

issues had been solved in the past; it embarks on investigating and finding the real nature of the problem. Essentially exploratory research is aimed at gaining additional information about a topic and generating possible hypotheses to test, it is described as “gathering information in an informal and unstructured manner” (Burns & Bush, 2006).

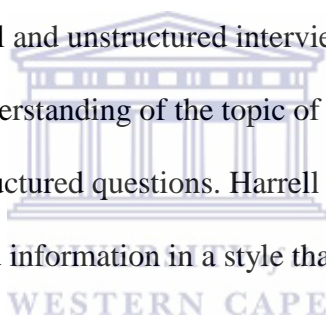
Exploratory research helps to determine whether to proceed with a research idea and how to approach it (Creswell, 2008). The present study was exploratory since it attempted to approach research supervision and working alliance from a new angle that focuses on the subjective processes involved in establishing a working alliance with a new supervisor in the first six months of the supervisory relationship. The groundwork on the importance of the working alliance has already been established in the literature (Malhotra & Birks, 2000). Thus this study tried to describe what is happening in more detail, filling in the missing parts and expanding our understanding of how working alliances are established. The research aimed to collect as much information as possible instead of making guesses or elaborate models to predict future outcomes. For that reason, the primary objective of exploratory research is to provide insights into the problem situation confronting the researcher. The results, however, are not hoped to be concise determinations but rather guidelines in achieving a better understanding of the problem situation at hand (Rutenberg, 2003).

Descriptive studies usually have one or more guiding research questions, for example, “What were your reasons for enrolling in a directed Masters programme in Psychology?” and “What were your expectations of the programme?”; however guiding questions are generally not driven by structured research hypotheses (Vilakati, 2009). A descriptive approach in data collection focuses on the collection of accurate data and providing a clear picture of the phenomenon under study (Malhotra & Birks, 2000). In regard to the supervisory working alliance, Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail (2011) reported that various studies have approached the question on how to deal with graduate students from a supervisory perspective, the present

study focused on the graduate students themselves. In this way the study fulfils the descriptive aspect of exploratory research as the research focused on the student perspectives, their interpretation and learning experiences with regard to the working alliance.

3.6 Data collection:

Semi-structured interviews were the method of data collection for the present study. Interviews can be used as a primary data gathering method to collect information from individuals about their own practices, beliefs, or opinions. Harvard Education (2015) on research methods notes semi-structured interviews are primarily used in explanatory research to understand the relationships between constructs, and to provide further information about the research area. Cohen and Crabtree (2006) underscored semi-structured interviews are often preceded by observation, informal and unstructured interviewing in order to allow the researchers to develop a keen understanding of the topic of interest necessary for developing relevant and meaningful semi-structured questions. Harrell and Bradley (2009) asserted this kind of interview collects detailed information in a style that is somewhat conversational.

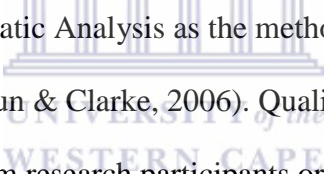


Qualitative interviewing does not simply involve recording information; it is a process of social interaction between two individuals, in which qualitative data is particularly useful when it comes to defining feelings and attitudes (Corbetta, 2003; Harvard Education, 2015). Instead of focusing on numbers, qualitative research focuses on observations and words, evocative characterisations, stories, visual depictions, interpretations and other expressive descriptions (Rustenberg, 2003). In view of that, the interview process was thus suitable for exploring students' experiences in supervision and providing in-depth exploration and ample freedom (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). At the same time the researcher must ensure that all the relevant themes are dealt with and all the necessary information is collected in discretion (Corbetta, 2003). One of the strengths of interviews was their personal nature. Regardless of

how the data was emerging, interviews provided qualitative depth by allowing interviewees to talk about the subject in terms of their own frames of reference. In so doing, the method enabled the interviewer to maximise understanding of the respondent's point of view consistent with Harun's (2010) assertion.

Interviews were conducted at the university which was known to participants and easily accessible. The semi-structured interviews used guiding questions that ensured the areas covered corresponded to the objectives outlined (Appendix A). The interviews were approximately one hour long and were conducted in English. Interviews were facilitated by the primary researcher and overseen by a supervisor with training in research methodology. Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously until saturation was reached.

3.7 Data Analysis:



The study adopted a Thematic Analysis as the method of analysis. Thematic analysis is a type of qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Qualitative data may take the form of interview transcripts collected from research participants or other identified texts that reflect experientially on the topic of study. It can be used to analyse diverse groupings across data sets, whether it be interviews or surveys in order to find repeated patterns of meaning that relate to the detailed data. Essentially a thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Alhojailan, 2012).

Fundamentally, thematic analysis helps researchers move from a broad reading of the data toward discovering patterns and framing a specific research question, it gives an opportunity to understand the potential of any issue more widely; thus illustrates the data in great detail and deals with diverse subjects via interpretations (Komori, 2011). Researchers use thematic analysis as a means to gain insight and knowledge from data gathered. As a result, it minimally describes your data set in rich detail. Furthermore, Boyatzis (1998) emphasises thematic analysis is flexible and what researchers do with the themes once they uncover them

differs based on the intentions of the research and the process of analysis. Carrying out the thematic analysis, certain guidelines helped me analyse the available data in relation to the research question. Following Braun and Clark's (2006) six prescribed steps to aid in providing a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data. Essentially, the following guidelines informed the analysis 1) Familiarising yourself with your data, 2) Generating initial codes, 3) Searching for themes, 4) Reviewing themes, 5) Defining and naming themes, and 6) Producing the report. For that reason, the objectives for thematic analysis included the identification of the content of the data, then reducing redundancy and representing that data in whole or in parts as themes. The resulting themes provided the basis for tentative recommendations and inferences that was consistent with the delimitations of explorative research produces (Parasuraman et al., 2004).

3.8 Reflexivity:

Reflexivity has gained a vital role in qualitative research, and "is accepted as a method through which qualitative researchers can validate their research practices" (Lambert, Jomeen & McSherry, 2010, p322). The main objective of using reflexivity in qualitative research is to acknowledge and interrogate the constitutive role of the researcher in research design, data collection, analysis, and knowledge production (Moon, 2008). In essence, a method where researchers can validate their research practices, and emphasise the continuous reflective process and how one's own values, perceptions and behaviours come into play. Moon (2008) stressed that reflexivity is a process that challenges the researcher to explicitly examine how his or her research agenda and assumptions, subject location(s), personal beliefs, and emotions enter into their research. Similarly, Lambert, Jomeen and McSherry (2010) highlighted difficulties surrounding the practice of reflexivity, not only is it difficult to carry out, but that it is not always possible to stand back and examine the effects of one's preconceptions, since it is possible that we do not have an awareness of them.

Researchers must maintain self-awareness within the reflexive process. I have kept a journal of field notes and reflections tracking my own reactions to the research process.

Lambert, Jomeen and McSherry (2010) explained reflexive notes are not intended to provide a confessional of the researcher's personal experiences, but are to demonstrate a methodological and theoretical appreciation, openness and a truly honest awareness of interactions between the researcher and participants. Krefting (1991) asserted that reflexivity refers to the assessment of the influence of the investigators own background, perceptions, and interests. For example, my personal experience in regard to a supervisory working alliance/relationship consisted within the Psychology Honours research process; in which the supervisee-supervisor working alliance was more of a mentored-style relationship; as such, I had certain expectancies of what a working alliance could entail.

I am a NRF grantholder within the Masters' postgraduate programme with a newly appointed supervisor, at the University of the Western Cape. I am a primarily English speaking female of ethnic designation, with a prior undergraduate degree from the University of the Western Cape; thus the environment as a student was familiar. Having experienced my first semester with a newly appointed supervisor, it was interesting hearing the diverse participant perspectives. Being a student myself, my experiences could resonate with those of the participants and gain new perspectives on the supervisory working alliance. These signifiers aided in building a rapport that was relaxed and informal, comfortable and easy to communicate. Throughout the research process, I reflected on myself as the researcher and the impact I had on the research process, particularly during data collection. As a trainee interested in the field of attachment theories, the interviews provided the participants with an opportunity to teach me, and I was aware of my interest in the reflections of the interviewees, which might have encouraged the participants to share their supervisory experience. I was aware that my interest deepened the rapport with the participants. Moreover, within the Masters' programme, I too established a new working alliance with a newly appointed supervisor, in which adjustments were needed to establish a new supervisory style in order to establish a good working alliance within the supervision process.

3.9 Trustworthiness & Credibility:

While credibility is defined as the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings, credibility establishes whether or not the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants' original views (Golafshani, 2003; Major, Savin-Baden, 2010).

Paraphrasing was done throughout the interviews; ensuring participants had an opportunity to verify the correctness of their expressions relative to the research questions. After each interview the transcription was reviewed in order to provide reflexive feedback and inform further data collection. Through reflective discussions, participants identified their subjective factors that facilitate and inhibit their postgraduate process; as a result through data gathered from participants, broad common themes were identified (Roets & Botma, 2012).

Two persons, the principal researcher and a supervisor, conducted the analysis independently to strengthen the credibility of the analysis and the trustworthiness of the findings. Vilakati (2009) emphasised data analysis is done to preserve the uniqueness of each participant's lived experience while permitting an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Thus in qualitative research the most basic aspect of validity centres on how representative the results are and how justifiable the findings become (Calabrese, 2012). The researcher and research supervisor further reviewed the initial codes that were highlighted into themes and clusters to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings. The openness to the suggestions of others and informed consent provided an opportunity to strengthen the credibility of observations and a more robust tracking of process (Cresswell, 2011).

