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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
PSYCHOLOGY

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Title:

The Job-Seeking Experiences of Unemployed Psychology Honours Graduates in South Africa.

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Date: 30 April 2021

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my dear mother, Dibuseng Sylvia Mosena. Your unwavering love and support throughout my academic journey have always carried me through.

"Kgomo ga e ke e tlhaba mong wa yone" – Tswana Proverb.

(A good child is one who makes his or her parents proud).

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To my participants, thank you all for taking part in this research. Without you this research would not have been possible. I wish you all the best in your respective journeys.

Finally, to my family, thank you all for your kindness and support during the research process.

Abstract

The issue of unemployment is a serious and widely studied socio-economic problem. While many studies have investigated varying aspects relating to employment; graduate unemployment experiences in relation to identity and meaning is not widely studied within the South African context. Moreover, minimal studies investigate the unemployment experiences of Psychology Honours graduates. Therefore, this study sought to gain insight into the unemployment and job-seeking experiences of Psychology Honours graduates to understand how unemployment and job-seeking influence identity as they transition from of being a student to being a graduate, and from being a graduate to being an unemployed graduate, and the meanings made from the transitions and unemployment. To determine this, a qualitative research methodology using interviews and thematic analysis was utilised. The findings suggest that unemployment and job-seeking experiences are influenced by identity. Furthermore, in relation to Wilcock's theory of the human need for occupation, the findings suggest that there is a need for occupation which is evident in the negative experiences associated with unemployment. The implications of this research are that the findings of this paper be considered when finding solutions to and adequately resolving the unemployment problem.

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Glossary of terms

Job-seeking is defined as actively seeking employment and using the many different job search activities which could be both formal and informal to find employment (De Bruyn & Cameron, 2017).

Unemployed is defined as the state of not being in active employment, being a discouraged work – seeker or having other reasons not seek employment as well as actively seeking employment (Statistics South Africa, 2019a).

HPCSA is the Health Professions Council of South Africa.

Registration category in this study refers to the categories of registration within the psychology profession as stipulated by the HPCSA.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction and Background

In the past few years South Africa has experienced a sizable and problematic increase in youth unemployment with the current rate sitting at 41,8% for youth aged between 15 and 34 in the fourth quarter of 2020 (Statistics South Africa, 2020a). Furthermore, graduate unemployment was at a rate of 1,8% (Statistics South Africa, 2021). Although 1,8% may be small in comparison to the vast majority of unemployed youth who do not have some form of higher education and training, it is important to address the issue of unemployed graduates.

Covid-19 brought unprecedented effects, one of which was the exacerbation of the already present problem of unemployment. The implementation of lockdown saw millions of South Africans lose jobs and those already without jobs being unable to secure any employment. In June 2020, Statistics South Africa released the results of the Quarterly Labour Force Survey of the first quarter of 2020, the report stated that the unemployment rate had increased by one percentage point, the absorption rate (i.e., the proportion of the working-age population that is employed) had declined by 0.3% of a percentage point and the number of discouraged job-seekers had also increased (Statistics South Africa, 2020b). As lockdown came into effect, government expected a contraction in the economy thus resulting in more job losses and less absorption of jobseekers into the job market. In September of 2020, Statistics South Africa released the results of the Quarterly Labour Force Survey for the second quarter of 2020 which provided a positive outlook for the South African population as the number of employed persons increased from 2.2 million to 14.1 million in the first quarter of 2020 while the number of unemployed and discouraged jobseekers had decreased in the second quarter (Statistics South Africa, 2020c).

Shifting the focus to graduates, in the first quarter of 2020, graduates made up 2.3% of the unemployed population in terms of unemployment by education level. In the second quarter this number increased to 2.4% (Statistics South Africa, 2020c). Many suggest that making education more accessible to a larger number of the population will create a steadier future for the South African workforce (*Unemployment and Its Effect on South Africans*, 2016). It certainly is the case that higher education qualifications contribute to the betterment of one's chances of attaining employment. This is evident in the difference we see with fewer graduates being unemployed as opposed to the higher number of unemployed individuals without higher

education and training. This suggestion is supported by the reality that there is a clear difference between unemployment rates across education levels (Staff Writer, 2019). However, we still find that many graduates remain unemployed.

Social media has been inundated with images of graduates dressed in graduation regalia standing at street corners holding up signs asking for employment opportunities which implies that graduates find it just as difficult to procure employment. The employment prospects of graduates depend on several factors, two of which are qualification and career choice. Some graduates from certain fields of study take longer to secure employment than others or do not secure employment at all (Mncayi & Dunga, 2016).

Research conducted by the Department of Labour during the 2017/2018 financial year found that there is a clear demand for graduates in the workplace. Overall, a large portion of the job vacancies which are advertised require people with a degree or diploma. Although we have seen a shift towards a more educated labour force, we find that community health workers were the least in demand (Department of Labour, 2018). This finding is interesting when considering the incongruence between the need for community and professional mental healthcare workers and the supply of such competent professionals (Docrat et al., 2019; WHO et al., 2007). This incongruence emphasises that there is indeed a gap which needs to be filled and this is a gap that could be exploited by psychology graduates. Within the South African context, only a small portion of those in need of psychological services are able to access it, and this small portion is concentrated in the private sector (Burns, 2011). For this reason, many lower income households in South African cannot access affordable psychosocial services, this gap can be considered as an opportunity to make existing training more accessible and develop employment opportunities for Psychology Honours graduates.

It is well known that unemployment has both individual and social consequences, and it is suggested that these consequences can be alleviated through policy interventions like social support for the unemployed. Studies conducted by Du Toit et al., (2018) investigating this issue found that public policy interventions are needed to help connect unemployed people to relevant jobs in the job market and job networks ; providing much needed support to subsist oneself against the stereotypes associated with unemployment (Du Toit, 2020). However, for appropriate policy interventions to be developed it is imperative that we recognise existing gaps within society and the job market that can be utilised. It is also important if policy developers are to develop and implement relevant interventions. To achieve these goals we

need a better understanding of the experiences of the unemployed population (Du Toit, 2020; Du Toit et al., 2018).

Understanding the job-seeking experiences of unemployed psychology graduates may highlight these gaps as seen from the graduate's perspective, and it may assist policy developers to better understand how graduates are affected by unemployment. To this end, it may further assist policy developers to consider intervention for graduates from fields of study which are least in demand when developing interventions to curb unemployment. This research study purports to explore the job-seeking experiences of unemployed Psychology Honours graduates with the intention to gain insight into meaning making in relation to these factors and the effects of these factors on identity. This chapter will further discuss the rationale for study, the research problem, aim and objectives and research questions of the study.

1.2 Rationale

Some studies have investigated employability in many aspects and on student groups including Psychology Master's graduates (Bonn et al., 2009; Senekal, 2018). In addition, many of the studies which interrogated the issues of unemployment, employability and job-seeking experiences are quantitative or mixed methods studies (Coetzee & Esterhuizen, 2010; Jackson, 2014; Mncayi, 2016). The knowledge gathered from this study intends to highlight questions around unemployment particularly pertaining to Honours Psychology graduates. It may also spark a much-needed conversation and interrogation around the value of Psychology Honours graduates in the South African society and the job market. Furthermore, hearing the voices of unemployed graduates may add some much needed depth to the conversation that is already highlighting this issue (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015; Jeske, 2018; Oluwajodu et al., 2015; Yu, 2013).

To date, few studies focused on the identity aspect of the student-to-employee transition. In their study, among other relevant issues, Long and Fynn, (2018) explore the importance of personal identity as one of the factors that influence employability and how Master's Research Psychology students navigate developing a professional and career identity. They argue that beliefs and identity, among others, play a crucial role in the early career development of professional graduates. They also argue that graduates need to introspect on the decisions they make and how a variety of factors influence the development of their professional identity. Graduate employability can therefore be understood as a factor which is impacted by graduate

identity. Graduate employability is often seen as dependent on one's skills possession and skills acquisition (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011). However, graduates' identities are linked to their competencies and their perceived ability to function in the work environment. Therefore, when considering the employment of graduates, the focus should not be solely on employability skills but on identity shifts as well. This is because shifts in identity can impact an individual's job-seeking experiences as they go through changes in identity. This reasoning may even be extended to how a graduate will function within the workplace as the development of a professional identity is important for a graduate's employability. The development of a professional identity is needed because through it, graduates are able to understand and relate to their projected careers (Jackson, 2017) and this in turn affects their job-seeking experiences. Furthermore, they can learn what is expected of them, while being able to refine their skills and qualities, providing a higher chance of success within the job market.

This study is therefore relevant because not only does it give a voice to unemployed Psychology Honours graduates, but it will also add a qualitative perspective to the existing literature and body of knowledge that is already grappling with this issue. Other aspects which are uncovered are whether participants presume there are skills shortfalls and whether there is real or imagined misconceptions surrounding psychology as a discipline and how these affect the employability of graduates. Moreover, this research study has the potential to highlight the difficulties experienced by graduates in selling their skills especially considering the generic nature of a Psychology Honours degree and the narrow 'professional Master's' trajectory. In addition to these reasons, considering the identity shifts which take place as a student moves from one defining milestone of their life to another, the study could tell us more about the complexity of job-seeking; that it is not simply moving from the state of being an Honours graduate to the state of being an employee.

1.3 Research Problem

Coverage of the issue of unemployment and attempts to curb it seemed to focus on technical and practical skills and development offered by Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions which provide training to students in marketable and practical skills (Besent, 2020; *National Development Plan 2030 Our Future-Make It Work*, 2012; Nordling, 2020; Willis, 2020). Furthermore, the South African Government has noted a significant increase in the number of graduates in South Africa. Government's National Development Plan for 2030 states that in order for graduates to be meaningful to the South

African economy, it is imperative that graduates "must be in the critical skills categories, such as engineering, actuarial science, medicine, financial management, and chartered accountancy" (*National Development Plan 2030 Our Future-Make It Work*, 2012, p. 317). Issues of mental health are only addressed under the Developmental Social Welfare section which addresses the need to reduce and prevent social pathologies and there is no mention of the need to expand availability of specialised mental health care practitioners (*National Development Plan 2030 Our Future-Make It Work*, 2012).

This observation conjured up questions regarding the silence around the unemployed population with non-technical skills and what their experiences and opinions might be. Another issue that did not seem to garner attention is that of the lack of psychology professionals in South Africa, this despite the reality that there are many unemployed Psychology Honours graduates who could be training at Honours level to become professionals. Yet no discussions seemed to be taking place around this issue. These two observations sparked interest in whether there are studies which focused on the job-seeking experiences of unemployed Psychology Honours graduates in South Africa and, if so, what these experiences are. Investigation into the issue found that there were studies which speak to the issue of unemployment and employability of psychology graduates; however, few are interested in job-seeking experiences, particularly the job-seeking experiences of unemployed Psychology Honours graduates.

1.4 Aim and Objectives

This study aimed to gain insight into the job-seeking experiences of unemployed Psychology Honours graduates. The objectives of the study are to gain insight into unemployment and job-seeking; their influence on participants' identities and the kinds of meanings drawn expressed in thoughts, feelings and perceptions surrounding these experiences.

1.5 Research Questions

This study seeks to respond to the following primary and secondary research questions:

The primary research question is how have the experiences of unemployed Psychology Honours graduates in the South African context in relation to job-seeking and unemployment affected their identities? The secondary research questions are 1) what are their job-seeking experiences? and 2) what meanings do they construct of their job-seeking experiences and unemployment?

1.6 Conclusion

To conclude, unemployment is a problem with significant economic, psychological, and social implications to job seekers and society at large. It is evident in the statistics provided by Statistics South Africa that varying groups of South African youth are affected, including graduates. Although obtaining a higher qualification in the form of a degree may better one's chances of securing employment, not all qualifications are equally in demand in the eyes of the job market and graduates are just as impacted by unemployment as non-graduates or individuals who do not have a qualification. Social Science graduates take longer to procure employment and their qualifications are the least in demand (Department of Labour, 2018; Mncayi & Dunga, 2016). Public policy, government and private sector interventions are necessary for supporting the unemployed by tackling job creation and other relevant opportunities within Higher Education and Training. In such instances, it is important that the experiences of unemployed persons be considered because knowledge of their experiences will foreground existing gaps which may have been missed which can be exploited. This chapter provided the background, the aims and the rationale for this research. Chapter two will discuss the literature review, the theoretical and the conceptual framework in relation to this study. Chapter three will outline the research methodology, while chapter four present the results and findings of this study. Finally, chapter five will present the findings of this study, highlighting its limitations and implications of this study, as well as the future recommendations and concluding remarks.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines and discusses the theoretical framework and literature review pertaining to the subject of this study. The theoretical framework discusses phenomenology as a theory and Wilcock's theory of the need for human occupation. In the literature review section, various bodies of literature pertaining to the study will also be discussed.

2.2 Theoretical framework

2.2.1 Phenomenology as a theory

In phenomenology, emphasis is placed on the importance of meaning making in everyday experiences and happenings (Smith, 2008). Phenomenology is traditionally an epistemological positioning and a methodology which seeks to understand the quality and texture of experience rather than what causes psychological and social events to occur (Willig, 2013). However, it can also be considered as a theory of experience in that the researcher positions themselves in that they can think of the ways in which the data gained through investigation can be explained and elaborated as indicators of the phenomenon under study and not the cause of the phenomenon itself (for example, using themes). As a theory, phenomenology allows us to think of subjectivity and subjective experience as an area of rigorous knowledge about the world that can be studied (Tarozzi & Mortari, 2010). Furthermore, phenomenology allows us to understand how people make sense of significant life experiences (De Bruyn & Cameron, 2017).

Unemployment as a phenomenon affects individuals holistically. At a personal level, unemployment as an experience is subjective in that it affects an individual's mental and physical health (Wanberg, 2012). Du Toit et al., (2018) further argue that unemployment is both an individual status and a social assignation. These two factors render unemployment as a subjective experience because as a social assignation, it is often associated with stigmatisation, labelling, marginalisation and unfair judgement, and as an individual status it is linked to one's identity. Unemployment can be seen as linked to identity because "human occupation may be viewed as a source of identity and self-expression" (De Bruyn & Cameron, 2017, p. 14). In their study, De Bruyn and Cameron, (2017) found that people who viewed work as a core component of their identities experience the job search and unemployment as distressing because the loss of a key influential factor to how one identifies oneself is

experienced as a threat to one's identity. This is because job-seeking individuals often fear that they would need to compensate for who they are in order to secure a job and is thus the loss of an acquired identity and the need to assume a new social status, role and identity.

Unemployment is therefore not something that happens outside of the individual who is thus affected by an external phenomenon, it is a subjective experience because of the effects it has on individual lives at a personal and social level. Phenomenology as a theory which emphasises meaning making allows us to fully understand unemployment as a subjective experience and how it is identity laden.

This study investigated the lived experiences of unemployed Psychology Honours graduates in the South African context and their job-seeking experiences. The interest of this study was in how meaning is constructed from situations (job-seeking and unemployment) and how self-concepts are affected by the phenomenon of unemployment as graduates move through shifting identities (i.e., from Honours student to Honours Psychology graduate, to unemployed psychology graduate, to job-seeking graduate). Aspects of the phenomenological approach to studying these graduates' experiences allow for a deeper understanding of the phenomena of unemployment and job-seeking as experienced by Psychology Honours graduates. Thus, phenomenology as a theory can explain and answer the questions pertaining to meanings that can be drawn and insight or knowledge that can be gained from this study.

2.2.2 Wilcock's theory of the human need for occupation

Wilcock (1993) states the importance of engaging in work or as she describes it, occupation (i.e., purposeful activity), and argues that people are occupational beings in that they inherently want to use their time in a purposeful way. The need for occupation makes it possible for individuals to use their biological capabilities in such a way that gives them the potential to thrive; it also enables individuals to engage in daily or new occupations. In addition, occupation provides people with a means through which to interact, develop society and to grow. All these aspects form the foundation for communal, local, national, and personal identity formation because through the pursuit and execution of activities, people can contribute to goals set for personal and communal purposes or both. Unemployed individuals often experience boredom which results in a less structured and purposeful use of their time (De Witte et al., 2012; Jackson, 1999) and so occupation is necessary to alleviate these unpleasant experiences.

Wilcock (1993) also states that people have dreams for the future and such dreams often predict potential awards for what will be achieved (e.g., degree, employment, and career in this case). This in turn reflects how occupations (studying and actively looking for employment in this case) are an expression of personal and culturally desired intellectual, moral, and physical attributes and behaviours. Thus, through occupation, people can show their capabilities and therefore be seen as valuable and worthy to their society and the world.

