

UCT Undergraduate Psychology Students' Perceptions of Psychology in the Context of
the "Relevance Debate"

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ABSTRACT

There has been much debate around whether the discipline of psychology in South Africa is relevant to the needs of the majority of the population. This “relevance debate” highlights the inaccessibility of psychological services to the majority of the population and the skewed demographics of psychologists. The majority of psychologists in South Africa are white, English-speaking females. There is a great need to train more psychologists from other demographic groups. However, despite the variety of students in undergraduate psychology courses, postgraduate studies continue mainly to attract white, female students. This qualitative study looks at University of Cape Town undergraduate students’ experiences of their psychology courses and their feelings about postgraduate study, to explore why certain students do not pursue psychology as a career. Furthermore, it examines students’ perceptions of the relevance of the discipline of psychology. The theoretical framework for this study is located within a social constructionist paradigm. Three focus groups were held with second- and third-year psychology students, and a thematic analysis was conducted on the focus group transcriptions. The findings of the study indicate three main reasons students cite for not pursuing psychology further: the unanticipated academic difficulty of psychology courses; the perceived impossibility of acceptance into postgraduate programmes; and the time and money required. With regard to the “relevance debate”, the findings suggest that these students believe that the discipline is not accessible to the majority of the population. However, students propose two contradictory solutions: the first acknowledges the need to change aspects of the discipline; and the second holds that South Africans (specifically black South Africans) should change their view of psychology and mental health. Furthermore, it appears that students are engaging with issues of relevance with regards to their own studies and a potential career in psychology.

Key Words: Relevance debate; psychology; South Africa; undergraduate students; universities; careers; postgraduate studies

Introduction

Many countries have struggled with the question of the relevance of psychology. There has been much debate about how psychology can become more applicable to its socio-political context (de la Rey & Ipser, 2004). The question of relevance is particularly pertinent in South Africa, and has been the focus of much discussion since the 1980s. This “relevance debate”, which began during apartheid, has continued in different forms post-1994, with many aspects of the discipline criticised as lacking relevance in the South African context. South African universities have an important role to play in ensuring the relevance of psychology through what they teach, how they teach it and the kinds of students they select for psychology programmes (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; Macleod, 2004). This study focuses on the experiences and perspectives of undergraduate psychology students at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in relation to the “relevance debate”.

The “Relevance Debate” During Apartheid

The term “relevance debate” emerged in South Africa during the 1980s, when a group of psychologists began to question and criticise psychology’s role in apartheid. Some psychologists actively supported apartheid, even producing pseudo-scientific research as justification, while many psychologists inadvertently supported apartheid by remaining politically “neutral” or silent about its detrimental effects (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; Duncan & Bowman, 2009; Gentz & Durrheim, 2009; Macleod, 2006; Painter, Terre Blanche, & Henderson, 2006). Furthermore, psychology was accused of being irrelevant to the needs of the majority, as it was focused on serving the interests of the white minority elite (Macleod, 2006; Suffla & Seedat, 2004; Watson & Fouche, 2007). However, not all psychologists in South Africa supported apartheid. A minority of psychologists offered resistance, openly opposing apartheid and criticising the role that psychology played in apartheid society (Duncan & Bowman, 2009; Foster, 1991; Painter et al., 2006; Macleod, 2006).

The “Relevance Debate” Post-1994

Since the end of apartheid, the discipline of psychology in South Africa continues to be criticised on issues of relevance. One of the main concerns raised is that psychology is too Eurocentric, decontextualised and individualistic to be relevant to a South African context. Western mainstream theory dominates the discipline, and is considered inappropriate to the needs of the majority of the population. Many believe that psychology will only become relevant in South Africa once it embraces indigenous forms of knowledge and traditional healing, while some argue that South Africa needs its own distinctive form of psychology (de la Rey & Ipser, 2004; Hickson & Kriegler, 1991; Matoane, 2012; Ruane, 2010).

A similar criticism levelled is that the discipline of psychology is depicted as neutral and apolitical, and thus ignores socio-political contexts (de la Rey & Ipser, 2004; Macleod, 2004). Some critics propose that psychology should become more socially responsive and that psychologists should play an active role in addressing inequality in South Africa (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; Hickson & Kriegler, 1991; Macleod, 2004).

A further concern of the “relevance debate” is the inaccessibility of mental health care for most South Africans. During apartheid, mental health care access was skewed in favour of the white, middle- and upper-class urban population (Hickson & Kriegler, 1991; Pillay & Petersen, 1996). Psychology was largely unknown in predominantly black communities (Mayekiso, Strydom, Jithoo, & Katz, 2004), with most clinical and counselling psychologists based in affluent, urban areas (Gentz & Durrheim, 2009). Mental health services available to the black population were inferior to those available to whites, and were often under-utilised as they were usually too expensive, difficult to access and poorly developed (Hickson & Kriegler, 1991). Although there have been attempts to address this inequality post-1994, there is a long way to go before mental health care is equally accessible to all in South Africa (Lund, Kleintjies, Kakuma, & Flisher, 2010).

Demographic Profile of Psychologists in South Africa. The demographic profile of all kinds of psychologists in South Africa has also been a source of much concern and criticism (de la Rey & Ipser, 2004). During apartheid, the majority of psychologists were white, middle-class, English- or Afrikaans- speaking and based in

affluent, urban areas, unlike the majority of the population (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; Mayekiso et al., 2004). This was a problem across all five registered categories of psychology (Skinner & Louw, 2009). With the end of apartheid, the “relevance debate” began to focus on the need to alter the demographic profile of the discipline. Although there has been some progress, there is still much to be done (de la Rey & Ipser, 2004; Mayekiso et al., 2004).

Race. Until the early 1990s, fewer than 10% of all registered psychologists were black (Duncan, van Niekerk, & Townsend, 2004). Most traditionally “white” universities refused to allow black, coloured or Indian students into psychology programmes (Stead, 2002). In 2000, 90% of registered psychologists were white (Mayekiso et al., 2004). In 2004, black psychologists accounted for 5% of all registered psychologists, 1% of registered psychologists were coloured, 3% were Asian, 42% were white and 49% categorised themselves as “other” (Skinner & Louw, 2009). Mayekiso et al. (2004) analysed the gender and race of students selected for clinical Masters Programmes at a number of South African universities between 1994 and 2004. They found that despite a slight increase in the number of candidates selected from previously disadvantaged groups, overall the demographics were not significantly closer to being representative of the South African public. When Ruane (2010) held focus groups with residents of Mamelodi township, a number of participants complained that white clinical psychologists were elitist and too culturally distant from black communities. They said they would prefer to see a black psychologist but they had difficulty in finding one.