3.10 Ethics considerations:

Ethics clearance (Registration no: 15/5/4) and project registration were granted by the Senate Research committee at the identified university (Appendix B). Permission to conduct the study with students at the identified university was requested and granted from the

Registrar (Appendix C). Eligible participants received an information sheet containing relevant information about the study. Indicating the purpose of the research project was to explore how students approach establishing a working alliance with a newly appointed supervisor, and to identify the factors that facilitate or hinder good working alliances. Data collected was in the form of interviews, in which audiotapes were used from the interview to assist in transcribing the information given. All participants consented to participate in the data gathering process and participants have provided written consent attesting to their willingness to participate voluntarily and their understanding that they can withdraw at any time without fear of negative consequences or loss of benefits (Appendix D). Actions were taken to facilitate specific ethical principles. Accompanied interview schedules with open-ended interview questions were included. An information sheet facilitated informed consent, recourse and underscored rights and responsibilities of the participant and researcher as a representative of the identified university. Additionally, the information sheet described what the current study entails, in addition to the secure handling and storage of transcripts and data. Furthermore, issues of confidentiality regarding the interviews not containing information that would personally identify participants, their anonymity, and consent were addressed at the beginning of the session to maintain the confidentiality of the student respondents, as well as their supervisors.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Discussion

Results from the thematic analysis produced two thematic categories. The two thematic categories identified from the thematic analysis were: 1) Requirements for a Working Alliance, and 2) Support. Each thematic category is comprised of themes and subsidiary themes that will be discussed separately. The results have also been tabulated to facilitate an overview of the cascading thematic clusters. Illustrative quotes are provided to further elucidate the themes and sub-themes.

4.1 Thematic Category 1: Requirements for a Working Alliance

The first thematic category was entitled requirements for a working alliance. This category referred to the patterned responses participants gave about the factors that contributed to establishing a working alliance with a new supervisor. The category was comprised of three themes namely: 1) Basic Requirements for Establishing a Relationship; 2) Structural Requirements and 3) Knowledge of Working Styles and Preferences. Table 4.1 Reflects the Themes and Sub-themes that make up this first Category.

Table 4.1 Thematic Category 1: Requirements for a Working Alliance

| Category | Themes | Sub-theme |
|-------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| Requirements for a Working Alliance | Basic Requirements for establishing a Relationship | Establishing a Relationship |
| | | Clarifying Expectations |
| | | Building a Mutual Rapport |
| | | Degree of Decision Making |
| | Structural Requirements | Ground Rules |
| | | Consistent Communication |
| | | Feedback |
| | Knowledge of Working Styles and Preferences | Diverse Working Styles |
| | | Prior Experiences |
| | | Compatibility |

4.1.1 Theme 1: Basic Requirements for Establishing a Relationship. The first theme centered on the views expressed by the participants on the basic requirements for obtaining a strong working relationship. This theme included four sub-themes namely, 1)

Establishing a Relationship, 2) Clarifying Expectations, 3) Building a Mutual Report, and 4) Degree of Decision Making. These four sub-themes identify core features that contribute to the establishment of a working alliance.

4.1.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Establishing a Relationship. This theme entails the participants' viewpoints regarding the basic components that are required to establish the dyadic relationship between supervisor and supervisee. Table 4.2 below presents illustrative quotes for the first sub-theme related to the establishing a relation.

Table 4.2: Category 1, Theme 1, and Sub-Theme 1 - Establishing a Relationship

| Illustrative Quotes |
|---|
| "It's important that both parties realise that this is something new that actually rapport has to be established". Participant A |
| "Like building any new relationship, sort of getting to know one another, seeing what the requirements are, what their needs are, also put across your needs. I think obviously first your interpersonal rapport. It is sort of critical to establish a relationship then quickly". Participant B |
| "Approachability from the supervisors side... must be approachable and you must feel comfortable coming to them with stuff, just being approachable is important. Definitely a relationship of trust, you know where you can trust them with asking any questions. Honesty – how you feel about a topic, how you feel as a student, how you feel the relationship direction should go in and just to have that balance between supervisor and student is important". Participant K |

Participants underscored that building a relationship is integral to forming a supervisory relationship. The participants essentially identified the relational aspects as a basic requirement for the supervisory relationship to be established. Participant B expressed the opinion of all interviewees by articulating that there needs to be a process of "getting to know each other." Participants emphasized different aspects in this requirement. For example, Participant K emphasised the role of approachability and being at ease with one's supervisor, as well as trust and honesty to produce a strong working alliance. Participant B identified familiarization ("sort of getting to know one another"), boundaries ("seeing what the requirements are"), mutual sharing ("what their needs are, also putting across your needs"), as well as engagement and contact ("Spending some time at the beginning to consider how the relationship will work"). Regardless of the aspects mentioned, participants underscored that the relationship had to be

actively built or established. Thus, establishing a supervisory working alliance was understood as an active process that drew on different skills and processes.

This first theme resonated with earlier literature where Kam (1997) underscored that research supervision has no set prescriptions, which is why the supervisor must actively consider factors that enhance the supervisory working alliance, i.e. role expectations of the student and supervisor, the quality and style of supervision; and the research field of study. More recently, Schulze (2012) suggested that supervisory relationships are as unique as every supervisor and student are different that in turn necessitates a negotiation of common meanings and a mutual trust and narrative. This author further argued that the success of the student-supervisor relationship was dependent on the success of the negotiation between student and supervisor. Similarly, Severinsson (2015) concluded that the research supervisory relationships are created and ideally would take on a caring, constructive, supportive, and empowering quality. Chiappetta-Swanson and Watt (2011) stated that a focus on the relationship must occur early on in the relationship and attributed successful completion to it. Severinsson (2015) argued that supervisors must create a trusting relationship using clear communication, maintaining an awareness of supervisee goals and expectations. These quotes from the literature underscore the importance of recognising that establishing a relationship is an intentional task that is best attended to earlier on in the supervisory relationship. Thus, a working alliance is built or established, it does not emerge spontaneously.

4.1.1.2 Sub-theme 2 Clarifying Expectations. This sub-theme related to the need for expectations to be clarified in order for a working relationship to be established between supervisor and supervisee. Essentially, participants felt that clarifying and setting realistic expectations could help prevent problems and foster success. Table 4.3 below presents illustrative quotes for this second sub-theme.

Table 4.3: Category 1, Theme 1, Sub-Theme 2 - Clarifying Expectations

| Illustrative Quotes |
|--|
| <p>“I prefer it when the supervisor is in control and there is an agenda. I prefer structure, think I prefer it when they come to me with a certain structure, and much rather prefer the supervisor to tell me when things are due. Good time management, responding well to your e-mails and giving feedback”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant E</p> |
| <p>“Research for me is just something that needs to get done. I am here to get a job done, so I want to sit down. I want to have a plan of action. I want to go through work, talk about interviews, talk about analysis and then leave. I like a structured kind of guidance”.</p> <p>“Masters level, there are certain expectations about your ability to do your research, your ability to think independently and work independently, so I think in the beginning you do feel like you need that hand holding, but like proper step by step guidance”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant G</p> |

Participants expressed a desire for a clear set of expectations. For example, Participant G reflected a need for “proper step-by-step guidance” even though there are expectations about the student’s ability to conduct research. Similarly, Participant E expressed a personal preference for a set structure that will encapsulate expectations and directives. What emerges is a clear expectation that supervisors must initiate a process through which the goal posts or parameters are made explicit. For example, Participant G stated a preference for the supervisors to “come to me” and “to tell me when things are due.” Participants are looking to supervisors to take the lead in providing structure and clarifying expectations for various aspects of the project including time management.

This theme resonated with literature that stated that both the student and the supervisor have different roles and/or responsibilities to fulfil in the research process, and these have to be comprehended by both parties if their relationship is to be smooth (Masembe & Nakabugo, 2004). Literature denoted that students often have misperceptions of standards or requirements of the supervisor's role (Lessing, 2001). Unrealistic or baseless expectations of each other are

likely to result into unnecessary frustrations (Masembe & Nakabugo, 2004). Thus, the issue of clarifying expectations has been identified as an important component of establishing effective supervisory relations.

Explicitly stated expectations help to establish a frame of reference within which the student and supervisor can conduct or execute their respective tasks. For example, Emilson (2007) identified having a frame for supervision as a pedagogic method that ultimately enhances the likelihood of a positive outcome. Bordin (1983) identified mutual agreement and understanding between the supervisor and supervisee on the goals of supervision, as well as mutual agreement and understanding of the tasks of each partner to accomplish those goals as integral to successful completion. Bilodeau, Savard and Lecomte (2010) further emphasised that the working alliance provided a frame for agreement upon specific goals and tasks for supervision. Therefore, McGill (2016) argued that the clarity and mutuality of given agreements are essential to a strong working alliance. Furthermore, bonds are built when a common enterprise is carried out and experience shared. The establishment of a supervisory contract as a way to negotiate goals and tasks, and parameters of the relationship is encouraged (Falender & Shafranske, 2004).

4.1.1 3 Sub-theme 3: Building a Mutual Rapport

This subtheme related to the role and importance of building mutual rapport in establishing a working alliance. Applicants viewed building a mutual rapport between the supervisor and supervisee as an important influence filtering the basic requirements in establishing a relationship. Table 4.4 below presents illustrative quotes for the third sub-theme of theme 1 of category 1.

Table 4.4: Category 1, Theme 1. Sub-Theme 3 -Building a Mutual Rapport

| Illustrative Quotes | |
|--|---------------|
| “Rapport is important I think your approach should be to actually establish rapport at the outset”. | Participant A |
| “There needs to be a kind of mutual respect ... a kind of understanding, you and your supervisor are on the same page kind of thing”. | Participant C |
| “I think there must be a good rapport between the student and the supervisor... must be some kind of connection so the rapport is the first step”. | Participant E |
| “You need to build some rapport, you don’t have to be friends but there needs to be a genuine core in terms of, you really not having a good day, or you have a bad whatever...you know this is what happened now so they are understanding. So rapport is important”. | Participant F |

Participants identified that mutual rapport as an aspect of establishing a relationship and determining the quality of the supervisory relationship that in turn is vital to positive outcomes in supervision. For example, Participants A and E underscored the need to “establish good rapport between the student and supervisor at the onset of the relationship for a conducive working alliance”. Similarly, participants C and F indicated that “a type of mutual respect is required to have some form of understanding.” What emerges clearly is the sense of a productive and reciprocal relationship being contingent on mutual rapport.