Finally, in her theory, Wilcock (1993) also argues that the rise of a technologically driven society has led to a lack of occupational balance (physical, mental, social needs and needs for fulfilment and purpose are met) which results in people being burned out and losing interest in productive activities. Prosperous societies may have plenty of occupational choices which offer the opportunity for physical, mental, and social skills development; however, the stratified nature of values placed in different occupations (e.g., 4IR oriented jobs and studies being more valuable in today's world of work) limits successful access to occupations thus resulting in a lack of paid employability among other consequences.

This theory will in part explain and answer questions pertaining to how job-seeking and unemployment affect identity, it also speaks to some of the literature in the literature review regarding the negative effects of unemployment.

2.3 Literature Review

2.3.1 Unemployment defined

Unemployment is a widely and extensively covered topic both locally and internationally with both qualitative and quantitative research conducted on this issue. Statistics South Africa defines unemployment as the state of not being in active employment, being a discouraged work seeker or having other reasons not to seek employment and finally, being in a state of actively seeking employment (Statistics South Africa, 2019). The information relating to the statistics of unemployment includes who is most affected by it, how labour market structures make it difficult for job seekers to find employment and factors that influence the ability or inability of young people to find work (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015). The statistics of youth unemployment in South Africa have also been compared to international statistics and in this instance, the effects of unemployment and the possible solutions to the problem are discussed (Du Toit, 2003).

2.3.2 Consequences and effects of unemployment

Studies interested in the effects of unemployment have been published over the years. In one study, De Witte et al., (2012) investigate the affective experiences, attitudes to work, and job application behaviours of unemployed people and found that regarding affective experiences specifically, the state of unemployment was explained as being very distressing. Unemployment in this case was also related to feelings of boredom, loneliness, uncertainty regarding the future, worrying about financial issues, feeling empty and finding that unemployment contributes to the presence of conflict. Similarly, across other studies we see reports of unemployment influencing physical health and manifesting as headaches, stomach aches, sleep problems and lethargy, among others. Psychological effects include increased hostility, depression, anxiety, stress, anger, fear, despair, lack of self-esteem and life satisfaction to name a few (De Witte et al., 2012). Jackson (1999) notes the kind of financial strain unemployment puts on different groups and found that the unemployed population was more distressed, had more financial stress, had less structured use of their time, used their skills less and experienced less psychosocial support than other groups.

Considering that the consequences of the social stigma of unemployment on job-seeking behaviour and attitudes are just other ways to see how individuals' psycho-social well-being are affected by unemployment. Krug et al., (2019) argue that existing literature focuses on the discrimination of unemployed people by recruitment agencies, but none consider how unemployment stigma influences job-seeking behaviour, attitudes, and success. In their study Krug et al., (2019) found that the stigmatised unemployed individuals were not passive or helplessness as some literature suggests, however the opposite was true. While those that are stigmatised during their job search may suffer more from their experience of joblessness, this does not necessarily translate into inactivity but rather an increase in effort to find employment by using more diverse job-seeking methods and spending more time in active job searching. Therefore, a lot of value is placed on the ability to work, and when it is not satisfied in people's lives, they may experience negative effects such as unhappiness, dissatisfaction, anger, and health-related outcomes (Vansteenkiste et al., 2005). Many studies which are interested in the phenomenon of unemployment and how it relates to a myriad of issues, including experiences, are quantitative while others are mixed methods studies in the South African context (Coetzee & Esterhuizen, 2010; Koloba, 2017; Mncayi & Dunga, 2016) and abroad (Coffey et al., 2018; Jackson, 2014; Rajecki & Borden, 2011). However, few are qualitative studies which focus on the lived experiences of unemployed individuals.

There also seems to be a lack of such studies in the South African context. Shah (2019) focuses on the lived experiences of unemployed people and mental health issues related to their unemployment. This author argues that while it is important to study mental health and its relationship to unemployment, it is also just as imperative to understand the first-hand experiences of those being studied. In a study conducted in the United Kingdom, De Bruyn and Cameron (2017) are concerned with an individual's job-seeking experience and argue that job-seeking is an occupation in itself and that the only way we can appreciate this is if we get an account of the lived experience of someone who is currently seeking employment. Finally, having conducted a study on the experiences of unemployment in Ireland, the stance of Delaney et al., (2011) is that unemployment is inherently a social process therefore exploring the experiences of unemployment from a qualitative viewpoint means that we can understand it from both individual and social perspectives.

2.3.3 Transition from graduate to the world of work

Understanding how graduates respond to the transition from university to the world of work is crucial as if we understand this, it may allow universities and recruitment agencies prepare students for the next step of finding employment after graduation (Perrone & Vickers, 2003). For the student and graduate, a better understanding of this transition and what it entails could help students hone their skills, qualities and competencies gained from their educational experience (Sadarangani & Ahuja, 2014). However, in many cases, the process of transitioning from student and graduate to employee is not a smooth unobstructed one. Challenges include struggling to identify their competencies thus making it difficult to find where they fit in the world of work, lack of working experience and unemployment (Nielsen & Holmegaard, 2016).

Studenthood or the university journey is a transitional time and space where students are passing from one status to another (Habib & Ward, 2019). Habib and Ward (2019) also argue that in this transition phase, the transition is not linear but rather complex and nuanced because the 'student', 'academic' or 'disciplinary' and 'professional' identities develop alongside each other. During this time, it is important that students experience a sense of belonging as this will promote identity and self-esteem by making the student realise that they matter within society (Habib & Ward, 2019).

The transition is often at times a disorienting one and the experience of unemployment can be distressing for some. Therefore factors such as adequate social support and the provision of

decent work once one enters the job market can act as a buffer to the effects of transitioning and unemployment (Kossen & McIlveen, 2018). Decent work, which is defined as "a combination of safe working conditions, personal time and rest, respect for the needs of family, social values, provisions for compensation when income is not assured or diminished, and access to health care" (Kossen & McIlveen, 2018, p. 475) can help graduates settle into the process of change more comfortably.

In addition to the challenges experienced during this transition, shifts in identity also occur. With a newly acquired identity comes performance and behavioural expectations from potential employers and society alike. Such expectations include being able to function appropriately in a work environment and being competent in certain areas and skills (Sadarangani & Ahuja, 2014). Identity shifts are important to understand as this will influence behavioural patterns and therefore how well graduates fit within certain industries in the world of work.

2.3.4 Identity and the Self-concept

The concepts of identity and self-concept answer questions concerning who we are ("Who am I?"), where we belong ("Where do I belong?") and where we fit within society ("Where do I fit in?") (Oyserman, 2004). Identity can be defined as a form of social representation that facilitates the relationship between the individual and the world which also simultaneously encompasses the way we think about ourselves and how we think about the world in which we live (Chryssochoou, 2003). Chryssochoou (2003, p. 237) argues that "identity is linked to action because a new configuration of identity is needed due to changes at a micro or macro social level". The self-concept refers to the image one has of oneself and is constructed from the beliefs one holds of oneself in relation to others. This image is also subject to change depending on a number of internal and external factors and how these factors influence our behaviours in relation to the different situations we are exposed to (Redek et al., 2013).

The changes which occur in identity and self-concept could affect what constitutes the self-knowledge, the categorical boundaries within which the contents of the meaning of self – knowledge exist, what we claim to be and on patterns of how we recognise ourselves (Jordan, 2020; Oyserman, 2004). These changes could be imperative enough to prompt the need for a new identity or a restructuring of current identity and thus becomes a form of how we represent ourselves in society. We may behave in accordance with the newly acquired identity which then crystallises the change. This understanding of the concept of identity could explain and

answer questions pertaining to how job-seeking (action) and unemployment (changes at micro and macro level) affects the identities of individuals.

The concept of the-looking-glass-self states that "the self is a result of the social process whereby we learn to see ourselves as others see us" (Yeung & Martin, 2003, p. 843) and that such internalisations influence identity and personality development. According to the authors Yeung and Martin (2003), this statement is consistent with some of Cooley's claims pertaining to how one internalises the self-concept from the perspectives of those they see as influential or powerful over them, however they also argue that this "does not rule out the possibility of individuals persuading others to accept self-presentations" (Yeung & Martin, 2003, p. 844). In testing the hypothesis that self-understanding (internal perspective of self) versus the looking glass effect (self-understanding and self-perspective through the eyes of others) is to some extent an internalisation of how others view us, Yeung and Martin (2003) found that these perspectives are not independent of each other. They also found that we are able to externalise our own self-conceptions and presentations thus influencing how others view us and that when the looking glass self-effect does occur, it is not always as a result of internalising other's perspectives but rather a result of affording more attention to the perspectives of those more important and powerful than us (Yeung & Martin, 2003).

Identity can be defined as the meaning that is attached to the self by oneself and others. Identities are also linked to the actions one is expected to carry out based on the many social roles we enact as well as on the meanings that we have attached to us and those roles (Delamater & Myers, 2011). Within qualitative studies and the literature focusing on the job-seeking experiences of unemployed individuals, we find that there is little sufficient coverage of the links between unemployment and identity or the self-concept (i.e., a knowledge system we use to represent ourselves that includes our beliefs about our personality traits, physical characteristics, abilities, goals, and roles to play) (Jhangiani et al., 2011). Schöb (2013) investigated these two factors and found that unemployment threatens an individual's identity (i.e., an individual's perception of "self") because unemployment lowers one's self-worth. The reason why an individual's low self-worth is lowered is because when an individual feels as though they are not able to meet their own needs, and lives within a society that places a great deal of importance on work, there is an increase in negative perceptions related to how the individual believes others see him or her. This in turn threatens an individual's identity. Unemployment therefore threatens a person's identity thus causing a loss of a sense of meaning and fulfilment. Furthermore, it has an impact not only on individual's emotional and

psychological wellbeing, but also reduces their cognitive or judgmental well-being and this in turn affects individual's functioning and self-perception (Schöb, 2013).

The impact of unemployment is also present in the relations one has with others. The effects of unemployment on an individual's self-esteem indirectly affects an individual's network of relationships and social support. This is because a person's self-image is dependent on relationships which are rooted in relations to different social groups. Similarly, the damage that we see in self-concept because of unemployment can also lower a person's motivation to seek employment. Thus, a continued lack of success in acquiring a job as time goes can in turn damage a person's self-concept even more (Redek et al., 2013).

Finally, graduate employability is often seen in terms of skills possession and acquisition. However graduate employability is more complex than this shallow perspective; graduate employability must be seen in terms of identity and performance (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011). Graduates are expected to perform in a certain way and for them to perform in the appropriate way, they need to understand how they need to perform, and they need to be able to establish an appropriate identity for themselves. Therefore, the identity a graduate acquires can be considered as "the cultural capital acquired prior to entering an organisation" (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011, p. 581) or a professional identity (Tsakissiris, 2016). This is to say that the knowledge and skills a graduate acquires cannot be identified apart from the 'graduate identity' they embody and enacts, and the knowledge and skills they disseminate. The development of a professional identity which pertains to an individual perceiving themselves in relation to their projected profession is another aspect of identity to consider because professional identity aids and influences the shaping of identity and behaviour of individuals in accordance with their projected profession, and knowledge and skills acquisition associated with the projected profession (Tsakissiris, 2016). These aspects should be regarded when considering employing graduates; the focus should not be solely on employability skills. It is therefore important to pay attention to shifts in identities because identity is an important part of who we are and plays a role in how we represent ourselves to the world. Shifts in identity can also indicate how a person changes as they move from one stage to another in their life and how the ways in which they identify changes and impacts their job-seeking experiences.

2.3.5 Employability

In the current age where the focus is on technology and the rapid development of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), the question about the employability of those studying in non-

technical fields creeps up. To some extent, perhaps the contributing factors to the causes of graduate unemployment may be the proposed mismatch that exists between the skills students are equipped with during their studies and the skills that employers need (Fatoki, 2014; Senekal & Smith, 2018). It was found in a tracer study conducted by Senekal and Smith (2018) that Clinical Psychology and Research Psychology Master's graduates' skills were perceived as transferrable which makes them more employable. This may explain why we see a strong positive trend of employability among Master's Psychology graduates. The reason for this is because Master's training was reckoned relevant to the job market which allows graduates to access the world of work and initial employment after graduation (Senekal & Smith, 2018). However this poses a problem in the South African context where many students are not able to be accepted into Master's programmes at various South African universities (Bonn et al., 2009), thus this begs the question; where does this leave unemployed Psychology Honours graduates and what are their job-seeking experiences?

The broad argument is that graduates should acquire skills that are relevant to changing labour market needs. There is on-going contention between institutions of higher learning and employers where employers criticise the quality of university graduates while institutions of higher learning state that employers do not appreciate the qualities and skills graduates possess (Fatoki, 2014). Fatoki's (2014) study investigated the perceptions of final year students doing non-technical studies and the importance they place on their studies and found that students have a positive perception of their non-technical skills. This is despite evidence showing that generally graduates from the Humanities and Arts are less likely to find employment (Mncayi, 2016).

In an Ethiopian study that looked at the job expectations of psychology graduates, similar issues of employability of students were found. Tulu (2017) attributed unemployment to several factors namely: lack of job searching skills and work experience; a mismatch between expectation of the kind of job they can do and the reality of what is available in the real world; a discrepancy between economic power of the state and the actual number of graduates and low-quality graduates who lack the appropriate skills for the world of work amongst others. In the South African context, we see a similar trend except that proximity to places of employment is also a contributing factor (Mncayi, 2016).

2.3.6 Job search behaviour

Job search can be perceived as multidimensional in nature as there are many different types of job search behaviour and job search resources. This behaviour can also be understood as an independent process that involves identifying and committing to an employment goal which kick-starts the job search behaviour that will result in achieving the goal of successful employment. Van Hoye (2017) describes the factors pertaining to job search behaviour as falling within these categories: job search effort and intensity; content and direction of job search behaviour and preparatory job search behaviours. As time progresses, job search behaviour may change in concentration or direction depending on the response one receives from the environment. Also, how persistent one is in pursuit of a job also may change as the job search becomes more challenging.

Vansteenkiste et al., (2005) are interested in whether expectancy-value theory and the self-efficacy theory can explain unemployed people's job search behaviour, unemployment experience, and psychological well-being and the extent to which these theories can provide an understanding of the psychological factors and processes involved. The degree to which people suffer from unemployment and how much effort they put into job-seeking are also of interest. They found that some unemployed people are certain they will be successful in finding a job and give priority to other activities (hobbies, spending time with family, etc.) before beginning the job search; the high expectations people have with regard to finding a job may be related to thinking there is an abundance of available employment opportunities and as a result don't think they have to frequently search for one. Thirdly, unemployed people with high hopes of finding a job might be so certain that they will be successful that they do not think it is necessary to start their job search (Vansteenkiste et al., 2005).

2.3.7 Career choice

Career choice is described as a developmental process because it involves an individual making a number of important decisions as opposed to one single important decision (Alkhelil, 2016). Such decisions often include internal factors such as how well potential careers would match with one's values, aptitude interests and personality (Alkhelil, 2016; Añaña & Nique, 2010). External factors such as parental expectations and the home environment, media portrayals of various professions, academic achievements, employment opportunities, career popularity and lucrativeness also influence student's career choices (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017; Laker, 2002). With so many factors influencing student's career choices, Laker (2002) argues for the importance

of testing the validity of beliefs and assumptions about chosen career paths before investing time, effort and resources into pursuing projected careers. The assumptions, whether positive or negative, that students hold about their chosen respective projected careers will determine whether students engage in approach or probationary career-related behaviours. Such career assumptions may be invalid and could lead to ill-informed decisions, efforts, and undertakings in hopes of becoming a professional in a chosen career path (Laker, 2002). Laker (2002) found that in situations where students tested the validity of their assumptions about certain careers, they often find that their assumptions were invalid and lost interest in pursuing such careers.

As already stated above, career choices are not determined by a single important decision but rather by a succussion of important decisions leading up to the attainment of the projected career. Individual values and personality also influence the types of careers people choose to pursue (Alkhelil, 2016; Kaygin & Gulluce, 2013) because values emanate from life experiences, educational backgrounds and varying contexts and thus guide our life choices, judgement and our motivations (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017). Wrzesniewski et al., (1997) make distinctions between a job, a career and a calling. These authors suggest that a job is focused on financial rewards and necessity as opposed to pleasure and fulfilment; a career is focused on advancement and a calling is focused on fulfilment, enjoyment and doing socially relevant work. How an individual relates to work (as a job, career or calling) and what motivates them may determine the type of employment they seek and the amount of effort they put into attaining and becoming successful within such a career.