Gender. Women dominate the discipline of psychology in South Africa. The majority of postgraduate and undergraduate psychology students are female. More women than men enrol in clinical, counselling and educational Masters programmes, and there are greater numbers of women than men in research psychology; in fact, there are more women than men in all ranks of academia, except at the level of professor. However, there are many women in senior lecturer and lecturer positions, suggesting that it is only a matter of time before women reach the professorial level (Skinner & Louw, 2009). This feminisation of psychology seems to be an international and local trend (Bonn, Janeke, & Kruger, 2009; Pillay & Kramers, 2003; Skinner & Louw, 2009). Mayekiso et al. (2004) found that between 1994 and 2004, there was a decline in the

number of male psychology students. However, Skinner and Louw (2009) suggest that the number of male students remains static, while the number of female students is increasing drastically. Nonetheless, the number of male students is very low. Psychology seems to be considered by many as a “women’s profession”, perhaps because stereotypically women are believed to be more nurturing than men (Mayekiso et al., 2004).

The feminisation of psychology is not necessarily a problem. Many researchers have pointed out that this may have positive effects; for example, female researchers have often been responsible for broadening research interests (Skinner & Louw, 2009). However, the potential decline or low numbers of male psychologists could be problematic as there may be occasions when a male clinical or counselling psychologist would be better suited to the needs or preferences of a particular client (Mayekiso et al., 2004).

Language. The majority of clinical and counselling psychologists practising during apartheid were English- or Afrikaans-speaking. However, only a minority of South Africans speak English (8.2%) or Afrikaans (13.3%) as a first language (Cooper & Nicholas, 2012). Consequently, the majority of the population were unable to receive therapy in their mother tongue (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004). Post-1994, there has been a slow increase in the number of psychologists who can speak other African languages; however, English and Afrikaans speakers still constitute the majority among South African psychologists. Pillay and Petersen (1996) found that although many psychology students are eager to learn an African language, few graduating clinical and counselling psychologists actually have sufficient grasp of the language to consult using it. Thus, a huge majority of the population are unable to receive therapy in their language of choice. This could be seen as a human rights issue, particularly since the medium of therapy is language (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; Pillay & Kramers, 2003).

The Role of Universities in the “Relevance Debate”

Universities have an important role to play in making psychology relevant in South Africa in regard to student selection criteria, course content and teaching methods (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004).

Postgraduate psychology programmes. There has been much debate about whether clinical, educational and counselling psychology Masters training programmes prepare students for working in South Africa. Some critics believe that the training models used rely too heavily on Western, individualistic theories, and are ill-suited to prepare students for practice in South Africa (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; Bandawe, 2005; Hickson & Kriegler, 1991; Watson & Fouche, 2007). Gentz and Durrheim (2009) collected data from clinical psychologists showing that a number of these psychologists felt that their training was not relevant to the kinds of problems they encountered regularly in practice. Some participants, particularly those working in challenging socio-economic circumstances, reported frustration at their inability to actually help their clients. It has been argued that South African universities produce an “irrelevant educational elite” unable to adequately serve the needs of the local population (Bandawe, 2005, p. 298). Participants in Ruane’s (2010) township focus group felt that the training that psychologists received was not suited to the needs of those in black, low-income communities. Consequently, they felt that no psychologists, regardless of their skin colour, were able to help them. There is also a concern that training programmes based on an individualistic, westernised worldview may clash with the worldview of some black students, resulting in feelings of alienation (Bandawe, 2005; Gentz & Durrheim, 2009).

Selection criteria. Selection criteria for postgraduate psychology programmes greatly influence the demographics of the profession. These programmes should include students who are culturally and linguistically diverse enough to serve the mental health needs of all South Africans. Selection criteria need careful examination for subtle bias and maintaining of existing inequalities (Mayekiso et al., 2004; Watson & Fouche, 2007). For example, “life experience” is a selection criterion for most clinical and counselling Masters programmes, yet there is little consensus on what experience is appropriate for preparing students to work in South Africa. Many students apply for Masters after working and travelling overseas, thus gaining “life experience”. However, disadvantaged students would not be able to afford this overseas travel (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; Mayekiso et al., 2004).

While the Health Professions Council of South Africa has released directives asserting that universities must ensure that at least 50% of psychology students are black, this is rarely the case (Eagle, 2005). Mayekiso et al. (2004) analysed the selection criteria for eight clinical training programmes over a 10-year period. They found that although all of the programmes had adjusted their selection criteria, this had not resulted in a significant increase in the number of black students accepted. In my 2012 psychology Honours class at UCT, for example, there are no black South African students, and only one black student from elsewhere in Africa.

Undergraduate psychology. As much as universities may want to accept a culturally and linguistically diverse range of students, this can only be achieved if the pool of applicants reflects this range (Mayekiso et al., 2004). Undergraduate psychology courses are extremely popular in South African universities, with at least one in five students taking undergraduate psychology (Cooper & Nicholas, 2012; Louw, 2002). These courses appear to attract a diversity of students; in 2002, for example, black women comprised the largest group (31%) of undergraduate psychology students at South African universities (Skinner & Louw, 2009). Thus, there should be a great variety of potential applicants for postgraduate programmes. However, certain groups of students (namely, white females) appear more likely to pursue postgraduate psychology than others (Mayekiso et al., 2004; Pillay & Kramers, 2003; Skinner & Louw, 2009). There appears to be a lack of black applicants for postgraduate programmes, which is surprising given the dramatic increase in the number of black women in undergraduate psychology and undergraduate studies in general. Consequently, there is some concern over how black undergraduate students view psychology both as a subject and profession. There are similar concerns about male students. Although the numbers of male students are not declining, these numbers are low (Skinner & Louw, 2009).

Critics have called for universities to examine their undergraduate courses, and to attempt to make psychology more attractive as a profession to a wider variety of students. This emphasises the need to explore undergraduate students' experiences of psychology courses. Furthermore, given that these students may become psychologists in South Africa, it is important to explore the extent to which their undergraduate psychology courses engage with issues of relevance (Bandawe, 2005; Mayekiso et al., 2004; Pillay &

Kramers, 2003). However, little research has been conducted on what undergraduate psychology students think about their psychology courses and why they would or would not consider pursuing a career in psychology. Most research in this area involves quantitative analysis of the demographic breakdown of students and registered psychologists.

