

**Third and Fourth Year Psychology Graduates' Employment Experiences
Post-Graduation**

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	v
Abstract	vi
Presentation based on data on this thesis	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
Declaration	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Graduate Attributes	1
1.3 Psychological Literacy	3
1.4 Workforce Readiness in Graduates	5
1.5 Expectations and Satisfaction Levels of Graduates	6
1.6 Emphasis on Work-Ready Graduates	8
1.7 Present Research	8
Chapter 2: Method	10
2.1 Participants	10
2.2 Procedure	10
2.3 Analysis	13
Chapter 3: Results	14
3.1 Where Graduates Are Working	14
3.2 Skills	15

3.2.1 Research skills	17
3.2.2 Interpersonal skills	19
3.2.3 Lack of recognition of skills	20
3.3 Knowledge	23
3.3.1 Knowledge applied in employment roles	24
3.3.2 Knowledge applied in personal life	26
3.4 Growth and Development	27
3.4.1 Professional growth.	27
3.4.2 Personal growth.	29
Chapter 4: Discussion	32
4.1 Overview	32
4.2 Where Graduates Are Working	32
4.3 Usefulness of Skills.....	32
4.3.1 Research skills	33
4.3.2 Critical thinking	33
4.3.3 Interpersonal skills	34
4.4 Lack of Recognition of Skills and Graduate Attributes.....	34
4.5 Differences in Age and Experience	36
4.6 Knowledge	37
4.7 Psychological Literacy.....	38
4.8 Professional Growth Through Work-integrated Learning.....	39

4.9 Personal Growth and Value	40
4.10 Implications	41
4.11 Strengths	43
4.12 Limitations and Future Research	44
4.13 Conclusion	45
References.....	47
Appendix A: Undergraduate Research Conference Application Acceptance	54
Appendix B: Undergraduate Research Conference Presentation Slides.....	55
Appendix C: Participation Information Sheet	60
Appendix D: Consent Form.....	62
Appendix E: Interview Guide	63

List of Tables

Table 1. List of graduate attributes as outlined by APAC2

Table 2. Sectors graduates are currently working in post-graduation..... 14

Table 3. Skills graduates believe to have developed through the degree and utilise in role.... 15

Abstract

A Bachelor's degree in Psychology is considered one of the most popular undergraduate degrees undertaken among students enrolled at university in Australia. While graduates may decide to pursue further study upon graduating, many instead choose to enter the workforce. Previous studies have suggested that undergraduate psychology degrees provide limited preparation for students who enter the workforce. However, minimal research has looked into exploring the extent of the usefulness of the degree. Therefore, this study will assess how past graduates perceive that the undergraduate degree has prepared them for employment. Open-ended interviews were conducted with graduates from a Bachelor of Psychology degree who were currently employed and had not undertaken any further study. Sixteen graduates were interviewed; 5 with a Bachelor's degree and eleven with an additional Honours degree. Year of graduation varied between 2010 to 2018. Thematic analysis identified the main themes: *Skills, Knowledge, and Growth and Development*. Overall, the findings show that the degree prepares graduates for employment, however a lack of recognition of skills as well as limited opportunities to practically apply skills hinders the extent these skills are utilised. Suggestions for strengthening work-readiness include inclusion of work-integrated learning and clearer identification of skills in psychology curricula.

Presentation based on data on this thesis

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree of diploma in any University, and, to the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published except where due reference is made. I give permission for the digital version of this thesis to be made available on the web, via the University of Adelaide's digital thesis repository, the Library Search and through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the School to restrict access for a period of time.

Connie Tran

October 2019

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

Thousands of students graduate from a Bachelor of Psychology degree in Australia every year (Hamilton et al., 2018). Although psychology is considered to be one of the most popular tertiary degrees, the pathways that students pursue following the completion of the undergraduate degree alone is unclear. Traditionally, completion of a psychology degree at both the undergraduate then postgraduate levels leads to a career as a registered psychologist. This usually consists of 6 years of study, involving the completion of the Bachelor (3 years), Honours (1 year), followed by the Master (2 years). Progression to each level of study also becomes increasingly competitive. Alternatively, completion of a PhD (approximately 3 years) can also lead into a career in academia/research. While a number of graduates intend on pursuing postgraduate study, many decide against this route and instead enter the workforce – with an estimated figure of approximately 66% of graduates choosing not to continue with postgraduate training (Hamilton et al., 2018). Therefore, what becomes of graduates who complete the undergraduate psychology degree?

1.2 Graduate Attributes

The Australian Psychological Accreditation Council (APAC) is an independent organisation that sets accreditation standards for psychology programs in Australia at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels (APAC, 2010). APAC also accredits universities that offer psychology degrees in line with these standards (Cranney et al., 2009). In 2010, APAC first introduced a list of graduate attributes (GAs) that students are expected to develop during their four years of study. These attributes were developed through consultation with stakeholders and informed by literature, and also reflect the principles of the scientist-practitioner model (APAC, 2018; Haw, 2011). The model places a strong emphasis on research and developing discipline-specific knowledge during the undergraduate years, with

practical application of knowledge implemented during postgraduate study (Geodeke & Gibson, 2011; Hamilton et al., 2018). As a result, the undergraduate degree provides a broad foundational knowledge, with a strong focus on developing skills in data analysis, research methods and report writing (Cranney et al., 2009). The six GAs of the four-year undergraduate program are outlined in Table 1 (APAC, 2008). Although the GAs are presented as six separate attributes, the development of these attributes can overlap and occur simultaneously (APAC, 2010).

Table 1

List of graduate attributes as outlined by APAC (2008, pp. 2-6)

Graduate Attribute	Description
Knowledge and understanding of psychology	Demonstrate understanding of the major concepts, theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and historical trends in the core topics of psychology
Research methods in psychology	Understand, apply and evaluate basic research methods in psychology, including research design, data analysis and interpretation, and the appropriate use of technologies
Critical thinking skills in psychology	Respect and use critical and creative thinking, sceptical inquiry, and the scientific approach to solve problems related to behaviour and mental processes
Values in psychology	Value empirical evidence; tolerate ambiguity during the search for greater understanding of behaviour and knowledge structures; act ethically and professionally; understand the complexity of

	sociocultural and international diversity; and reflect other values that are the underpinnings of psychology as a discipline
Communication skills	Communicate effectively in a variety of formats and in a variety of contexts
Learning and the application of psychology	Understand and apply psychological principles to personal, social, and organisational issues

The list of GAs provides a framework that directly links the psychology curriculum to workplace skills (Haw, 2011; Landrum, Hettich & Wilner, 2010). In particular, the sixth GA was developed in accordance with a report by Lipp et al. (2006) to better equip graduates who do not continue with postgraduate study (APAC, 2010). Attainment of this particular attribute – as well as with all other attributes – leads to the development of psychological literacy (Morris, Cranney, Jeong & Mellish, 2013).

A revised set of accreditation standards was introduced in 2018 (effective as of January 2019), with the main changes being the identification of more specific competencies to be developed at each level of study. This includes a greater focus on inter-professional learning, cultural responsiveness and student support and wellbeing (Carpenter & Crowe, 2018).

1.3 Psychological Literacy

There has been growing interest towards developing “psychologically literate” graduates (Hamilton et al., 2018, p.153). Originally coined in 1990 by Boneau, being psychologically literate requires people to not only having an understanding of how

psychology influences the world around them, but also the ability to apply psychological knowledge and skills to real life contexts (Coulson & Homewood, 2016; Mair, Taylor & Hulme, 2013; McGovern et al., 2010).

McGovern et al. (2010) describes being psychologically literate as entailing:

- an understanding the basic concepts of psychology;
- the ability to think critically;
- having problem solving skills;
- understanding scientific research practices;
- communicating well in many different contexts;
- applying psychological principles to personal, social or organisational problems;
- acting ethically;
- having cultural competencies and respecting diversity;
- having self-and other-awareness and understanding (p. 11).

Cranney et al. (2009) recommend that students need to achieve psychological literacy to benefit their lives and careers. Psychological literacy is stated to have positive impacts on the community and the world (Kennedy & Innes, 2005). Furthermore, graduates who do not necessarily continue with further study are still able to utilise psychological literacy within their occupational roles (APAC, 2008).

Benefits of psychological literacy have been identified. Morris et al. (2013) examined first, second and third year students' perceptions of psychological literacy as well as the relationship between GAs and psychological literacy. It was found that ratings for the GAs and psychological literacy were moderately high, indicating both awareness, perceived development and importance of these concepts within students (Morris et al., 2013).

Hamilton et al. (2018) investigated psychological literacy and work-readiness of psychology

undergraduates. The study found that work-integrated learning (WIL) not only consolidated psychological literacy within students, but also addressed a significant gap in the work readiness of Australian graduates (Hamilton et al., 2018). Defined as the integration of exposure to professional employment settings alongside academic study, WIL is aimed at preparing students for work by providing opportunities to implement theoretical knowledge in a practical setting (Doolan, Piggott, Chapman & Rycroft, 2019; Jackson, 2015). There are a variety of benefits for employment-seeking graduates who undertake WIL during their studies (Doolan et al., 2019; Hamilton et al., 2018).

1.4 Workforce Readiness in Graduates

Despite the initiative and steps taken in helping to prepare graduates for employment, the literature published (both prior to and following the development of the GAs) paints a somber view of workforce readiness for psychology graduates. Previous literature has indicated that undergraduate psychology degrees only provide limited preparation for employment (Appleby, 2018). Although the scientist-practitioner model provides a strong foundational base for graduates to build upon, it simultaneously has also been criticised as inadequate preparation for graduates who intend on going into work (Hamilton et al., 2018). A popular viewpoint shared since the 1970s is that there is too much emphasis placed on theory and inadequate development regarding vocational skills (Hayes, 1996; Kennedy & Innes, 2005; Mitchell & Montgomery, 1977). As a result, Appleby (2018) argues that undergraduate psychology programs have not provided the same level of support for students who intend on working compared to students who plan on pursuing postgraduate study. This was echoed in a study by Clough (1993), in which psychology graduates who were surveyed reported feeling disadvantaged in comparison to other graduates from skills-focussed degrees.