2.3.8 Psychology graduate unemployment in the South African context

There are approximately 2.75 psychologists per 100 000 people in South Africa. The need for quality mental health services is in low income communities where negative socio-economic and psycho-social factors take a toll on people's psychological wellbeing and where these issues remain unaddressed (*Mental Health News South Africa*, 2019; Burns, 2011). This is the gap unemployed Psychology Honours graduates; policy makers and government could be taking advantage of.

Many Psychology Honours graduates aspire to become professional psychologists, (Bonn et al., 2009). Students may not have a realistic outlook about the outcome of their studies because Honours Psychology graduates are unsuccessful in gaining employment in the counselling and mental health care sector, and a very small percentage of them are accepted into Master's programmes required for professional registration in psychology.

The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) wrote an article warning students that graduation is not a guarantee for employment and that the institution of higher learning indeed has an influence on one's chances of finding employment (HSRC, n.d.). There are examples of students who studied psychology who feel as though they have wasted their time obtaining a qualification in psychology because of an inability to find employment (Moriri, 2016). In addition, Registered Counsellors are struggling to secure employment. Pretorius (2019) accounts the dire need for mental health practitioners in South Africa and the inability of Registered Counsellors to find employment in the public sector. Many of these HPCSA registered professionals remain unemployed while others resort to opening their own private practices.

2.3.9 Training of psychology professionals

The minimum-standards-for-training-of-psychology-students guidelines produced by the Health Professions Council of South Africa's Board of Psychology for all psychology professional registration categories (i.e., Registered Counsellor, Psychometrist, Clinical Psychologist, Counselling Psychologist, Industrial Psychologist and Educational Psychologist) not including Research Psychologist, state several guidelines required by institutions of higher learning to train psychology professional. These guidelines are the rationale for each registration qualification, the prerequisite learning to be in place for said qualification, access to the qualification which is open to all who meet the necessary academic and training requirements and finally the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). RPL is within the power and scope of the individual institution of higher learning to declare whilst within and in addition to the requirements stipulated by the board. The guideline for RPL allows universities to determine their own requirements for entry or acceptance into a programme (Professional Board for Psychology, 2019f, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d, 2019e).

Few to no studies directly address the issues that make it difficult for students to enter into Master's level of studies once they have completed their Honours level of studies. One that does address this issue also enlightens us that not much has changed within the discipline and profession of psychology in thirty years and that the difficulties that were dealt with then are still present today. van der Westhuyzen and Plug, (1987) addressed several issues pertaining to the training of psychologists such as the lack of internships, the lack of qualified senior staff to supervise interns, lack of internship sites and the lack of university subsidies all of which negatively impacted the ability to match the supply and demand for qualified and competently

trained psychologists. The lack of recent research in the area which addresses the issue of bottlenecking at Master's level warrants the review of dated but relevant literature. This study also found that the reason for many Master's applicants being rejected for Master's programmes (clinical and counselling to be exact) included limited work opportunities for trained professionals, demands for trainees of a very high standard, a limited number of internships available to a university department and a shortage of manpower for specialised training. In addition, van der Westhuyzen and Plug, (1987) also found that professional training in psychology as opposed to training in many other areas requires a large amount of individual contact between trainees and supervisors.

It is difficult to corroborate these findings for this day and age as there is a substantial lack of studies that focus on these specific issues in the past decade, however it may be safe to assume that many psychology departments of many universities face similar issues today. These issues may be influencing the small number of Honours graduates being absorbed into Master's level of studies and training. Questions surrounding the occurrence of bottlenecking at Master's level in psychology relevant to this day and age remain unanswered and perhaps warrants further study as this may help us understand the real problem and address it adequately.

As enrolment numbers dwindle the higher up the academic ladder one climbs, some authors equate the loss of students from psychology to "a form of professionalisation which restricts psychological practice to the Master's level qualification" (Richter et al., 1998, p. 4) that "is costly and wasteful of human resource potential, and limited in terms of its capacity to produce the number of psychological practitioners commensurate with social need" (Richter et al., 1998, p. 4). It could therefore be quite useful for future curriculum developers and employers to re-evaluate how and where psychology fits in society, how the skills developed by students can be enhanced and how such enhancement could be beneficial not only to students but to all stakeholders involved in the training, education and employing of such graduates.

Employers argue that there appears to be a mismatch between the skills students acquire during studies towards their qualifications and what employers require (Mncayi & Dunga, 2016). It is possible to see the validity of this argument when taking into consideration the 2020 list of occupations in high demand (DNA Economics, 2020). Indeed, the Department of Higher Education has several factors to evaluate when considering its role in improving the responsiveness of the post-school education and training system to the skills needs of the economy. These considerations include successfully meeting the goals of the National

Development Plan 2030, the New Growth Path and the Industrial Policy Action Plan, all of which aim to reduce poverty, enhance growth and employment, create equity and enhance the capabilities of the economy (Department of Trade and Industry, n.d.; Economic Development Department, 2011; *National Development Plan 2030 Our Future-Make It Work*, 2012). The list indicates that psychology is only considered a scarce or critical skill at a lecturer level, in addition to this, psychology is not indicated as a skill shortage (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020), thus the lack of job opportunities for psychology graduates may be attributable to the information provided in this list.

2.3.10 What do employers want from psychology majors?

Psychology scholars and graduates supposedly host a range of skills that are said to be valued by employers. Naturally, one would expect to see this play out practically in the real world with at least a relatively large number of students being absorbed into the job market. However, this is not necessarily true (Haskell et al., 2012). According to Haskell et al., (2012) numerous studies in the American context suggest that employers highly value the skills gained from studying towards a degree within the Humanities (Liberal Arts in the American context). These degrees are said to provide communication and critical thinking skills to name a few.

Studies within the Humanities provide students with broad generalisable skills such as interpersonal skills, organisation and adaptability, critical thinking and problem solving and ethics and values, among others (Appleby, 2000; Haskell et al., 2012). These are skills that employers supposedly regard as valuable, however few Humanities graduates with a Bachelor of Arts degree are employed. Moreover, those who find themselves employed in positions not related to what they majored in are earning less than their peers with a similar level qualification (Haskell et al., 2012) and are less likely to find permanent full time employment. They are also more likely to take longer to find employment (Mncayi & Dunga, 2016).

Interestingly, Haskell et al., (2012) also found that part of the reason why psychology majors are unsuccessful in the world of work or find it difficult to secure employment is because psychology majors do not understand which skills they have acquired and whether they are regarded as valuable. Furthermore, they have a limited understanding of where psychology majors are supposed to work. This may affect how graduates advertise their skills to potential employers thus limiting their employment prospects and opportunities. Landrum and Harrold (2003) surveyed employers to determine what skills and qualities are regarded as important by employers. They found that the top five of the most valuable skills and qualities required by

employers are listening skills, desire and ability to learn, willingness to learn new and important skills, getting along with others, and ability to work with others as part of a work team (Landrum & Harrold, 2003). All these are skills and qualities not necessarily part of conventional academic curricula, teaching, and training. It is therefore understandable why students and graduates are unsure of which skills to promote.

Concerning job opportunities for psychology graduates in South Africa, job advertisements that were judged as offering suitable employment for psychology graduates were analysed by Richter et al., (1998). They found that the ratio of graduate to suitable job was small as the number of graduates far exceeded the opportunities available. Sectors that were regarded as suitable for psychology graduates were human resources, manpower and industrial relations, education, research, social development, welfare, and health (Richter et al., 1998). However, many of the skills required for these jobs are not taught to psychology students. When students enter the world of work, they are going to be required to be able to perform tasks such as training or teaching and administrative tasks; they are going to need to be numerate thus being able to understand how to access, analyse and interpret data which are skills often reserved for postgraduate studies. Finally, they will need to understand the labour and the developing and changing social environments (Appleby, 2000; Richter et al., 1998). Such skills are important and undergraduate psychology curricula does not adequately prepare students for these demands. Richter et al., (1998) advise that South African Qualifications Authority take such data into account when approving curricula.

The focus of most psychology curricula is on preparing students for Master's level of studies and training and the lack of psychology professionals warrants some form of professional development at graduate level (Richter et al., 1998). Such professional development has been made available through the introduction of the Registered Counsellor and Psychometrist HPCSA registration categories which allow professional training and registration at an Honours level. Despite this development, job opportunities for Registered Counsellors are scarce and most of the professional training for this Bachelor of Psychology Equivalent professional qualification is offered at few institutions of higher learning across the country. While training for the Registered Counsellor qualification is available at private institutions, it is embedded within the curriculum. Consequently, psychology Honours graduates from other institutions interested in the Registered Counsellor course cannot do training separately and would have to complete a second Honours Degree at the respective private institution. Only five of the eighteen accredited public universities in South Africa offer Registered Counsellor

training and qualifications while two of the accredited private institutions offer this Bachelor of Psychology Equivalent qualification (Professional Board for Psychology, 2020). Only four of the eighteen accredited public universities offer the Bachelor of Psychology Equivalent qualification and training for Psychometry (Professional Board for Psychology, 2020) and none of the accredited private institutions offer this course.

Finally, Richter et al., (1998) argue that there is a wealth of untapped potential pertaining to the training of psychology graduates and majors and to some extent a responsibility to offer an equivalent alternative to that of postgraduate (Master's level) training to psychology graduates who are not selected into Master's level programmes. They also argue that it is important to consider including vocational skills training and development at an undergraduate level so that students may be equipped to enter the employment environment at all qualification exit levels.

2.4 Conclusion

The theories and concepts utilised in this research speak to the type of methodology and analysis employed in this study. Phenomenology as a theory provide lenses through which to view data relating to experiences as intrinsic knowledge about the phenomena under study. In this case, these phenomena are job-seeking and unemployment and how they influence and are influenced by identity and meaning making. Supplementarily, Wilcock's theory of the human need for occupation provides lenses through which to view occupation as necessary and important. The conceptual framework served to define the concepts of identity and the self-concept in relation to the study. Finally, the literature review discussed literature relating to unemployment, employability, graduate transition, identity, and psychology within the South African context. In the next chapter, the research design methods on data collection analysis are explicated. Finally, the chapter also outlines how the considerations for the trustworthiness and ethical principles for this research study are ensured.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a description of the research design used to conduct the study to answer the research questions will be provided. This will include the description of the methodology which discusses the research approach employed in the study. Furthermore, descriptions of the sampling method, data collection method and the shortfalls thereof, research procedure and data analysis method used are provided. This chapter also includes a reflexivity section addressing issues of trustworthiness, and finally the ethical considerations implemented throughout the execution of the study was conducted.

3.2 Methodology

This study undertook a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is centred on interpretively studying a specific issue or experience in which the researcher is a central part of the logic, sense and understanding that is made from the data. This approach or design allows for the researchers' chosen area of study to be an aspect of action or of experience. Qualitative research also attempts to capture the essence of an experience and explores, elaborates and systematises the significance of the phenomenon under study (Banister et al., 1994). The area of study in this case is experience, more specifically the job seeking experiences of unemployed Honours Psychology graduates. Therefore, a qualitative research methodology is a good fit as this study attempts to capture, as much as possible, the essence of this experience. Phenomenological research is a qualitative research approach which intends to describe experiences as they are lived (Groenewald, 2004). It is focused on an individual's meaning making this the essential element of the human experience and assumes that there is an essence to shared experience. Therefore, a reader should get the sense that they understand what it is like to have experienced a particular phenomenon because it is extremely detailed and thus the description must capture the essence of the phenomenon (Worthington, 2013).

A qualitative approach was relevant for this study because many studies are not focusing on the story of the process of transitioning from being a university student to being a full-time employee which entails more than a simple job search and job application that captures the attention of a recruiter (Perrone & Vickers, 2003). Another argument Perrone and Vickers (2003) make is that the majority of studies which investigate the graduate-to-employee transition process are quantitative in nature and not much consideration has been given to

exploring the lived experiences of graduates as they transition. In their study they also discuss the identity shifts a graduate goes through and how this may influence job-seeking behaviour and how the type of jobs secured could affirm or disaffirm their graduate identity. Potential employers need to be sensitive to the social significance of these developing identities. Another author, Christie, (2016) is concerned with the transition experiences of recent graduates and also argues that a qualitative perspective is valuable if we are going to understand how individuals respond to the changing labour market conditions. Therefore, a qualitative investigation provides an opportunity to better understand the job-seeking experiences of unemployed Honours Psychology graduates and to develop supportive interventions and job opportunities which are relevant for them.

3.2.1 Selection of participants

While the concept of sampling has been reserved for quantitative studies, this concept is also used in qualitative research to denote the subset of the population with the criteria and size adequate to meet the objectives and answer the research questions of the study (Christensen et al., 2015). The snowball sampling technique used in this study is a type of purposive sampling technique. When utilizing purposive sampling, the researcher specifies the characteristics of the participants he or she wants to include in the study (Christensen et al., 2015) and when utilising snowball sampling there researcher increases the sample by requesting initial participants to identify others who could participate in the study (Manohar et al., 2019). The characteristics in this case were participants who were 'Honours graduates', 'unemployed' and 'seeking employment'. Social media platforms (LinkedIn, Facebook, WhatsApp) were used to recruit participants. The contact details of the researcher were provided on an information leaflet distributed online by the researcher. As a result, the researcher was able to obtain the contact details of participants who contacted her in the manner stated on the information leaflet. Participants recruited for the study may have been of any gender and any race and between the ages of 21 and 31 age. All participants were over the age of 18 and were therefore able to give informed consent, which in this study was obtained from all participants.

A specific sample size was not fitting for this study as the intention was for data to be collected until data saturation point was reached. Saunders et al., (2018) identify four models for saturation in qualitative research which are 'theoretical saturation', 'inductive theoretical saturation', 'a priori thematic saturation' and 'data saturation'. The final model defines data saturation as relating to "the degree to which new data repeat what is expressed in previous data" (Saunders et al., 2018, p. 1897) and new data tends "to be redundant of data already

collected" (Saunders et al., 2018, p. 1896). The homogenous nature of the sample meant that the data generated was redundant and the likelihood of further interviews with participants of a similar demographic to yield additional or new information was low. Therefore, data saturation was reached at nine participants. Participants were individuals who have graduated with an Honours Degree in psychology and at the time of conducting the study, were unemployed and in the process of actively seeking employment.

Pseudonym	***Age***	***Gender***	***Location***
Tumelo	28	Female	Limpopo
Marilyn	24	Female	Johannesburg
Kamogelo	27	Female	Johannesburg
Dineo	25	Female	Eastern Cape
Melissa	29	Female	Johannesburg
Nomalanga	31	Female	Thembisa
Mpumi	27	Female	Mpumalanga
Masego	23	Female	Mpumalanga
Tshegofatso	27	Female	Centurion

Figure 1: Demographic table of participants.

The figure above depicts the demographics as well as geographical location of participants interviewed for the study.

3.2.2 Data collection method

This study sought to gain knowledge of the experiences of unemployed Psychology Honours graduates; therefore, a semi-structured interview method was the most appropriate data collection method as it allowed the researcher to both guide the conversation as well as afford the participant the necessary freedom to express themselves in as much detail as possible. Open-ended questions were used, and the interview was of a conversational style. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher and permission to

record was requested from the participants. Due to Covid-19 lockdown regulations, all semi-structured interviews were conducted online. The method of online semi-structed interviews is the same as traditional individual interviews however these interviews are conducted online by the researcher. These interviews were conducted using the following video-calling applications: Zoom or WhatsApp video calling services, and all were audio recorded and transcribed. Permission to record was requested and participants were informed that interviews are being audio recorded. The cell phone application used (i.e., WhatsApp or Zoom) was dependent on availability, cost effectiveness and convenience for the participant.

3.2.3 Research procedure

At the beginning of each interview the participant was informed of their rights to withdraw before, during and after the interview had been conducted and that there would be no negative repercussions for doing so. This study was a low-risk study and was not of a sensitive nature, as such, there was no need for information about the aims of the study to be withheld form the participant, consequently there was no need for psychological debriefing. At the end of each interview, participants were afforded the opportunity to ask the researcher questions relating to the study and all questions were answered in a satisfactory manner. This may have been a low-risk study; however, it was important to consider that the topic of unemployment is an upsetting one and for this reason the contact details of a Registered Counsellor were provided to participants in an information sheet. In addition to this, prior to the commencement of an interview, each participant was reminded to contact the Registered Counsellor should they experience some distress caused by the interview. These services were offered free of charge to participants. On average, interviews lasted between 25 and 55 minutes long. The length of interviews was dependent of the length of the participant's responses and the stability of network services. Therefore, in addition to network interruptions, the disadvantages of conducting qualitative online include impeding inclusion because online interviews can make participation more convenient, accessible, and appealing for some groups than others which is evident in the homogeneity of the sample.

