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Reflecting on South African Psychology: Published research, 'relevance' and social issues

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Reflecting on South African Psychology : Published research, ‘relevance’ and social issues

Abstract

As South Africa prepared to host the 30th International Congress of Psychology in 2012, a call was made to reflect on the strengths of and challenges facing contemporary South African Psychology. This paper presents our response to our brief to focus on social issues by presenting the results of a situational analysis of South African Psychology over the last five years and comparing this corpus of data to a similar analysis reported in Macleod (2004). Articles appearing in the *South African Journal of Psychology (SAJP)* and abstracts in *PsycINFO* with the keyword ‘South Africa’ over a 5½ year period were analysed. The content of 243 *SAJP* articles and 1986 *PsycINFO* abstracts were analysed using the codes developed by Macleod (2004). Results indicate: an increase in the number of articles, a reduction in the percentage of articles using quantitative methodologies and ‘hard’ science theoretical frameworks (particularly in the *SAJP*), and an increase in qualitative, theoretical, and methodological papers, and papers using systems-oriented theory (particularly in the *SAJP*). Traditional topics of assessment, stress and psychopathology continue to dominate, with social issues such as housing, land reform, development programmes, water resources and socio-economic inequities being largely ignored. Most research continues to be conducted in Gauteng, KwaZulu/Natal and the Western Cape, predominantly with adult, urban-based, middle-class participants, sourced mainly from universities, hospitals or clinics and schools. Collaborations or comparisons with other African, Asian, South American and Middle East countries have decreased. While the analysis presented in this paper is limited by its exclusion of books, theses, research reports and monographs, it shows that in published research there are some positive trends and some disappointments. The limited number of social issues featuring in published research, the under-representation of certain sectors of the population as participants, and the decrease in collaboration with, or comparison to, countries from the global ‘South’ represent challenges that require systematic attention.

Key words: Knowledge, Methods, Relevance, Research, Social issues, South African Psychology

In preparation for the 30th International Congress of Psychology (ICP), which was hosted in South Africa in 2012, Prof Norman Duncan, the chair of the Scientific Committee, called on some chairs of the Scientific Divisions to: (1) gauge the strengths of and challenges facing South African Psychology, and (2) start the process of charting a course for the acceleration of the discipline in the South African context. We were asked to reflect specifically on social issues. This paper is thus a response to this call and considers social issues and ‘relevance’ through presenting the results of a situational analysis of publications appearing in the *South African Journal of Psychology (SAJP)* and abstracts in *PsycINFO* over the last five and a half years, and comparing this corpus of data to a similar analysis reported in Macleod (2004). A version of this paper was presented as part of the panel discussion on this topic at the ICP 2012.

As stated by Macleod (2004), the position taken in this article is that Psychology is always a socio-political project that is intricately interwoven with the socio-historical and socio-economic power relations of modern society. Recognition of this means, we argue, that Psychologists should aim to produce knowledge that not only engages with the diverse socio-political concerns of the country, but also contributes to overcoming the multiple sources of social inequalities and diffractions characteristic of South African society, and the psychological issues attached to these concerns. Psychology is ‘relevant’, in our view, insofar as it recognises its potential complicity in the perpetuation of inequities, and asks questions and utilises theoretical frameworks that illuminate the interweaving of the individual with the social and how power relations are maintained or resisted.

In the following, we briefly discuss the history and current usages of the notion of ‘relevance’. We outline social issues in relation to current trends in Psychology. This discussion forms the backdrop against which we present the method used in this research and the results of our analysis.

Background: ‘Relevance’

How and what knowledge is produced in a discipline is, as has been pointed out by many post-structuralist writers, always contingent, historical and contextual. In South Africa, Psychology has reflected the ideological power relations interweaving the political and private lives of South Africans both before and after the end of Apartheid. For example, during the racial oppression of the 1980s, the lowest

proportion of articles dealing with race appeared in the *South African Journal of Psychology*. After the release of political prisoners, the unbanning of previously banned political parties and the beginning of transition in 1990, articles dealing with race began to take a more political, critical stance (Durrheim & Mokeki, 1997).

In recognition of the embeddedness of Psychology within Apartheid ideology, a number of Psychologists began to raise the question of ‘relevance’ in relation to South African Psychology in 1980s. Psychology was accused of, *inter alia*: adhering to a non-critical, conservative ideology, and thus either actively or inadvertently supporting Apartheid ideology (Dawes, 1985), ignoring working class issues (Dawes, 1986), and perpetuating inequities in mental health service provision (Vogelman, 1986). As such, these critiques created points of resistance not only to the mainstream South African Psychology of the day, but also to Apartheid ideology.

