate the lack of vitality experienced by students when in controlling environments. Of interest to note is that of the three participants who reported positive supervisory experiences, two managed to complete their dissertation within the stipulated time frame. All seven participants who reported negative supervisory relations did not manage to complete the dissertation within the stipulated time frame. This possibly indicates that when the supervisory relationship is positive, students feel more motivated and their basic psychological needs tend to be fulfilled, whereas in the negative supervisory relationships the fulfilment of basic psychological needs may be thwarted, resulting in less motivation.

The participants' need for competence was also negatively affected due to supervisors being extremely critical in their feedback. As mentioned before, when feedback supports the students' worth, intrinsic motivation can be maintained (DeHaan, Hirai, & Ryan, 2000). In this study, participants rarely experienced that type of feedback, resulting in the thwarting of the need for competence. Furthermore, the challenges with throughput rates in South African universities, which also exist within applied psychology master's courses, can be explained with the work of Cavusoglu and Karatas (2015). These researchers reported on the effect of motivation on academic procrastination and how this stems from undermining any of the three basic psychological needs (Cavusoglu & Karatas, 2015).

Finally, participants reported feeling unsupported by their supervisor and their institution. One participant specifically discussed how she had reported her supervisor to superiors at the institution and received no support in dealing with her supervisor. The experiences regarding the lack of support are similar to the findings of Silinda and Brubacher (2017), who reported on South African students experiencing a lack of academic support from the institution and research supervisors.

6.5. Challenging Personal Processes

The pressure of time resulted in personal processes that proved to be an upheaval and resulted in negative emotional experiences for the participants. The time pressure of completing the mini-dissertation within the two years of completing the coursework and the internship had a negative impact on several aspects of the lives of the participants. These pressures resulted in anxiety and, ultimately, in participants feeling that they could not put a sufficient amount of effort into the coursework, the internship, or the research itself. Some of the participants felt torn between their coursework, practical work, and research, or between their internships and research. One participant, indicating the challenge of finding time for everything, stated:

> *"You have to choose: am I researching for my client to be a better psychologist or am I going to do my dissertation tonight, and you end up doing your dissertation. So that's very difficult because you're not doing the best you can because your dissertation is waiting for you."*

Participants described the year as being too busy to pay attention to their mental health. One participant found herself having to place her research on the "backburner" in order to survive the coursework year. These perceptions indicate that students felt unsure of their academic and practical performance, indicating the hindrance of the need for competence. In addition, feeling torn between elements on which to work left participants feeling like they could not give each of the different elements enough effort and attention. This alludes to the lack of a sense of mastery over their environment, which Hyde and Atkinson (2018) perceive as important for competence.

Research indicates that students must avoid increased amounts of stress during the years of completing the mini-dissertation (Roslan, Ahmad, Nabilla, & Ghiami, 2017). The findings, however, prove to be ironic in light of the aforementioned research. Participants were

stressed and overworked to the point of being burned out. Others were ignorant of the state of their mental health and chose just to keep going in spite of how they were feeling mentally. It is unsurprising that the act of balancing the roles of researcher, student, and therapist leads to a decrease in the quality of mental health.

In addition to the challenging process of the mini-dissertation, participants had difficulties with finances. According to South African literature, it is the most challenging aspect to deal with in the entire process of writing a mini-dissertation (Zulu, 2014). Counselling and clinical psychology students cannot register with the HPCSA until they have completed the mini-dissertation. As a result, some of the students are left unemployed after having completed their coursework and internship, leading to the financial difficulties that many participants mentioned. In addition, students often have to continue paying for their studies irrespective of being unemployed because they still need to complete their mini-dissertation to obtain the degree. What is more, the costs of editing the mini-dissertation, along with registration fees for the board examination, make the financial burden heavier. Students are then forced to seek alternative employment while having to focus on research, creating another time related challenge. In addition, the temporary employment may interfere with the necessary frame of mind students need to be in for the writing of the mini-dissertation. Participants reported that it was challenging to focus completely on the mini-dissertation while worrying about bills that were piling up. This was reported to be a major adjustment as they had been used to receiving a salary during their internship.