3.2.4 Data analysis method

The study utilised a thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as one of the most used qualitative research methods that is employed to identify, analyse, and report the patterns or themes found within the data that we collect. This method of analysis is used to organise and describe the data in such a way that what is produced is a rich and detailed

analysis. The thematic analysis used was inductive in nature as the identified themes were strongly linked to the data themselves and the data informed the codes. Furthermore, the analysis was driven by the data as opposed to the analysis being driven by a particular theoretical or analytic interest which gives a less detailed description of the overall data. The six phases of analysis are not a linear process as the researcher is constantly moving back and forth between phases. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis are as follows:

Familiarisation and coding (Phases 1 – 2). In this phase after data has been collected and transcribed, the text was read and re-read. Notes were made for purposes of reflection. Initial thoughts about observations in the text were noted and recorded in one of the margins of the text (Terry et al., 2017). Codes were noted in the margins, and these were transferred to a separate document for further analysis.

Theme development (Phase 3). In this phase, the researcher engages in an active process of forming and identifying patterns within the codes (Terry et al., 2017). Patterned responses in relation to research questions were identified. These responses were then clustered, candidate themes were developed, and an early thematic map was developed.

Reviewing and defining of themes (Phases 4 – 5). These phases are the phases within which themes are clarified, collapsed into other themes, refined, and/or rejected. In this phase, the researcher ensures that the themes work well with the coded data, the dataset and the research questions (Terry et al., 2017). Candidate themes were collapsed into other overarching themes and where relevant, included as sub-themes. These themes were then further refined by checking whether they work with the dataset, the coded data, and the research questions. A final thematic map was developed, and the original transcribed dataset was read through again. Extracts that fit with the themes were then chosen.

Producing the report (Phase 6). Themes are interpreted in relation to research questions, meanings and implications of themes, assumptions underpinning themes and conditions that gave rise to those themes (Willig, 2013). Extracts from the interviews relating to the themes, research questions and literature are selected and used as examples (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.3 Issues of Trustworthiness

Rigour is a means through which social scientists demonstrate the legitimacy of the research process (Tobin & Begley, 2004). In qualitative research rigour necessitates transparency and is

demonstrated through trustworthiness, which is ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checks, reflexivity and soundness (Koch, 1994; Tobin & Begley, 2004). In an effort to enhance trustworthiness, reflexivity and credibility as qualitative validity criteria were employed in this study as discussed below.

3.3.1 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is argued to be both a concept and a process (Palaganas et al., 2017). As a concept, reflexivity should be understood as referring to the ability of the researcher to be conscious and self – aware of the fact that they not removed from the research process but rather they are a part of the process. As a result, reflexivity as a process entails the active self-analysis of the researcher's subjective role in the research process. Palaganas et al., (2017) argue that this is achieved by firstly acknowledging that the findings are a product of the researcher's own interpretation. Secondly, by constantly reflecting on one's values and identifying, scrutinising, and understanding that one's background and assumptions influence how research is conducted. Lastly, this can be achieved by ensuring that the relationship between the researcher and the participants is made clear, as well as the influence of this relationship on the research process. Trustworthiness will therefore be assured through reflexivity.

As a Master's student who was in the same position the participants found themselves in at the time of data collection, the researcher was aware of how her personal experiences could influence how she interacted with the data and participants. Acknowledging this, the researcher had to constantly be aware of how she engaged with participants and how she read and understood the data for analysis to ensure that she does not insert her own experiences when interpreting the data but rather letting the data tell the story. This involved continuously going back to the data to ascertain that the raw data speaks to how she was interpreting it.

The researcher was also aware that as a Master's student, she was in a position that the participants aspired to be in, and therefore this may have influenced how participants engaged with her. In addition to this, the relationship between the researcher and participant was clarified by the researcher introducing herself and setting the stage for an interview session by reiterating the information provided in the participant information sheet at the beginning of the interview session. The researcher also became aware that some participants did not quite understand the term 'identity' within the context of the study. Clarification of the meaning of

the term was given by explaining the definition of identity to participants so that they could answer questions relating to identity from an informed position.

3.3.2 Credibility

Reliability and validity in qualitative research are conceptualised as trustworthiness, rigor and quality for the most important test of qualitative studies is their quality which is meant to produce understanding (Golafshani, 2003). Credibility is therefore a way of thinking about and ensuring the extent to which research findings are truthful and thus trustworthy (Mills et al., 2010). To ensure this member checking, triangulation, thick description, peer reviews and external audits are often utilised (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Member checking is employed to assess and ensure that participants' realities have been accurately represented in the final report (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Member checking thus entails taking the data and interpretations back to the participants in the study for them to confirm the credibility or accuracy of the information they provided and the account the researcher provides.

For the purposes of this study, member checking was utilised because the study undertook a qualitative approach which is interested in the experiences of participants. Member checking was executed through sending all participants a summary of all the themes which were developed and a copy of the transcript specific to each participant. Participants were requested to read through all the documentation sent to them and to comment on whether the themes and categories are comprehensible and whether the themes were representative of their lived experiences. This process allowed the participants the opportunity to reflect on the credibility of the account of their experiences.

3.3.3 Dependability

The research audit trail is a strategy for establishing research confirmability (Carcary, 2009). The study employed a semi-structured interviewing strategy, and the same research instrument was used to interview all participants. Audio recording interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher and where the audio was inaudible it was noted on the transcript. An audit trail of the research process which includes transcripts, theme development summaries, recruitment of participants and decisions taken was developed with the supervising researcher.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Prior to commencing with data collection for this study, ethical clearance was granted by the University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (refer to Appendix E).

Participation in the study was voluntary. All participants were provided with an information sheet stating all important information regarding participation (refer to Appendix B). This was sent in conjunction with the consent form (refer to Appendix C) which needed to be completed prior to the interviews. If participants could not complete and return the consent form prior to the commencement of interviews, participants were asked to give verbal consent and then later written consent. In addition to this, participants were informed about the researcher, the purpose of the study and their rights to withdraw from the study at any time.

The nature of the study was such that it carried low risk and potential for distress, nevertheless participants were provided with the contact information of a Registered Counsellor should they feel distressed during and after the interview. At the end of the interview, participants were asked if they had any questions for the researcher and all questions relating to the study were answered fully.

Anonymity was guaranteed using pseudonyms and participants were informed that no identifying information will be used in the study. Furthermore, confidentiality was maintained via restricting access to the data therefore only the researcher and supervisor had access to the data materials.

3.5 Conclusion

This study utilised a qualitative methodological approach to determine the job-seeking experiences of participants. This approach comprised of a purposive sampling method and semi-structured interview data collection method. Interviews were conducted online, and audio recorded for transcription purposes. The disadvantages of this are those online methods of data collection are prone to issues such as network interruptions which affect the quality of data collected and unintended restrictions in acquiring a more diverse sample. A thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Issues of trustworthiness were addressed through reflexivity and all ethical protocol was observed. The following chapter will present the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 Findings and Discussion

4.2 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the research design and methodology used to answer the research questions. The above chapter also outlined the thematic analysis approach to data analysis as well as the steps taken in conducting analysis. This chapter will present the findings and the themes which emerged from the data and discuss these findings in relation to the research questions of the study.

4.3 Overview of themes

All the identified themes can be traced back to the central theme of "Master's is the golden key". This theme became apparent as participants continuously mentioned the importance of attaining a Master's Degree. This degree, according to participants, is what is needed to procure employment, to attain their desired identities and to establish a stable sense of self. It is also what is needed if they are to be regarded as valuable by the world of work and what would make all the current qualifications worth acquiring. Attaining a Master's Degree is the main goal for choosing psychology a career and the goal to be achieved once participants have completed their Undergraduate and Honours qualifications.

For each theme, data extracts in the form of quotations will used to provide evidence for the theme in an analytic and illustrative way such that the narrative of the data is comprehensible. The four themes which emerged from the thematic analysis are as follows: '4.2.1 Choosing psychology'; '4.2.2 Transitional identity'; '4.2.3 In limbo: The unemployment experience' with the subtheme '4.2.3.1 Solutions' and finally, '4.2.4 Perceptions: Their views of us, Our view of ourselves' with the subthemes '4.2.4.1 Other's views on psychology' and '4.2.4.2 Own qualifications'.

4.3.1 Choosing psychology

The home environment, media, interest in the subject and the social environment are some factors which influence career choice. Career choice is also influenced by values which are attached to certain careers which in turn arise from factors such as life experiences (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017). In addition, the positive or negative assumptions people make about careers

either encourage behaviours that bring them closer to or further from (i.e., avoidance) those careers. These assumptions validate or invalidate their career related beliefs (Laker, 2002).

Participant's choices of psychology as a career were inspired by personal experiences. The following participants were influenced by parental and social factors, respectively. For instance, Melissa stated that she was influenced by her mother and her involvement with community work,

> *...I also saw my mother who is a teacher, she went and also studied part time to do counselling she used to work at the Teddy Bear Clinic volunteer for the Teddy Bear Clinic and she was always counselling kids and people and I also saw that and it just always… and still now people talk to me very easily, they feel comfortable just you know telling me what's going on…(Melissa).*

Social and environmental factors such as the circumstances of others around us can also influence our career choices. Nomalanga spoke about an experience which made her realise her interest in pursuing a helping career,

> *...The one experience that led me to choose this career I remember when I was… just opposite the street that side after you cross the main road so there are these shops that everybody would go there to buy stuff and I remember that day it was cold, it was in the morning and we were just walking by, there was… you remember those containers? The Cell C, Telkom where you would call using telephones and stuff like that? So there was this child about our age if not bigger, he looked a little bit taller and you know…he would stay there each and every morning, sleep there and majority at that time there wasn't much of street kids to be honest, and where I am staying there wasn't any you know what I mean so it was something of peculiar to see that you know if you see that it is like okay, it is something to be concerned so as a child I did have that concern and then we started talking that you know what we could help this child. We started talking to him we asked him why are you staying in the streets and he would say no this is my life my situation I have no one, there is nowhere where I can go and then we were like but there is actually an orphanage not far away from where I am staying so we started calling the social workers and stuff like that and then the process whereby he was assisted they gave him counselling and they found him that orphanage, I think then it was Fosters, that process there that everything it made it clear for me that okay fine I*

may not be in the social work stuff like that but I want to be in a helping career… (Nomalanga).

Interest in a career can also stem from other personal experiences which are more internally motivated such as pregnancy. Dineo associated her interest in psychology to her pregnancy experience.

…I think I just fell in love with it because I was actually going for criminology but then when I saw this, I was like no man this what I actually want. Uhm, well when I first got into it, I was… I remember falling in love with it because we were busy with uhm the prenatal stages and I was pregnant so it was it was the best and then I just realised after that no man you know as… as the years went by I am like no I actually love, uhm I am actually concerned about children's wellbeing so that is when I am like okay this is where I am going to focus, uhm my focus will be on children because – and their wellbeing – and they are affected by their parent's like stuff and all of that so that is kind of my focus (Dineo).

Other personal experiences which inspire one's choice in a particular career can arise from traumatic events such as rape, as Masego explains,

…I experienced a lot of hiccups, personal hiccups you know being raped and all that, that kind of really put me down a little bit but then attending psychology sessions and therapy really helped and I realised that this is what I want to do actually. I actually want to be part of the few people that assist people when they are vulnerable you know and yeah, I overcame that… (Masego).

The above are indicative of a deeper meaning attached to choosing psychology as a career, these meanings validate choices graduates made for pursuing a career in psychology. For these participants, studying psychology meant an opportunity to make sense of their personal experiences. In addition to this form of validation, another type of validation found across the data comes in the form of linking one's personality to one's career choice. Personality is an influential factor when it comes to important life decisions of which one is career choice and so people gravitate towards choosing professions which best fits their abilities, personal interests, skills and values (Alkhelil, 2016). Tumelo spoke about how being a talkative person and her love for people influenced her career choice.

…The reason why I chose psychology is because I love people, I am a talkative person so I talk a lot and I love people man I love to smile I love to laugh so I also wish the same to other people so my wish is to see people get healed and to help them so I hope to do that to people and I hope to have that impact on everyone (Tumelo).

Having experience working as a human resources practitioner in an environment which was more corporate, Melissa explains how this type of employment and work environment did not fit her personality,

I think and then I also uhm started volunteering and stuff and I found that it actually does click with who I am and my personality, and when I was volunteering at SADAG I'd wake up Saturday morning early I'd be there for my 8 to 12 shift and I felt like I was doing something, you know I might be tired and thinking why am I giving of my Saturday morning and then I would get there and I get the first phone call and that is it I am in my element…(Melissa).

In reference to her experience of helping a homeless child find foster care through engaging with social workers and then being exposed to psychology through a television programme, Nomalanga makes associations between engaging with these different influential factors and her own personality which further validated her choice of psychology as a career.

…That process there that everything it made it clear for me that okay fine I may not be in the social work stuff like that but I want to be in a helping career so I decided that you know what with the television when you see Taylor, when you see… what is it The Bold and the Beautiful… this is where I am going if it is the helping career this is what I want to do. I am good with people, I can communicate with people and I am a good listener, and you would think that psychology back in the day you would give advice, or you would think that oh maybe you just pose questions that people need to think hard about and stuff, so I decided there and then that this is where I am going (Nomalanga).

The culmination of both the above-mentioned reasons for validation of career choice led to psychology being viewed as one's purpose and therefore a career that one is passionate about. Marilyn spoke about being passionate about psychology.

I enjoy psychology it was just something that I was always passionate about (Marilyn).

In addition to feeling passionate about psychology, another participant Dineo also expressed viewing the career of psychology as a purpose.

> *I feel like seeing myself being able to assist you know those types of children in a way that would be helpful for their future I feel like I would know that this is the reason why I am here, you know by the time I become a psychologist I feel like you know, helping out with such children with such situations will be… will mean a lot basically I will feel that I know my purpose, what my purpose is. Yeah (Dineo).*

Viewing a job as a purpose or calling means that people experience that work as fulfilling (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Melissa compares her work as a human resources practitioner to her desired job, which is within psychology, and how employment in corporate was not fulfilling.

> *…To the point where at companies that I've worked for I did not feel a sense of fulfilment unless I was volunteering or doing something else I did not feel like I was fulfilling my purpose I didn't feel happy in like really good jobs, I worked for two of the big four auditing firms within HR and I just did not feel… you know everyone wanted a job like that with all the benefits and all of you know whatever it is and it served its purpose but it just was not what I wanted to do and I could not get myself to, you know, I could not force myself into liking something that was not my passion (Melissa, 29, Female, Johannesburg).*

During interviews, many participants mentioned the process of becoming a psychologist within the South African context and some stated their lack of knowledge regarding this process and what it entails. Marilyn spoke about her naivety regarding the process involved in becoming a psychology professional.

> *Uh well to be honest before you are actually in the course you don't realise how difficult it actually is to actually become a registered therapist uhm… like any other career I think it is easy like with accounting you just do your… your accounting and then there you go you can be an accountant, uhm so I got a bit of a surprise when I realised that it is a lot harder to become a therapist uh while you are studying psychology uhm and that always was the end goal so uh I am trying to remain… I am going to leave it as the end goal (Marilyn).*

In contrast to the abovementioned, Nomalanga was more informed about the process of becoming a psychology professional within the South African context.

> *I know it is not going to be easy I actually came across a lot of uhm… you could say other students who were discouraging me and say Master's is hard to get in and it is true, it is very hard uh and you would feel discouraged, and I told myself you know what, it does not matter… (Nomalanga).*

In light of the knowledge about what it takes to become a psychology professional in South Africa, participants continued to pursue this career. This pursuit can be attributed how participants validate their career choices.

Realising the process was going to be taxing, some participants expressed that they felt demotivated to continue the journey to pursuing a career in psychology. However, they continued to pursue this career because of the amount of time and effort invested into their chosen careers. Tumelo drew positive meaning from the difficult process by using this experience as something that contributed to their resilience.

> *…When I began to realise that this is the whole process, this is what I have to go through, this is what I have to do it kind of became discouraging and asking myself all sorts of questions like do I really have to go through this, do I really have to work this much hard to get to be a psychologist one day…and then later on just like okay let me just continue with my honours and see what happens, still after my honours again there is another process which is, wow, another nightmare because mmm… what I can say with the Master's thing… (Tumelo).*

> *Interviewer: And then, what did that mean for you? Like when that happened, when you finally got that email that says you have completed all the requirements necessary for your graduation… leading up to the graduation and then finally graduating, what did all of that mean for you?*

The process of studying to become a psychology professional is demanding. However, for Tumelo, after realising that a Postgraduate Degree in the form of an Honours Degree is attainable meant that attaining a Master's Degree and becoming a psychology professional is also possible. The meaning drawn from the process was resilience.