Alumni perceptions of workforce readiness have also previously been investigated in the literature (Borden & Rajecki, 2000; Landrum et al., 2010). Borden & Rajecki (2000) found that alumni ranked relatedness and preparedness of the degree to their role lower than alumni from other degrees. Landrum et al (2010) further investigated emotional and personality changes in alumni, and found that graduates reported increased levels of confidence, as well as higher levels of independence and maturity.

A report by Graduate Careers Australia (GCA) (2015) surveyed graduates regarding post-study outcomes. The survey included Australian Domestic students who had graduated from degrees in 2010 and were followed up again in 2013. Of the 12,384 participants, 265 had graduated from a 3-year psychology degree, constituting approximately 5 per cent of the overall sample. The study found that the number of psychology graduates in full-time work rose between 2010 and 2013, from 67.5% to 85.4% respectively; although this was still considered to be below-average rates of employment with respect to the overall sample (76.7% in 2010 and 90.5% in 2013). Of graduates who were working full-time, 73.2% of graduates stated that they were working in an area relevant to their study in 2013, compared to 46.3% in 2010. In 2013, the highest proportion of psychology graduates working full-time were found to be employed in the health care and social assistance sector (34.0%), followed by education and training (17.7%), and public administration and safety (17.0%). Psychology graduates were also more likely to continue with further study, with 51.3% undertaking further study at the time of survey, compared to 25.3% of graduates in other fields. This figure decreased to 38.6% in 2013, but was still noticeably higher than the overall sample (28.7%) (Graduate Careers Australia, 2015).

1.5 Expectations and Satisfaction Levels of Graduates

Hamilton et al. (2018) also argued that the scientist-practitioner model forming a basis of the undergraduate degree gives rise to a discrepancy between what students expect of the

degree and what the degree provides. Specifically, students enter into the degree expecting skills-focussed training but instead are presented with a heavy focus on scientific and research knowledge (Gaither, 2005). Furthermore, limited opportunities for “authentic application” may result in the student interpreting this knowledge as irrelevant (Hamilton et al., 2018, p. 152). As expectations of students are not met, students may feel as if the degree was a waste of time, thus may warp the perceptions students have regarding the usefulness of their skills (Hamilton et al., 2018).

Failure of recognition of skills is also an issue prominent within higher education (O'Hare & McGuinness, 2013). Hayes (1996) states that in psychology, the development of skills is often automatised and internalised by graduates – i.e. graduates are unaware of when new skills are obtained, and place little attention and importance on these skills. Due to this, graduates feel that they have not gained anything following completion of the degree (O'Hare & McGuinness, 2013). As a result, graduates encounter difficulty communicating their skills and abilities to potential employers (Hayes, 1996).

Despite the perceived limited usability of the undergraduate degree, earlier studies which have surveyed graduates reported that if given the choice, psychology graduates would choose to major in psychology again (Lunneborg & Wilson, 1985). Lunneborg & Wilson (1985) found that 69% of graduates pursued psychology due to interest or personal growth rather than career opportunities. As a result, psychology graduates were found to be more satisfied with their personal growth and less so with preparedness for employment (Littlepage, Perry & Hodge, 1990). However, a survey by Graduate Careers Australia (2015) found that three years following graduation, 52.5% of working graduates said that they would repeat psychology, indicating that the value of a psychology degree may no longer be as prominent as it previously was. Previous literature on graduate satisfaction levels were also found to have differed between recent and older graduates. Landrum & Elison-Bowers (2009)

reported that older alumni were more satisfied than younger alumni regarding how helpful their psychology courses were; this may be because older alumni have had longer careers, and consequently more opportunities to apply their psychological skills and training.

1.6 Emphasis on Work-Ready Graduates

At present, there is a current push from both government and universities to produce work-ready graduates (Diaz, 2019a; Hamilton et al., 2018). Simultaneously, there are also pressures for the undergraduate program to address both student and employer needs (Cranney et al., 2009; Strapp, Drapela, Henderson, Nasciemento & Roscoe, 2017). Currently, there is a gap in literature in which updated views of students' perceptions of the usability of the degree have not been addressed. With universities now being publicly accountable for graduate employability levels, below-average employment levels in comparison to other degrees has resulted in the value of a psychology degree also being questioned by the public (Kennedy & Innes, 2005; Landrum & McCarthy, 2018). Kennedy & Innes (2005) acknowledge that addressing the requirements of the APAC accreditation guidelines as well as pressures from stakeholders is a common issue faced by those who teach psychology in Australia.

With the perception that the accreditation guidelines are not adequately addressing the reality of vocational paths psychology graduates are facing, alongside the changing nature of the employment field and pressure for the degree to address the needs of various stakeholders, it is important "to consider the extent to which these guidelines meet the needs of all stakeholders: students, academics, the profession, the APS [Australian Psychological Society], registration boards, employers and the public" (Kennedy & Innes, 2005, p. 162).

1.7 Present Research

Due to increasing pressure from stakeholders for graduates to be work-ready, an updated study is required to assess the relevancy of the degree in today's employment setting. The study will be informed by the APAC GAs and psychological literacy; both which have been identified as fundamental for employment, but have only been addressed separately and intermittently by literature. Prior research conducted on this topic has also predominately been composed of quantitative methodologies which limit the extent graduates are able to elaborate on their experiences. Thus, an in-depth, qualitative study is required to fill this gap and assess what graduates report they are gaining from their undergraduate studies. A qualitative study will be able to ascertain graduates' thoughts, feelings and perceptions on whether they consider the degree to be useful in their current employment role.

The research question to be investigated is, "How does an undergraduate degree in psychology prepare graduates for the workforce?". The study will assess whether the requirements of the Bachelor in Psychology curriculum are perceived by graduates to be providing the necessary skills and knowledge required to excel in the workforce. The study will also investigate whether graduates are currently satisfied with the skills and knowledge they gain from the degree. The types of career paths a third and fourth year graduate can pursue will also be explored. Recommendations for curriculum design and delivery will be provided.

Chapter 2: Method

2.1 Participants

A total of 16 participants took part in the study. Participants in the study consisted of graduates who had completed an APAC accredited undergraduate degree in Psychology in Australia. Of those participants interviewed, five had completed their degree at the Bachelors level and 11 at the Honours level.

The inclusion criteria for participation in this research project was any individual who had previously completed an undergraduate degree in psychology with or without honours in Australia, currently employed, and fluent in English. The exclusion criteria included any individual who also completed a double degree along with their undergraduate psychology degree or was also currently completing any form of further study. This ensured that participants who were interviewed reflected on their experiences based on the contents of what was taught within the undergraduate psychology degree.

2.2 Procedure

The University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Subcommittee approved this study (H-2019-19/30). Passive snowballing and social media were the predominant form of recruitment methods used to recruit participants. To snowball, the researcher contacted previous colleagues from the University of Adelaide's Psychology Students' Association, as well as peers who were currently studying or had studied a degree in psychology. Details of the study were provided to peers to pass onto potential participants who met the criteria. Eligible participants were encouraged to contact the researcher directly through the email address provided to ensure confidentiality of participation. For social media, a digital flyer was posted in informal university Facebook groups consisting of psychology students in South Australia as well as interstate universities. The flyer contained key information regarding the study. Eligible participants were encouraged to contact the researcher via the

email address provided. Participants who had volunteered were also asked to pass on word of the study following the conclusion of the interview.

Eligible participants were provided with an Information Sheet (Appendix C) which contained further information regarding the study of the research, as well as the consent form (Appendix D). Interviews were conducted face-to-face in a private room at the University of Adelaide, and through video chat for participants who were unable to attend in person. Participants were informed of their rights to withdraw. All participants consented to being interviewed and to being audio-recorded during the interview. Participation in the study was voluntary, and not rewarded nor reimbursed.

An interview guide was developed (Appendix E). The guide consisted of prompts relating to knowledge and skills utilised in the participant's current job, as well as prompts relating to participant's thoughts and feelings regarding the usefulness of the undergraduate degree. Prompts also explored potential themes that had arisen in prior interviews. A pilot interview was conducted to assess the applicability of the interview guide, the guide was then modified and refined accordingly. Once data collection had begun the guide was continuously refined by the content and direction provided by preceding interviews. New prompts were introduced as the researcher became more familiar with the topic (Pope & Mays, 2006).

The researcher transcribed the interviews. The transcripts were deidentified to ensure confidentiality. This was done by removing personal identifiers and identifying place names, and replacing the names of participants and other individuals mentioned with pseudonyms. Line numbers were also inserted into the document to identify quotes. Member checking was also undertaken, in which participants who indicated so on their consent form were given a copy of their transcript. Participants were able to request any changes be made upon viewing the transcript. A total of 6 participants opted to partake in member checking. Furthermore,

any follow-up thoughts that participants had following the interview were communicated to the researcher via email, and also included as part of the data. The skills participants reported utilising in their occupational roles was also recorded. These data were collated and presented in the form of a table (see Table 1).

A second researcher cross-checked the deidentified interviews and themes. An audit trail was also maintained subsequent to each interview and throughout analysis to ensure self-reflexivity and transparency through the research process (Tracy, 2010). Notes that were made included potential themes that were apparent after an interview, changes to prompts, notes for future interviews and generating of themes during analysis. Reflexivity was also practiced throughout the audit trail as the researcher had also undertaken a 3-year psychology degree and at the time of study was currently studying an honours degree in psychology. This enabled the researcher to have an insider's perspective. In qualitative research, it is imperative that any influences researchers may have that affect the research process be acknowledged; this can be addressed through transparency and reflexivity (Kitto, Chesters & Grbich, 2008). Tracey (2010) states that a key element of reflexivity is noting the impact of the researcher's presence on the scene and in turn how participants react to them. It is important that researchers are aware of how they are perceived by the interviewees, and how personal characteristics may affect the interview (Pope & Mays, 2006). As a current student interviewing former students, the researcher had a shared sense of identity with participants. It may be possible that graduates may have felt more willing to divulge information due to both parties identifying as a part of an in-group as a result of discussing a shared experience. Graduates may also have assumed that there was a shared understanding of knowledge as well.

