Historicizing the Relevance Debate in Psychology

Daniel Sher
Department of Psychology
University of Cape Town

ABSTRACT

The relevance debate in psychology can be described as discourse which calls for the discipline to become more socially valuable and accessible to those who purportedly need it. A literature review suggests that a) there is a socio-historical dimension to relevance discourse, and that b) such discourse is typically presented ahistorically and axiomatically. Thus, it is argued that there is a need for an historical perspective on the relevance debate. This project compares relevance discourse from South Africa (1974-1994) and North America (1960-1980) by means of a thematic analysis. The following themes emerged from such an analysis: 1. Social turmoil; 2. A pure or applied emphasis for psychology?; 3. A socio-political role for psychology?; 4. Science in relation to human values; 5. Equity in psychology; and 6. Indigenizing psychology. On the basis of such an analysis it was argued that the American and South African debates share a similar thematic structure and emerge from similar social contexts, and thus that relevance debate is contingent on a social context characterized by turmoil. Drawing on the theory of Nikolas Rose, this project problematizes the ahistorical and axiomatic presentation of the relevance debate. Thus, by historicizing and contextualizing relevance discourse, the historical conditions under which the relevance debate has come to be perceived as 'truth' are demonstrated. Such historicization of relevance discourse allows for a more critical and accurate understanding of the relationship between the relevance debate and contemporary society.

Key words: relevance debate; relevance discourse; critical history; axiomatic; thematic analysis; critical

BACKGROUND

The relevance debate in psychology can be defined as discourse emphasising the need for the discipline to become more socially valuable to the people who purportedly need it. Examples include discourse calling for the indigenization of psychology within South Africa (Seedat, MacKenzie, & Stevens, 2004), and the 'demystification' of the discipline in America (Miller, 1969). A review of the literature calling for relevance in South Africa and America suggests that a) there is a socio-historical dimension to the relevance debate; and that b) relevance discourse is presented ahistorically. The review suggests, therefore, that there is a need for an historical perspective on the relevance debate (Louw, 2002). Such a perspective will allow for a more critical and accurate understanding of the roles played by relevance discourse within society, by challenging implicit assumptions within the relevance debate that might be obscured by its ahistorical presentation (Rose, 1996). Thus, it is argued that such historicization will be achieved by contextualizing relevance discourse. In other words, this project aims to determine the nature of the social contexts to which relevance discourse has been linked historically, thereby providing a necessary socio-historical perspective to the relevance debate (Louw, 2002).

'Relevance' is a term that has been used to call for changes within psychology, in order to make the discipline more socially responsive. However, the notion of 'relevance' is relative and multi-dimensional; the term has no single definition or absolute meaning (Biesheuvel, 1991). What calls for relevance have in common is an implied objective to bring about positive social outcomes. However, such calls differ in their proposed method of achieving such outcomes (Nell, 1990).Thus, within South African psychology, the singular term 'relevance' has been used to call for various mobilization strategies, from action against Apartheid (Dawes, 1985), to the indigenization of psychology (Holdstock, 1979), and the development of a scientific understanding of the psychological process underlying social issues (Biesheuvel, 1991).

The following literature review compares the South African and American relevance debates. In doing so similarities are identified, not just in the issues raised, but between the social contexts from which these debates emerge (Seedat et al., 2004). Such similarities suggest that the emergence of the relevance debate is contingent on very specific circumstances; and that, therefore, there is a socio-historical dimension to such discourse. Despite the existence of such a dimension, however, relevance discourse is typically presented ahistorically (Louw, 2002; Rose, 1996).

Thus, this review identifies a gap in the literature: That there is a need for an historical perspective on the relevance debate. The historicization and contextualization of the relevance debate will allow for any taken-for-granted assumptions couched within the debate to be challenged. Such a perspective, it is argued, will enable a deeper understanding of the role and functions which the relevance debate and psychology play in our society (Gergen, 2000; Louw, 2002; Rose, 1996).

The literature covered by this review includes discourse calling for relevance in psychology from contemporary South Africa, and from America during the 1960/70s. By identifying specific similarities between the two bodies of literature, two points are made. First, the literature from South African and American debates is qualitatively similar; and second, such debates emerge out of similar socio-political contexts, characterized by rapid transformation and upheaval (Seedat et al., 2004).

Social Context

The first similarity identified between the American and South African debates relates to the social contexts. The social context in America during the 1960's was characterized by widespread social unrest: There was concern over issues such as poverty, racism, a nuclear arms race, the assassination of J.F Kennedy, the L.A Riots, an impending environmental crisis, and widespread student protests (Albee, 1969; Baron, 1971; Hornstein, 1973).

Similarly, South African literature from the latter quarter of the 20th century makes reference to widespread protests and uprisings against the Apartheid regime, and to psychological issues associated with the socio-political transformation to a democracy after 1994 (Pillay & Kramers, 2003; Van Vlaenderen, 2001).

Need for Theoretical Transformation

A second point of similarity between the debates is an expressed need for theoretical transformation within the discipline, so that psychology may begin to address social issues (Miller, 1969). Both the South African and American relevance debates hold that this will be achieved by challenging the basic theories upon which mainstream psychology is based, such as an individualistic focus, and use of the 'medical model' for understanding mental disorders (Hersch, 1969; Macleod, 2004).

American psychologists, for example, have claimed that the basic theories upon which traditional psychology was based impeded their ability to effectively meet the service-needs of their clients. It was argued that the biomedical model's emphasis on a rigid scientific

method and individualistic approach should be replaced by a more fluid understanding of the impact of social context on mental health. In order to become of practical use, therefore, the focus of psychology shifted from individual pathology to socio-political population-level issues (Hersch, 1969).

Similarly, South African literature critiques the biomedical focus and individualistic reductionism within mainstream psychology. Critics argue that in order to be relevant to South Africans, psychology needs to focus on those issues which have the largest impact on mental health in South Africa. Such issues include poverty, violence and HIV, as well as racial, class and gender-based social inequality (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004). Thus, in order for psychology to be relevant in South Africa, there is a need for the discipline to be wary of mainstream psychology's biomedical theoretical basis, and to move towards a focus on wider social and political issues (Macleod, 2004).

Under-Representation of Minorities

A third point of similarity between the debates is a critique of the under-representation of black people within the discipline of psychology. In the American debate, for example, there was widespread criticism of the fact that psychological training institutions consisted predominantly of white candidates (Kennedy & Wagner, 1979). It was argued that more black students should be recruited so as to make psychology more socially relevant to black communities (Bayton, Roberts, & Williams, 1970), and to produce more black-psychologist role-models, so as to attract black students to what was perceived as being a traditionally 'white profession' (Albee, 1969).

Similarly, in contemporary South Africa, critics have voiced the need for greater recruitment of black African psychology students (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; De La Rey & Ipser, 2004; Pillay & Kramers, 2003). This call is related to concerns over providing equal opportunities for all 'races', in order to begin to rectify the disadvantage conferred upon certain racial groups by the Apartheid regime (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004). Additionally, it is argued that there is a need for a greater number of African psychologists in order for psychology to become more socially relevant and applicable in the context of non-Western cultures (De La Rey & Ipser, 2004).