Okay remember I told you that there was a time where I felt like uhm being discouraged in continuing or actually have that eye of being a psychologist one day, so that… I think it was uhm another eye opener for me because after… actually the moment… I think it was just after writing my exams that I started to feel no I did great, I did good. So, to me what came to my mind was that you can still do this it is not as hard and as difficult as and as tough as you thought it was, so whatever the process or the process… however long it is you can still do it and you can still get there (Tumelo).

All participants began the journey in psychology with the intention to become a psychologist with the most common choice of profession being Clinical psychology. Clinical psychology was chosen for several reasons from the breadth of its scope of practice to it being the only type of psychology participants knew about. Clinical psychology seems to be the ideal and popular career choice. While Counselling psychology and Educational psychology were first choices for other participants, these and other registration categories were considered as second options if participants were not accepted into a Master's programme for Clinical psychology. When asked what branch psychology she was interested in, Tshegofatso expresses her unawareness of branches other than Clinical and Counselling psychology:

Well… I did not know there were types. Uh I honestly did not know there were types… (Tshegofatso).

After learning about Counselling psychology, Tshegofatso made a comparison between the two branches and chose Clinical psychology, as she explains,

…But I mean afterwards and I did my Honours, uhm my honours was actually at UNISA it was a Counselling psychology and then when then I realised oh I have to do my Master's, so it was like okay then there was an option between Counselling and Clinical and then when I gauged the two I was like well, it seems like Clinical is more broad then that is how I was like ugh I would want to do Clinical but yeah I, I just… yeah I really don't know where I fall in but uh yeah (Tshegofatso).

For many participants, Clinical psychology was the first choice of career and specialisation within the psychology profession. However, for Melissa, becoming a psychologist irrespective of which branch, has become just as important as becoming a Clinical psychologist. This can be understood as a decision brought upon by failed attempts to gain admission for Clinical psychology and not being a fulltime student.

So my plan was and still is to be a Clinical psychologist, so it is… and I think okay my plan has changed a little bit because I am kind of at a point where okay any psychologist… you know I just want to be a psychologist in the end so when I started that was my goal uhm it took a long time because it was not fulltime so I think that is why I am still… like I am not where I want to or I could have been…(Melissa).

Failed attempts to get admission into Master's often left some participants feeling uncertain about their futures. Marilyn explains that the period of unemployment coupled with failed attempts at gaining admission makes getting into Master's more and more difficult. Furthermore, these experiences force one to consider alternatives to initial career choices.

So I would like to go into clinical uhm Clinical psychology is what I would like to go into for my Master's uh but the more I sit at home and because it is so difficult to get in you try to figure out like what's an alternative uhm and it would obviously be Counselling psychology uh Master's for me to… to go into so that it is still therapy but it is not as in depth as clinical psychology would be so I have applied uhm for next year so we will obviously have to wait and see should we get into it which I am really hoping for but also keeping me being realistic and knowing that there is an option around uhm not getting in again and then knowing that I'll need to have something to fall back on (Marilyn).

For other participants, the choice of Counselling psychology as a career came because of further knowledge about the scopes of different registration categories and fitting oneself into the relevant career. Masego explains that she thought choosing a career within psychology would be easy and wanted to become a Clinical psychologist as well. She was naïve about what the process entails.

Well I actually thought it was going to be easy number one, and so I thought I could do this, I didn't think it is that complicated and I thought I am just going to do my undergrad then do my honours then Clinical then that… like I didn't even know about Counselling psychology, you know, Neuropsychology you know such things, I only knew that being a psychologist is you being a Clinical psychologist and that is the only path. I do not know maybe I did not do my research at that time but yeah that is how I thought it was back then and also, I think at first year we… yes you were given information but then it wasn't… like they didn't really go into detail, so it was our

responsibility to really find out how this career path of psychology like entails (Masego).

Interviewer: So… when you started your… when you thought about okay psychology you thought Clinical psychology…

Masego: Yeah.

Interviewer: And that is what you wanted to become?

Masego: Exactly.

She lacked knowledge about other registration categories, however after learning more about herself, she decided on Counselling psychology:

Interviewer: So, do you still want to become a clinical or have you learned about other psychologies and you are thinking about branching differently?

Masego: Well right now because I know myself way better and I have done self-introspection uhm I am thinking of doing counselling psychology because that is where I see myself in.

For an individual to become registered as a psychologist in South Africa, it is required that they complete an accredited Master's programme offered at any one of the institutions of higher learning before completing an internship, writing a board exam, and becoming registered with the HPCSA as a practitioner. Across the data, participants highlight their major goal as gaining admission into a Master's programme, obtaining a Master's Degree, and becoming a registered professional (psychologist). In addition, Undergraduate and Honours graduations are perceived as milestones and steppingstones to achieving the next goal which is admission into a Master's programme. This highlights the importance and value placed on a Master's Degree for Honours graduates. When asked how they felt when they graduated and what graduation meant, Tshegofatso stated,

…I felt like I was moving you know, getting somewhere like getting closer you know when you have your goals you know that okay I need to do this three year degree and then do honours and then I need to do Master's so it was like tick, tick, you know it felt

like I am getting closer to my goal you know, so as in psychologist obviously so yeah it felt great (Tshegofatso).

In response to the same question, Kamogelo responded,

I can say, it means I am a step closer to Master's, and hopefully I can get into the Master's programme and become a psychologist as it has been one of my dreams. Yeah. (Kamogelo).

The same sentiments were echoed by Dineo.

It means I am a step closer into getting that, that … what can I say… into getting my Master's, into being a psychologist, I am a step closer, it is not an easy journey but I just feel like okay, I am capable of doing a lot of things, if I am able to survive my honours, to get my degree, I can do anything basically. So now it just means, uhm… it just means I just means I just want to focus on getting my Master's, I just want to focus on getting this career, you know, this is my vision right now (Dineo).

An individual's personal values can influence their choice of career because values affect their behaviours, attitudes and thoughts and personality (Kaygin & Gulluce, 2013). Some people choose to devote themselves to certain careers because of a value-driven decision rather than an economic decision and social science students have been found to be more concerned with the necessities of others. Such careers which are more focused on helping others are more likely to be careers which are strongly influenced by values (Añaña & Nique, 2010). The pursuit of a career in psychology by participants is not only driven by the need to procure employment, but also seen as an opportunity to produce social change. This echoes the meaning placed on a career in psychology as a one's purpose. When asked what they hope to gain out of their qualifications, Marilyn responded that she desires to make a positive impact in communities.

Uhm well I think it is just doing what I want to do, I have a lot of uhm… and it is not employment… but I have a lot of plans with regards to what I would want to do at the end of my Master's career, uh not necessarily employment but there is a lot of social work that I would like to do, uh making a difference in communities that are affected uhm there is quite a few things that I would like to do but can't do it now because I don't have the means to be able to do it, so it is just uhm, making my mark in society

is being halted by the fact that I am unable to do it at this point in time due to the fact that I don't have my Master's Degree (Marilyn).

In response to the same question, Tshegofatso's response is more so geared towards finding fulfilment in her work.

…You know I love… I love people. I just… the fulfilment of helping somebody else through their journey or just step by step helping the country to heal you know I feel like so many people have past traumas especially in South Africa, so I feel like having had the opportunity to use my degree in that sense to help people that is really what I wanted to get out of it. Also wanted to add that contentment and fulfilment that okay, so and so was here today and oh this person is actually doing much better than before you know so those kinds of experiences, that is what I kind of want to live for or what I expect to get out of my degrees yeah (Tshegofatso).

Participants' choice in psychology as a career goes beyond the need to procure employment. For many participants, the choice stems from and is validated by personal experiences and other influential factors which leads to participants' meaning making of their career choice as their purpose and passion. The values participants hold also influence their choice in career, this is evident in what they desire to achieve beyond their qualifications. These values come through in the ways participants speak about why they chose psychology. Participants also described the journey to becoming a psychology professional as difficult however it is one that participants are willing to endure because of the effort invested in achieving their current academic milestones. From this, some participants drew positive meaning such as realising their resilience. Regarding career projections, most of the participants expressed interest in pursuing a career in Clinical Psychology, while others expressed interest in other registration categories. Some lacked knowledge of other registration categories besides Clinical Psychology. Many participants expressed interest in doing more with qualifications than procuring employment.

4.3.2 Transitional identity

Students make sense of themselves and their environments while navigating physical, cognitive, and emotional spaces. During this navigation process they also develop their identities and a sense of belonging through engaging in student practices within a university environment. Within the university landscape, as students figure out their identities and claims

of studenthood (the state of being a student), they begin to construct a sense of belonging and the dynamics at play within this space also influences the development of a "student identity" as well as disciplinary and professional identities (Habib & Ward, 2019).

For many participants, student identity was centred around learning and the learning environment and within the learning environment, participants found a sense of belonging.

> *Interviewer: Yeah, and then what did being a student mean for you in terms of your identity?*
>
> *Marilyn: Well it was… it firstly gave me a sense of belonging outside of school… uhm… because you obviously, the anxiety of leaving school and not knowing where you are going to fit in uhm after that so it felt really good to at least have a place where… like going there with people that are similar, having a similar experience to mine uhm so it was really, it was really nice and I actually miss it because now it is like at the current state that I am in this… I am like floating so I am not anywhere uhm so it was really an experience it gave me a sense of belonging it was easy to identify with other students because they were going through similar experiences uhm… yeah.*

In addition, within studenthood (the state of being a student), participants also developed a sense of independence. This independence was focused on the responsibilities of what is expected of an individual as a university student. For Tshegofatso, these responsibilities and activities involved solely being focused on her studies.

> *Oh, okay well I would say uhm okay identifying as a student… I feel like in a sense it is like uhm I knew that I had to do well in my course or I needed to focus and concentrate and study study study study uhm so I didn't really focus too much on student life I would say or like partying all of those things yeah so I think yeah it was just a matter of me and school really uhm and enjoying the subject matter… that is really… yeah… all I can say (Tshegofatso).*

For Tumelo and Marilyn, independence during the time and state of being a student meant being responsible for oneself and one's studies thus not being expected to rely on lecturers to make sure a student's work is done.

…Uhm getting to be like independent and getting to know this whole process of studying, of being alone and thinking for yourself, making decisions for yourself and things that maybe before in high school or in primary you didn't have to… someone had to tell you do this don't do that but then now you had to do it on your own, you have to make choices for yourself, you have to decide, should I do this shouldn't I do that…(Tumelo).

So, it was not as bad as what I thought it would be uhm the first few years of adjusting obviously was difficult, the workload and uhm the difference in the lecturer not spoon-feeding you and you doing most of the work uhm but as the years went on it got a lot easier just the workload got more but you became more uhm ready for what is to come (Marilyn).

Professional identity is a concept for which various definitions have been provided and so no single universally accurate definition exists. For this reason, the following definition is utilised in this research report because it is fitting for the theme that has emerged from the data. According to Tsakissiris (2016), professional identity refers to how one perceives of oneself in relation to a profession and being a member of that profession. Professional identity is developed by way of the beliefs, attitudes, values, motives, and experiences one holds through which one defines oneself in their current or projected profession and professional life. Professional identity is also associated with the gaining of symbolic resources which include status and esteem, mastery, sense of belonging and attachment (Tsakissiris, 2016). The independence participants experienced during the time and state of being a student differed from the desired identity that participants hoped to acquire post-graduation. Post-graduation, participants' desired identities are "professional" and "independent adult".

One participant expressed that she hopes to acquire the title of psychologist which is indicative of the desired professional identity.

I hope to have that title, I hope to have that title (Tumelo).

In addition to wanting to become a psychologist, participants also explicitly expressed the type of psychologist they want to become. Melissa clearly expressed the type of psychologist she wants to become, however even if she does not become the preferred type of psychologist, what mattered most was attaining the title of psychologist.

So, my plan was and still is to be a Clinical psychologist, so it is… and I think okay my plan has changed a little bit because I am kind of at a point where okay any psychologist… you know I just want to be a psychologist in the end so when I started that was my goal (Melissa).

The importance of being a professional within the field is also expressed by another participant.

…I need that one thing, just that small thing to be registered so that I can say besides having this Honours, I am also registered so I am a professional (Nomalanga).

Being regarded as a professional strengthens one's sense of self in their desired professional identity. In addition to the desire to attain a professional identity is the desire to gain independence as an adult.

I am grateful that I have a quite supportive father, so he is not necessarily putting too much pressure on me with regards to finding work and just finding anything that I want to do and at the same time it is just the form of trying to find my independence and trying to gain that independence financially uhm to be able to have my own money… (Marilyn).

The experience of unemployment is also described as an obstacle to attaining independence and the desired identity of "independent adult".

…For me it is just uhm… uh… a halt in my independence. So, it is just like a gap that is getting bigger and bigger uhm and pulling me further away from me gaining my independence in society as a female and as a… yeah as a working woman basically so uhm it is difficult for me but it is not as bad as somebody that has responsibilities, well a lot of more responsibilities uhm and therefore needs employment more at this point, yeah (Marilyn).

In addition to unemployment being experienced as obstacle to attaining the desired identity as an independent adult, participants identify with being individuals who are dependent on others. This is an undesired identity.

I feel like I lost support from my family because now they feel like I am not trying, it has, it was very… wow I do not know how to say it, but it has been the worst feeling ever, the worst experience ever because now I do not get any financial support from

anyone, now I have to find ways and means for myself to get things that I need. It is fine, I get provided… uhm I get food and like the basic things that I need, okay fine but then there are other things that I need for myself but then I cannot get and there really is not anything I can do like it has been, you know, it is simply very difficult you know I really do not know what to do with myself any more I have tried (Dineo).

Participants feel it is part of their responsibility to provide within their respective households and this forms part of the desired "independent adult" identity. Assuming an identity means also actively participating in the duties, responsibility, and activities of an independent adult. These are also the expectations family members and society have of an individual who is regarded as an "independent adult". Unemployment forms a barrier to the development and attainment of this desired identity by making it difficult for individuals to participate in such activities. This inability also negatively influences emotions and self-perceptions. Nomalanga explains,

…It is like okay fine I am not making money and I am looking at my age, I am looking at home that you know what I should be providing for these people, not asking money from them to do stuff because it is actually I feel embarrassed, I won't lie, that I shouldn't even as money at all from them, I should be the one providing, so being unable to do that or to provide or to actually do things for myself to me it is embarrassing, sometimes I feel shameful and then sometimes I just feel this certain weakness even though every day I try to motivate myself that it is okay, it is not the end of the world, something will come something will come. But being unemployed it is really not a good thing (Nomalanga).

Participants illustrate the desired identity of an "independent adult" through descriptions of what is expected of such an individual. They also express their inability to fulfil these expectations thus being unable to therefore identify with their peers. Nomalanga reflected on her not being financially independent at her age and what that meant.

…I am looking for work because staying at home and not having money at my age sometimes I do feel a little bit pressured that I am at this age and I do not have income and sometimes it is so… it is not easy to tune out the noise you know what I mean? The noise being that you see other people they are driving cars, your age group they are

doing this, and you feel that you know what, I wish as well you know, I could be there…(Nomalanga)

Society has certain expectations of graduates, one of which is to procure employment. This is true for many graduates who can live up to such an expectation while those who do not are judged to be something other than what the unemployed graduate identifies with. Mpumi explains that it is expected that graduates become financially independent and as a psychology graduate it is expected that one will procure employment quickly. Graduates who cannot live up to this expectation are perceived as lazy or incompetent.

Wow, identifying you know in society it becomes a bit hard because now remember you have your peers, people you went high school with, who obviously did different qualifications and stuff and now they are doing things for themselves and things like that and you are just like… everyone just knows like… everyone just thinks just because you did psychology you are going to find a job just like that but then it is not like that and everyone is just looking at you like it is either you are lazy or there is something wrong because we know you've studied something but the why are you sitting? So, it has been hard to like identify with your peers because their live are already somewhere you know headed for whatever direction that it is, which is a good one but then here you are stuck so you cannot identify with them because you are not on the same level you know? You do have your qualification; they do have their qualifications but then now it is a matter of working you know? (Mpumi).

