

CHALLENGING AUTHORSHIP AND AUTHORITY IN PSYCHOLOGY: A PUBLISHING INITIATIVE

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INTRODUCTION.

The recent publication of **Contemporary issues in human development: A South African focus** (1997) heralds a significant achievement for many of us in South African psychology. This is not only because it is a useful teaching text that talks about South Africans: black people, women, young people, and others marginalised by mainstream psychological texts, but also because it constituted an empowering experience for those who participated in writing the text. The empowerment of the participants, most of whom have felt "silenced" in the corridors of psychological knowledge production, is not just an achievement for a few individuals, but represents a challenge to the dominance of white and male voices in South African psychology.

The discipline of psychology in South Africa has been faced with a number of critical challenges over the last few decades. Progressive South African psychologists have drawn on global debates in psychology as well as the particularities of South Africa to pose serious questions about the past and future of psychology in our country. The critique of the dominant tradition of practice and theory within South African psychology has been viewed as constituting a profound crisis for the discipline. While South African psychology is not alone in this moment of crisis, but mirrors similar moments in psychology internationally, the uniqueness of our local context needs to take centre-stage in any struggles for change in the discipline.

Since the 1980s much time has been spent deconstructing the politically conservative and abusive legacy of psychology in South Africa, including the way in which the discipline has allied itself with ruling class ideologies; its lack of concern for, and inadequate service delivery to the majority of the population; and its marginalisation of majority voices in the country, black people, working class people, women (see for

example Dawes, 1985; Lazarus, 1985; Swartz, 1986; Vogelmann, 1986; Cooper, Nicholas, Seedat & Statman, 1990; Nicholas, 1990; Seedat, 1990; Louw, 1992; Nicholas, 1993). There have been calls for the reshaping of psychology and theorising of possible models and frameworks for a more progressive, preventative, community-based and accessible mental health system, including the practice and training of psychologists (see for example Anonymous, 1986; Dawes, 1986; Fullagar & Paizis, 1986; Berger & Lazarus, 1987; Eagle, Hayes & Bhana, 1988; Lazarus, 1988; Perkel, 1988; Freeman, 1991, 1992). There has also been a proliferation of community-based primary and preventative mental health care projects, like trauma centres, research units and resource centres, amongst others, all geared towards the development of more appropriate psychological services.

These historical developments have been critical in the transformation of South African psychology. Much of the challenge was however contextualised in the pre-election period and was infused by a strategy of response rather than reconstruction which is the imperative of today. Furthermore, much of the challenge to South African psychology remains theoretical. Psychology in South Africa stands deconstructed and exposed as “elitist, ethnocentric, androcentric, and decontextualised” (Seedat, 1990:22), yet we continue to teach from North American textbooks, with little reference to South African life and people. The majority of people who benefit from psychological services are still white and middle class. And most importantly for this particular project, the majority of those who publish and who consequently determine the parameters of psychological discourse, are still white and male (Seedat, 1990).

Seedat (1992) points out that between 1983 and 1988 the journals, **Psychology in society (PINS)** and the **South African Journal of Psychology (SAJP)** had only 4% of articles either authored or co-authored by blacks and 27% by women. While **PINS** has had a focus on issues of oppression, the majority of these articles in the 1980s were written by white males, “which dangerously reinforces the notion that whites are 'experts' on blacks, and men on women ...” (Seedat, 1990:38). In both journals there is a marked silence around gender issues (Seedat, 1990; Levett & Kottler, in press). In an analysis of 19 issues of the two journals between 1983 and 1994 Levett and Kottler (in press) found that only 5% of articles in the **SAJP** and only 6% of articles in **PINS** dealt with gender or feminist issues. It should be remembered that a focus on a topic does not ensure a critical or progressive framework. Furthermore, in the **SAJP** about 40% of these articles were written by men as first or sole authors. However, since then there has been an **SAJP** special issue on gender but all the papers are authored by white academics.

This short piece reflects on a project which makes a very practical intervention in South African psychology, particularly within the academic and educational arena. One of the major aims of the project was to challenge the ‘silences’ described above through a collective writing project managed by young, black and women psychologists. The project was based on a participatory methodology which also comprised continuous self-evaluation and a documentation of the process (described below). This paper, drawing on this evaluation, presents a description of the project and highlights three aspects which motivated the initiation and completion of the book, and constituted central points of value of the project.

THE TEXTBOOK INITIATIVE.

The project to develop a South African orientated and critical text for undergraduate students began early in 1995. The project was located in a broader movement to develop black authorship in the country. A range of programmes promoting authorship, which preceded and coincided with the launch of the textbook project, impacted powerfully on the initiative. The group involved in the early discussions and organisation of the textbook initiative all acknowledged the influence of a number of other authorship programmes. These included: a workshop hosted in Pretoria by ACCESS; the launch in the Western Cape of a Black Research and Authorship Forum; and a range of writing projects developed and sustained by the Psychology Resource Centre at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). The quotes in this article come from interviews conducted with the editorial collective and other authors involved in the textbook initiative.