Furthermore, participants reported that the mini-dissertation left minimal or no time to spend with family and friends. This was a frustration for participants and thwarted their need for autonomy as well as relatedness. Participants were now forced to do research instead of focusing on the things on which they really wanted to focus. Resultantly, the intrinsic motivation of the participants was undermined since autonomy is a prerequisite for intrinsic motivation (Mozgalina, 2015). Mozgalina (2015) further indicates that activities that leave individuals with minimal choice, as the mini-dissertation does, threatens the fulfilment of the need for autonomy. The psychological need for relatedness may have been left unfulfilled due to the lack of time spent with family and friends.

Many negative emotional experiences resulted from feelings of incompetence. Although a few participants described the experience as positive, they still experienced negative emotions due to being significantly stressed. Cavusoglu and Karatas (2015) highlight that the

lack of fulfilment of any of the basic psychological needs would lead to academic procrastination, which it did for some participants in this instance. Anxiety was one of the core emotional responses toward the mini-dissertation. Silinda and Brubacher (2017) as well as Bocar (2009) have similarly found that anxiety is one of the major difficulties with writing the dissertation. Feelings of isolation also stood out among participant reports of the master's dissertation. One participant specifically described feeling as if he were "drowning in an ocean".

These emotional experiences, particularly feelings of isolation expressed by the participants, lead one to believe again that their needs for relatedness may not have been fulfilled throughout this process. The fulfilment of the need for relatedness can be challenging for this specific group of students, as some completed their research from home. Many reside in provinces outside that of their university, thus making access to the university more challenging. This poses a challenge to the university in ensuring that students do not feel isolated. It does, however, indicate a need for universities to look into different means of ensuring that students feel supported irrespective of whether they are able to access the university or not. Considering that the need for relatedness should be fulfilled for individuals to experience intrinsic motivation, reports of participants feeling demotivated are foreseeable (Cavusoglu & Karatas, 2015).

6.6. Creating a More Positive Master's Dissertation Experience

Support and bringing about specific changes within the research module were discussed at length during the data collection process. Support appeared to be the most important factor in coping with the challenges of completing the mini-dissertation. This provides some evidence in support of the important role played by the fulfilment of the need for relatedness in the participants' navigation of the mini-dissertation process. Frequently mentioned support systems were that of family members and colleagues who were also completing their master's degrees. Some felt comforted knowing that they were not alone, hence seeking support from classmates as well as individuals who had been through the process before. These findings echo the research of Niemiec and Ryan (2009), who found that people internalize the values of those to whom they feel close and in contexts where they perceive a sense of belonging. Biggam (2008) also highlights the importance of group meetings between students.

Many of the participants experienced significant difficulty with the supervisory relationship and suggested changes to the roles of this relationship. They perceived their supervisors to be lacking in areas of support, guidance, encouragement, and, most importantly, emotional and academic availability. They suggested that the internal supervisors provide academic input and also be emotionally supportive and provide the students with more guidance. Further suggestions included supervisor training as participants perceived supervisors to be lacking in a professional capacity.

The lack of emotional and academic availability of the supervisors, as perceived by the participants, suggests that the participants' need for relatedness was not fulfilled. Research indicates that people will internalize into their sense of self the values of those to whom they feel connected (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). Accordingly, students may grow to value the research in which they engage if they feel more connected to the supervisor to whom the research is of value. This integration may result in an increase in intrinsic motivation to do research. Furthermore, the essential role that emotional availability plays in maintaining the intrinsic motivation of students is highlighted.

6.7. Conclusion

In light of the above discussion, it is evident that the mini-dissertation is perceived to be challenging from beginning to end. Although challenging, it remains an important and beneficial process for the growth of clinical and counselling psychologists. This was evident in the discussion of these findings. The process is not flawless and is perceived as requiring some changes, but the complete removal of the process was not suggested by any of the participants. Students were clearly able to identify the value of the research component regardless of their attitudes toward it.

Irrespective of having time to work on their mini-dissertation after completing the coursework and internship, many participants still did not complete the mini-dissertation within the stipulated time frame. The possibility thus arises of a lack of motivation to work on the mini-dissertation. The discussion above indicates that in many instances the three basic psychological needs were not fulfilled.

