Graduates' perception of the honours programme and the influence it has had on their careers and employment options.

by

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Declaration of Originality

The research is submitted in partial fulfilment of Master in Social science in the Applied Human Sciences Department, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

I, Zamokuhle Siphosethu Ngubo, declare that this dissertation is my own work. Information derived from the published and unpublished work of others has been duly acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given. None of the work has previously been submitted for degree purposes or any other academic accreditation.

Editor: Janet Whelan

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Signed ……………….. Date …………….

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Abstract

The study explored the experience of the honours graduates in psychology and industrial psychology at a South African university. It focused on how they experienced the transition from being a postgraduate student to an employee in the workplace. The necessary information was acquired through a qualitative method of data collection and analysis; semi-structured interviews were conducted, involving eight graduates who had previously completed the honours programme. The findings indicated that graduates perceived that they had benefited from the programme, the exposure and the understanding of human behavioural sciences and other skills acquired during their honours study period was acknowledged by the participants. Although they were generally happy with the programme they did, however, feel that there was room for improvement in some areas. The study concluded that the programme was perceived to equip students with essential knowledge, behavioural habits and skills that prepare graduates for endeavours after completion of study especially in the workplace. However, they may not have all the necessary skills to be immediately effective when entering the workplace and may require workplace training prior to full completion of the learning process. In addition, in order to constantly improve the post-graduate honours Programme, the university needs to be mindful and engage with both the students and the workplace alike. This may be challenging considering that the Health Profession Council of South Africa has an influence on curricula in South African universities; nevertheless the voices of students need to be heard.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study explored graduates' perception of the honours programme in psychology and industrial psychology at a local university in South Africa. It explored the graduates' experience during the programme and how; it had prepared them for life after graduating. How the graduates perceived the relevance of the honours programme in the workplace. The rationale was to explore an improved honours programme, an honours programme relevant to graduates' needs and one that was relevant to societal needs and produced graduates who were prepared for employment and careers after the period of study. Qualitative methodology was adopted to acquire in-depth insightful information pertaining to the programme.

The study was guided from the social cognitive theory perspective. According to Bandura (1989) social cognitive theory explains psycho-social functioning or human behaviour by understanding the contributions of: 1) Cognitive factors; knowledge, expectations and attitudes of the individual. 2) Behavioural factors; the skills, practice and self-efficacy the individual possesses. 3) Environmental factors; social norms or the resources of the community in which the individual is situated. The above mentioned components determine human behaviour. Many theories have viewed behaviour as being driven by internal forces, which in turn has resulted in researchers putting emphasis on internal explanations in the pursuit of understanding human behaviour. Cognitive social theory provides a holistic approach in explaining human behaviour and was suitable in explaining the different components of the graduates lived experience of the honours programme and their lives after the completion of the programme.

This study focused on experiences of graduates pertaining to the honours programme in psychology and industrial psychology at a South African university. A brief background of universities in the South African context was necessary. According to Fourie (1999) the South African higher education system cannot be understood or explored in seclusion from the past oppressive system. Higher education aims to transform and address past inequalities, which has had an influence on student intake and number of students included for honours programmes.

There is very little research that exists or has been published regarding student experience of the various honours programmes internationally and even less in the South African context.

The research that is available indicates that the honours year of study is commonly recognized as both a transitional and transformational phase for graduates; progression from knowledge acquisition of undergraduate studies towards an introduction to knowledge production, innovation and a critical approach to subject matter (Allan, 2011; Jansen & Suhre, 2015; Manathunga, et al., 2012;). The overarching concept of the study year for all honours programmes is providing the graduate with advanced disciplinary knowledge, research training and to allow the individual to complete an independent research project.

Research suggests that students completing their honours year of study feel it is an intense and a challenging task. It requires dedication, an open mind to learning and unlearning. Graduates have to quickly adapt to new challenges associated with honours study, introduction to research, engaging with lectures on an individual basis and going beyond knowledge acquisition and the beginning of knowledge production. It is hoped that after completing their honours studies, they have an advantage to future endeavours whether in the workplace or in academia.

The findings indicated they had a mixed set of experiences but the general findings revealed that graduates' perception regarding the programme had indeed equipped them well for life after the honours programme, particularly in the workplace. Graduates suggested that they were critical and analytical in the job environment, which they felt could be attributed to their studies in psychology and industrial psychology at honours level. They were able to problem solve with ease, present, interview and engage with all stakeholders relatively well from the onset of their careers. However, they did express concerns regarding how the organisations perceived that there was a gap and need for improvement regarding the preparedness of graduates entering the working world. One of the major concerns was that the learning process at the university functions in relative isolation to the workplace and as a result has a limited practical component to it. If it is to improve the learning experience for graduates, it may require further research in how some element to crystallise the theory knowledge into tangible workplace competencies that are desirable by the graduates and potential employing organisations can be incorporated.

Graduates have an expectation that the honours programme will equip them with skills and adequate preparation to meet the opportunities/demands of the workplace. There may be a gap in what the workplace demands and what university graduates offer that requires bridging

(Richter et al. 1998). Each environment needs to recognise the needs of the other, what is required in the workplace and the limitations of the universities to provide this; what is required in universities and the limitations of the workplace to provide this. A collaboration between the two environments may optimise the functioning of the respective environments. The university provides the workplace with graduates who have potential to benefit business and the organisations can feedback vital information into current market trends to keep universities updated on their academic scope.

A University has an important role to facilitate an establishment to gain and access knowledge (Maharasoa & Hay, 2001). In the South African context it can be argued that it needs to be aligned with the needs of the community and other socio-economic factors specific to South Africa. It has to go beyond knowledge acquisition, production and provide a platform for knowledge to be transferred into skills that can be advantageous in the workplace or shape entrepreneurship. This cannot occur if the graduate learning process is perceived as existing in isolation to the broader context. There are certain environmental factors to an individual's development (Bandura, 1989) and one needs to be well aware that graduates do not function in a vacuum. For holistic development of the graduate the cognitive, environmental and behavioural factors have to be nurtured in alignment with the social cognitive theory. For graduates to complete their learning and transition into the workplace or life after the study period a link is necessary between university and workplace. Graduates enrol in programmes with numerous expectations; they expect return on investment (Koskina, 2013) in the form of acquired knowledge that can benefit the individual after completion of study.

It is imperative that the discourse regarding employability shifts from the status quo of perceiving that graduates are solely responsible for equipping themselves for the workplace to one of collaboration where the individual exercises internal locus of control and self-efficacy and is assisted by the university (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006). This complex issue cannot be simplistically understood to rest solely on the graduate. Factors external to the individual need to be taken into account and to what opportunities the graduates have been exposed regarding the workplace, type of learning they have been exposed to during tertiary education and the role of the organisations in facilitating opportunities for learning regarding graduates. According to Tomlinson (2008), students have been urged to view their schooling as an investment. Post-graduate qualifications should provide students with higher levels of understanding, critical engagement with their area of study, potential exposure to practical

engagement with their studies and ultimately entering the workplace with an edge to make meaningful contributions after completion of study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1.1 Introduction

There is a gap that exists in the literature and research pertaining to students' perceptions about the honours programme and the influence it has on students' careers and employment options/employability. In addition, there is very little research that exists regarding honours programmes in the South African context. The literature review will explore existing research related to the background of South African universities to assist in gaining a better understanding of past legislations and the influence they have regarding university policies and strategies in the modern era. An in-depth analysis of the research that exists pertaining to characteristics associated with the honours year of study both internationally and in the South African context will be searched and research regarding students' experience of their respective honours programmes will be reviewed. Research pertaining to the reason students pursue courses in psychology will be explored and an important brief review of what research exists concerning possible future roles of the university will also be investigated.

According to Maharasoa and Hay (2001) it is evident that honours learners wanted a stronger linkage between universities and the workplace. There is a perception of students being somewhat exploited as they expected that their study qualifications should contribute to them becoming adequate workers after the qualification had been obtained. The literature review will focus on past research pertaining to honours programmes around the world in order to get an in depth understanding of what the role of the honours programme in the various countries and in the South African context entails.

2.1.2 Background of the University in the South African context

The university in the South African context cannot be understood in isolation of the past legislative policies during apartheid that resulted in segregation pertaining to race and gender. As a result, in South Africa, the Higher Education system is aligned towards the transformation and restructuring of the inequality of the past and to compliment the country's broad political and socio-economic transition to democracy and equality (Fourie, 1999; Seabi, et el., 2014). According to Fourie (1999) the transformation of higher education is a radical, comprehensive process. Academia in the South African context needs to be adaptive, make paradigm shifts and approach its endeavours in new and innovative ways to meet the needs of the shift in universities' approach.

Due to transformation there has been a massive growth of black students in universities and universities of technology. This adds a further complication, as some students come from previously disadvantaged schools with poor teaching backgrounds and availability of resources to facilitate their learning process at school level (NCHE, 1996b cited in Fourie, 1999). The consequences of post-apartheid era are still apparent in South African schooling system as many English second language learners are struggling to manage academically due to their inadequate foundation in the English language. This seems to be a significant constraint because for effective learning to transpire, learners need to be proficient in the language of instruction. (Seabi, et el., 2014) The implication of previously disadvantaged students is a reality of most universities and a challenge with which higher education institutions are presently faced. One of the most pivotal changes in universities is shifting from a high pedestal and becoming more responsive to community needs (Fourie, 1999). As stated by the National Commission on Higher Education (1996b) there is an emergence of new transdisciplinary knowledge production, which will include additional research from those who are in academic research

> In the research context, academics will interact with their colleagues in higher education, but also with knowledge producers in a range of other organisations and enterprises (Fourie, 1999, p285).

However, the transformation of higher education is not without its critics in the South African context. Jansen (2003) posits that the changing climate of higher education threatens the very core principles of what university education in this post-apartheid era stands for. According to Steur, Jansen and Hofman (2012) the formative merits of university education are at risk of being reduced from graduate-based in the sense of broad academic cultivation to professional training with a strong emphasis on employability. Perhaps constraining the study is the limited research regarding University roles both locally and internationally.

According to Parker and Jary (1995), universities are moving away from elite specialisation to a more mass production arrangement. In the politics of university, many may advocate for the mass inclusion of students where time, space and status barriers should be broken down. This notion rests on the belief that university expansion has a direct relationship with economic growth and can thus be an agent for economic equality (Robinson, 1968).

A University in the modern era is expected to contribute to the job market by ensuring that graduates have the necessary skills to make them employable (Maher & Graves, 2007). According to Coetzee (2012) the expectation is that graduates would have established comprehensive all round skills and acquired more than their discipline-specific knowledge, skills and competencies, broader transferable skills, and attributes that facilitate innovation and effectiveness in the job market.

2.1.3 <u>Honours programme defined</u>

According to Manathunga, et al., (2012) honours programmes are designed to develop students' capacity to engage in higher order thinking which leads to knowledge production. The phase consists of advanced disciplinary knowledge, introduction to research training and a research or similar project. Wolfensberger and Offringa (2012) state that honours programmes are developed precisely to offer educational prospects that are more challenging and demanding than regular programmes; they are designed to induce excellence in talented students. Honours can be perceived as a transitional phase from undergraduate to postgraduate studies or enhanced career prospects (Allan, 2011). Jansen and Suhre (2015) posit that honours programmes must facilitate opportunities for high ability students to satisfy social and scientific needs and to foster graduate attributes. There is no one common definition for an honours programme, but it can be seen from the above mentioned definitions that honours programmes are considered to challenge the learner a little more than they would have experienced during undergraduate studies because they are expected to engage in some form of research project to introduce them to academic research and postgraduate work. Honours programmes also seek to facilitate an environment whereby students can engage in critical thinking and analysis of their specific subject matter (Allan, 2011; Jansen & Suhre 2015; Manathunga, et al., 2012).

Honours programmes in South Africa are generally confined to those from former British colonies from whom they inherited various higher education systems. Original honours programmes were created as an award of merit for higher achievement in a three-year undergraduate degree. Generally, in most countries the model has stayed the same or similar with adjustments to align and suit the local cultural and educational employment requirements. In Australia honours programmes are perceived as pathways to postgraduate research and knowledge production (Manathunga, et al., 2012). Honours programmes expose students to the

opportunity of producing new knowledge and to advance the students' capacity to explicitly engage in this kind of knowledge production. Students are expected to undertake an investigative or research project to gain exposure into knowledge production and in some courses they may be expected to complete coursework.