ACCESS Authorship Programme.

The Centre for Science Development, within the framework of its ACCESS Programme organised a workshop in April 1995 entitled "Towards developing a programme for black authorship development". The workshop brought together an array of social science academics and journal editors from across South Africa, to examine various aspects of local publication systems and authorship. Workshop participants shared their experiences of social science publishing as exclusionary and "not conducive to drawing in black authors". This workshop was reported to be an " ... important event which motivated us to go forward ... where we realised that there was in fact a need for an initiative for black people to collaborate and for black people to get their work into print."

Furthermore, it was felt that the ACCESS workshop "put us all in the same place at the same time, discussing the same issue [and allowing workshop participants] the opportunity to meet up with people at other universities and to see that our experiences are very similar, that everyone has frustrations around publications". The workshop is reported to have had a "consciousness raising function", bringing into focus the range of obstacles impeding historically disadvantaged scholars and others from writing up and publishing their work. Two members of the editorial collective were present at the workshop, as well as two other contributors to the textbook.

The Black Research and Authorship Forum.

Approximately one month after the ACCESS workshop, a group of psychologists from UWC organised a meeting, calling upon especially black psychologists and other social scientists marginalised from mainstream psychology, to attend and launch "The Black Research and Authorship Forum". The objectives of the Forum are recalled by one of the participants, who would later also assist in the launch of the textbook initiative: "... [the Forum] wanted to encourage black people to do research and publish research and other theoretical papers that they were working on...Also to offer support to black people and marginalised people to do just that...The forum helped the [textbook] initiative."

Practitioners, academics, school psychologists and current and past students all attended the first Forum meeting. The attempt to include as many people as possible in this initiative appears to have been important in terms of the legitimacy of the Forum and the projects which would lead directly from it, or be associated with it. Since the launch, the Forum has been approached by the **South African Journal of**

Psychology to guest edit a special issue on black scholarship. Furthermore, many of those who attended the Forum subsequently participated in the textbook initiative. The decisions taken at the Forum meeting are reported to have complemented and supported the momentum which led to the subsequent launch of the textbook project.

The Psychology Resource Centre.

A number of other writing initiatives are reported to have played a part in the successful launch of the textbook. The Psychology Resource Centre (PRC), of the UWC's Psychology Department, has been promoting authorship amongst psychologists and other social scientists at UWC for a number of years. A number of the textbook contributors had previously published in the PRC's three publication formats: the *Occasional Publication Series*; the *Working with Children Lecture Series*; and the **Psychology Bulletin** (previously the **Psychology Quarterly**).

"From the outset we had decided in the PRC to enable staff members to start the publishing process or the authorship process by having their notes typed out and published or printed by the resource centre and these could then theoretically be sold to students... Quite a number of people utilized the facility of the resource centre. [Other Psychology Department members] and I took our lecture notes and had them published by the resource centre. Out of that flowed the notion that perhaps we could take all those things that were published as part of the publication series, and we thought that perhaps we could bind a number of them, or publish a number of them together as a book."

So too, some have written and submitted to the **Psychology Bulletin**, again a process some of the group felt supported their later involvement in the textbook. As one participant put it: "The **Psychology Bulletin** has developed very slowly but very systematically and in a solid manner. I am very proud of the last issue and last year's issue and the one that is going to come out. We are getting more people that recognise the value of the **Bulletin**, people off campus and outside the country. This is related to initiatives such as the textbook."

In the words of one of the group: "we went through the mechanics of publishing and the publication cycle all on our own ... That was an important way to demystify the manner in which publication happens." The process of submitting work, whether "flimsy or superficial", of receiving comments from peers, and seeing one's work coming back in printed form, is reported as important in promoting the confidence to write up work and submit it for publication in the textbook project. These experiences of previous exposure to supportive, non-threatening writing and publication formats are reported by the group to have facilitated the success of the textbook initiative: " ... exposure to writing and writing for peers to comment and to see and to not feel threatened by that. That has contributed as well ... This kind of way of working has made it ideal for the textbook initiative to take off."

Besides the PRC initiatives, a number of other authorship and textbook projects have been proposed in the past. While these initiatives and their outcomes were not clearly specified or clarified in the interviews [with participants in the authorship initiatives], one of the group noted the difficulties these initiatives encountered, particularly around collaboration with partners from advantaged backgrounds and universities. As one participant expressed it: "In the other initiatives I must add that you had people at

various academic development levels, in terms of their knowledge and skills around publishing. People from historically white institutions came to UWC to work with black people. And because people from the two groups functioned very differently, not only at different levels but I think their existential being in the world is very different, the project could never gel, because the people were not together. Many of the people who had already published and especially those people from the white universities felt that they were being held back by the others and it was not in their interest to get involved in a project which was taken up collaboratively."