Chapter 7: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1. Introduction

This study addressed students' perceptions of the dissertation as a component of applied psychology master's degrees in South Africa. SDT (Ryan & Deci, 1985) was used as a theoretical framework for the study, specifically the basic psychological needs theory. Several aspects regarding student perceptions about the mini-dissertation were discussed, and these were explored through the lens of SDT. The data gathered from the 13 semi-structured interviews were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The results were then discussed in relation to the three basic psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Chapter 7 concludes the study with a presentation of the summary of the findings and the strengths of the study. The implications as well as the limitations of the study are also considered. Finally, recommendations for future research and some final reflections are made in this chapter.

7.2. Summary of Findings

The fulfilment of the three Basic Psychological Needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000) is proven to be of utmost importance for psychological health. The satisfaction of the three Basic Psychological Needs is further vital for the development of intrinsic motivation and ultimately the optimization of human motivation (Vansteenkiste, Niemiec, & Soenens, 2010; Deci & Ryan, 2000). The findings of this study indicated that motivation was negatively affected when the basic psychological needs of the participants were not fulfilled. This was evident in how several of the participants stopped working on their mini-dissertations when they were feeling incompetent. Participants also felt demotivated when they perceived their supervisors as controlling, indicating that their need for autonomy was undermined. A hindering of the need for relatedness caused some of the participants to procrastinate. It was clear from the findings that the intrinsic motivation of the participants was negatively affected due to feelings of incompetence, which many of them felt upon beginning their journey into the master's degree in psychology. These feelings were often influenced by negative supervision experiences, as reported by several participants. This echoes the findings showing that the supervisory relationship is the most important aspect to successfully completing the mini-dissertation (Ho, Wong, & Wong, 2010). One of the key issues with the research component is also the lack of understanding of the necessity thereof,

which students often mentioned. In addition to this, the time frame in which to complete it proved to be a major challenge for all the participants.

To conclude, participants struggled with motivation because their basic psychological needs were not being consistently satisfied. Furthermore, negative supervision experiences had an impact on the attitudes about the research component they developed over time. Finally, the question of why this research was necessary amidst an already busy course was one that many participants asked.

7.3. Implications of the Study

- The study's findings clarify the importance of the mini-dissertation as a component of applied psychology master's degrees.
- This study's findings can provide future master's students with valuable information regarding the process of writing the mini-dissertation.
- The study's findings could provide valuable information for training programs regarding aspects such as the challenges students face (personal and academic), the shortcomings of supervision from the perspective of the students, and how improvements to the program could be made.
- The study's findings highlight the important role motivation plays in ensuring students achieve their goals.
- The study's findings provide information on how the three Basic Psychological Needs of applied master's psychology students can be met.
- The study's findings could contribute valuable information for students striving to enroll for an applied psychology master's degree.
- The findings of this study could broaden current and future applied psychology master's degree students' perspective of the mini-dissertation as well as create awareness of the process involved in conducting research at a master's degree level of study.
- The findings of this study could provide valuable information to researchers interested in the training of psychologists.

7.4. Strengths of the Study

The study included participants from six different universities in South Africa. This implies that the study covers perspectives from several different South African universities. Furthermore, although other studies have been conducted that focus on the dissertation, not many have been conducted in the field of psychology. Many studies also tend to focus on one aspect of the mini-dissertation, such as supervision, whereas the present study tried to cover several aspects of the mini-dissertation process.

7.5. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Study

Even more participants from a broader range of universities in South Africa might have provided a larger spectrum of perspectives on the applied psychology master's dissertation. The researcher only conducted one semi-structured interview with each of the participants, which limited the opportunity for clarification. The researcher is a novice researcher and may have faltered on some of the steps recommended in literature for data collection. The researcher knew one of the participants personally and, therefore, had to be aware of how that relationship may have contaminated the information provided by the participant. Finally, one of the participants had a vast research background prior to enrolling for the applied psychology master's degree. This factor would have made her perspectives incomparable to the rest of the participants who had only been exposed to research in their honors year of study. The participant did not disclose her research background prior to the interview, hence data collected from her were excluded from the analysis and discussion chapters of the study.

The first clear recommendation flowing from this study is that more research on current supervision practices (and how these can be improved) is necessary within the South African context. Other aspects to consider in future research are how to increase the intrinsic motivation of students and how to ensure that students are academically prepared for the level of research necessary at master's level.

The following are further recommended:

- more participants from a wider variety of universities;
- follow-up interviews or even a focus group;
- analysis to be done in conjunction with the specific program structure;

- ensuring awareness of how personal relationships with participants could affect the data; and
- providing more accurate information on participant criteria.