Participants find themselves stuck in a phase where they are dependent on others because of unemployment. This is an undesired identity, that of a "dependent" person. Acquiring a Master's Degree and then consequently obtaining employment would result in the acquiring of the desired identities of "professional" and "independent adult". This will give participants a stable sense of self. As these identities have not yet been acquired, participants find themselves identifying not only as "unemployed" but as having an incomplete sense of self and as having an unstable sense of self. When asked if participants think there has been a change in terms of their identity as they transitioned from undergraduate to graduate to unemployed, Marilyn responded,

Yes, no definitely there was definitely a change uhm in my identity moving forward because it was… like I say once I left varsity it is again… you are like floating now you

have no sense of identity until you find yourself in the workplace or until I navigate myself back into uhm student life but so for now it is just… everything… I am just floating and trying to… yeah… find a way forward (Marilyn).

Masego explains that the transition from graduate to unemployed has affected her sense of self.

I think I am in that space or maybe I am just in that period where I am just trying to figure out myself again, maybe I am just…. I do not know but then I think I do not recognise myself anymore like I think I am just in that period like I am trapped in that period where I just have to sit down… well I am sitting down right now and just trying to figure out uhm what went wrong, what do I like, like I am just in a confused mode right now so it is really hard to answer such a question but then yeah (Masego).

Participants also alluded to having an identity attached to them by others and how others see them and the discrepancy between this and how they view or identify themselves. Mpumi explains that where other people see someone qualified and educated who should not have trouble finding employment, it is not necessarily the case for the unemployed Psychology Honours graduate.

…It is frustrating also because people don't understand that you need to go for Master's and register for the HPCSA so people will be like 'but hospitals are hiring you know they want you guys, and you have to explain constantly this is how it works and and and…(Mpumi).

Mpumi further explains,

…Everyone just thinks just because you did psychology, you are going to find a job just like that but then it is not like that…(Mpumi).

Dineo expressed difficulty with identifying herself the same way others identify her. Similarly, in her case just as in the case of Mpumi, where others see someone with potential, she does not. She, however, sees someone who is not satisfied with her achievements and her current state because such potential is only useful if one can reach what one has set out to achieve.

I really really do not know because you know there are a lot of challenges and I really do not know how I identify myself compared to how people identify myself at this point

because people see potential, and I am like guys I am not satisfied with where I am right now (Dineo).

While participants were students, they developed a sense of belonging identifying as students by engaging in the responsibilities and activities expected of them as students. During this time participants also developed a sense of independence and the desired professional identity of psychologist. However, this state of independence differs from the desired independence they wished to acquire once participants had completed their studies. The "independent adult" identity is an identity which participants also desire to acquire because of what they believe is expected of them by family, society, and themselves. During the period of unemployment, some participants experience an unstable sense of self and a lack of a sense of belonging within society and develop the undesired identity of "dependent person". The experience of unemployment is also a barrier to acquiring their desired identities.

4.3.3 In limbo: The unemployment experience.

Many studies on unemployment have addressed the negative consequences of unemployment on several factors (De Witte et al., 2012; Jackson, 1999; Vansteenkiste et al., 2005). It is therefore expected that participants would mention the negative impact of unemployment on themselves.

Moving from a state of engaging in daily mental and physical activity to a state of inactivity is a difficult transition to become accustomed to, one participant describes the experience of unemployment as poverty and a disease.

…Unemployment it is… just the same as poverty, and not just saying it is poverty because of resources, it is poverty also of the mind. Mind you, if you are just sitting at home and not doing anything, your mind is not working, you are just doing the same thing every day, you wake up, eat, sleep, doing the same thing every day there is no challenges there is no eye-opening experiences that you are going through so you are degrading yourself, you are degrading mind, you are degrading your thoughts and actually not even understanding what you could possibly be so really being unemployed… it is a disease (Tumelo).

Tumelo further explains that the experience of unemployment had a negative impact on her mental state because of the uncertainty of what the future holds. This uncertainty is stressful and therefore has an impact on one's mental state and functionality.

> *...I remember just after my degree in 2016 I spent so many months without working without doing anything so it was… it was not a nice experience like just sitting at home not doing anything like it is damaging to your mind and to your own self and your tomorrow your future because you don't even what tomorrow you'll be required to do, so going there and there doing this and that challenges you, it challenges your mind, it challenges your ability so you get to have a functioning mind, a working mind and a functioning body (Tumelo).*

Another participant echoes Tumelo's negative experience of this transition. For Marilyn, the continuous waiting for employment opportunities or admission into a Master's programme are frustrating because of the repetitive routine one subjected to when one is not being productive.

> *I am extremely frustrated and I think the longer I am unemployed the more frustrating it is becoming uhm because its literally… the routine stays the same and especially after coming from a studying background - when you are able to just sit at home and do nothing all day it is pretty annoying uhm so it is very frustrating and it is demotivating because it is like what did I study so hard for if it is not going to show… have anything to show at the end of the day uhm so we try to stay positive… (Marilyn).*

The negative consequences of unemployment and job-seeking include feelings of frustration and demotivation.

> *Uhm, disappointed and just uh defeated in a sense because I mean you send out applications… I mean there is times where I would be like okay this week its working week, work work work, send out applications you know, then the following week okay I have not heard anything or maybe I got some couple of rejections then it is like, you become like… depressed is taking it too far but, kind of like depressing and just disappointing you know? And then a few days you just chill and then after you are like okay, I am going to try this again, you try you try you try, send out application but then still so hence I said it is feeling… just feeling defeated, yeah, really, yeah (Tshegofatso).*

Furthermore, because of the unemployment experience, participants question their choice of psychology as a career.

> *It is… it is demotivating, it really is uhm, it makes you question whether you did the right thing in going… well in doing a psychology degree uhm and that also is*

problematic because then it makes you feel as if your passion to do something is not accepted by society, so for me it is just like I question whether psychology was the best route to go, what's the right route to go and like I also question how long am I going to suffer with the current situation if I don't get into the Master's programme, how long am I going to be unemployed for and am I going to have to change uh my end goal just to be able to fend for myself out there? (Marilyn).

Questioning one's career choice is indicative of invalidation of one's career choice (Laker, 2002). This is to say that the negative experience of unemployment brings about uncertainty about one's career choice because the beliefs one has about a chosen career path are either challenged or false. This invalidation may cause individuals to consider alternatives (Laker, 2002). Kamogelo states contemplating changing career paths in hopes that this would provide more opportunities for her.

I normally get that feeling, there was a time when I even thought of changing to human resources thinking that it might be easier in that department. I did counselling psychology, so I tried converting to industrial psychology hoping that it would open more opportunities for me, so I do have that belief that had I done a different qualification I would be able to get a job with my undergraduate degree (Kamogelo).

Furthermore, some participants stated that in hindsight, had they known the reality of the difficulty of pursuing a career in psychology, they would have chosen different paths.

Yeah, sometimes I am like hey what have I gotten myself into you know like did I make a good choice like is this what I… I am like okay is this really what I wanted to do but then is this what… it is really not… I am like maybe I should have gone for nursing or something I would have been working by now you know that is how it is (Dineo).

I sometimes… you know when I feel so frustrated, I just sit down and I think you know what? Had I known better about this qualification from high school I would probably have done something like hospitality because I love cooking, maybe I could have… you know there are other colleges that just offer a one year course and I am thinking I could have save so much money, I could have just sone like a one year course (Mpumi).

Participants desire to procure employment for various reasons and because of this desire, oftentimes participants seek employment in whatever field they can gain employment, even if it is not related to what they studied. However, psychology-related employment is a priority.

> *…It is difficult you know because you can just apply. I just apply for anything I will not lie to you, anything…(Nomalanga).*

> *…I ended up on that 'I just need income it does not matter what kind of job that I get it really does not matter all I need is income' and then I can push my way through that (Dineo).*

Masego explains that she applies for any type of job until she is accepted for admission into Master's programme.

> *I really feel hopeless. I tried… maybe… like… feel positive and just say 'no you'll get it' but then right now I am just willing to go for any job until I find… you know until I am accepted…(Masego).*

Employment is not only sought for financial independence, which is important for one's identity, it is also sought as a means-to-an-end, particularly in relation to studying further or continuing one's studies in psychology to attain a Master's Degree. Marilyn explains that employment is a way for her to gain her financial independence and to gain experience for admission into a Master's programme.

> *…It is just the form of trying to find my independence and trying to gain that independence financially uhm to be able to have my own money and eventually go back into my Master's because at the end of the day that was my idea to go back into Master's after I have gained some work experience since that is also something that counts uhm when you are going into Master's (Marilyn).*

Furthermore, she also explains that employment at the current stage in her life would be a productive way to use her time while reiterating the importance of pursuing admission into a Master's programme.

> *…I did not get into the Master's programme this year, so I had to then figure out a way of navigating what is next, and the next best thing was obviously to try and get uhm employment for the time being until I am able to reapply for Master's… (Marilyn).*

Employment is important if one needs to fund one's studies. Therefore, in the case of Kamogelo, employment is an important factor if she to secure funds to study further.

> *I am hoping that I can get a job so that I can save up for my Master's. I know you can apply for scholarships and bursaries but then also the uncertainty of what if I don't get it so I am hoping to get a job with my honours so that I can save up for my studies (Kamogelo).*

In addition to the issue of finding employment as a means-to-an-end, some participants also pointed to the difficult problem of having to choose between one's chosen career and whether working in any other field would be worth one's time and effort.

> *Do you stay stuck in a corporate world where you do not want to be where you are really unhappy or do you take a risk and try to at least counsel or start something on your own which I think the second or latter option is very difficult uhm because money is not guaranteed at the end of the of every month which is something I've always needed when I stayed at companies which is why I couldn't just leave companies…(Melissa).*

The amount of time, effort and resources spent in acquiring qualifications is not to be taken lightly. The qualifications graduates acquire are viewed as investments that graduates hope to benefit from. Thus, finding work that is not related to their studies is seen as a waste of skills, knowledge and qualifications gained, therefore uncertainty arises about the worthiness of a job not related to one's studies and qualifications.

> *…You know you apply for things and you go like but really, is it what I want to do with my time? You know what I mean? Because I am thinking I've spent all this time learning for something and you know that you are not even registered for that matter I'll need to do my BPsych programme which is flipping expensive to do it so that I can be a registered professional at least then I'll start to hustle for a job, but now knowing that I cannot do that then I have to search for something that is recruitment or sales or stuff like that and then sometimes you ask yourself but even though they say I do get the job will I enjoy waking up in the morning? (Nomalanga).*

Participants also referred to the importance of doing work that is fulfilling and for this reason, there is apprehension and hesitancy when seeking employment not related to one's studies or chosen career.

> *It is stressful and then you end up having to settle for anything just so that you can say you are actually working. And I do not want to find myself ten years later in a job that I do not like just because I did not want to stay unemployed (Kamogelo).*

Participants spoke about how difficult it is for them to procure employment and their perceived reasons for this include the current global pandemic, lack of work experience or adequate training and finally, not having a Master's Degree and not being registered with the HPCSA.

One participant attributes the difficulty of procuring employment to the lack of relevant work experience where most of the work done was voluntary work.

> *I think I would say it is experience like I have not worked like much like in terms of work. Like I have your uhm… charity work like you know volunteering, I have that like more that I have jobs that I actually did so I think maybe that lack of not doing so many jobs or having worked much because like I said my parents were always like no focus on work, don't worry about getting a job now focus on school, so in a sense I feel like I wish I had done more you know, like gotten a small part-time job while doing my degree. So, I think mostly definitely the maybe not having enough job experience (Tshegofatso).*

Another participant attributes her inability to procure employment to her work experience mostly being psychology related and not being a registered professional.

> *First, like I said my CV is more of psychology so I do not know how I should change it. I am thinking that is the problem… okay it is the problem, and I would say that the biggest problem is that I am not registered, I am not going to lie. I think that is a huge reason why I am struggling to get a job because if I was a registered counsellor or psychometrist then I, I know a lot of people that I can say okay let me come in you can give me whatever you can afford to give me and then I would do the assessments and do that, so I think that is the huge problem (Nomalanga).*

Melissa echoes Nomalanga's sentiments about being a registered professional and attributes her unemployment to not having a Master's Degree.

> *Mmm, so for me it always seemed like the obstacle is the fact that your studies are not complete in psychology unless you have a Master's in something… (Melissa).*

The Covid-19 pandemic has also been cited as an obstacle to procuring employment.

> *It is stressful especially with the pandemic because most companies are retrenching and you are out here looking for a job, so you apply, there is no response, some reply, they say that you do not meet their qualifications, their requirements so it is quite stressful, it is quite stressful (Kamogelo).*

> *You are busy applying, you are sending out CVs but you can't even go there and say okay fine look for something for me, even though this is a small thing or even if it is ushering or something for students then you could easily do that but because of this Covid, like really I am in one place, I am stuck and the fear of going somewhere especially hospitals even though to say okay fine I can intern or I can find something, you are thinking okay fine everything is overwhelmed, and then you are stuck in one place, there is not really so much only to send CVs and hope that one person do call you or something, so it is also affecting me (Nomalanga).*

One participant attributed this difficulty to the lack of adequate skills and training for psychology students at undergraduate and honours level of studies which would make them more employable.

> *I think psychology as a whole does not train us to, you know, explore in other fields and be flexible and it does not really allow practicality and I think that affects us like the whole four years it is theory, theory, theory, theory so we've got nothing to really show like there are no practicals, like there is nothing so, they [employers] also just see that these people are just clueless, like all they did for the four years is just theory, theory no practical… like the field itself… like psychology BA, it is just narrow, like it does not really verge you into other fields and try to… so I think not having exposure maybe (Masego).*

4.3.3.1 Solutions

Under this subtheme and in their responses, participants also mentioned a few solutions which, in their opinion, could potentially resolve the unemployment problem for Psychology Honours graduates. Participants mentioned that it may be beneficial for students if the world of work creates entry-level or work-integrated learning opportunities for Psychology Honours graduates.

> *…I would wish maybe if there was some kind of like an entry level where they say okay you've got your degree or you've got your honours, this is what you could do but then you know with psychology…(Tumelo).*

> *I feel like uhm you know when you already, when you done your honours you are a step ahead you know and providing some sort of learnerships for psychology students with their honours would be very helpful because now after a learnership I can maybe become a… or I could be like… it would be very helpful to get that experience you know so that I know that okay maybe for Master's I might be able to qualify because now I have my learnership and I know, you know, what was needed form me and I know, you know, such things so I feel like learnership would be helpful and to uhm maybe becoming a counsellor or becoming whatever…(Dineo).*

Furthermore, they suggested that psychology as a discipline should be treated as important. If psychology is taken seriously within society and the world of work, more opportunities can be developed, as one participant explains.

> *…So, if we could make a space for psychology more in society, I think it would obviously create more employment which would make like unemployment graduates feel a bit better because they know that there is a place for them in society and that they would be able to gain that experience while pursuing a career further than what they would currently be sitting in (Marilyn).*

Finally, another suggestion is that the BPsych (Bachelor of Psychology Equivalent) which is a qualification which includes practical training and registration with the HPCSA at honours level should be the only option available thus eliminating the academic Honours Psychology degree.

You know this BA/Honours thing for me it does not cut it anymore. Unless if they say okay fine there are certain organisations that could give you 6 months training where you could be trained to become a counsellor afterwards you could register then at least it provides a lot of opportunity for students. Like look at me right now I am sitting at home, I am not even registered, I cannot even go and register, with what? I didn't even do a BPsych, I did my honours and I can't even find an organisation that would provide or train me that is registered or recognised by the HPCSA to say okay fine we are going to give you these 6 months training even though I am not paid, I don't care about that one, just so that I get that and I could be a registered professional so we need that because there are a lot of counsellors that are needed, we need that so why not offer those opportunities, build those opportunities so that people can register as counsellors? They have that even when they did not do the BPsych or just cancel the honours and the BA and just do the BPsych and that is it (Nomalanga).

Many studies have reported on the negative impact of unemployment which participants also voiced the interviews. Throughout the data, unemployment is spoken about as a negative experience which caused some uncertainty within participants regarding their choice of career and contemplating other career paths. Participants express a desire to procure employment and they also express a desire to gain admission into a Master's programme. In the pursuit for employment, participants seek jobs in whichever field they can gain employment, however employment within the field of psychology is preferred as this is viewed as beneficial for admission into Master's programmes. Employment is sought for two reasons: financial independence and as a means-to-an-end to funding a Master's Degree. Furthermore, because employment outside of psychology is not preferred, some participants spoke about the difficulty of having to choose between one's chosen field and working outside of psychology and questioning whether the latter is worthwhile. Difficulty in procuring employment is attributed to various factors. Participants voiced thoughts which in their opinions could potentially resolve the unemployment problem, these include the changing of attitudes towards psychology, creating entry-level opportunities for graduates and finally having only one type honours programme, the BPsych programme offered at universities, thus eliminating the academic honours degree as participants see no value in it.