Community Psychology

A fourth point of similarity observed between the debates was a call for a theoretical shift towards community psychology. For example, in both the South Africa and American

literature there was a call for psychology to work towards the empowerment of communities, thus enabling them to take control over their own futures (Hersch, 1969; Seedat & Nell, 1992). Similarly, both literatures called for psychology to abandon its traditional curative focus, and adopt a primary preventative approach to mental illness (Bennett, 1965; Seedat & Nell, 1992). Finally, both literatures emphasized the need for interdisciplinary communication, calling on psychology to broaden its theoretical foundation by drawing on knowledge from other disciplines. (Biesheuvel, 1987; Goodstein & Sandler, 1978).

Ahistorical Presentation

The striking similarities identified between relevance discourse from America during the 1960/70s, and from contemporary South Africa, suggest the existence of an historical dimension to the relevance debate. Despite the existence of such a dimension, literature on the relevance debate tends to approach the issue of relevance from a psychological, rather than an historical perspective (Louw, 2002).

For example, Holdstock (1979) calls for the indigenization of psychology, so as to make the content of psychology more relevant to South African populations. By referring to changes in psychological theory as a means of addressing the topic of relevance, such an issue is approached from *within* the perspective of psychology. An historical perspective, on the other hand, entails shedding light on the historical conditions which allowed this sort of discourse to be accepted as truth. Because the relevance debate is presented ahistorically, it is also presented axiomatically, in that it frames the need for the indigenization of the discipline as a self-evident truth, rather than as the result of specific socio-historical circumstances (Danziger, 1994; Louw, 2002).

Thus, an historical perspective is useful to the extent that it will challenge any implicit assumptions within the relevance debate, which are obscured by the fact that the debate is presented ahistorically. In doing so, such a perspective will reveal the existence of any possible historical and ideological underpinnings to the debate (Danziger, 1994; Louw, 2002). Therefore, this review suggests a gap in the literature, and that therefore, there is a need for an historical perspective on the relevance debate.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework upon which this study is grounded is a critical-historical perspective, based on the work of Nikolas Rose (1998). By treating contemporary reality as a problem to be explored, rather than a self-evident truth, this perspective enables a better

understanding of the complex relationship between psychology, society and the object of psychological knowledge.

Rose (1998) delineates two ways of conducting a history of psychology which should be distinguished from a critical-historical approach: 'recurrent history' and 'history as critique'. A recurrent history presents the current image of a discipline as a straightforward culmination of the past. For example, such a history may recount aspects of the past in a way which justifies and idealizes the contemporary image of psychology. The discipline's contemporary form is often explained merely as a response to external societal and contextual changes. History as critique, on the other hand, attempts to de-legitimate the contemporary image of psychology by drawing attention to historical factors which have impeded and subverted psychology in its path to becoming a virtuous discipline. From such a perspective, psychology is often seen as a tool through which certain parties have come to dominate and oppress others.

The problem with these approaches is that they implicitly frame 'psychology', 'reality' and 'society' as conceptually distinct and independent entities. 'Reality' is presented as that which psychology seeks to study, and includes concepts such as personality, subjectivity and emotion. 'Society' is understood as the backdrop upon which the psychological study of 'reality' occurs, and consists of predominating social, cultural or economic outlooks. Both society and reality are perceived as existing independently of psychology (Rose, 1998).

This perspective is problematic because psychology, society and the object of psychological knowledge cannot be understood separately from one another. The relationship between them is one of mutual constituency. In other words, contemporary 'psychology', 'society', and the reality which psychology seeks to study, have all come to play a role in constituting each others' existence (Danziger, 1994).

A critical-historical perspective is preferable to traditional historical approaches in that it acknowledges this relationship of mutual constituency between psychology, reality and society. A critical-historical perspective is also unique in that it makes no attempt to understand psychology by value-laden terms, such as 'true', 'false', 'virtuous' or 'exploitative'. Rather, it seeks to enable a fuller understanding of our contemporary reality by examining the historical processes through which society has come to occupy its current form, and the conditions whereby the above-mentioned value-judgements have been made possible (Rose, 1998).

In terms of the relevance debate, a critical-historical perspective problematizes the way in which relevance discourse is typically presented, by drawing attention to the specific conditions under which such discourse has been constituted historically. By revealing the historical and social circumstances on which the relevance debate is contingent, a critical-historical perspective opens up space to challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions relating to such a debate (for example, the implicit notion that the relevance debate is an aspect of psychology which is ahistorical, and therefore axiomatic) (Louw, 2002, Rose, 1996). Thus, by moving beyond psychological and traditional historical perspectives, this research enables a more accurate understanding of the roles and functions performed by psychology and the relevance debate in contemporary society (Louw, 2002).

Significance

This study is a theoretical one, which attempts to provide an alternative perspective on the nature of psychological knowledge, and the way in which such knowledge operates within society. However, the knowledge generated by this study may have wider social implications. The relevance debate typically addresses those who have been marginalized by mainstream society. In South Africa, the population groups addressed by such discourse predominantly consist of those who have been marginalized historically: black Africans, the poor, rural inhabitants and women (Seedat et al., 2004). To the extent that the relevance debate concentrates on these groups, therefore, the knowledge generated by this study may have implications for such populations. By challenging those aspects of the relevance debate that psychology currently poses as axiomatic truth, this study will seek to uncover any possible historical and/or ideological underpinnings to such discourse. Although this research is not predominantly concerned with a power analysis (see 'aims' section), such an analysis may help to determine "whether Psychology will be about giving the powerful more power" (Louw, 2002, p. 3).

Aims of the research

This project is atypical to the extent that many of the articles included in the literature review form a part of the larger *data corpus* examined by this project. The literature review should be understood as a preliminary investigation, the results of which suggest that a comparison between American and South African relevance discourse is justifiable on the grounds of the identified similarities between the two debates. This research therefore extends the scope of

the literature included in the preliminary review, thus providing a more thorough and substantive analysis of such data.

The main aim of this research is to historicize the relevance debate. This historical perspective is realized by examining the contextual factors to which relevance discourse has been linked historically. Thus, the research question for this project is: "To what contextual factors is the relevance debate linked?"

Such contextualization and historicization of the relevance debate entails treating relevance discourse as a problem to be explored, rather than a self-evident truth. Thus, by framing the relevance discourse in terms of contingency, rather than axiomatic inevitability, this project allows for a more critical and accurate understanding of the relationship between the relevance debate and society (Louw, 2002, Rose, 1998).

METHOD

Qualitative Research

This research employs a qualitative approach, which prioritizes detailed understanding and rich description over quantification and statistical explanation. A qualitative approach is well suited to the aims of this study for several reasons. First, qualitative research enables a researcher to approach the data from an exploratory, inductive perspective (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2008). Such an approach is well suited to my study, as my data-analysis is not driven by any specific theory. My research is open-ended, and potentially significant findings can be induced from an immersion in the data. Second, qualitative approaches emphasize that phenomena derive meaning from their context. Such a perspective is useful for my study, which seeks to understand the relevance debate within its wider socio-historical context. Finally, qualitative research tends to be focussed on language, rather than numbers (Willig, 2001). The data analyzed in this study consists of discourse calling for relevance in psychology. Although it is possible to quantify this sort of data, a qualitative approach is preferable, as it provides an understanding of the way in which the language analyzed is meaningful to my research question (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2008).

Design and Data Corpus

The design for this study is a comparative one, entailing an analysis and comparison of the contents of American and South African psychology journals. Such a comparison has already been made on a preliminary level in the literature review. The results of this review suggest

that the American and South African relevance debates are comparable in terms of the issues raised, and the contexts from which such calls for relevance emerge. Thus, the content sampled by this project includes articles, letters and commentaries which relate to the relevance debate.