7.6. Final Reflections

Since the researcher conducted this research for her applied psychology master's degree, the study provided her with valuable information. This information proved to be beneficial for creating awareness of the challenges of the process. The researcher was further able to learn from mistakes that previous applied psychology master's students had made and shared with her. This, however, proved that the master's dissertation journey is unique for each student irrespective of how much they prepare.

7.7. Conclusion

This study has shown that the mini-dissertation embedded in the applied psychology master's degrees in South Africa is necessary although fraught with challenges. The findings of this study highlighted how important the fostering of intrinsic motivation is for the completion of a mini-dissertation. It further emphasized how much time the research component takes up as well as how pressured students feel because they have to complete it simultaneously with the coursework and internship. In addition, it is essential that postgraduate students understand the valuable role that research plays in their professions. Ironically, in most cases a more positive and enthusiastic attitude toward research is only fostered by doing more of it yourself.

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APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

UFS·UV

Faculty of the Humanities

03-Apr-2018

Dear **Mrs Burger**

Ethics Clearance: **Students' perceptions of the research component in an applied psychology master's programme**

Principal Investigator: **Mrs Nicole Burger**

Department: **Psychology (Bloemfontein Campus)**

APPLICATION APPROVED

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of the Humanities. I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Research Ethics Committee of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence is: **UFS-HSD2018/0010**

This ethical clearance number is valid for research conducted from 03-Apr-2018 to 03-Apr-2019. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours Sincerely

Dr. Asta Rau
Chair: Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of the Humanities

Office of the Dean/Kantoor van die Dekaan/Ofisa ya Dine
T: +27 (0)51 401 2240 | F: +27 (0)51 401 7363 | E: humanities@ufs.ac.za
P.O. Box/Posbus 339 | Bloemfontein 9300 | South Africa/Suid-Afrika | www.ufs.ac.za

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA
UFS UV

RESEARCH STUDY INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM

DATE

January 2017 – December 2018

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Students' perceptions of the completion of a dissertation as a core component in an applied psychology master's programme

PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATOR / RESEARCHER(S) NAME(S) AND CONTACT NUMBER(S):

Nicole Candice Burger	*2016089795*	*0768097741*
Name of student/researcher	*Student number*	*Contact number*
Name of student/researcher	*Student number*	*Contact number*
Name of student/researcher	*Student number*	*Contact number*

FACULTY AND DEPARTMENT:

Humanities
Psychology

STUDYLEADER(S) NAME AND CONTACT NUMBER:

Dr Lindi Nel
0514012732

WHAT IS THE AIM / PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The aim of the study is to explore the perceptions of students who have completed a master's degree in applied psychology of the dissertation as a core component of the degree. These perceptions will be viewed through the lens of the self-determination theory.

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

I Nicole Candice Burger am currently an intern-counselling psychologist at the Tshwane University of Technology. I am conducting this research as a component of my master's degree in counselling psychology

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?

This study has received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of UFS. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher.

Approval number: ***UFS-HSD2018/0010***

WHY ARE YOU INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?

Your invitation to participate in this research project stems from the fact that you have completed a master's degree in an applied psychology master's programme. As a core component of your degree you were required to complete a dissertation. You are thus invited to participate in the research to share your perceptions of the dissertation as a core component in an applied psychology master's programme. Your details were obtained from (name of individual) who is also a participant in the study for the same reasons as you. There are approximately ten participants including yourself.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The role of the participant in this study is to provide honest information regarding their perceptions of the research component in applied psychology master's programme. The participant will thus be the principal source of data for the study. The study contains a semi-structured interview and an audio taping. The questions in the interview will be predominantly open-ended. Research activities including filling in a biographical form, reading and signing the consent form and the interview will last for approximately two hours. The duration of the interview will be approximately one hour and thirty minutes.

CAN THE PARTICIPANT WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?

Being in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without justification or any loss of benefit for non-participation.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

Your participation in this study will remain confidential and your identity will be kept anonymous during all stages of the research process. The information provided by you will possibly aid universities in South Africa to enhance the marketing strategies of the research component in the training programmes. Through an exploration of the challenges faced by participants, the research could further assist current and future researchers in conducting research more effectively.