This is not to say that the voices of opposition to mainstream Psychology during Apartheid were unified. For example, challenges were launched not only at mainstream Psychology, but also at liberal and socialist traditions within Psychology (Nicholas, 1993; Nicholas & Cooper, 1990), and the usefulness of the concept ‘relevance’ was questioned (e.g. Manganyi (1991) indicated that he had ‘little interest in the fashionable but sterile notion of a “relevant” psychological theory and practise’ (p. 120)).

With the transition to democracy, how ‘relevance’ was viewed changed. Oppositional discourse gave way to a discourse of social responsiveness, with, in the words of De la Rey and Ipser (2004) Psychology being ‘judged in terms of the degree to which [it] has responded to government-led initiatives to promote social and economic development’ (p. 548). This has led to a recent critique by Long (2012) in which he argues that ‘the latter-day conception of “relevance” has abandoned, to a significant degree – and perhaps unwittingly – its early radicalism and has been absorbed by a new dispensation that commodifies knowledge’ (p. 12).

De la Rey and Ipser (2004) contend that it is time to extend the notion of ‘relevance’ to include not only questions of gender, race and policy responsiveness but also to ‘critical issues related to the nature of knowledge production in South African Psychology’ (p. 549). In contrast, Long (2012) argues that the idiom of ‘relevance’ has outlived its usefulness. While recognising the slipperiness of the notion of ‘relevance’ and the multiple potential uses of the word, we acknowledge its strategic importance, as suggested by De la Rey and Ipser (2004), in initiating

discussions concerning *how* Psychology engages with its subject matter, and, particularly in terms of this paper, with what kinds of knowledge are produced.

Social Issues and Currents in Contemporary Psychology

The transition of South Africa from Apartheid to democracy brought with it the space for Psychologists to engage in what could be broadly termed socially relevant and critical work. Publications relating to mental health practice and policy (steeped in the hope of providing equitable, primary mental health care to all) appeared, in which there was an active promotion of an understanding of mental health as related to social policies (e.g. Freeman, 1991; Freeman & De Beer, 1992; Pillay & Freeman, 1996). Two special editions of the *South African Journal of Psychology* appeared in 1995 and 1997, devoted to gender issues in Psychology and to black scholarship respectively, both of which challenged the relative silence of South African Psychology on issues of gender and race. In 1999, *Feminism & Psychology* carried a special feature, ‘Society, transformation, gender, feminism and Psychology in South Africa’. Debate continued, particularly around the usefulness of particular paradigms and methods in elucidating key social issues, and around Psychology as a racialised site of knowledge production and as a profession (see, for example, Duncan, van Niekerk, de la Rey and Seedat’s (2001) edited collection).

A key point of reflection in the development of South African Psychology was the special edition of the *South African Journal of Psychology (SAJP)* entitled ‘South African Psychology: Reviewing the first decade of democracy.’ In it, several authors addressed the progress and challenges inherent in the reconstruction of Psychology in a democratic South Africa. Many challenges were noted, but at the same time positive signs of progress were identified. Painter and Terre Blanche (2004) argued that there were ‘clear signs that progressive initiatives are building momentum, and we may even be on the brink of a historical shift where critical ideas and practices for the first time really become mainstream in academic psychology’ (p. 537). De la Rey and Ipser (2004) outlined as positive trends the increasing representation of marginalised groups in Psychology, the conscious responsiveness of (some) psychologists to post-apartheid imperatives (particularly the Reconstruction and Development Programme and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission), alignment with international theoretical trends, and an increasing recognition of the political nature of Psychology. Duncan, van Niekerk and Townsend (2004) identified an increase in black authors

contributing to the *SAJP* (although Shefer, Shabalala and Townsend (2004) highlighted the continued marginalisation of black women authors).

Macleod (2004), however, was somewhat less upbeat. She conducted a situational analysis of articles in the *SAJP* and abstracts in *PsycINFO* with the key word South Africa published over a five and a half year period from 1999 to mid-2004. In this analysis, to which our analysis is compared, Macleod found that:

- There was a domination of quantitative methods based on ‘hard’ science theory;
- The traditional topics of assessment, psychotherapy, counselling, psychopathology and stress predominated;
- A minority of studies utilised theoretical frameworks and tackled topics that illuminate the interweaving of the individual with the socio-political context;
- Knowledge was being generated chiefly about urban, middle-class adults living in the three wealthiest provinces;
- University students were the most popular source of participants;
- Historically white universities dominated the publishing scene; and
- Collaboration took place chiefly with high-income countries.