The dual student/researcher insight was taken into consideration throughout the research process – it is possible that the researcher's individual views and perceptions of the

degree may also have impacted on the undertaking of this study. While the researcher was conscious of this, it should also be noted that conversely, the research itself impacted on the researcher's views and perceptions of the usability of the degree. Throughout the progression of the research process, the researcher gained a greater understanding of the utilisation of skillsets in employment settings, prompting personal reflection of her own skills and abilities. To ensure sincerity of the study, this was documented in the audit trail (Tracey, 2010).

2.3 Analysis

Thematic analysis was utilised as the method of data analysis as it is well suited to identifying patterns and obtaining rich, deep information into a specific topic of interest from a smaller group of participants (Norwell, 2017). Thematic analysis allows for the researcher to identify codes in the data, and to group these through shared meaning into themes. A theme is defined as a word or phrase that captures something significant about the data and/or research question, and also represents a level of a patterned response within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Data were collected through the form of open-ended interviews, which allowed for further exploration into the research topic. Interviewing continued until saturation was reached – this occurs when no new themes appear in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Saturation occurred after the sixteenth interview.

Analysis followed the six stages of thematic analysis: data familiarisation, initial code generation, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and reporting themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Analysis was undertaken at both inductive and deductive levels. Collection and analysis involved moving iteratively between stages in order to refine results.

Chapter 3: Results

This study aimed to explore how the undergraduate psychology degree is perceived by graduates to prepare them for the workforce. Three main themes were generated: *Skills*, *Knowledge* and *Growth and Development*. Occupation-wise, graduates were found to be working in a variety of sectors and roles.

3.1 Where Graduates Are Working

The graduates interviewed were found to currently be working in a variety of sectors (see Table 2), with multiple graduates working within the same sector. Twelve out of the sixteen graduates stated that their current role was relevant to their degree, however only 8 out of the sixteen graduates reported having felt the degree adequately prepared them for employment.

Table 2

Sectors graduates are currently working in post-graduation

Sectors of where graduates currently work (N=16)	
Administration (N=1)	Higher education (N=1)
Child protective services (N=1)	Industrial & organisational psychology (N=1)
Consulting services (N=1)	Not-for-profit organisations (N=3)
Customer service (N=1)	Research (N=1)
Disability support (N=1)	Student support (N=1)
Government (N=4)	

3.2 Skills

Graduates reported developing a number of skills through the degree that they found to be beneficial and currently utilise in their employment role. Table 3 outlines the list of skills graduates reported.

Table 3

Skills graduates believe to have developed through the degree and utilise in role

Skill	Definition of skill according to graduates
Active listening	Attentively listening to the needs and enquiries of others
Building rapport	Ability to develop positive relationships with others
Critical thinking	Not taking information at face value
Communication	Exchanging information with others (written and orally) Communicating psychological theories and terminology to a non-scientific audience
Confidentiality	Understanding and respecting people's privacy, personal and/or sensitive information of others
Counselling	Ability to appropriately respond to the problems of others – comprised of multiple sub-skills such as active listening, understanding and awareness of body language, building rapport.
Empathy	Understanding the perspectives and sharing the feelings of others
Evidence-based arguments	Supporting arguments with evidence

Independence	Ability to self-manage and complete tasks by oneself
Interviewing	Ability to conduct an interview – comprised of multiple sub-skills such as active listening, maintaining confidentiality, asking open ended questions
Open-mindedness	Respectful of the opinions of others, acknowledgement and consideration of opinions different to one's own
Project management	Managing a group of people who are all involved with completing a group task
Problem-solving	Ability to find solutions to issues that may arise
Professionalism	Acting appropriately in a workplace setting
Supporting others	Assisting others with difficulties they may be struggling with
Teamwork	Working collaboratively with others
Time management	Ability to balance and complete a range of tasks/activities whilst adhering to deadlines
Use of technology	Being able to competently use electronic devices (eg. computers)
Working with quantitative data	Read, understand and interpret quantitative data
Working with qualitative data	Read, understand and interpret qualitative data
Writing	Ability to write clearly and succinctly

While graduates reported developing a wide variety of skills, research and interpersonal skills were found to be the most valued and applied in employment roles.

3.2.1 Research skills.

Research skills were one of the most commonly reported skills that graduates utilised in their role, with graduates highlighting a number of further skills that were beneficial. In particular, graduates spoke highly about the development, use and transferability of critical thinking skills.

Yeah. I mean, critical thinking is an amazing skill that you can apply to almost anything. And that's been a great skill that I've been able to utilise across all the different sectors that I'm volunteering and also working in (██████████ lines 55-57).

The strong focus on developing critical thinking within the psychology degree was also seen to be advantageous in employment settings. Critical thinking was viewed to be a necessary skill in certain roles. Furthermore, it appeared to be a skill that non-psychology trained co-workers were seen to lack.

I see a lot of others sort of in other roles where their degree of being able to look at problems in different angles isn't there? And you do need that in my role (██████ lines 178-180).

In a similar manner, statistical skills and knowledge were also found to be valuable skills psychology graduates possess that graduates from other disciplines did not.

...I have found my stats knowledge is better than the public health RAs [research assistants]. They do nothing on stats from where they came from so they had to learn from scratch. Um so that was definitely an advantage ([REDACTED] lines 394-396).

Graduates noted that they also applied their use of critical thinking skills outside of their employment role and in aspects of their personal life as well. A consequence of having studied a psychology degree – and consequently developed critical thinking skills – was changing how they perceive and evaluate different aspects of their life. This shift in thinking was something graduates were aware of and able to consciously articulate and demonstrate.

And you're more critical of – I would say, when you're watching the news and you're hearing the reporting of Trump, you really go, hmm how do I feel about that, like does this align with my values and you think critically about it and that's – that's probably what's changed, how I view the world. Yeah ([REDACTED] lines 413-417).

Although not every graduate was working in a research-related sector, skills related to research were still found to be valued and commonly utilised in other employment roles. For instance, Gaia acknowledged the use of her research skills in her counselling role:

...in regards to research, and no I'm not doing anything research related now, but even when I'm doing group programs, having those skills to be able to back up my work, um, you know, if I'm doing a group program I need to put in some evidence as to why it would be beneficial... ([REDACTED] lines 123-126).

3.2.2 Interpersonal skills.

Graduates also reported both formally and informally developing interpersonal skills while studying their degree, which they found relevant to both their personal and professional lives. For instance, the ability to be able to communicate and relate to other people in their employment roles – particularly with clientele – was viewed as beneficial.

...so when I first started the role, I guess I was just able to talk, and to converse with clients came quite easily, um, so being able to build that rapport was good (■■■■ lines 52-53).

Skills developed through more counselling-focussed courses were also found to be beneficial regarding communicating with others, whether in an employment setting or outside of it.

So doing those couple of counselling skills I've actually found *really* useful in terms of communicating, even with stakeholders at work, and with, engaging with those people...you can apply that outside of a counselling setting as well, it works. Um yeah so I think that's at work or even in friendships and new relationships, I feel like that's – yeah, definitely a skill within life itself (■■■■ lines 558-560 and 562-565).

Empathy was another interpersonal skill that graduates further developed. Although the degree does not formally teach empathy, graduates reported that the contents of the degree encouraged them to adopt and form an empathetic-like mindset.

...I think that in general it teaches you empathy...there was just a lot of talk throughout the years, that was about, not judging people, about considering all the different aspects of a person, and all the different elements that make up them, um, and, you know, consider people from all those parts rather than just making judgements... (████████ lines 239-244).

On the contrary, a different view that was held was that “a blessing and a curse with the degree is the ability to empathise with people” (Athena, lines 731-732). At times having developed that skill was seen as a hindrance in employment settings, as recounted by Athena:

For example I had to fire someone...I could understand where she was coming from, I could empathise with her situation and you know I – it was really difficult for me to kind of step back and go – well look, I know how you're feeling but right now, I need to do what I need to do (████████ lines 733-738).

3.2.3 Lack of recognition of skills.

Conversely, there was a lack of recognition – and at times devaluation – of skills amongst graduates. An older graduate, Gaia, reflecting back to the first year following the completion of her degree, stated that she initially “wasn't really certain of the skills that [the] degree had given” her (████████ line 602). Scepticism and devaluation of skills was also demonstrated by graduates:

Written down on a resumé it just seems pretty wishy-washy no? At this point communication is a skill that anyone can write down on their resume? And isn't very

specific to display what a person is actually capable of. And what they've done ([REDACTED] lines 184-186).

Similarly, Aphrodite reported that although useful, research skills were able to be gained through other degrees and was not necessarily distinctive of the psychology degree, that "most degrees will probably give you that if you work hard at it and develop those skills" ([REDACTED] lines 101-102).

Uncertainty around what skills employers value was also reported. This was considered to be more prominent during the period following completion of the degree:

...that was my first job out of uni, I didn't really know how to sell myself because I didn't know what they [employers] were looking for, and I didn't know what qualities would be, would be seen as – yeah, helpful, for that particular, um, profession as well... ([REDACTED] lines 603-606).

Although the APAC competencies underpin the foundation of the undergraduate degree, only two graduates had heard of the competencies. Iris, in her final year of study, was informed of the competencies by her Honours supervisor. Due to this she was able to reflect upon the skills outlined by the accreditation body, but stated that had she not been informed, she would not have been fully aware of the skills she had developed – further demonstrating a lack of recognition of skills for graduates.

When – when he actually sat down with me and kind of went through it all, I was like yes, actually, yes I can see that. But I did have to think about it. If I hadn't sort of

been given it, or thought about it, I wouldn't have sort of thought twice (■■■■ lines 641-643).

However, this perception was not apparent across all graduates. Others were able to give both insight into use of skills as well as demonstrate these in employment settings. In particular, the ability to view how skills are transferable across various environments was stated to be a crucial factor in effectively utilising skills gained from the degree. This was explained by a younger graduate, ■■■■

You just need to think about what you've learnt flexibly rather than keeping it in the sole box and sole contexts where it was taught. Considering the competencies where it was developed and the skills and processes and how they might be useful to someone else or somewhere else. So yeah, it prepared you, it's just not immediately clear (■■■■ lines 242-246).