WHAT IS THE ANTICIPATED INCONVENIENCE OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

Participating in this study could consume a portion of your time, however your participation is voluntary and the interview should be scheduled during a time that suits you the participant. You may find that some of the questions will require information that you might consider to be a personal embarrassment. You are however not obligated to reveal information that you are uncomfortable with. It is however a requirement that you be as honest as possible.

WILL WHAT I SAY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

The information provided by you will remain completely anonymous throughout the research process and your name will not be recorded on any official documents or tapings. Your name may be recorded in the audio taping, but this will not be recorded during transcription of the audio. Should any names be used, these will be pseudonyms and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings. Information such as your age, race, marital status, religious affiliation and other biographical information provided will be recorded in the output of the research. No information that runs the risk of revealing your identity will be made public. Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber and external coder. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records. Your anonymous data may be used for other purposes, e.g. research report, journal articles, conference presentation, etc. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report. Should any names be included in such a report they will be pseudonyms. Please keep in mind that it is sometimes impossible to make an absolute guarantee of confidentiality/anonymity, e.g. when focus groups are used as a data collection method. Focus groups are interviews that are conducted in a group setting and require participants to share opinions, perceptions and so forth. You may refuse to be a part of the study and you may withdraw at any time without any repercussions for withdrawal.

HOW WILL THE INFORMATION BE STORED AND ULTIMATELY DESTROYED?

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet in the home of the principal researcher for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. All hard copies of the data will be shredded. All electronic data will be permanently removed from all devices that it will be stored on. Participating in this study could consume a portion of your time, however your participation is voluntary and the interview will be scheduled for a time that will suit your schedule. You may find that some of the questions will require information that you might consider a personal embarrassment. You are however not obligated to reveal information that you are uncomfortable with. It is however a requirement that you be as honest as possible. Considering the nature of the study, readers could interpret or perceive the information in a negative manner and knowing the identity of those who provided the data might then cause personal harassment of the individual/s or possible slander.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICPATING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not receive any payment for participating in the study because participation is voluntary. Should the interview take place in a coffee shop/restaurant, you will receive one non-alcoholic beverage. Participating in this study could consume a portion of your time, however your participation is voluntary and the interview will be scheduled for a time that will suit your schedule. You may find that some of the questions will require information that you may consider a personal embarrassment. You may find that some of the questions will require information that you might consider a personal embarrassment. You are however not obligated to reveal information that you are uncomfortable with. It is however a requirement that you be as honest as possible. Considering the nature of the study, readers could interpret or perceive the information in a negative manner and

are uncomfortable with. It is however a requirement that you be as honest as possible. Considering the nature of the study, readers could interpret or perceive the information in a negative manner and knowing the identity of those who provided the data might then cause personal harassment of the individual/s or possible slander.

HOW WILL THE PARTICIPANT BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS / RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Nicole on 0768097741 or e-mail ncburger22@gmail.com. The findings are accessible for six months. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact 0768097741 or ncburger22@gmail.com. Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact 0514012732, nelli@ufs.ac.za or 0514013556. Participating in this study could consume a portion of your time, however your participation is voluntary and he interview will be scheduled for a time that will suit your schedule. You may find that some of the questions will require information that you may consider a personal. Participating in this study could consume a portion of your time, however your participation is voluntary and he interview will be scheduled for a time that will suit your schedule. You may find that some of the questions will require information that you might consider a personal embarrassment. You are however not obligated to reveal information that you are uncomfortable with. It is however a requirement that you be as honest as possible. Considering the nature of the study, readers could interpret or perceive the information in a negative manner and knowing the identity of those who provided the data might then cause personal harassment of the individual/s or possible slander.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA
UFS UV

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable). I am aware that the findings of this study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings.

I agree to the recording of the *insert specific data collection method*.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Full Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Full Name(s) of Researcher(s): _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

- What are your views regarding the dissertation being a core component of all applied psychology master's programs in South Africa?
- Describe your personal process of completing your dissertation.
- What did you find to be the most challenging in completing your dissertation?
- Why do you regard these to have been the most challenging aspects?
- How did you address these challenges?
- What did you find to be the least challenging aspect of completing your dissertation?
- Why do you regard these as the least challenging aspects?
- Given the opportunity to make any changes to the research component of the training program, what would those be?
- How would your ideal research component be structured?