Unlike the projects hosted by the PRC, the Black Authorship Forum and ACCESS, the last set of "failed" initiatives appear to have lacked the supportive features common to the others.

The textbook project.

Following the initiation of the textbook project, a number of meetings and workshops were organised with the primary aim being to provide a supportive and developmental forum for the writers. One goal of the meetings and workshops was to provide a democratic writing and publishing process. This was underpinned by a participatory, developmental methodology, which in practice meant a number of processes including:

- Skills workshops on writing and publishing;
- Collective decision-making regarding the publication process. Major decisions, including the philosophical underpinnings of the project (e.g. a critical text with a South African focus; the inclusion of marginalised voices) and guidelines for writing (e.g. non-sexist, non-racist writing) were all taken collectively. The first workshop held focused on developing this ideological framework for the book;
- The presentation of chapter outlines to peers and external 'experts' for evaluation. In this way peer evaluation and collective accountability was built into the project;
- The presentation of chapters at a conference titled "Contemporary issues in human development" at UWC from 31 May - 1 June 1996. The idea of the conference was to provide participants with further opportunity to practice academic skills, that is, formal presentation skills. Furthermore, an extremely rigorous process of review was constructed as part of the conference. Three external reviewers were selected from three environments of relevance to the book (an academic, an NGO employee and a student) to present a verbal assessment of each paper following the presentation by the author. Written reports were also submitted by the reviewers. In this way, authors underwent the process of review that accompanies publication, but were able to face their reviewers, having the opportunity to respond to and get clarity on points made by reviewers. A chairperson ensured that reviews remained constructive and focused. Following the conference, a debriefing session was held to provide contributors the opportunity to discuss their experiences of their presentation and reviews received, thus ensuring that negative consequences were contained.

The project was coordinated by an editorial collective that was elected by the group of authors. The four members of the collective coordinated a range of tasks including: seeking funds for the project; organising the workshops, meetings and conference; negotiations with publishers; carrying out a content edit on the chapters; and overseeing the copy edit. The project was located in the PRC (see above) which administered the funds, and provided other infrastructural support for the project.

From the outset, the textbook initiative was recognised as valuable by the ACCESS Programme and a documentation process was initiated, in which all aspects of the project were documented and analysed. The interviews with the editorial collective and some authors, conducted at regular intervals of the project, also provided a useful reflective function for participants. A report documenting the project is underway. Quotes in this article are drawn from this documentation process. Three central themes, emerging from the documentation process, which constitute both the motivating factors and the value of the project are explored below.

EMPOWERMENT OF PARTICIPANTS.

One of the most striking outcomes of the project was that participants felt empowered during and after the process of working together for a year and a half. This had much to do with the collective nature of the project, outlined above, and that it was fuelled by a political goal broader than individual gains, but also intent on developing individual participants' skills.

A collective, democratic endeavour was clearly an aim of the project and the opportunity to work collectively was mentioned by participants as a prominent reason for their involvement in the project in the first place. As expressed by one participant: "I was comfortable (in the project) as I prefer to work in a collective situation. I had once before worked on a collective book and it was a wonderful experience and I saw this as not only being an end product but also a pleasant, empowering process."

Speaking of rejecting a previous offer to write a text one of the participants stated: "It would not have been a collective project like the present one. I don't want to sound like this principled person. It is just when you realise that people are egocentric and egotistical there is a greater chance of you being abused in the process. So if I look for a collective process, it is not because of any magnanimous aspirations on my part. The collective would be more nurturing for my own developing skills."

The collective nature of the project was experienced as supportive and nurturant for development. One participant expressed the process as an "affirmation of power at a collective level in the sense of togetherness in the endeavour", as well as serving as "affirmation and empowerment at an individual level".

The regularity of peer review built into the project also played an important role. While the conference reviews were difficult for many of us, undergoing such direct peer review and evaluation was ultimately a confidence-building exercise. As a consequence of the inherently more lengthy process of collective ventures, we are convinced that most of the contributors to the textbook emerged feeling more equipped and confident as authors to "take academic space" and to "have a voice" in the discipline.

CHALLENGE TO THE DOMINANCE OF WHITE MALE VOICES.

The project, as elaborated above, had its roots in the Black Authorship Forum and a major motivation was therefore to provide a forum for black psychologists and other social scientists to develop authorship and research skills and build confidence. A number of white women also joined the initiative for the same reasons. Throughout the process the collective was inspired by the goal of challenging the dominance and "authority" of white and male voices in psychology.