■■■■ further provides an example of transferability of skills across different employment sectors based on his experience:

You learn how to do the scientific process which is composed of lots of little parts, like writing an interview, like being reflexive, like using open-ended questions. You're not necessarily going to use all of that but then in an office context or in a workshop or at a youth event, you still know how to be reflexive, ask open-ended questions, you still have this...this analysis running in the back of your head when someone says something you know you can use, you can report a really valuable

quote or data or follow up on, or research, it's that awareness that you bring out of it.

That's a great tool that can be applied in lots of situations (■■■■ lines 266-273).

However, lack of education regarding what skills psychology graduates develop was criticised. Graduates felt that "they don't teach you how to sell yourself" (■■■■ line 166). Rather, graduates felt unprepared in finding employment as they were unaware of the unique skills they had gained from their degree. This sentiment was also echoed by Uriel:

Cause, well, I kind of did interviewing trainings and stuff outside of uni, but like no one out of uni actually told you how to, prepare for interview, especially interview that is related to your current degree. So like, how to sell yourself, and like your kind of, like, degree. I just have to kind of have to find my way through it (■■■■ lines 426-430).

3.3 Knowledge

Graduates found that the knowledge gained through the degree was particularly helpful and relevant. Graduates were able to recall the content and theory they had gained from their degree and demonstrated use of the knowledge in a variety of ways. In some instances, graduates recognised theories as they encountered them during day-to-day life.

Yeah. I find that, um, sometimes there's things that are like, almost in general, day to day things, where I'll be like, oh yeah, that's that theory that I learnt about or something, and usually I can't remember the actual name of the person or the actual theory but I remember like, the theme behind it, or – you know what I mean? (■■■■ lines 193-196)

Graduates were also able to actively apply knowledge in both employment roles and personal lives.

3.3.1 Knowledge applied in employment roles.

Graduates viewed the broadness of content taught with the degree as an advantage, which provided them with a “good base foundation” (████████ line 669). As a result, graduates were able to draw upon information from an area of the degree that was relevant to their role. For example, while working in disability support, Poseidon was able to draw upon his knowledge of disabilities which assisted him when interacting with clients.

...we've been taught about stuff like disability as well, so a lot of the kids that I work with have like general intellectual disabilities, Autism, Asperger's, which we've been taught in a course which was handy (████████ lines 80-82).

Indirect application of theory into employment roles was also exhibited by graduates, in which knowledge was not directly applied to their role but to bring an awareness of how they perform in their role. Pan, aware of how stereotypes are formed, consistently tried to keep this in mind when interviewing consumers with drug problems in his work.

Everyone has an image in their head of *the* drug addict, this archetype. And it's not them. And when I'm sitting in the location and they know I have a red folder and they need to identify me, and I try to identify who it's going to be, I've been surprised by my own biases...in undergrad, they taught about stereotypes being emergent truths of groups. If you look at the social factors that produce these behaviours that's, that's how the stereotypes, the social determinants of drug use or of physical abuse, and

that's why the stereotype exists. So I've always tried to think about that (■■■■ lines 86-89 and 124-127).

In some instances, recognition of the relevance of the content taught was not fully realised until graduates started working. For instance, ■■■■ draws a parallel between his employment sector (health) and the relevance of the more health-related courses taught:

...something that I've come to appreciate a whole lot this year, is Rhea's classes, Zeus' classes, Circe's classes, they focused more on the qualitative side, on the health side. And this company here is consumer (■■■■ lines 156-159).

However, not all graduates found that the content taught was relevant. Some graduates reported that the degree was not enough to help them in their employment role, but in fact lacked teaching of further content that would have been valuable. This was described by ■■■■ as "kind of like being given a test, but not full knowledge" (■■■■ lines 155).

Poseidon also reported a similar experience:

...I personally feel that while I did learn about child development we don't learn how to deal with child trauma...because – what I see right now is that the children who have been through trauma have um, really different attitudes compared to the children who are you know, developing in a normal setting, yeah (■■■■ lines 224-229).

3.3.2 Knowledge applied in personal life.

As well as within their role, application of theory into their personal lives was also something that graduates reported doing. Graduates were able to recall and link the content when they encountered it during their lives.

Because, like it's easier to relate some of the things that you learn about as you sort of develop, I guess, have a bit more experience in life? So, you know, with my kids, I can see some of those, you know, ages and stages of learning and stuff like that ([REDACTED] lines 231-234).

Similarly, Artemis also recognised the developmental stages but explained that after being aware of the differences of children in each developmental stage, she adjusted her behaviour when interacting with them accordingly.

...for instance with child and adolescent development was a unit I did and I really loved – I think it's even kind of changed my perspective in the way that I communicate with certain ages, you know in terms of their development, and understanding ([REDACTED] lines 303-306).

Graduates also demonstrated further application of knowledge during such encounters. Graduates said that they were able to not only recognise material they had learned, but also inform and educate others. A recount of an informal conversation between Athena and her co-worker illustrates this:

...there was a lady who was quite unwell um, at work, and she was talking about, you know, wanting to quit and all this sort of stuff, um and I kind of remembered having the conversation around, you know the link between physical and mental health, um and the fact that everything is sort of on a continuum and you know, one doesn't come before the other and kind of all my understanding around that sort of came into play and I was able to have that conversation with her... (████████ lines 183-188).

3.4 Growth and Development

Graduates reported having gone through a significant amount of both personal and professional growth, while studying as well as within their employment roles.

3.4.1 Professional growth.

Graduates discussed undergoing a significant amount of professional growth once entering the employment field. A distinction made by graduates was that working in the field gave them insight into their studies they did not previously have. For instance, ██████ stated that "a lot of the changes in my thinking started when I actually started work, rather than actually during my studies..." (████████ lines 469-470). Following this, graduates consequently viewed their studies with a 'new lens'.

...back then I couldn't relate my knowledge then to the real world of counselling because I didn't know what it actually looked like? Whereas, you know, I look back now, and in my work, I can be like, okay, you know, I learnt that in first year, for example. If I had known that in first year, I would've been able to process what that actually meant better, whereas – because I was so young, um, I didn't really have that knowledge as to what it looked like early, early on (████████ lines 132-137).

The distinction between the 'safety' of study and the 'severity' of work environments was also noted by graduates as something that they were unexpected and unprepared for. Exposure to real life cases were found to be unsettling, with the distinction between the two environments clearly identified by [REDACTED]

But that was all books smarts. Now for the first time it's applying it in the real life and I'm not talking to other students, I'm not reading it on a paper, I'm - I'm hearing about the real-life ramifications and that's been a little full on. Yeah ([REDACTED] lines 111-114).

While the degree was generally viewed as having adequately prepared graduates as a 'foundation/base', limited exposure to the 'real world' during their undergraduate years was regarded as a negative of the degree. Many graduates reported that having a placement, or a work-integrated learning course would have better prepared them in both giving insight into study as well as a taste of the 'real world'.

But then, it is a little bit different seeing it in real life. Because one the one hand I've engaged intellectually, mentally in uni, books and papers and peers, but then emotionally, and viscerally, in real life it's different. It becomes real. So I was prepared, but if there was some sort of placement program throughout undergraduate I could've been more prepared ([REDACTED] lines 128-131).

Likewise, graduates who had undertaken a placement attested to the value of having this experience. Specifically, having that opportunity to utilise their skills in a real world

setting through their degree increased their feelings of preparation for employment – more so than the degree alone.

...like I did an elective and um, that was actually where I got to do a bit of a placement and I worked as a [REDACTED] and I actually loved it and that's when I kind of, realised I like and would love to do as a job so, um if I hadn't done that elective I don't think I would've felt quite as equipped as I do now ([REDACTED] lines 48-51).

3.4.2 Personal growth.

Graduates also stated having undertaken a psychology degree contributed immensely to their personal growth and self-development as individuals. An example of this was that having studied psychology also contributed to graduates becoming more self-aware and reflective of themselves.

Um I think I gained the ability – probably to reflect... I think it's really helped me kind of reflect on myself when I'm – when I'm doing things, so I have the ability to, you know, ah for example, make a phone call, and then after that phone call go, 'Okay – this is what I could've done, this is what I should've done, this is how that person was feeling, this is how I was feeling', you know that kind of stuff ([REDACTED] lines 124-130).

Strong identification with the psychology degree was also highlighted. The degree was viewed to be more than just a 'degree'; graduates reported that they perceived their study in the field of psychology as being closely entwined with their identity.

Oh, again, I can't see myself – like I can't figure out the type of person I would be without it, um, so high? ((laughs)) It's – it's been pretty important for me and I...I couldn't at the time and I still can't imagine studying anything else (■■■■ lines 515-517).

Although the perceptions of the usefulness of the psychology degree employment-wise differed across graduates, 14 out of the 16 graduates reported that they would do the degree again – including those who viewed the degree negatively. Identity with the degree appeared to transcend perceived usability of the degree.

I wouldn't see myself doing any other degree. Like this is the only one – it's not the only thing I know, but it's the only thing I *feel* like I was meant to do. So I don't see myself doing any other degree. So it might be shitty but I'll still do it (■■■■ lines 484-486).

The two graduates who reported that they would not do the degree again stated that they would instead have completed a different degree that led to a clear and specific vocational role that they felt their degree does not. Poseidon for instance states that in the same time it took to complete an undergraduate psychology degree, he could have completed a social work degree instead, and that this could have led to registration and a title of a social worker.

...I think social work stops at the bachelor level right? So you get a – you can be licensed at that level. But psychology required further study before you can be a

licensed psychologist right yeah, so that's one of the things because if you're not willing to commit long term it's not really that worth it ([REDACTED] lines 418-423).

Ultimately, the degree appeared to not only have influenced graduates on an academic level but also on a personal level. Graduates placed high personal value on the degree, attributing their growth and development as stemming from having completed a psychology degree.

I definitely feel like the degree had an impact on who I am as a person, um, and then residual, um, yeah residual impacts on kind of where I am today and what I do and also how I do it. So on paper it might not look like it did but I definitely hold it quite near and dear to my heart, my degree ([REDACTED] lines 783-786).

