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An exploration of undergraduate student experiences of self-defeating behaviours

by

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ABSTRACT

The choice to procrastinate continues to perplex researchers and procrastinators alike. Previous research has assumed that the behaviour is paradoxical and therefore researchers have searched for answers to this paradox. The present qualitative study aimed to explore students' experiences of self-defeating behaviour by mainly focusing on their experiences of procrastination. The notion of procrastination as paradoxical is suspended in favour of exploring the meaning participants attribute to their behaviour by using interpretative phenomenological methodology. Six participants were purposively selected from the University of Pretoria using a screening questionnaire developed by the researcher. The selected participants were interviewed, and the resulting data were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Four themes emerged from the data which included procrastination and the self, agency, the function of procrastination, and coping with procrastination. Furthermore, a fifth theme, namely, additional self-defeating behaviours is also discussed. The findings suggest that participants derive meaning from their procrastination beyond defining their self-defeating behaviour as paradoxical. The implications of the findings and resulting conclusions are thereafter further discussed with regards to future research on procrastination.

Keywords: Procrastination, self-defeating behaviour, experiences of self-defeat, IPA, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Phenomenology, Reversal theory

Table of Contents

List of Tables

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview of Chapter 1

This chapter introduces the reader to the research project by contextualising the exploration of self-defeating behaviour. Secondly, I discuss the motivation for the present study concerning the phenomenon explored, academic requirements and personal reasons that may influence how I explore the phenomenon. Thirdly, I briefly contextualise the research problem and thereafter present the research question, the goals of the research project and research objectives. I also provide the delineation and limitations inherent to the study to maintain transparency throughout the study. Lastly, I define key concepts utilised in later chapters and provide an overview of the chapters to follow.

1.2. Contextualisation of the Research Project

Like, why can't I just realise every time that this is what I should be doing instead?

- Bruce (pseudonym)

The quote above captures the frustration experienced by a participant in the current study due to his habitual choice to procrastinate. It is likely that we have all, to some degree, procrastinated before (Steel, 2007). The differences between occasional and chronic procrastination are determined by the significance of procrastination in our lives and the time spent ruminating about how it affects our daily experience of life. Imagine feeling like a slave to your procrastination; having your decision-making permeated by procrastination to the point of regret and shame.

The present study aims to explore the experience of self-defeating behaviour by focusing on procrastination as an experience emblematic of a large proportion of the student population and those selected to participate in this study. Steel (2007) argues that 75% of college students identify as procrastinators and that approximately 50% procrastinate consistently and consider their behaviour problematic. Procrastination has been defined as irrational delay, unwarranted or paradoxical behaviour, and ultimately self-defeating (for example, Anderson, 2016; Davis & Abbitt, 2013; S. Kim, Fernandez, & Terrier, 2017;

Steel, 2007, 2010). Procrastination has been identified as a form of self-handicapping which, in turn, is characterised as self-defeating behaviour (Barratt, 2011).

Baumeister and Scher's (1988) work has been cited in several articles (for example, Agnew, Carlston, Graziano, & Kelly 2010; Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005; Baumeister, Vohs, DeWall, & Zhang, 2007; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Jiao, DaRos-Voseles, Collins, & Onwuegbuzie, 2011; Shahidi, 2013; Tice, Bratslavsky, & Baumeister, 2001) and has been influential in conceptualising our current understanding of what constitutes self-defeating behaviour. Baumeister and Scher (1988) conceptualised three models of self-defeating behaviour, including *primary self-destruction*, *counterproductive strategies,* and *tradeoffs*. The present study will focus on *tradeoffs*. *Tradeoffs* are foreseen but undesired self-defeating behaviours which include self-handicapping, substance abuse, healthcare negligence, face-work (maintaining your public image at a cost), and shyness (Baumeister & Scher, 1988). An example of self-handicapping could include an individual who does not prepare sufficiently for a test and, should they fail the test, use their unpreparedness as an excuse. If the individual passes the test (without having prepared sufficiently), they are likely to attribute this to exceptional ability. The cost of being ill-prepared for the test is accepted to, for example, protect their self-esteem from the consequences of possible failure. The individual in this example might, therefore, consider two competing goals; to pass the test or to protect their self-esteem from a perceived threat. Often, by choosing to protect themselves at the expense of long-term success, individuals end up engaging in self-defeating behaviour. Baumeister and Scher (1988) state that the intention is never to fail, but rather to protect the self. The immediate need to protect the self takes precedence over achieving set long-term goals, and the long-term goal is compromised. The authors state that in many instances of *tradeoffs*, individuals perform a cost-benefit analysis and choose between a short-term goal and a long-term goal. When an individual chooses a short-term goal (with short-term benefits) over a long-term goal (one which the individual has been striving towards), they defeat themselves.

An individual under emotional distress might choose the immediacy of a short-term goal despite acknowledging the greater benefits of the long-term goal. In many instances, the immediate benefits are attainable, whereas the long-term benefits or effects, at the time, may seem like only a distant possibility. Baumeister and Scher (1988) also state that this characteristic separates *tradeoffs* from *primary self-destruction* and *counterproductive*

strategies. According to Baumeister and Scher (1988), the goal of *primary self-destruction* involves the intentional pursuit of harm. The authors could find no evidence for *primary self-destruction* as a self-defeating behaviour. Individuals who partake in *counterproductive strategies* make suboptimal choices but are unaware of the consequences thereof (Baumeister & Scher, 1988). Individuals who make *tradeoffs* tend to choose short-term goals over long-term goals and can foresee the consequences thereof (Baumeister & Scher, 1988).

Overall, many self-defeating behaviours are a result of seemingly poor judgements or unrealistic expectations. Interest in this phenomenon, with a specific focus on procrastination as a self-handicapping strategy, is on the rise (Duru & Balkis, 2017; S. Kim et al., 2017; Meier, Reinecke, & Meltzer, 2016; Sirois & Pychyl, 2016). The interest of the current study stems from the fact that individuals can and do perform actions which act against the very goals they have set for themselves. They effectively perform certain adaptive functions daily but, under specific circumstances, make maladaptive choices, which has a negative impact on the goals they have set for themselves (Crocker, 2002; Moeller, Crocker, & Bushman, 2009). Often, upon reflection, they acknowledge that they have made poor choices, but that some mechanism prevented them from seeing the negative consequences resulting from their actions in the present moment (Baumeister et al., 2007; Karoly, Boekaerts, & Maes, 2005; Schraw, Wadkins, & Olafson, 2007). I would argue that under certain circumstances, certain factors make their poor choices seem more appealing but upon reflection, they can acknowledge the error in their judgement. Ultimately, procrastination must provide certain benefits that warrant its consistency. Baumeister and Scher (1988) state that individuals who make *tradeoffs* have high self-awareness and specifically focus on negative affect. Specific consequences of negative affect may include increased aversive emotional states, anxiety, fear, anger, and embarrassment, which could explain erroneous decision-making.

My focus on the *tradeoffs* associated with self-defeating behaviours stems from the intentionality of this specific strategy. Baumeister and Scher (1988) argued that individuals who use specific *tradeoffs* are more concerned with self-presentation, preserving a positive public image, and protecting their self-esteem above achieving the goals they have set for themselves. For instance, some procrastinators may have committed to completing a degree that requires studying, but procrastination inhibits

them from accomplishing that goal. Substance abusers tend to choose the short-term effects of their chosen substance over their long-term health and the very likelihood of becoming addicted to the substance. Shy individuals tend to avoid anxiety-provoking social situations but forego the long-term resolution to this anxiety because they subsequently never create the opportunities to improve their social skills (cf. Baumeister et al., 2005; Baumeister & Scher, 1988; Berglas & Jones, 1978; Sirois & Pychyl, 2013; Vohs, Baumeister, & Ciarocco, 2005).

Recent articles (for example, Duru & Balkis, 2017; Keng Cheng & Law, 2015; Meier et al., 2016; Terada, 2017) investigate procrastination using quantitative methodologies. However, limited research undertakings (for example, Barratt, 2011; Ellis, 2012; Martin, 1998; Martin, Marsh, Williamson, & Debus, 2003; Schraw et al., 2007) attempt to understand the meaning individuals attach to their self-defeating behaviour. In addition, research also has to express the extent to which these individuals are aware of their behaviour patterns and the causes they attribute to these patterns. Baumeister and Scher (1988, p. 17) also acknowledged that "By exploring situational and intra-psychic boundary conditions (including individual differences), it may become possible to understand how self-destruction can be avoided." Therefore, the current study attempts to understand individuals' experiences of self-defeat, how they cope with their experiences, and how it affects their daily functioning. In addition, research conducted in this manner may result in new understandings of self-defeating behaviour, acting as a catalyst for future research on the topic. Therefore, I propose that it is necessary to gain an insider's perspective on the present topic of interest.

1.3. Justification for the Study

Initially, the motivation for the present study involved exploring self-defeating behaviour as a phenomenon. However, during the study, it became clear that this aim would not be feasible and instead, the focus shifted to academic procrastination as a self-defeating behaviour. The scope of self-defeating behaviour was too general and would have detracted from a more thorough exploration of a more specific topic, especially in light of the amount of data accumulated on procrastination. Secondly, all the selected participants defined their procrastination as their most significant self-defeating behaviour; thus providing additional motivation to focus on procrastination. Consequently, the present study is motivated by an attempt to understand participants'

procrastination as a self-defeating behaviour and to contribute to existing literature on the phenomenon.

It is relevant for the reader to know that I (the author) am a procrastinator, to the extent that I could have been selected as a participant for this study. My identification with procrastination has, therefore, shaped all aspects of this study. The motivation for the study stems from my own frustration with procrastination as a form of self-defeating behaviour and my inability to overcome it. My experience as a procrastinator may present as a source of bias in quantitative research; however, the current research is qualitative in nature and requires transparency about how my own experiences affected the interpretation of the findings contained herein. Although I am a procrastinator, I preferred to focus throughout the study on the experiences of the participants and the phenomenon itself rather than on my own experiences of procrastination.

1.4. Brief Description of the Research Question

The present study aims to explore participants' experiences of self-defeating behaviour by focusing on procrastination. The limited available qualitative research on the topic of interest, calls for research that attempts to explore and understand the experiences of individuals affected by self-defeating behaviour. Therefore, new insights regarding self-defeating behaviour may emerge by exploring the selected participants' lived experiences of procrastination.

1.4.1. The research question

How do individuals personally experience their own self-defeating behaviour patterns?

1.4.2. Goals of the research project

The present research aims to understand why participants limit their potential success in achieving the goals they have set for themselves. The research also seeks to understand how aware participants are of their contradictory behaviour and the reasons for their feelings of conflict between accomplishing their intended goals and their procrastination. This study seeks to discover why participants feel that their procrastination outranks the need to achieve the goals they have set for themselves.

The primary goal of this study is to gain insight into the experiences of those who partake in self-defeating behaviour. By acknowledging the distinctive experiences of participants

who self-defeat, the researcher can gain insight (to a certain extent) into the lived experiences of those who procrastinate. Limited studies have focused on the experiences of individuals demonstrating self-defeating behaviour patterns. Ultimately, an interpretation of the lived experience of self-defeat could inform future research conducted in this area and pose alternative avenues for future research.

Self-defeating behaviour applies to a vast number of complex human behaviours (cf. Renn, 2005; Steel, 2007; Steel & Ferrari, 2013) and research on this topic can further allow researchers to understand why some individuals rely on self-defeating behaviour. In understanding the many facets of self-defeating behaviour that individuals choose to employ, we may learn how to help individuals to overcome these patterns of self-defeat. Procrastinators who are overwhelmed by indecisiveness can fail at a task they know they have the potential to complete successfully. Improved knowledge on procrastination would assist scholars in understanding why individuals delay tasks that are important to them. It could also help students to understand why they procrastinate and possibly help them to overcome their self-defeating behaviour. Past research has focused on using quantitative methods to understand why individuals defeat themselves. A goal of the present research is to adopt a qualitative approach to access individuals' experiences of their own self-defeating behaviours, indirectly. Also, a qualitative approach could either confirm, contradict, or add to the conclusions of various quantitative studies conducted on self-defeating behaviour, and procrastination specifically. The present study will lead, ideally, to a better understanding of why individuals defeat themselves and assist future researchers to formulate interventions to circumvent self-defeating behaviour altogether.

1.4.3. Research objectives

- To explore participants' experiences of a specific self-defeating behaviour;
- To understand how participants define their procrastination;
- To explore the meaning participants attribute to their procrastination;
- To derive themes from participants' experiences of procrastination to describe and interpret the phenomenon being investigated.

1.5. Delineation and Limitations

The present study does not seek to find generalisations or objective truths about self-defeating behaviour or procrastination. An underlying caveat of qualitative research is an interest in subjective experiences and thus, the inability to generalise behaviour across populations (Willig, 2013). Therefore, the current study is purposely exploratory and aims to highlight the lived experiences and nuances of those who identify as procrastinators, idiographically. In addition, the study does not aim to be representative of a specific population but instead assumes that experience is idiosyncratic and fully accessible only to the individual.

The primary focus of this study is on procrastination as a means of self-defeat. However, where applicable and to a limited extent, other self-defeating behaviours regarded as *tradeoffs*, including substance abuse, healthcare negligence, and shyness, are explored. Face-work as a *tradeoff* is not explored at all. Qualitative research is often iterative (Willig, 2013) and, therefore, it was not the intention at the beginning of this study to focus mainly on procrastination. I realised that a general exploration of self-defeating behaviour would not be feasible when bearing the goals of this study in mind. Instead, I chose to explore and focus on procrastination as a specific form of self-defeating behaviour. Although this may seem apparent with the benefit of hindsight, I did not assume at the start of the study that facets of self-defeat could emerge by only exploring procrastination. As the study progressed, it became clear that an in-depth exploration of the expression of self-defeat in one form – procrastination – would also add to an understanding of self-defeating behaviour.

I deliberately chose not to use reflexivity as a strategy for validation throughout the study. The choice to omit the use of reflexivity stems from its roots in the critical paradigm and related focus on power relations (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Willig, 2013). In the present study, my focus is on the experiences of the participants in line with the assumptions of phenomenology. I initially chose not to implement reflexivity and, due to time constraints, could not implement it at a later stage either. Therefore, I employed other methods of validation as indicated in Creswell and Miller (2000), which are further elaborated on in Chapter 3. The exclusion of reflexivity could be perceived as a limitation of the present study, especially considering my position as a procrastinator. However, I aimed to be transparent from the outset of this study and, only thereafter, to focus on the

phenomenon at hand and participants' experiences thereof. Without any doubt, my identification as a procrastinator had an influence on the interpretation of findings during the study and the reader should bear this in mind throughout their review of this study.

1.6. Definition of Terms and Concepts

Self-handicapping – The choice to externalise the implications of failure but internalise success, depending on the outcome of a task (Berglas & Jones, 1978).

Procrastination – Procrastination is defined as "culpably unwarranted delay" (Anderson, 2016, p. 47). However, in the context of the current study, behaviour related to participants' procrastination can be perceived as unwarranted in relation to academic goals only. The purposeful nature of procrastination is explored in terms of the participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon. Thus, the consistent decision to procrastinate warrants an exploration of the meaning attributed to this self-defeating behaviour by participants. All of the selected participants mostly shared their experiences of academic procrastination.

Self-defeating behaviour – Self-defeating behaviour is "any deliberate or intentional behavio[u]r that has clear, definitely or probably negative effects on the self or on the self's projects" (Baumeister & Scher, 1988, p. 3).

Tradeoffs – *Tradeoffs* are foreseen but not desired self-defeating behaviours which include self-handicapping, substance abuse, healthcare negligence, face-work, and shyness (Baumeister & Scher, 1988).

Self-presentation/impression management – This refers to procrastinators' concern over managing how other individuals (public image) perceive them. Due to increased self-consciousness, individuals may manipulate how they are perceived by the public to project favourable impressions of themselves (Ferrari & Díaz-Morales, 2007).

Ego depletion – Ego depletion refers to an understanding of self-control as a limited resource that can become depleted by actions requiring self-control (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000).

Counterfactual thinking – McCrea (2008) states that counterfactual thinking involves reimagining past events as either positive (upward counterfactuals) or negative (downward counterfactuals).

If-then contingencies – If-then contingencies are an internalised representation of choices where an initial condition must first be met to move forward and consider further related choices (Baumeister et al., 2007). For example, *if* I study for the test, *then* I should pass it.

Agency – Agency refers to the capacity to take responsibility for one's own choices (Alexander & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

Reversal theory – This theory understands personality as dynamic or evolving in a given context rather than as static, stable, or unchanging (Apter, 2016).

IPA – Interpretative phenomenological analysis is a methodology pioneered by Jonathan Smith. It aims to explore the idiographic nature of lived experience through a phenomenological and hermeneutic lens (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Subordinate or emergent theme – Subordinate or emergent themes are themes that emerge while reading the transcript of a participant after initial noting has taken place (Smith et al., 2009).

Superordinate theme – Superordinate themes are a collection of emergent themes that commonly relate to participants across cases, which provide a descriptive and interpretative understanding of the phenomenon being explored (Smith et al., 2009).

1.7. Summary of Chapter 1

This chapter briefly contextualised the phenomenon under exploration. Secondly, factors motivating the exploration of the phenomenon were discussed. The research problem was outlined by providing a brief description and statement of the research question. Thereafter, the goals of the research project, the research objectives, delineations and limitations were discussed. Lastly, I provided key concepts utilised in later chapters, and the summarised overview of chapters to follow is provided below.

1.8. Summarised Overview of Chapters to Follow

Chapter 2 – This chapter explores literature pertinent to understanding the concept of self-defeating behaviour patterns and specifically *tradeoffs*. External and internal factors that may shape individuals' experiences of self-defeating behaviour are also considered. The understanding of self-defeating behaviour explored in the chapter is specifically applied to procrastination in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 3 – This chapter outlines the paradigmatic point of departure and the methodology employed in the current study. Firstly, the research approach is elaborated on in relation to the theoretical context and assumptions employed. The theory utilised is phenomenology, and certain assumptions pertaining to Reversal Theory have been adopted. The methodology section outlines sample characteristics, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 – The chapter outlines how participants were recruited and the extent of their participation in the study. Thereafter, I discuss the events following the recruitment of the six study participants. An overview of the selected participants' results is provided to explain their selection. Lastly, in accordance with IPA, I provide a descriptive account of each of the selected participants' to situate their experiences idiographically for the reader.

Chapter 5 – This chapter is used to discuss the findings obtained. It complements the preceding chapter and provides interpretations for the descriptions provided in Chapter 4. Thus, Chapter 5 provides an interpretation in the form of superordinate themes to complement the descriptions provided in Chapter 4. I begin the chapter by outlining the process used to compare across cases and discuss the five emerging superordinate themes for the remainder of Chapter 5. Accompanying each of the superordinate themes is a discussion of literature relevant to the theme discussed.

Chapter 6 – The final chapter provides an overview of the findings discussed in previous chapters to contextualise the conclusions presented to the reader. Thereafter, I discuss the limitations of the present study in light of the conclusions reached up to that point. Lastly, I provide recommendations and suggestions to the reader for future research relating to self-defeating behaviour and procrastination, specifically.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Overview of Chapter 2

In order to understand the mechanisms underlying self-defeating behaviour, I reviewed literature on how the experience of self-defeating behaviour has evolved within the context of research. Through an extensive review, I identified and explicitly focused on factors which would influence the experiences of those who defeat themselves using *tradeoffs* (Baumeister & Scher, 1988). These factors can be divided into two categories, namely, external and internal factors. External factors play a role in shaping the individual's experiences while internal factors lead to the choices the individual makes. The external factors identified and discussed in this study are the parental role (Alshawashreh, Alrabee, & Sammour, 2013) and external self-presentation (Ferrari & Díaz-Morales, 2007). I also examine the external role of situational factors as proposed by Metcalfe and Mischel (1999). Secondly, I discuss the internal factors I identified, such as internal self-presentation (Barratt, 2011), self-efficacy (Steel, 2007), self-control (Baumeister, 2002) and self-regulation (Baumeister et al., 2007). Self-regulation broadly includes self-esteem protection, emotional regulation and the limitations imposed on these factors by emotional distress or negative affect. These factors are by no means an exhaustive list of those involved in self-defeating behaviours. They are, however, pertinent to the current research undertaken, specifically for the combined influence they possibly may have on the lived experiences of those who self-defeat. However, not all individuals would experience the factors mentioned above as equally important. Specific factors may also not be relevant to certain individuals at all. However, these factors do offer a way to recognise self-defeating behaviour within the individual's unique experience. I then discuss the impact and possible consequences of using self-defeating strategies. The discussion of the factors and their consequences indicates the need for a qualitative approach.

The methodology employed in the current study is mainly concerned with the internal world of the participant. However, one cannot ignore the influential role of the participant's environment and the impact it has on the participant's subsequent behaviour. A reciprocal relationship exists between the actions of the individual and the limits that the environment places on those actions. Individuals create their own lived experiences, although the environment within which those experiences are created also

provides the individual with feedback for future experiences. In this way, the environment broadly limits the possible types of lived experiences that the individual may have. As a reminder, the external factors the reader needs to consider in the current study are the parental role, situational factors, and self-presentation, which will be discussed next.

2.2. External Factors

2.2.1. Parental role

Alshawashreh et al. (2013) recently recommended that future research investigate the role of parental styles in relation to self-defeating behaviour. This recommendation seems warranted upon also viewing the results of a doctoral dissertation by Barratt (2010). The author found that participants tended to describe at least one of their parents as simultaneously demanding and distant. The author further found that participants who avoid failure tended to have an authoritarian parent who exaggerated failure while minimising success at a given task. Ferrari and Olivette (1994) found a link between female participants' chronic procrastination behaviour and the home environment in which they grew up. They showed that participants whose fathers were overly controlling while simultaneously appearing unsupportive played a role in their daughter's preference for procrastination. Martin (1998) stated that when children needed to meet conditions for parental love, it increased their avoidance of failure rather than the pursuit of success. Prioritising the avoidance of failure was especially relevant when they had little confidence in their ability for a given task. Similarly, Eisenberg, Cumberland and Spinrad (1998) also showed that children perceived negative emotions as threatening when emotional expression was discouraged or even punished. Roberts and Strayer (1987) suggested that the negative affect associated with negative emotions and its maladaptive response were stored and triggered in specific situations. Thus, negative emotions could produce undesirable responses and could also result in an individual needing to avoid specific negative emotions altogether through procrastination. For example, procrastinators may avoid failure in a specific instance by using procrastination instead of testing their potential for success.

2.2.2. Situational factors

Mischel and Shoda (1995) identified a reciprocal relationship between cognition, affect, and the influence of situational factors on both cognition and affect. Individuals' cognitions and affective emotions are influenced by perceptions formed through previous similar situations. The individual encodes specific situations in a certain manner based on experience. The individual then activates the appropriate cognition and affective emotions previously associated with a specific situation. New factors within previously similar situations may result in the reshaping of previous emotions and cognitions associated with the situation. Until a change in the situation, cognition or affective emotion occurs, the individual's future behaviour or response toward a specific situation remains relatively consistent. Crocker and Park (2004) argued that conditional regard was one situational factor which activated self-doubt regarding self-esteem. When individuals emphasised their external behaviour as a source of support for self-esteem, they started to doubt those behaviours because they are externally assessed.

Litt, Reich, Maymin, and Shiv (2011) have also shown that individuals who experience emotional distress seek familiarity in their possible choices, even when available familiar options are self-defeating or suboptimal. Uncertainty facilitates the need for the familiar even when unfamiliar options show more promise. They further state that the familiar suboptimal decision is disguised in safety. The concealment lies within the fact that although suboptimal, it appears familiar. Uncertain choices, however, carry the additional risk of unknown failure as well as unknown reward. Essentially, they choose a suboptimal choice with certain consequences instead of a possibly beneficial choice attached to uncertain failure. For instance, procrastination may be disguised in safety (availability of an excuse) whereas wholly attempting a task promises possible rewards as well as failure. Participants in the study by Litt et al. (2011) even knew that the familiar option was suboptimal, which strengthens the argument that they indeed chose the familiar option based mainly on familiarity alone. Mischel (2004) additionally stated that negative affective and cognitive states could be triggered in specifically encoded situations which elicit the need to immediately relieve the threatening experience at the expense of more important long-term goals. For example, individuals may habitually use significant others to externally validate their self-worth erroneously. Externally validating their self-worth may be a familiar suboptimal choice to them while dependence on internal factors may

bring uncertainty. Thus, they may feel safer depending on others rather than themselves to regulate their self-esteem.

2.2.3. External effects of self-presentation on the individual and their environment

If an individual uses external validation to affirm their self-esteem, then a positive external presentation of the self to others should become a priority to that individual. Self-presentation has been identified as a key goal for those who use self-defeating behaviours (Ferrari, 1992). This is especially true when individuals self-handicap as indicated in several articles (For example, Ferrari, 1991, 1992; Ferrari & Díaz-Morales, 2007; Lupien, Seery, & Almonte, 2010; McCrea & Flamm, 2012; McCrea & Hirt, 2001; Tice & Baumeister, 1990; Urdan & Midgley, 2001). The study by Leondari and Gonida (2007) found that self-handicapping participants valued performance goals and pleasing others over the need to achieve. Similarly, Martin et al. (2003) in a qualitative study found that university participants' academic goals were orientated toward outperforming others instead of mastering the content being assessed. Barratt (2010) found that participants believed that others' expectations of their actions were significant when evaluating the success of their actions. Furthermore, greater emphasis was placed on negative outcomes and negative criticism from others, while positive outcomes were questioned and positive feedback disregarded.

Socially prescribed perfectionism was associated with greater self-defeating behaviour by Mushquash and Sherry (2012). The authors found that when participants felt perfect results were expected of them by others, they showed greater maladaptive patterns of self-evaluation and self-defeating behaviour, especially procrastination. The pursuit of perfection created a self-defeating cycle whereby participants could not live up to their unrealistic standards, which in turn created a greater need to procrastinate by using excuses to justify 'imperfect' performances. McCrea and Hirt (2011) found that participants would rather avoid fully attempting a task than to risk the impact that failing at the task would have on their self-esteem. This occurred because participants rather aimed to cherish their past success than test their potential to repeat that success in the present. These results confirm that self-handicapping is at times used to protect specific ability beliefs held by participants. By using self-affirmations (of past accomplishments) within the same domain as their self-defeating behaviour, participants created an

unrealistic standard of comparison which resulted in greater self-handicapping behaviour. They believed that the attempted past self-affirmation was an exception and used self-handicapping (for example, by taking drugs which affect performance) to avoid the need to prove that they could confirm the affirmation once again. Kimble and Hirt (2005) showed that increased threat in evaluation leads to greater uncertainty for self-handicappers regarding their abilities. They also found that evaluation was significant to participants and, more importantly, that it may be linked to their self-concept. Therefore, for those individuals, external validation by significant others could be seen as evidence for a positive or negative self-concept.

2.3. Internal Factors

The external factors described above also then affect the internal events experienced by the individual. The dependence on others to approve actions in order to verify the self-concept has several negative implications for the internal self and the individual's future experiences. When the individual largely depends on the external environment for affirming self-esteem, conflict may arise (Crocker & Park, 2004). The shared relationship between external experiences and internal mental events will be discussed with self-presentation, self-efficacy, self-control, and self-regulation in mind. These internal events inform behaviours enacted by the individual and fulfil specific functions. Self-regulation has been identified as central to understanding self-defeating behaviour (Sirois & Pychyl, 2013; Steel, 2007); therefore, I will elaborate on self-regulation by discussing its effect on self-esteem, its nature as a depleting resource and what activates specific self-regulation strategies. Lastly, I discuss the article by Baumeister et al. (2007) at length to show the relationship between emotion and behaviour with specific reference to self-defeating behaviour.

2.3.1. Self-presentation

Barratt (2010) found that participants would use the necessary resources to depict a positive image to others even if it defeated their own purposes. Therefore, impression management and being perceived as competent by others was an important outcome related to the participants' procrastination. They would do so by ensuring that their peers were aware that they procrastinated. For example, they would ensure that their friends were aware that they only studied for a test the day before it took place. The objective (although not all participants were aware of this) was to ensure that they presented

themselves as lacking in effort instead of lacking in competence. Some participants in the study by Barratt (2010) recognised that they could have been more prepared if they worked more consistently. However, it seems that overall, participants were not aware of the fact that they required the excuse in relation to impression management. McCrea and Flamm (2012) showed that cognitive resources were being used by participants to do a cost-benefit analysis while focusing on negative aspects of their performance. Their primary focus was on minimising the impact of a negative performance and then on exerting the least possible effort required to perform adequately. The focus on the negative aspects of performance also resulted in identifying specific obstacles and strategically using them to generate an excuse or excuses.

Mushquash and Sherry (2012) showed that this is why many self-defeating individuals may also be perfectionists. They seek perfection precisely because it is unattainable, and consequently avoid the impact failure may have on their self-esteem. Indeed, Hendrix and Hirt (2009) found that while maintaining a positive image was important to the self-handicapper, it was secondary to the aim of preserving their self-esteem. According to Martin (1998), self-handicappers equated failure with low ability and consequently, low ability with low self-worth. Therefore, it would be a priority to avoid failure in areas significant to the self-handicapping individual. The importance of impression management thus stems from the need to protect self-worth and avoid the full effect of possible failure. The full effect of possible failure is successfully avoided by making use of a self-handicapping strategy in significant areas; thus, continuing the theme of protecting self-worth discussed in conjunction with Mushquash and Sherry (2012) and Hendrix and Hirt (2009). Martin (1998) also recommended that qualitative data would be useful by providing in-depth data which richly details a participant's experience of their self-handicapping strategies.

Martin et al. (2003) followed up on his suggestion by using a qualitative approach to enrich or elaborate on the quantitative conclusions he reached in previous research. Additionally, a qualitative approach often offers additional insights and the authors improved on previous knowledge in key areas related to self-handicapping. The authors noted that some participants were aware of their use of procrastination as an excuse while others were not. Others only used procrastination as an excuse if they failed, but they were not aware of its usage as an excuse if failure did not occur. Some participants

also spoke of an intense need to avoid failure and doing so by using procrastination as a coping mechanism. The need for an excuse, which could be perceived as reduced effort, was considered better than an evaluation of their competence. Therefore, some participants seemed aware of the fact that they used self-handicapping strategically to avoid being evaluated in significant domains. Why was it so important (enough to self-sabotage their potential for success) not to appear incompetent to others in areas significant to participants? According to the authors, some participants understood that they used self-handicapping strategically, yet understanding why may eliminate the need to use self-defeating strategies. I would argue that they may not be aware of why they need to avoid being perceived as incompetent by others. Additionally, they may not be aware of the strength of that need and its impact on their long-term goals.

2.3.2. Self-efficacy

Steel (2007) consistently linked self-efficacy to procrastination. Authors have started to examine specific self-efficacy beliefs and the impact on certain self-defeating behaviours. For example, Gadbois and Sturgeon (2011) looked at academic self-efficacy and Sirois (2004) focused on self-efficacy beliefs regarding health. The focus on self-efficacy illustrates the importance of acknowledging that specific types of self-efficacy beliefs underlie certain self-defeating behaviours. Additionally, Wei and Ku (2007) found that social self-efficacy significantly mediated the relationship between self-defeating patterns and interpersonal distress. Renn (2005) proposed that general beliefs in attaining achievement should be negatively related to procrastination in an organisational context. The author found that procrastination and other self-defeating behaviours investigated could affect self-efficacy, amongst other aspects of the self, and increase the risk of self-management failure. Similarly, Bandura and Locke (2003) using a meta-analysis consistently showed that efficacy beliefs played a prominent role in the individual's level of motivation and had an impact on performance. Bandura (1997) also stated that repeated failures would negatively affect self-efficacy beliefs. Therefore, the cycle of procrastination would not only result in lowered performances but also in performances that would continually decline due to the adverse effects of failure on self-efficacy.