There have been a number of engagements around the status of Psychology since this special edition of the *SAJP*. Once again, the responses have been varied. Cooper and Nicholas (2012) argue that since the advent of democracy in South Africa various events and processes have ‘resulted in a transformation of the discipline, setting the tone for a psychology that reflects social concerns, transcends personal interest and group prejudice, and is set to continue to serve humanity’ (p. 100). Others have been less upbeat about the transformation of South African Psychology, specifically in terms of issues relating to gender and race. Kiguwa and Langa (2011) argue that ‘[g]ender research in psychology in post-apartheid South Africa is indeed quite sparse and very often far from reflective about its own theoretical and paradigmatic positioning and representation of many of the social and political aspects of individual subjectivity’ (p.263), while Callaghan (2006), commenting on the practice of applied psychology in South Africa, concludes that ‘discourses of professionalisation, and of femininity, intersect to discourage the feminist and activist engagement with Psychology in South Africa’ (p. 305). From the position of Liberation Psychology, Duncan and Bowman (2009) indicate that ‘there is insufficient generative

psychological theory and productive psychological research to counteract the ongoing deleterious influence of racism in South African society' (p. 94).

Methodology

The broad question posed in this analysis is: what kinds of knowledge are being generated in published research in South African Psychology, and how does this relate to social issues and the 'relevance' of South African Psychology? More specifically we sought to answer the following questions: What types of articles are being written? What topics are covered? What theoretical resources are utilised? About whom is knowledge being generated? Who is publishing? And with whom are they collaborating?

The data were collected using the same criteria for data collection as Macleod (2004): (a) all articles published in the *SAJP* from 2007 to mid-2012 (the same length of time used by Macleod (2004), and (b) all abstracts appearing under the key words 'South Africa' in *PsycINFO* in the peer reviewed journal section for the same time period. *SAJP* publishes 'empirical, theoretical and review articles on all aspects of psychology' and, as such, provides a good forum for in-depth analysis of full-length articles. *PsycINFO* bills itself as the 'largest resource devoted to peer-reviewed literature in behavioral science and mental health'. The abstracts retrieved from this database provide a broader, albeit less in-depth, brush stroke of published psychological research on South Africa. *SAJP* articles were not extracted from the *PsycINFO* database, for a number of reasons: (1) our aim was not to create independent samples for comparison but rather to present a picture of published South African research as reflected in these two databases; (2) for a valid comparison with Macleod (2004) we needed to follow the same sample selection process.

Our analysis is, of course, limited by its exclusion of books, monographs, research reports and theses. As such, this paper only reflects research featuring in articles that have gone through a peer review process.

Data were analysed using content analysis. Articles from *SAJP* and abstracts from *PsycINFO* were coded into the categories used in Macleod (2004), most of which were deductive (predefined by the authors) and one of which was inductive (emerging from the data) (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). The inductive category was 'topic'. Categories were defined as follows:

- Type of article:

- Empirical quantitative: articles that presented data from research and that utilised quantitative methodology;
 - Empirical qualitative: articles that presented data from research and that used qualitative methodology;
 - Empirical mixed quantitative and qualitative: articles that presented data from research and that used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies;
 - Theoretical: articles that did not present data but rather engaged in theoretical discussion;
 - Review: articles that reviewed other research (full-length article book reviews; systematic reviews; reviews of literature, theory, policy and legislation, description of an intervention);
 - Comment: articles that commented on a particular issue or debate or replied/commented to/on another article;
 - Methodological: articles that engaged in discussion about a specific methodology.
- Theoretical resources:
 - ‘Hard’ science frameworks (positivist, psychometric, neuropsychology, psychiatric, evolutionary psychology)
 - Individual-focused theory (e.g. attitude, identity, personality, wellness, moral development, risk/resilience)
 - Systems-orientated theory (e.g. socio-ecological, cultural, community, health systems, organisational)
 - Classic theories (existentialism, phenomenology, psychodynamic, hermeneutic, cognitive behavioural)
 - ‘Postmodern’ frameworks (social constructionism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism).
 - Topic (categorised according to the research questions and emerging from the data – in the *SAJP* a total of 53 topics were covered, while in *PsyncINFO* 435 individual topics were covered).
 - Province in which the research was conducted.
 - Demographics of the participants:

- Location: urban only (including township and informal settlements); rural only (including commercial farms and former homeland rural areas); mixture; unclear;
- Class as stated by authors of article: middle-class only; working class or poor only; mixture; unclear;
- Race: black African only; coloured only; white only; Indian only; mixture; unclear;
- Sex: male only; females only; males and females;
- Age of participants: pre-school children; primary school age children; teenagers; children in general (across the latter age ranges or unspecified); early adulthood; middle adulthood; late adulthood; adults in general (across the age ranges or unspecified); mixed adults and children (ages included in the various categories differed somewhat across studies – we used the language used by the researchers (e.g. young adults) to guide our categorisation);
- Sources of data: universities; hospitals/clinics; schools; documents (newspapers, hearings, records); organisations in the private sector; household survey; specified sampling; postal survey; government department; convenience; South African data archives; clubs; child care institutions; non-governmental organisations; adverts; referrals; multiple; not clear.
- Author affiliation: traditional universities; comprehensive universities; research councils; universities outside South Africa; other;
- Country of collaborators the number of studies in which there was either collaboration with researchers in another country or where a relevant comparison was made with results from elsewhere is indicated (*SAJP*); and
- Country of origin of author (*PsyncINFO*)

The tertiary education landscape of South Africa is very different from when Macleod (2004) conducted her study. A number of universities have undergone mergers or incorporations, and technikons have been absorbed into the university system. It was therefore not possible, as was done in the previous situational analysis, to categorise South Africa's universities along the lines of 'historically black' or 'historically white' or in terms of their medium of instruction (English or Afrikaans). We have therefore

chosen to categorise the author affiliations according to whether the author originates from a traditional university (University of Cape Town, University of the Free State, University of KwaZulu/Natal, University of Limpopo, North West University, University of Pretoria, Rhodes University, University of the Western Cape, University of the Witwatersrand), from a comprehensive university (University of Johannesburg, University of Zululand, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, University of South Africa, Walter Sisulu University), a research council (such as the Human Sciences Research Council), or from any 'other' type of institution (such as a hospital or clinic, for example). Universities of technology have been excluded as they did not contribute to the publications record in this instance.

Two hundred and fifty nine (259) articles appeared in the *SAJP* in the period specified, while 2333 appeared in *PsycINFO*. Some articles and abstracts were excluded from the analysis on the following grounds: highly irrelevant (South Africa is mentioned, but not discussed); obituaries; articles or abstracts that were clearly medical, legal, biological, or zoological in focus, or about Social Work as a profession. With these exclusions, the analysis was conducted on 243 *SAJP* articles and 1986 *PsycINFO* abstracts. Compared to the 147 *SAJP* articles and 432 abstracts that formed the database for the analysis conducted by Macleod (2004), this represents a significant increase in the amount of knowledge being produced about South Africa

It must be stated at the outset that the studies forming the data used for this analysis are not generated by psychologists only. Researchers from other disciplines publish on occasion in the *SAJP*, and *PsycINFO* accesses articles from a range of journals that may be of interest to Psychology researchers. Nevertheless, the two sources of data, when used together, give a reasonable picture of the current status of psychological and Psychology related research.

Results

Types, topics and theoretical resources

Table 1 presents the types of articles featured in *SAJP* and *PsycINFO*. A striking aspect of this comparison is a reduction in the percentage of articles employing quantitative methodologies in both the *SAJP* and *PsycINFO*. This has been accompanied by an increase in qualitative research articles, although this is more marked in the *SAJP*. In tandem with this, the percentage of articles/abstracts directly

concerned with theory and theory making has nearly doubled. Commentary articles have remained at a respectable level in the *SAJP* and have increased in *PsycINFO*. The percentage of methodological conversations has increased in both, while the percentage of review articles has decreased. The percentage of mixed method articles has decreased in the *SAJP* and increased in *PsycINFO*.

<Insert Table 1 here>

In terms of theoretical resources analysed in Table 2, the reduction in ‘hard’ science frameworks in the *SAJP* mimics the reduction seen in quantitative articles. A similar reduction is not noted in *PsycINFO*, owing to the use of a ‘hard’ science framework in many mixed method papers. While *PsycINFO* saw the continuation of the pattern of use of theoretical resources, the *SAJP* saw some increase in the percentage of articles using individual-focussed theory and a sharp increase in those using systems-orientated approaches and classic approaches. Interestingly, the percentage of articles using postmodern theoretical frameworks has declined in the *SAJP*. Some of this is accounted for by the fact that a special feature on Critical Psychology appeared in 2002, increasing the percentage of articles using postmodern frameworks in the analysis by Macleod (2004).