Chapter 4: Discussion

4.1 Overview

This study investigated the perceptions of third and fourth year psychology graduates and assessed whether graduates felt that the degree, framed by the GAs and psychological literacy, is preparing graduates for employment. Three main themes were generated: *Skills*, *Knowledge* and *Growth and Development*. The first two themes outline how graduates perceive the degree content – skills and knowledge – as being adequate preparation for work. The third theme refers to how the degree contributed to both personal and professional development of graduates.

4.2 Where Graduates Are Working

The sixteen graduates interviewed were employed in a variety of sectors, aligning with literature in which psychology undergraduates pursue a range of different roles (Borden & Rajecki, 2010; Hamilton et al., 2018; Moores & Reddy, 2012). Twelve out of sixteen graduates reported that their degree was relevant to their roles; this is consistent with the findings of GCA (2015) in which three quarters of graduates surveyed stated they were in a role relevant to their study.

4.3 Usefulness of Skills

The first theme, *Skills*, demonstrated that graduates were able to identify skills that they had developed through their degree and currently utilise in their position (see Table 2). This supports the notion that undergraduate psychology students develop a broad range of skills and abilities that are applicable to a variety of employment roles (Hayes, 1996; Landrum et al, 2010). The skills identified by graduates also align with the skills Hayes (1996) believes make a psychology graduate distinctive.

4.3.1 Research skills.

Graduates identified research skills as one of the most valuable skills, regardless of whether their employment role required direct application of research knowledge and methodologies. Graduates reported that even if their role did not explicitly require this skill, they were still able to use their research skills in a transferable manner. The versatility of these skills was also supported by Hayes (1996) in which research skills were perceived to be useful in a variety of employment settings. Similarly, an early study by Lunneborg and Wilson (1985) reported that in regards to career preparation, alumni were most satisfied with the acquisition of research skills. Consequently, these skills appear to still be valued by graduates today.

Recognition and application of research skills indicates development of the second GA, *Research methods in Psychology*. Specific skills such as statistical analysis and interpretation were also reported as useful, as well as an advantageous skill that appeared to be lacking in non-psychology trained co-workers. Other skills, such as the use of technology and working with qualitative and quantitative data were further stated as useful research skills (see Table 1). This is also consistent with Hayes (1996), in which numeracy, measurement skills, computer literacy and information-finding skills were considered distinctive skills of psychology graduates.

4.3.2 Critical thinking.

Graduates reported developing critical thinking skills and highlighted this as a particularly useful skill in their employment role, demonstrating the third GA, *Critical Thinking Skills in Psychology*. Graduates were particularly conscious of this ability, and were able to demonstrate the development and application of critical thinking skills by acknowledging it and providing examples. For instance, reflecting on the concept of stereotypes in their employment role resulted in critical analysis of their own prejudices and

biases. Additionally, this also indicates overlap with the fourth GA, *Values in Psychology* in which one suggested outcome is understanding how prejudice and discriminatory behaviour exists (APAC, 2010). Development of critical thinking skills through the degree resonates with a study by Haw (2011), who tested the development of critical thinking skills in Australian psychology students undertaking an APAC-accredited undergraduate degree. It was found that through instructional based teaching practice students showed an increase in their critical thinking skills (Haw, 2011). Likewise, skills identified by Hayes (1996) that overlap include critical evaluation and higher-order analysis.

4.3.3 Interpersonal skills.

Graduates have reported developing interpersonal skills such as empathy as a result of their studies, and viewed this as a beneficial skill that is utilised within various employment roles. This coincides with the fifth GA, *Communication Skills in Psychology* in which development of interpersonal skills is stated to be an outcome of this attribute. Psychology, as the science of human behaviour, uniquely offers “a body of knowledge that forms a foundation for understanding and reaching emotional maturity” (Landrum et al., 2010, p. 104). As a result, students are aware of the behaviours and mental processes that drive human behaviour and are able to utilise this knowledge in various areas in their lives. This aligns with the findings of Landrum et al. (2010) in which changes related to personality and emotional dimensions were also reported within the surveyed psychology alumni. Similarly, Hayes (1996) reported interpersonal awareness as a distinctive skill of psychology graduates. Demonstrated applicability of this skill in a variety of contexts further increases the psychological literacy of graduates, as well as aligning with the sixth GA, *Learning and the Application of Psychology*.

4.4 Lack of Recognition of Skills and Graduate Attributes

While graduates were able to identify and acknowledge the variety of skills they had developed and currently utilise, lack of recognition as well as devaluation of these skills was also apparent. For instance, although *Communication Skills in Psychology* is considered as a GA, acknowledgement of having developed communication skills was only occasionally reported, with graduates further devaluing the usefulness of this skill. Furthermore, although the development of interpersonal skills was highlighted, no recognition of it being a form of communication skill was made. Additionally, graduates stated that following the completion of their degree, they were either unaware of what skills they had developed, and consequently unsure of how to communicate the skills they had learnt. This was consistent with literature, in which internalisation of skills was a common issue among psychology students (Diaz, 2019b; Hayes, 1997; O'Hare & McGuinness, 2003). This further results in a lack of ability for psychology graduates to market themselves to employers (O'Hare & McGuinness, 2003). Lack of recognition was particularly prominent within recent graduates in the first year of their completion of the degree, resonating with the findings of Hayes (1997). Similarly, another identified issue is the lack of understanding of what skills employers who hire psychology graduates value (Miller & Cardiccu, 2015). Results from Miller & Cardiccu's study (2015) showed that there was in fact an overlap in the knowledge, skills and abilities perceived as important for employment by both graduates and employers. This indicates that graduates are generally aware of what skills, knowledge and abilities are valued by employers. Thus the findings of this study only partially support existing literature, indicating that perhaps some but not all graduates are able to identify skills and knowledge relevant to employers.

There is also a lack of awareness from graduates across multiple institutions regarding what GAs are. This contradicts the findings of Morris et al. (2013), in which the students surveyed were aware of GAs. However, Morris et al. (2013) surveyed 231 students from a

singular Australian university, whereas the sixteen graduates interviewed in this study were from a range of universities across Australia. This may be indicative of a lack of awareness of GAs from multiple universities. Of the few graduates who were aware of the GAs, it was reported that the skills outlined in the GAs were not immediately clear – this may potentially contribute to the lack of recognition of skills. In a similar manner, some graduates noted that the more prominent skills developed (such as critical thinking) was not a skill that is unique to psychology; it can be developed through other degrees. This notion is echoed in literature, for instance Murdoch (2016) questions what unique attributes psychology students bring to the workforce. This perception – that the undergraduate degree does not produce skills unique to the discipline – may further contribute to lack of recognition and devaluation of skills in graduates (Hayes, 1996).

Additionally, graduates felt that universities should be responsible for teaching them how to sell their skills. Graduates critiqued universities for not explicitly outlining and identifying skills relevant to their degree, i.e. what skills developed through the degree that are unique to the psychological field. There has been discussion within literature regarding the responsibility – Bates, Bates & Bates (2006) argues that universities are accountable for the learnings of students and thus required to meet these demands. Likewise, Hamilton et al. (2018) argues that the responsibility lies with the educators. As a result, it appears that having a curriculum framework alone is not sufficient, students also require explicit indication of the skills they are developing.

4.5 Differences in Age and Experience

Older graduates who had been working for longer reported that it was not until they had been working in the field for a certain period of time that they were able to recognise the value of their skills. Prior to this, being in an academic environment with limited exposure to the real-life situations impacted on their perception of the value of their skills. This aligns

with the findings of Landrum & Elison-Bowers (2009), as having more work experience allows for more opportunities to recognise, develop and apply skills in a broader variety of contexts.

However, this study found that a number of younger graduates were also able to reflect and demonstrate an ability to use skills flexibly, implying that perceptions of usefulness of the degree – while can be attributed to time and experience – may also be attributed to awareness and insight of the graduate. This may also be an indication of the development of psychological literacy, in which some graduates may have more thoroughly developed than others. As demonstrated by the findings, theoretical skills can be beneficial, however considered not so due to a lack of awareness of how to apply these skills.

4.6 Knowledge

The second theme, *Knowledge*, identified that recollection and application of content knowledge was considered by graduates as useful in employment roles, indicating development of the first GA, *Knowledge and Understanding of Psychology*. Almost all graduates were satisfied with the contents of the degree providing a broad foundational body of knowledge. Those who were not satisfied stated that the contents of the degree were not relevant to their role. However remaining graduates were able to draw upon different areas of content knowledge which they found to have assisted them in their employment roles. Thus graduates were able to demonstrate an outcome of gaining this knowledge, in that they are able to apply content knowledge outside of the classroom (Tomcho & Foels, 2017).

Particularly insightful graduates further demonstrated indirect application of knowledge by utilising content knowledge to guide their behaviours both inside and outside of employment contexts. This finding resonates with Hayes (1997) in which environmental awareness and interpersonal awareness can arise from knowledge gained from the degree. Demonstration of this (such as adhering to confidentiality or engaging in cross-cultural competency) also

reflect the fourth GA, *Values in Psychology* as well as the sixth GA, *Learning and the Application of Psychology*, and is indicative of psychological literacy (Tomcho & Foels, 2017).

4.7 Psychological Literacy

Psychological literacy is stated to be the primary outcome of the undergraduate degree in psychology (Cranney, Botwood & Morris, 2012; Roberts, Heritage & Gasson, 2015; Tomcho & Foels, 2017). Graduates who develop psychological literacy are seen as being in a unique position in which they are able to utilise and apply their pool of psychological knowledge to “personal, professional and societal issues” (Cranney et al., 2012, p. iii; Roberts et al., 2015). The concept of psychological literacy underlines the sixth GA, *Learning and Application of Psychology*, where this attribute was specifically developed with employment-seeking graduates in mind (APAC, 2010). Both the GAs and McGovern et al.'s (2010) characteristics of the psychologically literate citizen align closely. As a result, development of the GAs also leads to increased psychological literacy (APAC, 2008; Morris et al., 2013).

Psychologically literate graduates are deemed as global citizens; these citizens are stated to live, work and contribute positively as a member of global communities (Cranney, 2012; Mair et al., 2013). Graduates were able to positively contribute their psychological literacy within their surrounding environments; this is apparent through the subthemes *Interpersonal skills* (see section 3.2.2), *Knowledge applied in personal life* (see section 3.3.2), and *Personal growth* (see section 3.4.2). For instance, insight into one's own and other's behaviours is considered an attribute of psychological literacy (McGovern et al., 2010). This was reflected through conscious development of self-awareness, as well as an empathetic outlook and understanding of how and why others may behave the way they do. Graduates also exhibited psychological literacy through their thinking and behaviour. For

instance, utilising psychological knowledge to guide own behaviours accordingly is a valuable skill that is beneficial in a social context. Appropriately educating peers based on the content knowledge acquired also indicated psychological literacy. Critical thinking (such as in the face of societal issues) was also demonstrated as a tool to aid in evaluating the veracity of presented information. Psychologically literate graduates are critical thinkers, as well as ethically and socially responsible citizens (McGovern et al., 2010). It appears that by having developed this form of literacy, graduates contribute a positive influence on the world, aided by their skillset and knowledge (Mair et al., 2013).

4.8 Professional Growth Through Work-Integrated Learning

The transition from study to work was perceived to be a significant change, with graduates reporting a significant amount of professional growth occurring as a result of the transition between education and employment. This was captured through the subtheme, *Professional growth* within the third theme, *Growth and development*. This transition period has been identified as an especially challenging period for graduates (Hamilton et al., 2018). Although it was reported that the degree did prepare them in terms of setting a base foundation of skills and knowledge, graduates stated that it could have better prepared them by undertaking a placement, or an opportunity for work-integrated learning (WIL).

Graduates noted that working in the field allowed them to perceive their study with a new understanding that they were unable to obtain due to being in a classroom setting. This benefit of WIL has been highlighted in literature, in which WIL allows for the identification of theoretical concepts taught, and allowing opportunity to put theory into practice (Govender & Wait, 2017). WIL has also been demonstrated to consolidate psychological literacy within students (Hamilton et al., 2018; Homewood, Winchester-Seeto, Warburton & Hutchinson, 2012). Graduates who undertook a placement course spoke highly of the benefits they received out of it, aligning with the findings of Govender & Wait (2017), in which students

often view placements as the most significant influence on their future career. Bates et al. (2007) also notes that currently an increasing number of universities are incorporating work-placement experience as a part of their curriculum. Furthermore, both employers and students value work-based learning as a way to promote employability of graduates (Lowden et al., 2001).

However, findings from this study also indicate that while WIL can increase feelings of preparation, graduates who undertake placement also risk perceiving to have developed their skills through placement, rather than through the degree which they draw upon in placements. In line with Hamilton et al. (2018), graduates enter the degree expecting skills-focussed training, but when encountered with theoretical skills, devaluation of theoretical skills occur. This was resonated in the findings, in which graduates felt that up until embarking on placement they did not feel sufficiently equipped. Thus it is important that graduates recognise the value of the skills developed through the degree, and not misattribute nor devalue them in comparison to vocational skills.

4.9 Personal Growth and Value

An unexpected finding from this study was that of personal growth and value, captured through the subtheme, *Personal growth* of the third theme, *Growth and development*. The personal value graduates place on the psychology degree has only briefly been touched upon in literature (Goedeke & Gibson, 2011; Littlepage et al., 1990; Lunneborg & Wilson, 1985). Findings showed that majority of graduates place a high level of personal value on the degree, and perceived psychology as a part of their identity. If given the choice, 14 out of 16 graduates reported they would choose to do psychology again – aligning closer to the findings of Lunneborg & Wilson (1985) who found that 69% of surveyed graduates would, compared to the GCA (2015) survey in which only 52.5% of participants would.

Identification with the field of psychology appears to be a characteristic that attracts graduates to the degree. A focus study by Goedeke & Gibson. (2011, p. 136) regarding first year psychology students' perceptions of psychology found that participants portrayed psychology beyond an academic degree/discipline, but similar to a "calling", or an "identity". This finding also concurs with what graduates reported, hence the extent of personal value gained from the degree resonating highly among graduates, and consequently a strong motivator for choosing and continuing with studying the degree. Identification also appeared to be strong enough to transcend perceived usability of the degree, in which despite the undergraduate degree not meeting the expectations of graduates, graduates would still willingly return to it if given the opportunity.

Personal growth can also be viewed as relating to the GAs and psychological literacy. For instance, graduates reported developing the ability to self-reflect, which in turn contributed to their personal growth – this aligns with the sixth GA, *Learning and Application of Psychology*. Furthermore, development of psychological literacy may promote self-growth within graduates. This finding supports the view that psychological literacy has wide-reaching effects, not just on a social and societal level but also on a personal level (Cranney et al., 2012).

4.10 Implications

This study has implications for Australian psychology curriculums. While the findings show support for the relevancy and applicability of the GAs and usefulness of psychological literacy in employment settings, not all graduates were aware of these attributes and how to explicitly relate degree content with workplace skills (Diaz, 2019a; Hayes 1996; Morris et al., 2013). A greater focus on work integrated learning would open up valuable opportunities to better prepare graduates through application of skills and knowledge in a real-life setting (Doolan et al., 2019; Govender & Wait, 2017; Hamilton et

al., 2018). However due to the already prominent issue of skill internalisation, it should be done so with caution as WIL also carries the risk of graduates further misattributing developed skills (Hayes, 1996; O'Hare & McGuinness, 2003).

As a result, recommendations are made for curriculum design and delivery. It is suggested that universities develop a course with a focus on career preparation and skill development to ensure graduates are aware of the skills they have developed through their degree. Raising awareness of the GAs is also recommended; this may involve explicitly outlining skills and knowledge in relation to the GAs (Diaz, 2019b; Landrum et al., 2010; Miller, 2015). Awareness of these attributes may prove to be a beneficial tool for students to clearly identify the skills and knowledge they have gained through undertaking a psychology degree, and may help reduce the issue of internalisation of skills within psychology students (Diaz, 2019b).

It is also recommended that through this course students develop an understanding of how skills gained from the psychology degree can be used flexibly in employment settings, and how to communicate this to employers (O'Hare & McGuinness, 2013). In conjunction, encouraging students to utilise university career services may assist with skill identification and communication to employers (Diaz, 2019a; Landrum et al., 2010; Strapp et al., 2018).

The integration of WIL into psychology curricula may pose as an opportunity for students to develop an understanding of how to apply their transferable skills, and how they are able to contribute their skills and knowledge in an employment setting. WIL has also been demonstrated to increase the psychological literacy levels of students, satisfying an APAC requirement (Hamilton et al., 2018).

In order to avoid students misattributing skill development, it is recommended that graduates are made aware of the skills they have developed throughout their degree, and how these skills can be applied through WIL (Govender & Wait, 2017). For instance, outlining the

GAs and an assessment reflection piece before and after undertaking a WIL may assist graduates' awareness of the versatility of their skills. Critical reflection of experiences (such as through reflection pieces) are stated to assist students in reaching and consolidating learning objectives (Bringle, Ruiz, Brown, Reeb, 2016).

4.11 Strengths

This was the first qualitative study that explored graduates' views regarding the usefulness of their undergraduate degree in depth. This filled in a gap in literature, as behavioural and emotional characteristics of graduates that influence work-readiness has not been prominently addressed (Landrum et al., 2010). The study also added evidence that despite a lack of support from universities, graduates generally perceive the degree as adequate preparation. However, this contrasts with previous literature which have surveyed graduates and indicated that graduates felt they were not prepared for work (Borden & Rajceki, 2000; Landrum et al., 2010). As a result, this study demonstrates that a lack of recognition of skills may contribute to why there is less of a perception of preparedness in previous literature. This study also expanded on the limited literature regarding the personal value graduates hold of their psychology degree (Goedeke et al., 2001; Littlepage et al., 1990; Lunneborg & Wilson, 1985).

This study further adds to the Australian literature regarding work-readiness of Australian psychology graduates. This study was also the first study to assess the relevance of the APAC GAs in conjunction with workplace preparation, while simultaneously investigating how graduates currently utilise psychological literacy outside of educational contexts. Triangulation of theoretical frameworks is also stated to increase the interpretative rigor of the study by developing a greater understanding of the topic and reducing potential bias (Kitto et al., 2008).

Saturation of data was also achieved, indicating support for the claims made in this study (Tracey, 2010). Member checking was conducted with participants who wished to do so, which further added to the interpretative rigor of the study (Kitto et al., 2008). Furthermore, the use of thematic analysis enabled for the obtainment of rich, deep data from a small group of participants (Nowell, 2017).

A further strength of this study is the background of the primary researcher. As the researcher has completed an undergraduate Bachelor's degree and is currently studying Honours, this lends a unique, insider position in which the researcher was able to compare and reflect upon personal experience and knowledge. This is particularly beneficial when undertaking thematic analysis as "the researcher becomes the instrument for analysis" (Nowell, 2017, p. 2). Thus the researcher viewed this study through the lens of a researcher as well as a current psychology student.

4.12 Limitations and Future Research

A limitation to this study is that there is no clear definition of 'preparedness'. There may be a discrepancy between the standard of preparedness implied by this study and graduates' actual standards of preparedness. An agreed-upon definition of 'preparedness' would better aid further research in this area.

Another limitation was that although this study has inferred that graduates have achieved the GAs and psychological literacy, it cannot be conclusively determined. It is possible that graduates in this study may be undermining their skills, or they could simply have not achieved the GAs. To address this, an area for further study may be a mixed methods approach – a quantitative measure to assess whether graduates are achieving the GAs, followed by an interview to assess graduates' perceptions.

There are also reported gaps between student and employer perceptions of perceived work-readiness (Landrum & McCarthy, 2018). Furthermore, the skills that students learn and

the skills that employers seek are not mutually exclusive (Diaz, 2019). As a result, interviewing employers to ascertain what attributes employers value in psychology graduates may also be of interest. This could be an area for further research; triangulation of data with employer views would have further strengthened this study (Tracey, 2010). Alternatively, conducting a separate qualitative study on employer views would also allow for breadth and depth of data that previous literature conducted on this topic (which has been predominately quantitative) does not account for (Miller et al., 2015).