Klassen, Krawchuk, and Rajani (2008) showed that low efficacy in self-regulation impacted performance and consequently created doubt for participants when attempting to live up to their potential. Therefore, although individuals may believe achievement is possible (or else they would not attempt the task at all), they were not entirely convinced that they had the necessary ability to achieve it. A decreased academic self-efficacy and emotional self-efficacy accounted for the reduced ability to regulate the negative emotions experienced by participants. The inability to effectively regulate emotions, in turn, increased the appeal of procrastination. Procrastination seems appealing but contradicts individuals' original goal. Briones, Tabernero, and Arenas (2007) argued that a circular relationship existed between self-efficacy assessments, emotional reactions leading to self-defeating behaviour, and the interpretation of the overall situation. Therefore, the experiences of emotional reactions may have decreased the level of self-efficacy, and this interpretation may influence similar future decisions which lead to self-defeating behaviour. Thus, procrastinating participants felt they lacked the ability to perform academic tasks due to prior failed attempts at a task due to procrastination.

Tice et al. (2001) showed that mood affected self-efficacy and that intense negative mood could result in less confidence in achieving long-term goals. Caprara, Alessandri, Barbaranelli, and Vecchione (2013) focused on the use of emotional self-efficacy to manage negative emotions and the expression of positive emotions in their longitudinal study of 16 - 24-year-olds. The authors suggested that participants used self-esteem judgements as evidence to assess their ability. Additionally, it was suggested that emotional self-efficacy beliefs are a key factor in determining whether ability judgements would be negative or positive. The authors' further state that individuals drew a sense of emotional efficacy from successfully navigating challenging experiences. Therefore, individuals' mastery of, and approach to challenging situations from the domain of affect regulation may be crucial in increasing self-efficacy beliefs that contribute to their self-esteem. Thus, an avoidance strategy did not allow individuals' who defeat themselves to approach and learn from their own challenging experiences. Their primary challenge was to avoid the challenging aspects of their experiences partly due to low emotional self-efficacy.

Martin (1998) stated that self-handicapping individuals with low efficacy would concentrate on the negative aspects of a task, perceive the task as more difficult, and

display passivity in their reactions to negative experiences of a completed task. They would, therefore, fail to master a similar task in the future by attempting to avoid failing again instead of learning from the challenge associated with the task. Burns, Dittman, Nguyen, and Mitchelson (2000) argued that academic procrastinators limited their self-efficacy by using perfectionist tendencies as an avoidance coping mechanism. Academic procrastinators desired a self-defined perfect outcome but, in contrast, depended on how others perceived their effort for confirmation. Academic procrastinators essentially allowed others to define what perfection meant for them by using the feedback of others as their evaluative criteria (Burns et al., 2000). Thus, they seek to accomplish unrealistic goals and control within an environment where perceptions cannot be controlled (as they are external). Additionally, I do not believe their limited self-efficacy would allow the academic procrastinator to view external evaluations as perfect even if they were to be close to perfect. For example, even if a peer evaluated their actions as perfect, academic procrastinators likely would still focus on the possible negative aspects of their performance. If the aim is to create an unattainable goal in order to protect the idea of a perfect possible outcome, academic procrastinators cannot afford to achieve the ideal outcome. Once achieved, it becomes a reality, which consequently tests their efficacy each time the task is performed. However, if the goal remains unattainable, they maintain their potential to possibly perform the task perfectly. They maintain an ideal without having to test its plausibility and in addition test their self-efficacy. Therefore, self-efficacy in relation to self-defeating behaviour seems to be mediated by the conflicting desire to externally validate self-esteem and the need to avoid failing which impacts the self-esteem negatively.

2.3.3. Self-control

The loss of control felt by constant self-handicappers was apparent in the qualitative study by Martin et al. (2003) when a participant stated that she always ended up delaying her studying “no matter how hard I try” (Christine as cited in Martin et al., 2003, p. 4). It is evident from this comment that the participant felt a sense of lacking control in relation to her self-handicapping behaviour. The authors also found that certain participants were aware that they used self-handicapping strategically. However, the fact that Christine, who was quoted above, felt like she could not control her self-handicapping behaviour is a possible sign that she did not know why she needed the strategy. She knew it was

necessary for some reason, but the reason possibly eluded her, which could theoretically result in a sense of lacking control.

Baumeister et al. (2005) found that social exclusion prompted self-regulation failure, which, in turn, resulted in feeling a lack of control. Barratt (2010) stated that a high locus of control keeps one intrinsically motivated whereas a low locus of control forces the individual to find external validation. Muraven and Baumeister (2000) found evidence for conceptualising self-control as a limited resource that can be depleted. The authors also found coping with stress, regulating negative affect, and resisting temptations were factors which depleted self-control if viewed as a limited resource. Therefore, the continuous regulation of negative affect would result in depleted self-control at some stage. Negative emotions do not cause people to lack control, but it can start to deplete once the resource of self-control is continually used. Renn's (2005) and Muraven and Baumeister's (2000) findings suggest that the individual experiences limited self-control. If one agrees with the authors and views self-control as a self-regulatory resource that can be depleted, this would also have an impact on the person's sense of control. The experience of acute or distressing emotions may deplete the available level of self-control and employees (with reference to the study by Renn (2005)) would fail to delay gratification and thus, fail in the operation and monitoring of the self. Renn (2005) concluded that understanding self-defeating behaviours within an organisational context could help reduce inefficiency (by limiting the lack of control felt) and increase productivity. Similarly, the current study investigated participants' sense of control and how this related to their self-defeating behaviour in order to possibly reduce academic procrastination in the future.

Hagger, Wood, Stiff, and Chatzisarantis (2010, p. 55) found strong evidence that the ego (degree of self-control available in relation to the performance of a task) can be depleted and that "… it is generalizable across spheres of self-control." Therefore, impaired performance in a task and in ego-depletion is often linked with increased perceptions of fatigue, difficulty, and greater required effort. The authors' results also significantly link negative affect and ego-depletion. Therefore, negative affect, which induces a need to minimise aversive affect immediately, depletes ego-strength. Consequently, one may immediately choose to minimise aversive affect over one's long-term goals. Therefore, this process would then make self-control tasks seem more difficult (i.e. perception of

greater fatigue, difficulty, and effort). However, choosing the immediate goal over long-term ones, for the reasons discussed above, can create a sense of lacking control. The individual is then never in a position to focus on the long-term goal as they would like to and feel a sense of lacking control as a consequence. If an individual's self-control can be depleted it may also be possible to increase the capacity of self-control through training. By successfully navigating challenging experiences, individuals may be able to exercise the limits of their self-control through adequate training. However, self-handicappers are less likely to challenge themselves and are, therefore, unlikely to increase their self-control abilities. Instead, individuals may perceive their self-control as declining.

Uysal and Knee (2012) and Vohs et al. (2005) found that low self-control predicted self-handicapping and linked self-control with defensive behaviours and personality traits such as strategic self-presentation. Generally, individuals who exhibit low self-control prefer short-term benefits to long-term costs. The development of low self-control is related to self-regulation failure. Therefore, feeling like one has lost control results in enlisting self-handicapping strategies and may eventually progress to chronic procrastination. Therefore, what can be seen as a lack of self-control is possibly the fulfilment of a short-term goal, which appears more appealing in achieving a specific function. McCrea and Hirt (2011, p. 17) stated that their "… results are part of converging evidence showing that the goal of self-handicapping is to protect specific ability beliefs." If this is the case, then lacking the sense of control is in fact the individual prioritising the immediate protection of specific ability beliefs over achieving long-term goals.

In addition, Martin (1998) found that non-contingent feedback could also increase the perception of lacking control. The dependence on external validation as well as a lack of self-efficacy could make individuals view feedback as non-contingent. The result is that the individual does not know what counts as positive or negative feedback. The individual with perfectionistic tendencies, for example, can never achieve perfection even though it is what they are striving for. Therefore, they also never honestly know what conditions are applicable in defining feedback as either positive or negative. They never really approach a challenge to see what the result is because they are preoccupied with maintaining the possibility of an ideal outcome. Therefore, experiences cannot be compared when encountering future similar circumstances. Lacking the experience to make comparisons results in continuous non-contingent feedback. Without concrete

internal contingencies of prior experience to refer to, the individual may have an increased lack of perceived control for future similar situations. Stated differently, without a previous record of experience (good or bad), the individual does not know what constitutes control when encountering a similar future situation. As a result of relying on external validation, the individual continuously doubts their self-concept. Consequently, the protection of the self by using self-handicapping seems like the more appealing choice. The uncertainty of the situation due to a lack of previous experience makes the choice of protecting self-esteem more familiar. In the long-term, this choice is detrimental, as discussed above, but in the present moment, the familiar option could seem like the safest one to make.

Mischel, Shoda, and Rodriguez (1989) came to a similar conclusion some time ago in his seminal work on the delay of gratification in children. Mischel, Shoda, and Rodriguez (1989, p. 937) stated that "Postponing gratification sometimes may be an unwise choise [sic], but unless individuals have the competencies necessary to sustain delay when they want to do so, the choice itself is lost." The lack of emotional self-efficacy in delaying negative emotions combined with the lack of experience in self-control makes it exceptionally hard for one to choose anything other than focusing on avoiding the negative emotions anticipated when encountering a significant event. Zuckerman and Tsai (2005) concluded that self-handicappers would show decreased intrinsic motivation over time. Intrinsic motivation would decrease due to lower competence satisfaction (self-efficacy beliefs), mood, and well-being. Therefore, the contingent self-esteem creates a reciprocal inverse relationship in which self-handicapping increases while self-esteem decreases. Over time, individuals would start to lose their intrinsic motivation and feel that they are not in control of their self-handicapping strategies or their self-esteem.

Crocker and Park (2004) also stated that failing a task (specific to those using avoidance coping) would test the self-concept and lead to a depletion of self-regulatory resources. Therefore, according to Metcalfe and Mischel (1999), short-term affect regulation would take precedence and would impact other domains or make immediate gratification seem more appealing. Thürmer, McCrea, and Gollwitzer (2013) argued that self-worth protection is regarded as a priority because the prospect of failure is intensified by threatening a favourable view of the self. Therefore, the goal shifts from approaching a

challenging situation to avoiding the implications for the self-concept associated with failure.

According to Berglas and Jones (1978), self-handicappers externalise failure and internalise success which shows some level of strategic control. The need to externalise failure, but not understanding why this need to externalise failure exists in the first place, creates the perception of lacked control. Even though the individual may use self-handicapping strategically, they do not acknowledge *why* they need to do so. I would argue that individuals who feel a greater sense of lacked control are not fully aware of why they need to strategically handicap.

As further evidence of strategic control, Tice et al. (2001) showed that when participants believed their mood was not changeable, it eliminated the need to self-handicap. Essentially, if mood was frozen (unchangeable), they could not prioritise emotional regulation over their long-term goal and failed to use self-handicapping strategically. Therefore, a sense of control is increased because they do not have competing goals to contend with. They were under the impression that they could not choose immediate affect regulation and, therefore, did not attempt to self-handicap strategically. The above discussion shows that self-defeating individuals do not experience a lack of control when mood is controlled for. They do, however, perceive feeling a lack of control when moods are changeable because aversive emotions decrease their motivation towards approaching positive long-term outcomes. Thus, they choose to focus on short-term mood regulation and neglect to consider long-term goals. In short, the conflict exists between immediate affect regulation and long-term cognitive goals. The need to control aversive states would also arise from using external validation as a measure to determine the degree of self-protection required. For example, the more a procrastinator depends on external feedback to strengthen their self-esteem, the greater the need to strategically use self-handicapping to protect the self from failing external validations. If the procrastinator had internal feedback to compare with external feedback, he or she could create a compromise which satisfies both internal and external expectations. However, the failure to internalise challenging situations could instead create a perceived lack of control and in turn, a greater need to self-handicap strategically.

2.3.4. Self-esteem, self-regulation, and emotional distress (negative affect)

Several research articles focusing on various self-defeating behaviours (for example, Briones et al., 2007; Crocker, 2002; Ferrari, 1991, 1994, 2001; Ferrari & Pychyl, 2007; Klassen et al., 2008; Steel, 2007; Uysal & Knee, 2012) identified self-regulation, self-esteem protection, and emotional distress as key factors in understanding why individuals may be motivated to defeat themselves. Zuckerman and Tsai (2005) showed that instability in self-esteem, whether high- or low self-esteem, is a good predictor of self-handicapping behaviour. Instability would be linked to an unclear sense of self, and as the authors point out, the individual would use several means, including self-deception, to manage unclear representations of the self. The passage below describes an important distinction made by the authors relevant to self-defeating behaviours:

> Note that central to this conceptualization is not so much the uncertainty about outcomes as the dependence on outcomes as a measure of one's worth. This is rather subtle but, we believe, an important difference. One can be uncertain about outcomes but not dependent on them in terms of one's self-worth. On the other hand, dependence on outcomes as a measure of self- worth almost always entails uncertainty about one's self-esteem. (Zuckerman & Tsai, 2005, p. 25)

I believe that when uncertain, individuals with high-esteem would seek to present themselves positively to others in order to uphold the already positive notions they have of themselves. Therefore, while self-handicapping, they would aim to present a positive image to others in line with what they already know or feel about themselves. On the other hand, those with low self-esteem do not hold mostly positive views of themselves. Therefore, their goal may be to work on maintaining a positive image with others in the hope that external validation received shows that a positive self is indeed possible. My decision to delineate this study in such a specific manner was informed by the fact that external validation has such far-reaching consequences for the self-concept of an individual with low self-esteem. Although self-handicapping in individuals with high self-esteem is interesting, it is not the focus of the present research. The consequence of self-defeating behaviour on those with low self-esteem presents as more urgent for the present study.

Low self-esteem handicappers can be identified by performances they define as significant and the resulting link to the formulation of their self-concept (Blouin-Hudon & Pychyl, 2015; Ferrari & Díaz-Morales, 2007). My aim is to identify how aware individuals are of their need to protect their self-esteem and the cost of doing so. The more costs of self-handicapping escalate, the more the individual with low self-esteem needs to depend on a self-handicapping strategy (Ferrari & Díaz-Morales, 2007). However, self-handicapping as a contingency only increases the reliance on self-handicapping (Thürmer et al., 2013). The fact that an excuse is available and allows the individual to complete the task initially helps with the uncertainty experienced. The individual can have an excuse ready to protect the self in case of failure and cognitively attend to the task once that excuse is in place. However, lacking experience in challenging situations would not allow the individual to feel that they are performing to their potential. They may become aware of the fact that the excuse, while needed, additionally does not allow them to commit fully. A convenient excuse only serves to increase the uncertainty in one's self-concept because limited performances never allow the individual to challenge herself or himself. The unchallenged self would bypass self-esteem stability that largely depends on stable internal measures, which should instead be evaluating outcomes as successful or not (Zuckerman & Tsai, 2005).

Tice and Baumeister (1990) found that the aims of high self-esteem handicappers and low self-esteem handicappers differ. Individuals with high self-esteem strategically handicapped to confirm and keep congruency within the self. Low self-esteem handicappers aimed to protect the self by appearing positive to others. Therefore, the former helps protect the already positive image by showing that there was an excuse for failure, whereas the latter uses external validation to tell whether a positive self is a feasible option. DeMarree and Rios (2014) examined the effect of incongruence between desired self-esteem and actual self-esteem and its impact on self-clarity. The authors argued that individuals with low self-esteem had greater inconsistencies in self-clarity. The divide between actual and desired self-esteem creates conflict which has a negative impact on self-clarity. The authors also stated that this could lead to depressive affect. The results by Caprara et al. (2013) strengthened their view that self-esteem held the individual's general assumptions about how they view and approach experiences in their lives. Additionally, it was shown that emotional self-efficacy regulates or formulates the

assumptions used by the individual's self-esteem. Therefore, the degree to which one can manage negative affect and express positive affect moulds one's self-esteem. The impact of emotional self-efficacy on self-esteem would also shape how one perceives current and future experiences.

One can combine the two approaches above to attempt to further explain the perfectionist tendencies of those in the study by Mushquash and Sherry (2012). A discrepancy would persist when individuals attempt to present themselves as perfect while acknowledging that perfection is not possible. An attempt to present as perfect would lead to possible depressive- or at least negative affect, which would influence self-esteem. Self-esteem plagued by negative affect could create a view of the world that necessitates self-defeating behaviours. The continuing reliance on self-defeating behaviours helps in the short-term but produces greater negative affect over the long-term and further distorts the person's view of the world (Blouin-Hudon & Pychyl, 2015). The current study aims to understand how the tension experienced in choosing between short-term relief and long-term consequences is resolved. In addition, this study aims to discover what consequences the chosen resolution has had for the participant in the past.

Although Chapman, Gratz, and Brown (2006) looked at deliberate self-harm which is associated with self-mutilation, the underlying self-regulatory failure was similar to that of self-defeating behaviours. I believe the outcomes are different due to experiences shaping what constitutes an appropriate strategy. With self-mutilation, a release or escape from aversive emotions is preferred over avoidance of those emotions as in self-handicapping. What deliberate self-harm and self-defeating behaviour seem to have in common is the preference for short-term goals over long-term ones. The authors found that the focus on short-term aversive emotions limited cognitive and information processing, making short-term goals seem more appealing. Once again, the need to remove or decrease aversive emotions outranked the need to achieve potential long-term goals. In their article, Swann and Schroeder (1995) showed that conflict exists between choosing the beauty of experiencing a positive evaluation and the truth of knowing that failure is also a possibility. When one equates failing with the self, requiring an excuse to protect the self in the event of failure becomes essential. As seen thus far, it may become as important, if not more important than approaching success. Participants from the study by Barratt (2010) did not seem to know what motivated their procrastination, but

only that the behaviour was beneficial. The author surmised that participants could not separate the evaluation of their significant experiences as good or bad from who they were. A significant insight by the author was that:

> … the phenomenological research has more subtly shown that those who are prone to procrastinate will not do so in all task-orientated situations, and it is quite possible to surmise that certain types of task engender, in certain types of people, a particular emotional response – and it is this emotional state that results in procrastination. (Barratt, 2010, p. 138)

Tice et al. (2001) argued that emotional distress short-circuits impulse control so that short-term affect regulation seems more appealing than the long-term goals previously set by the individual. Therefore, the rational option and immediate concern become protecting the self; for if there is no self, long-term goals would not be attainable in any case. When the authors lead participants to believe that their moods were frozen (therefore, that they cannot improve negative affect) participants' procrastination decreased. Procrastination would, therefore, not fulfil the function it was meant to fulfil, namely relieving negative affect. Martin et al. (2003) concluded that the motivation to protect the self fundamentally defines self-handicapping. A participant in the authors' study also showed that an alternative task did not need to be fun as suggested in Tice et al. (2001). It makes sense that the nature of the task is not as important as the objective is to protect the self and any task will do (even cleaning one's wardrobe as reported by a participant in the authors' study) if it accomplishes the primary objective. Participants generally stated that an available excuse was better than an evaluation of their competence without an excuse. This would mean that appearing incompetent evoked anxiety for them which substantiated the need for an excuse. They also then equated not being smart enough with not having a good enough self-concept. In order to fully understand this relationship, I would argue that we need to understand why they are linked (self-concept and tasks defined as important to the individual) and how aware individuals genuinely are of the self-defeating strategies they use and the need to use them.

Baumeister and Scher (1988) stated that it seemed that those who used self-defeating behaviours continually made poor judgements. However, could someone irrationally and

continuously make poor judgements without the ability to learn from them? Our experiences help us approach future situations with new knowledge. However, in the case of those who defeat themselves, they may perceive that they lack enough control to, for example, stop procrastinating. The same authors also stated that highly emotional or aversive states are implicated as factors that promote high self-focus and acute negative affect. I would argue that when acute distress is present, the individual may be less inclined to make better judgements and self-defeating behaviours appear more appealing for the reasons discussed thus far. Wohl, Pychyl, and Bennett (2010) showed that self-forgiveness could lead to a reduction in procrastination by reducing negative affect and its consequent self-handicapping strategy.

Several research articles (for example, Baumeister et al., 2007; Briones et al., 2007; Chapman et al., 2006; Dewitte & Schouwenburg, 2002; Moon & Illingworth, 2005; Powers, Wagner, Norris, & Heatherton, 2013; Trivers, 2000) have pointed toward finding an underlying mechanism which results in self-defeating behaviour. I believe that mechanism lies within the functional outcomes of protecting self-esteem, depleted self-regulation, and emotional distress which serves to activate a need for protection. Below, I review the article by Baumeister et al. (2007) at length due to the authors' significant findings regarding the relationship between emotion and behaviour. The methodological direction I have taken views the subjective experience as important. Thus far, emotional distress, self-regulation, and self-esteem have been identified as core factors related to self-defeating behaviours. By using the article by Baumeister et al. (2007), an understanding of how emotions may contribute specifically to self-defeating behaviours can be formed.

Baumeister et al. (2007) argue that the regulation of emotion influences behaviour such as self-defeating behaviour. They also argued that feedback from emotions regulates cognition which, in turn, influences behaviour. One must first experience or anticipate an emotion, reflect cognitively, and then act accordingly (Baumeister et al., 2007). The authors argued that emotions play a role in restricting available cognitive thoughts that subsequently limit possible behavioural actions. For a long time, it was assumed that emotions directly cause behaviour, but Baumeister et al. (2007) argue against this assumption. Based on the authors' review of several articles (cf. Averill, 1982; Berkowitz, 1989; Fredrickson, 1998; Schwarz & Clore, 1996, 2007), Baumeister et al. (2007) show

that these assumptions lack in evidence to indicate that emotion directly causes behaviour.

Baumeister et al.'s (2007) article assist in creating a working theory in order to understand why individuals would be motivated to defeat themselves. The specific sections discussed in detail show how the authors describe emotions as a dual process consisting of automatic affective emotions and full, consciously experienced emotions. Secondly, by understanding emotional regulation as a dual process, a different perspective on the role of emotions follows. Furthermore, I attempt to understand the significant role of emotional regulation in relation to self-defeating behaviour. An understating of the importance of emotional regulation in self-defeating behaviour cannot be established without initially defining the role of emotions.

Baumeister et al. (2007) begin their argument by dividing emotion into the categories of automatic affect and conscious emotions. Affective emotions and consciously experienced emotions influence cognition differently (Baumeister et al., 2007). Affective emotions are categorised as automatically occurring emotions (Baumeister et al., 2007). They are automatic instances of emotions that help us approach or avoid a situation quickly (Baumeister et al., 2007). Thus, they are required for automatic actions which do not necessarily require conscious consideration (Baumeister et al., 2007). For example, when one needs to escape a dangerous situation quickly, affective emotions allow the individual to flee automatically without thinking first (Baumeister et al., 2007). They are the emotions that allow action before conscious reflection in order to save one's life, for example (Baumeister et al., 2007). They are automatically felt emotions such as fear, which is not immediately consciously experienced, to help individuals navigate a dangerous situation, quickly (Baumeister et al., 2007). Once the individual is safe, the conscious experience of fear would set in (Baumeister et al., 2007).

Baumeister et al. (2007) state that conscious emotion helps one to learn and reflect, which then allows one to seek pleasant emotions and avoid negative ones. Therefore, the intense conscious experience of fear allows the person to avoid any similar fear-provoking situations in the future (Baumeister et al., 2007). The authors state that affective emotions allow us to act quickly when required, whereas conscious emotions allow us to learn to avoid future situations that require quick action. Consciously felt fear

allows one to avoid future, fearful circumstances (Baumeister et al., 2007). However, if the individual finds themselves in a new fearful situation, automatic affect allows the person to escape this new situation (Baumeister et al., 2007). Once safe, the person has time to reflect on the new intense fearful situation felt (Baumeister et al., 2007). The new fearful situation is then added to the type of experiences that must be avoided in the future (Baumeister et al., 2007).

According to Baumeister et al. (2007), conscious emotions arise slowly and are experienced intensely. This intensity and slow build force the person to learn from and reflect on the emotion experienced. If the emotion is intensely favourable, the person will seek situations that result in this positive emotion again (Baumeister et al., 2007). If the emotion is experienced as intensely unfavourable, the person will seek to avoid situations in which this emotion could be experienced (Baumeister et al., 2007). New experiences bring new consciously felt emotions that allow individuals to learn from them and to discover how to navigate future similar circumstances (Baumeister et al., 2007). Once learnt, these feelings become automated for all similar future situations, unless new emotions are experienced (Baumeister et al., 2007). Similar situations then allow us to affectively make automatic choices until we uncover different emotions which change the automatic rules we have followed thus far (Baumeister et al., 2007). One could then ask whether individuals who procrastinate are not attempting to avoid the negative emotions associated with a present task by procrastinating. One function of emotional regulation is then to help the individual avoid negative emotions. Thus, it is possible that the negative emotion associated with a threatening task is possibly avoided by procrastinating.

Baumeister et al. (2007) further explain that individuals use “if-then contingencies” to regulate affective and conscious emotions successfully. For example, “if” fear has been felt before, “then” the fear-provoking situation must be avoided in future to avoid experiencing fear again (Baumeister et al., 2007). Only when new conscious intense emotions are felt do the current “if-then contingencies” change to accommodate what has been learnt from the newly felt intense emotion (Baumeister et al., 2007). Positive emotions then teach us to maintain the status quo in our decisions and to continually seek more of the same (Baumeister et al., 2007). Negative emotions should tell us a change is needed and that the status quo, including the current if-then rules, must change

(Baumeister et al., 2007). The authors state this as the reason why negative emotions lead to counterfactual thinking. Counterfactual thinking forces us to reconsider the usual actions we would consider in familiar situations (Baumeister et al., 2007). We are mainly considering how to change our current if-then rules to avoid the negative emotions attached to those rules in that specific situation (Baumeister et al., 2007). Counterfactual thinking allows us to consider all possible choices for future reference (Baumeister et al., 2007). Different choices produce a different outcome in situations whereby our choices initially resulted in an adverse outcome (Baumeister et al., 2007). A new if-then rule is created, and this rule is only challenged once it results in negative emotions once again (Baumeister et al., 2007).

Intense emotions guide us cognitively and subsequently limit the actions we choose (Baumeister et al., 2007). Thus, an emotion adaptively influences our thoughts so we may seek pleasant emotional situations and avoid negative ones (Baumeister et al., 2007). To a large extent, emotions then control us as they limit the number of cognitive choices and resulting behaviours for our benefit (Baumeister et al., 2007). Baumeister et al. (2007, p. 175) state that "The answer, we think, is that you cannot control your emotions because the purpose of emotions is to control you." This is evident, as individuals cannot force themselves to experience happiness under generally sad circumstances such as accepting the death of a loved one. Thus, we learn to understand that grieving in individualised ways helps to relieve feelings of sadness.

Baumeister et al. (2007) also show that decisions made while experiencing intensely negative emotions usually result in suboptimal decisions (Baumeister et al., 2007). Intense negative emotions force us to seek immediate gratification, and we then do not consider all possible choices equally (Baumeister et al., 2007). We seek immediate gratification to avoid the anticipated negative impact of negative emotions (Baumeister et al., 2007). The authors use the example of someone who decides against flying in an aeroplane after hearing about an accident involving another aeroplane. Thus, the shock of the aeroplane accident and its consequences challenge the individual's survival needs. The individual may decide to use a car instead, which statistically has a higher rate of accidents than aeroplanes do (Baumeister et al., 2007). The statistics on accidents are not adequately considered because the negative emotion is now attached to aeroplanes and the person wants to avoid the anxiety it may provoke (Baumeister et al., 2007). Therefore,

the more intense negative emotions are, the more detrimental the decisions may be due to a lack of complete consideration (Baumeister et al., 2007). Baumeister et al. (2007) also state that negative emotions especially force the individual to abandon all possible options and seek options which immediately alleviate the negative emotions.

Baumeister and Scher (1988) have shown that individuals who defeat themselves associate their self-concept with specified tasks. The experience of intense emotions felt while completing a task may affect the procrastinator's self-concept and influence how motivated they are to complete similar tasks in future. If the performance of a specific task is used to evaluate whether the self-concept is good or bad, bad performances must then be avoided. If the self-concept is based on specifically defined task performances, then it is important that the procrastinator avoid negative evaluations at all costs. Others can perform poorly, evaluate their performance based on external as well as internal factors, and decide to do better next time. For the person who self-defeats, everything after a negative performance in a task is internalised even if there are logical external reasons for failure. That failure may prompt the individual to change how they define their self-concept. Thus, the intensity and duration of negative emotions associated with a negative performance in a specific task must likely be avoided at all costs by those who self-defeat.

If the individual who procrastinates has situationally paired a negative emotion with a significant task, they may abandon possible success in that task to protect their externally validated self-esteem. Therefore, the prospect of failure may activate negative emotions because failure at the task would also define the self as a failure. Externally validated success or failure at a task when linked to the self, creates the need to protect the self immediately, and avoid even possible failure and its attached negative emotions. By having an excuse, the procrastinator may lessen the blow and anxiety associated with possible failure enough to finally attempt the task.

I believe specific tasks are defined as important to the individual's self-concept due to experiences and the resulting intense emotions involved. I would argue that those who defeat themselves are using two contrasting "if-then contingencies" simultaneously. On the one hand, they would cognitively like to perform a task to achieve something. For example, "if" I study appropriately "then" it is likely I will pass this test. However, the

contingencies change when the task has been specifically linked to the person's self-concept due to past intense emotions associated with a similar task. If there has been a link established between the current task and a previously aversive emotion which influences the self-concept, another "if-then contingency" is activated; namely "if" this task can affect my self-concept "then" I must consider ways of reducing the risk it poses to my self-concept. Therefore, procrastination may be used as an excuse, which allows the individual to cognitively complete the task while simultaneously knowing an excuse is ready if failure should occur. Therefore, procrastination is adaptive rather than paradoxical (self-defeating), and it allows the person to protect their self-concept. A paradox arises when this self-protection strategy never allows the person to achieve their true potential. Thus, the paradox does not lie in the behaviour performed but in the impact this strategy has on the individual's future decisions.

I would also argue that the anticipated negative emotion for the self-defeating individual is always an intense one and, as a result, leads to suboptimal choices. This intensity is due to the extreme importance attached to the link between the self-concept and specifically defined task performances. The anticipated adverse effect of failure at a specified task is so intense (due to possible influence it may have on the self-concept) that in most cases the individual immediately chooses, for example, procrastination. In essence, the individual chooses to protect their self-concept rather than consider potential success. This strategy helps to avoid the anticipated emotional intensity associated with possible failure at a task. The intensity of the anticipated negative emotion results in suboptimal decisions becoming automated. Once automated, the self-defeating strategy protects the individual from thinking about possible negative emotions linked to the self-concept. This also explains why individuals procrastinate on certain tasks and not on others. Intense emotions of past experiences have been specifically linked to tasks which may impact the self-concept. The person chooses to procrastinate to avoid a failure in self-concept or negative self-concept in relation to a specific task. The specific task activates a specific "if-then contingency" which leads to procrastination as the most appealing choice.

As previously discussed, avoidance coping may have developed in early childhood due to parental affections appearing conditional (Alshawashreh et al., 2013; Barratt, 2011; Eisenberg et al., 1998). The individual may learn that affection is determined by external conditions and also learn to avoid unfavourable conditions. The combination of a

perceived critical and unsupportive parent could foster avoidance coping. Additionally, internal validation may remain non-contingent (if the parent is perceived as unsupportive) as the person is solely focused on avoiding negative external feedback. The avoidance of negative external feedback may then become internalised as a means of evaluating the self-concept. Simultaneously, the intense emotional focus on external validation and lack of internal consistency (due to non-contingent, critical, and unsupportive parental feedback), creates the need to avoid tasks which have been defined as significant through experience. By avoiding challenging tasks, individuals are also avoiding the opportunity to create internal consistency, which would allow them to depend on themselves instead of external validation.

Not everyone makes the same decisions, and I believe self-defeat depends on the individual's different experiences of intense emotion. I would argue that if a negative appraisal is intensely felt for extended periods and in relation to a specific aspect of their lives, it becomes important for the individual to avoid those aspects. They avoid the negative emotions associated with specific aspects of their lives by depending on a specific type of self-defeating behaviour. The emotional intensity of experienced negativity may be one of the reasons individuals utilise self-defeating behaviour to avoid the experience of negativity entirely.

With regard to procrastination, suboptimal decisions may become automated to the extent that the person does not realise why they are procrastinating anymore. They then feel worse for not trying their best while attempting a task. This feeling is, however, outranked by the more intense feeling and "if-then contingency", and their self-concept may be at stake. For example, "if" I fail at this specific task, "then" it negatively changes who I am. Therefore, the thinking evolves into not being able to fail at certain tasks because it will result in a lesser self. They are not avoiding the task but the impending intense impact it may have on their self-concept. Shy individuals may avoid social contact because the intense anxiety felt during socialising outranks the need to socialise. In avoiding the associated anxiety, they are also avoiding the possibility of becoming better at socialising. The paradoxical impact is clear when their awkward deficits in social interactions are seen and felt years later. Therefore, self-defeat occurs when the individual does not attempt to avoid socialising but escapes it entirely by avoiding people altogether (Baumeister & Scher, 1988).