<Insert Table 2 here>

Tables 3 and 4 present the 18 most common topics in *SAJP* and *PsycINFO* respectively. The traditional topics of assessment, stress and psychopathology continue to dominate the publications in the *SAJP*, while psychopathology, counselling and assessment feature significantly in the *PsycINFO* abstracts. Interestingly, the focus on HIV/AIDS has increased in the *SAJP*, with the percentage of articles dealing with HIV or AIDS being the third largest. In contrast this category remains the highest percentage in *PsycINFO*. The Truth and Reconciliation Committee is no longer seen as an important topic of investigation, given its timing.

<Insert Tables 3 and 4 here>

The ‘whom’ of knowledge generation

Table 5 outlines the percentage of studies conducted in each province and juxtaposes this with the estimated percentage of the South African population living in the particular province. Compared to the analysis documented by Macleod (2004), there is an increase in the percentage of studies being conducted across provinces. Just under half of these comparisons were conducted between the Western Cape and Gauteng, with most of the rest of the comparisons featuring the Western Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal in combination with each other or with the Eastern Cape, the Free State and Limpopo. As was the case in the Macleod study (2004), the majority of research participants are drawn from three provinces: Gauteng, the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

<Insert Table 5 here>

Table 6 outlines pertinent demographic variables of participants in articles in *SAJP*. In terms of location, there is a slight increase of the studies being conducted in urban settings (including townships and informal settlements). There is, however, a decrease in the middle-class only participants; 23% of participants were from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds while only 15.8% were from working-class or poor backgrounds. In the case of 13% of the studies, the socioeconomic status of the participants was not mentioned and it was not possible to glean this information from the description provided in the study.

As seen in Table 6, there is an increase in the percentage of studies using black African only participants, and female only participants. In 55.4% of the studies, a range of participants were used in terms of race and 73% used both males and females. The studies with female only participants concerned reproductive issues (termination of pregnancy and pregnancy), sexual relations (especially in relation to HIV/AIDS, mothering, and rape), psychopathology (eating disorders and depression), health concerns (cancer and other common diseases), health services, and academic performance.

<Insert Table 6 here>

As can be noted from Table 7, the age of participants in research reported on in the *SAJP* has remained relatively stable, with adults in general and participants in

their early adulthood forming over two thirds of the participants. What is interesting to note, however, is the increase in papers concerned with both adults and children, and importantly, their *relationship*, and those with children in general.

<Insert Table 7 here>

Research concerning participants in their early adulthood remains prominent because many papers focus on university students, as reflected in Table 8. Researchers publishing in the *SAJP* continue to rely on universities, hospitals, clinics and schools for their data collection.

<Insert Table 8 here>

The ‘who’ and ‘with whom’ of knowledge production

As seen in Table 9, traditional universities produced the vast majority of articles featured in the *SAJP*.

<Insert Table 9 here>

As indicated in Table 10, there has been a decrease in the number of collaborations between, or comparisons with, other African countries. There has also been a dramatic decrease in collaborations with Asian, South American, and Middle East countries.

<Insert Table 10 here>

A review of author country of origin for abstracts in *PsycINFO*, as indicated in Table 11, reveals that the majority are from the USA and the UK.

<Insert Table 11 here>

Discussion

The increase in the number of articles/abstracts appearing in the *SAJP* and in *PsycINFO* is notable. This can be seen as a success story in the sense of having more

interest in South Africa from outside the country as well as an increase in the number of articles produced by South Africans. All in all, this amounts to an increase in the psychological knowledge production about South Africa and South Africans. Some of this increase may, however, be at the expense of quality. The editorial decision to limit the word count of *SAJP* articles to 5500 words means that theoretical articles and those using qualitative methodologies are limited in the depth that they may plumb in the explication of key issues. Furthermore, the question of *what* kind of knowledge is being produced raises itself, which is discussed below.

Macleod (2004) noted that ‘more needs to be done to promote theoretical development in South African Psychology’ (p. 625). The increase in the percentage of articles/abstracts directly concerned with theory and methodological conversations across both databases, together with the increase of qualitative research, which necessarily draws from theory, points to South African Psychology starting to engage with this challenge.

An interesting finding in this paper is the increase in systems orientated approaches to research and a decrease in methods based on ‘hard’ science frameworks in the *SAJP*. We may only speculate concerning the reasons for this, but wonder whether the prediction made by Macleod (2004) holds some validity:

While this more socially aware type of research remains subsidiary to ‘hard’ science, quantitative approaches, there is a potential for it to become more prominent, particularly with increased numbers of texts (such as those named above in community [Seedat, Duncan & Lazarus, 2001] and critical psychology [Hook, Mkhize, Kiguwa, Collins, Burman & Parker, 2004]) from which future generations of researchers may draw their inspiration (p. 618).

Despite this change, the traditional topics of assessment, psychopathology, psychotherapy and stress continue to dominate published research in South African Psychology. This does not, of course, mean that all researchers took a standard approach to these topics; indeed some took a critical stance. While these topics must clearly continue to be researched, the relative lack of engagement with topics that are more social in nature should be of concern.

The social issues that have received attention are: HIV/AIDS (which has seen an increase in percentage of articles dedicated to it in the *SAJP* and remains the most investigated topic in the *PsycINFO* papers); educational issues (which feature more clearly in this analysis than in Macleod (2004)); sexual abuse and rape, reproductive health, and violence and crime. Given South Africa’s high HIV infection rate, it has,

in some sense, become a ‘test-bed’ for analyses concerned with the topic, not least with respect to the many psychosocial issues relating to the pandemic. In addition, the crisis in education and the high levels of sexual and other violence and crime have provided an impetus for investigations in these areas. Cynically, one could argue that researchers are paying attention to prominent issues that cannot escape the eye.

Indeed, research in Psychology, as published in *SAJP* and *PsycINFO*, has under-explored a range of social issues pertinent to South Africa. Examples include unemployment and poverty, development programmes, land reform, water resource utilisation and management, housing and sanitation, public sector and institutional transformation, health and mental health systems, general health, ecological concerns and climate change.

Apart from topic, the question of about whom knowledge is being generated is pertinent. Research, as represented in the *SAJP*, is skewed towards understanding populations in Gauteng and the Western Cape, the wealthiest of our provinces. Little or no research is being conducted with participants from four provinces (Northern Cape, Mpumalanga, North West, Limpopo) all of which have poverty rates higher than the national average (Armstrong, Lekezwa & Siebrits, 2008). In addition, the low percentage of studies featuring working-class or poor people is in contrast to the fact that just under half the population falls below the national poverty line (World Bank, 2011).

In terms of the age of participants represented in *SAJP*, the 32.1% of research involving child or teen-aged participants reflects relatively closely the fact that 38.6% of the population is under the age of 20 (StatsSA, 2012). However, late adulthood has been consistently ignored. We know from Census 2011 that the percentage of population over the age of 60 (that is, of pensionable age) is 8% (StatsSA, 2012). Given the unique challenges facing many people in this age group (for example, providing for households from their state pensions or caring for grandchildren either because of labour migration or because of death of the parents), it is remarkable that this segment of the population is so neglected as participants.

Researchers publishing in the *SAJP* tend to rely on university, hospital/clinic or school samples. As indicated in Macleod (2004), these sources are clearly appropriate for certain research questions. However, it appears that we may be failing to generate knowledge across the range of spaces that people in South Africa occupy. The reliance particularly on university students to provide data on a range of topics is

problematic. This is most likely a function of convenience – universities provide a large resource of young adults in the form of students (although it must be noted that not all participants in the studies conducted in university settings were students).

The fact that most of the authors of research reported in the *SAJP* are affiliated to traditional universities is perhaps unsurprising, given the history of the institutions that were merged to create comprehensive universities (many of which were primarily teaching institutions). What is surprising is the decrease in the number of collaborations between, or comparisons with, other African, Asian, South American, and Middle East countries, especially in light of the calls that have been made for greater dialogue between South Africa and other ‘Southern’ countries (for example, through the BRICS economic partnership). The lack of engagement with these countries may reflect funding biases, and it is also possible that such collaborations/comparisons are being published elsewhere.

Considering the international scope of *PsycINFO*, and the fact that South Africa is often seen as a testing site for theories and practices that focus on violence, crime, HIV/AIDS, and education, it is possibly unsurprising that the majority of authors of the articles abstracted in *PsycINFO* hail from the USA, the UK, Ireland, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. It is worrying, though, that South Africa received far less attention from authors in other African countries. Combined with low levels of collaboration, this does not bode well for knowledge production on the continent, and especially about the continent.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper, we argued that to be ‘relevant’ Psychology needs to produce knowledge that engages with the multiple socio-political concerns of the country and to utilise theoretical and methodological frameworks that enable an understanding of the interweaving of the individual and the social as well as the operation of power relations. Our analysis points to some promising trends in this respect and to some disappointments.

Increased in-depth reflection on theory and method potentially promotes the generation of theory that is sensitive to our particular socio-historical context, and the sharpening of theoretical tools with which to elucidate key social issues pertinent to the country. However, research appears to continue to concentrate on traditional topics, with attention to social issues being restricted, for the most part, to a few major

points of concern. A range of other social issues are ignored or under-explored. If we understand humans as living in interaction with their environments and each other, these key social challenges facing South Africa should, we would argue, form a significant part of our knowledge production. In addition, the under-representation of certain sectors of the population (poor and working-class people, people from rural areas, elderly people, and people living in certain provinces) in research means that the social dynamics that people within these sectors of the population encounter have little chance to percolate into our knowledge base.

Given the nature of the challenges facing South Africa, the continued skewing of research collaboration to high-income countries which face very different challenges, and the decrease in collaboration with countries from the 'South', are both problematic trends. This must, however, be placed within the context of developments regarding knowledge production, both locally and internationally. The observation by Naidoo (2004) with regard to the 'attempts by governments to harness public universities in a relatively unmediated manner to economic productivity and to reposition higher education as a global commodity' (p. 249) has resonance in South Africa. Our knowledge production has been commodified through the subsidy system that rewards measurable research outputs and through the 'incentivising' systems put in place by many universities. This dovetails neatly with a strong 'internationalisation' trend that developed post-apartheid. The roots of 'internationalisation' in colonial conquest and the perpetuation of segregating practices (Sehoole, 2006) is evidenced in the relative weighting 'international' journals published in the Euro-America nexus compared to African or South African journals, and the fact that the rating system favours 'international' work, which, once again, perhaps inadvertently, favours work recognised in the resourced settings of the global 'North'.

What are the policy and practice implications of the results of our analysis? Easy solutions and trite recommendations to increase the 'relevance' of research in Psychology or to improve our attention to social issues have limited value in light of the deep entrenchment of Psychology as the science of individual behaviour as well as the current context of knowledge production. Nevertheless, forms of Critical Psychology, Feminist Psychology, Community Psychology, Race Psychology, and Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Psychology have found traction in South Africa in ways that are unthinkable in contexts like the UK and USA. These developments, together with increased theoretical and methodological debate, hold promise.

Our limited or non-existent focus on a range of social issues should cause us to look carefully at what we teach (and thereby legitimate as proper Psychological investigation), how we interact with other disciplines, and how research funding is allocated in Psychology. Given our poor history of tackling psychosocial questions related to the social issues listed above (unemployment and poverty etc.), engaging in, and funding for, interdisciplinary research that includes Psychologists in these areas is needed. In addition, the under-representation of certain sectors of the population as research participants, the continued reliance on university students, and the decrease in collaboration with countries from the 'South' all have implications for the decisions funders (in particular the National Research Foundation) make concerning the distribution of money for research.

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Table 1: Types of articles.

Type of Article	<i>SAJP</i> (2004) %	<i>SAJP</i> (2012) %	<i>PsycINFO</i> (2004) %	<i>PsycINFO</i> (2012) %
Empirical quantitative	50.7	32.5	47.9	38.6
Empirical qualitative	7.9	23.4	24.5	26.2
Empirical mixed quantitative and qualitative	9.3	5.2	2.5	6.8
Theoretical	9.3	15.4	6.7	13.4
Review	9.3	5.6	16.7	5.4
Comment	10.7	11.2	1.2	7
Methodological	2.8	6.7	0.5	2.6

Table 2: Theoretical resources.

Theoretical Resources	<i>SAJP</i> (2004) %	<i>SAJP</i> % (2012) %	<i>PsycINFO</i> (2004) %	<i>PsycINFO</i> (2012) %
'Hard' science frameworks	44.9	30	38.9	38.1
Individual-focussed theory	20.3	23.3	13.6	14
Systems-orientated theory	13.6	28.3	27.4	28.9
Classic theories	5.9	10.6	12.4	13
'Postmodern' theories	15.3	7.8	7.7	6

Table 3: Topics covered in *SAJP*.

Topic	SAJP (2004) %	Topic	SAJP (2012) %
Assessment	13.6	Assessment	14.8
TRC	7.5	Stress	13.8
Stress	6.8	HIV/AIDS	11.8
Psychopathology	6.1	Psychopathology	9.6
Sexual abuse/rape	4.8	Sexual abuse/rape	7.4
Professional training	3.4	Educational concerns	7.2
Reproductive health	3.4	Reproductive Health	4.4
Discourse analysis	2.7	Academic Performance	3.2
HIV/AIDS	2	Race/ethnicity	2.1
Academic performance	2	Historical concerns/apartheid	2.1
Race/ethnicity	2	Psychology as profession or discipline	1
Psychology as profession or discipline	2	Child care	1
Identity	1.3	Career	1
Suicide	1.3	Identity	0.8
Child care	1.3	Reflections/reviews	0.8
Cancer	1.3	Disabilities	0.4
Selection	1.3	Discourse analysis	0.4
Career Development	1.3	Career development	0.4

Table 4: Topics covered in *PsycINFO*.

Topic	<i>PsycINFO</i> (2004) %	Topic	<i>PsycINFO</i> (2012) %
HIV/AIDS	10.9	HIV/AIDS	12.6
Psychopathology	6.5	Psychopathology	9.2
Counselling/psychotherapy	5.8	Counselling (including ARV related)	6.6
Assessment	5.6	Assessment	5.4
Violence/crime	4.9	Sexual abuse/rape	5.4
Mental health services	4.4	Educational issues	5.1
Substance use and abuse	3.9	Violence/crime	5.1
'Race'/ethnicity	3.5	Stress	4.4
Sexual abuse/rape	2.5	Race/ethnicity	4.2
Professional training	2.3	Trauma	4.2
Trauma	2.1	Reproductive health	2.8
Parenting/mothering	1.8	Professional training	2.6
Reproductive health	1.8	Careers	2.1
Quality of life/wellness	1.6	Self concept/esteem	1.8
Learning	1.6	Disabilities	1.2
Self concept/esteem	1.6	Reflections/reviews	1
Politics	1.6	Identity	0.6
Identity	1.2	Politics	0.4

Table 5: Provincial data.

Province	SAJP (2004) %	SAJP (2012) %	Population %*
Gauteng	31	35	23.7
Western Cape	17.2	18.9	11.2
Kwazulu-Natal	16.1	9	19.8
Limpopo	8	2.5	10.4
Eastern Cape	5.7	7	12.7
Free State	4.6	3.7	5.3
North West	1.1	2.5	6.8
Mpumalanga	0	0	7.8
Northern Cape	0	0	2.2
More than one	10.3	20.5	
Not mentioned	5.7	0.8	

***Note:** the percentage of the population living in each province as enumerated in Census 2011
Source: StatsSA (2012)

Table 6: Pertinent demographics.

Pertinent demographics of participants (except age)	<i>SAJP (2004) %</i>	<i>SAJP (2012) %</i>
Urban only (including township and informal settlements)	66	69
Middle-class only	56.8	48.2
Working class or poor only	18.2	15.8
Black African only	25	37
Coloured only	3.7	3.1
White only	3.7	4.5
Males only	1.2	2.4
Females only	20.8	24.6

Table 7: Age of participants.

Age	<i>SAJP</i> (2004) %	<i>SAJP</i> (2012) %
Pre-school children	2.3	1.7
Primary school age children	3.4	3.8
Teenagers	9.1	6.3
Children in general	3.4	7.5
Early adulthood	22.7	16.7
Middle adulthood	2.3	0.4
Late adulthood	0	0.4
Adults in general	54.5	50.8
Mixed adults and children	2.3	12.4

Table 8: Sources of data.

Participants/data accessed from	SAJP (2004) %	SAJP (2012) %
Universities	27.8	33.4
Hospitals/clinics	18.5	20.6
Schools	12.4	15
Documents (newspapers, hearings, records)	12.4	8
Organisations in the private sector	7.2	4.3
Multiple	4.1	5.6
Household survey	2.1	1.6
Specified sampling	2.1	2.3
Postal survey	2.1	0.6
Government department	2.1	2.2
Convenience	2.1	2.8
Not clear	2.1	1.8
South African data archives	1	0.6
Clubs	1	0
Child care institutions	1	0
Non-governmental organisations	1	0.6
Adverts	1	0.6
Referrals	1	0

Table 9: Author affiliation *SAJP*.

	First %	Second %
Traditional universities	72.7	68.7
Comprehensive universities	7.3	6.4
Research Councils	4.3	2
Universities outside South Africa	12.5	20.9
Other	3.2	2

Table 10: Collaboration or comparison.

Collaboration/comparison	SAJP (2004) No.*	SAJP (2012) No.*
African countries	16	7
European (continent) countries	15	11
United States	12	12
Asian countries	10	1
UK	9	14
Australia	8	9
South American countries	7	0
Middle East countries	3	2
Canada	2	1
Mexico	2	0
Cuba	1	0

*Each instance of collaboration or comparison is counted. In some articles collaboration or comparison took place across more than one country

Table 11: Author country of origin (*PsycINFO*).

Country	%
USA	26
Britain/Ireland	23.4
South Africa	18.2
Europe	11.2
Australia/New Zealand	9.8
Other African Countries	8.4
Other	3