This study also shows mixed support for whether older graduates perceive the usability of the degree differently to recent graduates, and only partially support the findings of previous research (Landrum & Elison-Bowers, 2009). Other than what was reported in the findings of Landrum & Elison-Bowers (2009), there appears to be no mention in the literature on the relationship between year of graduation and perceived usefulness of the undergraduate degree. Further research can be conducted into this area to investigate the perceptions of older graduates and younger graduates separately.

Furthermore, the majority of universities do not keep track of where graduates go following graduation (Landrum & McCarthy, 2018). Therefore developing a form of tracking with a feedback mechanism for alumni to report on their experiences may aid future research. This would allow for easier, more accessible and frequent data collection.

In a similar manner, a potential avenue for future research may involve conducting a longitudinal study to track where psychology graduates go. A longitudinal study was conducted by Titley (1978) that followed psychology graduates 1, 5 and ten years after graduation, however due to the changing needs of stakeholders an updated study in the current day and age would be informative.

4.13 Conclusion

This study investigated third and fourth year psychology graduates' perceptions of work-readiness. Due to the rapid development of today's growing workforce, it was important that graduate perceptions be investigated to fill in this gap in literature. The study demonstrates that both the GAs and psychological literacy appear to adequately equip graduates within their employment roles. Graduates were also able to implement these skills beyond the university setting and also into personal contexts. Graduates also perceived these skills to be both relevant and useful, and recognised how to use these skills flexibly. However, this perception was not shared – other graduates also appeared to lack recognition of and devalue skills developed through the degree. Recommendations for curriculum design and delivery were made accordingly to address these issues; notably explicit communication of skills graduates develop through a psychology degree as well as the inclusion of WIL. WIL within the psychology curriculum would allow for graduates to apply their skills and knowledge in a real-life setting, aiding in the consolidation of skills. These recommendations would not only support graduates who intend on entering the workforce but also address growing the needs of stakeholders for universities to produce work-ready graduates.

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Appendix A: Undergraduate Research Conference Application Acceptance



Connie Tran <a1687093@student.adelaide.edu.au>

2019 Undergraduate Research Conference - Oral Presentation

1 message

5 July 2019 at 12:54

Dear Connie

Thank you for your interest in presenting at the [2019 Undergraduate Research Conference](#) and for your abstract: **Third and Fourth Year Psychology graduates' employment experiences post-graduation**

On behalf of the Review Panel, I am delighted to invite you to give an oral presentation at the conference. Congratulations!

Your presentation has been scheduled for **Thursday 25 July at 12.40pm in Napier 209**.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR PRESENTATION

Preparing your slides

Please use the attached PowerPoint template to prepare your slides. Please submit your final presentation slides to teachexcellence@adelaide.edu.au (use the subject line: URC Powerpoint Presentation) by **5pm Thursday July 18**

Please contact your supervisor as soon as possible to share the good news. They may also be able to provide advice on preparing for your presentation.

Presentation length

Your presentation is 10 minute. There will be 5 minutes for questions at the end of each presentation and then and a 5-minute allowance for changing presenters. A chair will be present in the room to assist with time keeping.

Optional presentation practice workshops

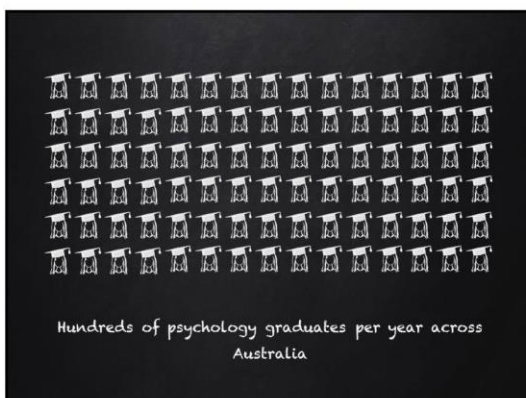
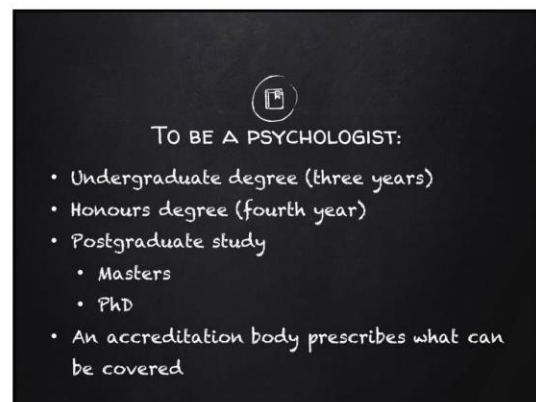
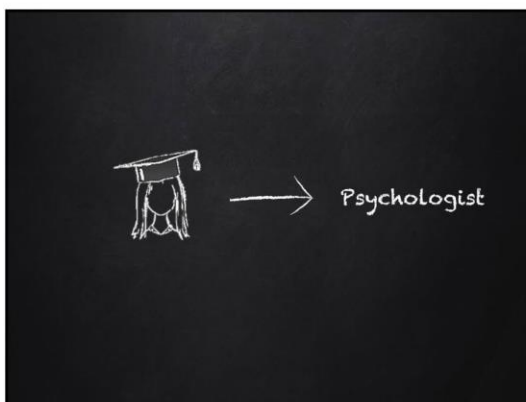
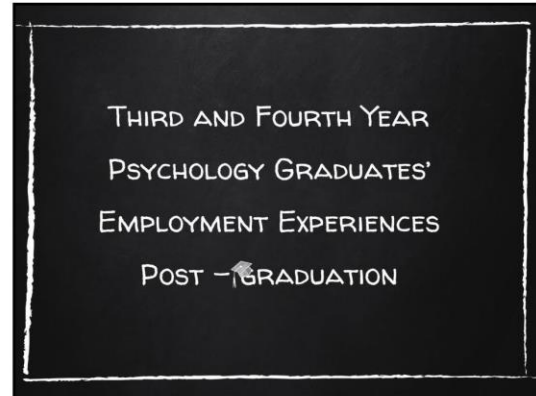
Following on from our abstract writing workshops we are pleased to offer presentation practice workshops on Monday July 22 and Tuesday July 23. These workshops will be an opportunity to give your presentation and receive brief feedback. We are holding them in Napier 205 which is one of the presentation rooms for the conference.

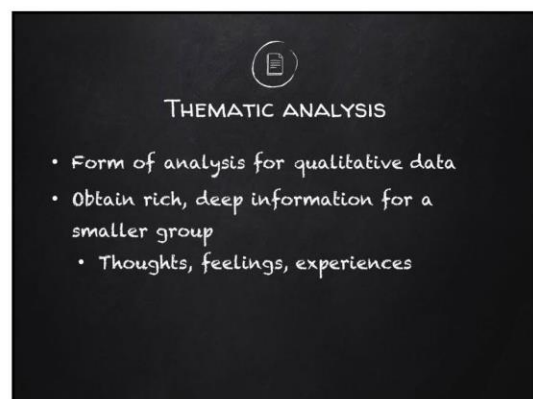
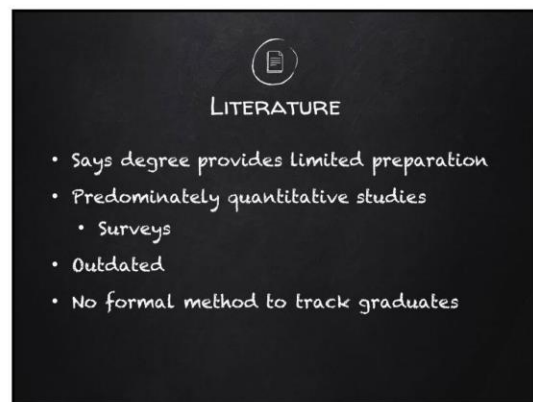
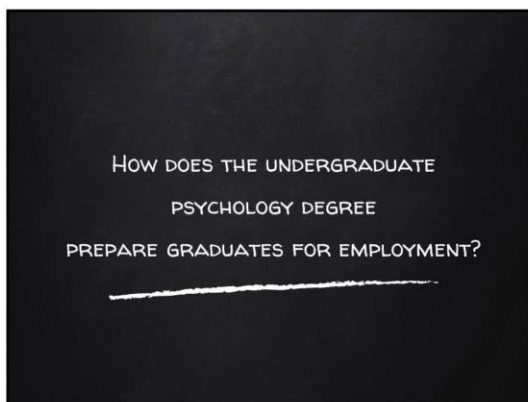
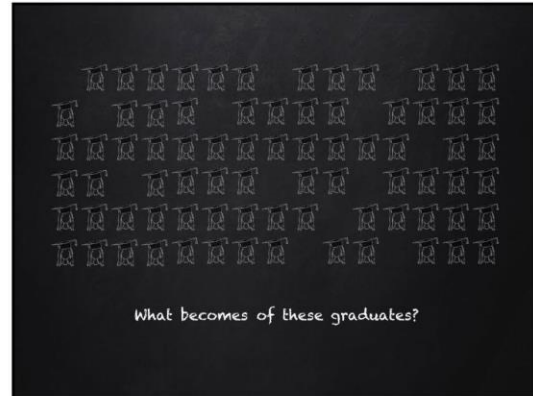
If you are interested in attending a presentation workshop please register by following the links below (you only need to register for one of these)

