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Exit level female students: Career aspirations and attainment strategies

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ABSTRACT

The World Bank asserts that South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world (Government report, 2015). In particular, females are still being treated unfairly even though the government has put policies, such as employment equity, in place. As this inequality increases, so does female graduate unemployment (StatsSA, 2016). This is only one of the barriers that exit level female students face. Against this background, this study explored exit level female humanities students' career aspirations and attainment strategies. This study focused on the application of Schlossberg's (1981) Transition theory to exit level female students' anticipated transition into the world of work. A qualitative research design within an interpretive paradigm was used. The sample consisted of eight third year participants from the humanities faculty, specifically studying psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. Thematic content analysis was used. The results obtained indicate that due to the economic instability in South Africa, the main career aspirations encompassed factors such as completing one's degree and obtaining employment. Furthermore, Schlossberg's model provided insight into the various perceived barriers and enablers to help students cope and achieve the anticipated transition into the job market. Some of these perceived barriers were issues related to gender and concurrent stressors such as workload and approaching exams. However, the participants also demonstrated enablers that could help the students cope, such as a positive self-belief and various support structures for example; parents and friends. Additionally, the participants reflected on the job strategies that they would utilise in order to find a job, the most frequent being networking.

Keywords: Career aspirations, graduate unemployment, perceived barriers and enablers, Schlossberg's Transition theory.