An individual must likely experience a new intense positive emotion by taking a chance and thereby changing the current established "if-then contingencies". The individual must work up the courage to try fully despite the possible impact. Completely attempting a task is not easy for the individual because anxiety is experienced when failure at a specific task results in a failed self-concept. The individual must somehow learn from positive emotions and experiences that their self-concept is not linked to a specific task. Once they learn to disassociate the links between tasks performance and their self-concept, they may create new "if-then contingencies". One must create situations where positive emotions can be experienced and subsequently new, optimal "if-then contingencies" are formed and followed automatically in the future. Therefore, emotions adaptively allow us to follow the rules that protect us from the experiences we have defined as negative for ourselves.

2.4. Consequences of Self-defeating Behaviours

Gadbois and Sturgeon (2011) found that academic self-handicappers held negative views about themselves, their self-efficacy and importantly, about themselves as learners. This lead to lower academic self-efficacy, lower scores in tests, and greater test anxiety. Van Eerde (2003) found that lower academic performance was associated with significant procrastination by students. McCrea and Hirt (2011) also found that attempts at protecting the self-concept could affect goal striving and subsequent achievement. Therefore, the impact of self-handicapping on academic potential is clear.

Baumeister et al. (2005) found that the subsequent emotional distress associated with social exclusion increased participants' self-defeating behaviours. Social exclusion was also linked to self-regulation failure, which made immediate self-defeating choices seem more appealing. Tice et al. (2001) showed that the need to reduce aversive emotional distress immediately has an impact on long-term goal planning. Self-regulation failure, therefore, intensifies the need to reduce the experience of emotional distress immediately. Consequently, the inability to regulate the self would increase the risk for substance abuse, addiction, sexually transmitted diseases, and debt, amongst others. For example, the short-term focus on immediate pleasure to negate emotional distress could make the abuse of substances or risky sexual behaviour seem more appealing.

Zuckerman and Tsai (2005) specifically considered the costs of self-handicapping and found that it was related to maladjustment, a lack of confidence in perceived ability, decreased well-being, increased substance abuse, and loss of intrinsic motivation over time. They found that participants were willing to endure all the above-mentioned negative consequences in order to protect contingent self-esteem that relied on self-handicapping for protection. Participants did not intentionally seek negative consequences, but the need to protect a fragile self-concept was prioritised in order to protect against a decrease in self-esteem. The authors concluded that there are serious implications associated with self-handicapping.

Sirois (2004) focused on healthcare negligence, whereby individuals do not persist with healthy behaviours but instead delay these behaviours or perform behaviours that are detrimental to their health. One very striking and alarming example is that of individuals who smoke tobacco or abuse other substances. In an attempt to extend her findings Sirois (2007) found that perceived health self-efficacy was important in determining the continued performance of healthy behaviours. The author also found that procrastinators had an increased risk for greater stress, which could result in more health problems. The lack of self-efficacy related to health could be detrimental to future health. Stead, Shanahan, and Neufeld (2010) followed up on the previous author's findings related to health and applied it to mental health as well. The authors defined mental health as the ability to balance coping with daily stressful situations while maintaining overall well-being (Stead et al., 2010, p. 175). They found that persistent procrastination is linked to the performance of fewer mental health behaviours by individuals. In addition, this also leads to individuals delaying the treatment required to bolster their mental health.

Participants in a study by Barratt (2010) related their performance on a task with their self-concept. Participants equated being a bad person with bad performance on specific important tasks. Thus, they did not distinguish between the degree of performance in a task and who they are as people. Therefore, negative performances have significant implications for the self-esteem, tasks they deem significant, and other important aspects of their lives such as their relationships. The consequences discussed above show the genuine impact self-defeating behaviours can have on individuals. Therefore, the current research is warranted as it can meaningfully contribute to a better understanding of individuals who defeat themselves and the significant implications thereof.

2.5. Summary of Chapter 2

Most articles (for example, Cerrone & Lades, 2017; Duru & Balkis, 2017; Rebetez, Rochat, & Van der Linden, 2015) use quantitative methods of investigation to elicit information about the behaviour patterns of self-defeating individuals. However, Karoly et al. (2005) argued that there is a need to start adapting research strategies which are also applicable to the real world. I believe the current study aims to further that goal, while also looking at how individuals experience self-defeating behaviours and the implications thereof. This may be accomplished by focusing on why individuals need to protect the self before attempting to accomplish their long-term goals. Although the quantitative articles above have greatly helped in understanding self-defeating behaviours, a qualitative approach is also needed.

Some studies (for example, Barratt, 2011; Martin, 1998; Martin et al., 2003; Mushquash & Sherry, 2012; O'Guinn & Faber, 1989), have already used qualitative methods to gain a richer understanding of the motivations behind self-defeating behaviours. In addition, I believe that research also needs to express the extent to which these individuals are aware of the reasons why they use self-defeating strategies. Baumeister and Scher (1988, p. 17) also acknowledged that "By exploring situational and intra-psychic boundary conditions (including individual differences), it may become possible to understand how self-destruction can be avoided." Therefore, the current study attempts to understand individuals' experiences of self-defeat, how they cope with this, and how it affects their daily functioning. Additionally, it is also important to understand their awareness of why they use self-defeating strategies. The research may allow for the expression of opinions about self-defeating behaviour that other researchers may be unaware of, acting as a catalyst for future research on the topic. This is why I felt it was necessary to gain an insider's perspective on the topic of interest, especially within a South African context. In conclusion, Martin (1998) strongly advocated for the adoption of a qualitative approach and additionally recommended that future research should focus on the extent to which individuals are aware of their need for self-protection strategies (Martin et al.,2003).

CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Overview of Chapter 3

The current study aimed to explore the experiences of individuals who use self-defeating strategies. Therefore, the present chapter aims to provide the research approach undertaken, as well as the specific methodology used to fulfil this aim. I will first discuss the research approach employed and motivate why this approach was utilised. Secondly, I will outline the theoretical context used to make assumptions about the data obtained. The theoretical context includes the nature of qualitative inquiry, generally, as well as that of phenomenology, specifically. I will then illustrate the necessity of also adopting the assumptions posed by reversal theory to facilitate an understanding of self-defeating behaviour. I will also discuss validity within a qualitative approach, as well as specific strategies of validation applicable to phenomenological research.

The methodology section is comprised of the sample used, data collection methods, the data analysis method employed, and an overview of the ethical guidelines considered throughout the study. The section on sampling includes the size, characteristics, and recruitment of the sample obtained. In addition, the appropriateness of the sampling method is discussed. The section on data collection includes a discussion of the researcher-developed questionnaire for screening purposes. In addition, the applicability of semi-structured interviews utilised for the present study is discussed. Interpretative phenomenological analysis is described to illustrate the method of data analysis used in the study. Lastly, ethical considerations implemented throughout the study are discussed in relation to the methodology employed.

3.2. Research Approach

The manner in which we approach our research rests not with what we are comfortable, but rather with the most suitable approach to answering the questions we have posed (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2012). De Vaus (2001) shows that the primary aim of a chosen research approach allows one to view the gathered evidence through a specific lens. Therefore, the choice of research approach depends on the evidence gathered and the type of questions one will answer using the gathered evidence (de Vaus, 2001). The chosen research approach also allows one to answer questions about the gathered evidence in a specific manner (de Vaus, 2001). One can distinguish between two paradigms mainly used in research; a quantitative or a qualitative approach (Guest et al.,

2012). A quantitative perspective generally looks for objective knowledge which is evidenced through numbers, whereas a qualitative approach seeks subjective evidence, usually using language as data instead (Barbour & Barbour, 2003; Willig, 2013).

The current study and the questions posed advocate for a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach is open to interpretation and does not limit the data gathered within a particular objective framework. A qualitative approach allows one to dig deeper than surface-level explanations (Guest et al., 2012). Quantitative designs have contributed significantly to a greater understanding of the elements found in self-defeating behaviour. However, a qualitative approach is needed to understand the meaning of those elements as coherent lived experience. This approach allows for multiple realities as it is subjective and gives voice to those who experience self-defeating behaviour. Indeed, post-positivists have begun to question the notion of a single objective reality, especially in relation to the complexity of human experience (Guest et al., 2012).

A qualitative approach provides an alternative route to understanding why and how people defeat themselves. This route to understanding requires us to ask those experiencing self-defeating behaviour directly about their lived experience. This approach does not depend on findings which result from the aggregation of an identified population, but rather an understanding of the individual's experience and what that experience means to them (Guest et al., 2012). Therefore, although qualitative methods cannot produce statistically significant results about a population, qualitative methods can explore the meaning an individual attributes to their specific experience (Barbour, 2000). This study seeks to understand and explore the meanings participants' attribute to their self-defeating behaviour. Thus, a qualitative approach is suitable, and an appropriate research strategy follows from that approach.

Many qualitative approaches, including the present study, makes use of purposeful sampling, semi-structured interviews, and a specific method of analysis linked to the lens through which the researcher has chosen to view their data (Willig, 2013). The current study aimed to recruit individuals who felt procrastination was significant to them. Thus, selected participants reported that they procrastinated regularly and would reflect on their experience of procrastination. Those recruited then voluntarily attended a semi-structured interview to share their experiences with the researcher. Interviews were then analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis.

3.3. Theoretical Points of Departure

3.3.1. Qualitative inquiry

According to Willig (2013), a common thread within qualitative inquiry is the importance of meaning and, subsequently, how individuals experience their world and make sense of their experiences. The main area of concern is an attempt to understand and describe self-defeating behaviour instead of predicting the possible outcomes of those who self-defeat. By accepting the epistemological foundations of qualitative inquiry, I aim to understand the experiences of those who partake in self-defeating behaviour.

Qualitative inquiry is an iterative process involving forms of validation from several sources (Barbour & Barbour, 2003). Therefore, the data never speaks for itself but is constantly validated by acknowledging the assumptions used to understand the data at hand (Smith et al., 2009). This iterative approach seeks to view a phenomenon from all angles and test its most basic assumptions (Smith et al., 2009). By doing so, one often sees the phenomenon differently, and new knowledge related to a specific phenomenon may emerge (Smith et al., 2009).

Assumptions, according to this approach, are always embedded in various experiences (Smith et al., 2009). These assumptions also require continuous testing, especially in cases where the topic at hand is highly complex or requires a new perspective (Elliott & Timulak, 2005). The assumptions held regarding self-defeating behaviour, as well as recent literature, have continually demonstrated the need for new knowledge. Several articles such as Barratt (2011); Martin, Marsh, Debus, and Malmberg (2007); Martin et al. (2003); McCrea and Flamm (2012); and Steel (2010) mention a missing mechanism within self-defeating behaviour which remains a mystery. Therefore, a qualitative approach may be used to uncover new meanings and understanding within a topic that has largely benefited from quantitative methodology thus far. The vast advantages of qualitative methodology seek to expand on the gaps in knowledge specifically seen within self-defeating behaviour literature today. Qualitative methods ask those who experience the phenomena directly, what they believe the causes of their behaviour are, which the research participants then reveal to the researcher (Guest et al., 2012). A focus on lived experience allows for new knowledge to emerge and future research to explore these new

developments (Guest et al., 2012). In order to understand this hidden mechanism, a qualitative approach is needed.

A qualitative approach also advances practical knowledge, which can be utilised to help those who partake in self-defeating behaviour. By understanding self-defeating behaviour, we can move beyond peripheral forms of knowledge about it and possibly gain a greater understanding of the hidden mechanism underpinning it. Although participants' reflections are not verbatim accounts of their experience, they are the closest possible sources in relation to the phenomena being experienced (Smith et al., 2009). Remaining as close to the source as possible allows us to see old concepts in a new light and utilise this knowledge to a greater extent in relation to future research conducted (Sandelowski, 2004).

Qualitative methodology facilitates the re-imagining of old concepts by relying on language as data, instead of numbers (Sandelowski, 2004). Language allows one to clarify and acknowledge the lived experiences of those experiencing self-defeating behaviour (Smith et al., 2009). The behaviour of those who self-defeat is also seen as complex and ever-evolving. A qualitative approach moves beyond surface explanations and acknowledges the dynamic relationship involved between the phenomena of self-defeat and those who experience this behaviour (Polkinghorne, 2005). Therefore, qualitative inquiry aims to understand the unique meanings attached to individuals' lived experiences and, ultimately, how these meanings are constructed (Smith et al., 2009). This approach also then allows one to gain insight into the factors which underlie the meaning constructed by the individual who self-defeats. The point of view of the individual with the lived experience is an important one and one that can be reflected upon using a qualitative approach (Krauss, 2005).

3.3.2. Phenomenology

Phenomenology began as a radical philosophy proposed by Edmund Husserl. Husserl aimed to seek the essence of phenomena before it became tainted by historical conceptualisations (Smith et al., 2009). Misconstructions of a phenomenon could occur through several human filters, including religion, culture, as well as science (Moran, 2000). Thus the aim is not to discover or explain, but rather to uncover the essential aspects defining a phenomenon as itself (Giorgi, 2005). Furthermore, one seeks only the

elements of a phenomenon essential to defining it (Dowling, 2007). Thus, phenomenology is a philosophy containing assumptions which have been employed in psychology. The move from philosophy to psychology is necessary because as a philosophy, phenomenology is solely concerned with the researcher's experience (Giorgi, 2000). As a philosophy, the researcher would be limited to their thoughts alone (Giorgi, 2000).

Phenomenology used within psychology is more concerned with the unique lived experiences of those experiencing the phenomenon, in contrast to essentialising the phenomenon itself (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, a more psychological phenomenology results in an attempt to understand the impact the phenomenon has on the individual (Willig, 2013); for instance, how procrastination would impact on those experiencing the phenomena. In accordance with these assumptions, I employ an interpretative phenomenology in order to understand the impact self-defeating behaviour may have on selected participants (Smith et al., 2009).

An interpretative phenomenology acknowledges that both the researcher and the participant shape how the phenomenon is currently conceptualised (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, the essential nature of the phenomenon is shaped, in part, by the individual who contextualises it for themselves (Smith et al., 2009). The contextualised whole offers the individual an understanding of how the phenomenon is defined, thereby completing a hermeneutic circle (Smith et al., 2009). Thus, individual conceptualisations of procrastination shape how it is perceived as a phenomenon, generally. The phenomenon then remains contextualised and identifiable by those who wish to understand their own experience of a phenomenon like self-defeating behaviour (Willig, 2013).

By allowing participants the time to reflect on their experience of a phenomenon, they can provide their interpretation of what this experience means to them (Smith et al., 2009). The meanings of their lived experience are truths only the participant can access fully (Smith et al., 2009). However, by sharing their interpretations, the researcher can better understand the phenomena as a whole, as previously alluded to (Smith et al., 2009). The meaning attached to phenomena by the participant allows others to conceptualise what defines the phenomena through social interaction (Smith et al., 2009). Thus, to understand something means to interpret it from our own prior experience. A phenomenon is only meaningful to us as far as it is connected to our

previous experiences. As researchers, we are only privy to what the participant allows us to see and, therefore, can only use this to attempt to understand that which remains forever invisible to us (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2004). Thus, I will engage in a double hermeneutic by attempting to make sense of how the participant makes sense of how they experience procrastination (Smith et al., 2009).

Merleau-Ponty (1964) describes the process of interpretation and truth succinctly using the example of observing a cube. Individuals viewing a cube cannot see all six sides of a cube simultaneously without turning it in their hands (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). Instead, they use their previous experience and knowledge to construct what they believe a cube should look like (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). The hidden sides of the cube are interpreted in a particular manner through the use of previous experiences with the concept of a cube in mind (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). This interpretation thus results in something that is true to the individual and the reality of what a cube should be for the individual (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). Collected conceptualisations of what defines a cube (it has six sides) allow others to form their understanding of what a cube should look like when viewing it for the first time (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). The experience of procrastination, for example, is informed by prior conceptualisations of the phenomenon. The individual also attributes unique meaning to the phenomenon based on prior experiences of the phenomenon and its intended conceptualisation.

Any attempt to explain a phenomenon already starts with interpretations derived from prior experience (Smith et al., 2009). Both the researcher and participant use prior lived experiences to explain how they understand the phenomenon under investigation (Moran, 2000). Thus far, I believe we have attempted to explain the sides of the procrastination cube we can perceive. We have done so without further attempting to interpret the hidden sides also required to further understand the mysteries that are concealed within procrastination. An explanation can also serve to cover up the phenomenon of interest (Heidegger, 1962); for example, finding procrastination humorous is widespread among students (Binder, 2000). However, the impact of this phenomenon on individuals does not feel humorous to them at all, even though they may communicate it as humorous to others (Sirois, 2007). Heidegger (1962) goes on to further show that objects (or phenomena) are only defined by the context which precedes them. You cannot label yourself a procrastinator without drawing upon the definitions

others have already attributed to it. The meaning we derive from objects (or phenomena) only occurs in relation to its contextualisation (Heidegger, 1962). Being-in-the-world, therefore, denotes the interwoven relationship that exists between how we define ourselves and how we draw from our everyday context to do so (Heidegger, 1962). We use this information to project ahead-of-itself the self we are when experiencing a specific phenomenon in its given context (Heidegger, 1962). The context which is already-in-the-world is present and shapes how one will experience a phenomenon (Heidegger, 1962). Past, present, and intended future work in conjunction to shape the meaning one derives from the phenomenon one is experiencing (Cerbone, 2006).

3.3.3. Utilising the assumptions of reversal theory

To understand participants' experience of procrastination required an understanding of their behaviour as purposeful. The very label of self-defeating behaviour could prohibit one's ability to attempt to understand how and why individuals would procrastinate. Only accepting possible participants' behaviour as meaningless could limit my exploration of the phenomenon. Therefore, I required theoretical assumptions which moved beyond seeing individuals as homeostatic (unchanging) or contradicting themselves (lacking purpose and paradoxical). By assuming that personality is dynamic, I can explore how participants may make decisions that are both good and bad for them under certain circumstances (Apter, 2016). The focus then shifts from the outcome of their behaviour as self-defeating to their experience of the phenomenon. Thus, the aim is to understand, for example, the appeal of procrastination and the specific purpose of consistently choosing to procrastinate. Thus, I propose that reversal theory can accomplish this because of its paradoxical nature. Apter (1982) is credited as the developer of reversal theory and goes into great detail in explaining its assumptions. I will attempt to offer a brief explanation of the assumptions espoused by reversal theory based on the book by Apter (2001) and show why this paradoxical theory is useful in understanding self-defeating behaviour.

The first of these paradoxes lie within the primary assumption of the theory. It is a structural-phenomenological approach which focuses on the individual's emotion, motivation, and personality (Apter, 2016). Usually, a structural approach disregards subjectivity whereas a phenomenological approach regards the subjective as the only important factor (Apter, 2016). What reversal theory aims to do is look at the subjective

nature of experiences, but also at what this subjective experience produces relative to the world existing outside of the individual (Apter, 2016). Therefore, it starts with the phenomenological by acknowledging that the individual has a unique subjective experience (Apter, 2016). However, it also acknowledges that the individual's unique experience has structural consequences which affect the environment the individual is a part of (Apter, 2016). Therefore, it is an approach which starts inward, or from the subjective, and works its way outward toward behaviour (Apter, 2001).

Reversal theory proposes a structure of conscious experience that allows the researcher to accept that people can have paradoxical intentions (Apter, 2001). Therefore, individuals can have conflicting needs and the motivation to satisfy both needs such as, for example, wanting to pass a test but also wanting to relax. What is important in this study is to explore what motivates individuals to choose self-defeating behaviour patterns such as procrastination instead of following their own set goals. I believe the first step in doing so is to attempt to understand what it is that individuals experience when their behaviour leads to self-defeating consequences.

Apter (2016) conceptualises personality not as static but as dynamic and, as a result, inconsistent. For example, individuals can perceive themselves as procrastinators now and as being productive an hour later. Although they may define themselves predominantly as being a procrastinator, within reversal theory, this is not regarded as a static trait but as a state of being, influenced by similar reoccurring experiences (Apter, 2016). The current state experienced depends on the emotions and motivations which give a particular experience its meaning (Apter, 2016). For example, if individuals are more motivated to protect their self-esteem at present, it is more likely they will avoid completing an evaluative task which tests their self-worth. Thus, individuals are consequently more motivated by short-term mood regulation than by the long-term goals they have set for themselves. Indeed, Sirois and Pychyl (2013) demonstrated while investigating procrastination that short-term mood regulation is prioritised above the long-term goals set for the future self. Furthermore, Apter (2001) argues that we all are capable of making drastically different decisions even in familiar circumstances, depending on how we interpret those circumstances within the present context. Past experiences guide our perceptions of ourselves as having limited or effective self-control, for example, but they do not pre-determine how we will react in the present. This

constitutes a defining contradiction between trait and state (reversal) theoretical assumptions. Individuals are thus seen as patterns over time (termed *self-patterns*) instead of consisting of fixed traits (Apter, 2016).

Individuals' lived experience is perceived as bistable in reversal theory, instead of traditionally homeostatic (Apter, 2016). *Bistability* denotes, for example, that we are always capable of having both limited and efficient self-control depending on the context experienced (Apter, 2016). Apter (2001) argues that different circumstances require us to reverse to either limited or efficient self-control depending on the requirements of the present context experienced. Therefore, we are all always both hard-working and procrastinators, and this depends on how the individual interprets the present. The *bistability* proposed by reversal theory illustrates how individuals can at one point be motivated by short-term mood regulation and at other times focused on long-term goals set for the future self. Thus, depending on several factors, including the perception of the current environment and its limitations, experienced emotions, and meaning derived from motivation, one can reverse to either short-term mood regulation or projected goals for the future self (Apter, 2016). Thus, instead of the individual seen as having fixed traits such as low self-control, each person fluidly reverses between low self-control and high self-control depending on the requirements of their context (Apter, 2016). Within an aggregated trait approach, consistency in the individual's behaviour constitutes a dominant and thus defining trait (for example, Díaz-Morales, Cohen, & Ferrari, 2008; Steel, 2010; Uysal & Knee, 2012). Reversal theory assumes that personality remains fluid and adapts to the context (Apter, 2016). Essentially, the individual reverses between limited self-control and efficient self-control, and back again, depending on the context of their experiences. Instead of being defined as an individual with low self-control, we all are capable of having low self-control depending on the context of our experiences (Apter, 2016).

Reversal theory also allows for various research approaches to investigate the subjective experiences of individuals and the theory is not limited to a solely quantitative or qualitative approach (Apter, 2016). Thus, the strategy of using a phenomenological approach does not contradict the guiding assumptions espoused by reversal theory. For these reasons, I believe that reversal theory is the most appropriate set of guiding assumptions to facilitate an understanding of why people act in a self-defeating manner.

3.3.4. Methods of validation within qualitative research

The contrasts between quantitative and qualitative assumptions do not allow for the same manner of assessing validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, in order to validly understand the hidden voices of those who self-defeat, different strategies of validation are required. Strategies to enhance validity within a qualitative methodology also need to relate to the assumptions of the chosen qualitative approach (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Lincoln and Guba (1985) acknowledged that qualitative research required applicable criteria for validity and fashioned their validation strategies in relation to those applicable in quantitative methods. They advocated for trustworthiness; which includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

3.3.4.1. Trustworthiness

Credibility is required due to the acceptance of multiple truths within qualitative methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Therefore, within the current study, the participant forms the most credible source able to attest to the interpretations and conclusions reached by the researcher. The collaboration between the researcher and the researched strives for negotiated meaning which should resonate with the participants themselves (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Therefore, at each stage of analysis, I have strived to always link the interpretations arrived at back to the original transcript or the participants themselves where feasible. In addition, I always strived to retain the complexity of the participants' experience even if it contradicted the interpretations I reached.

Transferability allows for the transfer of conclusions from a study to different contexts or future research endeavours (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The responsibility to assess the transferability of the current study, therefore, lies in any future endeavours aiming to make the results of this study applicable to their own. However, in order to facilitate this process, I have undertaken to describe the process as fully as possible so that others may assess how applicable the findings are to their current research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

We show the ***dependability*** of our findings by remaining as transparent as possible throughout the research process and by allowing others to examine our findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Shenton (2004) states that by demonstrating credibility, one also increases the dependability of a study. By providing thick, rich descriptions which include both my interpretations and that of participants, I aim to provide the reader with enough

information to examine the findings in relation to their requirements (Shenton, 2004). Thus, the detailed outline of the present study increases transparency and ensures dependability should aspects of the study need to be repeated in relation to the reader's requirements.

Confirmability includes providing a trail of evidence allowing others to follow one's interpretations and the conclusions drawn from them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Therefore, the current study includes a compact disc containing transcripts, quotations, interpretations, emerging- and superordinate themes. Essentially, this allows the reader to follow the trail of evidence from the raw data to the conclusions reached and form their own opinions about how the researcher has interpreted the material (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In addition, all appendices are included which support the statements provided throughout the current study. Lastly, the methodology chapter itself acts as an attempt to guide the reader in assessing the conclusions reached at the end of the current study.

3.3.5. Strategies of validation appropriate to the chosen approach

The chosen qualitative approach also informs the strategies of validity selected by the researcher (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher, in this case, also influences the degree of validity. The researcher makes decisions on the length of interviews, transcribing procedures, and which interpretations are of importance. In trying to understand the experiences of those who self-defeat, participants' experiences become the highest measure of validity. Interpretations should, therefore, always relate back to the participant's voice (Creswell & Miller, 2000). It is also important to note that the interpretations formulated or even the transcripts itself are never verbatim accounts of participants' actual experiences (Smith et al., 2009). They always remain interpretations which are co-created by the participant and the researcher (Smith et al., 2009). This relationship between participant and researcher allows for meaning-making and eventually the possible interpretations the researcher arrives at (Smith et al., 2009). Although textual evidence is not a verbatim reflection of the participant's experience, the participant who experiences the phenomena remains the closest possible source of gathering the information needed to interpret the phenomena being researched (Polkinghorne, 2005). The participant's perception of the world they find themselves in, how others perceive them, and how they perceive others constitutes the intersubjective relationship the participant forms with the world they inhabit (Smith et al., 2009).

Understanding different perspectives from different participants enabled the researcher to co-create similarities and differences applicable to the phenomenon under investigation. The similarities experienced show the contextual agreements many have attributed to a phenomenon. Differences illustrate how the participant's unique context has shaped the meaning they derive from the phenomenon being investigated (Sadala & Adorno, 2002).

Creswell and Miller (2000) note that the purpose of validity in qualitative research is to explicate the underlying assumptions one uses when interpreting the data. The data itself is always valid; the individual's experiences are always valid to them (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In acknowledging the assumptions which shape our interpretation of those experiences, we should not confuse what we have interpreted with the inherently valid data which stem from the point of view of the participant (Creswell & Miller, 2000). We should not display the interpretations gathered as a truth attributed to the participant's reality (Smith et al., 2009). We should, however, attempt to increase the credibility of methods used to obtain the interpretations we have reached. By doing so, we increase the validity within a qualitative approach. The researcher shows how assumptions have lead interpretation and the reader can decide for themselves how credible those assumptions are. Textually transcribed evidence always remains as secondary, indirect evidence of a participant's true account of their reality (Polkinghorne, 2005). The participant's actual reality is only accessible to the participants themselves and always indirectly accessible to the researcher through interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). Thus, I have provided an explication of the assumptions accepted throughout the current chapter to facilitate an understanding of the interpretations reached. This enables the reader to judge the credibility of this study for themselves. Creswell and Miller (2000) also state that strategies of validation specifically applicable to a phenomenological approach are disconfirming evidence, thick, rich description, and member checking. In addition, all qualitative research also strives for trustworthiness as discussed above (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Disconfirming evidence demand that the researcher look for any evidence which contradicts the assumptions held (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Searching for contradictions allows one to acknowledge the complexity of reality as a dynamic process instead of one that is static. Due to the multitude of possible realities or interpretations, it is just as

important to find evidence which contradicts one's assumptions about a phenomenon as well as those assumptions which confirm it (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Thus all evidence is considered within the current study, including both confirming and contradictory evidence as suggested by Creswell and Miller (2000).

Creswell and Miller (2000) also see ***thick, rich descriptions*** of experiences as important. Thick, rich descriptions allow the reader to get a broad feel for the participant's experience. By describing as much as possible about the interview conducted, the researcher allows others the chance to understand the participants experience from their point of view (Shenton, 2004). Minute detail, locating participants, and describing as fully as possible the interaction between the researcher and the researched again illustrates the dynamics of the participant's lived experience by allowing for interpretation (Shenton, 2004). This process will be demonstrated while presenting the results of the current study.

Collected evidence and interpretations were related back to participants to gain their perspective on the conclusions reached. Thus, ***member checking*** involved relaying relevant findings back to participants when possible and recording their opinions about the conclusions reached (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Participants' conclusions are noted and also presented along with the results (Creswell & Miller, 2000). However, it should be noted that two participants, identified by their pseudonyms as Bruce and Floyd, were not available for member checking while the current study was conducted. Although unfortunate, this does not detract from the researcher's interpretations and the knowledge co-created during the semi-structured interview (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

3.4. Methodology

3.4.1. Sample

3.4.1.1. Sample size

The sample used in the study consisted of individuals who identified with procrastination. It is not so much the quantity but quality of participants' responses which are of importance. A homogenous sample in the case of qualitative research refers to a sample with a purpose in common (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). Although participants recruited for the study have differentiating factors (such as age, race, and gender), they all identify themselves as procrastinators. Seeing each participant as unique

and as having idiosyncratic lived experiences, one cannot compare them in terms of race or age, for example. Even participants within the same race group are seen as having substantially different lived experiences through the phenomenological lens (Smith et al., 2009). In addition, although all six participants identify themselves as procrastinators, their individual experience of the phenomenon is vastly different, and rightly so. They do, however, all have self-defeating behaviour, namely procrastination in common and, therefore, serve the purposes of the current study well. Smith et al. (2009) suggest, depending on factors such as commitment and constraints within the study, that five to six participants are adequate to provide qualitative accounts of the participants' unique experiences. Based on these suggestions, I decided that no more than six participants would be included and would offer a qualitative view of the selected participants' experiences, while also avoiding any possible errors which could have resulted by selecting too many participants.

3.4.1.2. Characteristics of the sample group chosen

Table 3.1.

Summarised characteristics of the selected sample

	AMINA	**BRUCE**	**CARRIE**	**DINAH**	**EMILY**	**FLOYD**
AGE	22	24	22	22	45	51
RACE	WHITE	WHITE	WHITE	AFRICAN	WHITE	WHITE
GENDER	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	FEMALE	FEMALE	MALE

All participants were in their third year of study at the University of Pretoria and were majoring in psychology. The demographic information for all six participants is illustrated in Table 3.1 above. It must be noted that two participants, one male, and one female, were much older than the other participants and both are completing their second degrees to date. I chose these two participants because, in addition to meeting my initial criteria, their accounts as older individuals with more experience of procrastination would hopefully add to the complexity of the phenomenon during the analysis stage. Based on these two individuals one could see how their experience and perceptions of procrastination specifically have changed over the years.

3.4.1.3. Sampling method

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who displayed self-defeating behaviours (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). I selected to use students at the University of Pretoria who are studying psychology as my sample. The incidence of procrastination within an academic environment is quite high (Steel, 2007). Steel (2007) argues that more than 80% of college students procrastinate and 75% define themselves as procrastinators. Additionally, psychology students may have a conceptual understanding of introspection due to the nature of the degree they are studying toward, which could assist in the recounting of their experiences. Although this may not always be the case, it is certainly more likely given the nature of their current chosen field of study. Therefore, students displaying self-defeating characteristics were screened and recruited by means of a questionnaire developed by the researcher which can be found in Appendix A. The self-developed screening measure was used to mainly identify participants who procrastinate. The screening measure allowed the researcher to select only those participants who would contribute significantly to the study when recounting their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher developed a questionnaire to ensure that those recruited would serve the purposes of the study and the questionnaire served as a screening device.

3.4.1.4. Recruitment of sample

I initially entered one lecture hall (with the permission of the relevant lecturer) to describe the study and inform students of the nature of my study. I explained the nature of the proposed research to students before their lecture commenced and gave them my contact details via a PowerPoint slideshow on a projector. By the end of the lecture, two individuals were interested in participating in the study. I also posted an announcement on their electronic notice board, ClickUP, to recruit those who may be interested. In the announcement, I informed students that I would be available at an announced venue for two hours if they were interested in participating. Within a two-week period, 21 individuals completed the short questionnaire to assess their suitability for the study. Suitability for the study entailed selecting the six participants who indicated the greatest degree of significance in relation to procrastination in their lives. For example, during the screening process, participants were asked how often they procrastinate before a test that is important to them. Participants who indicated “all the time” were considered more suitable than those indicating “sometimes” or “often”. Significance to the participant was

catered for by phrasing questions as important to the participant. Interested individuals also completed a consent form (Appendix B) explaining all the necessary details of the proposed research. Once participants completed the screening measure, the researcher also asked whether they were interested in participating further in a semi-structured interview. Participants, who indicated that they were, gave the researcher their contact details to arrange for the informal interview to take place. Participants were also informed that the interview attended would be between 45 and 60 minutes long. The researcher also explained that only six participants were needed and that the six participants would be selected based on their responses to the questionnaire completed.

I informed participants that I would contact those who were still interested and that their continued participation would be based on answers collected from the questionnaire. Six participants who indicated the greatest degree of significance regarding procrastination in their lives were contacted and invited to attend the semi-structured interview. Participants not selected were informed of this, thanked for their participation, and provided with the details of the student support office if required. All possible participants, including those not selected to participate further, were informed that they may contact the principal researcher at any point during or after the research process to remain informed about the results of the study. In total, 21 individuals (with two disregarded) completed the self-developed questionnaire, and six participants were chosen from this group based on their responses to the questionnaire. Two participants rescinded their consent by not returning to complete the consent form and, therefore, any information collected relating to them was wholly ignored.

3.4.2. Data collection

3.4.2.1. Self-developed screening measure

I employed two methods of data collection. The screening measure used was initially only meant to be used as a tool to determine the significance of procrastination for participants. However, the unique combinations of responses to the screening measure retrieved from selected participants were also used as a guide during the interview. I felt that these responses said something about the participants' experiences (they chose their answers and thus said something about their personal experiences) and so were also used within the structure of the interview guide. The screening measure did not define individuals objectively as procrastinators but did say something about the significance of

procrastination in their lives. In addition to ensuring that selected participants were able to contribute significantly to the proposed aims of the proposed study, it also allowed the researcher to customise the interview guide to gain insight into experiences already noted by the participants. For example, some participants indicated more than one self-defeating behaviour (smoking and/or healthcare negligence). This allowed the researcher to focus specifically on smoking or healthcare negligence based on the responses of that specific participant.

3.4.2.2. Semi-structured interviews

The second data collection method consisted of semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were arranged with the six selected participants who accepted the invitation to participate further in the study. All six interviews were conducted over a period of three days due to the availability and willingness to participate showed by the selected participants. Participants filled out a second consent form before being interviewed (Appendix C). The researcher also explained how the interviews would work and that they would be audio recorded to remove any ambiguity after the interviews took place. During the semi-structured interviews, participants were asked to clarify various answers from their questionnaires and elaborate on what this meant to them. The interview guide, found in Appendix D, provided a sense of structure but the previous answers to the screening questionnaire also communicated what was viewed as significant by participants. For example, question six in the questionnaire assessed the degree of control participants felt they had over the amount of time spent procrastinating. Some participants stated that they felt they were in control, whereas others felt that they were not in control or that their degree of control would depend on the situation itself. This information gained from the questionnaire allowed the researcher to customise the questions present in the interview guide. For example, I would either ask them why they felt in control or to describe what they meant by feeling a lack of control or which situations influenced the degree of control they felt. The interview guide should not be rigid and should depend on the direction that the interview takes (Willig, 2013). A participant's response allowed the researcher to probe areas which were important to the participant. By doing so, I was able to explore what participants deem important in relation to how they view a specific self-defeating behaviour. By paraphrasing, for example, during interviews, I attempted to identify what is important to the participant and, in this way, try to understand essential aspects of their experience. Therefore, I

looked at the emotional reaction to certain questions and not only to how frequently a participant mentions a specific topic (Smith et al., 2009). Once recorded, the interviews were ready to be transcribed.

3.4.3. Data analysis

I used Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, hereafter referred to as IPA, as my data analysis method (Smith et al., 2009). IPA is grounded in the interpretative phenomenological approach and was, therefore, used as an appropriate data analysis method for the proposed study. It is a data analysis method which allows the researcher to explore how participants perceive the significance of their lived experiences. It also allows the individual to tell their own story and does not seek objective statements (Smith et al., 2009). As discussed previously, all interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed in order for the analysis to take place. Each interview consisted of one full transcript and, therefore, each transcript was analysed individually in order to identify emerging themes. The transcription process took roughly 70 hours to complete. The transcript for each participant was carefully read numerous times, and any significant data concerning the interview was noted. Noted data were labelled as quotes, with each quote interpreted at three levels namely, a descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual level, as suggested by Smith et al. (2009).

Once all the significant data was captured, I tried to identify common themes which emerged in relation to each of the six participants (Smith et al., 2009). Themes identified were, however, as a result of what I essentially viewed as important in relation to the topic at hand. In this regard, I tried to identify components from participants' speech which had a degree of investment or impact in their lives. Transcripts were read several times to determine emerging themes constituting a reiterative process (Smith et al., 2009). Each theme was formulated with the three levels of interpretation discussed above in mind. Once themes were identified, I attempted to gain insight into what meaning the participant attributes to their self-defeating behaviour. Once this process was completed for each of the six participants, resulting themes were further categorised into superordinate themes. Themes and superordinate themes were then analysed, compared, and contrasted across the six selected cases (Smith et al., 2009).

Evidence of the researcher's understanding of emerging themes was illustrated by means of quoting passages from the transcripts to denote what has been recognised as emerging themes (Smith et al., 2009). To a certain extent, I could now understand what individuals experience when partaking in self-defeating behaviour. However, it is important to note that data analysed is always as a result of how it is interpreted by the researcher and is formed by the researcher's interaction with the participant (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, in accordance with phenomenology, the researcher can never completely understand the experience of the participant (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher must also keep in mind and reflect on his own experiences and preconceived knowledge (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, the researcher's previous knowledge and experience will influence how he interprets the results obtained (Smith et al., 2009). As the principal researcher, I collected all the data and analysed the data accordingly. Therefore, by becoming involved in all processes related to the data, I was able to gain a richer understanding of the data. The resulting interpretations aided in answering the research question as the researcher attempted to explore the significance participants attach to their lived experience of the phenomenon investigated.

3.4.4. Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance for the present study was obtained from the institutional ethics committee before commencing with the relevant research processes outlined in this chapter. Participants were informed of all research processes involved throughout the research endeavour. During the initial recruitment phase, I explained the purpose of the proposed research in lay terms to interested individuals. Possible participants received a consent form detailing all the processes involved in the proposed research. Individuals who agreed to participate signed the consent form to formalise their participation. However, participation remained voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any time. Secondly, those who were still interested in participating further completed the questionnaire I used as a screening measure. I indicated to participants that the questionnaire was used to select participants who met the selection for the proposed research undertaken. To maintain confidentiality, only the principal researcher has access to the completed questionnaires. In addition, only the principal researcher can link specific responses to specific participants identified by a pseudonym.

3.4.4.1. Ethical considerations during semi-structured interviews

Interested participants were informed that they could attend a semi-structured interview if willling, depending on the results of the questionnaire previously completed. Participants were also informed that the interview would be approximately 45–60 minutes long. Consenting participants were informed that a tape recorder was necessary during the interview in order to accurately capture their responses. In addition, participants were informed that all contact details provided remained confidential and would only be used by the principal researcher to contact them in order to attend the interview. I assured participants that their identity would remain confidential and only known to the principal researcher. Participants were also informed that pseudonyms would be used to conceal their identity. The consent form outlined the above information at each stage of the research process and stated how the results of the proposed research would be disseminated.

3.4.4.2. The potential for harm and support measures in place

The researcher identified no significant risks to participants in the proposed study. However, participants may discuss distressing personal events during the interview and require counselling as a result of sharing their experiences. Therefore, all participants were given the contact details of student support services for counselling in the event that they experienced any adverse effects during the research process. Counselling services are freely available to the selected sample as the sample consisted of registered students studying at the University of Pretoria. Prior permission from student support services was obtained to ensure that participants had this avenue available to them should they require assistance.

Although the potential for harm always exists in each research endeavour, I reasonably employed measures to counteract any adverse impact the study may have had. In addition, I believe that the selected sample of psychology students would be genuinely interested in the behaviour of others, as well as their own behaviour. Therefore, their voluntary involvement in the research process may have allowed them to experience the research process firsthand, as well as also identify their self-defeating behaviour patterns. The process of reflection may allow them to acknowledge certain self-defeating patterns in future which may hinder what they aim to achieve in their studies. Therefore,

the research conducted holds certain possible personal benefits for those who participated.

3.5. Summary of Chapter 3

A qualitative approach was employed to facilitate the emergence of new knowledge in relation to self-defeating behaviour. Focusing on the phenomenon of self-defeat, interpretative phenomenology was selected as the lens through which to view self-defeating behaviour. In addition, in accepting the behaviour of the selected participants as purposeful, I chose to employ the assumptions held within reversal theory. Methods of validation specific to the selected approach were discussed in order to ensure the transparency of findings for the reader.

In relation to methodology, the selected sample of six individuals was described in terms of sampling methods and recruitment strategies used. The data collection procedures were identified by discussing the researcher-developed screening questionnaire as well as the use of semi-structured interviews. The process of analysing the collected data was highlighted by discussing the selected method of IPA. Lastly, all considered ethical implications inherent to the study were discussed.

CHAPTER 4 – PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1. Overview of Chapter 4

Firstly, the following chapter will detail the extent of participation in the current study. I will elaborate on the recruitment methods employed to select participants for the study and outline the inclusion criteria utilised which involved the use of a self-developed screening measure. Secondly, I will discuss the procedure I used to select six participants to interview and provide an overview of the results that led to their selection. Lastly, I will idiographically situate and introduce each of the six selected participants to provide a detailed and rich context for the reader. Therefore, this chapter aims to provide a descriptive account of the participants' experiences of self-defeating behaviour. Although descriptive, it is important to remember that the final descriptions are the result of co-constructed interpretations produced during the interviews I conducted (Smith et al., 2009). The current chapter aims to ensure that the interpretations which follow in the next chapter are grounded within the participants' descriptions of the phenomenon being researched. The approach I have chosen is used to ensure that both the phenomenological and the interpretative are illustrated in my usage of IPA as a method of analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

4.2. Overview Regarding Participation and Selection Criteria Employed

I recruited possible participants in three ways. Firstly, with the permission of the lecturer and module co-ordinator of Critical and Community Psychology (SLK 320), I described and explained the aims of the study to the group of third-year psychology students. I asked that interested students contact me to find out more about the study and indicated that I would be available after the class should they have any questions. Secondly, I also informed the students that I would be available for consultation at a booked venue on two specified dates should they wish to participate or ask questions related to the study. This measure offered students time to consider whether they wanted to participate, should they have felt unsure during my presentation after their lecture. Lastly, again with the permission of the module co-ordinator, I placed information regarding the current study on ClickUP for SLK 320. ClickUP is the platform used by the University of Pretoria to communicate announcements to students online. The three strategies described above

resulted in 21 individuals participating and completing the screening measure developed by the researcher.

A total of 21 possible participants completed the screening measure and 10 individuals who demonstrated significant procrastination were considered for selection. I defined procrastination as significant to possible participants when they indicated that they habitually procrastinated and ruminated about the consequences thereof. Six participants who met the selection criteria were willing to participate further and attend the scheduled interviews. Three individuals met the selection criteria but were unwilling to participate beyond completing the screening measure. A fourth individual also met the selection criteria but stated that they already consented to participate in another unrelated study. Eleven individuals were not selected due to receiving lower scores of significance in comparison to selected participants. Of the 21 possible participants, four completed the screening measure but did not complete the required consent form and therefore, their results were wholly ignored. Each possible participant was informed whether they were selected, thanked for participating, and given the contact information of student support services. The six selected and willing participants were contacted to arrange for an interview to take place at an agreed upon date, time, and location.

The first three questions in the screening measure (Appendix A) were converted to a possible score out of 12. The selected participants had a score of greater than 10, whereas those who were not selected had scores below 10. Although 10 individuals had scores of 10 or more, four individuals were not willing to participate further as previously discussed. Thus, there were 17 possible participants, excluding the four participants who were not able to give their consent and, consequently, did not qualify to participate in the study.

The first three questions of the screening measure were used as a predictor of participants' procrastination and to determine whether their procrastination was significant to them. Question 1 attempted to assess the degree of procrastination and its significance to the participant by asking them to select an option that best described the extent of their procrastination. The available options were: I do not procrastinate at all (1); Sometimes I procrastinate (2); I procrastinate often (3); and lastly, I am a procrastinator, I procrastinate all the time (4). Options were scored from 1 to 4, ranging from "no procrastination" to "I identify as a procrastinator" respectively. The fourth

option additionally assessed whether the participant possibly linked procrastination to their identity by specifically identifying as a procrastinator. Question 2 assessed how often the participant felt that they procrastinated before an assessment they defined as being important. Available options ranged from "never" to "all the time". This question assessed the extent of procrastination in relation to academic assessments that were important to the participant. Lastly, Question 3 assessed the number of hours spent procrastinating. Question 3 had five available options from which to choose, in the form of hours spent procrastinating. The available options included 0, 1–2, 3–4, and 4+ hours, each scored as 1, 2, 3, or 4 points, respectively. In addition, the fifth option was open-ended as an amount specified by the participant (*other*), which allowed participants to indicate the number of hours spent procrastinating if they knew the specific amount of hours they spent procrastinating. In terms of scoring, the participants' answers were considered in relation to the number of hours specified. For example, a possible participant indicated "more than a week"; therefore, I could attribute greater significance to the number of hours specified in relation to the rest of her responses. Although the participant scored 4 (highest possible score) for the specified question, I also considered her response in relation to the significance she ascribed to procrastination. If a set amount of hours spent procrastinating was not immediately available to the participant, participants could choose from the range of options available to them. The intention was not to quantify their experience of procrastination; instead, I associated the amount of time spent procrastinating with the possible significance they attributed to procrastination.

Table 4.1.

Screening Measure Scores for All Possible Participants

Selected participants by pseudonym				
	Question 1	**Question 2**	**Question 3**	**Total**
Amina	4	4	4	**12**
Bruce	4	4	4	**12**
Carrie	3	3	4	**10**
Dinah	3	4	4	**11**
Emily	4	3	4	**11**
Floyd	4	4	4	**12**
Possible participants (PP)				
	Question 1	**Question 2**	**Question 3**	**Total**
PP7	3	2	2	**7**
PP8	2	2	3	**7**
PP9	2	2	1	**5**
PP10	3	3	4	**10**
PP11	3	3	4	**10**
PP12	2	2	4	**8**
PP13	2	2	4	**8**
PP14	4	4	4	**12**
PP15	3	3	3	**9**
PP16	3	1	2	**6**
PP17	4	4	4	**12**

4.3. Overview of Procedure Following the Selection of Participants

Six undergraduate students completing psychology modules at third-year level participated in the study. Therefore, a suitable number of participants were successfully recruited to participate in the study. The six selected participants were interviewed within a span of three days, owing to the enthusiasm shown by the participants. Once selected, I arranged a date with each of the participants for an interview, depending on their availability. All six participants were available for an interview within the three-day span mentioned earlier. Each of the six selected participants met the set selection criteria, and none of those selected withdrew from the study.

I ensured, as far as possible, that participants felt comfortable throughout the interview process. On average, interviews lasted for an hour and eight minutes. Interview durations ranged from one hour to an hour and 17 minutes. The goals, aims, and assumptions underpinning the study were explained and contextualised to selected participants before the interview took place. I informed each participant prior to being interviewed that I aimed to explore their experiences from their perspective. Thus, I also indicated that, contrary to objective research methods, their perspective is acknowledged as “true

for them", whereas my analysis would follow as an interpretation of their experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

During their respective interviews, participants reflected on their experiences in relation to their answers given in the screening measure used. I aimed to clarify and allow participants the freedom to elaborate on their experiences in relation to the phenomenon under consideration. Therefore, I aim to relay participants' experiences of procrastination and additional self-defeating behaviours, where applicable, by using relevant extracts. The appropriate use of extracts ensures that a thick, rich description is available to the reader (Creswell & Miller, 2000). During transcription, a legend (available as Appendix E) was utilised to note nonverbal gestures that further communicate aspects of the participants' experiences of self-defeating behaviour. In addition, all words in bold lettering denote the speaker's emphasis when using certain words while describing their experiences. The complete transcripts are available to the reader as a web page, available on a compact disk as Appendix F. However, the extracts used throughout this chapter and the discussion chapter are modified by the removal of transcript notations such as brief pauses used during transcription to improve readability. Pseudonyms are utilised throughout this process to conceal any possible identifying information; this includes participant names and the names of significant others discussed while sharing their experience with me. In addition, potentially identifying information is either omitted or adapted to conceal the identities of all the selected participants. In the current study, the pseudonyms of the six selected participants are Amina, Bruce, Carrie, Dinah, Emily, and Floyd, where required.

Follow-up feedback sessions or member-checking took place once the analysis phase concluded. This process was utilised to ensure that participants voiced any concerns regarding my interpretations of their experiences (Shenton, 2004). I shared participant-specific results from my analysis with the applicable participants. Subsequently, I arranged individual meetings with willing participants to discuss my interpretations of their experiences; four of the six participants were able to meet. The member-checking process that followed continued over a period of four months. All four participants indicated that my interpretation of their experiences resonated with their understanding of their experiences. The dates that were arranged to discuss the results depended on participants' availability and the length of time required to complete the applicable

analysis. Their feedback is included in the discussion of results to acknowledge participants' voices, concerns, and recommendations relating to their experiences of procrastination or other self-defeating behaviours. Two participants were unable to meet after sending them the resulting analysis but, to date, have not voiced any concerns or recommendations regarding my interpretations.

Table 4.2.

Tabulated Results from Screening Measure for Selected Participants

Participant	Age (years)	Male / Female	Q4 Impact of procrastination on test marks	Q5 Inform peers of procrastination	Q6 Control over amount of time spent procrastinating	Q7 Additional self-defeating behaviours	Q8 Reflection on reason for procrastination	Q9 Tendency to procrastinate before important tests
Amina	22	Female	Possible impact	All the time	Depends on the situation	None	Knows why she procrastinates	Yes
Bruce	24	Male	Direct negative impact	All the time	No control felt	Healthcare negligence; Smoking; Shyness	Often wonders why	Yes
Carrie	22	Female	Possible impact	All the time	Depends on the situation	None	Often wonders why	Yes
Dinah	22	Female	Possible impact	Occasionally	Depends on the situation	Healthcare negligence; Smoking	Knows why she procrastinates	Yes
Emily	45	Female	Possible impact	Occasionally	Depends on the situation	None	Wonders why all the time	Yes
Floyd	51	Male	Possible impact	All the time	Depends on the situation	Healthcare negligence; Substance abuse	Knows why he procrastinates	Yes

Review	
Number of Participants	6
Ranges	
Age range	22 to 51 years old
Mean Age	31 years old
Results of the screening measure for selected participants (averages)	
Impact of procrastination on a student's test marks	5 Particpants felt that procrastination had a possible impact on a student's test mark
Inform peers that I procrastinate	4 Participants indicated that they inform peers that they procrastinate all the time
Control over amount of time spent procrastinating	5 Particpants stated that their degree of control depends on the situation
Additional Self-defeating Behaviours	3 Particpants indicated None; 3 particpants indicated Healthcare negligence
Reflection on reasons behind procrastination	3 Participants indicated that they knew why they procrastinate
Tendency to procrastinate before important tests/assignments	All 6 participants stated that they usually tend to procrastinate before important tests/assignments
Ratios	
Male : Female	2 : 4
African : White : Coloured : Indian : Other	1 : 5 : 0 : 0 : 0
Procrastination : Healthcare negligence : Smoking : Shyness : Substance abuse	6 : 3 : 2 : 1 : 1

4.4. Introducing the Selected Research Participants

In the following section, I introduce each of the participants individually. For each participant, I will provide an overview of how they experience procrastination based on descriptions of their experiences, although I still employ interpretation to weave their experiences together coherently. I will highlight key themes and subordinate themes emerging from the research to demonstrate my interpretation of participants' experience of procrastination. Additional self-defeating behaviours are not discussed at length but are also presented, where applicable. The collected data included 378 pages of transcript,

663 selected quotations, 145 emergent themes, and 34 superordinate themes (five to six overlapping themes per participant). Consequently, not all available data can be presented. Instead, selected extracts are used to illustrate emergent themes, and in turn, emergent themes collectively illustrate superordinate themes in the chapter that follows. Therefore, the present chapter focuses on introducing the reader to emerging themes related to descriptions of participants' experiences of procrastination and applicable additional self-defeating behaviours. I have, however, modified the selected extracts by removing brief pauses noted during transcription to improve readability. In addition, I have also added clarifying text where required in brackets. The discussion chapter that follows focuses on the interpretation, analysis, and presentation of the superordinate themes in relation to the phenomenon of self-defeating behaviour, with an emphasis on academic procrastination. The present chapter aims to idiographically situate each of the six selected participants' experiences by offering their descriptions of their experiences in a coherent manner, starting with Amina's experience (Smith et al., 2009).

4.4.1. Amina

Amina is a white female, completing the third and final year of her undergraduate studies at the time of the research. She was uncertain about her future in her studies owing to indecisiveness about her two core modules, which may have affected her motivation to study. Amina was 22 years old at the time of the interview. She was the first person to participate in this study and also the first one I interviewed. Although her first language is Afrikaans, she had been attending classes presented in English since her second year. She used Afrikaans expressions, at times, to express her experiences of procrastination. She indicated that she was comfortable with conversing in English since she primarily studied in English.

Regarding procrastination, she felt that it is a part of who she is. Although she saw procrastination in a negative light, she also accepted that it was a part of her identity and that she could not be without it. Amina stated that procrastination provided the pressure she needed to start studying. Without this pressure, she lacked the impetus to start studying and described herself as a "spur of the moment" type of person. However, she was also aware of the negative consequences of her procrastination, which made it difficult to articulate her experiences of procrastination as they were often contradictory. The contradictory experiences of procrastination emerged as characteristic to the

phenomenon of procrastination for most of the participants and, thus, became part and parcel of this research endeavour.

She felt in control of and responsible for the time she spent procrastinating and defined it as significant. Amina felt her studies were the most important area of focus in her life and procrastination was, consequently, also seen as significant. She showed an awareness of the contradictions related to procrastination and the resulting difficulty in regulating her procrastinating behaviour.

An exploration of Amina's procrastination revealed that she created certain conditions to be met before she felt able to study. Without these conditions being met, it became increasingly difficult to become productive. The conditions she required to start studying cultivated her need for procrastination in several ways. Her retelling of her experiences allows me to structure and describe her procrastination as a phenomenon in this section.

Amina felt that pressure is the only thing that could get her to start studying. Without it, she felt a lack of motivation to start studying. She states during the interview *"I think the stress… will get me to sit down with my test and study* [get me to study for the upcoming test]." Without stress, she lacks the impetus to begin tasks. Unless the pressure builds to a preferred level, she is unable to start studying. Without a concrete deadline, such as the night before a test, she cannot bring herself to start studying and, instead, procrastinates until she feels the pressure. Without the pressure, she "*has so much time*" and then she will think to herself "*okay, maybe I need to… study, but then I* [also] *think, okay, but I still have so much time*, *so I could do other stuff.*" At this point, she has a typical routine regarding her preparation for tests and has a specified average number of hours required to sleep, as illustrated in the following extract: "*my average hours of sleep… before a test is four hours*."

I asked Amina that, if she could delete procrastination, erase it completely, would she? She replied "*[pause] I dunno, I will get a lot more – I will get a whole lot more sleep in if I don't procrastinate.*" Amina explains that she needs to procrastinate to feel the pressure she requires to start a task. For example, "*I need the stress, okay I'm stressing, okay I'm going to study*." Later on during the interview, she admits "*maybe [exhales] I need the adrenaline rush of maybe not going through all the work*." The previous extracts illustrate that her need to procrastinate is always relatively present but depends on the situation being experienced. Amina states that "*If I'm more passionate about the subject, then I'll*

start earlier" and later "*I procrastinate more on the subjects I don't like*." Procrastination then, ultimately, occurs due to using pressure or stress as a source of motivation.

Procrastination also results in negative consequences. Amina knows that if "*I studied at that moment, if I started then I would have enough time and then I would sleep and then everything would be fine*." Although she knows that studying earlier is better for her, Amina seems to experience mental paralysis without the pressure required to motivate her to start studying. The conflict between deciding to study and being unable to do so results in the experience of negative emotions directed toward her inability to act. Amina illustrates this cycle of self-defeat:

> *I just keep wasting time until I think like, okay 'Like really now, I need to study now, I need to study now' and then I'll put my phone away or whatever but ja, I'm not really pleased with myself.*

The experience of procrastination thus occurs in phases. Firstly, a lack of pressure is associated with a lack of motivation. "*I'm just like 'okay, but I still have time, so I don't have to study' and… a day before the test, then I'll like* [decide] *'okay, I have to study now' 'cause then, the time is getting less, and then I have to start*." Thus, time spent procrastinating means waiting for the correct amount of pressure felt to accumulate and force her to start studying. Amina says her "*thoughts dwell, but if I have the pressure and the stress, then I think my mind is focused just on that work.*" Procrastination lasts a specific amount of time "*So I'll procrastinate '*[un]*til I feel the pressure and until I begin to feel stressed*." Thus, Amina seems to require just enough time to fully focus on the specific module she is studying for. "*Ja, well, the pressure comes from* [the fact] *that my time, is, running, out*." Lastly, once the correct amount of pressure is experienced (enough to cause her to stress), she is finally able to focus on her initial task. This need for pressure is illustrated by Amina "*but ja, when I feel the pressure…then there's nothing that can get my attention…my mind, and everything is on* [doing] *the work*" and "*I feel that I want to study '*[un]*til the last second before I write the test*." Amina procrastinates until she only has a specific amount of time left to study and, thus, her efforts feel more directly linked to her studying. Without pressure, she does not feel that her efforts are measurable. Another consequence of procrastination is that she can prioritise studying and her efforts to study are perceived as meaningful to her.

I think it's just the overall, I'm writing a test, I need to study, I don't want to study, I need the stress. Okay, I'm stressing, okay, I'm going to study.

4.4.2. Bruce

Bruce stated that he attended the interview to try to understand his self-defeating behaviour. During the final year of his studies, he was determined to experience greater financial freedom once he graduated. Studying conflicted with his need for greater financial independence and he, therefore, considered taking the year off after graduating to gain work experience. He was thus determined to complete his final year. He wanted to counteract his procrastination by proactively seeking out possible solutions to his self-defeating behaviour. Possible solutions included attending a time management workshop and exploring his self-defeating behaviour in the context of our interview. As previously mentioned, I made the details of student support available to him while explaining the purpose of the current study. He felt that he could not afford to fail his modules because of the financial burden failure would place on his mother. Thus, procrastination had financial implications for Bruce. The contradiction, in this case, was that procrastination only increased the possibility of failure, thus fuelling his need to dispel it. Bruce and I attempted to unpack this contradiction during his interview. Unlike all the other participants, Bruce felt a complete lack of control over his procrastination. It appeared that he perceived self-control as absolute and believed that if he were in control, he would not procrastinate at all.

In addition to procrastination, he briefly addressed his healthcare negligence and shyness. Bruce considered himself to be a lifelong shy individual but noted that his shyness had decreased since starting university. He felt comfortable with a familiar group of friends; however, he noted that the social awkwardness he felt when meeting new people still frustrated him. His social awkwardness prevented him from having a conversation with someone new, even if he wanted to. I believe that his reflection on his healthcare negligence relates to the possible financial burden his potential poor health would place on his mother. He indicated that he would only approach his mother for assistance if the problem persisted and was no longer tolerable. Bruce's experience of healthcare negligence was primarily described as *"I didn't wanna maybe put my mom at an inconvenience*." The extent of the pain he experienced was not sufficient for Bruce to willingly place greater financial strain on his mother, at the time. In addition, he was

uncertain as to why he did not see a dentist when he had medical aid. I neglected to discuss Bruce's experience of smoking due to the amount of time spent discussing procrastination, shyness, and healthcare negligence.

I interpreted that there was conflict in his decision-making between the need to study and in weighing the consequences of failure; for example, deciding to study, yet not initiating any action toward studying. He also describes his experience of waiting for the right moment to study, and the role emotions play when attempting to study. The emotions he experiences centre on his fear of failing and the resulting financial consequences for his mother. Throughout these experiences, he referred to his perception of an ideal self as the standard he was not living up to. Lastly, he recounted sharing with his close group of friends that he is a procrastinator. According to Bruce, procrastination was something they all did "*to get through it* [part of being a student and studying]."

Bruce believes that procrastination means that "*There are things you have to do, but, you put them off. Ja, but you don't have the willpower to go and do it immediately or when you should be doing it.*" He perceives procrastination to be negative and without any value and feels that it is mainly his lack of willpower that stops him from studying. Consequently, he did not view procrastination as inherent to the individual, but rather as something one could change. When asked, Bruce said "*Um, I think you can possibly change procrastination*" and "*Ja, I don't think… it's like you know, you*'re *stuck with it* [procrastination]."

I asked Bruce what the purpose of procrastination was if defined as negative. He began to describe what usually occurs to illustrate the role of procrastination as experienced. "*Ja, there's always something else you feel is more important at the time, but in the long run it's not.*" He also stated that this usually results in a negative outcome: "*then the quality of your work decreases 'cause you have to rush, and you're, you*'re *filled with stress*." I asked Bruce whether he felt like he was making bad decisions on purpose and he said, "*Well, I know I've done it before and that I'm likely to do it again*." He later explains the conflict experienced when making decisions as:

> *In the first instance you imagine the next instance, but then that presence is the present, so then you imagine the future but when you get to that future point it now is the present, and you imagine a new future.*

I believe what Bruce means is that it is easier to imagine a future version of oneself completing a task than it is to complete the task when confronted with it in the present. Bruce stated that his choices are based on the present moment while he ignores the long-term consequences of those choices. "*I think the payoff for procrastination is just* [that] *in each moment you're doing what you prefer to be doing*" and "*generally, it is that you do make a decision to spend a little more time* [doing something other than the required task]." Bruce revealed that "*it is frustrating to know that I'm basically the only thing stopping me* [from studying]." He summarised the experience of procrastination as waiting:

> *I know I have to go to class later, maybe* [at] *11 o' clock. I'm* [at] *home, it's now eight o' clock, and then I don't actually know what I should be doing. So I'll just, you know, make some food, eat, er watch a show and then decide when I* [should] *get ready for campus half an hour before* [I should leave]*... I didn't end up doing anything, you know, significant... I'm just pretty much waiting for that time* [when I should leave], *and then I leave because of that waiting and not doing anything I end up not doing a lot of things.*

Bruce believes that his thinking is generally complicated and stops him from attempting a task immediately. "… '*Cause I do generally overthink* [what I choose to do next] *and then it stops me from doing something because I'm thinking of this, this and this* [multiple tasks] *and like, I can't actually choose what I'm supposed to do*." He went on to note that he stops overthinking in the company of friends and when he consumes alcohol which lowers his inhibitions. Bruce says, "*it lowers inhibitions, I'm, you know, more likely to do what I wanna do at that moment and my thoughts don't feel as complicated*." However, even amongst friends, his studies are something he thinks about: "*like if my friends wanna go do something, I'll tell them I can't do it because I have to study, but then I'll actually, like, just sit at home and you know, not study*." He related that he becomes frustrated with his overthinking and procrastination, stating that, "*Like, why can't I realise every time that this is what I should be doing instead."* I asked Bruce whether he feels conflicted when trying to attempt a task but, ultimately, delays the task he considers important. His response illustrates the complexity experienced by those who procrastinate: "*[pause] [laughs] I don't actually know*" but earlier he also stated that "*as time gets closer maybe I push that limit and then maybe I can actually get by on: 'Another day won't hurt.'*" But

generally, the effect of another day is usually "*I'm thinking, why did I take so long to get into this, I should've started a while ago.*" Bruce also expressed that he gets distracted easily, "*Ja, maybe it is focus, focusing issues* [finds it difficult to focus]" and that perhaps this plays a role in his decision to delay the task he has chosen to attempt.

I asked Bruce what his ideal-self would look like - a self without procrastination. He referred to an upcoming test, saying he would "*like to put in a lot of work next week to pass the semester test and assignments*." When I inquired about possible areas in which he does not procrastinate, he thought of when he used to work out and attend a gym. He indicated that he wants to get back to working out and stated that "*I see gymming [working out] as you know, beneficial, being closer to what I want to be rather than trying to hide away from something* [like studying] *with gym*." However, he acknowledges the difference between how he approaches working out and how he approaches studying. He describes an ideal-self in contrast to the self consistently experienced when procrastinating. With studying, the required effort is uncertain and, therefore, difficult to attempt and initiate. "*Theoretically you could study forever with like, you know, 15 minutes breaks in-between but you could, you know, study indefinitely and it's difficult to I dun*[do not know] – *conceptualise."*

The fear that accompanies his uncertainty about how to approach a task leads to a negative perception of self for Bruce: "*[pauses] I think, I procrastinate – I dunno if it's laziness*." However, the resulting guilt Bruce experiences lead me to question whether procrastination extends beyond laziness. Instead, I perceive him as unable to make the right choice under uncertain circumstances, and it appears that he chooses the most available option, instead. This is illustrated with two separate extracts: "*Ja, I mean, I think I would feel a lot less guilt if I said to myself: I must put in – at this time I must always put in one or two hours of studying and then I can't stop for the day*" and "*Like erm, like having to go get this series from my friend you know, that feels important at the time or I need to clean my room, that feels important at the time*." Taking Bruce's circumstances and his active attempt to decrease his procrastination into account, I interpret that his actions extend beyond laziness. I believe Bruce chooses laziness as the only available explanation in the absence of any other possible explanations for his decisions to procrastinate. The difference between laziness and procrastination is that the lazy person accepts that they

are not motivated to complete a task. Bruce sums up his frustration at attempting to understand why he procrastinates as concerning " *[exhales]* ***Willpower***."

Bruce also perceives procrastination as "*a way of socialisation…when you are very similar to someone, you know you kind of bond through that similarity*" and "*Well, it's – my friends and I – we all do it actually*." Amongst friends, his thinking becomes less complicated, and they find commonality in the fact that they procrastinate because:

> *we are um, showing each other that you know um, we are not – we both know that we are not like the greatest human beings [laughs] we are just normal people trying to get through it.*

Bruce also briefly discussed his experience of being shy. He views being shy as self-defeating and is frustrated by his inability to overcome his shyness under certain circumstances. He states, "*Umm, shyness I guess is also a way of, it's like a fear*." He feels his shyness stems from his childhood: "*you still get teased for all the stupid things like that, and it affects you because you think now that everyone you meet, thinks the same thing about you, so you're kinda scared to meet people*." He elaborates further by saying, "*you look inward and 'this is why' actually like 'there must be something wrong with me'… not that I'm talking to people, but there's something wrong with me that makes them do this.*" Feeling uncertain about himself in the presence of unfamiliar people frustrates him and he wishes he could just "*go and approach a random person, if I feel I want to, I feel like I can't*" and "*Ja, but I wish I was the kind of person who could be like: Hi guys, how [are] you guys doing?*" I asked Bruce whether procrastination is linked to shyness in terms of uncertainty, but he does not agree with this statement: "*Um, see I don't think being shy would have anything to do with procrastinating to study*" and from that perspective, he has a point. I imposed my preconceived understanding of self-defeating behaviour on Bruce in this instance. As a researcher, I regard both shyness and procrastination as self-defeating behaviour. Bruce, however, links shyness to social interaction and procrastination to studying.

4.4.3. Carrie

Carrie was 22 at the time of the interview and felt that she was not as interested in studying as other students seemed to be. She felt that she needed to implement what she had learnt practically and was tired of reading books all the time. Her apathy toward reading books was not always the case though, as Carrie stated that there was a time

when she used good results in tests as a measure of her self-worth. However, a significant experience of failing a test during her first year taught her that she could not define herself only by the results obtained from assessments. Thus, by her third year, she prioritised her friends over her studies, and her procrastination increased.

Carrie defined procrastination as "*to waste time and not to do the things you should actually be doing*", and she felt that "*often I procrastinate because I would far rather do socially* [meet with friends] *than academically* [study for a test]." Later during the interview, it became evident that she avoids studying for specific reasons and feels conflicted and guilty as a result. Therefore, she attempts to justify procrastinating:

> *So you know you should be studying, or you **should** be doing your assignment or whatever it is, but, then you rather procrastinate, and then you have to justify **why** you procrastinated [laughs].*

Her motivation to study is hampered by the fact that "*it's like I just want my degree to go and work*." Thus, she feels conflicted between doing what she has to do and what she would rather be doing. I speculate that to resolve this conflict; she distinguishes between constructive and destructive procrastination. Carrie explains that "*if I procrastinate with something that I enjoy and that's important to me, like having coffee with my friends, I won't feel guilty… 'cause to me, coffee with my friends is more important than* [studying]" and "*that's constructive because you actually gaining something from it*" However, she also feels that:

> *you can't always get to, do the constructive ones while you busy. Like I said, I go to – onto Facebook whilst I'm busy working sometime*[s], *um, so in a way the destructive one is* [a] *quick 'O, let me switch off my brain for five minutes and troll through Facebook.'*

Therefore, she feels that she is "*rewarded for doing the constructive procrastination and that's why I also believe it's constructive and not destructive, because I'm never gonna get rewarded for scrolling on Facebook or Twitter [laughs]*."

There is a point during the interview where we realise that she contrasts the importance of studying with the importance of people. In the following extract, she elaborates on deciding to value people over books: "*first year I was still books, books, books*", and by the "*third year, I put my friends before books anytime you know, whereas everybody else does it*

the flipside." To illustrate the conflict she experiences between prioritising people over books, I asked Carrie why she would decide to study but instead, scroll through Facebook (or have coffee with friends) - why choose to study but ultimately end up not doing so? She thought about this for a moment and continued, "*Mmm, that's a very good question [laughs]… Umm [pause] I don't actually know*."

Carrie, later on, reveals the function procrastination may perform: "*I think it makes me feel less uncertain because I can go back and say [that] I didn't have enough time to study.*" She goes on to explain that she does not trust her efforts to study and often looks to external sources for validation: "*I would probably still be like, '**no I haven't studied enough**' or… I've noticed I always have to ask my mom… or somebody outside* [a friend] *if I've studied enough, and I need somebody else to justify me* [my efforts]." Once she receives external validation, this helps "… *'cause then I don't feel guilty about not studying anymore… so I need somebody to actually be like '**It's okay** Carrie, you've done enough, **like chill**' [laughs]*."

Without external validation, it becomes difficult to gauge her progress and, therefore, she feels that she can gain more from maintaining the relationships she has built with her friends. She admits that she previously defined herself by her academic success but has since begun focussing on maintaining her friendships instead: "*that* [relationships] *is more valuable, to me, than the academics is* [are] *now, because I know I used to define myself hectically by the academics so, you need to – I had to find the balance between the two*." Carrie recognises her need to justify her procrastination and further explains "*So subconsciously,* [it] *might be* [that]*…'Well, two days, four hours, you still not gonna feel completely happy about how much you studied. So let's fill some of that time' so that you can go back if it goes wrong and say [claps], 'oh well, I didn't actually have the time to study.'*" I ask Carrie why the excuse is needed, and she admitted, "*… 'cause I still probably – part of me still defines myself based on academics*." Therefore, because she defines herself by her academic success or failure "*it's easier to have an excuse than to actually be like, 'yes Carrie, you did bad, you did bad' [laughs]*."

Her uncertainty in her ability to gauge when her efforts are good enough influences her ability to study:

> *Like the psychology assignment that we have to do, I think my friend and I have pushed it a bit too long because we dunno where to start. So it's a case of 'O no, but*

> *I've got this assignment due first and then I've got that to do' and 'O let me go have coffee with a friend rather' so, ja [laughs].*

and

> *whereas* [for] *the test, there's all this work, where do you start, what can you skip, what can't you skip… um should you do summaries, shouldn't you do summaries, should I do mind maps, etcetera?*

Carrie believes that the constant uncertainty evolved into "*a habit now, but I mean, it started because of a sense of, I don't feel like doing my work right away so let me procrastinate a bit, and now it's formed a habit*."

She further explained that she defined herself solely by academic success because, "*Ja, I always used to think that's why my parents accepted me because I got good marks*." She recalls an incident where she was punished for not writing a test but did not fully understand the circumstances linked to being punished. Thus, she linked academic success to her self-concept. She stresses that this may not have been her parents' intention but "*as a six-year* [old child] *I created that link*." Thus, she felt her extended family also only cared about her academic abilities. She states that "*I always had to write my aunts letters and they just cared about my academics…they didn't care about me as a person, so that's why I think I defined myself as* [by] *academics [laughs]*." I asked Carrie, if she defined herself by academics and did poorly in a test, what that would mean? She responded by saying, "*Well, that I'm a bad person, not really but…"*

4.4.4. Dinah

Dinah is an African female who was 22 years old at the time of the recorded interview. Although she did not fail any of her modules and did well on average, her academic performance was not sufficient to gain entry to the honours programme for psychology. Therefore, at the time of the interview, Dinah was repeating her modules to improve her chance of being selected for the honours programme. The retelling of her experiences of procrastination relates to her struggles during the preceding year as well as her current experiences while studying psychology. One of the challenges she faced was juggling an internship position while aiming to be selected for the honours programme. She acknowledged that she often prioritised her internship position over her academic studies. Therefore, it appeared to me that she approached the internship role with greater

certainty than she approached her studies at the time. We attempted to understand the role of her procrastination during her time studying and constructed a possible interpretation together.

Dinah defined procrastination as "*it's when you put off, something… that you have the time to do* ***now***." She further elaborates that, "*Ja, so if you have the time and resources and all of that to do it* ***now****, but then you decide to just, put it off, and do other things, or do nothing actually [laughs]*." Procrastination increases the pressure to perform a tedious task, as illustrated by "*you know, ja, I'll remember everything when the pressure is on, I'll do great, and I'll be fine and all of that, so I think that's a bit of a good thing*." However, it can be difficult to control "… '*cause at some point then the pressure is a little bit too much, and then – like, I fall apart, so, ja, I think pressure can be good but just…"* During the interview, I asked her to describe what procrastination or the pressure can feel like, as opposed to feeling prepared and in control. She states that "*Anxiety is the opposite, Panic attacks are the opposite*." I then attempted to confirm whether these feelings are associated with the experience of procrastination, and Dinah clearly said, "*Yes, defs* [definitely]."

I attempted to understand her motivation for procrastinating and what tended to trigger episodes of procrastination. Dinah stated that she finds psychology to be "*the most interesting* [subject]*, so* [for] *everything else* [boring subjects other than psychology]*, it's easy to procrastinate* [while studying for other subjects]*, because it's boring*." She further explains her motivation for procrastinating as:

> *It's easier, it's so much easier to procrastinate on stuff I don't really care about, or I don't want to do, or I have no interest in, but if you give me like a bunch of stuff to do, and, it was stuff I actually care about or like* [stuff I have] *an interest in, that stuff will get* ***done****.*

Dinah also mentions that delays in the tasks in which she has no interest in further delay tasks she may have preferred doing instead. "*I spend so much time procrastinating on doing that one silly thing, and it pushes everything back, even the good stuff, and all the stuff I want to do so that's the frustrating thing*." As frustrating as it becomes, she indicates that boredom is at the centre of her need to procrastinate. She stated on the completed screening measure that she knows why she procrastinates and I asked her during the interview to clarify her response. She stated that "*It's the boredom… [pauses] sometimes*

it's, ja, it's the boredom. So it goes back to the whole thing of the stuff not having meaning, I think, ja, or there's just something more interesting ***to do***."

Boredom, however, is "*not really a good enough excuse"* and therefore, Dinah requires other actions to justify her procrastination as she explains:

> *I have work to do, I shouldn't be doing this, and then I start, and I'm just like chilling like 'Ag, I'll see you later* [studying]*'... but then,* ***ja****, while the series is happening and I'm watching that then I'll be thinking 'Yes I have a test whenever'... but then I can think '****No****, it shouldn't be that much time'. Like I'll probably just need four hours for one chapter' you know. Then I start,* ***justifying****, like, putting everything – I think trying to make everything smaller or seem like, less effort* [is required] *than it actually will be.*

I asked Dinah when the justification would not be enough, to which she replied, "*if I had failed something*." Therefore, I started to believe that Dinah relied on external cues to moderate her procrastination. She explained that she uses her peers for guidance on when it is reasonable to start a task. She explained that she attempted to complete an assignment with a friend who also procrastinates and in reference to her friend stated that "*I think she was like 'No, I'm lazy today, let's do it tomorrow', and I'll be like, ja, actually, you know what, I also kinda have stuff to do."* Dinah goes on to explain how this influences her decision-making because "*more than anything, we reinforced each other*" and "*there was nobody to* [tell us when to meet], *we didn't have a disciplinary* [leader] *in our group to like* [say], *we have a meeting tomorrow* [to ensure that they meet consistently]."

Dinah states that she also uses her peers for motivation "*hoping that they'll like, kick my butt* [get me to study in advance]." She then described a friend who would occasionally motivate her to start a task, "*like, I did have a friend who – she didn't really like, sitting by herself... so if she didn't study, she'd come study in my room... and if she was sitting there and studying and we couldn't talk about anything then I'll start studying*." Thus, socially, her peers were used as a measure to "[not really] *get a procrastinating buddy but just, to have someone to* ***hopefully*** *be like, 'No let's do this, let's work' or whatever* [to motivate her to start studying]."

Consequences of procrastination include negative results, "*That's where I procrastinated the worst, and it showed in my marks though so...*" as well as regret, "*like after the marks*

are out… I always think 'If I had studied more." Afterwards, she reflects and says "*where I'm just like, that was such an easy test if I'd had just… read that one page*." Her regret also leads to feelings of guilt: "*I think that's more where the guilt comes from 'cause it's just like, 'I know I'll probably pass' but then, as soon as I do pass and it's* ***just*** *passed, and then I'm like 'If I'd just…'* [studied for] *even two extra hours!*" The guilt experienced leads her to feel that she may deserve to fail due to her procrastination. "*I'd be standing there outside the venue about to write, and I'm just like, I haven't even done my best, so I can't expect* ***God*** *to do, you know, to do anything. So I can't even sit there and be like 'Please Lord, help me' so I'm just like, no, whatever comes to me, I deserve it, it's fine*."

I attempted to understand how Dinah copes with her feelings regarding the consequences of her procrastination. She revealed that her feelings mostly stay personal: "*I usually just deal with that in my own head… and I, just like* [think to myself] *'Ah, you're such a horrible person' in my own head – ja, I don't really…* [tell others]." Thus, her experiences appear to be conflicting and result in feelings of uncertainty, as illustrated in the extract below.

> *Like, I'd literally sit and cry 'cause like, 'I don't* ***know*** *what to do. 'I don't know if I'm going to pass,' all of that so, I dunno if that counts* [as procrastination]*, even though there was procrastination… it was more, more form the stress and the anxiety and just being like 'This is the last exam I'm ever writing* [to get into the honours programme]*.'*

This exam would have been the first Dinah had ever failed, and the outcome caused her to think that she was "*playing with my own head* [doubting herself]." I asked Dinah about the amount of time spent procrastinating, and she revealed that "*It was like what I was saying with the whole not working from the beginning of the semester… and then trying to catch up*." It became clear that she does not have an actual start date in mind but feels *"I have the whole semester before exams so, I'm sure like, one weekend or something I'll just, I dunno… but then like, no, I never really start [laughs]*."

Dinah and I attempted to understand the conflict inherent in experiencing procrastination and whether it serves any function. However, at this stage, she viewed procrastination as paradoxical and could not think of a purpose it may serve. I asked her how she ends up continuously believing her own justifications or fooling herself and she replied, "*[laughs],* ***I don't know****… it's so retarded… but it happens"* and *"I'll be fine, 'cause I've always been fine so, ja [laughs]*." I approached the question from a different angle and

asked what she believes keeps her from starting tasks on time. She stated that she does not know why but finds it frustrating. I continued to ask her whether she believes that she could have made different decisions in similar situations, to which she replied, "*mm, sometimes [pauses]… Ja… Ja, 'cause sometimes it's just like, it's sort of a no brainer… like if you just* [started on time]*, I dunno, it's so* ***retarded*** *because like, I live according to a diary* [so why can she not schedule her studies]." Dinah illustrated the confusion and uncertainty related to her experience of procrastination, and yet, she does not fit the profile of someone who mismanages their time, as she stated, she does "*live according to a diary*" however, she also procrastinates under certain circumstances.

Dinah selected healthcare negligence on the screening measure as an additional self-defeating behaviour, however, upon clarification, her selection was linked to procrastination. She defines healthcare negligence as "*not sleeping, that counts right?…[laughs] and then just the [pauses] junk food that counts, right, um*." I stated that healthcare negligence would be defined as something that she personally felt bad about and, she clarified as, "*Ja, just like neglecting myself*." She confirmed that she neglected herself due to her procrastination and said, "*Ja it is, 'cause now if I'm gonna procrastinate, then I end up not sleeping to, catch up… and not sleeping is not good for me… I just really like my sleep so [laughs]… so I can't function without it.*" Later during the interview, Dinah also said, "*like I know what I feel like when I take care of myself and the minute I stop, taking care of myself and then I'm just like, 'it's not, it's not healthy anymore… sometimes even mentally*." Dinah also selected smoking as an additional self-defeating behaviour but stated that "*Ja, because I just put it there 'cause like – I mean I haven't smoked in like, a long time, but even that…* [was not good for me]." Thus, we determined that smoking was not experienced as significant to Dinah in the context of the current study.

4.4.5. Emily

Emily who was 45 at the time of the interview, is a white female who decided to pursue psychology as a second degree. As someone who chose to study again, she often attempted to understand why she would procrastinate. By her own estimation, she always did well academically, passing mostly with distinction. Thus, her resistance toward studying for tests contradicts the fact that she chose to study again of her own volition. As we spoke, it became clear that she linked her achievements to her self-worth. Thus, the possible role of procrastination in her life began to emerge.

She defined procrastination as "*waiting to do something until the very last [laughs] moment that it might still be* ***possible*** *[laughs] to finish it and then maybe not in the best,* ***ah, quality****.*" I attempted to explore her definition further by understanding what she deemed both positive and negative about her procrastination. Emily believed that procrastination produced the correct "*frame of mind*" and that it allowed her to "*focus because actually now I have an excuse only to focus on what I have to finish now*." She believed this explanation to be the reason for her procrastination because "*I need a certain level of adrenaline [laughs] or stress… to go into action* [start a task]." and *"I always tend to need a deadline, a serious deadline that can't be postponed, to actually get going* [and complete the task]." Although she understood that her procrastination performed a certain function, she also experienced the full effect of the negative consequences of procrastination. She stated that starting a task on time would mean that, "*the detail is probably better and the approach is more systematic.*" In addition, she stated that "*I think physiologically over the years… my poor adrenals is* [are] *in a state*" due to the fact that she goes "*into stress response quite quickly*." Beyond the physiological consequences, she also believed that "*[pauses] it might have a negative impact on my whole, self-image and then demotivate me even further*." Feeling demotivated also led to "*Ah, feeling guilty [exhales] a lot of time when I think I should be starting on something or I should be spending time on a specific project, ah then it links to the self-image*." Due to the feeling of guilt, she would think to herself, "*why am I such a poor planner or why can't I just get going with what I know has to be done?*" She reconciles her views by saying that "*the outcomes are not that negative eventually ah, the results of the stuff I had to finish is usually quite, still okay*" and "*so, the feedback, um, is not that negative* [eventually]."

Emily believes that she implements the "*planning fallacy of needing less time than I actually do*" due to "*not being able to focus on something that doesn't need to be finished now."* As a result, she ends up with "*[inhales] severe stress and um, wanting to stop studying and all of that [laughs]."* Even though completing tasks "*boosts my energy*" the conditions she sets for herself seem unrealistic in her attempt to attain perfection. She feels guilty when she does not complete tasks and "*knowing that this thing* [the task] *is not going away and I actually have to do it myself*." She further explains, "*mentally it decreases my energy, but there's a physical aspect of how much energy I have as well*." She describes the process of procrastinating as:

> *Starting with low physical energy and then not having the mental motivation to start with something. Then criticising myself because I'm not starting. Feeling guilty that I'm not starting ah, increases my negative emotional energy [laughs] and then I feel even physically less able to, to do something.*

I ask Emily whether her negative emotional energy is the defining point; the point at which she has given up on attempting a task. She affirmed my interpretation by saying, "*Ja, intellectually I can still say 'But I should be doing this' then 'ag' [laughs]*." I attempt to clarify that emotions play a big role in deciding whether to start a task or not and she again confirms with a "*Yes*."

She further stated that "*[exhales] I actually feel quite, critical of myself… um you know I'm – I feel a bit of shame that… I* ***should*** *be doing something, but I'm not*." So much so that, although procrastination "***drains*** *my energy*" it seems to be a means of regulating the unrealistic expectations she places on herself. She elaborates by revealing that her:

> *public image, the image that people have of me is [laughs] very important to me [laughs]. So if they think poorly of me, it will be very bad, um, so I need to keep up um, good appearances… to the people* [appear positive to others]. *They mustn't know my weak points because they must think I'm perfect.*

Furthermore, when she was very young, she says it was "***excruciating*** *if I was wrong in any context and I have to admit it, it was like um, saying I'm a bad person*."

Based on the description above, several conflicting needs are present in terms of the emotions and thoughts experienced by Emily. Conflicting needs include her need to maintain her public image while realising that perfection is unattainable. Emily thus decides to attempt a task, only to put it off again when the initial action is required. She does this by saying "*well it's easy when I experience the pressure, of now being in front of a deadline, to say to myself 'I don't want to feel like this again' and then when the pressures off, [exhales] then the motivation's gone again [laughs]*." Thus, instead, she places other individuals' needs before her own by seeing "*a client or two or, ah* [or] *chat with my friends on campus or…*" She, however, realises that this only increases her procrastination:

> *If I can, um, prioritise my own things above* ***all*** *the other needs of* ***all*** *the other people. I might be able to, um, start things earlier but, if I feel guilty about postponing their* ***stuff*** [her duties as a mother] *then it's also more difficult to, to… start with my own*

> *stuff instead **of**, completing whatever, they need. So it's the, the competing needs* [the needs of others versus her own].

Emily clarified that she believes that relying on the evaluations of others has influenced her tendency to procrastinate. She stated that as a child "*by doing well at school, um… I could at least have some presence*" and that "*I think I've grown up measuring myself – at what I achieve*." I proceeded to confirm whether I was correct in stating that this would imply that doing badly in a test would mean that she was a bad person, and she answered with, "*Well, ja*." Later, she also stated that "*I have to be, um, accepted as, er, a person, er ja, as a*[n] *almost perfect person [laughs]… um, and if, if I were rejected, I would perceive it as criticism on **my** self-worth*." Thus, her definition of perfection is linked to a perfect possible self; the more perfectly a task is completed, the better her self-worth would be. I asked Emily whether she thinks that perfection in a task is attainable, to which she answered:

> *No I don't think it's attainable… but it doesn't stop me from trying… or being, very much affected* [if] *I perceive myself as made – having made a big mistake.*

She added that "*if I don't finish something, it can't be evaluated, so they can't see if there are mistakes [laughs]*" and "*I think, yes maybe that aspect of when I finish something, it's there for people to, judge*." Thus, focusing on the needs of others appears to allow Emily to avoid giving them the opportunity to evaluate her efforts. Emily added that:

> *There's some self-sabotage at work. I might – not unconsciously think that my stuff is worth spending energy on my own* [not consciously think that my personal goals are also important]. *That I should always be looking at other people's problems and so on. So maybe some aspect of my own worth, if I can find **that**, and tell myself that **my own** priorities are as important if not more than other people's needs.*

However, it appears to be difficult to prioritise her own needs when it "*boils down to 'I'm not good enough' [inhales] then it impacts on me… so um, I'm still very much ah, dependent on external feedback*."

4.4.6. Floyd

Floyd, a white male in his early fifties, arrived home one day and let his wife know that he decided to study again. However, he soon discovered that he hated the current educational setting, which, in his view, focused solely on the regurgitation of study

material. He aimed to apply what he would learn to help others. He felt that he had always assisted others in his personal capacity and a degree in psychology would enable him to do so professionally as well. During our interview, he indicated that he experienced three self-defeating behaviours, namely procrastination, substance abuse, and healthcare negligence. We soon discovered that he had taken the question regarding healthcare negligence in the screening measure "*in a broad context*" and that healthcare negligence was not something he was "*gonna ruminate*" over. Thus, the following discussion will only focus on what we discussed relating to procrastination and substance abuse.

Floyd defined procrastination concisely as "*Er, putting off stuff that I need to do*." He goes on to explain, "*I needed to be under pressure, to really apply myself properly otherwise I would get distracted*." Thus, for Floyd, procrastination "*builds pressure and it makes you focus so, well for me, it increases my focus*." Procrastination "*reduces the time available and makes me focus*." He continues to explain that he becomes bored quite quickly and is consequently easily distracted, "*until I have to do it and then I do it*." However, while procrastinating, he still mentally considers the task and "*the fact that I'm not physically* [working on the task at hand] – *doesn't mean I'm not actually doing it*."

Floyd is aware of his need for pressure to begin a task and, therefore, has "*never, experienced it as a problem*" He knows that "*it's not good [laughs] to put yourself under so much pressure but… it's just how I'm wired*." He also procrastinates in areas beyond academia and explains that "*even when I've um – at my son's eulogy, I was in such a mess anyhow… but I waited until late that night, and then I sat, and I put, of a bit of a presentation together*." He views procrastination as having "*that habit that I work better under pressure*." He says that pressure "*actually helps… because you don't have days to mess around with*." The sense of urgency the pressure creates allows Floyd to secure "*a commitment to the situation where I can't find an excuse not to do it*." Thus, "*time becomes the pressure*" as it slowly runs out, forcing him to act urgently. He further elaborates and illustrates the process involved in his procrastination by speaking of the emotion involved.

> *Yes, I was justifying – I was using it to justify where I would say, 'Okay, I'm tired emotionally, I'm finished. I won't concentrate properly, so I'm (inaudible- 13.46) not going to remember* [anything I have studied anyway]. *So I might as well rather go*

lie down or work in the garden or something instead of studying, 'cause it's going to be pointless.

I asked Floyd whether the emotion involved while procrastinating affects his choice to delay a task and he responded by saying that procrastinating justifies his actions at present. However, the more time passes, the less apathy he experiences due to increasing pressure. He describes it "*like a scale, almost*" in that as pressure increases, his willingness to remain apathetic decreases. So, he has to "*wait for the feeling* [pressure]*... then it's like: Okay now [laughs] gotta start to stress* [and complete the task before the deadline]."

His willingness to give in to his apathy is primarily associated with the disdain he experiences toward the current manner of assessment. He states, "*I absolutely* ***despise*** *it 'cause what, what does it say about you. It doesn't say that you can understand or apply the information* [you have studied]. *It just says that you can regurgitate it*." Therefore, he places no value on passing assessments, and he merely studies "*as like a last-minute thing: 'O okay, there's a test, let's quickly do that then', and it's* ***worked***." Thus, studying for an assessment he does not value "*comes out begrudgingly because I really don't think I should have to... there's no incentive whatsoever* [to study]." He hopes that post-graduate assessments will be more meaningful because "*there* [during post-graduate studies], *I'm allowed to gather information and interpret it*" which would offer more incentive to study.

Floyd stated that he tends to "*feel guilty about studying at home instead of spending more time with my wife so, I've used that also to justify to continue procrastination*." He further explained that he is sure she would understand if he studied at home and "*it wouldn't be a problem*" but "*it suits me to have it as an excuse I suppose*." During the interview, we both became aware that Floyd does not problematise his procrastination and he said, "*[pauses] I won't say procrastination has had a negative impact. I'd say my memory, and the medication I'm on has* [had an impact on his ability to study]." Thus, he has felt that the outcome of procrastination can sometimes be negative, but "*I'm doing this* [currently studying] *because I like it. So then if I redo it, if I gotta redo it, I redo it, it's not the end of the world for me, it doesn't mean I'm a* ***failure*** *or anything like that you know? So, I don't take it as a reflection on me, it's most probably the lecturer asked the wrong questions*."

He stated that, if his procrastination only affects him and it "*doesn't affect my wife... in any way... 'cause it's just me that has to study*." he does not have an issue with procrastination. He further stated that it might affect his ability to spend time with his family because he

could have studied in advance but "*that's about the only time another person gets affected*" and "*I'm the one who takes the pressure*." Consequently, if he is the only one affected, he does not feel guilty about procrastination. Some (including myself) would interpret his view as another justification for his tendency to procrastinate, but I believe Floyd when he indicates that he places more value on his lived experiences than his ability to keep up with his academic obligations. He further elaborated that,

> *Whenever I've said yes to something, then I will deliver. Doesn't matter what it* ***took****, I would do it, and I got the confidence to do it. So I've never had any reason to worry about procrastination, you know, doesn't matter – that was* ***my*** *issue. if I had given myself two hours for something that took two days, that's* ***my problem****, but I would do it and deliver and be fine so. There was no reason to change my behaviour, and in the meantime, I was doing a lot of other things that were fun, so…*

Floyd, however, felt that abusing alcohol became problematic at a certain stage and described his experience of abusing a substance. He stated, "*I'm sure at one stage if you stuck a needle in my arm it would have been Jack Daniels flowing out of here.*" He described his reliance on alcohol as a means to cope with the unrealistic demands of his previous private businesses. When he got home from work, he would "*pour myself one like this and drink it and to me, it sort of cut me off from the day and I'm bound to relax*." He continued to say, "*It was the trigger… for me to say, work's over,* ***done****, and sometimes I'd come home from work like 10, 11, 12 at night and then I have that and then it's just [gestures switching off]… straight away my mind would switch off from work*." However, the "*problem was that I couldn't stop at one… once I've had that one and then because I was relaxed, I would think 'Ag, I'll just have another one and another one', and I never got a hangover, so I never really got particularly drunk or anything but, I was abusing alcohol, ja*." He started to explain that, at this point, he perceived his behaviour as problematic. He said, "*I was drinking quite a lot and after Steven died* [and] *I just thought 'I will bury myself in this alcohol* [drink beyond recovery], *so I better* [stop drinking] *and I just stopped, and I haven't touched the stuff again*." Unlike procrastination, he viewed abusing alcohol as problematic and decided to stop doing so. He also attempted to curb his procrastination, but he found it difficult, as he did not value the tasks procrastination allowed him to avoid. Thus, in contrast to his alcohol abuse, the outcomes of procrastination were not as significant.

4.5. Summary of Chapter 4

The current chapter detailed the extent of participation and the procedures used to recruit individuals for the study. A detailed description of the study's inclusion criteria was discussed to ensure transparency (Yardley, 2000). Furthermore, I described the process following the selection of the six required participants for this study. An overview of the selected participants' answers to the screening was also provided. Thereafter, each participant was introduced using selected extracts that were modified to demonstrate their experiences of self-defeating behaviour. In doing so, I aimed to provide descriptive accounts of participants' experiences in the current chapter. The chapter that follows provides my interpretation of participants' experiences in relation to the appropriate descriptive extracts provided in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1. Overview of Chapter 5

In this chapter, I will share my interpretations of the selected participants' experiences. This chapter complements the preceding chapter and provides interpretations of the participants' experiences beyond description. Due to the extent of data obtained, it is not feasible to discuss it all. However, I have provided all data as a supplement in the form of a web page on a compact disc (Appendix F) to allow the reader to explore it in greater detail.

I will begin by outlining the process of comparing across the selected cases. Similar subordinate themes are grouped and will be discussed in relation to all six participants. Five groups of superordinate themes emerged from the data, namely: procrastination and the self, agency, the function of procrastination, coping with procrastination and its consequences, and additional self-defeating behaviours. Each group is comprised of subordinate themes which emerged for each of the six participants. However, contrasts exist in how the experience of procrastination presents and what procrastination means to each participant. To complement the idiographic nature of interpretative phenomenological analysis, I included the subordinate theme, "procrastination as personal" to illustrate how each participant experiences procrastination and identifies with the phenomenon.

When comparing across cases, it emerged that five of the participants believed that procrastinating affected their sense of identity, while one participant, Floyd, did not. Thus, the grouped superordinate themes discussed in this section relate to the influence of procrastination on most of the participants' identity.

Agency, as a superordinate theme, relates to the frustration experienced by participants when reflecting on the decision-making processes related to their procrastination. I provide evidence here for the contradictions experienced when they procrastinate while fully understanding the impact of the consequences thereof.

I also discuss the interpretations of the functions of procrastination. As indicated throughout the study, I aimed to understand the need to procrastinate rather than conceptualise the phenomenon as a meaningless paradoxical behaviour. Thus, my interpretations serve to uncover the meaning participants derive from procrastination,

as well as why the derived meaning is significant enough to warrant the self-defeating consequences that ultimately result from procrastination.

I then proceed to provide grouped subordinate themes, which illustrate how the participants cope with the tension experienced while procrastinating. This section also includes a discussion of the consequences of procrastination both during and after the experience itself. Coping with procrastination is an important part of the experience and how participants cope with their procrastination appears to define the experience thereof.

The last superordinate theme relates to additional experiences of other self-defeating behaviours, including substance abuse, healthcare negligence, and shyness. Although the extent of data for this theme is minimal in comparison to that of procrastination, I deemed it important to include these experiences. I specifically investigate Bruce and Floyds experiences and question whether their experiences intersect with their experience of procrastination. I provide my interpretations to attempt to understand what drives self-defeating behaviour in relation to and beyond procrastination.

For each superordinate theme discussed, I situate my interpretations within current literature directly preceding the discussion of the next superordinate theme. After a discussion of all superordinate themes, I will provide a brief discussion on member checking and the informal follow-up interviews that took place with four of the six participants. I conclude the chapter by providing a summary of the content discussed in this chapter.

5.2. An Overview of the Process used to Arrive at the Selected Themes

To ensure transparency in my discussion of the process used to reach the final interpretations, the following section offers a single example of the process - from initial noting to the final interpretation. The example shown below reflects the process used for every interpretation made in the current study.

> AMINA: *With me, I dunno, maybe it's just how I work, so I need to procrastinate so that I can study so that I can do good* [do well in her tests]*, sort of.*

This example is an extract taken from Amina's transcript and is labelled as line 36 in the relevant Atlas.ti file. Following the procedure outlined by Smith et al. (2009), I initially listened to and read the transcript several times before selecting specific quotations

relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. Once selected, I proceeded to look at each quotation descriptively, linguistically, and conceptually. Not all quotes contained each of the three levels discussed above, and it appeared that some contained more descriptive than linguistic content. For the extract selected above, Amina described her procrastination as a need that allows her to initiate studying. Linguistically, I noted her use of the word "need" instead of using the word "want". In addition, I questioned whether procrastination as a need influenced the degree of control she felt while procrastinating. She also showed, through her use of language, that procrastination occurred as a process in that the need to procrastinate must arise before she can study and then perform well in her test. Lastly, in relation to linguistics, she ends her explanation with "sort of," denoting her uncertainty about the process itself and about why she needs to procrastinate. Conceptually, by defining procrastination as a need, Amina also felt that it formed part of her identity. However, her feelings of uncertainty about the choice between studying and procrastinating is also a consequence of defining herself as a procrastinator.

Thus, for the selected quote, the emerging theme was that "Procrastination is a need". All other quotations that referred to procrastination as a need received the same label. In addition, further subordinate themes emerged resulting in the overarching theme of procrastination as a need. Additional subordinate themes were the individual's awareness of procrastination, the function of procrastination, and the perceived need to procrastinate in relation to the self-concept. I interpreted the grouped emerging themes as indicating an underlying need to protect herself (Amina) by procrastinating. The chapter that follows contains a summary of the analysis performed. The analysis illustrates five superordinate themes reconfigured to apply across all cases and relevant subordinate themes that support each of the five overarching themes. The resulting five superordinate themes explore and offer interpretations of procrastination as a phenomenon across all participants' cases. All extracts utilised below are modified by the removal of the transcript notation used to indicate brief pauses to increase readability, and additional information is added in brackets to provide context when required. At this point, I would like to thank the participants again for their valuable insights, without whom the following chapter would not have been possible.

5.3. The Phenomenon of Procrastination and Additional Self-defeating Behaviour

In this section, I provide a summary of the interpretations. However, all transcripts used to compile the summary are available in Appendix F. Appendix F describes the content on a compact disk included with the dissertation. For example, the contents include all transcripts, quotes and themes (as a webpage) that were utilised to reach the following interpretations. Due to time and length constraints, I believe that this method of delivering the results is the best possible choice for the reader to gauge and digest the results in an orderly fashion. Should the reader, for example, experience scepticism about the meaning of "uncertainty in their own ability", the evidence base (Appendix F) provides quotes from the participants, where applicable. Therefore, the reader can review the documents available to follow my interpretation from exploratory comments to the final superordinate themes created and summarised below.

5.4. Procrastination and the Self

All the participants in the study, to some degree, identified procrastination as being a part of who they are. The selection of emerging themes below represents how procrastination and the self can intersect at various points across the experience of procrastination. However, it is important to note that Floyd defined procrastination as a consequence of his value system instead of something that would impact on his self-concept. In contrast to the other participants, he felt confident that he was able to procrastinate on tasks until they needed to be completed. More importantly, failure in a task did not seem to affect his self-concept as it did the other participants in the study. I also discuss how feeling uncertain about one's ability may increase the need to procrastinate. Next, I demonstrate the idiographic nature of phenomenological research by outlining participants' understanding of their lived experiences. Subsequently, I discuss three of the participants' understanding of procrastination as having a genetic basis. Lastly, I look at whether there are any benefits to feeling uncertain. All facets mentioned above are then explored in relation to existing available literature.

5.4.1. Uncertainty in own ability

Uncertainty became an overarching theme while I interpreted the participants' experience of procrastination. Specifically, in relation to their self-concepts, most of the

participants felt uncertain in their efforts to study. Amina and Carrie felt that they could not evaluate their efforts with any certainty unless they procrastinated before attempting to study. Amina shows her uncertainty by stating, "*I don't know, if I didn't procrastinate, I don't know how hard I would've studied* [she is uncertain of whether she would study as efficiently without procrastinating]." Emily gauges her uncertainty in her ability through the perceptions of others. The certainty she experiences depends on the perceptions others have of her efforts or ability. The uncertainty experienced by the participants is illustrated by Dinah's belief that obtaining a perfect result, 100 percent in a test, is somehow different from the other times she had obtained distinctions. Later in the interview, we discover that the pressure to maintain a perfect result is too much and Dinah questions her ability to do so consistently. She focuses on the extent of her ability rather than that she received a good grade for her efforts in a specific test. She is uncertain about her ability to receive a perfect score consistently and is more comfortable receiving less than perfect results. For example, she prefers 75 percent to a 100 percent in a test. What is important here is Dinah's association of a perfect result with her perceived ability to repeat her efforts consistently. Bruce sums up this theme perfectly when he agrees that it is more important to avoid failure than to move toward success. Therefore, participants' feelings of uncertainty lead to prioritising the avoidance of failure rather than successfully attempting a task they perceive as risky. I interpret this as follows: it is more self-serving to maintain the potential for success than to test whether their (selected participants) ability is sufficient to fulfil that potential. By procrastinating, participants preserve their potential by not committing fully to a task that may test or define their ability. Therefore, when they are successful, they have completed a task with less effort than others have. Should they fail the task, they have not fully committed to the task and therefore, preserve the potential to complete a similar task successfully in the future.

5.4.2. Procrastination as personal

Although the selected participants all have the phenomenon of procrastination in common, their lived experience of the phenomenon is unique and personal. The reasons for their procrastination stem from experience and is different for each participant. Thus, this section illustrates to the reader the idiographic nature of their experiences even while sharing a common self-defeating behaviour.

Amina understands the self-defeating outcomes that result from procrastination but still believes that she cannot study without it and that it is part of who she is. Thus, she is aware of the fact that she will leave studying to the last moment but knows that the pressure will enable her to start studying.

Bruce believes that failure may negatively impact on his self-worth and avoids failure to *"have some kind of self-worth* [maintain his current self-worth]". The need to prioritise failure stems from his experiences thus far. During the interview, he reflects and states that he and his mom are "*not well off financially*." Therefore, to Bruce, failure equates to a financial burden for his mother. He attempts to not "*put my mom at an inconvenience*" by avoiding the possibility of failure. I interpreted this as Bruce seeing himself as an inconvenience, especially to his mother, and that he would rather avoid a task than feel that his efforts were insufficient and thus lead to inconveniencing his mother.

Carrie started linking her test results to her self-worth from an early age and believed that she needed to avoid negative results. However, she failed a test during her first year at university. The experience of failure and its impact on her self-worth drove her to define herself in new ways. Her procrastination provides an excuse to avoid possible failure and the impact it would have on her. She attempts to show that social relationships are more important than good grades but also cannot fully escape her tendency to define herself by her assessment outcomes. Failing a test means, "*Well, that I'm a bad person, not really but…"* Therefore, to avoid defining herself as a bad person, she aims to illustrate that "*people are more important than books*" by choosing to help or spend time with others rather than attempt to study successfully. It is reasonable to assume that, if failure has an impact on one's self-worth and someone is unsure of how to obtain success, it would be easier to protect one's self-worth by avoiding attempting a task fully.

It appears that Dinah believed that she had to rely on herself from a young age, and as a result, she became a perfectionist. I interpret this as follows: If she can only rely on herself, it leaves little room for error. If all you have is yourself, then errors should be avoided at all cost, resulting in perfectionism. However, she also understands that perfection is not attainable, which creates tension for her, especially in terms of studying. The pressure of maintaining perfection becomes too much, and procrastination provides the "*leeway*" required to avoid being perfect all the time. Procrastination provides the pressure required to start a task eventually, knowing that the result will not be perfect,

while also knowing that she has not given it her all either. Procrastination, in this sense, protects her potential for perfection by facilitating the avoidance of situations which could confirm her potential ability.

Emily indicates that her procrastination stems from rebelling against others and their attempt to control her. However, she relies on others to a certain extent to define her value as a person. She argues that it is important for people to recognise her value and accept that her opinions are "*worth something.*" She discusses her childhood and relates that she lacked a presence, especially when compared with her sisters. Thus, getting good marks at school resulted in her feeling a sense of presence she did not experience otherwise. She states that it is "*excruciating if I was wrong in any context*" and procrastination helps protect her potential and the full effect of being wrong if she is wrong. Procrastination allows her to avoid risk and still attempt a task eventually to reach a tolerable outcome.

Floyd, unlike the other participants, does not link procrastination to his self-worth. He has always been confident in his ability to deliver the intended result and that the result would be good enough. However, should he not receive the intended result, he would not "*take it as a reflection of me*" He, instead, values his ability to deliver what he has promised, especially if he had promised to do something for someone else. He believes that others define him as "*Mr Fix-it*" and values his ability to help others. Thus, procrastination occurs because he does not define his assessments as meaningful and he does not place emphasis on obtaining good grades. Satisfactory grades are only worthwhile to Floyd if they are defined as meaningful to him.

5.4.3. Procrastination as genetic

Three participants indicated that procrastination was inherent and was the result of genetics. Defining procrastination as genetic means that it is largely unavoidable. I interpreted their understanding of procrastination as having a genetic basis as an attempt to understand the experience itself. Investigating the influence of genes in moderating procrastination is beyond the scope of this study. However, participants' emphasis on the influence of genes adds to an understanding of the phenomenon from their perspective. In addition, participants' understanding of procrastination as genetic is shared by others

and has become a new avenue for research, including that of Loehlin and Martin (2014) and Gustavson et al. (2017).

5.4.4. The benefits of uncertainty

Of all the participants, only Bruce and Emily outright accepted that feeling uncertain was beneficial. This view reflected my understanding of the phenomenon as well. I interpret it as the choice to avoid failure rather than to approach success. What this means, as Bruce states, is that "*it's easier to, to try half-heartedly and fail than to try fully and fail you know.*" Uncertainty, thus, protects the ideal version of oneself, the version that still has the potential to pass well with enough effort. Failure was to be avoided at all cost for most of the participants in this study, except for Floyd. However, the focus on avoiding failure or benefiting from uncertainty also meant that they rarely felt that they lived up to their full potential. Although an outcome of her procrastination meant retaining the potential for perfection in Emily's case, it also meant that she would rarely evaluate her actual efforts as good enough either.

5.4.5. The procrastinating self in literature

Participants' experiences align to current literature in several ways. They may identify procrastination as internal due to its daily influence on their lives. Glick, Millstein, and Orsillo (2014) describe academic procrastination in terms of psychological inflexibility. All six participants exhibit an attachment to a specific understanding of themselves as procrastinators. They display an unwillingness to experience uncertainty, as discussed above, and consistently fall back on decisions they label as habitual. For example, Dinah preferred her usual mark of 75 percent rather than obtaining 100 percent in her test. Psychological inflexibility in this sense is demonstrated by the fact that under different circumstances involving academic tasks, participants tend to make the same decisions knowing they will not appreciate the result.

Echoing Carrie's difficulty in managing her Facebook usage, Meier et al. (2016) investigated the use of Facebook to procrastinate and the effect on students' well-being. Like Carrie, students recruited for the study by Meier et al. (2016) defined using Facebook to procrastinate as a meaningless activity. Although a meaningless activity, the activity becomes an automatic, habitual choice to avoid an unpleasant task. Bruce describes how he would not want to disturb his moment of happiness when watching television, while

Dinah binge watches several seasons of a television series to avoid academic tasks. This seemingly meaningless activity allows Bruce, Carrie, and Dinah to ignore the negative emotions associated with a task and, over time, automatically avoid negative feelings associated with the outcome of a task. Thus, the familiar is preferred even if it is to their detriment (Litt et al., 2011). Cerrone and Lades (2017) argue that those who are aware of their preference for procrastination, form a habit over time and generally take longer with a given task. What the authors' term 'sophisticated procrastinators' habitually expect to be preoccupied with the present and, as a result, also expect that they will delay a tedious task. Procrastination becomes a habitual part of the self that starts to resemble a consistent trait. However, both Carrie and Dinah circumvent the meaninglessness of the habit by finding meaningful ways to avoid academic tasks that feel unpleasant. Carrie chooses to sustain and enhance her meaningful relationships with others, and Dinah uses duties related to her internship to avoid academic tasks. Carrie defines using social media to procrastinate as destructive procrastination and continually attempts to reduce this type of procrastination. Instead, she uses what she terms constructive procrastination to maintain meaningful relationships while simultaneously habitually avoiding unpleasant academic tasks. Carrie and Dinah attempt to accomplish more meaningful or plausible tasks, respectively. The chosen activities of socialising or completing administrative tasks lack uncertainty and can be perceived as an attempt to replace the unpleasant and uncertain academic task awaiting them.

I interpreted that most of the participants, excluding Floyd, experienced uncertainty about their abilities. The feeling of uncertainty in their ability to approach a task often results in negative emotions related to their procrastination. Tamir and Ford (2009) argue that people use emotions for a specific purpose, independently of whether those emotions are negative or positive. Thus, individuals are willing to experience fear, even though aversive, if fear is utilised to avoid a threat (Tamir & Ford, 2009). Specifically, when participants in the study were motivated by goal avoidance, they chose to increase feelings of fear. In addition, according to Tamir (2009), individuals prefer aversive emotions when negative emotions are utilised to pursue long-term goals that outweigh immediate goals. Tamir (2009, p. 102) argues that "What people want to feel is not necessarily based on rational choice." Thus, if a procrastinator's long-term goal involves idealising or preserving their potential to complete a task, they may be willing to experience procrastination's aversive consequences to achieve that goal (Litt et al.,

2011). For example, in relation to procrastination and the utility of emotions, Tamir (2009) adds that individuals can be unaware of why they need to feel certain emotions in a specific context. Once emotion is interpreted as useful in a specific context, it may become the default choice employed upon encountering the situation in the future (Baumeister et al., 2007).

When participants focus on whether they are good enough at present, it may interfere with their ability to see a future self that is challenged to attempt a task successfully. Negative emotions related to participants' procrastination may limit their ability to experience a future version of themselves as successful (Blouin-Hudon, Sirois, & Pychyl, 2016). Focusing on the uncertainty surrounding their ability to complete the present task, ensures that they avoid finding out the extent of their ability. Thus, an ideal version of self is consistently maintained but never tested or discovered. Blouin-Hudon et al. (2016) have shown that procrastinators are generally more disconnected from their future selves in relation to their identity. Therefore, they may remain disconnected from a concrete future self to preserve an abstract ideal version of the self that is impervious to criticism. Indeed, Wohl et al. (2010) have shown that self-forgiveness decreases procrastination by reducing negative affect in the short-term. It is possible that self-forgiveness only works in the short-term because procrastinators may utilise negative emotions to maintain long-term goals of which they are possibly unaware. The strategic use of procrastination to maintain an ideal self appears to be a complex endeavour. Participants seem to employ contrasting cognitive and emotional strategies situationally to achieve multiple concurrent goals (Mischel, 2004). However, self-esteem may act "…as the 'lens' through which individuals view and evaluate their experience of the world, and thus their feeling of competence" (Caprara et al., 2013, p. 866).

5.5. Agency

Agency or the capacity to take responsibility for one's choices emerged as an interesting aspect of the phenomenon under investigation (Alexander & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Although participants felt responsible for their choice to procrastinate, they also believed that they could not avoid procrastination. Much like other aspects of procrastination, I interpreted participants' agency as an incompatible acceptance of the acknowledged self-defeating outcome resulting from procrastination and the contradictory sense that they begrudgingly need to procrastinate. They acknowledge and accept that they make bad

choices before making them but tend to ignore other alternatives when it is time to make a choice. For example, Amina says "*it's me telling myself, 'okay the right thing to do would be to study now' so then I'll go sit in front of my books, but then I'll just be like, 'I have time, I'm not in the mood now, I still have time.'*" Dinah illustrates this by labelling her procrastination as "*retarded*" because she lives by a diary but cannot stop procrastinating. Participants revealed some of the conflicts they face when choosing whether to study or to procrastinate. They also reveal an awareness of their decision to procrastinate even though they will knowingly regret their decision to do so at a later stage. The result for all the participants except for Floyd are feelings of guilt, shame, and often regret. Lastly, it emerged that all the participants consider their choices in relation to others and generally regret that their choice to procrastinate could also have an impact on others. Furthermore, I discuss agency in relation to procrastination and current literature.

5.5.1. Conflict, complications, and decision-making

There is difficulty in conceptualising the tension experienced when deciding to procrastinate. I interpreted this difficulty as participants defining procrastination as negative and yet, somehow, consistently making this contrary choice. Due to the tension described above, the contrary choice itself requires justification. Usually, this manifests as fooling oneself in terms of the amount of effort or time the delayed task requires. However, participants also revealed the physical and emotional toll the choice to study takes on them. Thus, the tension experienced when making a choice stems from knowing what the required choice is, but not having, for example, the willpower to make it. Participants experienced guilt because they defined procrastination as negative but continued to partake in such behaviour. Participants' feelings of guilt support the notion that procrastination is a choice; thus, the decision to do so requires justification.

The tension mentioned above becomes clearer in Bruce's case when he externally validates his choice to study but fails to follow through on that choice. Bruce declines an invitation to spend time with his friends to study. However, when alone, he still ends up procrastinating. His expressed tension is illustrated in the ease of understanding the right choice to make while with others, but lacking the willpower to do so when alone. The conflict of choice can be summed up as they are aware of their choice to procrastinate but find it difficult to accept that they make a choice they know will affect them negatively. Only Floyd acknowledges his decision to delay tasks in favour of something more

pleasant. However, he does not feel guilty when making this choice because he does not link his ability to complete a task with his self-worth.

5.5.2. Awareness of the decision to procrastinate

All the participants are, to some extent, aware of their decision to procrastinate and accept that they are responsible for the outcome of their decision to procrastinate. Being aware of the outcome of their decision is frustrating and facilitates the regret they may experience at a later stage. However, the decision is made to *"feel less uncertain because I can go back and say, 'I didn't have enough time to study*.'" Participants appear to prioritise unnecessary tasks over uncertain ones. Prioritising non-contingent tasks enables them to control uncertain circumstances and to gain a sense of agency over the uncertainty in the value of their efforts. Both Carrie and Dinah acknowledge that they prioritise other tasks to delay the tasks they are obligated to complete. Participants trade their feelings of uncertainty about their abilities for a task they believe will offer a more predictable outcome. All participants remain aware of the fact that they are only delaying a necessary task, but are compelled to attempt a predictable task instead. For example, Bruce would rather clean his room to feel a sense of achievement than testing whether he can study for an upcoming assessment.

5.5.3. Guilt, shame, and procrastination

Participants who have defined their procrastination as negative, yet continue to procrastinate, are plagued by feelings of guilt. They experience their actions as irrational and counterproductive because they remain aware of the correct choice they should make. Most participants indicated that they feel guilty about their actions and attempt to justify their behaviour either to themselves or others. They simultaneously feel guilty for initially not making the correct choice and for consistently being unable to make the correct choice in the future.

5.5.4. The role of others

Participants also transfer their sense of agency to significant others and use them to judge the value of their actions. Other individuals who procrastinate also normalise the experience of procrastination for participants and consequently, the feelings they experience as a result. For example, Carrie consistently chooses to demonstrate that

people are more important than books by choosing social interactions over studying. She later states that she would trade getting 10 percent less in a test for a valuable experience with her friends. Dinah, however, hides her procrastination from others, feeling guilty for her behaviour and believes that she deserves to fail a test due to her procrastination. Thus, her procrastination remains internalised and separate from the world of others to avoid their judgement. Emily uses significant others as a source of support, but she only shares her grades with others if she did well. Thus, how other individuals perceive participants is important to participants. In addition, other people are also used to evaluate participants' efforts to varying degrees. Participants' efforts are defined as a measure of self-worth and, therefore, the perceptions of others are important for their self-image. Although Floyd does not relate his efforts to his self-worth, he acknowledges the importance of the impact of his decisions on others. For Floyd, the possible consequences of procrastination for his wife or possible group members is what he struggles with the most. Thus, all the participants use others in several ways to evaluate their efforts.

For most of the participants, significant others can be a source of support because they are also procrastinators. Sometimes participants also conceal the guilt they feel about their procrastination from significant others. Significant others can also act as substitutes, where the procrastinator transfers the responsibility of initiating a task to them. The transfer of decision-making illustrates the difficulty and frustration in resolving the conflict participants experience when consistently making the wrong choice. Participants, in a sense, start to distrust their own decisions and look to others to identify what the right choice is and when it should be made. Participants are uncertain regarding when it is okay to begin studying and what results they will obtain if they do. They trust the certainty in other individuals' choices because they cannot rely on their own judgements as proven by their past attempts thus far.

5.5.5. Agency and procrastination in literature

The conflict experienced by participants is influenced by an awareness of their responsibility for the choices they make and the guilt experienced as a result. They are also affected by how others may perceive them and the impact their choices may have on significant others. According to Crooks (2016), those who procrastinate erroneously perceive their future selves as more capable than they are at present. Thus, a divide exists

between their present and future selves. In terms of decision-making, this allows procrastinators to mistakenly see future versions of themselves as able to complete a task (Crooks, 2016). The task can, therefore, be abandoned today in favour of a more favourable future moment when an ideal self can complete the task instead (Crooks, 2016). The responsibility for the task is, thus, transferred to a future ideal version of the self. Simultaneously, this transfer of agency ensures a focus on the present and regulating the negative emotions experienced in relation to the task. The future self is always an automated ideal while the focus remains on surviving the present. Sirois (2014b) has shown that procrastinators disengage with future selves to focus on temporal choices demanding immediate cognitive and emotional resources for coping. Procrastinators are, therefore, perpetually focused on negative evaluations of their efforts at present while idealising a future self that is perceived as being better. Sirois (2014b) also notes that the focus on the present as negative is a strategic attempt to avoid considering the potential of the future self. Both Anderson (2016) and Crooks (2016) argue that decreasing procrastination requires focusing on the present. Thus, the responsibility for a choice cannot be successfully transferred to the future, and the ideal self should exist in the present. The conflict experienced by participants in this study may, therefore, occur due to their separation of the future self from the present self to avoid criticism in the present.

The negative evaluations that persist for procrastinators in the present activate various mechanisms aimed at resolving the threat of negative evaluations (Sirois, 2014b). Terada (2017) links procrastination to an anxious fear of failure, seeing intelligence as stable and the self as concrete. Thus, procrastinators may perceive their ability as consumable (view their ability as limited and susceptible to threat) and focus on threats that may consume aspects of their self-worth. They accept responsibility for managing ideal versions of themselves by avoiding threats in the present and transferring the responsibility of a threatening task to their future selves. Their inability to seize the moment only exacerbates the need to postpone a task but creates incongruence between their desired self-esteem and actual self-esteem (DeMarree & Rios, 2014). This lack of self-clarity evokes frustration, confusion, and importantly, feelings of conflict and uncertainty in their ability to study effectively and achieve their long-term goals.

Participants may have discovered a strategy of habitually avoiding the negative emotions they feel at present when attempting a task (Tice et al., 2001). Negative emotions alone

can ensure that individuals focus on the present to avoid threats (Blouin-Hudon et al., 2016). The fact that procrastinators experience circumstances as threatening by default may create the need to strategically regulate those negative experiences (Blouin-Hudon et al., 2016; Terada, 2017). One could argue that procrastinators attempt to retain an ideal and concrete sense of self by focusing on navigating the negative emotions they feel at present. As much as they feel responsible for their bad choices, they also have a responsibility toward maintaining a satisfactory sense of self. If participants link their abilities to their sense of self, their sense of self can also be perceived as consumable (view their sense of self as limited and susceptible to threat). However, maintaining an adequate sense of self is also compounded by the perception that society defines procrastination as negative (Giguère, Sirois, & Vaswani, 2016).

Up to this point, I have focused on the internal conflict experienced and voiced by participants of this study as it relates to relevant literature. However, participants' experiences of procrastination are also affected by social conceptualisations of procrastination and their interactions with significant others. The participants often revealed the need to present themselves to significant others as responsible. Similar to the study by Barratt (2011), participants in the current study are frustrated by their inability to live up to societal expectations. Participants agreed with the negative connotations attached to procrastination by society and as a result experienced guilt while procrastinating. Except for Floyd, all the participants discussed the guilt they experienced while procrastinating. Giguère et al. (2016) argue that guilt becomes shame when individuals who procrastinate associate their feeling of inadequacy with their self-worth instead of their behaviour. Self-imposed guilt results from self-criticism and may ultimately lead to shame when defining themselves as bad people (Giguère et al., 2016). They avoid real social evaluations that would confirm that their choices are either negative or positive. They do so by deciding beforehand, without any external supporting evidence, whether they deem their behaviour to be positive or negative. Giguère et al. (2016) show that an accumulation of guilt due to procrastination ultimately leads to experiencing shame, as the focus shifts from unwarranted behaviour to an unwarranted self. Thus, although Wohl et al. (2010) point to self-forgiveness as a short-term solution to reduce negative affect as a result of procrastination, it is possibly only a short-term solution because procrastinators tend to focus on criticising themselves by default (Terada, 2017). The focus on the self as negative cultivates the need for avoidance and

mental disengagement (Chao, 2012). The participants in the current study also indicated that they use other students as a source of support, and to compare how they are coping with a task.

The focus on the self as negative, as well as potential threats to the self, may stem from strategies used as children. Thompson, Hannan, and Miron (2014) argue that a greater threat sensitivity to fight, flight or freeze can result in emotional dysregulation. Although the authors investigated chronic childhood maltreatment, the traits expressed by their participants, including neuroticism, are often associated with procrastinators as well (Steel & Ferrari, 2013). In addition, the participants also showed a tendency to focus on threats and on how to avoid them. The focus on themselves as negative also results in the need to present themselves as positive to others. Thus, there is a need to avoid negative evaluation by others strategically and to compare their efforts to those of others (Barratt, 2011). Participants in the current study and that of Barratt (2011) seemed to avoid all situations that may lead to an academic assessment of their full potential.

It has been suggested that future studies focus on parental rearing styles and their association with procrastination (Alshawashreh et al., 2013; Barratt, 2011; Ferrari & Olivette, 1994). All the participants in the current study mention their upbringing to varying degrees. For example, Carrie now associates negative results with a reduced self-worth due to her missunderstanding of why her parents' punished her for a specific incident as a child. Dinah discusses her need to have absolute agency and depend solely on herself while referring to the physical absence of her parents. Bruce attempts to avoid negative results due to the financial inconvenience this may cause his mother. Floyd indicates that his parents were not interested in his academic achievements and Emily recounts that she felt invisible and lacking a presence in her family when she was young.

5.6. The Function of Procrastination

Uncovering the functions of procrastination has been the aim of the current study and is thus fully explored as a theme below. Firstly, how the individual defines procrastination may alter their experience of the phenomenon and thus acts as a starting point for exploration. For most of the participants, however, procrastination is used to delay tasks strategically. It is also an attempt to regulate uncertainty by relying on external validation. Participants are mostly aware of their strategic need to avoid certain tasks but may not be fully aware of the degree of emotional regulation required to sustain this

strategy as procrastinators. The following section discusses each facet mentioned above to gain a better understanding of procrastination as the phenomenon under investigation. Thereafter, I discuss how procrastination is perceived and understood in current literature in relation to the interpretations at which I arrived.

5.6.1. Defining procrastination

Procrastination can be defined in a variety of ways. Some view it as part of the fabric of their identity, whereas others perceive it as an external consequence. For the most part, participants defined it as delaying a task they can complete due to a lack of willpower. The task is delayed to the very last possible moment, and as a result, the quality of their efforts is questionable. Without a justifiable reason to delay the task, procrastination is defined as a waste of time which leads to guilt and regret in some cases. Carrie also separated constructive or positive procrastination from destructive or negative procrastination. Positive procrastination is an attempt to replace studying with a constructive activity such as helping or being there for others. Although positive procrastination is then justified to a certain extent, Carrie still feels guilty for delaying the required task. However, Carrie prefers constructive procrastination to time-wasting on social media, which is defined as unjustifiable. The tension felt in defining procrastination seems to arise from the need to delay a task but having no apparent justifiable reason to do so.

5.6.2. Avoidance and procrastination

At its core, procrastination enabled the participants to avoid necessary tasks and, instead, prioritise their immediate concerns over their obligatory goals. Avoidance stems from the unwillingness to commit to the task and, instead, replacing the delayed task with one that is more enjoyable or one that feels more urgent. As a result, avoiding the task provides “leeway” to participants and ensures that their potential effort is idealised and preserved. Thus, avoidance assures that possible efforts are never evaluated and that momentary possible failure is avoided. However, this approach also ensures that participants also never see their efforts beyond the ideal, apart from Floyd. Floyd’s efforts remain satisfactory as his procrastination enables him to complete the task only when completely necessary. Participants mentioned difficulty in starting a task and struggle

with the realisation that they do not want to attempt the task for various personal reasons.

5.6.3. Reliance on external validation

The tension experienced in attempting to complete a task is often resolved by searching for external sources to validate the decision to begin a task. Therefore, participants may continue to procrastinate until external sources can provide indicators of certainty in the outcome of their behaviour. Participants use procrastination as a reason to wait for external sources that might offer a link between their decisions and possible outcomes. By relying on external sources, participants reduce the amount of uncertainty felt when depending on themselves to assess how reliable their efforts are. External sources include others' evaluation of their efforts, using other students to assess when to begin a task, and using time itself as an indicator of the appropriate time to attempt a task. For example, Carrie cannot accept her efforts as valid unless someone else (especially her mother) has judged that she has studied enough. Dinah shifts the decision to begin a task to her colleagues; thus, knowing when others begin to study enables her to feel more certain about her attempts to start studying. Essentially, others are used to judge when the appropriate level of effort has been spent to obtain an acceptable result. Time, as the last source of external validation, is the culmination of habitual procrastination that is used to define how much time is sufficient to complete a given task. For example, Amina has decided that she requires four hours of sleep before writing a test. Therefore, she will study and "feel" that her efforts are sufficient when she has four hours of sleep remaining. Thus, in each of the three cases of external validation, the responsibility to determine the appropriate moment to start a task is transferred to an external source. I interpreted this as participants' unwillingness to trust their efforts, except in Floyd's case. The five remaining participants bypass testing their potential by avoiding the decision to evaluate when it would be the best time to start a task. Thus, their potential efforts are seemingly protected if they do fail the task. However, the guilt experienced while procrastinating and in the case of failing a task shows that participants still feel responsible for their efforts and the consequences thereof. Relying on external sources to validate efforts usually results in less than optimal outcomes but also in outcomes that are ultimately acceptable. For example, Amina knows that she is better off studying in advance but

experiences greater certainty in her efforts to study if she studied the evening before tests.

5.6.4. Regulating the feeling of uncertainty

I interpreted Amina's required hours of sleep (four), as an attempt to regulate her uncertainty. Amina consistently attempted to recreate specific conditions to evaluate her study efforts. Being unable to define how much effort is required to obtain acceptable results creates uncertainty among participants. I would argue that procrastination is used to regulate the feeling of uncertainty. Thus, procrastination ensures that participants must wait for external indicators, which leads to more certainty regarding the outcomes of their efforts. They question their ability to succeed at full potential but are better able to accept that delayed efforts will produce adequate results. As Carrie puts it,

> *So probably subconsciously* [it] *might be a thing of* [I might feel like] *'Well, two days, four hours, you're still not gonna feel completely happy about how much you studied, so let's fill some of that time* [by procrastinating]*.' So that you can go back if it goes wrong and say [claps], 'O well, I didn't actually have the time to study for two days.' You know?*

Essentially, participants wait for greater certainty and for their actions to lead to outcomes that are more predictable. Only two outcomes are predicted by waiting for more certain conditions before attempting a task. Either, they may fail the test, which can be justified by their lack of studying at their full potential, or they can pass the test adequately but could have potentially done better with more effort. In the event of either outcome, their ideal potential always remains plausible in the future. The choice to delay a task ensures that participants' potential remains intact and independent of results obtained. Thus, procrastination facilitates the move from conditions of uncertainty to conditions of certainty. It is used to regulate the uncertainty experienced by allowing participants to wait for more predictable circumstances to test their efforts. For example, Amina constantly studies the day before a test and up to the point that she only has four hours to sleep. The period of delay ensures that ideal efforts are never tested and that the ideal potential version of herself remains intact or, more importantly, is not revealed to be inadequate. Participants regulate their uncertainty by using procrastination to avoid testing the true potential of their actions under uncertain circumstances. Therefore, they

know beforehand that their true ability cannot be compromised but also that they avoid realising their potential. Floyd, however, indicated throughout our interview that he deliberately uses procrastination to delay any tasks that he is not interested in doing.

5.6.5. Regulating emotions and procrastination

All the participants identified mood or emotion as a significant factor when deciding to attempt a task or not. Feelings of apathy could result from efforts to regulate uncertainty. Procrastination bypasses the need to evaluate whether a participant's ability is adequate. For example, it may be tiring to know one is obligated to attempt a task while also constantly questioning whether one has the ability or potential required to complete the task. Constantly quentioning one's ability then results in a decision to delay the task until a future point with more certainty. Floyd however, uses his apathy as an indicator that the task is not yet a priority. Although he has confidence in his potential, his value system prioritises other activities above academic ones. For the other participants, it seems emotionally difficult to attempt a task when they are uncertain of how much effort is required to demonstrate their potential. They are not willing and sometimes unable to attempt a task when it would measure their full potential or possibly reveal that their potential was insufficient. The absence of perceived predictable measures of their ability facilitates apathy and a resulting need to regulate the uncertainty they feel. They do so by using apathy as an indication that they should wait for more predictable circumstances. However, they also experience guilt while waiting to act, which only facilitates delaying the task further. Thus, an apathetic cycle is created and continues until an external source promotes greater certainty and the ability to commence with the task. The only certainty is that the task must be completed. However, they are uncertain of when to attempt the task and whether their efforts will be appropriate. I believe that the conflict experienced by participants regarding uncertainty about their abilities results in the choice to delay a necessary task. According to Carrie, she thinks "*it* [procrastination] *makes me feel less uncertain because I can go back and say 'I didn't have enough time to study.'*"

5.6.6. Understanding the role of procrastination in existing literature

The following discussion is divided into two accompanying sections used to discuss related literature. I will first discuss literature related to defining procrastination in comparison to the participants' experiences, the use of external validation, and

procrastination used as an avoidance mechanism. The second sub-section combines and discusses the complementary nature of procrastination when utilised as a means of regulating a sense of uncertainty and the emotions related to the experience of procrastination.

5.6.6.1. Definition, external validation, and avoidance

Rebetez et al. (2015) used cluster analysis to identify subgroups of procrastinators by looking at factors related to procrastination already established in previous literature. The authors found evidence that procrastinators lack perseverance, are easily distracted, and seek immediate gratification due to the emotions they experience. Furthermore, procrastination is described as a self-protective strategy used to mask fragile self-esteem (Rebetez et al., 2015). Participants identified as having the highest degree of procrastination exhibited low self-regulation, self-esteem, and extrinsic identified motivation (Rebetez et al., 2015). In addition, Grunschel, Patrzek, and Fries (2013) also identified four types of procrastinators. The authors indicated that the second group of procrastinators (consisting of those who were worried/anxious and those who were discontent with their studies) exhibited the highest degree of academic procrastination. During their interviews, Amina, Carrie, Dinah, and Floyd all exhibited uncertainty or discontent regarding their studies. In Grunschel et al.'s (2013) study, those labelled as being discontent with their studies or worried/anxious also experienced the greatest level of psychological pressure.

Students may also attempt to redefine their procrastination as productive to make sense of their apparently paradoxical behaviour. Productive procrastination is defined as completing an easier assignment while delaying a more difficult but urgent assignment (Westgate, Wormington, Oleson, & Lindgren, 2017). The authors also argue that existing literature is limited because of the assumption that students procrastinate in the same way for all tasks. The authors illustrated their argument by showing that the classic procrastinator profile was the least found amongst participants in their sample of more than a 1000 individuals (Westgate et al., 2017). Procrastinators use procrastination to varying degrees for various purposes, depending on the personal meaning they attach to the phenomenon. For example, using social media to procrastinate is often defined as meaningless and leads to feelings of guilt (Meier et al., 2016). In the current study, Carrie distinguishes between productive and destructive procrastination, where she labels the

use of Facebook to procrastinate as destructive. She, thus, attempts to partake in more productive procrastination which she defines as improving and maintaining social relationships with her friends. She argues that there is greater meaning in socially interacting with her friends than in her studies, but no meaning at all in wasting time with social media to avoid academic tasks. Furthermore, Westgate et al. (2017) would define Carrie's behaviour as non-academic productive procrastination. Bruce indicates washing dishes, cleaning his room, or working out as his methods of procrastinating productively. Dinah would watch television series or use her internship position to, respectively, procrastinate destructively or productively.

Although procrastination is traditionally defined as maladaptive when investigated, this was not always the case (Kim & Seo, 2015). The negative relationship between procrastination and academic performance is influenced by the selected measuring instrument and the negative assumptions about procrastination inherent in the measure used (Kim & Seo, 2015). However, procrastination only started to be perceived as negative after the industrial revolution (Kim & Seo, 2015; Steel, 2007). Therefore, the negative perception of procrastination was not essential to the phenomenon prior to the industrial revolution. Thus, any attempt to understand the phenomenon of procrastination rests on how it is described within current social norms and the impact of adopting a specific perception of the phenomenon.

Giguère et al. (2016) argue that the demonisation of procrastination as a social construct has implications for individuals experiencing procrastination, which include feelings of guilt and possibly shame. Most of the participants in the current study discussed their experience of guilt, and this could be due to defining procrastination as a transgression of social norms. Their negative perceptions of themselves serve as a strategy to delay difficult tasks and influence whether they perceive themselves as productive members of society. Thus, as previously mentioned, procrastination is used as a self-protective strategy that masks low self-esteem against normative social behaviour that is defined as productive (Giguère et al., 2016; Rebetez et al., 2015).

Procrastinators may embellish achievements in an attempt to appear productive in their respective social circles (Ferrari & Díaz-Morales, 2007). Thus, impression management plays a role in understanding the phenomenon of procrastination. Procrastinators seek external validation for their behaviour and use the perceptions of relevant others to

validate their worth (Crocker & Park, 2004). Their uncertainty regarding how others may evaluate their behaviour forces them to focus on avoiding failure instead of working towards achieving success (Blouin-Hudon et al., 2016; Crocker & Park, 2004; Sirois, 2014a). However, avoidance also serves as a means of shifting responsibility to an ideal future self that is never tested, while the potential to complete the task remains intact (Crooks, 2016; Sirois, 2014b). Thus, external validation acts as a means of shifting the responsibility for the consequences related to their actions to relevant others or a future ideal self.

At its core, the strategic use of procrastination seems to relate to avoidance. Procrastinators use procrastination to avoid the negative impact of threats on their self-esteem by focusing on the regulation of presently experienced negative emotions (Blouin-Hudon et al., 2016). Avoidance coping ensures that they circumvent threats associated with a task to preserve their self-esteem. In addition, this fosters a preoccupation with the impact of failure (Gustavson et al., 2017). They are essentially unwilling to experience uncertainty and are psychologically rigid in terms of maintaining the possibility of their potential (Glick et al., 2014). Therefore, not only do procrastinators avoid the possibility of failure but true success as well. Crooks (2016) argues that the individual must be committed to the present to experience the potential of the future self eventually. Procrastinators, however, use procrastination to avoid contextualising a future self with real potential, of which they are aware to an extent (Anderson, 2016). Procrastinators successfully use procrastination to avoid the full impact of failure on their self-worth, but they do not avoid feeling responsible for their choice to delay a task. For example, Carrie shifts the responsibility for her decision to procrastinate to her interactions with her friends to determine the validity of her initial decision to spend time with them. Thus, choosing to spend time with her friends is only valuable if their interactions with her are worthwhile and justify her decision to avoid studying. However, when alone, she still experiences guilt for delaying her studies and should she fail, accepts her choice to delay as unwarranted and herself as culpable (Anderson, 2016; Crooks, 2016).

5.6.6.2. Uncertainty and emotion

Using failure as a measure of self-worth may encourage the avoidance of tasks that test the limits of self-worth (Duru & Balkis, 2017). Thus, a core aspect of procrastination may

be interpreted as experiencing uncertainty. Uncertainty exists over the amount of effort that is required to complete a task optimally. The procrastinator may while viewing themselves in a negative light, mull over how long it would take to complete a task, thus, reducing their willingness to persist at a task. Thus, feeling uncertain about their abilities could facilitate the conditions necessary to delay a given task. When feeling uncertain, procrastinators may induce strategic delays to give themselves time to cope with the uncertainty they experience. They second-guess themselves, primarily because the consequences of failure are equated to personal failure. Thus, with tasks defined in this manner, failure leads to a reduction in self-worth (Duru & Balkis, 2017). As alluded to earlier, social norms portray the procrastinator as unproductive, which may also increase their feelings of uncertainty (Giguère et al., 2016). Procrastinators may accept socially defined understandings of procrastination as detrimental but experience tension and uncertainty about the fact that they procrastinate consistently, despite the negative connotation attached to procrastination. The negative emotions generated from feeling uncertain in several domains facilitate coping mechanisms to deal with the potential threat by using avoidance (Blouin-Hudon et al., 2016). Negative emotions are, thus, utilised to preserve long-term self-worth by avoiding current tasks that may threaten or reduce self-worth if attempted at full potential (Tamir & Ford, 2009). Avoiding a task thus allows ideal potential to remain plausible, while a less than satisfactory result is accepted as a trade-off.

Thürmer et al. (2013) argue that if-then contingencies can effectively facilitate success when automated. However, it is possible that success for the procrastinator is defined as the avoidance of reductions in self-worth. Thus, if-then contingencies for procrastinators may become automated to avoid testing self-worth by utilising strategic delay. Indeed, Pychyl and Sirois (2016) argue that procrastinators strategically choose to avoid tasks, but the decision to do so may occur at a nonconscious level. I speculate that individuals regulate various aspects of themselves simultaneously, but nonconsciously prioritise the retention of an ideal self by avoiding threats to their self-worth. Therefore, although Rebetez et al. (2015) describe those who procrastinate the most as having low self-regulation, I want to argue that their degree of regulation is not low, underregulated, or misregulated (cf. Duru & Balkis, 2017) but instead redirected to cope with perceived threats to their self-esteem. Thus, procrastination appears to be used as a coping mechanism to regulate feelings of uncertainty. Rebetez et al. (2015) provide further

evidence that emotional regulation is at the centre of procrastination. Negative emotions related to academic tasks are perceived as threats to self-worth, thus activating the need to employ a self-protective strategy.

According to Tamir (2009), when future goals outweigh immediate benefits, the individual will utilise and choose to experience emotions that are aversive. Procrastinators may feel guilty about their procrastination but choose guilt while nonconsciously protecting their self-worth in the long-term (Pychyl & Sirois, 2016). Therefore, negative emotions are utilised in the service of maintaining an idealised version of self-worth, which remains protected. Indeed, "Learning that an emotion is useful in one context should increase preferences for that emotion in that context" (Tamir, 2009, p. 104). Individuals may actively increase fear if it allows them to avoid threats (Tamir & Ford, 2009). Thus, if procrastinators fear that a task may reduce self-worth, they may be motivated to delay the task perceived as threatening, especially since their delayed efforts generally still produce tolerable results. Thompson et al. (2014) argue that procrastinators have developed a greater sensitivity to threat and may consistently search their surroundings for threats. Sensitivity to threat in combination with associating academic results with their self-worth may lead to increasingly employing mechanisms that allow for avoiding threats (Tamir & Ford, 2009; Thompson et al., 2014).

The procrastinator's ability to imagine their future selves as successful at a task is key to reducing their procrastination (Blouin-Hudon & Pychyl, 2015). However, I interpreted the participants in the present study as prioritising the preservation of a future successful self. They preserved their future selves by protecting the ideal self that is perceived as fragile. Positive affect is required to broaden and enhance cognitive flexibility to creatively imagine a future self as successful at a task (Baumeister et al., 2007). A preoccupation with negative emotion and self-criticism would lower an image of a future self as continuous and result in more procrastination (Blouin-Hudon & Pychyl, 2015). For the procrastinator, negative affect acts as a signal to preserve the ideal self and create distance between the actions of the present self and the potential of the future self that appears threatened. This may create a cycle of defeat whereby procrastinators consistently choose downward factual thinking to regulate present mood at the expense of an actual future self that is successful (Sirois & Pychyl, 2013). Indeed, habitual

procrastination and being aware of one's own procrastination increase procrastination instead of reducing it (Meier et al., 2016; Sirois & Pychyl, 2013). When participants in the study by Briones et al. (2007) experienced low-level positive emotions, they partook in more self-defeating behaviour. The authors state that if participants felt that their choices were limited when threatened, they would experience reactance (reaction to threat) and attempt to avoid threat. The authors also add that a high level of reactance may influence the individual's sense of identity (Briones et al., 2007). Procrastinators may react to a potential loss of self-worth to such a degree that they separate the present self from the future self to preserve the potential of the future self.

Self-esteem acts as the centre of emotional perception, which filters and manages emotions and self-efficacy beliefs (Caprara et al., 2013). If procrastinators focus on avoiding threats, then anticipated emotions about perceived threats may promote "presumably safer" choices even if there are better options available (Baumeister et al., 2007; Litt et al., 2011). For example, if procrastinators were threatened by the possibility of failure in a test, they may choose their familiar coping strategy, namely procrastination, instead. Although earnest efforts may result in a good grade, the safer and more familiar choice is to protect one's self-worth when anticipating that comprehensive efforts could also result in failure and, as a result, reduce self-worth. Procrastinators are aware of the fact that they attempt to avoid negative emotions associated with a task (Tice et al., 2001). However, I disagree with this view and argue that the activity used to procrastinate or delay a necessary task does not need to be enjoyed by the individual. If the aim is to protect self-worth, then the procrastination activity is used to decrease awareness of an aversive task (Tamir & Ford, 2009), whether it is by cleaning one's room or socialising with friends.

5.7. Coping with Procrastination and its Consequences

In the following section, I discuss how participants cope with procrastination by looking at three emerging themes namely: Living with procrastination, the role of punishment, and the desirability of procrastination. Living with procrastination emerged as an essential theme in understanding the participants' experiences of the phenomenon. The negative connotations related to procrastination and being socially labelled a procrastinator fuelled the definition of the phenomenon, to an extent. I interpreted Amina's behaviour as self-punishment at times and, therefore, explored the role of

punishment for her procrastination. I then discuss the desirability of procrastination by exploring whether participants want to procrastinate or not. Furthermore, I explore literature about coping with procrastination to assess any plausible links between the participants in the current study and related literature.

5.7.1. Living with procrastination

The theme "Living with procrastination" can be perceived as an attempt to understand and justify the decision to procrastinate and the consequences thereof. The choices made are not always fully understood but consistently chosen and difficult to rationalise. At times, it seems to be perceived as the obstacle to one's success. To rationalise the decisions made thus far, participants often question whether they are good enough. They question whether they are good enough to succeed, and good enough to make the choices they know will lead to success. Consistently questioning whether they are good enough is accompanied by constant lurking regret that they will, ultimately, not make the choice needed to succeed at a task. It was difficult to assess whether the participants felt that they knowingly made consistent decisions to avoid evaluations from others. I speculate that participants may spend most of their energy deciphering how irrational their procrastination is, instead of asking whether there was a point to their procrastination. They focused on how they would neglect themselves throughout the experience. This sense of neglect formed part of the process and occurred mentally as well as physically. I interpreted the neglect as a tiring process; a process whereby some participants internalised the negative outcomes of tasks as a reflection of their self-worth and subsequently, avoided tasks that could plausibly affect their sense of self-worth. In the end, it was tiring for participants to consider themselves the obstacle to their own success. Floyd echoed the other participants when stating that it may have been functional before, but now "*procrastination is becoming a problem*." The other participants may not have defined procrastination as functional, but they all recognised it as presently problematic.

5.7.2. The role of punishment

An interesting theme emerged in relation to Amina's experience of procrastination. It appeared that she punished herself for her procrastination by stating that if she needs more time "*I'll just take it out of my sleep.*" Amina agrees that "*I lose sleep and obviously*

that's not good in any aspect for your, um, body or anything." She still consistently chose to "lose sleep" to build up the pressure she required to study. She admits to the consistency in her behaviour: "*My average hours of sleep, I sleep before a test is four hours, that's my average* [amount of hours she sleeps before a test]*, so somehow I get it like that all the time*." Therefore, although she is aware that losing sleep takes a physical toll on her body, she also seemed to communicate that her lack of sleep is deserved because of her choice to procrastinate. Although she realises that she requires pressure to complete a task, she also accepts that she is responsible for her actions. Thus, her lack of sleep is justified and deemed an adequate punishment for her choice to procrastinate. During our follow-up interview, Amina confirms my interpretation that her lack of sleep is deserved due to her procrastination.

5.7.3. The desirability of procrastination

Dinah undoubtedly defined procrastination as undesirable. However, Amina and Bruce were hesitant to describe it as only negative. Amina felt that procrastination formed part of her identity and letting go meant parting with a piece of who she is. I interpreted Bruce's hesitation to rid himself of procrastination as the possible acknowledgement that it performs a specific function for him on some level. By letting go of procrastination, Bruce would be letting go of the strategy to regulate the uncertainty he felt when approaching his studies. Emily demonstrated a need to understand the pervasiveness of procrastination in her life and how to cope with it. She struggled with labelling her procrastination as undesirable while choosing to procrastinate consistently. Ultimately, all the participants demonstrated a need to understand their procrastination and find alternative means to regulate the pressure they required to start a task. All the participants struggled with their choice to procrastinate while simultaneously defining it as undesirable.

5.7.4. Literature on living with procrastination

According to Steel and Ferrari (2013), the incidence of academic procrastination could be as high as 80% amongst university students. The high incidence rate can be coupled with the notion that students define their behaviour as problematic and feel the impact of procrastinating. Furthermore, another consequence of procrastination includes stress and as a result, greater health issues both mentally and physically (Sirois, 2007). Sirois

and Kitner (2015) state that procrastination results in stress, rather than students procrastinating due to stress. Students who procrastinate are prone to blaming themselves and tend to be overly critical of themselves (Sirois & Kitner, 2015). Ultimately, academic procrastinators partake in less adaptive coping and simultaneously utilise more maladaptive coping strategies, resulting in greater perceived stress (Sirois & Kitner, 2015). Traits linked to procrastination can include the internalisation of failure, the fear of failure, and neuroticism (Gustavson et al., 2017). Considering the negative consequences of procrastination, it is difficult for the non-procrastinator to imagine why procrastinators resist changing their behaviour.

To cope with stress, procrastinators often adopt dysfunctional and unhealthy behaviours to regulate negative emotions (Sirois, 2016). Negative affect also promotes greater procrastination and in turn, increases negative mood and further procrastination (Argiropoulou, Sofianopoulou, & Kalantzi-Azizi, 2016). Sirois (2016) attributes these dysfunctional coping strategies to a lack of future self-orientation, amongst other factors. Procrastinators are less able to imagine themselves in the future and, as a result, are less likely to adopt healthy behaviours now, which would benefit them in the future (Sirois, 2016). Instead, they experience poor sleeping habits (Kroese, Nauts, Kamphorst, Anderson, & de Riddler, 2016) and chronic stress, which could significantly impact their long-term health (Sirois, 2016). Chronic stress can be partly explained by the critical self-evaluations used by procrastinators to measure their self-worth. Self-criticism can lead to chronic stress by decreasing the probability of success, but it also serves the function of creating an excuse in the event of failure (Crocker & Park, 2004). Sirois and Pychyl (2013) argue that due to their lack of future self-orientation, procrastinators choose their present self and concerns at the expense of their long-term goals. One could also argue that they may be attempting to preserve the potential of their future selves in a dysfunctional manner. If procrastinators tend to use external tasks to validate their self-worth (Crocker & Park, 2004), then they may need to protect the possibility of a future self with potential self-worth. Protecting a potential future self could also become exhausting due to the consistent experience of perceived threats to their self-worth. Consistently considering perceived threats may result in downward counterfactual thinking, negative emotions, chronic stress, and maladaptive coping strategies (Argiropoulou et al., 2016; Sirois, 2016; Sirois & Pychyl, 2013).

When I met with Carrie, informally, to discuss my interpretation of her transcript, she asked that I emphasise society's role in unfairly encouraging rational thinking at the expense of emotional intelligence. Social norms dictate that procrastinators are "bad people" only in relation to productivity (Giguère et al., 2016), but generally, do not acknowledge the emotional turmoil and toll procrastination takes on health. Thus, when comparing themselves to social norms, procrastinators tend to form negative opinions of themselves (Giguère et al., 2016), which becomes a point of focus that drives their procrastination. The relation between societal definitions of procrastination as bad and individuals internalising this definition as their fault exacerbates their procrastination. This often starts out as guilt for their behaviour but, over time, leads to shame when their actions start to determine their self-worth (Argiropoulou et al., 2016; Giguère et al., 2016). What starts out as a transgression of social norms due to their behaviour becomes internalised as shame due to chronic procrastination (Giguère et al., 2016). Feelings of guilt and shame forced Dinah to avoid seeking social support or discussing her procrastination with others. The guilt and shame related to procrastination often become self-imposed and facilitate greater procrastination due to a fear of failure and avoidance coping (Giguère et al., 2016; Gustavson et al., 2017; Sirois & Pychyl, 2013).

Procrastination is defined as undesirable not only by the affected individual but society at large (Giguère et al., 2016). The stigma associated with procrastination has plausibly been linked to delaying help-seeking behaviour, and as a result, procrastinators experience poorer mental health and physical health concerns (Stead et al., 2010). To avoid being socially labelled as a procrastinator, individuals may avoid seeking support in many forms, much like Dinah in the current study. She kept her procrastination to herself and felt a sense of shame in revealing to others that she procrastinates. Thus, as much as her procrastination feels out of her control, she also accepts responsibility for the outcome thereof. Consistently, choosing to transgress perceived social norms by procrastinating begins as guilt but eventually changes to feelings of shame (Giguère et al., 2016). Crooks (2016) argues that we can only value the creation of our future selves by building the present but, procrastinators seem to, instead, use the present adaptively to avoid the full effect of failure in the future (Stead et al., 2010).

Avoidance coping is often utilised while actively experiencing negative emotions to accomplish avoidance goals (Tamir & Ford, 2009). Thus, the guilt and shame associated

with procrastination and the transgression of social norms (Giguère et al., 2016) could plausibly be instrumentally used (Tamir & Ford, 2009) to preserve a perceived fragile self-worth. Ultimately, procrastinators may be willing to experience the negative aspects of procrastination to retain a sense of self-worth as a trade-off. Although Anderson (2016, p. 47) defines procrastination as "*culpably unwarranted delay*", I do, however, believe that procrastinators may be unaware of their behaviour as a warranted and strategic effort to protect what is perceived as their limited and fragile self-worth. By all definitions, procrastination can be perceived of as negative (Crocker & Park, 2004) and temporarily adaptive but still damaging in the long-term (Stead et al., 2010). However, for individuals to choose to experience the negative consequences related to procrastination, requires the consideration that procrastination may serve a function of which they are not fully aware. They may be unaware of the fact that the negative choices they make are used to protect their fragile self-esteem using a familiar but dysfunctional coping mechanism that has consistently been utilised to that effect.

5.8. Additional Self-defeating Behaviours

Although the content related to additional self-defeating behaviours is limited and the focus of this study was primarily based on procrastination, I felt it important to share participants' experiences of their additional self-defeating behaviours, where applicable. The content below examines instances where participants shared their experiences of shyness, substance abuse, and healthcare negligence as self-defeating behaviours, in addition to procrastination.

5.8.1. Bruce's experience of shyness and healthcare negligence

Bruce described shyness as a fear of being rejected. The fear of rejection is internalised and expressed as a negative perception of his self-worth. He describes his shyness as "*having less worth."* Therefore, it is not that there is something wrong with others but that "*there's something wrong with me that makes them do this* [avoid social interaction with him]." The strongest theme emerging from my interpretation of Bruce's transcript is that he sees himself as an inconvenience in different contexts, including his experiences of procrastination, shyness, and healthcare negligence. Therefore, it is not so much that he neglected his health but more that his health was expendable, to a degree, in relation to the amount of inconvenience it may cause his mother. Bruce states that people may

neglect their health to avoid inconveniencing others or "*Like, they* [himself included] *feel they don't have the right to, you know have this emergency.*"

5.8.2. Floyd's experience of substance abuse

Floyd describes his abuse of alcohol as a coping mechanism used to filter out the negative events of the day. He states that alcohol is used to "*cut me off* [stop thinking about]*"* the demands of work. Thus, both procrastination and alcohol are used to escape current obligations he does not wish to think about. However, Floyd recognised that alcohol was not a sustainable coping mechanism when his son passed away. I believe that the passing of his son gave him clarity about the impact of using alcohol for this purpose. In addition, he understood that the outcome of possibly using alcohol to cope with his son's death would destroy him. He states that after his son's death, he realised that, "*I will bury myself in this alcohol so I better [stop].*" Therefore, I believe he recognised the danger of using alcohol as an escape, more so after his son's death than before.

5.9. Member Checking

Four of the six participants could meet with me informally to discuss my interpretations of how they experienced procrastination. I met with Amina, Carrie, Dinah, and Emily to discuss my findings and to elicit their opinions thereof, resulting in member checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Thus, the process is not intended to verify the interpretations I reached but rather to assess whether the themes resonated with the participants' lived experience of the phenomenon. Participants with whom I met received their transcript, a list of emerging themes and superordinate themes, and a summary of my interpretations of superordinate themes relevant to them. I then arranged to meet with them at a location with which they were comfortable to have an informal conversation about how I arrived at the themes summarised for them. I also indicated that I would be recording our conversation to reflect on their thoughts and to note them in the current section. The following section discusses each participant's opinion in turn below.

5.9.1. Amina

Amina readily agreed to most of my interpretations but found that they could largely be attributed to unconscious choices of which she was not always fully aware. For example,

she felt that my interpretation of her best efforts not being enough could rightly be attributed to something most individuals experience, whether they procrastinate or not. She also did not feel that she was avoiding failure rather than approaching success. She further disagreed with the role I attributed to her mother in relation to her procrastination as she defined her mother as a procrastinator as well. Essentially, she did not believe that her mother exacerbated her procrastination or contributed to her choice to procrastinate. The one interpretation that peaked her interest was using lack of sleep as punishment for procrastinating. She thought this interpretation was novel and agreed to my interpretation of this aspect of her experience. She also agreed that uncertainty played a role in her procrastination and that she would seek external sources of validation for her actions. Amina agreed to the role of emotions while procrastinating but felt that the need to protect herself remains an unconscious need of which she is possibly not fully aware. She especially understood the role of positive and negative emotions by stating that finishing a television series could feel like an accomplishment in contrast to starting her required academic task. Lastly, she felt that her procrastination could be strategically used to justify possible failure when telling others that she procrastinated.

Amina also felt that setting personal deadlines instead of fully relying on external validation might help reduce her procrastination. The narrowed focus gained from personal deadlines may assist in her need for pressure and allow her to start the task, even if just for five seconds. Lastly, she stated that continuous assessments helped her during her studies and helped to keep her, as a procrastinator, engaged with the content.

5.9.2. Carrie

Carrie felt that my interpretation resonated with her experience of procrastination, but also added specific information that I did not consider before. She was mostly interested in social norms that value cognitive intelligence or IQ over emotional intelligence (EQ). Thus, perceptions of herself as lazy were fuelled by social norms that ignore the need to process her experience emotionally. She felt socially conditioned to feel latent guilt while procrastinating. Feelings of latent guilt also meant that she struggled to feel valuable in terms of contributing to society based on the prioritisation of IQ within current social norms. However, during her fourth year when the follow-up interview took place, she felt she had less opportunity to procrastinate. Carrie's experiences, in this case, also resonated with the participants with whom I met after their initial interviews. In addition,

she mentioned an interesting area for future research related to emotional procrastination; essentially, how individuals may put off experiencing certain emotions because they are uncomfortable to process them at present. She considered herself to be self-reflective and, therefore, my interpretation in terms of procrastination being linked to emotions and self-worth made sense to her. Generally, Carrie felt that my views were novel and made sense to her after reading the summary I provided.

Carrie mostly agreed with how I chose to interpret and define her experience of procrastination as a mechanism to protect her self-worth. She also added that it could act as a means of escaping social pressures that one does not endorse. She started to wonder what she was missing by only focusing on grades during her matric year and shifted to defining herself by her relationships with others. She felt uncomfortable with a lack of choice and felt suffocated by only defining herself by her results obtained in school. When very young, she was punished for receiving zero in a test and mistakenly linked the result she obtained to her self-worth and not to her behaviour. She discusses how she had thrown a temper tantrum that day, received zero for the test as a result, and was subsequently punished by her parents. Thus, she felt the experience outlined above was linked to her procrastination and to proving that people are more important than books. She adds that she may not have been choosing her friends over her books but rather hoping that they would choose her over theirs. Carrie hopes that her friends confirm that she was more than just her IQ and that her definition of self, extended beyond just her academic ability. Lastly, she also indicated that she felt completely responsible for her choices (whether they were conscious or not) and that the justifications used while procrastinating would not be enough to justify failure at a task.

5.9.3. Dinah

I confirmed with Dinah that she disliked the study centre because it amplified the guilt she felt while procrastinating and watching others able to focus on their tasks. She also confirmed that although having stated so in the interview, she did not 'just want to make it' for Honours but ultimately wanted to feel like she deserved to be there. At the time of our follow-up interview, Dinah reveals that she was selected for the Master's programme in her selected field. She further elaborates and agrees that boredom is not at the core of her procrastination, that she does not procrastinate simply because the task bores her. Rather, boredom is the result of feeling apathetic; an emotion she links to feelings of

incompetence. She feels worried that her efforts may not be sufficient for a given task, which results in procrastination. She felt that she explained procrastination in terms of boredom because one considers only the cognitive aspects of procrastination by default. However, after reading the summary I provided, she was interested in the emotional element of procrastination and a plausible need to protect her self-worth. She acknowledges the divide many individuals create between their academic selves and their feelings or personal goals.

Dinah confirms that she would have attributed getting into the honours programme to internal factors but attributed failing to be selected to external factors. She, however, refutes my interpretation of her experience as dependent on external validation. Rather, she felt that she was forced to rely on herself early on due to living with her grandmother instead of her parents. Furthermore, according to Dinah, solely relying on herself intensified her need for perfectionism. Thus, she agreed that, due to perfectionism, she used procrastination defensively and strategically to create a margin of error to protect her potential. She also adds that she eventually started living with her parents, but that due to her self-reliance, she felt less independent and suffocated at that point. Lastly, Dinah states that our initial interview took place during a difficult period in her life. She was also seeing a psychologist and states that many themes discussed in our interview, related to the sessions she had with her psychologist at the time.

5.9.4. Emily

A big part of procrastination for Emily was feeling a sense of being in control. She states that she often felt that procrastination controlled her and perceived it to be like an addiction. She felt that she was rebelling against a deadline externally, but was being internally guided by her procrastination. She feels now that she should not wait to make perfect decisions but should rather remain in the present and make the best possible decision at the time. She also reveals that her need for perfection has been reduced due to focusing less on the conditions placed on her by others. She states that her current aim is to try and control her own choices and not the behaviour of others in relation to the conditions she feels they place on her. She concludes by saying that the traumatic event she mentioned during our previous interview led her to the realisation that she cannot control others. In addition, it also reduced her need for perfection and the conditions required to attain perfection.

She agrees that she is aware of using procrastination strategically but finds it difficult to understand why she needs to do so. She states that she would strategically use procrastination to delay a task and avoid any humiliation attached to possible failure. Procrastination was used adaptively and later habitually. She would start by questioning whether she was good enough to complete a task perfectly. She then agrees that she may be using procrastination to avoid the conditions for achieving perfection. She felt that avoidance coping was habitually used to avoid negative perceptions of herself. She continues by stating that her avoidance coping may have begun in Grade 11 when a friend received an accolade Emily felt she deserved. Again, in Grade six, she felt humiliated when she expected to get the position of head girl but was overlooked. Thus, she felt that she could preserve more confidence by avoiding humiliation rather than be let down by her expectations.

She agrees that emotions control our decisions to an extent, sometimes even before cognition takes place and that procrastination may be a means of emotionally bypassing the fear of reduced self-worth. The emotion involved in considering reduced self-worth is linked to her feeling of apathy or lack of energy when attempting to start a task. She also agrees that it is easier to help others due to the relaxed conditions placed on herself, that the assistance offered does not need to be perfect but is already appreciated by default. Lastly, she agreed that the need for external validation is regulated by procrastination to maintain a consumable (view their sense of self as limited and susceptible to threat) self-worth. Her overly self-critical approach helps her to avoid testing her self-worth. However, this consequently results in feeling like a fraud at times and feeling undeserving of her accomplishments.

5.10. Summary of Chapter 5

The current chapter provided an overview of the analysis that resulted from the current study. I first introduced the reader to the method of analysis by providing a short extract and showing the process involved during analysis. This brief example of the process was intended to show transparency and describe the manner of arriving at the five superordinate themes discussed. I discussed my interpretation of how many of the participants internalised procrastination as a part of their identity and the consequences thereof. Secondly, I looked at the role of agency and how participants cope with continuously choosing to procrastinate. The theme that followed explored the potential

function of procrastination for the participants in this study. Next, I discussed how participants live with their choice to procrastinate, especially in relation to societal acceptance of procrastination as a transgression of social norms. Lastly, although brief, I shared the additional self-defeating behaviours of two participants and their experiences of healthcare negligence, shyness, and substance abuse. In addition, throughout the chapter, I situated the interpretations at which I arrived within existing literature, and concluded by sharing the opinions of four participants through the process of member checking.

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

6.1 Overview of Chapter 6

The following chapter will provide a summary of the findings discussed in Chapter 4 and 5. I provide a summarised version of the findings to contextualise the study's conclusions for the reader. In relation to the conclusions reached herein, I will summarise the plausible contributions of the present study. I will then discuss the possible limitations inherent in the study which may have had an impact on the conclusions that I have reached and will provide recommendations and suggestions for future research to address the identified limitations. Lastly, I provide concluding comments that contextualise the significance of the present study.

6.2 Summary of Findings

My exploration of procrastination led to the emergence of five superordinate themes that are essential to the interpretation of the experiences of the six selected participants. The themes summarised below include procrastination and the self, agency, the function of procrastination, coping with procrastination and its consequences, and lastly, additional self-defeating behaviours.

Participants' experiences of procrastination intersected with their identity at several junctures while they discussed their experiences. They felt uncertain in their ability to study successfully. Each participant's experience of uncertainty in their ability manifested differently, except for Floyd. Three participants attempted to relate their procrastination to genetics to understand their paradoxical behaviour. Lastly, two participants discussed the possible advantages of feeling uncertain.

The second superordinate theme is concerned with the sense of agency that participants attributed to their actions. They felt that their decision-making became complicated due to the paradoxical consequences of consistently choosing to procrastinate. All the participants remained fully aware of their decision to procrastinate and accepted responsibility for their actions. In addition, their awareness and sense of responsibility lead to feelings of guilt and shame, except for Floyd. All the participants mentioned the role that others played in defining their experiences of procrastination and their ultimate struggle with the responsibility they felt towards others while procrastinating.

I explored possible reasons for the participants' procrastination to gain an understanding of what they deem important. All the participants agreed that they perceive procrastination as negative. Although defined as negative, they also stated that procrastination served a certain purpose. Some of the participants also agreed that procrastination helped them to shift the responsibility for their choices to external sources. Four participants agreed that they might, unconsciously, strategically use procrastination to regulate feelings of uncertainty and the accompanying emotions.

Coping with their paradoxical decision-making emerged as essential in their experience of procrastination. Participants recalled experiences of struggling with their constant decision to procrastinate while being aware of the consequences thereof. Amina seemed to punish herself for her procrastination by sleeping less. Ultimately, all the participants experienced procrastination as undesirable, yet constantly chose to procrastinate.

Bruce and Floyd briefly discussed their experiences of shyness and healthcare negligence, and substance abuse, respectively. Bruce appeared to communicate that, at times, he questioned his self-worth because of his tendency to be shy (e.g., he questioned whether he was worthy of others' attention) and his tendency to neglect his health (e.g., he would question whether his toothache was painful enough to inconvenience his mother financially). Floyd discussed the differences between substance abuse and procrastination. He felt that they performed the same function in diverse ways and he managed to stop abusing alcohol. Although both substance abuse and procrastination ensured that he avoided tasks he was obligated to complete, he recognised the inherent danger of using alcohol for this purpose.

6.3 Conclusions

How do individuals personally experience their own self-defeating behaviour patterns?

The primary objective of this study was to explore specific self-defeating behaviour patterns of the selected participants. Thus, one of the aims was to discover the meaning participants attributed to their paradoxical behaviour. Another aim was to explore how participants define their procrastination and their awareness of its contradictory nature. Both aims were achieved by using phenomenology to describe and interpret the essential facets of the phenomenon investigated. It became clear during the study that academic procrastination was the most accessible route in attempting to understand the self-

defeating behaviour patterns of the participants. Thus, academic procrastination became the focus of the current study, and I explored the phenomenon to understand self-defeating behaviour better.

I explored participants' experiences as fully as possible. The exploration yielded a definition of procrastination as primarily negative and unwanted, yet necessary. The meaning attributed to procrastination was different for each participant. Amina felt that her procrastination facilitated action when required. Bruce felt that he used procrastination to delay tasks when he could not define the amount of studying required to study for a test successfully. Carrie interpreted her procrastination as allowing her to preserve her self-worth and cushion her from the impact of failure. Dinah found it difficult to find meaning in her procrastination but ultimately felt that it provided a margin of error that was acceptable and justified. She perceived the margin of error provided by procrastination as useful in avoiding the possibility of completing a task imperfectly. Emily perceived procrastination as a means of resisting compulsory tasks, but also as a means of protecting her self-worth from the consequences of assessment by others. Floyd accepted the disadvantages of his procrastination in the past and felt that it was required to complete the tasks that he defined as meaningless. The themes derived collectively from each participant denote an understanding of procrastination as purposeful in some form, specific to each participant. Thus, an exploration of participants' experiences of procrastination during the present study has led to reconceptualising procrastination as meaningful within a context that ultimately results in unwanted consequences.

Participants define success in multiple ways, and procrastination facilitates success in certain aspects relevant to them. Amina uses procrastination to start studying. Bruce uses procrastination to cope with feeling uncertain about what he is required to do. Carrie uses procrastination to protect her efforts and self-esteem in the event of failure. Dinah uses procrastination to avoid trying her best and to maintain the possibility of attaining a perfect result. Emily uses procrastination to protect her self-image and self-worth from others who may criticise her efforts. Floyd prefers to complete apathetic tasks only when the time or pressure to do so becomes unavoidable. They are all aware of the fact that their use of procrastination in this manner may jeopardise their long-term goals, but consistently prioritise goals related to self-preservation through strategic delay.

Participants choose to procrastinate but feel guilty about it. The choice to procrastinate is one they feel responsible for making each time, even though they do not fully understand why they consistently choose to do so. During the interviews, they attempted to find meaning in an apparently meaningless activity that remained difficult to define (i.e., procrastinating). Thus, procrastination is socially defined as paradoxical and accepted as paradoxical by the participants in the context of this study.

Participants attempted to resolve their paradoxical behaviour by shifting their sense of agency to others, objects, and their future selves. The ability to shift their agency is a habitual discovery and possibly used to cope with negative emotions as they occur. However, the societal construction of procrastination as a negative habit forces participants to define themselves as negative. Participants' strategic shift in agency only performs its intended function in the absence of measurable consequences. Measurable consequences can include failure at a task or accepting societal definitions of procrastination as negative. Their need for procrastination may stem from an emphasis on threats to their self-worth in their environment, which may result in the strategic avoidance of these threats.

Arguably, the most valuable conclusion reached in the current study is the use of procrastination as a means of regulating participants' uncertainty. Default mechanisms of avoidance and an emphasis on threats create the need for a strategy to resolve the uncertainty experienced as a result. Procrastination, although having negative consequences, is utilised to protect a perceived limited self-worth. Strategic procrastination accomplishes this by preserving the potential of an ideal future version of the self. Participants may perceive threats as reducing self-worth, and, thus, procrastination may assist in preserving their potential. Floyd, however, may actively acknowledge and accept that he prioritises his self-worth above the requirements of academic tasks. Thus, by procrastinating, he avoids experiences that he defines as meaningless. For the other participants, avoidance becomes habitual, and an automated strategy used to protect themselves from circumstances that may reduce their self-worth. Participants possibly utilise procrastination to divide the present self from the future self and, thus, avoid reductions in self-worth; or in Floyd's case, to prioritise meaningful experiences. Ultimately, for the selected participants, the benefit of maintaining self-worth outweighs the paradoxical outcomes of choosing to procrastinate.

The interpretation relating to the protection of self-worth is one that justifies the persistent choice to procrastinate and to accept the consequences thereof. In short, the benefits outweigh the costs and, therefore, justify the consistent choice to procrastinate. Participants, to an extent, seemed unaware of utilising procrastination in this manner, but understood that they procrastinated strategically for some reason. Being aware of the function served by procrastination may render the strategy meaningless and, thus, may explain why the function of procrastination remains unexplored by participants. Participants, instead, focus on the irrationality of their behaviour, without actively requiring an understanding of the specific function it may be performing. The perception of the environment as threatening by default may force the participants to regulate the uncertainty they feel by using an established coping mechanism. In contrast, Floyd may use procrastination to prioritise meaningful experiences over fulfilling academic obligations. Defining procrastination as purposeful creates conflict when most of the participants define procrastination as negative in accordance with societal norms. Thus, although the consequence of procrastination is self-defeating, the choice to do so may remain consistent to protect self-worth perceived as fragile or to delay apathetic tasks, in the case of Floyd. In conclusion, procrastination means something to participants, but an understanding thereof may threaten their ability to continue using it as a coping mechanism. Procrastination is a relatively certain means of navigating an uncertain world which is also perceived as threatening. The benefits of preserving potential or self-worth outweigh the consequences of consistently using procrastination strategically for this purpose.

6.4 Summary of Contributions

The article by Baumeister et al. (2007) convincingly argued that emotion shapes instead of causes behaviour. However, the authors found it difficult to conceptualise self-defeating behaviour as a beneficial evolutionary trait. Therefore, the authors argued that short-term benefits might appear appealing enough to outweigh long-term costs while individuals experience negative emotions. I have shown, at least in the context of the current study, that the preservation of self-worth may be a long-term benefit that outweighs the immediate negative consequences of self-defeating behaviour. Thus, individuals may prioritise self-worth over the costs of procrastinating. Their need to preserve self-worth may shape their decision to accept the consequences of

procrastination. The current study only focused on procrastination, and future research is required to understand whether the implications proposed here apply to other self-defeating behaviours. In short, it is possible that participants are not choosing a short-term solution due to a lack of foresight but may, instead, strategically be choosing to use procrastination for a specific purpose at the expense of required long-term academic goals. Long-term obligations do not necessarily outweigh the perceived need to preserve self-esteem. Ultimately, it appears that uncertainty steers participants' decision-making instead of their lack of foresight to focus on long-term goals. In addition, negative emotion in a world perceived as threatening or nonsensical may limit participants' ability to focus on socially prescribed long-term goals. In the context of the current study, procrastination is possibly utilised as a long-term strategy to preserve self-worth at a cost. Thus, although the outcome is negative, paradoxical, or maladaptive, the initial strategy fulfils its aim and, thus, remains consistent.

An exploration of individuals' experiences of procrastination provides contextually significant lived experiences of a phenomenon that is currently conceptualised as mysterious or paradoxical in current literature. Therefore, the current study provides qualitatively collected and analysed data to complement the various quantitative studies undertaken thus far. The findings of the current study imply that one can move beyond the paradox customarily associated with procrastination and find meaning in the actions of individuals who partake in this self-defeating behaviour.

As illustrated by Giguère et al. (2016), society plays a role in shaping how we define the concept of procrastination. In addition, the current study illustrates how that definition impacts those afflicted with procrastination and in most cases, increases procrastination. Therefore, the current study argues that interventions used to alleviate procrastination should consider the impact of conceptualising procrastination as paradoxical and the impact such a conceptualisation may have on the reduction of procrastination.

Future studies should not ignore the importance of emotion in the experiences of procrastination, as illustrated in this study and several others I refer to throughout this dissertation. Therefore, those who wish to treat individuals who procrastinate should also focus on the emotional cues that lead to procrastination rather than only on the cognitive aspects related to long-term academic goals. Emotional regulation has

repeatedly been shown to be a core feature of procrastination (Pychyl & Sirois, 2016), and, as a result, should become an area of focus in interventions designed to reduce procrastination.

6.5 Limitations of the Current Study

While undertaking specific research aims, each study is likely to experience limitations because no study can be perfectly executed. It is, at times, easier to observe a study's limitations once it has been completed (Willig, 2013); however, one should attempt to make the best possible choice at the moment it is required. A difficulty in the current study was the choice of focusing on self-defeating behaviour or procrastination as a core area of interest. My interactions with the participants led to the decision to change the focus from self-defeating behaviour to academic procrastination. Before commencing with the study, I could not know, but only estimate, that academic procrastination was the most significant self-defeating behaviour among participants. Upon confirmation, I chose to focus on procrastination throughout the study due to the amount of data devoted to this specific area. Qualitative inquiry does not normally remain static and, therefore, this change in direction was warranted and pursued when confirmed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The topic of self-defeating behaviours (especially procrastination) is one that I identify with personally. The personal impact of procrastination in my life served as the impetus for completing this dissertation. I would neatly fit in with the purposive requirements of the sample of individuals I selected, which has both its advantages and disadvantages. However, I do believe that my novel interpretation of the researched phenomenon would not have succeeded had it not been for my personal attachment to the topic under consideration.

The personal significance of procrastination may have limited the research conducted in one important way. One can argue that I may have had narrow assumptions when beginning the research, which would, ultimately, influence the type of conclusions I reached. My experience of the phenomenon may have, at times, blinded me to alternative explanations; certain aspects may have felt significant while, simultaneously, others may have seemed inessential based on my personal experience of the phenomenon. A researcher without this background or insider information may have seen several more

aspects of the phenomenon that may have enriched the possible transfer of these findings to more individuals. I conceded to this limitation but chose it carefully while weighing up the requirements to complete this study.

Upon considering the assumptions held in qualitative research, the above statements could apply to all possible researchers (whether personally affected by the phenomena or not). Our experiences dictate our interest areas and those interest areas are ultimately what we choose to research. Within a quantitative methodology, my level of objectivity would raise serious concerns. However, within a qualitative framework, I had to consider the impact my choices would have on the transparency and transferability of my conclusions. In saying so, I believe that I took the necessary steps to increase the validity of these findings qualitatively. In addition, I purposely avoided using reflexivity as a strategy for validation to remain focused on participants' experiences, as well as to complete the study in time. One can also consider my lack of reflexivity as a limitation of the present research.

One of the steps taken to enhance the credibility of the findings was to consult several sources in literature to distinguish between how current literature defines procrastination and how I experience it (Shenton, 2004). I also continually questioned the applicability of my assumptions to the participants and myself. Lastly, I did not shy away from disconfirming evidence from participants or even contrasting signifiers of procrastination between them. Many times, either the participants' experiences spoke more to the literature or I had interpreted meaning specific to them that was beyond the scope of current literature.

Although the reader may argue that my personal experience of self-defeating behaviour is a limitation to be avoided in future studies, I believe it played a significant role in this instance. The insider knowledge, at times, allowed me to identify and empathise with the participants on a level that would otherwise not be possible. I believe this was required for a topic which has, for a long time, been perceived as paradoxical, and my subjective experience thereof may have contributed to making sense of a phenomenon conventionally defined as nonsensical. This does not mean that my position as a procrastinator provided complete access to participants' experiences, although it provided a unique perspective and as a result, distinct interpretations.

6.6 Recommendations and Suggestions for Future Research on Self-defeating Behaviour

More studies should pursue a qualitative understanding of procrastination and other self-defeating behaviours because the approach can provide meaningful insight into behaviour only those who partake in it can sometimes understand. I hope that the current study has demonstrated the advantage of qualitative enquiry in the attempt to further knowledge related to procrastination and self-defeating behaviour. Alternatively, researchers who do not identify as procrastinators may utilise a similar design and assess how transferable the current findings are. Future studies could also follow mixed-method approaches to find meaningful insights and then attempt to generalise those insights using quantitative methods. The current study is exploratory, and therefore, provides possible insights to investigate using quantitative methods in future studies.

The focus of the current study was on academic procrastination due to the sample recruited. Future studies could focus on procrastination outside of the student population or on other self-defeating behaviours. For example, looking at tradeoffs in relation to retirement planning, productivity in the workplace, or as Carrie suggested, the tendency to delay acknowledging difficult emotions. A focus on alternative self-defeating behaviours may allow for an assessment of whether the findings contained herein are transferable to other self-defeating behaviours. In addition, conceptualising other self-defeating behaviours as plausibly purposeful for possible participants may extend our current understanding of "self-defeating" behaviour.

Future studies may also focus on how the current study re-conceptualised procrastination as a meaningful strategy used to navigate the uncertainty experienced by participants. If emotion controls us, as suggested by Baumeister et al. (2007), then procrastination may illustrate a pronounced ability to help participants strategically avoid threats while remaining unaware of the strategy behind their emotions. Future studies starting with the assumption that emotions possibly strategically direct our decisions to protect us from harm may contribute further to our understanding of the mechanisms behind self-defeating behaviour. In addition, future research may utilise reversal theory more comprehensively to assess the dynamic aspects of personality at work while utilising self-defeating behaviour (Apter, 2016).

6.7 Summary of Chapter 6 and Concluding Comments

Chapter 6 began by providing a summary of the findings discussed in previous chapters. A summarised version of the findings provided the reader with the context required to explore the conclusions reached in the sections that followed. Thereafter, I discussed the plausible contributions of the present study in light of the conclusions reached. Every study contains limitations and, therefore, I discussed the limitations present in this study for the reader to assess how far the conclusions reached might extend. Finally, I offered recommendations and suggestions for future research in relation to the findings, conclusions, and limitations discussed in the present study.

At the very beginning of this study, Bruce wondered why he consistently chose to procrastinate instead of studying. The present study argues that procrastination remains a consistent choice because it performs a purpose, which participants are not always aware of or willing to accept. Reconceptualising procrastination as meaningful to participants proved a unique journey, which may have led to an understanding of procrastination that differs from the conventional acceptance of procrastination as paradoxical. In addition, the current study may also have, indirectly, shed light on the ability of our emotions to protect us, even when such protection stands in contradiction to the long-term goals we may set for ourselves. Ultimately:

"Emotion, which is suffering, ceases to be suffering as soon as we form a clear and precise picture of it."

Baruch Spinoza

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: RESEARCHER-DEVELOPED SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

STUDENT EXPERIENCES OF SELF-DEFEATING BEHAVIOURS

QUESTIONNAIRE

There are no right or wrong answers. I am only interested in your actual personal experiences and feelings about your own self-defeating behaviour (if applicable). My aim is to try to gain insight into your experience of self-defeating behaviours. Every possible manner to ensure your anonymity has been adhered to and your data may only be accessed by me (Sulaiyman Philander), the principal researcher.

PAGE 1 OF 3

Please choose only **ONE** option unless specified otherwise for the questions below.

1. Choose one of the following options

I do not procrastinate at all.	Sometimes I procrastinate.	I procrastinate often.	I am a procrastinator, I procrastinate all the time.
◯	◯	◯	◯

2. How often do you procrastinate before an upcoming test/assignment that is important to you?

Never	Sometimes	Often	All the time
◯	◯	◯	◯

3. How many hours did you spend procrastinating before your last important test/assignment?

0 hours	1 - 2 hours	2 - 4 hours	More than 4 hours
◯	◯	◯	◯

Other amount of time (please specify)

4. In your opinion, would procrastinating have an impact on the final test mark obtained by a student?

- ◯ In my opinion, it has no effect on a student's mark.
- ◯ It has little effect on a students mark, everyone procrastinates.
- ◯ I never really thought about it before.
- ◯ It can have a negative impact on a students mark.
- ◯ The more a student procrastinates, the worse their mark will be.

5. How often do you let your friends know that you procrastinated before an important test/assignment?

- ◯ I do not procrastinate.
- ◯ Never
- ◯ I never really thought about it.
- ◯ Occasionally
- ◯ All the time.

STUDENT EXPERIENCES OF SELF-DEFEATING BEHAVIOURS

QUESTIONNAIRE

6. How much control do you feel you have over the amount of time you spend procrastinating?

- ◯ I do not procrastinate.
- ◯ I feel like I am in control of the amount of time I spend procrastinating.
- ◯ At times, I feel in control but it depends on the situation.
- ◯ I do not feel like I am in control of how much time I spend procrastinating.

7. Which of the following options are applicable to you? (You may choose more than one option for this question)

- ☐ I smoke cigarettes.
- ☐ I am shy.
- ☐ I have abused other substances before (for example, alcohol).
- ☐ I have neglected my health before (for example, I did not take my medication as recommended by my doctor).
- ☐ None are applicable.

8. How often do you find yourself wondering why you procrastinate before important tests/assignments?

- ◯ I wonder about why I procrastinate, all the time.
- ◯ I often wonder about why I procrastinate.
- ◯ Sometimes, I wonder about why I procrastinated.
- ◯ I do not really wonder about why I procrastinate
- ◯ I know why I procratinate
- ◯ I do not procrastinate

9. Do you usually tend to procrastinate before important tests/assignments?

No	Yes
◯	◯

STUDENT EXPERIENCES OF SELF-DEFEATING BEHAVIOURS

QUESTIONNAIRE

PAGE 3 OF 3

10. If you have answered yes to the previous question (Question 9), why do you feel you need to procrastinate before an important test/assignment?

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM - PARTICIPATION

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

PARTICIPANT'S INFORMATION LEAFLET

Researcher's name: Sulaiyman Philander
Student Number: 24286321
Department of: Psychology
University of Pretoria

To whom it may concern

The Phenomenological exploration of undergraduate student experiences of self-defeating behaviours

INTRODUCTION:

My name is Sulaiyman Philander and I am a student from the Department of Psychology at the University of Pretoria. You are invited to volunteer your participation in my research project on The Phenomenological exploration of undergraduate student experiences of self-defeating behaviours.

DEFINITION: SELF-DEFEATING BEHAVIOUR

An action or behaviour which ultimately leads to a negative outcome. The negative outcome is not intentional in this case and the person does not always foresee the negative outcome. In addition, the person may believe that they gain something positive at the time or that the behaviour will lead to a positive outcome. The outcome is negative because the person does not sufficiently complete the goal they initially intended to achieve.

For example: When students do not feel like studying for a test. They may do something else which is enjoyable. They may believe that they still have a lot of time to study. In the course of these actions, the test date draws nearer and they have still not studied sufficiently. They may get poor marks for the test. It is important to note that the student never intended to get poor marks for the test and that they believed they still had enough time to study. This specific behaviour is known as procrastination and is one of many different types of self-defeating behaviour.

You may also benefit from this study by becoming aware of your own self-defeating behaviour patterns and therefore seek solutions to help you change your behaviour if you wish to do so. Student Support Services (012 420 2333) are also available to you free of charge as a registered student, whether you take part in this study or not.

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YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

The purpose of this study is to explore and ultimately try to understand why people use self-defeating behaviours such as procrastination. By documenting your experiences, I (the researcher) will try to form themes around your experiences of self-defeating behaviour. The data collected will then be used to form part of my Masters dissertation. With your consent, the results of this study may also be used in full or in part of future research articles as well as presented at conferences.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can refuse to participate or stop at any time without stating any reason. Your withdrawal will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. The results will not contain any information that can be used to identify you and your anonymity will be protected at all times.

If you choose to participate you will be asked complete a questionnaire. The completion of the questionnaire may take between 5 - 15 minutes. I will require some form of contact information, if you are still interested in further participating in the study. I (the researcher) will be the only one who has your contact information. Your contact information will only be used to arrange an informal interview with you.

The study protocol was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria within the Faculty of humanities and the committee has granted written approval.

If you have any questions during this study, please do not hesitate to approach me. You may also contact the researcher on sulaiyman.philander@up.ac.za or 062 292 3344 should you have any questions related to the study.

Thank you for your time and consideration.
I sincerely appreciate you help.

Yours truly,

Sulaiyman Philander

_____

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INFORMED CONSENT FORM

1. Title of research project: The Phenomenological exploration of undergraduate student experiences of self-defeating behaviours

2. I hereby voluntarily grant my permission for participation in the project as explained to me by: Sulaiyman Philander

3. Upon signature of this form, you will be provided with a copy.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Researcher: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM - INTERVIEW

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

PARTICIPANT'S INFORMATION LEAFLET

Researcher's name: Sulaiyman Philander
Student Number: 24286321
Department of: Psychology
University of Pretoria

To whom it may concern

The Phenomenological exploration of undergraduate student experiences of self-defeating behaviours

INTRODUCTION:

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For example: When students do not feel like studying for a test. They may do something else which is enjoyable. They may believe that they still have a lot of time to study. In the course of these actions, the test date draws nearer and they have still not studied sufficiently. They may get poor marks for the test. It is important to note that the student never intended to get poor marks for the test and that they believed they still had enough time to study. This specific behaviour is known as procrastination and is one of many different types of self-defeating behaviour.

You may also benefit from this study by becoming aware of your own self-defeating behaviour patterns and therefore seek solutions to help you change your behaviour if you wish to do so. Student Support Services (012 420 2333) are also available to you free of charge as a registered student, whether you take part in this study or not.

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The purpose of this study is to explore and ultimately try to understand why people use self-defeating behaviours such as procrastination. By documenting your experiences, I (the researcher) will try to form themes around your experiences of self-defeating behaviour. The data collected will then be used to form part of my Masters dissertation. With your consent, the results of this study may also be used in full or in part of future research articles as well as presented at conferences.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can refuse to participate or stop at any time without stating any reason. Your withdrawal will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. The results will not contain any information that can be used to identify you and your anonymity will be protected at all times.

If you choose to participate you will be asked complete a questionnaire. The completion of the questionnaire may take between 5 - 15 minutes. I will require some form of contact information, if you are still interested in further participating in the study. I (the researcher) will be the only one who has your contact information. Your contact information will only be used to arrange an informal interview with you.

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Thank you for your time and consideration.
I sincerely appreciate you help.

Yours truly,

Sulaiyman Philander

_____

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

1. Title of research project: The Phenomenological exploration of undergraduate student experiences of self-defeating behaviours

2. I hereby voluntarily grant my permission to participate in an interview as explained to me by: Sulaiyman Philander

3. Upon signature of this form, you will be provided with a copy.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Researcher: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE

A) EXPLORING THE PARTICIPANTS IDENTIFIED SELF-DEFEATING BEHAVIOUR

1. What's your view on self-defeating behaviour
2. In your opinion what makes these behaviours self-defeating?
3. Can you describe a point in your life, where you felt like you were defeating yourself?
   PROMPT: for example, I shouldn't smoke, I should've studied harder or if only I wasn't shy at that moment.
4. What thoughts are going through your mind at the time?
   PROMPT: Are you okay with your actions, accept what happened or do you criticize yourself?
5. Do you feel like your actions are self-defeating?
6. Can you describe what makes you feel like your actions are self-defeating?
7. Do you ever talk to someone about this experience or other experiences of self-defeat?
8. How do others react when you share your experience/s with them?
   PROMPT: Is this the reaction you are expecting?

B) EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF SELF-DEFEATING BEHAVIOUR ON THE INDIVIDUAL

9. Looking back, could you name any positive or negative aspects related to your experience.
   PROMPT: If there are more negatives ask question 10
10. Why do you think you continue/d to defeat yourself if there are more negatives than positives?
11. Do you ever feel like you could've have made different choices if you wanted to. Do you feel like you are in control of your decisions?
    PROMPT: If you could, would you take back some of the decisions you've made?
12. Do you ever feel as though you have missed a lot of opportunities because of decisions you have made in the past?
    PROMPT: Ask participant to elaborate further.

C) EXTENT OF IDENTIFICATION

13. Can you describe the impact self-defeating behaviour has had in your life?
14. Why do you think you do it?
15. Is your self-defeating behaviour something you would want to change about yourself?
16. IF YES: What do think is stopping you from changing your behaviour?
17. Is there anything you would like to add, any additional comments or something you would like to discuss some more?

PROMPT: Anything you feel that I have left out that you feel is important?

APPENDIX E: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTION / NOTATION

CONVENTIONS/ NOTATION USED:

[pauses] - indicates a lengthy pause

, and ., and .., - indicates briefer pauses depending on length of pause

[laughs] or [exhales] - indicates nonverbal gestures or communication

A dash such as – indicates using a different sentence or word midway through speaking

( ) – indicates added information to clarify text or a possible interpretation of inaudible material

(inaudible- specified time e.g 01. 11) indicates lapses of audibility and time noted e.g at one minute and 11 seconds

… - indicates tailing off or continuing to speak after an interruption.

“ ” – indicates thoughts or speech quoted from someone other than the participant or interviewer or previous thoughts of the participant themselves

_____ - indicates protecting information that could be used to identify the participant

[sic] - indicates non-existent words or incorrect usage of words by the participant

Words in bold – Indicated words emphasised by the participant or the researcher (only applicable in chapter 4 and 5, emphasised words by the participants are italicised in original transcripts)

[Words not in italics] – Indicates words added by the researcher to contextualise and clarify information quoted by the participants (only applicable to chapters 4 and 5 and not in original transcripts)

APPENDIX F: AUDIT TRAIL

Please note that the reader can find a full audit trial pertaining to the current study, which is available as a web page (including instructions) on the compact disk provided. The web page includes:

- statistics regarding the number of documents, quotations, codes or subordinate themes, and code families or superordinate themes
- Full transcripts for each of the six participants
- All quotes with exploratory comments included as described in chapters 3 and 5
- All codes/subordinate themes linked to corresponding quotes utilised
- All code families/superordinate themes linked to corresponding quotes utilised

An electronic copy of the complete dissertation can also be found on the compact disk accompanying the hard copy of this dissertation.