Bilodeau, Savard and Lecomte (2010) stated that rapport is a measure of the supervisor’s effort to build a bond or relationship with the supervisee. Huber et al. (2010) asserted that developing out of their work together; building rapport highlights the interpersonal connection and emotional bond between an advisor and advisee. Bordin (1983) asserted that the most pivotal tasks necessary to sustain the thesis endeavour included the emotional bonds between the supervisor and supervisee i.e. rapport. As stated before, early meetings are considered important for building rapport that will contribute to the establishment of a stronger student-supervisory relationship or working alliance.

Bilodeau, Savard and Lecomte (2010) emphasised that the working alliance is a collaborative endeavour that is based on mutual agreement. Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail (2011) pointed out that the central focus of the beginning phase in this relationship is the development of trust between the supervisor and supervisee. Research suggest a stronger working alliance

within the supervisory relationship if supervisees had a choice in who their supervisors would be. For example, Huber et al. (2010) highlighted that stronger advisory working alliances are linked to students who chose their advisor, especially during the first 6 months of the advising relationship, than advisees who were assigned by their department. Within a research-based supervisory working alliance, Ray (2007) suggested perhaps the most significant decision a student can make in the beginning of their research career is the selection of a thesis supervisor. Abiddin and Ismail (2011) recommended that universities should ensure that students and supervisors have similar interests and supervisors should have expertise in the students' research area. Thus, establishing rapport is an important component of establishing the working relationship early in the supervisory process; additionally supervisors have to actively engage in their relationships with their students in order to help them to find their own voice (Schulze, 2012).

4.1.1.4 Sub-theme 4: Degree of Decision Making. The fourth sub-theme related to the extent to which students have decision-making power in the research project. Participants identified that a degree of decision-making power or ownership on the research project is an important requirement to establishing a working relationship. Table 4.5 below presents illustrative quotes for this fourth sub-theme of theme 1 category 1.

Table 4.5: Category 1, Theme 1, Sub-Theme 4 - Degree of Decision Making

| Illustrative Quotes |
|---|
| <p>"I didn't want to do the topic, I was forced to do the topic and my preference would have been to work with my previous supervisor. The area of focus of your supervisor definitely determines your level of interest and the level of input that you will offer".</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant D</p> |
| <p>"I wasn't really given the option or the opportunity to choose my topic, so it feels like it is an assigned topic and I am really just having to fit in with the researcher".</p> <p>My expectation for Masters was that I would choose the topic and it would be my motivation or my interest that would drive the process, but what has happened, is not that at all... not this whole romantic notion that I choose something that I am motivated about".</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant I</p> |
| <p>"My first semester it was tough, I didn't chose my topic for my thesis... it was so challenging because I have never worked in that field and I wasn't familiar with the terms or anything".</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant J</p> |

“I think be willing to allow me to be able to give my own input and ideas, and not just throw your own ideas and I need to follow that, or allow me to have some leeway and allow me to have some independence. I think it’s important that we, it’s our study we take ownership of it and we allowed leeway for some independent thinking. I want to state upfront that I would want to implement some of my ideas in, just letting them know from the start what my challenges were before.” Participant K

Participant D identified the preference of choice. The level of interest in and commitment to the study is influenced by the extent to which the student has the freedom or responsibility to choose his or her research topic and area of study, as well as selecting a supervisor you are more inclined to work. Participant K spoke to the balance between being directed versus being guided. For students the impact of feeling that they do not have input into the research adversely impacts the entire process and the quote from Participant K speaks to the need for clarifying that they will have an input or the extent to which they will have decision-making power. Participant J captured the impact of having topics and foci or research questions imposed. This participant clearly identified that it not only made the process more challenging, but also posed an obstacle to establishing a relationship between student and supervisor.

In short, these sentiments expressed by the participants illustrate that the working relationship was impacted by the extent to which the students were afforded independent thinking and decision-making power in the research process. The emergence of this theme was an intuitive finding that resonated with the literature. For example, Schulze (2012) argued students should find their own voice and take ownership of their projects. This leads to legitimate power and self-transformation. Similarly, Lessing and Schulze (2003) reported that students who chose their supervisors were more satisfied with their supervision experience. Schulze (2012) underscored supervisors and students should share experiences, perspectives and decision-making tasks. Unilateral decision-making within power-centered supervision constrained students. A healthy, power-balanced supervision relationship can improve the quality of theses or dissertations and, by implication, the quality of graduates.

4.1.2 Theme 2: Structural Requirements. The second theme centered on those aspects that are provided by the supervisor in the process of establishing a working alliance and

have been termed structural requirements. Participants identified three issues namely, 1) Ground Rules, 2) Consistent Communication, and 3) Feedback. Participants felt that these were necessary requirements for establishing a relationship. This theme was structured to include three sub-themes that correspond to the three issues identified by the participants. These three sub-themes identify core structural provisions that contribute to the establishment of a working alliance.

4.1.1 5 Theme 2, Sub-theme 1: Ground Rules. Participants reported that it was important for the supervisor to implement a preliminary set of ground rules within the supervisor-supervisee relationship in the initial stages of the working alliance. A number of factors or issues were identified that could form part of these ground rules. This subtheme differed from the subtheme, “clarifying expectations” in theme 1 in that this theme specifically refers to actions by the supervisor whereas in clarifying expectations there was an interaction between the supervisor and the student. Ground rules refer specifically to the supervisor providing parameters for the process. Table 4.6 below presents quotes that illustrate some of these ground rules that participants identified; identifying a plan of action, setting mutual boundaries and exploring possible solutions to aid in establishing a working alliance.

Table 4.6: Category 1, Theme 2, Sub-Theme 1: Ground Rules

| Illustrative Quotes |
|--|
| <p>“You need to set boundaries within the beginning of when you start supervision with the supervisor in terms of what the supervisor expects from you and what you expect from supervisor”. Boundaries and setting up rules or things that you and your supervisor can abide to”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant C</p> |
| <p>“In terms of barriers when everything is due... the work ethic between the supervisor and the student. Being organized. Having certain due dates set in place and you know you are going to get your feedback”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant D</p> |
| <p>“It probably would have been a good idea to set some boundaries or set parameters in the beginning in the initial meetings with the supervisors, just in terms of how long feedback should take”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant G</p> |
| <p>“Just to put ground rules down at the beginning already as to what is expected and how is it going to work”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant H</p> |
| <p>“We have a structure in that we meet certain days and submission days, like certain days set for submission and for feedback so we stick to that”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant J</p> |

From the above quotes, it emerges that participants expected that supervisors would provide a framework or structure that clearly stipulated the ground rules. For example, Participants C, G and H all stated the importance of setting boundaries or parameters in the beginning meetings to know what to anticipate within the working alliance. Participant D and J underscored the importance of structure, regular attendance and an agreed-upon work ethic between the supervisor and the supervisee within the working alliance. The participants expressed a need for or expectation that supervisors will articulate ground rules that will assist the establishment of a productive working alliance.

This subtheme resonates with the body of literature where a framework for the supervisory relationship and working agreements provided by the supervisor were identified as playing a pivotal role in the participants' outcomes. For example, Dysthe, Samara and Westheim (2006) identified regular attendance, mutual obligation, structure and clear rules as critical factors that must be articulated as ground rules for supervision. Similarly, Reid and Westergaard (2006) recommended that a 'facilitating environment' must be created in supervision. Such an environment aims to develop an open relationship in which language, expectations and ground rules are common understandings developed between the supervisor and the supervisee. Thus, such an environment becomes facilitative of an effective working alliance and is containing.

McEvoy (1998) identified clear boundaries as a structural provision that good supervisors prioritize in their supervisory relationships. Similarly, Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail (2011) concluded that thoughtful supervision must be informed and guided by ground rules that create consistency and availability. Huber et al. (2010) also reported that ground rules such as

frequency of advising meetings typically resulted in satisfied advisees whereas a lack of ground rules provided by the supervisor resulted in dissatisfaction amongst advisees. Supervisors should provide structured supervision and guidance in the form of regular (weekly) consultation meetings (Lessing & Schulze, 2003). These authors further argued that none of the manuals on postgraduate supervision explicitly recommend specific ground rules as a structural provision, but underscore that students expressed the need for supervisors to do so.

The literature further resonated with the findings in that it identified a framework is containing, and enhances satisfactory subjective experiences. For example, ground rules are not expected to include or even imagine the variety of possible situations that may arise between a supervisor and a candidate, but instead convey enthusiasm, support, and overall guidance from the supervisor. This in turn will be containing for students and strengthen the relationships (Lessing & Schulze, 2003). A framework reportedly will also provide direction for reconciling differences. For example, Huber et al. (2010) stated the differences or disagreements between student and supervisor can be improved by the frequency of meetings which would have been formalized in a framework. Similarly, Lessing and Schulze (2003) reported that satisfied advisees typically attended frequent advising meetings that were set as part of a clear framework for how they would work together. Thus Huber et al. (2010) suggested now that the advisory working alliance has been shown to be related to important training variables (e.g., ability to choose their advisors, frequent weekly advising meetings, discussed career plans and advisee-advisor conflicts), these ground rules seem important to gain a better understanding of the factors that influence the advisory working alliance in order to guide future advising relationships.

4.1.1 6 Sub-theme 2: Consistent Communication. Participants underscored the need for consistent communication within the supervisory relationship. The practice of communicating with one another is developed over time, based on mutual trust and respect, establishes the tone of the relationship. Table 4.7 below presents illustrative quotes for the second sub-theme of theme 2 of category 1.