According to Schweinsberg and McManus (2006) the coursework component has a rationale to the learning experience of students at honours level. Schweinsberg and McManus cited an example of an honours programme in the school of information technologies at one of the universities in Australia. The aim of the coursework component was to introduce students to the honours programme, speak to issues of research philosophy, develop research methodologies and assist with the practicalities of thesis writing, giving presentations and preparing poster material (Schweinsberg & McManus, p5, 2006). Beyond the research component some coursework includes disciplined specific seminars.

> …the objectives in geography honours seminar were as follows; demonstrate that the student can interpret geographical literature within a framework of various paradigms; evaluate the various points of view of the discipline; make a verbal presentation of a seminar to class members (Schweinsberg & McManus, p6, 2006).

There are indications that similar practices exist in other disciplines. The English Department at one of the universities in Australia allows students the opportunity to document the ambit of their research which is assessed by the coordinator. Students have seminars on general supervision, general expectations, scholarly documentation, conference speaking, scholarly augmentation and postgraduate research opportunities (Gardiner & Brooks, 2004, as cited in Shweinsberg & McManus, 2006).

In South Africa an honours programme is usually an additional year of advanced study; it is commonly classified as a postgraduate degree. It is often awarded separately as an honours degree or at first year of a two-year master's degree (Bawa, 2008). According to Paxton (2011) in South Africa most honours programmes are similar to those of the Australian description. They are not necessarily perceived as a postgraduate degree nor under graduate degree but rather as a programme that is somewhere in between postgraduate studies and undergraduate studies. The programme is seen as a bridge between undergraduate and postgraduate studies; some are perceived to be advanced undergraduate studies. Please refer to Appendix B for clarification of the honours psychology outline.

2.1.4 Honours programme

Table 1: Honours programme components

Advanced disciplinary knowledge	Research training	Completion of an independent research project

By Zamokuhle Ngubo (2017)

There are numerous models pertaining to honours programmes around the world, but what seems to be clear is that the one common trend is that the honours programme is believed to assist the student in making the transition from knowledge acquirer to knowledge producer (Manathunga, et al., 2012). According to Manthunga, et al. honours programmes indicate to the tertiary institutions and potential employers that the student has progressed further than the basic knowledge acquisition approach; the student is likely to have started to apply disciplinary-based knowledge to new settings, situations and problems. The emphasis is that universities not only prepare students for the workplace but also add to knowledge and understanding, enhancing the values that are fundamental to the university, respect for evidence and the search for truth.

There are three components that are consistent in all curricula at honours level regardless of the discipline of the course.

1. Advanced disciplinary knowledge
2. Research training
3. Completion of an independent research project

Advanced disciplinary knowledge indicates the additional demands associated with the honours programme in comparison to previous degree demands or knowledge acquisition. The subject matter goes beyond what was taught to students during undergraduate period of study. The research training component specifically aims for students to familiarize themselves with research principles and concepts, research methodology, theory development or other material about research practice (Manathunga, et al., 2012). Completion of an independent research project normally consists of an introduction on how to conduct academic research. Students are expected to conduct some sort of research project presented in the form of a thesis or dissertation.

What is however common to all honours programmes in the South African context, is the pedagogical aspect surrounding programmes, which is unclear and an area of concern. Students are introduced to research and required to complete a mandatory short research paper, which is often difficult for the students and their respective academic supervisors (Paxton, 2011). According to Paxton (2011) the academic staff members are faced with the challenge of dealing with large numbers of students in lectures; in addition to the large numbers, the resources available to them to cater for these large diverse classes are scarce. The lecturers are also required to publish; there is increasing institutional pressure for staff members to publish their own work while advancing the postgraduate output. As a result, the department has shifted toward streamlining the process to ensure that as many postgraduates graduate within a specified period.

According to Long (2012) honours programmes have become a booming business, which notion is supported by Jansen and Suhre (2015). The European Council embarked on a journey to be the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world. To achieve this objective a larger educated workforce was required, which resulted in organised measures to increase the number of students enrolling in university. However, there was evidence that the policies that had been put in place resulted in the increase of less-prepared students and students who had difficulties coping with university demands. Jansen and Suhre (2015) indicate that the increased numbers enrolling into programmes has resulted in increased graduation

rates; however there is growing concern that high ability students are being insufficiently challenged. Lecturers report that they often feel incapable of supporting diverse groups of students which limits the learning process (Jansen & Suhre, 2015).

Jansen and Suhre (2015) identified teaching and learning to increase graduate development for high ability learners or honours students. They believed that teaching has to focus on the elaboration of conceptual knowledge and programmes must focus on critical and creative thinking skills. To incite critical and creative thinking skills and facilitate an environment that promotes development of graduate attributes, educators must go beyond transmitting information and clarifying concepts to a more reflexive approach questioning and raising interpretive issues for discussion and debate. Van Tassel-Baska (2003) indicates the teaching environment for honours students should involve brainstorming to nurture problem-solving and understanding of interdisciplinary topics. Teachers have the responsibility of investigating issues in collaboration with students; creative and critical thinking should take place in a group setting to allow students to learn from each other (Biggs, 2012; Paul & Elder, 2008 as cited in Jansen and Suhre, 2015). Biggs (2012) states a learning context that supplies active and creative learning tasks will improve the level of engagement and endorse higher order learning. A learning environment that allows for interaction between students and teachers seems to help students acquire graduate attributes more readily through engagement in a learning community (Jansen & Suhre, p4, 2015).

2.1.5 Students Experience

According to Petersen (2007) as cited in Allan 2011 postgraduate student-centered research is implemented with the objective of improving support for students; the goal is interestingly measured by the completion rate of the respective programmes. A study by Aspland et al. (1999) indicated that students were dissatisfied with supervision and other support and this was the cause of the high attrition rates in Australian postgraduate courses. Research has recommended that better supervision practices be put in place to support students during their postgraduate studies. Students indicated that prior to the commencement of their study period they had very little knowledge pertaining to what was expected or required at honours level; all they knew was is that it was going to be challenging and hard (Allan, 2011).

According to Kiley et al. (2009) students are motivated to do honours to consolidate their undergraduate degree with the intention of having an edge in the workplace and as an introduction to postgraduate study. For many students the honours programme is about

development. Kiley et al. (2009) go so far as saying that it is further training and most students had absolutely no idea about post graduate research; coordinators believe that students do not understand that the end of third year is a pathway to academia. Similar to Kiley et al., Allan (2011) suggested that students enrolled in honours programmes either to learn more and develop skills, or avoid unemployment. The pursuit of a doctorate qualification did not seem to be the driving or motivating component amongst students. However, when departments had informed students about honours early in their undergraduate studies there appeared to be an appreciation that honours programmes were a stepping stone to research and postgraduate studies.

Chen and Turbil (2003) as cited in Allan (2011) posit that an honours study period for students is not just an in-between phase, nor just the linear progression from coursework orientation of undergraduate work to the introduction phase of postgraduate degrees. Chen and Turbil (2003) indicate that honours study goes beyond the transitional, it is also transformational. Transformational learning is about improvement or change, rather than simply progressing to the next phase of higher education studies.

A study by Allan indicates that students perceived themselves as part of a hierarchical world – the academics are near the top, undergraduates near the bottom and the honours and postgraduate students occupying the in-between position. This perception suggests that transformation of identity is arising through the honours programme simultaneously with the transition of academic abilities. This notion supports the theory that learning through research at honours level is also a personal journey of discovery (Brew, 2003 as cited in Allan, 2011). It seems that the transformation component of honours study receives considerably lower academic considerations in Australia. There have been assumptions which indicate that this may be as a result of the transformational component being less tangible in comparison to the transitional component. The transformational aspect may be easily recognized by focusing on students' emotions, but this area has received very little research; even the most current and detailed review of Australian honours programmes, which sources data from students, has no reference of emotion and refers to transformation only in regard to institutions.

According to Allan (2011), by not putting enough emphasis on the transformative nature of honours programmes, the potential benefits to students is likely to be constrained by academic norms and institutional processes. Supervisors working with school support mechanisms play a central role in guiding students through the academic transition in honours programmes. The

study found that there was less evidence to show that supervisors were supporting identity transformations; the nature of academia and supervisors were sometimes constraining the emotional confidence of students. Universities have a robust culture of academic rigour, which is established partly as exhaustive criticism of work presented in public, including at student seminars. Allan's research suggests that some transition academically and transformation personally occurred for students undertaking honours study showing the school/university must be providing adequate support for students. The transitional is easily identified by the measures put in place to indicate whether objectives have been met, while in contrast the transformational less tangible.

Allan (2011) states a common theme amongst students was how intense the workload was at honours level as it required many hours of work and the students' time. Students perceived the year as challenging; there were different requirements and expectations from graduates in comparison to undergraduate studies. For example, students were now required to administer seminar presentations which some students found daunting. Students had to learn to embrace criticism of their work. As a result of the challenges most students indicated that they had felt stressed or experienced crises at some point during the study period.

In Australia one of the institutions requires honours students in Human Geography to complete two components, the course work and a short thesis research component. Students are expected to fulfil both components simultaneously, while they are completing their coursework they are required to start research and field work for their short thesis (Kite et al. 2012). As indicated in Manathunga et al. (2012), in honours programmes that require students to fulfil both research and coursework, students are often faced with challenges, the most prominent challenge being the balancing of knowledge acquisition and production. Some students, especially those who were keen on their research project, perceived the knowledge acquisition during their period of study was distracting. According to Manathunga (2012) students suggested universities offer courses more focussed and related to their thesis topics, which would prevent the coursework assessment interfering with their research project progress. Students also indicated the high pressure environment was brutal especially since they were being introduced to knowledge production and are trying to familiarise themselves with this environment.

Research by Kite et al. (2012) shared the experiences of the honours students in how they perceived research as a cyclical process indicating that research was not a linear process and there are no clear cut categories between the various stages of research. Students' view was

that although the different sections appeared to be separate in the final thesis paper, introduction, literature review, methodology results and discussion, in fact all these sections were connected and informed each other. What was evident for the students was that the research process was iterative rather than a linear process; students had to learn and relearn explore and re-explore. The students had to consistently revisit and review their original ideas and thoughts towards a more refined and clear point towards submitting their final thesis.

According to Kite et al. (2012) constant reflection and reconsideration for students can be perplexing and demoralizing. The students' perceived that the constant change of ideas without getting closer to resolving them was frustrating. What was vital for students was to embrace the cyclical process, which allowed their ideas to progress in an organic way, which in turn allowed students to be more open to new perspectives. The students indicated that the honours year study was an opportunity to identify a topic, but as a result of the time frame put on the year of study there was a limit on how far a specific topic could be explored.

Kite et al. (2012) suggest that honours study involves forming new relationships, a student/supervisor relationship. According to Kite el al. (2012) it is likely to be the most important relationship at honours level. Students revealed that the supervisors had a major influence in the quality of their research and the broad context of the honours experience for them. The students noted that it was, therefore, important for them to maintain a good relationship with their supervisors and the relationship is dependent on both the student and the supervisor. Prior to engaging with their supervisor some of the students were unsure about what to expect from the student/supervisor relationship, there were concerns that supervisors would assume the role of an authoritarian figure and dominate the direction of the research (Kite et al, 2012). The study indicates that students quickly figured out that supervisors were not a fountain of knowledge but rather as a figure who would help guide their research. According to Schweinsberg and McManus (2006) such freedom can be scary at times for the student, it is however likely to be rewarding to cultivate a sense of ownership over your ideas as opposed to regurgitating those of others.

According to Kite et al. (2012) students' perception of what makes a good supervisor is facilitating open communication and clarifying roles from the onset. Clarification of roles led to accurate expectation identification and consistent mutual understanding. A good supervisor according to students has the ability to guide the student through a research process and prompt for additional knowledge, which involves a holistic approach of academics through emotional,

practical and or ethical guidance. Supervisors had the ability to draw on their network and numerous years of experience to show possibilities of information that students may not have had access to. Supervisors enabled the students to move from the known and start getting comfortable working with autonomy and innovation. In addition, students mentioned the support of other honours students as being a key component of the honours year. The honours year can be isolating, students found comfort in the fact that there were other students in similar situations with the same stresses and deadlines; it allowed them to have a community in which they could share and assist each other with work related issues or concerns.