4.3.4 Perceptions: Their views of us, Our view of ourselves.

This theme has been divided into two sub-themes as there are two types of perceptions which arose from the data. Firstly, the perceptions students have of the views the world of work has of psychology and secondly, the perceptions participants have of their own qualifications.

4.3.4.1 Other's views on psychology

Participants mentioned their perceptions of the views the world of work has of psychology as a discipline. This is an issue that highlights the previous theme where participants pointed out that one of the solutions to the unemployment problem faced by Honours Psychology graduates is that psychology must be valued. Participants' perceptions of the views others hold about psychology and psychology graduates are that psychology is not taken as seriously as compared to other disciplines, fields of study and qualifications.

> *I feel like also with the job market uh psychology… like people who studied psychology are side-lined (Tumelo).*

> *…I feel like we are being side-lined or there is limited space or limited positions for psychology students or people who want to pursue a career in psychology. I mean uhm… with many courses or degrees most of them you just do your diploma or a certificate there you are you have a job or there are so many positions or vacancies that you can option for but then with psychology even with an Honours like it is still limited (Tumelo).*

> *I think it is just… I think it is just companies not acknowledging students that do psychology I think it is more… a lot of work that I have seen is people in accounting or engineering or all those other faculties, but the humanities faculties struggle to find a position in society, find work, uhm I mean as a whole it is so difficult to find psychology jobs…(Marilyn).*

One participant attributes the lack of employment opportunities for Honours Psychology graduates to an unfairness within the job market.

> *I think for me unemployment is… it just relates to unfairness in, you know… how can I put it? It is just unfairness in how jobs are distributed and how other qualifications are ranked as you know higher or better than others and how we are just more like… you know we are just grouped in this small thing where like just because you did psychology*

then you belong at the hospital or you belong at whatever mental institution of some sort and we cannot be included in other factors you know…(Mpumi).

Another participant illustrates the lack of value placed on psychology graduates as a form of exploitation because not only is psychology not valued but employees are often underpaid.

…I mean as a whole it is so difficult to find psychology jobs that is not necessarily counselling or therapy but just to form basis of your experience for that and not only that but when you do find something like that then the money is not that great because it is just… and then it feels like it is a form of exploitation it is just that we need somebody to fill that position and therefore since you are a graduate and you are and honours graduate in psychology we will take you just for the sake of having a job and for the experience…(Marilyn).

Two participants echo this point by stating that employers require psychology graduates to volunteer as opposed to compensating them for their work.

Yeah, it is harsh in terms of the job seeking market it is really harsh, it seems unfair you know?... There is a need for counselling and then you cannot even apply at Helpline and say okay fine I need a job, first you need to be registered, that is the first thing they would tell you unless if you are volunteering. Yes, volunteering is good, but it does not put food on the table. How long are we to volunteer? You get what I mean? How long? For how long without getting something? (Nomalanga).

…These places you contact them and it is like yeah, they are actually looking for a psychologist or actually we would like someone who has more experience in this field, or yes you can join our institution, but you will be volunteering, you know and that is not feasible to only volunteer, I love volunteering but it cannot be the only option, it cannot be like I volunteer full time you know (Melissa).

Another perception is that psychology is only valuable at Master's level or with registration.

…So, I feel it is just that we are just not getting acknowledged unless you have your Master's Degree and you are able to practice, to do whatever your goal is at the end of the day (Marilyn).

…to get a job in that department you have to go up to a certain level and then other departments they want certain qualifications (Kamogelo).

Lastly, according to some participants, psychology is not recognised and is seen as undesirable.

…Uhm, I feel like uhm here in South Africa we do need psychologists and it is not considered the most… I do not know, okay not that it is not considered but then it is not really uhm the most needed job right now, you know…(Dineo).

4.3.4.2 Own qualifications

In addition to the perceptions stated above, participants hold some perceptions about their own qualifications. Because of the inability to procure employment, participants view their own qualifications as worthless or useless.

…Okay I have my undergrad, I really cannot do anything with my social sciences degree so what now? So, it really did not mean that much (Dineo).

So uhm… it sounds horrible, but it does not mean much to me now because it is not bearing any fruits as per yet uhm so yeah that is the frustrating part unfortunately…(Marilyn).

…You have this paper which is like a higher qualification of which you cannot do anything with so it is just like now you are stuck with a piece of paper and you cannot do anything unless you apply for Master's…(Mpumi).

Participants also view their qualifications as useful only in preparing them for Master's level of studies.

…I cannot get employed after getting two degrees some people they get employed with just a certificate and you ask yourself am I really not that informed, did all this training not prepare me for this moment, for this time here? And then you think was it only preparing me for Master's but then nothing in between you know what I mean? (Nomalanga).

…great to have it and knowing you are one step closer to you know you could apply for Master's and be accepted…(Mpumi).

Other participants stated that their qualifications are not enough to secure employment and that employers require psychology students to complete all levels of their studies until Master's before employment opportunities are made available.

> *I feel like also uhm just having an honours degree is really not enough and it is limiting like the opportunities aren't there (Dineo).*

> *…They just want you to finish everything and then that is when you get to get jobs…(Tumelo).*

Although the above-mentioned perceptions are negative, a positive perception is that participants see psychology as valuable. Tshegofatso states that psychology is useful in environments where psychological support is needed.

> *…Having done psychology like there are things you can help with you know even if you can be an assistant or something to a psychologist or at a hospital where you are just really helping families you know to calm or be calm or just to… for example if the family comes there and somebody has passed on, just to have people in the field that can work and be like you know come to the office before you prepare to see the doctor or after someone has seen the doctor and they got this horrible diagnosis, to have someone they can sit with for a moment to say 'did you understand what the doctor told you?', how do you… you know? Just presenting more job opportunities and areas of… I feel like psychology…like we can do so much with it (Tshegofatso).*

Mpumi sees the current pandemic as a situation that has caused an even greater need to social and psychological support and this need can be used to create opportunities.

> *Just like now with this pandemic I think our need for counsellors and psychologists is on the rise but then there are a thousand people sitting at home with their honours and they cannot do a thing and yet every day they are like there are no psychologists, we need more psychologists, and you are thinking 'why not make room for the ones that already have their honours in hand'? (Mpumi).*

These sentiments are echoed by Melissa.

I think that people who have completed their honours in psychology have a lot to offer, they have a lot of knowledge they volunteered, they are able to counsel they have something to give (Melissa).

The looking-glass-self concept created by Charles Horton Cooley in 1902 (Yeung & Martin, 2003) states and theorises that individuals shape themselves according to other's perceptions of them. According to this, people define themselves via internalising their own perceptions of how they think others perceive them. Therefore, individuals adopt and accept these perceptions that they see as reflected in the 'faces' of others and their social environment. Cooley also theorised that the perceptions of those in positions of power are more influential, therefore those who are influenced are more likely to internalise their (i.e., those in powerful positions) perceptions of them (Yeung & Martin, 2003). Participant's negative perceptions of their own qualifications may be attributable to how they think the world of work perceives of them through their inability to procure employment. This is also evident in how participants speak of employers not regarding psychology as valuable or desirable and only being so on condition that graduates have completed a professional qualification. Therefore, although participants may see no value in their own qualifications of their own accord, participants do see the value in psychology as a profession even though they believe the world of work does not see any value in them.

Two types of perceptions arose from the data; the perceptions participants have of the views the world of work holds about psychology and the perceptions participants have about their own qualifications. Within the former, participants express that the job market does not regard psychology as important or valuable as compared to other disciplines. It is only regarded as important in conjunction with a Master's Degree or with some form of registration. Lastly, they express that psychology is unrecognised and seen as undesirable by the world of work. Within the latter, participants view their current qualifications as worthless, as only being useful in preparing participants for Master's admission and level of studies and as insufficient for securing employment. Finally, in contrast to the perceptions the world of work holds about psychology, participants also view psychology as valuable within society.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the themes and respective sub-themes which emerged from the data. All subsequent themes related to the overarching theme, 'Master's is the golden key". The

Master's Degree is central to identity development, procuring employment, choosing psychology as a career and perceptions surrounding psychology from the perspectives of participants. The next chapter is the presents summary of research findings and will discuss the findings in relation to the literature review and theoretical and conceptual framework. The latter part of the following chapter will also address the research questions in relation to the findings and conclude the chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 Summary of research findings and conclusion

This section will discuss the findings of the study in relation to literature and the theoretical framework. This chapter will also present the concluding remarks. Finally, the limitations of the study and recommendations for future studies will also be presented.

The aim of the study was to gain insight into how unemployment affected the identities of unemployed Honours Psychology graduates. The purpose of the study was to understand this better by gaining insight into what the job-seeking experiences of unemployed Honours Psychology are as well as the kinds of meanings constructed from these experiences. Four major themes and three subsequent sub-themes emerged from the data.

5.1.1 Choosing Psychology

Participant's choice in psychology stems from a few factors most of which can be regarded as personal experiences. These played a role in the meanings constructed regarding career choice such as viewing one's career as one's purpose and something one is passionate about. The kind of attachment participants have to their assumed careers and the ways in which they validate this attachment is related to their desired professional identity development and the job-seeking experience. This is in such a way that most, if not all job-seeking efforts are in relation to psychology so that participants can acquire employment within their projected careers and professional identities. This finding corresponds with the argument Bonn et al., (2009) put forward that many Psychology Honours graduates aspire to become psychologists. Therefore, for participants, being employed is just as important as having a career within their chosen field. This finding also relates to Wilcock's (1993) theory that people engage in purposeful activities to plan, reflect and influence future outcomes.

5.1.2 Identity in transition and In limbo: The unemployment experience

The identities which participants adopted can be described as desired and undesired identities. Desired identities are the "student", "professional" and "independent adult" identities. These are identities that give participants a sense of belonging and a stable sense of self. This finding is in accordance with Oyserman's (2004) definition of identity relating to questions around who we are, where we belong, where we fit in and how important these answers are for how we represent ourselves in society.

In contrast, the undesired "dependent person" and "unemployed person" identities are a negative consequence of unemployment and the discrepancy between how others identify participants and how they identify themselves further entrenches the negative experience of unemployment. Wilcock (1993, p. 18) theorised that occupation (purposeful activity) "is an expression of culturally desired intellectual, moral and physical attributes". Through occupation, people exhibit their capabilities and capacities by showing that they are valuable and worthy to their society (through studying, job-seeking, and employment). Through their activities and occupations, they also "demonstrate what they are or hope to be" (Wilcock, 1993, p.18) which correlates with the desired identities participants hope to acquire. Our identities are also related to the actions we are expected to undertake based on our social roles (Delamater & Myers, 2011). Participants express personal, social, and familial expectations of being able to be financially independent and employed to actively partake in the roles, responsibilities, and activities of a graduate. Unemployment is therefore experienced as an obstacle to developing the desired identities and actively participating in those roles, responsibilities, and activities. Participants view attaining a Master's Degree and consequently employment as the way to developing a stable sense of self and acquiring the desired identities.

The transition from student to graduate to unemployment is a change that occurs at a micro level and macro level (Chryssochoou, 2003) but is experienced as more impactful at a micro level by participants. Occupation functions as an integral part of the relationships people have with each other and the world which suggests that people also have a biological need to be active (Wilcock, 1993). The micro is level where interactions occur between individuals and groups and where participants express how unemployment has negatively impacted their physical and psychological health and relationships with their families and peers and how members in society relate to them. Furthermore, during the transition from student to graduate to unemployed person, participants go through identifying as student and independent person. However, this independence is defined differently to the desired identity of "independent adult". As a part of the 'independent adult" identity, participants expressed feeling the need to fulfil social roles and activities such as being financially independent from the family, moving out of the family home, buying cars, and assisting the family financially.

Throughout the transition, participants maintain their respective desired professional identities (Bonn et al., 2009). Following graduation and during the period of unemployment, participants identify as unemployed and having acquired the undesired identity of "dependent person".

Participants also express not being able to identify as others identify them (i.e., qualified, in a better position to find employment, having potential) and this discrepancy further entrenches the negative experiences and consequences of unemployment such as feeling disheartened and frustrated. These undesired identities are experienced as a lowering in participant's self-worth which negatively impacts identity (Schöb, 2013) where feelings of frustration, discouragement, uncertainty, loss of a sense of self and feeling unstable are present. Consequences of unemployment also cause participants to doubt their career choices.

Therefore, unemployment is largely experienced as negative by participants, with unemployment negatively impacting their emotional, physical and psychological wellbeing (De Witte et al., 2012; Krug et al., 2019). The experience of unemployment also invalidates participant's career choice because their career-related beliefs and assumptions are challenged (Laker, 2002). The above shows that participants express a need to work, and that work is important because the transition from being active to being inactive is difficult to become accustomed to. This finding supports Wilcock's (1993) theory of the need for occupation. Furthermore, employment in the instance of this study is treated as a means-as-an-end to furthering academic studies and attaining a Master's Degree.

5.1.3 Their view of us, Our view of ourselves

The job-search behaviour of participants is not only influenced by the need to work (Wilcock, 1993), it is also influenced by the feedback they receive from the job market environment (Van Hoye, 2017). This is expressed in the perceptions participants have of their own qualifications and how they believe the world of work views them. As already stated above, participants seem to be seeking employment as a means-to-an end to alleviate the negative experiences of unemployment and to study further towards a professional Master's Degree. Throughout the study, participants continued to emphasise admission into a Master's programme as the end goal. A Master's Degree in this case can be understood as the 'golden key' to attaining employment because it makes participants more desirable to the world of work. It is also the key to attaining the desired identities, and it can be understood as the culmination of all the academic achievements and milestones leading up to that point thus making the years of studying worthwhile. This may make participants feel a sense of completeness. Therefore, a great deal of importance and value is placed on the Master's Degree.

Phenomenology provides a perspective through which to take experience and use it to understand meaning making thus providing us with deeper knowledge of the phenomenon

under study (Tarozzi & Mortari, 2010; Willig, 2013). The meanings made from the unemployment experiences are seen in the perceptions participants hold of their own qualifications and their perceptions of the views they believe the world of work holds about psychology. Participants' perceptions of their own qualifications are also influenced by how they believe the world of work views them and their qualifications. The inability to procure employment is interpreted as psychology having no value within the job market unless graduates hold a professional degree of which there are numerous including the Master's Degree. Therefore, graduates regard their current qualifications as having little value. Without a professional qualification, participants feel as though they do not fit well in many of the available opportunities and if they do, it is only within certain types of employment. This finding is consistent with Nielsen and Holmegaard's (2016) argument that struggling to identify competencies makes it difficult to find where one fits within the job market. Participants are unable to effectively identify current competencies, qualities and skills outside of the competencies, qualities and skills they believe they will acquire through studying towards a Master's Degree. Such perceptions influence the employability of graduates. Participants alluded to a misalignment between their qualifications and opportunities available in the job market (Fatoki, 2014; Senekal & Smith, 2018) where they mostly feel that their years of studying have only prepared them for admission into Master's programmes and nothing in between. The lack of appropriate opportunities and skills taught at Undergraduate and Honours level of studies led participants to suggest making professional qualifications at Honours level accessible to graduates. According to participants, these are currently not easily accessible because they are too expensive.

Finally, another meaning drawn from the unemployment and job-seeking experiences was that of resilience. Participants expressed that these experiences not only revealed to them how resilient they are but also helped them develop this resilience. They continued to seek employment, pursue their respective projected careers or find alternatives to their chosen careers. Krug et al., (2019) also argued that the unemployed population is not passive or helpless but are rather active in their job-seeking, often finding more diverse job-seeking methods to increase and improve their job-search.

The negative perceptions participants have does not translate to participants seeing the discipline of psychology as worthless. This is because as students and graduates of psychology, they have an insider's perspective on how Psychology Honours graduates can benefit society.

Echoing Richter et al., (1998) and their stance that the professionalisation of psychology being restricted to Master's level studies as a great loss of human resource potential, participants are able to see value in the skills they possess or could possess if professional qualifications were widely accessible, affordable and available in public institutions. Even though unemployment is for the most part experienced as negative, the most prominent meaning made from the experience as expressed by participants is the realisation and development of a resilience. For this reason, participants continued to pursue psychology as a career because of the time, effort, and resources invested into attaining their qualifications in conjunction with the types of connections they made to their projected careers.

How the phenomenon of unemployment has affected the identities of unemployed Psychology Honours graduates is evident in the difficulty to reconcile what is expected of them by society, which is to be economically active and independent, and their inability to fulfil those expectations. The identity development of graduates is therefore stunted. The most affected identities are the desired identities of "independent adult" and "professional identities" which are dependent on employment for development. Successful identity transition and development and a stable self-concept is thus to an extent dependent on fundamental life events such as employment.