My decision to use psychology journals for this analysis is based on the fact that it is through journal articles that psychology publicly manifests the discipline's concerns with its own social relevance (Seedat et al., 2004).

Journals

The journals analyzed by this project were selected on the basis of their prominent status in psychology within their respective countries. From South Africa, the *South African Journal of Psychology (SAJP)* was sampled. As the official publication of the *Psychological Society of South Africa*, the *SAJP* constitutes a good reflection of the predominant theoretical positions within South African Psychology (Seedat et al., 2004).

From America, *The American Psychologist* was sampled. This is the official journal of the *American Psychological Association,* and constitutes an encompassing representation of various theoretical perspectives within American psychology (Koulack & Keselman, 1975). My decision to analyze content from only two journals was based on the spatial and temporal limitations imposed upon this Honours-level research project.

Scope

The journals were sampled from timeframes during which calls for relevance were most prominent within American and South African literature. Thus, in the American literature, relevance discourse was particularly prominent during the 1960s and 1970s. During this period psychology experienced pressure to address issues such as the L.A Riots, the assassination of J.F Kennedy, and widespread student protests (Miller, 1969; Seedat et al., 2004). Thus, the American journals were sampled from between 1960 and 1980.

In South African psychology, calls for relevance were most prominent during the 1980s (Macleod, 2004). Such discourse was largely constituted by calls for action against the Apartheid regime. Anti-Apartheid activism reached its pinnacle during 1976, when the Soweto Riots ensues due to the promulgation of the Afrikaans Medium Decree of 1974, which made the use of Afrikaans within Black high-schools mandatory (Zunes, 1999). Thus, South African journals were sampled from between 1974 and 1994.

Sampling Procedure

Content was sampled on the basis of its pertinence to the relevance debate. Based on the literature review, this research understands the relevance debate as constituting any discourse which calls for psychology to become more socially applicable, accessible and useful to the populations who purportedly need such services (Seedat et al., 2004).

The journals were sampled by means of a key-word search on the PsycINFO database. Keywords included: 'relevance', 'social responsiveness', 'social issues' and 'community psychology'. The titles and abstracts of the articles returned by such searches were examined, and all articles which called for relevance in psychology were included in the study. From the South African literature 21 articles were sampled, and from the American literature 29 were sampled.

Data Analysis

The data collected for this study was analysed by means of a thematic analysis. A 'theme' is defined as a recurrent and meaningful reference to a specific subject or idea within a dataset. A thematic analysis seeks to identify such patterns of meaning within a dataset, and to analyze their significance in terms of the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

A thematic analysis is well-suited to my research question and research aims for several reasons. First, a thematic analysis not only identifies themes, but also provides an understanding of such themes within their wider context (Yardley & Marks, 2004). The main aim of this research is to link the relevance debate to the historical and social contexts that give rise to it. Thus, by identifying patterns of meaning within data, and establishing how such meaning relates to a wider context, a thematic analysis allows for the historicization and contextualization of the relevance debate. Second, a thematic analysis is useful for summarising, organizing and understanding large bodies of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The relevance discourse examined by this study form part of an expansive and heterogeneous body of data, and it was necessary to understand and organise this data in a meaningful way. Third, thematic analysis enables a detailed and rich understanding of the data, and is able to generate insights that were not anticipated by the researcher (Yardley & Marks, 2004). Given the complexity and heterogeneity of the data used within this study, and the fact that I was unsure of the results that my analysis might yield, such features make thematic analysis a technique which is well-suited to this topic. Fourth, thematic analysis is a flexible technique, in that it is not committed to any specific theoretical or epistemological framework. This allows the researcher to understand the data from various perspectives, and to draw various

conclusions from such data. Considering that this research project constitutes a first attempt to link the relevance debate with a critical-historical framework, the flexibility conferred by such a technique is useful (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

One recurrent problem with thematic analysis, however, is that researchers often do not make explicit the theoretical and epistemological assumptions that underlie their data analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise the importance of considering such issues prior to analysis, and of making such assumptions explicit within the methods section of the report. Therefore, this proposal discusses the coding method used, the level at which the analysis occurred and the epistemological grounding of this project, so as to unambiguously delineate the theoretical and epistemological assumptions underlying this research.

Coding method. This project used an inductive approach to coding the data. Coding is the process by which a theme is identified and categorized; this can occur either inductively or deductively. A deductive coding method is theory-driven, and involves focusing on a specific aspect of the data to with which such theory is concerned. An inductive approach, on the other hand, involves allowing themes to emerge 'naturally' from the data, without attempting to fit such themes into a theoretical framework. It should be noted, however, that the theoretical and epistemological assumptions on the part of the researcher will always affect the process of coding, and that a certain degree of reflexivity is required in order to acknowledge that patterns do not 'emerge naturally' from the data, but are actively selected and identified as themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Rather than focussing on a specific aspect of the data, an inductive approach aims to provide a detailed and sweeping description of the data. Such an approach is well suited to this project, as my research is not based on a specific theory which attempts to understand a specific aspect of the data. Although this research is based on a critical-historical framework, such theory relates to the way in which themes are meaningful within their wider socio-historical context (Rose, 1996), rather than requiring that a specific aspect of the data be analyzed in a particular way (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Level of coding. The themes in this project were coded at a latent level. Coding at a semantic level involves developing an understanding of surface meaning, and aims to identify themes which are communicated in a straightforward way by the text. Coding at a latent level, on the other hand, entails understanding the underlying meaning of themes. A latent theme is one which may be implicitly referred to, and coding at this level seeks to go beyond the surface-

meaning of the theme in order to understand the significance of that theme within wider, contextual structures of meaning. Latent coding was appropriate for this project, therefore, as it allowed me to go beyond merely understanding the surface meaning of themes within the relevance debate, and to understand how the themes that make up such a debate are linked to a wider social and historical context (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Epistemological grounding. This study is grounded in a contextualist epistemology. An epistemological position refers to the researcher's understanding of the nature of knowledge, and the process by which such knowledge can be obtained. Epistemology relates to the way in which the data is viewed, and informs the sorts of conclusions that can be made by analyzing the data (Willig, 2001).

Contextualism bridges the gap between naïve realist and constructionist epistemological perspectives. Whilst the former holds that there is a stable reality that can be discovered, the latter holds that all reality is socially constructed, and that the only way to understand such a reality is via de-construction (Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000). Contextualism, on the other hand, holds that there is a reality which is demonstrable through the data, but that this reality is shifting and incomplete, rather than absolute. From such a position, reality must be understood in terms of the context in which such a reality is made possible and true. However, contextualism goes beyond the mere acknowledgement that context impinges on phenomena, and understands that such phenomena exist in a state of mutual constitution with their context. Therefore, context is understood not as something separate from the phenomena being studied, but as a constitutive part of the phenomena (Jaeger & Rosnow, 1988).

A contextualist epistemology was well-suited to my research aims, method and theoretical framework for several reasons. First, contextualism bridges the gap between naïve realism and constructionism. This allowed my study, for example, to identify semantic features of relevance discourse as representing a meaningful element of reality within the debate, but also to describe how such themes are meaningful within their wider social context. Second, the fact that contextualism understands truth and meaning as being defined in relation to context means that such an epistemological stance allowed me to pursue my primary research aims: to historicize and contextualize the relevance debate (Jaeger & Rosnow, 1988). Third, contextualism understands the phenomena under study as being in a relation of mutual constitution with its context, thus rendering such a position complementary to this project's critical-historical framework, which holds that psychology, society, and the

object of psychological knowledge must be understood as constituting each other (Rose, 1998).

LIMITATIONS

One critique which applies to historiography generally, and this project specifically, comes from a post-modern perspective. Such an argument holds that historical analyses are problematic to the extent that they are inherently ideological. The first premise of this argument is that history (as a discipline) presents itself as being objective. History does this by differentiating between 'uppercase' and 'lowercase' histories. Uppercase history entails a selective recounting of past events in a way which characterizes the present as the progressive outcome of a culmination of past events. Such forms of history have been widely criticized, and consequently, the vast majority of contemporary historical studies are conducted from a lowercase perspective. Lowercase histories are said to be objective in that they are closely tied to historical fact. Such histories claim that historiography occurs for its own sake, rather than to further some sort of ideological objective. By defining itself as the antithesis of uppercase history, lowercase history implicitly frames itself as being free from ideology, and thus as being objective.

The second premise of this argument is that the true nature of an event can never be captured by re-presenting that event. Thus, the recounting of historical events does not constitute 'historical fact', but an interpretation of a text, which in turn is an interpretation of an event. History, therefore, can never be tied to historical fact, as it claims to be (Jenkins, 1997).

The conclusion of this critique, therefore, is that historiography portrays itself as being objective, whilst such objectivity is impossible. Historiography, therefore, is inherently ideological, and may serve the function of furthering the interests of the perspective represented by the historian (although this is likely to occur on an implicit level) (Jenkins, 1997). The implication of this critique for my own research is that in examining the relevance debate historically, I make an implicit assumption that such an investigation is objective to the extent that the analysis is based on historical fact. Since objective historical fact is unobtainable, however, my approach to the relevance debate must unavoidably have ideological underpinnings of some sort. This indicates a need for a degree of researcher reflexivity.

REFLEXIVITY

The nature of this project is such that a certain degree of reflexivity was required on my behalf. First, no historical study can be purely objective. Therefore, to the extent that this research claims (implicitly) to represent historical fact, such an endeavour is influenced by the ideological positioning of the researcher (Jenkins, 1997). The knowledge produced by this research may have implications for South African population groups that have been marginalized historically. These include Black South Africans, rural inhabitants, the poor and women (Seedat et al., 2004). A reflexive approach requires, therefore, that I consider the way in which my own ideological position (as a white, educated male) may influence the findings of this research.

Second, as a data-analytic technique, thematic analysis requires that the researcher considers the extent to which his/her own perspectives have influenced the process of identifying themes within the data. This has, to a certain extent, already been achieved by making explicit the theoretical and epistemological assumptions which guided the analysis (see above). However, there is still a need for one to acknowledge that themes do not simply 'emerge' from the data, but are actively selected and identified by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Third, contextualism as an epistemological stance, and critical-history as a theoretical framework both hold that meaning, truth and knowledge are products (and producers) of their specific socio-historical and cultural context (Jaeger & Rosnow, 1988; Rose, 1998). Such considerations do not only relate to the phenomenon which this project endeavoured to investigate, but should also inform an understanding of the knowledge which is produced by this study. Thus, such knowledge must be considered in relation to the wider context within which such it was constructed (Rose, 1996).

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research is archival in nature, and did not involve any human participants. For this reason, there were no ethical issues to consider.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A comparison of literature from the *American Psychologist* (1960-1980) and the *South African Journal of Psychology* (1974-1994) demonstrates several similarities between the debates. A thematic analysis suggests the existence of six themes within the data corpus. These are: 1. Social turmoil; 2. A pure or applied emphasis for psychology?; 3. A socio-political role for psychology?; 4. Science in relation to human values; 5. Equity in psychology; and 6. Indigenizing psychology.

The following section comprises an explication of the six themes that I have identified during this analysis. Extracts will be drawn on to demonstrate the similar way in which the themes and subthemes have manifested within the USA and SA.

Theme 1: Social Turmoil

A common theme that I identified in both the SA and USA literature is a reference to a social context characterized by a state of change and upheaval. For example, within the American literature frequent references are made to social issues such as riots in the cities, a largely unsupported international war, widespread student protest (Walker, 1970), alienation and protest on the part of the American Negro, and the assassination of J.F Kennedy, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King (Hersch, 1969).

The South African literature, on the other hand, contains references to issues such as the Apartheid regime, the struggle for equality by Black South Africans (Retief, 1989), international sanctions placed on the country, economic insecurity (Mauer, Marais, & Prinsloo, 1991), township violence and the 1976 Soweto Uprising (Seedat & Nell, 1992).

Despite differences in the specific issues faced by each country, the literatures are similar to the extent that they describe a society characterized by rapid social change and a sense of immanent social catastrophe. This is demonstrated in the SA literature:

> *...the socio-political situation in the country is a good deal less stable than it has been at virtually any point in our history. (Mauer, 1987, p. 84)*

> *South Africa is in the process of dramatic social and political change. (Freeman, 1991, p. 141)*

A similar emphasis on social change and impending crisis is evident in the USA literature:

> *I believe we are all experiencing an awareness of a large array of social problems and a sense of impending social crisis. (Walker, 1970, p. 1081)*

It is quite possible that the social demands are changing more rapidly than our methods of training and the available modes of providing psychological service. (Ericksen, 1966, p. 952)

Theme 2: A Pure or Applied Emphasis for Psychology?

This theme encompasses a debate on whether psychology's emphasis should be basic (pure) or applied. Basic research refers to the process whereby scientific knowledge is obtained under experimental settings, whilst applied psychology is the utilization of that knowledge upon specific problems (Retief, 1989). This debate is subdivided into three argumentative positions (subthemes): a) Need for a focus on applied psychology, b) Need for a focus on basic research, c) Need for an equal emphasis on pure and applied psychology.

Need for an emphasis on applied psychology. This subtheme comprises the argument that in order to be socially relevant, emphasis should be placed on the application of psychological knowledge to specific issues. For example, in the USA literature Miller (1969) argues that:

...it is through the success of such practical applications [of psychological knowledge] that we have our best hope for revolutionizing public psychology. (p. 1072)

Additionally, Walker (1969) argues that:

...in judging the merit of basic research, colleagues have an obligation to evaluate the research in terms of relevance and social need in the broadest sense (p. 863).

Similarly, In the SA literature, the need for an emphasis on applied rather than basic knowledge is explicated in the following quote:

...the nature of our [psychological] knowledge and theory itself suggests to anyone who is exposed to it that this information ought to be applied. (Strümpfer, 1981, p. 25)

Need for an emphasis on basic knowledge. This subtheme entails an argument that psychology's potential to make positive social contributions comes from its scientific base, and that, therefore, there is a need for emphasis to be placed on the acquisition of basic knowledge. This position is exemplified by the following extracts from the USA literature:

As social scientists our area of expertise is theoretically oriented experimentation; this basic research is preferable, because applied research diminishes the "scientific" contribution and becomes sterile fact-finding; (Tornatzky, Fairweather, & O'Kelly, 1970, p. 885)

Let us by all means do everything we can to promote human welfare, but let us not forget that our real strength in that cause will come from our scientific knowledge. (Miller, 1969, p. 1065)

A similar argument is demonstrated within the SA literature:

> *I shall not keep repeating the credo that we are in dire need of the development and testing of better theories and of basic research. I shall assume that this will be interpreted as a pre-condition for being able to embark upon socially relevant research. (Mauer, 1987: 86)*

Need for an equal emphasis on basic and applied knowledge. This subtheme demonstrates the argument that both basic and applied psychology are necessary components of a socially relevant discipline, and that neither side should be emphasized over the other. This argument is evidenced in the USA literature:

> *I think scientific psychologists need to be supported in their basic research, but they also need to be encouraged to tackle the more controversial but more urgent problems. (Walker, 1969, p. 863)*

And in the SA literature:

> *I know that today's basic research may tomorrow produce an explosion of technological applications. I know that I am really talking about a continuum stretching from abstraction to application, and that both kinds of study are needed. (Strumpfer, 1981: 19)*

Theme 3: A Socio-Political Role for Psychology?

An integral component to the relevance debate is an argument for psychology to broaden its focus to encompass socio-political issues. On the other hand, an argument is also put forward that such a focus is contradictory to psychology's status as a scientific discipline. These two positions in the debate are described below.

Argument for a socio-political focus. This subtheme comprises calls for psychology to focus on issues of advocacy, politics and social intervention. This is evidenced in the American literature**:**

> *Another model of intervention involves political action and advocacy. In this approach, the development of a competent community is seen as requiring a redistribution of power so that there is more equity of access to those resources that led to both physical and psychological well-being. (Goodstein & Sandler, 1978, p. 888)*

> *Another is political lobbyist, promoting new legislation in areas touching on the welfare of the community. The role of the clinical psychologist in this setting, then, may extend appreciably into the domain of social intervention. (Hersch, 1969, p. 914)*

Discussion of a socio-political role for South African psychology are also evidenced in the following extracts:

> *This article marked an attempt to open debate in psychology regarding the degree to which South African psychologists should become involved in socio-political issues relating to their work. (Liddell & Kvalsvig, 1990, p. 1)*

> *...the association as a whole should accept that psychology in the public interest, and the resultant advocacy role of PASA, is a prerequisite for our survival. (Mauer et al., 1991)*

Argument against direct socio-political involvement. This subtheme comprises the arguments that psychology is not mandated to focus on social issues, and that a socio-political focus undermines psychology's (proposed) status as an objective science. The following extracts demonstrate these arguments within the American literature:

> *...what I do most heartily object to is the participation [in social action] as a psychologist, with explicit or implicit indication that psychological science is responsible for the social or political views of the psychologist. (Sorsby, 1963: 535)*

> *For the activist, disaster as a psychologist is certain – he simply ceases to be one. (Walker, 1970, p. 1082),*

And the following extracts demonstrate a similar position in the South African literature:

> *...there is an implicit but not mandatory responsibility that this [psychological] knowledge should be contributed to the well-being of society and the health and happiness of its members. (Biesheuvel, 1991, p. 138)*

> *The most obvious objection to the notion of scientists becoming involved in issues regarding social accountability lies in the argument that all sciences are and should be objective and unbiased. (Liddell & Kvalsvig, 1990, p. 2)*

Theme 4: Science in Relation to Human Values

This theme is constituted by two debates, which are presented below as subthemes. The first debate is over the extent to which science can be considered objective, and the second concerns the nature of the role of the scientist in relation to the moral obligations of the ordinary citizen. Both of these debates are characterized by a concern over human values and what part (if any) they should play in the scientific process.

Scientific objectivity. This theme entails a discussion on the extent to which scientific knowledge is objective, and thus whether a neutral or value-free position should be adopted by those who apply scientific knowledge to specific issues.

In the American literature it is argued that scientific knowledge cannot be divorced from the context in which it was produced, and thus that such knowledge cannot be presented as being objective or value-free. This argument is exemplified by the following extracts:

> *The sooner we recognize that such knowledge [social science] is not truth divorced from the realities of time, place or use, the better will be our chances of making a truly responsible contribution to societal improvement. (Caplan & Nelson, 1973, p. 211)*

> *No part of science is categorically free of social values. (Walker, 1969, p. 864)*

Similar arguments exists in the South African literature, where Retief (1989) states that

> *Because the status of our knowledge is (partly or wholly) determined by contextual and social causes, the ideal of 'objectivity' itself probably exists as a (context-determined) social and scientific norm (p.76)*

Thus, both debates emphasize the need to acknowledge that scientific knowledge is not objective, and that science cannot be practiced outside of the influence of human values. Nonetheless, there is also an argument that the techniques by which research is conducted (i.e. scientific *method*) are capable of producing objective, factual data, and must thus be allowed to operate independently from human values. For example, in the USA literature it is argued that:

> *It is not necessary for experimental psychology to take sides on controversial issues, but it is necessary to provide the data and principles in terms of which rational solutions can be reached. (Walker, 1969, p. 868)*

Similarly, in the SA literature it is argued that:

> *...the epistemic (or explanatory) power of psychological theories (specifically in the form of tried-and-trusted scientific method) is their major advantage. (Retief, 1989, p. 80)*

And thus:

> *Scientific method should be value-free and obedient only to its own prescriptions. (Biesheuvel, 1987, p. 3)*

The scientist's role. This subtheme consists of a debate over the extent to which the roles of scientists and ordinary citizens should be similar or distinct. To argue that these roles are distinct is to imply that the practice of scientific research can and should occur free from the influence of morals and values. This position is evidenced in the American literature:

> *There is an old tradition in psychology—particularly academic psychology—that makes a clear distinction between citizen and scholarly roles, (Tornatzky et al., 1970, p. 885)*

And in the South African literature:

> *....the first duty of clinical psychologists is towards their clients, to alleviate their distress and to build up coping behaviour. There are other constituencies available through which they can if so inclined and acting as concerned citizens, make their view known on what they consider to be desirable political action. (Biesheuvel, 1987, p. 6)*

On the other hand, it is also argued that the gap between these roles should be narrowed, implying that there is a need for the role of the scientist to include the moral obligations of the citizen. This position is exemplified in the American literature:

> *I would argue that science cannot proceed as if the individual's roles as scientist and as human being are completely separate. In some respects, they are inseparable. (Walker, 1969, p. 864)*

And in the South African literature:

> *Some reconciliation between our role as scientists, and as responsible agents of social change is clearly required.(Liddell & Kvalsvig, 1990, p. 57)*

Theme 5: Equity in Psychology

This theme entails calls for greater equity, in terms of making the discipline more demographically representative, and making psychological services more accessible. The following subthemes suggest two ways in which this might be achieved: a) addressing inequalities in mental health provision, b) affirmative action policy to increase the representation of minorities in universities.

Improving accessibility. This subtheme suggests that there are too few psychologists to provide the requisite services, and that such services are too costly. Thus, in the American literature Miller (1969) states that:

> *There are simply not enough psychologists, even including non-professionals, to meet every need for psychological services. (p. 1071)*

And Bennett (1965) argues that:

> *...psychotherapy is costly and at best appropriate to certain problems as one method of intervention. (p. 833)*

Similarly, in the South African literature Freeman (1991) argues that:

Psychological services in the private sector are unaffordable to the vast majority (p. 142)

And that even if such financial inequalities did not exist

...the ratio of clinical psychologists to population would still be an unfavourable 1 per 37 000 population. (p. 143)

Underrepresentation of minorities. A common feature between the two bodies of literature was a stated need to address the underrepresentation of minorities in psychology. For example, in the American literature Albee (1969) states:

In the course of the discussions the Conference participants became increasingly aware of the extent of underrepresentation of minority groups in psychology. (p. 720)

And in the South African literature Holdstock (1979) states that:

...there is only one registered black clinical psychologist in the Republic of South Africa. (p. 119)

Thus, both bodies of literature state the need for affirmative action so as to increase minority representation within university psychology programs. This is exemplified in the South African literature:

The goal of constituting a critical mass of black staff at South African universities cannot be met through good intentions or by traditional selection procedures that claim to be guided only by 'academic excellence'. These goals can only be met by vigorous and quota-directed affirmative action policy. (Nell, 1990, p. 138)

Similarly, in the American literature Korman (1974) states:

The Conference's concern with the implementation of affirmative action programs—viewed as a basic ethical obligation—for the identification, recruitment, admission, and graduation of minority group students has been discussed above. (p. 448)

Theme 6: Indigenizing Psychology

Theme 6 was the only theme that I did not identify in both literatures; it was unique to the South African debate. This theme is comprised by discussion over the indigenization of South African psychology. Central to the notion of indigenization is the recognition of difference between South African and Western cultures. This recognition is linked to a discussion on how (or whether) psychology should cater for such difference. Whilst some propose the establishment of separate (indigenous) psychologies, and others argue that a Western

psychological framework is sufficient, some propose an integration of indigenous and Western frameworks.

This theme comprises four subthemes which demonstrate different aspects of the indigenization debate. These include a) a criticism of Western psychology's applicability in a South African context, b) the possible benefits of drawing on indigenous healers as a mental-health resource, c) a debate over whether psychology should adopt a relativist or universalist orientation, and d) a description of the tension between recognizing difference and seeking 'the exotic'.

Criticism of Western psychology. This subtheme entails a criticism of Western psychology's applicability in a South African context on the grounds of three arguments. Firstly, it is argued that psychology's Western origins render it largely irrelevant to the issues faced by African peoples:

> *It is unlikely that Eurocentric theories of human behaviour can be fully relevant for people still concerned with bread and butter issues in a severely oppressive society. (Hickson & Christie, 1989, p. 166)*

Secondly, it is argued that that psychology may be largely ineffective in a South African context due to language differences between Western practitioners and African clients:

> *There is also no doubt that language barriers stand in the way of effective therapy. (Freeman, 1991, p. 144)*

Thirdly, it is argued that Psychology's Euramerican cultural orientation renders it largely irrelevant within the context of South African culture:

> *Western techniques are, with a few exceptions, culturally too different to offer a psychological approach towards healing that would be meaningful for the majority of South Africans. (Holdstock, 1979, p. 119)*

Benefits of incorporating indigenous healers. Within this subtheme it is argued that drawing on indigenous healers as a resource for mental-health provision would make psychological services more accessible to black South Africans. This is because healers do not experience the same cultural and linguistic disparities as Western psychologists, and are also better placed geographically to provide such services. This position is exemplified in the following extract:

> *If traditional healers are accepted as a mental health care resource this will go some way towards not only solving the content/process problem, but also the problem of geographical accessibility. (Freeman, 1991, p. 145)*

Furthermore, it is argued that indigenous healers are already perceived as important source of mental-health services by black South Africans, and that recognizing them officially may create much-needed employment opportunities:

> *During this time of high rates of unemployment among the black sector of the population, indigenous healing provides valuable career opportunities for a large number of people. (Holdstock, 1979, p. 118)*

Universalism versus cultural relativism. This debate entails a discussion over whether psychology should approach cultural difference from a Universalist or a relativist position. According to the relativist position, psychology is a methodologically and theoretically fragmented body knowledge. Therefore, there is an expressed need to develop culture-specific psychologies to cater for cultural difference. This position is exemplified in the following extract:

> *If psychology as a scientific enterprise has failed, the failure lies in the absence of thematic and methodological coherence. Accordingly, country by country, and culture by culture, the demand for a unique local psychology, in parallel to unique local literatures, could legitimately be made. (Nell, 1990, p. 134)*

The universalist position, on the on the other hand, holds that psychological afflictions are universal in nature, and that mainstream (Western) psychology provides the perspective from which such afflictions must be understood. This constitutes an implicit argument against the establishment of indigenous psychologies. The Universalist position is demonstrated in the following extracts:

> *...a certain dissatisfaction was expressed among the ranks of helping professionals who disagreed with a cross-cultural focus and stressed instead, the universality of suffering and confusion in the human psyche. (Hickson & Christie, 1989, p. 165)*

> *The search for universals will continue. This work is of theoretical significance in defining constructs that are necessary to clarify the developmental origins and relatedness of numerous differential attributes observable in people of all kinds and cultures. (Biesheuvel, 1991, p. 136)*

A tension between recognizing difference and a search for the exotic. This subtheme addresses a discussion over whether or not the indigenization of psychology is tantamount to a neo-colonial obsession with difference. On the one hand it is argued that indigenous psychologies should not be pursued, as this would entail a dehumanizing search for the 'exotic'. For example:

> *Attempts to link relevance to the impossible task of developing an indigenous African or third-world psychology pander to a self-indulgent search for the exotic, to which, when discovered, the psychologist-anthropologist may lay personal claim, denying access to those who do not pronounce the prescribed incantations. (Nell, 1990, p. 138)*

On the other hand it is argued that the indigenization of the discipline is in the interests of the indigenous population, and that this process does not constitute an obsession with the 'other':

> *...one sees in a call for indigenous psychology an earnest attempt to de-anthropologize psychology and to empower the non-indigenous psychologist who is keen and prepared to learn. This can hardly be regarded as a call for the mystification and mythologizing of psychology nor a search for the exotic. (Bodibe, 1993, p. 57)*

This subtheme demonstrates an intractable dilemma faced by South African psychology: on the one hand there is an expressed need to recognize difference in order for the discipline to be socially relevant, on the other hand psychology is admonished for addressing indigenous South Africans as 'the other'. Recognition of this tension is further demonstrated in the following extracts:

> *Yet, despite the concern that has been voiced about the dangers of cultural stereotyping, there continues to be an increasing orientation to the needs of culturally different clients and to racial and ethnic variables within the therapeutic process. (Hickson & Christie, 1989, p. 163)*

> *...various options need to be explored so that without glorifying traditional culture, and without becoming party to emphasizing difference, interventions cohere with the world-view of the clients. (Freeman, 1991, p. 145)*

Summary and Synthesis

The literature review presented at the beginning of this project constitutes a preliminary investigation, the results of which suggest that the American and South African relevance debates shares certain similarities and are thus comparable. Thus, by expanding the scope of the literature initially included in this review, this project provides a more comprehensive and substantive data-comparison between the American and South African relevance debates.

Using a thematic analysis I have presented 6 themes within the data corpus, of which all - except theme six – are present in both the American and South African literature. On the basis of these findings, three key arguments are established in relation to this project's research question: 'To what contextual factors is the relevance debate linked?'

My first argument is that the American and South African relevance debates are qualitatively similar. This is justified by the fact that both literatures evidenced analogous

debates as regards a pure versus applied emphasis for psychology (theme two), a socio-political role for the discipline (theme three), the extent to which science is influenced by human values (theme four), and a need for equity within psychology (theme five). A close correspondence between themes is evident within both bodies of literature, suggesting a qualitative similarity between the American and South African relevance debates.

However, it is also necessary to consider a critique which might be levelled against such an assertion of similarity. It may be argued that it was in my interest to find such equivalence, and given that there are no criteria by which to assess the rigor and objectivity of my research methods, such findings may be a product of my personal motivations (conscious or unconscious) (Davies & Dodd, 2002).

The problem with this critique is that it is foregrounded in a naïve realist epistemology, which holds that there is a stable reality that can be observed on the basis of essence. Such a perspective overlooks the contextual and constructed nature of knowledge: thus themes are conceived as being embedded in the data, waiting to be uncovered by empirical observation. In contrast, my research is grounded in a contextualist epistemology, which holds that there is a reality which is demonstrable within the data; but that such a reality is shifting, incomplete, and contextually influenced (Madill et al., 2000). Thus, I have explicitly acknowledged that meaning does not simply emerge naturally from the data. Rather, themes are actively selected. However, this does not imply that such themes are inconsequential. Meaning must be understood as emerging from the point of contact between researcher and data (Cheek, 2004).

Furthermore, in the absence of any standardized measures of rigor which might be applied to my findings, I have adopted a degree of reflexivity and transparency with regard to my research practice, which entails declaring the theoretical and epistemological assumptions underlying my research practice (Davies & Dodd, 2002), and openly describing the logical pathways which I have followed in drawing conclusions from my data (Taylor & Ussher, 2001).

Nonetheless, the thematic map is not identical for both American and South African literatures; theme 6 (Indigenizing psychology) was specific to the South African debate. One possible explanation is that in America, ethnic minorities are also numeric (Albee, 1969). South Africa's social context, on the other hand, is vastly different, because 'indigenous' peoples far outnumber white South Africans (Pillay & Kramers, 2003). Thus, it is likely that calls for indigenization were far more salient in a South African context.

Another possible explanation is that American psychology is characterized by a certain arrogance linked to its status as the 'core' of the discipline. Consequently non-Western voices (including indigenous psychologies) have been relegated to a peripheral position, from which they can have little impact on dominant psychological theories and practice. South Africa, on the other hand, is likely to have been more responsive to indigenous paradigms due to its peripheral status, relative to American psychology (Brandt, 1970).

My second argument is that both debates occur within similar social contexts. The presence of theme 1 (social turmoil) within both American and South African literatures demonstrates that a variety of social issues were referenced within both countries, and that both social contexts were characterized by change and upheaval.

My third argument, therefore, is that the relevance debate is contingent on social turmoil. This follows from my first and second arguments: despite emerging within separate geographical and historical circumstances, both debates share a similar thematic structure and social context. Therefore, historically speaking, the relevance debate has generally been linked to a context of social change and upheaval. This argument addresses both my research question and research aims directly, as it constitutes a contextualization and historicization of the relevance debate.

Nevertheless, to claim that the relevance debate is contingent on a social context of social upheaval is not to imply that the relevance debate is merely a *product* of social turmoil. In accordance with a critical-historical framework**,** this project understands psychology, society, and the object of psychological knowledge (relevance discourse, in this instance) as existing in a state of mutual constituency. The implication, therefore, is that psychology and the relevance debate simultaneously constitute, are constituted by, and exist in, a state of contingency with a social context characterized by change and upheaval (Rose, 1998).

This critical-historical approach provides a necessary perspective on the relevance debate, which has typically been precluded within relevance discourse (Louw, 2002). This can be demonstrated by drawing on the closing line of Miller's (1969) presidential address for the American Psychological Association:

> *...I can imagine nothing we could do that would be more relevant to human welfare, and nothing that could pose a greater challenge to the next generation of psychologists, than to discover how best to give psychology away. (Miller, 1969, p. 1074)*

This argument suggests that relevance in psychology will be achieved by rendering psychological knowledge accessible and appropriate for use amongst the general public, or 'giving psychology away' (Miller, 1969). However, the problem with this statement and relevance discourse in general, is that it is presented ahistorically and axiomatically. By this I intend that Miller's (1969) statement precludes a consideration of the historical conditions which have enabled such discourse to be understood as truth. The statement is presented in such a way that its 'truth' appears self-evident, or axiomatic – thus constituting an assumption which tends to be taken for granted within relevance discourse (Louw, 2002; Rose, 1996).

By contextualizing and historicizing the relevance debate, this project challenges taken-for-granted assumptions within such discourse, by demonstrating that the 'truth' of relevance discourse is not self-evident, but contingent on a social context characterized by upheaval. Whilst not seeking to invalidate Miller's (1969) argument by contesting its status as 'truth', this project provides a more critical perspective on the relevance debate by examining the historical processes whereby such statements have been legitimated as truth (Rose, 1996).

Thus, by historicizing relevance discourse, and by reframing the relevance debate in terms of contingency rather than axiomatic inevitability, this project challenges assumptions which have been taken for granted within the relevance debate, thereby providing a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between the relevance debate and society (Rose, 1996).

CONCLUSION

The 'relevance debate' may be described as discourse which calls for psychology to become more socially valuable. This project compares such discourse from South African and North American psychology journals. A preliminary literature review suggests that a) a shared socio-historical dimension exists between South African and American relevance discourse, and that b) such discourse is typically presented in an ahistorical and axiomatic manner (Louw, 2002). Hence, this review identifies a gap in the literature: a need for a historical perspective on the relevance debate.

Thus, the primary aim of this research is the historicization of the relevance debate, which is achieved by posing the following research question: 'To what contextual factors is the relevance debate linked?' I have used a thematic analysis to historicize and contextualize the relevance debate, by comparing relevance discourse from American (1960-1980) and South African (1974-1994) psychology journals. This analysis suggests the existence of six themes, all of which are present in both American and South African debates, except for theme six (indigenizing psychology), which is only evidenced within the South African literature. Furthermore, the social contexts from which both debates emerge are characterized by similar states of social upheaval. Therefore, given the similarities between the thematic structures and social contexts of the data analyzed, it is argued that historically, the relevance debate has been contingent on social turmoil.

Such historicization of relevance discourse allows for a more accurate understanding of the relationship between the relevance debate and society, by challenging assumptions about 'truth' that are couched within the relevance debate's ahistorical and axiomatic presentation. Drawing on a critical-historical theoretical framework, this project approaches psychological knowledge as a problem to be explored, rather than a self-evident truth (Rose, 1996). Thus, a critical-historical perspective is drawn on so as to frame relevance discourse in terms of contingency, rather than axiomatic inevitability, thereby allowing for a more critical and accurate understanding of the relationship between the relevance debate and society (Louw, 2002; Rose, 1998).

References

Ahmed, R., & Pillay, A. L. (2004). Reviewing clinical psychology training in the post-apartheid period: Have we made any progress? *South African Journal of Psychology*, *34*, 630-656.

Albee, G. W. (1969). A conference on recruitment of Black and other minority students and faculty. *American Psychologist*, *24*, 720-723.

Baron, J. (1971). Is experimental psychology relevant? *American Psychologist*, *26*, 713-716.

Bayton, J. A., Roberts, S. O., & Williams, R. K. (1970). Minority groups and careers in psychology. *American Psychologist*, *25*, 504-510.

Bennett, C. C. (1965). Community psychology: Impressions of the Boston conference on the education of psychologists for community mental health. *American Psychologist*, *20*, 832-835.

Biesheuvel, S. (1987). Psychology: Science and politics: Theoretical developments and applications in a plural society. *South African Journal of Psychology. 17,* 1-7.

Biesheuvel, S. (1991). Neutrality, relevance and accountability in psychological research and practice in South Africa. *South African Journal of Psychology*, *21*, 131-140.

Bodibe, R. C. (1993). What is the truth? Being more than just a jesting Pilate in South African psychology. *South African Journal of Psychology*, *23*, 53-58.

Brandt, L. W. (1970). American psychology. *American Psychologist*, *25*, 1091-1093.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*, 77-101.

Caplan, N., & Nelson, S. D. (1973). On being useful: The nature and consequences of psychological research on social problems. *American Psychologist*, *28*(3), 199-211.

Cheek, J. (2004). At the Margins? Discourse Analysis and Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Health Research*, *14*, 1140 -1150.

Danziger, K. (1994). *Constructing the subject: Historical origins of psychological research*. Cambridge University Press.

Davies, D., & Dodd, J. (2002). Qualitative research and the question of rigor. *Qualitative Health Research*, *12*, 279-289.

Dawes, A. (1985). Politics and mental health: The position of clinical psychology in South Africa. *South African Journal of Psychology*, *15*, 55-61.

De La Rey, C., & Ipser, J. (2004). The call for relevance: South African psychology ten years into democracy. *South African Journal of Psychology*, *34*, 544-557.

Ericksen, S. C. (1966). Responsibilities of psychological science to professional psychology. *American Psychologist*, *21*, 950-953.

Freeman, M. (1991). Mental health for all: Moving beyond rhetoric. *South African Journal of Psychology*, *21*, 141-147.

Gergen, K. J. (2000). Emerging Challenges Redux. *Theory & Psychology*, *10*, 23-31.

Goodstein, L. D., & Sandler, I. (1978). Using psychology to promote human welfare: A conceptual analysis of the role of community psychology. *American Psychologist*, *33*, 882-892.

Hersch, C. (1969). From mental health to social action: Clinical psychology in historical perspective. *American Psychologist*, *24*, 909-916.

Hickson, J., & Christie, G. M. (1989). Research on cross-cultural counselling and psychotherapy: Implications for the South African context. *South African Journal of Psychology*, *19*, 162-171.

Holdstock, T. L. (1979). Indigenous healing in South Africa: A neglected potential. *South African Journal of Psychology*, *9*, 118-124.

Hornstein, H. A. (1973). Psychology in action: The social psychology of change: A seminar with academic and social relevance. *American Psychologist, 28*, 191-194.

Jaeger, M. E., & Rosnow, R. L. (1988). Contextualism and its implications for psychological inquiry. *British Journal of Psychology, 79*, 63-75.

Jenkins, K. (1997). *The postmodern history reader*. Psychology Press.

Kennedy, C. D., & Wagner, N. N. (1979). Psychology and affirmative action: 1977. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 10*, 234-243.

Korman, M. (1974). National conference on levels and patterns of professional training in psychology: The major themes. *American Psychologist, 29*, 441-449.

Koulack, D., & Keselman, H. J. (1975). Ratings of psychology journals by members of the American Psychological Association. *American Psychologist, 30*, 1049-1063.

Liddell, C., & Kvalsvig, J. (1990). Science and social accountability: Issues related to South African developmental psychology. *South African Journal of Psychology, 20*, 1-9.

Louw, J. (2002). Psychology, history, and society. *South African Journal of Psychology, 32,* 1-8.

Macleod, C. (2004). South African psychology and "relevance": Continuing challenges. *South African Journal of Psychology, 34*, 613-629.

Madill, A., Jordan, A., & Shirley, C. (2000). Objectivity and reliability in qualitative analysis: Realist, contextualist and radical constructionist epistemologies. *British Journal of Psychology, 91*, 1-20.

Mauer, K. F. (1987). Leporello is on his knees: In search of relevance in South African psychology. *South African Journal of Psychology, 17*, 83-92.

Mauer, K. F., Marais, H. C., & Prinsloo, R. J. (1991). Psychology: The high road or the low road? *South African Journal of Psychology, 21*, 90-96.

Miller, G. A. (1969). Psychology as a means of promoting human welfare. *American Psychologist*, *24*, 1063-1075.

Nell, V. (1990). One world, one psychology: "Relevance" and ethnopsychology. *South African Journal of Psychology*, *20*, 129-140.

Pillay, A. L., & Kramers, A. L. (2003). South African clinical psychology, employment (in)equity and the "brain drain." *South African Journal of Psychology*, *33*, 52-60.

Retief, A. (1989). The debate about the relevance of South African psychology: A metatheoretical imperative. *South African Journal of Psychology*, *19*, 75-83.

Rose, N. (1996). Power and subjecitivty: Critical history and psychology. *Historical Dimensions of Psychological Discourse*. Cambridge University Press.

Rose, N. (1998). *Inventing our selves: Psychology, power, and personhood*. Cambridge University Press.

Ruane, I. (2010). Obstacles to the utilisation of psychological resources in a South African township community. *South African Journal of Psychology*, *40*, 214-225.

Schulberg, H. C. (1972). Challenge of human service programs for psychologists. *American Psychologist*, *27*, 566-573.

Seedat, M., MacKenzie, S., & Stevens, G. (2004). Trends and redress in community psychology during ten years of democracy (1994-2003): A journal-based perspective. *South African journal of psychology*, *34*, 595-612.

Seedat, M., & Nell, V. (1992). Authoritarianism and autonomy: I. Conflicting value systems in the introduction of psychological services in a South African Primary Health Care System. *South African Journal of Psychology*, *22*, 185-193.

Sorsby, F. B. (1963). Participation in Social Action. *American Psychologist*, *18*, 535-536.

Strümpfer, D. J. (1981). Towards a more socially responsive psychology. *South African Journal of Psychology*, *11*, 18-28.

Sue, S. (1977). Community mental health services to minority groups: Some optimism, some pessimism. *American Psychologist*, *32*, 616-624.

Taylor, G. W., & Ussher, J. M. (2001). Making sense of S&M: A discourse analytic account. *Sexualities*, *4*, 293-314.

Terre Blanche, M., Durrheim, K., & Painter, D. (2008). *Research in Practice: Applied Methods for the Social Science* (2nd Ed.). Juta and Company Ltd.

Tornatzky, L. G., Fairweather, G. W., & O'Kelly, L. I. (1970). Psychology in action: A PhD program aimed at survival. *American Psychologist*, *25*, 884-889.

Van Vlaenderen, H. (2001). Psychology in developing countries: people-centred development and local knowledge. *Psychology in Society*, *27*, 88-108.

Walker, E. L. (1969). Experimental psychology and social responsibility. *American Psychologist*, *24*, 862-868.

Walker, E. L. (1970). Relevant psychology is a snark. *American Psychologist*, *25*, 1081-1086.

Willig, C. (2001). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology*. Open University Press Buckingham.

Yardley, L., & Marks, D. F. (2004). Introduction to research methods in clinical and health psychology. *Research methods for clinical and health psychology*. SAGE Publications.

Zunes, S. (1999). The role of non-violent action in the downfall of apartheid. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, *37*, 137-169.