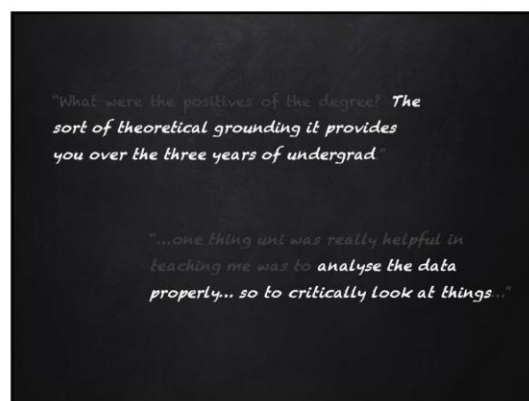
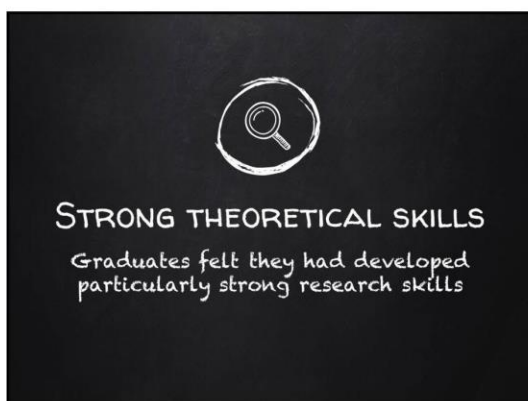
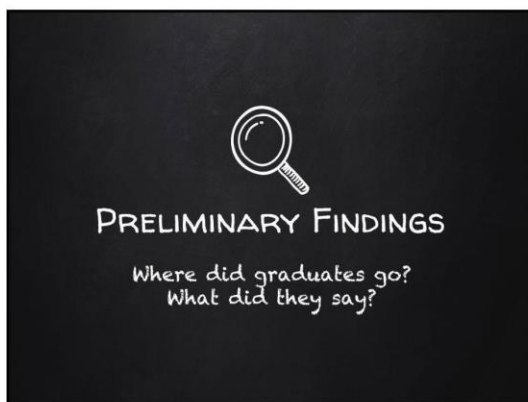
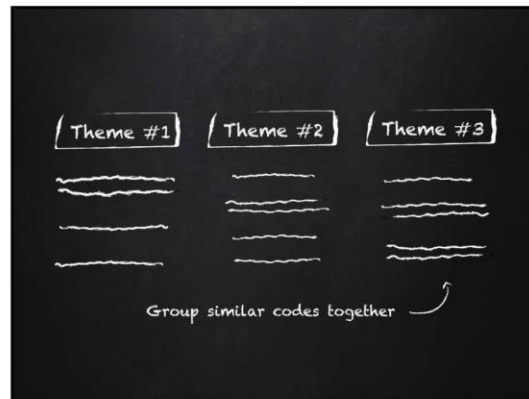
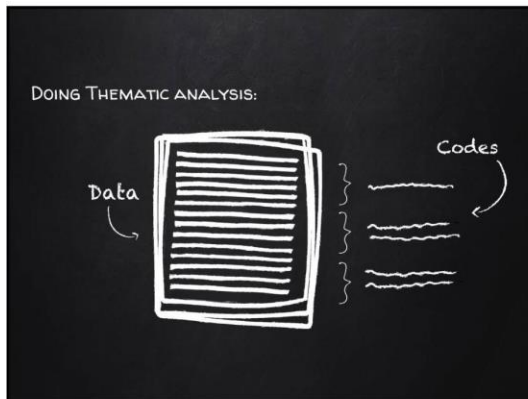
Monday 22 July 2.30pm-5.00pm <https://careerhub.adelaide.edu.au/students/events/Detail/2239313>

Tuesday 23 July 9.00am-11.00am <https://careerhub.adelaide.edu.au/students/events/Detail/2239315>

Appendix B: Undergraduate Research Conference Presentation Slides









DEGREE → "FOOT IN THE DOOR"

Psychology degree valued as a degree
in itself

*"...it gave me the piece of paper that I
needed. It gave me that certificate."*

*"Without that piece of paper, I
wouldn't have been able to get
the job that I have now."*

*"...my degree, definitely got me a
foot in the door in the industry that I
wanted to work in."*



LACK OF PRACTICAL SKILLS

Not enough "hands on" experience in
their degree

*"And so then when I had to start working,
I couldn't draw on any practical stuff, it
was only the theory"*

*"...we get taught what they [types of
therapies] are... but we don't get a
chance to implement them."*

DESPITE MOST SAYING THEIR DEGREE DIDN'T
PREPARE THEM FOR THEIR ROLE, MOST
GRADUATES SAID THEY WOULD STILL DO
PSYCHOLOGY AGAIN.

WHY?



PERSONAL VALUE IN DEGREE

The degree added to the personal
growth and development of graduates

"...you come out with this thing that you've achieved that you feel really good about"

Honours gave me a bit of a career direction it actually taught me what I wanna do."

"...you kind of become more tolerant, more accepting, more compassionate towards people"



WHAT CAN WE INFER FROM THESE RESULTS?

- Graduates develop a broad range of skills and knowledge
- In the eyes of graduates:
 - Too broad, theoretical and not practical enough
- Viewed as lacking work-readiness
- Contradictory views



WHAT CAN I DO WITH THESE RESULTS?

- Make recommendations for curriculum design and delivery
- TBA



POTENTIAL FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Interview employers
- Interview older graduates
- Improvement feedback system from graduates who have left



RESULTS ARE PRELIMINARY

- Ideas presented are not all my findings so far
- I'm excited to keep analysing the rest of my interviews!



THE UNIVERSITY
of ADELAIDE

Appendix C: Participation Information Sheet**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

PROJECT TITLE: Third and Fourth Year Psychology graduates' employment experiences post-graduation

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL NUMBER: [REDACTED]

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Professor Anna Chur-Hansen

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Connie Tran

STUDENT'S DEGREE: Honours in Psychology

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?

Following the completion of an undergraduate or honours Psychology degree, a number of students do not take on further study, but instead decide to enter the workforce. This project will investigate whether the Australian undergraduate/honours psychology degree is adequately preparing third and fourth year graduates for employment.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Professor Anna Chur-Hansen and Connie Tran (student researcher). The interviews will be conducted by the student researcher. This research is part of the requirements of a research thesis for the degree of Honours in Psychology at the University of Adelaide under the supervision of Anna-Chur Hansen.

Why am I being invited to participate?

You are being invited as you are a psychology graduate who has completed a Bachelor/Honours degree with no further study undertaken, and are currently in employment.

What am I being invited to do?

You are being invited to attend a single one-on-one interview, either face-to-face in Adelaide, or via telephone, Zoom or Skype, that will explore your perspective as a psychology graduate currently in the workforce. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded. If face to face, the interview will take place in a private room in the School of Psychology at the University of Adelaide.

How much time will my involvement in the project take?

You will be asked to take part in a single one-on-one interview with the student researcher that will take approximately 45-60 minutes. There will be no direct or indirect financial benefit, participation is completely voluntary.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

The study has no foreseeable risks and is unlikely to cause any harm or distress to you.

What are the potential benefits of the research project?

You will not gain a direct benefit. The findings will contribute to the literature on whether psychology graduates are meeting the needs of employers.

Can I withdraw from the project?

Participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time without explanation. We can withdraw your data anytime up until submission of the thesis (i.e., October 2019).

What will happen to my information?

Your interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed into a written interview. This will be unidentifiable with a number allocated to you, or a pseudonym of your choice. The audio-recordings, notes and transcripts from the interviews will be accessed by the student researcher and her supervisor. You will be offered the opportunity to receive a copy of your final de-identified transcript within two weeks of your interview and request changes if you would like to. You will also be offered a summary of the research findings on completion of analysis. The findings may be included in a relevant journal paper. All audio recordings, notes and transcripts will be stored on a password protected computer. The student researcher will be the only individual able to access this. At the completion of the project, all files will be deleted from the computer and destroyed. A copy of the final transcripts will be stored on a USB at the School of Psychology at the University of Adelaide for a period of seven years, at which time they will be destroyed. If you are interested in the results of the project, we will send this to you.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

If you have any questions, please contact:

**If I want to participate, what do I do?**

If you wish to participate, please contact the student researcher to organise an interview . Upon review of your consent form, you can email a signed copy to the student researcher. Alternatively, you can provide a signed consent form on arrival to the interview.

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Adelaide (approval number H-2019-xxx). This research project will be conducted according to the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018). If you have questions or problems associated with the practical aspects of your participation in the project, or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, then you should consult the Principal Investigator. If you wish to speak with an independent person regarding concerns or a complaint, the University's policy on research involving human participants, or your rights as a participant, please contact the Human Research Ethics Committee's Secretariat on:

Phone: +61 8 8313 6028

Email: hrec@adelaide.edu.au

Post: Level 4, Rundle Mall Plaza, 50 Rundle Mall, ADELAIDE SA 5000

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

Yours sincerely,

Appendix D: Consent Form**Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)****CONSENT FORM**

1. I have read the attached Information Sheet and agree to take part in the following research project:

Title:	Third and Fourth Year Psychology graduates' employment experiences post-graduation
Ethics Approval Number:	██████████

2. I have had the project, so far as it affects me, and the potential risks and burdens fully explained to my satisfaction by the research worker. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions I may have about the project and my participation. My consent is given freely.
3. Although I understand the purpose of the research project, it has also been explained that my involvement may not be of any benefit to me.
4. I agree to participate in the activities outlined in the participant information sheet.
5. I agree to be audio recorded.
Yes No
6. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time.
7. I have been informed that the information gained in the project may be published in a journal article, via media release through the University of Adelaide, or in conference presentations.
8. I have been informed that in the published materials I will not be identified and my personal results will not be divulged.
9. I would like to receive a copy of my final de-identified transcript from my interview.
Yes No
10. I would like to receive a summary of the findings of this study.
Yes No
11. I understand my information will only be disclosed according to the consent provided, except where disclosure is required by law.
12. I am aware that I should keep a copy of this Consent Form, when completed, and the attached Information Sheet.

Participant to complete:

Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher/Witness to complete:

I have described the nature of the research to _____

(print name of participant)

and in my opinion she/he understood the explanation.

Signature: _____ Position: _____ Date: _____

Appendix E: Interview Guide

Name:

Date:

Employment role:

Job Seeking

- “Selling yourself” – how?
- Why hired for role?
- Imposter syndrome
- Job market for psychology graduates
- Difficulties encountered seeking work
- Employer perceptions of psych graduates

Employment/degree

- Main skills used in role
- Things that came easily in role
- Difficulties encountered in role
- Takeaway from degree
 - Positives of degree
 - Negatives of degree
- Degree adequately prepare – feelings?
- Content in undergrad that would better prepare?
- Redesign degree – what changes?
 - Design a practical course
- Career expectations
- Why study psychology
- Reason for not pursuing further study
- APAC Competencies (awareness)

Life Perspectives

- Volunteering/extra-curricular while studying
- Opportunities degree did not provide
- Studying psychology → view of the world?
- Occupation → perspectives on life?
- Paths psychology peers have taken
- Final comments