Aims of the Research

This research project is broadly concerned with the relevance of psychology in South Africa, in relation to undergraduate psychology students. This study examines how undergraduate students experience their psychology courses at UCT, and the impact on their decision to pursue postgraduate studies in psychology. Furthermore, it looks at how these students view the relevance of psychology in South Africa today, and how they engage with issues of relevance.

Main Research Question

How do undergraduate psychology students at UCT feel about the discipline of psychology?

Sub-Questions

- How do undergraduate psychology students perceive psychology as it is taught at UCT?
- How do these students feel about pursuing a career in psychology?
- How do these students view the relevance of psychology in South Africa, and how does this influence their future career plans in psychology?

Design and Methodology

Research Design

Qualitative research design. This research project is located within the qualitative research paradigm. This research methodology enables researchers to explore and make sense of participants' perspectives and experiences in an open-ended way, and

thus hopefully generate novel ideas and understandings (Terre Blanche, Kelly, & Durrheim, 2006; Willig, 2008). This methodology is appropriate for my study, as it is exploratory in nature and does not have a predefined set of possible explanations. Furthermore, qualitative research focuses more on studying constructions of meanings than objectively testing variables (Willig, 2008).

Theoretical framework. The framework for this study is located within a social constructionist paradigm. Social constructionism encompasses a great variety of perspectives; however, there are several common ideas that underpin social constructionism. Firstly, it adopts a critical view of taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world; for example, the “naturalness” of certain categories, such as gender, is challenged and rejected. Instead, social constructionism views these categories as artificial and socially constructed. It also looks at the cultural and historical specificity of how individuals understand the world. Thirdly, it proposes that ways of understanding the world are not “true” and based on objective observations, but rather result from social processes and interactions. Lastly, there are a number of possible social constructions that can be made about the world; with different constructions, different social actions are possible (Burr, 1995). Social constructionism is not concerned with uncovering an objective truth, but rather explores how different representations of the world are constructed and used (Burr, 2002). This perspective is appropriate for my research topic as discussion around the relevance of psychology inspires different reactions. Different participants attach distinct meanings to their experiences of undergraduate psychology. There are a variety of responses and perspectives, some of which are contradictory and inconsistent. Social constructionism is interested in these possible differences and contradictions.

There is a continuum within the social constructionist research paradigm. On the one end lies an extreme perspective, which proposes that nothing is real and what is described as reality has actually been constructed through language and discourse. The risk with this radical, relativistic viewpoint is that it denies that there is a material basis to individuals’ everyday lives. Certain factors, such as poverty, which have a very significant impact on how people live, are regarded as merely a product of language (Burr, 1995, 1998).

This project is situated in a more moderate social constructionist perspective. This is appropriate for the particular research question as it acknowledges that, although categories such as race and gender are socially constructed, they have a material reality. Ignoring this material reality can be problematic as it does little to confront how race is played out on a daily basis (Burr, 2002; Riggs & Augoustinos, 2005). In South Africa there are very real consequences tied to the category of race. Although race and gender are artificial categories, there are often real differences in the experiences of “black”, “white” or “coloured” and male or female students at UCT.

Focus groups. This study uses focus group design involving semi-structured discussions with a small group of participants on a particular topic. This method of data collection involves the interaction of participants with each other, in addition to the researcher. Focus groups were appropriate for my research question as they provide the opportunity for participants to engage and debate, and thus elicit a range of views. Participants could expand upon, challenge and support each other’s contributions (Wilkinson, 1998; Wilkinson, 1999; Willig, 2008). This is particularly important in this study, as the question of the relevance of psychology is something that most participants had not considered or discussed much before. Many participants did not have formulated ideas about the relevance of psychology. Thus, debate was needed in order for students to explore the concept of relevance. In discussion, students began to establish and voice their own opinions. In my view, asking students about their feelings on the “relevance debate” in a one-on-one interview would have elicited far less nuanced data (Payne, 2007). Furthermore, as the topics of discussion were not of a particularly intimate nature, focus groups were appropriate (Willig, 2008).

Participants and Recruitment

The participants are undergraduate psychology students at UCT, recruited through the Department of Psychology’s Student Research Participation Programme (SRPP). As first-years are unlikely to have had sufficient exposure to psychology to have made a firm decision about pursuing postgraduate studies, only second- and third-year students were recruited, while Honours students were already more likely to be committed to pursuing psychology as a career. Recruiting second- and third-year students ensured the inclusion

of participants with a thorough experience of undergraduate psychology, who both did and did not want to study psychology further.

The first focus group contained seven participants, the second and third focus groups contained six participants each. When participants signed up they were asked to complete and return via email a form with their demographic information (see Appendix A). The focus groups were heterogeneous in terms of gender, with both male and female participants in all three groups. However, there were fewer male participants; with one male in focus group one, two males in focus group two and three in focus group three. Focus groups one and three were heterogeneous in terms of race and languages spoken. However, the second focus group had only white, English-speaking participants. The majority of students who signed up for the study were white, English-speaking females, perhaps indicating that the number of black and male psychology students is already disproportionate by second- and third-year level. As I am exploring how a variety of students experience undergraduate psychology and perceive psychology in general, it was important to have participants of different genders and from a range of race and language groups. Thus, when mainly white, female students were interested in participating, I changed the SRPP announcement to request “Indigenous African language speakers” specifically to obtain greater language and “race” variation in the first and third focus groups.

Data Collection and Procedure

The study consisted of three separate focus groups. The first focus group was approximately 1 hour long. The second was 40 minutes, and the last focus group was 1 hour and 20 minutes in total. Eight questions were used to stimulate and guide the discussion (see Appendix B). Each focus group was tape-recorded and the recording was transcribed in full (see Appendix C for transcription information key). A research assistant took notes to aid the transcription.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the focus group transcriptions. Thematic analysis involves searching for recurring patterns of meaning across a whole data set. It

focuses on the content of what was said, and describes the data in full detail. Thus, thematic analysis was appropriate for the aims of this study as I was interested in identifying common patterns in the content of students' descriptions of their psychology courses and psychology in South Africa in general. Thematic analysis suits focus group data as it searches for common themes across a broad data set, such as that generated by focus group discussions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

There is not one particular, uniform list of instructions for thematic analysis; however, I followed the guidelines set out by Braun and Clarke (2006). I carefully read and re-read the transcriptions, coding the entire data set. I then searched for themes within the coded data. I looked for patterns in the way that students spoke about their undergraduate psychology courses at UCT and their feelings about their future careers, and identified experiences and feelings that were common within and across all three focus groups. I also looked for contradictions in how particular participants spoke about certain experiences (for example, some experiences were articulated by black students only). Similarly, during the second half of the focus groups which focused on questions of relevance, I identified ideas that emerged frequently, as well as contradictions in the way that students spoke about relevance and psychology. I then grouped the significant extracts from the different focus groups together into the themes that I had identified, and analysed these extracts and themes.

I did not have preconceived ideas about what students would say about relevance or the factors that discourage students from pursuing psychology further. Thus, my analysis was largely inductive (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, I did code the data with my particular research questions in mind. This was necessary as at times the focus group discussions strayed from the particular topics I was researching (for example, the participants began asking me about my own experiences of psychology Honours).

Reflexivity

Qualitative research methods and the social constructionist theoretical framework draw attention to the role that researchers play in research. It is important to consider the part that I played, as the focus group facilitator, in contributing to and shaping the data (Burr, 1995, 2002). A researcher's demographics can influence the kind of information

elicited from participants (Eagle, Hayes, & Sibanda, 2006). For example, the fact that I am a psychology Honours student at UCT, and thus presumably invested in the discipline, could have influenced the way that the participants spoke about psychology in my presence. They may have wanted to avoid being too critical of the discipline or the department given that I have chosen to pursue my studies in psychology. However, the participants were at times quite critical of their courses, so I feel my presence did not censor them unduly. My identity as a psychology Honours student also influenced the discussion at times as some participants saw me as having achieved their desired goal, namely getting into Honours. Thus, they occasionally tried to turn the discussion towards asking me questions about getting into the Honours and Masters programmes at UCT, rather than discussing the discussion questions.

Furthermore, the fact that I am “white”, English-speaking, and female may have meant that some participants felt uncomfortable voicing particular views on psychology, race, gender and relevance in my presence. For example, they may have been wary of voicing opinions such as “psychology is too full of white, English-speaking females” in a focus group that I (a white, English-speaking female) am facilitating.

Ethical Considerations

Consent and Confidentiality

At the beginning of each focus group, I obtained informed consent from the participants (see Appendix D). They were told that they were free to withdraw from the study at any point. The discussions were tape-recorded and the participants were informed of this at the beginning of the focus groups.

The participants were speaking about their experiences of their undergraduate psychology courses, which is not a hugely sensitive topic. It is thus unlikely that participants felt distressed by discussing these topics in a group setting. Nonetheless, I ensured them that their real names would not be used in the transcription. Anonymity is particularly important as participants were asked to discuss psychology courses run by lecturers in the UCT Psychology Department, who may read the research report. Some participants spoke about some of their lecturers and courses in an uncomplimentary way.

Therefore, it was important to assure participants that they could speak openly and confidentially.

Incentives

The participants were awarded 3 SRPP points for participating in the study. This amount of SRPP points is customary for the scheduled length of time of each focus group, namely 90 minutes.

Debriefing

As the topics for discussion were not of a hugely sensitive nature, no formal debriefing was given. However, at the end of the focus groups I invited the participants to ask any questions they may have about the study. My contact details and those of my supervisor were provided to the participants at the beginning of the focus group (see Appendix E).

Analysis and Discussion

In analysing the data generated in these focus groups, a key trend identified was the perceived barriers to pursuing postgraduate studies in psychology. The three main barriers cited were: psychology is more academically difficult than participants had anticipated; they feel that there is no point in pursuing psychology further as getting a place in a postgraduate programme is so competitive; and finally, the high cost and lengthy time required to qualify and register. The analysis also examined how participants spoke about the relevance of psychology in South Africa. It appears that these students perceive that psychology in South Africa does need to be made more relevant; however, there were two contrasting ideas about how to achieve this. Finally, the analysis examined the ways in which students in these focus groups are engaging with questions of relevance in relation to their own lives and university studies.

Psychology is Academically Difficult

Many of the participants felt that undergraduate psychology at UCT was very academically challenging. Often this was something that students had not anticipated at the beginning of their degree, and found to be very discouraging.

Lihle: I think what I regret is having started with the mentality that it's actually very simple... had I looked at it from a way that, you know what? This might be complex, I'm sure I'd have got... better grades.

Cate: I totally agree. In high school ... most of my subjects were application. In second year I got the shock that, because I did clinical 1 and Research 1, ... I actually do have to rote learn everything, and that was really hard for me because I was so used to just understanding and applying it. And I thought I could get away with that, but no, it didn't work like that.

JC: Anele?

Anele: ... I also came with the mentality thinking, ok psychology, how hectic can it get? ... So for me it was also a wakeup call, once you get to doing it it's actually a whole lot more complicated than people make it out to be.

(FG1)

Research in Psychology 1 (PSY2006F) was the course that nearly all students identified as of particular concern. Psychology students' struggles with Research Methods, especially Statistics, are well-documented as a problem at universities globally. Research methods courses are usually the most dreaded of all undergraduate psychology courses, and are frequently the courses that students find the most academically challenging (Dempster & McCorry, 2009; Murtonen & Lehtinen; 2005; Papanastasioua & Zembylasb, 2008). As Amina remarks, "*But I just, just passed the course, and five out of my friends who were doing it, two of us passed. So I found out that research is actually extremely hard*" (FG1) and:

Beth: ... the exam was literally the hardest exam I'd done at University

Nandi: The worst!

Beth: worst exam (FG 3)

What students perceived as the most problematic aspect was the lack of guidance, particularly in relation to the Statistics component of this course:

Mbali: The problem I had with Research I was, I think everything was just on its own level... we had no tutorials... in most cases you have tutorials so you get to understand more.

Beth: Ya

Mbali: The only tutorial we had was Stats like, one day ... We didn't have that ... closer in connection with our tutors so that they can help us understand. I think that it got to the point that when you are writing a test you don't understand, when you're writing an exam you don't understand... So, it was like a whole lot of things to understand without that one person to guide you through it. I didn't like it (FG3).

The participants in focus group 3 described their Statistics tutorials as follows:

Beth: We had ...like, 40, a person at every computer and it was just like, "ok, start". And the tutors would just sit down, and we'd have to put up our hand if you can't get it right. And you'd have to get it right to move on ... I don't even know how I passed the Stats exam ...

Joe: Some of the tutors who were available were a bit scary. You didn't actually want to

Nandi: Ya, yes

Beth: Ya, there was one that I liked, and that person was often quite popular so they were busy.

Mbali: Yeah, exactly.

Beth: So, I'd wait

Nandi: Until she's free

Beth: Until they walk past ...

Nandi: It was a really distressing course.

As these participants were second and third-year students and would most likely have completed the course in different years, this may be a relatively common perception among undergraduates. These students appear to feel that there is a lack of guidance and support with this subject. It is particularly important that students from disadvantaged schools are given as much support as possible in Statistics, as existing educational disparities in South African high schools mean that many students from poorer schools

struggle academically at university (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; Cooper & Subotzky, 2001).

At UCT, Research Methods I is a prerequisite for a major in psychology. In order to graduate with distinction in psychology, students must obtain a first (75%) for this course (UCT, 2012). Furthermore, postgraduate studies in psychology at UCT (and elsewhere) have a very strong research component, requiring that students have a thorough grasp of research methods and attain reasonable marks in this course to gain admission. It is thus problematic that this particular course is one that students struggle with the most. Additionally, places in psychology Honours programme are extremely competitive (Mayekiso et al., 2004). For example, the UCT Psychology Department received 255 applicants for their 2012 Honours programme, but only offered 45 places, of which 33 were accepted (R. Adams, personal communication, September 25, 2012). As it is important that students excel academically in all their courses if they want to be accepted at postgraduate level, I would suggest that the UCT Psychology Department explores ways to improve students' experiences and perceptions of this course. One possible way to do this may be by implementing weekly tests. A number of participants proposed that this would be helpful: *I would have liked it to have been tested in the same way as cognitive... because that had the weekly tests and I do think it would have helped* (Kim, FG2). Furthermore, As Matt and Ben suggest,

Ben: Can I make one suggestion? I think that the courses that I did the best were the ones that had a weekly test. That's great because then you just keep up to date, and you're constantly just learning stuff...come the end of exams when you're revising stuff it's great...

Matt: Ya, it's interactive you need that process; otherwise it just becomes a stack of notes (FG2).

“What’s The Point, I’ll Never Get In”: Psychology as an Impossible Goal

Students in all focus groups appeared to be very discouraged by the difficulty of gaining acceptance into postgraduate psychology programmes. This was raised repeatedly:

Nicky: It's just the thought of trying, getting through all these barriers like Honours. There are so many people, and there are only so many places. And then Masters there's also a lot of people and there's six. And also those barriers, kind of very daunting and they kind of put you off ... It's like, I still want to do it, but it's just one step at a time at the moment. You don't know how to get there.

Lihle: I agree with her. You look at yourself and you think, "ok well we are already 600 people wanting to get into honours". ...So, you'll be like, "can I actually do this?" Sometimes, that's why the other options come into your mind, for me. (FG1)

Similar concerns are echoed in focus group 2:

Jane: From the beginning, they kind of told you, "you have no chance to get in, only eight of you will get in", and so from the beginning that's ... the mind-set I went with...Until last year I changed my mind, where I was pretty serious, I actually decided what I want to do. And ... that's a bit late to kind of pick up the ball. And that just like deterred me from doing Honours. Like, they told me, "you're not going to get in".

Kim: Ya, that's so true. They emphasise the fact that they only take so many students. And you keep making yourself believe, "well, actually, will I make that cut?"

Sally: Like, "three of you will make it! The rest of you will not".

Similarly, from focus group 3:

JC: Are there a lot of people, a lot of black students in undergrad psych in your experience?

All: Ya...

Mbali: But I think it's because of Social Work and stuff.

Vuyo: Ya!

Mbali: They don't want to pursue that psychology.

Nandi: ... you'll get a lot of Black students who want to do psychology, but then psychology is so strict that, like, in terms of getting into Honours that just

Mbali: Blows people away.

These extracts reveal that these students perceive the UCT Psychology Department as actively trying to discourage them from pursuing psychology further. This may well stem from attempts to forewarn students about the realistic difficulty of acceptance into postgraduate programmes. However, the Psychology Department is eager to encourage black students with potential to apply for postgraduate psychology programmes, offering a mentorship programme for such students (S. Kessi, personal communication, October 9, 2012). Most of the participants speaking in the first and third extracts are black, suggesting that the Department may discourage the very students they are actively seeking. Of course, the experiences of black students in these focus groups cannot be assumed to reflect the opinions of all black undergraduate psychology students at UCT. However, it is important to note that all black participants mentioned this sense of the futility of pursuing psychology further.

The Financial Burden of Studying

Many students view the costs and length of time required to qualify and earn an income as barriers to future study. It takes a minimum of five years' study, and a yearlong internship for registration as a Clinical, Counselling or Educational psychologist; and a minimum of five years' study for Research Psychologists. Consequently, qualification and registration is an expensive, time-consuming process, and means a long period before students can earn an income (Hickson & Krieglner, 2001; HPCSA, 2010). For some students this was linked with feelings of guilt about putting pressure on their parents, for example:

Lihle: I might actually change and do Law or ...something ... with all the stages as you go up, because obviously you can't be a licensed or recognised psychologist until you've done your Masters and two years' field work, right? And I mean, to be honest, I come from Zimbabwe, right? And is that even financially viable that I'll be at school for that long? I don't want to put too much pressure on my mom. Although she will say, "No, you can go. I'll pay for you". But you can see that you're actually putting pressure on her, because I'm not the only child. (FG1)

Participants in focus group 3 describe a similar situation:

JC: *You were saying something about most of the black students being from Social Work*

Mbali: *Yeah*

JC: *Why do you think that is?*

Mbali: *'Cos like, with psychology it's like she said, you take forever. You have to do Honours, and ... Masters. And in most black communities, you have to do something and then work, and go give back to your house... So ... there are more financial constrains for some people. You can't just study for ... years ... and do the whole academic thing, because you need to get your degree and go work and have some income...*

Nandi: *Yeah*

This was a concern raised mainly by the black students in focus groups; concerns about study costs were not raised in the solely white focus group two. When white participants did mention money, it was mainly in relation to earning a good income rather than difficulty in affording fees. For example, Ben states that he does not want a career in psychology because he wants “*to make bucket loads of money*” (FG 2). Although this by no means reflects the attitude of all the students, it is interesting to note.