Allan (2011) suggests that students had positive experiences regarding the honours programme, with the passion, excitement and enjoyment associated with the year of study being amongst the characteristics mentioned by the students. All students indicated that they had benefited from the programme. According to Allan (2011) students perceived that they had obtained good research skills; the year was about preparing the students to do more in future. There was an appreciation by the students pertaining to the depth of knowledge they had acquired and the skills they had gained during the honours year of study.

Kite et al. (2012) indicated that the honours year is an exciting and a challenging experience for the student. The main objective is to complete the year of study for qualification purposes, but even more valuable are the skills and knowledge that were gained throughout the study period. The finest details such as time management and embracing an analytical mind-set to the honours year equipped students with an array set of new skills. The students indicated that after finishing their honours year, they felt more confident about their own abilities. The study also indicated that students perceived that the honours year resulted in their having improved chances of being employable, they believed that they had developed skills beyond those generally acquired in a bachelor's degree in areas of problem solving, literature searching and reviews, project planning and development, and taking personal responsibility and ownership over their work (Kite et al., p11, 2012). According to Kite et al. (2012) the students viewed the honours programme as a pathway to many possibilities and futures; students perceived the rewards were worth the effort that they had put into their honours year of study.

2.1.6 <u>Pursuing Higher Education</u>

Kaye and Bates (2017) proposed that there are various reasons for a student to pursue courses in psychology; there are vocational reasons, career prospects, familiarity of the education system and the versatility that psychology offers to students. Kaye and Bates (2017) state that youth could experience conflict of interest because of the lack of job opportunity; this can often result in youth turning to higher education in the attempt to adequately address the lack of job opportunity. Indicating that the motivation to study is in gaining better opportunities to the job market as opposed to interest in the subject matter of the course or psychology.

According to Kaye and Bates (2017) the results also showed that a participant strongly suggested that continuation of education is an accepted norm. Students come from a schooling system and in some cases there is a perception that the norm is that a student will move on to study at a tertiary level/higher education. In the above mentioned case the student's rationale for pursuing studies at university is based on keeping familiarity and societal norms. Participants also indicated that psychology was chosen as a result of the versatility associated with the discipline, ranging from the learning outcomes during study period to the different career prospects that students could pursue from studying psychology. Finally, the vocational aspect was a common theme as to why students pursued psychology courses. Students were aware that a degree in psychology was a prerequisite to becoming a registered professional as a clinical psychologist, counselling psychologist, educational psychologist or industrial psychologist.

Kaye and Bates (2017) also make a distinction between younger generation students and older adult students. According to Villar et al. (2010) older adults take up university courses for personal growth opportunities and to remain mentally active. This may differ slightly to the 'traditional' student who may put greater emphasis on career alternatives and may be tactical in choosing specific types of courses with greater career options following graduation. There has been ample research that indicates students have a tendency to have a vocational orientation attitude towards university (Jian et al. 2010; Krutii & Fursov 2007; Lehmann, 2009; Loeber & Higson 2009).

2.1.7 <u>Workplace perspective</u>

According to Kraak (2010) many graduates after completing their university studies find themselves without any idea of the steps or measures they need to take in gaining entrance to the workplace or the skills they need for the career options available to them; this is a growing problem in the South African context. One of the contributing factors may be the lack of a direct link to the workplace; students studying degrees in the social sciences are often self-sponsored and have no link to potential organisations prior to or after the period of study (Kraak, 2010). This non-existing relationship between the graduates of the social sciences and potential organisations that will employ graduates leads to under prepared graduates and unsatisfied organisations.

Many jobs have been created but the rate at which they are created is far slower than the graduates seeking entrance into the labour market (Kraak, 2010). In addition, the employers seek experience which many graduates do not have. The reason behind the desirability of experienced workers has to be the minimal guidance they would require and the practical skills they would bring to the workplace in contrast to the textbook knowledge that graduates offer. Students who majored in psychology have untapped potential for training and there is an urgent need for alternative routes to better prepare graduates for workplace training (Richter et al, 1998).

Stewart and Knowles (1999) proposed that providing students with greater awareness of employment opportunities and allowing or promoting a proactive engagement with potential employers, can lead to better and more effective self-management. The exposure to potential employers during a recruitment and selection processes is a vital part which can influence a graduate's development of appropriate expectation and informs the early development of an individual's psychological contract with the organisation. The incongruence in relation to graduates' expectations and realities of employment has been linked to inadequate recruitment procedures (Scholarios et al., 2003). It is argued that exposure to potential organisations through recruitment and selection is a social process whereby the two parties, organisations and employees, gradually perceive a match. The majority of students in their final year of study will have had some contact with potential employers. Graduates who are part of dedicated professional courses are most likely to gain information pertaining to potential employment

much more so than those graduates who registered for general courses (Stewart & Knowles, 1999).

A possible contributing factor is the link that educators of professional courses possess with practicing professionals. According to Scholarios et al., (2003) the incongruence between a graduate's expectations and the realities of work experience training can be attributed to the lack of realistic information provided to graduates. It can be argued that better matches to the workplace can result from providing realistic exposure of the profession earlier to graduates. Furthermore, career-related work experience at university may contribute in structuring graduates' expectations.

The study further emphasised that potential employers prefer graduates with a broader range of skills than academic knowledge, which most university institutions currently offer (Scholarios et al., 2003). According to Scholarios et al., (2003) there is a clear need for career-related work experience from institutions which will go a long way to better structuring graduates' expectations and necessary skills after completion of studies.

According to Bonn et al. (2009) psychology graduates are expected to have skills and perform duties in the work context for which universities have not prepared them. Potential employers are interested in social or personal competences, attending to people effectively, managing conflict, productivity and communication skills of graduates; rather than their abilities acquired during their studies like performing quantitative or psychometrics assessments.

2.1.8 The role of the university and possible future trends

According to Maharasoa and Hay (2001), although the university is an establishment from which to gain knowledge, in a third world country like South Africa, which has been characterised by past oppressive legislative laws that have led to segregation in race, income wealth and resources, the role played by universities has to be aligned with the needs of the community in which it is situated. Knowledge acquisition to many South Africans is not enough, but rather a combination of knowledge and job opportunities that will provide monetary income is more desirable and relevant in the South African context.

Universities may need to re-evaluate what is taught to students, as research shows employers are unhappy with what current graduates have to offer in the work context (Bonn et al, 2009; Maharasoa & Hay, 2001; Richter et al., 1998; Rothwell et al., 2008). Graduates lack behavioural and emotional qualities that can contribute to job readiness, the teaching of which is obviously absent from university courses (Landrum et al., 2010). Psychology graduates feel they are not prepared or ready for the workplace. However, as stated before, the training of the professional is complete after employers have trained the graduate for a period of time as an intern. So the responsibility of providing adequate training is not solely the responsibility of the university but also the job market, employers and the graduate (Kruss, 2004; Luckett, 2001). For example, other disciplines like accounting have adopted laws and regulations focusing on attainment of a minimum level of education prior to entry into the accounting profession (Jackson, 2015). There are certain obligations that the sector requires prior to the professional gaining an occupational licence as an accountant. Graduates must obtain a learnership in a registered training office. Only after the work experience is complete, are they perceived as ready to potentially obtain a licence as a professional accountant. According to Jackson (2015), the work experience is an essential part of the learning process for the graduate. It may require organisations and businesses to play a role preparing graduates to meet labour market demands.

Makharasoa and Hay (2001) state it is evident that learners wanted a stronger linkage between universities and the workplace. Furthermore, students expressed dissatisfaction with the perception that universities valued the learners only when they could reap financial benefits and they were reluctant to invest in better linkages with the workplace to enhance student employability (Makharasoa & Hay, 2001). There are feelings or perceptions of being slightly exploited by students as they expect that their study qualifications should contribute to them becoming adequate workers after the qualification has been obtained.

A study by Choy and Delahaye (2011) reviewed a partnership between universities, workplaces and challenges for work-integrated learning in a case study pertaining to the negotiation of curriculum with a cohort of learners, managers, other academics and the university administrators (Choy& Delahaye, 2011, p.160). The purpose of partnership between the NGO and the university was to design and facilitate a tailored curriculum to improve the leadership qualities of 12 worker learners through a postgraduate course. According to Choy and Delahaye (2011) the partnership impacted the culture of the NGO and the higher education institution.

The NGO and the learners welcomed change but it was unfamiliar territory for the university culture and the associated traditional stance it had adopted. The case study pointed out that the primary product of a university is no longer the content but rather services to transform changes subsequent to the learning experiences through academic studies. The partnership relies on learning whereby the power over the curriculum and pedagogy are shared (Choy & Delahaye, 2011). The learning and success of the partnership is dependent on the redistribution of power-relations between both universities and organisations. However, Choy and Delahaye (2011) draw attention to the challenges of such experiences. It is more of a complex process than may seem and requires continuous renegotiation of power relations in order to achieve outcomes for learners as well as the workplace. In concluding Choy and Delahaye state partnership of work-integrated learning requires further research to better understand the complexities inherent in the relationship and the role of the parties involved.

Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 <u>Social Cognitive Theory</u>

There have been numerous theories that have explained human psychosocial functioning. The most common perception by various personality doctrines, has portrayed the notion of behaviour as impelled by internal forces in the forms of needs, drives and impulses, often operating below the level of consciousness (Bandura, 1989). As a result of perceiving the cause of behaviour to exist internally with the individual, researchers focused on internal explanations in an attempt to understand man's actions. Such theories were criticized on both conceptual and empirical grounds. The inner determinants were typically from behaviour they supposedly caused resulting in pseudo explanations (Bandura, 1989, p1). Often human behaviour has been explained in one-sided minism. These models perceive the causation of behaviour is considered to be shaped by an environmental influence or by internal dispositions. Social cognitive theory posits that people are self-organising, proactive, self-reflecting, self-regulating; people are not just reactive organisms shaped and shepherded by environmental forces or driven by concealed inner impulses. Human functioning is perceived as a product of dynamic interplay of personal, behavioural and environmental influences.

According to Bandura (1989), social cognitive theory explains psychosocial functioning in terms of triadic reciprocal causation. The model posits that behaviour, cognition and other

personal factors and environmental events operate as interacting determinants that influence each other bi-directionally. Bandura explains that reciprocity does not indicate that the different components are of equal strength. Nor do the reciprocal influences occur simultaneously. Social cognitive theory perceives people as both products and producers of their environment.

Cognitive Factors
(also called "Personal Factors")
· Knowledge
· Expectations
· Attitudes

Determines Human Behavior

Environmental Factors
· Social Norms
· Access in Community
· Influence on Others
(ability to change own
environment)

Behavioral Factors
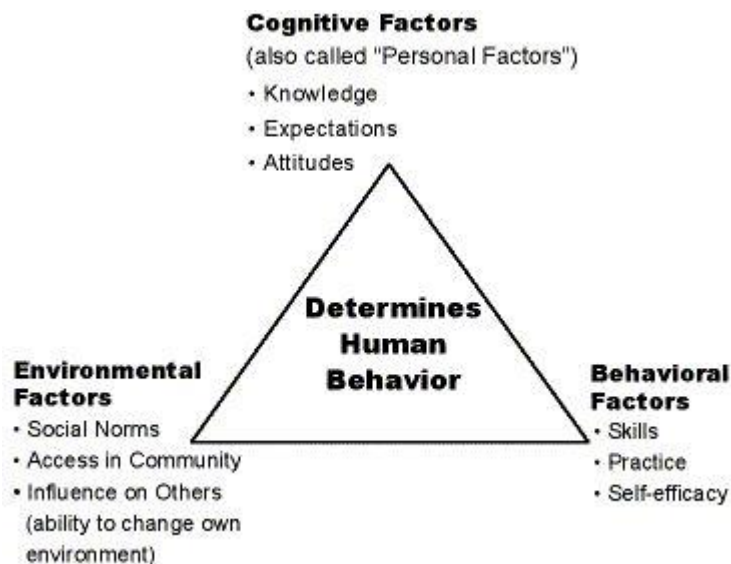· Skills
· Practice
· Self-efficacy

Figure 1: Social Cognitive Theory

Johns Hopkins University. (2016).

The social cognitive theory framework is suitable for this study as attempts to improve social wellbeing can be aimed at improving emotional, cognitive or motivational processes, increasing behavioural competencies, or altering social conditions under which people live and work. For example, in a school context, teachers have a challenge of improving the academic learning and confidence of the students for whom they are responsible. Using the social cognitive theory as a framework, teachers can work to improve their students' emotional states and to correct their faulty self-belief and habits of thinking (personal factors), improve their academics skills and self-regulatory practices (behaviour), and alter the school and classroom structures that may work to undermine student success (environmental factors). The example can be transferred to the context of the university honours programme. In an attempt to understand the honours programme, the study used the social cognitive theory framework. The framework allows for in-depth understanding and perceptions of the graduates' experience by looking at the personal factors, behavioural factors and environmental factors to alter the programme to meet the needs of the graduates.

2.2.2 Social learning

According to Bandura (1989), from a social learning perspective, the individual is not driven by an inner force or stifled helplessly by environmental influences. Psychological functioning is best understood in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between behaviour and its controlling conditions. Traditional theories of learning portray behaviour as the product of directly experienced response consequences. Most learning phenomena results from direct experiences and arises on a vicarious basis through observation of other people's behaviour and its consequences for them. Similarly, emotional responses can be improved by observing and witnessing the effective reactions of others undergoing painful or pleasurable experiences.

An individual's cognitive capacity is also a component that determines how a person will be affected by his experience and the future direction his actions may take. According to Bandura (1989) the individual is capable of creating self-regulative influences through managing the stimulus determinants of given activities and producing consequences for their own actions. People are able to control their own behaviour to some degree.

In social learning new patterns of behaviour can be attained through direct experiences or by witnessing the behaviour of others. It is believed that responses are automatically and unconsciously strengthened by their immediate consequences. Social learning focusses on personal and behavioural factors; the relevance to this study is to get a better understanding of the role the graduates have of achieving their goals and how they can regulate and influence their own situation despite external factors and influences.

2.2.3 Self-regulated learning

Self-regulated learning can be defined as the degree that students are meta-cognitively, motivationally and behaviourally active participants in their own learning process (Zimmerman, 1989). A study interested in academic self-regulated learning explored processes that students use to initiate and direct their efforts to acquire knowledge and skill (Zimmerman, 1989).

The study indicated that the social cognitive assumptions pertaining to the students' view of self-regulated academic learning consist of triadic reciprocity. The proposed view of students'

self-regulated learning assumes reciprocal causation among three influence processes. According social cognitive theory self-regulated learning is not determined merely by personal processes; the processes are influenced by environmental and behavioural events in a reciprocal manner. Bandura (1986) stated that reciprocity does not indicate symmetry in strength or temporal patterning of bi-directional influence. For instance, environmental influence may be stronger than behavioural or personal ones in some contexts or during behavioural interaction sequences. Zimmerman (1989) illustrates this using an example of schools with extremely controlled curricula or restrictive codes for classroom conduct and many forms of self-regulated learning such that student planning or self-reward may be stifled. Zimmerman believed that self-regulated learning occurs to the degree that a student can use individual processes to strategically regulate behaviour and the immediate learning environment.

According to Zimmerman (1989) there are three general components of strategies for increasing the regulatory influence of a person's processes. There are strategies designed to control behaviour, the environment, or covert processes. Firstly, a student's self-evaluation strategy will provide information about accuracy and whether checking must continue through inactive feedback in this reciprocal depiction, causation is personally initiated, implemented through use of strategies and inactively regulated through perception of efficacy. Secondly the environmental self-regulation speaks to the students' proactive environmental manipulation strategy. Arrangement of suitable study facilities to complete their school work; this could include an intervening behavioural sequence of room-altering responses such as eliminating noise, arranging adequate lighting and arranging a place to write. Thirdly an individual's covert processes also reciprocally affect each other. There is a role that is played by the meta-cognitive processes on other personal processes such as bases of knowledge or affective states.

Bandura (1986) presumed that the relative strength and the temporal patterning of mutual causation among personal, environmental and behavioural influences can be changed through personal efforts to self-regulate, outcomes of behavioural performance and changes in the environmental context. Bandura made use of an example of a student who struggles to memorize the names of certain bones in a course in human anatomy. The individual may improve by deciding to self-record the names of the bones he does not remember, which is the first influence (personal efforts) and the second influence (outcomes behavioural performance) or the third influence (changes in environmental context) would be when another student enters the equation seeking to jointly memorize the list . According to Bandura researchers seeking

to better understand self-regulated learning must be cognisant of the impact of variations in context and personal experience of the individual.

2.2.4 <u>Self-efficacy</u>

The social cognitive theory perceives that self-efficacy is a vital variable affecting cause of behaviour. Self-efficacy can be defined as an individual's beliefs or confidence about his or her abilities, mobilize motivation, cognitive resources, and course of action needed to successfully execute a specific task within a given context (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998, p1). Prior to an individual selecting choice and initiating effort, they are most likely to evaluate and integrate information about their perceived capabilities. Self-efficacy determines whether an individual's behaviour will be initiated in a given context, how much effort will be expanded, and how long that effort will be sustained. Individuals with a high sense of self-efficacy are more likely to activate sufficient effort which would probably yield positive outcomes. On the opposite side of the spectrum, individuals with low self-efficacy are likely to prematurely stop putting in effort towards a certain task and have a higher probability of failing.

According to Bandura (1993) perceived self-efficacy exerts its influence via four major processes. Namely the cognitive, motivational, affective and selection processes. Cognitive processes speak to the fact that much of human behaviour, which is purposive is regulated by forethought embodying cognized goals. Individual goal setting is influenced by self-efficacy, the more difficult the goals people set for themselves the more likely they are to be committed to those goals (Bandura, 1991).

The motivational processes speak to the assumption that human motivation is cognitively generated. Individuals motivate themselves and direct their actions by the exercise of forethought. They construct beliefs on what it is they can do. They anticipate/predict likely outcomes of prospective actions. Individuals set goals for themselves and plan courses of action designed to realise valued futures. Forethought is translated into incentives and appropriate action through self-regulated mechanisms.

Bandura (1993) posits that individuals' beliefs pertaining to their own capabilities affect how much stress and depression they experience in threatening or difficult situations, as well as their level of motivation. Affective processes are the perceived efficacy to gain control over stressors which plays a focal point in anxiety arousal. Individuals who believe they can exercise control over threats do not invoke disturbing thought patterns. On the opposite side of the spectrum those who believe they cannot manage threat experience high anxiety arousal. These individuals are likely to perceive their environment as troubled with danger. As a result of their ineffective thinking they are likely to distress themselves and impair their level of functioning.

Selection processes address the assumption that people are moderately the product of their environment. Indicating that personal efficacy can shape the course lives take by influencing choice of activities and environment (Bandura, 1993). Individuals tend to avoid situations they perceive to be exceeding their coping capabilities. In contrast they will willingly take on tasks and challenges and situations they believe they are capable of coping with. The choices an individual makes, cultivate different competencies, interests and social networks that determine life courses.

Bandura (1993) indicates that self-efficacy operates at three different levels to contribute to academic development. The individual or students' belief in their efficacy to regulate their own learning and to master academic activities determines their aspirations, level of motivation and academic accomplishments. Educators' beliefs in their personal efficacy to motivate and encourage learning affect the types of learning environment they create and the level of academic progress their students accomplish. The faculties' belief in their collective instructional efficacy contribute significantly to the schools' level of academic achievement.

Bandura (1993) believes that an individual's self-influence affects the selection and construction of environments. The impact of most environmental influences on human motivation, affect and action, is heavily mediated through self-processes. It gives meaning and value to external events. Self-influence thus operates as important proximal determinants at the core of causal processes. Efficacy beliefs influence how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave.

The social cognitive theory allows for a holistic approach to understanding the experience of graduates and the influence the honours programmes had on their careers. Social cognitive theory facilitated an in-depth perspective of the cause of behaviour pertaining to individuals. It explored internal and external factors to understanding human behaviour. The framework has

been used to better understand schools and the challenges that they face (Bandura, 1986), it is transferable to the university context. The framework extended to self-regulated learning which posits that graduates are motivationally and behaviourally active participants in their own learning processes. Self-regulated learning explored how students acquire knowledge and skills and how it can contribute to better understanding the graduates' experience of the honours programmes. Taking into consideration the role that self-efficacy plays in human behaviour.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 <u>Aim</u>

The aim of the study is to explore graduates' perception of the honours programme, to explore the experiences of the graduates during their study period and whether it adequately prepares or has relevance to students for life or work after the completion of the programme. The study will seek to find out the perceptions that graduates have about the role the honours programme had on their careers and employment options.
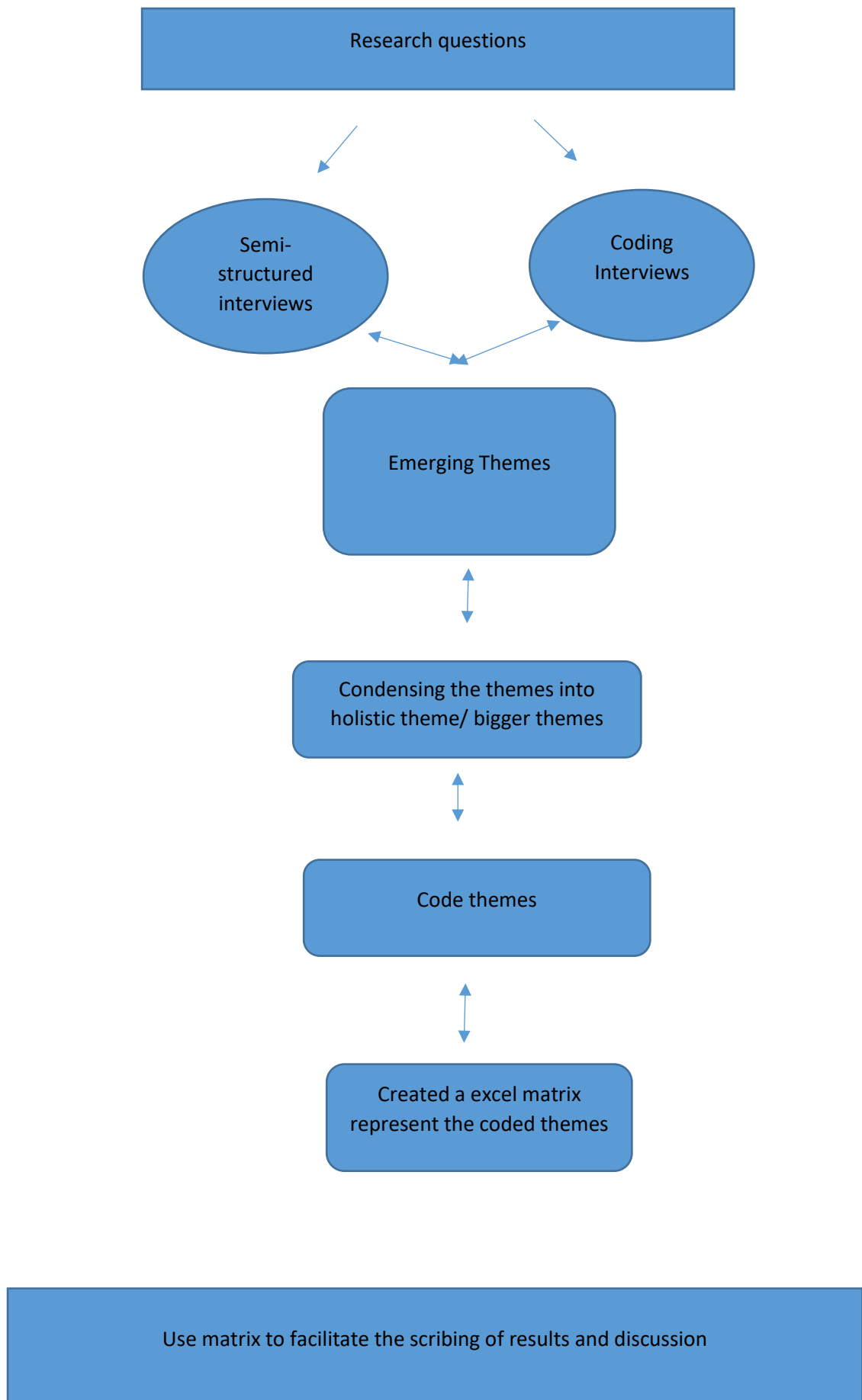
3.2 <u>Research Questions</u>

1. What are graduates' perceptions of the honours programme?
2. What are graduates' experiences during the programme?
3. Perception of the programmes' relevance to the workplace?

3.3 <u>Rationale</u>

There have been calls from government to higher education students to view their schooling as an investment, thus the growing number of students pursuing post-graduate degrees (Tomlinson, 2008). The idea behind it is that degrees can provide students with higher levels of understanding in their particular field of study; potentially more practical engagement with studies and possibly those individuals can have a competitive edge within the workplace. The study explored graduates' experiences of the honours programme. How the graduates experienced the study period and the influence this period had on their career or prospects after completing the honours programme. The study explored whether graduates perceived the programme to be effective with respect to adequately addressing the set objectives of the various courses and overall year of the honours programme.

Many students find themselves under prepared for employment after completing their studies. Therefore the role of the university concerning graduated students should focus on better equipping graduates for the various roles and options available to them after their period of studies.

It is important that students are equipped with the necessary skills and support to make informed career decisions (Mhlongo, 2009). Graduates need to have access to all the information regarding the honours programme course and the objectives of the programme should be clearly stated. This would ensure that both graduates and the university have realistic expectations for the study period and the outcomes after completion of the honours programme. For many graduates who pursue the route of employment, being a new employee can be an overwhelming experience; assistance from the institutions might be fundamental to the success of the period after completion of studies for graduate students. If students received adequate guidance, necessary skills and information about the specific possibilities regarding psychology, graduates could address the workplace related experience, which in turn would better prepare new employees and address some of the shortcomings that employers have indicated about new graduates in organisations.

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    │    Semi-    │          │   Coding    │
    │ structured  │          │ Interviews  │
    │ interviews  │          │             │
    ╰─────────────╯          ╰─────────────╯
              ↘          ↙
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          │                     │
          │   Emerging Themes   │
          │                     │
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          ┌─────────────────────────┐
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          │ into holistic theme/    │
          │ bigger themes           │
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          │      Code themes        │
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          │ Created a excel matrix  │
          │ represent the coded     │
          │ themes                  │
          └─────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Use matrix to facilitate the scribing of results and │
│                    discussion                         │
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Figure 2: Research process

Zamokuhle Ngubo (2017)

3.4 <u>Research Methodology</u>

The present study adopted a qualitative approach; qualitative research is primarily concerned with understanding human beings' experiences in a humanistic, interpretive approach (Jackson et al., 2007). It allowed for participants to share their lived experiences and perceptions of the honours programme. Qualitative research allows for the in depth exploration of the participant's perceptions of the honours programme, to give their informed viewpoints and influence on their careers and career options. A qualitative study enables the study to produce rich data from the individuals that serves to provide a perspective that directly affects the people involved in the honours programme (Neuman & Neuman, 2006).

<u>Sampling</u>

3.4.1 <u>Sampling method</u>

The present research made use two non-probability sampling methods, purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling technique. This type of sampling allows for a researcher's discretion into what is investigated and the specific participants who are needed to provide the necessary information required. The objective is to focus on a particular characteristic of a population that is of interest, which will enable the researcher to answer the research question. The sampling enables the research study to select participants who are of importance to the research or participants who enable the researcher to give relevant information to the subject of the study (Neuman & Neuman, 2006). Snowball sampling is using the current research participants to recruit other participants for a study. This method suggests that the initial participants recruit other participants and those participants recruit yet more participants; once the ball is rolling is, it will pick up more along the way, hence the term snowball sampling (Neuman & Neuman, 2006).

3.4.2 <u>Participants</u>

The study was administered on a graduated industrial psychology and general psychology honours class at a university institution in Durban, South Africa. Participants were recruited if they had successfully passed their industrial psychology or general psychology honours degree from the university institution in South Africa and were currently employed. They had to have

graduated within the last five years so that they were relevant participants to answer current arguments pertaining to the honours programme. The participants were recruited by making contact with graduates from the past honours class, making use of phone calls or text messages. Participants who agreed to take part in the research were encouraged to suggest other participants who were currently employed and had been students in the honours programme in industrial psychology and general psychology. The study had both female and male participants to ensure that there was no gender bias. The sample size was eight participants consisting of females and male participants.

The demographics of the study were important so as to try to represent accurately the demographics of graduates from the institution from which the research took place. As shown in table 2 below there were four females of which one was an Indian female and three black African females. There were four males of which one was black African, two coloured and one Indian. The participants selected ensured that the study could receive accurate information regarding graduates' perception of the honours programme and their experiences after completing the study period and embarking on their different endeavours.

Table 2: Table of participants

Graduates' perception of the honours programme and the influence it had on their career and employment options/employability								
Matrix Response								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Gender	female	female	male	male	male	male	female	female
Age	22	22	26	22	22	24	23	21
Race	Indian	African	African	coloured	coloured	Indian	African	African
Degree	industrial/ general	industrial	general psych	honours industrial	general psych	honours industrial	honours industrial	honours industrial
Type Of Job	HR internship	HR internship	HR internship	Accounts manager	management	Debt collection	Training and development	OD internship

3.4.3 <u>Instruments</u>

Interviews can be defined as a qualitative research technique which requires conducting concentrated individual interviews with a small number of participants to explore their perception on a particular situation (Seidman, 2013). There are three different formats of interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. According to Seidman (2013) structured interviews consist of pre-determined questions that all participants answer in the same order. Data analysis usually tends to be more straightforward because the researcher can compare and contrast different answers given to the same questions.

Unstructured interviews entail no questions prepared prior to the interview and data collection is conducted in an informal manner. Unstructured interviews can be linked with a high level of partiality and comparison of answers given by different respondents tends to be difficult due to the differences in formulation of questions (Seidman, 2013). Semi-structured interviews contain the components of both, structured and unstructured interviews. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer prepares a set of questions to be answered by all participants. At the same time, supplementary questions might be asked during interviews to clarify and/or expand on certain issues.

Interviews were conducted to gather data from participants. Interview schedules were used to collect data and questions that were used in the schedule were semi-structured. The questions were in-depth to allow the participants to share meaningful information pertaining to the topic. The questions were informed by the literature, which lacked a student perspective in its inquiry. In addition to using the literature review to guide the questions of the semi-structured interviews, questions that would inform/address the research questions were used. The semi-structured interview was used as guideline to ensure that there was consistency in the line of questioning while also allowing the interviewees to share their perceptions regarding the honours programme.

Interviews lasted between 35 to 60 minutes and varied from one participant to another. Some participants had a great deal to share while other participants had less and required rigorous probing to share relevant information. Four interviews took place on campus in quiet tutorial rooms. The other four interviews took place at the respective participants' place of employment, as they had indicated that that was the most convenient place for them.

3.4.4 <u>Data collection procedure</u>

Interviews were recorded via a tape recorder and immediately saved onto a laptop and a USB memory stick as back up. The recordings were sent to a professional transcriber to be transcribed verbatim. After receiving the transcriptions, an analysis was done to compare the transcriptions to the original recordings, so as to ensure that they were accurate and corresponded with the original recording and information provided by the participants. The transcriptions were safely saved and stored in a word document on a laptop, which was later used for data analysis.

Prior to approaching the participants an ethical clearance application was required and granted by the research institution and the gatekeepers which was also the institution. Participants were approached and the aim of the study was explained to the potential participants. The participants who agreed to participate in the study were asked to sign an informed consent form. It was made explicitly clear that the interviews would take place at a place of convenience to the participants. The interviews was were conducted in English, which was a language that participants were comfortable speaking and adequately understood. The present study's data collection lasted for two months.

3.4.5 <u>Feedback</u>

Follow up interviews were made to provide participants with detailed information of the findings and results of the research study. The participants were contacted with a date and place of convenience for the participant for the feedback interview. In the follow up interview participants were questioned about any difficulties that may have occurred as a result of participating in the research study. Furthermore, full disclosure of the findings and results were shared with participants.

3.4.6 <u>Data analysis</u>

Data was analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). It minimally organises and describes the data set in rich detail. The study made use of a Theoretical Thematic

Analysis, indicating that the analysis was driven by the researcher's theoretical interest in the area of study. This form of thematic analysis tends to provide less rich description of the data overall, but more detailed analysis of some aspects of the data. The research focused on semantic themes as opposed to latent themes. Indicating that themes were based on the surface meaning of the data and summarised to interpretation, where there was an attempt to theorise the significance of the themes, the broader meaning and implications were used.

Thematic Analysis consists of six phases

1. The researcher to familiarise him/herself with the data: The researcher to read and re-read the transcription to familiarise him/herself with the data and start making notes of potential ideas that could emerge.

2. Generating initial codes: This phase consists of coding interesting features of the data in systematic fashion. The researcher starts to highlight and tag comments in the transcriptions, using data that was interesting and relevant to the research.

3. Searching for themes: The researcher collates codes into potential themes and then refers to comments made and codes generated to construct potential themes.

4. Reviewing themes: this phased requires the researcher to check the themes in relation to the coded data extracts and the entire data sets.

5. Defining and naming themes: the fifth stage requires the researcher to analyse the data further and refine the existing themes. This phase allows the researcher to generate clear definitions and names for each theme. The researcher reviews the data and refines the data into main themes and sub-themes.

Producing the report: in the last phase the researcher selects vivid, compelling extract examples, undertakes a final analysis of selected extracts relating back to the analysis of the research question and literature, and finally the researcher produces a scholarly report of the analysis The results section of the report is informed from selected extracts from the data which represent the themes.

Thematic analysis was suitable for the present study, to identify the emerging themes from the interviews and the patterns that students reported, pertaining to the honours programme and the influence it had had on their careers and career options/employability as graduates. From the emerging themes data was coded and a matrix on Microsoft excel was used to capture all the themes and findings and discussions.

3.4.6 <u>Ethical considerations</u>

<u>Credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability</u>

Credibility deals with questions such as how congruent is the research with reality and appropriate operational measures for the concept being studied (Shenton, 2004). The questions from the semi-structured interview schedule of the study were aligned to previous research that was similar to the current research study. Prior to the interviews, a rapport was built to ensure familiarity with the culture of participants. The research project was reviewed by the supervisor, other researchers and other academic staff members to ensure that the researcher received useful feedback pertaining to the research study. The process that was used to gather questions for the interview schedule was rigorous and iterative. Material similar to that found in previous studies was adopted for the present study, in terms of the investigation regarding information-seeking behaviour (Shenton, 2004). No participants were forced; every participant was given the opportunity to refuse to participate in the study (Shenton, 2004). The process of the project has been open to peer scrutiny to provide the researcher with valuable feedback.

The present study provides sufficient descriptions of the phenomenon being investigated for all those who read it to have a good understanding; this will enable the comparison of the described phenomenon and this research report to their own situations (Shenton, 2004). All the important characteristics of the methodology were made explicit.

Regarding dependability, the process was explicitly detailed so that other researchers who carry out similar research could replicate the study although the results would not be the same. This will allow the reader to evaluate whether proper research methods had been used for the research study (Shenton, 2004).

Confirmability is the result of the experiences and thoughts of participants, not the preference of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). Vital to confirmability is a reflexive approach to administering the research and being aware of the researcher's biases. The fact that the researcher was also an honours class graduate and was aware of his predispositions and the potential bias to analysing the data was something that was constantly monitored through peer reviews.

Informed consent: all participants were briefed pertaining to informed consent. In addition they had read and signed the informed consent form prior to participating in the interviews. The decision to participate or not to participate in the study was entirely up to the participant. The study had no evident risks. The researcher was free to stop the study or choose to remove participants without their consent if it was felt that their well-being was under threat at any point during the research study.

Withdrawal from study: participants could voluntarily ask to stop or be excluded from participating in the study at any time. It was made clear to participants that no penalties or discrimination would occur to participants who chose to exclude themselves from the study.

Gatekeeper permission: prior to commencing the study, the researcher ensured that gatekeeper permission had been granted by the institution in which the study took place.

Ethical clearance: ethical clearance was granted for the study prior to the researcher engaging with participants.

3.5 <u>Location of the Study</u>

The present study took place in an institution situated in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa as all the participants were familiar with the location. For graduate students who were not nearby, a place convenient to them and was suitable to administer the interviews for the present study was arranged or alternatively traveling costs to the campus was made available to participants. The interviews were held in a quiet room no later than 11:00am so as to avoid or limit any other external factors that could hinder the participants' concentration to provide insightful feedback on the semi-structured questions. Each interview lasted for a minimum of 30 minutes per participant and the participants were made aware of this prior to commencement of the interview. The room was checked for any possible distractions so as to ensure that participants were focused on the questions.

3.7 <u>Limitations</u>

The study may have been influenced by the fact that the experiences of the study period of general psychology honours graduates were most likely to have been vastly different from those of the industrial psychology students and hence their initial experience of the job market may have differed somewhat. The initial thought was that the career paths of both general and industrial psychology students at an honours programme level of study would be similar. Secondly using participants from industrial psychology and general psychology allowed for broader information about honours programmes in general as opposed to one specific programme. The time at which graduates were interviewed may have had an influence with regard to how they answered the questions; a graduate who had recently started a job was most likely to perceive more gaps regarding the skills/capacity to fulfil the job requirements than someone who was interviewed at a later stage of employment who may have perceived that they were more or less capable of doing their job. This in turn could have influenced how the participants perceived what they studied and how it integrated with what was required of the job they presently held. It was difficult to find graduates who had completed the honours programme at the same time and also started working within a similar time frame. The expectation of graduates and the university may require analysis, which may contribute to students' perceptions regarding the honours programme.

Chapter 4: Results

The emergent themes and sub-themes pertaining to graduates' perception of the honours programme and the influence it has on employment options/employability were as follows:

(a) **Theme 1: Experience of the honours programme and the challenges during the honours programme**

(b) **Theme 2: Transition to the workplace**

(c) **Theme 3: Suggestions for improvement regarding the honours programme**
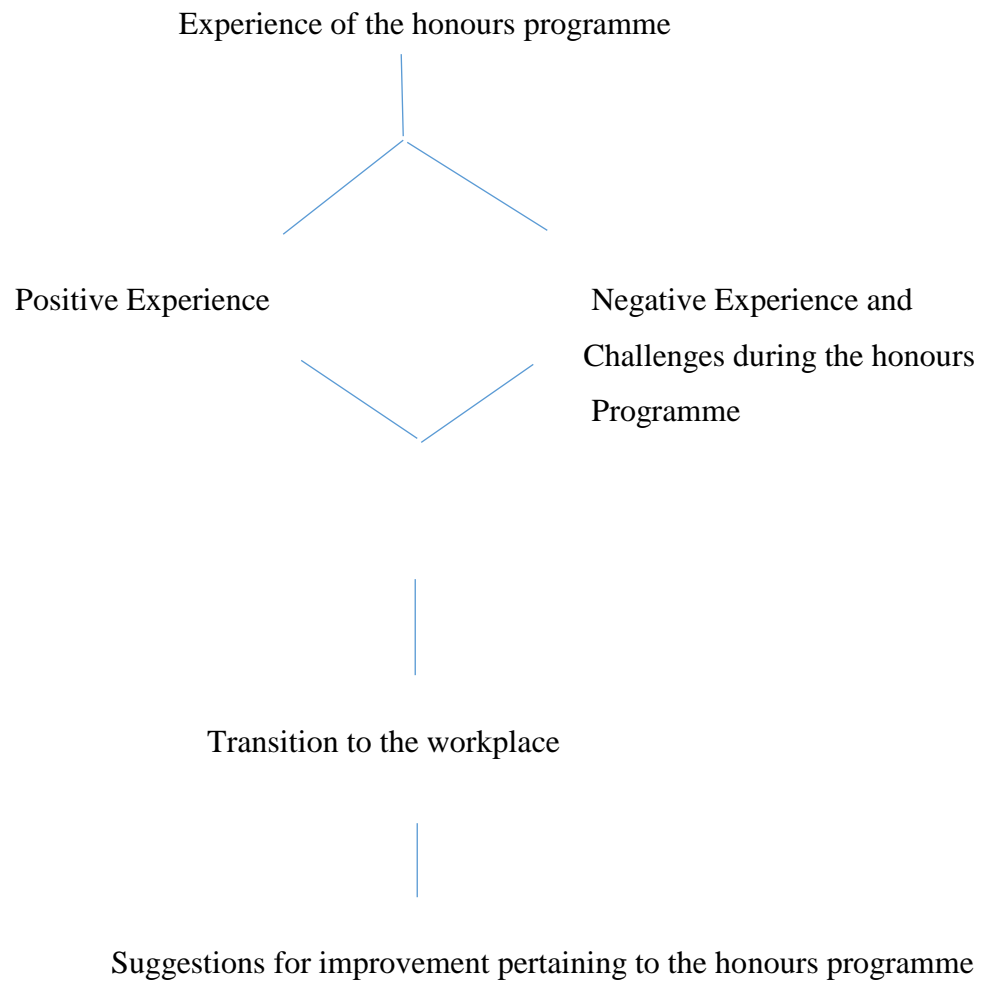
Table 3: Themes

Theme	Sub-theme
Experience of the honours programme	1. Positive experience 2. Negative experience
Challenges during the honours programme	
Transition to the workplace	
Suggestions for improvement regarding the honours programme	1. Practicality 2. Guidance and support

The results indicate there was an appreciation of psychology equipping graduates with vital skills and experiences that they could make use of within the workplace after a period of study, such as behavioural issues, critical thinking to deal with work situations or tasks and organisational development to mention a few positives that participants shared. Some of the participants revealed that they had gained valuable skills during their study period at honours level, presentation skills, problem solving, interviewing skills and the ability to engage with different personalities. However, they did raise a few concerns regarding the honours programme. The large numbers of students made it challenging for graduates to receive the desired support they expected, the limited supervision capacity and timing of the research project was also reported by graduates. In addition, perceptions of not preparing learners well enough to meet challenges after the completion of the study period, specifically regarding graduates' expectations, one of which was a lack of practical exposure pertaining to the nature of how the programme was taught. As stated by Kruss (2004), a participant's experience indicates that the learning process at university may need to have a workplace component to transfer the theory knowledge into practice that would result in graduates meeting workplace tangible objectives set by organisations or business.

Table 4: Theme and link to Social Cognitive Theory

Theme	Component of Social Cognitive Theory
Theme 1: Experience of the honours programme	
Positive experience	1. Cognitive factors 2. Behavioural factors 3. Environmental factors 4. Experiential learning 5. Self-efficacy
Negative experience and Challenges during the honours programme	1. Cognitive factors (knowledge) 2. Environmental factors 3. Environmental factors (large classes) (Support structure)
Theme 2: Transition to the workplace	1. Cognitive factors (knowledge) 2. Behavioural factors (skills) 3. Experiential learning 4. External locus of control 5. Self-efficacy 6. Motivation
Theme 3: Suggestions for improvement pertaining to honours programme	
Practicality	1. Cognitive factors (knowledge 2. Environmental factors (large numbers)
Support and guidance	1. Cognitive (Expectation) 2. Environmental factors (engagement with workplace)

Experience of the honours programme

Positive Experience

Negative Experience and
Challenges during the honours
Programme

Transition to the workplace

Suggestions for improvement pertaining to the honours programme

Figure 3: Results

Zamokuhle Ngubo (2017)

4.1.1 <u>Theme 1: Experience of the honours programme (positive)</u>

Seven of the participants had some positive aspect to share regarding the programme. A few participants made reference to the presentation skills that they gained during their study period, how standing in front of a large class and having to present on a specific topic was beneficial when the entered the job market. They were able to use the skill of presenting as they had prior experience during the programme. One participant shared that the theory content was critically analysed throughout all the modules but the content had to constantly be related to the South African context. That sort of thinking helped in the work place as the graduates felt as a result they were able to make informed decisions by analysing every situation critically.

> It was nice to present the subject matter with the guidance of the lecture; it improved presentation skills. Honours programme taught me to be more critical in my viewing of the literature, where it's not just "okay this textbook says that and that's it."; you could actually see how all the theories come together basically and how it fits in with each other and sort of in a way learn how to apply it to the South African context. (P1)

Four participants made mention of the positive role that lectures had on their thinking (1, 6, 7 and 8), how they were able to critically apply themselves in situations because of the studies that they had been exposed to during the honours programme. One of the major themes in the findings was the yearning for a practical component to the programme that would have better prepared graduates for employment.

> I enjoyed the lecturers. They treated us better, they treated us as adults. They were willing to help us with whatever we had. Obviously I did my honours in psychology and it's one of the most in-depth and most absorbing subjects or modules that I have done.; It helped me think critically about the work, which is a positive because I think critically about the world now and it did open my eyes a lot.(P5)

The programme was facilitated in a way that graduates had to learn how to work in group situations; some graduates found this aspect of the course to be beneficial.

I find working in groups quite effective, more than working alone... The stuff that was covered was relevant I'd say. Well, I believe that two brains are better than one. So, whatever I couldn't think of someone else could think of. (P2)

Graduates perceived the programme to assist them in gaining planning skills and the ability to meet set deadlines by prioritising their work.

We had to prioritise things, our submissions, and in terms of having too many things to submit at the same time; presentations. (P7)

4.1.2 <u>Experience of the honours programme (Negative) and Challenges during the honours programme in psychology</u>

The graduates indicated that there were negative experiences during the honours programme. Two participants mentioned the issue of the number of students allocated to classes being too excessive to be productive.

I think regarding the sizes of the classes, it was just not good. (P1)

The number of people we had in our honours class and then I try and relate it to how I learn as a person and I realized that it was just… it was overcrowded. (P4)

One of the graduates indicated that he was dissatisfied with the level of intellectual engagement of other students during the honours programme.

But I felt that there wasn't a lot of maturity amongst the honours class which is a big thing because you need maturity when you come to argue with people… I think that in terms of emotion, in terms of intellect/intelligence and in terms of just general maturity and emotional maturity which binds the first things I said. (P5)

Graduates suggested that the number of students made it challenging to engage in depth with the subject matter for the various modules in the honours programme. In addition, the graduates indicated there was a lack of attention as a result of the number of students lecturers were

expected to assist. Graduates felt that there was a lack of guidance pertaining to their research projects as lecturers had limited time to assist graduates adequately during period of study.

> When it gets to honours, it's supposed to be really in-depth and you're supposed to be discussing concepts in depth, academically, socially and also our different upbringings. Culturally how we view things and yes, it just wasn't possible in a class of 120 odd. (P4)

> It became quite difficult when it came to group-work where you have like ten or eleven people in one group and it was just, it wasn't structured I think very well. I think that the large classes weren't really beneficial to us because we couldn't get the full honours experience. It's hard to maintain because a lot of people don't really pull their weight and then you're left having to cover up for their work and I think the groups were just too big to really function. (P1)

> I was doing a research project of about, I think 120 odd of us in one class and it just meant that I had one hour a week to see my supervisor, whereas in other universities you would be liaising with your supervisor on a nearly daily basis. And so my research really struggled in a sense that when it did come time to give in my first draft, it just wasn't up to scratch... (P4)

Graduates perceived the numbers to be a major area of concern, as the large number of students in the honours class made it challenging to get the necessary support from lecturers and supervisors. In addition, there was a perception that as a result of the large intake into the programme the expected standard of work and engagement in classes dropped significantly.

4.2.1 <u>Theme 2: Transition to workplace</u>

All industrial psychology graduates (1, 2, 4, 6, 7 and 8) indicated that the programme had some influence in preparing them for employment. One participant made mention that what they were doing in their current role as an HR intern is material they had covered in theory during their study period; there was a sense of preparedness in that regard. However, they still had no practical experience and that component of their employment was like starting from scratch. Participant 8 who was an organisation development consultant intern stated that they had

acquired a wealth of knowledge about most of what they were doing in the workplace. They were going through lots of changes in management and restructuring all of which the participant had been exposed to in theory during their studies in the honours industrial psychology programme.

> Specifically, in my world of work, they assigned me to organisational development. I learnt about it in class but it is emphasized that it is all about change management. So in that regard it has relevance because there are a whole lot of changes that we deal with within the organisation. (P8)

In addition to having the knowledge of the content that they had been exposed to in the work environment, they revealed that their studies had equipped them with skills that were beneficial in the role. They indicated they had the ability to be observant, to critically analyse situations and have the necessary interpersonal skills to communicate with different stakeholders within the organisation. According to participant 8, the psychology background made it easier for them to build relations at work and feel as if they were part of the group. Participant 7, who was part of the learning and development graduate programme at one of the logistics organisations in South Africa, indicated that they had been prepared to think creatively and outside the box which they perceived as essential in their world of work. They perceived the programme enabled them explorative skills, which they were making use of in their current place of employment.

> It did, because it helped me to think, they say "out of the box." My managers were telling me to think "out of the box." To think creatively, so it helps you to analyse certain situations, and think of them in different perspectives. So, the honours programme, because of the way we think of things, allows you to sit at work and feel like, "Okay, this is what I need to do, and what options do I have to do it? What ways can I do it, so that I can do it quicker or more efficiently? (P7)

One participant acknowledged that the programme prepared them for life after graduating; however it also required the individual to show internal drive and willingness to learn.

"Yes, the honours has helped prepare me for the working world. I wouldn't say a 100% prepared me; it still takes a lot of personal preparation and personal motivation and desire to want to learn and obviously requires money." (P4)

One graduate expressed that it was difficult to get a job in the industrial psychology field with an honours degree qualification.

"I think with your honours degree it is very hard to actually be in the field of industrial Psychology, but I think it gives you adequate knowledge to understand how things work in the organisation." (P1)

The graduates expressed satisfaction with the skills they acquired during their psychology/industrial psychology honours year of study. They indicated that it made it advantageous when they entered the workplace as new employees. Graduates mentioned presentation skills, problem solving skills, conflict resolution, interviewing, group work, interpersonal skills and research skills were some of the skills that graduates felt they had acquired during the study period.

"Where you find that there's things like problem solving, I think. Where in the workplace there are certain steps or procedures that you have to follow in terms of solving a problem or a dispute in the organisation. So, it is those type of things that come into play that we've covered in the programme; so, like interviewing a person properly. You know how in the honours programme we have to interview a person?" (P2)

"We learn about psychology and people. It helps. It helps interaction... you're working with people. There's inter-personal relationships. There's arguments amongst people. There's not agreeing with this, not agreeing with that. There's clashes of personality. So, you can navigate through that." (P6)

"Presentation skills…because it is an important skill to have as you get older when you get into the working world you have to do presentations and even in large groups you have to present in front of them." (P1)

4.3 <u>Theme 3: Suggestions for improvement pertaining to honours programme</u>

4.3.1 <u>Practicality</u>

It was concerning to some of the participant (1, 2, 4, 6 and 7) that they had been taught a great deal of theory throughout their studies and very little exposure to what they would be required to do practically in a work context.

> "At honours level we have no practical experience at all – it's just theory. How do you actually really see how the theory applies in a practical context? They should have included some practical components like maybe for organisational studies where we covered HR and OD." (P1)

One participant proposed that in modules such as organisational studies, where they covered organisational development, they could have done an intervention.

> "We could have done an intervention even if it was just at the university. Alternatively, maybe we could have actually gone out to an organisation and seen how they work and their processes and maybe have done a write up to apply the theory we have learnt in the module and actually see it happening in the organisation. Maybe see how reports are being written and how they have been administered to candidates and other components of the recruitment process"

The graduate revealed that this would have given her a much clearer understanding between theory and practice and how it actually linked together rather than drawing conclusion from theory as to how it would play out in the organisation.

Participant 7 shared that she was part of a graduate programme and there were graduates from different institutions that were part of this graduate programme. She revealed that people from universities of technology had a better grounding on the practical side in the workplace.

> "We would find a balance between the theory side and balance between the practical components of things which would help." (P7)

4.4.2 <u>Support and guidance</u>

Participant 4 perceived that the information pertaining to what possible fields they could pursue after completion of the honours programme might have made them more employable.

> "You only find out once you start working that it could be HR, it could be OD, it could be industrial relations, it could be law… and once you know the practice, then you can actually see what's worth putting time and effort into and yes, and then pursuing it. And that way you'd make a lot more students employable because they would know exactly what's in…" (P4)

Participant 5 explained that the programme required students to complete a systematic literature review, which according to them was not accredited by any other university. This suggested that they were limited to doing their master's degree at the university in Durban and if they did not get in, they were not eligible to pursue their master's studies at other universities.

Two of the participants (1 and 5) experienced the numbers to be an area of concern; participant 1 believed that a smaller group may have been easier to manage; maybe with a smaller group, students would get full exposure and some practicality in the programme. Participant 5 explained that they had hoped that the classes would be interactive "it wasn't it just kind felt like another undergraduate year." Participant 6 proposed that the class could be split to make the numbers manageable and get different viewpoints from different lectures.

Participant 1 recommended that the university could possibly assist regarding some form of agreement with organisations in the area where they could actually send students for work experience.

> "We can arrange with different organisations and they can possibly take on students from there and give them their practical experience." (P1)

The participant suggested that the university play a role in collaborating with organisations to provide a holistic education, to link class learning to the practical learning acquired in the workplace.

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The results indicated that the graduates had some similarities regarding the psychology and industrial psychology honours programme; they shared some positive and negative experiences during their honours programme study period. All the participants had some feedback regarding elements where the programme could improve; the general results indicated that the perception was that the honours programme in psychology/industrial psychology was beneficial for graduates, in addition it prepared graduates for life after the period of study.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The results indicated that participants experienced the programme to have had various benefits; there were both positive experiences and negative experiences during the graduates' study period. Graduates also experienced some challenges during their year of study. It was noted that participants generally acknowledged that their study period had some influence in preparing them for the transition phase into the workplace. Almost all the participants reported that there were some elements in the honours programme in industrial psychology and psychology that could be improved to make the experience better for students who enrolled in the programme.

Experience of the honours programme

The honours programme in industrial psychology/psychology shaped the graduates' thinking in a positive way with regard to their ability to think critically and to use behavioural knowledge to their advantage post study period and in the workplace. Perhaps this can justify Wolf's assertion (2002) that the purpose of a university education is knowledge assimilation, to prepare a graduate to think critically as opposed to vocational training that is simply preparing a person for the world of work. It was noted that most participants had acknowledged that their psychology grounding was advantageous in the work context. They mentioned having the ability to build relationships, that psychology had enabled them to interact and build inter-personal relationships, gave them the ability to work with different personalities and communicate at their level, to have the ability to observe others and behavioural awareness that benefited them in their daily working space. The above mentioned supports the notion of Bandura (1989) that what determines human behaviour is cognitive factors. In the case of the graduates it is the attitude to knowledge they acquired during their study period, behavioural factors associated with the numerous activities and skills gained through the various tasks and objectives set out in their modules or the research project process. The knowledge gained from behavioural sciences aided interpersonal skills amongst graduates, in turn the transition to the workplace and connecting with different stakeholders after completing their studies seemed to benefit graduates in their respective line of work.

The discussion regarding preparation of graduates cannot be understood in isolation in the institution, but should rather be included with organisations or the workplace, acknowledging that the learning can only be complete once the graduate has been exposed to workplace training as suggested by Richter et al (1998). The graduates perceived the environment factor associated with the social cognitive theory had a limited influence on the preparation of their needs at honours level, or at the very least had room for improvement. Graduates were clear that there was a need for some practicality regarding the programme. As noted in social learning, an individual is influenced by direct experiences or exposure which is lacking in the current honours programme in industrial psychology and psychology.

Graduates sought a balance between the theoretical content and tangible application of that theoretical foundation, which is aligned to the social cognitive theory's assumption that learning by observation or direct experience can ground the individual in the subject matter (Bandura 1989). Alternatively, graduates perceived a need for universities to build relationships with organisations to help them gain access to the practical component of their learning process; thus ensuring that the learning environment component of social leaning is influenced positively, resulting in a more improved honours programme. Graduates perceived that by engaging with organisations the learning process would be enriched and have some relevance as to how it could practically be applied after completion of study in their various workplace endeavours; thus better preparing the graduate to meet challenges after the study period.

A few participants revealed that they gained valuable skills during the psychology/industrial psychology honours programme. For example good presentation is perceived as an important skill to possess in the workplace. Often graduates are required to present to large groups. During the programme the graduates revealed they had exposure in presenting to the class and lecturer, which equipped them with the ability to present adequately in the workplace. Skills that were directly experienced during the honours year of study were easily transferable to the graduates' workplace, supporting the notion of experiential learning pertaining to the honours programme. It was evident that all the tangible skills that the graduates had acquired during the study period resulted in the graduates being prepared for those specific components much more than their only being familiar with the theory. To ensure a holistic learning process, graduates desired a practical or tangible component to ground the theory knowledge into workplace transferable skills or knowledge.

The advanced disciplinary knowledge associated with the honours programme equipped graduates with advanced skills such as problem solving, which allowed graduates the capacity to apply the very same skill in the workplace. As they continuously had to problem solve in the programme, they had to figure out how to collaborate as a group and they were required to reflect and come up with solutions in their scripts; all of which contributed to their problem solving capacity. This supports the notion of behaviour being determined by social cognitive theory triadic reciprocal causation. Individuals have the cognitive ability to use existing knowledge and expectation to influence their behavioural component by practicing problem solving which is necessitated through environmental influence, academic norms associated with the honours programme subject matter and their own viewpoints in questioning existing material and attempting to solve issues in the form of reflexive writing. Through this continuous practice the individuals established competence in problem solving, which would likely be realised and transferrable to the workplace.

The honours programme in industrial psychology and psychology enabled graduates the ability to plan and prioritise effectively so they could submit within the specified time frames. The busy schedule and extra work load that they received during their studies equipped them with the ability to meet deadlines, which could be transferred to life after completion of study, especially in the workplace. Although not formally in the scope of the syllabus of the honours programme, the experience and challenges faced during the programme had a direct influence on the growth of the graduate. Group work facilitated good exposure to what they were soon to be faced with in the world of work. Participants mentioned that group work was important in most businesses today and the exposure they gained during the period of study allowed the work transition and collaborating with others in the workplace to be a much smoother transition.

Participants suggested that the programme opened up their minds, it facilitated a mind-set that required individuals to be analytical and consider evidence and perception from different sources. Essential to the programme was graduates being open to learning and unlearning consistently and avoiding a rigid dogmatic approach to subject matter (Kite et al., 2012). In addition, they gained research skills that could be used in the workplace, and this was deemed an important skill to have in the workplace according to the participants. Overall the participants had some positive experiences regarding the programme, as the majority perceived

that the programme had some influence in preparing them for the workplace or life after completion of the honours programme, although not all participants were fully satisfied. There was a general notion by most graduates interviewed that the honours programme contributed to their preparation for the workplace.

<u>Challenges during the honours programme</u>

There were some concerns raised by the graduates regarding the programme. One of the major concerns was that they would have benefited from a programme that had a practical component to it. Graduates perceived that the programme fell short in facilitating practical learning which was considered important in preparing the graduates for the workforce according to Scholarios et al., (2003) and Richter et al., (1998). Due to the limited practical exposure some graduates believed that their own expectations of the programme were not met. In addition it was felt that when they entered the workforce it was most likely that their employer's expectations were not met. Perhaps a counter argument would be that self-regulated learning is relatively dependent on the graduates' efforts to initiate and direct their efforts to obtain the desired knowledge, posing the question that if graduates were motivated enough they would seek exposure to the practicality of the theory subject matter that they acquired during class. Do graduates make efforts to connect with organisations during or after the period of study? In addition to all suggested improvements the graduates may need to take accountability for the role they play and ensure they obtain the necessary exposure outside of the classroom with a limited internship or learnership available to the large pool of graduates at the end of every academic year.

Graduates indicated that the large number of students in the honours class made it challenging to receive the necessary support from lecturers and supervisors. The graduates noted that the environmental factors pertaining to the honours programme posed challenges as they felt they could not gain the in-depth knowledge they required. Firstly, with large classes it made it challenging to engage in class discussions, graduates perceived that there were too many students to engage with the subject matter adequately. Secondly with a high intake, graduates perceived that standards dropped as the quality of students who were accepted into the programme was not at the expected standard by some of the graduates. Thirdly as stipulated one of the objectives of the honours year is to introduce the graduate to research writing or similar research projects. Due to the large numbers graduates were are unable to fully engage

with the research component part of their honours year of study, supervisors' time allocation was constrained as a result of the large number of students allocated to supervisors. This may likely have influenced the students' experience negatively as they did not receive adequate support from supervisors or the skills they expected to gain during the research component of the honours study period.

Transition to workplace

Participants also indicated that it would be beneficial with regard to employment options to have lecturers who were currently in practice or directly linked to the world of work, for example a practicing HR manger, line manager, practicing industrial psychologist, practicing organisational development consultant and psychometrist to mention a few. This could potentially bridge the gap of what is studied and what is required by the workforce from graduates entering the working space. Collaboration between university and work could be advantageous to the academic world. Ensuring that current teachings are aligned to the practice in the workplace and in turn the market could benefit with academic research that is relevant to business needs. According to Bandura (1989) at the core of social cognitive theory is the perception that the individuals are both the product and producers of their own environment. As much as there are certain objectives pertaining to existing honours programmes, institutions need to be reflexive and open to feedback and lived experiences of the individuals who are graduates of the current programmes. The feedback or information extracted from research involving students can assist universities to design programmes that are updated and relevant to student requirements and needs.

Some participants reported that their experience when they entered the world of work was that the job had nothing to do with what they had studied which corroborates the findings of Richter et al, (1998). Although the programme facilitated the open-mind approach and assisted in human interpersonal skills, participants felt it was not enough. One participant experienced the programme to have little influence in preparation for the job "I don't think it prepares you enough".

Suggestions for improvement pertaining to honours programme

At the root of the graduates' expectation to acquire a more practical approach, is the perception that practical learning would prepare them for the new challenge ahead, which in most cases was employment. Participants' perceptions indicated that they had the theoretical background, but they would have liked to start putting that theoretical knowledge into practice at honours level. Potentially at the core of this study is what students/graduates expected from the learning process was not aligned to that of the programme or that of the institution (Bonn et al., 2009; Kruss, 2004). The graduates had hoped that the programme would equip them with the necessary tools to enter the workplace and add tangible value. Tangible value in this case would be skills required to meet their organisations' objectives.

The lack of direct contact with organisations or potential employers was a concern for graduates, which may support the calls for a collaborative effort in facilitating the graduates' learning process (Richter et al, 1998). Graduates' expectations regarding practical exposure were not met. A few of the participants perceived the programme to be an extension of undergraduate studies, due to the fact that they could not distinguish between the teaching and facilitation of lectures from third year to their honours year. This is contrary to the findings of Chen and Turbil (2003) who perceive the honours year to be beyond transitional to transformational, a change in the students' ability to think critically, innovatively and question existing knowledge.

All the participants had input as to how they perceived that the honours programme in psychology/industrial psychology might possibly be improved in future. A few of the graduates revealed that the information given to students about the programme prior to commencement of studies could be one facet that could be improved. Participants indicated that explaining the implications of not getting a master's qualification was vital and in addition information and support as to what alternatives were open to students who did not pursue a master's degree in psychology would go a long way to preparing graduates. Graduates perceived that they lacked the necessary information to make informed decisions regarding their careers after completion of the study period. There was prominent dissatisfaction among students with regard to the support and supervision that was available to them at post-graduate level (Aspland et al., 1999). This may be due to the large number of students who enrolled into the honours programme

resulting in students not having consistent contact with academic staff members, supervisors and support structures to make their workload or work life more manageable during their study period.

It must be made clear that the participants who were graduates of industrial psychology reported that they had some form of preparation for their current roles as opposed to those who were enrolled in the general psychology honours programme, who perceived the programme to have had very little to no influence in their current roles in the workplace. This might be an indication that the industrial psychology programme is workplace or organisation focused in contrast to the general psychology honours programme that may be focused on clinical issues that may not necessarily be a focal point in the workplace in the human capital field, learning and development specialist or assessing people for recruitment purposes.

The relevance of mentioning the skills gained supports the notion that the programme did have components to it that equipped graduates with skills that were required in certain job roles, and perhaps argues that indeed the programme has had an influence on employment of graduates pertaining to preparedness and meeting some of the desired components of employers.

The expectation of graduates may be unrealistic as the university is not a vocational institution; therefore learning is most likely to be only complete once students get workplace training in internship and learnership programmes. Graduates who were likely to have had a positive experience after completion of study may be those who portrayed internal locus of control and a higher sense of their own self-efficacy in alignment with the social cognitive theory and the importance of positive self-efficacy in success rates of graduate endeavours. The environment also has to be considered as the graduates' success after completion of study is not solely the function of their cognitive abilities but rather the cognitive factors, environmental factors and behavioural factors in alignment with social cognitive theory disposition.

The institution may not be a university of technology, which prepares graduates for the workplace according to Wolf (2002), yet there may be possible benefits to exposing honours students to what will be out there in the world of work as a component of their study subject matter.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In conclusion, the graduates reported overall mixed experiences regarding the honours programme. The programme was perceived to provide graduates with an edge after completing their studies; they entered the workplace with a critical thinking approach which they perceived as a huge advantage when entering the world of work. The knowledge acquired during the period of study was transferable to the workplace for most graduates. Understanding human behaviour assisted graduates to be effective employees in the human capital field after receiving workplace training. In addition to the skills associated with the psychology discipline of understanding human behaviour and critical thinking, the graduates gained tangible skills such as presenting to a group of people, interviewing, researching and academic writing to mention a few.

Although there was positive feedback, graduates did see gaps in the current honours programme. What was evident was that at post-graduate level the graduates expected a more practical approach when it came to their studies. Somehow the university needs to find innovative ways to try to enrich their programmes with practicality and engagement with the workplace. It may be a challenge with a high student intake at honours level as mentioned by the participants, however it would not be an impossible task if all the parties involved had a mutual understanding and perceived the benefits in pursuing a more practical approach. Perhaps the issue is that they may be reluctant when it comes to making the programme more practical as it may be perceived by some academics that a university should exist in relative isolation from external factors that disrupt the autonomy and independence of university functioning. One of the counter arguments would be that a university in the modern era should contribute to the socio-economic factors of the surrounding communities; with this notion, universities should be preparing graduates who can contribute to the economy after completion of studies.

Further research needs to be done regarding the student experience at honours level in university and the expectations regarding honours and other post-graduate degrees in the social sciences in present day universities in the South African context. Clarity regarding expectations by all stakeholders in student relationships, lecturers and the university will go a long way to improving the quality of education in post-graduate degrees in social sciences. What is clear is that graduates expect a more practical approach when it comes to their post-graduate studies in

the social sciences which would better prepare them for roles that they will assume after completing their studies. Whether that exposure is the responsibility of the university or that of the job market to prepare the graduate and provide workplace learning after completion of the studies still remains very much unclear. What may be worth exploring is how the two environments, workplace and university, can collaborate to contribute in making them both function effectively.

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Appendix A

Interview schedule

Semi-structured questions

1. What was your experience of the industrial psychology/psychology honours programme ?
   - How were classes in the honours programme administered?
   - Were there any challenges faced during the honours programme?

2. What was your experience after completing your honours year?
   - What were your expectations?
   - Describe the experience?
   - What is your understanding of employment options?

3. How can the honours programme improve?
   - Why is that needed?
   - Do you think you were adequately prepared for life or work after period of study?
   - What influences employment options?
   - If you had to make recommendations in relation to the programme to prepare graduates for the workplace what would it be?

<center>**Appendix B**</center>

Honours Psychology Outline

According to Achterberg (2005) the fundamental rationale for honours programme is that a group of students are identified as similar to each other and perhaps different from non-honours students, which justifies the separate learning process based on their peculiar learning needs, aspirations and background preparation. As stated in the UKZN humanities handbook (2017, p177) the Psychology Honours degree is an academically based degree which equips students with theoretical and research knowledge and competencies that are valued in a variety of contexts. It aims to deepen students' theoretical knowledge in psychology in order to prepare them for further postgraduate study and professional registration, or for specialised work contexts.

The honours programme in psychology is targeted at candidates who have achieved a good set of results during their undergraduate studies. Fundamentally, the programme is designed to equip students with critical and conceptual grounding for those candidates that wish to pursue higher degree studies in the field of psychology (UKZN humanities handbook, 2017). The programme intake involves some sort of selection process, which has set criteria for which students will be successful selected into the programme (Achterberg, 2005).

The honours programme in psychology consist of numerous modules, two of those modules are compulsory for all students, industrial psychology and general psychology students. As stated in the UKZN humanities (2017) Research project PSYC 7PR; the purpose of the research project at honours level is to expose students to research, they are expected to focus on a specific research area. Students are required to review the available knowledge and literature in the specified field, devising methods to describe and investigate issues of social psychological interest, evaluating their research by using set standards as guided by the fields of research in academics. Second module, which is a compulsory module is Research Fundamentals PSYC 701, the module consist of two overarching sections; data analysis and research design. Data analysis is intended to provide the essential foundations for experimental research whilst laying a foundation for studying multivariate methods (Neuman, 2006). In addition the students are required learn a computer package SPSS-statistical package for social

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sciences and ensure they understand how the package is used in research (Pallant,2011). Research design aims to explore the range of methodologies which are used in the social sciences and psychology; it equips students to better understand which different methods are to be applied accordingly. The module is an introduction to design issues, the different qualitative and quantitative methods that social sciences make use of (UKZN humanities handbook, 2017).

Psychological assessment is an elective that is offered to both general psychology honours students and industrial psychology honours students. The module incorporates broad overview regarding the major theoretical issues relevant to psychometric/psychological assessments with key focus being the South African context (Foxcroft, 1997). The objective is to expose students with the practical and conceptual framework pertaining to the practice of psychological assessment, facilitate a process by which students acquire some basic knowledge of test and other techniques (UKZN humanities handbook).

Industrial psychology students were required to complete the following Electives; psychology in context, Organisational studies and Identities at work. According to Isaacs p.1 (2014) industrial psychology in context module explores the emergence of industrial psychology as a scientific discipline and critically examines the disciplines scientific credentials. The module explores the emergence of industrial psychology and its practice in present day. There is a specific focus on critically evaluating the concept of work and the role or impact of industrial psychology and the social sciences (Isaacs, 2014). Organisational studies module introduced students to what organisational development entails, the foundations of OD and the conceptual frameworks guiding OD. Students were exposed to various OD interventions. Student are expected to understand organisational change and transformation; structural interventions and the applicability of OD (Reuben, 2014).

The Identities and work module allows students to explore the social construction of identities and work. The module challenges traditional career theories and the assumption that people's career choice can be adequately understood individualistically without reference to the social, political and culture context in which they exist (College of Humanities, 2017, p497).

General psychology graduates were required to select from the below mentioned electives; counselling and therapeutics, Neuropsychology, psychopathology, psychology of diversity,

gender and sexuality, Advanced topics in African psychology and African feminism, womanism and negofeminism. Pertaining to counselling and therapeutics module students are expected to develop a critical understanding of the theoretical roots of counselling and psychotherapy. This includes the different approaches in counselling in the application of counselling skills in specific context (College of Humanities 2017, p495).

The purpose of the neuropsychology module was to study the main theoretical principles that have been developed in order to understand human behaviour and cognition from a neuropsychological perspective (Humanities, 2017). Psychopathology module aims to introduce and explore some of the main theoretical approaches used to understand psychopathology. The main categories of psychological disorder, disorder and treatment interventions were critically evaluated and examined during the completion of this module (Humanities, 2017).

Diversity of psychology module facilitates an exploratory approach to the study of human diversity issues, within the broader field of multicultural psychology (Humanities, 2017, p496). The module aimed to provide students with models and frameworks for understanding complex issues of power and privilege in society, it explores how systems of oppression and domination operate within and between groups. The gender and sexuality module aimed to provide an overview of the impact of gender roles on sexuality and major theories of human sexuality; to provide forum for academic examination of matters sexual; to enhance self-knowledge, address stereotypes and prejudice (Redding, 2001); to provide an introduction to the field sexology (Humanities, 2017, p496).

Advanced topics in African psychology, the module introduced students to concepts and principles of African psychology. The module was intended to equip students with the understanding and mastery of the rationale, meaning and scope, philosophy, history and worldview and a few challenges and proposed future direction of African psychology (Ebede-Ndi, 2016; UKZN humanities handbook, 2017, p498). African feminism, womanism and negofeminism, the module introduced students to psycho-cultural assumptions and concerns of African feminism, womanism and negofeminism. The issues and complexities of woman-being in post-colonial Africa were considered, with particular attention given to expand student's critical appreciation of the kinds of girlhood and the variety of choices for being a women in present day urban and rural Africa. The humanities Handbook gives us concise

summary of the learning outcomes expected after completion of the honours degree in psychology and Industrial psychology. It would be perhaps worthwhile to review the research pertaining to specialised work contexts and graduates perception of their capabilities in the workplace.