Job-seeking is the exercise which precedes successful employment and so in engaging in active job-seeking, graduates develop and work towards developing their desired identities. In actively seeking employment, graduates also portray to others how they wish to be identified – as active members of society working towards fulfilling societal, familial, and personal expectations. Graduates' job-seeking experiences are however for the most part expressed as negative because it is an exercise consistent of a great deal of failure and frustration. The inability to procure employment within and outside of the field of psychology is experienced as demotivating which affects one's sense of self. Meaningful occupation is therefore important, and job-seeking is therefore done to fulfil personal and societal expectations, to develop professional and other desired identities, a stable sense of self and to shed uncomfortable undesirable identities and negative perceptions.

The meanings constructed of these unemployment and job-seeking experiences are influenced by internal and external factors. Where internal factors are involved, the hardships of job-seeking and unemployment and the negative effects of these experiences seem to foster positive meaning making in the form of resilience. With negative meaning making, the perceptions

participants hold of how they believe the world of work views them and their qualifications affects them at a personal level where the inability to procure employment means they are unvalued, incompetent, and exploitable therefore the way the world of work engages with graduates and the opportunities availed to them speaks volumes regarding how this communication is internalised and understood by unemployed individuals.

5.2 Limitations, Proposed Future Recommendations, and Implications

5.2.1 Limitations

Although it is not in the scope of qualitative research to generalise the findings of research projects, the author is conscious of the fact that nowhere in this research report has it been declared that the findings of this study are not generalisable to the broader population. It is however essential to state that the nature of this study does not allow for the generalising of findings to a larger population, this is because qualitative research focuses on the experiences of a small group of people. Readers may identify with the participants, but the experiences may not be shared as applicable to all people from different contexts.

A second limitation is the small sample size which may have affected the robustness of the study and perhaps future qualitative studies on the matter could procure a larger number of participants.

A final limitation is related to the characteristics of the sample which may have been a consequence of the recruitment process, data collection and sampling techniques, all of which yielded a homogenous sample. The homogenous characteristics of the sample meant a lack of diversity in responses. The data collection method which consisted of online semi-structured interviews created a limitation for potential participants who may have qualified to participate in the study but had limited access to internet and online services. Future studies on the matter could make use of both online and traditional face to face interviewing to ascertain that all qualifying individuals are able to participate in the study. Such a method could also ensure the recruitment of a heterogenous sample in terms of race and gender.

5.2.2 Recommendations for future studies

The first recommendation relates to mitigating the issue of generalisability. Replicating the study in other South African provinces and contexts to yield context specific results and recruiting a more diverse sample of participants is recommended. In addition to this, a larger more gender and race diverse sample and focus group discussions can be included as another

method of data collection to get diversified responses. This may help us better understand how people engage about their experiences if they speak to others who may be having similar experiences.

A second recommendation is conducting qualitative studies that investigate the psychological benefits of employment. Such studies could help us to better understand the importance of employment from a more positive perspective. Other future studies may be interested in investigating the concept of the looking glass self in relation to unemployment using both qualitative and quantitative approaches either individually or as a mixed methods approach.

Further recommendations include conducting studies investigating the relationship between desired professional identity and success in the workplace among psychology graduates; assessing the influence of mentorship on one's career trajectory following honours and finally studies pertaining to the narrow trajectory or bottlenecking at Master's level and what happens transpires of psychology Honours graduates once they leave the university system.

5.2.3 Implications of the study

The findings of this study suggest that unemployed individuals indeed experience a need to engage in purposeful occupation (Wilcock, 1993). The negative effects of unemployment are felt in various areas of participants lives (familial, societal, psychological, physical). The reasons behind why graduates select psychology as a profession or career particularly speaks to career choice and the need for occupation being deeply rooted in how individuals choose to express themselves personally, psychologically, intellectually, morally, physically and behaviourally. Therefore, when developing curricula and creating employment opportunities, it should be taken into consideration that job-seeking is not merely and exercise to keep oneself occupied or to find employment to become occupied; occupation is meaningful in the sense that people attach their identities, their values and their experiences, among others, to their careers, jobs or occupations. Such attachments also ensure successful careers for employees. Occupation which does not have these factors attached to them is experienced as fruitless of minimally rewarding.

Secondly, the findings also suggest that there are gaps to be drawn upon within the world of work by psychology honours graduates. The solutions provided by graduates speak to how the issue of unemployment can be resolved and how the perceptions the world of work hold about psychology inhibit this exploitation. Psychology graduates identify how these they can be

integrated into employment in various ways and the different kinds of industries they could become employed in. The world of work, institutions of higher learning and curriculum developers should use these perceptions, solutions and experiences to address reformation of curricula and development of employment opportunities for psychology honours graduates. Curriculum developers should also seriously consider whether what is being taught to psychology students is sufficient for post Bachelor and Honours degree employment.

Finally, the findings suggest that when selecting careers, considering employment and exercising active job-seeking, graduates' careers are already selected with a projected professional identity in mind which enables them to relate to and understand their projected careers (Jackson, 2017). Furthermore, qualities and skills development are done with this in mind. Therefore, a career is not selected in one single moment, it is an investment which begins long before an individual enters the workspace. For graduates, job-seeking is therefore a meaningful exercise which encompasses intention, personal, familial and societal expectations and identity development. The effects job-seeking and unemployment have on identity and identity development pertaining to how they foster or stunt identity development, how self-concept is encompassed within the job-seeking process and the toll job-seeking as an exercise and unemployment take on individuals should be taken into consideration when creating employment opportunities for graduates, when making the decision to employ graduates and when preparing students and graduates for the world of work.

5.3 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the job-seeking experiences of psychology Honours graduates and gain insight into how unemployment and job-seeking influence graduates' identities as well as the kinds of meanings drawn from these experiences. To determine this, thematic analysis was utilised and revealed themes which related to meaning making, identity, job-seeking, unemployment, and psychology as a career.

The themes revealed that psychology as a career is influenced by personal values and experiences and is validated by the degree of attachment participants make to their projected careers. Unemployment and job-seeking are largely experienced as negative, impacting psychological and emotional wellbeing. The job-seeking behaviours of participants was mostly geared towards the need to work and the need to continue pursuing their respective projected careers. For this reason, the type of employment sought was employment that related to psychology as much as possible. Employment was also sought as a short-term solution to

attaining admission into Master's programme at a later stage as great importance was placed on the attainment of a Master's Degree.

Throughout the transition from student to graduate to unemployment, different identities are acquired. Job-seeking and unemployment influenced these identities in such a way that unemployment was experienced as an obstacle to acquiring desired identities. Identity also influenced job-seeking such that job-seeking was approached in such a way to not only acquire these desired identities but also to alleviate the negative experiences of unemployment and relinquish acquired undesired identities. The development and acquisition of desired identities, especially the professional identity was also viewed as necessary for employability. Therefore, employment is not only important to fulfil the need for occupation, but also for career development Master's Degree selection and identity development and navigating the world of work.

The meanings drawn from the job-seeking and employment experiences are based on how the psychology honours graduates perceive their own qualifications and how they believe the world of work perceives of them. These perceptions are mostly negative as participants saw no value in their current qualifications which is informed by how the world of work sees no value in what they have to offer. While they initially perceived value in what they have to offer interestingly, it took the unemployment and job-seeking experiences to reveal to them their own resilience.

Finally, in line with the National Development Plan 2030 and New Growth Path objectives, it is economically unsustainable and an intrinsic failure of the system to have the majority of psychology honours graduates serve as a pipeline and the selection pool for the bottlenecked minority Master's programmes. Thus, it is imperative that policy makers, employers and curriculum developers work collaboratively to consider the problems and gaps identified by participants if the unemployment of graduates, particularly psychology Honours graduates is to be resolved.

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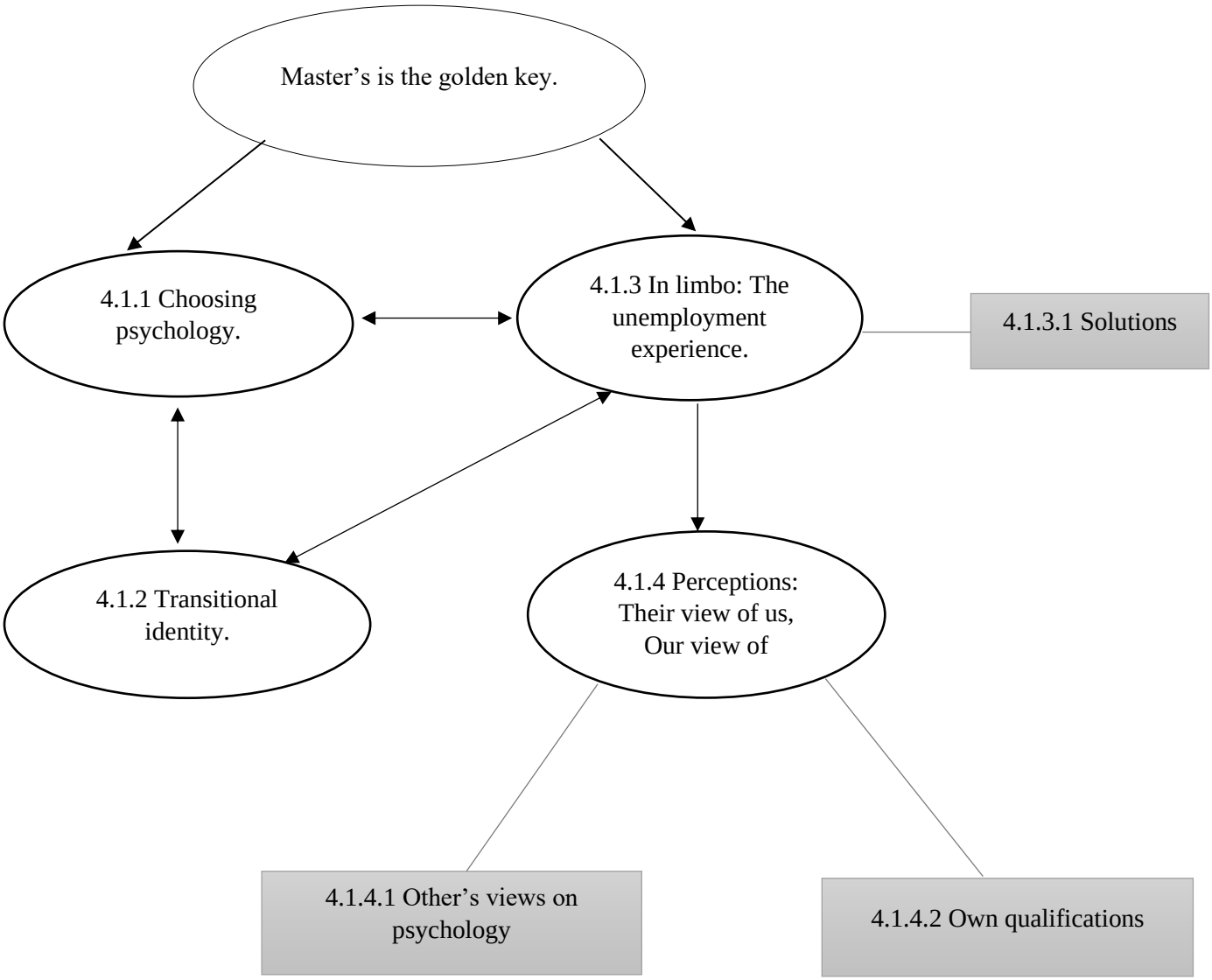
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Appendices

Appendix A: Thematic Map



Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet



Dear Sir / Madam,

My name is Matshepo Setlaleleng and I am a Masters student in Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating the job-seeking experiences of unemployed psychology honours graduates under the supervision of Dr Simangele Mayisela. The aim of this research project is to find out about the job-seeking experiences of unemployed psychology honours graduates.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in an online interview either on Zoom or via WhatsApp video call. This activity will involve answering questions in an online interview setting; this interview will only take place once and will take around 45 - 60 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to record the interview using a digital device (a cellphone) or the recording settings provided by the online app on which the interview will be taking place.

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project, You will not receive any direct benefits from participation but there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from the study. You may withdraw at any time and you are allowed not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your name or any identifying information, and the information you give to me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report. Please be aware that results may be reported in journal articles or conference proceedings and data may be used for future studies.
If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume another time. If you need some support or counselling services following the interview these are available free of charge. The name of the registered counsellor is Lizaan van Zyl and the contact details for the counselling service are as follows: email Lizaanvanzyl0305@gmail.com or cellphone: 081 039 3967.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you. The data collected from this research project will be stored on password protected devices and will be kept for 5 years. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email
hrec-medical.researchoffice@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,
Matshepo Setlaleleng

Researcher:
Matshepo Setlaleleng, 540635@wits.students.ac.za

Supervisor:
Dr. Simangele Mayisela, simangele.mayisela@wits.ac.za, Tel: 011 717 4529.

Appendix C: Consent Form



I, …….., agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. I agree to the following:

(Please tick next to the relevant options below).

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous	YES☐ NO☐
I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in his / her research report	YES☐ NO☐
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded	YES☐ NO☐
I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymously after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained.	YES☐ NO☐

…… (tick /initials and surname/ signature of participant)
…… (full name of participant)
…… (date)

…… (signature)
…… (name of person seeking consent)
…… (date)

Appendix D: Research Instrument

Research Instrument: Interview schedule

Introduction

Hello my name is Matshepo Setlaleleleng and I am student at Wits University. I appreciate you taking the time to participate in my research study. Please be aware that you are welcome to stop the interview at any time if you feel uncomfortable or if you do not wish to continue. Also, if for any reason once the data has been collected you feel that you want to withdraw from the study; you are free do so as well, and you can do so by letting me know. If you feel distressed at any time after the interview is concluded please feel free contact Lizaan van Zyl for free counselling services, their contact details will be provided to you at the end of the interview, they are also available on the participant information sheet that I emailed to you. Also, please be aware that your real name will be changed to a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and that no identifying information will be used in the final report of this study.

Demographics

1. Could you please tell me, how old are you?
2. Could you please tell me what gender you identity as?
3. Where do you currently live at the moment?

Cluster 1: Undergraduate experience

1. Can you tell me about where you studied and what your experience was like at the institution?
2. Can you tell me about your career projections? / What career(s) did you want to go into?
3. How did it feel being a student / how would you explain your journey as an undergraduate student?
4. What did being a student mean to you at the time in terms of your identity?

    The following are potential follow up questions for clarity if participant does not answer the prior questions fully:
    a. Can you tell me what made you choose psychology as a subject?
    b. Why did you choose psychology as a potential career?
    c. How did you feel once you graduated with your undergraduate degree?

Can you tell me what happened after you finished your undergraduate degree?

Cluster 2: Postgraduate experience

1. How did you feel when you got accepted into honours and when you graduated?
2. What did being a psychology honours student and graduate mean to you in terms for your identity?
3. What has changed, in terms of identity, for you as you moved from being an undergrad student to being a postgrad student and after graduation?

Cluster 3: Job-seeking experience

4. Can you tell me what happened after you finished your honours degree?
5. How do you navigate the process of finding a job and how do you feel during this time?
6. Why do you think you are struggling to get a job?
7. How has this influenced your identity?

    The following are potential follow up questions for clarity if participant does not answer the prior questions fully:
    a. Can you tell me how it feels or felt not being able to find a job?
    b. Where are the difficulties in finding employment for you?
    c. Besides looking for a job, what else are you doing?

Cluster 4: Unemployment experience

8. Can you explain unemployment in your own terms?
9. Can you tell me how it feels not being able to find a job that you studied for?
10. What do you / did you hope to gain out of your degree/s?
11. What changes would you like to see (probe: in psychology, in the job market)?

Closing statements

1. Is there anything you would like to ask me?
2. The aims and purpose of the study are explained to the participant.
3. Thank you again for participating in my study. Your time and input are greatly appreciated.
4. Contact details for Lizaan van Zyl (email: Lizaanvanzyl0305@gmail.com and cellphone: 081 039 3967) are given.

Appendix E: Ethical Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE:	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MASPR/20/12**
PROJECT TITLE:	The job-seeking experiences of unemployed psychology honours graduates in South Africa.
INVESTIGATOR	Setlaleleng Mmatsepo (540635)
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	SHCD/Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	12 June 2020
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	Low Risk
EXPIRY DATE	31 December 2022

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 21 June 2020 **CHAIRPERSON** ___ ____
(Dr Sahba Besharati)

cc: Dr Smangele Mayisela (Supervisor)

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

_____ _____/_____/_____
Signature Date

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES