

**An investigation into the motives and aspects of career development of university students with regard to studying psychology at first-year level.**

By

**Clive Hartsman**

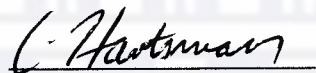
**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of M. Psych (Clinical) in the Department of Psychology at the University of the Western Cape.**

**May 2000**

**Supervisor : Prof. L. Simbayi**

## DECLARATION

The author hereby declares that this whole thesis, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in this text, is his own work.



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## ABSTRACT

Psychology is a very popular course amongst first year university students in South Africa. However, an interesting paradox is that psychology is sometimes accused of being largely irrelevant in South Africa. In contrast, psychology has in general not been a popular discipline at universities in the rest of Africa. The main foci of this study were firstly to explore the motives of students who enrol in a Psychology course at the first-year level at the University of the Western Cape, and secondly to explore aspects of the career development of these students which relate to the field of psychology. A focus group study was conducted, which consisted of three focus groups. All the participants in the study were first-year psychology students who had volunteered to participate. The data generated by the focus groups was thematically content analysed. Three major themes emerged, namely: the appeal of psychology as an academic discipline; reflections regarding participants' careers and reflections regarding psychology in the South African context. In general it can be stated that psychology appealed to many participants as a means of being of service to others. Many also believed that psychology was a useful vehicle for understanding themselves as well as for helping themselves with their own psychological difficulties. All the participants revealed that at this stage of their lives, they were thinking about their future careers and exploring various ideas and options in this regard. Most participants expressed an interest in either working in the field of psychology, or in using what they had learned in psychology by applying this knowledge to another area of work. In terms of psychology's role in South Africa, many believed that psychology had a role to play in helping the victims of crime. Many also believed that psychology had a useful role to play in helping to ameliorate some of the problems encountered in educational settings, particularly in primary schools and high

schools. In terms of psychology's popularity in South Africa compared with the rest of Africa, the findings of the study suggest that this phenomenon may relate to the impact of popular North American culture on South Africa, such as television programmes. Various recommendations were made in response to the findings of the study and several suggestions for future research were made. It is hoped that the findings of this study would be of use to those who teach psychology, especially in the South African context, as well as those who are involved in the re-shaping of psychology as a profession in South Africa.



## CHAPTER 1

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the area of investigation by providing relevant background information and outlines the aims of this research. It concludes by providing a layout of the rest of the mini-thesis.

#### 1.1 Background and motivation of the study

There has been a remarkable growth in the number of students majoring in psychology in South Africa from the mid 1970s to 1993. In 1993, 6825 students, who constituted one third of all first year university students in South Africa, were enrolled in a psychology course. This means that 8% of the total student enrolment in all South African Universities was registered for a psychology course at first-year level. In the same year, the University of the Western Cape (UWC) had 15.2% of its total student number registered for the first year psychology course, which represents the highest proportion of all the universities in South Africa (Richter *et al.*, 1998).

In the light of the popularity of psychology as a subject of choice amongst so many South African students, it is an interesting paradox that psychology is sometimes accused of being largely irrelevant in South Africa. According to Louw and Edwards (1993), there are at least four reasons for this accusation. Firstly, psychology is an American-European import, which as currently practised is of little if any value to the majority of South Africans, who are Black. Secondly, there are few Black psychologists and this has seriously hamstrung the offering of appropriate psychological services

within the Black community. Thirdly, most psychological research has focused on issues pertaining to Whites. With regard to psychometric tests, by far the majority of tests have only been standardised for Whites. Fourthly, many psychologists, either by acts of omission or commission, stand accused of having colluded with the apartheid state (Louw & Edwards, 1993). In addition, psychology has in general not been a highly prioritised nor popular academic discipline on the African continent (University of Zambia Funding Proposal, undated ; C.Myambo, personal communication, 4 June 1998). The reason for the latter may be partly ascribed to a limited number of bursaries available for post graduate students in psychology (University of Zambia Funding Proposal, undated) as well as a paucity of career opportunities in the field of psychology on the continent as a whole (C.Myambo, personal communication, 4 June 1998). In addition, psychology is often viewed as a colonial import from Western Europe and the United States of America (Moghaddam & Taylor, 1986), with limited use in Africa.

In a review of employment opportunities in South Africa for psychology graduates, Richter *et al.* (1998) suggest that current training methods in psychology are not producing the human resources necessary to meet the social needs of the country. Further they suggest that data on social trends as well as information regarding the continuing development of the psychological profession "be used to reflect on current social and psychological practise and tertiary educational curricula in psychology" (Richter *et al.*, 1998, p. 1).

The great popularity of psychology at UWC is an interesting phenomenon. The question arises: "What makes psychology as a subject so appealing to so many students?" Many psychologists appear to be debating the issue of whether their discipline has an important role to play in South African society. Information regarding the



reasons for the popularity of psychology courses at UWC amongst undergraduate students may provide useful information in terms of the above mentioned debate. This study forms part of a larger project which is an initiative of the UWC Department of Psychology which relates to providing "access and success" to it's students.

### **1.2 Statement of the research problem**

Many students in South African universities study psychology at first-year level. It appears as though no research has been published which seeks to understand what motivates this large number of students to do so. The lack of information in this regard prompted the initiation of the current study.

### **1.3 Aim of the present study**

The main aim of the study was to gather information from a sample of Psychology 1 students at UWC regarding their motivation for studying psychology, aspects of their career development in relation to psychology and their views about the value of the subject, both in their own lives as well as for South Africa as a whole.

### **1.4 Significance of the study**

It is hoped that the information generated by this study will be of value to those who teach psychology in South African universities as well as those who are involved in the re-shaping of psychology as a profession in South Africa.

### **1.5 Layout of the rest of the mini-thesis**

In Chapter 2, a review of the literature and theoretical perspectives relevant to this study

will be found.

Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology employed in this study. It includes a description of the participants, the research design, the procedure of data collection and the analysis of the data.

Chapter 4 contains the results of the data analysis. The results are presented as three main themes, namely : the appeal of psychology as an academic discipline; reflections regarding participants' careers; and reflections regarding psychology in the South African context. When the researcher thought that a particular quote was helpful with regard to illuminating the material in question, it was included verbatim.

Chapter 5 is a discussion of the results. The researcher attempted to explore and integrate the various findings of the focus groups, relating them to the literature discussed in Chapter 2. He also sought to offer possible interpretations for the findings. The rest of the chapter discusses the limitations of the study and suggests ideas regarding possible future research in this area.

Chapter 6 presents several recommendations, made in response to the findings of this study. This is followed by a conclusion to the study.

## **1.6 Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided some background information relevant to the study and attempted to highlight the need for studies such as the present one. The chapter concluded with a description of the layout of the rest of the mini-thesis.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses literature which pertains to the current study. The chapter begins by discussing several studies which are marginally related to the current study. It goes on to discuss only two studies which relate directly to the current study. Thereafter, the chapter focuses on several theories of career development and suggests that one of them, the Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad and Herma theory of Career Development (1951), may help the researcher and reader to understand and interpret the results of the current study.

#### 2.1 Literature Review

##### 2.1.1. *Attitudes, interests and values of undergraduate students who major in psychology*

A literature search revealed a scarcity of studies which specifically investigated the motivation of undergraduate students for studying psychology. There were only two international studies which appeared to be directly related to the current study. The first of these is the study by Cupchik, Klajner and Riley (1984), which investigated the values, attitudes and beliefs of a sample of 409 undergraduate students who were enrolled in psychology courses at the University of Toronto. They found that these students especially valued the following two aspects of psychology: first and foremost it's professional-healing orientation and second, as a vehicle for 'understanding', wisdom and self awareness. The authors suggest that the professional-healing orientation

suggests a high level of dedication to service and healing, and they further presume that this orientation reflects the employment concerns of these students. The authors further suggest that the second most important attraction of psychology to these students, that of the vehicle for wisdom, understanding and self-awareness, is not associated with professional aspirations, but is rather the expression of a personal quest.

The second study which appears to have a direct link to the current study is the one by Lunneborg and Lunneborg (1991). With regard to the career interests of university students who major in psychology, these researchers found that such students, whilst in high school, displayed vocational interests in artistic, general cultural, scientific and service areas - in that order.

A literature search failed to reveal any studies dealing with the motivations, values, interests and aspirations of undergraduate psychology students in South Africa. There is therefore a gap in our knowledge about this topic and hence the present study.

### ***2.1.2 Undergraduate student misperceptions about psychology***

There are a few studies which although marginally related to the current study, do enrich one's understanding about undergraduate psychology students in general. A number of international studies (e.g., Best, 1982; Furnham & Rawles, 1992) as well as a South African study (Simbayi, 1994) have shown that both prospective psychology students as well as students currently enrolled in psychology courses at universities have many misperceptions about the field of psychology. For example, Simbayi (1994) found the following misperceptions amongst first-year students at a university in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, who were enrolled in an industrial psychology course: only 5% of the sample (of 90 students) believed that psychologists could help poor people; as many as

23% believed that psychologists could read other people's minds; only 49% believed that a psychologist could give teenagers advice about jobs; only 72% believed that psychologists could help children with serious problems at school.

These studies serve as a warning that many of the students registered for Psychology 1 at UWC may have misperceptions about psychology as an academic discipline and/or as a career. Although the current study did not seek to investigate directly any misperceptions which the students may have regarding psychology, it will however be of great interest to note if there were any misperceptions regarding psychology which the participants would reveal in the course of the study.

## **2.2 Theoretical Perspectives of career development**

It seems a reasonable assumption to make that first year university students, in one way or another, are involved in a decision-making process regarding their future careers. There are a large number of competing theories of career development. These theories are relatively immature - they are fragments which attempt to make sense of a portion of human behaviour (Osipow, 1983). For the purposes of the current study, it appears that Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad and Herma's (1951) wide ranging theory of Career Development may provide a useful theoretical orientation.

### ***2.2.1 Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad and Herma's theory of Career Development***

This theory, first published in 1951, takes cognisance of a multitude of elements involved in the process of career development in a person's life. In 1972 Ginzberg modified certain aspects of the theory. The basic theory, however, is unaffected by these modifications (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996) and will thus be utilised in it's original form.

An element of this theory which may cast some light on the motivation and aspects of career development of first year psychology students is its description of the various phases of career development.

Ginsberg and his associates postulated three major periods in the process of career development, namely, the Fantasy, Tentative and Realistic periods (Osipow, 1973). During the Fantasy period, the child fantasises about an occupation without reference to reality. During the Tentative period, children begin to discover what they enjoy doing. They soon realise that there are some things they can do more skilfully than others and they thus learn to review their fantasies in the light of their actual capacities. Later in this period, the notions of service to society and life-style associated with various careers come to the fore. The final stage of the Tentative period is known as the Transition stage (approximately age 17 or 18) and it is possible that some UWC Psychology 1 students can be located here. This is a phase during which the young person no longer only considers values, interests and capacities. The focus now also shifts to considerations of realistic aspects of work - for example, career options, length of studies and so on. The end of the Transition stage flows into the third major period, the Realistic period (approximately ages 18 to 24).

The initial stage of this period is called the Exploration Stage and it is quite possible that some UWC Psychology 1 students can be located in this stage. This stage is a continuation of the Transition stage characterised by the attempt to acquire the knowledge and experience which will help the person to make an occupational choice (Nelson-Jones, 1982). Sources of career related information include exploring various subjects of study and discussions with teachers and career advisers.

### **2.2.2 Alternative theories of career development**

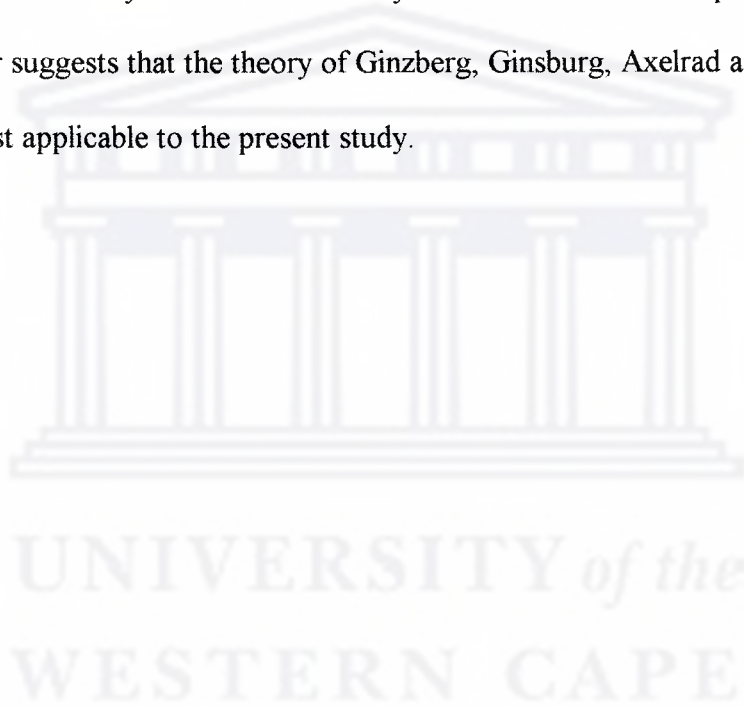
The field of theory building and research with regard to career development has been an active one over the previous two decades (Lent, Brown & Hackett 1994). During this time, several new theoretical formulations have been introduced, for example, the Social Learning Theory of Krumboltz, Mitchell and Jones (1976). Further, during this period, other well-known theories have been modified, for example, Super's (1990) Developmental Self-Concept Theory of Vocational Behaviour. In spite of these relatively recent developments, as well as some short-comings in the basic theory of Ginzberg *et al.* (1951), this researcher proposes to make use of Ginsberg *et al.*'s (1951) theory. The reason is that this theory, amongst other things, provides information about what career-related behaviour may be expected from a group of people in the age range of approximately 18 - 24 years.

This study does not intend to delve deeply into the personalities of these students. If this were the case, another theory, for example, Super's Self-Concept Developmental Theory (1990) or the Social Learning Theory of Krumboltz, Mitchell and Jones (1976), may have been more appropriate. However, even if the aim of the study was to focus on individuals in depth, as Stead and Watson (1998) have pointed out, the application of Super's theory in the South African context is problematic. They suggest that Super's theory does not adequately consider the importance of a variety of issues on black South Africans such as ethnic identity, discrimination, unemployment and world-view.

The present study aims to assess general trends and themes, related to the study topic, amongst *groups* of students. For these reasons it appears that Ginsberg *et al.*'s theory (1951) appears to be an appropriate one in terms of providing a theoretical background for the study.

### **2.3 Chapter Summary**

It appears that very few studies have investigated the motivation of undergraduate students for studying psychology. Two studies which relate directly to this topic were reviewed in this chapter. No South African studies of this nature were found in the literature. Several other studies - both international as well as a South African study, which are marginally related to the present study, were also briefly reviewed. Finally, the chapter presents a discussion regarding the applicability of career development theories to the present study. Of all the currently available career development theories, the researcher suggests that the theory of Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad and Herma (1951) is the most applicable to the present study.





## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter provides a detailed presentation of the methodology utilised in this study. It includes a description of the participants, the research instrument, the research design, the procedure of data collection and the analysis of the data.

#### **3.1 Participants**

Once the first-year psychology students had been informed about this study and invited to participate, approximately 20 of them volunteered to do so. In this way, three focus groups were arranged. Seventeen participants eventually participated in the three focus groups. Two focus groups consisted of six participants each while the third one consisted of five participants. All the volunteers were coloured females. With regard to their ages: five participants were 18 years old; six were 19 years old; five were 20 years old; one was 21 years old.

There were 633 students registered for Psychology 1 in 1999 at UWC. A fairly large number of the students who have registered for Psychology 1 did not do so of their own volition. Rather, they had committed themselves to study programmes such as nursing or teaching (HDE) and were expected to do the subject as part of their course requirements. Others were students who sought to do Psychology 1 as a "filler" subject whilst they pursued studies in a field only indirectly connected with psychology, for example, law. It was decided to exclude these two groups from the study. In other words, any Psychology 1 student who was already aligned with a career outside the field

of psychology was excluded from the study. This left a population of students who were all BA students, registered with the Faculty of Arts.

### **3.2 Research Instrument**

In this study, focus groups were utilised as the setting for generating the data. A list of questions, referred to as a "questioning route" (Krueger, 1994) was used to collect the data. These questions, or topics of discussion, were carefully pre-determined and based on the information needed to answer the research questions. Another option would have been to have had a list of topics and to have spontaneously composed relevant questions as the focus group progressed. The "questioning route" was the technique of choice for the following reasons. Firstly, it ensures that the question asked is exactly what the facilitator intended. This promotes the generation of relevant data. Secondly, it takes a high level of mastery to be able to spontaneously compose a question which captures the essence of a topic. For this reason, the questioning route is advised for relatively inexperienced facilitators (Krueger, 1994). The questioning route used in the study is included in this mini-thesis as Appendix A.

With regard to the validity of the research instrument, Krueger suggests that "focus groups are valid if they are used carefully for a problem that is suitable for focus group enquiry" (Krueger, 1994, p. 31). Focus groups usually have a high face validity, in other words, the results appear to be valid. This is largely due to the believability of comments from participants (Krueger, 1994). The reliability of focus groups is poor. In spite of this, however, as discussed below, in the context of this study, focus groups were an appropriate and powerful research instrument.



### **3.3 Research Design**

The study was an exploratory one - the intention was to generate qualitative data relating to students': motivations, perceptions, experiences, opinions, values and goals with regard to studying psychology. For this reason, a qualitative study seemed to be more appropriate than a quantitative study. Due to the exploratory nature of the study, the researcher decided that an appropriate technique for gathering data would be via focus groups. Focus groups are commonly employed for an in-depth exploration of a topic about which little is known (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

Focus groups are group discussions, with ideally between 6 and 9 participants, which seek to understand their views on certain pre-determined topics. Smaller focus groups, with 4 to 6 participants may also be utilised (Krueger, 1994).

A focus group study usually consists of a minimum of three focus groups. After the third group, the researcher should evaluate the situation; if necessary, further groups may be held until it appears that no new major ideas or themes emerge (Krueger, 1994). This approach was applied to the current study.

Another possible method of data gathering in this study would have been via individual interviews. However, according to Stewart and Shamdasani (1994), focus groups were likely to offer several advantages over individual interviews for the following reasons: Firstly, they tend to allow for spontaneous, unconventional responses. The reason for this is that no individual is required to answer any specific question. Participants thus tend to speak only when they have definite views not because a question demands a response. Secondly, focus groups are likely to be less intimidating and provide a greater sense of "security" for participants than individual interviews, since the researcher in the former is less intrusive and directive than is the case in the latter. This feature of focus

groups is likely to be extremely useful in this study since the participants are first-year university students who may be somewhat intimidated when asked by a stranger (who is associated with the University of the Western Cape's Psychology Department) to reveal personal information regarding their studies in psychology. Thirdly, focus groups often have a synergistic effect, the combined effort of group members promoting a greater disclosure of ideas than via individual interviews. Fourthly, a "snowballing" effect often happens in focus groups whereby the comment of one individual elicits a chain of responses from other individuals. Fifthly, the level of excitement about the topic often increases after a while, encouraging group members to express themselves. Sixth, it is more likely that a new, totally unexpected idea will emerge in a focus group than in an individual interview. Finally, larger numbers of people are interviewed in focus groups within a given time than in individual interviews.

All methods of data collection, however, have limitations. The following disadvantages of focus groups apply in the context of this study. Firstly, the information which the focus groups generated should be generalised with caution due to the nature of the participant recruiting procedure. The participants cannot be regarded as a representative sample of the population upon which this study has focused. All three focus groups consisted of female, coloured students. Thus, no males, nor members of other population groups were represented. In addition, the participants were volunteers. Thus, the findings of this study may not apply to first-year psychology students in general.

Another issue which further limits the generalisation of the results is the fact that the responses of group members are not independent from one another. This does not mean that all generalisation is inappropriate. The generalisations which one makes based on

the data generated by the focus groups should, however, be general, tentative and descriptive, rather than specific. Secondly, group "dynamics" may cause the results of a focus group to be biased. For example, a dominant group member may influence others, whilst a reserved participant may not venture any information. Thirdly, the results may be difficult to interpret. Fourthly, the focus group facilitator may bias results by unwittingly providing cues about desirable responses (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

### **3.4 Procedure**

Permission was sought from the Head of Department of Psychology at UWC to carry out this study. Once granted, permission was also sought from tutors/lecturers to inform the potential participants about the study and invite them to participate. In accordance with a well-established tradition in focus group research (Krueger, 1994; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990), as a token of appreciation for the time commitment which participation in a focus group requires, each potential participant was offered a R25 reward for volunteering to participate in a focus group. Once the latter had been informed of the study, those who were interested in participating provided the researcher with their names and contact telephone numbers. Three focus groups were arranged. Each participant received a reminder call the day before the focus group. The interval between the three focus groups was approximately one week. The first focus group was held late in September 1999.

The present researcher was the facilitator of the focus groups. He was assisted by a co-facilitator, a black male who is a masters student in his first year of training in the clinical psychology programme at UWC, and who has some experience in co-facilitating focus groups.

The venue for two of the focus groups was the "Honours Room" in the Psychology Department. For the second focus group this venue was unavailable and a nearby smaller, but adequate venue was used. Each focus group ran for approximately 60 minutes. Each focus group was captured on audio-tape.

Each focus group's audio-tape was supplemented by the field notes taken during the session as well as by a discussion from the debriefing of the co-facilitator. The field notes included major points of discussion and information which was difficult or impossible to record on tape such as group dynamics. In this regard the field notes of the co-facilitator were especially important, since the latter has more time to make detailed notes of this nature than the facilitator. The debriefing with the co-facilitator happened immediately after the focus group has finished and was captured on audio tape. The reason for this is that first impressions are often soon forgotten and should thus be recorded as soon as possible.

### **3.5 Data analysis**

Data analysis was via the tape-based analysis option. This involved careful listening to the audio tape and the preparation of an abridged transcript (Krueger, 1994). The transcript was close to a verbatim transcript with the following differences. Firstly, non-language sounds such as "um" or "er" were not included. Secondly, if a comment was very long, it was summarised, using the same or similar words to those which the participant had used. Thirdly, in the few places that responses were difficult to hear - either due to a soft voice or to more than one participant speaking simultaneously - the response was listened to carefully and then summarised in an effort to place on record the essence of what the participant was saying. These abridged transcripts are included

in the mini- thesis as Appendix B. The transcript was then subjected to an analysis based on a model suggested by Vaughn, Schumm and Sinagub (1996). Data analysis consisted of the following four steps: firstly, *identifying the big ideas*; secondly, *unitizing the data*; thirdly, *categorising the data*; and fourthly, *identifying themes and use of theory*. Each of these steps will now be discussed in turn.

### **3.5.1 Step 1: Identifying the "big ideas"**

The "big ideas" emerged after careful consideration of the data; listening and re-listening to the audio tapes as well as reading and re-reading the abridged transcripts of the three focus groups. Krueger (1994) likens this process to detective work, suggesting that one tries to discover trends and patterns - the "big ideas"- which reappear among the various focus groups. The big ideas were refined as the process of analysis proceeded. However, they provided an initial orientation or framework, which allowed the subsequent steps in data analysis, which entail the consideration of smaller "units" of data, to unfold in a meaningful and logical fashion. In other words, it allowed the researcher to not "miss the forest for the trees" (Vaughn *et al.*, 1996, p. 105).

### **3.5.2 Step 2: Unitising the data**

This step entailed a careful reading through the transcript and then cutting out (with a pair of scissors) and sorting the basic units of data, as described by Steward and Shamdasani (1990). In essence, each statement of each participant was considered as a unit of data. At this stage it was possible to continue with the next step, namely, categorising the units.

### **3.5.3 Step 3: Categorising the units**

This step entailed sorting the recently identified units into meaningful categories or themes. In this step, those information units that were related to the same content were brought together. Categories served as headings, providing an organisational theme for the units of data. During this step, the researcher defined the properties of each category, enabling him to place each unit of data in the appropriate category. Once this process was completed, the researcher reviewed all the categories - their defining characteristics and the criteria for including data into a specific category. The placement of all units of data was then reviewed, to see that each unit was placed in the appropriate category. This entire review process resulted in a few minor changes as a few units of data were moved into more appropriate categories.

### **3.5.4 Step 4: Identifying the themes**

The final step was to *identify the themes* in the data. This step basically re-examined the "big ideas" which emerged in the first step. The researcher questioned whether the "big ideas" established during the first step were supported or contradicted by the various categories and their respective units of data (which had been created in Steps 2 and 3). At this stage the researcher realised that the "big ideas" had not been contradicted by the analytic work done in steps 2 and 3. However, the researcher was now much more familiar with nuances of the data which had not been apparent during the first step of analysis. The researcher was now in a position to refine and transform the initial "big ideas" into various themes and sub-themes. These themes and sub-themes constitute the "Results" of the study which are presented in Chapter 4.



### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

The researcher took care to explain the exact nature and purpose of the research project to all prospective participants. Informed consent was sought from all participants. Those who volunteered were free to withdraw from the research at any time. The participants were informed that the research would not have any direct benefit to themselves - in terms of their marks etc.. Conversely, it was explained that nothing that they revealed would cause them any harm. Confidentiality was assured and ensured with regard to data publication as their names would not be revealed.

### **3.7 Self-reflexive issues of the researcher**

Self-reflexivity is an important aspect of qualitative research (Banister, Burman, Taylor & Tindal, 1994). The following are some of the researcher's thoughts and ideas regarding this study. They are not presented in order of importance - rather, they are presented as a group of inter-related reflections.

The researcher is a white person and was aware that due to the demographic profile of the first-year psychology class at UWC, there were very few potential white participants in the study. Thus, in an effort to prevent or minimise any "colour" barrier which may have arisen in the focus groups, he recruited a black co-facilitator. It was and remains very difficult to ascertain the effect of the researcher's race on the outcome of the focus groups.

The researcher is a male, as is the co-facilitator. All the participants were females - there were no male volunteers for the focus groups. It is thus possible that this may have had some impact on the focus groups. For example, had the researcher and/or co-facilitator been female, additional or different data may have emerged. Likewise, had

there been some males amongst the volunteers it may have resulted in the emergence of additional or different data. In addition, the presence of male volunteers may also have affected the dynamics of the focus groups.

Language may have played a role. The home language of most of the participants was most probably Afrikaans. The facilitator and co-facilitator are both fluent in Afrikaans and all participants were invited and indeed encouraged to express themselves in Afrikaans if they so wished. In general however, they chose to speak English - comments in Afrikaans were very rare. There may thus have been a language barrier, with some participants struggling to express themselves fully in English.

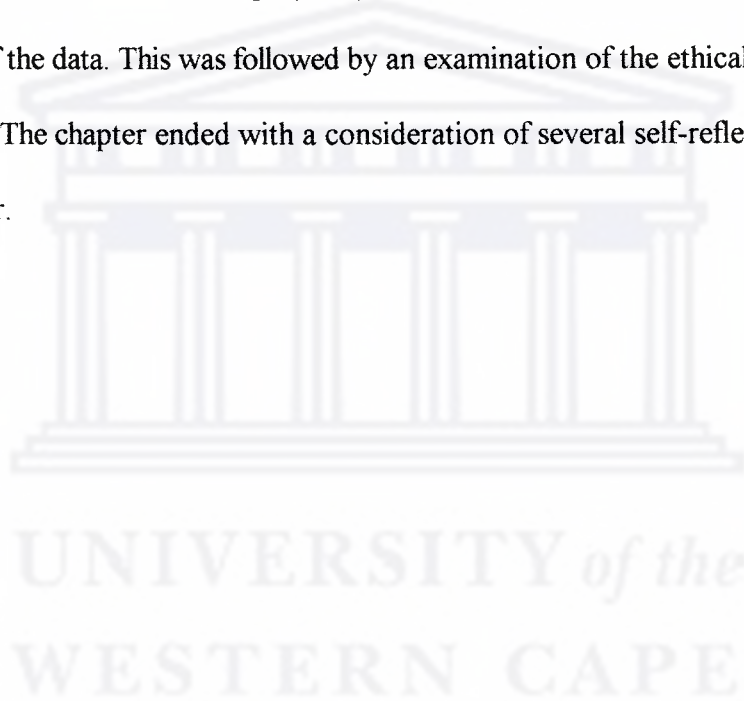
As explained in the section on "ethical considerations", the participants were informed that whatever they said, regardless of how critical, "negative" or "positive" it may be, there would be no repercussions whatsoever against them personally. However, the fact that both the facilitator and co-facilitator are senior (clinical psychology masters) students in the Psychology Department of UWC, doing a research project of this nature which has been sanctioned by the latter, may have had an inhibiting effect on at least some of the participants. These participants may have felt that they were "exposing" themselves and that they needed to behave well, because they may have believed that in spite of my assurances, any "bad" behaviour in the form of negative comments may have resulted in negative consequences for them.

Finally, both the facilitator and co-facilitator are highly motivated with regard to studying psychology and are passionate about the discipline in general. Whilst they attempted to remain as neutral as possible throughout the focus groups, it is likely that some of their positive biases towards psychology was apparent to the participants and that this may indeed have influenced some of the latter's responses.



### **3.8 Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided information regarding the methodology employed in this study. It began with a description of the participants and continued with a discussion of the research instrument. This was followed by a discussion of the research design. Included in the discussion on the research design was a fairly detailed examination of the advantages versus the disadvantages of utilising focus groups in this study. This was followed by a description of the procedure followed in the research process. Thereafter, the chapter focused, in a step-by-step fashion, on the researcher's approach to the analysis of the data. This was followed by an examination of the ethical issues related to the study. The chapter ended with a consideration of several self-reflexive issues of the researcher.



## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### 4.0 Introduction

The themes and sub-themes which emerged in the focus groups are presented below.

The focus group discussions revolved around three main themes : the appeal of psychology as an academic discipline; reflections regarding participants' careers; and reflections regarding psychology in the South African context. Each of these themes, with their various sub-themes will now be discussed in turn. The discussions will relate to findings across all three focus groups, unless otherwise specified.

#### 4.1 The appeal of psychology

##### 4.1.1 *First discovery of psychology*

It emerged that teachers, mostly guidance teachers in high school, were the most common source of introduction to the field of psychology for the participants. The following two quotes are informative :

I also heard about psychology in school in Std 7. My guidance teacher used to tell us a lot about psychology, that she had studied psychology ... and she was one of the best teachers at school and she had a way with people that I liked. Because of her I thought that psychology would be interesting. She explained to us how psychology had helped her to understand people and overcome problems in her life. She used to have a lot of personal discussions (Group 2).

One of the participants in the same group, however, had had a very different experience:

I want psychology as a profession. Last year I had a Home Economics teacher who wasn't pleased when she heard I want to study psychology because she believed that

there's no need for psychology and then I was doubting if I was going to do it and I started looking at alternatives but nothing really interested me the way psychology did. I knew that if I would do something else I wouldn't finish it because it wouldn't interest me and so I decided I want to do it (psychology) and that's what I did. (Group 2)

The second most common source of introduction to the field of psychology was by family members who were either directly involved (studying or working) or had a significant interest in the field of Mental Health (e.g., psychology, social work). For example, one participant said:

It was way back through my aunty's husband, who is a psychologist - but I had a dream to become a psychologist in Std 5. I wanted to help people - to solve the whole world's problems - that type of thing (Group 3).

Another participant said the following :

I first discovered psychology by the end of matric. My cousin is studying here - clinical psychology and because I like to help people and I care for the environment and that motivated me to further my studies in psychology. I was first interested in doing Marine Biology but you have to work away and I'm a Moslem and you are not allowed to work away from home and so my interest turned to psychology. My cousin who was studying psychology is always talking to me about the subject and she introduced me to it. (Group 3)

A third source, whilst not as common as the previous two, was via (North American) television programmes. One participant, for example, said the following :

When I was in about Std 5, I was introduced to psychology when watching TV - the programme "The days of our lives". When I was in Std 8 and thinking about my career, I decided to study psychology and I chose the school subjects which I thought might help me to do so. (Group 1)

Another participant said the following:

In Grade 10 I was watching a TV programme about a father abusing his two small

daughters and a psychologist was trying to analyse them by using dolls - to demonstrate how the child's mind works and what the father has done to the children. I thought that's quite nice to do something like that. I like working with children and I thought that being a Child Psychologist would be great. (Group 3)

#### **4.1.2 *Why study psychology ?***

The majority of participants said that they were studying psychology because they wished to help others. This was often, but not always, linked to a curiosity to understand human behaviour. A lesser, but significant theme was the need to understand and help one's self. This need was not always expressed clearly - approximately half the time it was expressed ambiguously, for example :

My friends always come to me with their problems and I thought that I always listen to people's problems so I might as well do something to do with it ... people always tell me their problems and then my own problems don't seem so important (Group 2)

A theme which emerged in the first focus group, but which did not emerge in the subsequent two, was the issue of status :

Now, (since one is studying psychology) you try to analyse everything people do... it makes you sound very intelligent, it impresses people! (Group 1)

This statement was greeted with much laughter and general agreement from the other participants.

#### **4.1.3 *The most important aspects of psychology as a discipline***

This sub-theme overlaps considerably with the previous one. When asked to describe the most important aspects of psychology as a discipline, the major issue to emerge was that it was a vehicle for understanding others and one's self. The following was a typical

quote :

If a person commits a crime like murder, you want to understand ' How can someone do something like that, what makes them tick'. I think that psychology teaches you to understand the different parts of why ... what attributed (sic) to that person's behaviour (Group 3)

A further , though less emphasised point was that psychology has great application value - in terms of helping people with their problems :

Psychology has also improved education and many marriages have been salvaged. Parents and children are able to improve their relationships. Communication between employer and employee has been improved. (Group 3)

#### ***4.1.4 Does psychology appeal to a specific "type" of person?***

The main issue to emerge here was that psychology appeals to persons who wish to help others and themselves deal with their problems. The emphasis was perhaps slightly more on wishing to help others as opposed to helping one's self. The following is a fairly typical quote, blending the wish to help one's self with the wish to help others :

Like if a person had problems of their own, like losses, then they may want to help others with problems because they know what they are going through. (Group 2)

Of note, however, is that at least one person in each focus group raised the issue that not all those who studied psychology wish to help others. For example, a participant in Focus Group 2 stated the following:

I don't think that it's just specific (types of ) people who want to study psychology. If you look at Verwoerd who started the crisis here in South Africa - he was a psychologist - so it isn't only for people who want to help others. But most of the people I know want to help people - that's why they are doing psychology. (Group 2)

In addition to the above, another participant in Focus Group 3 stated the following:

Hopefully only people with these qualities we have been talking about would study psychology, but you will find people who are not sincere, who are not genuine - like 'spoilt brats' who do the course. (Group 3)

With regard to the specific personal qualities of the student who is attracted to studying psychology, no consistent attribute was mentioned. A few people did however emphasise listening skills.

## **4.2 Reflections regarding participants' careers**

### ***4.2.1 Are the participants thinking a lot about their careers at this stage of their lives?***

Without exception, all participants stated that during the year they had been thinking about their future careers. The following are two fairly typical quotes:

I still ask a lot of questions. I know I want to study psychology, but I want to understand what it's all about.. what I am going for? (Group 2)

One should explore other fields. South Africa is a developing country and you don't know what the future holds so you're not sure after three or four years if you are going to have a career in psychology... so you have to explore other options . I do try and learn about other options for my future. (Group 3)

It was interesting for the researcher to note that many participants appeared to learn things and develop new ideas in the course of the focus group. For example, at the end of Group 1 the researcher asked if there were any final comments. The following are three participants' responses :

I have learned a lot from this discussion - thank you - my mind is more open now about psychology, what it is about and why we are really doing it. (Group 1)

Initially I thought that I would come to help you with your thesis, but it's been a 'two way street' - you've got part of your work and our minds are more open. (Group 1)

I feel I want to go and do more research about what I want to do in the field of psychology (Group 1)

#### ***4.2.2 Do participants have a definite idea about the work they would like to do once they have completed their studies ?***

When each participant was asked individually this particular question, approximately half the participants had a clear and definite idea about the type of work which they would like to do upon the completion of their studies. For example, two participants stated :

I want to do clinical psychology (Group 2)

I want to be a child psychologist" (Group 3)

The other half were uncertain about the type of work which they would like to do upon the completion of their studies. Most, however, expressed an interest in working in the field of psychology. The following quotes exemplify the above:

I haven't decided on a specific direction yet. I want to work in psychology ... maybe I don't have enough knowledge yet about all the fields. I still need to be captured by one of the fields. (Group 3)

I want to go to the navy afterwards with a degree in psychology - there's lots of problems there - I want to help out. (Group 1)

Of note are the responses of two participants, both of whom wished to become psychologists, but first wished to train in other fields first in order to get a "solid grounding" in their areas of interest :



I want to become a teacher to get to understand children and after that I want to become a child psychologist. (Group 1)

I want to become a crime reporter and after a few years I want to become a Criminal Psychologist. As a crime reporter I will really get a chance to be objective about criminals. (Group 1)

Also of note are the responses of two participants, one of whom plans to become a teacher and the other a regional planner. Both felt that psychology, which they plan to continue studying as one of their 'Major' subjects, would enhance their functioning in their chosen careers. One of them articulated this in the following way :

My first choice is to become a teacher. I was thinking of becoming a psychologist but I have now decided against it because I don't feel like studying for such a long time. Psychology will help me to be a better teacher. (Group 1)

#### ***4.2.3 Do the participants wish to continue studying psychology in their second year at University ?***

Without exception the participants answered in the affirmative.

### **4.3 Psychology in the South African context**

#### ***4.3.1 Psychology's role in South Africa***

In response to this question, a variety of issues emerged. These issues will now be presented in descending order of importance. "Importance" in this context refers to the frequency with which participants raised the issue and the emphasis they placed on it:



#### **4.3.1.1 *High crime levels***

The issue of crime was frequently raised in all three focus groups, related to various topics of discussion. Most participants stressed psychology's role in helping the victims of crime, as illustrated in the quote below :

I think that psychology is also useful with the high crime rate in South Africa, to help people with crime ...their experiences (victims). (Group 2)

A few participants did, however, mention psychology's role in the rehabilitation of criminals.

#### **4.3.1.2 *Education system***

A number of participants suggested that psychology could play a valuable role in educational settings. To illustrate this point, note the following two comments from Group 1 :

The teaching system is going through a lot of changes. There's a lot more freedom to explore and the children have to figure out things for themselves and I think they are getting more 'out of hand' and I think the children are needing more attention. The psychologist can listen to the child's problems because the child is not going to tell the parents what the problem is. (Group 1)

In response to the above statement, a fellow participant said the following :

My mother is a teacher and I know that teachers also go through a lot of stress with the new system. There's always a school psychologist there for the children, but what about for the teachers. I think that they also sometimes need someone to talk to about what is going on. (Group 1)

#### **4.3.1.3 *Social problems***

Several participants referred to various social problems other than crime such as

poverty, overcrowding, unemployment and substance abuse and suggested that psychology has a role to play in alleviating the problems. The following quote illustrates one participant's views:

The 'urban thing' in my community where you get gangsters ... you get people living in flats - its crowded - there's nothing for them, there is no method to relax, they just go to the shebeen and drink beers. Our people are all in one hole and they are just rotting. Psychology can identify and address the problems ... for example, to show people how their behaviour influences children. (Group 3)

#### ***4.3.1.4 Adapting to changes in South Africa***

A few participants emphasised that psychology could play a role in helping people adapt to the new social order:

It (psychology) can also be used to help people adapt to changes in society. Some people are still going around thinking that it's the old South Africa. They can get therapy to make them feel that the change is for the better and to understand why things are happening ... and you're not going to adapt if you don't understand why its happening. (Group 2)

#### ***4.3.2 Do South Africans experience many psychological problems (compared with people who live elsewhere) ?***

It seems that most participants felt that the mental health of South African's was, in general, equivalent to that of people living elsewhere. For example, a participant in Group 1 stated the following :

Yes, but everyone has psychological problems, its just that some people have it worse than others and can't handle it. I don't think South Africans have more psychological problems than others, its just that ours are revealed, whilst, for example in America,

theirs are hidden - so I think that we are on a par. (Group 1)

There appeared to be consensus, or close to consensus in this group on this issue - there were certainly no opposing views in this regard.

Two alternative, and less popular, views were expressed in the other two groups. The first was that highly industrialised nations - America was used as an example, have more serious problems in this regard than South Africa. For example, one participant said the following :

I don't think that South Africa's problem is that deep. Look at America - most of the serial killers come from there. And the problems you see in the movies you see - what kind of minds come up with problems like that? And their president having an affair with the intern and the people still respect him (Group 3)

Only one other participant appeared to concur with this view.

A lone voice in Group 2 suggested that South Africans had greater problems with their psychological health than elsewhere:

I think we have more problems than other countries. Because of the high crime rate, there are more people that are victims and they have more stress and problems. Also because of the high rate of unemployment, it causes a lot of stress. (Group 2)

#### ***4.3.3 The availability of jobs in South Africa for psychologists***

There was a great deal of uncertainty about this issue, with only a few participants having a firm opinion. The uncertainty of most participants is illustrated in the following wide variety of quotes :

I'm not sure about this but I heard that next year they are going to choose only 10 students to go on with Psychology 2 and then less students for honours and then for Masters only four students - every university will select only four students to do the Masters programme to become psychologists - so how can there be enough

psychologists in South Africa ? I'm thinking about becoming an industrial psychologist because there are more jobs available in the field. (Group 1)

I was worried about getting a job in psychology but after listening to the others I think that I can get a job in psychology somehow. (Group 1)

There might not be so many (jobs). (Group 2)

I think few (jobs) - but it's hard to find any job, even outside the field of psychology. (Group 2)

One doesn't hear about many psychologists in the work-place compared to say, lawyers, but there must be jobs for psychologists - there is a big need for them. (Group 3)

Few participants had firm opinions regarding the availability of jobs for psychologists in South Africa. Amongst those that did have firm opinions, approximately half thought that jobs in psychology were readily available, whilst the others thought that it would be difficult to find a job.

#### **4.4 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the main themes and their respective sub-themes which emerged during the analysis of the data. The three main themes were the following: the appeal of psychology as an academic discipline; reflections regarding participants' careers; and reflections regarding psychology in the South African context. Apposite verbatim quotes were included where the researcher thought that they would illuminate an issue and thereby enhance the reader's understanding thereof.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### 5.0 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, the three main themes which emerged in this study were: the appeal of psychology; career-related issues; and psychology in the South African context. These three themes are discussed in turn at the beginning of the chapter. The rest of the chapter presents the limitations of this study and proposes some ideas regarding future research in this area.

#### 5.1 The appeal of psychology

The majority of participants stated that they were studying psychology because they wished to be of service to others. This was the most common reason cited. The second most common reason provided for studying psychology was the need to understand and help one's self. This finding is in concord with the findings of Cupchick *et al.* (1984). Thus, many, if not most, of the participants were extremely curious about human nature - their own and others'. Most also professed to be altruistic - they sought to help others who are experiencing psychological distress.

It is noteworthy that for most participants, their guidance teachers in high school were the most common source of introduction to the field of psychology. This finding emphasises the important role which many teachers play in the lives of their pupils, and the impact which they may have on career related decisions of the latter.

The issue of psychology's popularity in South Africa compared to the rest of Africa was not addressed directly in the focus groups. However, some of the information generated

by the study may provide a possible explanation for this phenomenon. It was found that television programmes were a major source of information for the participants regarding psychology. Psychology enjoys a high profile in North America. Best (1982) quotes a 1973 Newsweek article that states that Introductory Psychology had become one of the most popular courses on many campuses (presumably in North America). South Africa imports many television programmes from North America. Many of these programmes feature matters related to psychology. The following are three examples of such TV programmes which are currently screened in South Africa and which attract a large number of devoted viewers: "The Oprah Winfrey Show", "Days of our lives" and "Frasier". In particular, Oprah Winfrey often deals with issues related to psychology in her programmes. She often has psychologists as guests and the latter talk freely about people's problems and how they would attempt to help them in this regard. These psychologists often provide therapy to volunteers on the programme, which is then broadcast into living rooms of a large number of South Africans. This researcher suggests that the popularity of psychology amongst undergraduates in South Africa may be a replication of a similar trend in North America.

## **5.2 Career-related issues**

All participants stated that during the course of the year, they had been thinking about and exploring various ideas and options related to their future careers. This is to be expected, in terms of the Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad and Herma (1951) theory of Career Development. The ages of the participants ranged between 18 and 21 years of age. According to Ginzberg *et al.* (1951), these students would be in the Exploration stage. This theory suggests that at this stage these students would be expected to be



attempting to acquire the knowledge and experience which will help them to make an occupational choice (Nelson-Jones, 1982). They are expected to be narrowing down their career goals, in contrast to the broader goals of earlier periods. However, a good deal of career flexibility is expected to be present at this stage. A general indecisiveness is expected to continue, partially because their interests are changing and partially because the reality of the situation does not yet require a decision to be made. The principal task at this stage is thought to be the selection of a path to follow from two or three strongly held interests (Osipow, 1973). The results of this study indicate that, in general, as predicted by Ginsberg *et al.*'s (1951) theory, at this stage of their lives the participants were increasingly involved in trying to discover the various reality-based career options open to them. This phenomenon was also reported by Hollender (1967, in Osipow 1973) who found in a cross-sectional study of 4600 students in Grade 6 through to 12, that career choices do become more realistic with age. These findings were presented as support for Ginzberg *et al.*'s (1951) notion that with the passage of time, choices move increasingly from the realm of fantasy to the realm of reality.

All participants revealed in their responses to the topics under discussion that they certainly were exploring various issues related to their future careers. Some were exploring more actively than others. Many were uncertain about the exact type of work which they wished to pursue in the future, which is what the theory would predict. However, some participants *were* clear and exactly sure about their chosen career paths - a finding which appears to contradict Ginzberg *et al.*'s (1951) theory - because the latter predicts a greater level of uncertainty at this age. This finding is consonant with the findings of two previous studies which also contradicted the timetable suggested by Ginzberg *et al.* (1951). For example, Tucci (1963, in Osipow 1973) found that many of



the participants in his study had made firm decisions regarding their careers at an earlier age than would be expected according to Ginzberg *et al.* (1951), while Gribbons and Lohnes (1968, in Osipow 1973) found that the role of values in early career decision-making predates the timetable suggested by Ginzberg *et al.* (1951).

The results of this study thus suggest that Ginzberg *et al.*'s (1951) theory is useful in terms of its notion that the career-making process entails a process whereby people relinquish fantasies regarding career options in favour of the realities which face them and from which they cannot escape. However, the sweeping generalisations that the theory makes regarding which stage of the career-making process is to be found at a particular age were not supported.

The finding that so many participants were motivated to study psychology in order to understand and help others as well as themselves leads this researcher to wonder whether Super's (1990) Self-Concept Developmental Theory may not provide some insight into the motivation of many participants for studying psychology. As stated in Chapter 2, it is beyond the scope of this research to delve into the personalities of the participants. However, judging from the general responses of the latter, it appears that notwithstanding the very real concerns raised by Stead and Watson (1998) regarding the application of Super's theory to black South Africans, his notion that people seek to express their self-concepts through their choice of occupation needs to be taken seriously.

Many of the deliberations of the participants regarding career options were related to the uncertainties regarding both the training of psychologists as well as work opportunities in this field. South Africa is in the process of developing radical changes in the way that psychologists are trained. One can most probably assume with a fair

amount of certainty that the changes in training will affect employment opportunities for people trained in psychology. It is thus perhaps inevitable that uncertainties will abound and that students would be confused about these issues. Of relevance to the findings of this study is the possibility that had there been a more stable external environment - had psychology not been in such a state of flux - there may have been less agonising amongst the participants about the various options available to them. A final comment in this regard is that despite the participants' confusion about the training of psychologists as well as their uncertainty about career opportunities, all chose to continue studying psychology at second-year level.

A noteworthy finding is that without exception, the participants appeared to equate employment in psychology with psychotherapy or counselling. This is obviously a misperception. Such misperceptions, however, should perhaps be expected as various studies (e.g., Furnham & Rawles, 1993, Simbayi, 1994) have previously demonstrated how common such misperceptions are amongst undergraduate psychology students. One of the reasons for this misperception may relate to the way in which psychologists are generally portrayed in television programmes - namely as psychotherapists. The question arises : "what can the psychological profession as a whole do to dispel as many of these misperceptions as possible?". An attempt will be made to address this question in Chapter 6.

### **5.3 Psychology in the South African context**

When the role of psychology in South Africa was discussed, the issue which received the most emphasis was the high level of crime in the country. Most participants stressed the role of helping the victims of crime. It appears that what they had in mind was a

counselling service provided to the latter. Psychology's potential role in the rehabilitation of criminals received scant attention, suggesting a significant level of identification with the victims of crime.

After crime, the issue which received the most attention was problems related to education. Various ideas were put forward with regard to the role which psychology could play in educational settings. Firstly, psychologists could provide support to pupils and teachers who were struggling to adapt to recent changes in the educational system. Secondly, psychologists can help to deal with problems in the school setting such as rape and suicides. Thirdly, a suggestion was made that psychologists can play a role in schools helping children to adapt to the realities of social transformation in South Africa.

Many participants raised the issue of high levels of stress amongst South Africans. They usually related this stress to crime - but also to poverty, unemployment, overcrowding, as well as to social transformation. It is interesting to note that in spite of emphasising these social problems, the majority of participants felt that in terms of mental health, South Africans are (to use the word of one of the participants) on a "par" with people living elsewhere. In other words, the majority of the participants did not believe that the social problems which prevail in the country have led to unusually high levels of psychological problems amongst South Africans.

Several participants suggested that psychology could help alleviate various social problems other than crime such as poverty, overcrowding and substance abuse. These responses were not carefully probed, since the facilitator believed that such probing fell outside the ambit of the study. In addition, the facilitator was aware of the "questioning route" which he wished to complete within the time allotted to the focus groups. Nonetheless, according to the responses of the participants with regard to the issue in

question, it appears that what they had in mind was for psychologists to institute preventive measures in these areas - for example, to try in some way to prevent children from repeating dysfunctional patterns which they had observed in their environment. This idea could perhaps be linked to the previously discussed suggestion that psychologists could play an important role in the schools - in an attempt to help children who may be at risk of perpetuating, in their own lives, the previously mentioned social problems.

A noteworthy finding was that whilst all of the participants were coloured females-members of a previously disadvantaged population group- and students at UWC, which has a reputation of being "the intellectual home of the left", relatively few of them discussed the potential role of psychology in terms of helping to heal a nation which has suffered from the destructive consequences of apartheid. A few participants did, however, raise the idea that psychology could help South Africans to promote understanding between members of different cultural groups and to help people to come to terms with the current social transformations which are happening in the country.

#### **5.4 Limitations of the study**

Possible limitations of the study include the following: Firstly, for the reasons discussed in Section 3.3, the findings of focus groups have limited generalisability. Thus, the findings of this study may not apply to first-year psychology students in general and hence the need for further research in this area.

Secondly, drastic changes have recently been implemented in the professional training of psychologists. Thus, there has been a change in the context within which first-year students study psychology. One of the major changes has been the introduction, since

the beginning of the year 2000, of a four-year Bachelor of Psychology (B.Psych.) course. Students apply for one of the limited places on this study programme and a selection process ensues. This study programme is a professional training and upon successful completion thereof, the candidate will be entitled to register with the Health Professions Council of South Africa as a registered counsellor and offer various professional services. It thus makes a significant difference, in terms of career prospects, whether a student studying psychology at first-year level is registered as a B.Psych. student or as a B.A. student.

### **5.5 Ideas for future research**

In any future studies related to motivations and career aspirations of first-year psychology students, it would be important to carefully consider the dramatic changes in the education of undergraduate psychology students in South Africa which have been mentioned above.

Due to the absence of both males and participants from a variety of population groups in the focus groups of this study, it may be useful to run further focus groups which include such participants. Similar questions to the ones discussed in the focus groups of this study could be explored and it would be interesting to discover whether similar or different themes emerged.

If one wished to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the issues raised in this study, a further study, based on quantitative methodology, such as a survey, may prove to be useful.

Another worthwhile research project may be to run further focus groups in order to explore ideas which undergraduate psychology students may have about specifically how

psychology could play a role in the following areas: alleviating social problems; promoting understanding between different cultural groups; helping people to adapt to the current social transformations in South Africa. As previously discussed, several participants suggested that psychology could play a role in these areas, but an in-depth exploration of these issues was beyond the scope of this study. It is possible that students may emerge with novel and feasible ideas regarding these issues. It is also possible that such a study may produce ideas for projects which the students themselves (under supervision) may be in a position to implement.

The current study focused only on students who are registered in the Arts Faculty, and are doing a general B.A. degree. Many undergraduate psychology students are committed to careers outside psychology, such as social work, law or nursing. It may be interesting to run focus groups for students in each of these various career streams, in order to gain an understanding of how they experience their studies in psychology. It is possible that they may make novel suggestions regarding their respective needs - information which may be of use to their educators.

## **5.6 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented a discussion of the various themes and sub-themes which emerged during the analysis of the data. When appropriate, the findings of this study were compared with the findings of previous research. The researcher also presented the limitations of the study. Finally, the chapter offered several ideas for future research.



## CHAPTER 6

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

#### 6.0 Introduction

In this chapter, several recommendations are made in response to the findings of this study. These recommendations relate to the following issues : harnessing the abilities and potentials of undergraduate psychology students; promoting psychology as a vehicle for wisdom and personal development; keeping Guidance teachers fully informed about psychology; a proposal for a debating forum for undergraduate psychology students; and keeping psychology students abreast with changes in psychology. This is followed by the conclusion to the study.

#### 6.1 Recommendations

##### 6.1.1 *Harnessing the abilities and potentials of undergraduate psychology students*

The participants, in general, come across as a group of caring individuals, strongly motivated to help others. The question arises : "are these altruistic interests being adequately recognised and harnessed during their undergraduate years by their educators?" As the participants have pointed out, South Africa is a country with a variety of social problems - at least some of which could be at least partially alleviated by those working in the field of psychology. Although this issue was not addressed directly in this study, this researcher believes that many of the undergraduate students may be very willing to become involved in community psychology projects - either as a formal part of their curriculum or on a voluntary basis. For example, there are most probably Children's Homes or Homes for the Aged, where the students could provide

something of value to those in need. In addition, it may afford the student's real-world experience of providing care for others and provide them with "food for thought" in terms of their career plans. The logistics of arranging such projects may be daunting, but in a country so in need of "social repair", it seems a waste not to harness the goodwill, energy and idealism of students such as these.

### ***6.1.2 Promoting psychology as a vehicle for wisdom and personal development***

Many of the participants stated that psychology was a vehicle for them to understand the self and others, and to help them deal with personal problems. Whilst it is true that there is more to psychology than this, these are important foci in the field of psychology. There is much stigma attached to problems of a psychological nature. This is a large, controversial topic and one worthy of lengthy debate. Such a debate, however, is beyond the bounds of this treatise. Suffice to say, this researcher believes that students should be encouraged to use psychology as a vehicle for personal growth and wisdom. For example, perhaps they should be offered opportunities to participate in self-exploration workshops. Further, the processes of counselling and psychotherapy should be destigmatised and offered as useful methods of self-exploration and personal development.

### ***6.1.3 Keeping guidance teachers in high schools fully informed about psychology***

Many participants were introduced to psychology by their guidance teachers at school. Guidance teachers appeared to play a major role with regard to the career orientations of many participants. It thus seems to be important that guidance teachers are kept fully informed about the scope of psychology, changes in the training of psychologists as well as career opportunities in the field.

#### ***6.1.4 A proposal for a debating forum for undergraduate psychology students***

All of the participants had concerns and questions regarding their future careers. Some were completely unsure about their career paths, others appear quite definite - yet even they have various unanswered questions. Several students commented that the focus group was valuable for them in terms of providing a learning opportunity - they found the various topics and group discussions to be a rich opportunity for clarifying issues related to the field of psychology.

It thus seems that it may be a good idea for psychology students to have regular opportunities to interact with one another and various experts in the field of psychology. Perhaps undergraduate psychology students should form an organisation which would meet at regular intervals. Students would join on a voluntary basis and they could decide on the topics which they would like to discuss and invite appropriate guest speakers to their meetings. It is hoped that such meetings would afford students the opportunity to debate with one another and their invited guests on topics related to psychology. Such experiences may help the students to shape their ideas regarding the field of psychology and whether or not they envisage a place for themselves in it - in terms of their careers.

#### ***6.1.5 Keeping psychology students abreast of changes in psychology***

Psychology in South Africa is in a period of enormous flux, especially with regard to the training of its students. This flux appears to have led to many uncertainties amongst the participants with regard to both the training of psychologists as well as employment opportunities in the field. This researcher suggests that many of these uncertainties, and their attendant anxieties, could be alleviated if undergraduate students were kept abreast

of all the current changes and debates in the field.

## **6.2 Conclusion of the study**

The main foci of this study were two-fold. Firstly, it explored the motives of students who enrol in a psychology course at the first-year level at the University of the Western Cape. Secondly it explored aspects of the career development of these students which relate to the field of psychology.

A focus group study was conducted, which consisted of three focus groups. All the participants in the study were first-year psychology students who had volunteered to participate. The data generated by the focus groups was thematically analysed. Three major themes emerged, namely: the appeal of psychology as an academic discipline; reflections regarding participants' careers and reflections regarding psychology in the South African context.

In general it can be stated that psychology appealed to many participants as a means of being of service to others. Many participants also believed that psychology was a useful vehicle for understanding themselves as well as for helping themselves with their own psychological difficulties. All the participants revealed that at this stage of their lives, they were thinking about their future careers and exploring various ideas and options in this regard. Most participants expressed an interest in either working in the field of psychology, or in using what they had learned in psychology and applying it to another area of work. With regard to psychology's role in South Africa, many believed that it has a role to play in helping the victims of crime. Many participants also believed that psychology has a useful role to play in helping to ameliorate some of the problems encountered in educational settings - in particular primary schools and high schools.

With regard to psychology's popularity in South Africa compared with the rest of Africa, the results of the study suggested that this phenomenon may relate to the impact of North American culture on South Africa.

Various recommendations were made in response to the findings of the study. In addition, several suggestions were made regarding future research in this area. It is perhaps a cliché but nonetheless true that psychology students are the "life-blood" of the discipline - it is naturally from amongst the ranks of these students that the majority of South Africa's future psychologists will emerge. The participants, in general, came across as a group of caring individuals, strongly motivated to help others and viewing psychology as a vehicle for the development of personal wisdom. They also had various ideas regarding a constructive role for psychology in South Africa, some of which may be novel and potentially useful.

It is surely a challenge for all interested psychologists, particularly those involved in the education of such students, to try to respond appropriately to the latter's high ideals and attempt to ensure that the potentials and abilities of psychology students such as these are nurtured and developed.

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## APPENDIX A

### *Focus group Questioning Route*

- \*How and when did you first discover psychology ?
- \*Which are the most important aspects of psychology as a subject?
- \*What are your reasons or motivation(s) for studying psychology?
- \*Do you have a definite idea about what work you wish to do upon leaving university?  
If YES, please state what this is and why you would like to work in this field.
- \* Are there jobs available in South Africa for psychologists?
- \*What role do you think that there is for psychology in South Africa ?
- \*Do you think that South Africans in general experience many psychological problems?
- \* Do you think that psychology appeals to a specific kind or type of person ?
- \*Would you like to continue studying psychology next year? If you answer YES, please say why and if you answer NO please say why.
- \*Has the Psychology 1 course lived up to your expectations ?

**APPENDIX B**  
**ABRIDGED TRANSCRIPTS**

**FOCUS GROUP 1**

**HOW AND WHEN DID YOU FIRST DISCOVER PSYCHOLOGY ?**

Participant 1 (19 years old) : I had heard about psychology from TV programmes. Then, in matric, we went to UWC's "Career exhibition" and I spoke to the Psychology Dept.

Participant 2 (19 years old) : I initially wanted to become a physiotherapist but in Std 9 I changed my mind. I became interested in psychology to help me understand why one does things and also when I had problems I had nobody to talk to and I just wanted somebody to be there for me and I thought of psychology and how it can help me. And also my niece is doing industrial psychology and she told me about it and I got interested in doing it - how it could provide answers in my life. Also, in std 9 I saw the "career exhibition" by UWC and I became more interested in psychology after that.

Participant 3 (20 years old) : I am interested in children but I don't want to be a teacher so I thought about child psychology especially about the fact that you see a lot of children and they're quite problematic and you always wonder why they're like that, their attitudes and so on. I discovered psychology from my Biology teacher.

Participant 4 (19 years old) : In Std 5 I had to do a project on what I want to become one day and I just chose, by accident, a Psychologist. That made me interested, I made a picture of people wearing masks and a Psychologist going behind the mask to see who is this person really.

Participant 5 (18 years old) : When I was in about Std 5, I was introduced to psychology when watching TV - the programme "The days of our lives". When I was in Std 8 and thinking about my career, I decided to study psychology and I chose the school subjects

which I thought might help me to do so.

#### WHAT MOTIVATES US NOW- WHY DO WE STUDY PSYCHOLOGY ?

- \* The crime rate - trying to find out why people commit crime and abuse and trying to help survivors of crime and abuse.
- \* I have a cousin who was raped when she was in Std 4 and I always wonder what is going through her mind now and what went through her mind then - how that experience influenced her later attitudes - such as aggression.
- \* I just want to help people - like that girl who was raped by her father - I just want to know what I can say to her to help her.
- \* I want to become a teacher and one day when the children are acting in a specific way then I can try to understand why they are acting like that - so psychology is not just for someone who wants to become a psychologist - it can help in other ways.
- \* To understand the reasons for people's behaviour so you can counter that.

#### IDEAS ABOUT WORKING AFTER COMPLETING STUDIES

- \* I want to become a teacher to get to understand children and after that I want to become a child psychologist
- \* I want to become a crime reporter and after a few years I want to become a criminal psychologist. As a crime reporter I will really get a chance to be objective about criminals.
- \* I wanted to become a clinical psychologist to work with family problems, emotional problems but now I'm thinking of doing industrial psychology but I first want to get more information about that - there are so many people training to be clinical psychologists and working in that field - I've heard about that this year.
- \* I want to go to the navy afterwards with a degree in psychology - there's lots of problems there - I want to help out.
- \* My first choice is to become a teacher. I was thinking of becoming a Psychologist but have now decided against it because I don't feel like studying for such a long time. psychology will help me to be a better teacher.

DO YOU THINK THAT PART OF FIRST YEAR STUDENT LIFE IS THINKING A LOT ABOUT CAREERS, ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT CAREERS ETC?

\* Unanimously : "Yes".

ARE THERE JOBS AVAILABLE IN SOUTH AFRICA FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS ?

\* I think there will always be jobs for psychologists - people will always need to see psychologists and as a psychologist you can always start your own practise - psychologists can also work in the education system.

\*Psychology is going to be needed - people are living fast-paced lives and they don't think about why they have problems or talk to people about their problems - so psychology will pick up eventually.

\* I'm not sure about this but I heard that next year they are going to choose only 10 students to go on with Psychology 2 and then less students for Honours and then for Masters only four students - every university will select only four students to do the Masters programme to become psychologists - so how can there be enough psychologists in South Africa? I'm thinking about becoming an industrial psychologist because there are more jobs available in that field.

\* One can study psychology but go into a different field and it will improve you abilities in that job.

\* I was worried about getting a job in psychology but after listening to the others I think that I can get a job in psychology somehow.

HOW AND WHERE DO WE GET INFORMATION REGARDING OUR CAREER?

\*Ask Mommy and Daddy !

\* Go and talk to somebody in the field - people who have studied psychology - family and friends.

\*Career exhibitions at school.

\*Fellow students.

## WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF PSYCHOLOGY AS A SUBJECT ?

- \* It's personal - it deals with how people think and feel and it tries to be as objective as possible.
- \* It deals with persons individually whereas in other subjects such as Sociology, they deal with groups.
- \* It looks at how and why people behave in a certain way - which makes it very interesting.
- \* It helps you to understand why people make the choices they do and you can then help them.
- \* It helps you to understand yourself.
- \* It helps you to give solutions to your own problems.
- \* Now, you try to analyse everything people do - it makes you sound very intelligent - it impresses people (much laughter and general agreement)

## DO YOU GO INTO PSYCHOLOGY BECAUSE OF THE STATUS OR DOES ONE JUST ENJOY IT AFTERWARDS?

- \* Afterwards - (general agreement).
- \* But we enjoy it when it comes (accompanied by laughter and general agreement).

## WHAT ROLE DO YOU THINK THAT THERE IS FOR PSYCHOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA ?

- \* We definitely need it because of the high crime rate in South Africa. People are frustrated and have no one to talk to - they'll feel ashamed to tell friends or family so now they can tell a psychologist their problem. But if there's no psychologist they can get frustrated and take out their frustration on other people. But psychologists are very expensive and very restrictive - say for example some one is on the verge of figuring out what the problem is then the stupid psychologist says "no, you have to stop now" and the person has to come back for another session.
- \* Our country has been through a lot of changes which have affected people and psychology can do something there also. Like with big companies, they have Human Resources Departments with a psychologist for their employees - and with people not



getting jobs or getting retrenched - you get those people that just need to speak to somebody

\* With regard to psychology being more popular in South Africa than elsewhere in Africa, we are very modernised and our life is much faster than over there - so they have more time to sort out whatever is going on in their heads whereas here we just push aside our problems and they build up and we get stressed.

\* Friends of our family went to live in Malawi - but they missed South Africa and have returned - now I think they need help with these adjustments.

\* The teaching system is going through a lot of changes - there's a lot more freedom to explore and the children have to figure out things for themselves and I think they are getting more "out of hand" and I think the children are needing more attention. The psychologist can listen to the child's problems because the child is not going to tell the parents what the problem is.

\* My mother's a teacher and I know that teachers also go through a lot of stress with the new system - there's always a school psychologist there for the children, but what about for the teachers? I think that they also sometimes need someone to talk to about what is going on.

**DO YOU THINK THAT SOUTH AFRICANS, IN GENERAL, EXPERIENCE MANY PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS?**

\*Yes, but everyone has psychological problems, its just that some people have it worse than others and can't handle it. I don't think South Africans have more psychological problems than others -it's just that ours are revealed, whilst, for example in America, theirs are hidden - so I think we're on a par.

(No other opinions were expressed - there appeared to be consensus on this issue.)

**DO YOU THINK THAT STUDYING PSYCHOLOGY APPEALS TO A SPECIFIC TYPE OF PERSON ?**

\* I don't think that it's for everybody - it appeals to somebody with patience - it's also quite difficult and a lot of work, so you have to be interested in it. If you just did it for the status or because your friend is taking it, you're going to fail and you're not going to

want to go on with it.

\* It's true, you have to like it.

\* You've got to be a good listener.

\* You have to want to listen to other people's problems and to tolerate them.

\* You need to have the ability to understand people and motivate them to do things.

There was a guy from student counselling at the beginning of the year who gave us a talk and we were "hanging on his lips"- he just motivated us to do things.

\* Not all students who do study psychology have the qualities which we have spoken about, for example the physiotherapy students, who have to study psychology. They don't study psychology because they want to - they have to.

\* Some BA students just take Psychology 1 to "fill up the gap".

\* Some do it for the status.

DO YOU WISH TO CONTINUE STUDYING PSYCHOLOGY NEXT YEAR?

\* Yes. (all participants answered in the affirmative.)

HAS THE PSYCHOLOGY 1 COURSE LIVED UP TO YOUR EXPECTATIONS ?

\* It is definitely interesting but it's things you already know - but now you are just given a name for it - I was hoping for more depth -going into why people do the things they do

\* We did too much Biology - we already know those things.

\* But maybe other people did Maths or some other subject, not Biology and you need to understand which emotions are provoked .. so that's why they teach Biology ... but it was a waste for me.

\* I got more from the course than I expected. I expected that you just sit and the person comes to you and they "talk and talk and talk" .. but now I know psychology is not just about listening to the people's problems - you learn about the stages people go through ...that was interesting and I didn't expect it.

\* It "whetted my tastebuds" to carry on studying psychology .. it gave names to many things I already know but I am eager to see what is in psychology beyond first year level.

## ANY FINAL COMMENTS

- \* We should do more psychology related to the South African context.
- \* I have learned a lot from this discussion - thank you - my mind is more open now about psychology, what it is about and why we are really doing it.
- \* Initially I thought that I would come to help you with your thesis, but it's been a "two way street" - you've got part of your work and our minds are more open.
- \* I feel I want to go and do more research about what I want to do in the field of psychology.



## FOCUS GROUP 2

### WHEN DID YOU FIRST DISCOVER PSYCHOLOGY ?

Participant 1 (19 years old): My guidance teacher in Std 7. She interviewed each pupil individually to help us to choose our subjects for the next year. Since then I always wanted to do it.

Participant 2 (20 years old): In my first year, but I wasn't interested in psychology at that time - I just needed a subject but now it's definitely changed that I know more about the subject. But I heard about it for the first time in school from a teacher - a guidance teacher - but it didn't interest me much.

Participant 3 (19 years old): I also needed a subject and then I started enjoying it and it became interesting - it's like you see where you come from and about the different stages of development - and everybody's feeling that way at a certain time and you feel aaargh - I'm going through that phase but you see that everyone's going through that.

Participant 4 (18 years old): I also heard about psychology at school in Std 8 or 9 - but I want to major in psychology, that's why I took the subject. They told us what psychology is all about. I first thought I would like to do Law but at the end of last year I decided to do psychology.

Participant 5 (18 years old): I also heard about psychology in school in Std 7 - my guidance teacher used to tell us a lot about psychology - that she had studied psychology and she was one of the best teachers at school and she had a way with people that I liked - because of her I thought that psychology would be interesting. She explained to us how psychology had helped her to understand people and overcome problems in her life. She used to have a lot of personal discussions.

Participant 6 (18 years old): I heard about psychology in std 9 or 10 - from a career guidance teacher.

#### WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF PSYCHOLOGY AS A SUBJECT ?

\* You learn a lot about people - what goes on in their minds, what makes them "tick".

\* I think that if you understand how you react in a certain situation and psychology has shown us how another person may act in a certain way - so you understand certain situations.

\* Just to get to know people, why they do certain things and when and also just to get to know yourself better.

\* I agree with her, also to get to know what people think, because if something happens you will judge a person, but you don't know that maybe it can be a social (cause) or something else behind that. It gives you insight into what others do. (In terms of the social aspects) you have internal attributions rather than external so if something happens and your friend gets into a rage you are going to think "but how can she act like that - everyone is watching" - but you don't know the situation behind that and what caused her to do that.

\* I think it's important for you to know why you act as you do before you can understand other people's behaviour.

#### WHAT ARE YOUR REASONS OR MOTIVATIONS FOR STUDYING PSYCHOLOGY ?

\* Mine was to - I want to help people - like I said I always wanted to do law but I thought I would rather want to help people deal with what happened to them - not external things but rather internal.

\* What motivated me was to understand myself better and not to really help other people but maybe to understand them.

\* My friends always come to me with their problems and I thought that I always listen to people's problems so I might as well do something to do with

it. People always tell me their problems and then my own problems don't seem so important.

\* At first nothing but now I just want to understand people and know maybe whatever circumstances you can maybe handle it.

\* I studied it just because I want to help others.

\* Mine is also helping because sometimes I feel more comfortable speaking to someone that I know that will understand my situation - if I have problems I don't want to speak to just anyone because they might not know what I'm going through and they might not understand it the way I want someone to understand it - and with the proper training you will be able to help people people.

DO YOU HAVE A DEFINITE IDEA ABOUT WHAT WORK YOU WANT TO DO WHEN YOU LEAVE UNIVERSITY ?

\* I'm not sure.

\* I want psychology as a profession. Last year I had a Home Economics teacher who wasn't pleased when she heard that I wanted to study psychology because she believed that there's no need for psychology and then I was doubting if I was going to do it and I started looking at alternatives but nothing really interested me the way psychology did - I knew that if I would do something else I wouldn't finish it because it wouldn't interest me and so I decided I want to do it (psychology) and that's what I did.

\* I want to do clinical psychology.

\* I want to do clinical psychology or counselling psychology - I'm not sure which one yet.

\* Not straight into psychology but maybe as a major. I want to do regional planning as a career - they always say there's no work for psychologists but if you look at a lot of the changes you can't expect that they won't speak to people - with psychology there will always be jobs there - in social work - that's one of the reasons why I want to keep it as a major - maybe because you'll always have a job there. At the moment I want to do regional planning



and you're also dealing with people there and psychology will help with that.

\* I think I want to become a psychologist - I'm not sure what type.

IS THIS A TIME IN YOUR LIVES WHEN YOU ASK A LOT OF QUESTIONS ABOUT WHAT WORK YOU WANT TO DO WHEN YOU LEAVE UNIVERSITY ?

\* I am asking a lot of questions

\* Things are changing such a lot out there - I don't feel settled

\* I am certain what I want to do but you must always have an alternative - so I ask questions around that.

\* I still ask a lot of questions - I know I want to study psychology, but I want to understand what it's all about, what I am going for.

WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR INFORMATION FROM REGARDING CAREERS

\* I have a career book at home to give me relevant information.

\* Libraries.

\* Career books.

\* TV.

\* Teachers at school.

\* Internet.

WOULD YOU SAY IT'S A CONFUSING TIME AT UNIVERSITY - ALL THE CAREER OPTIONS AVAILABLE ETC?

\* You can never be sure if there's going to be an opportunity.

\* At the beginning of the year they told us that maybe the people who want to major in psychology won't be able to go on with it next year - so I had to do BA Gender Studies so that I can choose next year if they don't pick me to go on with second year (psychology) then I can just go on with something else.

## ARE THERE JOBS AVAILABLE FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS IN SOUTH AFRICA?

- \* There are jobs.
- \* I agree.
- \* Not sure.
- \* There might be but not so many.
- \* I think few, but it's hard to find any job (even outside the field of psychology).
- \* I think that at the rate so many students are studying and graduating in psychology at university, the ratio of those getting a job in psychology is going to be low.

## WHAT ROLE IS THERE FOR PSYCHOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA?

- \* Now that things are changing - there's no apartheid anymore - we can use psychology to understand each other - different cultures etc.
- \* It can also be used to help people adapt to changes in society. Some people are still going around thinking that it's the old South Africa. They can get therapy, to make them feel that the change is for the better and to understand why things are happening - and you're not going to adapt if you don't understand why it's happening.
- \* I think psychology is also useful with the high crime rate in South Africa, to help people with crime - the victims - with their experiences.
- \* Also to rehabilitate criminals.
- \* I think that psychology can help people to deal with the past and what happened to them in the past. Like she said, with the high crime rate, we need Psychologists. South Africa needs psychologists ! Also with schoolchildren, there's a lot happening at school - rapes, suicides - psychologists can help to deal with these problems.
- \* Marital problems.

## HOW DOES SOUTH AFRICA COMPARE WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD IN TERMS OF MENTAL HEALTH ?

- \* With the changes in South Africa, many people don't want to change, they want to stay the way they are. Psychologists can help them individually to understand why certain things are happening, to start like in schools with children to learn to change.
- \* Changes make people confused - they don't know what's going on and it leads to a lot of stress.
- \* I think they're probably scared about the changes.
- \* I don't know what happens in other countries.
- \* I think we have more problems than other countries - because of the high crime rate, there are more people that are victims and they have more stress and problems. Also because of the high rate of unemployment it causes a lot of stress.
- \* But if you look at the northern part of Africa they also have a high crime rate and a lot of uncertainty but there aren't so many psychologists.
- \* If the other countries had more exposure to psychology, perhaps then it would be the same as in South Africa.

## DO YOU THINK THAT PSYCHOLOGY APPEALS TO A SPECIFIC TYPE OF PERSON ?

- \* To a person who likes people and wants to talk to them.
- \* To a person who experiences problems.
- \* Like if a person had problems of their own, like losses then they may want to help others with problems because they know what they're going through.
- \* It appeals to those who like helping others, who enjoy mixing with others.
- \* I don't think that it's just specific people who want to study psychology. If you look at Verwoerd who started the crisis here in South Africa - he was a psychologist - so it isn't only for people who want to help others. But most of the people I know wants to help people -that's why they're doing psychology.
- \* To help others.

\* To understand your own problems better (another participant says "uh huh" in agreement)

\* Psychology helps you to understand that you're not the only one going through problems and then you forget about it because sometimes there are reasons why you go through certain stages and feel in certain ways and do certain things.

DO YOU WANT TO CARRY ON STUDYING PSYCHOLOGY IN THE FUTURE ?

\* Yes - I want to become a psychologist so I will continue.

\* The same with me.

\* I am going into Regional Planning but I will continue to take psychology as a major.

\* I'll also carry on.

DID THE PSYCHOLOGY 1 COURSE LIVE UP TO YOUR EXPECTATIONS ?

\* I didn't expect too much but it's good.

\* Everyone always told me that psychology is a very interesting subject and I found it was. I enjoyed doing it this year.

\* I also heard that psychology is very interesting and I do find it interesting but not as interesting as I thought because most of the stuff you know already, you read about already. Everything is so theoretical and I didn't know that there was such a lot of different opinions amongst psychologists. It was actually disappointing.

\* It was interesting, but I want to become a psychologist and I was hoping to do more practical, problem solving exercises.

\* It was interesting - about what I expected.

### FOCUS GROUP 3

#### HOW AND WHEN DID YOU FIRST DISCOVER PSYCHOLOGY ?

\* Participant 1 ( 20 years old): My mother wanted to become a social worker - so that probably influenced me. There was an educational psychologist at school and I read up in the library about psychology and my interest grew more. This was in about std 5. When I started high school I met some-one who was good at analysing people and he showed me that I had this potential too. I wanted to help people and influence people positively.

\* Participant 2 (19 years old): I first discovered psychology by the end of Matric. My cousin is studying here - clinical psychology and because I like to help people and I care for the environment and that motivated me to further my studies in psychology. I was first interested in doing marine biology but you have to work away and I'm a Moslem and you aren't allowed to work away from home and so my interest turned to psychology. My cousin who was studying psychology is always talking about the subject and she introduced me to it.

\* Participant 3 (21 years old): my interested started in about Std 8 - I did voluntary work at Nicro/Nimro where we used to work with children and I used to be in contact with a lot of social workers and a psychologist - and my interest was motivated by these women on my street. They are mothers who fight against crime - they work for the Police Station - they've got a lot to do with abused women. My interest was to join the force to work with abused women so I decided to study psychology - I thought it would allow me to be a better helper - to help these women with their "mental state". I've always liked listening to people's problems and helping them - my friends used to always come to me for advice. At Nicro, most of the people discouraged me from studying the course, they said that in South Africa you will "land up nowhere" with a BA. I thought I might do Human Resources Management -

people say it's more "profitable", but I decided I would do psychology. Even if I don't get work, at least I'll be happy in what I'm doing.

\* Participant 4 (20 years old): In Grade 10 I was watching a TV programme about a father abusing his two small daughters and a psychologist was trying to analyse them by using dolls - to demonstrate (sic) how the child's mind works and what the father has done to the children - I thought that's quite nice to do something like that. I like working with children and I thought that being a child psychologist would be great.

\* Participant 5 (18 years old): I had my first encounter with psychology in Std 8. My uncle is a teacher and he introduced me to psychology. Then I had personal experiences with my parents and family members which were so ... (does not say). I really wanted to know what makes them do stuff and what did I do - what went wrong - analysing it - also to cut myself emotionally from people. It may sound weird but I've been hurt a lot by people close to me and I don't want to take the chance again - and if you have a client, you have to be able to cut yourself off emotionally.

\* Participant 6 (20 years old): It was way back through my aunty's husband, who is a psychologist but I had a dream to become a psychologist in Std 5. I wanted to help people - to solve the whole world's problems - that type of thing.

#### WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF PSYCHOLOGY AS A SUBJECT ?

\* If a person commits a crime like murder, you want to understand - how can someone do something like that, what makes them "tick". I think that psychology teaches you to "understand the different parts of why - what attributed to that person's behaviour"

\* I also think that it's the human body and you can "take everything out of it



- the mind , the peripheral" and then pinpoint the cause of particular behaviour.
- \* The way I see it is that you need a doctor to heal certain illnesses and you need a doctor to heal certain minds. Everyone has that weirdness in him that psychopathic or neurotic thing and you need someone to help with that.
- \* Psychologists can analyse how an environment can influence people's behaviour.
- \* People are also curious about human behaviour, they try to find out how people think.
- \* Psychology also provides tests - we can know our IQs and what characters we have.
- \* Psychology has also improved education and many marriages have been salvaged. Parents and children are able to improve their relationships. Communication between employer and employee has improved.
- \* Psychology also tries to understand how the environment affects us and vice versa.
- \* Psychology also helps students who are having difficulty with their studies.
- \* Also to help those that are physically handicapped - to build centres for them to enrich their lives.

#### WHAT ARE YOUR PERSONAL REASONS FOR STUDYING PSYCHOLOGY ?

- \* I want to be a child psychologist - I like working with children, I love children. I relate better to children , I understand how their minds work.
- \* I'm sick of the abuse of women in our communities. It's not a psychologist I'm looking at but more helping counsel these abused women. I want to work in the police force in the department that helps these abused women and I am studying the subject to help me help these women.
- \* I am also frightened about our community - adolescents - you hear about teenage boys raping children - its sick and they are the future, they are tomorrow's leaders - what are they going to be like in the future ? At school all of my friends came to school with huge problems and there's not always a

guidance teacher there. And then some of them haven't got a clue about what to do with their problem - their parents might not be able to help them - and then they act out on it in a different way - like using drugs. My dream is to see a psychologist or a social worker in each school in this country to help the children. Psychology can help me help myself first - I have to bridge over that first - and if I can be cured of my past then maybe I will be able to help our children.

\* On that point of helping ourselves first, I feel very strongly about that - that was main reason for studying psychology, for wanting to become a clinical psychologist. I feel that if I can't help myself, I'm not going to do a proper, objective job of helping everyone else.

\* There are a lot of children who get hurt. Most of them are raped or abused by their own families and I want to contribute by helping them. I want to work in the field.

\* I want to become a Psychologist because there is still so much about people's behaviours that I need to learn. I would like to share my knowledge to help others who have difficulty in their lives.

DO YOU HAVE A DEFINITE VIEW OF THE WORK YOU WOULD LIKE TO DO WHEN YOU FINISH YOUR STUDIES ?

\* I want to be a child psychologist.

\* I feel that most people are uncertain because of the way the system is in South Africa - getting jobs etc., but if the time comes and there's a job for me to become a child psychologist - then definitely.

\* I want to work with abused women in the Police Force - I want to become a psychologist but I know how hard it is becoming a psychologist - only 12 in your Masters (course) - so I am just being realistic, I am not aiming too high. My first step is to find myself in the Force and maybe they will send me to complete my studies in psychology - part-time studies and so on.

\* I would like to be a clinical psychologist because I think it covers a broad aspect of psychology, compared to say a child psychologist.

\* I haven't decided on a specific direction yet. I want to work in psychology - maybe I don't have enough knowledge yet about all of the fields. I still need to be captured by one of the fields.

\* I'm also still unclear but what I know is that I want to work with adolescents and older children in a community setting - schools. I'm still not quite clear about it.

IS THIS A TIME OF YOUR LIFE WHEN YOU THINK A LOT ABOUT WORK, DIFFERENT ASPECTS AND OPTIONS ETC ?

\* I'm just concentrating on the present right now - my main concern is to get through what I'm busy with. My heart is set on what I want to do - (Police) Force is my aim - to work with abused women. I don't know exactly how it works but I can't be too hasty now already and find out how it works - they will tell me "go away, you're a first year student, come back in your second and third year - but I plan to go there and find out at the end of next year if they have a department like that -they should have one. So I will do some research about finding a job there.

\* There are many negative things about becoming a psychologist - there is a lot of work to be done but only a few are chosen so obviously you hear about HRM (human resources management) or a personnel manager or whatever - these things have been mentioned to me but if I should become a personnel manager, I will do it very grudgingly because it is psychology I really want to do and I would be doing that only for the money and wouldn't be having as much pleasure as I would have doing psychology. I'll think about alternatives if I get stuck and push comes to shove. Now you get industrial psychology as well - I am not interested in that because it has a lot to do with business - you are just there to help the workers to work better so that you can get more money out of them. You're helping them for the sake of profit - not to heal them.

\* One should explore other fields - South Africa is a developing country and you don't know what the future holds so you're not sure after three or four

years if you are going to have a career in psychology - so you have to explore other options. I do try and learn about other options for my future.

\* It sounds like most of us want to be psychologists but what's also making us think differently is probably because we are scared by people who tell us how difficult it is getting in there (to become trained as a professional psychologist).

\* I think that some-one should have confidence that I will "make it" - but you must be realistic as well.

\* It's really psychology that I want to do but I find myself thinking that maybe I should be an English lecturer ! ( general laughter) I have a high regard for the English Department, so I do find myself thinking of different careers. But it really is with people I want to have "one on one" working experience with, helping them.

\* My father comes to me and says "Why don't you do law like your cousin (she's an established advocate) or Nursing?" So you think about other subjects but my interest is still in psychology.

\* In high school I did work at Nicro and at the Care and Rehabilitation wards at Lentegeur, where my mother was a nurse. Also I worked a lot with children at Nicro and I have also worked a lot with old people who I adore - so if I don't become a psychologist there are always clinics - a lot of other branches that come out of psychology.

\* I agree with her - if I don't qualify as a psychologist - if I just get my Honours, I will feel guilty if I don't go out and help people in my community.

\* We all talk about career options.

\* I think that this is the period when everyone is exploring different careers.

\* I wish they could make our course more practical so that we have a better chance to find employment - we will come with some experience.

**ARE THERE JOBS AVAILABLE FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS IN SOUTH AFRICA ?**

\* One doesn't hear about many psychologists in the work-place compared to

say, lawyers, but there must be jobs for psychologists - there is a big need for them.

\* Psychology isn't only found in South Africa - so if you don't find a job here, you can try elsewhere. I think it would be wrong to qualify yourself here and leave but I always thought that there is nothing for psychologists here, because you never hear about these things.

\* I think that the only reason you don't hear about psychology as much as you would hear about doctors or lawyers is that people wouldn't brag about going to see a psychologist. How many people would be open enough and honest to say "I'm going to therapy and my psychologist's name is XYZ"? People don't do that.

\* For graduates in psychology - it will not be easy to find a job.

\* I agree.

\* I've read recently that Psychologists are suffering a lot from the stress of having to cope with the terrible problems people bring to them.

\* That brings me back to my point about having psychological knowledge about yourself to make you strong enough to do the work and to be able to separate your life from that of others - you have to be able to say : "this is you and this is me".

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WHAT ROLE DO YOU THINK THAT THERE IS FOR PSYCHOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA ?

\* Looking at the country as a whole, the violence etc. - so there are a lot of people out there that need mental help.

\* The urban "thing" in my community where you get the gangsters - you get people living in flats, its crowded, there's nothing for them, there is no method to relax - they just go to the shebeen and drink beers. Our people are all in one hole and they are just rotting. Psychology can identify and address the problems - for example to show people how their behaviour influences children.

\* What she is trying to say is - I mean, what makes that person drink? Maybe



there is abuse in the family - you try and work out what makes them do the drinking. The point is to prevent problems before the problems go far.

HOW WOULD THE ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGY BE DIFFERENT IN SOUTH AFRICA TO SAY THE ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGY IN AMERICA?

\* Different cultures - people's needs are different everywhere. Their cultures change and vary from place to place.

\* I don't think there's a unique role for psychology in South Africa - because the basic needs of people stay the same no matter where you go ... everyone needs love .. it's a basic need.

\* But for example Japanese culture differs from American culture - collectivism versus individualism so you have to know how people in that community relate to each other. But basically everyone does have a need and it's a basic thing.

WOULD THERE BE CHALLENGES THAT ARE UNIQUE IN SOUTH AFRICA, THAT ARE DIFFERENT TO OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD?

\* The uniqueness and difference would be found with individuals.

\* The Psychologist must come down to the person's level, not to use language that they can't understand.

\* The stuff that we see in our communities is an historical response to what went wrong in our history and it is still with us - and we live with it today and I don't know if it can be over-turned. People being clamped together, crowded - and different groups forced to live together.

\* Also the high crime and unemployment rate here.

\* I think that most of our cases are going to come from people that were involved in crime - most of the people in our community will not come to discuss their own personal problems - like relationship difficulties etc. - the people that see Psychologists will be referred by other people - people who have been involved in crime.



DO YOU THINK THAT SOUTH AFRICANS IN GENERAL EXPERIENCE MORE PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS THAN PEOPLE IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD ?

\* No I don't think so - like in America they have racial problems and crime too - it's basically the same thing

\* It boils down to helping people coping with stress.

\* I don't think that South Africa's problem is that deep - look at America - most of the serial killers come from there - and the problems you see in movies you see - what kind of minds come up with things like that? - and their president having an affair with the intern and the people still respect him.

\* If our Psychologists had to go over there a gap would have to be bridged from what our Psychologists know so that they would be able to work with those people there - because there definitely is a gap between us and them - because they are highly industrialised and we are a developing country - so they have very much more advanced problems.

\* Ya, the more you have, the more problems you've got - like their very high divorce rate.

DO YOU THINK THAT PSYCHOLOGY APPEALS TO A SPECIFIC KIND OF PERSON ?

\* Yes. First of all you must love to work with people - the type of people that others feel they can open up to (a lot of people nod in agreement).

\* It must come naturally. I've experienced with my friends, I'm like the centre-point - people become co-dependent on you - and I'm just human.

\* You have to be influential as well, you should be able to persuade them.

\* Sincerity - one must be able to really feel for the next person.

\* One should have trustworthiness.

\* Hopefully only people with these qualities we've talked about would study psychology - but you will find people who are not sincere, who are not genuine - like "spoilt brats" who do the course.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO CONTINUE STUDYING PSYCHOLOGY ?

All six answered in the affirmative.

HAS THE PSYCHOLOGY ONE COURSE LIVED UP TO EXPECTATIONS ?

\* I wondered to myself, when are we going to study the mind - but you have to learn to crawl before you can walk - probably by next year we'll talk about these things - like I wasn't interested in the brain, I was more interested in what makes you love the next person - about human behaviour.



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