This is consistent with literature on the topic, which proposes that the cost of studying psychology puts it beyond the reach of many black students. Many previously disadvantaged students are put off applying for postgraduate psychology programmes because of the paucity of funding available (Mayekiso et al., 2009; Pillay & Kramers, 2003). Additionally, the literature suggests that careers in the industrial or economic setting are seen as more attractive and lucrative (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004). Furthermore, Cooper and Subotzky (2001) point out that despite growing numbers of black student enrolment, most of these students complete only 3-year undergraduate degrees. They propose that this is linked to educational and economic disparities created by apartheid that continue to affect students today.

Views on the Relevance of Psychology

Considering that undergraduate psychology students will become South Africa's future psychologists, it is important to explore these students' views on relevance. There was consensus across all three focus groups that psychology as it currently is in South Africa is "not working". However, two contrasting perspectives emerged concerning exactly why psychology is not relevant and what should be done to change this.

Relevance through changing psychology. Students identified a number of ways that psychology in South Africa should change to become more accessible to all. Students of all races felt that there was a need for more black psychologists. In focus group three, a black participant raised this as a solution to the problem of relevance: *I also think we need more black psychologists* (Mbali). This issue also came up in the all-white focus group two:

Sally: I think that in South Africa there is a huge lack of people studying psychology who are not, middle- to upper-class, white people. I mean you just sit in this room ... we're all white people.

Kim: That's so true.

Sally: ... I think if it was between me and someone else to get into Honours who was African and could speak a language and understand that culture, I'd step back, and say: "you do it, I'll go and do Org. Psych". Because really, there's such a need, because I don't understand their culture, I just don't... But I think, ya, that's the biggest problem.

Matt: Ya, that's a really good point.

It seemed that this was perhaps an issue that participants Matt and Kim had not considered before, whereas Sally had an opinion on this. In hearing Sally's perspective, the other participants are made to reflect on this issue, and came to agree with her viewpoint.

A further problem that students highlighted is the high cost of consulting a clinical or counselling psychologist. In fact, participants in focus group one saw this as one of the biggest problems:

Tim: I think that in America or whatever psychology is really a luxury for those who can afford it The challenge is for us to make it, take it away from being an upper-class luxury and make it accessible for everyone.

JC: Do you think that it is accessible at the moment?

All: No.

JC: What do you think the biggest problems are?

Anele: Money.

Tim: Ya, I think it's expensive

A further problem that students identified was the dominance of English within the discipline of psychology:

Tim: I think it's a very huge issue, because

Jen: Not enough people who can speak

Lisa: Yes

Tim: Because if people, if I couldn't speak English and I had a problem and I knew about a psychologist, and that psychologist ... if she couldn't speak the same language as me

Lisa: Ya

Jen: Then what's ... the point of going to see her? (FG1)

These participants stressed the need for more psychologists who could speak languages other than English. However, interestingly the participants in the following extract believe that this would not be enough:

Vuyo: I think it's because it's like, psychology ... they like live on the DSM and the psychology language, it's English. Just imagine seeing someone who's schizophrenic in Zulu?

Nandi: [laughs] yeah

Mbali: That definitely wouldn't work.

Vuyo: How would you explain to them? That's going to be different (FG 3).

These three participants are all mother-tongue speakers of indigenous African languages. However, they also believe that it would be difficult to see non-English speaking patients. This is not because they would not be able to understand their patients, as is the concern of the participants in the other extract. Their concern is that “*the*

psychology language, it's English". Vuyo is Zulu-speaking, yet he still believes it would be difficult to see a Zulu-speaking patient, because psychology is a Westernised discipline.

The issues of language, the cost of seeing a psychologist and the lack of black psychologists are all central concerns in the current "relevance debate" in psychology (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; Hickson & Kriegler, 1991; Mayekiso et al., 2004; Pillay & Kramers, 2003). It is clear that psychology undergraduate students at UCT are engaging with some of these issues, which may be beneficial for the future of the discipline in South Africa as these students may be the psychologists of the future.

The need to change perceptions about psychology. In contrast to the idea that the discipline of psychology needs to be changed, the other view that emerged was that psychology was inaccessible mainly because most South Africans did not know about it. Psychology does not need to be changed as such, but rather promoted. For example:

Anna: I don't think there should be a matter of where it is applicable or relevant.

I feel like psychology, the discipline is useful in any context...

Ben: Ya

JC: Ya, so do you think it's working in South Africa?

Kim: I think they should expand it more. I do think that it can work, and that South Africans can benefit from psychology. Like when I first started psychology, it was actually when I was doing clinical psychology. I was just like, "I wish more people knew what I was learning, because it would help so many people" (FG2).

Similarly,

Joe: Or they just don't know about it, maybe

Vuyo: Ya, like psych, it's new and you have to know more about psych, 'cause I didn't know much about psych until I got here.

Nandi: Mmmm, yeah

Vuyo: 'cause you don't get that much information. 'cause let's say maybe it's like in ...the townships and villages, teachers tell you, 'cause that's the primary resource about careers, they'll end up telling you about doctors, accountants ... some careers that you mostly see on the TV. You hardly

see psychologists ... You hardly know more about them, so I think that's why majority cannot access, doesn't have much access to psychologists.
(FG3)

These extracts imply that if more South Africans knew about psychology, more South Africans would access psychological services. This contrasts with the first perspective discussed, which emphasises that there are more barriers to relevance than merely a lack of knowledge about psychology. Certainly, during apartheid years psychology was comparatively unknown within black communities (Mayekiso et al., 2004). However, many people in South Africa are still reluctant to make use of psychologists (Ruane, 2010). Explanations of these kinds do not answer why mainly white, middle-class South Africans make use of the services of psychologists.

Some students felt that even when people in black communities were aware of psychology, they chose not to “believe” in the discipline or in mental illness, favouring traditional healing methods and explanations. As Mbali remarks, “*it's not a black thing to have schizophrenia or bipolar*” (FG3). When I asked about how to get more black representation in psychology, one participant suggested that we need to “*change the view of psychology*” (Mbali, FG3). Once again, the idea is that it is perceptions of psychology and mental health that need to change, rather than the discipline itself.

Nandi: But also, it's interesting to try and think about how people receive psychology here ... most African people... don't fully believe in it. So, it's interesting that we have it here and we just need to try and make people aware.

JC: Do you think that it can work here?

Nandi: Yes.

JC: Yes, you do? Do you think how it is at the moment it's working?

Beth: Not really.

JC: Why not?

Nandi: ... Because we still have, I don't know if it's part of culture or tradition that people don't want to throw away because of modernization, but people still have this whole belief of being possessed with weird things like spirits, and maybe being bewitched and all this kind of stuff (FG3).

In this view, psychology is perceived as “not working” because of African people’s reluctance to accept it and their desire to hold onto traditional African methods. While Nandi initially identifies herself as being from an African background, as she speaks about how psychology is perceived by those from an African background she distances herself from their views:

Nandi: Coming from an African background where psychology isn’t really known, and some disorders aren’t really taken seriously, like depression. I’d like to do it and maybe educate some people at home about it.

JC: So, do you think there isn’t really a...in African culture there isn’t

*Nandi: Ya, ya **they** don’t really, you know when you’re depressed for **them** it’s just like, you don’t want to live or whatever... **they** just want you to get over it, to get on with life. Because **they’re** just thinking everyone else has a problem, but why should yours be any different. **They** have that mentality that you just get over it, and you never really do (FG3)*

Perhaps, due to her university education she views herself as having knowledge which most people from an African background lack, and thus she would like to share this. This may be an example of what some theorists describe as the alienation of African students from their original worldviews due to exposure to westernised education (Bandawe, 2005; Gentz & Durrheim, 2009; Ruane, 2010).

Students’ Personal Engagement with the “Relevance Debate”

The issue of relevance was not limited to discussion of psychology and South Africa in general. Students described their own personal struggles with questions of relevance. Relevance concerns featured in the way that students spoke about the possibility of a career in psychology, and the way that they were taught at UCT.

Relevance and future careers. Participants expressed conflicting feelings about pursuing a socially relevant career in psychology, while also desiring to make money.

Nandi: I mean it’s expensive for us to study psychology.

Mbali: Ya [others nod].

Nandi: So, when we go out we need to make some money. But at the same time, we’ve been drawn to addressing social issues ... I mean we’ve studied for

how many years. You expect to be financially stable. But at the same time, you also want to go out and make some real change at the ground level.

Tom: ... sometimes, especially with clinical psychology... people who do Masters are normally a lot more mature so they could have... a family and kids so, to a lot of people would believe that would come first. You'd obviously want to support your family first, before you try and save the world.

Mbali: It's true, and that could be why it's not as accessible ... psychologists get paid a lot. That's a good thing. I can't exactly lower my price because maybe my son is in a private school... so, ya that could also be a problem (FG3).

Similarly, in focus group two Sally remarks:

I mean working in corporate it's much more, in a sense stable job with a salary and lots more. I suppose it's a money thing, which is so fickle, but it is. I'll make a lot more money if I'm a human resource specialist, than if I'm doing clinical assessment on kiddies.

There is a sense that psychology careers that are engaged with social issues are not financially stable. For some, they appear to prioritise stability over relevance: “*You'd obviously want to support your family first, before you try and save the world*” (Tom, FG3). Although this is understandable, it is of concern that these students believe that having a “relevant” psychology career, or one that is involved in “*addressing social change*”, should come second to a financially stable career. These kinds of perceptions may account for the disproportionate amount of clinical and counselling psychologists working in private practice in middle-class, suburban areas (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; Lindén & Rådeström, 2008).

Furthermore, some students were also concerned and discouraged by the perceived inability of psychology to actually help people in a South African context.

Lihle: You don't want to be sitting there and being depressed and you actually can't help people out of their problems, because some of the disorders seem to be very difficult to manage in the case of South Africa, you know? Sometimes you will give a person anti-psychotic drugs but then they are

going back into the social context, and you really can't change that. Ok, so is this really going to be rewarding and can I actually do this? ...it's a bit confusing (FG1).

These are realistic concerns. For example, Gentz and Durrheim (2009) found that many of the clinical psychologists they surveyed felt that they had limited ability to help many of their clients living in economically impoverished situations.

Relevance and UCT psychology courses. Students also raised issues around the relevance of their undergraduate training. A concern discussed in all the focus groups was the lack of practical experience offered in undergraduate psychology courses, and the heavy reliance on theory. *“And here... we learn the theory and we're in this little bubble”* (Sally, FG2) and *“that's the theory ... we don't really get round to the social or practical aspect of it”* (Tim, FG1). Some students felt that this did not adequately prepare them for work as a psychologist.

Jen: I think like, one of the big things is they don't give you enough information about what it's going to be like ...

Lihle: I agree

Jen: Because then you get to third year and you hear about what clinical neuro-psychologists are actually doing. And you're like, “but this isn't what I anticipated!” So I think that's a really big thing. We learn all the theory but we're not sure what we're really supposed to do with it at a certain point. (FG1)

Furthermore, while participants recognised the importance of being able to speak indigenous African languages for working in psychology, some felt that the UCT Psychology Department should encourage this actively:

Lisa: I think it should be UCT's responsibility to recognise the environment in which their psychologists may go and practice and try and implement some sort of treatment plan. Because at the end of the day it's ineffective if you have a psychologist who's talking one language and somebody else who's, like, it's a waste of time ... I think it would be, probably be in their best interests ...

Lihle: I agree with her... I think it's very important that they actually think about that

Amina: ...even the medical students have to do compulsory

Lihle: ...compulsory. They have to go and learn another language because there are so many different people coming into hospitals it's not going to be any different as so many people coming into your practice.

Jen: I ... thought it was really cool because they do oral examinations. So they have a patient speaking to them in Xhosa and they have to talk to them...

Amina: They should do the same in psychology (FG 1).

Interestingly, the students in this extract appear to be eager to learn an African language, and do not view it as an imposition. This is perhaps because students are made aware of language and relevance issues in some of their courses; however, this is usually only towards the end of their degrees. The third-year Clinical Psychology II course covers this, for example (UCT, 2011). As Lisa remarks:

What we know now about the contextual issues of practicing in South Africa, if you knew that when you first came into first-year, then I realise the relevance of that now. But if somebody said to me in first year: "oh, you need to learn a different language". I'd be like: "why?" Teach me why I need to do that and I'll understand, and probably have more empathy ... towards that (FG1).

This suggests a need for issues around relevance and language to be raised at a first-year level (rather than in the more critical third-year courses later on) so that students are encouraged to take African language courses from the beginning of their degrees.

Students also expressed concerns with the Westernised focus of their courses: "*I think that in the way that psychology is taught, right? Even at UCT having done it, and look at the textbooks that we use, clearly it's American and Westernised*" (Mbali, FG3).

Additionally,

It's frustrating for you to try and learn... sometimes they ask you to put whatever disorder in a South African context ... you can only quote a few examples because ... we don't have a lot of research done here, because it's mostly Western, so it's frustrating (Nandi, FG3).

This echoes with literature on the topic that proposes that the content of psychology courses at South African universities is too westernised and may consequently be alienating for some students (Bandawe, 2005; Gentz & Durrheim, 2009; Ruane, 2010).

Summary and Conclusion

Most research on the “relevance debate” and students involves quantitative analysis of demographics. Undergraduate students will potentially shape the face of psychology and its relevance as a discipline in South Africa in the future, yet their perceptions and experiences are relatively under-researched. This study sought to address this gap, adding to the theory underpinning the “relevance debate” by using focus groups and qualitative analysis to explore the experiences of undergraduate psychology students at UCT.

Although there are students from a range of demographic groups taking undergraduate psychology courses, relatively few black and male students pursue postgraduate psychology (Mayekiso et al., 2004; Pillay & Kramers, 2003; Skinner & Louw, 2009). This study found that participants perceive a number of barriers that discourage or prevent them from pursuing a career in psychology, or even applying for postgraduate study.

These barriers include the unanticipated academic difficulty of psychology courses, in particular Research Methods I, along with a perceived lack of academic support from lecturers and tutors in this course. Considering the focus on research methods in postgraduate programmes and the need for high undergraduate grades for acceptance, it is important that students feel that they are supported.

Additionally, many participants feel that the UCT Psychology Department actively discourages them from pursuing psychology further. While this may be an unintended consequence of preparing students for the extremely competitive process of acceptance into postgraduate psychology programmes, the result is that many students believe it is pointless even to apply. Thus, some students who the Department may be particularly interested in attracting, such as black students, may reject psychology on this basis. Furthermore, in this study black participants in particular raised the length of time and cost of qualification as barriers to pursuing psychology as a career, confirming the

role of funding and scholarships in transforming the demographics of this discipline (Pillay & Kramers, 2003). Considering the urgent need for more “non-white” psychologists who can speak indigenous African languages (de la Rey & Ipser, 2004; Mayekiso et al., 2004), it is important that these perceived barriers are addressed.

This study reveals that undergraduate psychology students at UCT are engaging with the “relevance debate” and in critical thinking about the challenges facing the discipline of psychology in South Africa. Some students propose that educating the South African population (particularly “black communities”) to change their views on psychology and mental health will address these challenges. However, research suggests that even when people in black communities are aware of clinical and counselling psychological services, they remain reluctant to utilize these services. This may be due to other factors, including the inappropriateness of certain psychological interventions in these communities (Bandawe, 2005; Matoane, 2012; Ruane, 2010).

It is also apparent that some students are engaging with issues of relevance at a personal level. With regards to their psychology studies, participants understood the importance of learning an indigenous African language and expressed willingness to do so. Some participants expressed frustration at the westernised focus of much of course content, and the heavy reliance on theory. When considering a possible career in psychology, some students regarded a “relevant” career and earning a good income as incompatible goals. Furthermore, some students doubted their ability to help people as psychologists given the socio-economic problems facing many South Africans.

The way in which students discussed the “relevance debate” reveals that they have been exposed to these ideas in some courses. However, the way that some participants conceptualised relevance underlines the need for increased focus on this issue and exposure to relevance concerns at the start of their undergraduate degrees. This may inform critical decisions, such as taking an African language as a major.

This study was limited by the difficulty of recruiting black and male participants, which meant these groups were underrepresented in the focus groups. This suggests that these groups of students may already be in the minority at second- and third-year level. Interviews with more black and male first-year psychology students may offer a more thorough and nuanced explanation. Furthermore, this study was conducted with UCT

students only and experiences of students at other South African universities may differ. Despite these limitations, it is hoped that the insights gained into the perceptions of a group of second- and third-year undergraduate students may offer be of use to those involved in designing and teaching undergraduate psychology at UCT. Further research among first-year psychology students at UCT, and at other South African universities, could provide a more in-depth picture of the experiences and perceptions of undergraduate psychology students.

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Appendix A: Demographic Information Sheet

Please complete the following form and email it to josie.cornell@yahoo.com

Name: _____ Surname: _____

Student number: _____

Year of BA/BSocSci: _____

Race: _____ Gender: _____

What languages can you speak fluently? _____

Email address: _____

Appendix B: Focus Group Questions

1. Please tell me about why you decided to major in psychology.
2. Please tell me about your view of psychology now compared to when you started studying it.
3. Are there any undergraduate psychology courses you regret taking? If so, why?
4. Which undergraduate psychology courses have you found the most valuable/enjoyed the most? Why?
5. How do you feel about studying psychology further and having a possible career in psychology?
6. If you do want to study further in psychology, in what particular capacity? (e.g. clinical psychology, neuropsychology, research psychology) Why?
7. Please tell me about what you would change and what you would keep the same regarding the content of undergraduate psychology courses at UCT and how they are taught.
8. Discuss your opinion of the discipline of psychology within the context of South Africa.

Appendix C: Transcription Information

- JC: The researcher is speaking.
- FG1: Extract taken from focus group one
- FG2: Extract taken from focus group two
- FG3: Extract taken from focus group three
- ... The use of ellipsis indicates that part of the participants' original speech has been omitted from the quoted extract.
- Bold** Words that are in bold indicate my emphasis.
- Underlined Words that have been underlined were emphasised in the participant's original speech
- [] The use of square brackets indicates additional information, such as laughter or non-verbal gestures.

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

University of Cape Town

Department of Psychology

Informed Consent Form:

I, _____, agree to participate in this 90 minute focus group.
I consent to this focus group being recorded and transcribed, and I consent to the transcription being used for research purposes. I agree to keep what is discussed in this focus group confidential.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix E: Information Sheet

You are invited to participate in this focus group about your experiences of undergraduate psychology courses at UCT.

- Your participation in this focus group is completely voluntary; you will be allowed to leave at any time you wish.
- The conversation in this focus group will be recorded, but you will remain completely anonymous – your name will not appear anywhere on the transcription of recording or any published research that may result from this study.
- You will receive 3 SRPP points for participating in the full 90 minutes of the focus group.
- There are no foreseeable risks attached to participating in this study.

If you have any questions relating to this study, please feel free to contact me, Josephine Cornell on 0823615603 or josie.cornell@yahoo.com or my supervisor, Wahbie Long, at wahbie.long@uct.ac.za.

Thanks,

Josephine Cornell