The intention was to produce a text which would contribute to the transformation of South African psychology through the inclusion of authors who have been historically "silenced" in psychological knowledge production. These objectives were clearly motivated by the macro political changes in the country, which seemed not to be filtering down rapidly enough to the academic and psychological institutions. An urgency for transformation enabled and inspired individuals to initiate and maintain the programme of writing and publishing. Participants were motivated by a history of frustration with the discipline's exclusionary practices based on colour, gender and age hierarchies as evidenced by these quotes:

"I suppose that there are a lot of factors which would have influenced it. The first factor being that we are living in a different political period. Blacks are increasingly realising that despite the fact that political power has moved from the hands of white people to black people, *white people are still dominant in our society and specifically in academia*" [emphasis added].

"Psychology has a lot of changing to do, not only in the kind of texts that we use and the resources that we use, but also in who teaches and who represents the discipline, both as an academic profession, as well as a practical profession. I think that it has not changed fast enough. I think that *white men* still dominate in South African psychology" [emphasis added].

"... What frustrates a lot of academics in psychology and specifically at UWC, given our youth ...is the fact that the profession is still run by a number of *older people* - established academics who are not going to approach younger academics and empower them into doing things" [emphasis added].

A strong sentiment expressed throughout the project was the need to empower black, women and young psychologists through "our own" action, that is, without the "help" of those established within the profession. Again in the words of one of the participants: "... We had to make things change for ourselves. If I speak of we, I speak of primarily black people, but women as well, from all shades and backgrounds, and younger people." Empowerment in the project was therefore experienced through the "taking of power", that is, through the self-directed autonomy of the group of authors.

CHALLENGE TO THE DOMINANT CURRICULUM.

The project was strongly motivated by the need for curriculum changes in South African psychology training. The continued lack of appropriate, critical and relevant texts from which to teach, is reported by one of the participants to be the "straw that broke the camel's back". We continue to rely heavily on North American and European texts with their own universalised versions of experience which do not represent reality for the majority of South African students: "... North American and European textbooks were totally inappropriate for us. That understanding had always been there. I think last year was just the limit when we were looking for textbooks in fact, and we realised that we were not going to find an appropriate textbook."

The challenge to the Eurocentric, middle class, male focus of traditional psychology was a central goal of the project. In the development of the book, a strong effort was made to include South African local experiences through case studies and empirical data. Furthermore, an attempt was consistently made to include the experiences of those usually silenced or marginalised in traditional mainstream psychology texts, such

as physically and mentally disabled people, young mothers, victims of sexual, physical and civil violence. The choice of working on a developmental psychology text in particular was circumstantial. It was however a strategically important decision, as it contained and focused the project, facilitating an achievable project.

The idea of developing texts detailing the experiences of South Africans is clearly not new, and a number of attempts to write texts had been initiated already in the Psychology Department at UWC and other historically disadvantaged institutions. It seemed that this time the moment was ripe for the success of such a project, which is seen as a product of a range of contextual conditions, like "the circumstances outside ... a newfound sense of empowerment ... a newfound imperative to produce ... a newfound movement towards self affirmation".

The mission of curriculum change was also informed by a critical move to challenge dominant theoretical frameworks in psychology. Participants had collectively agreed to not only contextualise their chapters in South Africa but also to raise critical questions about hegemonic psychological knowledge in their area of interest. Many of the participants framed their chapters as critiques of traditional theories on that topic, highlighting the neglect of social context and raising debates in the South African context.

Although philosophical principles were agreed on in workshopping the project, these were differently interpreted by authors. Consequently the text includes a range of philosophical and ideological positions with some conflicts between different chapters in the book. However all locate themselves in South African context and raise issues of social concern.

CONCLUSIONS.

While the product of this project, a textbook, is probably a fairly small contribution to South African psychology, it is the process of the project which has been of particular value. This is particularly so for those who participated, but also, we believe, has wider value as a model for further critical and empowering interventions in transforming contemporary South African psychology. What stands out in reviewing the success of this publishing venture are three central aspects of the process: the collective, democratic nature of the project; the developmental, skills-based programme; and shared political and ideological goals.

While the textbook project provides a useful model for authorship endeavours, it is also evident that support from academic institutions for such initiatives is an essential ingredient. There is much rhetoric for change, but paying lip service is not enough. Material support in the form of funding and infrastructure are important for ensuring success. The project was born out of a political motivation to challenge the continued marginalisation of black, women and young psychologists and other social scientists in the construction of knowledge. Spaces for "silenced voices" and those standpoints historically excluded only become possible when systemic transformations are underway, as is the case in South Africa.

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