Table 4.7: Category 1, Theme 2, Sub-Theme 2 – Consistent Communication

| Illustrative Quotes | |
|--|---------------|
| “Open communication from both the student and supervisor. Open communication that you can in a way say what you feel, that you don’t need to hold back because you are being judged”. | |
| “Two way communication and access to the supervisor that is not once in three months. If that relationship is open and there is a two way communication”. | Participant B |
| “Constant communication between the supervisor and the student”. “Main thing is communication. Constantly just communicating with your supervisor, process of just checking in is very important... we constantly keep in contact via e-mail or WhatsApp”. | Participant C |
| “I basically have to always go to my supervisor to establish any kind of communication. There was hardly any communication from his part, as well as the relationship road” | |
| “Good communication between the student and supervisor. Just a good relationship, good communication, giving your ideas and tips of where to go. Just giving good guidance”. | Participant E |
| “For us to come together and plan. Just to have a conversation about that; speak about the different steps, get open communication. I think open communication is best”. | |
| “It’s important that you establish a good relationship and I think open communication, discussing everything that works and doesn’t work is important”. | Participant K |

Participant B, C and E stated that ‘two-way open communication’ from both the student and supervisor would be ideal. Communication was expected to be non-judgmental and instructive. Such communication would include constant check-ins that enhances the working alliance. Participant K maintained that open communication to discuss and plan different steps is a requisite that would be important in establishing a good working alliance. The participants identified communication as an important component or requirement to establish a working alliance. Moreover, they expressed an expectation that the supervisor will create an atmosphere for open communication that will enhance the student and supervisee relationship. The tone established for communication is considered the responsibility of the supervisor and thus a structural provision

This subtheme reciprocated the literature where effective supervision is characterized by good communication. For example, Vos (2013) stated that the quality of supervision was determined by regular contact and effective communication between supervisors and students.

Similarly, Pearson and Brew (2002) identified good communication between the supervisor and the student as a feature of adequate supervision. Conversely, the lack of communication often made challenges faced by students in dissertations more difficult. Vos (2002) stated that the lack of communication extended to the communication of trade secrets or tacit knowledge of the features and approaches to dissertations. Subsequently, most supervisory problems could be overcome if there is clear and open dialogue on all aspects of the project. For example, Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail (2011) highlighted that without open and honest communication, it is very difficult to identify the nature of and reasons for the shortfalls perceived by the student, in which both parties should be open to criticism, willing to listen to each other and to talk openly. Therefore, these authors recommended that a supervisory skill set should include good communicative skills, attentive and active listening and being able to comment openly, objectively and constructively.

4.1.1 7 Sub-theme 3: Nature of the feedback. This theme centered around feedback from supervisors on their work and the participants' expectations in this regard.

Table 4.8 contains quotes that illustrate the content of sub-theme.

Table 4.8: Category 1, Theme 2, Sub-Theme 3 - Nature of the feedback

| Illustrative Quotes |
|---|
| <p>“Also with my academic requirements now, if I do something, I need quick feedback. I like structure. So quick feedback, structured feedback. I also like to be able to contact them either by e-mail or WhatsApp, not only via scheduled appointments”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant B</p> |
| <p>“I felt it was all just an editing process really. I didn’t find it very supportive. Just give me some guidance”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant I</p> |
| <p>“I am not saying be unnecessarily harsh but there are ways of diplomatically saying, this is not on. They are the supervisors, so they are the experts, I think once you in a role here, the idea is to learn, so you are going to come in and you are going to take what they are telling you”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant F</p> |
| <p>You can actually perform way higher than someone who is giving you constant criticism. I’m not against healthy criticism; I think it’s just important that you give a balanced feedback. You cannot just be criticizing and negative criticism all the time”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant K</p> |

Participants indicated that they expect feedback and expect to be directed and corrected through the feedback process. For example, participant F indicated that “you [have] to take what they are telling you.” In addition, the feedback is coming from supervisors who have been constructed as experts and thus there is an expectation of the feedback being substantial, valuable and instructive. Participants also commented on the nature and frequency or timeliness of feedback. In particular, a need or expectation was expressed for structured feedback provided within a quick turnaround time. For example, participant B captured the sentiment of all participants by saying “I need quick feedback.” The need for a faster turnaround time extended to the need to be able to contact supervisors via alternative means such as social media (e.g. WhatsApp).

Participants also expressed that tactful communication helped to make feedback more constructive and palatable. For example participant F stated that “there are ways of diplomatically saying ...” In essence the nature of feedback constituted an important aspect that assists in providing a containing framework for the working alliance and contributes to the quality of the relationship between student and supervisor. As such, feedback becomes an essential part of the teaching process. Both supervisors and supervisees can view the nature of feedback as a detailed or constructive way of addressing the structural requirements within the working alliance.

These findings are consistent with the literature where the quality, nature and timing of feedback was identified as an important factor in the working alliance. For example, Vos (2002) stated that students expected prompt feedback, a balance between direction and independence, appropriate expert advice from the supervisor, and suggestions for alternative designs if problems arose. Similarly, McGill (2016) highlighted that feedback needs to be specific, often detailed, and constructive since it is recognised as part of the learning process and more than just error correction. Diplock (2010) identified that the provision of the supervision process offers an opportunity for reflection, feedback, and where appropriate, guidance on the student’s work. Barnett, Cornish, Goodyear and Lichtenberg (2007) reported

that constructive feedback that is supportive must be provided in order to promote a mutually respecting relationship between supervisor and supervisee. In addition, McGill (2016) recommended that feedback should include constructive comments that make specific suggestions that improve the writing more quickly, because they reduce trial and error.

Conversely, vague and destructive comments do not explain or address identified problems. Thus, the literature over the last two decades resonated with the findings of the present study identifying feedback needs to be done in a responsible manner that facilitated learning and further enhanced the working alliance. In short, it identified that feedback is important and they have identified various aspects such as the frequency, nature and tenor of the feedback.

4.1.3 Theme 3: Knowledge of Working Styles and Preferences. The third theme in category one centered on the knowledge of working styles and preferences. This theme included three sub-themes namely, 1) Diverse Working Styles, 2) Prior Experiences, and 3) Compatibility. These three sub-themes collectively speak to the impact knowledge of working styles and preferences have on establishing a working alliance.

4.1.1 8 Sub-theme 1: Diverse Working Styles. Participants highlighted working styles within a supervisory relationship, and how that frames expectancies or a mismatch within the supervisory relationship. Table 4.9 below presents illustrative quotes for the first sub-theme of theme 3 of category 1.

Table 4.9: Category 1, Theme 3, Sub-Theme 1 – Diverse Working Styles

| Illustrative Quotes |
|--|
| <p>“We just have a very different work ethic, which is very new for me. Ever since then it has just been a bit of a struggle to maintain your own sense of motivation with your own thesis. If you feel sense of a lack of motivation from your own supervisor, I mean as a student it’s a long process, you going to have up and down motivation levels – and if you see your supervisor is not really keen either, it just makes that process completely, a lot more difficult. It feels like it’s almost a mountain you’ve got to climb and then you also just demotivated so you don’t really want to do anything, and it translates over to your thesis”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant H</p> |
| <p>“Research I still feel like there is no connection between me and the supervisor... on the other hand, the supervisor also indicated to me that why aren’t you asking for more help, why aren’t you saying that you are struggling with this. It was a bit of a miss-match there”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant I</p> |

“This new supervisor is very different, and I feel like I’m almost pushed out my comfort zone, which is not a bad thing, but also very – it’s very intimidating... high expectations creates an atmosphere where you don’t feel comfortable. And you know you not going to be able to thrive like you would be in a non-judgmental space”.

“Sometimes I feel these power relations where I feel, well you feel the difference, you feel the one is very superior and you feel sometimes intimidated to ask those questions”.

“I think the mistake that we did, we didn’t actually sit down and discuss our different styles of working, and didn’t discuss any of those things... we had never really sat down and discussed the working relationship. These high standards caused uneasiness, it caused power relations where I really felt inferior, intimidated. He didn’t make it easy by his short temper, very impatient, and he didn’t make it easy. And I feel, still until this day, you know I’ve been trying, but I think it’s still not as smooth as it can be. There is still not a smooth relationship, not only his style of supervision, it’s their personality”.

Participant K

Participants reflected that perceived or actual differences in working styles, personality and work ethic impact the research process and supervisory working alliance. For example, Participant H and I related not having a connection with their supervisors. Not having a connection or ‘not clicking’ with the supervisor was highlighted as having a major adverse impact on the supervisory working alliance. These mismatches help students develop a sense of who they would work with best. For example, participant K stated that [she] ‘definitely see[s] which personality styles, supervision style [she] work[s] better with. Participants also identified that mismatches increases the subjective experience and awareness of power differences and detracts from their ability to assert themselves in the supervisory relationship. Similarly, participants reflected that different supervision styles and work ethics can be intimidating and “out of their comfort zone.” These findings suggest that there is more to be considered when assigning students to supervisors.

Research has examined the impact of personality or psychological factors such as self-esteem on the working alliance between supervisors and students. For example, Lee (2008) argued that emotional intelligence and flexibility play a large part in working with students through to successful completion. The findings resonate with the literature where personality styles and ways of working have been identified as important factors in the research process. There is some evidence that poor emotional intelligence, a mismatch in styles (such as when the student is still dependent but the supervision style is one of ‘benign neglect’) leads

unsurprisingly to poor completion rates. Lee (2008) stated that more responsibility rests on the supervisor taking the initiative to establish a productive relationship. Thus supervisors must be able to track the impact of their own preferred working styles on the working alliance, as well as have an awareness of the conditions under which students function or learn optimally. As such, there should be a structure in place as to what is expected of the student and a framework for supervision which facilitates rather than hinders development and creativity.

4.1.1 9 Sub-theme 2: Prior Experiences. Participants highlighted previous experiences within a supervisory relationship, and how that frames expectancies within the current supervisory relationship. Table 4.10 below presents illustrative quotes for the second sub-theme of theme 3 of category 1.

Table 4.10: Category 1, Theme 3, Sub-Theme 2 - Prior Experiences

| Illustrative Quotes |
|--|
| <p>“I suppose the unrealistic expectation that it is going to go the same [as Honours supervision]... thinking because if the previous one would have direct ways of doing things, whereas the current one, it is very different, so it has been a bit challenging”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant F</p> |
| <p>“I think going from someone close, from my previous working professional relationship to something a bit more distant is something that I struggle with and still struggle with this year... the only time I actually really sat in my supervisor’s office was the day of handing for the proposal ethics as well as our first meeting”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant H</p> |
| <p>“Honours year, I had a supervisor who had a really easy going approach, not lazy or laid back, just easy going, the whole process. I felt like I was able to thrive in the environment. Felt I was comfortable around him, felt like I could express myself, felt comfortable and confident. Knew that he would guide me, put in the right format and right way without taking away my independent thinking.</p> <p>“He also didn’t give a lot of negative criticism – don’t mind criticism but constant negative seems like what is it that you doing right. I think also giving that kind of praise and acknowledgement, already made me feel somewhat build up. I felt like he was really on my side”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant K</p> |

Participants reflected on prior supervisory experiences at the Honours level. They reported on the natural tendency to make comparisons between the working alliance and supervisory styles of the respective supervisors. For example, participant F reflected that there was an expectation that the supervisory relationship during masters was going to be the same as in honours. This participant in retrospect was able to reflect that the expectation was

“unrealistic” and that there is such a tacit assumption or expectation that the tenor of previous relationships would continue into the current supervisory relationship.

Participants made several comparisons between previous and current supervisors and appeared to emphasise differences where the current relationship was less satisfying. For example, participant K reported that the previous supervisor had a “more relaxed style” and provided “praise and acknowledgement.” In short, the implication was that the previous supervisor was able to create a relationship that was more conducive to work than the current supervisor. This participant captured a sentiment that students compared the extent to which different supervisory styles enable them to perform optimally.

Participants also compared supervisory relationships in terms of how closely they worked together. This included frequency or regularity of meetings, and the nature of contact. For example, participant H reflected that contact with the current supervisor was minimal and guided by requirements or deadlines in comparison to a far closer working relationship in the previous degree. This highlighted that students vary in the extent to which they desire closeness and direction etc. The findings also demonstrate that students have a sense of the conditions under which they work best. The aim is not to change things to suit them, but there should be periodic assessments where students can provide such feedback and where unrealistic expectations can be clarified.

Participants appeared to adopt a negative tone during these comparisons suggesting that they come into new relationships with expectations of the manner in which the relationship would manifest and thus end up expressing disappointment. It is unclear to which extent the students are engaging with the productivity of the new relationship since they expressed their disappointment in indirect terms. The findings suggest that students invariably compare supervisors and develop a sense of which style was more conducive to their progress and success. Moreover new working alliances are entered into with expectations based on previous experiences. Thus supervisory working alliances are not established in a vacuum, but are partly

a product of prior experiences.

The findings reported above resonate with Bilodeau, Savard and Lecomte’s (2010) finding that the differences in student-supervisor expectations regarding approaches to managing the relationship have been linked to supervisory satisfaction. Mat Min (2012) highlighted that each individual who is involved in this relationship has his or her own expectations, particularly about the experience that will occur in this relationship. The literature though is not explicit that previous supervisory experiences will inform the expectations of current supervision and subjective experiences of the working alliance.

4.1.1.10 Sub-theme 3: Compatibility. This sub-theme entailed the compatibility between the student and supervisor in general and in relation to working styles and preferences in particular. Participants essentially expressed the sentiment that relational compatibility is an important contributor to establishing a working alliance. Table 4.11 below presents illustrative quotes for the fourth sub-theme of theme 4 of category 1.

Table 4.11: Category 1, Theme 3, Sub-Theme 3 - Compatibility

| Illustrative Quotes |
|--|
| <p>“I think another thing that is quite important is the type of fit, I mean if I look at my research supervisor now, I am quite type ‘A’ personality, he is the same. That works for me, I like structure. So if we have the same type of working style that for me works”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant B</p> |
| <p>“I suppose you must be able to get along. I think if somebody that I really didn’t like, it would be very difficult to be able to relate to somebody like that, so you must be able to get along”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant C</p> |
| <p>“I don’t think I had a very good relationship with my supervisor in the first term... What is making it difficult for me is that I never really had a – still don’t have a real connection with the supervisor. He gives me very good feedback. I just don’t feel that there is a real connection, so it makes the working alliance difficult”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant E</p> |
| <p>“My supervisor and I haven’t connected at all... and I started to see we not clicking well at all, we just two very different people... like I said initially maybe I just attributed it to the – maybe it was her style, but you know it is just beyond that it’s we just don’t connect... at all, on that kind of level”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant H</p> |

Participants expressed that the supervisory relationship or working alliance remains a relationship that is predicated on a level of relational compatibility. For example, participant C explicitly stated that being “able to get along” was an integral requirement for supervisors and

students to establish a productive working alliance. Similarly, participant H attributed much credence or importance to personality compatibility and the impact it would have on the ability to establish a working alliance. Thus compatibility at the level of personality becomes a facilitating, if not prerequisite factor, for establishing a working alliance.

The findings in this sub-theme underscore the relational aspects and determinants of the working alliance noted in literature as well. For example, Bordin (1983) identified that the development of a strong and supportive emotional bond is one of three major tasks within the working alliance model. Bilodeau, Savard and Lecomte (2010) underscored that establishing a safe, trusting, and respectful climate for supervision is of primary importance for supervisees before they can expose themselves comfortably to their supervisors. Incompatibility poses a threat to such a bond. Coker and Schooley (2012) stated that strong emotional bonds between supervisor and supervisees create an environment that encourages the supervisee.

Abiddin (2006) indicated the importance of compatibility in the relationship between a student and a supervisor in this particular context where the two work closely over a period of time. As characteristics of the relationship - whether working styles or interactions influence the overall supervisor-supervisee relationship, ideally 'getting along' on some relational level would mutually benefit the supervisory relationship (Severinsson, 2015).

Smith (2004) reported that the working alliance was a proxy for attachment style which essentially speaks to the quality of the relationship. As previously stated the quality of research supervision can be enhanced by improving the relationship between postgraduate students and their supervisor. Thus compatibility at the most basic level of personality style could impact on academic supervisor-postgraduate student interaction that in turn influences the quality of research supervision and the outcome of the supervision process.

4.2 Thematic category 2: Support. The second thematic category was entitled, Support. This category referred to the patterned responses applicants gave regarding guidance and direction that stems from support with the supervisory working alliance. The participants within the study conveyed their views on support within the supervisory relationship. This thematic category included a singular theme labelled, “Guidance and Direction.” The theme included core features of support that facilitate establishing a working alliance. Three subthemes emerged namely 1) Encouragement, 2) Emotional and Psychological Support and 3) Dynamics of Co-Supervision as illustrated in Table 4.12 below.

Table 4.12 Thematic Category 2: Support

| Category | Themes | Sub-theme |
|----------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Support | Guidance and Direction | Encouragement |
| | | Emotional and Psychological Support |
| | | Dynamics of Co-Supervision |

4.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Encouragement. Within this subtheme, participants identified encouragement sought from their supervisors. Participants highlighted encouragement as an important feature of support in supervision. Table 4.13 below presents illustrative quotes for the first sub-theme.

Table 4.13 Category 2 Theme 1 Sub-Theme - Encouragement

| Illustrative Quotes |
|---|
| <p>“Supervisor constantly encourages and motivates his/hers students... your supervisor will constantly push you and encourage you to finish or reach your goal”</p> <p>“It’s important that supervisors constantly encourage or push their students... it’s quite emotionally and mentally draining and it is quite a lot of work if you don’t have that encouragement or motivation from your supervisor”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant C</p> |
| <p>“Coming to supervision can sometimes be very daunting, you have submitted and now your work is ripped apart and it is like you see all these track changes – it does make you feel like have I done nothing right. Perhaps you know for all the wrong that I did, find one thing that I did right and mention it”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant F</p> |
| <p>“She [supervisor] was very supportive and she kept on empathizing that it is going to get easier, she understood that I didn’t have any idea of what was going on, but as time went on, I got to understand more. So it became easier towards the end of the first semester actually”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant J</p> |
| <p>“No matter how hectic things get, if you’ve got somebody whose telling you can do it, work hard, you can do it, and really spurring me on as a mentor, I feel you can actually perform way higher in that specific situation. Taking on a mentor role – I don’t think a supervisor should be an authoritative person, should be one to mentor you through this, you know emotionally as well, that is also very important for me”.</p> <p>“I would actually like someone to tell me where I am doing something right. It is not that I need acknowledgment, but I would like to know the areas that I am doing right. At the end of the day, you know we’re still human and we would like to see where we are going – yes where we did badly, but we’re also doing really well”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant K</p> |

From the above quotes, it becomes apparent that students look for encouragement and validation as an important factor in establishing a working alliance. The responses of all participants reflected an appreciation for encouragement and support from their supervisors. In particular, of efforts made during the research process and the impact on their progress. For example, participant K best illustrated the desire for encouragement and positive feedback when stating, “I would like to know the areas I am doing right,” Although participant K denied that she needs acknowledgement, the quote continues to underscore the humanity of students that implies a need to be both encouraged and challenged, as well as to improve and for gains made to be acknowledged. When this balance is lacking, the vulnerability of students is emphasised. For example, participant F reflects the subjective experience of receiving feedback that was lacking in the acknowledgement of work that has been done well or correctly.

Participant K further connects encouragement of a supervisor to that of a mentor’s guidance throughout the research process. Mentoring can also involve supporting students with the emotional dimension of their experience, as they learn how and when to assert independence. This may mean broadening the range of assistance offered, to not only academic, but including personal development.

Consistent with the findings of the present study the literature highlighted the importance of encouragement from supervisors since the supervisory relationship is likely to be the most significant relationship graduate students will have. For example, Foster, Heinen, Lichtenberg and Gomez (2006) emphasized that supervisors who are supportive and instructional are associated with positive supervisory experiences. Huber et al (2010) noted that students who felt supported and guided by their advisors (supervisors) were more likely to report satisfactory supervision experiences.

Millar, Holloway and Henderson (2014) stated people perform best when they feel encouraged, appreciated, understood and accepted. The findings resonated with Severinsson’s (2015) assertion that encouragement and motivation from a supervisor was essential for the development of postgraduate students as academic researchers, but also for the academic staff

and research in general. Abiddin (2006) argued there are many views and definitions of the role of a mentor, but all include verbs like support, guide and facilitate. Similarly, Jansen (2004) stated that supervisors are to be encouraging, mentoring, and aware that student' lives extend beyond postgraduate studies. Millar, Holloway and Henderson (2014) noted that the encouraging supervisory relationship provides a space where learning from mistakes, coping with uncertainty, and processing our emotions, are valued as normal and actually essential elements of our professional development. For that reason throughout the research process, supervisors of beginning students should provide high levels of encouragement, support, feedback, and structure in order to facilitate and enhance the working alliance. All supervisors have opportunities to develop appropriate skills and subject knowledge to enable them to support, encourage and monitor research students effectively (Young, 2014). Essentially the supervisor should ensure the well-being of the supervisee (O'Donovan, Halford & Walters, 2011).

4.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Emotional/Psychological Support. This sub-theme related to emotional or psychological support from supervisors. The expectations of emotional or psychological support from supervisors varied based on the needs of respective students. Table 4.14 below presents illustrative quotes for the second sub-theme of theme 1 of category 2.

Table 4.14 Category 2, Theme 1, Sub-Theme 2: Emotional/Psychological Support

| Illustrative Quotes |
|---|
| <p>"I enjoy having someone that can guide me through the process and actually support me. Not necessarily academic support that I needed more, but it's probably more the emotional support. It is important that support, the relationship influences your whole experience of it, also when and if you finish".</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant A</p> |
| <p>"Support from the supervisor, life happens man and there needs to be a level of support". "Emotional support, it kind of influences you and affects you. You tend to then look at your supervisor as a mentor, as a source of guidance, support... but there needs to be a level of support professionally".</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant D</p> |
| <p>"I found my relationship with my supervisor quite frustrating. I felt very alone and I didn't feel like I got enough support from my supervisor... and from a personal point of view that hinders your engagement with the research".</p> <p>"It's quite overwhelming to be thrown into and to conceive this huge thesis project, so I think definitely a lot more hand on guidance. As a student, you are still looking for a lot of guidance, which maybe is not readily given".</p> <p>"You feel very unsure of yourself and your skills and it's just a lot emotionally. So I feel like the research is one area which they can provide more containment in terms of how they structure the help that they give you, or the guidance or feedback".</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant G</p> |

Participants A and G reported that the overall research experience is an overwhelming one, where not only academic support but emotional/psychological support is often needed. Participant G states the research process in postgraduate training is emotional, and as a student, “you feel uncertain of your skills”.

The findings in this sub-theme underscore the literature where the need for emotional and psychological support is identified as a key requirement. Participants expressed the need that the supervisor will create an atmosphere of not only academic support, but also emotional/psychological support to enhance the student and supervisee relationship and overall working alliance. The tone established for the specific emotional/psychological support is considered the responsibility of the supervisor.

The literature suggests the success of the supervisory relationship relies largely on the supervisor’s role in providing the expertise and support necessary to foster graduate students. Supportiveness is the quality that graduates value most highly in supervisors (Janssen, 2004). Research identified intrapsychic or psychological factors as important influences in the facilitation or hindrance of student retention and throughput. Chiappetta-Swanson and Watt (2011) highlighted that the success of the supervisory relationship relies largely on the supervisor’s role in providing support necessary to foster in their graduate student the skills that will ensure the production of a successful thesis. Pearson and Brew (2002) noted that supervisors have to consider widening the kinds of supportive relationship they are prepared to have in order to respond to the emotional needs and the maturity of students.

Bilodeau, Savard and Lecomte (2010) reported that emotional support provided in the working alliance is often cited as a means through which competence is enhanced and supervisee development is facilitated. Thus, the emotional bonds between the supervisor and supervisee become necessary to sustain the endeavour (Bordin, 1983). Similarly, Mat Min (2012) indicated that supervisees with high support conditions were more satisfied with their

supervisory relationship. Chiappetta-Swanson and Watt (2011) noted the success of the supervisory relationship relies largely on the supervisor’s role in providing support necessary to foster in their graduate student the skills that will ensure the production of a successful thesis.

Roets and Botma (2012) stated that the tasks for supervisors are to assist students to access available support systems and to guide students to become independent. Foster, Heinen, Lichtenberg and Gomez (2006) cited ‘supportive’ supervisor behaviour as one of the qualities associated with a positive supervisory experience. Similarly, Janssen (2004) identified supportiveness as the quality that graduates students valued most highly in supervisors. Thus, an important part of the supervision process is an awareness of the range of advice and support available to students, and knowledge of how students can access it (Young, 2014).

4.2.3 Sub-theme 3: Dynamics of Co-Supervision. Participants highlighted the dynamics of co-supervision in establishing a working alliance. Participants reported both negative and positive outcomes of co-supervision. Co-supervision was reported to augment or complement the shortcomings of the primary supervisor, but it requires more careful attention to the logistics and ground rules of the arrangement since it now involves a third person in the relationship. Table 4.15 below presents illustrative quotes for the fourth sub-theme of theme 1 of category 2.

Table 4.15 Category 2, Theme 1, Sub-Theme 3: Dynamics of Co-Supervision

| Illustrative Quotes |
|--|
| <p>“I have a co-supervisor and I felt my relationship with him was a lot better. He was more involved in the work, and because my topic was in line with his research area. I felt like I had a lot more connection with him, a better working alliance but with my actual supervisor it was a bit different, there was no communication between co-supervisors and supervisor, so it was very disorganized, very disconnected”.</p> <p>“I have four supervisors. One for Clinical and the thesis, a group supervisor and a Psychometry supervisor. So I feel like supervision is important. It can be helpful, depends on how good the relationship is, because sometimes it can actually be a waste of time”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant E</p> |
| <p>“For me the difficulty is the fact there is two of them. Two supervisors... what I find difficult is that if you need an answer now, you can WhatsApp your supervisor, but they first have to confirm... once they decide together they come back as a unit which I completely understand and respect that the one won’t answer you without the other, but sometimes it is a bit frustrating, waiting on both of them to have a look at it. I found that one on one was better, previous experience showed me that, that is what worked best for me”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Participant F</p> |

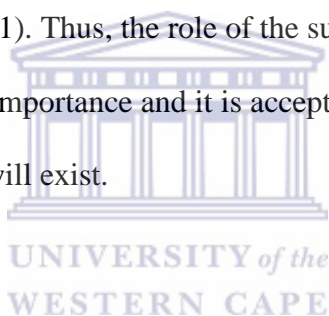
“I think if you going to have co-supervisors, there needs to be a lot of consistency between what they communicate to you together... it was very frustrating, because I would then submit my proposal and it would be accepted by one supervisor but then the other would come and pretty much change the entire thing. There was a lack of consistency which is very frustrating”.

Participant G

Participant E states the supervisory relationship as important if there is a connection and a good relationship which aids in a better working alliance. Highlighting the co-supervisor being more involved within the research process, in which the research topic correlated with the co-supervisor more than the actual or focal supervisor. Essentially the supervisory relationship was more beneficial due to the co-supervisor, noting the research foci was connected to the co-supervisors research area establishing more of a connection. While participants F and G collectively stipulated challenges between the dynamics of the supervisors, identifying that consistency, consultation and role clarification are important to ensure that the dynamics do not become a barrier to completion. These participants noted that the presence of more supervisors increased the challenges associated with establishing a working alliance. Participant F reflected challenges in that co-supervision made for slower communication and thus became frustrating. For that reason, supervision must be dealt with differently to ensure that co-supervision does not become a barrier to the progress of the work and the supervisee.

The findings in this sub-theme resonated with the literature where the need for set structures and consistency between dual supervisors was deemed as important since all supervisors have a joint responsibility towards their supervisees. The interaction among group members becomes more complex, and there are more decisions to be made around roles and responsibilities and expectations for the relationship. For example, Chiappetta-Swanson and Watt (2011) stated that as a member of a co-supervisory team, there are a number of structural and organizational issues that need to be addressed and negotiated. These authors further argued that there is much debate around the merits and challenges of co-supervision or a supervisory panel compared to the traditional single supervisor model. This echoes the mixed reports in the present study.

Literature suggested that the goal of achieving a good match between supervisor and student becomes even more challenging in an added co-supervisory relationship, where there are three or more individuals each with a different view of the roles, responsibilities and expectations for the working alliance. The benefits of co-supervision is underscored by Grossman and Crowther (2015) who suggested that informal co-supervision serves as a way to supplement the supervisors' needs by using the co-supervision potential of co-workers, postdoctoral students and senior postgraduate students to assist in the training of other postgraduates. Thus, co-supervision can take many forms and is subject to diverse regulatory practices. As a result, the role of the co-supervisor(s) will vary according to the various research projects. In many cases the co-supervisor will play a major role in directing the research, in other cases the role will be more supportive (Grossman & Crowther, 2015; Chiappetta-Swanson & Watt, 2011). Thus, the role of the supervisors and their relationships with their students are of critical importance and it is accepted that a wide range of successful student-supervisor relationships will exist.



CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

5.1 Executive summary

The present study was conducted with master's students who were in their first semester of enrolment in a Psychology Masters programme at the University of the Western Cape. Samples of 11 participants were recruited for the study, from three Masters Programmes in Clinical, Research and Masters by Thesis Psychology respectively. The current study was exploratory as it highlighted research on a subject that has not yet been clearly defined. As the study aimed at exploring psychology masters students' subjective experiences of establishing a working alliance with their newly appointed research supervisor, in the first semester of supervision. The focus on how supervisory relationships are established was based on core findings in the literature indicating that 1) the working alliance is an important and significant factor in predicting completion, 2) the early stages of the relationship are crucial and 3) subjective experience is an important predictor of subsequent student behaviour. Thus the present study explored psychology masters students' subjective experiences of establishing a working alliance with a newly appointed supervisor.

Semi-structured interviews were the method of data collection. Interviews explored students' view on a good quality working alliance between a supervisor and supervisee should entail; their approach towards establishing a supervisory relationship with a newly appointed supervisor, what factors contribute to establishing a working alliance in a new supervisory relationship and lastly how that compares to prior established supervisory relations. Interviews were transcribed and subjected to a thematic analysis.

5.2 Core findings

The findings of the current study indicate that two thematic categories emerged from the exploration of supervisees' subjective experiences of establishing a working alliance with

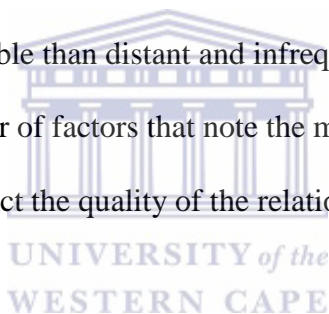
their supervisor. The categories spoke to a) requirements for a working alliance, and b) support. The first category included the requirements for a working alliance, which comprised of three structural themes, each containing sub-themes. Theme one consists of a) basic requirements for establishing a relationship; expanding the sub-themes a) establishing a relationship, b) clarifying expectations, c) building a mutual rapport, and the d) degree of decision making. Theme two consists of the a) structural requirements; with the sub-themes a) ground rules, b) consistent communication and c) feedback. The final theme in category one relates to the a) knowledge of working styles and preferences, connecting the sub-themes a) diverse working styles, b) prior experiences and c) compatibility.

| Category | Themes | Sub-theme |
|-------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| Requirements for a Working Alliance | Basic Requirements for establishing a Relationship | Establishing a Relationship |
| | | Clarifying Expectations |
| | | Building a Mutual Rapport |
| | | Degree of Decision Making |
| | Structural Requirements | Ground Rules |
| | | Consistent Communication |
| | | Feedback |
| | Knowledge of Working Styles and Preferences | Diverse Working Styles |
| | | Prior Experiences |
| | | Compatibility |

The first theme related to thematic content about what participants considered basic requirements for establishing a working alliance. These requirements were summarized into three sub-themes. Firstly, basic requirements for establishing a relationship included establishing a relationship, clarifying expectations, building a mutual rapport, and the degree of decision making. Participants emphasised there are different aspects required in establishing a working alliance, what emerges clearly is the role of approachability and being at ease with one's supervisor, as well as having trust and honesty within the working alliance. Participants clarified spending some time at the beginning of the relationship, developing a relationship and to consider how the alliance will work in a long-term mutually effective relationship.

The second theme was structural requirements which entailed ground rules, consistent communication, and feedback. Overall participants indicated that supervisors were responsible for providing a framework that included a clear set of expectations, roles and ground rules to adhere to. This theme was entitled structural provisions to reflect the expectation that participants had of supervisors. In this way it was considered a provision by the academic departments and considered a structural provision.

Theme three identified that it was important for supervisors and students to have a working knowledge of working styles and preferences in order to facilitate the establishment of a working alliance between supervisor and supervisee, underscoring the diverse working styles, prior experiences and compatibility. Participants also compared supervisory relationships in terms of how closely they worked together, students noted regular physical contact as more conducive and beneficially desirable than distant and infrequent communication. Findings further indicate there are a number of factors that note the manner supervisees and supervisors interact with one another will affect the quality of the relationships and what they accomplish within the research process.



The second category was support, with one overarching theme of guidance and direction. This consisted of three sub-themes namely; encouragement, emotional and psychological support and the dynamics of co-supervision.

| Category | Themes | Sub-theme |
|----------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Support | Guidance and Direction | Encouragement |
| | | Emotional and Psychological Support |
| | | Dynamics of Co-Supervision |

The first sub-theme highlighting encouragement indicated that it was apparent that participants looked for encouragement as an important factor in establishing a working alliance. Participant responses further reflected an appreciation for supportive encouragement made during the research process, particularly efforts made in their progress. The second sub-

theme, emotional and psychological support indicated participants felt the research experience to be overwhelming, whereby not only academic support but emotional/psychological support is often needed during the working alliance. The third sub-theme consisted of the dynamics of co-supervision, in which participants stipulated the presence of more supervisors increases the challenges associated with establishing a good working alliance; in which participants highlight if there is a connection between supervisor and supervisee it fosters a good relationship which aids in a better working alliance overall.

The findings indicate the importance of encouragement from supervisors since the supervisory relationship is likely to be the most significant relationship graduate students will have during their supervisory working alliance. The importance of encouragement is in correlation to a type of emotional/psychological support from the supervisor during the working alliance, which will aid in the overall working relationship.

5.3 Attachment formulation and interpretation

Attachment theory posits that the quality of current relationships is a function of early relationship experiences. For that reason, the assumption is that earlier relationships form a sort of template or blueprint for current or future relationships. Thus starting a new relationship activates experiences, anxieties and coping mechanisms from earlier relationships.

The findings of the present study reflect a similar process albeit differently formulated or constructed. Participants clearly indicated that prior supervisory or mentoring experiences influenced expectations of the current relationship and the subjective experiences of establishing a new relationship. Previous supervisory experiences have been presented in the literature from an attachment perspective. For example, Huber et al (2010) reported that attachment orientations are linked to the supervisor- supervisee relationships. It is expected that faculty advisors would likely emerge as attachment figures to their advisees. That is, similar to the stress associated with working through interpersonal problems, the wide range of stressors

associated with graduate training would likely produce the need for an attachment figure. Thus the understanding is that earlier relationships form a sort of template for future or current relationships, and when there are mismatches, students might experience increased anxiety and dissatisfaction that in turn can impact completion.

Students did not link their experiences in an attachment formulation, but emerged from their description of the process of establishing a relationship reflected needs, anxieties, emotional reactions and desires that were part of learnt expectations from other relationships. All the subthemes and themes spoke to their need for containment, structure, reciprocation, mutual respect and boundaries that ultimately become the parameters for the quality of the relationship. Students spoke about their experience of establishing a supervising relationship that was sufficiently containing emotionally and academically that in turn would facilitate retention and throughput.

Participants' particular attachment orientation influenced their orientation or stance towards the supervisor and the supervisory relationship. Students, who placed greater emphasis on the emotive aspects of the supervisory relationship such as rapport building and the matching of personality styles, reflected an internal working model in which they attempt to hyperactivate the relationship in an attempt to manage their anxiety resulting from a more anxious ambivalent attachment style. Similarly, students who used distancing and avoidance or felt less able to impact how the relationship was being shaped by asking or setting demands or expectations, demonstrated an internal working model consistent with anxious avoidant attachment.

Students who were able to choose their supervisors and were able to communicate clearly what they needed in the relationship and academic endeavour demonstrated an instrumental coping style which reflected an internal working model consistent with secure attachment. Thus the manner in which students identified their particular needs and approaches to establishing a relationship were reflective of attachment needs and associated internal working models and coping styles.

The fine attunement demonstrated the quality of the relationship and the comparison not only to prior relationships, but to other observed relationships clearly demonstrated that the emerging supervisory relationship was being represented mentally or that there are internal representations created. These representations meant that there was the capacity for students to engage with the supervisor in real time, but also as a mental representation; in which the latter is where the attachment needs of the student were more visible. Thus, the nature of the interviews that were conducted did not explore the prior attachment of the students more explicitly, which could be attributed in part to the closeness of the primary researcher to the topic and to the lack of training to conduct a more clinically oriented interview.

The findings indicated in essence that students were looking for a relationship and not simply a functional academic partnership. The supervisory relationship as a relationship will be subject to all psychological constructs including but not limited to attachment style. The expectations that students had of supervisors in establishing the relationship reflected their particular attachment orientations or styles. Thus consistent with Smith (2004) the expectations students had and the manner they went about establishing the relationship was driven by the quality of the relationship that in turn reflects attachment. Smith (2004) reported that the working alliance was a proxy for attachment style which essentially speaks to the quality of the relationship. As previously stated the quality of research supervision can be enhanced by improving the relationship between postgraduate students and their supervisor

Over time as new supervisors better understand the needs of supervisees, the general supervising approach can be tailored. Also if students have insight into their particular attachment needs they can have a better understanding of the internal pressures or motivations for their behaviour, thoughts and emotions in the process of establishing a new working relationship with supervisors. Supervisors can also track how these expectations potentially could influence the working alliance.

5.4 Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to explore students' subjective experiences of establishing a working alliance with their research supervisor. It was the intent of this study to explore how students approach the supervisory relationship with a newly appointed supervisor. Whereby identifying the processes involved in establishing a working alliance with a newly appointed supervisor, and the quality of the working alliance established in the first semester of supervision. Essentially, identifying factors that contributed to the quality of the working alliance.

Significant conclusions that can be drawn from the literature review indicating the establishment of a good working alliance within supervision is a central process for the successful completion of graduate students. As Abiddin, Ismail & Ismail (2011) highlight in recent years, research supervision has become very critical for graduate students to achieve higher degree certification. Likewise, Chiappetta-Swanson & Watt (2011) emphasised the success of the supervisory relationship relies largely on the supervisor's role in providing the expertise and support necessary to foster in their graduate student the skills that will ensure the production of a successful thesis. Overall, findings gathered from the analysis of data revealed supervision as a valuable component in the supervisory working alliance; and that supervisory relationships do not occur spontaneously, but result from intentional actions on the part of both supervisor and supervisee. There is a clear indication that students look to supervisors as the authority figure and expect them to actively initiate actions that will result in the development of a strong working alliance. Thus, the components and features identified by participants all speak to the importance of a frame work within which the work is to be completed. A number of factors were identified that contribute to the establishment of a functional working alliance or supervisory relationship, but what was telling was that participants did not reflect on their contribution to the relationship, instead largely focused on the relationship of the supervisor. What was a very important finding was that students go about establishing a relationship with

their supervisors by deferring to the authority of the supervisor and adopting a particular stance that renders them dependent and less able to initiate or even express their expectations, views, needs etc. This underscored the notion that the supervisory relationship is also a relationship of unequal power that is intersected by race, gender, social class, generation status as a student etc. Thus, the supervisory relationship is clearly seen as a relationship, albeit a working relationship that requires cultivation.

5.5 Limitations to the study

While most supervisory relationships are essentially dyadic in nature (Ghazali et al., 2015), the supervisors' perceptions were not documented; and could have provided a richer in-depth view of a dyadic supervisory relationship. Additionally, the study was confined to the Community and Health Sciences Faculty at the University of the Western Cape. The sample size was small, limited to Psychology students as a cohort as they were primed and more reflective of their supervisory experiences. However, the literature also suggests that discipline specific investigation is better since it captures the particular contexts of students. Limited use of the theoretical framework was a limitation as the depth of the interviews could have been significantly enhanced if the framework was used to guide the enquiry and not just the formulatory interpretation of results. In addition, the researcher was not a trained clinician and thus had a limitation in the manner that interviews were conducted to explore more depth interpretations and examining whether students have thought about their attachment styles rather than only asking how they went about establishing a new relationship. This required a strong interpretive stance in the results or integrated discussion. The researcher opted to limit the interpretation from the theoretical framework to a formulation rather than infusing it into the discussion as it might have required a greater degree of inference.

5.6 Recommendation for future studies

Future research could investigate what supervisors consider important for establishing a good quality working alliance. Furthermore, as this study only targeted selected Psychology masters' students within the Community and Health Sciences discipline, future research may replicate the study with other target groups.

Findings indicated that co-supervision can be two-fold, either to augment or complement the shortcomings of the primary supervisor and need to be managed explicitly. Thus the dynamics of co-supervision could be explored further to facilitate growth within the research process and to ensure that it does not become a barrier to the progress of the work and the student.

5.7 Significance of the study

The proposed study was measured from the students' vantage point, their subjective experience of establishing a working alliance with their research supervisor. Essentially, the study addresses the stated gap in the literature that reports on how early supervisory relationships are established from the student's perspective. The study contributed to developing insight into the experiences of psychology students who form part of a vulnerable population that has been at risk for retention and throughput resulting in a further loss of scarce skills.

This makes this study, and potential future studies important as we can see that early supervisory working alliances can impact student's academic achievement and completion positively or negatively. The insights into subjective experiences are important as student's subsequent behavioural responses to supervision and behaviour in supervision are primarily informed by subjective experiences regardless of their accuracies. Furthermore, the study represents an attempt to use psychological theory to understand relationship formation. At a

practical level, the findings provide a way for supervisors to broach the topic of a working alliance with students. If a good quality supervisory working alliance can lead to a less stressful postgraduate research experience of the thesis, the beneficial implications for tertiary institutions could be far-reaching. As research has shown that constant, thoughtful supervision and availability is the key to successful graduate programme completion.



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APPENDIX A: Interview Schedule

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

Tel: +27 21-948 3748 **Fax:** 27 21-948 3796

E-mail: tarrynbm@gmail.com

Data Collection Tool: Semi-structured Interviews

Open-ended interview question:

1. What in your view does a good quality working alliance between student and supervisor entail?
2. How do you (as a student) approach the supervisory relationship with a newly appointed supervisor?
3. What processes are involved in establishing a working alliance with a new supervisor?
4. How would one explore the quality of the working alliance established in the first semester of supervision?
5. How would one then identify the factors that contributed to the quality of the established working alliance?
6. How does the way you approach the relationship with your supervisor compare to how you approached or established new relationships previously?

APPENDIX B: Ethics Clearance & Project Registration



OFFICE OF THE DEAN DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT

24 June 2015

To Whom It May Concern

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

Research Project:

Exploration of Psychology Masters students' subjective experiences of establishing a working alliance with their research supervisor.

Registration no:

15 534

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

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

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

APPENDIX C: Permission to Conduct the Study



UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa, Telephone: (021) 959-2283/2453
Fax: (021) 959-3515 Telex: 52 6685

The Registrar
Student Administration
UWC
Private Bag X17
Bellville, 7535
24 June 2015

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

I am a student registered at UWC for a Masters degree in Psychology. My thesis is entitled an "Exploration of Psychology Masters students' subjective experiences of establishing a working alliance with their research supervisor." The proposed study has been registered on the SASI system with ethics clearance number 15-5-4.



The study sample is Psychology Masters students registered at UWC in their first semester of thesis work. Eligible candidates specifically need to have completed a proposal and have worked with an allocated supervisor. The study aims to explore their reflections on how they went about establishing a working relationship or alliance with their supervisor. The study is being supervised by Dr. Mario R. Smith and it is being funded by the National Research Foundation. I hereby request permission to conduct the study with Psychology Masters students at UWC. In addition to permission to conduct the study at UWC, I would like to request permission to obtain access to the names and e-mail addresses for Masters students in Psychology from the Department in order to invite them to participate in the study. To assist you in your consideration of this request, I include some brief detail below about the study, as well as a copy of the proposal, ethics clearance certificate and proof of registration.

This explorative study will use semi-structured interviews to obtain students' reflections and experiences of establishing a supervisory relationship. The UWC protocol for ethics will be adhered to including, but not limited to, anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent and voluntary participation. There are no risks anticipated in participating in this research project and

students will be reassured that there will be no loss of perceived benefits or fear of negative consequences should they choose not to participate.

The benefits of participating include:

- An opportunity for students to think reflexively about the relationship with their supervisors.
- An opportunity to gain insights from this process that can impact their continued relationship.
- An opportunity to gain insights into what students perceive to be a productive, good quality working alliance.
- An opportunity to learn more about students' subjective experiences of establishing a working alliance with their research supervisor.
- Future students and supervisors might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the process of establishing a supervisory relationship from the students' perspective.

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

Thanking you in anticipation.



UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE

Ms. T. Mullins
Student # 2826048
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0725173591

Dr. Mario R. Smith
Supervisor
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Department of Psychology
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APPENDIX D: Information Sheet



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Tel: +27 21-948 3748 Fax: 27 21-948 3796

E-mail: tarrynbn@gmail.com

INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: Exploration of Psychology Masters students' subjective experiences of establishing a working alliance with their research supervisor.

What is this study about?

This is a research project being conducted by Tarryn B Mullins at the University of the Western Cape. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a Masters Student in Psychology currently in the first semester of studies and have begun to establish a working alliance with a research supervisor. The purpose of this research project is to explore how students approach establishing a working alliance with a newly appointed supervisor, and to identify the factors that facilitate or hinder good working alliances.

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

You will be asked to participate in an interview. That entails a semi-structured interview with guided questions relating to the quality of a good supervisory working alliance. The interviews will be conducted at UWC, approximately one hour long and will be conducted in English.

Audio taping/Videotaping/Photographs/Digital Recordings

This research project involves making audiotapes. As audiotapes provide data from the interview and assist in transcribing the information given - to ensure your confidentiality, interview sessions that are audio-recorded will be stored on computer files that are password-protected, and locked filing cabinets and storage areas will ensure any transcribed data to be securely placed.

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

To ensure your anonymity, information regarding the interviews is anonymous and will not contain information that may personally identify you.

To ensure your confidentiality, interview sessions that are audio-recorded will be stored on computer files that are password-protected, and locked filing cabinets and storage areas will ensure any transcribed data to be securely placed.

If we write a report or article about this research project, your participation and personal information will be kept confidential.

What are the risks of this research?

All human interactions and talking about self or others carry some amount of risks. We will nevertheless minimise such risks and act promptly to assist you if you experience any discomfort, psychological or otherwise during the process of your participation in this study.

Where necessary, an appropriate referral will be made to a suitable professional for further assistance or intervention.

What are the benefits of this research?

This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about the individual experiences of establishing a working alliance with their research supervisor.

We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of what students perceive as a good quality working alliance. You do have the opportunity to think reflexively about your relationship with your supervisor to date and may gain insights from this process that can impact your continued relationship.

Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. However, I urge you to finish the study once you have started, but it would not be held against you if you decide to withdraw.

What if I have questions?

This research is being conducted by Tarryn Mullins (Department of Psychology) at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact me at: 072 517 3591 or email: tarrynbn@gmail.com

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

Supervisor: Dr. Mario Smith (Clinical Psych), Columbia University,
USA Senior Lecturer
Department of Psychology, UWC
Faculty of Community and Health
Email: mrsmith@uwc.ac.za
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Head of Department: Dr. M. Andipatin
Department of Psychology, UWC
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Fax: 0219593515

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

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

APPENDIX E: Consent Form



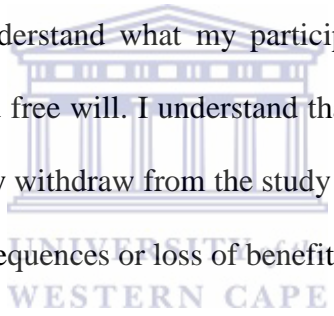
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CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: Exploration of Psychology Masters students’ subjective experiences of establishing a working alliance with their research supervisor.

The study has been described to me in language that I understand. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand what my participation will involve and I agree to participate of my own choice and free will. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed to anyone. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without fear of negative consequences or loss of benefits.



___ I agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.

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

Participant’s name.....

Participant’s signature.....

Date.....